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Bodies, Emotions and "Feminine Space": The Changing Femininities and Masculinities in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature and Culture

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Bodies, Emotions and “Feminine Space”: The Changing Femininities and Masculinities in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature and Culture

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

Jun Lei

Committee in charge:

Professor Yingjin Zhang, Chair
Professor Amelia Glasser
Professor Ari Larissa Heinrich
Professor Ping-hui Liao
Professor Paul Pickowicz
Professor Roddey Reid

2015
The dissertation of Jun Lei is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO
2015

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VITA

2015  Ph.D. in Literature, University of California, San Diego
2015  Instructor in Modern Chinese Literature, University of California, San Diego
2008-2014  Teaching Assistant, Literature and History Departments, University of California, San Diego
2006-2008  Lecturer in Chinese, East Asian Studies Department, Princeton University
2006  M.A. in Asian Studies, Seton Hall University
2003  M.A. B.A. in English, Wuhan University

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Bodies, Emotions and “Feminine Space”: The Changing Femininities and Masculinities in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature and Culture

by

Jun Lei

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

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Professor Yingjin Zhang, Chair

This dissertation theorizes “feminine space” and uses it as a parameter to examine changing visual and textual representations of “modern” Chinese women and men in selected fiction, film, and pictorial magazines over the twentieth century. “Feminine space,” pertains to both male and female subjects, and signifies a discursive sphere that writers and cultural critics involuntarily dwell or consciously create to accommodate
affective dynamics in narratives. I argue that such dynamics engage the “feminine” side of Chinese modernity, such as irrational emotions, sentimental selves, and bodily pleasures or discomforts of everyday life. These affective vectors have been marginalized by grand discourses that promote modernizing the Chinese nation with imported knowledge and practice of science, democracy and military reforms, ever since China was repeatedly defeated in military contests with foreign powers in late nineteenth century. The perspective of “feminine space,” however, draws attention to these trivialized alternative elements of Chinese modernity, which I argue are embedded in literary and cultural productions throughout the twentieth century, including canonical works by May Fourth writers such as Lu Xun who is usually read as an advocate for teleological advancement of the modern nation.

After the introductory chapter, there will be 6 other chapters to probe different aspects of the tension between body and gendered identities as played out in literary narratives and cultural debates about body, emotionality and gender identities. Chapters 2-4 focus on the textual and visual representations of Modern Girl and New Woman in order to map out aesthetics and politics conveyed through the female body and emotionality, particularly those concerning the contradiction between Chinese “national” modernity and modern Chinese femininity. The subsequent 3 chapters focus on the representations of men, examining the heritage of and resistance to wen—a pre-modern “soft” masculinity—in the formation of modern male subjectivity in the twentieth-century Chinese context.
Chapter 1

Gender and “Feminine Space” in the Twentieth-Century Chinese Context

This dissertation theorizes “feminine space” and uses it as a parameter to examine changing visual and textual representations of “modern” Chinese women and men in selected fiction, film, and pictorial magazines in the twentieth century. “Feminine space,” pertains to both male and female subjects, and signifies a discursive sphere that writers and cultural critics involuntarily dwell or consciously create to accommodate affective dynamics in narratives. I argue that such dynamics engage the “feminine” side of Chinese modernity, such as irrational emotions, sentimental selves, and bodily pleasures or discomforts of everyday life. These affective vectors have been marginalized by grand discourses that promote modernizing the Chinese nation with imported knowledge and practice of science, democracy and military reforms, ever since China was repeatedly defeated in military contests with foreign powers in late nineteenth century. The perspective of “feminine space,” however, draws attention to these trivialized alternative elements of Chinese modernity, which I argue are embedded in literary and cultural productions throughout the twentieth century, including canonical works by May Fourth writers such as Lu Xun who is usually read as an advocate for teleological advancement of the modern nation.

This research project aims to contribute to gender studies and China studies mainly in three aspects: First, it rethinks the relations of gendered subjects to nation and nationalism. References to China as an emerging nation-state are inevitable in discussing
gender and modern subjectivity since nationalism was an aesthetic and political concerns throughout the twentieth century. But using the overarching framework of nationalism to talk about gender tends to camouflage if not completely hide the role of emotions beyond the nationalistic sentiments in forming modern manhood and womanhood. This research, by rereading canonical texts and rediscovering unrecognized texts and images, challenges the current scholarly practice that tends to focus on analyzing women within the masculinized framework of nationhood. It proposes to appraise gendered subjects of both men and women within what I call “feminine space,” an alternative and marginalized discursive space.

Second, it addresses the imbalance of scholarly attention to femininity and masculinity in China studies, where “gender has almost become synonymous with ‘woman’” (Kam Louie, Theorizing Chinese Masculinity 2). To be sure, Chinese men have been thoroughly investigated by scholars as significant players in history and society, but they have rarely been studied as gendered beings the way women have. Literary and film critics widely adopt the “male gaze” model that fixates man as the spectator and woman as the object of the gaze. Scholars are oblivious to the display of man—particularly the male body—in textual and visual representations. My research brings man to the front stage together with woman, drawing attention to man as an equally problematic gender construct.

Third, it provides new theoretical models—such as “feminine space” (chapter 1), performative masculinity (chapter 5) and introspective masculinity (chapter 6)—for examining the Chinese gender order represented in literary and cultural productions, which has been restructured since the “national crisis” in late nineteenth century.
The Study of Chinese Men as Gendered Beings

This dissertation, first of all, represents my effort to redress the imbalance of attention to femininity and masculinity in current China studies, where “gender has almost become synonymous with ‘woman’” (Louie, *Theorizing* 2). To be sure, Chinese men have been thoroughly investigated as intellectual and political leaders, and as other actors of historical, cultural, and social significance. However, focus on the significant social roles by men tends to lump men into a single definition, affirming the entrenched view of all men as privileged members of a persistent gender hierarchy. Asking “the man question” helps us to establish a more nuanced view of masculinity in gender studies by looking into variations of manhood and masculine experience. As Harry Brod and Micheal Kaufman convincingly argue, “We cannot study masculinity in the singular, as if the stuff of man were a homogeneous and unchanging thing” (5-6). In line with recent studies of masculinities that highlight the constitutive uncertainty of manhood, I accept that masculinities are fluid and incoherent, but I am not in favor of a relativist view that makes it impossible to study an ideal pattern or mode of masculinities. Admittedly, masculinities, like femininities, are continuously subject to reconfiguration and reinterpretation, but within a limited historical and cultural frame, distinctive patterns of masculinity and femininity do exist and some are considered more ideal than others. Identifying these patterns is not to camouflage the complexity of masculinity, but to better trace and compare ideal and counter-ideal masculinities over time and across space.

Moreover, men who are bestowed significant social roles in literary and cultural representations and criticisms have rarely been treated as gendered beings in the way
women have. As John Tosh points out, “masculinity is everywhere and nowhere” (180). Man has been such a dominating subject of many fields of study that in traditional scholarship history has become his story, and mainstream has turned into male-stream (Nancy Dowd 17-18). Men’s public roles have been thoroughly researched, but have been largely absent from gender-related or other studies as an object of gender. In studies focusing on women, men become an undifferentiated group who benefit from the gender system as a contrast to women’s subordination. Resser, quoting Roland Bathes, uses “significant absence” to talk about the unmarkedness of masculinity in comparison to femininity (1). It’s unmarked because it’s taken to be the norm. Men are the assumed subject, the unstated norm, and men uni-dimensional. Hence, the need to study men as men, not universal human beings with presumed subjectivity.

The widely deployed model of the “male gaze” in literary and cultural criticisms fixate man as the spectator and woman as the object of a heterosexual maze gaze, often leaving out the discussion on the display of man—particularly the male body—in textual and visual representations. Masculinity thus becomes what Michael Kimmel calls “the normative referent against which standards are assessed” (10), or what Peter Middleton metaphorically describes as the “left-behind-the-scenes” phenomenon despite of its active role in “script-writing, action-directing, and camera-operating” (152). The spotlight is shone on woman. True, woman, especially New Woman or Modern Woman, is often used as a gendered trope to signify “new self,” “new nation” and “new order” in modern Chinese literary and cultural representations. But the hyper-visibility of woman as a signifier should not conceal the ideas about masculinity in both male and female writers. After all, as Susan Brownell and Jeffrey Wasserstrom’s research on modern Chinese
gender dynamics shows, “[T]he category of Woman does not appear and develop independently of the Man” (30). I contend that the invisibility of masculinity is not so much that Chinese man and male body is missing in literary and cultural representations, but rather that literary scholars and scholars working in other fields of China studies have failed to notice or adequately address this “male” aspect of gender.

Therefore, one aim of this dissertation is to bring man to the front stage, draw attention to man not as a normative referent, but as a problematic gender construct—particularly when they are defined in corporeal terms—in twentieth-century Chinese literature and culture, so as to put into scholarly practice a model that frames masculinity and femininity as mutually constructed phenomena (22).

The paucity of scholarly treatments of Chinese men is also keenly felt in studies of the world gender order, where masculinities elsewhere—such as in the U.S., U.K., Australia and Canada—have gradually secured scholarly interest since 1980s (Connell, Gender and “Masculinities and Globalization”). Even though gender has been accepted as a valid category in literary analysis since 1960s in Europe and America, women were the focus. European, Australian and Northern American men, like their counterparts in China, were largely absent in academic research as gendered beings. Only staring 1980s, gender began to cast its gaze at “man” in academia of the above-mentioned countries, changing the graphics of gender studies that was fixated with femininity. However, the gaining popularity of “Western” masculinity in gender studies tends to encourage the export of a dominant Euro-American type as the universal masculinity, which makes it urgent to study masculinities other than in American and European contexts (Connell Gender and “Masculinities and Globalization”).
There are major limitations of applying hegemonic masculinity theory to the Chinese context. First of all, my undertaking of ideal masculinities, particularly that of *wen* masculinity—masculinity that emphasizes scholarly grace and gentility—is different from “hegemonic” masculinity that was made famous by R. W. Connell\(^1\). Ideal masculinities overlap and yet are distinctive from “hegemonic masculinity.” Ideal masculinities can contain both hegemonic of the time and residual from the past; on the other hand, ideal masculinities could be, or have the potentials to be, but are not necessarily already a dominant cultural form; instead, it could be part of an alternative even oppositional culture in a particular historical juncture. According to Raymond William, residual experiences, meanings and values are “lived and practiced on the basis…of some previous social formation” and “if the residue is from some major area of the past—will in most cases have had to be incorporated” into the dominant culture (414). The Chinese model of *wen* masculinity, for example, was residual and yet incorporated, persistent and at the same time resistant in the Republican era (1911-1949) and later times as I will show in chapters 4-7. Moreover, even “hegemonic” masculinity of Euro-America or the West, is far from a homogenized whole. The understanding and practice of gender are specific to different social strata, different historical periods and different places. Even within the so-called “Western” countries, as Christopher Forth and Bertrand Taithe points out, “national and international histories have been written as the competitive struggle for one gendered model against another” (Introduction to *French Masculinities*, 2). The rising bourgeois once may have deemed the aristocratic males as

\(^1\) R.W. Connell is the preferred name of Raewyn Connell, an Australian sociologist known as one of the first scholars searching on masculinity. She uses R.W. Connell for almost all her publications.
effeminate neglecting the fact that aristocracy was once based on warrior spirit and physical vigilance, but could not help being considered by working class as too refined and soft. The German and the British might consider the French men unmanly, but neither could they escape the softening effect of civilization and both have their share of idealizing the “gentlemen” with “civic” qualities and refined tastes (Forth and Taithe 5-7; Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West* 42). In fact, Britain was condemned by colonial America as effeminated and corrupted by luxury (Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West* 53). However, despite variations and complexities of different “Western” patterns, by the turn of the twentieth century when China had a full encounter with American and European powers, the “West” in general adopted a new focus on “aggressiveness, physical force and male sexuality” (Forth and Taithe 5). In the early twentieth century context, Chinese men, exposed and feeling threatened by the more viril Western masculinity, were becoming effeminated in the Orientalizing or self-Orientalizing discourses.

Even under such circumstances, Chinese masculinity studies did not commence till almost the turn of the 21st century. In literary studies, there are only three monographs in English on the subject of Chinese masculinity: Xueping Zhong’s *Masculinity Besieged: Issues of Modernity and Male Subjectivity in Chinese Literature of the Late Twentieth Century* (2000), Kim Louie’s *Theorizing Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China* (2002), and Geng Song’s *The Fragile Scholar: Power and Masculinity in Chinese Culture* (2004). These works, especially Louie’s and Song’s, have successfully identified Chinese masculine patterns and paradigms in pre-modern Chinese literary texts that are distinct from Euro-American masculine types. As foundational
works on masculine roles in pre-modern China, they all clearly point to the inadequacy of applying existing masculinity theories to the study of Chinese men. Louie, for example, brings forth the *wen-wu* dyad as a construct for describing Chinese masculinity. He presents *wen-wu* as “ideal Chinese masculinity throughout Chinese history” (Louie, “Chinese, Japanese and Global” 4), with *wen* associated with literary attainment and genteel qualities of the classical scholars, and *wu* with physical power, martial valor and military strength. According to Louie, the *wen* type of masculinity always enjoyed textual, sexual and even political privileges in pre-modern China (Louie, *Theorizing Chinese Masculinities* and “Chinese, Japanese and Global”). Song also designates paramount significance to feminine *wen* qualities associated with the “fragile” scholar and identifies *wen* as a marker of the China-West masculinity divide.

If Song and Louie only intend to objectively picture the superiority of feminine qualities associated with *wen*—fragility, passivity and stillness—in Chinese history and literature, Yuejin Wang, in his article on the images of men in Chinese films and literature, asserts that “it is the man who lacks” (35), therefore more explicitly lauding “femininity” as a desirable component of Chinese masculinity. He suggests that a “femininity complex” exists as a “cultural form of collective unconsciousness” in Chinese artistic representation of men (36). I believe that although is it simplistic to pin *wen* as the divide of Chinese and the Western masculinities, acknowledging in men the *wen*-qualities which are often denigrated as “effeminate” is necessary to re-conceptualize Chinese masculinity or any *wen* masculinity on a neutral or positive note. Particularly given the emasculated image of Chinese men and men of Chinese descent that has been promulgated in Western discourses (Eng and Bryn Williams), a theoretical
conceptualization of Chinese masculinity with an emphasis on *wen* provides a useful framework for understanding Chinese masculine models, and serves as an effective counterbalance to reductive readings of Chinese men as the effeminate “other” in Western notions of masculinity.

However, none of these works addresses in detail the formation of masculinity in the Republican era, which I argue serves as the crucible that forged modern Chinese manhood and womanhood, and as the crucial link between the pre-modern and contemporary gender configurations in China. While Zhong situates the discussion of “masculinity in crisis” mostly in novels of the post-socialist 1980s, Song’s masculine models are exclusively inspired by pre-modern canonical texts. Louie has a more sweeping coverage spanning from the time of Confucius to late twentieth century, but his *wen-wu* paradigm, not unlike Song’s “fragile masculinity” model, is mostly based on analysis of cultural icons or literary texts before the nineteenth century. Even though Louie does select for analysis two literary works produced in Republican China and a few in and after 1980s, they are largely treated as testers of the established *wen-wu* paradigm and therefore no longer contain the generative power of the pre-nineteenth century texts. In other words, Louie stops theorizing when Chinese traditional values, including those concerning ideals of manliness, are seriously challenged by encounters with modern imperial powers starting mid-nineteenth century.

What is implied, if not explicitly stated, in these works and other scholarly works I examine below is that traditional Chinese conceptualization of gender are different, and comparatively free from the heterosexual binary of essential maleness and femaleness often found in the post-enlightenment Western gender hierarchies. China historian Susan
Mann observes that up to the late nineteenth century in China, there had been “few discernible traces of what today’s described as homophobia” (147). This is explained by some scholars through the correlation between the yin/yang dyad and the traditional Chinese concept of male/female, in which each element is complimentary to rather than contradictory with the other. Charlotte Furth, another China historian who focuses on gender, describes Chinese bodies as “homologous along a shifting continuum” between yin and yang forces (48). Gender here is relative rather than absolute, social rather than biological. China scholars Brownell and Wesserstrom in the introduction to their co-edited volume on Chinese femininities and Chinese masculinities, similarly argue that “Yin and yang expressed complementary, hierarchical relationships that were not necessarily between males and females, even though yang was typically associated with masculine and yin with feminine principles” (27). China historians working on gender and sexuality issues, though mostly focusing on women, offer insight on this Chinese refracture of gender order, underlying the importance of treating femininity and masculinity as specific to historical time and space. Tani Barlow, in her ground-breaking essay “Theorizing Woman: Funü, Guojia and Jiating” persuasively argues that nüren (Woman) in imperial China existed as a social category in relation to husband and to children, and only began to emerge in the May Fourth Movement (1919) as a generic category when the neologisms funü 妇女, nüxing 女性 were coined and introduced to China. Barlow’s study again reveals that in imperial China, gender symbolism is highly dependent on other supposedly more important social categories such as family. More importantly, the evolution of Woman in its changing social and linguistic implications calls attention to the importance of historicizing gender categories.
Literary scholar Lydia Liu looks at Chinese modern neologisms—translations of European terms and concepts in Chinese characters—as “the trope for change in the context of translingual practice” (*Translingual Practice* 32). This is a change from both the old Chinese past where the characters originated, and from the West where the new concepts are borrowed. Thus Woman should not be treated as a trans-historical and trans-cultural phenomenon. Liu’s explanation for the neologisms in translingual practice and Barlow’s theory about Chinese Woman can inspire the study of Chinese Man. We can approach Chinese concepts of masculinity more effectively if examining them in specific sociolinguistic and historical contexts.

Indeed it is important to treat femininity and masculinity as social constructions specific to historical time and place. I emphasize the importance of relating the modern gender construction in China to pre-modern notions of men and women. However, if we agree that it is inadequate to apply existing Euro-America based masculinity theories to the studies of Chinese masculinities, it is equally inadequate to use only the ideal models drawn on texts or living experience of pre-modern China to measure femininities and masculinities of later times, particularly after the weakened China encountered the “West” in mid-nineteenth century. After repeated failures in military contest with imperialist powers starting the mid-nineteenth century, China had to face the eternal dilemma of the self-conscious and self-designated weaker party in a relationship: it had to emulate in somewhat similar form the way of the stronger—the military powers of West and Japan—despite the national humiliation caused by them. However, the literati culture and aesthetics that had dominated imperial China persisted in late Qing and the Republican period even though the nation’s cultural consciousness was shifting towards a
more Western modernity. Japanese Sinologist Yoshimi Takeuchi’s study of modern Chinese history shows that “the modern Orient was born only when it was invaded, defeated and exploited by the West” (quoted in Naoki Sakai 114). Although this Western-impact-China-response model of reading history tends to neglect “the internal dynamics and logic of a non-Western nation” (Hanchao Lu 17), Takeuchi’s approach helps illuminate the paradoxical position of late Qing elites, who, in front of the modernized barbarians, felt the nagging urge to see the self from the viewpoint of the other. In “othering the self;” they had to abandon the hierarchical thinking pattern that placed the civilized Chinese high above non-Chinese barbarians, and to adopt a perspective informed by knowledge from the west on the body hygiene and on race.

“Othering the self” is part of making the new self. Pathologizing the Chinese body serves the purpose. As Michel Foucault suggests in his study of the archeology of the human sciences, that we consider disease as “disorder—the existence of a perilous otherness within the human body,” a disorder constantly under the threat of being shut away to maintain the order of things (Foucault, “The Order of Things” xxiv, emphasis mine). Disease thus can be read as a culturally constructed other, which is at once interior and foreign. The Chinese body, stigmatized as sick and weak, needs to be tempered and renewed, so that a new order of the body can be established. Given the lack of masculine virtues in China, the establishment of the new body order needs to look for models elsewhere.

2 Yan divides people of the world into four categories: White, Yellow, Red and Black in his essay Yuan Qiang (Origin of strength, 21), and Liang follows the theory that there are five races in the world: black, red, brown, yellow and white in his essay Xin Min shuo (On the new people).
Hence, in this dissertation, I draw particular attention to two modes of attempts in generating or assessing “modern” gendered identities in China: the elsewhere model that seeks masculine and feminine ideals and inspirations in the “Western” culture; and the elsewhen model that emphasizes the root of Chinese culture in shaping ideal manhood and womanhood despite the unrelenting impact of the “West.” As later chapters will show, the elsewhere and elsewhen models both existed; the distinctive patterns of modern Chinese masculinities and femininities results from the joint force of both, but the former became more of a conscious/conscientious choice while the latter influenced more subconsciously though occasionally emerging among elite groups as a conscious mode.

This dissertation explores how individuals (including authors and characters in fictional representations), and collective social forces such as popular media and intellectual discourse, have made choices between Western models of “modern” manhood and womanhood and existing Chinese cultural forms inherited from earlier times. It pays special attention to the unstableness of masculinity and femininity. I do not intend to argue for a causal framework of crisis when China encountered the West because the framework assumes a stable pre-modern masculinity or femininity, which the “shock” of modernity affects and destabilizes. Rather, I intend to show that masculinity and femininity are never stable and Chinese gender “norms” and ideals always co-exist with “deviations” and that both “norms” and “deviations” are all constituents of masculinity and femininity. Nevertheless, the “shock” brought by the West, to some extent, reconfigured the ideal and counter-ideal feminine and masculine models, and rearticulated the norms and the deviations. As the subsequent chapters will show, enlightenment-informed literature and mass media, equipped with the new lens to
examine health and the body, no longer presented fragile scholars and beauties with “bound feet” as desirable. However, fragile bodies have always been part and parcel of the cultural logic that regulates both ideal masculinities and femininities in China.

The Emotive Body: Gendering Beyond the Nation

Because of the semi-colonial status China fell into, configurations of gender in intellectual discourse of the late Qing and Republican era was often related to the survival and strengthening of the Chinese nation. Contemporary scholarly works in the field of modern Chinese literature concerning gender issues also tend to focus on links between gendered symbols and visions of the nation. Xueping Zhong’s Masculinity Besieged, for example, unlike Louie’s and Song’s books, is not an explicit study of masculine ideal but an examination of Chinese male intellectuals’ “besieged” situation upon encounters with Western modernity. According to Zhong, these humiliating encounters produced a “marginality complex” (14) and “crisis of masculinity” in the collective male psyche, which surged in the May Fourth era and irrupted again in the post-Mao literature of the 1980s. Zhong’s approach suggests the new orientation of valuing masculinity during the modernizing process, that is, the correlation between the identity of Chinese men and the merging identity of China as a nation state. Her approach belongs to the scholarship that emphasizes the link between gendered symbols in literature and the vision of the nation, although she focuses on man while other literary scholars are almost exclusively on women.³ To be sure, references to China as an emerging nation-state are inevitable in

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³ See Rey Chow’s Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading Between the East and the West (1991), Xiaomei Chen’s Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China (1993), and
discussing gender and modern subjectivity since nationalism is an aesthetic and political concern throughout the century (probably all centuries). But using the overarching framework of nationalism to talk about gender tends to camouflage and downplay, if not completely conceal individual agency and the function of emotions not directly related to patriotism. In short, nationalism has limits.

Scholarly debates on gender and nation points to my second goal, that is, to rethink the relations of gendered subjects to nation and nationalism. Underlining nation and nationalism makes us neglect the articulating power of sentiment discourse and bodily experience not directly linked to nation. Highlighting nationalism in literary and cultural productions often leads to reductive readings of texts and images in the following ways. First, it tends to cast women in a “metaphoric or symbolic” role but denies them as effective agents of the nation. As Synthis Enloe argues, nationalisms have “typically sprung from masculinized memories, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope” (46). Anne McClintock further points out that when nationalism is deemed as masculine, “gender difference between women and men serves to define symbolically the limits of national difference and power between men” (261). Men therefore are “metonymic,” a contiguous part of the national rather than the “metaphoric” role women play in national configurations. Second and related, it tends to align national modernity with the “grand” side of history—physical strength, action, rationality and progress associated with male—and marginalize emotions as feminine every day details as trivial. Third, it tends to read the depictions of physical and emotional frailty, which are prevalent in literary and

cultural texts in the period under discussion, purely as symptoms of a weakened nation.

Therefore, thinking gender beyond the nation opens up multiple meanings of a given text, especially the possibility of reading anguish over nation as a projection of feelings resulted from failures on personal grounds. As later chapters will show, for example, Xiao Hong’s and Yu Dafu’s novels which are traditionally understood in terms of their explicit expression of patriotism will immediately reveal the author’s “aberration” side when read from the perspective beyond the nation. Thus, “Motherland, when can you get stronger?” the famous line most poignantly uttered by the young man in Yu Dafu’s story “Sinking” allows us to understand the character as a man with human needs and sexual frustrations rather than merely a symbol of the weakened China.

Similarly, the agonizing female bodies in Xiao Hong’s novels are not merely a reflection of the victimization of Manchuria under the Japanese occupation, but rather the unending physical and emotional agony and dilemma of being a human and a woman. In other words, reading beyond the nation helps to rethink the hierarchical relations between the national and the personal. It is not that the nation is not a concern, but rather the “human nature” of an individual can weigh over concerns with the nation in various circumstances.

This dissertation, mainly informed by two strands of scholarships—the poststructuralist discussion on the social construction of gender and the body, and the revisionist reevaluation on the function of emotions in forming modern subjecthood—seeks to bring attention to the individual bodies and personal emotions in making “new” femininities and masculinities during the modernizing process in the Republican era. These two strands are tied in their common project to dismantle the thinking of
hierarchical distinctions—mind/body, reason/emotion, nature/culture, and male/female—as inherent realities. Poststructuralists treat these pairs as social constructions whose distinctions and hierarchies are situated in economic interests, power dynamics, interpersonal relationships, and other ordering principles of social life (Bourdieu). Foucault shows that “sex” is far from being a fixed and coherent substance in a given subject, but rather an “artificial unity” with seemingly “autonomous agency,” which in fact is determined by various social and cultural technologies (*History of Sexuality* 154-55).

In addition, Foucault’s methodological reflections, in particular, encourage the shift of gaze from the traditionally privileged “mind” and “rationality” to “body” and “sentiment.” Indeed, with his own works as examples, Foucault convincingly shows that in addition to histories of economics and politics, “it was also possible to write the history of feelings, behavior and the body” (“Politics, Philosophy, Culture” 112). Foucault’s genealogies concern above all the body (Lash Scott 256 and Margret MacLaren 86). Equally important is his concept of affective history, which subverts the understanding of history as a totalizing rational progression towards a greater development. This is a history, as Foucault claims, that “differs from traditional history in being without constants” (“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 153). It looks at discursive or non-discursive formations as they emerge through historical contingencies and accidents. The genealogies of effective history disclose ruptures, discontinuities, fissures rather than upholding some truth of history marked by continuities, regularities and linear progress. Foucault makes it clear that the discontinuities and ruptures are mostly manifested in divided emotions, dramatized instincts, and multiplied bodies (“Nietzsche, Genealogy,
History” 154). Foucault’s effective history distrusts rationality, or as Habermas puts it, “Foucault wants above all to put an end to global historiography that covertly conceives of history as a macro-consciousness”(8). Instead, effective history brings attention to discourse of sentiment. As Foucault emphasizes, effective history “must record the singularities of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most promising places, in what we tend to feel is without history—in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts” (“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 139).

The revisionist scholarship of emotions shares Foucault’s emphasis on sentiment and bodily experience. Revisionist scholars of emotions are also often fueled by the poststructuralist concept of human experience that dissolves the traditionally perceived hierarchies. As Haiyan Lee points out, they reexamine “the entrenched oppositions between emotion and reason, instinct and rationality, body and mind, nature and cultural, private sentiment and public morality, and inter truth and outer expression” (12). The revisionist scholars further suggest that it is emotions not rationality that forms the foundation of modern society and individuals. For example, George E. Marcus argues that emotion is the root of rationality, and that rationality should “enable rather than disable reason” to meet the requirements of a modern “sentimental citizen” (47).

Similarly, in Charles Taylor’s mapping of the emergence of modern selfhood, a modern socio-political community is not pathos-free and a modern individual is first and foremost a feeling subject (371). Alasdair MacIntyre also considers emotion to be the essential component of the modern identity and calls the modern self an “emotivist self,” taking emotion to be the essential component of modern identity (34).
These two strands of scholarship have deeply influenced my own conceptualization of body, emotionality and gendered identities for the dissertation. While I accept the poststructuralist practice that situates the gendered subjects within a matrix of societal and cultural factors, I do not intend to deprive the body of its agency as Foucault does. In other words, I agree with Foucault on his claim that the body is acted upon and shaped by different social and political powers, but I seek to mend the Foucauldian gaze that turns the body into “the inscribed surface of events,” or “a sociocultural text” that is “totally printed by history” (Foucault, “History” 148). In the dissertation, I adopt Foucault’s methodological shift from mind to body, from rationality to sentiment in scholarly research, but in the meantime, I also utilize the concept of “emotivist self” proposed by the revisionists, and assign emotions, together with the body, a role in constituting and shaping gendered subjects.

In regard to gendering Chinese literature beyond the nation, this dissertation benefits from *Translingual Practice* by Lydia Liu and *Revolution of the Heart* by Haiyan Lee. At first glance, this may look counterintuitive since thematically both works focus on theorizing the linkage between modern subjectivity and the nation, and neither is primarily concerned with the gender question. Yet both scholars recognize the importance of discourse of the body and sentiment in redefining self and sociality in early twentieth-century China and applied gender perspective to their analysis of literary and cultural texts. Lydia Liu, for example, in one of her influential essays on the female body and nationalist discourse, tries to “ponder the meaning of national literature from a gendered point of view” and use it as “a way of reading and intervention into the dominant theoretical and critical practices” that are male dominant” (“The Female Body”
Her reading of Zhenzhen’s body in Ding Ling’s short story “In Xia Village” shows that the story “refuses to let the trope of rape signify the victimization of China” (199); and she also successfully draws attention to moments of “aberration” from nationalism in Xiao Hong when the female writer expresses emotional and physical agony as a human being and as a woman in her novel *Field of Life and Death*, not merely as a bearer of the weight imposed by national crisis. Similarly, Haiyan Lee in her reading of weeping in Liu E’s *The Travels of Lao Can*, a famed novel published in the last few years of the Qing era, challenges the critics who attribute the novelist’s indulgence in tears to national crisis and social upheaval (2). Instead, Lee points out “the centrality of sentiment in defining human identity and community” and finds “the fundamental connection made by the author between weeping and human nature” (3). Both Liu’s and Lee’s works imply the necessity to rethink the hierarchical relations between the national and the personal. It is not that nation is not a concern, but rather “human nature” of an individual can weigh over concerns with nation in certain circumstances. Lee argues that “Discourses of sentiment are not merely representations or expressions of inner emotions, but articulatory practices that participate in (re)defining social order and (re)producing forms of self and sociality” (8).

If we agree that emotions shapes modern identity and subjectivity, then my project asks further questions: How do emotions (re)define and (re)produce gender identity? How do they form the new ideals of Chinese masculinity and femininity? To answer these questions, I will introduce discourse of sentiment into the examination of gender formations in Republican China with an emphasis on emotions beyond the nationalistic sentiments in forging a man or a woman as a modern subject.
As the subsequent chapters of this dissertation will show, obsession with the body dominates Chinese literature and popular culture as well as intellectual discourses in late Qing and Republican China. I contend that the reshaping/reorientation of gendered identities in Republican China originates from a new knowledge on the biological body, and a new fascination with the exterior body (display, perseverance, disease), a new concern with the interior of the body (psyche, emotions, intellect etc) as individualist ethos emerged in the Chinese horizon. The encounters with the West, particularly Western medical and biological knowledge of the body, and Western sartorial practices and sports, changed the Chinese notions of the body-person, bringing two seemingly opposite effects on gender-related body consciousness. On the one hand, the imported biological knowledge of the body tends to naturalize and rigidify femininity and masculinity. On the other hand, identities, including identity associated with gender became more fluid, malleable and performative when sports began to reshape bodies and dressing codes became loose. The body became increasingly visible as a physical and cultural phenomenon, both in discourse and in everyday practice.

Theorizing “Feminine Space”

I theorize “feminine space” and use it as a complex parameter to changing visual and textual representations of “modern” Chinese women and men in selected fiction, film, and pictorial magazines over the twentieth century. The conceptualization of “feminine space” is informed by the poststructuralist theory about gender and body, the revisionist scholarship on emotions, and the research on gender and masculinity in the Chinese context. “Feminine space” underlines my speculation that the ostensibly
dominating male tradition in Chinese literature and culture betrays an emptiness that needs to be filled by incorporating female gendered behavior. “Feminine space” is a gender-neutral sphere pertaining to both male and female subjects. It signifies a discursive space that writers and cultural critics involuntarily dwell or consciously create to accommodate affective dynamics in narratives. I argue that such dynamics engage the “feminine” side of Chinese modernity, such as irrational emotions, sentimental selves, and bodily pleasures or discomforts of everyday life. These affective vectors have been marginalized by grand discourses that promote modernizing the Chinese nation with imported knowledge and practice of science, democracy and military reforms, ever since China was repeatedly defeated in military contests with foreign powers in late nineteenth century. The perspective of “feminine space,” however, draws attention to these trivialized alternative elements of Chinese modernity, which I argue are embedded in literary and cultural productions throughout the twentieth century.

“Feminine space,” promulgating the centrality of the body and effective history in modern Chinese discourses, is first of all a corporeal social space, a space for examining how forms of power act upon human subjects through “subtle coercion” and micromanaging of the body. However, it differs from Foucault’s treatment of the body as, in Foucault’s own words, the “pretext” for “the insurmountable conflicts,” “ the inscribed surface of events,” or a sociocultural text “totally printed by history” (“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 148). In other words, while accepting the poststructuralist practice that situates the body within a matrix of societal and cultural

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4 Foucault uses the Panopticon as a heuristic device for understanding the modern functioning of power and the surveillance system. Based on Foucault, the Panopticon serves as an ideal model micromanaging the body (Foucault Discipline and Punish).
factors, I do not intend to treat the body as merely a “docile” socio-cultural text to be inscribed upon. In fact, the third goal for the dissertation, closely linked to the second, is to treat the body as a body-subject, to assign the body, along with the embodied emotions, a role in constituting or forming gendered subjects.

“Feminine space” incorporates the treatment of the body of free will. Therefore, in addition to Foucault, it becomes necessary to resort to other theorists to illustrate my approach. Henri Lefebvre reinstates the importance of the body in the production of social space against the “decorporealization” of space in the Western history (Derek Gregory 368). Like Foucault, Lefebvre pays attention to the corporeal side of social space, but the corporeal space for him is not just a discourse, but a “perceived–conceived–lived triad,” which produces the human body and is produced by it (Kirsten Simonsen 10). Lefebvre’s idea of the living body as “at once ‘subject’ and ‘object’ (407) can be traced to French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “connatural body.” Merleau-Ponty uses the term to resolve the dualism of mind-consciousness-subject and body-world-object. He postulates that the body is both sentient and sensible; just as there is a corporality of the consciousness, there is an intention of the body; the body and the consciousness function in a mutually transformative way (127). “Feminine space” is a social space lived by bodies that experience and interact. It allows studies of the body both as acted upon and as lived and generative. The generative power of body is particularly accentuated in forming social relations and human knowledge by sociologist Erving Goffman. As Christ Shilling argues, “Goffman is centrally interested in how the body enables people to intervene in, and make a difference to, the flow of daily life” (72). Goffman’s concept of “body idiom” is an effective term for bringing out the integral role
of the body in human agency. “Body idiom” is “shared vocabulary” of the body including “dress, bearing, movements and position, sound level, physical gestures, such as waving or saluting, facial decorations, and broad emotional expression (33). It offers the information for categorizing other people. At the same time, it enables people to manage their own bodies during social interactions, and therefore used for the purposes of self-classification as well. The body management is thus vital to both a personal’s self-identity and social identity. Although Goffman’s theory means to explain human relations in reality, it equally helps to illuminate my conceptualization of “feminine space” as a represented bodily space because in literary and cultural works are produced by and reproduce human relations in reality. Goffman’s theory allows me to interpret the body represented in literary works and cultural images as an exerting influence on the self, the world and intersection of the two. As a medium between the individual self and the social self, this aspect of “feminine space” is particularly apparent in my analysis of different expressions and gender identities in chapters 3.

So far, I have explained how the body is neither biological given nor socially acted upon in any simple way, and how the unique properties of “feminine space” allows it to become the site for reconciliation between the personal and the social, the physical and theoretical, concrete and abstract, the generative and the reflective. Now I will link “feminine space” to the scholarly discussion of gender and masculinity in China and explain why I define this space as “feminine.”

“Feminine space” intersects with Louie’s theorization of wen masculinity, and Yueyin Wang’s notion of “femininity complex” for our common interest in providing a positive interpretation of the incorporated traits that are now normally associated with
women. I join Louie and Wang in their attempts to highlight the desirability of feminine qualities in accessing masculine ideals. And like Louie and Wang, I see the continuity of Chinese masculinity—that is, the connection of modern masculine forms to traditional Chinese culture. “Feminine space” ostensibly dominating male tradition in Chinese literature and culture betrays an emptiness that needs to be filled by incorporating female gendered quality and behavior. As Stefan Dudink suggests, effeminacy was an “intimate other,” an implication that “masculinity—and the political liberty it supported—could never be assumed but always had to be guarded or regained, and therefore it called for permanent vigilance and constant action” (Quoted in Forth, “Surviving Our Paradox” 10-11). Compared with the physically robust ideals of masculinity, the more sedate and gentle masculinity, though marginalized in certain historical periods of certain cultures, seems to be a much more stable and “natural” form in modern societies. Louie convincingly demonstrates the appraisal of wen (soft masculinity, genteel qualities associated with a classical scholar) over wu (hard masculinity, physical power and martial valor) in Chinese history, and Wang’s “femininity complex” reveals that “it is the man who lacks” (35).

However, my conceptualization of “feminine space” differs from Louie’s wen and Wang’s “feminine complex” in the following aspects: First, unlike Louie’s wen and Wang’s “femininity complex,” which are defined as a sphere exclusively occupied by men, “feminine space” acknowledges the habitation of both men and women. More importantly, instead of interpreting the feminine elements in Chinese men purely as inherent of “traditional” Chinese culture, I see “feminine space” as being reoriented by encounter with “Western” modernity in late Qing and the Republican era. In fact, the
desire among Chinese writers to embrace a more aestheticized and feminized modernity was partly prompted by their readings of Western literary works whose cult of the feminine—physical and mental softness and emotional sensitivity and vulnerability—among some male writers in the West was to some extent a subversion of the masculine modernity and the scientific and technical rationality. In a non-teleological vein, “feminine space” embraces subaltern elements that allude to dangers in grand narrative’s future-based judgment of the past and present. In “feminine space,” the body as a feeling subject prompts the rise of modern subjecthood, particularly when identities are manifested in gender terms. In “feminine space,” new thoughts about body, sex, and consciousness get circulated in literary and cultural texts, and generate new meanings of gender. In “feminine space,” bodies and emotional lives generate ideals or counter-ideals of femininity and masculinity by transgressing social, historical and political boundaries.

**Chapter Arrangement**

This dissertation will map out the sometimes parallel and sometimes intersecting paths that Chinese femininities and masculinities have travelled against the changing background of aesthetic and political sentiments in twentieth century China, with a particular interest in and detailed focus on the formation of modern manhood and womanhood in Republican China. Diverging from the scholarship that argues for the self-scripting of female writers and other-imaging of male writers, I contend that both male and female writers not only construct texts of “Self” but also construct and rewrite texts

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5 In not only contemporary literary criticism, but also criticism during the republican period, there has been a trend among scholars that treats “New Woman” or “Modern Girl” as the male writers’ imagined “Other,” and female writers indulgent “Self.”
by and about each “Other.” Although the modern man image might not have dominated the literary and cultural scene like the trope of “new woman,” the parallel discussion of it is necessary to reveal the complexities of gender. In line with Browell and Wasserstrom, I argue that new notions of femininity and masculinity emerged during this time period as mutually constructed phenomenon. However, unlike Browell and Wasserstrom’s edited volume, which mainly looks at how “femininity and masculinity in China are constructed and performed as lived experience (emphasis in the original text)” this dissertation focuses on the construction and performance of femininity and masculinity as representations, both in popular magazines and films and in literary works and intellectual discourses of the time.

As I already touched upon earlier and will discuss in more detail later in the following 6 chapters, my approach to Chinese gendered identities center around the body image. This choice of focusing on representations of male and female bodies partly coincides with the philosophy Heinrich and Martin adopts in gathering essays for Embodied Modernities: “[R]ather than conceiving of body representations and body practices as two discrete realms, we assume that to a large degree, publicly available representations of bodies shape lived experiences of bodies” (5). Nevertheless, unlike their volume that deliberately “move[s] away from elite intellectual culture” and “focuse[s] on popular cultural forms” (Heinrich and Martin 12), I will incorporate not only the embodiment of gender in popular cultural forms, but also gender and the body in intellectual discussion and literary representations of the body. It seems to me that the cultural studies approach that has become popular in China studies from the mid-1990s till now needs to be reexamined. It was a significant shift at the time when the
dominating methodologies completely ignored the everyday, exclusively resorting to elite intellectual texts for answers to Chinese modernity. But after the turn to studies of everyday in Republican China for over 20 years now, it is time to acknowledge that certain strands of popular culture, literature and popular culture certainly are latched onto each other, particularly in expressing Self and shaping Individual.

As already laid out above, the first chapter of the dissertation sets up the theoretical framework by critically utilizing three strands of scholarships: first, the theory on the social construction of gender and the body, particularly Foucault’s reflections on the “fate” of the body in history that emphasize “body” and “sentiment” in critical examinations of culture; second, the reevaluation of emotions in forming modernity by revisionist philosophers such as Charles Taylor and Chinese literary scholar Haiyan Lee; and third, existing scholarship on gender and sexuality in China by historians and literary scholars such as Charlotte Furth and Kam Louie, who offer insight on a Chinese refracture of gender order different from that of the West.

After the introductory chapter, there are other chapters probing different aspects of the tension between body and gendered identities as played out in literary narratives and cultural debates about body, emotionality and gender identities. Chapters 2-4 focus on the body aesthetics and body politics of the Chinese New Woman and chapters 5-7 on those of modern Chinese men. The topic-based chapter arrangement helps to illustrate breaks and continuities of a single aspect/pattern, and draw attention to different aspects of the complex and often fragmented nature of gender constructs. This arrangement is also my attempt to avoid particular reductive schemes in literary criticism: the gender differentiation scheme that emphasizes separation and opposition between female and
male authors and tends to neglect or minimize shared ground and negotiation in their works; and the periodization scheme that posits artificial breaks between literary expressions based on regime changes, though such terms as Imperial China, Republican China, socialist or post-socialist China will be used, mostly as temporal terms.

Chapters 2-4 focus on the textual and visual representations of Modern Girl and New Woman in order to map out aesthetics and politics conveyed through the female body and emotionality, particularly those concerning the contradiction between Chinese “national” modernity and modern Chinese femininity. Chapter 2 teases out the difference and convergence of three different channels in representing modern women from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s: the leftist-controlled film productions, urban fiction by Shanghainese male writers, and leading female writers such as Ding Ling and Lu Yin. I argue that they constitute three coexisting expressions of modernity: the first one, linking the “wounded” female body to the weakened Chinese nation, strives for a modernity that goes hand in hand with a strong nation; the second emphasizes the sensorial experiences of the male body in shock and loss when facing the Modern Girl, an enigmatic figure of modernization and urbanization; the third focuses on the traumatic or ecstatic bodily experience of women in the wake of Chinese modernity. The latter two expressions, although long overshadowed by the first, are indispensable to a rounded understanding of Chinese modernity and modern femininity. Chapter 3 approaches breast binding as an entry point to chart the changing aesthetics of the female body from late nineteenth century to the 1930s in print media. Inspired by Dorothy Ko’s revisionist study on foot binding, this chapter complicates any simplistic treatment of physical bindings as a purely restrictive force. Rather, it establishes the practice of breast binding as an
increasing aspiration among Chinese new women to exert control of their own bodies and the surroundings. Chapter 4 uses Liangyou—one of the most influential pictorial magazines in China during the 1920s and 1930s—to showcase how print media of the time resorted to “scientific” knowledge on biology and evolution from the West to regulate the female body and sexuality. My analysis of the pseudo-scientific discourse breaks down the false dichotomy between mixin (blind belief/superstition) and kexue (science), revealing the two terms as oftentimes overlapping rhetoric that the nation-builders exploited so as to subjugate the female body to the strengthening of the nation.

The subsequent 3 chapters focus on the representations of men, examining the heritage of and resistance to wen—a pre-modern “soft” masculinity—in the formation of modern male subjectivity in the twentieth-century Chinese context. Chapter 5 focuses on the emergence of a “hard” masculinity—what I call “performative masculinity”—in print media in the first half of the twentieth century. Performative masculinity, while resisting against wen masculinity, draws upon bodily habits and physical culture from the West, and calls upon “Sick Men of East Asia” to perform physically. If military men and body builders provided inspirations for the performative masculinity that emphasized the exterior physical performance, what then prompted a new masculine interior? Chapter 6 provides an answer by situating the discussion of the interior world of Chinese modern men in the global intellectual and literary circles in early twentieth century that prioritized the irrationality of human psyche. Through close examination of two archetypes in the May Fourth literature—the madman and the hypochondriac man—I argue that introspective masculinity was an elitist corrective to the performative masculine ideal, and a reorientation of the traditional wen masculinity by Chinese
intellectuals: it acknowledges the power of emotions as the agent of modern manhood, rather than physical strengths and martial valor favored by the performative masculinity. Unlike the passive sentimentality of fragile scholars in *wen* masculinity, introspective anti-heroes often exemplify an irrational and sometimes violent exuberance of free will and craze for change and individuality. Chapter 7 surveys the continuation of introspective masculinity in literary works from the 1930s to 1990s by reading Shi Zhecun, Zhang Ailing, and Zhang Xianliang.
Chapter 2

Emotionality and Body Politics of Modern Girl and New Woman, 1925-1935

In literary and cultural representations of gender identity in the early-twentieth-century China, complex positionings of modern Chinese women were often linked to competing visions of Chinese modernity. Contemporary China scholars who work on gender issues of the Republican era have illuminated complex ways in which the formation of modern womanhood was intricately related to Chinese modernity in general, particularly to the modernization of the Chinese nation. As Shuqin Cui points out, “gender and nation”—Cui mostly focuses on women and nation—“have often served as narrative subjects and visual tropes” in the history of twentieth-century Chinese cinema (xi). The connection between Nation and Woman was made not only in Chinese cinema, but also in literary works and criticisms. Tonglin Lu argues that the new order of the nation is established through the representation of female body in twentieth century Chinese literature (10). Wendy Larson also notes that China’s “early modern intellectuals positioned women as symbolic of China’s lack of power, authority, and prestige as a modern nation-state” (26). Undeniably, at a time when Chinese intellectuals felt most humiliated for the fall of China into a semi-colony, their sentiments could well be captured in visual media and literary works where female figures frequently served to represent the nation. However, as Lydia Liu points out, “The majority of modern writers and critics, who are dominantly male, have largely shared a conspicuous blind spot when discussing the nation, class world capitalism, culture, and representations” (Translingual Practice 194). I further argue that this blind spot was partially caused by the hypervisibility that was conferred on women and turned them into the site for brooding
over national humiliation. It is exactly this hypervisibility of women in national/nationalist discourse that causes the subjugation of the question of woman to the question of the nation and consequently conceals expressions for women’s individual agency and the function of “personal” emotions not directly related to nation. I intend to shed light on the blind spot by introducing the “feminine space” that emphasizes a Chinese modernity differing from national modernity. This “feminine space,” where both male and female writers dwell for inventing or recuperating subjectivity, projects an alternative modernity that is intimately linked to individuals’ emotions in the turbulence of the modernizing process.

As I attempt to come to terms with the representations of modern women in the first few decades of the twentieth century, I encounter an abundance of materials in literary works and films dealing with Modern Girl and New Woman, the two archetypes in visual and textual representations in the 1920s and 1930s. Academic writings on modern women of that era are similarly abundant. Although scholars generally agree that both Modern Girl and New Woman are the embodiment of Chinese modernity and are conspicuously different from the “traditional” woman, the approaches differ in examining the relations of women to modernity.

Some position the New Woman and the Modern Girl as two distinctly opposite archetypes in literary representations of modern women affiliated to the writers’ different political agendas. Sarah Stevens, for example, associates New Woman with the leftist

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"According to Leo Ou-fan Lee, “In the popular May Fourth parlance,” “to be ‘modern’ means above all to be ‘new,’ to be consciously opposed to the old” (Modernity 159). Feng Jin defines New Woman as “highly privileged urban figures who shed the stereotypical domestic roles.” Sarah Stevens says that “both were posited in opposition to conservative ideals such as those endorsed by good wife, wise mother rhetoric” (82)."
(male) intellectuals’ and their pursuit of “positive aspects of modernity” such as civilization, strength and progress of the nation. Stevens thus describes the New Woman as “educated, political and intensely nationalistic” (83), “recognizable because of her revolutionary nature, her devotion to the larger cause of nationalism” (87). And in diametric opposition to the New Woman, Stevens links Modern Girl to the “disillusionment with the promise of modernity” because of her indifference to the national cause and her self-absorbed “elusive, fragmented and cosmopolitan” nature (83).

According to Stevens, Modern Girl appeared both as “the primary voice in (female-authored) works that explore female subjectivity,” and in the New Perceptionists’ works, which express male disillusionment with modernity and male fears of female subjectivity (83). Shu-mei Shih also differentiates the Modern Girl from the New Woman along a dividing line, but attaches opposed connotations to the gendered tropes. Shih conjures up a rather positive reading of the Modern Girl that frequently appeared in the New Perceptionists’ works as “a desirable embodiment of anti-patriarchal, autonomous, urban, and hybrid modernity,” while reducing New Woman to a symbol of the May Fourth intellectuals’ failure and despair in carrying out their high-profile projects of nation-building and women’s emancipation (“Gender, Race” 953). Although Stevens and Shih relate Modern Girl and New Woman differently to national modernity, both aligned them politically, emphasizing the psychological dimension of the enigmatic images, as symptomatic of (mostly) male intellectuals’ anxiety facing national crisis. In my discussion I will use this political divide postulated by Stevens and Shih as a springboard into comparing different scholarly conceptualizations of the two terms.
The Modern Girl Around the World Group including Chinese historian Tani Barlow and Dong Yue, adopts another approach that acknowledges the overlap between the two terms:

While our research suggest a close association between the Modern Girl and commodity capitalism in all contexts, it also questions hard and fast distinction that align New Women with political activism and modern girls with consumption. New Women were often avid consumers and passionate advocates of “free love,” and Modern girls embraced a variety of political projects including socialism and nationalism (9).

Compared with Stevens and Shih, the researchers of this group pay less attention to the “interior” of the two archetypes. Instead, they look at the political and commercial divide. Although they examine the Modern Girl image circulated in global mass media—including the Chinese media—mostly as a consumer in the flux of global capitalism, they make the distinction between Modern Girl from New Woman and yet acknowledge the overlap of the two concepts and thus reject any simplistic alignment of the two terms to political affiliations.

And yet some other scholars use Modern Girl and New Woman interchangeably. Wendy Larson describes Modern Girl as such:

The modern girl had easily identifiable physical characteristics, such as short hair and stylish, modern clothes. She was an urban woman, and often one who attended school to prepare for a career and sometimes immersed herself in love affairs or later worked for social justice. The modern girl had a deep, emotional interior, sought meaning form her life, struggled against inequality, and valued her intellect... (138).

Larson’s portrayal of Modern Girl, besides her similar physical resemblance to New Woman, was fraught with contradictions, as she obviously entertains both the negative and positive sides of modernity, which Stevens assigns respectively to Modern Girl and New Woman. Feng Jin’s studies on the New Woman image in early twentieth century
Chinese literature also contain different symbolic facets of modernity. Like Stevens, Feng treats New Woman as a term prescribed by the May Fourth radical male intellectuals for those “highly privileged urban figures who shed the stereotypical domestic roles” (2). Feng’s list of new women—girl students, urban drifters, career women and female revolutionaries—is more inclusive than Stevens’, and her interpretation of the New Woman image is not completely positive as Stevens’. First, Feng aims to reveal the prescribed term as an artificial break the male intellectuals strategically made between “traditional women” and “modern women” to seize power for modern knowledge and to marginalize alternative representations of women (2-5). Second, Feng’s use of the term New Woman can easily be an equivalent of Modern Girl as defined by Stevens for the lack of care for and commitment to the social and national issues. According to Feng, the female writers (new women in real life)—and female characters (new women in fiction) were often criticized for their fickle emotions and lack of commitment to revolution or national cause as compared to the modern male intellectuals. China historian Louise Edwards uses “new woman” (or “modern woman”) to encompass both the political and commercial sides of Chinese modernity, identifying a shift from “the politically aware, patriotic, independent, and educated” women created by the radical May Fourth intellectuals, to “the glamorous, fashionable, desirable, and available” women in the “commercial framework” of late 1920s and early 1930s’ Shanghai (115-116). Edwards acknowledges other scholars’ treatment of New Woman as a release of male anxiety, and further contents that radical male intellectuals’ tactic of differentiating the “real” new woman from the “fake” ones functioned as an ideological struggle between different leftist ideology and the central-government rule (123).
An examination of the scholarship on Modern Girl and New Woman poses a few sets of questions. The first set concerns the inceptions of Modern Girl and New Woman: Did the two terms come into being and come into play at the same time? Did they respectively contain both negative and positive connotations in terms of national modernity? The second set concerns relations between the images of modern women in current scholarship, literary works and literary criticism in early twentieth century: is the distinction between the two terms a false dichotomy made by contemporary scholars through looking back at literary and cultural scenes in the 1920s and 1930s from a vantage point? Or the distinction was already made by (dominantly male) literary critics back then to claim their mentorship for the emerging female writers and monopolize the modern knowledge? Or were they already labeled as Modern Girl or New Woman by the authors? The third set of questions is related to the gender-inflected criticism on Modern Girl and New Woman: were the two terms a mere male invention? If so, how do we evaluate the agency of female writers when New Woman was mostly hailed as the fortification of national modernity and male subjectivity? Almost all scholars mentioned above argue for the male invention of the two archetypal female images for their agendas. Larson and Feng, for example, said male intellectuals attached personal emotions to female writers and characters to assert their own legitimacy as the mentors of new woman and advisers for the new nation. I ask further: What standards did the male critics apply to evaluating whether the expressed emotions are personal or national? Was it possible to separate the two? Since turning to the emotional interior was also adopted by leading male writers such as Lu Xun and Yu Dafu in depicting male protagonists (as
discussed in chapter 6), what accounts for the difference in female writers’ examination of interiority, emotions and subjectivity?

In this chapter, I address these questions concerning Modern Girl and New Woman in multiple layers—current scholarship, fiction of the 1920s and 1930s and its contemporary literary criticism—and how they inform and regulate each other. I argue, against Stevens and Shih, that the sharp distinction between Modern Girl and New Woman is a false dichotomy that hides the discursive and prescriptive nature of the images. But unlike Larson, Feng and Edwards who use one term to include both concepts, I use Modern Girl and New Woman as two conceptually distinct terms because they did exist as two separate appellations in spite of the overlap. I propose that the often negative political and commercial connotations associated with Modern Girl is closed associated with the redefinition of New Woman in late 1920s by various interest groups. As somewhat a derivative of New Woman whose individualism and emotionality had been a celebrated hallmark during and even before the May Fourth era, Modern Girl, emerging in a different political (more leftist-leaning) and commercial (more globalized economy, especially in Shanghai), was labeled as “Western” and “bourgeois,” magnified, scrutinized and policed by various interest groups including the increasingly leftist ideology of literary criticism starting in the late 1920s. Of course, this is not to ignore the fact that the term Modern Girl made its appearance in China about two decades later than New Woman. According to Shu-mei Shih, Modern Girl was first mentioned in 1927 by a Japanese educated May Fourth writer Tao Jingsun in his short story collected in *Concert Ditties*, and it was used by Xu Xiacun as the title for his short story in 1929 (948). The late 1920s witnessed the inception of the term Modern Girl, which was immediately
grabbed by writers, literary and cultural critics to denote female weaknesses, including not only the materialistic and pleasure-seeking nature of the emerging Chinese female consumers in the globalized commerce as some scholars pointed out, but also the “self-centered” emotionality residue of the May Fourth New Women.

New Woman Turning Left

As the enthusiasm of saving and building the nation was heightened in the 1930s, the interest in the “woman question,” as the twin of the “nation question,” was also intensified. Film scholar Zhang Zhen evokes Walter Benjamin’s notion of “monad” as a crystallization of tensions and shocks thrown at Chinese people in the process of modernization (xiii). The year 1930 saw the formation of both the Chinese League of Left-Wing writers and of Lianhua film studio that recruited progressive directors including Sun Yu and Cai Chusheng. Leftist or pro-left writers, filmmakers and artists also made use of visual and textual images in mass media to excite patriotism.

The images of suffering naked women were often deployed in pictorial magazines to embody the endangered Chinese nation. A painting published in the art section of Liangyou—one of the most popular magazines of the time—is entitled “The Heroine” (fig. 2.1), which evokes images of female warriors ready to fight and sacrifice for the nation. The naked heroine in the painting holds a Chinese sword that suggests the imposing danger. Yingjin Zhang rightly points out that the naked heroine can be read contextually as China, which “was intended in part to stage a symbolic fight against the Japanese aggression” (“Artwork,” 152). Another painting published in Meishu shenghuo (Art and life), a visual arts magazine based in Shanghai, titled “National Heroine,” sends
out a similar message. The painting of a semi-nude woman fighting with a gigantic eagle (fig. 2.2) was featured as the front cover of the magazine’s inaugural issue in April 1934. As Carrie Waara observes, this image represents the magazine’s efforts to “dramatize the climate of national crisis and to evoke the idea of Chinese resistance” (179). In fact, the half-naked woman in the painting is one of the many 19th-century European portraits emblematic of the French Revolution. The woman’s naked body comprises the center of the painting, with the torso twisted as she turns her head towards the eagle and stretches her arm to push away the attacking eagle. Her clothes, torn open in the front down to her hip, reveal her upper body with one breast bleeding under the eagle’s talons. On the one hand, we see her determination: she confronts the bird’s gaze bravely, her fire-colored hair flies towards one direction, and her right arm tightly holds a sword. On the other hand, we also see her vulnerability: her flesh appears extremely pale and soft; her facial expression is a mixture of surprise and fear; and one of her feet stands on the ground, but the other blurred out by smoke and fire, making her gesture unsteady. *Meishu shenghuo* re-contextualized the painting and turns the European female image into a national heroine who bravely defends herself from the attack of the imperial force—symbolized by the menacing giant eagle.
Figure 2.1 The Heroine

Figure 2.2 The National Heroine
In Chinese cinema, left-wing films became dominant in the early and mid-1930s, and the Chinese woman in leftist films became a gendered cultural battlefield where national identities and social ideals were fought. Zhang Zhen considers the year of 1931 in early Chinese film history as “one of those monadic moments when history congeals and implodes, generating as much tension as energy” (xiii). On the one hand, the national crisis posed by Japanese invasion threatened the freedom to present and represent lived experience on silver screen, and on the other it opened a new venue for filmmakers to depict unexpected changes and problems in China. Vivian Shen, after examining gender relations in left-wing films of the 1930s in general, argues that they did little to promote women’s liberation (60). Lai-Kwan Pang, in opposition to Shen’s emphasis on the disempowering nature of representations of women, asserts that the left-wing cinema was devoted to women’s liberation precisely because this masculinity had to rely on femininity as its legitimizing other (Building a New Cinema 113). Pang also disagrees with Yingjin Zhang, who discusses that left-wing cinema’s tactic of stripping off the femininity of progressive and leftist-leaning female characters and make them genderless objects of representation (quoted in Pang, Building a New Cinema 114). For Pang, “femininity in this left-wing cinema was not removed but in fact emphasized” (Building a New Cinema 114). In my view, it is more of a question as to whose femininity was deprived, than whether the femininity was deprived in general.

As I will demonstrate in the following discussions on Mao Dun’s novel Rainbow (1929) and the much acclaimed leftist film New Women (1935, directed by Cai Chusheng), the “bourgeois” new women, with their femininity emphasized, dwelled on the “feminine space” that conflicted with the progressive marching of the nation, and
therefore should give way to the female revolutionaries or female factory workers whose
deprived femininity gained them access to the masculinized framework of nation
building.

Mao Dun, though a major opponent of the love and revolution formula in fiction
writing, presents a series of prominent female images that straddle New Woman’s
revolutionary spirit and Modern Girl’s seductive body and decadent life style: Jing and
Hui in Disillusions (1927), Sun Wuyang in Wavering (1927), Zhang Qiuliu in Pursuits
(1928), and Mei Xingsu in Rainbow (1929). Leftist ideology had already started to
transform literary scenes in 1925 when critics and writers began to prioritize “the
investigation of social problems” over “pouring emotions” (Wendy Larson 176-80). The
popular revolution plus love fiction in the late 1920s among the leftist writers becomes an
reconciliatory form of these two increasingly conflicting writing modes, which find their
embodiment in female characters who bear both what Sarah Stevens defines as the
negative and positive sides of modernity. In other words, these female characters do not
easily fit into Stevens’ neat categorization of Modern Girl and New Woman, but occupies
a rather ambiguous place in between. The deep-seated ambivalence mainly lies in the
contaminated and eroticized female bodies— at one point, these new women have to
prostitute themselves for usually a good reason— that needs the salvation via the
revolution. The erotic body is thus made into a coherent correspondence to the
progressive political agenda. It is worth noting that the May Fourth new women in Mao
Dun’s fiction including Hui, Sun Wuyang, Zhang Qiuliu and Mei Xingsu all possess
alluring bodies and lose their virginity. I argue that the female protagonist’s body,
particularly its loss of virginity, is the body politics that Mao Dun deploys to convert
individualism to collectivism. On the other hand, Mao Dun’s body politics is a conflicted one since “self” was always an important dimension embedded in his writerly unconsciousness so abandoning the self to wholeheartedly embrace collectivism proves to need painstaking efforts.

In *Rainbow*, Mei’s relationships with three men represent her interaction with different ideological symbols in relation to the May Fourth and the process of Mei growing politically mature is also the process of her desexualization. Literary critic Jianmei Liu considers women figures in Mao Dun’s fiction as “the beginning of a positive representation of revolution’s significance to the new woman,” as compared to women in May Fourth literature (81). But as exemplified in *Rainbow*, the story of Mei’s bildungsroman carries a didactic undertone: although it’s obvious that Mao Dun intends to create a perfect female character in Mei, Mao Dun ends up using the female protagonist merely as a prompt and sacrificing her true emotions and happiness for the linear progressive plot with revolution as its final destination. Furthermore, Mei’s growth from a May Fourth bourgeois New Woman/Modern Girl into a revolutionary New Woman was at the cost of suppressing her desire and depriving her sexuality. Throughout the novel, Mao Dun’s criticism on the May Fourth is apparent mainly for its advocacy for “empty” ideas and for free love. When telling the story of students during the height of the May Fourth who are engrossed in the new books and magazines, Mao Dun emphasizes that “in reality, neither really understood the works of these great masters” (25). At near the end of the novel, through Yinming’s mouth, Mao Dun particularly points out the flaw of the movement: “it offered us two imperatives: to discard all the old dogmas and to rely on our own convictions to create a totally new
system of values. But with our empty minds, what could we create? So all we did was follow the impulses of the moment” (190). Mao Dun makes it clear that the May Fourth movement only made people conscious of the necessity for social changes, but failed to provide independent thinking and necessary strategies to implement the ideas. Mao Dun in particularly links the “impulses of the moment” to free love and the accompanied sexual desire. Wei Yu is Mei’s true love, a typical May Fourth new youth who absorbs new thoughts from new magazines and imparts them to Mei to shape her into a new woman, but from the vantage point of Mao Dun, Wei Yu’s individualism and non-resistance eventually impedes his own progress and his relationship with Mei. Wei Yu and Mei’s relationship is platonic until the day when Wei Yu tells Mei they cannot be together and Mei asks him to send her his new magazines:

Suddenly the evening breeze blew through Mei’s muslin blouse, revealing the hem of her pale pink camisole. Like rosy clouds it dazzled Wei Yu’s eyes and aroused his passions. Instinctively he rushed forward, about to press Mei to his bosom, but he instantly recovered his composure and stopped (23).

It is not a coincidence that the evening breeze came right at this moment to reveal Mei’s body. Mei’s interest in the new magazines aroused Wei Yu’s desire for her. But as a signifier for the New Fourth ideal in Mao Dun’s narrative scheme, although the May Fourth idealism is declining in popularity and is often implied as outdated throughout the novel, Wei Yu still represents the force to enlighten Mei’s mind, so he is not in the position to function as the violator of Mei’s body. Liu Yuchun, Mei’s husband of an arranged marriage, is presented as the patriarchy that takes away Mei’s virginity and eventually causes Mei to determinedly break away from her past. Losing virginity to Liu Yuchun confuses Mei’s identity as an ideal May Fourth type of new woman but prepares
for her maturity into a female revolutionary. The contamination of the body destroys the 
self which was sustained by the May Fourth ideals and makes it necessary to seek 
salvation in a new ideology. In the following scene where Mei was indignant against her 
husband’s visits to prostitutes, it becomes apparent that liberal ideas has spread by new 
books and magazines during the May Fourth:

The fire of rebellion burned in her heart. She thought again of Yosano 
Akiko’s “On Virginity” and of the romantic adventures of the heroine in 
one of de Maupassant’s short stories. She admitted to herself that if any 
man had walked in at that moment, she would surely have let him do as he 
pleased, not for love but for revenge against Liu….. A feeling, half numb, 
half despondent, poured into her mind” (57-58).

The magazines and books that Wei Yu sent Mei apparently have only partially shaped 
Mei into a new woman, that is, she is aware of the oppression of patriarchy and wants to 
rebek against it, but can only sink into the type of Modern Girl thoughts of sexual 
indulgence due to the lack of guidance for actual “revolutionary” actions. Therefore, 
Mei’s salvation needs to be completed by Liang Gangfu, a brave and firm revolutionary 
hero. Mei and Liang had a long talk about “new life” (194-196). Here, Mei’s 
understanding of new ideas and new life is from the May Fourth idealistic concepts on 
freedom and individualism, as contrasted to Liang’s idea about fighting towards the 
emancipation of mankind. Through their debate on the nation, the foreigner’s presence in 
China, and the National Assembly, Mao Dun goes into great details to present Liang’s 
leftist ideology. The debate prompts Mei to reflect on individualism: “On the whole, what 
I did was a success, but what earthly good did any of it do for my country? 
Nonewhatsoever” (194). Equally important, Liang gets Mei to reflect on her “blind” 
pursuit for love: “When by chance luck and opportunity came together and passion
erupted, a woman could stumble blindly into a love affair with a man she did not really like. But at another time, when the same circumstances prevailed, she was just as likely to dig her claws into some other man in the hope of making up for the long absence of love’” (191).

Liang Guangfu’s presence and his rejection of Mei’s love eventually reformed Mei’s thoughts and reassigned her to the revolutionary order. In addition to psychological transformation, Mei’s ritual of conversion is completed with a physical transformation in her dream: In the dream, after Liang told her, “But I cannot love you. All I can give you is the pleasure you require,” “Mei cried and wrapped herself around him like a snake. Suddenly a heavy fist fell on her chest. She collapsed. Red blood spurted from her mouth and dripped into the floor” (210). Mei’s sexuality and desire for love, as symbolized by her snake-like body, reaches its life’s end as the red blood spurts out. In this Freudian moment, Mei is castrated by Liang Gangfu, the ultimate spokesperson for the communist revolution as if she needed to pay tribute to her love for him/the leftist ideology. The novel ends with a symbolic gesture where Mei, when walking on the street, is told by a foreign cop, “Walk to the left” (234).

To come back to the earlier question as to whose femininity is deprived: Mei, in order to be reassigned to the revolutionary realm and become a revolutionary new woman, must renounce her femininity and female sexuality, which dwells excessively in the body of the May Fourth Modern Girl/New Woman. In the leftist film \textit{New Woman}, this process of conversion is completed by female characters, with Wei Ming—the May Fourth New Woman/Modern Girl—replaced by the revolutionary worker A Ying.
“The Suicide of Woman Writer Wei Ming,” “The Tragic End of the Romantic Woman (langman nuzi),” “The True Reflections of the Modern Girl (modeng guniang),” “Big Revelation of Her Secret Life,” “A Fallen Woman and Unwed Mother”—these are among the array of newspaper headlines that Wei Ming—the protagonist of The New Woman, a 1935 film directed by Cai Chusheng—is forced to confront when she revived from an unconscious state caused by a suicidal attempt. The association of Wei Ming with “Romantic Woman,” “Modern Girl” and “Fallen Woman,” in contrast with the title of the film “New Woman,” poses a few questions to the audience: Is Wei Ming a New Woman or a Modern Girl? How are the stories of Wei Ming as a Modern Girl, a Fallen Woman and a New Woman intertwined?

The femininity issue brings out a broader social configuration that enhances the ambiguities between the New Woman, the Modern Girl, and the Fallen Women as they are constructed by the leftist filmmakers. Here, it becomes necessary to wind the clock back to the time when Wei Ming is pressurized to prostitute herself for one night so we can gain more accurate picture of her attempted suicide and a fuller understanding of Wei Ming’s identity as a Modern Girl and/or New Woman. Wei Ming, having lost her job as the music teacher at a girls’ school, cannot afford the hospital admission fees for her daughter Xiaohong, who is infected with pneumonia and in critical condition. Wei Ming’s last resort is selling her own body for one night. When she realizes that the customer is Dr. Wang, the school board member who has sexually harassed her and fired her when she rejected him, she fights to leave but returns home only to find Xiaohong dead in bed.
On the one hand, the sensational headlines that denigrate Wei Ming as a fallen woman are purely based on Dr. Wang’s slanderous reports to a male tabloid journalist; both the Dr. Wang and the journalist were “humiliated” by her rejection of their sexual advances. On the other hand, Wei Ming’s experiences reveal that there is no strong line demarcating her as the Modern Girl or the New Woman, and that contingencies play a large role in determining how the cultural representation is categorized. Bourgeois new women like Wei Ming would fit readily into the Modern Girl category in the leftist rhetoric: Wei Ming is a professional writer and a teacher from a middle class background, both emphasizing her role in what would be categorized as a New Woman. However, she is also associated with the Modern Girl in the film due to her embracing of modernity in its superficial forms: She appears in dance halls not infrequently, and “imprisons” herself in qipao and high-heels on a daily basis.

Figure 2.3 Wei Ming’s Death

After going through numerous hardships, the Modern Girl/New Woman Wei Ming still comes to her demise at the end of the film (fig. 2.3). Wei Ming’s death is documented in one of the most memorable death scenes in Chinese silent films: Her
repeated words “I want to live,” which are animated and superimposed on the screen over her desperate look for help, spring from her mouth as she struggles to sit up, attempting to reach the doctor’s hands. The poignant moment intends to force the audience to ponder: What caused Wei Ming’s death? Apparently, the film attributed her demise to the oppressive patriarchal power in different stages of her life: her father who strongly opposed her relationship with a poor student so she had to elope with the young lover; the lover who eloped with her but later abandoned her after she gave birth to a daughter; Dr. Wang, a board member of the school where she taught music, who fired her after making advances and got rejected by her, and who further humiliated her as the customer when she had to prostitute herself one night for her daughter’s medical fees; and the male journalist was making profit by selling her works as products of a “pretty female” writer but refused to pay her royalties. In this sense, the New Women is undoubtedly a feminist film that blamed the tragic fate of Wei Ming on the tyranny of the dominant patriarchal power against women. At the same time, the film is obviously directed by a leftist ideology that pins hope on the working class new women represented by A Ying rather than bourgeoisie women like Wei Ming. In fact, Wei Ming and A Ying are presented as two competing forms of new women: If Wei Ming represents the “emphasized” or excessive femininity, then A Ying is the dispossession of it. Wei Ming fits the New Cultural Movement’s typical imagination of a new woman: She is well educated and comes from a financially advantaged family; She breaks ties with her family for the sake of love and freedom, and seeks economic dependence by teaching and writing. Her femininity finds full expression in various qipao and high-heel shoes and her allure to men. A Ying, in contrast, represents the type of new woman advocated by the leftist
ideology in the 1930s: She is proletarian, a factory worker who dresses and acts like a man and is endowed with male physical strength and will power.

A Ying eventually replaces Wei Ming as the “real” new woman that advances the progress of the nation. The replacement is first suggested when Wei Ming is indulging in a dance to the “decadent” romantic music of “Peach Blossom River.” Her image quickly fades and gives way to A Ying, who, shown in a parallel montage, is teaching women workers a revolutionary song called “Huangpu River.” The replacement is even more obvious in the last scene of the film, where Dr. Wang—the ex-suitor of Wei Ming—is snuggling in the car with a dance girl, throwing away the previous night’s newspaper with Wei Ming’s image in it; the newspaper is blown away by wind and Wei Ming’s picture is stepped on by pedestrians; then, A Ying and a group of female workers appears in the morning sun on the street. The message here is clear: Wei Ming and the type of bourgeois new women she represents belong to the past.

Wei Ming’s fate is representative of many female protagonists in leftist films from the same era, such as Peach Blossoms Weeping Blood (Taohua qi xie ji in 1932), The Goddess (Shen nü in 1934), The Daybreak (Tian ming in 1933). Almost all the female protagonists, not to mention Wei Ming (in New Women) and the goddess (a prostitute in The Goddess), even Linggu (in Peach Blossoms) and Lingling (in The Daybreak) who came originally from the countryside, are corrupted by city life and modern dresses. Linggu (fig. 2.4), taken to the city by a young man, begins to dress like a city girl, wearing short-permed hair, fashionable qipao and high-heeled shoes. Lingling (fig. 2.5) reappears after one year into prostitution and transforms her appearance into a look that fits Barbara Sato’s description of the ultimate Modern Girl perfectly: “one piece dress
reaching only to the knees or a little below, high-heeled shoes and sheer stockings that showed off her legs and a wide-brimmed floppy hat or cloche made of a soft material partially concealed her short hair bobbed in the style of Hollywood idols” (53).

![Figure 2.4 Linggu dressed in qipao](image1)

![Figure 2.5 Lingling flirting with soldiers](image2)

All these women are confronted with the dilemma of either selling their bodies or witnessing the death of their loved ones: In *Peach Blossoms*, Linggu accompanies her father back to the countryside and gives birth to a girl, and not unlike Wei Ming, she is struck by poverty and sickness, and thus has to consider the option of offering herself to a
well-off lecherous old man in order to save her daughter from starvation. In *The Goddess*, the mother is a prostitute who bears all imaginable humiliations for the sake of her son’s education and future. In *The Daybreak*, Lingling at first is tricked to sleep with the factory owner, which prevents her tuberculosis-stricken cousin from losing his job, and later seems to be willing to prostitute herself so that she can help poor people and the nation.

![Figure 2.6 The Goddess](image)

At the end of the films, they are all hastened to an untimely demise: Lingling is shot to death, Linggu dies of illness and hunger, and the goddess is caged in prison. Ultimately, they all have to be in some way killed or contained for the health of the nation, as they represent contaminating forces that threaten national purity. As mentioned earlier, Wei Ming (*New Women*) is forced into selling her body for the benefit of her daughter. Even though she escapes, this very possibility seems to turn her into a contaminating force for the nation in a period when hygiene, strength and health are emphasized as vital to the national formation (*Yingjin Zhang “Prostitution and Urban Imagination”*). Her very existence thus becomes intolerable. Allowing her to live is to pollute the nation, especially in her role of New Woman, as teacher, writer, and mother. It
is in these terms that we read Wei Ming’s death. In *The Goddess* and *Daybreak*, the governmental authorities are explicitly shown imprisoning the female protagonist or sentencing her to death, respectively, drawing out the tensions between national authority and the nation as embodied in the figure of the Modern Girl. The goddess (fig. 2.6) gazes forlornly out at the audience, confined in a wooden box. Yet what is clearly more confining than the box, which rises only so far as her waist and nearly fades into the background, are the stark black uniforms of the male officers standing to either side of her, blocking her off on both sides with the stark contrast of their shapes. Both officers gaze off screen to the left, as if taking their orders from somewhere invisible to the audience, and ignoring the plight of the woman. In order to build an idealistic strong nation, the leftist films sacrifice the figure of the Modern Girl, exposing tensions between the modernizing Chinese femininity and the Chinese national modernity.

**The Modern Girl and the City as the New Perceptionists’ Neurological Conception of Modernity**

“Shanghai, a heaven built on hell!” To the New Perceptionist writer Mu Shiying, these words express the ultimate experience of a modern man in the metropolis of the 1930s Shanghai. The juxtaposition of “heaven” and “hell” brings to mind Raymond Williams’ contrast of the city as “light” and “darkness.” The exhilarating and dislocating personal engagement with the Shanghai modern suggested by Mu Shiying also fits Marshall Berman’s definition of urban modernity as a distinct mode of “vital experience—experiences of space and time, of the self and others, of life’s possibilities and perils” (14). Scholars who study Chinese cities have made similar observations. For
example, Frederick Wakeman asserts that the city’s “everyday life was suffused with ambivalence”(12). Yingjin Zhang, in one of the earliest books on the city in Chinese literature and film, summarizes the “clusters of equally ambivalent values” that have accumulated the city as: enlightenment/ambition, democracy/disorder, freedom/uncertainty, technology/estrangement (City 262). It is precisely this ambiguity that constitutes the double-sided nature of the urban modernity. The New Perceptionist School was crucial to introduce urban modernity to the Chinese audience through their short stories and cartoon images from the late 1920s to the mid-1930s. They construct the double-sided nature of Chinese urban modernity through the psychological experience of the male protagonists in face of the danger and allure of the city and its emblematic Modern Girl figure.

Indeed, in the New Perceptionists’ images and texts, the city and the Modern Girl are configured as heaven and hell at the same time, sharing the common conflicting features of modernity by being both the lure and the trap, the feared and the desired, light and darkness. For sure, Shanghai modern has many facets, and the concept of modernity in general invites many different definitions. What I find particularly relevant to the discussion on the New Perceptionist writers and the Modern Girl is Ben Singer’s interpretation of modernity. Singer, drawing on the theories of George Simmel, Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin, gives “a fourth major definition of modernity” in addition to the three dominant modes which posit modernity as “a moral and political concept,” “a cognitive concept” and “a socioeconomic concept.” Singer’s fourth assessment focuses on “a neurological conception of modernity…a fundamentally different register of subjective experience, characterized by physical and perceptual
shocks of the modern urban environment” (72). Simmel uses “intensification of emotional life” to describe the mental state of city dwellers in response to mechanization, the intensified pace, and experiences of hyper-stimulation of the urban space in late nineteenth and early twentieth century (11). Benjamin not only situates shocks in the context of the modern city, but also employs shocking experience for the creative process. Regarding shock experience as “the norm” and “inherent” to the modern metropolis (165-175), Benjamin suggests that “fear, revulsion, and horror were the emotions which the big-city crowd aroused in those who observed it”(174). The New Perceptionist writers in Shanghai, though completely unaware of Simmel or Benjamin and their theories, shared with their contemporaries an intense interest in subjective sensory experiences of urban male dwellers, and a deep anxiety about the effects of such experiences brought by the city and the Modern Girl on male psychology.

The cityscape in the short stories of Liu Na’ou, is a kaleidoscopic spectacle of high rise-buildings, fast-moving crowds, hectic traffic, loud dance music, glaring neo lights and, most importantly of all, alluring modern girls who constantly challenge the psyche of a modern man. Leo Lee summarizes the prototype of the Modern Girl looks in Liu Na’ou’s short stories as such:

She has round, thick lips, protruding breasts, a body soft and smooth like an eel, and dangling jade earrings (references to her sexuality and seductiveness); she has a “rational” forehead, short hair, and a Greek nose (reference to her Western appearance). She seeks pleasure, speed, and

7 Liu Na’ou was considered the leading figure in the New Perceptionist School. He was born and raised in Japan, and was well-versed in both modern Japanese and French literature (941)—in effect tracing the origin of the Chinese Modern Girl to the mysterious Egyptian dancer Kuchuk Hanem in Gustave Flaubert’s travel notes, whose image, according to Shi, influences the French Novelist Paul Moran’s depiction of exotic women, and in turn, the construction of the Japanese Modern Girl (mogan gura or moga) and the Chinese Modern Girl (Shih “Gender, Race” 947-48).
money; she is attractive, precocious, and most importantly, unfaithful (292).

The femme fatale image of the Modern Girl not only “populate[s] many stories” (Lee 292), but is also frequently the subject of pictorial representation. Guo Jianying’s Modern Girl cartoons are a pictorial translation of Liu Na’ou’s textual description: Their hyper-visible sex appeal allured men, but their pursuit of selfish sensual desires may bring men to their untimely demise. Guo’s cartoon “Model of the Modern Girl” (fig. 2.7) vividly portrays such conflicting qualities embedded in the Modern Girl: The repeated word IT manifests the magnetic force the Modern Girl has to attract men. The two sources of energy that power the Modern Girl are transported by two big tubes, one is fed by a
machine into which a worker is shoveling American dollars, and the other is connected to two young men, one labeled “hormone” in Chinese and the other labeled in English, who are weakened lying on the floor as “hormone” suppliers of the insatiable Modern Gir. As suggested by the title, this is the “Model of the Modern Girl,” a dominant female figure with erotic body, energized by money and hormones, radiating with sexual appeal, and posing great danger to men. While Yingjin Zhang argues that the New Sensationalists “inscribe woman as an object arousing male erotic desire... and as the indispensable ground of male ego-formation (City 232),” given the self-autonomy exercised by the Modern Girl, I think Modern Girl as a trope more as the ground of male ego-deformation, than formation. The New Sensationalists desired new forms of sexual gratification and yet feared losing control of female sexuality.

*Cosmopolitan Landscape* (Doushi fengjing xian)—Liu’s collection of stories first published in 1930—is suffused with descriptions of all different aspects of urban life, particularly those pertinent to visual and aural perceptions of the modern city and Modern Girl. In Liu’s short story “Two Men out of Tune with Time,” we again catch a glimpse of the Modern Girl stimulating senses of her male observers:

> When H turned his head he saw the image of a sportive, modern girl. Under transparent, glossy French silk were elastic muscles trembling as if engaged in a slight exercise. When his eyes focused, he saw the small cherry break open and a smile protruding from the green lake. He felt he could not remove his eyes from the pair of white knees slightly covered by the opera bag and peering out through the gray-black stockings (quoted in Shih “Gender, Race” 949).

Liu’s Modern Girl, a hybrid of the Chinese and the Western physical and mental features, refuses to conform to the Western Orientalism and is not bound by the concerns with Chinese traditional patriarchy and anti-imperialist nationalism either. Thus, as Shu-mei
Shih argues, she possesses “the particular modernity” that “affords her a surprising degree of autonomy and agency” (953). The thrills brought by the Modern Girl are inseparable from those brought by the modern city. A nightclub “Tango Palace” in Liu’s story “Games,” captures the new sensations of the city:

Everything in this “Tango Palace” is in melodious motion—male and female bodies, multicolored lights, shining wine goblets, red, green liquid and slender fingers, garner lips, burning eyes. In the center is a smooth and shiny floor reflecting tables and chairs around it and the scene of people mixed together, making one feel as if one had entered a magic palace, where one’s mind and spirit are both under the spell of magical powers…The air is heavy with a mixture of alcohol, sweat and oil, encouraging all to indulge in the high level of excitement…Suddenly the air begins to stir and a blast of music vigilantly cries out (quoted in Shih, *The Lure of the Modern* 288).

Shu-mei Shih deftly illustrates how this passage reveals Liu’s profound fascination with the magical powers of the city and great pleasure he feels in describing them (145). However, Liu’s fascination with the new sensations of the city is always accompanied with a critical voice. The collage of different sensations—colors, smells, sounds—suggests the variety and excitement of the urban night life, but also the ephemerality, fragmentation, displacement inherent to urban modernity, and the loss of wholeness of human feelings among the individual subjects in the city. This fits what Burton Pike calls “City Flux,” where “the lens cracks” and the image of the city is composed of “bits, pieces and shifting moods” (72). The city, being looked at from inside the psyche of a human being becomes a psychologized “unstable refraction of an individual consciousness rather than as an object fixed in place” (Pike 71-72).

Human alienation grows as the tempo of the urban life increases. Buqing, the protagonist in “Games” cannot keep up with speed, and rapid transformation of the city,
as well as the fast pace of the modern girl. Buting’s girlfriend is significantly named Yiguang—meaning moving light—who feels more at ease with the city life and in fact striving on it. Yi Guang’s ability to adapt to the city life and even to take advantage of it is set in sharp contrast with Buqing, who complains to her:

Yiguang, can you believe? This morning when I came out of a friend’s house, walking on a busy road, I felt the city was dead. Cars cramming the streets, trams on the tracks, people hurrying ahead, advertisements, messy store decorations all disappeared in front of me. I only saw a vast desert, as silent as in Archean era. The noises on the street became the whispers of a gentle breeze through the green woods, and the rumbling cable car sounded like little bells hanging on camels’ necks (3).

Buqing’s description of the street scene he remembered from the morning here serves as a double escape for the modern man. First of all, it is an escape from the nightlife he was experiencing at the moment. His dwelling on “then” instead of “now” is not without ambivalence, as the morning scene in fact sounds rather drab compared with the colorful nightlife at the moment, as if to confirm that “one’s mind and spirit are both under the spell of magical powers” in Tango Palace. Sensual pleasures are unreal. When magic disappears, “the city was dead.” More importantly, it is an escape from the urban life in general. In Buqing’s escaping trip to the morning street scene, his fantasies about desert, green woods and camel bells betray a deep yearning to return to nature.

Liu does not harbor Shen Congwen’s Utopia of the country where traditional virtues are maintained, but he does portray the countryside as a temporary retreating place for urbanites. Ran Qing, the protagonist in “Scene”—another story in Cosmopolitan Landscape, was totally engrossed by the beautiful rural scenery outside the train. He and the woman he encountered on the train decided to get off before reaching the destination, and consummate their romance in nature. They eagerly ran to the embrace of green trees,
rolling fields, and eventually each other’s arms. When the woman took off her clothes after they arrived at a vast green meadow, she claimed: “Clothes feel like such a nuisance whenever I am in a place like this” (27). This stimulates Ranqing’s reflection on the mechanization of urban life in general:

Not only clothes were mechanical, our houses have turned into machines too. Don’t we live among machines: cables, water pipes, heating pipes, gas pipes, square roofs—all buildings and objects are made of lines and angles. Today, we are getting rid of the restrictions of machines and returning to nature (28).

Breathing “the air without coal dust,” making love on “the green blanket of grass,” he felt “the instant pleasure all over the body” (29). However, the pleasure is fleeting, and nature, at its best, only offers a temporary relief. The evening train took them to where they belonged. Trains and cars are presented as emblems of mechanical force behind the unstable motion and discontinuity of modern city life in Liu’s stories. In “Games,” Yiguang left Buqing for a richer man who promised to give her “a racy sports car” with “two black-faced chauffeurs” (7). In “Two Men who are out of tune with time,” the protagonist H, confident that he is in tune with the urban tempo, had to take blame from the lady he met at the horse for being “so clumsy and slow with hands and feet” because he wasted time inviting her for eating ice cream and taking a walk instead of performing “love-making in a car amidst the wind” (98). When cars and trains change how the city is experienced in temporal terms, the modern men often discover that they lag far behind the pace of modern girls, whose speed parallel the speed of the city featured by fast cars and brief encounters.

Emotionality Politics in Lu Yin and Ding Ling
Incited by leftist ideology, early 1930s saw the denunciation of the “self”-centered elitism of the early May Fourth era. Critics and writers alike promoted a new type of literature that emphasizes social commitment and class awareness. Women’s writings in particularly were criticized for their narrow topics, individualistic experience, and overt expression of emotions and desires. Literary critic Qian Xingcun identified emotions as the default and faulty mode of women’s writings:

In the creative works of most women writers, there are unmistakable latent signs that will show you the author is a woman as soon as you open the book. The most important is that they use passionate feelings as their ink of creation and turn their personalities of their selves from the old era into the center of their characters’ personalities. Their works are lyrical and autobiographical, and nothing can depart from their own immediate environment. Emotions are weightier than logic (quoted in Larson 185).

Qian’s remarks invoked gender stereotypes by aligning “emotions” (vs. logic) and “autobiographical” (vs. social) with women writers. Mao Dun’s literary criticism in early to mid-1930s similarly attributed the installation of women’s writing skills to their focus on narrow and autobiographical topics. He criticized Lu Yin and early Ding Ling for relying too much on emotions to fortify themselves and for the female writers’ lack of efforts in engaging social realities. Another contemporary male critic He Yubo further pointed out that women writers did not engage with social reality because of their inability to understand social organization. He Yubo also relates women’s frequent use of fragmented narration in personal pieces such as letters and diaries to their less logical mental faculty and poorer writing abilities (quoted in Larson 182).

“Miss Sophie’s Diary,” a short story written by Ding Ling in 1927, is also a record of the pain of a woman who possesses an irrepressible inner drive for intellectual as well as sexual expression and understanding. Apparently a result of the combined
influence of the May Fourth Movement and the Western feminist ideas, Sophie fits the description of the New Woman: She appears to be well educated, reading books and newspapers and engaging in intellectual conversations with friends; she also manages to be financially independent. More importantly, the diary entries reveal her defiance against patriarchal tradition. She left home. The reason why she left is not explained, but the very gesture of cutting off ties with one’s family is symbolic of the New Woman of the era who is ready to make proud departures from Confucian ideology and familial structure, to resist patriarchal appropriation and subordination, and to embrace the new nation and freedom it promised. She took the crucial step in the realization of the new woman’s individuality. Many female characters in her early works before 1930 such as Meng Ke (“Meng Ke” in 1927), Isa (“Suicide Diary” in 1929), Lijia (“Weihu” in 1930) we will see the traits of New Woman. On the other hand, her later works that many critics considered more leftist—Stevens considers her “Shanghai Spring, 1930” as a defining turn from Modern Girl to New Woman—were often fraught with the “selfish” and “trivial” pursuits of a Modern Girl. Another Ding Ling’s contemporary literary critic Mao Dun thinks Sophie as “representative of liberated young women after the May Fourth and her psychological contradictions in sexual love” (Dingling yanjiuzhiliao 253). Mao Dun’s comments on the liberated young women after the May Fourth implies the existence of a generation of liberated young women in the May Fourth.

Sarah Stevens considers “Miss Sophie’s Diary” as the ultimate portrayal of a self-absorbed Chinese Modern Girl, which dovetails the comments Ding Ling’s contemporary critic Qian Qianwu made in 1931. According to Qian, “Ding Ling is the most skillful introducing the character of Modern Girl” and understands the
characteristics of Modern Girl better than any of her contemporaries (226-36; Modern Girl originally in English). Qian’s remarks imply that Sophie was one of the first Modern Girl images if not the first in Chinese literature and Ding Ling herself was more or less a Modern Girl in real life thoroughly familiar with her life style, appearance and inner thoughts. While Stevens mostly looks at the political affiliations of the Modern Girl, Qian emphasizes the emotional instability as the major trait of the Modern Girl. He identifies 6 characteristics of the Modern Girl as manifested by Sophie: 1) very selfish; 2) overly emotional and easily moved to laughter or tears; 3) often tired, frustrated, and made pessimistic by the people and situations surrounding her; 4) depressed in activities; 5) mired in obsessive and unproductive thinking; 6) suspicious, irritated, and lost in a “mystical delirium” (quoted in Larson 91). Apparently, nearly all the traits that Qian lists are related to unstable emotions. The short story allows readers to peek through a solitary young woman to reach her inner world of frustration in the quest for love and passion. What she constantly asks in the diary is “What do I want?” (19, emphasis mine). She analyzes herself all the time, but only realizes that “I really don’t know how to analyze myself” (19). At one point she declares, “I want, I want to make myself happy” and “I desperately need those human emotions and want to possess all sorts of impossible things” (23). The syndromes of the Modern Girl intensify when Sophie gets entangled in the love triangle between Brother Wei and Ling Jishi.

It’s worth noting that the emotional turmoil was mostly attributed to the presence of men as well the masculine force of intellect, which prompts Sophie resort desperately to the feminine realm to release anxiety and obtain comfort. In one of the most talked
about scenes about the reversal of the male gaze, Sophie is often considered as the active bearer of the gaze the first time facing Ling Jishi:

How can I describe the beauty of that stranger? Of course, his tall body, his delicate white face, his thin lips and his soft hair would all dazzle anyone, but there is also an elegance about him that I can’t express in words or put my hands on, but set my heart aflame…. Could I tell anyone how I looked at those two delightful lips like a child longing for sweets? (21)

This passage is often read as the author Ding Ling endowing Sophie the absolute power to reverse the gaze, to express female desire and to assert female subjectivity. However, a further examination shows that Sophie reverses the gaze only half way because Sophie already interiorized the male gaze at the “emotionality” of women and uses that as a standard to scrutinize herself all the time. This self-securitization becomes particularly evident at the very end of the diary when Sophie concludes: “Oh, how pathetic you are, Sophie” (64). Sophie’s gaze on herself admits that she is emotional about personal issues, which is a good reminder of the male critics’ gaze on female writers’ writing. Therefore, the gaze-reversal scene is not a usurping of male as some critics claimed, but rather an unsuccessful tactic to cope with the masculine presence.

Ding Ling uses Sophie’s desire for material comfort and her indulgence in emotions to establish the “feminine space” in Sophie’s world that seems to contradict the masculine “intellect.” Sophie’s pursuit for material comfort is associated with freedom and love. She hates the suppressing hostel bedroom, which she describes as “terrifyingly lonely… especially inside these four whitewashed walls.” The walls and the ceiling are easily identifiable symbols of obstacles to achieving freedom. “Whenever you sit they blankly block your view. If you try to escape by lying on your bed you’re crushed by the
ceiling, which is whitewashed too” (15). She dreams of herself “lying on a bed in an extremely luxurious bedroom” surrounded by her sisters “kneeling on a bearskin rug” praying for her and her father “sighing quietly at the open window” (23, emphasis mine). The emotional wellbeing is related to material comfort, because warmth and openness of heart only comes into being with the presence of bearskin rug, the luxurious bedroom, and the open window, which sharply contrast the reality largely constituted by whitewashed walls and low ceiling of the hostel room. Sophie suffers from both physical diseases such as tuberculosis, headaches, insomnia, and from mental ones like melancholia, depression, and neurosis. The doctor’s advice that Sophie should not read or think suggests the lack of physical and mental health is associated with strenuous intellectual exertions. When Sophie reads newspapers, she “start[s] with the big headline stories of national news then go to the summaries of world events and the gossip about this city,” and after she reads all, she “languidly drop[s] the paper” (14). Reading newspapers gives her no pleasure, because important topics on “education, party propaganda, economics, and the price of 96 government stocks” don’t provide her with the warmth and comfort she needs. After reading the newspaper and not having anything else to do, she will “sit in the stove and get into a bad temper” (14).

Liquid images such as milk and tears connect Sophie to the feminine realm. In the December 24 diary entry, she writes: “I warmed my third drink of milk when the sun started shining on the window-paper. Yesterday I heated milk up four times” (13). According to Lydia Liu, milk is one of Ding Ling’s “favorite liquid images for the representation of femininity” (176). Through Sophie’s action of warming milk again and again, Ding brings out the desire of the female character and of herself to construct a
space of femininity. The triviality of boiling milk is up-lifted to “a kind of exercise to build up [her] spirits and ward off irritation” (13-14). Another significant gesture to construct the “feminine space” is through diary writing. Sophie writes her diary with feelings and tears, as the March 28 diary entry reveals:

All her life Sophie has been too passionate and too sincere about wanting people to understand her and share her feelings. That’s why she’s been submerged in bitter disappointment for so long. But who else, apart from her, can know the weight of her tears? This diary is less a record of Sophie’s life than simply every one of those tears. Only they (the tears) seem to be true to her (61).

According to Lydia Liu, the metaphor of tears serves another liquid image of femininity in the text (*Translingual Practice* 177). Liu thinks that tears “with their connotations of evaporation and blankness, signify the absence of meaning” (117). I would say that tears, with the fluidity and warmth, are not the signifier for absence of meaning, but rather the means of writing a different meaning, different from the one created by pen and ink.

Sophie’s diaries, which she intended to write for Sister Yun, were denied by and ultimately inaccessible to masculine intellect, as shown by Sophie’s failure in getting Weidi to understand her through the diary entries. Ding Ling thus creates a writing written for and read by female readers and a feminine realm shared by them.

The writings of Lu Yin (1899-1934) are steeped in equally strong emotions of love, sorrow and despair of love’s loss. Lu Yin herself was a May Fourth new woman relentlessly pursuing education, free love and women’s liberation. 8 Her student days in Beijing Women’s Normal College were devoted to writing and social activities for

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8 Lu Yin went to Beijing Women’s Normal College the same year when the May Fourth movement took place. As a teenager, she insisted in engaging to an economically disadvantaged cousin Lin Hongjun against the will of her mother but later broke the engagement when she fell in love at college with a married man Guo Mengliang, whom she eventually married in 1923. Her second marriage was with Li Weijian, a poet 9 years her junior.
women’s liberation. Mao Dun thus praised her as the product of the May Fourth movement and her earlier works for their concerns with social issues (3). However, Mao Dun criticized Lu Yin’s fiction after 1925 as autobiographical with a very narrow scope in subject matters. To Mao Dun, who was primarily concerned with social engagement and political leanings of the female writer, Lu Yin changed from a 4th May new woman full of revolutionary vigor to a self-pitying lady obsessed with her own misfortune in mid 1920s.

Mao Dun’s male-centered leftist criticism ignores the poignant female experience that Lu Yin had persistently expressed throughout her writing career. After the first few years at college experimenting with such “social” topics as the unfair treatment of factory workers and farmers, Lu Yin began to reflect on her own writings, turn to the emotional experience of new women like herself, and develop her own unique aesthetics that emphasizes women’s subjectivity and legitimize the female “empirical” perspective. In fact even Lu Yin’s earliest works, which Mao Dun praises as dealing with more realistic and objective “social” topics, contains gender perspective. For example, in “Can One’s Soul Be Sold Out,” the female narrator hears the protagonist Hegu tells her story of women working under harsh conditions in a cotton mill. This way, Lu Yin not only denounces class oppression but also gender inequality. The emphasis on female bonding and female subjectivity is further developed in Lu Yin’s later works. Undeniably, Lu Yin, like many of her contemporary May Fourth writers, indorses Western realism, but as Kirk Denton points out, their notion of realism mainly concerns “the writer’s cultivating a personal, meaningful relationship with the external prior to the process of creation and then embodying that subjective experience in the work” (Modern Chinese Literary
Lu Yin, more than anybody else of the May Fourth generation, prioritizes writing as a way to reflect and cultivate the inner self in relation to the exterior “reality.” As she asserts, “the crystallization of art is subjectivity” (quoted in Denton, *Modern Chinese* 235). She prefers the type of writing spontaneously nourished by emotions and intuitions to the type motivated by a political agenda. She describes her own writing as “natural expression of intense emotions, a voicing out of heart.” And her ideal writing process is: “Wherever the emotions go, the meanings follow and the writing comes into shape” (*Yun Ou Love Letters* 82). For Lu Yin, writing with and on emotions is not only natural and unpretentious, but also makes a better literature because emotions, especially sadness, according to her, also adds texture to creative writing: “I often see the world and explain everything through a sign or a drop of tear; I blame it to the pair of gray classes I was born with, which do not beautify the universe in my eyes. After all, the world has many colors, but doesn’t the hue of sad mourning still make a better poem?” (*Yun Ou Love Letters* 7). Thus Lu Yin emphasizes subjective experience and personal emotions as essential elements for artistic creations.

Lu Yin is fond of using the first-person narratives, and she frequently deploys letters and diaries in creating the realm of a “feminine space” where she can lavish ink on emotions and psychological facets of women and allow the female characters to share personal experience with each other. Self, in its confessional mode becomes the most powerful performance in this process of asserting female subjectivity. “Li Shi’s Diary” is a short story that combines diary entries and letters. Through Li Shi’s diary entries, Lu Yin reinforced her philosophy of life: “How can life be fun without emotions? How can spring rose buds fully bloom without sunshine? Human life without emotions will too...)
soon wither” (38). All the diary entries are records of emotions alternating between
“loneliness that makes me bitter, boredom that makes me sad and longing that makes me angry.” Cutting emotional ties with Yuanqing eventually led to Li Shi’s death, as Li Shi wrote in the last diary entry: because of Yuanqing, I no longer enjoy life, because of Yuanqing, I am incurably troubled…Let me die from depression…” (41). It’s also emotions that build the multi-layered female community in the story: between the author and the female characters, between the female reader/narrator of the story and the protagonist Li Shi, between Li Shi and her female friend Wenwei and female lover Yuanqing. As Tse-lan Sang points out, “Among May Fourth fiction writers, Lu Yin dwells most persistently on female same-sex attachment, primarily as a spiritual, ideal, and liberating love, surpassing cross-sex love and marriage” (133). Diary writing and reading helps create this same-sex attachment through emotions and also sheds the feminine world from male gaze. The story begins and ends with the narrator of the story reading and lamenting on Li Shi’s diary entries. The narrator believes that Li Shi died of a disease of heart (xinde bing, emotional) rather than a heart disease (xinzang bing, physical) as diagnosed by the doctor (presumably male). The challenge of the doctor’s diagnosis highlights a criticism that runs throughout the story: men’s lack of understanding of women’s suffering which was emotional rather than physical. The female narrator, with tears streaming down, releases the diary entries to other readers. Although the story ends in tragedy, it more or less reveals what Lu Yin considers as the ideal love and ideal process of creative writing. In other words, through the tragic story of Li Shi, Lu Yin intends to show the superiority of female same-sex love both for achieving women’s autonomy and for a satisfying writing experience: First, the same-sex love is
superior to a heterosexual relationship because a man’s love and the consequent 
restrictive domestic life could smother the new woman’s newly awakened self; and 
equally important, the superiority of the same-sex relations also lies in emotional 
exchange as the ultimate source of artistic creation.

Lu Yin continues her exploration of autonomy and female relations as an 
alternative life style to marriage in “Old friends from Seashore” (in 1923) and “After 
Victory” (in 1925). “Old Friends,” although in a third-person omnipotent narrative, 
reveals the inner feelings of five young women through conversation and letters. Lu Yin 
describes a Utopian women’s kingdom through Lusha: “The ideal life we talked about—
we’ll built an exquisite house by the ocean, Songyin and I open the windows to the 
ocean, and write masterpieces; You and Linyu go to nearby villages and teach innocent 
children there, come back in the evening; then we can have dinner on the lawn near the 
seashore and tell stories. What a happiness.” But this Utopian feminine world shatters as 
the five friends went to live their separate lives. Letters thus provides the opportunity to 
construct a virtual “women’s kingdom” for them to freely expressing their thoughts and 
pouring out their emotions as contrasted to the restrictive heterosexual relations. The 
development of the plots is replaced by actions around letters. In “After Victory,” which 
can be read as a sequel to “Old Friends,” Lu Yin makes even fuller use of the epistolary 
form. Through Qinzhi’s letter to her college friend Qiongfang, which branches out to 
other letters and letters inside letters, creates a web of emotions to restore the intimate 
pre-marriage female community, reminiscent of the women’s kingdom in “Old Friends.”
The letters are deeply personal, besides fond memories of the carefree life before 
marrige, mostly focusing on the boring and purposeless daily routines after marriage,
and frustrating house chores and child-rearing experiences. In “After Victory,” Lu Yin seriously reflects on the “victorious” New Woman project championed by male intellectuals: she casts doubt on “free love” which was promoted and idealized as “modern” by May Fourth intellectuals. Almost all the women in the story embraced “free love” and got married—often after struggling with or breaking away from their own families—with the men they chose, which was supposed to be a triumph over traditional arranged marriages. However, they began to sense the aftermath of free love and the dissatisfaction with everyday life after marriage. “We were filled with literature and free thoughts and managed to achieve this victory, but now after victory our joys are few and our troubles great” (155). Through different female characters in the story, Lu Yin further evaluates the conflict between marriage and women’s education, as … “Once women who have received an education get married, not only do they have little skill in managing the household, but they also lack the energy to take up work in society” (151). The epistolary form creates an intimate female community that underscores emotions as a manifestation of new women’s gender consciousness and as a necessary tool to combat male critics’ vintage point.

**Conclusion**

I examined how the nuances and valences of the Modern Girl figure allow it to be confused with the New Woman, and how such confusion signifies the contradictions within modernity, for instance between the national (or nationalistic) and the personal.

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9 The only exception was Wenqi, a principal of an elementary school who remained single due to doubts about marriage after witnessing other women’s fates.
(individualistic). Although some male writers such as Lu Xun and Yu Dafu, endeavored to have individualistic and personal emotions connect with and contribute to social and national projects, their overt efforts often betray the mission impossible as I demonstrate in chapter 6.  

In this chapter, I mapped out the emotionality and body politics and aesthetics conveyed through the New Woman/Modern Girl images, the shifting boundaries between which, I argue, signifies the unresolvable contradiction between Chinese “national” modernity and modern Chinese femininity and the inseverable ties between the nationalistic and individualistic sentiments embedded in literary and cultural discourses in the 1920s and 1930s. I examined three major channels in representing Chinese Modern Girl and New Woman from 1925-1935: the leftist literature and film, urban fiction by Shanghai modernists or the so called New Perceptionists, and leading female writers of the time such as Ding Ling and Lu Yin. I choose this time frame mainly because that was the time when new women of the May Fourth generation were brought into scrutiny by the increasingly leftist ideology to promote a type of new women different from the May Fourth generation. It was the time when Modern Girl came into being and full play. To some extent, the three channels mentioned above, although constituting three seemingly distinct modes of representing the modern woman and the modern nation, were all looking at the New Women of the May Fourth generation critically from a vantage point with a rather ambivalent attitude. These three channels constitute three coexisting expressions of modernity: the first one, linking the “wounded” female body to the weakened Chinese nation, strives for a modernity that goes hand in

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10 In Yu Dafu’s “Sinking,” for example, the hypochondriac youth always awkwardly contributes his sexual frustration and feeling of inadequacy in a foreign country to China’s national quandary.
hand with a strong nation; the second emphasizes the sensorial experiences of the male body in shock and loss when facing the Modern Girl, an enigmatic figure of modernization and urbanization; the third focuses on the traumatic or ecstatic bodily experience of women in the wake of Chinese modernity. The latter two expressions, although long overshadowed by the first, are indispensable to a rounded understanding of Chinese modernity and modern femininity (and consequently masculinity).
Chapter 3

“Natural” Curves: Breast Binding and Changing Aesthetics of the Female Body in China of the Early Twentieth Century

In 1931, Liangyou (Young companion), one of the most popular pictorial magazines of Republican China, published a cartoon that sketches the models of changing feminine beauty (fig. 3.1). The cartoonist Lan Weibang, through a series of statues that represent varying forms of the female body, lays out what he conceives of as the historically progressing standards of feminine beauty from the right to the left. Each of these statues is representative of a particular era: the platform upon which the right statue rests is inscribed with the “Era of the beauty of slender waist and bound feet,” the middle with the “Era of the beauty of face,” and the left the “Era of the beauty of curves.”

Figure 3.1 Models of Changing Feminine Beauty. A cartoon by Lan Weibang, “Nüxing mei bianqian moxing” (44).
Within the chronology, the right statue turns slightly towards her left, peering into an unrepresented past. The statue’s extremely small and pointed feet indicate that they have been bound, which fits standards of beauty in Imperial China, and yet her constricted waist expresses a more European aesthetic, where various corsets and girdles were used to bind the waists of women. The thicker lines of her back and legs further emphasize the small size of her waist and feet, drawing even more attention to these locations of distortion. Her missing arms invoke the image of excavated Venus de Milo, which further signifies a hybrid image of feminine beauty combining both Chinese and European aesthetics.

The middle statue is a more complex hybridization. Unlike the first one that places the difference between Chinese and European standards horizontally, this statue is divided vertically down the middle, with the back of her head featuring a Chinese hairdo, but her face composed of non-Chinese traits. Here, the suggestive foreignness of the face—high nose, deep-set eyes and thick lips—is no longer purely European. The body, dwarfed by the gigantic head, is presented in a frontal pose and split in the middle even more conspicuously: her left foot, as in the first statue, is also pointed and malformed, especially when compared to the more fully-developed right foot; her left breast is underdeveloped, flat and hanging down to the thigh, which suggests that it was once bound closely to the body, in contrast to her full and round right breast that forms the curvier half of the body.

The left statue, free of hybridization patterns suggested in the first two, is merely a line that seems to curve randomly as it thickens towards the top. Yet a closer examination
reveals the line as the silhouette of a woman’s body turning sideways to face her right, compressed to a formation where only the curviest parts remain. The upper half of the statue follows a woman’s front, tracing the curve of her breast and the flat of her abdomen, and the lower half traces the curves of her buttocks, down her thigh and around the line of her calves. It represents a form of beauty determined by the reductively idealized geometric lines of the most sensuous parts of a woman’s body, namely, breasts and buttocks.

Lan’s cartoon draws attention to various shapes of “unnatural” female bodies so that they cannot be understood independently from the larger shaping forces. The exaggerated shapes of the bodies are placed on pedestals for display, inviting viewers to ponder what the forces and practices were behind the visible unnaturalness, and how they came together to shape the bodies. One important shaping force is implied, intentionally or unintentionally by the artist, through the hybrid nature of the cartoon—the juxtaposition of Chinese characters and English words in addition to the combination of Chinese and Western aesthetic standards in the statues—an—that is, the colonial presence in China and its impact on Chinese aesthetics. Lan, an artist in Semi-colonial Shanghai, seems rather ambivalent about the non-Chinese elements. On the one hand, he seems to be critiquing the colonial force and the unnatural hybrid formations; on the other hand, the deployment of “cartoon,” a loaned non-Chinese form, betrays his dilemma: he had to live with, even to endorse the very force he was critical of. Lan’s ambivalence is made particularly apparent by his initials and date “LWB, September 1930,” which he

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11 In this article, unless specified otherwise, I use West and Western in a broad sense to include European, American and Japanese influences. For the mediated influence of the “West” on China through Japan, see Lydia Liu (1994), and Joan Judge (2001).
deliberately rendered in English and yet firmly inserted between the second and third statues to mark his own time and space. To artists such as Lan who believed in the role of art as social criticism, this particular cartoon is not meant to be an objective depiction of changing feminine beauty, but rather an interpretation with a purpose. Lan consciously marks his own time as the historical moment between the “the beauty of the face” in the past, and “the beauty of curves” in the future, and makes apparent the desire to secure a Chinese artist’s space for representing and potentially shaping feminine beauty.

How did Western standards and native aesthetics compete and negotiate in the shaping of Chinese feminine beauty in semi-colonial China? In what forms and how effective did they manifest as shaping forces? How do we locate women’s own agency in the process? Furthermore, were there two conspicuous changes regarding standards of feminine beauty as the artist suggests, namely, the changing emphasis from face to body, and the appearance of “curves” of the body? If so, what prompted the change? To be specific, what were the forces that impinged upon the female body—both the literal forces of the bindings used to alter the physical shapes of women’s bodies, and the social, historical and political forces that occasioned the new awareness of curves? And given the conspicuous time in question, “September 1930,” what were the historical and cultural contexts that reflected or prompted the appearance of curves?

12 Lan Weibang’s cartoons and art criticism appeared in pictorial magazines of the 1920s and 1930s such as Liangyou, Shanghai manhua (Shanghai sketch), and Shidai manhua (Modern miscellany). He translated articles about the social function of cartoons by Japanese scholars, like “The Sociality of Cartoons” by Tomoyuki Ishihama and “The Power of Cartoons” by Ippei Okamoto, both published in Shidai manhua, respectively in 1934 and 1935. For more detailed information about Lan’s translation, see Qiu Zhiheng (2004).
I will address these questions in this article by delving into the portrayals of the female body in influential women’s magazines, pictorial magazines and other visual and textual sources published in the first few decades of the twentieth century. My examination of visual and textual representations will illustrate that although different discourses on the female body of the time broached oftentimes competing and contradictory ideas about the increasingly more visible body and “curves” of the time, they did, almost unanimously, affirm the shift of focus from the face to the body in assessing feminine beauty. The shift from face to body and the appearance of “curves” in representations speak of the importance of health and mobility to the new standards of feminine beauty that were gradually established in China of the 1920s and 1930s; however, the appearance of curves and the increasing rhetoric to “free” the female body are not equivalent to giving women autonomy and freedom.

In the past two decades, there has been an increasing academic interest among China scholars in the study of the female body in the Republican era, particularly on how the body facilitated or was disciplined by the emerging discourses of feminism, nationalism, and sports culture. Fan Hong (1997), for example, uses footbinding as a springboard for discussing how sports liberated women’s bodies and advanced feminist agenda of gender equality. The study of Chinese female athletes by Andrew Morris (2014) in print media complicates Fan’s optimistic notion of sports as a liberating force and contends that the “liberating” mechanisms of the female body may subjugate women’s bodies to the discipline of various “national projects.” Yunxiang Gao’s article (2006), drawing attention to both the liberating and restricting potentials of print media in the 1930s, differentiates the honored bodies of the New Woman from the condemned
bodies of the Modern Girl in feminist and nationalistic rhetorics. My article shares their view that the aesthetic form of the female body is shaped by the larger political and historical contexts in which it resides, but I propose going beyond the relations between the female body and the nation, calling attention to women’s own will and action taking in body management as well as the logics of the body and fashion that may not always conform to the rules that their political and social contexts stipulate. Equally important, I intend to explore the possibility that similar modern aesthetics of the body and fashion may have occurred simultaneously or even earlier in China, which challenges the general belief that the global circulation of fashion through media in the early twentieth century was a one-way traffic from the West to the East and that Chinese fashion was always following Western standards.

I use breast binding as an entry point to the excavation of the complex forces that constructed feminine beauty in early twentieth century. This is because breast binding was one of the most debated among women’s beauty practices of the time, and yet remains the most understudied subject in current scholarship on women’s bodies. Anti-breast binding campaigns deemed breast binding, together with foot binding, as the most “unnatural” and “unhealthy” beauty practices by Chinese women in 1910s and 1920s. However, the stubbornness of bound breasts begs for a different story than what anti-breast binding campaigns informed people of. In the 1910s, while bound feet were largely “emancipated” in big cities, flattened chest became a new fad, and flat chest aesthetics remained popular well into mid-1930s despite severe attacks from all sides. Although breast binding was often linked to foot binding in public rhetoric by Republican-era authors as one of the two biggest evils in distorting and restricting
women’s bodies, it has rarely received attention from contemporary scholars compared with foot binding. Antonia Finnane’s *Changing Clothes in China*, a well-documented monograph on Chinese fashion of the twentieth century, brings up the issue of breast binding and situates it in the broader historical concerns about fashion and the nation. Since the focus of the book is on male and female clothes in general, the small section on breast binding and women’s undergarments understandably only gives a broad overview of their relations to the dictating forces of nationalism, women’s liberation, and fashion. Nevertheless, Finnane’s work prompts me to do further research on breast binding. For example, Finnane suggests that Chinese women bound their breasts to fit in with the popular streamlined style of the outer garments (163). That leaves me wonder: On what ground is the claim made, and could it be the other way around, that is, the practice of breast binding advanced the popularity of the form-fitting outfit? And in terms of the history of breast binding, Finnane draws parallels between breast binding and foot binding in early twentieth century China and suggests that women were more ready to give up the latter than the former (161 & 164). Questions arise: Was breast binding an old custom or a new fad in China at the beginning of the twentieth century? If it were old, why would it suddenly become the common target of attacks by conservatives and radicals alike, and the shared object of intervention from government and intellectuals at the same time? Why did women, particularly those educated new women who embraced natural or “emancipated” feet, get so hung up on the “unnatural” practice of breast binding?

Dorothy Ko’s revisionist study on foot binding provides useful methodology for further search on breast binding. Ko challenges the tendency in existing scholarships that
treat Chinese women as victims. This tendency is partly the consequence of what Ko calls “gigantic histories of the nation” (*Cinderella’s Sisters* 9). Ko draws attention to “a space of repose outside the purposeful march of the nation” (*Cinderella’s Sisters* 76) and presents women’s own views of their worlds to locate women’s agency and subjectivity in the foot binding process. Her argument about the neglect of female agency and the over concern with the nation in foot binding history remains a valid insight for examining history of breast binding. It helps me to see beyond the anti-breast binding lens that looks at women with bound breasts as victims of old Chinese tradition and anti-breast binding as a modern and liberating force. More aware of women’s participation in the body-beautifying process as a reasonable choice, I am thus able to read between the lines of anti-breast binding narratives in order to recuperate the weaker voices and to explore the significance of women’s will and action in the process. In other words, I will draw attention to the role of women themselves in forging the new feminine beauty standards in addition to other players like government, school, media, intellectuals, particularly when they had to make choices between Western models of modernity and existing Chinese aesthetics. I will establish that breast binding actually signifies the increasing aspiration among Chinese new women in early twentieth century to exert control of their own bodies and the surroundings. Unbound and more visible breasts, on

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13 Ko categorizes some scholarly books and articles on footbinding as “histories of anti-footbinding” because these scholars condemn footbinding and neglect women’s agency. See Ko’s introductions to two books on footbinding: *Cinderella’s Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (2007) and *Every Step a Lotus: Shoes for Bound Feet* (2001). In an earlier book titled *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, Ko (1994) traces the origin of histories that make priori assumption of women as victims to “a rare confluence” of three divergent traditions: the New Culture movement, the Communist revolution, and Western feminist scholarships (3). In spite of the difference between these scholarships envisioning modernity and women’s positions, they all tend to talk about women as victims of old China.
the other hand, can either subjugate the female body to the grandiose discourse on
groups as qualified mothers for the nation, or to derogatory remarks of women as
sexualized playthings. I focus my efforts on four distinctive and yet intertwining
objectives: First, to examine visual and textual representations of the female body and
discourses on breasts in order to trace the development of curves and chart the shifting
standards of feminine beauty; second, to research the origin and transformation of breast-
binding devices, and their function in maintaining female hygiene and sex appeal; third,
to unravel the few distinctly emerging concepts of feminine beauty—pingxiang meixue
(flattened chest aesthetics), quxian mei (beauty of curves), ziranmei (natural beauty) and
jianmei (athletic/healthy beauty)—and their connections to body and fashion; and fourth,
to display the shaping forces behind the body, their interactions with each other and their
impact on the aesthetics of the female body.

Breast Binding: The Making of a Flat-Chested Beauty

Attacks on breast binding had already started in mid-1910s, but the height of
criticism surged in mid to late 1920s, which attests to the popularity of the practice at the
time. Women with bound breasts were criticized by conservatives and radicals alike with
different agendas in mind. The harm of breast binding was often exaggerated and talked
about side by side with foot binding to raise social awareness of breast binding as an
equally, if not more severe social and medical issue essential to women’s emancipation
and strengthening of the nation. One of the most popular criticisms of the time,
particularly by anti-traditionalists, was to target breast binding as a living evidence of the
still lingering “feudal” Chinese ethics. However, as the following section substantiates,
linking breast binding to Chinese tradition was a strategy to gain public support; the particular tight breast binding under attack was not continuation of an old custom, but a new aesthetic practice; and the flat-chested beauty created by breast binding marked the transition to a more modern aesthetics of feminine beauty that embodied both the new and traditional cultural forms and standards.

Although breast binding has been talked about as a practice dated far back to dynasties of Yuan (1271-1368), Ming (1368-1644), or even earlier, an quick examination of the so-called breast binding undergarments in earlier times shows that they were used to cover not only the chest area but any part or the entire front of the upper body, mostly for protection, convenience and comfort. Official and unofficial records on the history of breast binding before the Republican era are scattered and incomplete. In Republican China, although the topic of breast binding was popular among newspapers and journals in 1920s and 1930s, it was almost always mentioned side by side with foot binding as an evil Chinese custom that tortured and crippled women’s bodies. Except for a few articles published in 1927 Beiyang huabao (Beiyang news pictorial, abbreviated as BYHB hereafter), which I will examine later in detail, references to the origin of breast binding in Republican era are usually vague, limited to descriptions such as: “Women have used breast binding device since ancient times” (Wanxianggezhu, “Guanyu xiaoshan” 4); “the backward habit of breast binding has been adopted by Chinese for hundreds and thousands of years” (Liu Yulun 208), or “sometime in the past, women started to bind their breasts” (Lin Lianying 2319). Recent scholarship on women’s fashion in Republican China, such as Finnane’s book mentioned earlier, also regards the practice as an old custom, offering little information on the origin. Except for underwear mentioned in R.H.
van Gulik’s study of Chinese erotic art, the information I have gathered on the origin of the practice is mainly from books on ancient Chinese clothes based on archeological finds. One opinion holds that the practice of breast binding already started in Yuan, and was reinforced in Ming. Zhu Yuanzhang, the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty, ordered all Han women to wear zhuyao (waist control), so they could flatten their breasts to distinguish themselves from the bustier barbarian women (Li Desheng 33-34). Zhuyao (fig. 3.2 left) looks like a vest, with opening in the front and tied with strips on the back: one strip on each side of the shoulder, one under each arm, and one or sometimes three on each side around the waist area (Zhou and Gao 55). In Ming dynasty, besides zhuyao, another common piece of breast clothing women wore is moxiong (chest cover). R.H. van Gulik describes it as a broad strip of cloth or embroidered silk wrapped around breasts, reaching the armpits on top and the area below the navel on bottom, fastened to the body with a silk band around or below the breasts (171). Zhou Xun and Gao Chunmin similarly depict moxiong as a device with strips, but point out that it was worn by both men and women (56, fig. 3.2 middle and right). The older forms of moxiong and zhuyao are said to have already existed in Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), including pafu (abdomen kerchief), baofu (abdomen hugger), or xinyi (heart cloth), all different names for undergarments that cover the partial or full front of the upper body from chest to abdomen, with or without strips for tying on the back (Zhou and Gao 54; Wu Xin 102). As late as Qing (1644-1911), doudu (stomach wrap), the most popular undergarment for both men and women, though often cut in a different diamond shape, is an inherited form of these older styles (Zhou and Gao 56).
Figure 3.2 Undergarments in Pre-Modern China. Left: women’s zhuyao in Ming; middle: men’s moxiong in Song, and right: women’s moxiong in Song (Zhou and Gao 55-56).

In fact, undergarments such as xinyi (heart cloth), mofu (abdomen cover), moxiong (chest or breast cover), and doudu (stomach wrap) were not exclusively worn by women. Men also wore them for warmth and comfort (Zhou and Gao 54; Wu Xin 102 and 105). And if we look at different body parts—xiong (chest), xin (heart), yao (waist), du (stomach), fu (abdomen)—involved in naming these undergarments, each one of them is used more or less randomly to refer to a larger area in the front of the body that the undergarment covers. It can be argued that the random reference betrays Chinese people’s inaccurate knowledge of the human body back then. But before anything else, the randomness of the body-part reference shows that no particular control was exerted on a certain part of the body, including the breasts. Therefore, more accurate words to describe the functioning of these undergarments should be covering, wrapping or securing, not binding. The wrapping could be either tight or loose, but never too tight. These undergarments were worn by both men and women, never only by women.

14 If I have to point out a part that received some control by undergarments, it should be the waist, not the breasts. Zhuyao literally means waist control, and moxiong (chest cover) was also at times called yaojin (waist kerchief); both are more often used to tighten the waist than the breasts (Wu Xin 102; Zhou and Gao 55). Ideal female figures depicted in literature, or portrayed in artwork or archeological objects often emphasize the slimness of the waist.
It was in the last few years of Qing that breast/chest wrapping evolved into breast binding, an aesthetic practice that became exclusively for women and required tight flattening. Shen Weizhen, an educator and physical education instructor, identified wearing *xiaobanbi* (little half-arm) as a new fad among female students in Beijing, explaining: “This is a new invention. It is also called *xiaobeixin* (little vest), a device used to bind breasts. People consider flat chest beautiful” (1). In the 1920s, breast binding continued to be the fashion and flat-chest aesthetics spread unchecked (Bao Tianxiao 37). In Shanghai, where women finally got rid of foot binding, the prevalence of breast binding became “a crushing blow” to “the balance and harmony of women’s beautiful curves” (Benjing page n/a). A medical doctor Peng Tianxing observed that there was an undergarment with buttons in the front called *xiaobeixingzi* (little vest) that would fix women’s breasts extremely tight to chests (page n/a). In Guangzhou, most women under thirty were freed from the pain of foot binding, but still suffering from breast binding—“a bigger pain than foot binding” (Zhu Jiahua page n/a). In Beijing, as a famous art critic Li Yuyi confirmed, women followed the same fashion: “These days, women do not bind their feet but their breasts,” and Li further identified the bread binding device as “a kind of vest named *banbidai* (half-arm band)” (6).
Figure 3.3 Little Vest. A drawing to accompany Guanxianggezhu’s article on the history of little shirts (4).

Baibi dai (half-arm band), xiao banbi (little half-arm) and xiao beixin (little vest) refer to the same kind of breast binding device (fig. 3.3). This device was confirmed as the most popular one of the six styles of xiongyi (breast clothing) featured in a series of BYHB articles in 1927. According to the series of articles on breast clothes by Wanxianggezhu, banbi dai (half-arm band) was the name used in the north; it was also called xiao majia (little waistcoat) in Shanghai and Zhejiang, and xiao beixin (little vest) in Guangdong. Other styles mentioned in the articles include: doudu (stomach wrap, fig. 3.4 left), which, with a loose fit and shaped like a shield, was also called mofu (abdomen cover), moxiong (chest cover) or modu (stomach cover), could be dated to ancient times, and was still worn all over China though being gradually replaced by other styles; laoshi moxiong (old-style chest/breast cover), which was also ancient, but shaped like a long
towel, tighter than *doudu* and was still popular in the north; *xinshi moxiong* (new-style chest/breast cover, fig. 3.4 middle), which would wrap the breasts even tighter, most popular in Guangdong, but was being replaced by *xiao majia* (little waistcoat); *banjie majia* (half waistcoat), which served as a transitional piece between *moxiong* (breast wrap) and *xiao majia* (little waistcoat); and *zui xinshi moxiong* (the newest chest cover, fig. 3.4 right), which was more open, not necessarily covering the upper part of the breasts, but was not popular yet and only worn by extremely fashionable women.

Figure 3.4 Other Styles of Breast Clothes in 1920s in China. Drawings to accompany Guanxianggezhu’s articles. Left: *doudu* (“Zhongguo xiaoshan yange tushuo, shang” 4); middle *xinshi moxiong* (“Zhongguo xiaoshan yange tushuo, zhong” 4); right *zui xinshi moxiong* (“Zhongguo xiaoshan yange tushuo, zhong” 4).

Various names given to one particular article of breast clothing in different regions, which will be referred to hereafter as “little vest,” bear witness to its popularity in China of the 1910s and 1920s. The popularity derives from its efficiency in tight breast binding in comparison to all other forms of breast clothing. Although breast clothes have been used since ancient times, in the Republican era, up to at least 1927, women’s breasts were bound tighter and tighter by new devices, such as the little vest, which was probably
invented sometime between 1905 to 1915. This little vest has the shape of a vest jacket but is a piece of underwear and the buttons in the front are sewed close to each other for the enforcement of tight breast binding. Bao Tianxiao, a famous newspaperman and writer of Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies fiction, humorously noted that fashionable young women, fond of wearing densely buttoned little vests to flatten their breasts, if carelessly took a deep breath, would cause a splash of falling buttons.

What did women look like with bound breasts? How were their bodies different from those of earlier times? Before going to details of the bound breasts, we will look at visual representations of the female body to understand better what I call “a shift from the invisible body to the flat body.” Photos and paintings of unclothed Chinese women before 1920s are almost non-existent except in erotic art. In fact, pre-modern Chinese paintings primarily focus on the face in depicting feminine beauty without as much importance attached to the body. The body is at best part of an intangible *titai* (bearings of the body), created by suggestive movements of outer garments and drapery folds. As art historian John Hay argues, the body in traditional Chinese art is not an objectified and solid nude body but a body dispersed through rhythmical Chinese brush line. In other words, Hay argues for a Chinese tradition that conditions the visual representations of the body. The representations of the female body in Chinese art reflect a particular literati taste of feminine beauty: First, the face is essential to feminine beauty; second, the ideal female body to be seen is paradoxically a body invisible of its flesh and bone, a body simultaneously hidden in and dispersed through clothes and surroundings.

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15 Shen Weizhen said that the little vest was a new invention in 1915 (1), Wanxianggezhu estimated that it was no more than 20 years’ old in 1927 (“Zhongguo xiaoshan, shang” 4), and Finnane suggests that the design of the little vest was to complement the tight-fitting jacket that became popular around 1908 (163).
last years of Qing and early Republican China, the literati aesthetics that had persisted in earlier times as the dominant determinant of feminine beauty was strongly challenged as Chinese women became increasingly visible in the public sphere and the nation’s cultural consciousness was shifting towards a more Western modernity. In terms of the once “invisible” female body, as Yingjin Zhang (“Artwork” 129 and 150) convincingly argues, it was becoming “highly visible” in visual representations, though the traditional concept of the dispersed body persisted.

Figure 3.5 Changing Clothes in China. Zhang Ailing’s drawings (Zhang and Jones 430).

Figure 3.6 Women’s fashion (Zhou Xibao 498, 501, 538 and 539).
The shift from “body invisible” to “body visible” was reflected on the “flat body” that became popular among female students and prostitutes near the end of Qing. We can catch a glimpse of the shift through both Zhang Ailing’s and Zhou Xibao’s drawings (fig 5 and fig 6). A sharp contrast can be detected between the tight-fitting fashion in the last two decades of Qing and the loose style of earlier times (fig 3.5 left two, fig 3.6 left two). The body-fitting cut was the most noticeable trend of the changing fashion in the transitional period. Before 1890 the female body, flat-chested or not, was invisible due to the extremely loose-fitting clothes. As Zhang Ailing describes it, “The sloping shoulders, narrow waist, and flat chest of the ideal beauty…would disappear under the weight of these layers upon layers of clothing” (“A Chronicle” 429). The fashion in the last decade of the 19th and first decade of the twentieth century is a somewhat boyish-looking outfit that consists of a high-collared close-fitting jacket top and a narrow-cut trouser bottom, accompanied by either bound or large-footed shoes (fig. 3.5 left two, fig. 3.6 left two, and fig. 7). Although Zhang Ailing (“Chinese Life” 56) complains that even then the female body was rather “the disembodied conception” than “the realistic picture of a feminine figure,” I would say that compared with earlier times when outer garments overwhelmed and devoured the bodies underneath, at least the frame of the body became more visible through the jacket that clings to the body and arms. Exactly because of the

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16 This essay of Zhang Ailing’s first appeared as “Chinese Life and Fashions” in the January issue of the XXth Century in 1943, an English-language journal published in Japanese-occupied Shanghai. Less than a year later, Chang translated, revised, and expanded the piece for a Chinese-language journal, Gu jin (Past and present), and changed the title into “Gengyi ji” (A chronicle of changing clothes). I will treat these two versions as two related but separate pieces because they carry somewhat different tones and emphasis and even the details of information are not identical at times. The quotes from “Chinese Life” are from the original writing in English, and those from “A Chronicle” are the translation by Andrew Jones, “a triangulated translation into English of Chang’s translation into Chinese” as Jones calls it (Zhang and Jones, 428). In Jones’ introduction to his translation (Zhang and Jones 428), he praises Zhang’s essay as “an inevitable touchstone for scholars of modern Chinese fashion and a key text in modern Chinese cultural studies by one of the most celebrated of all modern Chinese writers.”
relative visibility of the body underneath, when the breasts are actually bound—as shown in later sections on the breast binding trend among female students—one can be more certain about it when the breasts are actually bound—as shown in later sections on the breast binding trend among female students—one can be more certain about it. It was near the end of the Qing that the “wonders of Chinese corseting” (Zhang Ailing, “Chinese Life” 56) helped to achieve the looks of the flat-chested beauty.

Figure 3.7 Photo of a Young Woman Wearing Aoku (Yang Yuan 72).

The “flat body” in the tight-fitting outfit was a more mobile body. As Zhang Ailing observes, “In times of political turmoil and social unrest…there will always be a preference for tight-fitting clothes, light and supple, allowing for quickness of movement” (Zhang and Jones 433). The tight-fitting jacket and narrow-cut pants after all were not necessarily more of a hindrance to activities than the loose-fitting outfit, wide and long in arms and the main body. The slit on each side of the jacket that almost
reaches the waist, together with the separate legs of the trousers, would allow easier and quicker movement of the body, particularly the lower body. The shorter and narrower sleeves also made it easier for hands and arms to engage in physical exercises and labor. The contrast becomes more discernible if we compare the women respectively featured in *Wu Youru huabao* (Wu Youru pictorial) in 1908 (fig. 3.8), and in the front cover of *Funü shibao* (Women’s eastern times) in 1911 (fig. 3.9). The two ladies portrayed by Wu Youru, similar to the first image in Zhang Ailing’s ’s drawings, are donned in layers of traditional clothes with elaborate embroidery, one sitting and one standing motionlessly in an indoor setting, waiting for their photos to be taken. The title of Wu’s drawing *Wojian youlian* (Pitiable loveliness) also manifests a literati taste, which associates feminine beauty with the immobile and obedient female body. By contrast, the young lady in *Funü shibao* is no longer pitiable and immobile. She has stepped out of the inner chamber and begun to enjoy outdoorsy activities. Dressed in the latest fashion of the time—a tight-fitting jacket and trousers of narrow cut—she is running on a tennis court, confidently finishing a forehand shot with her racquet. Compared with the boudoir ladies, the flat-chested young woman looks rather boyish with her natural feet and all her hair combed back and tied in one braid. Despite her bound chest, she shows self-possession in controlling the surroundings and her own body. Her deft handling of the tennis racket demonstrates her confidence in handling goods and concepts imported from the West. The two women in traditional attire depicted by Wu, in contrast, are under the surveillance of the Western eye, as symbolized by the camera directing at them.
Figure 3.8 Pitiable Loveliness. According to Yingjin Zhang ("Artwork" 136), this picture by Wu Youru was originally published in 1908 in *Wu Youru huabao*.

Figure 3.9 A Fashionable Woman Playing Tennis (*Funü shibao* front cover).

As counter-intuitive as it might seem, breast binding may have actually encouraged quicker movement, which became necessary for middle and upper Chinese women who were no longer restricted to the domestic sphere. Breast binding may also
have facilitated women’s participation in physical exercises that started to gain popularity in women’s schools in late nineteenth century. As a matter of fact, the outfit featured in the cover of *Funü shibao* resembles *caoyi*—the uniform female students were wearing for their P.E. classes around 1910. As mentioned earlier, little vest—the tight breast-binding device—was also invented approximately around the same time. Therefore, the requirement for quicker movement possibly initiated both the tightening of the breast binding device and the streamlining of the *caoyi* uniform. Female students’ *caoyi* at the time consisted of a jacket—with body and sleeves cut narrow—a pair of pants, and a pair of shoes, all made of plain cotton cloth. In illustrations that accompanied articles in print media on women’s sports, we can see flat-chested female students dressed in *caoyi* or *caoyi*-style outfit while engaging in various physical exercises and military drills. The young lady featured in the cover of *Funü shibao* could very well be a female student in *caoyi*, playing tennis for a P.E. class or a sports meet. As a *Shenbao* article (“Wuben nüshu kai yundong hui” 3) informs us, tennis, pellet gun practice, rope-ladder climbing, and rope jumping were popular physical exercises in women’s schools. In another *Shenbao* report on January 24, 1910, covering the first commencement of Chinese Women’s Sports school, one illustration by Songyun and Zhang Nuanzhi captures the

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17 I suspect that Chinese girls’ *caoyi* style copied boys’ which were inspired by Western and Japanese boys’ outfit for PE classes and military drills. Margret Burton mentioned a Rev. John Parker’s explanation for girls donning boys attire at school: “I was told that the young women of the well-to-do families were now attending girls’ schools and doing the same studies as their brothers, but that with their girls attire they could not go out on the street to attend the classes, an so to avoid this they now dress almost the same clothes as the men…. and, I suppose, had drill exercises” (187).

18 Government and school regulations in the last years of Qing stipulated that female students should dress simple and clean clothes. The recommended colors for school uniforms were blue, light blue or dark blue, and the recommended material was cotton cloth, particularly homespun cotton cloth. See “Nüxue fuse zhangcheng” 2241-2242, and Jin Gui 580.
dashing marching of female students trained at the school. They are dressed in *caoyi* and men’s hats, holding pellet guns and performing military style marching for the audience attending the commencement (fig. 3.10). The style of the clothes, the way they tie the hair, and the ease with which they handle “Western” gadgets can easily remind us of the young lady running on the tennis court.

In addition to female students, prostitutes were another group of trendsetters who donned *caoyi*-style clothes with such a sporty spirit. As reported by *Pictorial Daily*, prostitutes in Shanghai were often spotted practicing bicycles in Zhang Park (*Zhang yuan*). One of the illustration below (fig. 3.11) shows two prostitutes practicing biking in *caoyi* style, an outfit which resembles female students’ *caoyi* in cut but differs from the actual *caoyi* in fabric material and patterns.19

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19 In terms of bicycling, female students also had opportunities to practice in their P.E. classes and compete in sports meet (“Wuben nüshu,” 17). Its popularity among some women’s schools in Shanghai could be discerned from the following anecdote told by Margret Burton, who was visiting and researching women’s education in China in the year of 1909. Burton was amused at a Shanghai gentleman’s disappointment when he learned that the school he planned to enroll his two daughters did not teach bicycling: “The principal of Mctyeire school can scarcely have been less surprised when an intelligent and wealthy gentleman of Shanghai, of influential family, inquired, as he was about to enroll his two daughter in the school, “Do you teach your pupils to ride the bicycle?” On being answered in the negative, he exclaimed disappointedly, “Oh, I think you ought to teach that” (182-83).
Women’s fashion continued to evolve in the 1910s and early 1920s: Breasts stayed flat, but waistline became more visible, more flesh was exposed, and more mobility of the body was allowed. The iconic outfit of female students in the May Fourth era, consisting of an abbreviated jacket fitting prettily around waists and a calf-length skirt,
gained the fame as *Wenming xinzhuang* (new outfit of civilization, fig. 3.5 right). The style, influenced by Western fashion, is “light and gay” with “trumpet sleeves” that afford “a view of the pale jade of a woman’s wrists,” and skirts that expose ankles and even part of the calf (Zhang Ailing, “Chinese Life” 59). This “light and gay” style apparently did not appeal to everybody’s taste. The female body, which was made more discernable through the waist-hugging jacket and shortened sleeves and skirts, proved to be particularly obtrusive for a more conservative taste. Among a series of articles published in *Funü zazhi* (Lady’s journal) on the general topic of how to improve women’s clothes in 1921, one author Zhuang Kaibo explicitly showed his disapproval of women’s latest fashion:

Tops should be wide and loose. Recently, Chinese women are fond of short and narrow tops barely reaching the stomach, with short sleeves barely covering the upper arms. Some clothes imitate Western fashion and expose the chest area even in winter. Some clothes are so narrow that they cause lung diseases (44).

Zhuang is critical of the more tight-fitting and flesh-exposing fashion among Chinese women and attributes the change to Western influence. Compared with Zhang Ailing’s remarks on fashion which also note the Western influence, Zhuang takes a different stance, a stance of reprehension and admonition rather than acceptance and appreciation. The majority of the articles in this series are informed by a “traditional” taste, which, as I stated earlier, is shrouded in a paradox about the female body, that is, an ideal female body to be seen should be a body invisible of its flesh and bone. The new fashions, deviating from older dressing codes, not only draw too much attention to bodies but also render too much mobility and self-sufficiency to women.
The desire for freedom and mobility is also signified in another fashion object—
*changpao* (long robe, fig. 3.5 second to the right), which coexisted with *wenming xinzhuan* (fig. 3.5 middle), though not as popular. *Changpao* is arguably the embryonic form of *qipao*. Zhang Ailing dates its invention to 1921 (“Chinese Life” 60), and Zhou Xibao to 1916 (539). In shape, it looks rather retrogressive, wide and long, similar to the loose outer jacket. But unlike the jacket, which is part of the two-piece traditional jacket-skirt outfit of Chinese women, this one-piece gown had long been a sign of Chinese *wen* masculine grace, ease and self-contentment. Zhang Ailing reads the “stiff and masculine” style as a sign of women’s desire to copy men and to be men’s equals (“Chinese Life” 60).²⁰

I want to add that in concept, in spite of their apparent opposite looks, the loose masculine *changpao* resembles the tight boyish *caoyi* style (jacket-pant outfit) mentioned earlier. Both styles, one loose and the other tight, aspire for an androgynous look. In fact, paired with breast-binding and boyish hair styles, both were criticized for making women indistinguishable from men. By today’s standards, neither the loose *changpao* nor the tight jacket-pant outfit (or the *caoyi* style) looks like the most convenient, most mobility-enhancing clothes to wear. However, put in historical context, both enhanced women’s mobility either physically or psychologically. The *caoyi* style, compared with the traditional loose jacket-skirt outfit, allows women more freedom to move their bodies, which explains why it was often seen on women engaged in physical activities. Moreover, the quasi-masculine traits in *caoyi* and *changpao* added a psychological

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²⁰ For discussion on the significance of both men and women wearing *changpao*, see Finnane 177.
dimension to women’s fashion, readily encouraging female wearers to imagine a more easily attained freedom for the androgynous body.

**Natural Beauty, Natural Breasts: Freeing the Body of New Woman?**

The chronologies of both the under and outer garments I have examined from late nineteenth century to 1920s show that the practice of breast binding, though probably spreading to women of all classes by late 1920s, was first practiced among upper class women and trendsetters in very late Qing and the beginning of the Republican era. Yi-li Wu (2008: 470) notes the changing views of women’s breasts as such: In Imperial China, a nursing female body could symbolize “ideals of agricultural productivity and fertility,” but in late Qing, “breast-feeding began to represent poverty and ethnic minority status.” Finnane’s research confirms the linkage of exposed breasts to class and further suggests that breast binding was probably more prevalent among the upper class women.

According to Finnane, exposed breasts during breastfeeding was considered “rather infra-dig” and usually associated with poor women (167). Only ladies from the upper class or “gentry” families could afford to have their babies fed by *naima* (wet nurse) and keep their “elegant” flat chests. Although it is possible that women of all classes took to breast binding in the 1920s, authors throughout the Republican era directed their criticism at cosmopolitan, educated and fashionable young women. Shen Weizhen associated the flat-chest aesthetics to female students (1), Wu Ming also saw bound breasts mostly popular

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21 Wanxianggezhu described the dissemination of the little vest, reckoning: “This kind of breast binding device has been invented for no more than 20 years. In the beginning, only the upper class ladies used them, but now it is popular among women of all classes” (“guanyu xiaoshan” 4).

22 Marion Levy uses “gentry class” when he talks about people who could afford to hire wet nurses in pre-communist times in China (115).
among young ladies, female students and new women, and Chen Xuezhao explicitly blamed the mal-practice on new women. These authors anticipate a difference between the two types of women, playing with the expectation, as true of foot binding, that it should be the uneducated and rural women who would continue the practice but not the more cosmopolitan and educated women. On the contrary, as Wu Ming emphasized, it was not “old women in poor and remote areas, or back-scratching ugly women working out in the fields” who took to this backward practice, but “those open-minded female students and fashionable new women in cosmopolitan cities who are well versed in civilized education and advocating for women’s emancipation.” Similarly, Chen Xuezhao said that that she would understand it if women in villages and small towns were binding their feet, but found it incomprehensible that educated new women were binding their breasts.

These remarks allude to the discrepancy between the name and the conduct of “new women,” who were supposed to be civilized and educated, but succumbed to what was perceived by some as an old and backward custom. I have contested this viewpoint and proposed to read breast binding as a new aesthetic practice popular among new women in late Qing and early Republican China. The popularity of breast binding among new women expresses a desire to separate the functional and the aesthetic aspects of the female breasts. Targeting the new women in the anti-breast binding sentiment, on the one hand, does reflect the class-situatedness of the phenomenon. On the other hand, as the following discussion on “natural beauty” and “natural duty” shows, it reveals the increasing aspiration among women for the control of their own bodies as well as the accompanying fear in the society about new women’s neglect of their “natural” motherly
duties. The bound breasts were a challenge to what the conservatives held as gender norms, a hurdle to the emancipation project of the feminists, and a pair of dysfunctional milk bottles that endangered the health of future citizens in the eyes of fervent patriots. “Natural beauty” in this context can be understood as a widely adopted rhetoric among various interest groups to regulate women’s bodies, particularly the bodies of educated new women who were most expected to procreate and rear quality citizens but who tended to neglect their “natural” duties.

The attacks on breast binding were closely associated with the trend in journals and magazines in Republican China to promote healthy and natural beauty. New women or female students were singled out, sometimes lumped together with the fragile Lin Daiyu types to condemn old Chinese customs and the backwardness of Chinese tradition, and sometimes lumped with Western modern ladies to chastise the corruption of Chinese women’s morality by Western influence. I argued earlier that the flat-chested women with bound breasts are distinctive from the fragile women whose “pitiable loveliness” lay in invisible and immobile bodies. Yet, both the new woman and the fragile woman embody an aesthetics that could only be enjoyed by a more privileged class, a class that was criticized as excessively cultured and decadent for its readiness to embrace the unnaturalness of human civilization.23 Natural beauty became a frequently used ingredient to create a panacea needed for solving different and even contradictory social and political issues in the transition to modernity. It was a stone that could possibly kill

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23 Since Western “civilization” emerged in Chinese horizon in mid-nineteenth century, it has challenged elite and popular perceptions of “civilization” and its connection to “traditional” Chinese culture in spite of its fluctuated reception among political, commercial and intellectual groups throughout the century since its emergence. One criticism on civilizations in East or West, is the “unnaturalness,” the pulling away from simple “natural” way of living.
many birds, or a touch stone to old customs and new fashions. Measured on the scale of natural beauty, unnatural were the heavily accessorized boudoir beauties lovingly pitied and coveted by the literati class, and equally unnatural were these new women wearing simpler Western styles and exerting efforts to be more visible in public.

Before looking into details about how new women were censured for their “artificiality” and were motivated to full-heartedly embrace ziranmei (natural beauty), I will briefly address the translingual background of the term ziran (nature or natural) to shed light on later discussion on natural beauty. Ziran is categorized by Lydia Liu as a “return graphic loan,” which refers to “Chinese classical compounds that were used by the Japanese to translate modern European words and were reintroduced into Modern Chinese” (Translingual Practice 302). Sometime around the turn of the twentieth century, the loan word ziran, having travelled to Japan and been readopted in China, acquired new meanings.24 One very important aspect of the new meaning is related to the English word “nature.” “Nature,” according to Raymond Williams, is “perhaps the most complex word in the language” (219). One of its key meanings—“the innate force which directs the human beings” (Chen Weifen 103)—in classical Chinese is expressed through xing, not ziran. In classical Chinese, while xing refers to human nature, ziran is mostly used to mean “spontaneously as it is” or “the non-man-made world.” In other words, ziran in classical Chinese does not have much to do with the human body itself; it at most suggests a reference to the ideal alignment of human behavior to cosmos. However, ziran

24 In Japan, the English word “nature” and its adjective form “natural” were not rendered into Chinese characters ziran or tianran until 1860s in Japanese-English dictionaries. Before that, the English word “nature” was translated as tiandi wanwu (everything in heaven and on earth), while the Chinese characters ziran meant “spontaneously as it is,” a meaning mainly derived from Chinese Daoist thinking. The new meanings accompanying the translation only prevailed in Japan after 1889. For detailed discussion on the evolution of ziran, see Chen Wei-fen 122 and 131.
as a graphic loan informs the term ziran mei (natural beauty) and injects into it a new meaning related to the biological traits of the female body.

The most “unnatural” behavior was mostly associated with women’s mishandling of their own bodies in journals of the Republican era. Frequently under attack were such “unnatural” practices as: being confined to indoor or urban space, far away from nature; wearing artificial objects or products to adorn face and body; altering the looks of body and face through more damaging measures such as piercing or binding; and rejecting or escaping the “natural” role of women as mothers. Voices censuring new women for such “unnatural” behavior accompanied almost all magazine articles advocating natural beauty. An article in Funü zazhi defined natural beauty as “beauty without artificial decorations,” advising women to try their best to maintain natural beauty. Adornment and decoration, it was said, rather than accentuating the beauty of a woman, would detract from her natural beauty and damage her health (Hu Huaichen 80). Some articles related adornments to prostitution and inappropriate display of female sexuality (Yu Zhulai 19-22; Xu Wenxue 876-887). Some feminists considered accessories as tools inherited from ancient times to enslave women. Yuhe, for example, equated the fashionable high heels of the time with foot binding, and criticized both as unnatural means of disfiguring women for the pleasure of men (37).

Critical voices not only associated new women with old timers like fragile beauties, concubines and prostitutes to discredit the Confucian patriarchal system, but also blamed the unnatural behavior of new women on Western influence. The article by a Lady Jin Lanyu presented a typical Westernized image of the “unnatural” New Woman. Jin drew the “objective picture” of New Woman as such:
They shave their natural brows into thin lines and paint them black. They powder their faces whiter than the wall, and paint their lips redder than blood. They put on high-heel shoes, and constantly change the styles of their clothes. They shout loudly “public socializing,” practice promiscuity, frequent dancing halls and movie theatres, ride in automobiles and dine in Western restaurants (1).

Similarly, five articles published in a 1925 *Funü zazhi* issue on the topic of “Mofan de xin nüxing” (“Exemplary New Women” 1131-1142), all ridiculed the “hypocrisy” and Westernized life style of the so-called New Woman. The authors criticized the discrepancy between the words and behavior of such a New Woman: She is well versed in women’s rights but willing to throw herself into men’s arms; she shouts patriotic slogans but is in favor of Western fashion, dining in Western-style restaurants, riding on cars and socializing with Westernized professors, artists and writers.

The criticism of Western influence often centered on the corrupting Western lifestyle on new women’s morality, but in terms of scientific knowledge imported from the West, even some of the most critical voices—including some male pro-feminists—actually relied on the “West” to validate essential differences between men and women for a “scientific” prescription of feminine beauty. In fact, the new notions of “natural beauty” was often linked to science, mostly biological or medical sciences concerning women’s bodies, but also “scientific” methods that are supposed to measure feminine beauty more objectively. A male painter and feminist writer Su Fuxi in his article “What is Feminine beauty,” complained that the Chinese standards for feminine beauty are too vague, not as scientific and systematic as the Western standards, and highly recommended a book by a French author Madame Gaboriau, whom he described as “a
medical doctor providing new standards of feminine beauty, standards for all parts of women: from head, face, to neck and arms, hands, chest, abdomen, back, waist, and all the way down to thigh, calves and feet” (360). Zhang Jingsheng (aka “Dr. Sex”) called upon Chinese women to pursue natural beauty by swimming and exercising naked in nature, insisting that the beauty of all things, including beautiful clothes and bodies, involves scientific concepts and is man-made (“Mei de rensheguan” 7). Like Sun, Zhang Jingsheng was dissatisfied with traditional Chinese criteria of feminine beauty, but his new model for feminine beauty seems to be a more hybrid type: to learn from the French for their fashion sense and concept of free body, and at the same time, retain traditional Chinese fashion like the long jacket and reform the length and shape. Zhang Jingsheng’s conceptualization of feminine beauty, “natural” but at the same time scientized and man-made, betrays the inherent contradictions embedded in “natural beauty.”

As Tani Barlow argues, even the neologism nüxing (women) that marks new notions of femininity in Republican China is fed on “the Western, exclusionary, essentialized, male/female binary” (“Theorizing Woman” 266). Zhou Jianren, a biologist and one of the major contributors to Funü zazhi, after giving details on the different “natures” of men and women in their brains, blood, muscles and bones, drew the conclusion that men are always abundant in masculinity, and women in femininity (2-5).

25 Zhang Jingsheng was also known as “Doctor Sex” in the 1920s. His graphic depiction of sexual intercourse, pro-eugenics theory and gyno-centrist ideas stirred mixed receptions among students, professors and the general public. An article in BYHB (Mei Weng, 3) speculated that most of the readers were students and professors, and emphasized that four out of ten copies of Zhang’s book Xing Shi (History of Sexuality) were sold to female students. According to the article, these girls were more eager than guys to know whether there would be a sequel. As the column title of the article indicates, the female students’ overt curiosity about sex was ranked no. 2 of the one hundred strange phenomena in society.
The most unnatural behavior criticized by conservatives and liberals alike was probably the tendency among women to deviate from their naturally endowed femininity and become disan xing (the third sex). Marrying a man was considered natural; embracement of celibacy, involvement in same-sex love, and resignation of motherhood were said to be “perverse” (Yanshi 14-15). Zhang Xichen, the editor-in-chief of Funü zazhi from 1919 to 1925, openly expressed his uneasiness about women of “the third sex.” In one of the articles, using the pen name Selu, he disparaged women who rejected their “natural duties of the female sex” for their own pleasure (2-7). Another author Li Sanwu claimed that the most natural beauty for a woman is shown when she takes care of a baby (8-12).

The concerns about women’s “natural” duties, particularly the anxiety about the “unnatural” behavior of some new women, partly explains why when the construction of natural beauty and natural body became a prominent issue in the 1920s and 1930s, women’s breasts took on a particular urgency. Liberalism, conservatism, feminism, and nationalism all found their interest in anti-breast binding; government officials, intellectuals, doctors and educators were all too eager expressing their often negative opinions on breast binding. In 1920s, anti-breast binding replaced anti-foot binding and became a major focal point for those advocating for women’s rights and freedom. A popular slogan became, “Women’s emancipation should start from freeing their own breasts” (Liu Yulun 128). Articles criticized women who bound their breasts or wore tight clothes to conceal the breasts as most affected and unnatural. They urged women to liberate their breasts for natural beauty. Xu Shiheng asked women in Shanghai: “Full breasts are a feature of natural beauty, why do you bind them?” (Xu Shiheng 12). Heke
informed sisters in the north: “Women have two swollen breasts. That’s natural. Why hide? Women should get rid of little vests and abandon breast binding” (3).

On July 7, 1927, Zhu Jiahua, the deputy chief of the Civil Affairs Department of Guangzhou of the Nationalist Government, proposed to ban little vests and prohibit breast binding, which instigated Tianru yundong (Natural Breast Movement) in Guangdong province. From 1927 to 1930 after Guangdong issued breast-binding ban, Anhui, Hebei, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Henan, Liaoni, Nanjing, Beijing and other provinces in succession issued the ban either in provincial government official newspapers or journals (fig. 3.12). Popular newspapers and magazines in general showed support for government bans of breast binding, though not without dissenting voices.26 Generally speaking,

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26 Leading intellectuals such as Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren wrote articles responding to the movement, expressing concerns over the inconsistency of government rules and their manipulation of the female body. Lu Xun wrote in “Anxious Thoughts on Natural Breasts”: “This year girl students in Guangzhou are forbidden to bind their breasts, on pain of a fifty-dollar fine. The newspapers call this ‘the natural breast
despite different incentives in anti-breast binding and different visions for the replacement of little vests, the common rhetoric was focused on the unnaturalness of breast binding: Binding prohibits the natural growth of the female body, particularly the chest, and causes inverted nipples, tuberculosis and other lung diseases. More importantly, it deprives women of their natural duty of breastfeeding; their poor health, poor physique and lack of milk also disqualify them as good mothers. Lady Jin Lanyu pointed out the severe fallouts:

Breast binding is more harmful than foot binding, because foot binding only inconveniences walking and harms women, but breast binding injures the inner organs, hinders breath and causes lung disease. Once women have lung diseases, children will have them. It not only harms women, but the whole race! (1)

Indeed, in the rhetoric of many anti-breast binding activists, equally if not more important than women’s own health is children’s health and the fitness of the race. Zhu Jianhua, the nationalist government official who instigated the Natural Breast Movement, claimed that babies would be born weak because of mother’s bound and unhealthy breasts. According to Heke, the author who asked women to be proud of their “majestic breasts,” female breasts should not only be associated with feminine beauty, but more with women’s...
health and their descendents’ lives (3). Sun Fuxi, in his discussion of westernizing and scientizing Chinese feminine beauty, suggested equating “the ultimate purpose of feminine beauty” to “health of individuals and survival of the race” (361). Xiao Xiao spoke of the function of breasts more explicitly as naiping (milk bottles): “People forget that breasts are for feeding babies. If breasts are milk bottles, what’s the need to bind them?” (3) The notion of health, both of women and of their children, became increasingly linked to ideas of the natural in order to further different personal, social or political projects.

What did a natural beauty with natural breasts look like in the mid and late 1920s in China? She was often visualized in the image of a bob-haired Chinese new woman, occasionally naked, but more often fully dressed (figs. 3.13-15). Her foreign sisters seem to have enjoyed a bigger allowance of flesh exposure in cartoons, paintings or photographs. Naked bodies of French, American and sometimes Japanese women were still presented in Chinese visual media to show the natural curves of physically unrestrained feminine beauty in contrast to the unnatural bodies of Chinese women. However, after mid-1920s, photos, drawings and paintings of Chinese nudes did appear in pictorial magazines. Chinese new women with liberated breasts, either naked or dressed, seemed to be enjoying the freedom of a newly liberated body, though the fully dressed ones looked more at ease with her own body and/or gaze.
Figure 3.13 New Woman Enjoying Freed Breasts. Cartoon “Jinzhi shuxiong zhibou” (2).

Figure 3.14 Beauty of Natural Breasts. A cartoon by Jiang Hancheng, “Tianru mei” (4).
The confident Chinese New Woman image with natural breasts was often equated with a flapper by Chinese artists. One cartoon, with the English title, “The three points of Chinese flappers,” captures a woman’s exhilaration at the physical liberation of “three points”: hair, breasts and feet (fig. 3.13). She makes a flamboyant display in different poses of her bobbed hair, perking natural breasts and natural feet in high heels. Another cartoon, titled “Tianru mei” (Beauty of natural breasts, fig. 3.14) also identifies the featured young woman as a “Chinese flapper.” Her flirtatious smile and direct gaze sharply contrasts the demure nude featured in another cartoon “Mei ru” (Beautiful breasts, fig. 3.15). The nude with the labeled beautiful breasts is self-conscious and poised, typical of many Chinese nudes presented in pictorial magazines of the time. At first glance, she has a similar frontal pose of the upper body like the “Chinese flapper,” with her head slightly turning to one side. Unlike the “Chinese flapper,” the nude is shy, casting her gaze sideways to avoid eye contact with the viewer, self-conscious of her
being-looked-at-ness. Moreover, the nude’s position as an eroticized object is revealed through a hand reaching to touch her breasts, while the flapper is holding a Chinese fan—an artifact of male grace in literati tradition—that further enhances her image as someone in charge. Even without breast-binding cloth or the hindrance of outer garments, breast breasts are still subject to social and cultural constraints in these pictorial depictions.

It is ironic that natural or unbound breasts were often associated with “flappers” in Chinese media since the minimized bust was essential to the flapper looks in Paris, London and New York. As early as 1914, the journal of Women’s and Infant’s Furnisher already claimed, “Fashion has been most eager in her calls for bust controls or reduction brassieres” (39). This bust compression trend came to extreme in the flapper era of 1920s. The flapper ideal was a straight line from breast to hips, which characterized many liberated young women of the time in the West. Popular brassiere pressed the breasts against the body to achieve the straight-line ideal (Ewing 127). In early 1920s, established brassier companies were boasted to have 30 to 112 styles of breast-flattening devices named “flattening effect bandeaus,” or “bust confiners” (Fields 89). That is to say, in the 1920s, the equivalent of breast-binding was popular among fashionable young women in the West as well. As further evidenced in my following discussion on western bras recommended to Chinese women in the 1920s, the East and the West were not opposed as the anti-breast binding voices claimed.

The series of BYHB articles by Wanxianggezhu I mentioned earlier not only informed the readers of Chinese breast binding devices but also recommended western bras to female readers (“Zhongguo xiaoshan, xia” 4). Calling “natural breasts”—which was the promoted ideal in Guangdong during the Natural Breast Movement—a
“destructive” force, she proposed a more “constructive” alternative for the future of Chinese women’s breasts. Her theoretical support comes from Emile Bayard, “an expert on beauty from the West,” whom she quoted: “Breasts are the most tender part of a woman’s body. Curves are formed by breasts. If breasts don’t stand on the chest the right way, the beauty of the whole body will collapse” (4). Following Bayard, Wanxianggezhu told the readers that natural breasts are far from being beautiful and the right way should be putting on the suitable breast clothes instead of letting the breasts hang the way they naturally do. She hinted at the regional divide between the north and the south in China and the necessity for the northerners to come up with a more civilized solution than “natural breasts.” She suggested altering the fit of Chinese breast clothes instead of getting rid of them entirely: “There is no reason to abandon the little vest itself, because it is only a piece of cloth. What we should abandon is not the little vest itself, but the practice of ‘ya ru’ (pressing breasts)” (4). Her inspiration for a good fit was French brassieres, supposedly civilized and liberating at the same time. She called the Western breast clothes “modern brassieres,” whose features she summarized as: “Still bind breasts but do not press the breasts to the point of harming the lungs” (4).
Wanxianggezhu herself noticed the trend among Western women to “bandage” their breasts with flattening brassieres. She nevertheless remained enthusiastic about Western brassieres, attempting to establish a certain relationship between breast clothes and the modern West for the legitimacy of their existence in China (“Zhongguo xiaoshan, xia,” 4). As mentioned earlier, some popular bras in early to mid-1920s in the West were just as restricting as the Chinese little vests. Bras like the Symington Side Lacer (fig. 3.16) and “Modern brassieres I” (3) and “Modern brassieres II” (3).
3.16), were in fact designed specifically to flatten the bust when laced tightly and to create a flatter, slimmer, and more youthful silhouette, and to secure the flattening effect for larger-breasted women, some breast reducers were even made of firm broche or rubber (Ewing 127; Fields 85). In fact, almost all the “modern brassieres” advertised in BYHB have a flattening effect to the already moderate breasts (fig. 3.17). They are very similar if not identical to “flattening effect bandeaus,” or “bust confiners” advertised in the West. Therefore, little vests could be a “liberating” gesture to Chinese young women as flating bras to the flappers.

**Jianmei curves: what did breasts have to do with them?**

If ziranmei (natural beauty) was a popular rhetoric in shaping women’s bodies and regulate their behavior in the first three decades of the twentieth century, jianmei (athletic/healthy beauty) was its hipper sister whose power came into full play in the 1930s.\(^2^7\) *Jianmei* diverges from ziranmei in the following aspects: First, while ziranmei often entails discussions on powdering or rouging the face, jianmei almost entirely focuses on the body; second, unlike ziranmei which emphasizes clothes as hindrance to the natural development of the body, jianmei is more concerned with clothes’ concealing effect of unfit and unhealthy bodies and more encouraging of exposed fitness, third, while ziranmei endeavors to free women’s faces and bodies from man-made restraints

\(^2^7\) Yunxiang Gao’s research on the politics of jianmei in the 1930s traces the refashioning of Western concept of jianmei in Linglong, a Chinese woman’s magazine located in Shanghai, focusing on how print media, together with state power, connected physical discipline of the female body to citizens’ morality. I expand the discussion to other print media in addition to Linglong and address issues involving jianmei beyond its link to state power and morality issues. Besides, unlike Gao, who differentiates the honored bodies of the New Woman from the condemned bodies of the Modern Girl in feminist and nationalistic rhetorics (563), I hold that this sharp distinction between the Modern Girl and the New Woman is a “false dichotomy.” As I have argued in earlier sections and will continue to show, the bodies of new women were under severe criticism throughout the first three decades and beyond.
and distortions, jianmei goes further, requesting women to be physically active in shaping their own bodies. In this sense, some concerns of jianmei such as health and physical mobility are already hatched in the concept of ziranmei, but the lens of jianmei reinforces a perspective somewhat contradictory to ziran mei, that is, the most natural—not doing anything to the body—is not necessarily the most beautiful. Rather, jianmei rhetotic stipulated that the far from perfect bodies of Chinese women could be and should be reshaped by physical exercises.

Figure 3.18 Liangyou’s Ad. for Jianmei Huakan

The term jianmei started to appear in popular magazines in mid to late 1920s, a time we detest a “new conception of the female body as an aesthetic object in and of itself” in
visual representations of women (Yingjin Zhang, “Artwork” 130). Successful pictorials such as Liangyou and BYHB, and women’s magazines such as Linglong certainly helped to popularize the concept of jianmei among urban women. Linglong magazine showed particular concerns for the “sickly appearance” of Chinese women and called on them to pay attention to jianmei. In 1933, Linglong devoted its new section of “Beauty Advisor Column” to the debate on jianmei. The editor Ms. Zhenling informed her readers of jianmei as such: “full figure, healthy color and live gestures.” As Zhengling claimed, “The sentimental and sickly Lin Daiyu types have been admired by women and desired by men...[Now] Jianmei is appreciated” (“Xiandai nanzi” 636-637). Zhu Yaoxian echoed Zhenling: “We have a lot of Lin Daiyus...Recently, there is some progress. We see women jumping and running, jianmei women, tanned new women, women with determination, endurance and courage” (575). BYHB, in addition to a brief mentioning of jianmei here and there, published 10 installments of a series on jianmei from August to October 1935, including topics from general information on jianmei to specific instructions on how to improve the looks of different body parts. Liangyou publishing house even launched a new magazine Jianmei huakan (Pictorial of athletic beauty, fig. 3.18) with a mission to “promote healthy physique and express feminine curves” (page n/a). The caption further explains jianmei as: “A body healthy and yet not thick, curves tender and yet not licentious.” The curvaceous body of the nude in the advertisement is formed by firm breasts, protruding buttocks, and long athletic legs. While flat-chest aesthetics in China may have come into the public sight independent of and even

28 Zhenling, “Rubu de weisheng” 636. Zhenling’s full name was Chen Zhenling, the editor in charge of texts in Linglong magazine. She was also responsible for answering questions raised by female readers.
precedent to the flapper looks in New York and Paris, the jianmei trend was heavily inspired by Hollywood stars. Their success was said to be dependent on their jianmei physiques. Greta Garbo was quoted in saying that, “Jianmei is our lifeline, the provider of our food and clothing!” Jean Harlow was considered an exemplifier of jianmei for modern women. There was even a news report on why beauty experts in the West selected an American beauty to replace Venus de Milo as the modern jianmei standard. The new standards, based on the measurements of an American beauty, were listed as: 120 pounds in weight, 5.5-foot tall, 34.5-inch chest, 5.43-inch wrists, 26-inch waist, 36.5-inch hips, 21.5-inch thighs, 13.4-inch calves and 8-inch ankles. Besides the precise measurements, more common in women’s magazines were standards such as: straight back, erect breasts, ample behind, slender waist, even-proportioned fitting figure, and strong legs.”

Finnane suggests that in the 1930s “swelling bosoms, curvy hips and exposed legs” were only visual representations in commercial advertisements, and “in life, the opposite seemed to be the case” (166). I agree that the prominence of curves and flesh exposure in some representations was probably not representative of many Chinese women. Yet, the curves of Chinese women in real life did get captured in print media even though their bust lines usually looked more moderate if compared to those of their Western counterparts (fig. 3.19 and fig. 3.20). Yongyi (swimming suits) and qipao

29 For information concerning Harlow, see “Shijie biaozhu meiren zaoxing” (Models of standard beauties in the world), Linglong 264 (1936): 3683; concerning Garbo, see “Gelantai jibao huazhuang tan” (Greta Garbo’s words about make-up), Linglong 168 (1935): 98; concerning the American beauty’s measurements, see “Jianmei de bianzhun” (Criteria for jianmei), Linglong 74 (1932): 1112; concerning the less precise standard, see “Zenyang shi shenti jianmei” (How to obtain a jianmei body), Linglong 136 (1934): 645-647.
became two most popular styles to accentuate Chinese women’s curves in 1930s.\textsuperscript{30} Although the former seems to give the body more freedom than the latter, both to some extent manifest jianmei’s philosophy on clothes and fashion, that is, the function of clothes, rather than hiding the “unsightly body parts,” is to reveal the body and thus encourage women to attain modern jianmei figures through physical exercises. In fact, women were seen dressed in qipao when playing leisurely sports like golf (fig. 3.19 lower right). In real life and in representations, women with jianmei bodies frequently alternated between the two styles. Visual media paraded the curves wrapped in swimming suits and qipao of Chinese film actresses such as Chen Yanyan (fig. 3.19 upper left), Hu Die and Li Lili. Other featured jianmei bodies were those of professional and amateur dancers and swimmers. Yang Xiuqiong (fig. 3.19 upper right), a famous swimmer nicknamed mermaid beauty, and girls from Mingyue Dancing Troupe were favorites of Liangyou and BYHB.

\textsuperscript{30} The reformed qipao in late 1920s already has a narrow cut to accentuate the curves, with sleeves length a little above elbow and body length between the knee and the calf. In 1930s, qipao is longer and even more body-hugging with side slits opening up to the knee or thigh.
Non-celebrity women in cosmopolitan cities also began to show curves of the breasts starting in late 1920s. In Hong Kong, as a BYHB travel journal revealed, girls looked *jianmei* and their breasts seemed unbound. The author attributed the *jianmei* physique to swimming.  

In Shanghai, as early as 1928, Xu Kangming already noticed

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31 In 1932, *BYHB* published a series of articles based on a journalist’s travel to southern cities such as Guang Zhou, Hongkong and Shanghai. In two of them, the author mentioned that women in Hong Kong have *jianmei* physique, more so than those in Guang Zhou or Shanghai. See *Nanyou zaji* (Journals of travelling to south), *BYHB* 808 (1932): 3; “Shanghai nüzi zhi zhuangshu” (Women’s dressing style in Shanghai), *BYHB* 812 (1932): 2.
that “nine out of ten women freed their breasts” (265). Xu’s observation could be exaggerated because a Miss Chen Yaoru, also from Shanghai, mentioned that in her school only about one third of the female students had emancipated their breasts, most of whom were from Guangdong (560-561). 32 Even for women who abandoned little vests, most other breast clothes available at the time were not lifting enough to create too conspicuous a bust line (fig. 3.21).

In the north, “freed” breasts appeared to be less common in late 1920s and early 1930s. What we see of women at that time was often a mix of flat line around the chest and curves around hips and legs. A 1930 article in BYHB showed the contrast of flattened breasts and curves of hips and waist in women’s fashion. According to Shi Liaoran,

32 The gap of Xu’s and Chen’s estimations might be caused by different standards on what “freed” breasts should look like. While for Xu, “freed” breasts could range from high “peaks” to not obvious at all (265), the example that Chen gave was a girl with “towering breasts” (560).
young women in the north were still addicted to breast binding but fashionable dresses would reveal curves around other body parts, particularly hips and waist. Shi was extremely appalled at the rear view of a woman: “Yesterday, I saw a woman wearing a long tight dress, but on her back below the slim waist, a lump of flesh protrudes like a tumor” (3). However, only a year later, Hong Xing noted “a strange phenomenon in 1931”: “It used to be the case that breasts of unmarried girls are as precious as gold because they are hidden and exposed breasts are as base as those of female dogs. However, nowadays women consider towering rufeng (breast peaks) beautiful, afraid that other people don’t notice them” (3).

Towards mid-1930s, especially after 1935, curves around breasts became more visible in China. In 1933, based on a few articles published in Linglong, some open-minded women were no longer ashamed of showing off their curves (Zhenling, “Rubu de weisheng” 63; Lin Yinglian 2319). In the same year, a doctor Qiu Jingzhou expressed his relief and excitement in Kangjian zazhi (Health journal) in seeing women’s breast peaks jumping underneath their outer garments as he was taking a walk along the West Lake in Hangzhou (1). In 1934, according to Ou Wai-Ou33, in a relatively short time period the size of women’s breasts increased: “A few years ago our women did not have breasts…. But recently I noticed women’s breasts are growing a few sizes bigger. They are set free from prison” (“Lian’ai xianfa” 16). In 1935, a popular journalist Lao Xuan34 claimed that he saw fashionable women in Shanghai wearing fake breasts, and commented on such

33 Ou Wai’ou, pen name of Li Zongda, was a poet and editor who contributed articles and poems to Furen huabao (Women’s pictorial) and other journals.

34 Lao Xuan, the pen name of Xuan Weiguang, a columnist of BYHB who was famous for his Wangtan (Presumptuous remarks) and Fenghua (Words of a madman) series.
incomprehensible behavior by quoting a foreign expert: “H.A. Jones said, women are a bunch of contradictions with hypersensitive nerves. Now that I look at modern women’s clothes—they used to put on little vests to bind their breasts, but are now using fake breasts—I truly believe in Jones” (3). These remarks can be overstatements but they reflect the increasing awareness among Chinese men and women of curves around breasts in mid-1930s. In fact, Linglong even received inquiries from women about breast-enhancement “how-to’s” such as: “How to make my breasts more lifted and peaks higher” (Fu Shuying, 645), “How to make my flat breasts fuller” (Wu Jingming 1827) or “What to do if I am already physically active but still have tiny breasts” (Zhenling “Nü yundongyuan” 2556).

Figure 3.22 A Hard but Useful Exercise (2).
Journalists, column editors and other “beauty experts” recommended leisurely sports and physical exercises as the most effective means for Chinese women to achieve jianmei physiques. Zhiying implored Chinese women to discover the power of basketball or running in shaping a beautiful waistline (89). Xiujuan suggested swimming and dancing as the recipe to fix Chinese women’s unsightly legs, which were “either as skinny as sticks or as thick as stumps” due to lack of physical exercises (112). As bust line became part of the beauty of body curves, physical exercises were also recommended to increase the size of breasts. The English title of a BYHB photo asked women to try a “hard but useful exercise, popular among foreign women” to enhance the bust line (fig. 3.22). The photo features a white woman in gym shorts demonstrating a breast-enlarging exercise: She was curving her back and raising her waist and chest with a stool placed against the tailbone. Another expert, a Dr. Lu Shifu told women to try dumbbell exercises when asked how to improve the looks of breasts (646-647).

By now we have already seen how bound breasts were lambasted. How were unbound breasts scrutinized? They were just as vulnerable if not more so under scrutiny. Zhang Jingsheng, who advocated “natural” beauty to free women’s bodies and breasts, also advised that men suck women’s breasts for the latter’s sexual pleasure. His ultimate concern, however, is how such a pleasure can benefit the nation by improving the quality of the “fertilized eggs.”35 The poet Ou Wai-ou who was pleasantly surprised at the increasing size of Chinese women’s breasts in 1934, placed breasts as the center of men’s sexual desires:

35 According to Zhang Jingsheng, women’s positive experience in sexual intercourse improves fitness of “fertilized eggs,” which would result in stronger citizens for the nation (“Mei de xingyu” 56).
Breasts—a feast for palms
Breasts—ecstasy in the round
Breasts—the first lure to attract men in
Breasts—the last thirst of men (“Lian’ai xianfa” 16).

More often than not, though, unbound breasts were related to maternity. Even the poet Ou Wai’ou did not neglect to mention that “breasts are not only a mark of femininity, but also a mark of maternity” (16). The famous BYHB columnist Lao Xuan who claimed seeing women wear fake breasts, disparaged them for the looks of the protruding breasts: “Women have breasts to feed babies, not to show off curves and allure men, just as in the past they had feet not to please men, but to walk with” (1935 “Wangtan” 3). He makes the analogy between breasts and feet so as to separate the natural/ necessary functions of each—“to walk with” and “to feed babies”—from the unnecessary/frivolous pursuits of women “to show off curves” and “to please men” (3). To Ou, Zhang, Lao Xuan and many others, the beauty of female breasts lie in their “natural” functions, that is, to feed babies and if possible to please men in “appropriate” circumstances.

But what do breasts mean to women themselves? As Marilyn Yalom argues, “The meanings attributed to the breast throughout history have rarely expressed women’s feelings about themselves” (275). The anti-breast binding voices, many of which are male, speak another reality as outsiders. Many educated young women who lived in early twentieth century China faced the dilemma: to bind or not to bind. Miss Chen Yaoru a 17-year old student from a teachers’ training school in Shanghai, told the story of her classmate Miss Liang who was heavily scolded by the school inspector for looking indecent with her plump body and liberated breasts that caught much attention (560). A
16-year old girl Cao Xiuying told a story about her new sister-in-law who was already facing a divorce the second day of the marriage because her husband (Cao’s elder brother) concluded on the wedding night that his new wife had too big breasts to be a virgin (1852). Here the visible size of breasts is inversely proportional to a woman’s chastity and a young woman’s value in the marriage market.

These stories express the concerns of young women about the social significances of breasts. One can understand, then, how some young women would choose to reduce their bust sizes to avoid the scrutiny of cultural conservatives who placed a high value on chastity. Or how others might boldly defy this scrutiny and show off their curves in qipao or swimming suits.36 Some women kept their breasts bound because they saw the practice as a means to assert their identities as humans, not merely as a “milk bottle” or “baby-making machine.” A female student named Wang Chuncui excitedly announced her self-discovery as a “fully developed personhood beyond a zhennü (chaste girl), xianqi (good wife) and liangmu (wise mother)” to be “no less exhilarating than Columbus’ discovery of the New World” (1093–1094). In fact, many female readers wrote to magazine editors to express their concerns that marriage and childbirth might be impediments to independent personhood. Even Ms. Huang Xiufen, a rather “traditional” 33-year-old woman who had given birth six times and was already the mother of four surviving children, expressed the agony of childbirth and breastfeeding. She complained that in the past thirteen years her life alternated between the two roles of shengyu jiqi (baby-making machine) and naiping (milk bottle) and wondered when she could take a rest for herself:

36 The more visible curves were not necessarily the equivalent of a freer body. In fact, as discussed above, the jianmei trend that encouraged more visible curves was another form of the subjugation of women’s bodies to the scrutiny of the “male gaze” and state power. See Yunxiang Gao for further discussion on the intervention of state power into the display of fashion and the female body in the 1930s.
“One baby is not even old enough for breast weaning, and I am pregnant with another. After ten months’ physical and mental pain, an exhausting little thing comes out to suck my breasts again. I wonder when I can stop being a baby-making machine” (221). Having their letters published in magazines, Wang Chuncui and Huang Xiufen openly questioned such female virtues as “chastity” and “devotion to husband and children,” defied the “traditional” roles imposed on women, and exhibited the desire for independent personhood. Huang, in particular, blamed her lack of independent personhood on the social treatment of the female body as “baby-making machine” and breasts as “milk bottles.” She thus anticipated the achievement of her new status as a “human being” through a better way of handling her own body and breasts. Ms. Huang obviously did not practice breast binding, probably due to social pressures, government regulations, inability to afford a wet nurse, or simply because she was not aware of the trend. One cannot say for sure that if she had had the opportunity, she would have done it. But breast binding would have offered an alternative to her objectified womanhood and provided a different vision of her value as a human being rather than a baby-making machine or a milk bottle.

**Conclusion**

In early-twentieth-century China, criteria for feminine beauty went through rapid and radical changes. Within this context of fast-changing aesthetic standards, the female body became a key locus for meanings related to Chinese modernity. As the cultural consciousness in Republican China shifted toward Western modernity, models and concepts from Paris, New York, Tokyo, and other metropolises inevitably influenced
Chinese criteria of feminine beauty. However, modern Chinese ideals of feminine beauty was not merely imitations of Western or Japanese concepts. In translating the concepts of modernity, or importing models from the West, new standards for feminine beauty took shape within a preexisting matrix of Chinese cultural and aesthetic traditions. The representation of women in early twentieth-century China, as Joan Judge argues, was an “articulation” of both “new discourses and existing cultural forms” (768).

zung mei (natural beauty) and jian mei (athletic beauty)—the two most prominent articulations of feminine beauty in the 1920s and 1930s—targeted Chinese new women, who were expected to combine the best of both modernity and tradition, but were often perceived as oddities both feared and desired, flattered and battered. Indeed, the visibility of new women in the public sphere made their personal appearance no longer a private matter, but a defining factor in the quest for modernity for intellectuals, governments, commercial advertisement, and other social, political, and cultural agents. Groups with different agendas found a common interest in forging a new aesthetics of the female body in the name of liberating women and strengthening the nation. Perceptions of the weak national body and the weak female body, as well as the interconnection between the two, were the rationale behind importing scientific knowledge and popular ideas about healthy bodies from stronger nations.

The discourses of feminine beauty draw on new and old understandings of ziran (natural) and kangiian (healthy, fit) in furthering various social, political, and commercial projects. Central to the rhetoric of jian mei and ziran mei is the claim to modernize and liberate Chinese women’s bodies. As I have shown in this essay, however, rather than liberate them, the new rhetoric sought to regulate the behavior of women, particularly the
behavior of new women who were expected to be agents for building a modern China. According to the regulatory rhetoric, breast binding was an “unnatural” and “unhealthy” practice; it was lumped together with foot binding to prove that “new” women with bound breasts, like “traditional” women with bound feet, were victims of tradition and needed to be rescued and emancipated. Although late Qing and early Republican China witnessed the gradual separation of the pragmatic (maternal) and aesthetic functions of breasts, the new aesthetics of breast was then naturalized and incorporated back into the pragmatic function in the name of modernity and science. When they showed any sign of steering away from their pragmatic functions or patriotic missions, female breasts, bound or unbound, would not pass the scrutiny of those advocates for ziran mei or jian mei. Women’s efforts to beautify their faces and bodies were often criticized as vanity or seduction.

In the process, women’s own desire and agency were ignored. Whether the breast binders themselves were fully conscious of it or not, breast binding could be an expression of the pure aesthetic value of breasts, or a gesture toward independent personhood, a desire to be mobile, to look youthful, and to be free from “natural” maternal duties, even if only temporarily. The flat-chest aesthetics shared by the young women in China and the West is not a pure coincidence considering the global social upheavals, the global circulation of images of women in film and other media, and the wide spread of ideas about gender equality in education, work, and leisure in early twentieth century. With the reconceptualization of gender roles, it became more viable, desirable and necessary than earlier ages to suppress gender distinction in fashion. A woman’s body, underwear, and outer garments provided her with the immediate
environments—as a buffer and interface between the self and the social surroundings—for redefining feminine beauty, talents and virtues.
Chapter 4

Producing Norms, Defining Beauty: The Role of Science in the Regulation of the Female Body and Sexuality in Liangyou and Furen huabao

Liangyou (The Young Companion), one of the most popular pictorial magazines in Republican China, published an article in 1935 symbolically entitled “Tanglang de beijü” (The Tragedy of the Praying Mantis). After a long and detailed description of the courting and mating process of praying mantises, the article concludes with a highly controversial argument that some females in the human world are equally, if not more cruel, than the female praying mantises who kill and swallow their partners (Dong, 43). The author argues that female praying mantis carnage is performed for the survival of the species, whereas women’s brutality is often caused by personal jealousy and hatred.

Coincidentally, Furen huabao (Women’s Pictorial), another influential magazine also run by Liangyou press, with women as its targeted audience, similarly emphasizes the linkage between women and female praying mantises only from a slightly different perspective: “The male praying mantis, grabbed and engulfed by the female, never tries to free itself even if its life is in imminent jeopardy” (Ou Wai’ou, “Yanjiu” 5). In addition, the female praying mantis also made its presence as visual images in 1930s’ pictorial magazines such as Shidai manhua (Modern Sketch). The very first issue of Shidai manhua in 1934 included a cartoon featuring a praying mantis and three women (fig. 4.1). The three women of different skin colors are positioned in a way to give space to a

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37 Translations in this article are mine unless otherwise specified.

praying mantis emerging from the ground. This seemingly odd juxtaposition of human beings and an insect is explained by the title of the cartoon “Hei, hong, canrenxing yu nüxing” (*Black, Red, Cruelty and Women*),” which explicitly points to the animalistic intrinsic character—cruelty—shared by modern women despite of their outward distinctions and different skin colors. Guo Jianying (1907-1979), the artist who contributed the cartoon to *Shidai manhua*, was, not by pure coincidence, the editor of *Furen huabao*.

![Figure 4.1 Guo Jianying, “He, hong, cai renxing yu nüxing,” (Red, black, cruelty and women)](image)

The linking of women with animals was not new. Positively or pejoratively, women had long been associated with animals in various discursive practices.
Nevertheless, if we compare the comments offered by Liangyou and Furen huabao with earlier references to the non-human world, we will notice a shift. Republican China witnessed the waning popularity of foxes and tigresses as metaphors for women. The image of the female mantis, instead, began to emerge in popular and scientific discourses. Furthermore, if the earlier comparisons were fanciful, even poetic metaphors, the mantis associations were presented as grounded in science.

Both the Liangyou and Furen huabao pieces underscore new discoveries in science and natural history to lend legitimacy to their arguments. This article intends to explore how Liangyou, together with Furen huabao, the women’s magazine run by Liangyou press, appropriates discoveries in science, and how this scientific discourse added to new structures of knowledge, particularly new modes of writing about female sexuality and aesthetics of the female body in Republican China. I realize that this understanding of Liangyou and its sister magazine goes against two notions associated with Leo Lee’s influential assessment of Liangyou: First, his general positioning of Liangyou as the commercial bourgeois “surface” of modernity as opposed to the more substantially intellectual “ideas” of enlightenment advocated by more “serious” magazines such as Dongfang zazhi (Eastern Miscellanies) (Lee, Shanghai Modern 45-47). Second, his reading of women presented in Liangyou as “young, rich, and alluring” bourgeois women confined either by domesticity or by burgeoning commercial forces (Lee, Shanghai Modern 66). My challenge to these two aspects does not diminish the importance of the “surface” dimensions that Lee believes are central to the magazine, but I suggest that we also consider other dimensions in an effort to understand the magazine itself and the issues it raises. Lee, very well aware of the two sides of modernity as “both
ideas and imaginary,” and “both essence and surface,” chose to take the non-elitist approach of a cultural historian to explore the surfaces of modernity that conjures up the “cultural imagery” (38). However, in addition to the “surface” of beauty that mainly involves outward appearance and sexual attractiveness, what other aspects of a beautiful and modern woman was Liangyou press trying to define and promote? What forces lurking behind the “surface” contributed to the preoccupation with the “surface” phenomena?

In Republican China, as the nation’s cultural consciousness was shifting toward a more Western modernity, the presentation and representation of the female body reflected and generated the changing perceptions of gender roles, social norms, cultural boundaries and traditional femininity. At this time, the increasing visibility of women in public sphere made their personal appearance no longer a private matter, but a defining factor in the quest for modernity articulated by intellectuals, government, commercial interests, and other social, political and cultural players. The ideal shapes of women’s bodies were forged by the power interactions and complexities of the various forces that had an interest in the category of feminine beauty. These forces included Western models of modernity as represented in films and other visual media; commercialization conveyed in advertisements for fashion; the state’s desire to mobilize women for employment or national service; and the evolving cultures of schools, education and uniforms. Situating Liangyou in the unprecedented changes unfolding in various domains in the 1920s and 1930s, I will focus on the role of science played in regulating the female body and sexuality. I argue that Liangyou, functioning as a platform for the dissemination of popular sociology, inspired, but at the same time constrained the new imaginations of
feminine beauty, female sexuality, and female-male relationship dynamics through the evocation of natural science, particularly scientific knowledge of biology and evolution.

**Vernacular Sociology: Morality in the Name of Science**

As Confucian knowledge was challenged by reformist intellectuals who were equipped with natural and social sciences from the West, China required a new and more heterogeneous epistemology. Tani Barlow detects a particular mode of knowledge—which she terms “vernacular sociology”—that was deployed for self-expression by modernists in 1920s China. Vernacular sociology emphasizes “natural manhood” and “natural womanhood,” by which Barlow refers to the “novel experience of body, mind, emotions, eros and social life” encouraged by new institutions, new careers and social possibilities (Barlow, “Wanting Some” 321). According to Barlow, vernacular sociology not only structured modernists’ foundational understanding of personality, social reality, and historical processes, but also charted the role of natural processes and natural science in social relationships and institutions (322-23). Besides, the term “vernacular,” although often associated with early times, is sometimes theorized as one of the world-wide modes of modernity emerging in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Vernacular modernity, inseparable from mass-production and mass-consumption, tends to blur “high” and “low” cultures and encourage the popularization of knowledge, literature and arts. In this sense, the “vernacular sociology” Barlow proposes, as well as Miriam Hansen’s theory of cinematic vernacular, is an attempt to capture the propensity of vernacular modernity (60).
Enlightened journals and newspapers including *Liangyou* provided a fertile field in which to sow the seeds of vernacular sociology. In these journals and magazines, intellectuals talked about themselves and their bodies in relation to what they called “society,” using “scientific” and “sociological” terms and concepts. An essay by Li Dazhao (1889-1927), “Wuzhi biandong yu daode biandong” (*Transformations of Material and Morality*) published in *Xinchao (New Waves)* in 1919 exemplifies how the relationship between the social and natural sciences can be explored in the terms of Darwinian evolution with a Marxist twist. His essay explains the origin and transformation of morality from animal instinct to human ethics, from natural order into social order, from natural science to sociological truth. Li, spends nearly half of the essay discussing the altruistic behavior of buffalos facing the attack of a tiger, in order to reveal the economic base of moral codes for female chastity and filial piety in human society (page n/a). Like Li Dazhao, Lu Xun (1881-1936) was another trendsetter of the time who relied heavily on the evidence drawn from the animal world to explain human behavior and the principles of ethics in society. Lu Xun published an essay in *Xin qingnian (New Youth)*, also in the year of 1919, to re-evaluate human relations structured in Chinese tradition. Lu Xun’s stance is even more explicit than Li’s in drawing analogy between animals and human beings. His answer to the question raised in the title—“What Is Required of Us Fathers Today”—is extremely simple and direct. He writes, “Judging by the animal world, our first duty is to preserve life, our second to propagate it, our third to improve it (in other words, evolution). All living creatures behave in this way, and fathers should be no exception” (“What Is Required” 56). Both Lu Xun’s and Li Dazhao’s arguments are based on an evolutionary truism, which, as Barlow explains, “holds that
natural science has already demonstrated how evolution is both natural and social” (325). The evolutionary arguments also target Confucian knowledge, or the “old” Chinese thoughts on the subjects of marriage, sex, and birth. According to Lu Xun, the old way of thinking is the “reverse” of evolutionary theory (“What Is Required” 56). In other words, Lu Xun and Li Dazhao evoked evolutionary science in order to explain social relations and guide the behavior of Chinese citizens. Before talking about other cases of using vernacular sociology to justify the necessity of regulating ethics, we need to ask first, at what point in modern Chinese history did Chinese intellectuals become preoccupied with the transformation of morality as a means of saving the nation?

China’s status shifted from a powerful empire to semi-colony after repeated failures in military contest with imperialist powers beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. Reflecting on guochi (national humiliation), Chinese intellectuals searched for strategies that would fasten nation salvation and nation strengthening. As early as 1844, in his work Haiguo tuzhi (Illustrated Treatise of the Maritime Kingdoms), Wei Yuan (1794-1857) already discussed the principal of shi yi changji yi zhi yi (using foreigners’ techniques to tackle foreigners) and urged China to learn from the West in order to strengthen itself against the West. However, failed attempts to save the nation with democracy and science, particularly the highly disappointing results of the Self-Strengthening Movement (Yangwu yundong, 1861-94) and the 1898 Reform (Wuxu bianfa) cast doubts on the effectiveness of imitating Western democratic political systems, and of pursuing Western science and technology.

Soon after the Self-Strengthening Movement and the 1898 Reform, intellectuals probed the realm of morality to find guidelines for the conduct of Chinese citizens. Chen
Duxiu (1879-1942), reflecting on the failed attempts, decided that the core of the reform should target morality, not technology or politics. For Chen, technology and politics are *zhiye* (leaves and branches), and the essence of reform lies in morality.\(^{39}\) Science, however, never lost its appeal among Chinese intellectuals, though concerns about the downside of science grew particularly acute after the First World War. Different views about science clashed and actualized in the form of the famous debate about science and metaphysics from 1923 to 1925. Central to the debate is whether science can provide guidelines for morality. The debate was instigated by Zhang Junmai (1887-1969) in his speech “Rensheng guan” (*Outlook on Life*) at Qinghua University on February 14, 1923. Zhang, focusing on the limitations of science, postulated that however advanced science might be, the issue of outlook on life is completely beyond the capacity of science (38). Zhang’s views were vehemently attacked by Ding Wenjiang (1887-1936), a geologist and zoologist, who traced the origin of Zhang’s thoughts to the neo-Confucian “School of the Mind” tradition and argued for the applicability of science to the resolution of issues in one’s personal life (41-46). Ding gathered more supporters, including Hu Shi (1891-1962), a leader of the enlightenment movement at the time. Hu Shi ridiculed Zhang’s paradigm: “Mr. Zhang Junmai claims that Chinese people have blind belief in science; I would say Chinese people only have blind belief, but no science” (“Hushi quanqi,” *vol. 7*, 483-84). But the support from one heavy hitter—Liang Qichao (1873-1929)—lent much weight to Zhang’s argument. Liang, after a long journey to Europe, lamented about the sad aftermath of the First World War and noticed the negative role science played in the

\(^{39}\) See Liang Suming, “Dongxi wenhua jiqi zhexue” (*Eastern and Western Cultures and Philosophies*), in *Liang Suming quanji* (*Complete Works of Liang Suming*), vol. 1, 335.
war: “The Europeans had a fond dream where science was omnipotent, but now they have declared the bankruptcy of science. This is a key shift in recent trend of thoughts” (Liang Qichao quanqi, vol. 5, 2972-74). Hu immediately spotted Liang as the archenemy and disparaged him for his degeneration from a “new mind,” to a slanderer of science (Hu Shi quanji, vol. 2, 196). Hu argued that unlike in the European nations where science has taken root and benefited people, China had not even greeted science. He insisted that China should value science, not demolish it (“Kexue yu renshengguan xu” 12-13). Hu further suggested a baseline for intellectuals in terms of morality cultivation. The baseline is identified as “the scientific outlook on life” and “the naturalist outlook on life,” which require knowledge of biology and sociology. According to Hu, if equipped with such knowledge, people can not only understand and explain the changing moral codes, but also bring about changes in life (23-25).

Central to the concern of the debaters is whether science can direct people’s outlook on life and therefore guide their conduct in the society. Their concern resonates with Lu Xun’s and Li Dazhao’s ideas discussed earlier. Lu Xun was obviously one of the strongest voices in the clamor for the use of science to guide human behavior. He humorously remarked that just as the magic drug 606 was invented to cure bodily diseases such as syphilis, science is a magic 707, which is invented to cure the disease of the mind (quoted in Huang Yanhui 324). He also insisted, “Guiding Chinese people’s progress must start with kexue xiaoshuo” (“Yuejie lüxing’ bianyan” 164). Here, I propose that kexue xiaoshuo be translated as “stories about science,” instead of “science fiction,” 40

40 Although the remark was made in the prelude to Lu Xun’s translation of From the Earth to the Moon by the famous French science fiction writer Jules Verne, we should not equalize kexue xiaoshuo with science fiction because science fiction is now translated as kehuan xiaoshuo, the genre that deals with the impact of
and that Lu Xun’s *kexue xiaoshuo* project be considered part of his continuous efforts to
build a science-based vernacular sociology. As early as 1907, he wrote “Ren de lishi”
(*History of Human Beings*) to introduce the evolution science to Chinese audience. In the
foreword to his translation of Jules Verne’s work, he pointed out that common people
were often bored by knowledge about science because of the rigid style of science writing
(164). In 1925, he complained again in a letter to a friend that scientists’ writings are too
dull and too profound for ordinary people and there are no popular magazines on science.
He hoped that writings about science could be “as interesting as Fabre’s stories about
insects with illustrations” (quoted in Zhou Jianren, no page).

Therefore, it is fair to say that Lu Xun invoked the term *kexue xiaoshuo* not to
emphasize the importance of science fiction, but to advocate the use of accessible and
interesting writing to popularize science. That is partly why he showed such special
interest in and support for *Liangyou*.⁴¹ Although *Liangyou* never focused specifically on
popularizing science, the particular “vernacular sociology” it promoted and the
approachable style it adopted coincided with Lu Xun’s ideas about how science could be
popularized, and put to good use. One of Lu Xun’s attempts to popularize science
involved a translation of *Souvenirs Entomologiques* (*Memories of Insects*) by French
entomologist Jean Fabre (1823-1915), a project he planned to accomplish with his brother
Zhou Jianren (1888-1984),⁴² a biologist and sociologist who contributed numerous

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⁴¹ Ma Guoliang mentions that Lu Xun felt a special affiliation to *Liangyou*. See Ma Guoliang 41.

⁴² Qin Ying mentioned the Zhou brothers’ attempts to translate Fabre’s work. See Qin Ying 45.
articles on love, marriage and sex to journals such as Funü zazhi (Women's Magazine) and Xin nüxing (New Women). Lu Xun’s other brother, Zhou Zuoren (1885-1967), showed equal enthusiasm about Fabre’s book. In fact, he was the first person who published an article in Chenbao fukan (Morning Post Literary Supplement) in 1923 to introduce Fabre’s book. Souvenirs fanned the Zhou brothers’ interest and enthusiasm for various reasons. First, I agree with Peng Hsiao-yen in her study of Souvenirs as a traveling text in China, that the scientific discoveries about insects can serve as a weapon of cultural critique on the human world (21). As Zhou Zuoren writes, “Seeing the comic-tragedy in the entomological world is like listening to the news of our distant relatives... We are equally moved and inspired to many considerations.”43 Second, the style of the book fits Lu Xun’s standards for popular science writing. Zhou Zuoren praises the author as “Homer of insects,” and considers his work as “the epic on insects” (quoted in Qin 44).

Entomology as Sociology: Biologizing Female Sexuality

None of the Zhou brothers ended up having enough time for translating Fabre. Dong Chuncai (1905-1990), author of the “Tragedy of the Praying Mantis” mentioned at the beginning of this article, is one of the first to translate Fabre’s works. In fact, he was a pioneer in introducing science to children and the masses in China, and made great contribution to the genre that Lu Xun calls kexue xiaoshuo. Dong’s translation, entitled Fabu’er de kexue gushi (Fabre’s Science Stories), was published in 1933 by Shanghai Children’s Press.44 Judging by the dates of the publication and Dong’s comments on

43 Zhou Zuoren, “Fabu’er kunchong ji” (Fabre’s Souvenirs Entomologique) 3. For the translation, I consulted Peng, “A Travelling Text” 37.
44 The 1933 version is the second edition. No information has been found about the first edition.
Fabre as “Homer of insects,” Dong had no doubt read Zhou’s article in the *Morning Post*. In the first section Dong explains the drive of nature using the newly acquired vocabulary of human physiology: “With the eggs maturing in the ovaries, time came for marriage and birth. A craze of jealousy bursts out… The stimulation from the ovaries drives them (the female praying mantises) to kill each other with madness” (42). The second section consists entirely of quotes from Fabre that focus on the cruelty of the female praying mantis during the fertilization process in the tragic comedy of nuptials: “The male mantis attentively performs his vital duty, grabbing his lover tightly in his arms, but this poor thing, his head was already gone and so was his neck, and even his body was partly missing. The female, her mouth on his shoulder, went on devouring her gentle lover. The incomplete body of the male praying mantis, was still holding her tight, continuing his duty” (43). In the last section, Dong comments on Fabre’s observation on the insects and relates it to the human world and the reality of China.

Although Dong closely follows Fabre’s account of the facts, the interpretation differs. While Fabre expresses his shock at the brutality, Dong tries to rationalize the act: “The tragedy, resulting from love, looks rather cruel in the eyes of human beings; but aren’t human beings who deem themselves the crown of creation just as cruel? In human society, aren’t there women who perform the tragic role of husband-killers, not even for the benefit of the species, but purely because of personal jealousy?” (43) Dong’s essay deploys and sometimes directly quotes the information on zoology and entomology contained in Fabre’s work to offer “scientific” commentary on the behavior of human beings. He is particularly concerned with the morality of human females. It seems that Dong nearly reversed what Fabre intended to achieve in presenting the world of insects to
human eyes. Fabre personifies the insects in order to create a link between the two worlds so that his audience could better understand the behavior and society of the insects. His personification of the insects makes the world of insects resemble that of the human society. Dong, however, is more interested in understanding basic human traits and instincts through the social life of insects.

Further, Dong’s interpretation takes up not only similarities, but also the alien nature of insects. As Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) notes in the preface to Febre’s work, “There is something, on the other hand, about the insect that does not seem to belong to the habits, the ethics, the psychology of our globe…” (7). Dong’s recall of the cruelty of women at the end of the essay dovetails Maeterlinck’s interpretation of insects as “a sort of ‘other’ that reveals the possibilities or alter ego that are inherent in civilized humans” (Paul Begin 449). Dong’s story confirms women as “other” who are mysteriously savage and yet intrinsically related to the civilization of the human world. The connection to the mankind makes females essential for the survival and procreation of human beings. However, their inherent savagery needs to be controlled to ensure the safety of the species. Dong’s remarks also imply that it is understandable for the female to kill the male for higher purposes such as the survival of the species. In other words, the sexual cannibalism or the disabling of masculine agency is tolerable if it is performed for the benefits of the nation.

Dong’s penchant for the zoological explanation of human behavior is shared by Ou Wai’ou (1912-95, penname of Li Zongda), a regular contributor to Liangyou’s sister magazine Furen huabao. Ou published a short story in a 1934 issue of Furen huabao entitled “Yanjiu chujiao de san’ge ren” (Three Men Who Study Antennas). The story is
about three male college students’ scientific experiment on the role the sense of touch plays in creating and maintaining sexual attraction. Ou locates the nature of human drives through the fatal attraction that takes place between insects: “The claws of the male diving beetle...snatch relentlessly at the female body for days on end. The male praying mantis, grabbed and engulfed by the female, never tries to free itself even if its life is in imminent jeopardy” (5). The science of insect behavior provides the students with evidence to support their theory that the attraction between the two sexes comes from sense of touch. However, the theory is challenged by the encounter with an “ugly” female doctor, whose unsightly pock-marked face is supposedly responsible for the students’ unanimous change of view. None of the students felt any physical attraction when she touched them while giving the vaccinations! They therefore conclude that visual pleasure is a prerequisite for tactile pleasure (5-6).

Ou’s tongue in cheek humor makes fun of a frivolous pseudo-scientific methodology and the rigid practice in applying natural science discoveries and theories to the human world. Therefore, in a way, Ou’s story can be read as an unintentional critical response to Dong’s essay in Liangyou. Moreover, the story betrays the author’s interest in science. In the very beginning of the story, Ou deploys the laws of physics to invoke the imagination of the attraction between two sexes: “Like charges repel while unlike charges attract” (5). He then elaborates on how under the power of the law, a steel ship passing by the magnetic rocks is sucked to the bottom of the sea by magnetism, and how this law, which explains the interaction between electrically charged particles, also has a universal application. The narrative continues to unfold various fatal attractions between two sexes, moving up the ladder of evolutionary hierarchy to include insects and finally human
beings. Ou might disagree with Dong, who intends to look for explanations and guidance for human conduct by examining the behavior of insects, but he is equally excited to use the new words of biology and medical and science such as “smallpox,” “vaccination,” “magnetic field,” “suction cup,” and so on. Further, the ridiculing of the three men’s failure to understand the way science works betrays Ou’s desire to decode scientific principles.

Indeed, Ou’s story is not to ridicule science, but to cast doubt on, even to ridicule the moral principles of Confucianism. Confucianism had been much attacked by the May Fourth enlightenment writers, but clearly Ou felt a need in the 1930s to renew the assault. By calling Mencius “the most ancient scholar who specialized in the sense of touch” (6), Ou dislocates Mencius from his common association with Confucian philosophy and mocks the hypocrisy of the Confucian saint who functions as the executor of a stringent code of ethics. Ou suggests that Mencius invented the theory about the sinful nature of hand touching between the opposite sexes only to cover up his own sinful pleasure derived from looking at a woman’s body: “Wasn’t it because Mencius saw the naked body of a girl that he rushed out of the room? He was afraid that the more he looked, the harder it would be to keep his hands from touching her” (6). The humorous rereading of Mencius feeds into the “scientific” understanding of the mechanics of desire and confirms the importance of visual pleasure in sex appeal. Therefore, science was Ou’s vernacular, not his target.

Ou is often associated with Xin ganjue pai (New Perceptionists) because of similarities in aesthetic expressions and their support for journals like Furen huabao. One of the devices they deployed was the use of biology to explain human behavior. Mu
Shiying (1912-40), one of the most well-known New Perceptionists, for example, when talking about the influence of Freud, relates it to changing concepts of evolution: “From creationism to evolution theory, we further our knowledge of the physiological makeup of human beings, and gain a greater control of our bodies. The modern disciplines of biology, psychology, and medical science changed people’s perceptions of the human body; man can be explained by their biological characteristics” (quoted in Jin Li 245). Freud’s theory had already come to China before the May Fourth era, and its defense of sexual desire provided a theoretical base for the May Fourth writers’ explicit expressions of human desires in that era. The New Perceptionists, however, differed from the May Fourth writers by adding even more ingredients from the natural sciences to the understanding of psychoanalysis. Jin Li, a Chinese scholar whose study focuses on the New Perceptionists, comments that the New Perceptionists’ discussion of human psychology often resembles a lab report (245).
Figure 4.2 Guo Jianying, “Xiandai nüxing de moxing” (Model of the Modern Girl)

Guo Jianying, whose cartoon featuring the praying mantis and women I discussed in the beginning of this article, was a New Perceptionist artist and the editor of *Furen huabao*. He also had his collection of cartoons published by *Liangyou* press in 1934. Guo was known for his portrait of the Modern Girl. The three women in the “Black, Red” cartoon are modern girls of different skin colors who are driven by animalistic desires, and the one in the middle is a mysterious and alluring Chinese Modern Girl image that permeates almost all of Guo’s works. The Chinese Modern Girl, ambivalent and subject to various ideological constructions, becomes an easy target of the New Perceptionists’ biologizing project. Another image entitled “Model of the Modern Girl” shows an
athletic Modern Girl, wearing only bra, panties and high-heeled shoes, with her right hand suggestively resting on her butt, and her left hand lifted alluringly to stroke the back of her short hair (fig. 4.2) (Guo Jianying, “Model” 1). The repeated word “IT” manifests the magnetic force the Modern Girl has in attracting men.\(^45\) Shocking in the picture are the two big tubes, which supposedly transport sources of energy and power to the Modern Girl. One is fed by a machine, into which an older man is shoveling American dollars, and the other is connected to two young men, one labeled “hormone” in Chinese and the other one in English. As suggested by the title, this is the “Model of the Modern Girl,” a dominant female figure with an erotic body, energized by money and hormones, and radiating with sex appeal. The caption of the picture highlights the basic elements that constitute the model of the Modern Girl: “Nonsensical brain cells, Grotesque upper body, Erotique lower body, money and Hormones as energy sources, It as the weapon” (1). Given the association Guo made in the image that links modern women and the praying mantis, the “grotesque” here is highly suggestive of the connection between women and animals/insects. The “erotique” lower body featured by the pronounced groin area signifies an insatiable female sexuality that sucks energy out of men. The two young men—one in a traditional Chinese outfit and the other in a Western suit—both of whom are identified as suppliers of hormones, are lying on the floor, looking extremely weakened. The older man supplies the Modern Girl with money, the other source of her energy. Again, her animalistic desires are satisfied at the cost of men’s energy.

\(^{45}\) “IT” is the quality that a man or woman possesses to assure absolute attraction to the opposite sex. “IT,” together with the term—“IT Girl” that directly derives from it—was made known internationally in 1927 through the film \textit{IT} and Calra Bow staring in the film.
Another image by Guo, entitled “Brain Cells of the Modern Girl (fig. 4.3)” shows what is depicted as the enlarged “nonsensical” brain of the Modern Girl, filled with a series of sensual pleasures, listed clockwise: a cocktail glass, the word “hormone,” a whiskey bottle, a racing dog, a car, dollar signs, the word “eroticism,” a bare leg, the name of a prominent movie theater in Chinese characters, and a pair of playing cards. The exposed brain contents confirm the message sent out by “Model of the Modern Girl,” that is, the Modern Girl is the embodiment of the dangers of hedonism and insatiable female sexuality. Guo, with the help of new scientific diction such as “brain cells,” “energy sources,” and “hormones,” presented a biologized Modern Girl image that relates her behavior, and her physiological and psychological traits to basic animal instincts.
Guo’s portrayal of the biologized Modern Girl, uses the new concept of human anatomy to provoke the fear and anxiety about the erotic female body, betraying the desire to control female sexuality. In this vernacular sociology, biology and moral warnings against the Modern Girl become inseparable.

**Visual Displeasure: Penetrating Scientific Lenses as a Surveillance System**

The New Perceptionist stories and pictures published in *Furen huabao* promoted the “surprising” scientific discovery that visual pleasure is the utmost pleasure and the sense of sight plays the most important role in producing attraction between opposite sexes. There is certainly no lack of visual pleasure in *Liangyou* pictorial. Scientific inventions such as microscopes and X-rays, however, complicate the visual pleasure and sometimes turn it into visual displeasure. In her study of the earliest pictorial presentation of the X-ray image of the beginning of the twentieth century, Laikwan Pang states that the apparatus “reveals a unique dimension of Chinese imagination and fear of Western modernity” because of the penetrating power associated with X-ray” (*The Distorting Mirror*, 8). The examination on the representations of X-ray in the *Liangyou* pictorial, however, reveals that the fear generated by X-ray is no longer identified as the fear of Western modernity, but rather with the fear of a degenerating morality. In fact Western modernity, with its trademark of scientific and technological advancement, is full-heartedly embraced and tactfully utilized in *Liangyou* to combat a declining morality caused by Modern Girls. As such, *Liangyou*’s discourse on science takes special interest in microscope and X-ray, which are believed to have penetrating visual power in
detecting and exposing ugliness, evils and lies hidden beneath the surface of pretty women.

In other words, the vernacular sociology of *Liangyou* not only looks for roots of human behavior in natural evolution to biologize women as Dong’s article demonstrates. Rather, precisely because of the traits in women are “particularly open to social remolding or social evolutionary restructuring” (Barlow 314). *Liangyou* finds it a viable means to disseminate popular sociology by discussing female sexuality and the female body. Since visual pleasure is primary, one of the effective measures used to remold and restructure women is to resort to scientific devices such as microscopes, X-rays, or cameras, which supposedly will help discern the nature of women better than naked eyes. In Guo Jianying’s Modern Girl images, particularly the one with the contents of the brain laid out, we can already catch a glimpse of the fantasy to see through woman’s bodies and minds, but the X-ray images of women presented in *Liangyou* “actualize” the fantasy and confirm the possibility of seeing through women with scientific equipments. “Fun Facts in Science,” one of *Liangyou*’s regular columns, dismantles what “people in the past” said about “seeing is believing.” “In fact,” the article points out, “your eyes only trick you” (“Yanjing de cuojue” 32). Another article warns people that although camera lens is “the favorite child of the new century” and “the production of science and civilization,” people still should not trust the “reality” it captures if it focuses on “pretty legs of dance girls” or “decadent bourgeois pleasures” (Hua Ling 18). These essays imply that the advancement of science and technology not only improves vision but also brings new challenges to our sense of sight. To *Liangyou*, the proper function of the new seeing devices is as a highly efficient surveillance system, which helps to see better,
know more about what is underneath the beautiful surface, and therefore regulate women’s behavior and looks.

A regular Liangyou column “The World of Science,” borrows the front cover of an American science journal with an inset caption that reads, “American scientists say that one kiss spreads 40,000 germs (fig. 4.4)” (“One Kiss” 21). The picture shows a fully-suited man engaged in kissing a woman dressed in a revealing tank top. The seriousness and blind naiveté of the man is further established by a central focus of the picture on the woman’s flirtatious pose and wide-open eyes. The man is, of course, a victim of a femme fatale beauty who not only plays with his feelings but also physically harms him, as evidenced by the discoveries of the scientists. The scientist is placed in the right corner of the picture, looking closely at the germs through the lens of a microscope. The source of the contamination is identified as the enlarged alluring lip of a woman located conspicuously in the upper middle of the picture. The messages are clear: First of all, men should not indulge in sensual gratification and end up falling victim to the feminine danger, and more importantly, such women, as the source of various potential diseases, should be quarantined.
In addition to discussion on images under camera and microscopic lens, X-ray pictures are also displayed in Liangyou to expose the danger of women. One picture in Liangyou presents the pretty face of a woman right next to the big letter X symbolizing its subjugation to the X-ray gaze. A skull five times as big as the woman’s head is placed right underneath her face to show sharp contrast between what is seen by naked eyes and what is “reality” detected by the X-ray (fig. 4.5). As the caption reveals, “Under the X-ray, everything will be exposed in its true form.”
“Hongfen kulou” (Skeleton: a pretty woman under X-Ray) A pretty woman is ultimately a skeleton. This is for those who are drowning in the sea of desire and need self-motivation” (38). Another X-ray picture focuses on the bone structures of three bathing beauties under the X-ray and bears a caption that emphasizes the same discovery by the new device, “Pretty women are ultimately skeletons.” In addition, it states the mission of X-ray quite explicitly as: “to rid people of enchantment, to expose the truth about the upper class” and “to criticize society” (20). Here, one major cause of the enchantment, of
decadent pleasures of the upper class, and of the evils of the society, not surprisingly, is identified as women with alluring bodies. With the help of X-ray, the “true shape” of women will be exposed. Hence the resolving of social problems is contingent upon the rectification of the degenerating morality. At the same time, the caption also identifies clothes as a device to cover up the “body” and hide the truth, claiming: “All clothes are false decorations” (20).

Figure 4.6  Zhang Jianwen “Renti mei xiezhen”

In “Renti mei xiezhen” (The Live Portrait of the Beauty of the Body) by Zhang Jianwen, published in Liangyou in 1929 (fig. 4.6) (29) we see the standards of a true
beauty without the annoying hindrance of clothes. The female body under the camera lens is shown in its shadow form, its “real” form and its mirrored form. Compared with images of women under X-ray lenses, this is to be considered the truly beautiful female body in all dimensions, one that can stand the scrutiny of the gaze directed from all angles as exemplified by the three different forms. The caption of Zhang’s photo reads: “The healthy body is the first condition for beauty. Clothes and powder are artificial. Body, hair and skin are naturally precious and therefore one should not hinder their development by overtly and artificially adorning the body. Otherwise it will lose its natural beauty” (29). The caption placed with the photograph emphasizes that one should do away with accessories and adornment in order to achieve a healthier and more natural form of beauty.

The increasing emphasis on natural beauty from the early Republican era to the 1930s sounded like a voice advocating for the freedom of women’s bodies. However, further examination shows that natural beauty is only a new and probably more easily accepted rhetoric to subjugate women’s bodies to the “shaping” process. Liangyou captured some challenging feminist voices of the day, which addressed both the old and new ways that impede the progress of women’s liberation. In a 1932 issue of Liangyou, Yuhe’s article underscored how women’s accessories function to make them subordinate to men. Yuhe points out that accessories are never mere superficial adornments, but directly shape the body of the woman. According to Yuhe, “Men look at women as the object of sexual desire and thus do harm to one part of their bodies and make them disabled. It is said that women with bound feet usually have a very developed vagina” (37). Yuhe then rhetorically equates the fashionable high heels of the time with foot
binding, and locates these practices directly in a primordial war in which women are the victims. In this way, a feminist discourse is created to directly link previous forms of restricting women’s bodies to newer forms. Whatever form it is in, the evolution from bound feet to high heels reveals the unchanging patriarchal power as the primary force that makes women nothing more than the objects of desire for men.

Figure 4.7 Lan Weibang, “Wan’ou” (The Plaything/the doll)

The “natural” beauty is furthered challenged by questions posed by “Wan’ou” (The Plaything/Doll) (fig. 4.7) (Lan Weibang 38), an illustration by the artist Lan
Weibang that accompanied Yuhe’s text. Lan’s illustration begs an answer to the question: How liberated are the naked bodies of women who are completely free from the hindrance of clothes and accessories? Lan’s “plaything” is a nude in a pose that provocatively reveals the woman’s body to the viewer. Her arms are held behind her head so as to fully expose her breasts and body. Yet what immediately captures the attention of the viewer is not simply the erotic pose but a set of marks that mar the body: dark splotches that run across the body like fingerprints, a reminder of the hands that have handled women’s bodies and turned them into the playthings. Lan wants to remind readers that in addition to the more obvious confining forces such as clothes and accessories, there are more invisible ones, which are made apparent by the fingerprints in the picture. The vulnerability of women’s bodies is thus further established. The naked “plaything” manifests invisible and more assertive forces than clothes and adornments that control women and shape their bodies. Without the restraints of clothes and accessories, women are not necessarily less susceptible to these shaping forces.

**Jianmei (Healthy/Athletic Beauty), Eugenics and Female Hygiene**

From the previous discussion on the presentation of female body in *Liangyou*, we can see that in *Liangyou*, and in the general public rhetoric of the era, the discourse on feminine beauty became increasingly linked with ideas of “natural” and “healthy.” From pictures of women’s bodies, to displays of various beauty pageants, to calls for women’s participation in national salvation projects, we can see the pervasive importance placed on women’s physical health and beauty in *Liangyou*. *Liangyou*’s editor Wu Liande (1900-72), when he did not see any Chinese participant in an international beauty pageant
competition, lamented, “What a shame, no Chinese representatives!” (7) For Wu, the image of woman is no doubt of vital importance to the impression Chinese people make. Beauty pageant competitions provide an opportunity to display the healthy and beautiful bodies of Chinese women. Wu, in fact, thinks that participation in such competitions can “change the world’s impression of Chinese people” (7).

_Jianmei_ is a key word that constantly appeared in magazines as a high praise for women’s bodies in the 1930s. _Liangyou_ showed special concern for the “sickly appearance” of Chinese women and called on them to pay attention to healthy beauty. In 1932, _Liangyou_ press was promoting another magazine, _Jianmei huakai_ (Healthy Beauty Pictorial), in almost every issue of _Liangyou_. This new magazine was advertised as “an advocate for _jianmei_ body,” “a promoter of healthy physique” and “an expression of female curves” (“Ad for _Liangyou_” page n/a). Firm breasts, protruding buttocks, and long athletic legs form the curvaceous body of the nude in the advertisement: “A body healthy and yet not thick, curves tender and yet not licentious” (page n/a). This _Liangyou_ advertisement not only emphasized healthy beauty, but also expressed a concern about the “licentiousness” of women. The female body, if beautiful for a selfish purpose, is likely to be associated with moral degeneracy.

The _Jianmei_ body is meant to serve for a higher purpose. The circulation of the discourse on _jianmei_ saw women’s bodies and female sexuality increasingly connected with the progress of the nation state. For example, in his book _Xing shi_ (History of Sexuality) published in 1926, Zhang Jingsheng (1888-1970), who was widely known as the sex doctor, broadcast the idea on how the prosperity of the nation and the race is directly related to women’s physical health and sexual desire (_Xingshi_ 38) According to
Zhang, “The weakness of this nation, of course, is caused by something that happens after the baby is born. But another origin of the weakness is the lack of the third water that women produce during sexual intercourse” (38). In this essay and his other essays about feminine beauty and female sexuality, Zhang always emphasizes the importance of both jian (health, fitness), and mei (beauty) of the female bodies to the production of healthier babies and a stronger nation. Lu Xun was another enthusiastic advocate for eugenics, although he put more responsibility on the shoulders of men. When he talked about “What Is Required of Us as Fathers Today,” he condemned those fathers who passed syphilis to their babies and therefore endangered society, concluding that those with “no self-love have no right to be fathers.” And continued, “If they insist on becoming fathers…In future, when science is more advanced and society has improved, such descendents of theirs as have managed to survive will undoubtedly be dealt with by eugenics” (59). The embracement of eugenics in Lu Xun’s and Zhang Jingsheng’s works, like the enthusiasm shown towards other new scientific and technological developments, is one of the main features of vernacular sociology. Liangyou helped the concept of eugenics, which was first embraced only by social elites, to reach a larger audience.

Women, once they were looked at as mothers of future citizens, the beauty of health of their bodies became a more urgent issue. Even medical ads in Liangyou learned to deploy the jianmei rhetoric with moralistic undertones. They are one form of the scientific vernacular that contributed to the creation of norms and standards of feminine beauty to support the modernizing project of the nation. Women featured in Liangyou medical ads are demonstrations of new medical science’s efficiency in solving women’s problems and enabling them to be modern, jianmei (beautiful and fit), and science-
conscious citizens and mothers. Medical ads make generalizations about the social and moral responsibilities of modern women, and justify them with corresponding “scientific” knowledge of new medicine and human body.

Figure 4.8 Medical ad for Sanatogen “Jiankang mei nai shi zhen mei” (Healthy beauty is true beauty)

One of the medical ads for women’s health-improvement products is entitled “Jiankang mei caishi zhenmei” (*Healthy beauty is true beauty*) (fig. 4.8) (41). The ad juxtaposes English and Chinese texts. The English text is placed on the left corner, which reads, “Better energy better health with Sanatogen the true tonic food” (41). In addition
to the Chinese translation of the English text that is placed by the side of its English version, a long narrative in Chinese is put in the center of the ad to make it clear that it is women who need this health boosting drink. The Chinese narrative reads, “Physically weak women are fond of putting on vain decorations, but they cannot enjoy true beauty” (41). It thus prescribes Sanatogen, which contains “phospholipid and protein,” as a cure for weakness of women, and a great help to gain strength, spirit and true beauty (41). In this advertisement, physical weakness is linked to vain decorations, and the decorative acts are thus held responsible for the superficial beauty and weak bodies. New scientific ingredients such as “phospholipid” and “protein” contain the magic power to solve women’s problems both externally and internally. Moreover, the ad particularly emphasizes the effectiveness of the medicine for regulating menstrual flow. The advertising campaigns turned women’s decorations and menstruation, which belonged to the extremely private and personal sphere, into a public event. Women’s personal trivia, in Barlow’s words, is “publicly trumpeted and measured for menstruating women’s scientific contribution to modern progress” (330). What is also worth mentioning about this ad is the image of an old gentleman dressed in traditional Chinese outfit on the package cover. Based on the text on the package cover, he is apparently an authoritative figure whose recommendation the potential buyers should trust. We might be puzzled by the strange logic here: What endows the old gentleman the right and ability to be a spokesperson for the medicine that is supposed to be extremely effective to regulate women’s menstrual flow?

Another medical ad might shed light on the question posed above. This is an advertisement for *Qingdaowan* (cleansing pills), entitled “Xiaoxiao shiwu changchang
neng huimei meiguan” (*Little Things Can Often Ruin Good Looks*) (page n/a). “People” here exclusively refer to women. As it is pointed out in the ad, “Sickly beauty like Lin Daiyu has long fallen out of fashion,” and the new “admirable” beauty should be “healthy and fit,” and the pills will help sickly women to reach the goal with a special “cleansing” power (page n/a). The ad then further emphasizes that the “inner organs” should be kept clean to ensure exterior beauty. The connection made between inner and outer is taken even further by the use of the word *bujie* (unclean), which, when associated with women, almost always invokes an allusion to moral impurity. Here, not only is beauty linked to health, but both beauty and health are linked to the concept of *jie* (clean). Just as in the other ad, an old gentleman, this time Mencius, is used as an authority to make judgments on women’s health and beauty, and to give recommendations on the cure. As the ad quotes Mencius, “Mencius said even Xishi (the most beautiful woman of her time) repels people when she is suffering from *bujie* (unclean).” I agree with Emily Baum in her discussion of the allusion to ancient texts and past cultural stereotypes in the advertisements for Dr. William’s pink pills. The medical ad “Little Things,” in fact, is a Dr. Williams pink pill ad. Baum reads the allusion to Chinese texts as the company’s advertising strategy to gain “traction in the community on account of their familiarity” (page?). In the case of medical ads for women, I will add that the Sinicization of the medical ads is often actualized through the evocation of an authoritative male figure to ensure the double protection for women: a protection for the body, and a protection for

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46 Ibid. Xishi is one of the four legendary beauties in ancient China. It is said that was a beauty in the ancient Kingdom of Yue during the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BCE), and was presented to the King of Wu to seduce him so as to prevent Wu from attacking her home country Yue.
morality. Given the story associated with Xishi and the diction used in the ad, bujie obviously alludes to both the physical and the moral uncleanness. Jie is thus established as the ultimate standard, the essence of true beauty. As the ad warns, bujie (unclean) will cause a peerless beauty to lose her attraction” (“Medical ad for Qingdaowan,” page n/a). By exploiting the pun, the ad deems moral impurity a disease, and claims an ability to improve women’s physical health as well as moral health, which is a prerequisite for curing women’s facial imperfections.

Conclusion

In Republican China, the increasing visibility of modern women in public sphere generated mixed feelings and heated discussions on gender roles, social norms, cultural boundaries and traditional femininity. Whether bearing the name of New Woman or Modern Girl, Chinese women in the unprecedented changes of the 1920s and 1930s China, made an assertive appearance in the burgeoning visual media of pictorial magazines. However, the relentless energy the modern women showed in pursuing fashionable appearance, material comfort, and gratification of “selfish” needs diverges from the “higher” purpose of the enlightened intellectuals. The emancipated women were expected to be stronger and more qualified female citizens and citizen mothers who can better shoulder the responsibility of strengthening the nation. Maura Cunningham identifies physical mobility of the Modern Girl as one cause of fears and anxiety about women’s emancipation. Ha Yoon Jung’s discussion on why New Women were singled out as undutiful wives and mothers provides further evidence that some people considered it a necessity to regulate modern women’s behavior. Hongjian Wang’s
research also reveals that *Liangyou* holds a rather conventional and conservative stance in describing and prescribing Chinese masculinity and femininity.

My study further demonstrates that *Liangyou*, together with its sister magazine *Furen huabao*, functioned as a platform for the dissemination of popular sociology. On the one hand, it captured the mobility of modern women and inspired new imaginations of ideal femininity through lively visual representations. On the other hand, it betrayed an anxiety about the “overt” mobility of modern women and about the changing female-male relationship dynamics. *Liangyou*, as a pictorial magazine, utilizes popular scientific discourse, particularly that concerning vision, to prescribe rules and standards for physical beauty and morality. Seeking new ways to mold women to fit the expectations of contemporary interest groups, *Liangyou*, like other “enlightened” magazines of its time, used vernacular sociology as, in Foucauldian terms, “subtle coercion,” in place of old and “unnatural” ways to restrict women, such as foot binding. As conveyed in the ads, essays and pictures, although not without voices of dissent, the vernacular sociology of *Liangyou* set the standards of female beauty for a larger audience than the social elites. By appropriating new discoveries in natural history, biology, physics and medical science, *Liangyou* attempted to produce norms and standards for women to follow; these norms and standards ultimately promoted the type of women who contribute to modern progress by combining good looks, fit physiques, and solid morality, all attested to the capability of truly beautiful women to pass the scrutiny of the “scientific” gaze. At the same time, by setting standards for women—the other—through the newly acquired linguistic and technological power of science, the vernacular sociologists promoted a
sense of self in the face of new social institutions, new structures of knowledge and new modes of writing.
Chapter 5

Malcontents of the Male Body: Performative Masculinity as National and Personal Assets

As the previous two chapters show, different powers placed demands on women’s bodies to suit their own agendas. The body emerged in intellectual and popular discourses as the locus of women’s self-identification and gender identity in Republican China. Could the bodies of Chinese men evade the scrutiny on their performance in the modernizing process? What role did the body play in forming the male self and individuality? Why did the discourse of the disease become so prevalent late Qing and Republican China? Given the dominant voices that promoted physical strength and martial valor in Chinese men under the influence of Western hard masculinity, how did masculinities in the modern era absorb or discard traditional elitist view that mostly preferred wen (scholarly gentility) to wu (martial valor) I discussed in the introductory chapter? What were the new masculinity models coming out of the confrontation and negotiation of conflicting forces?

The bodies of Chinese men were put under equal if not more pressure for renewal and reformation as the bodies of women did. Fragile scholars, the ultimate embodiment of wen masculinity in dynastic China were no longer admired for their weak and delicate bodies. Instead, their bodies became the object of distain in elite and popular discourses after devastating foreign encroachment of China in mid-nineteenth century. Chinese male intellectuals, ashamed of their newly gained reputation as “Sick men of East Asia,” universally pathologized and derided the weak and sick Chinese male bodies and lauded physical health and strength as the ingredient key to the making of the modern men. To
relate to the earlier question concerning the legacy of wen and wu masculinities in late Qing and early Republican China, I am of the opinion that the emphasis on virility and strength in forming a hard masculinity was not merely a heritage of traditional Chinese wu qualities. In fact, the modern hard masculinities were more inspired by the Western models than the traditional Chinese hero types. The traditional Chinese notions of Man and the imported scientific discoveries about the male body formed a new knowledge in flux where the two echoed, overlapped and interacted with each other. Chinese masculinity shifted from what I call “bestowed masculinity” to “performative masculinity.” Bestowed masculinity is power-based, intrinsically related to the power distribution in Confucian political and family structures, where masculinity was immediately associated with superior official posts and higher paternal authority. Performative masculinity is based on biological distinction as well as physical performance. Imported “scientific” knowledge about biological sex disrupted the type of masculinity endowed in the paternal authority. In the meantime, Western models of manhood challenged Chinese masculinity and provided a source of aspiration that encouraged regulatable bodily habits.

Therefore, the way to renew and reform Chinese masculinity consists of both “emulation and repulsion.” Christopher Firth, in his study of masculinity in modern West, states that “‘True’ masculinity is quite often located elsewhen,” and “corporeal plentitude” is an imagination for a more physically aggressive manhood of older times (2008, 16). Dominant masculinity of older times in China, nevertheless, much preferred

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I borrowed this expression from Forth who was talking about the contradictory path of the French state and society in relation to British and German models of masculinity. Forth, “French Masculinities” 3.
men’s literary accomplishments and cultural attainments to their martial progress and physical strength. Modern Chinese masculinity was conceptualized often through a discourse more explicitly on elsewhere than elsewhen if we understand elsewhen as a frame of reference located in the Self, and elsewhere in the Other. Japanese Sinologist Yoshimi Takeuchi claimed that “the modern Orient was born only when it was invaded, defeated and exploited by the West” (quoted in Naoki Sakai 114). On the one hand, this West-impact-Asia-response model of reading history tends to neglect “the internal dynamics and logic of a non-Western nation” (Lu Hanchao 17). As China scholars now mostly agree, Chinese modernity had a plurality of native and foreign origins. However, Takeuchi’s approach helps illuminate the paradoxical position of late Qing and early Republican elites when they witnessed the changing dynamics of Western and Chinese civilizations (wenming): Chinese civilization began to stand for the old-fashioned, the backward and the past while the Western civilization was equal to the new, the advanced and the future. Andrew Jones summarizes the changing dynamics of the Eastern and Western civilization as such:

By the late Qing, wenming came to serve as an emblem of all that was advanced, standing as a synecdoche for the power and prestige of the West, and marking the geographical and historical rupture between here and there, old and new. It was, in this sense, a deictic term, one that pointed not only to a thing in itself, but to the relation between self and other (17).

The late Qing elites, in front of the modernized “barbarians,” felt the nagging urge to see the Self from the viewpoint of the Other. Their frame of reference to measure civilization and progress shifted from an older Self—sages and prosperous kingdoms of old times—to the Other, often referred to as the white race (baizhong) or the West (xiyang). The
intellectuals of the May Fourth era came to an even more critical examination of
traditional culture, attempting to rid of the old political system together with
epistemology based on Confucianism so as to equip the nation and its people with
imported new knowledge about democracy and science.

From Bestowed to Performative: A Changing Definition of Chinese Masculinity in
Republican China

In the introductory chapter, I discussed how traditional Chinese conceptualization
of gender was different, and comparatively free from the essentialized heterosexual
binary often found in the post-enlightenment Western gender hierarchies. Charlotte Furth,
for example, points out that Chinese male and female bodies used to fall in a “shifting
continuum” between yin and yang based on the cosmological foundations of the universe.
Furth therefore suggests that gender was relative rather than absolute in traditional
Chinese thinking (48). Tani Barlow persuasively argues that “Woman” existed as a social
category in imperial China and only began to emerge in the May Fourth Movement as a
generic category (page). In the above cases, Furth and Barlow are mostly concerned with
women, but their speculations can be extended to men: Chinese male bodies were also
considered to be somewhere in a “shifting continuum” and masculinity was calculated
upon important social roles such as father and husband in a family. As I mentioned
earlier, it was a bestowed, power-based masculinity intrinsically related to the power
distribution in Confucian political and family structures. In late nineteenth century,
imported “scientific” knowledge from the West challenged the Confucian family
structure and its inscribed masculinity which had been tied to such authority of the male
as soon as they assume the roles of father or husband. The authority of the father/male elder was challenged by the evolutionary thinking that considered younger lives superior than the old; the authority of the husband was challenged by the biologizing discourse that created a gender hierarchy based on human anatomy rather than on cosmetic knowledge of the universe. Later I will examine the loss of bestowed masculinity in relation to the changing dynamics between the young and the old, and that between men and women. Before going to more details about these changing dynamics, I will first introduce two popular theories derived from the “scientific knowledge” of the body that remodeled the social relations based on Confucian family structure.

Anatomy-based knowledge spread one theory that human body was comparable to a machine. Tan Sitong, a student of Liang Qichao’s, also a leader of One Hundred Day’s Reform in 1898, was marveled at the vivid wax models, detailed descriptions of the human body, and the thorough knowledge about the human body in Western textbooks. He completely believed that sex is “nothing more than a mechanism,” a natural act between “two lumps of flesh and blood” (17). *Jixie* (mechanics) was often used in titles of magazine articles and textbooks on the human body. Tang Zhou, a contributor to *Students’ Journal*, wrote an article titled “A comparative study of mechanics of the human body and motorcycles,” explicitly compared the human body to the machinery of a motorcycle (19-25). Even as late as middle 1940s, Shen Junqi, a medical researcher in Beijing, still entitled his textbook on human physiology “Mechanic life” (*jixie rensheng*) and referred to the human body as a factory (page n/a). As Decoiter points out, unlike the “bodies” linked to the cosmological foundations of the universe in traditional Chinese medical discourse, the bodies in modernizing discourse “were
produced by biological mechanism inherent in nature” (22). The bio-mechanization of the human body, depleting the social connotation in femininity and masculinity, prepared the foundation for a more essentialized definition of masculinity.

The other theory, related to the first one, is that men have more active mechanics than women. The biological mechanism served as the foundation of the essentialized male/female binary. In Europe itself masculinity was radically refashioned at the end of the nineteenth century in response to scientific discoveries about the human body and psyche. Andrew Mangham writes:

New scientific norms of male and female sexuality were propounded in the late nineteenth century by sexologists and psychiatrists because transformation… appeared in the eyes of anxious observers to have undermined the explanatory powers of older notions of masculinity and femininity (5).

George Mosse similarly argues that the new sexology, among other developments, successfully shored up the modern notion of masculinity (5). In late 19th and early twentieth century China, elite and popular discourses introduced natural science to represent gender distinctions as “biologically determined structures” (Decoiter 14). It was said that gender differences exist in every part of the body and men have more active mechanism than the female body. Zhou Jianren, Lu Xun’s youngest brother, a biologist and sociologist, and one of the major contributors to Women’s Journal (Funü zazhi), published an article with his pen name Qiao Feng. After giving details on the different “natures” of men and women in their brains, blood, muscles and bones, he drew the conclusion that men are always abundant in masculinity, and women in femininity. It was appealing for “science”-prone intellectuals like Zhou Jianren to use biological differences between men and women to explain other differences: men physically active, emotionally
stable, and intellectually superior, and women passive, unstable and mediocre. The discourse in Republican China biologized the human body and created a new gender hierarchy different from the Confucian one that placed women on the bottom of the hierarchy in social relations. The new gender hierarchy, instead, were based on “scientific knowledge” of the body which stipulated that female bodies were the passive counterparts of active male bodies. On the one hand, such a new hierarchy enforced the physical, mental and emotional difference between men and women. But on the other hand, it provided a new source of inspiration to transform the understanding of masculinity and femininity based on the Confucian family structure.

To sum up, the scientific definition of men and women underlined the “natural,” biological difference between the two sexes. Such a definition disrupted and dislocated one of the most important aspects of traditional Chinese masculinity, that is, the social masculine roles despite of one’s physical virility--such as being a father (to son), a husband (to wife), or a government official of higher of position—would immediately enable one to occupy a space in the masculine realm.

The “bestowed masculinity” associated with social roles in China declined with waning of paternal authority when the Confucian family structure was in crisis. The whole hierarchy of Confucian system was challenged during the May Fourth era as a backward cultural legacy. As discussed in chapter 2, in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century China, evolutionary thinking and biological knowledge were circulated via print media and infiltrated into social-scientific disciplines and popular discourses. Many leading intellectuals from late Qing to the early Republic, such as Yan Fu, Liang
Qichao, Lu Xun and Chen Duxiu,\(^{48}\) impressed by scientific knowledge and discoveries and deeply influenced by social Darwinism, attempted to apply the universal “natural laws” to Chinese social relationships and institutions. “Natural laws” stipulate the survival of the fittest. Under such laws, China would have to renew itself by getting rid of its backward tradition in order to become fit and to compete successfully with other nations. Strength of the young thus became a much-preferred quality to the experience of the old.

Neither occupying the higher official post, nor being the elderly male of the family or clan would immediately bestow one with masculinity. Men need to reform and perform. The hopes were placed on the new and the young. Liang Qichao wrote “On the Young China” (Shaonian Zhongguo shuo): “Our country will be wealthy, strong, and independent if our youth are wealthy, strong and independent. Our country will outwit Europe if our youth outwit the Europeans.” Chen Duxiu named the flagship journal of the new cultural movement “Youth Journal” and then “New Youth.” Lu Xun, in “A Madman’s Diary,” a piece often considered the first vernacular fiction, called upon the society to save children, who he considered as the agent of national redemption.

In fact, some of the May Fourth writers are in a way “father killers.” They challenged filial piety, critically examining the father as a cultural figure incompatible with individual freedom and therefore deserving symbolic or real-life death penalty. In

\(^{48}\) I adopt Edmund Fung’s ideas and categorization of modern Chinese intellectuals in The Intellectual Foundations of Chinese Modernity. According to Fung, Liang Qichao belongs to the first generation of the new intellectuals who are “the classical scholars with varying degrees of knowledge of the west and the modern world.” This is a transitional generation from literati to modern intellectuals. This generation communicates with, but differs from the New Culture/May Fourth generation such as Hu Shi, Chen Duxiu and Lu Xun, who received education overseas, “completing their intellectual transition to the modern world” (Fung 18-19).
Ba Jin’s novels, for example, the father figures often suffer from loss of vitality under the autocratic culture themselves and would mercilessly suffocate and repress the younger generations’ longings and desire for freedom. The father figure appears not only as a cultural misfit, but also as physically disabled. Their disabilities are often caused by what was considered as “old Chinese customs” such as opium smoking, drinking, and prostituting. Lu Xun, highly influenced by the evolutionary thinking, in “What is required of us fathers today,” criticized the “reversed old way of thinking in China,” which “expects the younger generation to sacrifice itself for the elder’s sake” (60). He explicitly expressed his preference of the young/new to the old: “The latter forms of life are always more significant and complete, hence more worthwhile and precious; and the earlier forms of life should be sacrificed to the later” (59). Fathers need to behave and men need to behave. Lu Xun condemned fathers who handed down spiritual and bodily ailments to their children. According to him, “those with no self-love have no right to be fathers….and will be dealt away with my eugenics in the future” (no page).

Thus, the modern conceptualization of masculinity was gradually detached from the familial and social relations based on Confucian hierarchies and turned more external and performative.

**Performed Masculinity I: Male Virtue and the Disempowered Man**

With the decline of paternal authority, elite and popular discourses began to question the “backward” Chinese custom that only emphasized female virtues and female chastity. As a result, “male virtue” surfaced as a semi-mocking standard to measure a man in courting, conjugal and other social relations. Lu Xun denounced the traditional cult of female chastity, asking “Why is it that they went on blaming the woman alone
when everyone knew that a woman could lose her chastity only through a man?”

Loosening the ties between women and chastity pointed to the fact that men could be “unchaste” as well and would need to cultivate and manifest male virtues.

Cartoons of in the 1920s and 1930s humorously caught the loss of bestowed masculinity and acquisition of the “male virtue” in relation to the changing male-female dynamics. The changing power dynamics between husband and wife particularly reflects the waning of a bestowed masculinity in Chinese men and the increasing awareness of the “male virtue.” In his cartoon published in Liangyou entitled “Fudao” (妇道 Wifely virtues, fig. 5.1), Lu Zhensheng contrasts two standards for female virtues in the past and in the present, and humorously revealing the new standard for an “ideal” man. The first picture stands for the past, featuring a husband and wife in traditional Chinese outfits. While the husband is sitting leisurely smoking a tobacco pipe, the wife is rushing to get the laundry done. In contrast, the young wife in the second picture, dressed in a revealing sports tank and tight shorts, turns out to be the more leisurely one, smoking a cigarette and waiting for her high heels to be taken off by the husband. The husband is westernized from outfit to mannerism: He is dressed in western shirts and pants, kneeling on one knee and looking at his wife admiringly, and seems to enjoy being the “servant” of the household. The cartoon amuses the readers about the idea that female virtue—that is, a good wife should take care of household chores as well as the husband—was being replaced by male virtue where the husband would be willing to please the wife.
Figure 5.1 Female Virtue (Past and Present)
Similarly, another cartoon in Liangyou entitled “Three Eras” (fig. 5.2)—uses the changing sitting positions of husband and wife to represent their changing status in family and society from the past to the future. The cartoonist, aware of cartoon’s limitations in representing reality, deliberately framed the husband and wife in photographs, which were supposed to be more “realistic.” The three “photographs” were marked as if taken in different times: The “past” one was supposed to be taken in the 29th year of Guangxu Emperor (the year of 1903), the “present” one in 1929, and the “future” one in 1939. In the first picture, the husband and wife again are both dressed in traditional Chinese outfits. While the husband is sitting in an old-fashioned armchair that establishes his authority in the family, the wife is standing obediently by his side. In the second photo, both the husband and the wife are dressed in the latest fashion of the time: the wife in a body-hugging western dress and the husband in a western striped suit top and a pair of bell-bottom pants. But this time, it is the wife who is sitting and the husband
standing tractably behind her with his two hands holding onto the back of the chair. In the third photo the progression of change comes to an extreme: the wife with permed short hair in a mini-tank dress was holds a cigar, riding on the back of the husband who was crawling on the floor in all fours like a dog.

In the last pictures of both cartoons, the man is domesticated by the wild woman. Such domestication suggests a performative masculinity that disempowered men and reversed the gender roles of previous times. As shown in various cartoons, this particular performative masculinity under examination was to emulate Western gentlemen on the most superficial level—their clothes—and to push the gentle etiquette of the gentlemen into extreme as to completely succumbing to the unreasonable and insatiable desire of the modern women.

Figure 5.3 New Year Celebration
The hybrid new gentle man type, as two other cartoons above (fig. 5.3 and fig. 5.4) and another cartoon series “A Good Couple” in Liangyou also show, would perform multiple roles as the chef, the servant, the nanny, the pet and the entertainer in a modern family. In print-media representations, this Chinese new gentleman was a paradoxical figure in the threshold of Chinese modernity. He had lost the masculinity bequeathed by Confucian norms and yet had not acquired the essence—strong body and strong mind—of their Western counterparts. The “male virtue” was the fig leaf he was holding while fumbling for an ideal masculinity in the new era.
Figure 5.5 A Women-Centered Society
Figure 5.6 When Feminism Is Highly Developed

The male virtue, performed at the extreme would turn upside down the world where women used to be playthings of men. It would turn men into the playthings of women in the new women-centered world. Two surrealist cartoons in *Liangyou* feature men as the pure playthings in imagined future feminist societies. One cartoon (fig. 5.5) is set in a theatre where the performers on the screen are all naked men dancing and singing away to entertain the all-female audience. This cartoon provides an antithesis to the practice in popular films of the time, which heavily relied on naked or half-naked actresses to attract male audience. The caption of the cartoon reveals the reversal of roles:
“When the society becomes women-centered, the most popular film would be this style (men entertaining women).” The other cartoon (fig. 5.6) is entitled “When feminism is highly developed,” depicting a woman having too much fun in torturing a man in various ways: by piecing his flesh in the arm to weigh his body, forcing faucet water into his body to blow up his stomach, placing his head in between two flattened rock-like objects connected to a screw driver to squeeze out his juice—his tears and possibly his brain, and choking his neck with hands and placing feet on his ribs to bend/break his back.

The ways men’s bodies are depicted in the two cartoons spectacularize the increasingly malleable and performative bodies of the Chinese men. In addition, both cartoons can be read as nightmares caused by the declining of masculine authority and fear of uncontrollable feminine power. As elaborated in chapter 2 and chapter 3, changing gender dynamics raised anxiety in society about dangerous modern women. This anxiety motivated the coercive power in print media to control and regulate the female bodies and sexuality. These new women exuded a femininity that was more often than not interpreted as a threatening force for the proper development of a Chinese masculinity still in cradle. These “fake” Chinese gentleman that frequented Chinese print media represents an unwelcomed “drone” type born in the semi-colonial China.

**Performative Masculinity II: The Fit Male Body as a National Asset**

As discussed earlier, Chinese masculinity no longer automatically accompanied one’s social roles as a father or husband as in the traditional Chinese society. It became something one needs to work on, to strive for and more importantly to act out. In male and female relations, the performative masculinity registered a shift from the traditional
male virtue to the more modern “male virtue,” where men’s bodies became more performative and malleable. However, the malleable bodies of Chinese men with “male virtue,” often postured like a clown or a victim, carried negative connotations and served as the target of ridicule. The ideal Chinese man should not imitate only the superficialities—outfit and etiquette—of the Western gentlemen, but obtain the essence of masculinity: strong body and will power. According to Ding Chuwo, the chief editor of *Women’s World*, Chinese are supposed to look up to Americans and Europeans, every one of whom “is walking swiftly with a straight back and lifted head, strong and majestic.”49 The ideal Chinese man should also demonstrate physical strength of their bodies, the most admirable asset of performative masculinity in the grand narratives of the nation.

The model of robust soldiers became a much-preferred masculine type than the fragile scholars. The “fragile scholars” was a masculine ideal that existed long before the new hybrid gentleman type discussed in the last section of this chapter. It exemplified intelligence, grace and romantic emotions in earlier times but became the target of late Qing and early Republican intellectuals who attempted to cultivate harder masculine ideals. The intellectual discourses attacked the overtness of Chinese civilization and the effeminacy of Chinese men and demanded that Chinese civilization be revigorized by drawing upon bodily habits from the West rather than the “soft” literati ideals.

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49 There were two different journals titled *Women’s World* in early twentieth century China. One was founded by Ding Chuwo (丁初我) in January 1904 and ended with the seventeenth issue in 1906. The other one published its first issue in December 1914, and closed six months later. Chen Diexian (陈蝶仙) was the editor. The quotes here are from an article written by Ding himself in the earlier journal edited by Ding.
In 1902, Liang Qichao (1873-1929), a leading figure of the first-generation new intellectuals, launched his critique on the sick and fragile Chinese bodies in his influential essay “Xin min lun” (新民论 On the New People): 50

Chinese are ignorant of hygiene. They marry extremely early, to pass their seeds of course, but the seeds are already weak. When kids reach the school age, they bend over the desk reading all day, doing no physical exercises. Fragile gentility is a lauded quality; timidity and weakness are considered delicate and noble. Elegant young men are too weak to stand a gust of wind, bearing the name of “man” (zhangfu) but in fact weaker than girls. When they reach adulthood, they linger between sheets exhausting their energy, or smoke opium weakening their bodies...Alas, if the people are sick people, how can the nation not be a sick nation? (160)

Liang’s essay is an anti-glamour recap of Confucian scholars, who used to be highly admired for their bookishness, delicate physique and mannerism, and romantic involvement with beauties. However, in Liang’s essay, as in much of modern Chinese intellectual discourse of his time, “fragile gentility” is a self-indulgent way of the past. Old ways need to be reformed, and new people, especially new males, need to be “created” or reshaped for the making of a stronger nation. Liang asserts that a new body, healthy and strong, is essential to the new people, and thus links the creation of new people to a peculiarly bodily fact. By emphasizing the importance of healthy and strong bodies in the construction of a new people, Liang not only criticizes the common Chinese wisdom that “Barbarians celebrate strength (shang li 尚力), while civilized people celebrate intelligence (shang zhi 尚智)” (147), but also challenges the disregard of physical strength in traditional Chinese philosophy and practice, particularly Confucianism honoring wen 文 (scholarly gentility or civilized grace) over wu 武 (martial

50 Min here can either be translated into people or citizens. All the translations in this chapter are mine unless otherwise noted.
valor or physical strength), and Taoism preferring *wuwei* (non-action) to *dong* (motion) ("New People" 153-154).\(^{51}\) Liang explicitly advocates *shangwu* (尚武, celebration of martial valor) as a remedy for weakened Chinese males and nation.

Liang’s thoughts were hardly novel. Seven years before him, another influential scholar Yan Fu (1853-1921) introduced the idea that “The physical strength of hands and feet is the foundation of a nation’s wealth and strength” and encouraged Chinese to “exercise muscles and bones, and to improve blood and energy” (Yan, 28-29). Yan similarly blames China’s military failures on the *wen* character of Chinese men.

According to him, China excels at showing civilized grace (*wen sheng* 文胜), while Western countries are good at manifesting rough and bellicose qualities (*zhi sheng* 质胜) (Yan, 10). The dichotomy of *wen* and *zhi* in Yan’s remarks is similar to that of *wen* and *wu* in Liang’s. According to Yan, the qualities associated with *wen*, compared to those associated with *zhi*, though more advanced in civilization, made educated Chinese men indulgent in comfort and contemptuous of physical strength and manual labor (22).

Apparent in both Liang’s and Yan’s advocacy for physical strength are the ambivalent misgivings about China being overtly civilized and Chinese males being softened and emasculated by such a decadent civilization. The nationalist representation of the ideal masculinity requires the incorporation of physical prowess of the West. Yan, admiring the *zhi* character of the Western nations, cannot help lamenting: “Isn’t China today like a sick man?” (26) According to Yan, people of the white race, endowed with

\(^{51}\) Traditional Chinese philosophies prioritize heart-mind to body, which according to Liang leads to lassitude and weakness. *Xiushen* (cultivation of the body) is preconditioned by rectification of the heart” (*zheng xin*), regulation of the faith (*cheng yi*), acquisition of knowledge (*zhi zhi*), this *shen* is not a physical body composed of flesh and blood, but a carrier/form of *xin* (heart-mind).
zhi qualities, are tall, robust and vigorous, capable of enduring hardships and good at fighting; they, therefore, rule the roost (27). Liang particularly emphasizes the super physical power and endurance of British and German political and military leaders. He gives the examples of Napoleon, who only slept 4 hours a day when training the soldiers, Gladstone who, old as he was, could walk over 100 li (over 30 miles) every day, and Bismarck, who had a body weighing 280 pounds, with seasoned muscles and bones (159). Liang, marveled at the wisdom of Columbus, Martin Luther, Washington, Lincoln, and at the physical strength of Napoleon, Gladstone and Bismarck, complains, “The masculine type has been eliminated in China for the past thousands of years. In such a big country, there is only female virtue, no male virtue, only sick man, no healthy man” (41).

To some May Fourth intellectuals, such as Lu Xun and Chen Duxiu, their prescriptions for Chinese (lack of) masculinity were similar to their late Qing predecessors, only a more radical breakaway from the Chinese tradition. They looked at the West and Japan for inspiration and explicitly promoted beastliness (shouxing 動性) as a cure for the Chinese body. Chen Duxiu’s critique of the educated new youth in 1915 echoed Liang Qichao’s of the pale-faced scholar. Chen’s educated new youth, “as lovely as a virgins, as weak as a sick man,” are afraid of cold and heat, with “powered face and slim waist,” and “hands incapable of holding a chicken, heart deprived of the masculinity of a man” (“Jinri” 88). Feminine features and weakness were the major vices of Chen’s masculinity criteria. The powder-faced young men of China need to obtain the qualities of beasts—indomitable will, robust physique, independence and fighting skills—which according to Chen were the “sole reason” for White race’s global colonizing success and Japan’s domination in Asia (88). Lu Xun, unhappy with a Japanese scholar who praised
the lack of beastliness among Chinese people, seems to be endorsing Chen’s strategy.

According to Lu Xun, “The disappearance of bestiality is only good for shepherds, not for animals themselves when a bison is tamed into an ox, a boar becomes a pig, or a wolf turns into a dog.82 (1881, 414). The Chinese men need to acquire the tough body and mind of an animal, as these seemingly primitive qualities were necessary for beating the enemies as well as combating one’s inner weakness caused by civilization.

Military officers and soldiers and government officials, as the most visible “national asset,” drew criticism from all sides. Zhang Boling (1876-1951), Chinese educator and the founder of Nankai University in Tianjin, in his speech in 1925, recollected his shame and anguish at seeing the sharp bodily contrast between a Chinese and a western soldier 20 years before. While the British soldier had “a mighty build” and looked arrogant and yet dignified in his uniform, the Chinese soldier looked “haggard,” with his hunched shoulders and shabby uniform. The shame stayed with him and the contrasted images of the two soldiers “remained etched” on his mind (Wang Wenjun 143). Not only intellectual discourses of the early twentieth century promoted physical strength by linking the individual body to the grandiose body of the nation, popular discourses in 1920s and 1930s followed such a trend. The most visible males in pictorial magazines like Liangyou were more or less directly related to the nation. Military officers and government officials not only appeared fully dressed in military outfits in photographs, but also naked or half-naked in innovative portraits. A cartoon “This Year

82 Lu Xun, “Lue lun Zhongguo ren de lian” 聊论中国人的脸 (A brief discussion on the faces of the Chinese), Lu Xun quanji 鲁迅全集 (Complete works of Lu Xun). Vol. 3. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981. 414. This essay was originally published on November 25, 1927 in Mangyuan 莽原, a bimonthly literary journal founded by Lu Xun in Beijing.
and Last Year” (fig. 5.7) reveals the flabby body and hunched back of Sun Chuanfang (1885-1935), a military general, the “Nanjing warlord” in Republican China. Clothes made the man—his status, his authority—in traditional Chinese culture, but modern society required the healthy body be part of a performative masculinity. Sun’s undressed flabby body in the cartoon reveals the public’s suspicion on the fitness and qualifications of military leaders.

![Figure 5.7 This year and last year](image-url)

A photo collage “Naïve Design” (fig. 5.8) portrays Zhang Jingjiang (1877-1950) in real life and in the imagined idealistic shape. Zhang was the first chairman and one of
the “four patriarchs” of Chinese Nationalist party, and a sworn brother and mentor of Chiang Kai-shek. In real life, Zhang was suffering from chronic leg and eye diseases. The immobility of his weak body is well captured by the picture on the left where the lump of Zhang’s body collapsed into a chair. In the picture on the right, however, Zhang’s body is replaced by that of a body builder. In contrast to the invalid body in wheelchair, this Zhang is proudly showing off his well-sculptured body. The caption of the photo collage imitates the voice of the supposed 12-year-old author, asking naively: Mom, if Mr. Zhang Jingjiang did running and jumping, would his body become this strong?” The title “Naïve Design” indicates that this would be an unattainable goal for Zhang Jingjiang and for some military leaders and government officials whose weak bodies did not live up to their public roles and public expectations.
One model for Chinese military men, in the early to mid-1930s was derived from the hard German masculinity. A group of pictures (fig. 5.9) prominently featured in a 1934 *Liangyou* issue was entitled “Germany under Hitler: Men’s Strength and Women’s Gentleness.” The pictures present upbeat and vigorous German men and women happily engaged in different activities. These activities are highly gender-divided: The male images are either soldiers holding guns, or sportsmen playing soccer, running or jumping; the images of women include a mother holding a child, a woman whispering to the ears of her lover, and a naked woman playing with water. The presented countertypes reinforce the ideal masculinity emphasizing physical strength and femininity emphasizing gentleness. The quiet and still images of women provided a contrasting background for a more prominent hard masculinity. We already know that physical exercises and military drills were essential to the creation of a Fascist man. What can be added to the picture is that the further feminization of women is also essential to forging the ideal image of a masculine man in Germany under Hitler’s rule. As Georg Mosse points out, “This ideal of masculinity, indeed modern society as a whole, needed an image against which it could define itself.” Print media in China were following suit, promoting the images of feminine woman and masculine man. Masculinity and femininity are thus further linked to performance as the imagined presence of countertypes constantly reinforced the ideal masculinity and femininity (fig. 5.10).
Figure 5.9 Men and Women in Hitler’s Germany

Figure 5.10 Beauty of the male body-struggle vs. beauty of the female body: reverie
In China, the Fascist type of hard masculinity was highly admired for its iconic well-sculptured men’s bodies in the 1930s, a time when the Chinese nation was facing another crisis. In the early 1930s Japan occupied Manchuria, ready to encroach the rest of Chinese territory any minute. The whole nation felt the need to train citizens in general and soldiers in particular to gain fit bodies and strong wills. The Fascist man was an inspiration for China’s pursuit of the hallmark of the modern masculinity, which involved the cultivation of the male body. To survive in the modern world, China needed to encourage fit body and competitive spirit. The fit body was not just trained for its own sake but was a sign of the masculine spirit, necessary for the survival of the Chinese nation. The idealized male bodies in these circumstances were mostly used as a national symbol. They are stripped of sexual connotations and of the body as a personal asset.

**Performative Masculinity III: Fit Male Body as a Personal Asset**

Hongjian Wang, in her study of the male figures presented in *Liangyou*, states that: “There is a constant and strenuous denial of their being looked at, or being passive. As a result, the photographs of the male pin-ups convey a clear message, that is, they should be appreciated for anything but their appearance” (page). I agree that a lot of the fully dressed military figures and political leaders are not presented for erotic gaze, but Wang neglects the power of commercial force, popular culture and increasing awareness of the body as a personal asset for the Chinese men. The male bodies in *Liangyou* and many other journals were presented exactly to be looked at.

The print media took advantage of the increasing emphasis on the body for commercial gains, and at the same time promoted a body-consciousness as a new index
for performative masculinity in everyday life through advertisements. Advertisements for a range of Western, mostly American products constituted an imagined everyday Chinese urban modernity. These Western material goods were also integral to a more exteriorized body culture and performative masculinity.

Advertisements for Western foods and medicine were one of the most popular advertisements in magazines. They often depicted Chinese men as the sufferers of illnesses or mal-nutrition. These men are usually dressed in long scholarly robes (changpao) that mark them as followers of Chinese tradition. They look fable and stressed, and their poor physical and mental strength are waiting to be improved by Western medicine or other Western products. In a Liangyou ad, a sick and weary man in bed was receiving a guest. The guest was presenting to him Quaker Oats that was supposed to help him gain energy and strength. The sick man’s flaccid body was shrouded in a scholarly long robe, in sharp contrast with the dashing guest dressed in Western suit. Here Western foods such as milk and oatmeal were introduced to the Chinese as nourishment to the weak bodies. A Liangyou medical ad made of two panels (fig. 5.11), explicitly claims that Chinese men’s bodily and mental illnesses can find cure in western medicine. In the first panel, we see a man painfully lift his sleeve to show marks of scabies on his left arm. The advertisement asks him and the readers: “Why are you still suffering from scabies? Use Dr. Williams’ ruyi gao 如意膏 (all-purpose ointment), a miraculous cure for all skin diseases.” In the second panel, our attention is brought to another man, who was sitting by a desk with his left elbow resting on the desk to support the left side of his head. He apparently was suffering from a severe headache. And the large Chinese characters under the image reveals, he was actually suffering from
“too much stress and excess worries.” It further points out that mental stress can also be greatly eased, as “Williams pink pills make you spirited and happy.” The ads for Dr. Williams’ and other brands of Western medicine, like the Western nutritious foods, safeguard the masculine ideal by curing the pale-faced men with unhealthy bodies and minds.

Figure 5.11 Liangyou Ad for Dr. Williams Products

The sick men in medical advertisements was no longer only a symbol for the weakened Chinese nation. The male body could serve multiple functions, two most important of which are: first, as an expression of a nationalistic sentiment, and second, as an asset of the individuals. Two advertisements below represent the two different trends: of the body as a national symbol and of body as a personal asset. Both are advertisements for milk powder. In one ad (fig. 5.12), two babies are holding a can of Momilk, which is
framed by Chinese characters on the right and bottom. The most conspicuous characters on the right read: “To strengthen the nation, one must first strengthen the people; to strengthen the people, one must first strengthen the children.” The smaller characters on the bottom state that many famous doctors recommend Momilk as a better substitute for breast milk, and as “the way to strengthen the children” (強儿之道 Qiang’er zhidao). In another ad for milk powder (fig. 5.13), a baby and a young man are placed side by side behind the advertised product: The baby is sucking from a milk bottle and the topless young man is showing his muscular upper body. The message is rather obvious: by drinking this milk product the baby will grow up into a strong young man with a broad shoulder and defined six-pack abdomen muscles. The latter ad no longer explicitly relies on the nationalistic sentiment to sell the product. Instead, it appeals to the increasing awareness of the desirability of the male body.

Figure 5.12 Momilk ad.
Another case in point is a picture (fig. 5.14) used in both *Liangyou* and *Beiyang huabao (BYHB)* with different titles and captions. It features an athletic male body jumping up in the air and curving his body backwards into half a circle to look at the sky.

In *Liangyou*, it is entitled “Chizi” (naked son) and the caption says:

Human being lives between the sky and the earth. He admires the sun hanging high in the sky and throws himself over the fathomless abyss. He asserts his power of will, regardless of the difficulties or the risks. He would not enjoy sitting in the cloud-chariot in heaven or couching on the immovable earth. He is the son of freedom and he has to dance in the universe! (1)

Hongjian Wang, relating it to Mencius’s notion of *chizi*, reads the naked man as completely deprived of any erotic appeal, but merely as “the symbol of (hu)manhood, a symbol of the aspiring spirit of human beings” (1). But if we look at the way that the same image is presented in another pictorial *BYHB*, we see the emphasis on the male
body more than just an abstract symbol of spirit. The title in *BYHB* is changed into “Jinrou mei” (筋肉美 muscular beauty), and the captions identifies it as the best art photo from the West. The caption moves the image from the realm of morality and politics to the realm of artistic aesthetics. The title “Muscular Beauty” highlights the importance of physical strength and its exhibition to modern Chinese manhood.

![Figure 5.14 “Muscular Beauty” (aka Naked Son)](image-url)
Figure 5.15 John Grimek (I)

Figure 5.16 John Grimek (II)
This is the body not as an abstract symbol but as a concrete personal asset. This is a muscular body ideal originated not in Chinese Confucianism as Wang claims, but in Greek statues and more recent European or American athletes and body builders. In fact, many of the iconic photos of male nudes featured in print media in the 1930s and 1940s were body builders. John Grimek, for example, was considered as the man with the most robust masculine beauty by some Chinese magazines. *Health and Beauty Magazine* published an article with a series of his iconic photos. These photos were low-angle shots taken outdoors against the sky to evoke the arresting images of Greek statues. In one of the photos (fig. 5.15), Grimek was standing, stretching with his arms upwards and formed a backbend to show his flexibility. Striking is the resemblance between this image of Grimek and the “Muscular Beauty”/”Naked Son” photo, only with the latter one shot from a different angle to reveal the muscles of the frontal body. In another image (fig. 5.16) of Grimek in *Health and Beauty Magazine*, his half-reclining posture forms a signature invitation to be looked at. Meanwhile, the composure and balance of his posture demonstrates his confidence and strength, with his left wrist resting on the knee, right hand pressing the bench while his eyes steadily gazing into the distance. These images invite the readers to look at and appreciate the strength and flexibility of the muscular male body. As the article informs the readers, “Grimek not only has strong muscles but also the most agile and flexible body. He challenges the misconception that muscular bodies are rigid,” and further points out: “His body was appreciated not only by sports magazine editors but also by artists” (3-4). Here, we see the ideal male body as a personal asset that a Chinese male could aspire to possess.
Indeed, the male body is under gaze in pictorial magazines, and as the cartoon above (fig. 5.17) shows, not all male bodies are created equal. In the cartoon, the two gazers are two artists who represent “two new characters with opposite opinions” as the Chinese title suggests. The newness lies in both their profession as painters was well as what was considered the innovative hairstyles: one has cropped hair and the other wears hair shoulder-length. More importantly, they have new perspectives. Gazer A—the one with cropped hair—apparently thinks that the exposed male body he saw is “vulgar and indecent,” while Gazer B—the one with shoulder-length hair—utters “muscular beauty, beauty of curves” to show his excitement and appreciation of the naked male body. However, here is the irony of the cartoon: A and B are labeled as two new characters with opposite opinions about the naked male body. Further look at the cartoon suggests that it
is not that they have different opinions, but rather they are looking at two different types of male bodies. That is to say, their different opinions are not caused by their different perspectives and concepts about the naked male body, but by the actual difference between the two objects of gaze. Gazer A is looking at the flabby chest of an old man who is sitting behind a counter with one hand resting on the knee and the other holding a fan. Gazer B is looking the straight back and muscular limbs of a young man who is stretching his muscles to get ready for physical exercises. The older man under A’s gaze conjures the association with a Chinese tradition: lower-class men who like to take off their shirts and incite palm-leaf fans in summer when it’s too hot. The muscular young man, on the other hand, evokes the image of Gremik, or of other American or European athletes and body builders featured in Chinese magazines. Gazer A would probably appreciate the body of the younger man equally gazer B does and vise versa. Therefore, what is at stake here is not the different opinions of the gazers, but rather the two different types of male body under the gaze: the flabby body that invites criticism and the muscular male body meant to be admired and emulated.
Figure 5.18 Women’s expectations, men’s anxiety

Chen Haoxiong’s cartoon (fig. 5.18) manifests the importance of a desirable male body by putting it into a world of women. In the section on “male virtue,” I already talked about how men became the performers and playthings to entertain the female audience in an imagined world of women where gender roles are reversed. The naked male bodies in that case are also represented to be looked at. However, we can easily detect the negative association with the softness of the male bodies and the eagerness on those men’s faces to please women. In contrast, in Chen Haoxiong’s cartoon, the young
man has a robust body that naturally attracts the opposite sex. Unlike the male playthings in a women-centered world who are performing on state, this young man is standing in the wilderness as the focus of attention of all women surrounding him. Some women are leaning out of the window to look at him, some are leaning their bodies forward to look closer, and some seem to be fascinated by him after a casual glimpse. But all are marveled at what they see: a young man with a straight back, a lifted head, strong legs and arms, and a muscular upper torso. The title “Women’s expectations and men’s anxiety” indicates that this was the ideal man’s body that Chinese women desired to see but many Chinese men had not acquired yet. This is an ideal body incorporated the wu spirit dreamed by Qing intellectuals like Yan Fu and Liang Qichao, the beastiality hoped for by Lu Xun and Chen Duxiu. But more importantly, this cartoon vividly depicts the female fascination about the half-naked male body, which separates the imagination of the male body from the grand discourse about the nation. In other words, the muscles and strength of the male body here no longer signifies a requirement for national survival. Instead, by explicit subjugating the male body under the female gaze, it marks the birth of an ideal male body as the asset of man as man, not man merely as the builder of the nation.

Conclusion

As Chinese masculinity became less stable upon encounter with the West, the perceived “nature” associated with Chinese men went through a transformation. Important scientific knowledge from the West lent a new perspective to Chinese masculinity and changed what was “naturally” associated with the connotations of being
Man in Chinese society. The May Fourth intellectuals believed that the natural science already demonstrated that evolution is natural, but they were even more interested in applying the evolutionary arguments extensively to social relations. For them, evolutionary theory was an effective weapon to combat the Confucian knowledge on marriage, sex, and birth and to provide new guidelines for the modernizing Chinese men and women.

The recommended remedy for Chinese masculinity came from imported knowledge on the human body and the practice of body hygiene (weisheng) and body culture (tiyu) from Europe, America and Japan. The overwhelming idea in intellectual and popular discourses was that the sick should be cured and the weak need to be strengthened. Sickness can be cured by Western medicine and scientific knowledge about the body; and weakness can be cured by the practice of body culture (tiyu).

Chinese historian Yang Nianqun, in his book Remaking “Patients,” argues that in late Qing, Chinese “patients” were not merely a physiological phenomenon, but bearing political implications related to the formation of nationalism (7). I agree with Yang that the Chinese patients at the time were largely a “made” phenomenon, inseparable from the sense of humiliation and rising nationalism in modern Chinese history after numerous failed combats with the “West,” but I want to point out that the sick men were not just a nationalistic symbol for weakened China. The pathologization of the male bodies also reflected and inspired the changing perceptions of gender roles and social norms. It comprised an integral part of the modern gender formations in China. In other words, the call for the renewal and reformation of the Chinese male bodies had implications in both
the macro organ of the political reality and the micro mechanism of the personal
wellbeing and gendered identity.
In the previous chapters, I discussed how science was imported, appropriated and circulated in print media to become a yardstick for measuring the human body and regulating sexuality. We can see that in print media of early twentieth-century China, science exerted its influence not only as a collection of imported knowledge, but as a new rational to explain, a new world view to evaluate, and a new methodology to examine old and newly occurring things, people and events. In intellectual and popular discourses, scientific knowledge about the body comprised the major part in constructing an ideal masculinity that exhibited the exterior health and strength of the body. However, diagnosing and curing the pathogenic Chinese male was never limited to the exterior. The emphasis on the interior wellbeing of the mind and spirit was particularly identifiable in May Fourth writers such as Lu Xun.

This following event is often cited to show why Lu Xun gave up medical science for a more meaningful enterprise of literature: When Lu Xun was studying medicine in Japan, he watched a newsreel slide that shows how a crowd of Chinese spectators enjoyed seeing a fellow Chinese capitalized by the Japanese for serving as a Russian spy during the Russo-Japanese war. The experience was heart wrenching for the young Lu Xun:

… this slide convinced me that medical science was not so important after all. The people from a weak and backward country, however strong and healthy they may be, could only serve to be made examples of, or as
witnesses of such futile spectacles; and it was not necessarily deplorable if many of them died of illness. The most important thing, therefore, was to change their spirit, and since at that time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I decided to promote a literary movement (“Nahan zixu” 35).

Many scholars now agree that it was more than an autobiographical description of Lu Xun’s decision to give up medicine for literature. However, most still imply that it was the first story about Lu Xun’s conversion from literature to science on a metaphorical level even though they do not read this merely as a biographical turning point. According to Leo Lee, for example, this event is the beginning of Lu Xun’s internal debate between art and science, which leads to the creation of “A Madman’s Diary,” where “he seemed finally to emerge somewhat in favor of the arts over the sciences” (“Genesis” 180). Lydia Liu associates the event with Lu Xun’s favorite metaphor that compares the function of literature to that of a dissecting scalpel, and concludes “…this ‘metaphorical’ analogy helped arrogate the healing power of medical science to May Fourth literature while elevating the status of literature above that of science on the basis of a mind-body opposition” (50). Apparently, both Lee and Liu still emphasize the separation of literature and science, body and mind in Lun Xun’s thoughts and his preference of one to the other.

What I attempt to show is that admittedly the event prompted Lu Xun to think beyond the body, beyond the means of medical science. But as devout to science as Lu Xun was, his self-designated task was not to give up science or downgrade its importance. In fact, Lu Xun and some of his fellow writers of the time, who were well versed in classical Chinese and received education overseas, became more conscious and yet more conflicted than any earlier generation about the clashing elements of the era including the modern/traditional, the foreign/Chinese, the scientific/literary or artistic, the
rational/irrational, the national/individual, and the body/spirit, the material/spiritual. Overt emphasis on either one of the pair would be too dismissive of the complexity of Chinese modernity.

Hence, I contend that this event was not a moment of making either-or choices—body or spirit, literature or science—but rather the beginning of Lu Xun’s efforts to integrate these conflicts, that is, to inquire into the possibility of a scientific literature, a spiritual body, an objective perspective to the subjective, and a rational way to examine the irrational. Lu Xun’s attempt to conciliate the above-mentioned conflicts pertains to my discussion of the male body and masculinity mainly in the following two aspects. First, it represents the aspiration of May Fourth Chinese writers to reorient the Chinese male body. Ari Heinrich astutely points out that the significance of this seminal event in Lu Xun’s life lies in “the unexpected superimposition of the metaphysical body onto the scientific one, the cognitive merging of the represented scientific body, for the very first time, with an identifiable Chinese self or body” (156). I will add that the body after “the unexpected superimposition” and “the cognitive merging” was a psychological body driven by irrationality. As I will show later, the irrational nature of the psychological body partly resulted from and reflected the increasing awareness among Chinese intellectuals about the limit of science and rationality—one of the two pillars holding up the Chinese enlightenment movement like enlightenment elsewhere—and the abhorrence of falling back to a Chinese past. Second, the birth of the psychological body is emblematic of an intellectual effort among some May Fourth writers like Lu Xun and Yu Dafu to reconfigure Chinese masculinity. The result is what I will call an “introspective masculinity,” an alternative to the performative masculinity elaborated in chapter 4.
Unlike the performative masculinity that gives prominence to conformity, the exterior, and health of the physical body, the introspective masculinity draws particular attention to individuality, the interior, and the abnormality of the psychological body. In a way, introspective masculinity was consciously or unconsciously an elitist corrective to the performative masculine ideal.

The formation of the introspective masculinity, I argue, represents male Chinese intellectuals’ dissatisfaction and yet partial identification with the traditional *wen* masculinity, and the quest for new ways to express “great thoughts and emotions” in early twentieth century. The pursuit for introspective masculinity adds a psychological depth to the modernizing Chinese masculinity. This concept of introspective masculinity also sheds light on the dimension of the interior world, which the May Fourth literature seriously engaged with and remained somewhat neglected by current literary scholarship.

I will first investigate the reception of a few critical concepts on the irrationality of human psyche from Japan, United States and Europe among Chinese intellectual and literary circles in early twentieth century. Chinese literary historian Chen Pingyuan draws our attention to the fact that knowledge about psychology is what influenced the May Fourth writers the most (22). Such knowledge helped these writers to adopt a new perspective to the modern men, and to find a new expression to articulate the interiority of a particular masculinity. It is difficult to pin one-to-one relationships between Chinese writers and their Western sources of inspiration. It is equally difficult to trace all the sources of inspiration for these writers who were widely read and well versed in Western literary and philosophical thoughts. So I choose two of the most influential western thinkers Nietzsche and Freud known for their theories revealing the irrationality of
human psychology. Nietzsche’s idea of “reevaluating everything” was highly appealing to Chinese intellectuals in general who were looking for measures to reexamine the traditional Chinese culture. His superman ideal, for example, was particularly inspiring to the young Lu Xun who became suspicious of seeking cure merely in medical science for physical weakness of the masses and began to look for potentials of talented individuals. Freud’s psychoanalytical theory, on the other hand, though a product of the enlightenment and science, highlights the importance of the irrational, offering a well-packaged scientific approach to non-rational drives, which fit nicely the need among Chinese intellectuals for a rational/scientific perspective to the subjective/irrational.

Then I will focus my analysis of introspective masculinity on two fictional pieces: “A Madman’s Diary” (thereof referred to as “Dairy”) by Lu Xun and “Sinking” by Yu Dafu. “Diary” and “Sinking”, respectively the first fictional creation by Lu Xun and Yu Dafu, almost immediately established their authors as iconic writers of the May Fourth generation. The two authors, exposed to modernistic western aesthetics (often through Japanese sources)—an aesthetics partly shaped by the loath of the material, the scientific and the rational, and partly popularized by the belief that conflicted psyche more than a rational mind symbolizes the modern man—had affirmed their belief in the limit of science and rationalism in curing Chinese men. They created the archetypes of the introspective masculinity: an alternative masculinity that accommodated the irrational anti-heroes, respectively the madman in “Diary” and the hypochondriac youth in “Sinking.” Yu Dafu’s hypochondriac man is intrinsically related to Lu Xun’s madman in articulating the interior force, a demonstration that Chinese men possess “sensitive” nerves required of the modern males in a modern world. The abnormal psyche became an
ideal site to lay out concentrated exterior and interior conflicts that were more present than ever in the transitional period to literary and cultural modernity. In addition, the appearance of the madman and the neurasthenic marked not only the birth of the modern Chinese introspective masculinity, but also the birth of what Larissa Heinrich calls “anatomical aesthetics” (111) in literary expressions that goes hand in hand with the birth of the modern man with psychological depth. In order to exteriorize the interior masculinity, the May Fourth writers were engaged in exploring new expressions to present the human psyche. This chapter will examine what comprised the interior of the modern masculinity in Yu Dafu and Lu Xun as well as their language ideologies as modern writers to bring out the interiority. How they used their pens as anatomical tools to poke, probe and lay bare the interiority of the modern anti-heroes of the madman and the neurasthenic.

**Irrational Individualism: An Alternative Mode of Modern Masculine Expression**

During the New Culture Movement (mid 1910s-mid 1920s), intellectuals intensely reevaluated the old form of classical Chinese and advocated for new modes of expressions in literary and cultural debates. Debates of the time often emphasized the new and the modern as a strategy to bash the inadequacy of traditional Chinese linguistic and literary mode. The famous literary critic Qian Xingcun wrote in 1918: “Chinese characters… can only express the naive thoughts, absolutely incapable of presenting the new world civilization since Lamarck and Darwin” (352). Evidently, Qian revealed the non-coincidental “discovery” of two “lacks” among the Chinese: First, they lacked a new mode of linguistic expression since classical Chinese language was inadequate in presenting the new era; second, their thoughts are “native,” lacking the elements required
by the new world civilization. Zheng Zhenduo, one of the main participants in the debate
on the linguistic and literary reforms, also expressed his alert to the inadequacy of
classical Chinese language, and yet disagreed with Qian on Chinese people’s thoughts
and emotions. He wrote, “Restricted by the stereotypical patterns of the old style, so
many great thoughts and emotions cannot be expressed to its utmost accuracy and
subtlety” (quoted in Levan 31).

What are the “great thoughts and emotions” that Zheng was talking about? Were
they newly emerging at the time or had they already existed before? If they had already in
existence, why would the old style all of a sudden become insufficient in expressing
“great thoughts and emotions”? If they were new, what differed them from the older
“great thoughts and emotions”? What then would be the recommended new style(s)
capable of expressing thoughts and emotions in the most accurate and subtle way? I argue
that in a historical moment when wen masculinity was greatly endangered by the
abolishment of the imperial exam system on the one hand and by the encroaching
military virile Western masculinity on the other, Chinese male intellectuals were not only
questing a new linguist mode, but also a new way to reclaim the losing ground of the
Chinese masculinity.

In 1915, Chen Duxiu, one of the initiators of the New Culture movement,
criticized the fragile scholar types: “They are as lovely as a virgin, as weak as a sick man.
They are afraid of cold and heat. They have a powered face, a slim waist, hands incapable
of holding a chicken, and heart deprived of the masculinity of a man” (“Jinri” 88). Here
Chen’s evocation of the heart coincides with Qian’s of “great new thoughts and
emotions” as Chinese understanding of xin (the heart/mind) is the generator of both
thoughts and emotions. With Western and Japanese military masculinity in mind, Chen Duxiu effeminates the weak body and the sentimental heart of the fragile scholars. If military men and body builders provided inspirations for the performative masculinity that emphasized the exterior, what then inspired a new masculine heart? What is a new masculine heart? As I will show later in this chapter, it is the emotion-generator in the psychological body of the introspective masculinity. The impregnation of the masculine heart resulted from conscientious efforts by Chinese intellectuals of the time for multiple purposes: First, to resist the popular performative masculinity and its pure emphasis on physical exteriority; second, to keep themselves—the modern literati—from falling back into the past pattern of wen masculinity; third, to spread awareness about the limitations of science and rationality—a pillar that was holding up the Chinese New Culture movement.

As we noted in earlier chapters, physical masculinity itself resulted from a resistance starting in late Qing against an earlier elite wen masculinity represented by fragile literati scholars who were highly capable of generating thoughts and emotions. Therefore, introspective masculinity somewhat resonates with the literati wen masculinity of earlier times. However, to tie it back to its key element of the psychological body, introspective masculinity often exemplifies an irrational and sometimes violent exuberance of free will and craze for change rather than the idyllic and reserved sentimentality featured in wen masculinity. In other words, the new “great thoughts and emotions” contains a somewhat double negation of wen masculinity in dynastic China. The first negation was to condemn the wen legacy of literary sentimentality because sentimental emotions were deemed as effeminate and ineffective for the new era when
science and rationality initiated Chinese enlightenment. The second negation came to picture only with the dwindling enthusiasm with what science could offer. Some intellectuals began to harbor doubts about the obsession over science, rationality and the national and hesitant to retrogress to the old wen masculinity model. The madman thus came into being as a complex synthesis of the sentimental wen masculinity and with its birthmark of violent irrationality. The violent mental state on the one hand incorporated what was considered as feminine elements by enlightenment such as irrationality, and on the other hand deliberately manifested vehement anxieties about effeminacy.

Thus, I argue that the new masculine heart in modern Chinese literature was not entirely new, but a reworking of the literati sense and sensibility by incorporating literary and philosophical trends on irrationality and the abnormal psyche from the West.

In Europe, the suspicion about science and rationality started earlier than in China. In late nineteenth century, irrationality and abnormal psyche already became an honored title among intellectuals in Europe and the United States. Neurasthenia and mental illness were modern diseases that demonstrated civilization. As the French philosopher and psychologist David Émile Durkheim reported in the 1890s, “Today neurasthenia is rather considered a mark of distinction than a weakness. In our refined societies, enamored of things intellectual, nervous members constitute almost a nobility” (quoted in Kleinman 19). Western colonial expansion to China made popular the view that mental illnesses were non-existent among indigenous populations. The colonizers regarded the colonized population “free of worry and psychic conflict” due to their “‘primitive’ living conditions and thought processes” (Kleinman 20). We are already too familiar with Adam Smith’s description of Chinese masses with thick and robust nerves despite their
collective image as the weak and sick man of East Asia. And it is no surprise that in the Imperial Maritime Custom’s yearly report of 1871, Dr. John Dudgeon found none was related to nerves and mental illnesses among Chinese people’s health problems in Peking. According to the doctor, the Chinese, “in the absence of the pressures of Western life,” had “no worry” (quoted in Kleinman 20).

Colonial interpretation of Chinese men was that they have no nerves and are incapable of worries and psychic conflicts. This was of course a misunderstanding on purpose, but before the modern medical terms were introduced to China, traditional Chinese terms did appear to be under-equipped to render the interior complexity of the modern men. For example, Neurasthenia—one of the most frequently used terms both in medical and literary texts in 1920s and 1930s—was brought to China by Western physicians and medical missionaries and by Japanese health professionals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Kleinman 15). A European trained Japanese psychologist Miura Kinnosuke considered all the following diseases caused by nerves: hypochondria, Neurasthenia, and Hysteria. In “List of Diagnosis for Diseases of the Nerves,” his book published in Tokyo in 1894, Kinnosuke writes, “Neurasthenia is the cause of hypochondria and more of less mixes the dispositions of hypochondria. The spirit is easily excited, similar to hysteria” (quoted in Peng 196). Influenced by Japanese psychologists’ theories, Chinese medical texts often lumped neurasthenia, hypochondria hysteria together under the category of disease caused by nerves, emphasizing the commonalities and correlations between them. In fact, “neurasthenia” was the preferred term for describing all symptoms of nervous disturbance. While western doctors began to replace the all too general “neurasthenia” with more precise terms so as to denote the
psychological causation, Chinese doctors mostly used neurasthenia (Kleinman 18). Before the import of the word “neurasthenia,” the closest term in traditional Chinese medical text was probably youyu 忧郁, which implies a depression resulting from excessive worry. In traditional Chinese medical text, youyu was conceived to affect and to be affected by internal organ systems. The famous Chinese eugenicist and psychologist Pan Guangdan attempted to use “modern” terms and knowledge to investigate the “ancient” Chinese case of Feng Xiaoqing (1595-1612), a young woman of abnormal psyche in Ming dynasty. Pan deployed Freud’s psychoanalytic vocabulary such as narcissism, psychoneurosis, hypochondria, and neurasthenia to explain Xiaoqing’s symptoms which would have been rendered as youyu in Chinese terms. In the first published version of Pan’s article in 1922, he translated neurasthenia into the Chinese characters 精血衰弱 (jingxue shuairuo, weakening of essence and blood). Jingsxue was often used in traditional Chinese medicine to describe the bodily essence of the human body. In later versions, however, he used the more modern/western term shenjing 神经 (nerves) to replace jingxie 精血 (essence and blood). Peng Hsiao-yen’s research on the expression shenjing shuairuo shows that it was already seen in Chinese medical texts in the 1910s but would not be commonly used till the mid-1920s (73). By mid 1930s, the term shenjing shuairuo seems to have become the commonly accepted translation for

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53 Qing Yue’s Medical Text (1710), first published in the Ming Dynasty around 1624, is the earliest text we could find that technically defines depression as a detailed clinical category and elaborates it conceptually as an autonomous toxin. The author, Zhang Jiebin, affixed the term yu to this category and today this term remain central to the designation of depression as a psychiatric disease. With considerable analytic sophistication Zhang divided depression into three subtypes: 1. Nuyu 愤郁, depression resulting from excessive anger; 2. Siyu 思郁, depression resulting from excessive thinking; 3. Youyu 忧郁, depression resulting from excessive worry. The clinical sign and symptoms of the last sound much like those described for severe cases of depression in the west. Quoted in Peng Hsiao-Yen Dandysim.
neurasthenia and the term was widely used for diagnosis. In 1936, Song Mingtong, in a review he wrote of “neurasthenia” for Tongji Medical Journal, already said of neurasthenia as “a widespread social illness affecting many in China, particularly the young” (Kleinman 25).

As abnormal psyche became a superior marker of civilization, such vision found immediate applause from Chinese intellectuals who were troubled by what they believed to be the emasculated heart of themselves. The sentimental heart that once made the literati obedient subjects to the emperor and pious sons in the family needs a transformation, by acquiring the heart and body ready for emotionally fierce, spiritually combative and infatigable individuals. I am not trying to establish Nietzsche’s and Freud’s direct influence on Chinese intellectuals. I intend to show the intellectual connection and indebtedness of such Chinese writers like Lu Xun and Yu Dafu to Nietzsche and Freud, in their quest for a modern masculinity, and for new expressions to penetrate the irrational interior of the individuals.

Nietzsche’s thoughts and aphoristic style inspired many Chinese writers. Lu Xun, for example, after initial contact with Nietzsche’s ideas in his student years in Japan, became fascinated by him and twice started translating Nietzsche’s writings, and in later life helped younger writers translate Nietzsche.54 We can easily see influence of

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54 The year when Lu Xun went to Japan to study happened to the time interest in Nietzsche culminated. Japan’s first monograph on Nietzsche was published in Japan in 1902. In 1903, the famous Fujimura suicide made him the depressed youth stimulated by Nietzsche’s theory. Lu Xun purchased and read Nietzsche’s biography in German and translated “Thus Spake Zarathustra.” Zhou Zuoren later recalled: “Lu Xun read German books, but wasn’t that interest in German literature …… Nietzsche was an exception. “Thus spoke Zarathustra, “he kept on his bookshelf for many years. In 1922, he translated and published it in New Wave.” Zhang Jiabi, the second editor-in-Chief of Liangyou magazine also remembers Lu Xun’s affection for Nietzsche and in his memoir, he recalled that Lu Xun showed extraordinary enthusiasm about and support for Fan Cheng 梵澄’s translation of Nietzsche for the "World Library" series. See Zhao Jiabi 89.
Nietzsche’s superman concept in Lu Xun attempt to revaluate traditional morality and to set up a new masculine ideal in his short story “A Madman’s Diary,” his prose collection *Yecao* (Weeds) and other literary creations. Nietzsche’s thoughts also influenced the key members of the Creation Society including Guo Moruo and Yu Dafu, who, like Lu Xun, gained access to Nietzsche’s thought while studying in Japan. Their writings resonate with Nietzsche in their belief in human tragedy, solitude of human life, and transformative power of irrationality. Moreover, Nietzsche and Freud provided viable explanation to the aesthetics both Lu Xun and Yu Dafu embraced that deems arts as the product of the conflicts between the internal desire and external environment, the individual and the collective. Lu Xun himself explicitly expressed his indebtedness to European literature and philosophy as such:

> Since May of 1918, I’ve published “A Madman’s Diary,” “Kong Yiji,” and “Medicine,” which seems to show the achievement of “literature revolution.” Also the thought “the depth of the expression and the peculiarity of the style” really excited some young people. But such excitement is due to the fact that we were reluctant to introduce the literature of continental Europe…. In 1883, Nietzsche via the month of Zarathustra, said “…you’ve already walked the road from insects to human beings, but you still have a lot of instincts in you…” (“Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi xiaoshuo erji xu” 3).

Lu Xun was informed that it was “instincts” rather than irrationality that Nietzsche emphasized as a particular quality in human beings and in all living creatures.

> “Instincts,” together with “individuality” are perhaps two of the most important legacies which Nietzsche left to Lu Xun and some of his fellow May Fourth writers, and which gave the most influential works their hallmark semiotic innovation and emotional instability. Liang Qichao and Wang Guowe were among the first who introduced Nietzsche’s thought to China. In 1902, Liang Qichao said of “Nietzsche’s individualism”
as a “new religion of the nineteenth century” ("Jinhua gemingzhe” 4). Two years later, Wang Guowei summarized Nietzsche’s aesthetics as “absolute individualism” ("Shubenhua yu Nicai” 36). In the 1910s and 1920s, leaders of the New Culture Movement Hu Shi, Cai Yuanpei, Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao were all familiar with, if not all indorsed Nietzsche’s theory. Li Dazhao called Nietzsche’s philosophy the “genius’ individualism.” Leading writers in the 1920s such as Lu Xun, Mao Dun, Guo Moruo, Yu Dafu also benefited from Nietzsche’s theory on instincts and individuality as creative inspirations. Lu Xun was actually once known as the Chinese Nietzsche.

Nietzsche’s thoughts on individualism were initially alien to most of his Chinese audience. Nietzsche highly celebrated the essence of human being as an individual with a “self.” The Nietzschean self is often marked by irrationality and individuality, which set apart the talented individuals from the senseless masses. This self was not only suppressed by theology that granted God the power to dominate the world, but also by scientific rationality of industrial civilization that limit the freedom of human spirit. Nietzsche, therefore, wanted to free the suppressed self from such collective external forces as institutions, morality, and rational spirit of science, and from such collective mentality that fears difference and individuality and encourages mediocrity.

Some Chinese intellectuals equalized individualism and self to selfishness, rejected the concept all at once. Others insisted that individualism should only exist under the exegesis of collectivism. Lu Xun, in his 1907 essay “Extremes in Cultural Development” (文化偏至论) mentioned the initial negative reaction to individualism in China as such: “The word “individual” only traveled to China three or four years ago; all those who claim themselves to be well-informed disparage the word, looking at it as if it
were a traitor. Those who did not do enough research mistook it as “selfish.” But that’s not the case” (50). Li Dancen also expressed his indignation with the misreading of individualism in China: “Whenever Chinese people hear the term individualism, they’d think of selfishness, deeming it an ominous word. They do not realize that the essence of individualism is self-affirmation, which will lead to the self to affirm the world, and to be aware of individuals’ responsibility towards the society” (23?). No wonder the enthusiasts of such ideas like Lu Xun and Li Dancen needed to defend Nietzsche since even Liang Qichao, who praised the spirit of freedom and personal freedom in number of his books, maintained that freedom of individuals must submit to the needs of the nations and collectives. Liang attempts to use collective (qun) to replace ethical relationship between people in earlier times and he considered it essential to morality to strengthen the cohesion of community and to prioritize group interests (“Lun gongde” 216). Needless to say, the freedom of xinmin (new citizen) Liang advocated was incompatible with the Nietzschean individualism.

It was not until late 1910s, Nietzsche’s philosophy on individualism gained more supporters. In terms of the relations between individuals and collective interests, the popular concept of geren (individual human beings) developed during the New Cultural Movement was a big step forward compared to Liang Qichao’s conceptulization of xinmin (new citizen). May Fourth intellectuals, unlike Liang, were concerned with whether the society could provide individuals with the most favorable environment than vise versa. Chen Duxiu, for example, emphasized the rights of individuals: “If asked whether we should love our country, we should first ask what country it is….We’d love the country that benefits its people, not the country that sacrifices its people” (2). Hu Shi
was even more explicit: Now, some people tell you to sacrifice your personal freedom for the freedom of the country, but I’d like to tell you: your personal freedom is the freedom of the country. A nation of freedom and equality are not made of a group of slaves!” (635). As Yu Dafu later summarized, “Among the biggest achievements of the May Fourth Movement the first is the discovery of the gexing (individualism). In the past, a person existed for the emperor, for the Way, for parents, but a person now knows to exist for the “self” (“Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi” 5).

If these Chinese writers and intellectuals absorbed the irrational strength of Nietzsche’s superman character to transcend entrenched rules and celebrate individuality, then from Freud, they learned how to interpret the formation of one’s irrational self. There is no surprise that those drawn to Nietzsche would be interested in Freud. After all, Nietzsche’s psychological explorations in the meaning of dreams, the unconscious, sublimation of drives, the self anticipated some of the most fundamental concepts in Freud’ psychoanalysis. 55 Ronald Lehrer finds remarkable similarity between Nietzsche’s “superman” and Freud’s ideal vision for his subject of psychoanalytic study-- “the individual who succeeded in transcending the conflict between established values [i.e., society] and his instinctual urges, thus achieving inner freedom” (2-3).

Freud’s psychoanalytic theory was introduced to China in its heyday in 1910s and 1920s, mainly through literary works and criticism by Chinese writers who studied in

55 According to Freud’s biographer Earnest Jones, Freud emphasized that he never read Nietzsche’s works, but constantly showed his admiration for Nietzsche’s introspective power (5). Some Freudian scholars argue that Freud was aware of Nietzsche’s writings on the significance of dreams in The Birth of Tragedy, on sublimation and repression in The Genealogy of Moral, and on the more general philosophy of will to power (Lehrer 1995, 71-79, 137-145). Lehrer sees how Freud’s understanding of “super-ego” resembles Nietzsche’s remarks on the origin of “bad-conscience” (2).
Japan, including Lu Xun, Guo Moruo and Yu Dafu. They emphasized the social significance of psychoanalytic theory and its value of guiding literature and art. In Chinese literary circles, it is the adaptation of Freud by a Japanese literary critic Kuriyagawa Hakuson (1880-1923), rather than the original Freud, better suited the taste of Kuriyagawa’s contemporary Chinese writers. Chinese writers including Lu Xun and Yu Dafu were devout advocators of his literary aesthetics which was itself largely shaped by Freud’s psychoanalytic theory. Despite the heavy psychoanalytic element in some of their fictional works, few writers including Lu Xun and Yu Dafu openly acknowledged Freud’s theory as guiding principal for their writing. But they all openly showed their enthusiasm about Kuriyagawa. His works was popular among Chinese writers. According to Cheng Ching-mao, all three of his major works—Symbols of Agony (1921), Outside the Ivory Tower (1920), and Towards the Crossroads (1925)—“was widely circulated in China in at least one translation” (84). Lu Xun translated two of them: Symbol of the Agony and Outside the Ivory Tower. Lu Xun praised the Japanese literary critic’s deviation from his European inspirations after tracing his theory to Freud and Bergman:

The other channel was newspaper and journal articles by Chinese psychologists and philosophers who studied in the U.S. and Europe. They introduced Freud as a new trend of thought relevant to China’s current social issues. Zhu Guangqian and Pan Guangdan, though not the earliest ones to introduce Freud to Chinese audience, made Freud’s name known in China in early 1920s though their essays. In his essay “Freud’s sub-consciousness and psychological analysis” published in Dongfang zazhi (Journal of orient) in 1921, Zhu sorted out Freud’s ideas about the origin of sub-consciousness, and it’s relation to dreams, mythology, religion and education. Pang Guangdan, applied Freud’s theory to his study of Feng Xiaoqing, a young woman in Ming, whom Pang diagnosed of having narcissistic psychosis. Pang’s study was later published as Feng Xiaoqing kao (冯小青考, a critical study of Feng Xiaoqing) in 1924.

Kuriyagawa was a Japanese literary critic and professor of English who, with his thorough and extensive knowledge of Western literary tradition, was among the first to introduce aesthetics of European modernistic literature to Japan. European modernistic writers and philosophers exposed him to the excavation of the subjective interiority and self. His aesthetics was expressed in Symbols of Agony, Outside the Ivory Tower, and Towards the Crossroads. These symbolic titles were appealing to the Chinese writers who were agonizing at the crossroads looking for directions outside the ivory tower. Kuriyagawa’s intellectual contemplation resonate with theirs concerning not only literary, but also social issues.
“Kuriyagawa doesn’t show autocracy of scientists [like Freud], nor mysticism of philosophers [like Bergson], nor triviality of literary scholars ("Introduction to Symbol of Depressive Agony" 232).

There are two concepts that Kuriyagawa inherited from Freud that the Chinese writers would again and again refer to: “human vitality” (shengmingli) and “depressive agony” (kumen). Two key terms that the Chinese writers would again and again refer to are “human vitality” (shengmingli) and “depressive agony” (kumen). Kuriyagawa created the term “human vitality” to explain literary works as the creation of non-rational intuition. This term is almost a direct translation of élan vital (vital force or vital impetus), a concept proposed by Bergson, a philosopher himself arguably influenced by Nietzsche. But unlike the mysterious and unpredictable élan vital, Kuriyagama insisted that “human vitality” could be sensed by writers, the prophets of the times. The other term “depressive agony” (kumo in Japanese, and kumen in Chinese) was inspired by Freud’s theory on repressed libido as an impetus to literary and artistic creations. But Kuriyagama was against attributing all causes and origins of life and literary creation to sexual desire. According to Kuriyagawa, the two terms are closely related to each other because “depressive agony” is supposedly a result of “human vitality” being suppressed.

58 In addition to Freud, the other major source of Kuriyagawa’s intellectual inspiration was the French philosopher Henri-Louis Bergson. Here we can see the intersection of Nietzsche and Bergman. Despite of differences, Bergman also characterizes life in terms of will, emphasize the importance of internal conditions to the improvement of human life. It cannot be understood uniquely as adaptation to external circumstances; it also refers to an internal movement. “Life is not adaptation of internal conditions to external conditions, but will to power which, from within, always masters and incorporates more of the exterior,” [FP XII, 7 (9)] wrote Nietzsche. We find in Bergson analogous declarations: “Science has [...] shown along the whole evolution of life, the various consequences attending upon the fact that living things must be adapted to the conditions of the environment. Yet this necessity would seem to explain the arrest of life in various definite forms, rather than the movement which carries the organization ever higher” (ME 24). We even find in Bergson a reference to will: it is a “pure willing” that “runs through this matter, communicating life to it” (CE 238). Quoted in François 101.
Irrational human vitality turns into literary creation only the person feels the agony caused by the suppression of such vitality. In Kuriyagawa’s words, “agony arising from the suppression of human vitality is the foundation of literature and art” (26-27). This adaptation of Freud by Kuriyagawa, rather than the original Freud, better suited the taste of Kuriyagawa’s contemporary Chinese writers. Guo Moruo, obviously quoting Kuriyagawa, declared that “Human vitality is the essence of literature” (“Literature of Life,” page n//a). Lu Xun also identifies with Kuriyagawa’s theory on human vitality and thinks depressive agony generated by repressed vitality as the foundation of literature is. Yu Dafu attributed the origin of literature to kumen caused by the conflicting internal and external forces: “Externally, there are filthy surroundings, poor social system, and the de facto moral habits, so we find it difficult to express our internal needs” (“Wenxue ganshuo” 65-67).

His explanation for the correlation of agony, human vitality and artistic creativity provides theoretical basis for the May Fourth writers to explain the psychological body in reality and in fictional creations. In reality, it corresponds with the popularization of neurasthenia—a manifestation of depressive agony in the psychological body. Many writers in early twentieth century openly complained about suffering from it. As early as 1912 Lu Xun already recorded a Japanese doctor’s diagnosis of his chronic disease: “I have been coughing for a few days, and I suspected it to be bronchitis…. The Japanese doctor told me the symptoms indicated neurasthenia” (Lu Xun riji 14). Liu Na’ou’s recorded his diagnosis similar to Lu Xun’s after seeing a Japanese doctor in Feb, 11, 1927: “My head and face were more swollen…. They said it is migraine caused by extreme neurasthenia” (Liu Na’ou riji, quoted in Peng Hsiao-Yen Dandyism 179). In fact,
the public images of members of the Creation Society and the Neo-Perception school, according to Peng Hsiao Yen, “became connected with the disorder known as neurasthenia” (179). By 1920s and 1930s, neurasthenia became a frequently used term in literary works. As Peng Hsiao-yen observes, “After the discourse of the ‘Sick man of Asia’ prevalent in China since the late Qing, writers in the 1920 and 1930s were telling us that Chinese were now suffering from the “malady of the heart,” a disease “discovered together with modernity” (Dandyism 163-64). There is no coincidence that kumen (Depressive agony) simultaneously became one of the most frequently used words in Chinese writings. Indeed, as abnormal nerves became a superior marker of civilization and masculinity, such vision found immediate applause from Chinese intellectuals who were troubled by what they believed to be the paralyzed nerves of the Chinese masses. Zhou Zuoren in his essay “Wenming zhi jichu” (foundation of civilization 1908) observed that all five senses of Chinese people were declining and became paralyzed, and hoped that they could be trained to improve their senses and intelligence. Lu Xun was sympathetic with but at the same time intolerant of the senseless Chinese masses. This is apparent in the passage quoted at the beginning of the chapter, and also in the portrayals of such famous characters in his short stories such as A Q, Xiang Lin’s wife, and Runtu. He pinned his hope on the will power of the emotionally fierce, spiritually combative and infatigable individuals.

Depressive agony (kumen) and human vitality (shengming li) became the most frequently used terms by writers such as Lu Xun, Yu Dafu and Guo Moruo. Kumen and shengmingli also provide the masculine heart for the madman in Lu Xun and the hypochtonic young man, the two archetypes of introspective masculinity in modern
Chinese literature. In the subsequent section, I will discuss Lu Xun and Yu Dafu as part of the efforts in late 1910s and early 1920s to construct new thoughts and emotions and search for new expressions for such thoughts and emotions. The search for ideal medium was actualized in the madman in Lu Xun and the neurasthenic in Yu Dafu, the modern man with a psychological body. These two archetypes, unlike the sick man of East Asia that was considered the very symbol of China as a backward collective force, almost served as an anti-dote to China’s backwardness, and became emblematic of the modern and the individual male subject.

**From the Dead Man to the Madman: Mobilizing the Psychological Body**

The typical fictional subjectivity in the May Fourth literature, particularly that in Lu Xun, is often read as national and allegorical. My view is that Lu Xun’s and Yu Dafu’s fiction does encompass nationalism but nationalism does not contradict the individualistic and psychological dimension of their works. 59 A literary critic said of “Sinking” as “a spring breeze for the withered Chinese society, waking up numerous young hearts (Wang Zili and Chen Zishan eds.), and another one described the impact of “Diary” as such:

When we read “A Madman’s Diary” after reading these other novels, we felt like all of a sudden we walked to the inflaming summer sunshine from the dim light in the temple, we stepped into the Modernity from Middle-Ages” (Zhang Dinghuang 25).

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The shocking impact that “Sinking” brought to Chinese literature could equal that of “Diary.” Readers and critics were awakened and shocked because they were being exposed by the authors’ scalpel-like pens to the abnormal psyche of the madman and the hypochondriac, to a rebellious force for change otherwise buried underneath the seemingly tamed appearance. As Kirk Denton reminds us, the value of “Sinking” for Yu Dafu’s contemporaries lay in “the novelty of ‘real’ emotional turmoil unleashed through the text into the social world of the reader” (107). The same can be said of “Diary,” in which kuant serves as “the archetypal metaphor for an explosive ecstasy, a jumping off the right track, a transgressive crossing of the boundary—in short, a return to the primal of instinctual drive” (Tang 58).

The complexity of the “abnormal” psyche in both stories, to a large extent, can be understood in relation to the manipulating narrators. Each story is mostly concerned with the exceptionally irrational and dramatic thought and emotion of the protagonist who seems to be trapped in paranoia, believing that everybody around is plotting against him: the madman in “Diary” suspects that others are all cannibals desiring to bite his flesh, and the hypochondriac young man in “Sinking” feels that people look down upon him and look for ways to humiliate him. However, the complex of ironic tension between the narrator and the protagonist challenges any simplistic view of the “facts” about the mental state of the alleged deranged protagonists.

In “Diary,” there are two narrators. One narrator, presumably a medical doctor, tells the reader in the preface to the story that he came into possession of the diary of a madman through the madman’s elder brother. This narrator represents his attempt to provide an “objective” and even scientific view of the highly subjective world of the
paranoid subject, as he claims that he “copied out a part [of the diary] to serve as a
subject for medical research” (8). This narrator will thereof be called the doctor narrator.
The other narrator is the madman himself, who presumably wrote the diary entries when
he suffered from a serious mental disorder. The doctor narrator, after reading the diary,
diagnosed that the writer of the diary had “a form of persecution complex” (8). As he
commented on the diary itself, “The writing was most confused and incoherent, and he
had made many wild statements” (8). However, when we get to read the diary ourselves,
we noticed that the madman shows clear language and logic in the seemingly fragmented
diary entries, though his language and logic are very different from those of the doctor
narrator’s. He asserted in the beginning: “I have reason for my fear” (9), and then went
on listing one evidence after another to support his claim: On a moonless night, he
encountered Mr. Zhao and seven or eight other people who “had strange look in their
eyes” and “the fiercest among them grinned at me,” which made me shiver (9). One
morning, he found that the new doctor Mr. He had “a murderous gleam in his eyes” (10).
The same day, he made a “stupendous discovery” that his elder brother was an eater of
humans (10). More startling yet, he later realized that even he himself was responsible for
killing and eating his younger sister.

On the above account, the every diary that the doctor narrator intended to use as
an evidence to prove the illogicality of the madman actually speaks the opposite. I
propose that we read “human murdering” and “human eating” metaphorically as the
deprivation of “human vitality.” In this case, the madman’s logic is not only clear but
also sound. This is exactly the same logic Lu Xun deployed in his two essays “A Letter
to Beijing” (北京通讯) and “Sudden Notion, No. 5” (突然想到) Lu Xun expressed his
dread of the living dead man. The living dead man is opposite of the madman: He is immobile and depleted of “human vitality.” Lu Xun abhorred living a life like a dead man:

“I believe that human beings, in order to improve, to develop, we need to move, to act. It’s quite all right if movements or actions lead to mistakes. It’s completely a mistake to live like a dead person because he hangs the sign “I’m alive,” but actually leading the life of the dead (“A Letter to Beijing” 300).

In “A Letter,” Lu Xun gives one example of the living dead, an opium-addicted young man. He further reveals that it was the young man’s parents who encouraged him to smoke opium so that he would stay obediently home. The young man’s parents are the murders of their own son’s human vitality and in a way his life. In “Sudden Notion,” Lu Xun also identifies “the elders” and “respectable people” as such murders because “their instructions had such a strong effect on me that I dare not move or breath freely, and when I tried to be a little rebellious, “I was immediately knocked on the head” by them (136-37). Consequently, “I should have to go on looking more dead than alive to the end of my days” (137). We can definitely see the parallel between “Diary” and the two essays on the living dead: the madman could be “I” in a rebellious stage, Mr. Zhao represents traditional social force as “the elders” and those “respectable people,” and the madman’s elder brother stands for suppressing family structure like the opium-addict’s parents. In previous chapters, I discussed how discouragement of movement hindered people’s physical health, Lu Xun emphasizes here the interconnection between body and spirit and that the lack of movement also affected the spirit. The consequence would an obedient person he describes as such: “I hold my breath, dare not move or act indiscreetly, looking down at the earth since looking up at the sky means arrogance. I put on this look of a
dead person since talking and laughing means transgression…. I have to put on the look, till the day I die for real” (“Sudden Notion” 259). The dead man, was not only physically immobile, but so afraid of transgression and so eager to be like others, and thus also incapable of generating independent thoughts and feelings of his own. Therefore, the dead man also symbolizes mediocrity of the Chinese masses and their conformity to tradition while the madman represents individualism that ran counter to conventional morality and the contemporary common disposition. As Leo Lee points out, the madman in Lu Xun’s “Diary” “characterizes talented individual who contemptuously oppose themselves to a stagnant society and whose actions exceed the public’s comprehension” (58). Lee’s comment about the madman resonates with Zhou Zuoren’s 1922 critique of Yu Dafu’s collection of “Sinking”. Zhou writes: “This collection portrays the depressive agony of youth… the basis for this depressive agony is the conflict between the will to life (sheng de yizhi) and the cold hard reality (3).

The narrator in “Sinking” is also key to understanding the complexity and ambiguity of the protagonist’s psyche. Yu Dafu once commented that “Sinking” “portrays the psychology of a deranged young man, and in a way, it’s a dissection of hypochondria of the youth and a representation of modern men’s agony.” The word “dissect” betrays the author’s conscientious effort to separate himself and the protagonist, to show that the story was more than an autobiographical account. As Michael Egan observes Yu Dafu’s reputedly autobiographical style, “behind the simple unity of his life and works lies a maze of ambiguities between reality and appearance, between self and vision of self” (311). In “Sinking”, Yu Dafu missions himself as a doctor whose job is to probe the psyche of modern men in general. He thus uses a third-person omnipotent
narrator who watches the protagonist’s behavior and penetrates into his psyche. Like the
doctor narrator in “Diary,” the narrator in “Sinking” also judges and diagnoses the
protagonist, with an even more “objective” and sometimes indifferent tone. He even
directly undermines protagonist’s speeches and thoughts concerning his own identity in
the following few pivotal moments. First, the narrator conflicts with the protagonist on
his mental state. While the protagonist himself considered his mental illness a rumor an
eccentric classmate had spread (44), the narrator identifies him as a young man with
serious mental disorder, reporting the progress of the latter’s disarrangement: “He is
melancholy was getting worse with time”; “His megalomania, in exact proportion to his
hypochondria, was thus intensified each day” (34); “Troubled by his own fears as well as
by his sense of guilt, his hypochondria worsened” (43); “After he had moved to the mei
grove, his hypochondria took a different turn” (47) (all italicized words originally in
English). Second, the two conflict on whether the protagonist is a true lover of books.
The protagonist considers himself a poetry lover and a book enthusiast who often says to
himself, “I mustn’t gulp down such a marvelous book at one sitting. Instead I should
chew it over a longer period of time” (33). The “fact” is, as the narrator bluntly points
out, “This was the excuse he made every time he closed a book. The real reason was that
he had grown a little tired of it” (33). Third, the two have different views of how his
family treat him. The protagonist considers himself a good person and aggrieved that his
brother was uncaring for him: “If even my own brother could be so unkind to me, how
can I blame others?” But the narrator immediately specifies the cause of such fallacy:
The young man itemized his virtues and sufferings “in an exaggerated fashion.” Last and
most importantly, the two disagree on why the protagonist is isolated, particularly his bad
luck with women. The protagonist feels his identity threatened by his inability to access and cultivate intimate relationship with a woman. When he heard guests flirt with the waitress who had served him food and wine, he discerned the awkwardness and raged:

“Bastards! Pigs! How dare you bully me like this? Revenge! I’ll revenge myself on you! Can there be any truehearted girl in the world? You faithless waitress how dare you desert me like this?” The narrator, on the other hand, portrays the waitress as a gentle, considerate and respectful Japanese woman. The above-listed events all seem to suggest that the narrator has a rather accurate diagnosis of the protagonist mental conditions. However, we need to remind ourselves that like the madman in “Diary,” the protagonist in “Sinking” also feels constantly under “malevolent gazes”; and in fact, the closest and most critical should be that of the narrator. If the malevolence were lifted, if we reverse the gaze, we would see the agony of a talented individual combating with suppressive environment similar to that the madman encountered in “Diary”: the suffocating society consisted mostly of his Japanese and Chinese peers intolerant of his “emotional precocity” (9), and the family represented again by the elder brother.

Therefore, both Lu Xun and Yu Dafu highlight the conflict between individuals and society, and the value of individuality, sub-consciousness, solitude and introspection. Most important of all, they promote “human vitality” as the moving force behind all the other valued qualities. “Human vitality” is an irrational force that distinguishes the brilliance of individuals from the mediocrity of the masses.60 “Human vitality” is the

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60 Lu Xun explicitly said, “Right and wrong cannot be decided by the people; to let them decide would have no good result. National affairs cannot be decided by the people; to do so would not achieve pace and security. Only when the superman appears in the world will peace come and if not that, then at least a genius,” Mills 192.
power to demolish the past, and to pioneer the new “ever-evolving” struggle in human
development. In “Diary” and “Sinking”, the authors respectively embody “human vitality”
in the madman and the hypochondriac man to create an alternative masculinity. Both
protagonists have the appearance resembling that of literary scholars in the past. The
protagonist in “Diary” was a well-educated man apparently from a gentry family and
later later left his hometown to take up a official post after the cure of his mental disorder.
The one in “Sinking” came from a similar background as both his father and grandfather
are described as scholar officials. He himself was fond of reading and composing poems.
Yu Dafu’s contemporary writer and critic Su Xuelin unequivocally called the protagonist
in “Sinking” a member of “modern literati”:

“Egotism” [zìwò zhuyì] and “Sentimentalism” [gǎnshāng zhuyì] are also
the basic elements in Yu’s works…Both “sentimentalism” and “egotism”
are the characteristics of modern thought, a kind of abnormal “Hysteria”
[xìsidìlì] with which the malady of the century [shìjìbìng] endowed the
modern literati…The protagonist in “Sinking” fell ill with hypochondria in
Japan…. Because of the inability to contain his sexual desire, he was self-
destructive and became emaciated with neurasthenia committing suicide
by jumping into the sea in the end. [English words in quotation marks
originally in English] (Su Xuelin 66–67; English quoted in Peng Hsiao-
Yan Dandysim 179).

Su’s rather negative view of Yu’s works nevertheless brings to light one key feature of
the “modern literati,” that is, in her words, “a kind of abnormal ‘hysteria.’” As a malady
of the century, hysteria was not supposed to native to Chinese, which differs the
protagonist in “Sinking” from the old literati at least in two ways. First, his feelings and
thoughts are partly a translated reality as his physical and mental conditions were
described by such English words as “hysteria,” “hypochondria,” “megalomania” and
“neurasthenia” in addition to the Chinese characters 忧郁症 (youyu zheng, depression).
In fact, the short story contains more than 20 instances of foreign texts, the most frequent of which are the quotations of romantic literature and the insertion of English expressions for emotional/psychological disturbance among the Chinese texts. Michael Egan commented on this aspect of Yu’s writing and said, “His use of the English words ‘megalomania’ and ‘hypochondria’ …is both unsatisfactory and annoying” (320). However, I see these instances of foreign text as indispensable to Yu’s experimenting with new expressions for new feelings and emotions. To take hypochondria as example, the correspondent word did not exist in Chinese. In “Sinking,” Yu uses it immediately after the Chinese characters 忧郁症, which literally means sadness caused by excessive worries- to complement what lacks in the Chinese expression. In other words, the Chinese characters were no longer inadequate to express the emotional and physical conditions of the young man in “Sinking”. The loan words help Yu to dissect disturbed emotions of the Chinese young student who harbored and understood emotions different from the older-generations of literati. Yu himself considered “sentimental” a new feeling as Chen Xianghe recollected: “One day, Yu Dafu gave me a copy of his newly published “Sinking” and said, ‘Take a look and let me know what you think. Nobody else in China has written novels like this…. Nobody in China now understands what Sentimental (original English) is” (4). In the following instance, the English word sentimental is the chosen one for describing the protagonist’s feelings. When the depressed young man was taking a night train from Tokyo to city N, the text reads, “All of a sudden, ….He became emotional and tears came to his eyes: “sentimental, too sentimental” (original English).” In fact the protagonist so often feels the inadequacy of expressing himself in Chinese language that he even has to assume different identities such as Zarathustra—the
infamous individualistic immoralist of Nietszche’s creation: “When he met a farmer, he would think of himself as Zarathustra, and would use Z’s words to talk to the farmer in his mind-heart” (34).

Why did Yu Dafu have to add the English expression hypochondria to the Chinese 忧郁症？What different feelings does the English expression “sentimental” convey from its Chinese correspondent 感伤 (literally means feeling sad)? Why did the young man need to use Zarathustra’s words to talk? How can the hypochondriac and sentimental young man signify alternative masculinity? These questions lead to the second major difference that I propose between the modern literati and the older ones: The sentimental and depressive feelings of the new youth are no longer merely the poetic expression of sadness, nor were they only be suppressed in soft weeping as the traditional literati. What the hypochondriac young man experiences here is not a passive depressive, but an active and assaulting mental state. The sentimental and hypochondria young man, after “he cried,” he “wiped off his tears and began to laugh by himself.” When he assumes the role of Zarathustra, “His megalomania (original English) is increasing in proportion with his hypochondria (original English).” These new expressions are more in sync with what Yu Dafu himself summarized as the excitable psyche many modern young men “who are fond of the foreign, combative, enthusiastic, and irrational fengkuang (craziness)” (Yu Dafu, “Penchant in literary appreciation” 3). Through the young man in “Sinking”, his nervous excitement, violent passion, and his uncontrollable impulses to find love and to revenge, Yu Dafu assembled the crucial components of an introspective masculinity: the mobility of the spirit, and the irrationality of thoughts and emotions.
Conclusion

The moon is the most frequently occurring image in Lu Xun’s “Diary.” It also comprises the opening passage of the madman’s diary entries: “Tonight the moon is very bright, I haven’t seen it for over thirty years, so today when I saw it, I felt in unusually high spirits. I begin to realize that during the past thirty-odd yeas I have been in the dark” (9). Here the madman was enlightened by the moonlight, unable to look at the world the way he used to. In the eyes of the unenlightened, he turned into a madman, but in his own mind, he had a rational awakening. He since then embarked the journey to observe and make sense of his surroundings and to find meanings and purposes of human history. As Leo Ou-fan Lee rightly points out, the “recurring image of the moon gives rise symbolically to a double meaning of both lunacy (in its Western connotation) and enlightenment (in its Chinese etymological implication)” (Voices 54). The madman image thus points to a unique feature of Chinese enlightenment: a combination of rational and irrational elements. While “irrationality” was a rebellious slogan against the enlightenment in the West, the Chinese enlightenment in early twentieth century absorbed both the enlightenment ideas about science and rationality, and anti-enlightenment literary and philosophical trends of irrationality.

The appearance of the madman in modern Chinese literature is no historical accident. It signifies a shift in the new era of Chinese literary and cultural enlightenment, that is, literary representations began to shift to the individual and the interior and the introspective. It was an era when Chinese intellectuals and writers began to look for inspirations from Europe, America, and Japan because classical Chinese language was
deemed inadequate to express new thoughts, new events and new emotions. Lydia Liu asserts that “One of the first fruits of Chinese literary cross-breeding with European and Japanese fiction is the objectification of the inner world through the act of storytelling” (128). Displaying the psyche objectively is one way many writers of the time defined the difference between themselves and writers in the past and expressed the new experience of “being modern,” including being a modern male. Lu Xun and Yu Dafu, sharing equal enthusiasm about the human vitality embedded in kuang as the key ingredient of the introspective masculinity, respectively brought into existence “Diary” and “Sinking”, generally acknowledged in modern Chinese literature as the first modern stories to depict the agony of the modern men. The madman in “Diary” and the hypochondriac young man in “Sinking” provide two distinct and yet related archetypes of the introspective masculinity. Both characters are the embodiment of kuang, as a Nietzschean self-affirmation that produces the essential regenerative energy for any living man, as the human vitality that shapes the mobile spirit and drives spiritual metamorphosis. They both are self-conscious subjects who burst out a disruptive energy to have not only challenged the normative behavior and morality of the society but also pushed the limits of their own body and mind.

The psychic anxiety and fear legitimately became the active agent in representing a modern masculine model—an introspective masculinity—in Chinese fiction of the early twentieth century. If the robust body was the major component required of performative masculinity, a sensitive mind and mobile spirit is the primary building block of introspective masculinity in the era of Chinese enlightenment in 1910s and 1920s. Performative masculinity, principled against traditional Chinese elite masculinity that
valued wen (literary talent) over wu (martial valor), attempted to promote wu among Chinese males. Although the body ideal of performative masculinity also needs the support of a spiritual force, it is essentially a physical body. Introspective masculinity on the other hand focuses on the psychological body, a body that would otherwise always be a rigid and numb shell without the forging “human vitality” of the spirit. Further, unlike wen masculinity, introspective masculinity features the irrational mind in a deliberately objective way to highlight its unsettling and transforming power, despite their common interest in emotional sensitivity of the scholar (or scholar-like) male protagonists. In other words, if performative masculinity publicizes the mobility of the body, introspective masculinity elevates the importance of a mobile spirit with unruly and insuppressible emotions. However, introspective masculinity was only a temporary elitist corrective to the popular performative masculinity. This short-lived masculinity gradually disappeared with the rise of proletarian and communist literature in the 1930s and 1940s and was largely repressed in socialist literature of the 1950s-1970s, as we shall see in Chapter 7.
Chapter 7

“Feminine Space” and Soft-Body Masculinity in Post-May Fourth Literature

Fictional narratives on the everyday life were either subdued to grand narratives or denied access to serious literature since late Qing, especially after Liang Qichao entrusted fiction the mission of renewing Chinese people and nation in his article published in *New Fiction* in 1902. The May Fourth fiction writers are often considered as a patricidal generation who ruthlessly severe ties with literary and cultural “tradition” ((Dai Jinhua and Meng Yue). They are read as strong proponent of grand words and missions such as “science” “democracy” “liberation” “people” and “nation,” which repressed literary expressions for everyday life and for personal human emotions (Perry Link). However, as I discussed earlier on Dingling, Lu Yin, and Mao Dun in chapter 2, and Lu Xun and Yu Dafu in chapter 6, writings of the May Fourth generation are far more than monolithic, readily complicating any notion of Chinese modernity as diametrically opposed in the dichotomy of rationality and emotions, everyday life and grand nation. In fact, their works already signify the following shifts in fictional narratives: the adoption of an anatomic aesthetics to penetrate into human psyche, the conscious negotiation of fixated gender roles and gender norms, and the manifestation of a more comprehensive understanding of and therefore more ambivalent attitude towards the progressive national modernity.

Equally important, the May Fourth generation might be patricidal in ways Dai and Link pointed out, but at the same time, their writings about the “soft”-body and emotional masculinity incontrovertibly betray an Electra complex. As I illustrated in chapter 6,
introspective masculinity, although not a copy of wen masculinity, still manifests intricate relations to wen, as an inherent reinvention of wen. We need to recognize the importance of pre-modern gender configurations in informing modern masculine forms, but rather than seeing it as a stable and unchanged traditional asset, I emphasize how wen has been challenged and changed in modern times in early twentieth century. Introspective masculinity inherited, from wen, their scholarly appearance, fragile physique and knowledge of Chinese classics. The key difference between the two lies in whether individuality is valued and whether the power of irrational emotions is acknowledged as the agent of manhood. Unlike the meek Confucian scholar in wen masculinity who conforms to and benefits from the Confucian patriarchy, introspective masculinity often features anti-heroes, like this madman which I will elaborate later, who exemplifies irrational and sometimes violent exuberance of free will, a craze for individuality, and who consequently become disastrous misfits in the society.

As introspective masculinity gradually disappeared with the rise of proletarian and communist literature in the 1930s, this short-lived mode of looked like a temporary elitist corrective to the popular performative masculinity. However, we can find introspective masculinity in characters such as those in Shi Zhecun’s rewriting of famous male personas in history, and the last tubercular in Ba Jin’s novel Cold Nights. In socialist China (1949-1978), the introspective modes, not socially productive, too elite and individualistic, remained to be severely suppressed. In the late 1980s and 1990s, with reflections upon political power and ethics, narrative focus in literature moved to individuals and everyday life and declared the dissolution of the socialist collective masculinity myth. The famous fictional characters such as Zhang Yonglin in Zhang
Xianliang’s novella “Half of Man is Woman,” Shangguan jintong in Mo Yan’s novel *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* announced the arrival of a new generation of “introspective” anti-heroes whose existence ruthless deconstructed the strong heroic types and performative masculinity.

**Shi Zhecun: Anatomist of the Modern Men**

The under-explored “feminine” tradition of the May Fourth generation finds resonance throughout the rest of the twentieth century. Illuminated by the concept of “feminine space,” the works of Shi Zhecun, a Shanghai New Perceptionist writer who has rarely been put side by side with the May Fourth generation, can be seen as the immediate inheritors of this feminine side of Chinese enlightenment and modernity.

Indeed, it seems to be odd to juxtapose Shi Zhecun side by side with Lu Xun and Yu Dafu, but further examination of Shi’s works shows that he, like Lu Xun and Yu Dafu, are deeply influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis and took to anatomic aesthetics in writing. Their common interest in revealing characters’ interior world stands out. Like Lu Xun and Yu Dafu, Shi draws attention to the convoluted thoughts and emotions embedded in the interior world of the characters, rather than using the storytelling techniques and external actions emphasized in traditional Chinese fiction. As discussed in chapter 6, the anatomic aesthetics, partly inspired by foreign subjective literary and philosophical trend, and partly emboldened by the development of natural and human

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61 Although traditional storytelling techniques include the sketch of thoughts and emotions, but such a sketch is almost always external and secondary to the development of the plot.
Shi Zhecun himself resists being labeled “New Perceptionist” and considers himself a disciple of Freudian psychoanalysis. The leftist writer Lou Shiyi is among the first who have talked about Shi as a New Perceptionist. In 1931, Lou categorized Shi’s two works “In Paris Theatre” (在巴黎大剧院) and “Magic” (魔道) as “the literature of those who live on the interest of capitalism. A leftist literary critic Qian Xingcun (钱杏村) echoed Lou: “Shiyi’s criticism and instruction is completely correct .... Shi Zhecun on the one hand represents the soon-to-collapse capitalism, and on the other hand, tols the bell for those parasites (2). In the 1980s, literary critic Yan Jiayan (严家炎)—in his influential study on modern Chinese literary schools—reestablished the New Perceptionist School and reinstated Shi as its member. Shi himself recalled that back in May 1933, unsatisfied with the overt class consciousness in Lou and Qian’s literary criticism, he had said: “Since the publication of the two works (“In Paris Theatre” and “Magic”), I have been offered the title New Perceptionist. But I don’t think this is true. I don’t know what New Perceptionism in Japan and Europe is all about, but I know that my fiction is the application of a number of Freudisms (Creative Works 632). After reading Yan Jiayan’s theory about the New Perceptionist School, he insists: “I do not agree [with Yan] on this term. I think it’s more appropriate to call me psychological analyst of fiction” (quoted in Ni Ruiqin 47).

Shi Zhecun’s works deal almost exclusively with the unconsciousness of modern men or modern men in disguise. Since the publication of the short story “Kumarajiva” (
In 1929, his fictional works are almost all directed at emotions and other aspects of the human unconsciousness. He distinguishes the twentieth-century psychoanalysis technique in literature from the descriptive sketch of characters’ mental activity in earlier times: “There were already fiction about the mind in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but psychoanalysis belongs to the 1920s. My own fiction is psychoanalytical, because it’s about the complexity of psychology consisted of consciousness (上意识), unconsciousness (下意识) and sub-consciousness (潜意识).

Fiction in the 18th century is not the same; it didn’t have such depth” (Shi, 1995: 177).

Shi’s works reflect his sensitivity and curiosity about the human psyche. He particularly focuses on sexual desire—which is often suppressed by “civilized” social relations—as the fundamental human instinct. Probing into the repressed male sexuality in urban settings, Shi Zhecun detailed the conflict between human desire and reason in modern Chinese society.

In the short story “Evening in a Rainy Season,” Shi arranges the encounter of the male protagonist “I” and a pretty girl. Minimizing the plot, Shi skillfully unfolds the protagonist’s step-by-step release of his repressed desire through interior monologues. “I” approach the girl who is sheltering herself from the train underneath a roof and who “I” initially mistook as the first love. Although on the conscious level, “I” notice the thick lips of the girl and know for sure she is not the first love, “I” still insist holding the umbrella for her in the rain, which brings back memory about the romantic past with the first love. Meanwhile, fear of gossip and trouble confuses “me” to the point that “I” mistaken the woman standing in front of the counter as the wife. In this particular story, the rain season provides a perfect stage for the display of the unconsciousness. The rain
reactivates the desire repressed and stored in the unconsciousness and induces its outflow. In the rain, “I” admired the girl’s beauty and dreamed of intimacy, but as soon as the rain stops, rationality returns, social morality begins to exert influence, and “I” wake up.

Similarly, “I” in another short story “In Paris Theater” is a married man accompanied by a young woman in the city. “I” go to Paris Theatre with the newly acquainted girl friend, eager to be intimate with her but at the same time afraid of being noticed by acquaintances. Again, personal relations and events are unfolded completely in the protagonist’s inner monologues. The monologues resemble a Q&A session, which creates suspense and displays the protagonist inner turmoil and anxiety. “I” am initially embarrassed by the fact that the girl has gone to purchase the tickets: “Why did she go buy the tickets? This is my shame… Didn’t she know it would embarrass me? I am a man, a gentleman... She doesn’t want me to pay? Then why was she okay with me buying tickets last night? …. She’s walking towards me… Why did she give me both tickets? ....What, circle tickets! (circle originally in English).….I see, she must be protesting against the cheaper tickets I bought in the previous two nights....” As “I” am contemplating breaking up with her to rid the sense of shame, the monologue is momentarily interrupted by her explanation for purchasing the expensive tickets: the cheaper tickets were sold out! After sitting down, “I” was afraid of any real physical contact, but the interior monologues go on, and sexual attraction and anxiety keeps building up and finally finds a moment of release. “I” released the repressed desires through licking her handkerchief: “My hands are smeared with chocolate…. so sticky…She gave me her handkerchief…. Ok, my hands are cleaned. Wait, I want to
smell it. I can pretend to be wiping my mouth…. Oh, so nice, it is her smell, a mixture of sweat and perfume…. I want to taste….Ok, let me lick the handkerchief…. What a new invention of taste! …How strange, I feel as if I were holding her naked.” Despite the author’s rejection for the title New Perceptionist, his stories contain all kinds of raw and fermented senses and emotions. The exposure of these senses and emotions turns “I”—a cosmopolitan gentleman in appearance—into an insecure, and vulnerable effeminized “every man,” who is constantly afraid of “losing face,” but cannot with suppressed human desires and weaknesses underneath the decent exterior.

More than dissecting the cosmopolitan modern men, Shi Zhecun also powerfully deconstructs the image of those well-acknowledged and deified heroes in Chinese literary and cultural history, restoring them into the commonplace human shape. In the short story “Kumarajiva,” Shi Zhecun subverts the image of the holy monk: The representation of Kumarajiva in orthodox history is a sacred Buddhist master, who is free of all worldly desires. In Shi’s short story, he turns out to be a humble mortal, constantly suffering from the inner conflicts between flesh and soul. As Shi reveals at the end of the story, “He is secretly a common person, but pretends in front of the Chinese people to be a virtuous Buddhist master from the Western Regions (西域).” Another “profaned” heroic image is Shi Xiu (石秀), who originally appeared as a character in Water Margin, one of the four Chinese classic novels. In Water Margin, Shi Xiu is an extraordinarily strong, honest, and loyal superhero who kills Pan Qiaoyun, the adulterous wife of his sworn brother, for justice. While the characterization of Shi Xiu in Water Margin is mostly through a third-person narrative of his words and actions, the Shi Xiu in Shi Zhencun’s namesake story, is revealed of his inner self through interior monologues. Shi Zhecun shows the hero’s
darker and “disgraceful” side: He killed Pan because of jealousy. This Shi Xiú is no
longer a hero, but a man with the most basic instinct: he is secretly in love with the wife
of his sworn brother, but under the constraint of ethics and rationality, has to suppress his
sexual desire for her. But when he finds out about the woman’s illicit relationship with a
monk, his repressed desire turns into uncontrollable rage and hatred, which are the “real”
motive of the murder. Shi’s rewriting, besides its function as a projection of modern
men’s desire into the ancient masculine forms. Through rewriting these heroes, Shi
subverts the heroic images that are unequivocally praised and admired in Chinese
orthodox culture, depriving the heroes’ sacred aura and to some extend legitimize the
existence of “softness” among the modern men. Further, Shi’s successful subversion also
announces the power of the anatomic aesthetics he advocates.

**Zhang Ailing: Modernity Is Feminine**

Like Shi Zhecun, Zhang Ailing is a psychological mediator between the Chinese
tradition and the urban modernity. She is equally interested in understanding the hidden
complexity of human nature, in excavating the unconsciousness and the repressed desire.
Like Shi Zhecun, she also distinguishes her own use of psychological description from
the past. She writes, “In the past, the more naïve psychological descriptions are merely
sentimental confessions…. ‘Stream of consciousness’ responds to this trend. But the
interior world remains in the dark. A thought appears to be the brightest the moment t
flashes in the mind, but (I find it) rather difficult to capture this moment” (Zhang Ailing,
“A Few Words” 335). While Shi’s “past” refers to “traditional” Chinese fiction in
seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, Zhang’s refers to the two decades immediately
before her. Here what she calls “naïve” confession-like description can very well be a reference to Yu Dafu and/or Shi Zhecun.

Figure 7.1 The Cover of Zhang Ailing Reprinted Legend

Unlike Shi Zhecun’s “naïve” first-person inner monologues, Zhang Ailing usually approaches the psychological states of the characters with the perspective of a third-person omnipotent observer/narrator. My analysis of the following two passages of her writing on “looking” will shed light on her particular perspective. One passage is Zhang Ailing’s explanation for the book cover of the 1947 reprint of her fiction collection Legend (传奇):

It borrows the picture from a late Qing ladies fashion, in which a woman is playing dominoes quietly, sitting next to the grandmother
holding a child. It looks like the most ordinary family scene after dinner. However, outside the railings, a disproportionate human appears abruptly, like a ghost. It is a modern person (现代人), very curiously peeking inside (259).

Zhang’s explanation shows her awareness of the two layers of gaze: the gaze of the woman in traditional attire on the dominoes, a game originated in China, and the gaze of the “modern person” on the “traditional” family. Given the context, the family could be the characters in Zhang’s fiction, those who are so engrossed in their daily activities that they are completely unaware of the presence of the modern intruder. The modern intruder is the author/observer who has a full view of everybody and everything in sight. Further, the modern person has a female shape, her presence and posture subverts the male gaze as well as the taken-for-granted notion of modernity as masculine. The other passage is from her “foreigners watching Peking Opera” (洋人看京戏):

It’s meaningful (for Chinese) to adopt foreigners’ perspective to look at everything in China…. Unfortunately we live among the Chinese, unlike the overseas Chinese who could worship the sacred motherland in a proper distance. In that case, we might as well observe in the perspective of the foreigners (“They Are Shanghainese” 71).

In this sense, Zhang Ailing not only looks at the characters as a modern intruder looking at the “tradition,” but also as a self-designated foreigner who keeps a certain distance while watching the Chinese. Joyce and Freud whom she mentions in the comment on psychological description in Chinese fiction are among those foreigners’ whose perspective has sharpened her own vision.

These two passages partly explain why Zhang Ailing’s perspective is different from Shi Zhecun’s and Yu Dafu’s in portraying the interior world of the characters. She wants to keep a certain distance—as a modern person observing the traditional family or
as a foreigner watching Chinese opera—so that she can examine her fellow Chinese people in a more critical way, not falling into the “naïve” sentimental confessional style like Shi and Yu who often feature “sick” anti-heroes in first person narratives. The narrator in Zhang Ailing’s novel, on the other hand, assumes the role of a psychologist rather than a patient, a psychologist who keeps all medical records of psychoanalytical sessions with the psychologically disturbed protagonists. Among Zhang’s fictional works, “Heart Sutra” (心经), “The Golden Cangue” (金锁记) and “Sealed off” (封锁) exemplify the most distinctive use of psychoanalysis. The incestuous relations between father and daughter in “Heart Sutra” was obviously a twist of Freud’s Oedipus complex. Cao Qiqiao, the female protagonist in “The Golden Cangue,” is portrayed as a woman with a “crooked” mind who mercilessly undermines the emotional wellbeing of her own son and daughter. Men in “The Golden Cangue” are either tyrannical patriarchs or puppet shadow figures who cause or aggravate Cao’s emotional trauma and sexual repression. Similarly, the two main characters in “Sealed off” are sexually repressed, only able to release their long pent-up desire and become normalized under such special circumstances as in the halted tram during the blockade.

Zhang Ailing’s third-person narrator can see through the characters, and penetrate into their thoughts. The narrator in “The Golden Cangue,” for instance, makes Cao Qiqiao’s psychological activities completely transparent to the readers. In one of the rare moments when Cao Qiqiao finally sees the brother-in-law express his love for her after suffering for years, the omnipotent narrator lays bare her mixed feelings:

Qiqiao lowered her head, bathed in glory, such delicate music, such delicate pleasure…. Over the years, they have been playing hide and seek, but were never able to be physically close to each other. They never
expected they would have today…. He is a decade older, but the man is still the same man. Is he coaxing her? Does he want her money—the money she sold her life in exchange? This very thought raged her. She hated him....” (58).

The third-person narrator is able to get inside the minds of both parties and vividly delineates the nuanced psychological changes of Qiqiao from joy, anticipation, affirmation to suspicion, anxiety and hatred. In “Sealde off,” Zhang Ailing repeatedly emphasizes the presence of the tramcar tracks, they “stretch, then shrink, stretch, then shrink,” like “soft and slippery long worms, slinking on and on into people’s sub-consciousness (237). The tramcar tracks hypnotize Zongzhen and Cuiyuan in the enclosed space of the tramcar, where Zhang Ailing enters as a psychologist observing for potential motives and explanations for their behavior. She discovers that Zongzhen, a conservative bank clerk, a good father, and a faithful husband in appearance, starts to flirt with Wu Cuiyuan because of his dissatisfaction with his wife and with his trivial work and life. Similarly, Wu lives a monotonous life: she had to study hard as a student, without opportunity to get close with the opposite sex. As a pious daughter, she obeys her parents, as an appropriate woman, she avoids doing anything frivolous. Hypnotized in the tramcar, their suppressed desires surface and the perceivable closeness and affection make them break their normal thinking patterns and behavior. But the blockade ended, everything came to an end, as if nothing had happened.

Although Zhang Ailing differs from Shi Zhecun in her approach to the interior of the characters, she also takes great efforts like Shi Zhecun to set up the suppressing surroundings and to pull the trigger for a momentary release of suppression. Zhang tends to associate traditional households with patriarchal power that suppresses human desires,
and “foreign elements” as the trigger for releasing the suppression. Zhang Ailing looks at the traditional households like that modern intruder in the book cover picture, people inside the house, so entrenched in the Chinese tradition and so engrossed of their own affairs, are unaware and undisturbed by the outside world and the modern intruder. The claustrophobic atmosphere of the traditional household depicted in “Love in a Fallen City” (倾城之恋) is a typical suffocating space where many of the characters in Zhang Ailing’s novels live their day-to-day lives. We catch the first glimpse of the dilapidating Bai household through Fourth Master Bai who is “sunk in darkness, sitting alone on a ramshackle balcony and playing the huqin” (115). Later we are told through the female protagonist Bai Liusu that the Bai household is “a fairyland where a single day, creeping slowly by, was a thousand years in the outside world” (120). This fairyland, however, is no longer the happy one that is often associated with timeless and ageless carefree life, but a “flat and dull” place where “all the days would be the same” (120). More importantly, the isolation and boredom is self-imposed, as Zhang reveals at the very beginning of the novel: “Shanghai’s clocks were set an hour ahead so the city could ‘save daylight,’” but the Bai family said: ‘We go by the old clock.’ Ten to them was eleven to everyone else. Their singing was behind the beat; they couldn’t keep up with the huqin” (111). Bai family stubbornly sticks to the old time scheme they are used to. They also stubbornly stick to the traditional customs and rules and social hierarchies.

While traditional Chinese household suppresses human desires, what pulls the trigger for their release often ironically coincides with “foreign” elements. In “Sealed off,” Zhang Ailing allows the historical reality—the air raid by the Japanese—to intrude the story, but the invention of history is only made to stop a tramcar so that it can
function as the stage for a short-lived romance, for a momentary release of desire. The
story takes place almost entirely inside the tramcar, where two otherwise appropriately
behaving characters Lü Zongzhen and Wu Cuiyuan are awakened to transgressive
emotions and embark on a romance, though the romance itself is as short lived as the
blockade. The male protagonist Zongzhen is an ordinary urbanite who has lost touch with
his desires and emotions when attempting to qualify his roles as a bank accountant, a
good husband and father. The encounter with Cuiyuan in the tramcar rekindles his
passion and desire as a man. The deceptively peaceful episode in the tramcar hides the
shocking effects of his experience until at the end of the story, where the experience of
the protagonist parallels the bug on the kitchen floor. The bug was “crawling from one
deck of the room to another,” but then shocked by light, became motionless and then
disappeared. The bug’s reaction to light is reminiscent of Zongzhen’s to the emotional
lightening in the tramcar. The affinity between the bug and the protagonist is further
established by his own observation: “[Is the bug] faking death? Or thinking? Crawling
back and forth all day, probably there is no time for thinking? After all, thinking is
painful.”

Sublimation and Castration of the Performative Body (1950s-early 1980s)

Xiaobing Tang regards Wang Wenxuan, the male protagonist in Ba Jin’s novel
Cold Nights (1947), as the last tubercular in modern Chinese literature, whose death
“historically accompanies the end of the liberal ideology of the state and of its tortured

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62 The translation for this passage is not available in the English version; translation here is mine from the
relationship to individual subjects” (160). Wang’s fragile body, his acute sensitivity and sentiments, and his profession as an editor are all key markers of an introspective masculinity of Chinese male intellectuals. After the death of the last tubercular, “feminine space” in Chinese literature diminishes in the socialist period up to the early 1980s, when literature turns to grand cause of the nation and the accompanying exterior descriptions of the strong body. Men and women in socialist literature become castrated brothers and sisters in the household controlled by the Party father. Any transgression of such relations would be “incestuous.”

It is natural that war and peasant heroes should become the most conspicuous images in Chinese novels produced in 1950s to mid-1960s. As early as 1942, Mao’s Talk in Yan’an Forum on Literature and Arts already emphasized that the purpose of literature is to serve workers, peasants and soldiers, and that it should function as a political weapon to unite people and to attack enemies. A series of political campaigns against writers, literary critics and editors including Xiao Yemu, Yu Pingbo, Hu Feng, and the anti-rightist movement, rid of any other possibilities in literary representations.

These heroes, almost exclusively male,63 are strong in physique, brave in action, and lofty in thoughts. They appear to be full of masculine power, but are in fact castrated by politics. Since the heroes’ relationships with women are either non-existent or purely

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63 Sister Jiang in *Red Rock* (红岩) is probably one of the very few exceptions. War heroes include Zhou Dayong in *Defending Yan’an* (保卫延安), Zhu Laozhong in *Red Flag* (红旗谱), Yang Zirong in *Snowy Forest* (林海雪原), Shen Zhenxin in *Red Sun* (红日), Yang Xiaodong in *Struggle in an Ancient City* (野火春风斗古城), Xu Yunfeng in *Red Rock* (红岩), Lu Jiachuan and Jiang Hua in *Song of the Youth* (青春之歌). The most famous peasant heroes are Liang Shengbao in *History of Entrepreneurship* (创业史), Liu Yusheng in *Tremendous Changes in a Mountainous Village* (山乡巨变) and Xiao Changchun in *Sunny Days* (艳阳天).
platonic, the literature about heroes is asexual literature. Even *Song of the Youth*,
arguably the most romantic novel of the time, at best exemplifies the performance of
gender politics in the revolutionary history. Lu Jiachuan symbolizes the Party’s
revolutionary ideology that saves Lin Daojing and her spirit and soul but sacrifices his
own life for the Party. Lu’s relationship with Lin is not the relationship between lovers,
but that between a father and a daughter, the savior and the saved, or the party and the
people. Heroes in literature of this period, eager to please Mao, function as political
weapons to unite and educate the people, and as a mouthpiece to impart the Party’s order
to the people.

Heroes continue to dominate the asexual literary and cultural representations
during the Cultural Revolution, further deified and reduced to pure and simple
formulations of the mainstream ideology. They are often described as god-like figures,
with their steel-cast bodies shining under the sun, faces exuding hope and holiness, eyes
emitting light that penetrates mountains and clouds to find class enemies. The sublimated
body is possessed, standardized and castrated by political disciplines. The tall and
handsome male or female bodies, deprived of human desires and emotions, are
mannequins activated by Mao’s revolutionary spirit.

In the few years immediately after the Cultural Revolution to early 1980s,
although the discussion on humanism began to emerge, the literary scene was still highly
homogenous in the deployment of themes and techniques. The works by both male and
female writers explore similar themes: memories of the revolutionary battles and
establishment of new images for the new era. For instance, the male protagonists in the
following novels are all reformers: *Invisible Wings* (隠性的翅膀) by Zhang Jie, *Rising*
Star (新星) by Ke Yunlu’s, Men’s Style (男人的风格) by Zhang Xianliang, and a series of novels on socialist reforms by Jiang Zilong. Reformers replaced the war and peasant heroes in the previous three decades and became the new image of the new era, but maintained the strong, brave and noble image of the revolutionary heroes.

**Zhang Xianliang: Half of Man is Woman**

Towards the mid-1980s, the perfect image of the heroes in novels began to be replaced by ignoble and introspective individuals with defects and human desires. Chinese literary scholar Gao Dongling summarizes the change of Chinese literature: from “what to write” in early 1980s to “how to write” in mid and late 1980s, and from “how to represent reality” to “how reassemble life for expressing “feelings” (144). According to Gao, all trends of modernisms—from those that emerged in late 19th to the contemporary ones in Europe, American and Japan—were introduced to the Chinese literary scene, including symbolism, expressionism, stream of consciousness, futurism, absurd drama, black humor, existentialism, Japanese New Perceptionism, and Latin American magic realism. Nietzsche, Freud, and Sartre are among the most influential modern thoughts on Chinese literature (160). In the mid-1980s, Freudism resurged in works by a large group of Chinese writes: Zhang Xiaoliang, Liu Heng, Jia Pingwa, Su Tong, Mo Yan, to name a few.

Zhang Xianliang’s fictional works reflect this transformation. In his novels published in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the male protagonists are strong and optimistic participants in the socialist construction. Wei Tiangui in “Descendents of the River” (河的子孙, 1983), and Chen Baotie in Man’s Style (男人的风格, 1981) are such
heroes whose masculinity reside in physical sturdiness and strength, unweaving will and rational power, indomitable courage and superb vision. From the publication of his novella “Mimosa” (绿化树, 1984), the reformer hero type is replaced by that of intellectuals. The most famous representation of the intellectuals is Zhang Yongling whose name is used for the protagonists in two novellas: “Mimosa” and “Half of Man is Woman” (男人的一半是女人, 1985). Compared with the masculinity of reformer heroes typical in the fiction of early 1980s, Zhang Yonglin is physically delicate and emotionally sensitive. However, his desire for food and sex rekindle the human vitality in his fragile body.

In Zhang Yanliang’s works in or after the mid-1980s, gender politics is played out and masculinity is constructed once again on the interior level. The protagonist Zhang Yonglin, whose looks, as described in “Mimosa,” fit Liang Qichao’s description of Chinese literati 70 years ago: He is frail, pale-faced, as skinny as a monkey, incapable of any physical labor. In “Half of Man is Woman,” the first-person narrator makes a Freudian psychological analysis of the protagonist. The explicit description of sex sparked a widespread controversy like Yu Dafu’s “Sinking” once did. Zhang Yonglin, like the hypochondriac youth in “Sinking,” is fond of self-reflection and self-condemnation. However, unlike the young man in “Sinking” who jumps into the ocean to embrace the feminine, Zhang Yonglin eventually chooses to flee the flesh, denying his feminine side. It was not until Zhang Xianliang’s novel Getting Used to Death (习惯死亡, 1998), did the nameless protagonist “I” completely destroy the essentialized hard masculinity by committing suicide.
Zhang Xianliang’s fiction in and after the mid-1980s highlights the significance of bodily and emotional experience related to hunger and sex in order to reflect on human nature and life instincts. The male protagonists are psychologically conflicted intellectuals simultaneously pulled by two opposing desires: the desire for fulfilling his basic human needs such as food and sex, and the desire for “noble” pursuits such as knowledge and career. In “Mimosa,” the protagonist Zhang Yonglin comes to reside in a village in northwest after a few years of “imprisonment” in a labor camp. Hunger puts his ethical values under severe test in the deserted northwestern village. Threatened by intense hunger, Zhang is overwhelmed with a survival instinct: he sometimes swindles a bag of flour and often steals extra rice than the designated amount by using a special can, and then sincerely shows remorse each time afterwards. To show Zhang Yonglin’s determination to rid of his base desire, the author arranges a scene of black humor: The protagonist, running the risk of starving himself, skips the breakfast to discuss Marx’s “Das Kapital” with a lecturer of philosophy as spiritual entertainment. In another novella “Half of Man,” the protagonist (also named Zhang Yonglin) laments his loss of male potency and releases his anxiety by book reading and philosophical reflection. Even when he witnesses his wife having an affair, he deceives himself by indulging in an imagined intelligent dialogue with ancient and modern philosophers. In “Half of Man,” the author particularly draws our attention to the absurdity of the protagonist who is imagining a philosophical conversation with his black horse. The house ridicules the protagonist’s hypocrisy and cowardice and points out his futile attempts to replacing human desires with spiritual pursuits.
The two Zhang Yonglins’ impotence implies the castration and feminization by political authorities. In “Mimosa,” Zhang’s weak performance in the labor camp is tantamount to an abandoned woman: he cries, feels jealous and resentful when the party abandons him. In “Half of Man,” Zhang’s identity as a rightist deprives him of his human dignity and freedom, and the phallic power of politics deconstructs his male subjectivity.

In the “Mimosa,” the moment Zhang is released from the labor camp, he expresses the excitement about freedom as such: “Today I’m governed by my own will. Today, I am no longer dispatched here and there by the squad leader, nor do I need to report to him.” Only after fleeing the political power of the squad leader can Zhang truly embark the quest for his male subjectivity.

Zhang Yonglin has to gain his sexual potency and male subjectivity by embracing the feminine embodied by the native land and native woman. The analogy between the land and the woman is made apparent towards the end of “Half of Man”:

Oh, my wilderness, my alkali soil, my desert land, my vast loess plateau, I am about to say goodbye to you, as well as to her. Like her, you have been stripped naked, trampled and devastated by men, willingly lying underneath them. Like her, you once deceived me, unfaithful to me, and tortured me.... You’re so ugly, harsh, and yet so beautiful, almost magical. I curse you, but I love you. You devilish land and devilish woman, you sucked dry my sweat, my tears, and also my love, which seep into my spirit. From now on, I will not be able to give any love to any other land and any other woman.

And at the very end, the analogy between the woman and the land is repeated: “I feel two arms holding me tight and warm, pulling me down, and down.... I sink to the bottom of the lake-like moonlight. Remember, it is you who turned me into a real man.” The flood scene in “Half of Man” is highly metaphorical as a turning point of Zhang’s life: When the whole village is flooded by a leaking dam, Zhang Yonglin bravely jumps into water
to block the hole on the bottom; After he returns home, his impotence proves to be miraculously cured. It is in the flood that Zhang Yonglin is initiated to a rebirth. The flood is part of the land, the irrational and wild feminine nature, the moment Zhang Yong Lin jumps into the dam he embraces his own femininity. His encounter with the healing feminine power is completed by his physical reunion with his wife Huang Jiuxiang, a native woman from the village who finally transforms him from “half a man” into a complete man.
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