

GRAFTED IDENTITIES: SHREWS AND THE NEW WOMAN NARRATIVE IN
CHINA (1910s-1960s)

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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My dissertation examines the unacknowledged role of negative female models from traditional literature in constructing the modern woman in China. It draws upon literary and historical sources to examine how modern cultural figures resuscitated and even redeemed qualities associated with traditional shrews in their perceptions and constructions of the new woman across the first half of the twentieth century. By linking the literary trope of the shrew, associated with imperial China, with the twentieth-century figure of the new woman, my work bridges the transition from the late-imperial to the modern era and foregrounds the late-imperial roots of Chinese modernization.

The scope of my dissertation includes depictions of shrews/new women in literary texts, the press, theater, and public discourses from the Republican to the Socialist period. Although there exists a rich body of work on both traditional shrew literature and the new woman narrative, no one has addressed the confluence of the two in Chinese modernity. Scholars of late imperial Chinese literature have claimed that shrew literature disappeared when China entered the modern age. Studies on the new woman focus on specific social and cultural contexts during the different periods of modernizing China; few scholars have traced the effects that previous female types had on the new woman. My research reveals the importance of the traditional shrew in contributing to the construction and

reception of the new woman, despite the radically changing ideologies of the twentieth century. As I argue, the feisty, rebellious modern women in her many guises as suffragette, sexual independent, and gender radical are female types grafted onto the violent, sexualized, and transgressive typologies of the traditional shrew.

My research contributes to the studies of Chinese modernity and the representations of Chinese women. First, it bridges the artificial divide between modern and traditional studies of China and expands the debates about the nature of Chinese modernity. Second, it brings to light the underexamined constructions of the new woman as an empowered social actor through her genealogical connections to the traditional shrew. Third, it provides a methodology for rethinking the contested depiction of women in Chinese modernity.

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To all the new women.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: IN SEARCH OF A GENEALOGY FROM THE SHREW TO THE NEW WOMAN

This dissertation looks at the positive afterlife of the traditional shrew as a component of the new woman with a focus on Republican era debates about the role of women in modernizing China. As the first to claim the genealogical connection between the shrew and the new woman, this study draws upon literary and historical sources to map out the trajectories of the evolution of the qualities associated with shrewishness after the collapse of imperial China. Of particular interest is the reclamation of formerly repudiated shrew qualities in the on-going constructions of the new woman. Modern cultural figures manipulated and recuperated aspects of the prototypical shrew as positive expressions of female empowerment. The traditionally female vices of violence, jealousy, garrulity, and promiscuity were redeemed and even identified as virtues for modern women willing to engage in the political and ideological overthrow of China's feudal past.

By linking the literary trope of the shrew, associated with imperial China, with the twentieth-century figure of the new woman, this work bridges the transition from the late-imperial to the modern era and foregrounds the late-imperial roots of Chinese modernization. This continuity is significant because it indicates that modern cultural constructions have not only taken inspiration from traditional sources, but that new, progressive models of woman's leadership draw heavily upon negative and seemingly unsuitable traditional sources. As a product of the emergence of Chinese modernity at the turn of the century, the new woman was meant to exist on a completely new plane, breaking away from the traditional constructions of women that shaped social norms

during the premodern period. However, as this dissertation shows, the constant efforts to graft the new woman onto various aspects of the premodern shrew, especially her feisty rebellious spirit, demonstrates that such a clear-cut dichotomy between traditional and modern constructions of womanhood is false. Over the course of the twentieth century, the new woman models produced by each political movement not only adapt the fearless and rebellious spirit of the traditional shrew, but have also repurposed disparaged behaviors associated with notorious shrews, who were “a completely negative female image” in the premodern context.¹

The Shrew

In traditional China, Confucian classics placed regulations on women through the ethics of “three obediences” and “four virtues” (the so-called “*sancong side*” 三從四德). Three obediences prescribe that women should be obedient to their father before marriage, to their husband after marriage and to their son after the death of husband. The four virtues are defined as chastity, proper speech (either silence or being soft-spoken), modesty, meaning a willingness to keep oneself cloistered away from public view and a willingness to devote oneself to domestic labors, especially needlework. A virtuous woman should bind her feet, confine her mobility within the inner chambers of the household, and dedicate herself to maintaining the proper hierarchical order of the patriarchal family. She should be filial, serving her parents-in-law properly, submit to her husband, and bear children, especially sons, to carry on the family line. She should limit her speech to what is socially proper and restrain her bodily practices to what is permitted

¹ Martin W. Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 85.

by the cult of chastity.

However, in traditional literature there was a group of women who simply defy those strictures. They are the shrews.² The Chinese terms for shrew include three main typologies or categories: *pofu* 潑婦, the unconstrained, transgressive, and polluting woman; *yinfu* 淫婦 (sometimes as *dangfu* 蕩婦), the promiscuous woman; and *hanfu* 恼婦, the violent woman. While *pofu* can be understood especially in terms of the woman's "scattering" actions as indicated by the word *po* 潟 (to scatter, spill, or splash), *pofu* is often a broadly inclusive term used to refer to all types of shrews.³ Many modern texts use the inclusive term *pofu* without specifying which shrew type or types they are referring to.

In comparison to the Western concept of the shrew which is mainly used for comedic effect, the Chinese shrew is more threatening and culturally repulsive. Within the logic of the Neo-Confucian discourse, improper desires and behaviors open the door to disaster. The shrew, with her fearless defiance of all gender norms, is the foremost threat to Confucian social structures. In the Chinese context, the shrew is the ambitious woman who desires to displace patriarchal authority and pursue her own interests and desires; she is the jealous woman who wishes to control the men in her family; she is the

² Although shrews constituted a major theme in late-imperial literature, there is no one Chinese term to refer to this very common character type. Traditional texts typically use terms such as "wife-fearing" (*junei* 懼內) or "henpecked husband" and keep the focus on the male victims of the shrewish woman. The shrew is the unnamed inversion of the chaste and virtuous *jiefu* 節婦 ideal. The lack of a single native term to denote the related characterizations of women gone rogue does not delegitimize the use of the English concept of the shrew as an analytic term. Since current English scholarship uses the term "shrew" when discussing this pejorative typology, I follow the norm and use "shrew" as a shorthand way to refer to those transgressive women in premodern literature.

³ Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 55.

ruthless woman who schemes to overpower her female rivals, opponents, and she is the selfish woman who opposes polygamy even if it means the extinction of her husband's lineage. She is the angry and abrasive woman who uses verbal and physical violence on a regular basis. She is the lustful and sexually powerful woman who uses her sexual attractiveness to dominate, pollute, and kill. Shrews are a discursive concept; while actual women certainly adopted a variety of shrewish behaviors, this dissertation does not concern itself with trying to identify actual shrews. My interests are in excavating the intertwined histories of how some ideological and political actors adopted qualities historically identified with shrews for the sake of female empowerment and the overthrow of feudal values, while others pejoratively projected these same qualities onto women in order to shame them for seeking sexual and social equality.

The best known shrews in Ming-Qing literature include Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮 in *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (Plum in the golden vase), Xue Sujie 薛素姐 in *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳 (Marriage bonds to awaken the world), and Wang Xifeng 王熙鳳 in *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 (Dream of the red chamber). They are all strong women textually discredited for their ruthless will to power, autonomy, and self-fulfillment. These women are depicted as bestial in their fierce cruelty and they stand as foils to the ideal woman prescribed by Confucian ritual norms.

Shrew literature reached its peak during the seventeenth century, featuring full-blown comedies, satires, and novels on this stock theme. Researchers of Ming and Qing literature recognize that new variations on the stock character of the shrew continued to appear through the late Qing, but they generally maintain that shrew literature finally

came to its demise as China stood on the verge of modernity.⁴ My dissertation argues the opposite: Shrew imagery not only survived into the twentieth century, but has been central to the ways that new women have been portrayed and perceived, in both negative and positive terms.

The New Woman

Beginning in the 1890s, Chinese male reformers addressed the “woman question” (*funü wenti* 婦女問題) in response to the internal pressures of political corruption and the external pressures of Western imperialism. To the reformist intellectuals, the uneducated, subservient, and economically unproductive Chinese women were one of the root causes of the problems in Chinese society and culture. Heightened social demands for transforming women into capable and patriotic citizens led to the development of women’s education and the emergence of multiple new roles for women at the dawn of the twentieth century.

It was against this reformist backdrop, that terms such as “modern woman” or “new woman” began to appear in intellectual discourses to designate a new type of woman. The “modern” or “new” woman was not a temporal notion differentiating herself

⁴ Ellen Widmer directly refers to “the demise of shrew literature” when reviewing Yenna Wu’s *The Chinese Virago: A Literary Theme* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1995). See Ellen Widmer, “Review of *The Chinese Virago: A Literary Theme*,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 20 (1998), 187. Although Keith McMahon has made himself clear in refusing to see modernity as arising *ex nihilio* from tradition and has forcefully claimed that “whatever was on the verge did not simply disappear afterwards,” his exploration of continuity centers on idealized variations of “the remarkable woman” in late Qing love stories. He avoids any references to the shrew figure and does not talk about whether or how the shrew figure had evolved in any way after late imperial China. See McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 26; McMahon, “Love Martyrs and Love Cheaters at the End of the Chinese Empire,” in Doris Croissant, Catherine Vance Yeh, and Joshua S. Mostow, eds., *Performing “Nation”: Gender Politics in Literature, Theater, and the Visual Arts of China and Japan, 1880-1940* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008), 136; McMahon, *Polygamy and Sublime Passion: Sexuality in China on the Verge of Modernity* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 3, 15, 150.

neatly from the “premodern” or “old” woman in traditional China. A woman living in modern China did not naturally qualify herself as new or modern. The modern woman or new woman was a discursive ideological concept that emphasized social and political reform. On such instrumentalist grounds, the new woman in reformist discourses of late imperial and early Republican China was an extension of the traditional “good wife and wise mother” ideal (*liangqi xianmu* 良妻賢母). In society, this conservative construction of new woman gender roles faced an increasing challenge from women themselves as they became more publicly visible “as teachers and students, contributors to a women’s press, revolutionaries and suffragists.”⁵ Chapter II focuses on the early Chinese suffragettes. As in Europe, the press used the negative associations of the disruptive shrew to depict these women as uncivilized. The suffragettes strategically responded to these attempts to shame them by selectively aligning themselves with the trope of the shrew so as to lend power to their public persona.

In the ensuing New Culture (May Fourth) era from the mid 1910s to mid 1920s, discussions on the “woman question” began to take on a radical dimension. In the leading May Fourth journal *New Youth* (*Xin qingnian* 新青年), women’s subordinate status within the Confucian family system was treated as emblematic of the repression of individualism in traditional society. The new woman ideals generated by male May Fourth writers placed great emphasis on individual independence and personal autonomy. It was during the May Fourth era that the term “new woman” achieved currency. The first use of the term in the Chinese context occurred in a lecture delivered by Hu Shi 胡適

⁵ Paul J. Bailey, *Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 25.

(1891-1962) in 1918 at the Beijing Women's Normal School (*Beijing nüzi shifan xuexiao* 北京女子師範學校) and later published in *New Youth*. Hu Shi used the term *xin funü* 新婦女 (The New Women) to signify American women in his observations.⁶ In his lecture, Hu Shi's definition of the new woman included her use of “extremely intense speech” (*yanlun hen jilie* 言論很激烈), “extreme actions” (*xingwei wangwang quyu jiduan* 行為往往趨於極端), “disbelief in religion and disobedience in rules of conduct” (*bu xin zongjiao, buyi lifa* 不信宗教, 不依禮法) and being an “extremely good thinker with extremely high morals” (*sixiang jigao, daode jigao* 思想極高, 道德極高).⁷

Except for the positive reference to her intellect and high morals, Hu Shi's conception of the new woman maps neatly onto the stereotype of traditional shrew who is notorious for her biting language and offensive behaviors. Hu Shi's definition of the new woman is an important modern reformulation of the shrew trope, in which he grafted the progressive ideas of the day onto the transgressive and fearlessly rebellious spirit of the classic shrew. As Hu Shu intuited, this construction of the modern woman as feisty and indomitable became a powerful advocate for the new iconoclastic ideologies promoted by New Culture writers during the 1920s, and Leftists during the 1930s. For example, the new woman plays discussed in Chapter III showcased the shrewish qualities in the Nora

⁶ In addition to *xin funü*, terms such as *xin nüzi* 新女子 and *xin nüxing* 新女性 were also used to designate the new woman. By this time, Chinese terms in circulation for a new type of woman also include the “new style woman” (*xinshi funü* 新式婦女, *xinshi nüzi* 新式女子, *xinpai funü* 新派婦女) and the “modern woman” (*jindai nüzi* 近代女子, *jindai nüxing* 近代女性, *xiandai nüzi* 現代女子, *xiandai nüxing* 現代女性, *shidai nüzi* 時代女子). See, for example, Tze-lan D. Sang, “Failed Modern Girls in Early-Twentieth-Century China,” in Croissant, et al. eds, *Performing “Nation,”* 182, n.6.

⁷ Hu Shi 胡適, “Meiguo de funü” 美國的婦女, in Hu Shi, comp., *Hu Shi wencun* 胡適文存, 4 vols. (Taipei: Yuandong tushu gongsi, 1961), 1:662. Translation with slight modification from Kristine Harris, “The New Woman: Image, Subject, and Dissent in 1930s Shanghai Film Culture,” *Republican China* 20, no.2 (1995), 64.

figures beloved by May Fourth writers. Ouyang Yuqian's 歐陽予倩 (1889-1962) revival of Pan Jinlian, the epitome of traditional shrew, particularly demonstrates how a disparaged old female character could be legitimated to speak justice as a modern Nora.

After the May Fourth period, the new woman ideal shifted away from her bourgeois individualism to acquire a new identity as a revolutionary peasant woman. As the wartime atmosphere pushed the Nationalist government to reclaim traditional Confucian ideas about women's proper roles, Leftists began to produce images of radically independent and rebellious peasant women. Unlike the depictions of the ignorant and submissive peasant wife Xiang Linsao 祥林嫂 or the shrew Aigu 愛姑 who is only superficially unruly in Lu Xun's 魯迅 (1881-1936) two major stories on peasant women, these new Lefist models of new women were clearly defiant figures with a revolutionary impulse. Chapter IV analyzes the return of the motif of the shrewish wife and henpecked husband in Socialist constructions of the peasant new woman as an empowered wife and political activist. In the Great Leap Forward literature discussed in the epilogue, this image of feisty wifehood gained further prominence when peasant new women wives were deployed to police backward forces, including their husbands, for the sake of Party ideology.

Claiming a Genealogy

Scholarship to date on shrew literature and the new women narratives has treated them as two separate literary phenomena. No one has yet addressed the confluence of the two in Chinese modernity. Studies on the new woman focus on the interpretation of the image within the specific social and cultural contexts of modernizing China. They

emphasize the Western roots of China's gender modernization and of the production of the new woman. Few have traced the effects that previous indigenous female types had on the construction and understanding of the new woman. In particular, little scholarly attention has been paid to the role of the traditionally negative models in either the construction or reception of the new woman.

Hu Ying in *Tales of Translation: Composing the New Woman in China, 1899-1918* has traced one of the genealogical roots of the late-imperial composition of the new woman to the positive category of the talented woman (*cainü* 才女) in traditional society. The unacknowledged shrew type is left out of the “many antecedents” of the new woman Hu Ying considers in her book. Although she includes Pan Jinlian as one of the master plots to help interpret the emerging new woman Fu Caiyun 傅彩雲 in the late imperial novel *Niehai hua* 蔊海花 (A flower in the sea of sins; 1905), she does not follow this shrew strand and her conclusion obviously differentiates Fu Caiyun from Pan Jinlian.⁸

Catherine Yeh’s study on how the figure of the courtesan in late imperial Shanghai prefigured the emergence of the modern woman touches upon the influence and transformation of formerly negative female models in the modern milieu. Yeh’s work centers on historical evidence rather than the cultural imaginary. Her focus is on the modern woman in the entertainment culture rather than the new woman in the political and ideological realm.⁹

⁸ Hu Ying, *Tales of Translation: Composing the New Woman in China, 1899-1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

⁹ Catherine Vance Yeh, *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals, and Entertainment Culture, 1850-1910* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

Haiyan Lee has a small section in her book *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* examining the rehabilitation of the shrew on the modern stage. Although she has touched upon Ouyang Yuqian's play *Pan Jinlian*, her analysis centers on Yuan Changying's 袁昌英 (1894-1973) modern play *Kongque dongnan fei 孔雀東南飛* (Southeast flies the peacock; 1929), in which the redeemed shrew is not a new woman. Lee's interest in the modern representations of the shrew mainly concerns the changing views of sex and desire.¹⁰ But as my study shows, rather than being a passing image that modern writers occasionally borrowed to serve their modern agendas, the traditional shrew actually stands as one of the genealogical roots of the new woman.

When discussing the new woman, scholarship tends to center its attention on the May Fourth era and places emphasis on the new woman fiction written by leading male May Fourth writers such as Lu Xun, Yu Dafu 郁達夫 (1896-1945), and Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896-1981). Less attention is paid to other constructions of the new woman and alternative forms of new woman narratives. This study spans the 1910s to the 1960s drawing on different types of texts including literary works, the press, unofficial histories, theater, and political documents, to analyze a variety of new woman ideals. Aspects of the shrew can be found in many of these new woman paradigms.

The interdisciplinary scope of this dissertation recognizes that the new woman as a protean concept that has undergone constant and radical changes throughout the Republican and Socialist eras. Beyond acknowledging the privileged role of May Fourth intellectuals in giving form to the concept of the new woman, this study challenges the

¹⁰ Haiyan Lee, "The Shrew Rehabilitated," in *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

idea that their psychologically fractured female protagonists should stand for the dominant, iconic image of the new woman.¹¹ As shown by the various sources in this study, many new women characters and models in Republican China differ from the tragic Zi Jun 子君 in Lu Xun's canonical story *Shangshi* 傷逝 (Regret for the past; 1925) or the perplexed and stymied new women in Mao Dun's early leftist writings. The new women, both real and fictional, examined in this study, are neither failed models of engagement with the modern, nor the brooding, inward-looking bourgeois women who have no aspirations other than to find themselves through love. They are the empowered modern subjects who are willing to adopt a variety of shrewish attributes to enter the public sphere in order to fight for political and legal rights as women. These feisty and rebellious women form an alternative line of development in the construction of the new woman as a powerful social actor; unlike the much more studied distressed new women who limit themselves to the traditional *nei* sphere of domesticity and rely on male partners and lovers to help them actualize themselves as modern feminine individuals, the new women whom are the focus of my study strive to be the equals, and sometimes even the leaders, of men in their march toward progress.

In order to map out a genealogy of these empowered new women, this study frequently goes back and forth between traditional perspectives on the shrew, which are by definition negative, and the modern attitudes toward her various qualities. For many

¹¹ For how leading May Fourth male intellectuals constructed images of psychologically troubled new women to project their own sense of identity crisis, see Ching-ku Stephen Chan, "The Language of Despair: Ideological Representations of the 'New Woman' by May Fourth Writers," in Tani Barlow, ed., *Gender Politics in Modern China: Writing and Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Sylvia Li-chun Lin, "Unwelcome Heroines: Mao Dun and Yu Dafu's Creations of a New Chinese Woman," *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese*, vol.1, no.2 (1998); Jin Feng, *The New Woman in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Fiction* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2004), chapter two, three, and five.

modern radicals who were attempting to challenge the feudal *status quo*, the same set of shrewish qualities, such as lack of respect for social decorum, a willingness to use violence to pursue her own goals, jealousy, and wantonness that pejoratively defined the traditional shrew, were transvalued as a positive set of behaviors that could be used to create an empowered modern woman who could fully participate as a citizen of the new nation. Female jealousy became a symbol of agency, an appropriate protest against gender inequality, and an expression of love. Female violence became a manifestation of a forceful subjectivity, and was celebrated as one of the critical qualities of the leftist new women. Wantonness also came to mark the unconstrained nature and free will of a modern woman in pursuit of personal fulfillment. The bold character of the wanton women was even deliberately integrated into the Communist women's movement to push the wheel of revolution forward.

Indeed, repeatedly throughout the modern era, having a strong, rebellious, and even fiery spirit became a desirable quality for women. In real life, Lin Daiyu 林黛玉, the fragile and tragic protagonist of *Honglou meng* likely still served as the ultimate image of a desirable woman for men.¹² Yet in critical discourses her appeal apparently was fading as she began to be described as a model of all that was wrong with the weak and sickly feudal ideals for women. As Henrietta Harrison wrote, “the new ideal of citizenship came to affect the whole definition of femininity, and thus the construction of gender. In the past the delicacy and weakness of women had been their defining characteristic. Generations of young men sighed over such weak and sickly heroines as

¹² Catherine Yeh has written about how a legendary Shanghai courtesan took the name of Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 in order to attract customers. According to Yeh, in addition to Lin Daiyu, there were also “Lu Daiyu, Li Daiyu, Su Daiyu,” which showcased the popularity of the character Lin Daiyu among Shanghai prostitutes. See Yeh, *Shanghai Love*, 142.

Lin Daiyu in the *Dream of the Red Chamber*.¹³ Lin Daiyu, however, was rarely mentioned as an ideal for modern femininity, and writers never mention her, even with nostalgia, when criticizing the vulgarity of the new woman. The face of femininity was changing. As David Strand points out, “Modern-minded Chinese were coming to expect that women, like men, would be physically more active, assertive, and even vulgar in the role of citizen.”¹⁴

Vulgarity is one of the qualities associated with the traditional shrew that marked her as being outside the bounds of ideal femininity. The changing views of vulgarity as an aspect of engagement in the modern public sphere powerfully connects the modern construction of the new woman back to traditional shrew narratives and reveals how traditional shrewish attributes were being revitalized as a compelling dimension of the modern new woman. The changing attitude toward shrewish attributes is the modern adoption of the term *pola* 激辣, sometimes also as 激刺 (shrewish, feisty, pungent, forceful) as a positive description of the fearless and rebellious spirit that many wished to inculcate in new women in order to further their goals of political and social progress.

In premodern texts *po* was widely used to describe a quality of unruliness. For example, the Monkey in *Xiyou ji* 西遊記 (Journey to the west) is frequently referred to as a “*pohou*” 激猴 (wanton, impetuous monkey). *La* 辣 (hot, peppery, ruthless) was associated with ruthless characters. When describing female characters, it predominantly refers to those shrews known for their peppery character, pungent language, and cruel

¹³ Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 77.

¹⁴ David Strand, *An Unfinished Republic: Leading by Word and Deed in Modern China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 127.

behaviors. By no means were *po* and *la* traditionally sanctioned as qualities of desired femininity. In *Honglou meng*, the shrew Wang Xifeng is immediately introduced as a “*popi*” 濑皮 (ruffian, villain) and “*lazi*” 辣子 (hot pepper, peppercorn). When first meeting Wang Xifeng, Lin Daiyu is taken aback by her “brash and unmannerly” introduction.¹⁵ Xia Jingui 夏金桂, the shrewish wife of Xue Pan 薛蟠 in *Honglou meng*, is directly described as “*pola*” (“a spoilt shrew”) in the text.¹⁶

In the modern context, as female desires and sexuality were being seen in a new light, the fierce *pola* model of womanly behavior came to take on more positive meanings. In Lao She’s 老舍 (1899-1966) *Liutun de* 柳屯的 (A woman from the Liu village; 1934), one of the characters refers to the ugly and disruptive shrew in relatively favorable terms as a “*pola*” woman who is capable and resolute in organizing housework and managing the home.¹⁷ In *Shou dao* 獸道 (The way of the beast; 1936), Sha Ting 沙汀 (1904-1992) includes a description of “a cursing shrew” (*pola de zhouma* 濑辣的咒罵); the woman’s tirade is presented sympathetically as her means of last resort to survive the wartime hardships.¹⁸ Sha Ting challenged the image of woman as victim and created a model of tough resiliency. The quality of being *pola* also came to be linked with the progressive new women as a mode of female empowerment in daring to be transgressive

¹⁵ Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 and Gao E 高鶚, *Honglou meng (sanjia pingben)* 紅樓夢 (三家評本), 2 vols. (reprint; Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 1:41. For the translation, see David Hawkes and John Minford, trans., *The Story of the Stone*, 5 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 1:91.

¹⁶ Cao Xueqin and Gao E, *Honglou meng*, 2:1491. For the translation, see Hawkes and Minford, trans., *The Story of the Stone*, 4:224.

¹⁷ Lao She 老舍, “*Liutun de*” 柳屯的, in Fan Jun 樊駿, ed., *Lao She mingzuo xinshang* 老舍名作欣賞 (Beijing: Zhongguo heping chubanshe, 1995), 467.

¹⁸ Sha Ting 沙汀, “*Shou dao*” 獸道, in Sha Ting, comp., *Sha Ting xuanji* 沙汀選集 (Hong Kong: Wenxue chubanshe, 1957), 120.

if needed. Ouyang Yuqian stages such a *pola* new woman protagonist in his play *Pofu 潑婦* (The shrew; 1925). Lan Ping 藍蘋, later known as Jiang Qing 江青 (1914-1991), wife of Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893-1976) and figurehead of the “Gang of Four” (*siren bang 四人幫*), publicly and proudly claimed herself as a *pola* woman. Mao Dun in his story *Lu路* (The road; 1932) directly calls upon the new women not to be shy but be *pola* so as to merge into the masses (*buyao haixiu, pola xie, zuandao quanzhong zhongjian qu 不要害羞，潑辣些，鑽到群眾中間去!*).¹⁹ In the Great Leap fiction during the late 1950s and early 1960s, *pola* was publicly advocated as crucial to the socialist heroines.

These modern texts reclaim the potential of *pola* strength as a positive quality and dissociate it from the figure of the traditional shrew who willfully wreaks havoc to pursue her own goals. The new culture intellectuals recognized that traditional modes of women’s virtue would never work to help women break out of their traditional roles, and that some degree of shrewish behavior and discourse was needed for women to achieve substantial progress in social, cultural, and gender reforms. These modern texts identify the quality of being *pola* as being unconstrained, independent, and willing to take leadership—qualities that were expected and even necessary for the new woman to stand up to a society that was less enlightened than she. There was a line of development from the negatively portrayed traditional shrew to the principled new woman willing to speak truth to power. This development allows us to see the direct line from tradition to modernity and forces us to reconsider the current historiographical paradigm that traces China’s gender modernization to Western roots.

¹⁹ Mao Dun 茅盾, “Lu” 路, in Mao Dun, comp., *Mao Dun wenji* 茅盾文集, 10 vols. (Hong Kong: Jindai tushu gongsi, 1966), 2:319.

A variety of scholars have touched upon either the issue of the unseemly aspects of the new women or the question of the employment of shrew imagery in the modern literary and cultural representations of the new women.²⁰ But although their studies attest to the visibility of this theme, their descriptive recognition of these issues has been tangential, dispersed, and limited. By more centrally highlighting the shrew/new woman linkage, my study provides a concentrated, historically contextualized analysis of associations between the new woman and the shrew.

My chapters are organized by new woman types. The next chapter introduces depictions of early Chinese radical suffragettes in the 1910s, a new category of the public new woman. These activists were labeled as shrews in newspaper articles, unofficial histories, popular fiction, folk arts, and court reports. These suffragettes strategically utilized their identification with shrews in shaping their own public image. Chapter III looks at Ouyang Yuqian's rehabilitation of the shrew figure as a form of female empowerment in his Nora plays in the 1920s. Lan Ping developed her public identity through her performances of Nora both on and off the stage during the 1930s. In Chapter IV, I examine modern representations of shrewish wifehood, spanning the comic stories

²⁰ See, for example, Wang Dewei 王德威, “Pan Jinlian, Sai Jinhua, Yin Xueyan: Zhongguo xiaoshuo shijie zhong ‘huoshui’ zaoxing de yanbian” 潘金蓮、賽金花、尹雪豔：中國小說世界中‘禍水’造型的演變, in his *Xiangxiang Zhongguo de fangfa: lishi, xiaoshuo, xushi* 想像中國的方法：歷史，小說，敘事 (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhì sanlian shudian, 1998); Yomi Braester, “Rewriting Tradition, Misreading History: Twentieth-Century (Sub)versions of Pan Jinlian’s Story,” in his *Witness against History: Literature, Film, and Public Discourse in Twentieth-century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Madeleine Yue Dong, “Unofficial History and Gender Boundary Crossing in the Early Republic: Shen Peizhen and Xiaofengxian,” in *Gender in Motion: Divisions of Labor and Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China*, edited by Bryna Goodman and Wendy Larson (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); Paul Bailey, “‘Women Behaving Badly’: Crime, Transgressive Behaviour and Gender in Early Twentieth Century China,” *Nan Nü: Men, Women, and Gender in China*, vol.8, no.1 (2006); Louise Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy: Women’s Suffrage in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Strand, *An Unfinished Republic*; Richard King, “Li Zhun’s ‘A Brief Biography of Li Shuangshuang’: A Fast-Talking Vixen Creates a Village Canteen,” in his *Milestones on a Golden Road: Writing for Chinese Socialism, 1945-80* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013).

written by the “Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies” writers; post-May Fourth wartime writings that promoted powerful models of wifehood in the 1930s and ’40s; and the Communist promotion of strong wives in both policies and literature during the Chinese Soviet Republic and the Yan’an era. The epilogue examines the positive reconfiguration of *pola* womanhood in the model of the shrewish wife in the Great Leap Forward to meet the new political imperatives. As I argue, the construction of women as strong and independent agents in each of these eras makes use of traditional shrew imagery as the basic framework. At the end of the epilogue, I propose a future study on the contemporary image of the *nü hanzi* 女漢子 (manly woman) to further engage with the examination of the afterlife of the traditional shrew.

The traditional shrew did not die out as China entered the modern age. In the new times, she has been serving as a fearless and rebellious model of female empowerment and willingness to break previous constraints on women. As I argue, the modern women in her many guises as suffragette, sexual independent, and gender radical are female types grafted onto the violent, sexualized, and transgressive typologies of the traditional shrew. Shrewish behaviors and shrew discourse live on strong. By mapping out an alternative lineage of the shrew’s afterlife in modern China, my dissertation uncovers the contested history of the new woman as a strong female model empowered by the formerly repudiated qualities associated with the traditional shrew. My goal is to continue to bridge the artificial divide between modern and traditional studies of China, and to expand the debates about the nature of Chinese modernity by uncovering how constructions of modern women are evolving from and grafted onto the traditional shrew.

CHAPTER II

TO BE OR NOT TO BE A SHREW: EARLY CHINESE SUFFRAGETTES AND THE DISCOURSE OF FEMALE VIRTUE

On April 21, 1907, the *Beijing nübaobao* 北京女報 (*Beijing Women's News*) published a short story about a fight between a couple in Beijing. Under the title of “The Expansion of Women’s Rights” (*Nüquan pengzhang* 女權膨漲), the story depicted in satirical tone the fierceness of the wife, who knocks her husband onto the ground, rides him, and dramatically cries, shouts, hits, and curses. Amazed by such a spectacle of a woman’s strength (as the author gasped in the commentary “*Zhuang zai, Da’nainai*” 壮哉大奶奶 “What an impressive, strong woman!”), the author called the fight a laughingstock (*xiaotan* 笑談) and closed the story by inviting the readers to laugh along.

Shrew stories in the history of Chinese literature often featured similar ferocious women and their hen-pecked husbands. The authors of such stories almost always depicted those shrew-typed women as laughingstocks in order to laugh off their potential threat. However, this 1907 piece was different from traditional shrew stories because the shrew motif now fell under the new concept of women’s rights. It presented a novel perspective that not only differed but also was divorced from the past usage of the persona of the shrew as an emblem of “the breakdown of the sociopolitical order within orthodox discourse.”²¹ No longer a reflection of the weakness or moral failure of her husband, the shrewish wife, shaped by the modern trend of female empowerment, stood as an independent subject who could hold, enjoy, and even abuse her own female power.

²¹ Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Published by Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 121.

This treatment of the shrew figure offered a snapshot of the social and cultural transition at the verge of Chinese modernity. Admittedly, the shrew image at the time was still mostly used in a negative sense, reflecting the authors' anxieties when women's education and the promotion of gender equality were happening at an almost uncontrollable pace.²² Yet it was noticeable that even if the shrew was treated negatively, she was negative now more in her own right. She was not used to illustrate other male characters' defects. She entered modern China with a renewed life of her own. Now assuming a subject position in stories and public discourses, she came to intimidate society in a more direct and realistic manner.

This chapter focuses on social practices and public discourses surrounding early Chinese suffragettes after the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912. Mostly educated and trained in Japan, these women had shed their blood on the battlefield against the Qing regime. After the accomplishment of the revolution, they transferred their energies from the military to the political, asking for equal rights to vote. In order to achieve their goals, they resorted to force, provoking deep anxieties and harsh reactions in the public.

I analyze how the public discourses that raged in the emerging newspaper and periodical press as well as in popular fiction, unofficial histories, and folk arts deployed the traditional trope of the shrew to come to terms with the high-profile public nature of the suffragettes. I also explore how these disparaged women actually played a part in

²² Private schools for women emerged in the late 1890s. In 1904, the first official document on women's education warned against "the increasing presence of young girls in public as private female schools began to open" and proclaimed that young girls "should be educated *in the home and for the home*." However, social demands for women's education apparently went so far beyond the official control that the Qing government, under pressure, had to dismiss the 1904 document and "establish a system of public education for girls and women in 1907." See Joan Judge, *The Precious Raft of History: The Past, the West, and the Woman Question in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 72-73.

their public images as shrews. They, as social actors, exhausted every right and freedom that they could possibly have to carve out new subjectivities for themselves to perform in public. They accepted some of the shrewish qualities of which the public accused them, but they rebutted others they saw as inappropriate or harmful to their public personae. Unlike shrews who in the past had been the products of the imagination of male authors, the suffragettes strived hard to control their own presentation. Sometimes aligning with and other times rejecting the public labeling as shrews, the suffragettes open up a new direction for understanding the old trope of the shrew and for conceiving the newly emergent public woman.

The Public Woman in the Political Realm

The suffragettes I examine in this chapter were the radicals among the women activists in the women's rights movement. Compared to the moderates who demanded that women should improve themselves within their family lives before entering the public, the radicals adopted a revolutionary approach and advocated immediate exercise of women's citizenship directly in public spaces. The radicals featured more frequent and disruptive public activities than the moderates. Influenced by English suffragettes and their past experience as female militants,²³ the radical suffragettes resorted to violent

²³ Many studies consider the violence of radical suffragettes in China as a direct imitation of activities of British and American suffragettes, see for example: Ono Kazuko, *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978), 85; Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*, 71, 81-82; Strand, *An Unfinished Republic*, 116-17, 120; Jad Adams, *Women and the Vote: a World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 357-59; and Elisabeth Croll, *Feminism and Socialism in China* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1978), 70.

measures when offended by male politicians' indifference, hostility, or blatant betrayal.²⁴

They stormed the parliament, cursed and slapped male politicians, kicked policemen, smashed windows, and ransacked offices of newspapers.

In 1903, Jin Tianhe 金天翮 (1874-1947) in his renowned *The Women's Bell* (*Nüjie zhong* 女界鐘) had suggested in radical terms the idea of acquiring female franchise through extreme violence.²⁵ A decade later, when male intellectuals were facing the reality of women's violence, they finally understood how threatening it was to allow women into the political realm. These early radical suffragettes presented to society a new category of the public woman.

A Different Public Woman

Female students constituted the first group of public women in China.²⁶ Their novel, active presence in the urban landscape at the turn of the twentieth century

²⁴ In *Women Journalists and Feminism in China: 1898-1937*, Yuxin Ma questions the category of "militant suffragists" used in studies on early Chinese suffragettes. She contends that studies should distinguish "when and why" the suffragettes turned militant in their campaign, because even the most radical group adopted legitimate institutional means in the beginning and again when they saw militant methods were unable to achieve desired results. Ma calls for a more meticulous representation of the violent or militant nature of the radical suffragettes. See Yuxin Ma, *Women Journalists and Feminism in China: 1898-1937* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2010), 102, 110-17.

²⁵ The author Jin Tianhe maintains that in order to have woman suffrage, some other means are necessary if written appeals cannot achieve the goal. Those means include shedding tears, blood, and wielding swords, bombs, and cannons. See Jin Tianhe 金天翮, *Nüjie zhong* 女界鐘 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2003), 63-64. Although the idea of women participating in politics had been suggested in the Qing novel *Jing hua yuan* (鏡花緣), Jin Tianhe was probably the first intellectual to openly promote a violent method for achieving this goal.

²⁶ Ma, *Women Journalists and Feminism in China*, 132. Although prostitutes had made themselves "public" long before the female students, I agree with Joan Judge and Yuxin Ma in referring to female students as the very first group of public women in China, in light of the modern concept of public space and the relationship of female students to the cultural ideological construction at the turn of the twentieth century.

provoked hope as well as anxiety among social critics.²⁷ They often responded to new opportunities in the public space in their own ways without regard to rules or advice made by officials and intellectuals.²⁸ They further amazed the public when they automatically organized women's military activism during the revolution and insisted on joining the army to fight on the front line. Those who had studied in Japan were especially prominent because of their more militant gestures. The suffragettes to be discussed in this chapter are exactly those women who had studied militant tactics in Japan and brought them back to China as techniques for the battlefield and later for the political stage.

During the revolution, critics praised the public women as present-day embodiments of traditional women warriors such as Hua Mulan and Qin Liangyu.²⁹ Yet once the new regime was established the women were immediately attacked for their unconventional requests and behaviors. As Louise Edwards observes, the Chinese audience had considered women's public participation in warfare as simply another illustration of "the long-standing conceptions of women warriors in China's past—extraordinary women achieving extraordinary goals during times of national crisis who return to the domestic sphere when order is restored."³⁰ However, when the public expected the women to return to their domestic roles of daughters and wives, they

²⁷ For a discussion of female students as embodiments of the new social category of "public women," see Judge, *The Precious Raft of History*, 72-81.

²⁸ For cases and criticism of unseemly behaviors of female students at the turn of the century, see Bailey, "'Women Behaving Badly,'" 179-92. In footnote 2, Bailey also offers a list of studies on the behavior of female students in the late Qing and early Republic.

²⁹ Paul Bailey, *Gender and Education in China: Gender Discourses and Women's Schooling in the Early Twentieth Century* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 74.

³⁰ Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*, 66.

shockingly found that these women not only refused to return to the domestic space, but even demanded full citizenship and equal rights with men in order to reinforce and substantialize their public presence.

These new public women presented a different vision of woman and politics altogether. As David Strand pictures it, “A young woman with bobbed hair scolding a middle-aged male politician standing in the way of her winning political rights conjured up a new brand of politics.”³¹ Strand refers to politics on its own terms, yet this picture also articulated a change of gender politics. While the author of “The Expansion of Women’s Rights” discussed at the start of this chapter could only satirize the rise of female power through imagining conjugal conflict and fierce wifedom, the suffragettes were literally acting out the vision of shrews as the embodiment of female empowerment in this new time. Echoing the trope of the traditional shrew, the suffragettes brought domestic violence that was originally directed at incapable husbands out onto disappointing male politicians. Their forceful tongues and palms came to scold and slap the men that stood against their equal rights and the democratic spirit of the Republic. Shrewish behaviors of the women achieved legitimacy that helped them carve a foothold within the new Republican system. The unstable political environment at the start of the new regime made it possible for the women to upset the gendered spatial order and force their way into the public realm.

In this light, even if the suffragettes did not achieve franchise at the end, their movement was clearly not a simple failure. They shook the norms of both gender and politics in China and made the two intertwine at a deeper level: “Women’s suffrage in China in the 1910s shaped the national politics and the meaning of democracy in China

³¹ Strand, *An Unfinished Republic*, 2.

by injecting gender into early republican politics.”³² Through the suffragettes, gender became “a founding category in modern politics.”³³ The injection of gender into politics featured the women’s presence in the political sphere, and more critically, their critical awareness of being women as well as being citizens. They represented a consciousness that claimed and defended a different notion of feminine time outside of masculine time. In the beginning, the suffragettes were like the female warriors in the past who had entered the public domain by means of transcending the prescribed private and cyclical feminine time and joining the linear masculine time under the banner of nationalism.³⁴ Yet when the tide of revolution ebbed, the suffragettes realized how unsatisfying the enterprise of “imitating the masculine” (*ni’nan zhuyi* 擬男主義)³⁵ was and how little it could bring them. They demanded their own time, a time that differed from the life-cycle-bound pattern and also was unlike masculine temporality, but reflected their own aspirations as modern women with legal public identities.

Men in the eyes of the suffragettes moved farther away from models for emulation. The women openly announced their disappointment in the male sex and called them “failed stinky men” (*shibai chou nanzi* 失敗臭男子) in contrast to the purity,

³² Ma, *Women Journalists and Feminism in China*, 102.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ For cyclical and linear, feminine and masculine time, see Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, vol.2, *Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 1991), 231-32. Julia Kristeva, “Women’s Time,” in Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

³⁵ The term “*ni’nan zhuyi*” was first used by Guo Zhenyi 郭箴一 in 1937. See Guo Zhenyi, *Zhongguo funü wenti* 中國婦女問題 (Changsha: Shangwu yin shu guan, 1937 and 1938), 202-3.

nobility, flexibility, and tenacity of women.³⁶ Not every discourse the suffragettes used essentialized the gender contrast, but it was apparent that women's discourses were becoming more gender-sensitive and gender-identified. Even the women's use of the term "women's circles" (*nüjie* 女界) marked an updated understanding of sphere differentiation that was based more on gender than on social status. Prostitutes were now included or addressed more frequently in either the women's appeals to their female compatriots or in some playful writings making fun of the collaboration of female suffragists and their sisters in the brothels.³⁷

A Different Public and Gender Order

The period from the closing months of 1911 to late 1912 or early 1913 is known as the short but intense "first wave" of the women's suffrage movement in China.³⁸ It witnessed the forceful public presence of the early women activists, which started from women's outrage at the exclusion of women as equal citizens in the Republican constitution.

In October 1911, when Song Jiaoren 宋教仁 (1882-1913) wrote the first version of the Republican constitution ("The Ezhou Constitution"), it stated that all people were equal, without specifying whether the term "people" included both sexes. The ambiguity

³⁶ Wu Mulan 吳木蘭, "Tongmeng nüzi jingwulianxi dui xuanyan shu" 同盟女子經武練習隊宣言書, *Tianduo bao* 天鐸報 (January 2, 1912).

³⁷ The term "*nüjie*" did not always include all women. For the sake of patriotic or moralistic purposes, prostitutes were often excluded from mobilization efforts. See Paul Bailey, *Gender and Education in China*, 190, n.35.

³⁸ Louise Edwards, "Opposition to Women's Suffrage in China: Confronting Modernity in Governance," in *Women in China: The Republican Period in Historical Perspective*, edited by Mechthild Leutner and Nicola Spakowski (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2005), 113.

remained in the draft of the Provisional Constitution. However, when the senate promulgated the constitution on March 11, 1912, in article 5 Song Jiaoren's statement was expanded as: all people are equal, regardless of race, class, or religion. Sex was left out. At the time, three prominent suffragettes Zhang Hanying 張漢英, Tang Qunying 唐群英, and Wang Changguo 王昌國 had transformed the Women's Northern Expedition Team (*Nüzi beifa dui* 女子北伐隊) into the Shenzhou Women's Suffrage Alliance (*Shenzhou nüjie canzheng tongmenghui* 神州女界參政同盟會) and submitted a petition to the parliament declaring the urgency of women's political rights. Facing the refusal of their requests and the omission in the constitution of gender equality, the members of the Women's Suffrage Alliance immediately sent another letter to President Sun Yat-sen and the parliament asking to add the phrase “regardless of sex” to article 5.³⁹ The parliament decided to discuss their petition in the chambers on March 19. “Tang and about a dozen other women requested permission to enter the parliament to speak on behalf of their proposal. They received a flat denial in response.”⁴⁰

Enraged by the indifference of male politicians, the women took their anger out in public acts of aggression. On March 19, Tang Qunying, carrying her pistol, led over twenty women into the chambers where they seated themselves among the parliamentarians. During the debate, when their proposal was jeered and guffawed at by conservative male delegates, news reports described the women protesting with “harsh language” (*e'yu dichu* 惡語抵觸) and “wanton roars” (*dasi paoxiao/xiaoma* 大肆咆哮/

³⁹ “Nüzi canzheng hui shang Sun Zhongshan shu” 女子參政會上孫中山書, *Shi bao* 時報 (March 23, 1912).

⁴⁰ Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*, 80.

哮罵, *paoxiao kangji* 嚣哮抗激, *paoxiao fenxun* 嚣哮奮迅, *paoxiao zhenglun* 嚣哮爭論).⁴¹ In subsequent days the women's aggressive actions escalated, as authorities were reluctant to make further progress. On March 20 and 30, the suffragettes stormed the parliament again, shouting and cursing, pushing and kicking policemen, and even their hands bled (*shou jie yixue* 手皆溢血) from smashing windows.⁴²

In April, Yuan Shikai replaced Sun Yat-sen as the president of the Republic and moved the government to Beijing. The suffragettes continued to lobby the National Congress in Beijing for women's voting rights. In August, the women twice physically attacked Song Jiaoren—the leader of the Revolutionary Alliance and the principal spokesman of the newly formed Nationalist Party—in public meetings. Despite the women's constant protests, their suffrage campaign lost momentum from late 1912 under the regime of Yuan Shikai's anti-democratic government. The press reported that the suffragettes had their last boisterous protest on December 11, 1912.⁴³ Not until later in the decade during the New Culture Movement (1915-1925) did the women's suffrage movement regain impetus to embrace its second wave.

The first wave had failed to reach its political goals. But it dealt a heavy blow to the traditional gender norms and gave rise to a different public order. From responses in the press, it can be noted that what really caused a stir in public was not the women's

⁴¹ “Yaoqiu nüzi canzheng quan zhi wuli” 要求女子參政權之武力, *Shi bao* (March 23, 1912). “Nüzi yaoqiu canzheng quan” 女子要求參政權, *Minli bao* 民立報 (March 23, 1912). “Nüzi yi wuli yaoqiu canzheng quan” 女子以武力要求參政權, *Shen bao* 申報 (March 24, 1912). “Lun nüzi yaoqiu canzheng quan wenti” 論女子要求參政權問題, *Shen bao* (March 25, 1912). Meng Huan 夢幻, “Lun nüzi yaoqiu canzheng quan zhi guaixiang” 論女子要求參政權之怪象, *Da gong bao* 大公報 (March 30, 1912). “Xian ping er (Nanjing)” 閒評二（南京）, *Da gong bao* (March 30, 1912).

⁴² “Yaoqiu nüzi canzheng quan zhi wuli,” 2.

⁴³ “Nüshi dama canyiyuan” 女士大罵參議員, *Aiguo bao* 愛國報 (December 11, 1912).

political claims but their breaking of the separation between the inner and outer spheres (*nei-wai* 內外) and their challenging of traditional gender propriety.

Nei-wai, together with *yin-yang*, were the two traditional Chinese polarities that defined gender difference and gender ethics through the language of spatial propriety and cosmological schema. The two notions justified “the social and political submission of women to men, the exclusion of women from a direct role in public life, and the assertion that women were intellectually and morally inferior to men.”⁴⁴ *Nei-wai*, in particular, not only restricted women to the inner quarters of the house, but also prescribed the essential distinction between the sexes as well as the division of labor. Women were associated with domestic duties such as raising children and taking care of household chores and were linked with traits such as quietness, placidity, and obedience.

In the traditional conception, a shrew is the sheer antithesis to the Confucian ideal of womanhood. She is loud and short-tempered, instead of being quiet and peaceful. She usually refuses or is unable to bear children. She upsets the domestic order by abusing her husband, the servants, concubines, in-laws, and the man’s offspring with other women. In addition to her failure to manage the *nei*, the shrew also disregards the gendered spatial order to step into the *wai* at her will. Her unabashed willingness to expose her body as well as her behavioral and verbal improprieties in public always bring severe humiliation to herself and the family.

Similar to the shrews of traditional literature, the suffragettes stepped out of the domestic space and entered the public realm without being concerned at all about their vulgar speech, conduct, and their intermingling with men. To the conservatives, the

⁴⁴ Lisa Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 7.

suffragettes were traditional shrews coming to life. In the press, the ready-made image of the shrew aided social critics in finding the right word for the description of the threatening new women. Besides the curses and roars mentioned earlier that clearly mark shrew attributes, press reports also used terms such as “barbarian deeds, shrewish and violent behaviors” (*yeman shouduan, pohan xingwei* 野蠻手段, 潑悍行為), “unreasonably troublesome” (*wuli qu’nao* 無理取鬧), “wantonly disturbing” (*renyi raoluan* 任意擾亂), and “fierce edge” (*xiongfeng* 兇鋒) to portray the suffragettes.⁴⁵ In similar language, the press also referred to English suffragettes as “bitches and shrews” (*jian nü pofu* 賤女潑婦).⁴⁶ All of the terms invoked the animalistic, disruptive image of the shrew, especially the violent *hanfu* (悍婦) and the scattering *pofu* (潑婦) who now spilled blood and scattered pieces of broken glass.

However, the suffragettes were also depicted as scattering female effluvia. In the unofficial histories I will examine in a later section, the suffragette is literally the *pofu* who is unable or refuses to contain her excreta, even in front of male public figures. Here, I will briefly look at how the image of the leaking female body was used in the press to invoke the *pofu* and her transgression of the *nei-wai* order.

Figure 1 is an editorial cartoon published in *Zhongguo ribao* 中國日報 (*China Daily*) on November 9, 1912. It depicted a bobbed-hair woman giving a speech at the podium while breastfeeding her baby. She uses one arm to hold the baby and lifts the

⁴⁵ “Nüzi yaoqiu canzheng quan”, Meng Huan, “Lun nüzi yaoqiu canzheng quan zhi guaixiang.”

⁴⁶ “Yingguo nüzi zhi baoheng” 英國女子之暴橫, *Minli bao* (April 23, 1912).

other arm in the air as if she is speaking with quite a passion. With her blouse wide open, she clearly exposes her breasts to the male audience sitting under the podium.



Figure 1. “Obstacles to Women’s Suffrage” (*Nüzi canzheng zhi zhang’ai*). *Zhongguo ribao* (November 9, 1912), 7.

This cartoon is unusual and disturbing. Its disturbance lies in its crude exhibition of the mingling of spheres of the personal and the political, the private and the public, the *nei* and the *wai*, and the *yin*/feminine and the *yang*/masculine. A woman appears in the political realm, a long-defined masculine space. She is even nursing, a behavior that is strictly prescribed to the domestic. Standing high over a group of random men, the woman is unabashedly nursing, which marks her dismissal of gender separation. By captioning the drawing in the phrase “obstacles to women’s suffrage” (*Nüzi canzheng zhi zhang’ai* 女子參政之障礙), the author conveyed a pessimistic, if not all disapproving, message on women’s suffrage: to bring a person of the *nei* out to the *wai* and to the political arena would only seem unnatural and offensive. With the exposed female chest

and the leaking breast milk, the cartoon expressed its denial of women's public presence through the trope of female pollution.

In traditional Chinese literature, women's bodily effluvia are often linked with sinister omens or catastrophic power. This is especially true for the *pofu* shrew whose discharges are as unconstrained as her unruly nature. In the cartoon, the image of the shouting and nursing suffragette in the public realm evokes some classic Ming-Qing shrew narratives. For example, in the late Ming/early Qing novel *Marriage Bonds to Awaken the World* (*Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳), there is a scene in chapter 68 when Sujie 素姐, the epitome of traditional shrews, joins a group of women for a public pilgrimage. Maram Epstein analyzes how this scene depicts in vivid terms the disturbing spectacle of a group of unconstrained women acting wantonly in public.

The description of the crowd of women preparing to set out on the pilgrimage to Taishan is an offensive scene of pollution: women are running back and forth "like a pack of dogs," cursing, defecating, menstruating, nursing babies, and yelling orders back and forth. [...] the unruly, leaking female bodies in this scene are naturalized and foregrounded as emblems of social transgression.⁴⁷

Similar to the manner of the traditional narrative, *Zhongguo ribao* delivered its conservative view on women's public activities through imagining the pollution that women's bodily functions could bring to the public space. It visualized the concept of feminine pollution so as to make evident that allowing women into the political realm would be unthinkable and absurd: to mingle *nei*-associated activities with the *wai* would

⁴⁷ Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, 130-31.

appear both as a source of contamination to the public and as a threat to the domestic order.

The dismissal of women's endeavors to transgress their domestic roles reflected a pressing social concern about the blurring of gender difference. Expressing their deep distrust of women's suffrage, articles from the mainstream media chose to comment on the women's unconventional conduct instead of their political agendas. The articles spotlighted moments of the women's transgression of behavioral propriety: how the women "ignored the order and rushed into the parliamentary chambers" (*buting jing ru yishiting* 不聽竟入議事廳), how they "simply seated themselves among the delegates" (*yu zhu yiyuan zazuo* 與諸議員雜坐), and how they "pulled on the sleeves and jackets of the assemblymen" (*jing jianzhi yiyuan yimei* 竟堅執議員衣袂).⁴⁸ The terms "*zazuo*" (men and women sitting next to each other) and "*zhi yimei*" (pull ones' sleeves and jackets) clearly evoked the principles from the traditional "Domestic Regulations" (*Nei ze* 內則) in the *Book of Rites* (*Li ji* 禮記) which regulated a strict separation between men and women:

男女不雜坐，不同箑枷，不同巾櫛，不親授。（《禮記·曲禮上》）

Male and female should not sit together, nor have the same stand for clothes, nor use the same towel or comb, nor let their hands touch in giving and receiving.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ “Nüzi da nao canyiyuan ji” 女子大鬧參議院記, *Shengjing shibao* 盛京時報 (March 31, 1912); “Nüzi yi wuli yaoqiu canzheng quan”; “Xian ping er (Nanjing)”; “Yaoqiu nüzi canzheng quan zhi wuli”; Meng Huan, “Lun nüzi yaoqiu canzheng quan zhi guaixiang.”

⁴⁹ Raphals, *Sharing the Light*, 224.

Disobeying orders, sitting next to male strangers, laying hands on them, and intentionally brandishing “things that men tended to use, like revolvers and cigarettes,”⁵⁰ women’s willful crossing of gender boundaries gave rise to heated public debates over whether women’s new public personas went along with traditional Chinese conceptions about gender, order, and even equality.

Gender Difference and Gender In/equality

One typical debate took place in the Shanghai paper *Minli bao* 民立報 (*The People's Independence News*) from late February to early April in 1912. On February 28, the male journalist and editor of *Minli bao* Wang Yinchuan 王印川 (1878-1939) published an editorial titled “Doubts on Women’s Suffrage” (*Duiyu nüzi canzhengquan zhi huaiyi* 對於女子參政權之懷疑) under the pen name Kong Hai 空海 (literally, “empty sea”). The article expressed sympathy for women’s status but opposed women’s rights for political participation on three grounds:

First, we must examine the abilities of men and women (*budebu kaocha nannü zhi chengdu* 不得不考察男女之程度). Second, we must research the special natures of men and women (*budebu yanjiu nannü zhi texing* 不得不研究男女之特性). Third, we must consider the order of the society (*budebu ji ji shehui zhi zhixu* 不得不計及社會之秩序).⁵¹

⁵⁰ Strand, *An Unfinished Republic*, 121.

⁵¹ Kong Hai 空海, “Duiyu nüzi canzheng quan zhi huaiyi” 對於女子參政權之懷疑, *Minli bao* (February 28, 1912).

Kong Hai questioned whether women have the required knowledge and capacity for participating in politics. He asserted that men's role outside the home and women's role inside the home are determined by the natural order of evolution and are therefore inviolable (*chuyu tianyan buke xiangqiang* 出於天演不可相強). If women are to take on political tasks, something that is against their nature, the outcome can be nothing but like "teaching a hen to crow at dawn and forcing a man to bear children."⁵² He warned that because the family is the foundation of the society the social order would eventually fall apart if women were allowed to enter politics.

It seemed universal for those opposed to women's suffrage to discredit women's political efforts through the trope of a disrupted family order. Figure 2 is an exhibition of some anti-suffrage posters, postcards, and cartoons produced during the English Suffrage Movement. Similar to Kong Hai's warning, those images made fun of role-reversals and homes neglected because of women's activism in the suffrage movement. To conservative minds like that of Kong Hai and the others in British society, essentialized gender differences and labor divisions guaranteed order and natural equality. The breaking of such divisions signaled not progress but utter chaos.

Echoing Kong Hai's arguments, several similar articles appeared in other publications. In *Shi bao* 時報 (*The Eastern Times*), someone with the pen name Gu Fen 孤憤 (literally, "lone rage") wrote an editorial titled "The Problem of Women's Suffrage" (*Nüzi canzheng wenti* 女子參政問題) on March 24. The author summarized current social opposition to women's suffrage. Reiterating women's psychological, physical, and

⁵² Kong Hai, "Duiyu nüzi canzheng quan zhi huaiyi."

intellectual differences and inferiority to men, the author concluded that it was too early to grant women the franchise.⁵³

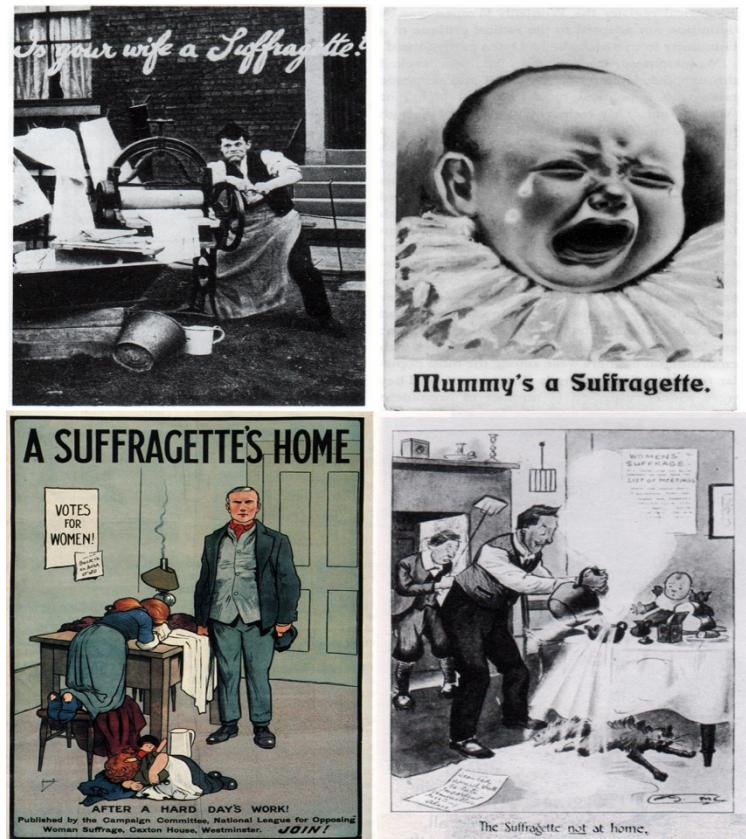


Figure 2. Anti-suffrage posters, postcards, and cartoons produced in the British Suffrage Movement (Cited from Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, illustrations 14, 29, 112, and color plate XV)

(Upper Left) “Is Your Wife a Suffragette? ”: postcard, Burlesque Series, postmarked 1908. (Collection of Patricia Leeming)

(Upper Right) “Mummy’s a Suffragette”: commercial anti-suffrage postcard. (Museum of London)

(Bottom Left) “A Suffragette’s Home”: designed by John Hassall, printed by Miles Litho, and published by the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage, 1912. (Bodleian Library, John Johnson Collection: Posters: Women’s Suffrage)

(Bottom Right) “The Suffragette Not at Home”: postcard, C. W. Faulkner and Co. (Collection of Patricia Leeming)

⁵³ Gu Fen 孤憤, “Nüzi canzheng wenti” 女子參政問題, *Shi bao* (March 24, 1912).

Another article titled “On Women’s Suffrage” (*Nüzi canzheng lun* 女子參政論) further buttressed Kong Hai’s point that men and women were not unequal but merely naturally different. Published in two parts in *Shengjing shibao* 盛京時報 (*Shengjing Times*) on March 24 and 26 and later in *Dagong bao* 大公報 (*L’Impartial*) on March 27 and 28, this anonymous article stressed that it was unnecessary and illegitimate to have women participate in politics: the rule of nature (*ziran zhi yuanli* 自然之原理) ensured separate spheres of labor for men and women and this separation embodied equality in itself. The author contended that not participating in politics does not mean women are unequal to men (*bu canzheng fei bupingdeng* 不參政非不平等) and women should have many things to do other than practicing in politics (*bu lilian yu zhengshi fei wushi kewei* 不歷練于政事非無事可為).⁵⁴

In addition to social critics, some government officials also publicly promoted the view of the necessity of maintaining gender differences. The eminent politician Zhang Zhidong had argued in earlier years for the need to uphold traditional gender roles and had deprecated suffrage for women: “If one recognizes the importance of the bond between husband and wife, then the doctrine of legal rights between men and women is impracticable.”⁵⁵ In early 1916, the director of China’s Department of Education Shibao’ an made similar remarks in a public speech: “Participating in politics is not suitable for women, considering their physiology and the conditions of China. Bearing

⁵⁴ “Nüzi canzheng lun” 女子參政論, *Shengjing shibao* (March 24 and 26, 1912).

⁵⁵ Croll, *Feminism and Socialism in China*, 75.

and raising children should be the sole duty for women.”⁵⁶ Practical educators in China also shared the view of women’s fundamental difference or deficiency.⁵⁷

Those conservative claims provoked passionate responses from the public. Kong Hai received no fewer than ten letters, both pro and con, within ten days after the publication of his editorial.⁵⁸ In another Shanghai mainstream paper *Shen bao* 申報, the famous male journalist Wang Dungen 王鈍根 (1888-1951) had an article countering the opinions of Kong Hai and the others who opposed women’s suffrage. Titled “Opposition to the Opposition to Women’s Suffrage” (*Bo bo nüzi canzheng quan* 駁駁女子參政權), Dun Gen’s article argued that those opposed lay too much stress on nature, but that in reality the differences and divisions between men and women were actually shaped by “habits” instead of “nature” (*te guanxi yu xiguan er qi xingzhi shiran zai* 特關係於習慣耳豈性質使然哉). He further argued, “If men were secluded inside the home from their childhood and made to wear women’s clothes, speak women’s words, and behave like women... they would grow up like virgins.”⁵⁹ Even though this was a reasonable social constructivist opinion against the anti-suffrage movement, this remark has unfortunately been misread by scholars as an ironic attack against the suffragettes.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Wang Kailin 王開林, *Minguo nüren: suiyue shenchu de chenxiang* 民國女人：歲月深處的沉香 (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 2013), 27.

⁵⁷ For detailed examples, see Bailey, *Gender and Education in China*, 78.

⁵⁸ Kong Hai, “Wei nüzi canzheng quan wenti jizhe zhi xuangao” 為女子參政權問題記者之宣告, *Minli bao* (March 14, 1912).

⁵⁹ Dun Gen 鈍根, “Bo bo nüzi canzheng quan” 駁駁女子參政權, *Shen bao* (March 18, 1912).

⁶⁰ For example, in *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*, Louise Edwards misreads this passage as “describing how in the suffragists’ world ‘men would be imprisoned in the inner chambers, wearing women’s clothing, using women’s speech, and acting like women.’” See Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*, 98.

In contrast to Dun Gen's article, the response letters published in *Minli bao* received more attention. Written primarily by several professional women, these letters revealed competing attitudes of urban new women towards the matter of women's suffrage. Of all the letters supportive of Kong Hai's argument, one woman, Zhang Renlan (張紓蘭), leveled the strongest criticism against the suffrage movement. Having studied in America, Zhang said she really could not sympathize with the Shanghai suffragettes who "hold forth without shame" (*yanyanbucan zhi dayan* 炎炎不慚之大言) and are "too bizarre to be considered as either Chinese or Western, male or female, monks or nuns" (*feizhongfeixi feinanfeinü feisengfeini* 非中非西非男非女非僧非尼).⁶¹ She argued that the *nei-wai* division was only about how men and women treat each other, but was not a statement about inequality (*neiwai nai duidai zhi ci fei bupingdeng zhi wei* 內外乃對待之詞非不平等之謂), and that only when men and women stay in their proper roles can there be real freedom and equality.

To counter the idea that gender difference signals gender equality, progressive women such as Yang Jiwei 楊季威 (a Shenzhou Society member, the head of the Shouzhou Girls Academy, and an editor of the *Shenzhou nübao* 神州女報 *Shenzhou Women's News*), Zhu Hui 朱繪, Yao Hui 姚蕙, and Zhang Hanying pointed out that gender differences are not natural but are culturally constructed. They elevated the Western political concept of "natural rights" (*tianfu renquan* 天賦人權) and pitted it

⁶¹ Zhang Renlan 張紓蘭, "Zhang Renlan nüshi lai han" 張紓蘭女士來函, *Minli bao* (March 9, 1912).

against the conservatives' notion of the "natural order" (*tianli* 天理).⁶² Claiming that women are human beings the same as men, they questioned how men could enjoy special natural rights while women have none (*yi nanzi you ci tebie zhi tianfu renquan hu* 抑男子有此特別之天賦人權乎).⁶³ The concept of "natural rights" had appeared in late Qing discourse on the reform of the Chinese population.⁶⁴ However, during the suffrage campaign, women began to adopt the concept and apply it to themselves.⁶⁵ Their claiming of natural rights not only articulated the women's feminist pursuits, but also lent discursive legitimacy to their campaign, since ideas about human rights and democracy were central to the political aspiration of the new Republic.

⁶² In "Opposition to Women's Suffrage in China: Confronting Modernity in Governance," Louise Edwards has a section titled "'Natural Rights' or 'Natural Order'" which examines how the proponents of the women's movement adopted the Enlightenment concept of "natural rights" while those opposed held onto the idea of "natural order." See Edwards, "Opposition to Women's Suffrage in China," 118-21. However, I would like to clarify that the division between "natural rights" and "natural order" was not that distinctively clear in public discourse of the time. I have found Song Jiaoren used "natural order" (*tian zhi* 天秩) in a progressive way in his congratulatory statement for the inaugural issue of Tang Qunying's *Nizi baihua bao* 女子白話報 (*Women's Vernacular Daily*). Song's usage of "natural order" actually invoked the meaning of "natural rights."

⁶³ Chen Huanxing 陳喚興, "Nüzi canzheng zhi taolun—Chen Huanxing nüshi lai han" 女子參政之討論——陳喚興女士來函, *Minli bao* (March 26, 1912).

⁶⁴ For example, *Nüjie zhong* had used the term "tianfu renquan" (天賦人權) in its opening words. See Jin Tianhe, *Nüjie zhong*, 2.

⁶⁵ Many female activists invoked the idea of "natural rights" in their writings. Wu Mulan used "natural rights" as a banner to mobilize women to fight against constraints imposed by the masculine world (*jiu kun yu yang* 久困於陽). See Wu Mulan, "Tongmeng nüzi jingwulianxi dui xuanyan shu." Jiang Renlan linked Chinese women's situation with the status of "African black slaves" (*feizhou heinu* 非洲黑奴) who lacked basic human rights. See Jiang Renlan 江紉蘭, "Shuo nüzi canzheng zhi liyou" 說女子參政之理由, *Funü shibao* 婦女時報, no.8 (1912). Tang Qunying questioned the lack of equal rights for women who were also human beings in the suffragettes' first petition to the parliament in February 1912. Later that year, Tang repeatedly invoked the term in her disputes with the senate for "trampling human rights." See "Nüjie daibiao Zhang [sic] Qunying deng shang canyiyuan shu" 女界代表張群英等上參議院書, *Shen bao* (February 26, 1912) and Strand, *An Unfinished Republic*, 128-29.

The Kong Hai debate ended in late March 1912 with Li Jingye's 李淨業 article celebrating Zhang Renlan's claims.⁶⁶ But discussions of the women's suffrage campaign and gender difference and gender in/equality continued in the leading Chinese dailies to the end of the year.⁶⁷ However, no matter how hard feminist activists kept pushing the idea of gender equality to the public, public opinion held to the essentialized view that equates gender with identity (instead of roles) and that biological sex predetermines each person's social functions.

As exemplified by the writing of Kong Hai and Zhang Renlan, it was common for those opposed to women's suffrage to glorify domestic life and the qualities associated with femininity and to describe public life and masculinity in unpleasant terms. Zhang Renlan directly referred to Chinese men as “rotten-hearted and greedy for profit” (*fu xin lu li* 腐心祿利).⁶⁸ Another commentator lamented in witty lines: “It is pitiful that pure and noble women want to enter the complicated and polluted world of politics” (*yi gaojie kegui zhi nüzi er yu ru fanlan yinzheng zhi zhengjie kexi* 以高潔可貴之女子而欲入繁爛淫蒸之政界可惜).⁶⁹ Gu Fen suggested that even after women's abilities reach a high level in the future, it still needs to be discussed whether women should participate in politics. He claimed this idea does not belittle women but pays respect to them: “I do not want the corrupt political career to insult our women who are too noble to be

⁶⁶ Li Jingye 李淨業, “Nüzi canzheng zhi taolun—zhi Jiangnan Zhang Renlan tongzhi shu” 女子參政之討論——致江南張紓蘭同志書, *Minli bao* (March 24, 1912).

⁶⁷ Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*, 97.

⁶⁸ Zhang Renlan, “Zhang Renlan nüshi lai han.”

⁶⁹ Ne Zhai 訥齋, “Shi ke” 十可, *Shen bao* (March 26, 1912).

contaminated.” (*bu yu yi fubai zhi zhengzhi shengya er wuru wo shensheng buke qinfan zhi nüzi* 不欲以腐敗之政治生涯而污辱我神聖不可侵犯之女子).⁷⁰

Despite their supposed purpose of protecting women from the degrading world of the public sphere, these essays were fundamentally no different from the ones that disparaged women as shrews who would bring filth to the public. Whether portraying women as the source or the victim of pollution, these discourses all failed to acknowledge women as human beings, the equal of men. The authors of both points of view dehumanized women in order to voice their own fears and uncertainties.

Not all laments about the loss of female virtue and purity were out of a Chinese patriarchal point of view, yet they took similar forms. Criticisms from American missionaries in China, for instance, though derived from the evangelical thinking of sexual determinism, surfaced in the same form as those conservative remarks in China. They commented on the changes in Chinese women’s behaviors and the violation of feminine modesty and purity represented by the womanhood of the suffragettes.⁷¹

In the following section, I will look closely at how the public resorted to images of shrews to react to the suffragettes’ unconventional presentation. The public directed

⁷⁰ Gu Fen, “Nüzi canzheng wenti.”

⁷¹ For example, the missionary Francis Lister Hawks Pott commented: “Boldness and boisterousness often take the place of the gentleness and modesty for which she has always been renowned.” See F. L. Hawks Pott, *The Emergence in China* (Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1913), 126, cited from Shirley Garrett, “Image of Chinese Women,” in *The Church and Women in the Third World*, edited by John C. B. and Ellen Low Webster (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 28. Two Chinese female doctors Jin Yunmei and Ida Kahn, who had studied in the U.S. and been influenced by the missionary culture in China, also expressed their disappointment in the fading “standards of purity” and “usual feminine virtues” in the new public women. See Weili Ye, *Seeking Modernity in China’s Name: Chinese Students in the United States, 1900-1927* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 126-27. Luella Miner, a female American missionary in China, also openly welcomed the suppression of the suffragettes, whom she called “the Chinese suffragist ‘Amazons.’” She thought the suffragettes “offended against the laws of the land and the humanitarian nature of womanhood.” See Luella Miner, “Higher Education in China” (1915?), American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, cited from Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), 265.

criticism at the loss of female gentleness by likening the suffragettes to the violent shrew (*hanfu* 悍婦 and sometimes *pofu* 濑婦). In fantasizing the suffragettes as licentious shrews (*yinfu* 淫婦 or *dangfu* 蕩婦), the public manifested its anxiety over the threat that women's rising mobility and autonomy would pose to sexual morality. In employing the specific image of the unconstrained scattering shrew (*pofu*), the public indulged in the fantasy of how the suffragettes were offending and defiling the public sphere.

The Shrew in the Mainstream Male-Dominated Media

This section looks at representations of the suffragettes in newspaper satires, popular stories, unofficial histories (*yeshi* 野史), and folk arts. Compared to editorials, social commentaries, and debates, these representations were more fictional, imaginary, and mostly satirical or humorous, aiming to entertain and amuse readers. By virtue of their popular, imaginary, and amusing nature, these texts usually featured more transgressive descriptions of events and characters that editorials or debate essays failed to present. They exposed uncommon aspects and perspectives on the suffragettes that added to the larger picture of public responses towards this new model of woman. Based on the differing foci of the texts in terms of which shrewish qualities they highlighted and for the sake of analysis, I categorize these narratives into three main types of depictions—the violent shrew, the obscene shrew, and the unconstrained shrew—although there was of course overlap among types.

Shrews as Violent

Violence was the most direct threat the public had to deal with from the suffragettes. Female violence at the time was both reality and imagination. Figure 3 is both a representation of an actual moment when suffragettes did kick policemen and a form of imagining the growing feminine violence to the point of horror. With the woman's image looming so large and her big foot in Western-style high-heels jabbing the body of a small man, the cartoon visualized the suffragette as an intimidating, monstrous being with both Chinese and Western, feminine and masculine features.



Figure 3. A Chinese suffragette kicking a policeman during a protest in Nanjing in 1912. The caption reads: “If a woman can kick a policeman, this woman must be extraordinarily valorous. I think so and therefore I draw this picture to show it (—Dun Gen).” *Shen bao* (March 30, 1912), 8.

Similar to the way in which the author enlarges the woman's image to create a sense of awe, public discourses never ceased to accentuate or exaggerate the violence of the suffragettes. In the press, there were various ironic or comic representations rendering

female violence a bizarre and amusing spectacle for public fantasy.⁷² Someone with the pen name “Shenjing bing” 神經病 (literally, “psycho”) copied lines of Li Bai 李白, the famous Tang poet, to mock the great physical power of the suffragettes in Nanjing: “one fist knocked down the Huanghe Building; one foot kicked over Parrot Island (一拳打平黃鶴樓一腳踢翻鸚鵡洲).”⁷³ Hitting and kicking were trademark actions of the suffragettes that really impressed the public. Even in articles seemingly irrelevant to the issue of suffragettes, women’s ruthlessness was still a focus. Zhou Shoujuan 周瘦鵠 had a translation in *Funü shibao* 婦女時報 (*The Women's Eastern Times*) in 1912 from a Western source about what raw materials in nature came together to make woman. Of the materials, there were “the brutality of the tiger” (*hu zhi canren* 虎之殘忍) and “the quick tongue of the parrot” (*yingwu zhi diaoshe* 鸚鵡之掉舌).⁷⁴ These terms suggest the consciousness of this women’s journal in capturing the overall discursive interest in female violence.

The violence of the suffragettes had its strongest manifestation in two events in 1912. Tang Qunying publicly slapped the politician Song Jiaoren for his failure to support the campaign in his public speech on August 25. Another famous suffragette Shen Peizhen 沈佩貞 thrashed the soldier Xiong Zaiyang 熊載揚 on his back on October 5 because he spread the rumor that he and Shen were a couple when they both stayed at

⁷² For example, in the article “Nothing Too Strange,” the author repeats the word “strange” (*qi*) to emphasize the weirdness of the women’s violence. See She Zi 舍子, “Wuqi buyou” 無奇不有, *Shi bao* (March 23, 1912).

⁷³ Shenjing bing 神經病, “Wuti” 無題, *Shi bao* (March 27, 1912).

⁷⁴ Shoujuan 瘦鵠 translated, “Funü zhi yuanzhi” 婦女之原質, *Funü shibao*, no.8 (1912), 24.

an inn.⁷⁵ Shocked by the two women's use of force, the public coined the term “Tang’s palm and Shen’s whip” (*Tangzhang Shenbian* 唐掌沈鞭) to refer to their formidable female power (*cifeng* 雌風).⁷⁶ The two events became perfect fodder for satire. Interestingly, in these satires the authors and commentators frequently referred to characters from the renowned eighteenth-century novel *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng* 紅樓夢) to come up with their depictions of the involved figures.

Someone with the pen name Xi Yinglu 息影廬 commented that “Xiong is even more pitiful (*kelian* 可憐) than the character Jia Rui 賈瑞 in *Honglou meng*; Huang [Huang Zhenxiang 黃禎祥] is even more adorable (*keren* 可人) than Jia Rong 賈蓉 in the Ningguo House.”⁷⁷ Huang Zhenxiang was the head of the Bureau of Shipbuilding at the time and was known for having a heroic character. When Shen Peizhen brought Xiong Zaiyang’s case to Huang’s notice, he quickly arrested Xiong, interrogated him in front of Shen, and insisted on sending Xiong to a military court to be shot.

If the author considered Xiong as pitiful and Huang as adorable, he must be assuming the perspective of Wang Xifeng 王熙鳳, the foremost shrew in *Honglou meng*. Parallel to Xiong Zaiyang who “hankered for the taste of swan” (*yu chi tian'e rou* 欲吃天鹅肉)⁷⁸ in desiring Shen Peizhen, Jia Rui in *Honglou meng* desires the high-class Wang Xifeng in a similar way (“a case of ‘the toad on the ground wanting to eat the goose in

⁷⁵ “Wuhan nüjie qutan lu” 武漢女界趣談錄, *Shen bao* (October 14, 1912). Xi Yinglu 息影廬, “Xinzhi koukuai” 心直口快, *Shen bao* (October 16, 1912).

⁷⁶ Gao Muzi 槁木子, “Nannü bu pingquan zhi biejie” 男女不平權之別解, *Shen bao* (November 8, 1912).

⁷⁷ Xi Yinglu, “Xinzhi koukuai.”

⁷⁸ Ibid.

the sky”” *laihama xiang tian’ e rou chi* 癩蛤蟆想天鵝肉吃).⁷⁹ With the help of Jia Rong, Wang Xifeng sets up Jia Rui, lures him in, and tortures him to death. The Jia Rui chapter in *Honglong meng* (chapter 12, a key *yin* chapter according to the gendered *yinyang* numerological punning⁸⁰) is a concentrated representation of the violence, pollution, and transgression of the shrew Wang Xifeng.⁸¹ Xi Yinglu likened Republican figures to characters in *Honglou meng* so as to suggest the shrewish identity of Shen Peizhen and how she and her accomplice or unlawful lover might have similarly hoodwinked Xiong Zaiyang.⁸² The commentator Dun Gen thought Shen exceeded traditional shrews such as Wang Xifeng (“*Shen nüshi fei Wang Xifeng kebi*” 沈女士非王熙鳳可比).⁸³ Yet whether or not Wang Xifeng was comparable to Shen Peizhen, the traditional shrew was clearly a convenient model for modern-time observers to use in building up their interpretations of the suffragettes.

Another text titled “The New Dream of the Red Chamber” (*Xin Honglou meng* 新紅樓夢) endorsed Tang Qunying’s public slapping of Song Jiaoren by drawing an analogy to the righteous smack that Tanchun 探春 in *Honglou meng* gives to the face of Wang Shanbao’s wife:

⁷⁹ *Honglou meng*, chapter 11. For the translation, see Hawkes and Minford, trans., *The Story of the Stone*, 1:242.

⁸⁰ For the reading of *yinyang* numerology in Ming-Qing literature, see for example: Epstein, *Competing Discourses*.

⁸¹ For how textual details in this chapter invoke the stereotypical shrew narrative, see Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, 173-74.

⁸² Some studies on *Honglou meng* imply that Wang Xifeng and her nephew Jia Rong might have an illicit relationship. One commonly cited example is Wang Xifeng’s unnatural speech and behavior in chapter 6 when Jia Rong comes to borrow a screen.

⁸³ Xi Yinglu, “*Xinzhi koukuai*.”

A newspaper reported that Tang Qunying struck Song Jiaoren. She slapped Song's face wildly, making a loud, sharp sound that shook the roof tiles. One can't help but recall the smack Tanchun gives to Wang Shanbao's wife in *Honglou meng*. That smack is also loud and clear. After the strike, Wang Shanbao's wife said, "This is the first time I got hit. Tomorrow I will go back to my home." I know this is also Mr. Song's first time to be hit. I already heard him saying things like going back home when he resigned as Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. Some said, "This smack might have beaten away many stars of misfortune surrounding Song and he can be expected to become the president in the future."⁸⁴

In fact, this was not the first time that Song was attacked. Other senators and suffragettes had struck him before because of political disputes.⁸⁵ However, this time "the public was greatly shocked" (*da gan jingyi* 大感驚異)⁸⁶ because he had been hit by Tang Qunying, a respectable revolutionary and leader of the suffrage movement with whom he had enjoyed a collegial relationship. Plus, she hit him in front of an audience of three to four thousand people in the middle of the conference when the Revolutionary Alliance merged with five other major parties and became the ruling Nationalist Party.⁸⁷ Tang hit him

⁸⁴ Xiao 笑, "Xin Honglou meng" 新紅樓夢, *Shi bao* (August 29, 1912).

⁸⁵ Strand, *An Unfinished Republic*, 124.

⁸⁶ Wang Jiajian 王家儉, "Minchu de nüzi canzheng yundong" 民初的女子參政運動, *Lishi xuebao* (國立台灣師範大學) 歷史學報, no.11 (June, 1983), 162.

⁸⁷ Kazuko, *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution*, 87.

because he deliberately dismissed the principle of sex equality in order to satisfy the conservative parties and smooth the way for a successful merger.

Tang's action was disruptive and shocking. Nevertheless, in this short satire, the author chooses to ridicule the victim not the perpetrator. By equating Song with an old, unctuous, and nasty female servant in a traditional family, the author inverts the moral structure of this incident, making Song the actual guilty party deserving of discipline.

Born to a concubine of the Jia patriarch, Tanchun in *Honglou meng* is both inside and outside the central Jia line. She is often wronged but keeps her dignity and her authority to criticize others. Tang Qunying resembles Tanchun, for she and her suffragist sisters were both included and excluded from Republican definitions of modern citizenship. She was like the daughter of a concubine who could never feel at ease with her relationship to the father/fatherland. In the eyes of Republican patriarchs, Tang Qunying's status was a source of trouble and embarrassment, as evidenced in her relationships to male politicians such as Song Jiaoren, Sun Yat-sen, and Yuan Shikai. Parallel to Tanchun's character, Tang Qunying presented herself as a defiant daughter who might have "accepted Sun Yat-sen's authority as leader but not necessarily as patriarch."⁸⁸

The slapping scenes exemplified the unruliness and volatility in both women. Tanchun slaps Wang Shanbao's wife when the servant steps out of line in even daring to touch her during a household search for proof of an illicit affair. Out of a frenzy of rage, Tanchun gives the old woman a resounding smack on the face and shouts: "Who do you

⁸⁸ Strand, *An Unfinished Republic*, 127-28.

think you are? How dare you touch me?”⁸⁹ The slap is meant to reposition the old woman, who obviously has been carried away, back to her proper role as a servant. Tang Qunying’s strike, by the same token, was also to discipline the servant that went astray. Song Jiaoren, as a government official, was a servant, too—a public servant that people looked up to for help. Tang Qunying and her team had been utilizing Song’s support in their campaign until the incident at the conference.⁹⁰ It must have caught Tang by surprise that her comrade and brother Song who had been showing support and addressing her by the honorific “Elder Sister Tang” (*Tang dajie* 唐大姐⁹¹) would back out at such a critical moment. She viewed the removal of the principle of sex equality from the party constitution as obvious contempt for women and an indication of the loss of the spirit of the Revolutionary Alliance.⁹²

Song Jiaoren was unable to respond to either Tang’s words or her blows. To some extent, Song at the conference did resemble a traditional female, intimidated, subjugated, and disciplined. On the contrary, the suffragettes on the scene were aggressive and dominant. With this inversion of gender roles and reversal of gender hierarchy, the

⁸⁹ *Honglou meng*, chapter 74. For the translation, see Hawkes and Minford, trans., *The Story of the Stone*, 3:473.

⁹⁰ Song Jiaoren met Tang Qunying in Japan. They both joined the Revolutionary Alliance in 1905 and had been conducting revolutionary activities together. Song Jiaoren showed constant support for the women’s suffrage movement and wrote several supportive statements for the women’s newspapers such as *Nüzi baihua bao* and *Yadong cong bao* (亞東叢報). See “Tang Qunying yu Song Jiaoren” 唐群英與宋教仁, in Wang Hui 王輝, *Tang Qunying shiliao jicui* 唐群英史料集萃 (Hengyang: Funü lianhe hui, 2006).

⁹¹ Louise Edwards, “Tang Qunying,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Lily Xiao Hong Lee (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), 505; Strand, *An Unfinished Republic*, 104; “Tang Qunying yu Song Jiaoren,” 78.

⁹² “Sun Zhongshan xiansheng ru jing hou zhi diyi dahui” 孫中山先生入京后之第一大會, *Minli bao* (August 31, 1912). Also see “Tang Qunying yu Song Jiaoren,” 79.

playful allusion to *Honglou meng* in the newspaper report humiliated Song Jiaoren and endorsed Tang Qunying's attack on him as righteous and justified.

Why was *Honglou meng* so frequently cited at the time in interpreting incidents involving the suffragettes? One reason is that *Honglou meng* was the most popular piece of literature that naturalized female superiority and empowerment. It brings to the fore a vision of a “girls’ kingdom”⁹³ that some researchers consider “deeply feminist.”⁹⁴ It is not hard to imagine, that for Republican male critics, seeing the suffragettes on the street was as if placing themselves in the kingdom of girls in *Honglou meng*.

Yet these modern texts signaled a change in the definition of femininity. Even if Lin Daiyu, the fragile and tragic heroine in *Honglou meng*, might still be the ultimately desired model of woman for men in real life,⁹⁵ in critical discourses her appeal apparently had dimmed: “In the past the delicacy and weakness of women had been their defining characteristic. Generations of young men sighed over such weak and sickly heroines as Lin Daiyu in the *Dream of the Red Chamber*. ”⁹⁶ Lin Daiyu never appeared as an ideal for the concept of modern femininity, nor did she even appear as a counter model in writings critical of the vulgarity of the new woman.

As illustrated by the two texts above, the shrew Wang Xifeng came to be a useful type for modern critics in representing the suffragettes. Even if men still wavered over

⁹³ Louise Edwards, “Women in *Honglou meng*: Prescriptions of Purity in the Femininity of Qing Dynasty China,” *Modern China*, vol.16, no.4 (October, 1990), 416.

⁹⁴ Moss Roberts, “Neo-Confucianism in the *Dream of the Red Chamber*: A Critical Note,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, vol.10, no.1 (January to March, 1978), 63.

⁹⁵ Catherine Yeh has talked about how a Shanghai legendary courtesan took the name of Lin Daiyu in order to attract customers. In addition to Lin Daiyu, there were also Lu Daiyu, Li Daiyu, Su Daiyu, and so forth, which showcased the popularity of the character Lin Daiyu among Shanghai prostitutes. See Yeh, *Shanghai Love*, 142.

⁹⁶ Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen*, 77.

whether or how they were to cast positive value onto these new women images, it is clear that these previously negative types were emerging and having an influence on public discourses. The unconventional conduct of these suffragettes pushed the public to change the face of femininity. Some public discourses even went so far as to anticipate certain unseemly female qualities with the new woman. As David Strand puts it, “Modern-minded Chinese were coming to expect that women, like men, would be physically more active, assertive, and even vulgar in the role of citizen.”⁹⁷ This changed view on female vulgarity suggested how the modern construction of the new woman extended back to traditional shrew narratives and revitalized the shrew trope to be a compelling dimension in many modern depictions of the new woman.

Some comments extended further back into the history of Chinese literature, but still revolved around the shrew trope. A commonly invoked stock metaphor was the “tiger with rouge” (*yanzhi hu* 胭脂虎). The term first appeared in the Song dynasty *Qingyi lu* 清異錄 (*Records of the Unworldly and the Strange*) to describe a minister’s wife who was capable, politically minded, and eager to participate in the business of her husband. In the Qing dynasty, the term was frequently used to refer to the shrew figure in texts such as Pu Songling’s famous shrew story “Jiangcheng” 江城 in his *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異 (*Liaozhai’s Records of the Strange*).⁹⁸ Ye Zhifei 葉稚斐 had a play entitled “The Tiger with Rouge” (*Yanzhi hu* 胭脂虎, also named *Kaikou xiao* 開口笑, “Open Your Mouth and Laugh”), which was based on Li Yu’s 李漁 (1610-1680) well-known

⁹⁷ Strand, *An Unfinished Republic*, 127.

⁹⁸ “醉態益狂，榻上胭脂虎。”Pu Songling 蒲松齡, “Jiang cheng” 江城, in *Baihua qianzhu Liaozhai zhiyi* 白話淺注聊齋誌異 (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1963), 340.

shrew story “A Jealous Wife Becomes a Widow” (*Duqi shou youfu zhi gua, nuofu huan busi zhi hun* 婉妻守有夫之寡，懦夫還不死之魂) and some episodes of the Ming-dynasty shrew play *Shihou ji* 獅吼記 (*The Lioness Roars*) by Wang Tingne 汪廷訥.

The term “tiger with rouge” captures the very nature of Chinese shrews who are usually depicted as beautiful and also cruel. In amusing articles that analogized Tang Qunying to a tiger with rouge, the writers invoked the traditional trope to portray Tang as a combination of a beauty and a beast. In *Shen bao*’s regular column “Straight Heart, Fast Mouth” (*Xinzhi koukuai* 心直口快) that usually featured sardonic or comic essays, someone with the pen name Hu Chi 虎癡 (literally, “tiger loony”) had a commentary saying that the slapping incident between Tang Qunying and Song Jiaoren “was like a performance of the tiger with rouge that was so wonderfully acted.” The author fantasized that “because the palms on the cheeks of the Nationalist Party governor Song Jiaoren belong to a young lady (*shaonian nüshi* 少年女士), I think the slapping must be dexterous in skill and clear in sound. I was itching to rush to Beijing to shout ‘Bravo!’”⁹⁹ In 1912, Tang Qunying (1871-1937) was forty-one, by no means a “*shaonian*.” But such fantasies were attractive for the wide male readership of *Shen bao*.

On the same day, *Shen bao* also published a comic short story (*huaji duanpian* 滑稽短篇) entitled “The Cheeks of the Hero” (*Yingxiong jia* 英雄頰). Written by Dun Gen, the story employed the old trope of hero and beauty. Tang Qunying was depicted as not only young (*shao nüzi* 少女子) but petite and delicate (*jiaoxiao qingying* 嬌小輕盈). She was the beauty (*meiren* 美人) while Song Jiaoren took the role of the hero (*yingxiong* 英

⁹⁹ Hu Chi 虎癡, “Xinzhi koukuai” 心直口快, *Shen bao* (September 3, 1912), 9.

雄). The author commented, “Striking the cheeks of the hero with the hands of the beauty, the two things are equal in high value. Of this kind of rare encounter in the world, what else can surpass this? !”¹⁰⁰ The narrative built upon the traditional model that the hero was strong and mature while the beauty was young and delicate. It blatantly disregards the fact that Tang Qunying was actually “short and plump” (*duan er weipang* 短而微胖)¹⁰¹ and not agile at all because of her bound feet. Besides, the beauty Tang Qunying was significantly older (eleven years) than her hero Song Jiaoren.

The author melds two female stereotypes: the beauty and the shrew. The story creates an ambiguous synthesis in which the slapping by Tang Qunying is between repugnant and admirable. The ambiguity became all the more evident in the text when the author had to deal with the young beauty’s violence, an obvious antithesis to the trope of the beauty. By narrating how Tang “slapped once, twice, six times, numerous times (*wushu zhang* 無數掌)” making the audience “astonished” (*da hairan* 大駭然), the story in effect sympathized more with the trope of the beautiful but bestial shrew than with the model of hero and beauty stories. Madeleine Yue Dong has described how the suffragettes exerted their power over men: they “challenged male dominance directly rather than manipulating politics behind the scene with ‘thin fingers.’”¹⁰² Women no longer had to put themselves behind influential men as modeled by the old trope of hero and beauty in order to participate in public affairs. They made themselves directly visible

¹⁰⁰ Dun Gen 鈍根, “Yingxiong jia” 英雄頰, *Shen bao* (September 3, 1912).

¹⁰¹ Wang Jiajian, “Minchu de nüzi canzheng yundong,” 163.

¹⁰² Dong, “Unofficial History,” 182.

in public, with their imperfect exterior and an imposing manner that apparently overshadowed the men.

Dun Gen romanticized the intimidating woman tiger by imagining her as a beauty. He further played with such hybridity of beauty and shrew by letting Song Jiaoren feel the sharp pain of the slap while indulging himself in the fragrance left on his cheeks by her palm (*zhixiang fenzeye sanri bu sanqu* 脂香粉澤越三日不散去). With the implicit masochistic pleasure felt by Song Jiaoren, the author seems to suggest that the physical ferocity of the violent shrew in the public space could break bodily boundaries between the sexes and potentially open the possibility for erotic sentiments and practices—a possibility that was widely and wildly imagined in public discourses through the role of the obscene shrew to be discussed in the next section.

It should be noted that the violent actions by suffragettes provoked similar reactions in the British press during the early 1910s. The radical women activists in London were also depicted as “viragos,” with their male targets mocked as “browbeaten” or “hen-pecked” husbands.¹⁰³ While the Chinese public found inspiration in the traditional trope of the shrew for the description of the suffragettes, the British press turned to the notorious shrew Katherine in Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*, restaged in London in 1913. The *News of the World* (May 11, 1913) declared, “Katherine was obviously a suffragette.” The *People* (May 11, 1913) called Katherine an “old time ‘militant.’” The *East Anglian Daily Times* (May 12, 1913) consoled “the male sex, now sadly beset by shrews” that “Petruchio, at any rate, succeeded in dealing with a mediaeval

¹⁰³ Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-14* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987), 34.

suffragette.”¹⁰⁴ The extent to which these writers confused old and new models was telling. By equating Katherine with militants and linking the suffragettes with mediaeval shrews, the commentators took it for granted that those ardent new women on the street could best be understood as genealogically related to the termagant shrews in traditional literature.

Commentaries in Chinese papers echoed these English satires to explicitly depict the suffragettes as domineering wives at home: the wives were described as having ultimate control over the family (*zhuquan shuyu furen* 主權屬於夫人), setting up strict rules for their husbands whereas they enjoyed various rights and freedoms even in the form of sexual license (*bangei laogong lümao huizhang* 頒給老公綠帽徽章). One of the top goals described for them and their sisters in women’s associations was to study how to resist husbands and abuse their in-laws (*dizhi zhangfu bodai wenggu* 抵制丈夫薄待翁姑).¹⁰⁵ These fanciful descriptions were clearly based on plots of traditional shrew stories. In both London and China, past models of the shrew provided the press with the image and the vocabulary for language to conceive the type of the new woman.

Shrews as Obscene

The *yinfu* or *dangfu* is a significant type in the trope of the shrew. Male authors of premodern literature often used sexualized female characters to emblemize the

¹⁰⁴ See the introduction to William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, edited by Elizabeth Schafer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 25.

¹⁰⁵ Xie Shengwei 謢聖韋, “Xini nüjie zizihui jianzhang yuanqi” 戲擬女界自治會簡章緣起, *Rizhi bao* 日知報 (November 28, 1913). Xie Shengwei, “Linshi furen yuefa” 臨時夫人約法, *Rizhi bao* (December 6, 1913).

destruction of the gendered moral order. In imagining the suffragettes, modern authors also employed this type of image. By depicting the new women as sexually offensive beings, the authors expressed anxieties provoked by women's political ambition and rising autonomy.

The intermingling of the sexes in the public domain was the most direct factor that stimulated public anxiety over women's sexual virtues. However, in the case of the modern suffragettes, the *yinfu* indictment existed also in relation to other factors such as women's crimes. Sexual criminality of women, especially of married and widowed women, was a distinct phenomenon in the early Republic.¹⁰⁶ The public had reason to suspect that the suffragettes (such as the widowed Tang Qunying, the divorced Shen Peizhen, and the divorced and remarried Lin Zongsu 林宗素) might also subject themselves to illicit or immoral sexual activities.

In *Liudong waishi* 留東外史 (*An Unofficial History of Studying in Japan*; 1916) by Buxiaosheng 不肖生 (the name of the author is a pun on the term “unfilial son”), women such as Tang Qunying and Wu Zhiying 吳芝瑛 who had assisted Qiu Jin 秋瑾 in the revolution are derided by male characters as vain “tigresses” (*mu dachong* 母大蟲). The women do whatever men want them to do when in need of help; but when the men

¹⁰⁶ Bailey, “‘Women Behaving Badly,’” 165; Wang Qisheng 王奇生, “Minguo chunian de nüxing fanzui (1914-1936)” 民國初年的女性犯罪 (1914 - 1936), *Jindai Zhongguo funü shi yanjiu* 近代中國婦女史研究, no.1 (June, 1993), 16-17. Bailey particularly points out that among homicide cases in years such as 1914 and 1919, the most common offence was the murder of husbands as a result of adultery (see page 167). I am amazed by the degree to which women in early Republican China were boldly carrying out scenarios similar to the story of Pan Jinlian (潘金蓮) in traditional literature. They were modern, real-life versions of Pan Jinlian who murdered her husband in pursuit of extramarital sexual pleasure. Parallel to the fate of the traditional Pan Jinlian, these Republican women were also subject to harsh punishment. However, in the next chapter, we will see a different law of justice applied to Pan Jinlian in the May Fourth dramatist Ouyang Yuqian's rewriting of the stock scenario. In Ouyang's play, this notorious shrew became a model of the new woman with her crimes celebrated as embodiments of the new ideology.

are no longer useful to them, they immediately abandon them.¹⁰⁷ The novel particularly criticizes Lady Hu (*Hu Nüshi* 胡女士), who the author considers to be like Tang Qunying (*Tang Qunying yiliu renwu* 唐群英一流人物). In the novel, this Lady Hu is described as having had many lovers since she turned fourteen. She is more capable than the top Shanghai prostitutes. She unabashedly comments on her lovers one by one to a male character and tells him that she lost her virginity at the age of fourteen to a photographer in a Beijing photo shop.¹⁰⁸

Indeed, it was a common trope to link the suffragettes with prostitutes. The late imperial press frequently warned against the mixing of students and prostitutes.¹⁰⁹ Yet the use of the analogy in the 1910s was not meant as a caution about the potential dangers. Instead, the writers drew parallels between suffragettes and prostitutes as social equals, discrediting the women activists as both morally unsanctioned and politically illicit.

Writers began to fantasize about the close interactions of suffragettes with local prostitutes. For example, *Shen bao* published an article by Du He 獨鶴 in the column “Amusing Articles” (*Youxi wenzhang* 遊戲文章) on November 22, 1912, which concocted a correspondence between the two groups of women. In the article, the suffragettes write to the prostitutes, complaining about the failure of the suffrage movement after a year of various endeavors, civilized and barbarian, moderate and radical. Admitting that “the lionesses” have lost their nerve to continue roaring (*shihou wuli* 獅吼無力), the suffragettes turn to prostitutes to contribute to the campaign with

¹⁰⁷ Buxiaosheng 不肖生, *Liudong waishi* 留東外史 (Beijing: Zhongguo huaqiao chubanshe, 1997), 446.

¹⁰⁸ Buxiaosheng, *Liudong waishi*, 448.

¹⁰⁹ Judge, *The Precious Raft of History*, 76-78. Bailey, *Gender and Education in China*, 43-44, 81, 101.

their expertise in manipulating men, especially the senator-patrons. The letter refers to the Qing-dynasty story *Huayue hen* 花月痕 (*Traces of Flowers and the Moon*) in which a prostitute even assists in the suppression of national enemies. The suffragettes express full confidence in the abilities of prostitutes, for, after all, “the land of the tender” (*wenrou xiang* 溫柔鄉) has the strongest power to move others (*zuiyi ganren* 最易感人).¹¹⁰ An article that appeared in *Rizhi bao* 日知報 (*Daily Learning*) delivered a blunter satire about the mixing of the two groups of women. It joked that the Women’s Autonomous Association was located in the Village of New Beauties (*xinyan cun* 新妍村) and would later expand to locations such as “the Land of the Tender,” “the River of Love” (*aihe* 愛河), and “the Ocean of Desire” (*yuhai* 慾海). The headquarters of the association was located on “the Street of Stealing Men” (*touhan jie* 偷漢街; “*touhan*” refers to a woman committing adultery), and all its members were good at flirting (*gongpin shanmei* 工顰善媚) and sleeping around (*neng zuo zhentou zhuang* 能作枕頭狀).¹¹¹

In Du He’s article, the prostitutes reply to the letter from the suffragettes and urge them to give up the pursuit of suffrage. The prostitutes suggest that if there are really talented women, they should exert their power in the domestic sphere:

They should shape their husbands into politicians who follow our political opinions (*fangchu kunwei qianzhi fuxu* 放出閩威箝制夫婿; *xingwu zhengjian* 行

¹¹⁰ Du He 獨鶴, “Xini mou nushi zhi bada hutong jijie shu” 戲擬某女士致八大胡同妓界書, *Shen bao* (November 22, 1912), 10.

¹¹¹ Xie Shengwei, “Xini nüjie zizihui jianzhang yuanqi.”

吾政見) ; but they themselves should remain in the inner space as supervisors

(*jishen fan chuyu jiandu diwei* 己身反處於監督地位).¹¹²

The use of the term “*kunwei*” (literally, power inside the inner chambers) illustrated the eagerness of the (male) author to resituate women from the public space back to the domestic sphere, even at the expense of the husbands’ submission. If women must seize some power, the author seems to say, let them have that in the household—a shrewish wife is acceptable provided that she does not appear in public.

An article entitled “The Loose Woman Joins the Reform” (*Dangfu weixin* 蕩婦維新) in *Aiguo bao* 愛國報 (*Patriotic News*) provided another glimpse into what men assumed modern ideas could grant modern women. The article imagines conjugal strife between a loose wife (*dangfu moushi* 蕡婦某氏) and her husband who has studied abroad. The wife is known for promiscuity and she becomes even looser after she considers herself to be a reformer (*yi weixin ziming* 以維新自命). When the husband attempts to discipline her, reminding her of the traditional value of propriety and shame (*liyi lianchi* 禮義廉恥), she counters with the modern concept of gender equality, claiming that he has no right to control her. The man gets angry, saying that they are predestined husband and wife (*jiefa fuqi* 結髮夫妻) and therefore he has a natural right over her. The wife laughs, “Now that you have cut your hair, what is there to tie?” The husband has nothing to reply. The wife then declares that she will leave her good-for-nothing (*buxuewushu* 不

¹¹² Du He, “Xini mou,” 10.

學無術) man and start an independent life (*shixing duli* 實行獨立) free of his intervention (*bubi guowen* 不必過問).¹¹³

The woman is referred to as loose, yet the author gives her the positive qualities of being calm, able to outwit her husband. She has the sort of verbal skills enjoyed by traditional shrews but using new vocabularies and modern concepts against her husband. The man, who has studied abroad, is conservative, ignorant, and helpless. One cannot but feel that the author sympathizes with and maybe even sides with the wife. This early example demonstrates how modern writers employed the bold voice of the shrew to level criticism at regressive figures—a tendency that gets fully developed in the 1920s in works such as Ouyang Yuqian’s new woman play *Pan Jinlian*.

The use of the term “loose” is ambiguous. On the one hand, it condemns how modern ideas open the door to sexual license and wifely shrewishness. On the other hand, the story sympathizes with the woman’s plight and suggests that the label of “loose” is facetious and might be only an unfair charge from the conservative public. After all, the textual evidence of the woman’s so-called licentiousness is merely that “she is not content to be at home” (*bu an yu shi* 不安於室).¹¹⁴ The author cares less about detailing her promiscuity and focuses on the modern charges that she levels against her husband. Those words strengthen her in the domestic conflict and in the struggle to free herself from the control of the man. The author’s presentation of the wife is ambiguous. Was he trying to suggest that modern ideas will promote sexual promiscuity? Or was he trying to

¹¹³ Jin 津, “Dangfu weixin” 蕩婦維新, *Aiguo bao* (October 1, 1912).

¹¹⁴ This statement first appeared in the ancient classic *Book of Odes* (*Shi jing* 詩經) to describe women’s promiscuity.

demonize a new woman's ambition beyond the inner chambers by depicting her as a *dangfu*? In either reading, the story clearly presents and plays with the slippery boundary between shrews and new women in the public view.

Similar to the wife in this sketch, suffragettes were widely imagined as daring wives who care less about marriage and family than wanton sex. Some writers explicitly dramatize the suffragettes' sexual hunger for men. One satire in *Aiguo baihua bao* 愛國白話報 (*The Patriotic Vernacular News*) recommends that the first two principles in the "Constitution for Equality between Men and Women" (*nannü pingquan jianzhang* 男女平權簡章) should be as following: "First, request the president to allow the establishment of brothels of male prostitutes all over the country so that women can freely visit for entertainment; Second, the Republican constitution should allow women to purchase male concubines, with the limit of a hundred."¹¹⁵ Earlier that year, the same newspaper had published another article titled "Phenomena in the New Women's Circles" (*Xin nüjie de xianxiang* 新女界的現像) that also denounced new women as being "loose" (*fangzong* 放縱) and "common" (*xialiu* 下流) for hiring prostitutes (*jiao tiaozi* 叫條子) and patronizing male opera actors.¹¹⁶

The public's unease with the suffragettes' sexual politics was particularly evident in the public responses to Shen Peizhen's claim of "no husband-ism" (*wufu zhuyi* 無夫主義). At a meeting of the Women's Suffrage Alliance in September 1912, the radical suffragette Shen Peizhen declared that if men continued to refuse suffrage to women,

¹¹⁵ Gai 勾, "Nannü pingquan jianzhang" 男女平權簡章, *Aiguo baihua bao* 愛國白話報 (September 17, 1913).

¹¹⁶ Yi He 一鶴, "Xin nüjie de xianxiang" 新女界的現像, *Aiguo baihua bao* (August 9-10, 1913).

women would adopt a new method: “single women would refuse to marry men for the next ten years (*shinian bu yu nanzi jiehun* 十年不與男子結婚) and married women should refuse to speak to their husbands for ten years (*shinian bu yu nanzi jiaoyan* 十年不與男子交言).”¹¹⁷ Although Shen said “no speaking,” no one missed the connotation of “no sex.” For instance, in the popular piece “Parodying Shen Peizhen” (*Xiyong Shen Peizhen 戲詠沈佩貞*), the line was rewritten as “for ten years, seek no land of the tender” (*shinian xiang bu mi wenrou* 十年鄉不覓溫柔)¹¹⁸ which echoes the common equation of suffragettes with prostitutes.

In October of 1912, *Shen bao* published several articles that called into question the ability of the suffragettes to put Shen Peizhen’s plan into practice. The commentator Li San 立三 hoped that the claim was not just empty talk and that Ms. Shen could really carry it out in her own personal life.¹¹⁹ Xi Yinglu countered Li San and argued that even if Shen could maintain chaste widowhood for ten years, she would not be up to the standards of the “strong-willed women who hold onto the principle of three followings” (*jushou sancong zhi wanfu* 拘守三從之頑婦) and the “chaste ladies who bite down on the corner of the quilt in bed” (*yao beijiao zhi zhenyuan* 咬被角之貞媛). Xi Yinglu thought the best solution was to have these talented women ask local prostitutes to stop serving old customers and reject new patrons for ten years. The author believed this method would eventually make men beg in tears for women’s participation in politics.

¹¹⁷ “Nüzi canzheng hui jishi” 女子參政會紀事, *Minli bao* (September 27, 1912).

¹¹⁸ Mang Han 莽漢, “Xiyong Shen Peizhen” 戲詠沈佩貞, in *Shen Peizhen* 沈佩貞, edited by Fan Lang 飯郎 (Beijing: Xinhua shushe, 1915), 61.

¹¹⁹ Li San 立三, “Xinzhi koukuai” 心直口快, *Shen bao* (October 18, 1912).

However, a concubine dismissed this opinion. The woman argued, even though the prostitutes could refuse their customers, it would still be hard to prevent the civilized new women from falling into decadence and taking business away from professional sex workers. Her claim that “although prostitutes are cheap and low, by no means are they willing to be fooled by the female heroes” (*jijie sui jian you an ken shou zhong yingci suo yu* 妓界雖賤又安肯受眾英雌所愚) bluntly manifested her distrust in the virtue of the new women.¹²⁰

The public felt repulsed by the idea of “no husband-ism” also because the idea became used as a synonym for sexual wantonness. Earlier on during the Kong Hai debate, some educated women had openly disapproved the suffragettes’ promotion of no husband-ism as an excuse used to cover up their loose morals. Zhang Xiaofen 張孝芬 said she knew some women in the Suffrage Alliance who indeed held such anti-humanitarian views.¹²¹ Li Jingye opposed it too, because she thought “no husband-ism” was nothing less than the freedom to change husbands without constraints. She despised the suffragette Lin Zongsu for having changed husbands three times before she was even twenty. Li openly dismissed the suffrage campaign on the grounds that the morals of the suffragettes were too despicable (*ruci zhi renge* 如此之人格).¹²²

Domestic readers found the suffragettes’ noncooperation declarations provocative. Similarly, overseas male students in America found the Western suffragettes’

¹²⁰ Xi Yinglu, “Wen Shen nüshi yanshuo ganyan” 聞沈女士演說感言, *Shen bao* (October 23, 1912).

¹²¹ Zhang Xiaofen 張孝芬, “Nüzi canzheng zhi taolun—Zhang Xiaofen nüshi lai han” 女子參政之討論—張孝芬女士來函, *Minli bao* (March 18, 1912).

¹²² Li Jingye, “Nüzi canzheng zhi taolun.”

determination to reject men and marriage an alarming loss of female virtue. In 1909, the American feminist Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont proposed “a general female strike,” requesting women to “withdraw from every activity in which they are now associated with men” and suggested that “the women will refuse to marry and will have nothing to do with the men, socially, industrially—any way.”¹²³ A couple of years later, both American and British suffrage campaigns reproduced Aristophanes’ play *Lysistrata* to promote the idea of noncooperation. In that ancient play, Lysistrata leads Greek women to “stop the Peloponnesian war by deserting their homes, children and husbands, until the latter will hear reason.”¹²⁴ The modern suffragettes found inspiration in those Greek women’s denial of sex, words of love, kisses, or even kind looks to their husbands or sweethearts.¹²⁵ They called the ancient women “the first suffragettes” or “Greek suffragettes” and were inspired by Lysistrata’s progressive claim that “if you make a man sufficiently uncomfortable he will give up his own soul.”¹²⁶

Facing such defiance, some overseas male authors chose to write a chaste—instead of obscene—story with its heroine being a prodigal suffragette. In the 1913 short story “Lydia and Her Experience” written in English by the Yale student Kai F. Mok 莫介福, the tale is not about how men are tortured by suffragettes to give up their souls. Instead, it is a paean to the triumph of a British man in winning over the soul of a devoted

¹²³ “Progress of Woman Suffrage,” *New York Times* (September 24, 1909).

¹²⁴ “Sit in a Drizzle to See Greek Play: Courageous Suffragists in Outdoor Theatre Hear Aristophanes Plead Their Cause,” *New York Times* (September 20, 1912).

¹²⁵ “First Suffragettes Seen in Greek Play: Aristophanes’s Famous Comedy, ‘Lysistrata,’ Presented at Maxine Elliott’s Theatre,” *New York Times* (February 18, 1913).

¹²⁶ “Sit in a Drizzle to See Greek Play.”

American suffragette. She feels a sense of full contentment in marriage and child-raising, something that the cause of the suffrage movement fails to give her.¹²⁷

The story intentionally elevates love and makes it the ultimate “reason for the persistent failure of the suffragette movement.” “For love grows strong in the breast of every woman at the slightest prompting—love is more natural to her than power—for love is for her to nourish as power is for man to cherish.” The power of love is so strong that even though Lydia has tried very hard to resist it, she eventually gives up her college, her degree, and her relations with fellow activists to embrace it. “Love triumphs over uncertain duty.”¹²⁸

In contrast to erotic fantasies of suffragettes in illicit sex and other forms of transgression, the text about Lydia is strikingly pure and conventional. It gently transforms an unruly suffragette into an innocent girl who happily basks in the warmth of conjugal love. The tone is soft and the image of the suffragette becomes all the more lovely and chaste. After marriage, Lydia officially converts to the position of opposing women’s suffrage. At the end of the story, the narrator “I” (who is a friend of Lydia from college) narrates how Lydia tells him of her enlightenment:

Yesterday while I was with her she pointed out the fact that the female sex of every living creature is invariably smaller than the male, and with this contention she essayed to prove woman has been made only to be the help-mate and consort

¹²⁷ Kai F. Mok 莫介福, “Lydia and Her Experience,” *The Chinese Students’ Monthly*, vol. IX, no.2 (December 10, 1913). Mok was also the chief editor of *The Chinese Students’ Monthly* for the year 1916. While Mok expressed disapproval of female ambitions in gender politics, in 1918, “when the ‘new woman’ increasingly overshadowed the traditional domestic type in America and the New Culture movement was gaining momentum in China,” another overseas male author Yan Dixun chose to write how similar qualities in an American woman he met on a train made him anticipate a similar femininity in a Chinese woman. See Weili Ye, *Seeking Modernity in China’s Name*, 158-59.

¹²⁸ “Lydia and Her Experience,” 141.

of man, while man is supposed to be her protector. How unnatural would it be, therefore, to take on unnatural usages?¹²⁹

By having Lydia voice the conservative position on natural gender order, the text is striking to its readers for its authorial voice and control over Lydia's thoughts, actions, and speeches. In fact, the story is told in a third-person point of view and Lydia is given only one chance of direct speech.

The text shows the author's determination to get Lydia back to the family, as a virtuous wife and mother. This literary treatment was not unlike the way the domestic press painted the suffragettes as husband-deserting and family-abandoning promiscuous women. It is interesting, that while the author in America focused on a chaste and lovely suffragette,¹³⁰ the authors in China showed more interest in imagining suffragettes as lascivious spinsters or lewd wives and focused on transgression as both a source of danger and entertainment. Compared to the violent shrew and the unconstrained polluting shrew, depictions of the obscene shrew in the modern context are the most versatile and politically sensitive. The authors are concerned less with sex itself than with exploring cultural, ideological, and moral tensions.

Shrews as Unconstrained

The *pofu* is literally the “scattering woman.” The character *po* is associated with actions such as spilling and splashing. By definition, the *pofu* prototype in traditional literature does scatter -- from various liquids, bodily wastes, to other forms of pollution.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 142.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

She is unable to constrain either her female effluvia or her temper. Out of rage or jealousy, she is often depicted as dumping a bucket of nightsoil onto men and female rivals.¹³¹ The *pofu* is “both a polluting force and a castrating one.”¹³² She not only brings pollution but also attacks and mutilates the male body.

Male authors frequently made use of the trope of the scattering shrew to fantasize women’s transgression. As analyzed earlier, in many public discourses suffragettes were depicted as spilling breast milk, splashing blood, and scattering violence. While in those discourses the appearance of the *pofu* trope is largely dispersed and fragmentary, a later text *Minguo yanshi yanyi* 民國豔史演義 (*The Unofficial Erotic History of the Republic*; 1928) offers a concentrated reworking of the characteristics of the *pofu* in its portrayal of the suffragettes.¹³³ It is interesting, that although the novel is titled “erotic history” and does include obscene stories of many “warlords and bureaucrats” (*junfa guanliao* 軍閥官僚) and “alluring and wanton women” (*yaoji dangfu* 妖姬蕩婦), when depicting the suffragettes the novel does not choose to write them as promiscuous. It discredits those women mainly through the trope of the *pofu* instead of the *yinfu* or *dangfu*.

The novel features a suffragette named “Sun Beizhen” 孫貝珍. The name invokes the suffragette Shen Peizhen, but the behaviors of this character also recall the radical suffragettes Tang Qunying and Wang Changguo. Physically similar to Tang Qunying, Sun Beizhen is portrayed as extraordinarily fat (*yichang feipang* 異常肥胖) and wears a

¹³¹ For details, see, for example, Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, 146-47.

¹³² McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 55.

¹³³ Tao Hancui 陶寒翠, *Minguo yanshi yanyi* 民國豔史演義, first published in 1928 by “Shi huan bookstore” (*Shi huan shuju*) in Shanghai. My quotes here are based on the contemporary reprint by *Zhejiang guji chubanshe* in 1990. This reprint keeps the novel’s original content, commentaries, and the 120 illustrations.

tight set of Western women's clothes and a pair of golden-rimmed glasses. She is described as ugly (*mianmu kezeng* 面目可憎), though her face in the illustration appears to be pleasant (Figure 4). She is good at public speaking. Whenever there are meetings, she always jumps up to the podium to shout new words such as "freedom" and "equality." She is also good at carrying out the idea of gender equality—she can insert herself in a crowd of men and speak without feeling embarrassed.



Figure 4. "The Original Erotic Look of Sun Beizhen." Tao Hancui, *Minguo yanshi yanyi*, 86.

One episode starts when Sun invites two male senators to her hotel room for a talk about women's suffrage. Afraid of Sun's female power (*ciwei* 雌威), the senators call off their dates with prostitutes and show up in her room. The story then goes on to depict in compelling details the bizarre behavior of Sun that greatly shock the male visitors.

Studies on Republican history have noticed the unusual depiction of the suffragettes in this piece of unofficial history. Researchers tend to interpret Sun Beizhen's unseemly conduct in terms of her transgression of gender codes.¹³⁴ No studies have yet paid attention to the specific method the text adopts to represent the

¹³⁴ For example, see Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*, 98-99; Dong, "Unofficial History," 174-75.

transgression by its dense use of tropes associated with the *pofu* shrews. David Strand in his *An Unfinished Republic* notices the specific traditional woman type that Sun Beizhen's character is modeled on. He categorizes Sun as "a vulgar slut,"¹³⁵ a synonym for the shrew. But Strand's study does not examine how Sun's image is based on an updated *pofu*. In this section, I aim to further the reading of this unofficial history from the perspective of its modern reconfiguration of the *pofu* shrew.

Sun Beizhen's image as a *pofu* starts to take shape at the moment the senators are entering the room. Her loud, coarse voice welcomes them before they see her, a scenario that somehow evokes the first appearance of the shrew Wang Xifeng in *Honglou meng* who is annoying by her "very loud voice" and makes Lin Daiyu wonder who is "so brash and unmannerly."¹³⁶ The men's first view of Sun Beizhen is also quite unmannerly. The men see her lying in bed with her legs widely splayed apart (like a prostitute waiting for her customers) and her big natural feet resting high on the edge of the bed. The men feel embarrassed. Yet Sun rises up very naturally to shake hands with them. One senator "feels that the palms of the great woman are wettish, which is probably because her hands get sweaty so easily (*shou han te duo* 手汗特多)."¹³⁷

This image of her damp palms situates Sun Beizhen within the norms of the *pofu* shrew. Literally, she starts to spill ("*po*") as soon as she appears in the story. This detail associates her with water and the concept of *yin* in the Confucian *yinyang* symbolism. Shrews normally stand for *yin* excess that often manifests in cold, wet, and dark imagery.

¹³⁵ Strand, *An Unfinished Republic*, 124.

¹³⁶ *Honglou meng*, chapter 3. For the translation, see Hawkes and Minford, trans., *The Story of the Stone*, 1:90-91.

¹³⁷ Tao Hancui, *Minguo yanshi yanyi*, 93.

As the water radical in the character *po* indicates, shrews' appearances in traditional literature are often accompanied by excessive water imagery such as floods or uncontained body fluids.¹³⁸ In this erotic history, Sun Beizhen exudes sweat, sweats heavily, gulps tea frequently, and has to relieve herself repeatedly.

When eloquently protesting against gendered differences in social roles, Sun suddenly stands up and takes off her Western-style long skirt. She tosses it on the bed and exposes a pair of pink flowery Chinese pants. The men see her calmly walking to the chamber pot that is placed in the same room. She bends down, throws the pot lid to the floor, pulls her pants down, and sits on the pot directly in front of the men. When she asks one man to pass her a cigarette, she urinates into the pot which makes a loud noise (*niao sheng da zuo* 尿聲大作). Sun then loudly declares that what the revolutionaries have been sacrificing their lives for are freedom and equality (Figure 5, upper half). Several plops come from the pot (*jingtong zhong youshi dingdong xiang le ji sheng* 淨桶中又是丁東響了幾聲) as she relieves herself and then quotes Madame Roland to assert her slogan: "I'd rather die than give up equality and freedom." Exactly at the moment when she shouts out her slogan, the chamber pot "ding dongs" again, "resembling the rhythm of a music box" (*wansi bayin zhong de jiezou yiban* 宛似八音鐘的節奏一般). As she continues to express her determination in winning freedom and equality for Chinese women, the music in the pot carries on (*youshi dingding dongdong dingding de zou qi yue lai* 又是丁丁東東東東丁丁的奏起樂來).¹³⁹ The text

¹³⁸ For an analysis of the shrew and *yinyang* symbolism through the imagery of water, see Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, 142-49.

¹³⁹ Tao Hancui, *Minguo yanshi yanyi*, 96-98.

intentionally sets up a parallel between Sun Beizhen's oral eloquence and her fluid excretory flow. She does not differentiate between the openings in her upper and lower body. This Bakhtinian carnivalesque display of the suffragette's uncouth natural body inserting itself into political discourse reveals nature to be an unattractive standard in comparison to the social construction.



Figure 5. Sun Beizhen sitting on the chamber pot and rubbing between her toes when discussing women's suffrage with the two senators. Tao Hancui, *Minguo yanshi yanyi*, 97.

The parallel climaxes when Sun raises her voice to an even higher pitch (*gaosheng* 高聲) and claims, “Chinese men always treat women as playthings. We women are really too pathetic. When we achieve equality between men and women, I

will let rip an even bigger sense of injustice (*xie zhe yi dakou yuanqi* 洩這一大口冤氣) on behalf of our two hundred million fellow women.” Instantly, there is a loud percussive noise coming out from the pot. The text comments, “When Sun Beizhen is talking about venting rage from her mouth, the lower part of her body vents air.” Sun continues, declaring that she wants to have the two hundred million Chinese men wear powder and rouge, bind their feet, and serve as women’s concubines and prostitutes. Another two “plunks” sound in the pot. The men feel repulsed by Sun’s absurd speeches (*jingren qlun* 驚人奇論) and the emanating stench (*chouqi si zheng* 臭氣四蒸).¹⁴⁰

The chapter title “Flowing and Gurgling, Letting Rip Some Hot Air” (*Taotao gugu da fang jueci* 滔滔汨汨大放厥詞) highlights the parallel between Sun’s upper and lower body and her bombastic speeches. Echoing the traditional *pofu*, Sun Beizhen refuses to contain either speech or her excreta (sweat, gas, urine, and excrement). The upper and lower bodily openings or gaps that signify trouble, contamination, and transgression in traditional literature, serve to reinforce Sun Beizhen’s identity as the loquacious and polluting *pofu*. The commentator of the novel laughs at Sun for being such “a monster of the women’s world” (*nüjie zhong zhi guaiwu* 女界中之怪物) and “a female evil spirit” (*nü er yao zhe* 女而妖者),¹⁴¹ which also evokes the traditional association between shrews and animals, fox-spirits, or monsters.

After about an hour, Sun Beizhen finally stands up from her chamber pot and sits back on the edge of the bed. She loudly calls in the servant to bring her a pair of small scissors. She then takes off her big black leather shoes and white socks, exposing a pair

¹⁴⁰ Tao Hancui, *Minguo yanshi yanyi*, 98.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 95, 105.

of fat, swollen feet. On her heels there are patches of calloused skin, peeling off, like a tree covered with warts.

The text revels in the exposure of Sun Beizhen's uncivilized natural body. From her lower body to her feet, she feels no qualms about exposing herself to the men. Not only do her acts rebel against established gender codes, but also the image of her body is sheer defiance against normative ideals. The look of her feet contrasts to the image of female feet desired by traditional males. Hers are big and rough, instead of small, soft, and fragrant. Her toenails are so old and thick (*ji lao qie hou* 既老且厚) that when Sun cuts them the nails jump and spatter (*tan jiang kailai* 彈將開來). One piece of the nails falls exactly on the lips of one senator and gets glued there in his saliva. The senator hurriedly wipes off the nail with his hand and pulls out a handkerchief to wipe his lips. The man's reaction once again highlights the sense of pollution generated by the *pofu*'s unconstrained, scattered bodily wastes. However, the author also makes the senators look bad through the image of the saliva on the men's lips. The saliva points to the fact that the men experienced sexual pleasure in seeing the prostitute-like Sun Beizhen. The public woman is being substituted for the prostitutes the men had planned to visit.

It gets worse. Sun Beizhen then dips one finger in her teacup and uses it to scratch between her toes. She tells the men that she has suffered from an annoying itch between her toes since she was little. She has to use her fingers to rub those areas very hard (*dada de moca yifan* 大大的摩擦一番) every night so that she can fall asleep. In order to achieve better results, she describes in excitement, "a desperate strength" (*yigu sijin* 一股死勁) is needed to break some soft skin between the toes (*ba jiaozhi wa li de ruanpi capo* 把腳指洼里的軟皮擦破) to let some water flow out—if you can get some blood out, that

would be even more comfortable (Figure 5, bottom half). When she asks the men for advice for treating the “ringworm” (*wan xuan* 頑癬), she keeps dipping her finger in the tea and rubbing hard between her toes. Sun says that her mother also suffers from a similar disease of ringworm over her body. To fight the itch, her mother must bathe in boiling hot water (*fei tang* 沸燙; *feishui* 沸水) every single day.¹⁴²

In *yinyang* symbolism, the “ringworm” is another *yin* imagery associated with dampness, bacteria, and contamination. Together with the water and bloody effluvia discharged from Sun’s feet, the image of the tea, and the bath water, the ringworm adds to the overall picture of *yin* excess associated with the suffragette. In particular, the detail about the critical demand for hot water, an apparent *yang* symbol, further manifests the nature of the suffragette and her mother as *yin*-excessive, contaminating creatures.

Although this *yanshi* text centers mainly on Sun Beizhen’s transgression and pollution, the many sexual innuendoes in the depiction of her frustrated efforts to get rid of the itch between her toes point to the sexualized nature of the meeting between the two senators and this public woman. Western psychosexual theories describe the foot as “a very primitive sexual symbol”¹⁴³ and point out the “world-wide association of the foot with the sexual organ.”¹⁴⁴ Ming Qing pornographic depictions of sex often describe the

¹⁴² Tao Hancui, *Minguo yanshi yanyi*, 99-100.

¹⁴³ Sigmund Freud, *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* (New York and Washington: Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Company, 1920), 19. Freud also pointed out in the note that “the shoe or slipper is accordingly a symbol for the female genitals.”

¹⁴⁴ Havelock Ellis, *Psychology of Sex: The Biology of Sex—The Sexual Impulse in Youth—Sexual Deviation—The Erotic Symbolisms—Homosexuality—Marriage—The Art of Love* (London: William Heinemann (Medical Books) LTD., 1939), 145.

man's fascination with rubbing the bound feet of his female lover.¹⁴⁵ Sun Beizhen takes unusual pleasure in scratching her feet; she requires a lubricant in order to achieve her goal of breaking the skin in order to release some blood. The written text focuses on Sun Beizhen's obsessive rubbing motions as she tries to relieve her itch. However, the details in the illustrations of the scene point to a mutual sexual engagement. In the top image in Figure 5, in which Sun is smoking and slouching over her chamber pot, she points in the direction of the two male voyeurs. In the second image, the men have drawn much closer to her and are sitting in erect attention pointing directly at the exposed vagina which peeps out from under her skirt, only inches away from her hand which is distractedly rubbing her foot. The painting on the wall beside her bed echoes the thrust of the man's extended finger. The exposure of Sun's natural feet is just one more detail of a traditional *yinfu*'s willingness to take unconstrained pleasure in her body. The illustration suggests an equal pleasure taken by male readers in the depictions of the obscene shrew, no matter how crude the presentation.

The senators are finally allowed to leave after showing their support for women's suffrage. Out of delight, Sun jumps off the bed and writes more than ten letters all at once, inviting her fellow sisters to come for a meeting the next day. She then pulls out a big jar of biscuits from underneath the bed. After gobbling biscuits, gulping down four big cups of tea, farting loudly, and sitting on the pot one more time, she falls asleep and immediately breaks out into loud snores. The full chamber pot overturns the next day during the women's meeting, when one suffragette jumps up while sitting on one side of

¹⁴⁵ In *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅, for example, there are various terms depicting Ximen Qing's ways of playing with women's bound feet. He can "nie" 捏 (pinch), "wo" 握 (hold), "nian" 拿 (use three fingers to fiddle with the toes), "sao" 搔 (use the thumb to scratch the bottom of the feet), and "kong" 控 (use the middle finger to insert in between the toes and then rub).

the pot. The filth shoots up (*zhi chong er qi* 直沖而起) and sprays in a wild manner (*kuang jian er chu* 狂濺而出) all over a suffragette who sits on the other side of the pot. This woman is surnamed Tang 湯 which literally means hot, boiling water, or soup.¹⁴⁶

This scene makes use of a dense web of associations to the trope of the scattering *pofu*. The novel presents a conjunction of almost all motifs that are typical in the characterization of this type of shrew. In addition to being a polluting force, Sun Beizhen also embodies the castrating threat of the *pofu* when she attacks Zhong Xiaorun 仲曉潤, the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, during the parliament meeting the next day. The scene is clearly based on the actual ruckus the suffragettes caused in the parliament and their public assaults on Song Jiaoren.

At the meeting, Zhong Xiaorun starts his speech by acknowledging the significance of suffrage for Chinese women, which exhilarates Sun Beizhen and the other women activists. However, Zhong's speech then takes a sharp turn to state that Chinese women are by no means ready for suffrage. The audience applauds, but Sun Beizhen immediately "glares in rage" (*dengyan danu* 瞪眼大怒). Other suffragettes turn red from their anger. As Zhong carries on with his opposition, Sun gets so angry that the blue veins stand out on her cheeks (*lian jia shang de jitiao qingjin ye bao jiang qilai* 連頰上的幾條青筋也暴將起來) and the fury in her heart (*xintou yiban nuhuo* 心頭一般怒火) can no longer be restrained (*nali zai anna de zhu* 那裏再按捺得住). She jumps onto the stage in a storm of anger (*nuqi chongchong* 怒氣衝衝) and tugs tightly (*jinjin niuzhu* 緊緊扭住) at Zhong Xiaorun's tie with her right hand. The women in the audience all chant, "Hit!

¹⁴⁶ Tao Hancui, *Minguo yanshi yanyi*, 105-106.

Hit! Hit!” Sun raises her left hand and gives Zhong a solid smack across his face (Figure 6, upper half). She intends to slap him one more time when the police swarm in and drag her off the stage. She and the other women stamp and curse (*dunzu dama* 賽足大罵), throwing the meeting into chaos.¹⁴⁷

According to Keith McMahon, the beating, slapping, and hair pulling are symbolic displaced forms of castration, although in several instances the castration “manifests itself in actual policing or attempted amputation of the penis.”¹⁴⁸ These forms of castration are all blatant in the depiction of Sun Beizhen’s attack on Zhong Xiaorun. Textual details highlight the shrew’s uncontained anger that rises, explodes, splashes, and finally takes the form of verbal and physical violence. The slapping is loud and the curses are crude. The symbolic castration is executed publicly and is therefore even more insulting. Also, as a phallic symbol,¹⁴⁹ the tie that Sun grabs in hand is emblematic of the shrew’s classic attacks on the male phallus.

In understanding how the author viewed the role of women in this *Yanshi*, I agree overall with Madeleine Yue Dong’s observation that “*yeshi* [unofficial history] does not imagine the Republic as giving women more public power.”¹⁵⁰ However, in those moments when the suffragettes are depicted as *pofu*, it is possible to see the narrator’s

¹⁴⁷ Tao Hancui, *Minguo yanshi yanyi*, 109-11.

¹⁴⁸ McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists*, 55.

¹⁴⁹ Sigmund Freud mentioned more than once the significance of neckties as phallic symbols. For example, in the tenth lecture of his *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* delivered at the University of Vienna from 1915 to 1917, he said, “A tie, being an object which hangs down and is not worn by women is clearly a male symbol.” See Sigmund Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (New York: Pocket Books, 1953), 165. Besides “the Freudian significance of ties” as a sexual symbol, scholars such as James Laver point out that there is also a dimension of “the Adlerian meaning” to ties which defines them as a symbol of social power and hierarchy. See James Laver, *Modesty in Dress: An Inquiry into the Fundamentals of Fashion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), 124-25.

¹⁵⁰ Dong, “Unofficial History,” 182.

delight in how the shrewish Sun holds power over the flawed male characters. While the Republic has not yet granted women power, the use of the *pofu* trope does. The image of the shrew engaging in her unseemly natural activities—either when sitting on the toilet or indulging in her own bodily functions—is an expression of contempt for these male representatives of the political order.

There is another striking passage from a modern Chinese text that revolves around the imagination of a modern Chinese woman sitting on the toilet. It is Zhang Ailing's 張愛玲 (1920-1995) unrelenting depiction of the female character's “narcissistic excrement-retention”¹⁵¹ in her short story “*Hong meigui yu bai meigui*” 紅玫瑰與白玫瑰 (Red Rose and White Rose) published in 1944. In *Yanshi*, the male author foregrounds moments of unconstrained excretion by the Westernized suffragette Sun Beizhen. In “*Hong meigui yu bai meigui*,” the female writer exposes the supposedly authentic Chinese woman (the “white rose”) Meng Yanli 孟烟鹂 being preoccupied with constipation and the contemplation of her own body image in the household bathroom. Zhang writes that Yanli likes to observe the changing looks of her belly and bellybutton when she sits on the toilet.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Rey Chow, “Seminal Dispersal, Fecal Retention, and Related Narrative Matters: Eileen Chang’s Tale of Roses in the Problematic of Modern Writing,” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol.11 no.2 (1999), 168.

¹⁵² Zhang Ailing 張愛玲, “*Hong meigui yu bai meigui*” 紅玫瑰與白玫瑰, in *Zhang Ailing duanpian xiaoshuo ji* 張愛玲短篇小說集 (Taipei: Huangguan chubanshe, 1976), 101.



Figure 6. Sun Beizhen jumping on the stage and slapping Zhong Xiaorun. Tao Hancui, *Minguo yanshi yanyi*, 108.

In no other modern Chinese texts do readers encounter episodes of women's excretion as honest and crude as depicted by these two texts. Both texts feature women's undignified moments of bodily discharging. One features bouts of diarrhea as a metaphor for the new woman's loose morals and fluid attitude towards modern ideas at the dawn of Chinese modernity in the 1910s. The other features self-willed frequent constipation as a metaphor for a Chinese woman's willful preservation of her inner matters: her excreta, her virginity, and her Chinese-ness. Similar to the repulsion felt by the senators towards Sun Beizhen's body image, the appearance of Meng Yanli's "white silkworm-like body" (*bai can shide shenqu* 白蠶似的身軀) against the dim light in the bathroom also annoys

her husband, provoking in him a sense of mundane filth (*jiachang zhong you yizhong wuhui* 家常中有一種污穢).¹⁵³

For both the unconstrained Sun Beizhen and the self-contained Meng Yanli, the time spent on the toilet grants them a chance to defy the masculine structure of time and order. They sit and sit, reluctant to leave the pot. They enjoy their excreta, either within or without. The female body becomes a source of freedom, discovery, and self-assurance. Both Sun Beizhen and Meng Yanli disregard the sense of filth felt by male characters about their natural bodies associated with scatological imagery. They knowingly violate standard models imposed on the behavior of bodies of women in a modern context.

Yanli's textual association with the toilet (even with the retention of the excrement) blemishes her assumed purity. Later plots of her committing adultery and indulging her husband's decadent lifestyle further add to her impure and unchaste image. "She is completely defeated."¹⁵⁴ Her husband laments at the end that even the white rose has changed. The whole story seems to say that there are no white roses in the modern world, only unconstrained shrews, of different types and dimensions.

A Battle of Typologies: Chaste Victim versus Shrew

In an article in late November 1912, Dun Gen suggested Shen Peizhen change her name. *Peizhen* literally means to follow the ideal of chastity, as *Zhen* is chastity and *Pei* means to wear or to admire. Dun Gen stressed that since chastity had become viewed as a female vice (*nüzi zhi ede* 女子之惡德) in recent modern theories, there was no need for

¹⁵³ Zhang Ailing, "Hong meigui yu bai meigui," 104.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 108.

Shen to preserve it.¹⁵⁵ Dun Gen probably did not know that Shen Peizhen had already changed her name. Originally named *Muzhen* 慕貞 (literally, “envy chastity”), Shen changed it to *Peizhen* to assert that her nature was chaste rather than that she desired to be chaste.¹⁵⁶

This seemingly trivial episode points to a larger issue that mattered to the suffragettes: their reputation for sexual purity. It is interesting that the suffragettes presented different attitudes towards public vilification. When newspapers depicted them as modern violent shrews, they felt no qualms about such associations. Instead, they even expressed pride in their virility and militancy. Yet when it came to their sexual reputation, they acted quite differently. As Louise Edwards observes, the suffragettes “felt no compunction about engaging in very public military battles, or acts of public nuisance such as window smashing, yet they repeatedly asserted their moral worth in echoes of old codes of female chastity.”¹⁵⁷ Sometimes they even intentionally resorted to violence (when there were alternative means) in order to save their sexual reputations. In the incidents to be examined below we can notice “the considerable extent to which the women suffrage activists were concerned to defend their moral status in matters of sexuality but were completely unconcerned about their reputations in regards to violence and the destruction of property.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Dun Gen, “Quan Shen Peizhen nüshi gaiming shuo” 勸沈佩貞女士改名說, *Shen bao* (November 24, 1912), 10.

¹⁵⁶ “Shen Peizhen zhi an zhong an” 沈佩貞之案中案, originally published in *Shenzhou ribao* 神州日報, quoted from *Shen Peizhen*, 35.

¹⁵⁷ Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*, 77.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 87.

Unlike shrews in the past, the suffragettes fought to control their own image and alternately embraced or rejected the depiction of them as shrews. Their violent high-profile rejection of the *yinfu* label can be read as attesting to their strategic reclaiming of the regime of female virtue, as we will see in the incidents in which Tang Qunying and Shen Peizhen ransacked newspaper offices as a protest against libelous reports that slandered their sexual morality. The sensational trial of Shen Peizhen, presented below, also illustrates the terms of discursive tactics employed by Shen Peizhen that showed her feminist embrace of traditional femininity in order to ward off the label of shrewishness.

It was not uncommon during the early Republican years for the new women to protest the press. *Shi bao* once noted that, after the emergence of the Republican new women, their “bizarre events and fancy stories” (*qishi jiahua* 奇事佳話) became a hot topic in the press. The new women could by no means accept those reports in silence (*bukeng rang ren qineng mo er* 不肯讓人豈能默爾), so there were always incidents of them causing trouble in newspaper offices (*danao baoguan zhi shi* 打鬧報館之事). The article mentions several such incidents: Tang Qunying took off the signboard of the *Guoguang xinwen* 國光新聞 (*Guoguang News*) and smashed up the office of the *Changsha ribao* 長沙日報 (*Changsha Daily*); Shen Peizhen wrecked the office of the *Guomin gong bao* 國民公報 (*Citizens' Daily*) because it published her name alongside the names of the prostitute Jin Xiuqing 金秀卿 and the opera actor Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳; Pan Lianbi 潘連璧 harshly beat a journalist from *Yaxiya bao* 亞細亞報 (*The Eastern News*) for his use of an erotic phrase when describing her appearance.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Ping Wu 平五, “Shen Peizhen wuda Guo Tong” 沈佩貞誤打郭同, originally published in *Shi bao*, quoted from *Shen Peizhen*, 13-14.

The women's degree of mobility and force demonstrated in these incidents is notable, since it speaks to their determination to intervene in the construction of their public image. In the case of Tang Qunying, a bound-feet, middle-aged woman, her stubbornness in defending her moral standing is even more telling. Her confrontation with *Changsha ribao* had to do with its publication of slander about her and a man named Zheng Shidao 鄭師道. Zheng was a senator and an old friend and supporter of Tang. He was said to have been attracted to Tang for a long time, yet Tang Qunying had rejected his advances and marriage proposals. Out of desperation, Zheng went to the office of *Changsha ribao* and published an announcement of their marriage in February 1913, hoping to force her to accept him. When other suffragettes told her about the announcement, Tang Qunying flew into a rage. She led a team of women to question the chief editor and demanded that the newspaper publish a correction. When the editors refused, the women stormed the office and damaged printing equipment, rendering the newspaper unable to publish for days.¹⁶⁰

Tang Qunying was “presumably a virtuous and chaste widow.”¹⁶¹ She viewed this incident as a disgrace to her good name. Those who had read the banns and later heard of the ruckus at the newspaper interpreted the episode as Tang acting as a loose wife who demanded a divorce right after marriage.¹⁶² In unofficial histories at the time, this incident was depicted as a typical shrewish farce. In *Liudong waishi*, she is depicted as a

¹⁶⁰ For details of the incident, see “Tang Qunying da Changsha nao bao” 唐群英大長沙鬧報, *Minli bao* (February 28, March 1 and 2, 1913), 10; “Tang Qunying yu Zheng Shidao” 唐群英與鄭師道, in *Tang Qunying shiliao jicui*, 102-4.

¹⁶¹ Strand, *An Unfinished Republic*, 126.

¹⁶² “Tang Qunying yu Zheng Shidao,” 103.

pofu who knocks over the type case in the printing room, scatters the types like a rainfall (*huahua de yizhen yu sa le yi di* 嘩嘩的一陣雨灑了一地), and lifts and waves the chairs like a demon’s dance (*juqi yizi zuo tianmo wu* 舉起椅子做天魔舞).¹⁶³ In *Minguo qu shi* 民國趣史 (*The Funny History of the Republic*; 1917), she is portrayed as a *yinfu* who cheats on and betrays her loyal lover Zheng Shidao.¹⁶⁴

The force and urgency of Tang Qunying’s response was remarkable. As observed by David Strand, when facing the editorial ridicule of her “as a not-so-chaste widow,” Tang did not choose to “offer mockery in return, even though her literary and debating skills fully equipped her to do so.”¹⁶⁵ Nor did she choose to use any of the newspapers she controlled to channel her rage. She opted for violent public actions, as her first and only choice. Her radical choice suggested unequal status and power of influence between mainstream newspapers and the women’s own feminist publications. Tang’s direct attack on the paper bluntly informed the public that her sexual morality was not something to be made fun of. The new women would defend their sexual reputations, even if it meant gaining a reputation for incivility. Facing social hostility, the new women’s embrace of shrewish violence enabled them to express their opinions and assert their agency in a more effective way.

¹⁶³ Buxiaosheng, *Liudong waishi*, 447.

¹⁶⁴ Li Dingyi 李定夷, “Xiaoxiang fengliu an” 瀟湘風流案, in *Minguo qushi* 民國趣史 (Shanghai: Guohua shuju, 1917).

¹⁶⁵ Strand, *An Unfinished Republic*, 273.



Figure 7. Tang Qunying (left) and Shen Peizhen

Shen Peizhen's conflict with *Shenzhou ribao* 神州日報 (*The National Herald*) in June 1915 was even more sensational. After the decline of the suffrage movement in late 1912, Yuan Shikai included in his government several leading women activists under the title of “female counselor.”¹⁶⁶ Shen Peizhen was said to be especially proud of her title and often carried a name card showing off her connection with Yuan’s regime.¹⁶⁷ In the 1914 novel *Jinling qiu* 金陵秋 (*The Autumn in Nanjing*), Lin Shu 林紓 used the character Bei Qingcheng 貝清澄 (“Qingcheng” is a pun on the Chinese term referring to the “city-toppling” catastrophic power of the femme fatale) to allude to Shen Peizhen’s illicit networking with political leaders. The novel condemned her for using her beauty (*fengmao yi jia* 風貌亦佳) and sexuality to pursue fame and social status (*te dang er wu*

¹⁶⁶ Xu Zhiyan 許指嚴, “Nü weiren” 女偉人, in *Xinhua mi ji* 新華秘記, first published in 1918 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 145.

¹⁶⁷ Bao Tianxiao 包天笑, *Chuan ying lou huiyilu* 鈿影樓回憶錄 (Xianggang: Dahua chubanshe, 1971), 394. Also see depictions in Tao Hancui, *Minguo yanshi yanyi*, 112.

jian 特蕩而無檢; *hao ming er guang jiao* 好名而廣交).¹⁶⁸ The Republican politician Liu Chengyu 劉成禹 (1876-1953) also recalled that Shen had intimate relations with every significant person in the government while also introducing (*gouyin shaojie* 勾引紹介) her female comrades to the political men for pleasures.¹⁶⁹

A two-part article published in *Shenzhou ribao* developed an incident that had occurred in a restaurant between Shen Peizhen, her girlfriends, and a couple of playboys into a full narrative which the author thought “could be read as an erotic novel” (*ke zuo yipian yanqing xiaoshuo guan* 可作一篇豔情小說觀). The narrative revolves around a party at the Xingchun Restaurant (*Xingchun ju* 醒春居) which was located in one of the popular centers of prostitution in Beijing. According to the article, the party was put together mainly for Shen Peizhen, because she was said to be interested in the young tycoon playboy Liang San 良三. At the party, one of Shen’s girlfriends, Jiang Shuwan 蔣淑婉, proposed a game. It was rumored that Jiang had earlier exposed her naked lower body on another public occasion. Jiang set Shen Peizhen up in the game and asked a man to kneel down to smell Shen’s feet. Shen Peizhen was offended: “My feet have long been unbound and look no different from the feet of men. What is the point of smelling them?” Liang San then smacked the table and shouted at Shen for not following the rules of the

¹⁶⁸ Lin Shu 林紓, *Jinling qiu* 金陵秋, in *Zhongguo jindai guben xiaoshuo jicheng* 中國近代孤本小說集成 (Beijing: Dazhong wenyi chubanshe, 1999), 5:3954.

¹⁶⁹ Liu Chengyu 劉成禹, *Shi zai tang zayi* 世載堂雜憶, in *Jindai Zhongguo shiliao congkan* 近代中國史料叢刊 (Taipei: Wenhui chubanshe, 1971), 717:220.

game. Shen immediately overturned the table in a rage and shouted abuse at him (*po kou da ma* 破口大罵).¹⁷⁰

After seeing the article in *Shenzhou ribao*, Shen Peizhen insisted the newspaper issue an apology. A correspondent for the newspaper Wang Pengnian 汪彭年 refused Shen's request and continued to expose her private affairs with political celebrities (*jie qi yin si* 揭其陰私).¹⁷¹ On the night of June 13, 1915, Shen Peizhen led a team of men and women to the paper's Beijing office to search for Wang. Unable to locate Wang, the team mistakenly assaulted a certain Guo Tong 郭同 who shared the courtyard with Wang. Guo Tong was said to have cursed and attacked the women as well on that night.¹⁷² The public was amazed at the women's use of violence and their flamboyant transgression of gender propriety. An article in *Shi bao* commented:

Gang fighting (*shuaizhong daren* 率眾打人) was popular among male party members during the first two years of the Republic. Now, it is rare to see that in the men's world, but it happens frequently among the women. Compared to the use of might (*wuli zhuyi shi shi lihai* 武力主義實是利害), all others measures such as going to court or arguing for justice seem only too cumbersome (*tai fansuo* 太繁瑣).¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Bei An 悲菴, "Shen Peizhen da nao Xingchunju ji" 沈佩貞大鬧醒春居記, *Shenzhou ribao* (June 1 and 2, 1915).

¹⁷¹ Liu Chengyu, *Shi zai tang zayi*, 221.

¹⁷² Ibid., 222.

¹⁷³ "Shen Peizhen wuda Guo Tong," 14.

This passage is helpful in understanding the suffragettes' resorting to violence rather than using the legal system to get redress. The women apparently placed more trust in the effect of violence than in pursuing justice reasonably through legal means. To them, filing a lawsuit was not only cumbersome but most likely fruitless. As we shall see, during the court trial of Shen Peizhen, the public was clearly more interested in hearing titillating details than in pursuing truth and justice.

Guo Tong in fact agreed not to sue the women intruders after having a drink with them. But the public opinion (*yulun* 輿論) insisted that the “extremely cruel and ruthless” (*bao li zi sui* 暴戾恣睢) Shen Peizhen must be punished. Several newspapers even “lined up together to ridicule” (*qunqi er yeyu* 群起而揶揄) Guo Tong as a loose man no better than the playboys like Liang San. Under pressure, Guo had no choice but to bring the case to court (*zhong bunengbu qisu* 終不能不起訴).¹⁷⁴

Although the new women had been irritating to the male-dominated press, it was not until this incident that the papers saw a perfect chance to take down those unbridled women. This incident marked “the first erroneous attack” (*cuoda ze diyi zao* 錯打則第一遭)¹⁷⁵ that the press saw as solid grounds for suing the women. With the exception of the newspaper *Shuntian shibao* 順天時報, the women's only supporter, Beijing papers such as *Chou hua bao* 酬華報, *Yaxiya bao* 亞細亞報, *Xin Zhongguo bao* 新中國報, and *Rizhi bao* 日知報 all expressed a determination to put Shen Peizhen on trial in order to save

¹⁷⁴ “Ben an zhi jieshu” 本案之結束, in *Shen Peizhen*, 1.

¹⁷⁵ “Shen Peizhen wuda Guo Tong,” 16.

“corrupted social mores and disrupted national order.”¹⁷⁶ The *Shenzhou ribao* openly referred to Shen as “a shrewish and badly behaved woman.” (*yi pola zhi chouxing niizi* — 濟辣之醜行女子).¹⁷⁷ Other reporters deplored the “vulgar speech” and “barbaric fighting” originally associated with “violent shrews in the countryside” (*xiangcun hanfu* 鄉邨悍婦) or “wanton shrews of the village” (*dangfu cunyu* 蕩婦村嫗).¹⁷⁸

One newspaper even produced a drum-song (*gu'er ci* 鼓兒詞) titled “The Fate of the Angry Women” (*Nu ci yuan* 怒雌緣) that framed the Guo Tong incident in an erotic style (*yanci yiduan chang lai ting* 豔詞一段唱來聽). The song was so popular in Beijing society that one article claimed that “ten thousand mouths were circulating it” (*wan kou zheng chuan* 萬口爭傳).¹⁷⁹ In comparison to other folk retellings of this incident (such as bamboo ballads and vernacular poems¹⁸⁰), this drum-song written by Dan Fu 丹斧 stands out for its obscenity. For example, while other caricatures described Guo Tong as having wounds on his head or neck or belly,¹⁸¹ the song fantasized that Guo Tong had been

¹⁷⁶ Wan Xiang 晚香, “Shen Peizhen ye da Shenzhou guan” 沈佩貞夜打神州館, originally published in *Shenzhou ribao*, quoted from *Shen Peizhen*, 24-25.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 25.

¹⁷⁸ “Shen Peizhen sao zhi guaixiang” 沈佩貞撒濺之怪象, originally published in *Beijing guo hua bao* (北京國華報), quoted from *Shen Peizhen*, 19. Lao Tan 老談, “Wenming...kaitong...haha” 文明...開通...哈哈, in *Shen Peizhen*, 41.

¹⁷⁹ “Shen Peizhen wuda Guo Tong,” 14.

¹⁸⁰ As recalled by Liu Chengyu, *Shanghai shibao* (上海時報) published a bamboo ballad (*xinhua zhuzhici* 新華竹枝詞) written by Pu Yicheng 潘一乘 which made fun of the foot-smelling farce at the restaurant. Later the newspaper had a satirical vernacular poem deriding improper behaviors of the new women. See Liu Chengyu, *Shi zai tang zayi*, 222-23.

¹⁸¹ Wan Xiang, “Shen Peizhen ye da Shenzhou guan”; “Juzhong daren zhi Shen Peizhen” 聚眾打人之沈佩貞, in *Shen Peizhen*, 31. “Guo Shen shuangfang shensu zhi ciling” 郭沈雙方申訴之詞令, in *Shen Peizhen*, 33.

completely naked when the women came to attack him. As a result, his penis was severely injured: “I [Guo Tong] never had syphilis in my life, but now I am too damaged to face my wife (*que jiao wo ruhe shangcan zen dui qi* 德教我如何傷殘怎對妻).”¹⁸²

In another caricature, Dan Fu created an imaginary letter from Shen Peizhen in reply to Liang San’s apology. In obscene terms, the author made Shen explain her wrath at the restaurant and tell Liang San that she was actually more than willing to present her feet to him in private. To further add to this portrayal of Shen Peizhen’s shamelessness, the newspaper *Xinghua bao* published an article on June 17, pointing out that Shen Peizhen had made the following shameful statement in a court case: “Shen unabashedly stated that there was a mole on a man’s penis so that she could prove to the court that she was once his concubine.”¹⁸³

In the face of the widespread public libel, Shen Peizhen wrote a letter to the Beijing press, stating that the newspapers had been misinforming the public. The stance she adopted in the letter is unusual: instead of identifying as a strong woman, Shen aligned herself with the image of the conventional “weak woman” (*ruo nüzi* 弱女子). In a calm and persuasive manner, Shen stated that she had never been anyone’s concubine. The lawsuit she had been involved in had been about debt issues not marriage. Shen rebutted the allegations claiming that she had two sons with the man involved in the lawsuit. She countered that only if she had given birth at the age of one or two could those allegations be true. If she had sons, Shen continued to question, why did the man

¹⁸² Dan Fu 丹斧, “Nu ci yuan” 怒雌緣, in *Shen Peizhen*, 57.

¹⁸³ “Shen Peizhen zhi an zhong an,” 35; “Shen Peizhen an zhi yiwen zhongzhong” 沈佩貞案之軼聞種種, *Qun qiang bao* 群強報 (July 8, 1915).

want a divorce without keeping the children? Why did he choose to pay the fines instead of claiming his heirs?¹⁸⁴ Her letter reveals the extent of misogynistic slander the male-controlled press was directing at her.

In her appeal to the court, Shen used a similar approach to expose how the patriarchal press had been exploiting and fabricating her private life as bait for public male voyeurism. She condemned the papers for not only “creating slander out of thin air” (*pingkong niezao yi wu ren* 憑空捏造以污人) but also “repeatedly using obscene depictions to impress the public” (*die gou hui ci yi gong zhong* 迭搆穢詞以公眾). She again invoked the trope of the “weak woman” and claimed herself to be a victim of both the attacks of Guo Tong and the hostility of the media. At the end of her appeal, Shen made Guo Tong look worse by charging him with abusing women in a rather ruthless way (*roulin nüjie* 蹤躡女界; *bu liu yudi* 不留餘地).¹⁸⁵ At a time when terms such as *nüjie* had become all the more sensitive in social discourses, Shen Peizhen’s accusation of Guo Tong for abusing women indicates her conscious manipulation of the discursive trends to strengthen her own position. By playing the weak or wronged woman, she was endeavoring to earn social capital for herself in the discursive battle. Later, in court, Shen’s performance also attested to her tactical sense of social sympathy and moral capital in order to empower herself.

On July 2, 1915, Shen Peizhen’s trial was a cause célèbre. Tickets were sold out a day in advance and there were crowds around the court in the early morning on that

¹⁸⁴ For the letter, see “Shen Peizhen zhi ge baoguan shu” 沈佩貞致各報館書, in *Shen Peizhen*.

¹⁸⁵ For the appeal, see “Guo Shen shuangfang shensu zhi ciling,” 32-35.

day.¹⁸⁶ The public not only enjoyed the spectacle of women criminals, but also actively engaged in the trial process. As Liu Chengyu recalled, when a witness swore to tell even the ugly truth in order to not violate the law, the audience all chanted, “Don’t violate the law; don’t violate the law.” Later when the statement did become so ugly (*guoyu chou’e* 過於醜惡) that even the chief judge asked the witness to stop, the audience still shouted, “Keep speaking! Don’t violate the law (*shuo xiaqu bu fanfa* 說下去不犯法)! ”¹⁸⁷ Apparently, most of the audience had come for the scurrilous details.

Although Shen Peizhen had started her deposition positioning herself as a female hero (*yingci qigai duoduo bi ren* 英雌氣概咄咄逼人), inspired by presence of the audience, she soon switched to the role of the weak woman and even resorted to tears. She cried and complained that she had been framed. Jiang Shuwan and some others in the audience also cried.

Shen Peizhen played her cards right. Some public voices took her side and accused Guo of treating women as playthings (*yi niizi wei wannong zhi wu* 以女子為玩弄之物).¹⁸⁸ Some considered Guo Tong venomous (*xia ci la shou* 下此辣手) for putting a weak woman (*yi ruo niizi* 一弱女子), a delicate bird, in a cage (*ru jiaoniao yu fanlong* 入嬌鳥於樊籠).¹⁸⁹ Shen continued to protest in tears that Guo Tong had demanded sex

¹⁸⁶ “Ben an zhi jieshu,” 8.

¹⁸⁷ Liu Chengyu, *Shi zai tang zayi*, 223.

¹⁸⁸ “Ben an zhi jieshu,” 13.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 7.

from her and her girlfriends in order to settle the dispute.¹⁹⁰ In this way, she was taking advantage of public voyeurism and the increasing discursive sympathy towards women's situations. Her lawyer Mr. Su also justified her behavior by claiming her conduct was a reasonable response of "weak women" when "facing unbearable insults" from men such as Guo Tong (*bideng jie ruo nüzi hekan shou ci wuru* 彼等皆弱女子何堪受此侮辱).¹⁹¹

Shen Peizhen's friend Jiang Shuwan also had quite an artful performance in court. The press reported that Jiang dressed in white on that day and tied her hair in a butterfly bun. Her manner was "graceful and delicate" (*chuoyue rouwan* 紹約柔婉), unlike the "stubbornness of Shen and Liu" (*bulei Shen Liu zhi juejiang* 不類沈劉之倔強). As a young widow (*miaoling youfu xin gua wenjun* 妙齡幼婦新寡文君), Jiang was considered to be a true weak woman (*bushiwei ruo nüzi* 不失為弱女子), who was essentially "timid and bashful" (*danxiao er qingqie* 膽小而情怯) even though she had been involved in the scandal leading up to the case. During the trial, she acted sick and fragile, unsure and shy. When questioned by the judge, she sobbed softly without speaking a word (*wanzhuan jiao ti nianjin wuyu* 宛轉嬌啼拈巾無語). The audience was moved. Guo Tong even came to exculpate her, and Jiang was released. Yet to everyone's surprise, once she left the court, Jiang quickly changed her expression (*hu bangqi miankong* 忽板起面孔) and showed an overbearing manner. One witness reported that

¹⁹⁰ "Ben an zhi jieshu," 11, 14. The press condemned this claim of Shen Peizhen as one of the typical "stock tactics played by obscene women when attempting to frame men" (*xialiufunü hui xian nanren zhi guji* 下流婦女穢陷男人之故技).

¹⁹¹ "Da shen Shen Peizhen zhi biannan" 大審沈佩貞之辯難, *Shenzhou ribao* (July 8, 1915).

“Jiang was pointing her fingers and stomping her feet (*zhi shou hua jiao* 指手畫腳), quite different from her sweet and timid look in court.”¹⁹²

Apparently, female chastity was still central to the construction of female virtue during the Republican years. However, the above incidents point to an ongoing change in which sexual morality no longer functioned to constrain the new public women. The suffragettes’ assertion of their moral value was no longer a repetition of the “old codes of female chastity” or a re-inscription of “a long-held patriarchal code.”¹⁹³ Instead, the regimen of female virtue came to be a source of social capital and autonomy that new women used to protect themselves against the hostile forces in society. The politics of virtue gave them the capital to “turn the tables on stronger powers representing patronage, patriarchy, and national patrimony,”¹⁹⁴ to empower and elevate themselves in difficult situations, and to justify the deployment of shrewish violent energies in the name of virtue.

In the May Fourth era that followed, women came to feel more confident exposing their sexual mores to public view as they gained more autonomy in defining their own virtues. They no longer felt the need to reject the label of the lascivious shrew in order to claim social capital. In some cases, as we shall see, being unruly and sexually free began to be forms of capital that the new women could call upon to assert their modernity over conservative forces in ideological battles.

¹⁹² For reports on Jiang Shuwan’s demeanor in and out of court, see: “Ben an zhi jieshu,” 4-5, 11. Wen Zhai 聞齋, “Shen Peizhen zhuo jiang guan li qu yi” 沈佩貞捉將官裏去矣, *Shenzhou ribao* (July 4, 1915).

¹⁹³ Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*, 77.

¹⁹⁴ Strand, *An Unfinished Republic*, 129.

CHAPTER III

I AM NORA, HEAR ME ROAR: THE REHABILITATION OF THE SHREW ON THE MODERN STAGE

The women's suffrage movement regained morale during the New Culture Movement (1915-1925). The new era was known for its "iconoclastic, nationalist, and cosmopolitan" visions.¹⁹⁵ New cultural intellectuals, who were mostly overseas-educated students, viewed the gender order in traditional China as symptomatic of the inhumanity of Confucian values, the vulnerability of China's national strength, and the inability of the state to become a modern democracy. They criticized female subordination as both a social reality derived from the old culture and a metaphor pointing to China's submission to foreign domination. Women's liberation became all the more critical to new-style male intellectuals and was developed at their hands into a full-fledged campaign. Debates raged in the pages of progressive journals about a wide range of aspects of the "women's question" (*funü wenti* 婦女問題), from female chastity to women's rights to education, work, and suffrage.

This milieu granted the women's suffrage activists more courage and optimism to continue their missions.¹⁹⁶ Not only were the women's suffrage movement and the

¹⁹⁵ Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*, 107.

¹⁹⁶ As Louise Edwards points out, because any arguments against women's suffrage would easily be linked to demonized Confucian traditions under attack at the time, those negative voices "were thoroughly discredited during the early and mid-twenties." See Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*, 109. Even the May Fourth liberal Zhang Xichen 章錫琛, who held mixed opinions on suffragettes in the pre-May Fourth period, shifted to a more positive tone in the May Fourth era and even set out to denounce the early Chinese press and commentators (like himself in the 1910s) for adopting negative or mixed attitudes towards the suffrage movement. See Zhang Xichen 章錫琛, *Funü wenti shijiang* 婦女問題十講 (based on his translation of Hisao Honma's book) (Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1924), 244-63.

women's rights movement "able to make significant advances,"¹⁹⁷ but the public also came to accept those dangerous women more sympathetically and enthusiastically. In the press radical figures such as Tang Qunying were transformed from troublesome shrews to legitimate models for young women to emulate. Their violent actions were now credited as examples of "radical Chinese feminism." Their past discourses were revisited and transvalued as "words of prophecy" that really hit a nerve at the time.¹⁹⁸

As the suffrage movement was gaining more legitimacy, the new culture intellectuals came to appreciate the powerful role shrewish new women could have in destroying traditional ideologies that held virtuous women back. Male intellectuals began to recognize that virtuous women would never be able to break out of the traditional roles for women, and that some degree of shrewish behavior and discourse was needed for women to achieve substantial progress in social, cultural, and gender reforms. The figures I examined in the introduction redeeming female jealousy from a shrewish vice to a modern virtue capable of facilitating gender equality demonstrate such a trend of recognition during the May Fourth era. This chapter shall continue the examination of the intimate link between the shrew and the new woman by concentrating on three "new woman plays" by Ouyang Yuqian 歐陽予倩 (1889-1962)—an influential modern dramatist in China, who carries the literary representation of the confluence of shrew and new woman to its most interesting development.

"New woman plays" emerged from the late 1910s as a particular genre of the spoken drama (*huaju* 話劇, literally meaning "talking play" as opposite to traditional

¹⁹⁷ Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*, 110.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 105.

Chinese operas) in the service of women's liberation.¹⁹⁹ These plays were so heavily influenced by Henrik Ibsen's 1879 play *Et Dukkehjem* (*A Doll's House*) that they are also known as "Nora plays." Nora, the protagonist in *A Doll's House*, is a happy and caring middle-class housewife living with her lawyer husband Torvald and three children. In order to get hold of the money needed for Torvald's illness, she secretly borrows a loan by forging her father's signature and has been saving money on her own to pay it back. Later when the secret is out, her husband, quite opposite to Nora's expectations, considers her as a simple child and decides to disclaim her even though she does everything for him. Nora becomes disillusioned with her marriage. After a forceful conversation with Torvald, she finally leaves the house with the classic action of slamming the door.

Nora impressed the world with her courage to confront masculine pride built upon hypocrisy and condescension. Her slamming of the door was espoused as a powerful gesture indicative of the emerging feminism of the late nineteenth century. However, when Nora was introduced to China in the May Fourth era, her defiance to patriarchy was much tamed. She is still the brave woman daring to slam the door, but in the Chinese context the question becomes: whose door to slam? In the first Chinese "Nora play" *Zhongshen dashi* 終身大事 (The greatest event in life; 1917), Hu Shi makes his heroine Tian Yamei slam the door, but it is the door of her parents' house. After leaving home,

¹⁹⁹ The term "huaju" did not come into existence until Tian Han 田漢 (1898-1968) created it in 1927, as a replacement for the term "xinju" 新劇 (new drama) or "wenming xinxi" 文明新戲 (civilized new drama). See Ouyang Yuqian 歐陽予倩, "Huaju, xin geju yu Zhongguo xiju yishu chuantong" 話劇、新歌劇與中國戲劇藝術傳統, in *Ouyang Yuqian* 歐陽予倩, edited by Ge Congmin 葛聰敏 (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2000), 351.

this Chinese Nora quickly enters the door of her lover and liberator Mr. Chen. Hu Shi's Nora tale ends in love and marriage, which is actually the start of Ibsen's original story.

Hu Shi's translation of Ibsen's "wife Nora" (*qizi Nala* 妻子娜拉) into the Chinese "daughter Nora" (*nü'er Nala* 女兒娜拉)²⁰⁰ was reinforced in his official introduction of "Ibsenism" in 1918 in "The Special Issue on Ibsen" (*Yibusheng hao* 易卜生號) in *Xin qingnian* 新青年 (*New Youth*).²⁰¹ Initially, within the May Fourth ideology, Nora's courageous rejection of traditional bourgeois values was taken more as a representation of youthful heroics, rather than as a gender-specific model for the new woman. As scholar Zhang Chuntian observes, Hu Shi's Ibsenism showcases how "individual liberation" (*gexing jiefang* 個性解放) and "women's liberation" (*nüxing jiefang* 女性解放) "articulated" (*jiehe* 接合) instead of "combined" (*jiehe* 結合) in the project of China's modernity.²⁰²

"The Special Issue on Ibsen" kindled an unprecedented enthusiasm for Ibsen's plays and theories among the May Fourth generation. "Every new man loves him crazily. Every magazine or newspaper talks about him. Many Noras emerge among Chinese

²⁰⁰ Wang Guimei 王桂妹, "Bei shuxie de panni: zhiyi 'Nala jingshen'" 被書寫的叛逆: 質疑“娜拉精神,” *Xi'nan shifan daxue xuebao* 西南師範大學學報, vol.32, no.3 (May, 2006).

²⁰¹ See Hu Shi 胡適, "Yibusheng zhuyi" 易卜生主義, *Xin qingnian* 新青年, vol.4, no.6 (1918). Although Hu Shi was the first person promulgating Ibsenism in China, he did not coin the term. In 1914, Hu Shi had already used the term in one of his English articles on Ibsen, which he later presented at a conference at Cornell University. His article in *Xin qingnian* was a revised version of that English article. See Zhang Chuntian 張春田, *Sixiangshi shiye zhong de "Nala": wusi qianhou de nüxing jiefang huayu* 思想史視野中的“娜拉”: 五四前後的女性解放話語 (Taipei: Xinrui wen chuang, 2013), 69.

²⁰² According to Zhang Chuntian, the "articulation theory" can be traced back to Antonio Gramsci. The theory empathizes relations that are not necessary, absolute, or essential, but are more about intentional choices, connections, or integration. See Zhang Chuntian, *Sixiangshi shiye zhong de "Nala,"* 74.

women.”²⁰³ The craze continued to the post-May Fourth period when leftist intellectuals redirected Nora’s escape towards the course of the Communist revolution.²⁰⁴

Along with the craze, a large number of “new woman plays” (or “Nora plays” 娜拉劇) emerged during the 1920s. Xiang Peiliang 向培良 in his *Zhongguo xiju gaiping* 中國戲劇概評 (A general review of Chinese drama; 1928) mentioned several such plays of the 1920s: *Qingchun di bei’ai* 青春底悲哀 (The sadness of youth) and *Xinren de shenghuo* 新人的生活 (The life of a new man) written by Xiong Foxi 熊佛西, *Qifu* 袷婦 (The abandoned woman) and *Fuhuo de meigui* 復活的玫瑰 (A revived rose) written by Hou Yao 侯曜, *Pofu* 潑婦 (The shrew) and *Huijia yihou* 回家以後 (After returning home) written by Ouyang Yuqian, and *Hao erzi* 好兒子 (The good son) written by Wang Zhongxian 汪仲賢. In addition, writers such as Guo Moruo 郭沫若, Bai Wei 白薇, Chen Dabei 陳大悲, Xia Yan 夏衍, Cao Yu 曹禺, Yu Shangyuan 余上沅, Ding Xilin 丁西林, Zhang Wentian 張聞天, Pu Shunqing 濕舜卿, Xu Baoyan 徐葆炎, and Xu Gongmei 徐公美 all produced Nora plays.²⁰⁵ These plays feature heroines who mainly run away from their patriarchal parents instead of husbands. Even in reality, celebrated models of female runaways (such as the cases of Li Chao 李超, Zhao Wuzhen 趙五貞, and Li Xinshu 李欣

²⁰³ A Ying 阿英, “Yibusheng de zuopin zai zhongguo” 易卜生的作品在中國, *Wenyi bao* 文藝報, no.17 (1956), cited from A Ying, comp., *A Ying wenji* 阿英文集, 2 vols. (Hong Kong: sanlian shudian, 1979), 2:670-71.

²⁰⁴ For the entire trajectory of the importation of Nora in China, see Zhang Chuntian, *Sixiangshi shiye zhong de “Nala”* and Xu Huiqi 許慧琦, “Nala” zai Zhongguo: xin nüxing xingxiang de suzao jiqi yanbian, 1900s-1930s “娜拉”在中國：新女性形象的塑造及其演變, 1900s-1930s (Taipei: Zhengzhi daxue shixue congshu 12, 2003).

²⁰⁵ For information about these writers and their Nora plays, see Zhang Chuntian, *Sixiangshi shiye zhong de “Nala,”* 92-93 and Xu Huiqi, “Nala” zai Zhongguo, 125.

淑²⁰⁶) almost all conformed to this paradigm that Chinese Noras fight their feudal families in order to pursue freedom of love and marriage.²⁰⁷

Scholarship on the theme of the Chinese Nora centers on Western influence, particularly that of Ibsen, on modern Chinese ideas of individualism, liberalism, feminism, and family reform. Researches look at Nora as both a literary motif and a political icon.²⁰⁸ While not arguing against the importance of Western influence in creating the enlightenment model of modern Chinese womanhood, my aim is to uncover the line of filiation linking the traditional shrew to the construction of the Chinese Noras. Yomi Braester has discussed the ambivalent attitude that May Fourth writers had toward the traditional literary legacy and has analyzed Ouyang Yuqian's *Pan Jinlian* as a peculiar example of "A Chinese Nora." However, he ignores the impact of the trope of the traditional shrew on this and Ouyang's other Nora plays.²⁰⁹ By reading Ouyang's Nora plays as a group, I will show how Ouyang resurrected and translated the indigenous shrew to create his characterizations of the empowered Chinese new women.

²⁰⁶ For public discussions on the three women being real-life Noras, see Zhang Chuntian, *Sixiangshi shiyezhong de "Nala,"* 78-92.

²⁰⁷ Ibsen's Nora casts doubt on marriage, while the May Fourth ideology wants its Nora(s) to embrace marriage. Although Chinese Nora's right to freedom in love and marriage was highly promoted, her freedom to stay single and celibate was discouraged. See You Jianming 游鑑明, "Qianshan wo duxing? Nian shiji qianbanqi Zhongguo youguan nüxing dushen de yanlun" 千山我獨行? 廿世紀前半期中國有關女性獨身的言論, *Jindai zhongguo funushi yanjiu* 近代中國婦女史研究 9 (2001).

²⁰⁸ See, for example: Roxane Witke, "Ibsen" in "Transformation of Attitudes towards Women during the May Fourth Era" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1971); Elizabeth Eide, "Optimistic and Disillusioned Noras on the Chinese Literary Scene, 1919-1940," in Anna Gertslacher, et al. eds., *Women and Literature in China* (Bochum: Studienverlag Brockmeyer, 1985) and *China's Ibsen: From Ibsen to Ibsenism* (London: Curzon Press, 1987); Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*; Kwok-kan Tam, *Ibsen in China, 1908-1997: A Critical-annotated Bibliography of Criticism, Translation and Performance* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2001); Shuei-may Chang, *Casting Off the Shackles of Family: Ibsen's Nora Figure in Modern Chinese Literature, 1918-1942* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004); Jin Feng, *The New Woman in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Fiction* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2004); Chengzhou He, *Henrik Ibsen and Modern Chinese Drama* (Unipub forlag, 2004).

²⁰⁹ Braester, *Witness against History*, 58-60.

This chapter conducts a selective study of the Nora plays. It centers on three Nora plays by Ouyang Yuqian: *Pofu* 潑婦 (The shrew; 1925), *Huijia yihou* 回家以後 (After returning home; 1924),²¹⁰ and *Pan Jinlian* 潘金蓮 (Pan Jinlian; 1928).²¹¹ I choose Ouyang Yuqian's plays as my key texts due to his unique contribution to the (theatrical) representation of the May Fourth new woman. As one of the founders of modern Chinese drama, Ouyang not only joined in the construction of the Chinese Nora, but also went beyond the Chinese paradigm to instill in his Nora(s) more awareness of and resistance to the gender hierarchy that was often overshadowed or legitimized in other Nora plays. Ouyang's Nora plays are closer to Ibsen's original play and more truly feminist than many male writers' new woman representations. More interesting, to manifest the feminist vision, Ouyang continuously finds inspiration in the figure of the shrew, as both a stock image and a trope. All three plays I will examine below present in different ways the subtle connection between the image of the shrew and the new woman.

Ouyang Yuqian's unique contribution also lies in his subversion of the long-standing misogynist view of the shrew as entirely negative. In his plays, the progressiveness of the new woman is expressed through once-negative shrewish qualities. Shrewish behaviors, speech, and spirit gained new legitimacy as he rewrote them as

²¹⁰ On the surface, *Huijia yihou* does not look like other Nora plays for its apparent lack of a leaving-home heroine. However, according to Xu Huiqi, there are also scholarly opinions that think the heroine Wu Zifang in *Huijia yihou* owns the Nora spirit, even if she does not leave home. The play can therefore be labeled as a Nora play as well. See Xu Huiqi, "Nala" zai Zhongguo, 126, n.594.

²¹¹ Guo Moruo 郭沫若 directly called Pan Jinlian "the predecessor" of Nora (*Nala xianbei bin Jinlian* 娜拉先輩續金蓮) in his eulogy of Ouyang Yuqian. See Hu Jiwen 胡基文, "Ji Ouyang Yuqian xiansheng liushi dashou qing" 記歐陽予倩先生六十大壽慶, *Ying ju* 影劇, vol.1, no.1 (1948), cited from *Ouyang Yuqian yanjiu ziliao* 歐陽予倩研究資料, edited by Su Guanxin 蘇關鑫 (Beijing: Zhishi chanquan chubanshe, 2009), 81. In current scholarship, *Pan Jinlian* is also analyzed as a Nora play. As Yomi Braester puts it, "The play should be counted among the 'new woman plays' inspired by Hu Shi's translation of Ibsen's *Et dukkehjem* (A Doll's House)." See Braester, *Witness against History*, 60.

positive qualities of the modern Nora. He demonstrates that in order to be viable in modern China the Nora figure has to be somehow feisty and difficult, like the once notorious model of the shrew. His theatrical renditions forcefully attest that Nora can actually be a shrew and a shrew can, at the same time, be the desirable Nora.

The form of spoken drama provided a natural, legitimate stage for the new woman to speak out, shout, and accuse. But Ouyang Yuqian goes one step further by creating a stage on which the new woman can roar—that is, be a righteous shrew!²¹² If in the previous decade, the early Chinese suffragettes had to literally fight like shrews in order to bring publicity to their campaign, Ouyang Yuqian's plays announced the coming of a new age when new women could openly and legitimately stage themselves as shrews. The theatrics of this righteous shrewishness is the focus of the following analysis.

Nora as Shrew: *Pofu* and *Huijia yihou*

I begin with two early plays of Ouyang Yuqian. *Pofu* and *Huijia yihou* both adopt the trope of the shrew to depict the modern new woman. With different modes of expressing the connection between the shrew and the new woman, the two plays, together with his later play *Pan Jinlian*, mark the trajectory of Ouyang's thinking on this topic. He

²¹² In the Western context, the term *roar* is often linked to a strong womanhood or a feminist gesture. The frequent roars in women-empowering songs (such as the classic “I Am Woman” in 1972 and the new “Roar” in 2013) may serve as a convenient example here. While the Western singer in the “Roar” video can proudly wear a leopard-print bikini to announce her identity as a roaring tiger, in China it is a different scenario. In the Chinese context, not only does the term *roar* carry negative associations with the shrew figure, but roaring women are identified with dangerous animals or monsters only to underscore their bad nature. As in long-established expressions on the shrew such as “the East-of-the-River lioness roars” (*hedong shi hou* 河東獅吼), “tigress” (*mu laohu* 母老虎), “tiger with rouge” (*yanzhi hu* 腫脂虎), and “female yaksha” (*mu yecha* 母夜叉), tiger and lion images are not used to empower women as in the Western context, but only to further demonize them, rendering them zoological shrews. With this difference between Chinese and Western contexts, I find the term *roar* best captures the grafted nature of the image of the new woman exemplified by Ouyang’s plays: she roars as both a Westernized feminist and a Chinese shrew, as both positive and negative, modern and traditional, Western-inspired and tradition-inflected.

reflects on the pejorative connotation of the term *shrew*, reconceives what it means to be a shrew in the modern era, and redefines what it takes to be a new woman.

Pofu and *Huijia yihou* are both one-act dramas written in 1922 when Ouyang Yuqian joined the Shanghai Drama Society (*Shanghai xiju xieshe* 上海戲劇協社). While it is unknown which play was written first, *Pofu* is often considered the earlier one that lays the groundwork for Ouyang's subsequent, more sophisticated representations of the link between the new woman and the shrew. Beginning with *Pofu*, Ouyang demonstrates that the closeness between images of the new woman and the shrew is by no means random or passing. It is a motif to him. He keeps visiting this association in later dramas and testing the righteousness of such a model of hybridity.

Pofu tells a simple story that celebrates Nora-hood. Yu Suxin 于素心 meets her husband Chen Shenzhi 陳慎之 at college. Both championing free marriage and women's emancipation, the two fall in love and get married. After marriage, Yu Suxin tries hard to balance her studies with the demands as a mother and a daughter-in-law. She cares about every member of her husband's family, but neither her in-laws nor her husband is satisfied. The feudal parents-in-law condemn Suxin's modernity, criticizing her for insisting on moving out as a nuclear family. The elders think Suxin fails to serve (*fushi* 服侍) her husband as a traditional wife would, while the husband blames her for failing to please the in-laws. Eventually, Shenzhi and his parents find the solution by bringing in a concubine.

The play takes place on the day when the concubine arrives. No one in the family dares to confront Suxin with the news. Even when questioned about things going on in the family, Shenzhi keeps deceiving Suxin with his hypocritical love speeches. When the

secret finally comes out, Suxin calmly calls the concubine to come out and presents the inconsistency and hypocrisy of her husband's behavior in front of the whole family. Parallel to Nora's resolute action at the end of *A Doll's House*, Suxin insists on an immediate divorce and demands the contract for the purchase of the concubine. Upon resistance from the Chen family, she pulls out a knife against her son's throat, threatening to kill the child if they are not listening. After the husband accedes to her demands, Suxin storms out of the door with the concubine and the son, leaving the whole family to denounce in astonishment: "What a shrew!" (*Zhen hao pofu a!* 真好潑婦啊!)²¹³

The most intriguing aspect of the play is how it toys with the term *shrew* and the genre of shrew literature. The play both adopts and abandons the existing pattern of the shrew story. In structure, it follows closely the classic plot of a traditional shrew story: the principal wife deals with her hostile in-laws and her unfaithful husband; after the concubine enters, her jealousy and ferocity turn the family upside down.²¹⁴ Although no jealousy is clearly manifested in the play, the fury of the main wife still propels the plot. Ouyang Yuqian subtly transforms shrewish jealousy into legitimate motivation by which Yu Suxin's shrewishness is less a result of her small-mindedness than a product of her ambition for women's emancipation. She persuades the concubine to leave with her, swearing that she will support her and make sure she receives the necessary education. The text does not inform whether Sunxin can support the woman, herself, and the child after departure. Nor does it make clear whether Sunxin's taking away the concubine is not a changed form of the shrew's jealousy and revenge—after all, other characters in the

²¹³ Ouyang Yuqian, *Pofu 潑婦*, *Juben huikan 劇本彙刊*, no.1 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1925), 26.

²¹⁴ For plot details and variants of the shrew story, see Yenna Wu, *The Chinese Virago: a Literary Theme* (Cambridge, Mass: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1995).

play all conceive of her behavior as a typical shrew fussing out of jealousy: “How can a wife force her husband to return his concubine? Even if it is a storm of jealousy (*chicu zhengfeng* 吃醋爭風), you simply can’t do that in front of everyone.”²¹⁵

Pofu is one of the few early Nora dramas in China that dares to depict the heroine as a real Nora who leaves her freely chosen marriage due to male hypocrisy. It foregrounds the resemblance of a new woman to a shrew and the shared qualities between the condemned traditional model and the celebrated modern ideal. It embraces the subversion and transgression of the shrew and makes them a virtue—instead of a sin—conducive to the modern protest against gender inequality. In Ouyang’s definition, *shrew* is by no means a shameful name. Being a shrew in the modern context is not only bearable, but can be quite admirable, as it exudes the rebellious spirit expected by the new era against traditional morals. Compared to traditional shrews, Yu Suxin represents a modern shrew who does not necessarily rely on physical violence to manifest her wildness. A modern mind and a tongue sharpened by new thoughts and vocabularies are her wildest weapons. She can be animalistic, but that is no longer her trademark. A modern shrew is shrewish specifically in social manners, because she has become the ally and defender of modern values.

Probably due to this shifting definition of the shrew, the audience at the time had difficulty fitting Yu Suxin into their familiar image of the shrew. According to Xu Meigong 徐美公, who once played Chen Shenzhi on stage, many people at the time had comments about the shrew being not shrewish enough (“*pofu bu po*” 潑婦不潑).²¹⁶ Even

²¹⁵ Ouyang Yuqian, *Pofu*, 24.

²¹⁶ Xu Meigong 徐美公, *Xiju duanlun* 戲劇短論 (Shanghai: Daguang shuju, 1936), 38.

today, some scholarly reviews still refer to Yu Suxin as a “fake shrew” but a true, virtuous wife.²¹⁷ Clearly, these comments fail to recognize the changing connotation of the shrew that the author tries to bring to the fore. The views that categorize Yu Suxin as a fake shrew fail to do justice to her apparent inner shrewishness. Were she a true virtuous wife, she would not have protested against her husband’s purchase of a concubine, nor would she have held a knife against her son more than once in order to secure a divorce. She never bends her rules or compromises her newness/shrewishness in order to cater to her husband or her family-in-law. Even the care and filial deeds she constantly offers are all out of her own will and standards, instead of from any prescribed and imposed rule of duty.

Unlike the traditional shrew who elicits scorn and repulsion, Yu Suxin embodies the modern progressive shrew who owns an aura of sublimity and therefore elicits awe. When the play was staged, as Xu Meigong recalled, the audience seemed really stunned by the unfamiliar, sublime image of the shrew: “When we performed the play, the audience was very quiet. There was not even a cough. The noisy theater was surprisingly (*juran* 居然) turned into a sublime chapel (*zhuangyan de libaitang* 莊嚴的禮拜堂). What an extremely comforting thing it was!”²¹⁸ Transformed from the villain in traditional theater aiming to elicit laughter and contempt, the shrew becomes the hero on the modern stage free of taming or punishment. Her character testifies to the changing perception and

²¹⁷ For example, see Yang Lianfen 楊聯芬, “Wusi lihun sichao yu Ouyang Yuqian *Huijia yihou* ‘benshi’ kaolun” 五四離婚思潮與歐陽予倩《回家以後》“本事”考論, *Xin wenxue shiliao* 新文學史料, no.1 (2010).

²¹⁸ Xu Meigong, *Xiju duanlun*, 40.

construction of the bad woman in literature, as well as the changing nature of Chinese theater (from laughter to awe, from entertainment to education).

In *Huijia yihou*, however, the new woman Liu Mali 劉瑪麗 is not depicted as admirable as Yu Suxin in *Pofu*. Mali is peremptory, impatient, and loud, like “a real shrew” (*zhen “pofu”* 真“潑婦”).²¹⁹ She serves as the foil to the character of Wu Zifang 吳自芳, who is the left-behind wife of Lu Zhiping 陸治平 when the man studies overseas and secretly marries Mali. Different from the Westernized Liu Mali, Wu Zifang enjoys the peaceful life of the countryside and devotes herself to her and her husband’s families. Zhiping originally planned to return home to divorce Zifang. Yet once home, he discovers Zifang has many good qualities that a new woman does not have (*shi xinshi nüzi suo meiyou de haochu* 是新式女子所沒有的好處). He starts to enjoy her company and the leisurely life in the country. When Mali suddenly appears and demands he divorce Zifang right away, the man’s inability to make a decision puts the elders in a state of consternation and pushes Mali to leave in a rage. At the critical moment, to everyone’s surprise, Zifang steps up, against her father’s orders. She states that Zhiping should stay with Mali while she does not mind a divorce. She calmly claims that she never sought happiness out of marriage, because it is nothing more than a form. Later, Zifang packs Zhiping’s bags and sends him on his way to get Mali back. Upon leaving, Zhiping swears that he will be back soon after he sorts things out. The ending implies the one who will be eventually divorced is probably not the arranged wife Wu Zifang, but the new woman Liu Mali.

²¹⁹ Yang Lianfen, “Wusi lihun,” 79.

Huijia yihou was published in October 1924 in *Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌 (*The Eastern Miscellany*). Immediately after its staging in December, it initiated heated debates lasting for over two months. The liberal camp, exemplified by figures such as Zhang Xichen 章錫琛 and Zhou Jianren 周建人, leveled harsh criticism against the play, accusing it of “restoring ancient thoughts in the form of new drama” (*gua le xinde zhaopai er tichang fugu sixiang* 掛了新的招牌而提倡復古思想).²²⁰ They condemned Wu Zifang, the acclaimed heroine of the play, for representing nothing less than the Confucian ideal of womanhood in being a woman who was not jealous, was always ready to sacrifice, and used to repressing her own emotions. Echoing other modern voices on female jealousy, jealousy here was also considered a form of female agency.²²¹ The liberals thought jealous women were admirable because they at least had their own character and temper as a normal human being. As Zhou Jianren put it, “Doing everything with her distinctive personality (*xianming de gexing de biaoshi* 鮮明的個性的表示), I think that is the attitude the new woman should have.”²²² Zifang’s lack of, or repression of, jealousy signals to Zhou Jianren and Zhang Xichen typical Confucian femininity in which basic humanity is sacrificed for doctrines. They want to see a new woman with a temper, even if she would then be like the unpleasant character Liu Mali:

²²⁰ Zhang Xichen, “Tao yi gui gao de ‘Huijia yihou’” 逃易歸高的“回家以後”, *Funü zhoubao* 婦女週報 (February 9, 1925).

²²¹ The idea of female jealousy as a manifestation of a woman’s agency also appeared in the debate on the “new sexual morality” (*xin xing daode* 新性道德) in 1925. The new culture intellectuals also translated from Western sources such as Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis’ essays on jealousy in order to make their points. For those articles, see Zhang Xichen, ed., *Xin xing daode taolun ji* 新性道德討論集 (Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1925-26).

²²² Zhou Jianren 周建人, “Wu Zifang jiujing shi jiazuzhuyi xia de nüxingxing bushi?” 吳自芳究竟是家族主義下的女性型不是?, *Funü zhoubao* (January 4, 1925).

“We would rather have modern women become the kind of new woman as Liu Mali, who the author tried hard to disparage in the play, instead of the kind of old-style woman as Wu Zifang, who totally sacrifices herself.”²²³

Yet the opponents of the liberals by no means agreed that Wu Zifang was a traditional virtuous wife, though they admitted she was not quite a new woman either. Were she traditionally virtuous, they argued, she would not have “used caustic language to mock her husband” (*qing feng qiao xue* 輕諷巧譴), she would not have “disobeyed her father and father-in-law and spoken up for herself” (*jing bu gonghou fuqin gonggong de mingling, er tingshen fabiao yijian* 竟不恭候父親公公的命令, 而挺身發表意見), and she would not have “dared to ask for a divorce despite the opposition from her father and father-in-law” (*bugu fuqin he gonggong de jinzhi er duzi xuangao he nande duanjue guanxi* 不顧父親和公公的禁止而獨自宣告和男的斷絕關係).²²⁴ It is true, as Edward Gunn puts it, that Zifang has the “ability to assert herself and resolve a crisis which traditionally would have been handled by elder authorities in the families.”²²⁵ It is exactly this assertion of agency and transgression of power that makes Wu Zifang rise above the Confucian woman and confuses the critics about whether she is a new woman.

However, this ambivalent characterization comes less from Ouyang’s sudden regression to the rural and anti-modern state (as the liberals argued) than from his self-healing from a real-life tragedy. In the same year when Ouyang wrote *Pofu* and *Huijia*

²²³ Zhang Xichen, “Wu Zifang yu Nala yu A’erwen furen” 吳自芳與娜拉與阿爾文夫人, *Funü zhoubao* (December 21, 1924).

²²⁴ Xue 雪, “Zai tantan Huijia yihou” 再譚譚《回家以後》, *Funü zhoubao* (January 4, 1925).

²²⁵ Edward Gunn, “Ouyang Yuqian--Huijia yihou,” in *A Selective Guide to Chinese Literature, 1900-1949: The Drama*, vol. IV (New York: Brill Academic Publishers, 1989), 193.

yihou, the famous supplement *Juewu* 覺悟 (*Enlightenment*) of *Minguo ribao* 民國日報 (*The Republican Daily*) published a letter by a reader named Zhou Li 周立. Under the title “*Ziyou lihun xiamian de xingui*” 自由離婚下面的新鬼 (“The new ghost under free divorce”), the letter narrated the tragic death of Ouyang Yuqian’s little sister Ouyang Liying 歐陽立穎 after her husband demanded a divorce. The author scathingly questioned the editors of *Juewu* who were known for promoting free marriage and divorce: “You are advocating free marriage and free divorce. Now, on this tragic case, please give your judgment. For this kind of divorce, should social ethics allow it to be free?”²²⁶ Ouyang Yuqian, as a new intellectual in public and a caring brother in private, seemed to have offered an uneasy answer to this questioning in his *Huijia yihou*. He recognizes the trend of free love and free marriage (as he only mildly ridicules the man’s infidelity), but he thinks the original wife can at least avoid becoming a victim by acting wisely and assertively like Wu Zifang. As Edward Gunn comments, what Ouyang is promoting in the play is a woman ideal in between tradition and modernity: “The ideal Chinese woman is not necessarily one indoctrinated with foreign education and manners, but she is also not so bound by tradition that she cannot assert her own capacity to determine her fate.”²²⁷

Even though the new culture camp was very unsatisfied with Ouyang’s hybrid model, Ouyang actually did not drift too far away from his supposed progressiveness. Comparing Wu Zifang with Yu Suxin, it is not hard to see that the two heroines in the two

²²⁶ Zhou Li 周立, “‘Ziyou lihun’ xiamian de xingui” “自由離婚”下面的新鬼, *Jue wu* 覺悟 (August 17, 1922).

²²⁷ Gunn, “Ouyang Yuqian--*Huijia yihou*,” 193.

plays are not essentially contrasting. While pursuing different life-styles (one enjoys modern life and one is fond of the country), they display an array of similar attributes: insight, courage, free will, and stubbornness. In other words, even when Ouyang temporarily expressed reservations about modernity and showed nostalgia for traditional life after his sister's death, he did not forget to instill in his (traditional) heroine the qualities that are favored by modernity. Similar to the positive Yu Suxin, the also disobedient and determined Wu Zifang does have a character that is somehow shrewish and inflected with modernity.

In this light, Ouyang Yuqian's exploration of the link between modernity and shrewishness continues in *Huijia yihou*. Whether it is Liu Mali's flamboyant aggressiveness or Wu Zifang's lurking insubordination, they both echo, in different ways, aspects of the righteous shrewishness of his earlier new woman model Yu Suxin. To Ouyang, the prototypical image or trope of the shrew maintains its tenacious hold upon his imagination and construction of the modern new woman. He keeps experimenting with possible roles and ways for the shrew to appear in Chinese modernity, until he finally lets go all his doubts and hesitations to boldly bring back Pan Jinlian—one of the ultimate shrews in tradition—to assert modernity in a noble fashion.

The Shrew as Nora: *Pan Jinlian* among Other Historical Nora Plays

Unlike *Pofu* and *Huijia yihou* in which the new women are called or presented as shrews, *Pan Jinlian* is the rehabilitation of an existing shrew in the history of Chinese literature. A character in the fourteenth-century novel *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (*Shuihu zhuan*) and the sixteenth-century *Jin ping mei* 金瓶梅 (*The plum in the golden vase*), Pan

Jinlian is “a licentious shrew and bloodthirsty villainess,”²²⁸ notorious for committing adultery and murdering her dwarf husband. She was not redeemed until the twentieth century. Ouyang Yuqian’s eponymous play is widely recognized as “one of the earliest modern efforts to rewrite the ‘bad woman,’”²²⁹ and the most “daring” and “innovative” play that overturns tradition through this theme.²³⁰ It is unclear whether Ouyang’s *Pan Jinlian* was originally produced during the May Fourth period.²³¹ Yet the play accurately enacts May Fourth ethos of individual emancipation and romantic love and speaks to the modern perspectives on the body and sex, in which the sexual body becomes a positive material, scientific truth in contrast to the hypocrisy of Confucian ideology.

Published in 1928 as a spoken drama, *Pan Jinlian* was originally adapted from the script of its 1926 opera version.²³² It was then revised and staged as a Chinese opera in 1927 by the Southern Society (*Nanguo she* 南國社) at Shanghai University of Arts (*Shanghai yishu daxue* 上海藝術大學).²³³ Based on the 1928 publication, which is the

²²⁸ David Der-wei Wang, *The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 55.

²²⁹ Ibid., 54.

²³⁰ See Chang-Tai Hung, “Female Symbols of Resistance in Chinese Wartime Spoken Drama,” *Modern China*, vol.15, no.2 (April, 1989), 153. Also see the introduction to *Twentieth-century Chinese Drama: An Anthology*, edited by Edward M. Gunn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), vii-xxiii, see page xiii.

²³¹ The scholar Yuan Guoxing claims that Ouyang Yuqian’s *Pan Jinlian* was likely produced between 1913 and 1915 in the form of a civilized play (*wenming xi* 文明戲), instead of during the May Fourth period as widely believed. He also thinks the opera and the 1926 drama are revisions based on the pre-May Fourth play. See Yuan Guoxing 袁國興, “Tan huaju *Pan Jinlian* de dansheng” 談話劇《潘金蓮》的誕生, *Dongbei shida xuebao* 東北師大學報, no.6 (1989).

²³² In 1959, Ouyang Yuqian recalled that *Pan Jinlian* was written in 1926, based on his opera script. See his preface to *Ouyang Yuqian xuANJI* 歐陽予倩選集 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1959), 1.

²³³ For records about the staging, see, for example: Tian Han, “Nanguo she shilüe” 南國社史略, in *Zhongguo huaju yundong wushinian shiliaoji (di yi ji)* 中國話劇運動五十年史料集（第一輯）, edited by

only surviving text of the play,²³⁴ the radicalness of *Pan Jinlian* lies primarily in Ouyang's bold rehabilitation of the title heroine. He translates Pan Jinlian from a nymphomaniac villainess to a noble Chinese Nora, who is intelligent, assertive, and rebellious.

To elicit the concerns of the May Fourth generation, the play chooses to elaborate on Pan Jinlian's emotion for her brother-in-law Wu Song 武松, a much underdeveloped plot line in the mother text *Shuihu zhuan*. The play transforms the nature of her emotion from the sinful seduction of a traditional femme fatale to the righteous free love of a modern new woman. The fervent pursuit of love drives Pan Jinlian to resist the advances of her first master Zhang Dahu 張大戶 and the tyranny of her mismatched husband Wu Da 武大. It encourages her to have an affair with the local wealthy merchant Ximen Qing 西門慶 and to kill Wu Da when he discovers her infidelity. She expresses her love to Wu Song at her death together with her accusation of patriarchal oppression. Her powerful utterance amazes the male audience in the final scene and even distracts the unrelenting hero Wu Song.

The most notable feature of the play is its manifestation of the new woman ideal through the stock character of the wanton shrew. I read *Pan Jinlian* as a key example of a text in which the author reworks characteristics associated with traditional shrews and refigures them as positive and empowering aspects of the new woman. It is a process of rehabilitating rather than a complete reinvention. The play is rebellious not because it

Tian Han, Ouyang Yuqian, and others (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1958), 121-22; Tang Shuming 唐叔明, “Huiyi Nanguo she” 回憶南國社, in *Zhongguo huaju yundong wushinian shiliaoji (di yi ji)*, 139.

²³⁴ According to Ouyang Yuqian in 1959, the scenario of the opera had been lost. See his preface to *Ouyang Yuqian xuanji*, 1.

takes traditional models and qualities and stands them on their head by inventing completely new and different models, but because it revives the old and the negative and makes them modern and virtuous. As captured by the term “to reverse a verdict” (*fan ’an* 翻案) which is often used to describe the means literary works take to rewrite historical events or figures,²³⁵ in *Pan Jinlian* the criminal and the crime remain the same while the verdict is remade in the light of the new law.

In my reading of *Pan Jinlian*, I shall refer frequently back to its mother texts (*Shuihu zhuan* and *Jin Ping Mei*). The two texts formulate and inscribe codes of shrew vices in *Pan Jinlian*, such as sharp-tongue-ness, jealousy, rage, ferocity, unbridled sexuality and so forth. Some of these trademark vices achieve redeeming values in Ouyang’s rendition as they come to be modern virtues associated with the new woman ideal. The two texts also set the misogynist tone and paradigm for the representation of *Pan Jinlian* in Chinese literature. I shall demonstrate below how Ouyang Yuqian in his twentieth-century theatrical rewriting revisits and reworks those established (misogynist) patterns to serve his proto-feminist agenda.

Flower and Cowpat: The Male as the Base and the Ugly

“People said that marrying Chin-lien [Jinlian] to Wu Ta [Wu Da] was like sticking a flower on a cow pie.”²³⁶ Shortly into the play, Zhang Dahu says this line to his

²³⁵ Critics at the time also used the term “fan’an” to describe *Pan Jinlian*. For example, Guo Moruo commented, “a wonderful pen reverses old verdict” (*miaobishenghua fan jiu ’an* 妙筆生花翻舊案). See Hu Jiwen, “Ji Ouyang Yuqian.” In addition, Xu Beihong 徐悲鴻 also extolled that this play “reverses old verdict of hundreds of years ago” (*fan shubainian zhi chen ’an* 翻數百年之陳案). See Tian Han, “Nanguo she shilüe,” 122.

²³⁶ I use Catherine Swatek’s English translation of the play. See Catherine Swatek, “P’an Chin-lien,” in *Twentieth-century Chinese Drama*, 54.

concubines, boasting that it served Pan Jinlian right because “with a temper like hers he [Wu Da] was the only man fit to marry her to.”²³⁷ The phrase “a flower stuck in a cowpat” (*yiduo xianhua cha zai niufen shang* 一朵鮮花插在牛糞上) is a popular Chinese saying referring to mismatches in couples where the woman is as attractive as a beautiful flower while the man is rather unpleasant in appearance. In addition to flowers and other exquisite plants, *Shuihu zhuan* and *Jin Ping Mei* also use the analogies of precious creatures such as the phoenix and delicate sheep to describe Pan Jinlian. In contrast, her husband Wu Da is known for the nickname “Three-inch Mulberry-bark Manikin” (*sancun ding gushu pi* 三寸丁谷樹皮)²³⁸ and is associated with base things such as crows, dogs, excrement, and mud.

This “beautiful woman, ugly man” contrast holds true only on the surface. For both *Shuihu zhuan* and *Jin Ping Mei*, women’s beauty stands at the same time for ugliness. A beautiful woman is considered as dangerous as a beast that seduces, contaminates, and kills. The beauty is beastlike beauty.²³⁹ As Ding Naifei points out in her reading of the sexual politics in *Jin Ping Mei*, “*yinfu* [licentious women] and *yinhua* [the obscene speech, bestial language] are not what they seem, they cannot be taken at

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ This translation is from David Roy in his *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

²³⁹ For further focused analyses on the association of beauties with beasts in Ming-Qing literature, see, for example: Maram Epstein, “The Beauty is the Beast: The Dual Face of Woman in Four Ch'ing Novels” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1992), *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Published by Harvard University Asia Center, 2001); Naifei Ding, *Obscene Things: Sexual Politics in Jin Ping Mei* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), chapter 5; and Victoria Cass, *Dangerous Women: Warriors, Grannies, and Geishas of the Ming* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), chapter 5.

face value, their beauty hides filth — in short, theirs is a moral depravity.”²⁴⁰ Men’s ugliness, however, can be an indicator of moral purity or beauty. The case of Pan Jinlian and Wu Da best showcases such misogynist logic. Not only do the texts intentionally weaken Wu Da’s outward ugliness by highlighting his inward plainness and honesty (*benfen* 本分, *pushi* 樸實, *laoshi* 老實), but also the man’s death as an inferior husband at the hands of a predatory wife further underscores the lethal beauty of the woman and the sense of justice undone. As the adulteress-murderer, Pan Jinlian becomes “the leading femme fatale of premodern Chinese fiction”²⁴¹ whose sins are simply too offensive to be redeemable.

The passing and hypocritical construct of woman as the beautiful and man as the ugly in previous texts is however taken seriously in Ouyang Yuqian’s *Pan Jinlian*. The author not only takes it literally that woman is beautiful and man is ugly, but also develops this contrast into a full-fledged theme informing the whole play. His male characters, from the gentry-class Zhang Dahu to the lower-class servants, waiters, and beggar, are all ugly. Their outward “ugliness” (*bu piaoliang* 不漂亮) is explicitly expressed through frequent ridicule from female characters or among themselves. Their ethical abjection is depicted through tropes of their abject mind, behavior, and speech. Even the masculine hero Wu Song and the innocent victim Wu Da do not escape the ugliness.

The play begins with the metaphorical pollution of Zhang Dahu, the “old and ugly” (*you lao you chou* 又老又丑) clearly identified on the cast list. Zhang Dahu wants

²⁴⁰ Ding, *Obscene Things*, 132.

²⁴¹ Wang, *The Monster That Is History*, 338, n.34.

to have his former maidservant Pan Jinlian back as a concubine after her husband dies. He makes his first sound in the play by clearing his throat, indicating that he wants to spit. The phlegm embodies his polluting ugliness and foreshadows the anger in his body that is about to come out. The rest of scene one then centers on Zhang Dahu spitting out his anger at his concubines, servants, the local coroner, and Wang Po 王婆 (Old Woman Wang).

Zhang Dahu is only a marginal figure in both *Shuihu zhuan* and *Jin Ping Mei*. He marries Jinlian off in *Shuihu zhuan* out of resentment for her resisting his advances and telling the principal wife on him. In *Jin Ping Mei*, Jinlian does submit to him, but that causes his death very soon. Neither text gives him his own voice. However, Ouyang Yuqian dramatizes the necessity to have Zhang Dahu speak and act his own part. The author also removes the domineering main wife, making Zhang Dahu conform to the modern view of the despotic patriarch.

This construct is very much in tune with the literary convention of May Fourth literature, in which an overbearing father figure is a must for telling the story of the rebellious youth. Zhang's character helps fulfill the dual task of the text to both rebel against the fatherly patriarchy and counter the gendered hierarchy. I will clarify how Zhang Dahu's role as a traditional patriarch informs the play as and beyond a Chinese Nora play in a later section. Here I am mainly concerned with how the author makes Zhang Dahu a key figure among other male characters that embody the trope of the ugly and therefore inverts the misogynistic paradigm that women or the *yin* world should bear the ugliness.

It is impressive how densely and intensely the text spotlights Zhang Dahu's ugliness. At the beginning of the play, when Zhang is angry with one of his concubines for saying he can never conquer Pan Jinlian, another concubine adds more fuel to the fire by pointing out: "It wasn't for lack of money or power—you just weren't cute enough [zhiguai ni bushi ge piaoliang xiaohuozi 只怪你不是個漂亮小夥子]."²⁴² Ugliness is aligned with and emblematic of one's inner incompetency. Even money or power could not counter its negative effect. Later, even Zhang Dahu's base servant Gao Sheng incidentally derides his master's ugliness (*buda piaoliang* 不大漂亮) as an apparent disadvantage for him in winning Pan Jinlian back. The servant compares the ugliness of Zhang Dahu to that of Wu Da, implying that Zhang's ugliness is not the worst. Such a comparison also appears earlier on when Zhang Dahu gains a sense of superiority by considering Pan Jinlian's marriage to Wu Da is determined by her fate: a woman with such a temper only deserves the ugliest man.

Ugliness connects Zhang Dahu with Wu Da, a connection absent from earlier texts. Pan Jinlian's rebellion against both ugly men is never so highlighted as in Ouyang's play as a woman's courage to assert personal agency and individual emancipation. Besides, if Wu Da's being a simple and weak man always wins him sympathy in the reception of the Pan Jinlian story, Ouyang further erases the possibility of sympathizing with the wronged husband by directly rendering him as yet another tyrant. In the final scene, under Wu Song's killing blade, Pan Jinlian throws out her accusation as an oppressed but insubordinate wife: "Then your brother took the tack of playing the master-husband [*bai ta zhangfu de jiaizi* 擺他丈夫的架子], which added to

²⁴² Swatek, "P'an Chin-lien," 54.

my troubles a thousand times over.”²⁴³ Both Zhang Dahu and Wu Da are ugly, in appearance and in nature. They fulfill the positions of the tyrannical father and the tyrannical husband, making the play both meet and transcend the paradigm of the Chinese Nora play.

Pan Jinlian’s Nora identity determines her fundamental difference and distance from figures such as Zhang Dahu and Wu Da. She represents the rebellious spirit of the new era, while the two men embody what is most loathed by May Fourth intellectuals in tradition: patriarchal oppression. Ouyang does not express this contrast between the old and the new too explicitly in order to maintain the authenticity of the play as a historical drama (*lishi ju* 歷史劇 or *lishi xi* 歷史戲, as used by Ouyang Yuqian himself). Instead, he adopts the established trope of the flower and the cowpat and develops the contrast between the beautiful and the ugly into an extended textual device that reveals his attitude towards women and men, modernity and tradition.

Other characters in the play are assigned beautiful or ugly roles correspondingly based on their symbolic distances from modern values. Literally, the characters, as figures in a twelfth-century plot, are all far away from twentieth-century ethos. Yet symbolically Ouyang finds some characters bear certain qualities that make them closer to May Fourth models. He embellishes those qualities and makes the figures that bear them beautiful. The characters that bear anti-modern qualities are therefore the ugly ones. For example, the beggar (who is not an existing character in previous texts) is ugly not only because he deforms himself and fakes disability but also because he invokes the anti-modern parasitic mode of living. Pan Jinlian despises him, thinking a man like that

²⁴³ Ibid., 73.

would be better off dead. Demanding no sympathy at all, Pan Jinlian would “rather be hated than pitied.”²⁴⁴ A similar voice reappears when Pan Jinlian complains about Wu Da to Wu Song in scene 3: “Your brother was too much of a weakling. He let people walk all over him. For a man like him, simply to be alive was to suffer hardship. Truly, life wasn’t worth living. The way I see it he’s better off dead.”²⁴⁵

Pan’s language invokes the distinctly May Fourth philosophy about the strong man (*qiangzhe zhuxue* 強者哲學). From Liang Qichao on, modern reformists such as Luo Jialun 羅家倫 and Lu Xun 魯迅 promoted a new national character with strong body, strong mind, and strong spirit in order to transform China and Chinese people as the “sick man of East Asia” (*dongya bingfu* 東亞病夫). In addition to the local urgency, admiration for strength also bears the mark of the aestheticism of European dramas. In the early 1910s when Ouyang Yuqian was studying in Tokyo he was exposed to ideas of Western aestheticism through Japanese “New Dramas” (*Xinpai ju* 新派劇).²⁴⁶ The romantic and aesthetic dramas that Ouyang and other members of the Spring Willow Society (*Chunliu she* 春柳社) played in Tokyo and later introduced to Chinese stages include: Victor Hugo’s *Angelo*, Victorien Sardou’s *Latosca* and *Patrie!*, Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé*, and George Bernard Shaw’s *The Man of Destiny*. Among them, *Angelo* and *Salomé* are deemed the most direct source of inspiration to the writing of *Pan Jinlian*.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 59.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 64.

²⁴⁶ In his memoirs *Zi wo yanxi yilai*, Ouyang Yuqian records in detail how he became interested in aestheticism during his stay in Tokyo. See Ouyang Yuqian, *Zi wo yanxi yilai* 自我演戲以來 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1959), 11, 23, 67.

²⁴⁷ According to Yuan Guoxing, who has a series of studies on the Pan Jinlian story and its variants, Ouyang Yuqian’s *Pan Jinlian* bears direct textual indebtedness to *Angelo*. See Yuan Guoxing, “Pan Jinlian

Pan Jinlian was explicitly acclaimed at the time for bearing characteristics similar to a Greek woman who admires beauty (specifically, “bodily beauty” *routi mei* 肉體美) and strength (specifically, “masculine strength” *nanxing de li* 男性的力).²⁴⁸

Wu Song and Ximen Qing are the only two beautiful male characters in the play, for they possess strong masculine bodies.²⁴⁹ Pan Jinlian admires Wu Song for his tiger-slaying virility and has an affair with Ximen Qing, for she finds him has a similar body and violent temper close to Wu Song. Female craving for male sexuality is a recurrent theme and literary device in the misogynistic depiction of licentious shrews. However, in a twist on this conventional characterization of the sexually hungry woman, Ouyang is able to rewrite a righteous Pan Jinlian out of the old debasing pattern.

Ouyang’s Pan Jinlian is not the villainous nymphomaniac depicted in the original texts. Her adultery with Ximen Qing comes less out of her lust for sex than out of her longing for love. “Pan Jinlian distinguishes between lust, which may warrant capital punishment, and love, which in her mind justifies adultery.”²⁵⁰ While she admits “there was no real love between us [her and Ximen Qing],”²⁵¹ she justifies her sin by declaring

muti’ fazhan jiqi dangdai mingyun” “潘金蓮母題”發展及其當代命運, *Zhongshan daxue xuebao* 中山大學學報, no.2 (2004), 56. However, *Salomé* is mostly noted for its likely influence on the final scene of *Pan Jinlian* in the plot of presenting the protagonist with the head of her man. As Yomi Braester puts it: “Significantly, the Southern Society staged *Pan Jinlian* following productions of *A Doll’s House* and Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé*, which like *Pan Jinlian* climaxes in a scene where the woman protagonist is presented with the head of the man she desired and is then killed. Ouyang expands the relevant scene in *Pan Jinlian*’s story to foreground the injustice done to the woman.” See Braester, *Witness against History*, 60.

²⁴⁸ See Su Xuelin 蘇雪林, *Zhongguo ersanshi niandai zuojia* 中國二三十年代作家 (Taipei: Chunwenxue chubanshe, 1983), 484. Also see Tian Han, “Nanguo she shilüe,” 122.

²⁴⁹ In both *Shuihu zhuan* and *Jin Ping Mei*, Ximen Qing is not a man who is “masculine and good at fighting” (*ta de shoujiao hai liaode* 他的手腳還了得) as depicted in *Pan Jinlian*.

²⁵⁰ Braester, *Witness against History*, 62.

²⁵¹ Swatek, “P’an Chin-lien,” 73.

that it was all because Wu Song rejected her love in the first place that she turns to illicit sex.

Adultery is vindicated in the name of love, even if only a substitute one. Pan Jinlian's autonomy is further enacted in her conscious choice to become Ximen Qing's plaything, while keeping the man as her toy in the meantime. "I only keep him around to relieve my boredom and pass the time. The minute I can't take him anymore the whole thing will be off."²⁵² She also likes to be Ximen Qing's plaything, as that grants her illusional feelings of love. "I willingly became his plaything. In my whole life, before meeting him [Ximen Qing], I hadn't even had the good fortune to be someone's plaything."²⁵³ She desperately asks to be the plaything in love so that she can remain alive as a real human being. This ardent demand for love and humanity—even at the expense of equality—marks Ouyang's May Fourth twist on Nora's attitude towards being a plaything in *A Doll's House*. While Nora runs away from being a plaything, the Chinese Nora runs away to become a plaything, in order to love.

Another twist Ouyang adds to the old pattern in earlier texts is the hidden ugliness in beautiful male figures such as Wu Song. Other than merely indulging in male bodies, Pan Jinlian sees through the superficial masculine beauty with her modern eyes. Wu Song is criticized, as is his substitute Ximen Qing.²⁵⁴ The criticism Pan Jinlian levels at Wu Song focuses on his spiritual world. While Wu Song possesses a strong body, he fails to have a strong mind. He hides himself behind "standards of integrity and morality" (*li yi*

²⁵² Ibid., 58.

²⁵³ Ibid., 73.

²⁵⁴ Admittedly, Ximen Qing is more positive in *Pan Jinlian* than in earlier texts. He is masculine and somehow heroic similar to Wu Song. But he is not more than a flat character, as the text does not really focus on constructing a new Ximen Qing.

gang chang 禮義綱常), so wary of losing the aura as a sage. Pan Jinlian condemns him, “Ah, so you only worry about what other people think, not about yourself?” “You want people to admire you as some kind of hero, sage, and superior man and for this you’ve cut off your youth in its prime.”²⁵⁵

In the preface to *Pan Jinlian* in 1928, Ouyang Yuqian approves of Wu Song for being “after all a manly man (*ta daodi shi ge hanzi* 他到底是個漢子).”²⁵⁶ At the same time, he disapproves of the hero for being a die-hard conservative. One evident example of the authorial censure of Wu Song is that Ouyang makes Wu Song fully responsible for Wu Da’s tyranny: “but unluckily Wu Song holds strongly to the old ideas (*shi ge jiu guannian ji shen de ren* 是個舊觀念極深的人), who must incite Wu Da to confine her [Pan Jinlian] with his authority as a husband (*ying jiao Wu Da na fuquan ba ta bi qilai* 硬教武大拿夫權把她闭起来). How can she be willing to submit to that?”²⁵⁷

In *Shuihu zhuan* and *Jin Ping Mei*, Wu Song does have a brief speech of exhortation to Wu Da, urging him to work less every day after he leaves:

You’ve always been weak and timid, and people may try to take advantage when I’m not around. If you sell ten trays of buns a day usually, from tomorrow on don’t sell more than five. Leave the house late and

²⁵⁵ Swatek, “P’an Chin-lien,” 65, 73.

²⁵⁶ Ouyang Yuqian, “*Pan Jinlian zixu*” 《潘金蓮》自序, in *Ouyang Yuqian yanjiu ziliao* 歐陽予倩研究資料, edited by Su Guanxin 蘇關鑫 (Beijing: Zhishi chanquan chubanshe, 2009), 119.

²⁵⁷ Ouyang Yuqian, “*Pan Jinlian zixu*,” 119.

come back early. Don't drink with anybody. And when you get home,
lower the curtain and bolt the door. In that way you'll avoid arguments.²⁵⁸

Not a single word is mentioned about Pan Jinlian, but every line in this passage registers Wu Song's concerns over possible dangers from his sister-in-law. Yet neither text goes on to develop Wu Da into a tyrant—on the contrary, Pan Jinlian in the texts remains the tyrannical wife who shrieks abuse at her husband for being so obedient to his younger brother. Ouyang Yuqian obviously adjusts the original plot to foreground the woman's oppression. His Wu Song, as a result, is transformed from the virtuous brother²⁵⁹ to the abominable persecutor who initiates, joins, and completes the patriarchal oppression done to Pan Jinlian.

In a word, no male character is truly beautiful in Ouyang Yuqian's *Pan Jinlian*. By projecting ugly forms and contents all onto the *yang* world, the author saves the women from being the socially base and the morally illicit. This situation is very different from what Ding Naifei sees in *Jing Ping Mei* where the bondmaid-concubines possess both social baseness (*jian*) and bodily baseness as “potent, powerful, and dangerous sexual agents or yinfu [lascivious women],”²⁶⁰ Ouyang grants the socially base female figures a legitimate stance to ridicule, expose, and destroy masculine hegemony. As I will elaborate in a later section on feminine and feminist utterances in the play, not a single

²⁵⁸ See *Shuihu zhuan*, chapter 24. Translated by Sidney Shapiro in his *Outlaws of the Marsh*, 3 vols. (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1980), 1:373. In *Jin Ping Mei*, this passage appears the same as in *Shuihu zhuan*.

²⁵⁹ For example, when reading this scene in *Jin Ping Mei*, the commentator Zhang Zhupo 張竹坡 uses words such as “crying” (*ku 哭*) and “pain” (*tong 痛*) several times to emphasize how touching the dialogue is between Wu Da and his considerate brother Wu Song. See Lanling xiaoxiaosheng 蘭陵笑笑生, *Zhang Zhupo piping Jin Ping Mei* 張竹坡批評金瓶梅 (Ji'nan: Qilu shushe, 1991), 49-50.

²⁶⁰ Ding, *Obscene Things*, xiv.

female character is silent and submissive in *Pan Jinlian*; even the wicked Wang Po is not beyond redemption under the author's modern, feminist perspective.²⁶¹

The author's attempt to claim modern qualities in historical figures does not necessarily mean an intentional act of anachronism or transgression of the author's own standards of historical realism, as scholar Yomi Braester argues in his reading of *Pan Jinlian*.²⁶² Instead, I sympathize more with Haiyan Lee's opinion that it is an act "of revelation or exposition, of bringing the hidden truths of the psyche and body to the surface."²⁶³ In my view, the most striking dimension that Ouyang Yuqian exposes, but that other modern male intellectuals hesitate or refuse to expose, is that the old-time shrew can be the modern-time new woman. Traditional shrewish qualities are rediscovered and rehabilitated by the new era as a legitimate manifestation of some of the qualities expected for the modern new woman. Within this dimension also lies the hidden or repressed beauty of the shrew character under her long-established misogynistic depiction.

From Transgression to Virtue: from Shrewish Rebellion to Nora's Heroic Escape

To Ouyang, the shrew is no longer the base and debased. Men's ugliness serves as a foil to her beauty. On Ouyang's stage, Pan Jinlian's shrewish traits, such as her sharp tongue, bodily violence, and unruly energy, are not symbols of her unseemliness, but

²⁶¹ For an overview of the outrageousness of Wang Po, see Cass, *Dangerous Women*, 57-64.

²⁶² By citing Ouyang Yuqian's own words that historical drama should not violate or misrepresent history, Yomi Braester refers to Pan Jinlian's distinctly modern sensibilities in the play as evidence of Ouyang's open violation of his own principles. "Ouyang's *Pan Jinlian* openly transgresses the standards of historical realism set by the playwright himself." See Braester, *Witness against History*, 71.

²⁶³ Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 323, n.15.

forms of her virtue. She still has her scolding tongue, but that is now embraced as a form of her resistance to male dominance. She is still the “hard mama who can lift a man on one fist and shoulder a horse”²⁶⁴ and who beats other characters at will. Yet the play chooses to spotlight only the moment of her slapping and beating ugly men such as the lewd and imperious servant Gao Sheng, so as to accentuate her sensitivity to equality in class and gender.

Among all her shrew attributes, the most offensive iniquity of Pan Jinlian is her committing adultery and murder. In the play Ouyang construes these ultimate sins of the shrew as praiseworthy female qualities of insubordination and pursuit of individual happiness. The author does not mean to absolve Pan Jinlian absolutely; he admits that execution is “the rightful fate” (*dangran de xiachang* 當然的下場)²⁶⁵ for her purposeful killing. But he firmly believes that more sympathy should be cast onto her crimes (*duiyu ta de fanzui, yingjia wanxi* 對於她的犯罪，應加惋惜)²⁶⁶ and the public should understand that it is the society and the men surrounding her that push her into the path of sin. In a society allowing no outlets to women, these extreme deeds seem the only possible means by which Pan Jinlian could symbolically run away, from social injustice, patriarchal oppression, and personal misery.

Pan Jinlian conducts her first symbolical escape by rejecting Zhang Dahu’s advances and asserting her right to love freely. Gao Sheng’s explanation is that the real reason for Zhang Dahu’s marrying Pan Jinlian to Wu Da is not the existence of a fierce

²⁶⁴ Swatek, “P’an Chin-lien,” 60. The original line is in *Shuihu zhuan*, chapter 24.

²⁶⁵ Ouyang Yuqian, “Pan Jinlian zixu,” 119.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

principal wife or Pan Jinlian's resistance (as represented in earlier texts), but that Pan Jinlian dares to choose her own lover. "She wouldn't go along, then on top of that she fell for one of the servants."²⁶⁷ In the script of the play, Ouyang uses the word "*pian*" (偏: willfully, determinedly. *Ta buken, pian qu aishang women zhe'er de yige tongshi de* 她不肯, 偏去愛上我們這兒的一個同事的) to stress Pan Jinlian's unruliness. The term *pian* indicates that Pan Jinlian probably pretends to fall for someone in order to torture Zhang Dahu and push him to send her away. She might or might not have a real lover, but the woman definitely seizes every opportunity to prove to her master that she can assert her freedom to love. With this added detail, Ouyang establishes Pan Jinlian as not only a disobedient woman (as parallel to previous texts), but also an individualist with modern sensibilities about free love and free will. In a way, Pan Jinlian plans and facilitates her own marrying out of the Zhang family. By such a twist, the author shifts the tone and redefines the Pan Jinlian story to be a Nora tale in tune with the May Fourth motif that a rebellious daughter runs away for free love.

As introduced earlier in this chapter, while Ibsen's Nora leaves her husband and her own family, Chinese Noras predominantly run away from their parents' homes. However, *Pan Jinlian* combines both forms of escapes. Zhang Dahu assumes positions as both a potential patriarchal husband (as he makes sexual advances toward her) and a patriarchal father (when he marries her off and then wants her back). As the master of Pan Jinlian, Zhang Dahu naturally holds power and authority over her. But in *Pan Jinlian* Zhang Dahu takes it for granted that his ownership of Pan Jinlian also grants him the right to discipline and educate her like a father, even after she has been married out. In

²⁶⁷ Swatek, "P'an Chin-lien," 57.

traditional Chinese culture, only a father can bring a married-off daughter back for discipline. For a master, his ownership of a maidservant ceases at the moment she is sent out (either married or sold), as she now belongs to another man, a new master or a husband. Zhang Dahu openly disregards the rules and transgresses his role in order to have Pan Jinlian back. One of his speeches to Wang Po epitomizes his logic:

Chin-lien [Jinlian] was a maidservant in my household. She didn't know her place and wouldn't accept favors from me. All I could do was marry her off. Even then her refusal to do her duty as a wife caused some ugly talk. My idea is to take her back and straighten her out. Go tell her that if she's willing to turn over a new leaf, I'll take care of everything for her. If not, then one of these days the whole affair will get out and her number will be up. If she has any sense, you'll come with her reply and I'll send someone to fetch her. Understand?²⁶⁸

Wang Po immediately counters Zhang's absurdity:

Your Honor would like to take her back. But, as they say, "A daughter married is like water thrown out the door." Is it any less true of the maidservant that's been sold? Miss Chin-lien [Jinlian] has already been Wu Ta's [Wu Da's] wife. Now that her husband is dead, do you really think that if you let her come back and be your maidservant she'll be willing? Forget about straightening her out; when a person is grown her

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 56.

mind is made up—who can change it? Be forgiving, Your Honor—let her go and be done with it.²⁶⁹

Zhang Dahu refuses to accept that his control over Pan Jinlian is over. He eagerly tries to fit himself into the father role in order to claim a permanent right, or “responsibility” in his language, over Pan Jinlian. If Zhang Dahu’s power still surrounds and penetrates Pan Jinlian after she gets married off (as she mentions how her husband Wu Da succumbs to regular harassment of Zhang’s servants), after Wu Da’s death every connection Zhang Dahu has with Pan Jinlian is broken. He has no way but to play the father card. However, facing a woman who dares to kill her husband to run away from oppression, Zhang Dahu now only stands for the weakened image of the (feudal) father castrated at the will of the (modern) rebellious daughter.

After leaving her feudal family, the rebellious daughter continues to run away from her unhappy arranged marriage. In *Shuihu zhuan* and *Jin Ping Mei*, Pan Jinlian never hesitates to curse the mismatched marriage with her sharp tongue. In *Pan Jinlian*, she does that with a language imbued with modern ethics of justice. She accuses arranged marriage of failing to treat her as a normal human being: “He [Zhang Dahu] used his position as a rich and powerful member of the local gentry to marry me, without my consent, to that ugly, short, dirty, good-for-nothing and revolting Wu Ta [Wu Da]—the number one freak of Yang-ku county. I’m made of flesh and blood; how could I take that kind of injustice?”²⁷⁰ She holds modern beliefs about free love and free divorce (“I

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 72.

thought, if a man and wife are a bad match what difference does it make if they part and remarry?"²⁷¹), but society forecloses any such possibility.

In addition, Pan Jinlian also sees her marriage as a reflection of the social bias on gender. After Wu Song comes back from his mission in the Eastern Capital, Pan Jinlian has a conversation with him when she compares her seeking a fair marriage to Wu Song's seeking a wise master:

JINLIAN: I hear that you'll be going to the Eastern Capital to look
for a job with Kao Ch'iu [Gao Qiu]. Is it true?

WU SONG: [With contempt] Hunh! Kao Ch'iu, T'ung Kuan [Tong
Guan] and that crew—they're all a pack of traitors. I'm a man of principle.
Do you think that I'd go looking for work at the gate of those traitors?
What kind of man do you take me for?

JINLIAN: If His Excellency the magistrate were to recommend
that you go be houseboy to those traitors—be their errand boy—would
you do it?

WU SONG: Throw pearls before those swine? I'd die first!

JINLIAN: Ah, you feel the same way—that it's better to die than
to throw away one's jewel. So men and women feel the same way!²⁷²
Gao Qiu is a government official in the Song Dynasty serving Emperor Huizong. In
Shuihu zhuan, he is the main nemesis of the outlaw heroes. In neither *Shuihu zhuan* nor
Jin Ping Mei does Pan Jinlian talk or care about this corrupt official. Ouyang Yuqian,

²⁷¹ Ibid., 73.

²⁷² Ibid., 64.

however, lets his heroine bring up this name as a way to present her acute awareness of sexual parity. Pan Jinlian tells/educates Wu Song: a woman serving a husband is like a man serving a master; if a man like him has the right to reject a bad master, so should a woman like her have the freedom to leave an awful husband. How could a man of principle be raised to a hero while a woman of principle only be lowered to a loose shrew? Pan Jinlian counters the assigned inferior role of woman and aligns herself with a masculine identity. Although her powerful claim that “I’m as tough and straightforward as any man!” (*wo shi yige bu dai toujin nanzihan* 我是一個不戴頭巾男子漢)²⁷³ is only used to accentuate her unlawful transgression in earlier texts, her ambition to compare herself to a man is shed in a positive light in *Pan Jinlian* as a forceful gesture of a modern woman striking mighty blows at gender inequality.

From a rebellious daughter to an insubordinate wife, Pan Jinlian eventually becomes a murderer. In the reception of the Pan Jinlian story, the act of her murder is widely recognized as evidence of the ultimate evilness of the femme fatale. Yet to Ouyang Yuqian, even if her sin is settled, Pan Jinlian is by no means the source of vice. On the contrary, her crime is only a reflection of what the society has been teaching her:

In the old time, a man can sleep with women or have affairs as much as he likes. His wife cannot say anything against that. If a woman commits adultery, her husband can kill her at will, without violating the law.

Therefore, Pan Jinlian has this fear of being killed minute-by-minute,

²⁷³ *Shuihu zhuan*, chapter 24. Translation is from Shapiro, *Outlaws of the Marsh*, 1:374.

hour-by-hour. At last, she was so overwhelmed (by the fear) that she turned herself to killing.²⁷⁴

It is therefore not a purposeful harming of the society done by an innately evil femme fatale, but passive self-defense and forced revenge of a victimized woman. Killing is not her crime, but her stubbornness in questioning social injustice is. Pan Jinlian questions the gender norm and finds her own answer about boundaries between the “chaste and exemplary woman” (*zhenjie lienü* 貞節烈女), the “whore” (*yinfu* 淫婦), and the “criminal” (*zuiren* 罪人): “Whenever a man wants to abuse a woman there are lots of men to back him up. Only women who meekly allow men to torture them to death are ‘chaste and exemplary.’ Anyone who survives the ordeal is a whore. A woman who isn’t willing to put up with a man’s abuse is a criminal.”²⁷⁵ She is the ultimate whore and criminal, as she survives and never ceases to run against and run away from patriarchal abuses.

Admittedly, as a woman with bound feet, Pan Jinlian is an unthinkable counterpart to Nora who easily slams the door and storms out of the house. But in terms of mentality, Ouyang sees strong connections between the two women of different temporal and geographic contexts. Similar to Nora, Pan Jinlian is a resolute woman who “is bound to find a way out (*ta biding yao xiang ta de chulu* 她必定要想她的出路)”²⁷⁶ in the face of oppression and injustice. Ouyang cherishes her resolution—which is labeled

²⁷⁴ Ouyang Yuqian, “*Pan Jinlian zixu*,” 119.

²⁷⁵ Swatek, “P’an Chin-lien,” 65.

²⁷⁶ Ouyang Yuqian, “*Pan Jinlian zixu*,” 118.

as a shrew's iniquity in previous texts—and dramatizes her iniquitous efforts as theatrical invocation to Nora's progressive act of running away.

In order to maximize the representation of the yearning to escape out of Pan Jinlian's physical limitation, Ouyang seeks every possible textual means. One example is how he transforms Wu Song and Pan Jinlian's conversation about going downstairs and upstairs inside the Wu household into a demonstration of the expression and repression of the woman's will to run away.

This conversation takes place when Wu Song comes back from his mission and learns from Pan Jinlian that his brother has died of some heart ailment. He keeps asking her how his brother died and who witnessed or was involved in it. In *Shuihu zhuan*, this conversation only constitutes a small portion in the chapter about Wu Song's avenging his brother. Downstairs and upstairs are merely architectural structures and physical sites where conversations take place. In chapter 26 on which Ouyang's scene is based in *Shuihu zhuan*, Pan Jinlian comes down from her room to speak with Wu Song and goes back upstairs when their conversation is over. In earlier chapters in *Shuihu zhuan*, Pan Jinlian invites Wu Song to the upstairs through Wu Da out of the proprieties as a sister-in-law. After Wu Da dies, she only talks to Wu Song downstairs and keeps the upstairs her private sphere. Even if a loose woman, Pan Jinlian does not need Wu Song to remind her that she, as a widow, should avoid her brother-in-law and confine herself to the most inner sphere of the household.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁷ For example, the Confucian normative text *Li ji* 禮記 (Book of rites) regulates in the “Domestic Regulations” (*Nei ze* 內則) that “a sister-in-law and brother-in-law do not interchange inquiries” (*sao shu bu tongwen* 嫂叔不通問). For further domestic rules concerning the separation between men and women, see Raphals, *Sharing the Light*, 224-27.

In *Pan Jinlian*, however, Ouyang Yuqian extends this portion to an independent scene (scene 3) and renders Wu Song the literal custodian of the gendered moral prescription about inner and outer spaces. He repeatedly and abruptly urges his widow sister-in-law to go back upstairs as a means to exert his patriarchal discipline on her. Pan Jinlian becomes looser/freer in the modern play for she seems always ready to come downstairs. More textual time lingers on the stairs in *Pan Jinlian*: the heroine slows her steps while the hero drinks her in with his eyes.

Scene 3 begins with Wu Song agitatedly walking in front of his brother's altar. He comes to a halt as he repeatedly looks (*kankan* 看看) and glances (*piaoyipiao* 瞟一瞟) upstairs, anticipating Pan Jinlian's presence. He says to himself he needs to ask her again about his brother's death. After Pan Jinlian comes down and repeats everything, he urges her to go back upstairs: "It's getting late. Please go get some rest." But Pan Jinlian is hesitant: "She slowly takes two steps in the direction of the stairs, then glances fleetingly in Wu Song's direction, thinks something over, sighs, and resumes her slow pace, looking very disappointed." Seeming to have captured Pan's emotion, Wu Song suddenly calls her to come back. Pan Jinlian is so surprised that she "quickly turns her head and retraces her steps."²⁷⁸ Wu Song then asks a third time how his brother died. By making Wu Song ask one time more than in *Shuihu zhuan*, Ouyang implies that Wu Song might be not the innocent, unemotional, and unwavering hero, because he obviously wants and desires Pan Jinlian's presence. The hero feels and enjoys the woman's presence, albeit while also agitated by it, having to ask the same question again and again in order to keep her. Were

²⁷⁸ Swatek, "P'an Chin-lien," 63-64.

it not for Wu Song's ambivalence and likely emotion, the author alludes, Pan Jinlian might not have been so desperately falling for him.

To Pan Jinlian, the action of going downstairs is an implied form of her defiance against the gender norm to attempt to run away. Being a bound-feet woman—Pan calls herself “a crab without legs” (*meijiao xie* 沒腳蟹) in earlier texts²⁷⁹—limits Pan Jinlian’s possibility of escape in the Nora style. But she displays her way of transgressing within the cramped domestic space by disregarding the prescribed inner upstairs and always expecting to step into the downstairs and the outside with the man. Different from her image in *Shuihu zhuan* who autonomously goes upstairs (*na furen zi shanglou qu* 那婦人自上樓去, chapter 26), she lingers on the stairs in *Pan Jinlian*, speaking to Wu Song in her modern and feminist voice. Her words often become so overwhelming that Wu Song has to press her to go back upstairs.

When answering the third time Wu Song’s question about his brother’s death, Pan Jinlian delivers a striking speech on her predicament as an enlightened woman stuck in an oppressive patriarchy:

Hai—really, your brother caused me hardship enough! You say I’m clever.
I really can’t be considered clever, but I’m not stupid either. You say I’m
able. I’m really not able enough but I’m not an incompetent either. But
“fishes in ponds don’t swim far; a bird in a cage doesn’t fly high.” What
can I do? [Sighs] You still don’t know my heart.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁹ See *Shuihu zhuan*, chapter 26 and *Jing Ping Mei*, chapter 9.

²⁸⁰ Swatek, “P’an Chin-lien,” 64.

An indirect declaration of the woman's love and intention to elope, this speech immediately unsettles the hero. "What's the point of all this talk? You'd better go upstairs (*shanglou qu ba* 上樓去吧)." He urges her to leave. Yet Pan Jinlian continues to ignore his order. She stays there, deriding his conflict between being a man enjoying her presence and being a moralist defending standards. "[...] No wonder you work for the magistrate, you're just like him. You only preach one-sided truths. [...] You're better off a little confused. If you were in less of a muddle you couldn't be such a good follower of Confucius." Wu Song would not let go of morals: "Standards of integrity and morality never change. Will you die without understanding that?" This final remark of her lover drives Pan Jinlian to total despair. For the first time, "she goes straight upstairs, her feet beating a rhythm on the steps (*yizhi dongdongdong shanglou que* 一直咚咚咚上樓去了)."

Upon her departure, Wu Song shows traces of reluctance. He "watches her go in stunned silence," and murmurs to himself, "I didn't think such women existed!" Textual time lingers, as Wu Song indulges his eyes and thoughts on the profile of the woman. He then wakes up his orderlies and insists that they leave immediately, even if it is still the middle of the night. Wu Song acts rather impatiently and irrationally that even his orderlies feel unsettled. "I can't stay here (*zhe'er zhubude* 這兒住不得)...." Wu Song shouts, as if he cannot bear one more minute at Pan Jinlian's place. Upon exiting, however, he calls Pan Jinlian two times straight, expecting her attention and presence once again!

Pan Jinlian comes out, but this time she is not eager to come downstairs. She "slowly descends and stands silently on the stairs." When her hero exits, she "descends

several more steps, cranes her head and watches the door at stage left, motionless.” She stands still on the stairs with this desperate silhouette “of great disappointment, anger, and resignation.”²⁸¹ Ready to run away, but the man she looks up to only shuts the door. It eventually propels her into the extreme shrewish posture of killing.

Feminine and Feminist Utterances: Shrew’s Tongues, Nora’s Speech, and Martyr’s Accusations

As the inversion of the idealized virtuous women, shrews refuse to be silent. Shrews are notorious especially for their abrasive outspokenness and willingness to speak uncomfortable truths. Tongues are tellers of their anger (shrews are full of anger, so their tongues rarely rest) and the most effective weapon against men. Ouyang Yuqian utilizes the unruly tongue of shrews to utter modern criticisms on traditional society. In a silencing and oppressive traditional world, only the unabashed shrew dares to remain loud and proud; therefore, a shrew’s nerve and tongue are everything desired in the modern battle against tradition.

Ouyang not only rehabilitates the title heroine, but also accords almost every female character in the play agency and poetic advantage over the male characters. Not a single woman in the play conforms to the traditional gender norm as being docile and obedient. Every woman in *Pan Jinlian* is a soldier who fights with her tongue.

At the start of the play the collaborative teasing at the concubines of Zhang Dahu makes possible a jarring and jesting feminine utterance that interrupts Zhang’s self-articulation as a powerful patriarch. Under their jokes and ridicule, Zhang is identical to

²⁸¹ Ibid., 64-66.

an innocent boy made fun of by a group of witty, playful women. His self-claim of authority and superiority only lends the women the script for parody and defiance. When Zhang Dahu sneers at the women's ugly appearances, the concubines immediately retort the charge: "Even if we are ugly, old Master, your face isn't much to look at either, is it?" Zhang Dahu counters with his misogynist philosophy: "Keeping women is like raising goldfish: you want the fish to be pretty but what's the use of a pretty fish keeper? It's only for fun. [...] As long as a man has money and power, there isn't a woman he can't have. A woman without a man to love her is finished, so if I take care of you it's like doing a good deed." His favor-receivers do not seem to feel grateful at all. One concubine calls her sisters' attention straight to the condescending tone of the goldfish metaphor, while another concubine directly asks Zhang to "stop blowing your own horn. There's someone right under your nose that you couldn't bring down."²⁸² They laugh together at his ugliness and inability, turning a patriarchal declaration briefly into a private feminine carnival. In contrast, the utterances of the patriarch simply lack verbal attraction, let alone verbal domination.

Wang Po, the wicked old woman in earlier texts,²⁸³ also remains one of the difficult women in the play. She assists Pan Jinlian's rebellion, curses, and beats Zhang Dahu and his servants with Pan. Wang Po stands both as a parallel and a contrast to the image of Pan Jinlian. Pan mirrors Wang's temper but transcends Wang's mindset as a new-time shrew with a modern spirit. Their cooperation in action and separation in mind

²⁸² Swatek, "P'an Chin-lien," 53.

²⁸³ Wang Po belongs to the "six categories of bawds" (*liu po* 六婆) who in traditional texts often serve as go-betweens, midwives, and nuns. Wang Po is a well-known example of this type of woman. She serves as go-between between Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian in *Shuihu zhuan* and *Jin Ping Mei*.

suggests the evolution of the shrew archetype, as well as the changing authorial attitude toward the value of traditional wicked women.²⁸⁴

Ouyang Yuqian redeems Pan Jinlian from legitimating her scolding tongue. In the literary tradition, women like Pan Jinlian, although lethal, are also considered the embodiment of the law of justice. As Victoria Cass points out, “Many stories confirm this mythology that many women are predatory, but truthful, corrupting, but ironically revelatory. Even Pan Jinlian, the ur-predator, has a good deal of ironic knowledge in her character.”²⁸⁵ Ouyang values the truthfulness of Pan Jinlian and makes her sharp tongue reveal the ugliness of male hegemony. When Pan Jinlian and Wang Po hurl invective and ridicule at Gao Sheng, their violent behavior and discourse only thrill the audience instead of repelling them. Poetic justice is delivered with the aid of the unadorned frankness of the shrew tongue. To some extent, Pan Jinlian does serve as the judge. Even her name (the surname Pan is a Chinese pun on the verb 判 which means “to judge”), as Cass states, serves to invoke the demonic judge (the adept Pan) from hell and “the sense of judging.”²⁸⁶

Besides frankness, Ouyang also endows the shrew tongue with exceptional intelligence and eloquence. Pan Jinlian makes her stunning appearance in scene 2 by delivering a penetrating speech on women’s status in a patriarchal society: “What’s there to like about men? All they do is bully us. Even if you had all the talent in the world they

²⁸⁴ In *Pan Jinlian*, Wang Po is like a follower of Pan Jinlian. She has difficulty understanding Pan’s progressive thoughts on gender and life. In *Shuihu zhuan* and *Jin Ping Mei*, however, the two female characters are not so different in both mind and behavior. Although one is old and the other is young, they share the same set of characteristics and visions as the wicked women.

²⁸⁵ Cass, *Dangerous Women*, 101.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 102.

wouldn't let you do anything with it. All you can do is dance on their strings." With a disillusioned air, she jokes to Wang Po that she wants to kill herself and thinks "best of all would be for women to die off completely." She imagines leaving men to suffer their crimes on their own: "The women die off and let the men go hang."²⁸⁷ As an intelligent woman stuck in a dead-end society, Pan Jinlian asserts her feminist ambition in a destructive language.

The force of Pan Jinlian's logic culminates in the final scene. As Wu Song stands over her, ready to disembowel her with his sword, Pan Jinlian converts the supposedly contrite confession of her crime into a sympathetic indictment of the crimes of her male oppressors. Rife with passion and tension, this scene wins the most acclaim from the audience. Pan Jinlian's powerful accusation lends itself to the gesture of Nora. As Joshua Goldstein observes, "Ouyang's twist was to provide Pan Jinlian with the opportunity, before being killed, to tell her side of the story. She does so through an eloquent speech condemning feudal society's oppression of women, reminiscent in some ways of Nora's speech at the end of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*."²⁸⁸

Both *Shuihu zhuan* and *Jin Ping Mei* render Pan Jinlian's confession in indirect speech from a masculine perspective. The Ming drama *Yixia ji* 義俠記 (The noble knight-errant) written by Shen Jing 沈璟 (1553-1610) is probably the earliest extant text that grants Pan Jinlian the opportunity to tell her version of her life. While in *Yixia ji* Pan Jinlian pushes the responsibility for Wu Da's murder onto Wang Po—another female

²⁸⁷ Swatek, "P'an Chin-lien," 58-59.

²⁸⁸ Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 180.

victim, in *Pan Jinlian* she boldly protests against the patriarchal society and its men, mirroring how Nora finally sees through the deception of her father and husband.

The final scene begins when Wu Song invites Wu Da's neighbors to a banquet, which is designed to be a trial of Pan Jinlian with the neighbors as witnesses. To Wu Song and everyone's surprise, Pan Jinlian not only calmly admits her crimes, but also testifies, with mounting passion, that Zhang Dahu and Wu Song are the genuine murderers responsible for Wu Da's death. If Zhang Dahu murders Pan Jinlian's will to marry someone she loves, what Wu Song murders is her last hope to love and to be a good woman. In the preface, Ouyang Yuqian bluntly condemns men for being shameless about pushing women into crime:

Men often step by step push women into crime (*bizhe nüzi fanzui* 逼著女子犯罪) or into depravity (*bizhe nüzi duoluo* 逼著女子墮落). At last, not only do the men shun responsibility, but also deride and curse the women as if they were not part of it. How can people in the world never question it? There are many other men who simply fear that women do not become depraved or brazen, because otherwise how can they appear noble and dignified? And how can they find many playthings for their entertainment? Confucian principals are made with supreme skills. For thousands of years, women could not jump out of its trap. My play really is asking for trouble.²⁸⁹

Not only does the author graft his authorial voice onto Pan Jinlian's speeches, but he actually played the heroine when the play premiered in 1927 as a Beijing opera.

²⁸⁹ Ouyang Yuqian, “*Pan Jinlian* zixu,” 119.

Ouyang Yuqian, the renowned female impersonator in China, “dazzled audiences with his remarkable skills”²⁹⁰ and reenacted the infamous heroine to be a desirable woman rebel. In his biography *Zi wo yanxi yilai* 自我演戲以來 (Since I became an actor), Ouyang recalls how his characterization of Pan Jinlian as a “rebellious woman” (*panni de nüxing* 叛逆的女性) echoed the ethos of the time and gained wide acclaim (*dangshi poshou huanying* 當時頗受歡迎).²⁹¹ The public celebrated the play for how it refreshed the perception of Pan Jinlian. Piao Peng 飄蓬 wrote, “With this play, I don’t believe that someone would still call Pan Jinlian a ‘wicked licentious shrew’ (*wan’e de yinfu* 萬惡的淫婦) or a ‘shameless bitch’ (*wuchi de jianren* 無恥的賤人).”²⁹² For the audience, the play updated both their knowledge of Pan Jinlian and their visual experience of this femme fatale on stage. Since *Shuihu zhuan*, this figure had never been performed righteously and pleasantly on stage. Nor had she been embraced by the audience as a positive model instead of a counterexample to socially sanctioned femininity. Ouyang’s sweet voice (*tianrun dongting* 甜潤動聽) manifests a new time for the shrew figure—she no longer must use coarse roars to make herself heard; she is now accorded a stage and a legitimate voice. She can roar beautifully.

Pan Jinlian’s utterances amazed the May Fourth audience as well as the bystanders in the final act. Those neighbors-turned-witnesses were constantly shocked (*jing* 驚) and appalled (*dai* 呆) by her speeches. The most shocking and controversial

²⁹⁰ Hung, “Female Symbols,” 154.

²⁹¹ Ouyang Yuqian, *Zi wo yanxi yilai*, 291.

²⁹² Piao Peng 飄蓬, “Cong Ouyang Yuqian shuodao Pan Jinlian” 從歐陽予倩說到《潘金蓮》, *Xinmin bao* 新民報 (April 15, 1936).

utterance is Pan Jinlian's final declaration of her love for Wu Song and her appeal to him to kill her. With her love confession and an unprecedented act of exposing her chest to Wu Song, Pan Jinlian seizes control of what should be the ultimate act of patriarchal discipline and transforms herself from a passive victim into a heroic martyr to the modern ideal of freely chosen romantic love.

When Pan Jinlian admits to having poisoned her husband, Wu Song demands her death right away. But rather than being petrified and throwing herself on the mercy of the executioner (which happens in earlier texts), Pan Jinlian adopts the pose of a martyr and faces death with defiance and willingness. She calmly addresses Wu Song: "Everyone has to die. Better to commit the crime, face disaster, and die forthright than be tortured to death bit by bit. To be able to die at the hands of the man I love—even to die—is something I'll do gladly. Brother—is it my head you want, or my heart?"²⁹³ Wu Song demands her heart.

Ah, you want my heart. That's very good. I've already given you my heart.

It was here, but you didn't take it. Come and see—[She tears open her clothing] inside this snow white breast is a very red, very warm, very true heart. Take it! [As the neighbors, nerves drawn taut, watch with amazement, WU SUNG drags CHIN-LIEN to him with one arm; she half reclines on the ground]²⁹⁴

²⁹³ Swatek, "P'an Chin-lien," 73.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

This is a powerful rewriting. In *Shuihu zhuan*, Wu Song rips open Pan Jinlian's bodice, plunges his knife into her breast and cuts.²⁹⁵ In *Jin Ping Mei*, Wu Song first strips Pan Jinlian of her clothes, makes her confess naked before her husband's spirit tablet, and then "took the dagger and cut open her pale and fragrant breast with a single slash."²⁹⁶ Instead of passively having her clothes torn open, this modern Pan Jinlian takes the initiative to expose her body to Wu Song. More than a mere objection to the earlier misogynist writing, Pan Jinlian's act testifies to the positive rehabilitation of shrewish qualities in the construction of the new woman. While her self-revelations might be deemed licentious or loose in a traditional context, they are now revalued as a forceful manifestation of a deeper truth, of her conscious and effective wielding of her sexual power over men. Whereas in earlier texts the woman under interrogation is denied any forms of autonomy —either verbal or physical, in *Pan Jinlian* she gets to use her body and speech to reveal a sexual truth that Wu Song famously denies. The materiality of the woman's body also constitutes an important marker of the new biologically-based scientific construction of self, as distinct from the Confucian ethical self.

The autonomy of the woman further frets Wu Song. "Who said you could talk so much? All I want now is to avenge my brother's murder." He must silence her. He raises his knife. Yet Pan Jinlian only cares about announcing her love, a love that transcends death: "I can't be together with you in this life; in my next life I'll be reborn as an ox and

²⁹⁵ *Shuihu zhuan*, chapter 26.

²⁹⁶ *Jin Ping Mei*, chapter 87. For the translation, see Roy, *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, 5:128.

flay my hide to make boots for you. I'll be reborn as a silkworm and spin silk to make clothes for you. Even if you kill me, I will still love you.”²⁹⁷

This utterance about afterlife is most controversial. Besides criticism of its seeming reiteration of women's service and sacrifice in the traditional language, modern critics such as Tian Han 田漢 (1898-1968) also denounced its tinge of sadism (*bei nüedai kuang* 被虐待狂).²⁹⁸ However, this utterance lends itself to more modern and positive interpretations. First of all, it reinforces the heroine's fidelity to the course of love. By sticking to the purity and endurance of her love, Pan Jinlian allies herself with the category of the modern woman who “dies” for love. As how Nora questions her husband's love and justifies her breaking of her marriage at the end of *A Doll's House*,²⁹⁹ Pan Jinlian's speech elevates her from a loose, lust-motivated criminal to a laudable, love-oriented soldier.

Moreover, I read this final utterance of Pan Jinlian as a rebellious feminist reformulation of the prescribed misogynist script. According to earlier texts, the bondmaid-concubine figures such as Pan Jinlian can only possess low status in reality and in trope. “She is tropologically close to domestic animals such as cats and dogs. These can be trained and groomed, and can give pride in ownership; at the other extreme, they can be punished and killed, or given away or sold.”³⁰⁰ Obviously, Pan Jinlian is fully

²⁹⁷ Swatek, “P'an Chin-lien,” 74.

²⁹⁸ Tian Han, “Ta wei Zhongguo xiju yundong fendou le yisheng” 他為中國戲劇運動奮鬥了一生, *Xiju yishu luncong* 戲劇藝術論叢, vol.3 (October, 1980), 5.

²⁹⁹ Yomi Braester analyzes how Pan Jinlian's celebration of the purity of love reflects the philosophy and rhetoric of Nora. See Braester, *Witness against History*, 63.

³⁰⁰ Ding, *Obscene Things*, xxiii.

aware of this prescription. She voluntarily adopts the script, animalizing herself to be the cow and the silkworm, both known for easy domestication, labor, and sacrifice. She does not counter the script, or she simply knows that there would be no way to counter it. In a rebellious fashion, she utilizes it to serve her own end. By serving as the boots and the clothes, she is claiming a perpetual attachment to the man: she will be forever binding his feet and tangling his body. If in *Jin Ping Mei* the base women are symbolically “domestic and sexual appendages of the master of the household,”³⁰¹ in Ouyang’s play *Pan Jinlian* asks to literally become an appendage to the man’s body. In *Jin Ping Mei*, the appendages embody the obscene and contaminating female power that kills. In *Pan Jinlian*, however, the woman’s commitment to becoming an appendage in her later lives acknowledges and reinforces the revenge threat of the inferior sex under the patriarchal hierarchy. As a wish and a curse, a reward and a reprisal, Pan Jinlian’s last word asserts a feminine gesture that no longer merely serves but also aggressively rules.

Greatly shocked by Pan Jinlian’s love confession, Wu Song completes his killing in a trance. His eyes open wide (*dengzhe yan* 瞪著眼), as he repeats her words to himself: “You love me? I...I...”³⁰² He does not finish his sentence before plunging (unconsciously) his knife into Pan Jinlian’s chest.³⁰³ He then stares at (*deng zhu* 瞪住) the corpse and lets the knife fall. Everyone in the scene is struck dumb (*dou dai le* 都呆了).

³⁰¹ Ding, *Obscene Things*, xx, xxxi, 196.

³⁰² Swatek, “P’an Chin-lien,” 74.

³⁰³ Interestingly, this unfinished and ambiguous line of Wu Song was improvised during the premiere of the play into a complete and moralistic sentence: “You love me. I love my brother (*ni ai wo, wo ai wo de gege* 你愛我，我愛我的哥哥).” Zhou Xinfang 周信芳, a renowned actor in the Southern School of Beijing opera, played Wu Song in the premiere. He insisted that Wu Song should always be a real hero, so he adjusted Ouyang’s Wu Song during his performance. In the 1960s Ouyang Yuqian recalled Zhou’s improvisation: “At the time we performed plays in a way different from today. We did not care much about

It is a different killing and ending. In earlier texts, not only does Wu Song not kill with hesitation, but neither Wu Song nor the witnesses let their eyes linger on the partially nude dead body of Pan Jinlian. Wu Song is apparently shaken and distracted. The iron man (*zhengzhengtiehan* 鋸鋸鐵漢) dissolves in the heat of the woman's love. He is no longer the unwavering superhero in *Shuihu zhuan* who kills fast and takes the woman's head straight with him to fetch Ximen Qing. Neither is he the one who quickly moves on to the next killings in *Jin Ping Mei*. Ouyang reverses the established pattern, letting Wu Song present Pan Jinlian with the head of Ximen Qing. It therefore makes the killing of the woman the most critical task for the hero—or, the most difficult task, as the author has been constantly suggesting Wu Song's feelings for her. While all three texts exhibit the process of Pan Jinlian's death, in *Shuihu zhuan* and *Jin Ping Mei*, the details are only to display the bloody justice done upon the sinful shrew by the righteous hero. In *Pan Jinlian*, nevertheless, new details are added to expose the weakness of the hero and the not-so-right or righteous aspect of the execution.

Ouyang radically changes the ending of the Pan Jinlian story, although his heroine still dies. In *Witness against History*, Yomi Braester voices pessimism over Ouyang's rewriting as a modern attempt to rewrite history. He argues that the same death ending of Pan Jinlian "symbolizes the power not only of male domination but also of the premodern text. Although she can address the audience and explain her motives, Pan Jinlian fails to

themes. Even the lines were added and revised in the course of a performance. Because Wu Song was so impassioned that when it approached the end he killed Pan Jinlian while saying 'You love me. I love my brother' under the witness of the neighbors. I remembered very clearly that he was singing this line while thrusting the knife into Pan Jinlian's chest." See Liang Bingkun 梁秉堃, *Shijia hutong 56 hao: wo qinli de renyi wangshi* 史家胡同 56 號：我親歷的人藝往事 (Beijing: Jincheng chubanshe, 2010), 6. Zhou Xinfang's performance re-ensures Wu Song's stereotypical image as a rational, ruthless, and righteous hero which Ouyang's script was actually meant to challenge.

change her fate, first and foremost because she cannot modify the narrative dynamics of the original plot.”³⁰⁴ I am afraid history is not merely rooted in the ending, as Braester understands it. Every changed line and adjusted detail throughout *Pan Jinlian* accounts for Ouyang’s reconstruction of history. The death alone by no means proves “the past continues to overshadow the present.”³⁰⁵ The richness of Ouyang’s ending only showcases how a modern subject can actively and freely play with bits and pieces of the existing script and piece together a present that seems similar to but is no longer the exact old history.

Braester’s idea that death suggests a form of the modern subject’s inability or submission also fails to acknowledge the type of death that fits Pan Jinlian’s case but is not about failure or surrender: martyrdom. “The martyr’s death must attract public attention, and the martyr must choose to die (or at least be perceived as making the choice) for a belief structure, adding legitimacy to his or her cause.”³⁰⁶ By this definition, Ouyang’s Pan Jinlian, who takes the initiative to declare modernity and embrace death, is definitely an active participant in her own destiny. She is a martyr for the cause of love and liberty. She upholds unpopular beliefs against traditional institutions and willingly accepts the ultimate sacrifice. “It is a willingness to die rather than to abandon those beliefs that generates the powerful images of physicality upon which partisans draw in proclaiming and propagating the martyr’s (and their own) beliefs.”³⁰⁷ Pan Jinlian’s death

³⁰⁴ Braester, *Witness against History*, 63.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 57.

³⁰⁶ Michaela DeSoucey, et al. “Memory and Sacrifice: An Embodied Theory of Martyrdom,” *Cultural Sociology* 2.1 (2008), 101.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

thus opens, instead of terminates, the possibility of promulgating modern values. As Pan Jinlian states, death will only bring her closer to her man. Through voluntary sacrifice she wins herself the chance to love, which is negated in her current life. Such a death allows her to actively redefine the relational hierarchy as well as the power structure between herself and Wu Song. Therefore, what really shocks the executioner and other male witnesses is not purely the image of Pan Jinlian's body, but the steadfast will of a woman to assert her love and agency, which makes her body stunningly noble and immortal, like a martyr.

While the ending of *Pan Jinlian* is admittedly a striking rewriting of law and justice,³⁰⁸ such a common view obscures the gendered subjectivity and fails to give credit to the distinctive gender play in the final scene. A woman, in the face of her male executioners (in addition to Wu Song, the neighbors are also executioners because of their indifference to Pan Jinlian's situation), fights hard and alone with her feminist tongue. In this light, she shall not be recognized as merely a gender-neutral mouthpiece for the May Fourth ideology—she is the model of the righteous modern shrew, who disgorges disturbances and threats on patriarchy through her unruly utterance, even after her mouth is shut by death.

In addition to Ouyang Yuqian's *Pan Jinlian*, another well-known historical Nora play is *Zhuo Wenjun* 卓文君 (1923) written by Guo Moruo 郭沫若. As the first episode in Guo's trilogy *Sange panni de nüxing* 三個叛逆的女性 (Three rebellious women),³⁰⁹

³⁰⁸ For example, Wang Dewei reads the ending as a forensic scene with renewed theatrics of law, justice, and violence. See Wang, *The Monster That Is History*, 55-56.

³⁰⁹ The three plays are: *Zhuo Wenjun* (卓文君; 1923), *Wang Zhaojun* (王昭君; 1923), and *Nie Ying* (聂嫈; 1925). Guo Moruo collected them under the name of *Sange panni de nüxing* 三個叛逆的女性 (Three rebellious women), published in 1926 by Shanghai *Guanghua shuju*.

the play sets out to address modern “isms” (such as individualism, nationalism, and feminism) through premodern female figures. Guo Moruo selects Zhuo Wenjun, Wang Zhaojun 王昭君, and Nie Ying 聶嫗 as the three defiant heroines, who epitomize (modern) defiance against the Confucian principle of “the three followings” (*sancong* 三從) for women.³¹⁰

Zhuo Wenjun, a widow and an eloper (despite parental objections in premodern texts), is openly embraced in Guo Moruo’s play as a typical embodiment of the May Fourth new woman, the leaving-home Nora. As Guo reveals, he fully redeems Zhuo Wenjun to be a model of new morality:

In ancient times, Zhuo Wenjun’s eloping with Xiangru was considered immoral. Even today, in our Republican era, many old-style moralists, especially the so-called educationists, still hold such view. [...] Never did someone seriously defend her, taking her behaviors positively as somehow moral. What I am doing is totally overturning the tradition. The unreasonable doctrine that “a woman should stick with one man her whole life” [*cong yi er zhong* 從一而終], I feel, has been completely destroyed by her bravery.³¹¹

³¹⁰ “The three followings:” following the father when unmarried, following the husband when married, following the son when the husband dies (*zaijia cong fu, chujia cong fu, fu si cong zi* 在家從父, 出嫁從夫, 夫死從子).

³¹¹ Guo Moruo, “Xie zai Sange panni de nüxing houmian” 寫在《三個叛逆的女性》後面, in *Guo Moruo quanji wenzuebian (di liu juan)* 郭沫若全集文學編 (第六卷) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1986), 138.

In the play, in direct response to Zhuo Wenjun's courage, her feudal father and father-in-law call her insultingly “rebellious daughter” (*nini* 逆女), “loose and lascivious woman” (*yinbenfu* 淫奔婦), “shrew” (*pofu* 濑婦), and “promiscuous woman” (*changfu* 姹婦).

Parallel to Ouyang Yuqian's *Pofu*, *Zhuo Wenjun* foregrounds the contrast that a woman attacked as a shrew by characters inside the story is celebrated as a positive model in the authorial opinion. On this contrast lies exactly what modern entrepreneurs see or claim as the subversive or progressive potential of once-condemned or contested female models.

The Real Nora/Shrew: The Brief Case of Jiang Qing as Nora on and off Stage

I close my Nora chapter with a brief examination of the performance by Lan Ping 藍蘋 (who later changed her name to Jiang Qing 江青) of Nora in Shanghai during the mid-1930s. She played Nora in 1935, a big success that makes the year known as “the Year of Nora” (*Nala nian* 娜拉年).³¹² Yet in contrast to the public acclaim of her Nora on stage, Lan Ping only received disparagement of her off-stage Nora deeds and speeches. The press changed its tone and perceived her performing of Nora as an indicator of her being a bad woman—a loose, vain, and lascivious shrew—in real life. This disparity propels me to reconsider the Nora-shrew association, especially the real-life realization and complication of the connection that the main body of this chapter does not focus on exploring.

I recognize this entails a methodological change: while the rest of the chapter has focused on literary analysis, in this small section I rely on historical materials to examine

³¹² “Nala da zou hongyun” 娜拉大走鴻運, *Shen bao* 申報 (June 21, 1935), the Supplement.

public discourses. However, I insist on choosing Jiang Qing's case as the coda or appendix to the Nora plays in the 1920s, due to its significance to the Nora/shrew theme. Although *A Doll's House* had been introduced and played since the early May Fourth era (around 1918), it was not until Jiang Qing's performance that the play reached a wide range of audiences and media forms.³¹³ In addition to the influence, the significance of the case also comes from its actress, Lan Ping. She was recognized at the time as a woman with a real Nora personality and she kept playing/being Nora even when off stage. Lan Ping's personal life, as narrated differently by herself and by the press, provides a window into contemporary social attitudes towards the on-stage image and off-stage actuality of the rebellious Nora.

After Ouyang Yuqian's bold claim of the blending of Nora and shrew in textual forms in the 1920s, Lan Ping carried that connection into real life. Her commitment to being a Nora on and off stage and her willingness to be a socially condemned shrew (in the 1930s as well as during the Cultural Revolution) all make her a concentrated embodiment of the grafted hybrid identity of the new woman. Compared to the aforementioned three cases of real-life Noras in the 1920s (Li Chao, Zhao Wuzhen, and Li Xinshu) and the post-Nora stories of the 1930s I mention at the start of Chapter IV, Jiang Qing's Nora story is more multifaceted and gender-sensitive. It reflects a real Nora's struggle against patriarchy as well as the negotiation between representational and social spaces that face both the woman and the society.

³¹³ According to Xu Huiqi, in addition to the stage drama, the play also appeared in forms such as radio drama and illustrated serialization. See Xu Huiqi, "Nala" zai Zhongguo, 3, 292.

Nora was no longer the ideal woman model in the post-May Fourth period after 1925. She gradually became the antithesis of the “woman hero” (*nü yingxiong* 女英雄)³¹⁴ the leftists promoted for the new era. But in the mid-1930s (mainly from 1933 to 1937), as the voice of “women returning home” (*funü huijia* 婦女回家) became loud in society due to the overall economic crisis and disillusion in the women’s liberation,³¹⁵ Nora, as the most available icon against the opinion on women going back home, once again gained favor and momentum. Even the leftist drama movement made use of Nora for its revolutionary and nationalistic propaganda.

Among the many performances in 1935 of *A Doll’s House*,³¹⁶ Lan Ping’s Nora was the most successful.³¹⁷ Created by the Shanghai Amateur Drama Association (*Shanghai yeyu juren xiehui* 上海業餘劇人協會), it was premiered on June 27 at the Golden City Theater (*Jincheng da xiyuan* 金城大戲院). The play was a big hit in

³¹⁴ For leftist intellectuals such as Nie Gannu 聶紺弩 and Mao Dun 茅盾, the individualistic Nora serves as a foil to the nationalist “woman hero.” In fact, their expressions of the newly defined new woman are realized through direct disapproval of aspects of the Nora ideal. For example, Nie claimed, “Women in the new time will appear in a gesture totally unlike Nora. First of all, she is not necessarily, or simply not, a young lady of the gentry, bourgeois class; she feels pains that are beyond her personal life; she does not resist in a passive way, much less go to the front on her own. As a member of the collectivity, she fights bravely for all women and men under the high pressure of life. She is the woman hero of now.” See Nie Gannu 聶紺弩, “Tan Nala” 談《娜拉》, written on January 27, 1935, originally published in *Tai bai* 太白, no. 10, cited from *She yu ta* 蛇與塔 (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhi sanlian shudian, 1999), 140.

³¹⁵ Zang Jian, “‘Women Returning Home’ – A Topic of Chinese Women’s Liberation,” in *Women in China: The Republican Period in Historical Perspective*, edited by Mechthild Leutner and Nicola Spakowski (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2005), 377-81.

³¹⁶ In addition to the best-known performance by the Shanghai Amateur Drama Association, other drama troupes also staged *A Doll’s House* in 1935. According to Zhang Chuntian, these troupes include *Mofeng yishe* 磨風藝社 in Nanjing 南京, *Minjiao guan* 民教館 in Ji’nan 濟南, *Zhirenyong jushe* 智仁勇劇社 and *Guanghua jushe* 光華劇社 in Shanghai 上海. See Zhang Chuntian, *Sixiangshi*, 157.

³¹⁷ For example, Xu Maoyong 徐懋庸 directly commented that the “yeyu juren” version of the play was the best among all the Nora performances he had seen at the time. See Xu Maoyong 徐懋庸, “Kan le Nala zhihou” 看了娜拉之後, *Shishi xinbao* 時事新報 (June 30, 1935), 3:4.

Shanghai and “ran for two months—unusually long for a left-wing production.”³¹⁸ For her representation of Nora, Lan Ping received thunderous applause from the audience and rave reviews from the press in Shanghai.

One factor that accounted for the sensation of Lan Ping’s Nora was her choice of adding spice to the characterization of Nora on stage. Lan Ping at the time was known among her fellow actors and directors as a feisty character both in daily life and in representational scenarios. As Zhao Dan 趙丹 (who played Nora’s husband in the play) recalled, Lan Ping was “stubborn and calculating (*gexing juejiang bing gongyuxinji* 個性倔強并工於心計).” “She spoke very vulgarly. Words such as ‘damn’ (*niangde* 娘的) often fell out of her mouth. She had a nickname back then: ‘rotten apple’ (*lan pingguo* 烬蘋果). [*Lan pingguo* is a pun on her name Lan Ping which literally means “blue apple.”] Therefore no men dared to touch her.”³¹⁹ But it was exactly this feisty woman that brought fresh air to the theater. As Zhao Dan also commented, “she performed female characters who had distinctive and shrewish personalities (*ta biaoyan xingge xianming pola de nüxing* 她表演性格鮮明潑辣的女性), very different from the uniformly soft and lovely (*roumei wumei* 柔美嫵媚) female images on stage and screen. She gave people freshness.”³²⁰ The audience was obviously exhilarated about the refreshing version of a

³¹⁸ Ross Terrill, *Madame Mao: The White-Boned Demon* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 57.

³¹⁹ Zhao Dan 趙丹, *Diyu zhi men* 地獄之門 (Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 2005), 84.

³²⁰ Ibid., 83.

rebellious, feisty Nora. According to Jiang Qing, her portrayal of Nora as a “woman rebel” won over the audience enough to applaud her—which was rare in those days.³²¹

Lan Ping’s forceful Nora brought high praise too in the press. Reviews raved about her acting, extolling her “forceful actions and lively facial expressions,” lauding how real the Nora was and how touching Lan Ping was “really freely living in her character.”³²² They gave special praise to the final moment when Nora was delivering the powerful speech in front of her husband and was about to leave the house. They thought Lan Ping was most successful in bringing this moment to life, which made “the powers on the stage all transfer to her body,” which “not only made Ibsen’s Nora alive, but also manipulated the emotion of the audience.”³²³ Some critics even asked Lan Ping to go even “fiercer” (*xiong* 兇) when criticizing and resisting the male characters.³²⁴ Lan Ping did not take the advice because she thought she “had already been too fierce” (*yijing taixiong le* 已經太兇了).³²⁵

The press celebrated Lan Ping’s onstage fierceness and determination to leave her man as tokens of modern woman in the representational space. But when it came to real-

³²¹ Roxane Witke, *Comrade Chiang Ch’ing* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1977), 102.

³²² Some rave reviews are: Haishi 海士, “Kanguo Nala yihou” 看過《娜拉》以後, *Min bao* 民報 (June 28, 1935). Qi Lin 麒麟, “Ping Nana zhi yanchu” 評娜那之演出, *Min bao* (June 29, 30, 1935). “‘Nala’ di yanyuan” “娜拉”底演員, *Shen bao* (June 21, 1935), the Supplement. You Na 尤娜, “Ping Nala de yanji” 評《娜拉》的演技, *Shen bao* (July 22, 1935). Bai Yan 白彥, “Dianxing de beiguo nüxing: Lan Ping” 典型的北國女性: 藍蘋, *Da wan bao* 大晚報 (January 7, 1937). Li Yi 李一, “Nala yeyu juren zai jincheng juyuan yanchu” 《娜拉》業餘劇人在金城劇院演出, *Shishi xinbao* (June 28, 1935). Xu Maoyong, “Kan le Nala zihou,” 3:4.

³²³ See Su Ge 蘇戈, “Cong Nala shuodao Yibusheng de chuangzuo fangfa” 從《娜拉》說到易卜生的創作方法, *Min bao* (June 29, 1935). Li Yi, “Nala yeyu juren zai jincheng juyuan yanchu.”

³²⁴ You Na, “Ping Nala de yanji.”

³²⁵ Ye Yonglie 葉永烈, *Jiang Qing zhuan* 江青傳 (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1993), 71.

life scenarios, the press swiftly took on its traditional misogynistic dimension towards Lan Ping's unruly spirit and behavior, even though it had just appreciated the blending of the actress's real character with her stage role.

Lan Ping created another sensation one year after her Nora success in 1935, concerning her affair with Tang Na 唐納 (1914-1988, original name: Ma Jiliang 馬季良). Tang Na was a talented arts critic, scriptwriter, director, and actor in Shanghai, who enjoyed Lan Ping's Nora and was completely drawn to her non-conventional "bold" character.³²⁶ The two played together in the film *Dushi fengguang* 都市風光 (Scenes of city life; 1935) and quickly fell in love. In April 1936, there was a joint wedding held at the Liuhe Pagoda 六和塔 in Suzhou 蘇州. Among the six Shanghai actresses and actors who participated were Tang Na and Lan Ping. The press covered the event, informing the public that Tang and Lan were married. In fact Lan Ping never agreed to sign the contract.³²⁷ At the end of the same month, Lan Ping told Tang Na she had to go to Ji'nan 濟南 for a while because her mother was sick. After her leave, Tang Na received the farewell letter she had left for him with their mutual friend Zheng Junli 鄭君里.³²⁸ He immediately went to Ji'nan to find her. Without any luck, at an inn in Ji'nan Tang Na "attempted suicide for the first time by swallowing matches and drinking pure

³²⁶ About his first impression of Lan Ping, Tang Na recalled: "Even in Shanghai, she was exceptional. Don't think of her as a timid Chinese girl. Perhaps you are used to Chinese girls being retiring. Well, Lan Ping was not like that. She was one who did not hesitate to go up and talk to a man, to take the initiative, to put herself in a man's path. Oh, she was a bold girl!" See Terrill, *Madame Mao*, 66.

³²⁷ Zhao Dan, *Diyu zhi men*, 82. Ye Yonglie, *Jiang Qing zhuan*, 88.

³²⁸ See Ye Yonglie and Natascha Vittinghoff. But according to Ross Terrill, Tang Na did not get the letter from Zheng Junli until he and Lan Ping came back from Ji'nan. See Terrill, *Madame Mao*, 83.

alcohol.”³²⁹ Lan Ping came to the inn and they finally went back to Shanghai together. In May 1937, Tang Na undertook his second suicidal attempt “by drowning himself in the waters of the Huangpu in the middle of the day.”³³⁰ At the time, Lan Ping had once again separated from him and was in love with Zhang Min 章泯, the most prominent director in Shanghai (also the director of *Nora*) who soon divorced his wife for her.

Scandals stirred up the Shanghai press. They even reached Beijing and Nanjing in newspapers such as *Zhongyang ribao* 中央日報 (Central daily news). The narratives in the press uniformly depicted Tang Na and Zhang Min as victims of Lan Ping, the sexually attractive, fame-seeking evil woman. She was portrayed as the femme fatale who traded beauty for fame: “In order to become famous (*chufengtou* 出風頭), Lan Ping makes use of the tactics of beauties (*meirenji* 美人計).”³³¹ She was the loose woman who had no commitment to love or marriage: “Got married twice, but she still wanders around.”³³² “She treats Tang Na far worse after marriage. She makes fusses (*nao* 鬨) almost every single day.”³³³ She was even linked to the bad karma a man would have if he had done wrong in his previous life: “Lan Ping has an arrogant temper and imperious

³²⁹ Natascha Vittinghoff, “Jiang Qing and Nora: Drama and Politics in the Republican Period,” in *Women in China: The Republican Period in Historical Perspective*, edited by Mechthild Leutner and Nicola Spakowski (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2005), 225. Vittinghoff’s account on this matter should be based on Ye Yonglie’s *Jiang Qing zhuan*, 91. In *Madame Mao*, however, Ross Terrill states what Tang Na took was actually “an overdose of sleeping pills.” See Terrill, *Madame Mao*, 82.

³³⁰ Vittinghoff, “Jiang Qing and Nora,” 225.

³³¹ (Author unknown), “Lan Ping xiang chufengtou, yong de shi meirenji” 藍蘋想出風頭，用的是美人計, *Shidai bao* 時代報 (June 15, 1937).

³³² “Shiyi qingchang qiusi de yingxing Tang Na yuju hou liuji hou jiayin” 失意情場求死的影星唐納遇救後留濟候佳音, *Shi bao* 時報 (June 30, 1936).

³³³ Tu Yu 傅雨, “Tang Na, Lan Ping heli ji” 唐納、藍蘋合離記, *Xin bao* 辛報 (July 1, 1936).

manner. Some say, ‘whoever gets this woman must have done evil in previous lives (*qianshi li zongshi zuolenie* 前世裏總是作了孽).’”³³⁴ In contrast, Tang Na’s image in the press was sensationalized as a sensitive, sincere, but wronged lover/husband. *Shi bao* 時報 (The Eastern times) published his touching letters to her and called those words “directly coming from the heart” (*chuzi feifu* 出自肺腑), “exceedingly sentimental” (*chanmian feice* 纏綿悱惻), and “passionately devoted” (*yi wang qing shen* 一往情深).³³⁵ Lan Ping’s letters to him were left out, which, as I will show, told a different story.

The concentrated focus of the press on reading Lan Ping’s affairs as moral cases overshadowed alternative reading perspectives. A noticeable one is the Nora perspective. In her relationship with Tang Na, Lan Ping acted rebelliously and assertively. Yet no reviews celebrated Lan Ping’s leaving Tang Na as a laudable behavior as modern and progressive as Nora’s leaving her hypocritical husband. Even when they did mention Nora in a couple of examples, the fact that Lan Ping used to perform Nora only lent itself to criticisms of her being an innately licentious and domineering woman in real life: “Lan Ping, as a woman who once played Nora, is rather confident about men (*duiyu nanren, ta shi po you bawo de* 對於男人，她是頗有把握的).”³³⁶ Although Nora had been a progressive icon for decades, even in 1930s’ Shanghai daring to play Nora in public was still received as evidence of a woman’s loose morals. As Natascha Vittinghoff points out, “The content of the play was reason for discriminating against women who played this

³³⁴ Xi Zi 系子, “Yingxing wowen lu: Lan Ping” 影星我聞錄: 藍蘋, *Qingchun dianying* 青春電影, vol.3, no.7 (July 10, 1937).

³³⁵ “Shiyi qingchang.”

³³⁶ “Lan Ping xiang chufengtou.”

role. Thus, the representation of a figure such as Nora on stage was directly linked to the social position of the actress in society.”³³⁷

Even in the relationship between Lan Ping and Tang Na, her forceful Nora action on stage was also considered from the start as an indication of her real-life irresponsibility. It had been whispered behind Tang Na’s back: “She’ll do a real Nora. She’ll play the role in Tang Na’s apartment, just as she did at the Golden City Theater! When the time is ripe, she’ll walk out on him just as Nora walked out on Helmer.”³³⁸ Similarly, in his letter to Lan Ping upon his first attempt of suicide, Tang Na opened with the sentence “Ping, my dearest, I did not expect you would leave so suddenly, so hastily...” as if he had been living in fear of her potential leave all along.³³⁹

No matter how the press vilified the Nora association in Lan Ping’s case, her own words reveal that behaving as Nora was not only her conscious choice, but also the proud (instead of shameful) thing she felt she had done. She was proud that her pursuit of the Nora spirit kept her alive as a real, modern new woman in such a malicious, hypocritical society. In Lan Ping’s farewell letter to Tang Na in 1936³⁴⁰ and her letter to the public in

³³⁷ Vittinghoff, “Jiang Qing and Nora,” 230-31. Besides the case of Lan Ping, Vittinghoff also refers to the widely discussed “Nora incident” that took place in Nanjing in 1935. The incident concerned a schoolteacher Wang Ping 王蘋 (original name: Wang Guangzhen 王光珍) being dismissed from office because she performed Nora in January in an amateur group. For information about the incident, also see Elisabeth Eide, *China’s Ibsen: From Ibsen to Ibsenism* (London: Curzon Press, 1987), 95-96. In addition to Wang Ping, other female students who had played parts in the play were all punished or expelled from school. See “Heri cai you guangming zhi lu Nala wei yanju er shiye” 何日才有光明之路 娜拉為演劇而失業, *Xinmin bao* (February 2, 1935); Zhang Zhizhong 張致中, “Yishu de xishengzhe ‘Nala’ Wang Guangzhen jiezhi qianhou” 藝術的犧牲者“娜拉”王光珍解職前後, *Da wan bao* (February 16, 1935); “Jing shi nusheng yanju fengchao” 京市女生演劇風潮, *Da wan bao* (February 18, 1935).

³³⁸ Terrill, *Madame Mao*, 78.

³³⁹ Quoted from Ye Yonglie, *Jiang Qing zhuan*, 92.

³⁴⁰ “Jiang Qing xie gei Tang Na de jueqingshu” 江青寫給唐納的絕情書, written on June 23, 1936, first published in *Dao bao* (北平)導報 (June 30 and July 1, 1936). It is republished in *Mingbao yuekan* 明報月刊, no.166 (October 1979). It is then translated by William A. Wycoff as “Chiang Ch’ing’s ‘Farewell

1937,³⁴¹ she provided a picture alternative, if not contradictory, to what the press and Tang Na had accounted.

Most striking are the reasons Lan Ping narrated for why she left Tang Na. Contrary to the committed good-man image of Tang Na in the press, Lan Ping exposed how his affairs with other women during their relationship drove her to distress and finally pushed her to depart from him.³⁴² In addition, quite different from her condemned image in the press as an overly ambitious actress, Lan Ping confessed that she had long been considering leaving the luxury life in Shanghai. “Ever since entering the movie world, the contradiction of the discrepancy between words and actions had increasingly aggravated my sense of frustration, hopelessness, and self-destructiveness.”³⁴³ When she brought her concerns to Tang Na, he only persuaded her to stay and keep acting in films. This divergence became a main reason for their quarrels: “We fought innumerable times over the fact that I had always wanted to leave the movie world, but not once were we able to come to any agreement.”³⁴⁴ Tang Na enjoyed the environment of the movie world in Shanghai and desired a “somewhat easier” life,³⁴⁵ whereas Lan Ping hoped her death

Letter’ to T’ang Na” in *Chinese Studies in History*, vol.14, no.2 (Winter, 1980-81). My quotes of the letter are from Wycoff’s translation.

³⁴¹ Lan Ping 藍蘋, “Yifeng gongkai xin” 一封公開信, written on May 31, 1937, first published in *Lianhua huabao* 聯華畫報, vol.9, no.4 (June 5, 1937). It is republished as “Wo weishenme he Tang Na fenshou” 我為什麼和唐納分手 in *Mingbao yuekan*, no.166 (October 1979). It is then translated by William Wycoff as “Why I Have Parted from T’ang Na” in *Chinese Studies in History*, vol.14, no.2 (Winter, 1980-81). My quotes are also from Wycoff’s translation.

³⁴² Lan Ping, “Yifeng gongkai xin.”

³⁴³ “Chiang Ch’ing’s ‘Farewell Letter’ to T’ang Na,” 77. Lan Ping also mentioned the discomfort of city life in other places such as in her article “Cong Nala dao Da leiyu” 從《娜拉》到《大雷雨》, *Xin xueshi* 新學識, vol.1, no.5 (April 5, 1937).

³⁴⁴ “Chiang Ch’ing’s ‘Farewell Letter’ to T’ang Na,” 78.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 79.

could be “somewhat more meaningful.”³⁴⁶ She eventually decided to leave “that greatly tempting life of prominence, position, and relative comfort” and accepted the invitation from a friend to teach at a school.³⁴⁷

The two reasons Lan Ping laid down in her letters aligned her with the exact image of Nora, who also departed from a husband who cheated and from a constrained domestic comfort to seek a more meaningful life. But the press refused to look at Lan Ping as Nora in a positive way. Nor were they willing to admit that the condemned behavior and thinking modes of Lan Ping were exactly what was desired for a modern-spirited woman in discourse. The fact that Nora’s rebellion in progressive discourses was so easily mixed with the traditional view of the disruptiveness of the shrew once again brings to the surface the genealogical closeness and the slippery boundary between the new woman and the shrew.

Another strategy the male-dominated press took to erase the legitimacy of the association between Lan Ping and Nora was glossing over the patriarchal abuse exerted on her. Tang Na, a soft and weak man in the press, was a rather manipulative and torturing husband in Lan Ping’s letters. If in *A Doll’s House* Torvald manipulates Nora through his sweet lies, Tang Na controls Lan Ping through his tears. When Lan Ping first found love letters written by him to other women, Tang Na used tears and suicide threats to force Lan Ping to forgive him. He was “sobbing bitterly” that Lan Ping “shall never forget the pitiful way that he cried.”³⁴⁸ Later when Lan Ping departed, Tang Na’s suicide

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 77.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 77, 79.

³⁴⁸ “Why I Have Parted from T’ang Na,” 85.

attempt once again successfully earned her back. As Lan Ping recounted, “I primarily wanted to have a frank face-to-face talk with him, to urge him to respect himself and not to be like this again, after which we would again separate. But when I saw how miserable he was, how shameful, my heart softened incredibly, to the point that I totally forgave his faithlessness... Out of a sense of sympathy and pity, I did the most humiliating thing in my whole life – I returned with him to Shanghai.”³⁴⁹ After their return, she soon found out that the man remained the same. And his tears and dramas continued to torture her.

According to Lan Ping, for a long while she was suffering from a mental breakdown because she found herself torn between her consciousness to leave the man and her sympathy that was repeatedly provoked by Tang Na’s emotional abuse. “I had already fallen into a very serious depression! I frequently shook my head and hit myself.”³⁵⁰ The press highlighted those moments of her hysterics in her letters as evidence of her being an unstable shrew, but erased the reasons she narrated for her breakdown. They only wanted her to be the innately mad woman, the born shrew: “The public letter of Lan Ping vividly represents her image of a shrew shouting abuse in the street (*pofu majie* 潑婦罵街).”³⁵¹

In order to tame the shrew, even Tang Na’s friends joined the abuse. When the couple separated, Tang Na kept bothering her, while his male friends “tried to hang ‘the damaging blow’” on her, as recounted by Lan Ping.³⁵² At the time when Tang Na

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 86.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 87.

³⁵¹ Ye Yonglie, *Jiang Qing zhuan*, 122.

³⁵² “Why I Have Parted from T’ang Na,” 90.

undertook his second suicide attempt, Lan Ping recalled, his friends even “were going to use force in dealing with me.” She laughed, with contempt and derision, at this pathetic patriarchal bluff: “Ha, ha! Good heavens! If they would be so brave in fighting against XX [referring to Japan], then, really, China would definitely not be defeated! Unfortunately, to use it against one young woman, ha, ha, ...”³⁵³

Every blow from the patriarchal world added to Lan Ping’s strength and determination to fight against it. Under pressure, she once thought about silence and suicide. But facing aggravated abuses from Tang Na, his friends, and society, she decided to be vocal and to live on, in a stubborn manner (*juejiang de huoxiaqu* 倔強的活下去). “Why should I be just a pitiful little bug and let others walk over me? No! Lan Ping is a human being and will never retreat, especially in the face of such shameless tactics.”³⁵⁴ Clearly a Nora declaration (“I’m a human being”³⁵⁵) from *A Doll’s House*, Lan Ping asserted as strongly her Nora gesture in the social space as she did on stage. She tried hard to stick to the new woman ideal even if the real world expected her to be otherwise.

According to Natascha Vittinghoff, even though the press lamented the suicide of the famous actress Ruan Lingyu 阮玲玉 in March 1935 as “tragic” and “unjust,”³⁵⁶ they still anticipated a suicide in Lan Ping’s case, so that there would be another sensation of

³⁵³ Ibid., 91.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 90.

³⁵⁵ Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll’s House*, translated and introduced by Kenneth McLeish (London: Nick Hern Books, 1994), 96.

³⁵⁶ Ruan Lingyu was one of the most prominent Chinese film actresses of the 1930s. After her divorce from Zhang Damin 張達民, the public leveled harsh criticism at her open affairs with other men (primarily the tea tycoon Tang Jishan 唐季珊). Ruan committed suicide on March 8, 1935, “international women’s day,” an incident that immediately became a big sensation in the press.

an actress dying for public criticism.³⁵⁷ “Jiang Qing’s open rebuttal of this option instead seems to have confused parts of the public opinion at that time, as well as contemporary historians today, as her outspoken appearance is now interpreted as part of her shameless, egoistic, self-centered character.”³⁵⁸ Lan Ping refused to conform to the norm of killing herself. “I’m certainly not going to be like Yüan Ling-yü [Ruan Lingyu] and kill myself because I’m ‘afraid of what people might say.’ Nor will I retreat. I’ll just wait without moving a muscle, wait for them to curse me in large bold type.”³⁵⁹

Lan Ping overturned the traditional gender paradigm that prescribes women as the passive party and determines a woman in distress should commit suicide for the integrity of virtue. She made Tang Na the passive follower in their relationship and had him actually take on the role of the conventional traditional woman, who is sentimental, jealous, and fragile. While I agree with Vittinghoff in saying that “male suicide – quite opposite to traditional female suicide – thus again became a means of oppression and forceful implementation of a man’s individual interests,” I also see Tang Na’s suicide(s) as emblematic of the empowerment of modern new women such as Lan Ping. There are, of course, control and abuse issues in his suicide attempts, but there is also desperation and a sense of castration for Tang Na when faced with such a restless woman.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁷ For another case of the new woman committing suicide, see Bryna Goodman, “The New Woman Commits Suicide: The Press, Cultural Memory and the New Republic,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 64, no.1 (2005).

³⁵⁸ Vittinghoff, “Jiang Qing and Nora,” 228.

³⁵⁹ “Why I Have Parted from T’ang Na,” 90.

³⁶⁰ Due to the traditional cultural value imposed on female suicide, men are exposed to far less pressure than women when it comes to solutions to relationship problems. Therefore, I tend to read Tang Na’s repeatedly autonomous choice to kill himself as a strong symbol of the (new) men’s self-feminization and self-castration in the face of the rising subjectivity and increasing mobility of the modern new women.

Performing the Nora discourse and behavior empowered the woman who performed it, even though society had not yet learned to appreciate the Noras both on and off stage.

Society celebrated Lan Ping's fierceness on stage as a progressive quality of the Nora model, but categorized her unruliness off stage only in the traditional language as a negative shrew attribute. Yet no matter how fluid the society was when speaking about the connection between the shrew and the new woman (or Nora), Lan Ping during her Shanghai era was consciously presenting and living such a connection in a positive way. She actualized Ouyang Yuqian's vision in his texts, that a shrew in the traditional view could best fulfill the modern expectations for a new woman (as represented in *Pan Jinlian*), that a modern new woman would never fear what others thought or said of her and would be willing and daring to be the shrew in others' mouths (as represented in *Pofu*). Lan Ping lived proudly as a Nora and a shrew. As she said in the closing words in her farewell letter to Tang Na: "You must remember me only as fiery female (*wo shi yige pola de nüxing* 我是一個潑辣的女性), as a woman unwilling to appear weaker than a man."³⁶¹

In the Lan Ping incident, both the female protagonist and her opponents were engaged in a battle of public opinion in which they manipulated two semantic fields for their own benefit. Tang Na and the press constructed Lan Ping as a cruel, selfish, and sexually immoral shrew who was interested only in her own goals. Lan Ping, in contrast, constructed herself as a fearless new woman, pursuing the modern ideals of autonomy and happiness. She acknowledged that the new woman had to deploy the tools of the shrew in order to stand up to the patriarchal norms that still governed society. The case of

³⁶¹ "Chiang Ch'ing's 'Farewell Letter' to T'ang Na," 82.

Lan Ping as Nora/ shrew constitutes the perfect coda to the textual representation of Ouyang Yuqian's positive construction of the Chinese Nora as grafted onto the powerful shrew in traditional literature.

As the analyses of Ouyang Yuqian's plays and Lan Ping's performances of Nora have shown, there was an active tension about how best to portray the new woman. The Nora figure was central to both the May Fourth and leftist attempts to construct women as powerful social actors able to rebel against traditional mores. As discussed here, the traditional shrew was an important inspiration for the transculturations of the empowered and fearless Chinese Nora. As *pola* hybrids who fight outwardly, the Nora figures created by both Ouyang Yuqian and Lan Ping contrast sharply with the brooding inward looking model of the new woman constructed by leading male May Fourth writers. These strong Noras reveal an alternative mode of representation of the new woman that has been overlooked by current scholarship.

From Ouyang Yuqian and Lan Ping's cases, it was apparent that there was greater social tolerance for symbolic and ideological battles than for changes in social practice that threatened the hegemony of husbands or male lovers. Society still struggled to come to terms with the set of qualities shared by both the negative stereotype of the shrew and the positive model of the new woman. Yet what Ouyang Yuqian and Lan Ping's cases suggest as valuable is the freedom of modern cultural figures in selecting among both past and present, negative and positive typologies of women to assert their own definitions of the new woman. Both the shrew and the Nora constituted the discursive repertoire available for the modern subjects to construct and perform female empowerment.

CHAPTER IV

WHETHER SHE SHALL BE A SHREW: WIFEHOOD, IDEOLOGY, AND HUSBAND-DISCIPLINING

The identity of shrew continued to haunt and frame representations of Jiang Qing after the fall of the “Gang of Four” during the socialist years. Her determination to assert an unconventionally strong womanhood continued to meet social criticisms that likened her to the shrew of traditional literature.³⁶² Social attacks at her Nora’s way of walking out on the male lover pointed to the fact that during the post-May Fourth period society was still reluctant to recognize Nora’s spirit as rebelling against male hegemony and opposing the wife-husband relationship as despotic.

Nora stories of the 1930s focused on transforming Nora from a bourgeois to a revolutionary who leaves her home to join the masses and serve the bigger goal of the nation.³⁶³ Similarly, social discussions on new women centered around issues relevant to Nora’s social life after leaving home. The discussions mostly came to the conclusion that in order to be a real Nora, Chinese women should first walk into the crowds to fight for the future of the nation.³⁶⁴ Mao Dun’s new women stories of the late 1920s and early

³⁶² For example, Roy Chan has discussed Jiang Qing’s engagement with *Honglou meng* and her being treated as a modern-day Wang Xifeng in the post-Cultural Revolution tirades against her. See Roy Bing Chan, *The Edge of Knowing: Dreams, History, and Realism in Modern Chinese Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), chapter 5.

³⁶³ For an overview of the post-May Fourth Nora stories, dramas, and films, see Xu Huiqi, *Nala zai Zhongguo*, 293-96, 302-305; Zhang Chuntian, *Sixiangshi*, 153-54.

³⁶⁴ There were two most influential discussions of the 1930s. One was held by *Guowen zhoubao* 國聞週報 (National news weekly) in 1934 on the issue of “What happened after all after Nora left home” (*Nala zouhou jiujing zenyang* 娜拉走後究竟怎樣) which lasted for over two months. The other was the talk and publications organized by *Funü shenghuo* 婦女生活 (Women’s life) in 1935 on the topic of “Nora after leaving home” (*chuzou hou de Nala* 出走後的娜拉). For information for the two discussions, see Xu Huiqi, *Nala zai Zhongguo*, 258-65, 301-302.

1930s, for example, showcased the leftist effort of revolutionizing the Chinese Nora to become “revolutionary Goddess” (*geming de nüshen* 革命的女神).³⁶⁵ The revolutionary new women should treat her body and sexuality lightly, channel her libido to national causes, and immerse herself in the revolutionary masses on the street.³⁶⁶

Both literary and social discourses in the post-May Fourth era highlighted public life and social mission of the new women. Yet by no means should we think that women came to be public figures and their roles were much disengaged from the home. One direct example was the revival of Confucian ideas on women and the discourses on women returning home during the period of “political tutelage” (*xunzheng* 訓政) imposed by the Nationalist Government in Nanjing.³⁶⁷ While the Communists reinvented Nora in order to call on women to join the revolution, the Nationalists reaffirmed the traditional female values of being virtuous mothers and wives as the ideal means for women to contribute to national building.

³⁶⁵ Zheng Jian 鄭堅, “Cong geming de ‘youwu’ dao geming de nüshen” 從革命的“尤物”到革命的女神, *Hebei shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 河北師範大學學報（哲學社會科學版）, no.3 (2007).

³⁶⁶ Scholarship has widely acknowledged these new Nora characters by Mao Dun for their unconventionally strong personalities. For example, Meng Yue 孟悅 and Dai Jinhua 戴錦華 have used the term “shrewish and wild” (潑辣狂放) to describe Mao Dun’s new women. See Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua, *Fuchu lishi dibiao: xiandai funü wenxue yanjiu* 浮出歷史地表：現代婦女文學研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2004), 107. At face level, Mao Dun’s female figures do seem to have transcended the victimized new women images constructed by writers such as Lu Xun and Yu Dafu. However, Mao Dun mainly depicted the unruliness of his new women through their carefree attitudes toward sex. When it comes to life goals and revolutionary pursuits, these women are still unsure, perturbed, and wandering. In this light, Mao Dun’s new women characters are not so much divorced from the trope of “despair” apparent in Lu Xun and Yu Dafu’s constructions. See Chan, “The Language of Despair,” 13-32. Mao Dun’s female characters still brood inwardly instead of fight outwardly, and they so easily fall into perplexity and become stymied. Therefore, Mao Dun’s new women do not really rise above the May Fourth paradigm nor can they be considered as truly shrewish new women figures.

³⁶⁷ See Xu Huiqi, *Nala zai Zhongguo*, 299-300; “Guo xin shenghuo, zuo xin nüxing: xunzheng shiqi guomin zhengfu dui shidai nüxing xingxiang de suzao” 過新生活、做新女性：訓政時期國民政府對時代女性形象的塑造, *Taida wenshizhe xuebao* 臺大文史哲學報, no.62 (May 2005).

Compared to the leaving-home public women and the returning home virtuous wives, what is less known are the types of new women who stayed inside the house but possessed the kind of strong personhood akin to the spirit of the public women. They were the shrewish new-women wives. Shrews in traditional literature were normally jealous, violent, and domineering wives. “Henpecking” (*juniei* 懼內 or *pa laopo* 怕老婆) was the central theme in shrew stories.³⁶⁸ In modern China, the henpecking theme continued. Some modern cultural figures redeemed qualities of the shrewish wives as consistent with an independent and assertive character expected of the new women.

These intimidating modern wives were the embodiment of the changing ideology. They carried out disciplines upon their not yet new or progressive husbands. This chapter will examine the following wife models: the new women wives in the stories from the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School (*yuanyang hudie pai* 鴛鴦蝴蝶派; I will use abbreviations such as “Butterfly School,” “Butterfly literature,” and “Butterfly works” in the following discussions) in the 1920s, who are free from punishment and retribution; the powerful models of wifehood promoted in post-May Fourth discourses in the 1930s and ’40s; and the Communist discussions and constructions of strong wives reconfigured to meet the CCP’s political imperatives during the Chinese Soviet Republic and the Yan’an era. This chapter aims to map the evolution of the henpecking shrew from the traditionally disparaged model to the favored wifely ideal in modern representations.

³⁶⁸ For an overview of the development of the henpecking theme in traditional Chinese literature, see the introduction in Wu, *The Chinese Virago*, 3-18.

The Early Stroke: New Women as Shrewish Wives in Popular Comic Stories

The role of wife was not as visible as it seemed to be in most of the discourses on the modern new woman. Despite the fact that late-Qing texts had been promoting a revised version of the “good wife and wise mother” (*liangqi xianmu* 良妻賢母) ideal,³⁶⁹ only the dimension of motherhood got foregrounded. When wifehood was mentioned in reformist discourses, it was largely treated as the necessary precondition for a woman to finally become a mother.³⁷⁰ In the May Fourth discussions on the new woman, the influence of Ellen Key’s idea on the “sacredness of motherhood” was rather visible.³⁷¹ Even if the discourse of mother and wife was disputed in the May Fourth era as

³⁶⁹ Scholars maintain different views toward the source of the “good wife and wise mother” ideal. Some claim traditional indigenous origin in Confucian morality. See, for example, Charlotte Beahan, “The Women’s Movement and Nationalism in Late Ch’ing China” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1976) and Weili Ye, *Seeking Modernity in China’s Name: Chinese Students in the United States, 1900-1927* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 134. Joan Judge argues that the concept was “developed in Japan in the last decades of the nineteenth century and traveled to China in the early years of the twentieth.” She also points out that while *liangqi xianmu* was most commonly used in late Qing sources, *xianqi liangmu* 賢妻良母 (wise wife and good mother) and *xianmu liangqi* 賢母良妻 (wise mother and good wife) were both common variants. See Judge, *The Precious Raft of History*, 110-11. Wang Zheng, however, emphasizes the influence of Western examples in inspiring and molding Chinese women into virtuous mothers and good wives. See Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 68-73. For a review of the literature on the concept in East Asia (China, Japan, and Korea), see Chen Zhengyuan 陳姪漫, “Jianjie jindai Yazhou de ‘xianqi liangmu’ sixiang – cong huigu Riben, Hanguo, Zhongguo de yanjiu chengguo tanqi” 簡介近代亞洲的“賢妻良母”思想—從回顧日本、韓國、中國的研究成果談起, *Jindai zhongguo funushi yanjiu* 10 (2002).

³⁷⁰ For example, Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培, the leading liberal educator of modern China, acknowledged motherhood as the first duty (*tianzhi* 天職) for women and urged modern women (*xiandai de nüzi* 現代的女子) to be wives in order to be mothers (*xiandai shehui zuzhi, wei mu de bunengbu xian wei qi* 現代社會組織, 為母的不能不先為妻). See Cai Jiemin 蔡子民, “Xiandai nüzi de kumen wenti” 現代女子的苦悶問題, originally published in *Xin nüxing* 新女性, vol.2 no.1, see *Funi wenti zhongyao yanlun ji* 婦女問題重要言論集 (Nanjing: Zhongguo guomindang zhongyang zhixing weiyuanhui xuanchuan bu, 1929), 63.

³⁷¹ Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*, 89.

underplaying women's individuality, no one could really dare to discard the two roles, especially the role as a mother, when claiming a modern womanhood.³⁷²

In the world of literature, there were Lu Xun's famous new woman-wife Zijun in *Shangshi* and the unhappy, struggling new women wives in female writers' works.³⁷³ These images all came from the later period of the May Fourth era. Scholarship to date has not paid attention to a group of earlier constructions of the new women as modern-day wives. During the early 1920s, the Butterfly School wrote the earliest new women wives in its comic stories (*huaji xiaoshuo* 滑稽小說). Due to the attacks by the May Fourth intellectuals and later Communist critics, the Butterfly literature have been labeled "traditional," "feudal," "conservative," and "reactionary."³⁷⁴ However, as the earliest stroke in depicting the new women wives, this group of stories by the Butterfly writers told much about the popular (not necessarily conservative) perspective on the emerging Westernized new woman. These stories not only conformed to the structure of traditional shrew stories, but also confronted the past patterns and values.

³⁷² See Yu Hualin 余華林, *Nüxing de "chongsu": minguo chengshi funü hunyin wenti yanjiu* 女性的“重塑”：民國城市婦女婚姻問題研究 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2009), chapter 2 “Nala jingshen’ huo ‘xianqi liangmu’: hunhou funü de jiating shenghuo” “娜拉精神”或“賢妻良母”：婚後婦女的家庭生活. For discussions on the representations of motherhood and mother's love in modern Chinese literature, see Sally Taylor Lieberman, *The Mother and Narrative Politics in Modern China* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998); Lingzhen Wang, *Personal Matters: Women's Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), chapter 2 and 3; Maram Epstein, *Orthodox Passions: Narrating Filial Love in China from the Qing to the Modern* (Forthcoming).

³⁷³ Modern female writers such as Lu Yin 墉隱 (1898-1934), Ling Shuhua 凌淑華 (1900-1990), Chen Hengzhe 陳衡哲 (1893-1976), Chen Xuezao 陳學昭 (1906-1991), Mei Niang 梅娘 (1920-2013), Su Xuelin 蘇雪林 (1897-1999) all had works on the theme. Bing Xin 冰心 (1900-1999) was probably the only exception, who celebrated motherhood and wifehood in her stories.

³⁷⁴ E. Perry Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), 55, 63, 208, 234.

The Diary of a Henpecked Husband

The Butterfly School gained its name in the early 1910s for writing sentimental love stories.³⁷⁵ The Butterfly writers situated themselves as the inheritors of the late-imperial cult of *qing* 情 for how they continued writing on emotion and love. But Butterfly writers also inherited the shrew literature that achieved full-fledged status during the Ming-Qing era. In Ming-Qing literature, the theme of shrewish wives and henpecked husbands was an alternative and often comic-satirical exploration of the male-female relationship in contrast to the articulations of *qing*. In early Republican China, the Butterfly writers rewrote this theme, making marital strife one of the most stimulating sites for presenting the irritations of the modern time.

There were mainly two groups of shrew literature produced in early Republican China. The first group included works closely following the literary traditions of the Ming-Qing shrew stories, in terms of plot, characterization, and even language style. These stories were often categorized as strange or eccentric. For example, Liu Tieleng's 劉鐵冷 (1881-1961) two shrew stories *Junlei miji* 懼內秘記 (The secret account of henpecking; 1920) and *Hedong shi* 河東獅 (The East-of-the-River lioness; 1922) were published under the title of *huiqi xiaoshuo* 恢奇小說 (fiction of unusual and strange matters). Authorial comments in the two texts indicate that the stories were a response to

³⁷⁵ At the beginning, the narrow definition of the “Butterfly literature” only referred to the love stories. As the May Fourth movement gained more momentum, the new culture intellectuals expanded the definition to include all types of old-style popular fiction, such as the social novels, detective novels, scandal novels, comic novels, knight-errant novels, and others. Later Chinese Communist writings adhered to this broad definition, while non-Communist writings normally adopted the narrower meaning. See Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 36. I use the broader definition, since otherwise it would be unnecessarily complicated to categorize the comic stories at the time.

the rise of feminine power (*nüquan* 女權) at the time.³⁷⁶ Yet the texts themselves did not deal with the threatening image of the new women but still wrote the shrewish heroines through traditional womanhood.

Written simultaneously in the 1920s, a second group of shrew stories featured distinctive constructions of the new women, aka the new-style or Westernized girl students. In addition to characterization, these stories differed from the first group and the Ming-Qing tradition in including quite a number of modern new words and having less didactic endings. Weaker on the admonitory dimension, the second group of works were published as comedic. Almost every work that has a new woman as the shrewish wife was advertised as associated with the concept of laughter. *Pa laopo riji* 怕老婆日記 (The diary of a henpecked husband; 1920) was labeled and published as a *huaji* 滑稽 (funny, comical, ridiculous) story in 1920 and was republished in 1923 as the first item in “the Grand Collection of Comic Stories” (*huaji xiaoshuo daguan* 滑稽小說大觀);³⁷⁷ *Miyue lüxing xiaoshi* 蜜月旅行笑史 (The laughable history of honeymoon travel; 1924) and *Junei qushi* 懼內趣史 (The funny history of henpecking; 1925) were clearly defined as comedies by the wording of the titles.

³⁷⁶ Both *Junei miji* and *Hedong shi* declared in their prefaces that the goal of the stories was not to repress women's power (*fei eyi nüquan* 非遏抑女權). This indicated that the texts were aware of women's changing status in society.

³⁷⁷ Other stories in this collection included *Wensheng riji* 瘋生日記 (The diary of a coward man), *Xiachan xiansheng riji* 瞎纏先生日記 (The diary of a pestering man), *Shoucainu riji* 守財奴日記 (The diary of a miser), *Niupi dawang riji* 牛皮大王日記 (The diary of a braggart), *Nü mowang riji* 女魔王日記 (The diary of a female devil), *Wantong riji* 積童日記 (The diary of a naughty kid), *Paima riji* 拍馬日記 (The diary about bootlicking). As suggested by these titles, unconventional male and female models were clearly the objects of laughter.

There seems nothing special about the categorization of the modern shrew stories as comedies. Traditional shrew literature was already acknowledged for its great comic potential and satirical effect.³⁷⁸ However, the 1920s stories signify a change in the meaning of the comic nature of the domineering wives and the suffering husbands. There was also an alteration in authorial intention and message. These writings were associated less with the cynical, moralistic traditions of Ming-Qing shrew literature than with the entertaining, highly farcical nature of the *huaji* culture budding in 1920s Shanghai. As Christopher Rea has pointed out, “the *huaji* culture that took root in 1920s Shanghai was built around mass entertainment” and it “tended to be celebratory and communal rather than satirical and derogatory.”³⁷⁹

This difference can be well noted by reading the 1920s stories of the new-style shrews against earlier renditions of the same topic. *Yanzhi hu* 腮脂虎 (Tiger with rouge; 1916) written by Yan Sanlang 燕三郎 is the earliest work I have located that constructed a new-style female student as the modern face of the shrew. The woman protagonist in the story is described as “quite knowledgeable in both Chinese and Western studies” (*xueshi yuanshen zhongxi bingjin* 學識淵深中西並進).³⁸⁰ She is also a typical *yinfu* who commits adultery, lives through the shame of gang rape without killing herself, mutilates her husband and cuts off his penis, and is eventually betrayed by her lover to be executed

³⁷⁸ Yenna Wu, *The Chinese Virago*; “The Inversion of Marital Hierarchy: Shrewish Wives and Henpecked Husbands in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol.48 no.2 (December, 1988).

³⁷⁹ Christopher Gordon Rea, “A History of Laughter: Comic Culture in Early Twentieth-Century China” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2008), 96-97. The dissertation has been revised into a recent book, *The Age of Irreverence: A New History of Laughter in China* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

³⁸⁰ Yan Sanlang 燕三郎, *Yanzhi hu* 腮脂虎 (publisher unknown, 1916), 72.

by hanging. The author identified the cruel shrew with a new woman only to lament, as shown in the preface, the imbalance in women's education between instilling knowledge (*changshi* 常識) and cultivating morality (*nüde* 女德).³⁸¹

The 1920s stories marked a different approach toward the newness the female students embodied. Other than mentioning the women's newness only in passing, the comic works of the 1920s represented the newness in a blunt and blatant manner. They explicitly associated the women's newness with the West and the cause for domestic conflicts. The new woman/shrew's Westernisms functioned more as the site of performance and laughter than as the foundation for bitter didacticism. In this light, *Yanzhi hu* should best be understood as still a cautionary tale about *qing* that belonged to the first major wave ("the love story wave"³⁸²) of the Butterfly fiction. The fact that *Yanzhi hu* was published under the category of "killing emotion" (*jianqing xiaoshuo* 獻情小說; a love or sentiment that kills³⁸³) also suggested that this text was more akin to the traditional orthodox treatment of the shrew than to the modern *huaji* renderings.

Pa laopo riji constructs the newness of the Westernized woman as the source of domestic trouble. The new woman's shrewishness is grounded in her educated (*wenming* 文明) values appearing so alien and intrusive to her traditional family-in-law. In the story, the woman is given a masculine name Wan Fuxiong 萬夫雄 (literally, as masculine as

³⁸¹ Yan Sanlang, *Yanzhi hu*, 1.

³⁸² Perry Link identifies three major waves in Butterfly fiction. See Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies*, 22, 54. Chinese scholarship also commonly discusses the different waves, see Wei Shaochang 魏紹昌, *Wo kan yuanyang hudie pai* 我看鴛鴦蝴蝶派 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1992).

³⁸³ The story concludes that "cruel killing is the truth of love" (*jiansha qing zhi zhenxiang* 獻殺情之真相). Yan Sanlang, *Yanzhi hu*, 100.

ten thousand men). She is also called Wan Xingshi 萬醒獅, which according to the commentator is matching her reality as a shrew coming from “the East-of-the-River” 產自河東³⁸⁴). In contrast, the husband’s name Bi Liang 鄙諒 (also as *Longqiu sheng* 龍邱生 which clearly refers to the henpecked Chen Jichang 陳季常 in history, alias *Longqiu jushi* 龍丘居士) only indicates his inferior status in the marriage. The man has a childhood sweetheart, his younger cousin Qiu Ping 秋蘋, whom he had hoped to marry.³⁸⁵ However, his mother takes others’ advice that a man in new-style school should marry a new-style female student and therefore chooses Xingshi. Xingshi not only graduates from a girls’ school but also possesses multiple modern titles: member of the Women’s Suffrage Alliance, instructor at the women’s sports field, and interim teacher at a girls’ school. The illiterate, humble and soft (*xing ji qianhe* 性極謙和) Qiu Ping is relegated to the background, as a potential threat or source of redemption for the marriage. One who reads the story is well informed from the beginning that there is the provocative new style embodied by the character of Xingshi, while “premodern values are still there, waiting in the wings” through the character of Qiu Ping.³⁸⁶

The formula of bipolarity between opposite types of women had a corresponding premodern pattern: the triangular relationship in Ming-Qing shrew stories among

³⁸⁴ Huaji Sanlang 滑稽三郎, ed., *Pa laopo riji* 怕老婆日記 (Hong Kong: Siti yinyeshe, 1920), 2. The shrew’s name Xingshi is obviously also a pun on the title of the late Ming, early Qing novel *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, the epitome of traditional shrew literature.

³⁸⁵ Echoing the plot of cousin love or cousin marriage as typified by the novel *Honglou meng*, modern Chinese literature saw a great number of works featuring either direct or latent love relationships between the male protagonist and his younger female cousin(s) (*biaomei* 表妹). The *biaomei* figure frequented in both modern popular fiction and the May Fourth literature such as Ba Jin’s 巴金 *Jia* 家 (Family; 1931-2).

³⁸⁶ Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies*, 208.

husband, concubine(s), and the shrewish main wife. In the 1910s this premodern triangle was reformulated to designate the dilemma for the man caught between tradition and modernity. The plight of the male character is usually embodied in his uneasy choice between a threatening new woman and a conventional old-style female in the sentimental love stories such as the best known *Yu li hun* 玉梨魂 (Jade pear spirit; 1916).³⁸⁷ While the Butterfly writers used the triangle affairs to mainly satirize the new women and reaffirm the reliability of traditional womanhood, later May Fourth writers such as Mao Dun used the love triangle to discredit old-style womanhood and make the revolutionary new women the desired choice for the male characters and readers.³⁸⁸

In addition to the pattern of characterization, *Pa laopo* follows closely with stereotypical shrew narratives in adopting conventional motifs traditionally associated with shrews. From the opening of the story, even before the entering of Xingshi, the text affirms her identity as a typical shrew combining beautiful exterior and bestial nature by depicting a dream that Longqiu Sheng has. He has this sensual dream after learning of his engagement with Xingshi. In his dream, Xingshi has light eyebrows, small mouth, thin and delicate fingers and legs, an ultimate beauty in the whole world (*tianxia zhi quan mei* 天下之全美). When the man fantasizes hiding her in his room and bathing her in fragrant water, the beauty suddenly changes her look, presenting a red face with fiery eyes, green eyebrows, a huge bloody mouth, sharp claws, and hairy legs, a stark “female yaksha”

³⁸⁷ In *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies*, Perry Link frequently points out that popular fiction writers tended to use opposite types of women to embody the dilemma between tradition and modernity. For his analysis of the use of such female models in *Yu li hun*, see Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies*, 41-54, 199-208.

³⁸⁸ Peng Xiaofeng 彭曉豐, “Mao Dun xiaoshuo zhong shidai nüxing xingxiang de yanhuajiqi gongneng fenxi” 茅盾小說中時代女性形象的衍化及其功能分析, *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan* 中國現代文學研究叢刊, no.3 (1992).

(*wuyi mu yecha* 無異母夜叉). The monster tightly clenches the hands of the man and roars: “I am the ultimate beauty in the world. What are you afraid of?” The man answers: “It is exactly your beauty that makes me fear.”³⁸⁹

The double-faced Xingshi reminds one of the visual dualities of the image of Wang Xifeng reflected in the double-sided “Precious Mirror of Love” (*fengyue baojian* 風月寶鑑) in *Honglou meng*. Parallel to Wang Xifeng’s opposing images in the two sides of the mirror as both an enchanting woman and a skull, Xingshi presents in the man’s dream in contradictory looks as both a beauty and a monster. This duality affirms the traditional trope of the shrew that both satisfies and sickens, appeases and appalls. In the *Honglou meng* chapter, Jia Rui 賈瑞 leaves a large pool of cold, wet semen after indulging in a sexual frenzy with the beauty in the mirror. Similarly, Longqiu Sheng finds himself drenched in cold sweat (*lenghan bianqu* 冷汗徧軀) when waking up. In adopting the shrew trope in depicting excessive *yin* imagery, the text shows that Longqiu Sheng is tormented from the beginning of the story by his own desires. His inability to resist the beauty of the woman determines his constant sufferings and family misfortunes. Although shrews were long defined as sexually attractive, this modern shrew Xingshi is especially appealing to Longqiu Sheng for her new woman identity. As a new woman, she is more irresistible; and as a new woman, she is entitled to go even further in being shrewish and challenging.

The first scene that Xingshi makes in the story illustrates the textual superimposition of new roles and concepts on the existing script of the shrew. The scene occurs on the day of the wedding. The text adopts the conventional depictions of cold

³⁸⁹ Huaji Sanlang, *Pa laopo riji*, 3.

weather and the imagery of water to foreshadow the entering of a disruptive shrew. On that day, there is a sudden drop in temperature (*tianqi zhou han* 天氣驟寒). When the bride's sedan is approaching there even comes high wind and heavy rainstorm (*jifeng baoyu* 疾風暴雨). As in premodern texts, abnormal natural phenomena are used as indicators of social transgression. As a new woman, Xingshi is an alien whose intrusion into the traditional community creates quite an outlandish spectacle.

During the ceremony, Xingshi stands tall and straight, only to be forced to kneel down to bow. Once entering the bridal chamber, she brutally tears off the veil, tosses her glasses to the ground, and curses the despotic family (*zhuanzhi jiating* 專制家庭) for making her kneel like dogs and horses. She calls in the match-maker and criticizes her for ignoring her request for a civilized wedding (*wenming jiehun lishi* 文明結婚禮式). When the match-maker responds with the clichés of the rituals of Zhou (*zhou gong zhi li* 周公之禮), Xingshi flies into a rage. She attacks the rituals as barbarian and responsible for China's failure to eliminate superstition. The match-maker is appalled and flees.

When later attending the banquet, Xingshi has removed the ceremonial dress and wears her new woman clothes: white shirt and shoes with plain jewelry (*danzhuang sushi* 淡裝素飾).³⁹⁰ The guests take her style of clothing as quite sinister (*buxiang* 不祥), because she is dressed in the manner of a new widow. As Xingshi strides (*da tabu* 大踏步) through the guests and steps into the yard for fresh air, everyone holds their breath,

³⁹⁰ While new women were often criticized for dressing ostentatiously, the standard clothing for modern female students was indeed plain. Female students were supposed to wear the so-called “civilized new clothes” (*wenming xinzhuang* 文明新裝): plain shirt, non-patterned long black skirt, no jewelry or kept to a minimum. See Zheng Yongfu 鄭永福 and Lü Meiyi 呂美頤, *Jindai Zhongguo funü shenghuo* 近代中國婦女生活 (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1993), 100.

stops blinking, wonders who this beautiful “husbandless woman” (*wufu* 婦婦) is. The woman’s disregard of propriety culminates when she walks to the yard and starts doing calisthenics and deep breathing exercises, something that the commentator marks as a “new trend” (*xin qixiang* 新氣象). She runs in the yard, with her skirt flying up like a dance. The guests are all dazed (*yanhua liaoluan* 眼花繚亂). The husband thinks to himself that even he who is in new-style school has never seen such unabashed behavior. The commentator comments, that only a specially grown (*tebie fayu* 特別發育) female gymnast as Xingshi can have a skin as thick as a drum (*yan hou ru gu* 顏厚如鼓).³⁹¹

In the night, the bride locks herself in the chamber, not allowing the husband to get in. The husband waits outside in chilly weather until two o’clock, only to get a note squeezed out from the crack in the door. Written in English with red ink, the note reads that Xingshi will not accommodate the man before he accepts her terms. Like Jia Rui, who is locked outside in the cold by Wang Xifeng in the precious mirror chapter in *Honglou meng*, Longqiu Sheng stays outside till dawn. Yet unlike the moralistic comments in the *Honglou meng* chapter, the commentator of *Pa Laopo* highlights the amusement value of this similar plot between Xingshi and Longqiu Sheng. The commentator finds Xingshi’s “new learning” highly laughable: her exercises in front of the wedding audience makes her into a laughingstock (*yixiao dafang* 贽笑大方); her passing the wedding night by writing a note in English makes people spit up their food

³⁹¹ Huaji Sanlang, *Pa laopo riji*, 6.

with laughter (*shu kan fajue, du zhi dang penfan manzhuo* 殊堪發噱，讀之當噴飯滿桌).³⁹²

The text continues to confine Xingshi's new style to a superficial level, as the major object of laughter. During the couple's first meeting the next day, Xingshi is caricatured for using Western social etiquette to greet her husband. She bows low, takes his hand, and kisses it, making the man feel quite awkward. She then lays out her principals for their marriage: she claims her right to absolute freedom and his money, but only gives him conditional freedom; she forbids polygamy and superstitious deeds, saying she will punish him if he dares to break the rules. At this point, the man still takes her demands as a novelty of marital life (*guifang zhong biekaishengmian zhi yunshi* 隨房中別開生面之韵事).³⁹³ The couple goes to bed at two in the night after the wife delivers a speech about women's rights. The man finally gets the sexual pleasure he has been dreaming of (*wenrou xiang zhi yukuai cheng buzu wei wairen dao* 溫柔鄉之愉快誠不足為外人道).

The woman's sexual attraction makes the husband comply with her demands to do physical exercises, wear Western suits, take cold showers, and learn English. He

³⁹² Huaji Sanlang, *Pa laopo riji*, 8.

³⁹³ Huaji Sanlang, *Pa laopo riji*, 13. In late imperial women's *tanci* 彈詞 (“plucking lyrics”) fiction, there had emerged similar ideas that treated shrew qualities as a kind of necessary spice beneficial for domestic life. For example, Cheng Huiying's 程蕙英 *tanci* text *Feng shuang fei* 凤雙飛 (Two male phoenixes flying together; 1899) positively describes how a shrew spices up life in a polygamous marriage. The wife's jealousy, rather than being the scourge of the polygynous household, functions as a positive spice that helps maintain a stable family order. For analyses of the positive image of the shrewish wife in *Feng shuang fei*, see Wenjia Liu, “The *Tanci Feng Shuang Fei*: A Female Perspective on the Gender and Sexual Politics of Late-Qing China” (Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon, 2010), 207-27; Maram Epstein, “Turning the Authorial Table: Women Writing Wanton WoMen, Shame, and Jealousy in Two Qing *Tanci*,” in Cuncun Wu and Mark Stevenson eds., *Wanton Women*, forthcoming Brill.

tolerates her for her extravagance and involvement in gambling, her public insulting of him to show off her new woman identity, and her cruelty in abusing everyone in the family from his aged mother to a little cat. The presence of a cat or dog in a shrew story is not accidental. Shrews in traditional literature are associated with images of deadly animal, such as foxes, tigers, and lions, as well as the more domesticated cats and dogs.³⁹⁴ These images help to embody the pollution and danger of the shrews. In *Pa laopo*, in addition to direct analogies between shrews and lethal animals (*hu bao shi xiang yuanshi tonglei* 虎豹獅象原是同類),³⁹⁵ the cat plot contributes to the identification of the jealous and cruel shrew through the ready-made trope of cat and killing.

The cat first appears at the end of the fifth chapter, preceding and foreshadowing the *yin* chapter, chapter six, which features a high-profile public exhibition of the shrew's disturbance during the couple's honeymoon travel. The cat is brought into the family by the husband to fulfill her request for a cat to deal with the rats. Yet the cat sounds like an old lady and arouses no awe. Therefore, from the beginning, the cat is introduced as associated more with the husband than with the wife. The cat comes closer to Longqiu Sheng, in terms of both intimacy and personality. To Xingshi, the cat is only a servant, and a not helpful one.

The cat is killed in chapter nine. This chapter emphasizes the function of the cat by a nexus of plots: Qiu Ping's visit, Xingshi's invitation of Qiu Ping for a talk, a clumsy

³⁹⁴ In the two masterworks of the late imperial shrew literature, *Jin Ping Mei* and *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, there are plenty of descriptions about animal imagery. Cats and dogs are both naturally and allegorically associated with the shrews. For readings on the images of the cats and dogs, see Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, 129, 136-37, 140, 147-48; Ding, *Obscene Objects*, chapter 7 “A Cat, a Dog, and the Killing of Livestock.”

³⁹⁵ For example, see Huaji Sanlang, *Pa laopo riji*, 10, 13, 20.

servant and an accident during their talk, Xingshi's anger and killing of the cat. In her talk with Qiu Ping, Xingshi praises Qiu Ping's appearance but laments her illiteracy. Qiu Ping politely responds, calling Xingshi an enthralling creature (*youwu* 尤物) who is pretty and talented (*maomei caiduo* 貌美才多). Xingshi is thrilled. When she excitedly describes Shanghai's modern scenery to Qiu Ping, her hand accidentally hits the tea cup that a servant is carrying. The tea splashes (*cha sijian* 茶四濺) and the cup scatters into pieces. In a fury, Xingshi kicks the servant out of the door. Qiu Ping shivers, at the sight of the shrew's scattered anger. Later, Longqiu Sheng holds the cat in bed. Xingshi mistakes the cat for an illicit lover. She picks up the cat by its neck and dashes it to the ground several times until its death. Parallel to her violence upon the servant, Xingshi brutally kills the cat, another good-for-nothing base figure.

Under the guise of her anger at the servant and the cat is her jealousy toward Qiu Ping (as indicated by the chapter title “*dusha linu*” 姑殺狸奴, literally, killing a cat out of jealousy). She intentionally asserts her power as the man's wife. Qiu Ping, as the potential lover or concubine to the man, is symbolically associated with the cat who is also close to him. Naifei Ding has discussed how imperial concubines and prostitutes are more prone than the wife to keep cats “as a substitute for the master(’s penis-phallus).”³⁹⁶ The presence of the cat on the man’s bed right after Qiu Ping’s visit makes clear the relevance of this trope.

What further links Qiu Ping with the cat is that Qiu Ping possesses a unique intimate bond with the man as his cousin and childhood sweetheart, something that Xingshi can never have. Cats “will come without the master’s having called for them, and

³⁹⁶ Ding, *Obscene Objects*, 200.

will not leave even upon being scolded. It is because of their intimate disposition [*qin*] that the master is close to them.”³⁹⁷ Like cats, Qiu Ping can always visit freely as a relative and an intimate . Xingshi cannot compete with this closeness, but can at least kill the cat that symbolically functions as Qiu Ping’s stand-in. It is similar to how Ximen Qing in *Jin Ping Mei* cannot kill Pan Jinlian, but can kill the cat, Pan’s deputy in attacking and killing his child.³⁹⁸ Setting the killing in chapter nine, a typical *yang* chapter, *Pa laopo* alludes to the inversion of the couple’s gender roles by depicting the wife as a ruthless killer while the husband is the companion of a weak cat.

Xingshi’s transcending of customary roles also finds expression in her relationship with her mother-in-law. Her ways of treating the supposed matriarch displays her flagrant disregard of filial piety that reinforces her identity as close kin to traditional shrews. Longqiu Sheng’s father dies early; he is depicted as a filial son from the beginning of the story through his obedience to his mother in marrying Xingshi. However, after marriage, the man gradually indulges himself in submitting to the wife rather than listen to his mother’s warnings against the threat of the beauty. At several critical moments, Longqiu Sheng fails to stand up to defend and protect his mother. The commentator sighs that “the wife’s order weighs more than the mother’s admonitions (*furen ming zhongyu muxun* 夫人命重於母訓).”³⁹⁹ When conflicts emerge between the superstitious ideas held by the mother and modern progressive thoughts of Xingshi, the son does nothing about the shrew’s vicious curses directed at his mother. Even when the

³⁹⁷ Ding, *Obscene Objects*, 222.

³⁹⁸ Even the manner of Ximen Qing in killing the cat is quite similar to the way of Xingshi. For an analysis of the episode in *Jin Ping Mei*, see Ding, *Obscene Objects*, 211.

³⁹⁹ Huaji Sanlang, *Pa laopo riji*, 27.

wife destroys his mother's Buddha statues, hides the shrine in the chamber pot, and dumps the pot of nightsoil all over the main room, Longqiu Sheng merely shivers and bitterly consoles his mother. Out of a pang of remorse, the old woman dashes her head against the wall and blood immediately trickles down her cheeks.

To further claim her power over the matriarch, Xingshi asks to tattoo her husband. Emulating the famous legend in which the mother of Yue Fei 岳飛 in the Song Dynasty tattooed four characters on his back to urge him to serve the country loyally, Xingshi tattooed the word “fear” (*pa* 怕) on the back of Longqiu Sheng’s hand to remind him to always serve her submissively. Xingshi co-opts the classic text of filial piety and makes that a foundation for asserting her authority. As the commentator remarks, the wife’s action of tattooing reflects a transgressive transformation of the model of “virtuous mother and filial son” (*xianmu xiaozi* 賢母孝子) to the relationship between “domineering wife and cowed husband” (*hanfu nuofu* 悍婦懦夫). Given the Confucian notion that body is given by one’s parents and one should not damage it,⁴⁰⁰ Xingshi is apparently seeing herself as fulfilling the modern mission of removing feudal structures and assuming the role of a mother to a weak man. The trope that strong wives can exert motherly influence over their husbands and shape them into useful beings reoccurred in later discourses on wifehood. Intellectuals such as Hu Shi, Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 (1897-1931), and Li Zongwu 李宗吾 (1879-1943) to be discussed in the next section revived the figure of the traditional shrewish wife when discussing the increasing profile of the modern new women.

⁴⁰⁰ *Xiao jing* 孝經 (The classic of filial piety), chapter one.

Xingshi's defiance against traditional norms comes to an extreme when she delivers her baby into a chamber pot and sits on the lid until the baby dies. It is a male infant. In order to "regain her lost freedom" (*huifu ziyou shen* 恢復自由身), Xingshi rejects all her marital responsibilities. If the most unfilial deed in Confucian thoughts is failing to provide an heir,⁴⁰¹ Xingshi knowingly cuts off any forms of her relations to that tradition. She presents herself as an ultimate shrew, who even dares to murder her own child to pursue her own desires.⁴⁰² Losing her grandson, Xingshi's mother-in-law attempts to hang herself. Without any sympathy, Xingshi disdains the old woman's behavior as one of the four magic weapons of traditional Chinese women. The poor mother is saved but leaves the home to become a nun. The story ends in Xingshi's divorcing Longqiu Sheng. Order is finally restored when Qiu Ping and her mother help to pay off the family debts resulted from Xingshi's gambling activities, bring back Longqiu's mother, and form a happy new family.

The Comical and the Radical

Pa laopo conforms to the tradition of writing shrewish wives and henpecked husbands as "enduring comical types."⁴⁰³ The comical element of the story lies in both the new woman shrew's actions of moving beyond social propriety and the husband's failure to maintain the marital hierarchy and family order. Similar to how premodern shrew stories indulge in hyperbole for comic or shocking effect, *Pa laopo* caricatures the

⁴⁰¹ *Mengzi* 孟子 (The Mencius), IV A.26.

⁴⁰² In traditional literature, shrews are either barren, refusing to bear heirs, or ruthless in causing their rivals to miscarry fetuses or losing their children. Xingshi is even more repulsive for intentionally killing her son.

⁴⁰³ Wu, *The Chinese Virago*, 161.

absurdities of the couple for caution. Authors of traditional shrew literature often claimed that the shrew stories were “actually heard, witnessed, or even experienced” by themselves.⁴⁰⁴ Similarly, *Pa laopo* lends credibility to itself by presenting itself as a diary. It delivers a message at the end that the readers can take the story as “a pill for failed husbands” (*yili zhangfu wan* 一粒丈夫丸).⁴⁰⁵

However, *Pa laopo* should not be treated only as a modern echo of traditional shrew stories. It is not only because the subjects have adopted new identities under Chinese modernity, but because the text has notably departed from its precedents in terms of how much sympathy or freedom the text allows for the troublesome shrew. *Pa laopo* still invites readers to laugh at the shrew, but the laughter is created and consumed more for its own sake than for some larger moralistic values. *Pa laopo* takes a more descriptive perspective on the shrew rather than prescriptive. She is placed into the story for her comical potential, and is easily left out of the story without a definite end. The readers are not informed about whether Xingshi remarries or remains single after the divorce. The text seems to care less about the fate of the shrew than the comic effect she brings. This situation was unthinkable in a premodern shrew story. Not to mention the severe punishment or inevitable reform done to the shrew in condemnatory satires, even in the relatively lighter comedies the endings of the shrews were always clearly recounted, though might they not necessarily be admonitory.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁰⁵ Huaji Sanlang, *Pa laopo riji*, 80.

⁴⁰⁶ Yenna Wu groups traditional shrew literature into three categories: dark satire and condemnation, caution and reform, and comedy. See *The Chinese Virago*, 10-11.

Pa laopo provides a different kind of laughter. The laughter now carries less moral burden deriving from disciplining the shrew. The focus is on enjoying her humour. The text plays with the novelty and alienness of the new woman as one entertaining spectacle of *huaji* Shanghai. This mode of writing later culminated in Xu Zhuodai's 徐卓呆 (1881-1958) skillful representations of the joyful urban life full of hoaxes and parodies.⁴⁰⁷

In contrast to premodern shrew stories, the textual emphasis of *Pa laopo* shifts to the exhibition of outlandish objects and thoughts. An advertisement promoting *Pa laopo* in 1922, emphasized the fun in seeing a new woman “making a fool of herself by misinterpreting the new terms” (*wujie zhongzhong xin mingci naochu zhongzhong xiaohua* 誤解種種新名詞鬧出種種笑話) and in being exposed to “bizarre things and peculiar ideas” (*shiqing zhi liqi sixiang zhi tebie* 事情之離奇思想之特別).⁴⁰⁸ It made entertainment a bait to attract the 1920s urban readers, rather than elaborating on the dangers of such women in family and society. When *Pa laopo* was reprinted three years later as a part of “the Grand Collection of Comic Stories,” the language adopted in advertising the series once again reinforced the value of *huaji* as a modern category in its own right. The advertisement claimed, that according to Western philosophers (*xizhe* 西哲) frequent laughers on a daily basis could greatly extend a person’s life.⁴⁰⁹ This recognition of the function of laughter identified the West as the enticement for the

⁴⁰⁷ Rea, “A History of Laughter,” chapter three. For his analysis of women as tricksters, see 127-31.

⁴⁰⁸ See the advertisement page at the end of Liu Tieleng 劉鐵冷, *Hedong shi* 河東獅 (Hong Kong: Siti yinyeshe, 1922).

⁴⁰⁹ See the advertisement page at the beginning of the reprint of *Pa laopo riji* in 1923 by Shanghai huaji publishing house.

readers. It marked a deviation from both traditional Chinese ideas on the concept of the comic and the cynical, nihilistic nature of late-imperial playful writings.

Other stories of the 1920s on new women as the new shrewish wives featured similar themes, plots, and characterizations as in *Pa laopo*. Cheng Zhanlu's 程瞻廬 (1879-1943) *Danqiu huazuo nü'er shen* 但求化作女兒身 (I wish to transform myself to a woman; 1924) derides the undesirable influence of the new learning. It shows how the wife, originally a Confucian model of female virtue, becomes an arrogant and domineering shrew after going to women's school and studying abroad in Japan. The text makes fun of the reversal of gender hierarchy by mixing bioscientific concepts of *ci* 雌 (female) and *xiong* 雄 (male) with culturally gendered terms such as *nan* 男 (man, male) and *nü* 女 (woman, female). It jokes that as women are gaining more power in the public sphere, it is as if that the female sex is flying high in the sky while the male sex is falling to the ground (*qun ci feitian zhu xiong saodi* 群雌飛天諸雄掃地).⁴¹⁰

Miyue lüxing xiaoshi written by Jiang Hongjiao 江紅蕉 also played with the mixing or inversion of gender roles. Similar to the metaphorical names of Xingshi and Longqiu Sheng, the wife Ni Baozhang 倪寶章 in *Miyue* has a name commonly used by men while the husband has a very feminine name Jin Jingzhen 金靜珍. Their names confuse the wedding guests because they cannot tell which is the bride and which is the groom. Their unconventional roles are further fleshed out through the shrewish characterization of the wife. She, referred to as a warlord-like wife (*junfa laopo* 軍閥老

⁴¹⁰ Cheng Zhanlu 程瞻廬, “Danqiu huazuo nü'er shen” 但求化作女兒身, in *Zhanlu xiaoshuo ji* 瞻廬小說集 (Shanghai: Shijie shuju, 1924), 55.

婆) in the text,⁴¹¹ insists on following the Western style of honeymooning and has total dominion over her husband.

Junlei qushi by Yu Xuelun 喻血輪 and Wang Zuidie 王醉蝶 consists of ninety anecdotes about almost all kinds of laughable behaviors of the shrewish wives. These stories are divided into twenty categories, covering both the private lives and public performances of the shrews.⁴¹² Although named a “history,” *Junlei qushi* is not about the diachronic development of the *junlei* concept or a collection of past stories on wife-fearing. Rather, it is a horizontal gathering of modern stories featuring various comic moments of the new women shrews—the female students, teachers, athletes, and so forth. *Junlei qushi* is therefore a microcosm of the new-style shrewish wives. The manner of grouping the stories by categories mimicked the popular know-how books at the time.⁴¹³

⁴¹¹ Jiang Hongjiao 江紅蕉, “Miyue lüxing xiaoshi” 蜜月旅行笑史, in *Hongjiao xiaoshuo ji* 紅蕉小說集 (Shanghai: Shijie shuju, 1924), 91.

⁴¹² Here are some examples of the categories: “the funny history of newly-married couples” (*xinhun yan’er zhi qushi* 新婚燕爾之趣史), “the funny history of studying under the light” (*dengqian dushu zhi qushi* 燈前讀書之趣史), “the funny history of honeymoon travels” (*miyue lüxing zhi qushi* 蜜月旅行之趣史), “the funny history of public speaking” (*dangzhong yanshuo zhi qushi* 當眾演說之趣史), “the funny history of pushing out the concubines” (*naqie bei duo zhi qushi* 納妾被奪之趣史), “the funny history of splashing vinegar/being jealous” (*nian suan po cu zhi qushi* 擦酸潑醋之趣史).

⁴¹³ The 1920s saw the publications of many know-how books, from guides to brothels, manuals on housework management, to books on dating and marriage. Some know-how books were really comprehensive and detailed. For example, *Xiang nang* 香囊 (Sachet; 1920), edited by a Butterfly male writer Qiandu Liulang 前度劉郎, grouped women into over 140 categories and listed under each category how men should treat them. Shrew types were among these categories, and the text gave concrete advice on how to tame the shrews. Later, in the 1921 edition, *Xiang nang* took out more than half of the over 140 categories and added a new section on how to deal with different types of husbands in a total of 53 categories. The new editor was the educated woman Xu Guifang 徐桂芳. The new addition openly asked women to rein in their husbands, with violence and sex as part of their tools. The 1921 edition juxtaposed two opposing perspectives: while the shrewish wife is the object of transformation in the first part on dealing with women, she is the desired model in the second part about the disciplining of husbands. This juxtaposition points to the modern interest, as well as struggle, in integrating shrew imagery into the new women debate of the day. As a new woman herself, Xu Guifang’s purposeful addition on disciplining husbands also suggests the lure of the stock role of the shrewish wife to the modern new women. See *Xiang nang* (Hong Kong: Huaxin shuju, 1920-21).

It provided the readers (predominantly male⁴¹⁴) with handy access to the specific aspects they wanted to know about the new women, especially what it would be like to marry one. Almost all the characters conform to the formulation that the men, no matter whether new-style or traditional, are spineless and emasculated, while the wives are bold, spirited, and manipulative. Like *Pa laopo*, the stories laugh at various aspects associated with the new women: the upheaval in gender hierarchy, the humorous grappling with new terms, and the women's superficial nature in accordance with their artificial modern looks. For example, in “the funny history of kissing and confessing love” (*jiewen shi'ai zhi qushi* 接吻示愛之趣史), a new woman simply gives up the modern etiquette of kissing because her husband likes eating garlic.⁴¹⁵

All these texts represented the new women's transgressive and therefore amusing moments without imposing moralistic endings. Readers were supposed to be exposed to the kaleidoscope of the new women's unconventionality rather than to receive any urgent messages against them. These stories constituted an open-ended carnivalistic play on gender roles and norms of decency.⁴¹⁶ Divorced from the ingrained cautionary tone in traditional shrew stories, these modern renditions conformed to the 1920s *huaji* Shanghai, “the fantasy world of play,”⁴¹⁷ by making gender a playground. Focusing more on play and display, these new shrew stories aimed not at converting the shrew and comforting

⁴¹⁴ Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies*, 189-95.

⁴¹⁵ Yu Xuelun 喻血輪 and Wang Zuidie 王醉蝶, *Junei qushi* 懼內趣史 (Shanghai: Dadong shuju, 1925), 95-96.

⁴¹⁶ In analyzing *huaji* Shanghai, Christopher Rea also employs the notion of carnival. See Rea, “A History of Laughter,” 151.

⁴¹⁷ Catherine Vance Yeh, “Shanghai Leisure, Print Entertainment, and the Tabloids, *xiaobao* 小報,” in Rudolf G. Wagner, ed., *Joining the Global Public: Word, Image, and City in Early Chinese Newspapers, 1870-1910* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 204.

the readers. For a reader who truly sought comfort in popular literature to appease his anxiety over the rise of new women, these texts that only exhibited chaos without offering solutions or disciplines by no means brought remedies.

According to Perry Link, the function of popular fiction for remedy or comfort accounts for the appeal of the Butterfly literature among urban readers.⁴¹⁸ Link emphasizes the “socially therapeutic side” of the stories and thinks that “popular fiction served as a forum for the working out of new norms, as well as a source of comfort from the anxieties which attended the great search.”⁴¹⁹ He uses this idea to analyze the peppery new woman character Yun Qian 翁倩 in the early Butterfly love story *Yu li hun*, who quickly abandons her new-style education to convert back to Confucianism.⁴²⁰ Link aligns this characterization in *Yu li hun* with the depiction of the sharp-tongued shrew Li Cuilian 李翠蓮 in traditional literature. Since Cuilian’s criticism “reaffirms” rather than “really threatens” the norms, Link uses the analogy to claim the “remedial protest” of the modern texts.⁴²¹ The threat of Westernization got blunted in *Yu li hun* as it successfully soothed the readers’ worries about losing the traditional rules and standards.

Yu li hun was written in the 1910s. During the 1920s, it seemed that the Shanghai urban readers came to be more mentally strong in accepting more open-ended works. One difference was that there was a remarkable change concerning how long within the text the shrew is allowed to stick to the newness and her transgression. Compared to

⁴¹⁸ Perry Link, “Traditional-Style Popular Urban Fiction in the Teens and Twenties,” in Merle Goldman, ed., *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977); *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies*, especially chapter 6.

⁴¹⁹ Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies*, 56, 213.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 205-208.

⁴²¹ Link, “Traditional-Style Popular Urban Fiction,” 341; *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies*, 212-13.

traditional shrew stories and early popular fiction such as *Yu li hun*, the 1920s texts were markedly radical. They allowed the entire textual time for the performance of shrewish attributes and the exhibition of new-style thoughts and behaviors. The shrews are not transformed by their husbands or some supernatural forces, nor are they executed through harsh punishment or bad karma. They remain intact in the texts, as do their new learnings. The newness is caricatured but not compromised or abandoned. The threats are there, but not treated.

This change of textual design had to do with the changing identity of the shrew. In premodern stories, the shrew was the definite antithesis to the Confucian ideal woman. The villain identity of the shrew determined her textual fate as the object of ridicule, transformation, and punishment. However, the twentieth-century saw remarkable changes in women's roles, and the reconstruction of woman became an integral part of the official project towards a new nation. The new woman stood as a major signpost of Chinese modernity. Under this circumstance, it would be impetuous and unwise to go against the trend of writing closed endings, especially those which use punishments to contain the new woman figures. Ridicule and caricatures fit better for casting doubt on the absurdities of the new women but without offending the modern world too much.

It is thought-provoking to see that modern writers chose to invoke the traditional shrew literature in order to complete their ambivalent depictions of the new women. Their opting for this notorious prototype of woman and their radical alteration of the stereotypical format of the genre claimed powerful redeeming values in the shrew figures. Shrews manifested the willingness and strength to protest against the traditional strictures

and gender hierarchy; shrews prefigured the new women, who were obliged to be transgressive and feisty for the modern world.

The Coexistence of Two Worlds

In *The Bitch Is Back: Wicked Women in Literature*, Sarah Aguiar has looked at the category of “the castrating bitch” that “reached full bloom during the male angst-ridden 1920s” in American society.⁴²² China in the 1920s witnessed a similar revival of a large number of shrew stories derived from male anxieties about the development of women’s status. But the Chinese stories differed in whether and how to cope with these disturbing women. The American bitch “will find no victory in male-authored literature; her rewards will be at best an unrelenting existential loneliness and at worst death.”⁴²³ The Chinese shrew, in contrast, can walk away after all the havoc she wreaks, not tamed, re-educated, reformed, or put under retributive justice.

The Chinese shrew is not treated as a villain, but an alien. Based on Link’s idea, popular fiction is a form of experiment, and the reading process for the readers is to “try out their notions in a fictional context and ‘observe’ the results” in a safe and comforting manner.⁴²⁴ But frustratingly, the stories such as *Pa laopo* offered no results or merely incomplete results. The texts demonstrated less an urgency to destroy the villain than a sympathy allowing the coexistence of both the victim and the victimizer, the secure old world and the threatening new one.

⁴²² Sarah Appleton Aguiar, *The Bitch Is Back: Wicked Women in Literature* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), 50-56. On the image of American bitch, also see Delores Barracano Schmidt, “The Great American Bitch,” *College English*, vol.32 no.8 (May 1971).

⁴²³ Aguiar, *The Bitch Is Back*, 50.

⁴²⁴ Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies*, 58.

At the end of *Pa laopo*, the new woman Xingshi goes back to her own world while the old world regains its own order. If the story starts with the intrusion of the new into the old, it ends with a recognition of both worlds. The new could not transform the old, nor could the old convert the new with conventional strictures. It transcends the simple binary of right and wrong, superior and inferior, but juxtaposes two worlds with different, sometimes oppositional, beliefs and principals. The text does not use one world to override the other or present only one dimension or value. It leaves things open and pending. The new world would continue to entice, disrupt, or even devastate the old order; but no one knows whether the old world would still be able to restore itself in its next encounter with the new. Nothing is settled or can be predicted. *Pa laopo* presents an open-ended and somehow open-minded picture about the new woman. After all, in that rapidly changing 1920s, who can really assure anything?

Pa laopo situates the new woman as an alien or a guest coming from outside of the traditional world, instead of a villain within. This treatment naturalizes her role as the comical clown and makes it easier for the story to develop in a less didactic manner. The text invites the new woman to come and allows her to leave freely. It comes full circle, without going into extremes to depict a broken structure of the old world or a changed look of the new. This approach keeps the story to the comical level and saves modern ideas from being criticized too rigorously. Throughout the story, the commentator actually has several remarks giving credit to Xingshi's seemingly absurd new thoughts.⁴²⁵ In addition, *Pa laopo* particularly shows its less castigatory standpoint by portraying a different image of the new-style divorce (*xinshi lihun* 新式離婚).

⁴²⁵ For example, the commentator approves Xingshi's criticism on Chinese women's favoring heavy makeup but ignoring natural beauty and inner self-cultivation. See Huaji Sanlang, *Pa laopo riji*, 23, 25.

New-style divorce in China started from the late Qing when Westernized figures such as Qiu Jin 秋瑾 began to experiment with many Western-style conducts. The new-style divorce quickly became a “category of scandal” and was condemned for allowing people to divorce “on a whim, shuffle some papers with a new-style lawyer, and falsely pretend to believe that nothing serious had happened.”⁴²⁶ During the May Fourth era, the issue of divorce was further addressed as a moral problem. The new culture intellectuals denounced the old-style divorce in traditional China as reinforcing men’s superiority over women. They advocated the new-style divorce to promote women’s equal rights in marriage.⁴²⁷ Although positive in progressive discourses, in popular representations, “stories about new-style divorce almost always show that the act is superficial and its results tragic.”⁴²⁸

However, *Pa laopo* does not present the new-style divorce as a bad thing. Although Xingshi’s reasons for divorce identify her as a vain and uncommitted woman, the text does not use new-style divorce to aggravate the sins of the new woman as painted in other popular stories. The new-style divorce, with its easy procedure and fast result, marks the turning point in *Pa laopo* that actually results in a happy ending beneficial to both parties of the couple.

The ways that the new-style divorce empowers Xingshi are revealing. Xingshi has brought the idea of divorce several times to her husband but the man kneels down to beg her to stay. Even after his mother has left, the husband is still obsessed with Xingshi, yet

⁴²⁶ Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies*, 222.

⁴²⁷ Shen Yanbing 沈雁冰, “Lihun yu daode wenti” 離婚與道德問題, *Funiu zazhi* 婦女雜誌, vol.8 no.4 (April, 1922).

⁴²⁸ Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies*, 223.

unable to restore order in the family. It is the new-style divorce that grants the wife the power to directly bring the case to the court so that she can avoid dealing with a weak-kneed husband. The new divorce system functions as an efficient tool for resolving domestic conflicts. In court, the woman defends herself in eloquent speeches. The man is totally drawn to her natural and confident demeanor when she talks about the sanctity of freedom (*haowu xiuse kankan tan ziyou shensheng* 毫無羞澀侃侃談自由神聖). He fails to speak for himself or to respond to her questioning.

The new-style divorce, the same as other new-style practices, gives Xingshi the right to action. A capable woman compensates for the inability of the man in bringing harmony back to the world. Xingshi, with the aid of the modern laws, shows that a modern shrew can bring peace rather than havoc. Xingshi is depicted as the ultimate source of all afflictions in the family. However, she is also represented as the forceful terminator of the trials and tribulations, a role that neither the characters of the old world nor the half-new, half-old husband is able to play.

The coexistence of two worlds at the end of *Pa laopo* pushes one to reconsider the labels of “traditionalism” or “feudalism” that have been deprecatingly attributed to the Butterfly literature. In *Pa laopo* there is no clear respect for Confucian norms, nor is there deeply-rooted commitment to tradition. Even though the old order embodied by the characters as Qiu Ping and her mother appears as an alternative, redeeming force in the text, it only gets relegated to the background. The foreground of the text is occupied by Xingshi’s dramatic performances of the new learnings and values. Traditional morals are admittedly visible, but modern and foreign practices are certainly narrated with greater curiosity and even tolerance. *Pa laopo* does not arrange its new woman heroine to

convert from a modern shrew to a traditionally virtuous model. She remains a shrew from the beginning to the end. Female transgression, though still used in literature to provoke laughter and relieve male anxiety, came to acquire increasing importance in writing Chinese modernization.

Experimentation of the 1930s and '40s: Wives, War, and Revolution

Unlike the unruly wives in popular literature, new women were represented less as wives than as individual fighters by the May Fourth male writers. Based on the few works on new women's wifely roles, the May Fourth male writers seemed quite uneasy and uncreative in depicting new women as wives. They largely reinstated the conventional husband-wife hierarchy, concealing the patriarchal hegemony under the modern discourse of enlightenment and transformation. In Lu Xun's well-known story *Shangshi*, the wife is put under strict supervision by her husband. The husband assumes the role of teacher, leader, and decision-maker over the wife. He observes her every bit of change after marriage, exercises his power in educating and transforming her, and eventually announces his verdict in giving her up. There is no room for the wife to assert her philosophy of living, confront the husband, or even transform him based on her own values. A similar scenario appeared in Ye Shengtao's 葉聖陶 1928 novel *Ni Huanzhi* 倪煥之. The text also positions the wife as the object of the husband's enlightenment. Like the husband in *Shangshi*, the man Ni Huanzhi sighs over the change of his new woman wife from progressive to petty after entering marriage.

The failure of the new women wives in May Fourth fiction was blamed for causing the male intellectuals to become disillusioned. The women's incomplete or

inconstant embrace of the modern ideals lent legitimacy to the self-identification of the male cultural figures with the role of enlighteners. It was under the guise of modern enlightenment that the old patriarchal order came back to continue exerting discipline on the married new women.

The husband dominance was so visible that some scholars have noted the theme of “*xun qi*” 馴妻 (“wife-taming/disciplining”) in May Fourth literature, describing those husband images as “*baonüe*” 暴虐 (violent and abusive).⁴²⁹ Although the May Fourth generation had launched a revolution of the sons against the fathers, the revolution of the wives against the husbands was yet to come. The scenarios of husband-disciplining so transgressively played out in the popular fiction were not an option for the male May Fourth writers. The reason not only lay in their sense of authority in the enlightenment movement, but also had to do with their hypocrisy towards gender equality and their manner of utilizing women. Male May Fourth writers needed new women as to model rebellion against traditional feudal parents and arranged marriages. They focused on women’s strength in freeing themselves from familial oppressions, instead of on their powers within marriages. A model new woman should leave a backward husband and pursue a progressive one rather than wasting her time on changing him. She should closely follow a good husband, not diverging from or rising above him.

Mao Dun’s short story *Chuangzao* 創造 (Creation; 1928) pinpoints that the husband’s obsession with creating a new woman wife was nothing less than restoring wifely submission and reinforcing male hegemony. At the end of *Chuangzao*, the wife

⁴²⁹ Chen Xinyao 陳欣瑤, “Chongdu ‘Li Shuangshuang’ — lishi yujing zhong de ‘nongcun xin nüxing’ jiqi zhuti xushu” 重讀“李雙雙”——歷史語境中的“農村新女性”及其主體敘述, *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan* 中國現代文學研究叢刊, no.1 (2014), 113-16.

runs away right under the nose of her husband. The man is shocked by how she manages to get away like a thug escaping from a detective (“*xiang baotu taobi le zhentan de weisui*” 像暴徒逃避了偵探的尾隨).⁴³⁰ The wife leaves a word to him, asking him to catch up with her; or if he chooses not to follow, she will not wait. The wife somehow starts to assume the role of a leader. She has a path to pursue and encourages the husband to join her. Unlike the compulsive and coercive gesture of the male enlighteners, the wife simply lays out the options and leaves it to the man to decide whether he wants to follow her and transform himself.

The ending of *Chuangzao* challenged the wife and husband relation constructed in previous May Fourth writings. The text does not specify what path the wife chooses. In a later article Mao Dun explained that the path is “revolution” (*geming* 革命) and the wife’s determination in heading on the path indicates the forward-going force (*yiwang zhiqian* 一往直前) of the revolution.⁴³¹ Based on Mao Dun’s explanation, *Chuangzao* can be read as his experimentation with women’s roles in revolution, which foreshadowed later leftist writings. It is true that Mao Dun continued to construct women’s superiority in enlightening and transforming men in his 1930s revolutionary stories. But as I argued earlier, Mao Dun’s revolutionary new women are outside the household and disillusioned in men, love, and marriage. Those revolutionary stories did not continue the model in *Chuangzao* that an awakened wife comes to lead her husband to the course of revolution. The significance of *Chuangzao* in prefiguring later leftist and

⁴³⁰ Mao Dun, “Chuangzao” 創造, in *Mao Dun wenji* 茅盾文集, vol.7 (Hong Kong: Jindai tushu gongsi, 1966), 33.

⁴³¹ Mao Dun, “Chuangzuo shengya de kaishi” 創作生涯的開始, in *Mao Dun quanji* 茅盾全集, vol.34 (Beijing: Renmin wenzxue chubanshe, 1984), 392-93.

Communist texts lay in this latent model of wifely discipline and leadership. It hinted that a marriage can be saved when the revolution is carried out inside the marriage, if there is a wife strong enough to lead the husband.

This model of powerful wifehood continued in 1930s and 40's leftist writings and reached its high point in early Maoist era during the Great Leap Forward (*da yuejin* 大躍進). As will be discussed in this chapter and the epilogue, Communist writers such as Jiang Guangci 蔣光慈 (1901-1931), Li Zhun 李準 (1928-2000), and Wang Wenshi 王汶石 (1921-1999) showed in their works the lure of strong wives to revolution. Before looking at the leftist policies and representations during the 1930s and '40s, I will start with non-leftist, humorous discourses in the post-May Fourth era, which also experimented with the constructive role of strong or shrewish wives in a time of turbulence. Compared to the radical gesture in leftist discourses which asked wives to rebel against their husbands, the non-leftist approaches are mild and playful. While the leftists focused on liberating women from family to join revolution, the non-leftists placed emphasis on women's roles as capable wives during the wartime. They revisited the old theme of shrewish wife and henpecked husband to playfully express their hope that wives could shape the husbands into strong and useful beings, a role that was much like the virtuous mothers.

Mothering the Husband

In December 1931, Hu Shi finished his overdue "*Xingshi yinyuan zhuan kaozheng*" 醒世姻緣傳考證 (A textual study of *Marriage Destinies to Awaken the World*), a solicited preface to the punctuated version of *Xingshi* published by the Yadong

Press (*Yadong tushuguan* 亞東圖書館). When Hu Shi was working on his textual research of the novel, he invited the famous poet Xu Zhimo to write a preface from the perspective of literary criticism. Xu ended up commenting primarily on marital relationships instead of the literary greatness of the novel.

In Xu's comments, the inharmonious marriage depicted in *Xingshi* is deplorable. However, he defends Xue Sujie, the epitome of the shrewish wife, for her sharp character and fair disciplining of her husband Di Xichen 狄希陳. Xu excuses the shrew's violence because the husband fails to redeem himself in terms of either sentiment or reason (*qingkui lique* 情虧理缺). The wife is therefore on legitimate ground to scold and punish him. Xu construes the shrew's curses as “wonderful speeches” (*juemiao de ciling* 絶妙的詞令) building upon “pure rationality” (*chuncui lixing* 純粹理性). In Xu's eyes, the hysterical shrew becomes a candid and righteous modern woman:

Her sharp-tongueness accounts for the fact that she is at least an agile, frank woman (一位爽利的女性). Yes, Sujie beats and curses, but hers are all open and positive deeds (全是中鋒陽性正面文章). By her assurance and eloquence alone, you simply cannot think she is in any way bad. Some friends of mine only wish their wives could have Sujie's openness and fairness (堂皇正大)!⁴³²

Xu Zhimo uses polite and modern expressions such as “*yiwei*” 一位 and “*nüxing*” 女性 to describe the traditional shrew. Given the cultural-political underpinning for “*nüxing*” –

⁴³² Xu Zhimo 徐志摩, “*Xingshi yinyuan zhuan xu*” 醒世姻緣傳序, in *Hu Shi wencun* 胡適文存 4, vol. 3 (Taipei: Yuanliu chuban gongsi, 1986), 180.

– the modern neologism for *women* (especially for new women, since the term was rarely used after words such as “old,” “old-style,” or “traditional”), Xu’s diction discloses that Sujie is employed to embody certain expected qualities for a new desirable wifehood.

Xu continues to mock the ways that modern new women (he calls them “modern Sujies,” *xiandai de Sujie* 現代的素姐) torture their husbands by means of “spiritual suffering” (*jingshen tongku* 精神痛苦). “Without even moving their fingers, the modern Sujies can make you lose your mind, and drive you to hang or drown yourself!”⁴³³ He asks the modern women to be as “completely objective and clearheaded” (*wanquan keguan de qingxing de* 完全客觀的清醒的) as Sujie so that their disciplining of their husbands can be justified.

Xu Zhimo was apparently teasing. But what is significant in this jokey discourse is the focus of Xu’s argument. Xu Zhimo did not see wifely dominance as negative or causing trouble, nor mock the inversion of traditional marital hierarchy. He recognized the necessity of wifely discipline upon problematic husbands, but simply alerted that new women should not carry that power too far. The disappointment in men’s inability or failures is more prominent in the text than the light sarcasm toward the rising threat of the wives.

In other humorous discourses, husbands’ submission to wives was associated with the destiny of the nation. Both Hu Shi and Li Zongwu had political readings of wife-fearing during the wartime 1940s. In a speech delivered at Peking University, Hu Shi once linked the amount of wife-fearing stories a country has to the degree of democracy

⁴³³ Ibid.

the country enjoys.⁴³⁴ Li Zongwu, a politician and scholar, published *Pa laopo de zhhexue* 怕老婆的哲學 (*The Philosophy of Wife-fearing*) in 1946. Written during the second Sino-Japanese War, Li's text playfully claimed that wife-fearing could strengthen the man, the family, and save China from the war. It treated wifely pressure as the starting force that could eventually whip a man into achievement.⁴³⁵

Li Zongwu's writings were known for their cultural and political cynicism. His piece on wife-fearing was also considered a sarcastic jab at Confucianism and probably a political satire against the Nationalist Government.⁴³⁶ However, at the end of *Pa laopo de zhhexue*, Li Zongwu provided a new definition of *xianqi liangmu* which complicated his mockery and the discourses on women's roles at the time. He wrote,

These days many people are singing ‘virtuous wife and good mother,’ making our women unhappy. Actually, it is a misunderstanding. The four words—‘virtuous’ ‘wife’ ‘good’ ‘mother’—follow each other and form a natural flow, rather than constitute two parallel concepts. The virtuous wife is exactly the good mother. The way of being a wife is the way of being a mother. [...] Being a wife hence means also bearing responsibilities as a parent, a teacher, and a guardian to the husband.

⁴³⁴ “If a country has many stories about henpecked husbands (*pa laopo de gushi* 怕老婆的故事), it means that the country will easily become democratic. Otherwise, the country will not. There are few such stories in German literature, indicating that it is not easy for Germany to become a democracy. But China has lots of those stories, so China is for sure to be democratic.” See Yin 音, “Taitai wansui” 太太萬歲, *Beiping ribao* 北平日報 (May 6, 1948).

⁴³⁵ Li Zongwu 李宗吾, *Pa laopo de zhhexue* 怕老婆的哲學 (Chengdu: Chenzhong shuju, 1946), 12.

⁴³⁶ See, for example, Li Fei 李飛, Zhao Shaocheng 趙紹成, Tang Zili 唐自力, Guo Ping 郭萍, “Lun Li Zongwu *Pa laopo zhhexue zhi lishi beijing*” 論李宗吾《怕老婆哲學》之歷史背景, *Qiu shi* 求實, no.2 (2008), 101.

Because of her roles, how can a wife act casually and carelessly? Wives guide husbands—can our women shun such responsibility?⁴³⁷

Here Li Zongwu was likely referring to the heated discussions during the 1930s and '40s over topics such as “virtuous wife and wise mother” (*xianqi langmu lun* 賢妻良母論) and “women going back home” (*funü huijia lun* 婦女回家論). The mounting social tensions over the war elicited anxieties and discontent over abandoned households and childcare as a result of the women’s liberation movement. Conservative discourses, exemplified by those of the “*Zhanguoce pai*” 戰國策派 (the group of writers advocating the *Warring State Strategy* during the World War II), openly demanded that women return home because giving birth to children should be women’s first and foremost task.

Pan Guangdan 潘光旦 (1899-1967), who started denouncing the women’s movement from the 1920s, consistently promoted motherhood.⁴³⁸ During the war against Japan, Pan put forward the concept of “*xin mujiao*” 新母教 (the new religion of motherhood) radicalizing the urgency of scientific child-rearing for China’s new women.⁴³⁹ This

⁴³⁷ Li Zongwu, *Pa laopo*, 17-18.

⁴³⁸ Lü Wenhao 呂文浩, “‘Funü huijia’ — Pan Guangdan yizai tiaoqi lunzheng de guandian” “婦女回家”——潘光旦一再挑起論爭的觀點, *Wenshi xuekan* 文史學刊, vol.1 (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2014).

⁴³⁹ Some of Pan Guangdan’s articles on the idea of *xin mujiao* are “*Xin mujiao*” 新母教, “*Funü yu ertong*” 婦女與兒童, “*Guanyu funü wenti de taolun*” 關於婦女問題的討論. See Pan Guangdan 潘光旦, *Youzheng yu kangzhan* 優生與抗戰, in *Pan Guangdan wenji* 潘光旦文集, vol.5 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000).

conservative wave had a serious effect on women's career employment.⁴⁴⁰ Women launched strenuous objections to the idea of returning home and exercising motherhood.

Against this social discursive background, Li Zongwu's interpretation of *xianqi liangmu* as "wives equal mothers" seemed less preposterous but indicated an effort to negotiate the conflicting concerns between returning home and being a public new woman. In Li's definition, wifehood was no longer secondary to motherhood. From Liang Qichao, modern Chinese intellectuals had been accentuating the connection between motherhood and nationhood, considering wifehood as only the initial stage leading to motherhood. Yet Li Zongwu's model prioritized wifehood by making that the ultimate goal for the new women to achieve. Being a virtuous wife automatically fulfills the duty of motherhood because women also mother their husbands. Being a virtuous wife is also patriotic because wifely discipline shapes men into strong individuals for the sake of the nation. It is no longer that women need to be transformed by men, but that men require constant mothering and disciplining from the women. The abilities to mother and to rule constitute the new virtues of the modern wives.

According to Li, new women should not feel offended by the call of "virtuous wife and good mother." Li argued that the call was not repeating the old doctrine but describing women's power in a new way. Rather than a regulation, Li suggested, the idea of returning home should be understood as giving women more power and autonomy: Women do not have to go outside to assert themselves as useful citizens; the "home front"

⁴⁴⁰ For example, Chen Yi 陳儀, the chairman of the government of Fujian province, wrote several articles emphasizing women's roles within the family as mothers and housewives. Starting from 1938, the Fujian government continuously laid off female workers and limited enrollment of women in companies and schools, which provoked intense responses in society. For details for these incidents in Fujian and discourses on women's public and private roles during the anti-Japanese wartime, see Lü Fangshang 呂芳上, "Kangzhan shiqi de nüquan lunbian" 抗戰時期的女權論辯, *Jindai zhongguo funushi yanjiu* 2 (1994).

can be their new battlefield—their ambitions in career, power, and patriotism can all meet in the domestic act of disciplining their husbands. In Li's essay, women are given legitimate ground to be shrewish wives. Their transgressive conducts are appreciated as beneficial for both the men and the nation. Due to Li Zongwu's playful style, the righteous shrewishness held true mainly at the discursive level. But Li's essay stood out for its radical tone in reversing the gender order and sublimating the status of shrewish wives and henpecked husbands.

In the 1940s, Li Zongwu was by no means alone in elevating the role of wives. In the article introducing Hu Shi's speech on wife-fearing and national democracy, the author Yin 音 mentioned that the term *pa laopo* had become outdated in the 1940s; a new phrase had come into circulation to designate the idea of “wife-fearing”: “*taitai wansui*” 太太萬歲 (long live the wives).⁴⁴¹ It was unclear when the modern, bourgeois flavored “*taitai wansui*” achieved currency in the public. Given the fact that the movie *Taitai wansui* (*Long Live the Missus*, 1947) had came out in the previous year with the same title, the author Yin might be pointing to a heightened social recognition of the increasing visibility and importance of the role of the wives.

The expression “*taitai wansui*” revolutionized the demeaning connotation of the old term *pa laopo*. It replaced the passivity of the husbands in being afraid and henpecked with the active eulogy of the longevity and empowerment of the wives. The new term equated wives with the image of the emperors. Since only rulers in China were addressed by “*wansui*” (ten thousand years of living), the term defined the worship of wives from

⁴⁴¹ Yin, “*Taitai wansui*,” 2.

the husbands. With women as the superior subject, “*taitai wansui*” embraced the idea of having female rulers in the families.

This changing attitude toward dominant wives was apparent in the reception of the 1947 movie *Taitai wansui*. Written by Zhang Ailing, this movie, like Zhang’s literature, focused on the mundane life of a petty-bourgeois wife Chen Sizhen 陳思珍. Zhang described her as a very common type in Shanghai neighborhoods, a woman who is lowbrow, parochial, vain, and always sacrifices herself for the family.⁴⁴² She is a capable housewife but uses her ability only to cater to the needs of her good-for-nothing husband. She lies to her father in order to lure him into funding her husband’s business. After her husband gets rich and has an affair with another woman, she restrains her sadness for the sake of family reputation. When she finally makes a hard decision to divorce her husband, the man’s several sentences of remorse immediately make her reunite with him.

This family melodrama was a big box office success. The common viewers in post-war Shanghai were enthusiastic about its depiction of daily life and its melodramatic representation of tears and laughter. However, in intellectual circles there were almost no positive reviews. For more than a month, several leading newspapers in Shanghai published articles criticizing the movie’s petty taste in advocating a backward model of how to be a wife.⁴⁴³ The criticisms centered on the lack of social and educational

⁴⁴² Zhang Ailing, “*Taitai wansui tiji*” “太太萬歲”題記, *Da gong bao* (December 3, 1947), 3:9.

⁴⁴³ Some reviews are: Hu Ke 胡珂, “Shu fen” 抒憤, *Shidai ribao (Xinsheng)* 時代日報 (新生) (December 12, 1947); Dongfang Didong 東方蝦蟆, “*Taitai wansui de taitai*” 《太太萬歲》的太太, *Da gong bao (Da gongyuan 大公園)* (December 13, 1947); Fang Cheng 方澄, “Suowei ‘fushi de beiai’—*Taitai wansui guanhou*” 所謂“浮世的悲哀”—《太太萬歲》觀後, *Da gong bao (Da gongyuan)* (December 14, 1947); Xu Ceng 徐曾, “Zhang Ailing he ta de *Taitai wansui*” 張愛玲和她的《太太萬歲》, *Xin min bao 新民報 (Ye huayuan 夜花園)* (December 15, 1947); Sha Yi 沙易, “Ping *Taitai wansui*” 評《太太萬歲》, *Zhongyang ribao 中央日報 (Ju yi 劇藝)* (December 19, 1947); Wang Rong 王戎, “Shi Zhongguo de you zenmeyang? — *Taitai wansui guanhou*” 是中國的又怎麼樣? —《太太萬歲》觀後,

significance of the movie. They questioned the value of the character Chen Sizhen to society because she obviously turns a blind eye to the larger progressive discourse on women's independence.

Even a real *taitai* Shen Xie 莘蘿 wrote to the press, announcing her disappointment over the fact that such a demeaning story was written by a female writer. Identifying herself as a *taitai* in her twenties, Shen Xie said she loves watching movies but often gets annoyed by the submissive, tragic wives constructed by male scriptwriters. She was expecting *Taitai wansui* to be different but only found that the wife was still willing to compromise. Shen Xie felt offended because she thought “a good wife is not a lapdog or stupid slave” (*hao qizi bushi haba gou ye bushi sha nucai* 好妻子不是哈叭狗也不是傻奴才) but someone with human dignity (*ren de zunyan* 人的尊嚴).⁴⁴⁴

The title of the movie made Shen Xie even more confused. She wondered, how could such a failing *taitai* be wished longevity (*mei chuxi de “taitai” haixiang rang ta huo “wansui”* 沒出息的“太太”還想讓她活“萬歲”)?⁴⁴⁵ Shen Xie had her own model of an admirable wife. She referred to Xie Dai'e 謝黛娥 in Tian Han's *Yi Jiangnan* 憶江南 (Recalling the Southland; 1947) as “the new type of *xianqi liangmu*” (*xianqi*

Xin min bao (*Xin yingju* 新影劇) (December 28, 1947); Shen Xie 莘蘿, “Women bu qiqiu yebu shishe lianjia de lianmin — yige ‘taitai’ kan le *Taitai wansui*” 我們不乞求也不施捨廉價的憐憫——一個“太太”看了《太太萬歲》, *Da gong bao* (*Xiju yu dianying* 戲劇與電影) (January 7, 1948); Hong Shen 洪深, “Shu wo buyuan lingshou zhefan shengqing — yige zhangfu duiyu *Taitai wansui* de huida” 恕我不願領受這番盛情——一個丈夫對於《太太萬歲》的回答, *Da gong bao* (*Xiju yu dianying*) (January 7, 1948). Except for Dongfang Didong's comment which was more objective and neutral, other articles were all critical.

⁴⁴⁴ Shen Xie, “Women bu qiqiu.”

⁴⁴⁵ It should be clarified that although Zhang Ailing did not follow the zeitgeist in writing husbands as following their strong wives, she did not sing the praises of wifely submission either. Based on Zhang Ailing's “*Taitai wansui tiji*,” she simply wanted to record ordinary life and an ordinary *taitai*. Therefore, the term “*wansui*,” rather than a celebration, should be understood more as an expression of sympathy or at least an uncritical attitude of Zhang Ailing toward her protagonist.

liangmu de xin dianxing 賢妻良母的新典型). She praised Xie Dai'e for how she “resists a husband of no soul,” “never takes off shoes or fetches cigarettes for her husband but always smilingly encourages him to improve himself” (*xiaoxixi de guli zhangfu shangjin* 笑嘻嘻地鼓勵丈夫上進). In Shen Xie’s definition, the ideal wife should lead rather than follow, and be willing to discipline the problematic husband rather than to transform herself to suit him. Shen’s “new type of *xianqi liangmu*” resembled Li Zongwu’s new interpretation of “*xianqi liangmu*.” Both Shen and Li emphasized the importance of an independent wife in guiding the husband to the right path, something that is similar to how healthy motherhood functions for children.

To echo Shen Xie, Hong Shen’s 洪深 (1894-1955) article *Shuwo buyuan lingshou zhefan shengqing* 恕我不願領受這番盛情 (Forgive me for being unwilling to receive the great kindness) was written from the perspective of a husband and published on the same page. It refuted the idea that a husband should cherish a wife as Chen Sizhen for her great tolerance and sacrifice. It denounced the movie for abetting decadence in men and urged for wifely regulation of husbands. While Shen Xie combined traditional soft femininity (“always smilingly”) with modern discipline in her model of the new *xianqi liangmu*, Hong Shen asked for more direct and harsh husband-control. He wanted to see immediate “punishment” (*chengfa* 懲罰) and “admonition” (*xunjie* 訓誡) of the husband, regretting that the wife finally gave up on her decision to leave him.⁴⁴⁶

Hong Shen and Shen Xie shared similar views on the failure of characterization in *Taitai wansui*. Hong Shen’s article was more austere and didactic. It is not simply a

⁴⁴⁶ Hong Shen, “Shu wo.”

difference between genders. Hong Shen did not see the transformation of the men as similar to the process of mothering. His language revealed that he understood the absence of wifely discipline in the movie as something larger and heavier. Given Hong Shen's identity as a left-wing dramatist, scholars have argued that the whole campaign of criticizing *Taitai wansui* was organized by the Shanghai underground Communist party, and Hong Shen's article was the voice of the "organization" (*zuzhi* 組織).⁴⁴⁷ No matter to what extent the criticisms of *Taitai wansui* were relevant to the underground movement, it is true that promoting awakened and strong wife models was central to the leftist campaign during the 1930s and '40s. In the leftists' revision, the new woman shook off her urban bourgeois label and adopted the rural identity. In both reality and literature, these brave rural new women constituted a major revolutionary force for the Communist movement. The women's first step towards revolution was to protest against their husbands.

Revolutionizing the Husband

In modern Chinese literature, peasants constituted a common image type. From Lu Xun to the "native soil" (*xiangtu* 鄉土) writers in the 1920s, peasants were linked with the hardship and misery of the countryside and depicted as benighted, naive and weak-minded. This stock image of peasants started to change from the late 1920s when peasant uprisings erupted in several places in China. In their representations of the rural revolutions, the left-wing writers reinvented the look of Chinese peasants as awakened

⁴⁴⁷ Wu Xiaoli 巫小黎, “‘Zhanhou’ Shanghai wentan: yi *Taitai wansui* de pipan wei ge’an” “戰後”上海文壇：以《太太萬歲》的批判為個案, *Xiandai zhongwen xuekan* 現代中文學刊, no. 5 (2013), 44.

and militant, full of revolutionary spirit and energy. The story that is widely acknowledged as the first literary endeavor in projecting a progressive image of the peasants is *Paoxiao le de tudi* 咆哮了的土地 (The roaring earth; 1932) written in 1930 by Jiang Guangci 蔣光慈 (1901-1931). Jiang Guangci was one of the most influential proletarian writers of revolutionary literature,⁴⁴⁸ mostly known for his creation of the “revolution plus love” formula. However, *Paoxiao*, Jiang’s last novel, marked his transcendence of that formula to focus on peasants, class struggle, and revolutionary activities.

Paoxiao tells the story of a young revolutionary intellectual Li Jie 李傑, who is the son of a local landlord. Set against the failed Communist revolution in 1927, the story depicts how Li Jie returns to his hometown to mobilize the peasants and stir up revolution against the landlords. Originally named *Fu yu zi* 父與子 (Father and son), this novel brings the May Fourth theme of the intergenerational clash between father and son to the level of class struggle. Because *Paoxiao* unprecedentedly “celebrates a ‘spontaneous’ uprising of the proletariat against the ruling class,” it is regarded as “one of the most important models for Chinese Communist fiction of the 1940s and 1950s.”⁴⁴⁹

Yet what makes *Paoxiao* a forerunner of Communist model of writings is also its groundbreaking celebration of the wives’ rebellion against the husbands’ oppression. This aspect is less noticed in current scholarship or simply treated as part of the transformation of the peasants’ image. The rebellious wives in *Paoxiao* deserve a more

⁴⁴⁸ Before *Paoxiao le de tudi*, some stories had been published about the peasant movement during the Northern Expedition. See Han Xiaorong, *Chinese Discourses on the Peasant, 1900-1949* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 64.

⁴⁴⁹ Wang, *The Monster that is History*, 61.

concentrated analysis in their own right. These women signify a revolutionized model of wifehood that continued to develop in later Communist writings. The model structures gender oppression as a domestic and internal conflict (rather than associated with class enemies). The wives are not only rebels but also enlighteners who help the husbands to understand Communist revolution. The husbands are not enemies but targets of reform. This pattern in *Paoxiao* continued to appear in Communist and socialist writings and achieved momentum in Great Leap literature, a topic to be discussed in the epilogue.

In *Paoxiao*, the primary figure of wifely rebellion is Hejie 荷姐. She is the wife of the tenant peasant Wu Changxing 吳長興, who suffers poverty and oppression by the landlord class. Different from other peasants who rely on superstitious ideas to come to terms with their fate, Wu Changxing is conscious of social injustice and does not believe the difference between him and the landlord is predestined. This consciousness gives him a distinctive indignation, which he then takes out on his wife. From the outset, the novel establishes two parallel forms of oppression: the oppression of the peasants and that of the wives. The wives are separated from the peasantry. Their protests are only directed at their violent husbands instead of the class enemy. The “roaring” (*paoxiao*) subject the novel constructs is therefore twofold: male peasants at the forefront of the class struggle and peasant wives in the front line of the struggle against husbands’ oppression (not gender oppression).

The novel explicitly depicts Wu Changxing as a violent husband. In later Communist writings, violence toward women is only associated with class enemies in order to emphasize the sense of total class oppression. For example, in later works such as *Baimao niü* 白毛女 (The white-haired girl; 1945) and *Wang Gui yu Li Xiangxiang* 王

貴與李香香 (Wang Gui and Li Xiangxiang; 1945), the wickedness of the landlord class is explicitly grounded in their violence against innocent peasant women. Among figures of the same class, either there is no oppression or the domestic violence is mentioned only briefly and given no significance. However, in *Paoxiao*, the scene of Wu Changxing's beating his wife is realistically detailed.

When Li Jie comes to Wu's house to broadcast revolutionary ideas, his zeal is almost extinguished when he hears Hejie's desperate screams. He peeps through the door: under the dim light of a grey-yellow oil lamp, a skinny and dark-skinned man in his thirties is clenching his teeth while pressing down on a woman with rumpled hair. Under his powerful fists, the woman seems to lose her strength.⁴⁵⁰ Li Jie is offended but still hesitant to enter. His companion Zhang Jinde 張進德, who is Hejie's younger cousin, goes to knock at the door.

Hejie lies on the ground, “half dead” (*bansi zhuangtai* 半死狀態). She remains silent while the three men talk and eat. But suddenly she jumps up and shouts: “Okay, since Master Li is here, let us judge who is right (*ping yi ping li* 評一評理)!” It is the presence of the revolutionaries that elicits her voice for the first time against her abusive husband. She becomes, literally and figuratively, a shrew. The text depicts her as looking like a “female yaksha” (*mu yecha* 母夜叉, a common image for describing the shrews) when shouting at her husband for abusing her on a daily basis. Like every shrew, Hejie delivers an eloquent tirade (*taotao* 滔滔, the word recalls the depiction of the suffragettes in popular writings discussed in Chapter II). Together with her verbal torrent, tears also

⁴⁵⁰ Jiang Guangci 蔣光慈, *Paoxiao le de tudi* 咆哮了的土地, in *Jiang Guangci wenji* 蔣光慈文集, vol.2 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1983), 181.

flow down her face uncontrollably. Instead of repulsing the interdiegetic male viewers (which occurs in the depiction of the suffragettes), Hejie's discursive and physiological reactions provoke great compassion in Li Jie and Zhang Jinde. Hejie's style of accusation, echoing the traditional shrew's tirade, also foreshadowed the *suku* 訴苦 (speaking bitterness) mode of indictment during the Communist land reform of the 1940s. Both tirade and tears are critical in order to have a cathartic release for the speaking subjects and draw out sympathetic responses from the audience.⁴⁵¹ The shrew-style performance of protest was being integrated into the revolutionary rituals for acting out the autonomy of the peasant wives.

After this brave voicing out, Hejie becomes curious about revolution. The next morning, she asks her cousin Zhang Jinde why Master Li does not go back home. Zhang answers that Li is coming to lead the revolution against his father (*ge ta laozi de ming* 革他老子的命).⁴⁵² Hejie is confused: “Is it right to have a revolution against one's father?” (*Laozi de ming ye keyi ge de ma?* 老子的命也可以革得嗎?) Zhang assures her that there can be a revolution against anyone if it follows a right reason; a son can have a revolution against a father and a wife can have a revolution against a husband. Hejie immediately repeats his words, “A wife can have a revolution against her husband?” (*Qi keyi ge zhangfu de ming ma?* 妻可以革丈夫的命嗎?)⁴⁵³ When Zhang reassures her that

⁴⁵¹ For some examples of the *suku* practice among peasant women during the land reform, see Kazuko, *Chinese Women*, 172. Note the similarity of crying and speaking between Hejie and the later peasant women.

⁴⁵² This line can also be translated as “to end his father's life” due to the literal meaning of the word *geming* as “to eliminate (*ge* 革) lives (*ming* 命).”

⁴⁵³ Jiang Guangci, *Paoxiao*, 229.

it is legitimate, Hejie eagerly asks him about the means of revolution (*gefa* 革法) with tears welling in her eyes.

One reason for Hejie's eagerness is the prospect that the revolution will allow her to live as a human. In her tearful indictment, she repeatedly emphasizes that she is done with her current life which even a dog would not be willing to live (*gou ye buguo de rizi* 狗也不過的日子). When she hears from her cousin about the plan to establish a Peasants' Association with regulations on domestic violence, she immediately shows her determination to join: "I will definitely join your association! If I won't, I am not a person!" (*Bu jiaru bian bushi ren!* 不加入便不是人!) This line is both an expression of her resolve and an indication of her yearning to become a human. If she does not take the step to join the association, she will not be able to "be a person" but will still live worse than a dog.

The novel does not give Hejie a spontaneous awareness about revolution. Her desire to join is contingent on the benefits that revolution promises to bring to her life. In her aforementioned remark, she uses "your association" instead of "our association," which distances herself from the peasant revolutionaries. She sees a difference between herself and the activists. However, she chooses to ignore the difference because she cares less about the larger goal of the revolution than about her fate as a wife. To Hejie, personal benefit is enough reason for her to join the revolution, even though she is far behind what the revolution is truly about.

Hejie aligns herself less with the category of the oppressed peasant than with the identity of the oppressed wife. In the novel, she is also determined to have other oppressed wives in the village join the revolution. Her language separates women into an

independent revolutionary force: “If we women are not going to have a revolution, it is really unbearable!” (*Women nüren bu geming, zhenshi buneng hun he!* 我們女人不革命, 真是不能混呵!)⁴⁵⁴ Implied by Hejie, what is unbearable is not that the women cannot participate in the ongoing movement, but that women cannot rise up to have their own revolution targeted at their personal enemies. Hejie’s definition of revolution is clearly narrower, primarily referring to women’s rights as wives. After talking with Zhang Jinde, Hejie shows an unprecedented joy. But that joy comes only from the idea that she can finally “free herself” (*chutou* 出頭) rather than from her happiness about the larger revolution.⁴⁵⁵ Later the text further foregrounds Hejie’s self-centered mode of revolution by depicting her objection to the dismissal of the Peasants’ Association. She opposes because she is afraid of losing her personal protector instead of worrying about losing the proletarian revolution.

Paoxiao does not criticize Hejie’s limited understanding of revolution. On the contrary, it uses Hejie’s character to show how revolution can successfully work to mobilize the masses. In *Paoxiao*, the peasant women have not yet constituted a genuine revolutionary force as they would in later Communist constructions and socialist Great Leap literature. Throughout the novel, only one peasant woman Mao Gu 毛姑 participates in decision-making in the Peasants’ Association. The majority of peasant women remain unchanged in their daily routines. The only change is their situation within the family. Hejie now obtains equal status (*duideng qilai* 對等起來⁴⁵⁶) with her

⁴⁵⁴ Jiang Guangci, *Paoxiao*, 230.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 231.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 382.

husband. When the man attempts to beat her again she runs away to the Association and uses divorce as her weapon. The wives' revolution achieves its goal in giving the women status as humans. As Zhang Jinde often stresses, the oppressed wives are, after all, humans (*jiujing shi yige ren* 究竟是一個人);⁴⁵⁷ the task of mobilizing the women at this point is more about helping them become humans than about shaping them into revolutionaries. This process of claiming their humanity coincides with the forceful moments of shrews' transgression in both literary and cultural memories. As analyzed earlier, Hejie's sudden self-empowerment appalls everyone as a shrew by both appearance and nature.

It is not until the end of the novel that Hejie's rebellious energy seems to be channeled into the peasant revolution. When Wu Changxing is about to follow the self-defense team to the mountain to prepare for the battle with the enemies, he asks Hejie to stay at home. Hejie insists that she go with the team. For the first time in the novel she questions her husband for leaving her within the household. She even reverses the power structure between her and her husband. After she decides what to bring for their journey to the mountain, the man submissively follows her (*hen fushun de genzhe* 很服順地跟著) as she walks upright ahead (*zai qianmian zhiting de zouzhe* 在前面直挺地走著).

Paoxiao established the precedent model of wifely awakening and wifely leadership to be developed in later Communist and socialist writings. The text focuses on raising the oppressed wives to a human status but not yet converted them into real public revolutionaries. Hejie's sense of revolution only derives from her instinct to protect herself from domestic violence. She does not understand the larger goals of the

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 186, 237.

proletarian revolution. Even when she is given the weapon and goes to the mountain with other revolutionaries, the text still does not give her enough footing in the revolution. When on the mountain the women are kept in a temple for the sake of safety; the men are out fighting the enemies. Even if Hejie becomes the leader in her family, at the public revolutionary scene she and other women are still confined to the symbolical *nei* space with less mobility and power.

In Yan'an stories and especially the Great Leap literature, the formula in *Paoxiao* was refashioned to grant the wives opportunities to assume leadership in public movements. The wives transcend the narrow status of individual humans to become *gongjia ren* 公家人 (people of the public sphere; people from the government; people working for the Communist Party). They not only lead their husbands but also the masses. The new versions of Hejie became more empowered. However, the wives' power was at the expense of their identity as women. The stubbornness (or ignorance) of Hejie in sticking to her rights as a wife/woman gradually disappeared in the Communist writings of the 1930s and '40s. A wife's turning over (*fanshen* 翻身) her identity from being oppressed by her husband is to be coded as destined for a higher purpose outside the family so that she can transcend her personal yearning to be a (wo)man.

Abandoning the Husband: The Chinese Soviet Republic and the Yan'an Era

Paoxiao was pioneering at the time for its acute revolutionary sensitivity. It constructed the Communist Party as the fundamental source of help for resolving domestic violence in peasant families. In *Paoxiao*, Jiang Guangci wrote differently from other revolutionary writers at the time. For example, in the story *Xing* 星 (Stars; 1936)

written by another leading leftist writer Ye Zi 葉紫, the abused wife Mei Chun 梅春 liberates herself from her violent husband by having illegitimate sex with a revolutionary cadre. But in *Paoxiao* Jiang Guangci made revolution directly available for the women seeking salvation. Also, unlike Mao Dun's version of revolution that distances and perplexes women, Jiang's revolution is tangible and reliable. Hejie does not need to sacrifice her body to another man in order to connect with the power of revolution. Sex is not treated as the fuel or compensation for revolution, but something that is alien to a revolution that opens its door to everyone.

Paoxiao marginalizes themes of love and sex while focusing its attention on the armed uprising of the peasants. Its political correctness has pushed critics to ponder over the relationship between the novel and early revolutionary writings of the Communist leader Mao Zedong 毛澤東 during the late 1920s. Jiang Guangci's ideas on the Peasants' Association and the rights of wives echoed several of Mao's points in his articles such as the famous *Hunan nongmin yundong kaocha baogao* 湖南農民運動考察報告 ("Report on an investigation of the peasant movement in Hunan"; 1927). There was no hard evidence that showed Jiang Guangci had read Mao's articles before writing *Paoxiao*. What is known is that Jiang Guangci had never been to the countryside and he had to go through various documents in order to write the novel.⁴⁵⁸

The texts by both Jiang Guangci and Mao Zedong signified a new era of the husband-wife power relationship. In *Paoxiao*, the presence of the revolutionaries (or the Party) lends Hejie strength to literally rise up from off the ground to speak to her rights.

⁴⁵⁸ Wu Sihong 吳似鴻, "Jiang Guangci huiyi lu" 蔣光慈回憶錄, in Fang Ming 方銘, ed., *Jiang Guangci yanjiu ziliao* 蔣光慈研究資料 (Beijing: Zhishi chanquan chubanshe, 2010), 91; Fan Boqun 范伯群, Zeng Huapeng 曾華鵬, "Jiang Guangchi lun" 蔣光赤論, in Fang Ming, ed., *Jiang Guangci yanjiu ziliao*, 324.

Her rising up is an act of righteous protest but is appalling to the men for it makes her resemble a monstrous shrew. In later Communist writings, the Party and the revolution further presented themselves as empowering the wives but also demonizing them in the eyes of the men. The Party policies further pulled the wives away from their husbands, making the men condemn the Party's shaping of their wives into shrews. In a way, the Communist ideology stepped in and acted as the driving force of the wives' rebellion against their husbands. This ideology gave rise to defiant wives who were coded as shrews in the past. The wives, in both literature and reality, not only protested against their backward husbands, but also went beyond Hejie in abandoning (either spiritually or physically) their men for the sake of the Communist movement.

In closing this chapter on the evolution of images of the empowered modern wife, this final section will look into Communist ideology and literature on marriage and wifehood during the Chinese Soviet Republic and the Yan'an era. While there was a change of path from radical feminism to a gentler reclaiming of marital harmony in policies and laws, the dominant image in literature and social practices was still that of the defiant wives who upset rather than enable domestic peace. More revolutionarily aware than Hejie in *Paoxiao*, the wives in Yan'an literature are the awakened ones in the family who identify the Party as their ultimate saviour and leader. The wives are dissatisfied with their husbands who usually fail to understand or accept the Communist cause. The women torture the men by either spiritually alienating them or physically throwing them over to run away with the Party. The image of the *gongjia* 公家 (the public, the Party, the government) is much troubled in these texts for being the responsible agent that entices the wives to become shrews.

Mao Zedong and the Communist Radical Feminism

Mao Zedong's *Hunan nongmin yundong kaocha baogao* (hereafter: *Hunan*) was the first Communist document that directly identified husbands' power over wives as an oppressive authority.⁴⁵⁹ In that article, Mao Zedong claimed that Chinese men are "usually subjected to the domination of three systems of authority: political authority, clan authority, and religious authority." But women are dominated by a fourth "thick rope": "the masculine authority of husbands (*fuquan* 夫權 or *zhangfu de nanquan* 丈夫的男權)." ⁴⁶⁰ Mao Zedong identified the husbands' oppression of women as yet another form of oppressive authority. He emphasized the necessity of destroying the landlords' political and economic control before attacking the clan, religious, and patirarhcal authorities. Eliminating the landlords' domination was considered a precondition for the struggle against gender hierarchy. Mao's article, though not sincere in protesting against patriarchy, marked a radical move for the Communists in integrating women's rights into the Party's ideological agenda.

⁴⁵⁹ Before *Hunan*, Mao Zedong had been continuously writing on women's oppression and submission. He wrote an article entitled *Xin zhi li* 心之力 (The strength of the heart; 1917) emphasizing women's role in raising new citizens when he was studying at *Hunan Diji shifan xuexiao* 湖南第一師範學校 (Hunan first normal university) in 1917. In 1919, Mao's articles became more radical. His *Nüzi geming jun* 女子革命軍 (Women's revolutionary army) and *Minzhong de dalianhe* 民眾的大聯合 (The great union of the populace) that were published in *Xiangjiang pinglun* 湘江評論 promoted women's equal rights. After the shocking event of a bride Zhao Wuzhen 趙五貞 killing herself in her bridal sedan as a protest against her arranged marriage, Mao published about ten articles within days criticizing the sin of society in killing the free will of the individuals. For Mao's earlier writings, see Stuart R. Schram, ed., *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949*, vol. 1 (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995).

⁴⁶⁰ Mao Zedong 毛澤東, "Hunan nongmin yundong kaocha baogao" 湖南農民運動考察報告, in *Mao Zedong xuanji* 毛澤東選集, vol.1 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1951), 33. For a translation, see Mao Zedong, "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol.1 (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 44.

Hunan was written based on Mao’s “thirty-two days” of investigation in Hunan Province.⁴⁶¹ In this report, Mao made two specific observations on women’s movements in Hunan. First, he found that peasant women were bravely breaking the old rule that barred “women and poor people from the banquets in the ancestral temples.” He reported that “the women of Paikuo [Baiguo] in Hengshan County gathered in force and swarmed into their ancestral temple, firmly planted their backsides in the seats and joined in the eating and drinking, while the venerable clan bigwigs had willy-nilly to let them do as they pleased.”⁴⁶² The historian Ono Kazuko thinks “such an event would previously have been beyond anyone’s imagination.”⁴⁶³ However, the scene actually recalled how shrews in Ming-Qing literature were often depicted as violating gendered spatial boundaries to expose themselves in public places such as the temples. For example, in *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, Sujie’s willful visits to temples cause her parents-in-law great anger to the point that her father-in-law has a stroke. In chapter 73, Sujie’s shameless act of refusing to veil herself when visiting a temple provokes some local youths to beat and strip her naked. Given the specificity of temples as a locus for the interrogation of women’s virtues, the peasant women in Hunan were not simply joining the grand revolution against religious authority, but challenging gender strictures embodied in both spatial and moral boundaries. Unlike Sujie in *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*, rather than be humiliated and punished, the new peasant women are celebrated in *Hunan* as heroic.

⁴⁶¹ Mao Zedong, “Report,” 23.

⁴⁶² Ibid., 44-45.

⁴⁶³ Kazuko, *Chinese Women*, 149.

The other thing Mao noticed was organization. Unlike the lonely battles he wrote about earlier individual women against society, he pleasantly found that “with the rise of the peasant movement, the women in many places have now begun to organize rural women’s associations.” He thought it indicated that “the opportunity has come for them [women] to lift up their heads, and the authority of the husband is getting shakier every day.”⁴⁶⁴ He institutionalized wifely rebellion against husbands’ control as a basis for women’s liberation. It was a radical step for it signaled how the Party started to sanction institutional interference in domestic affairs. Husband governance or wifely protest were no longer only concerned with individual behavior but got linked to the agenda of the Communist public campaign. This step prefigured the dilemma that the Party would soon encounter of being both a saviour and a destroyer of peasant marriages. It also foreshadowed women’s collaboration in disciplining problematic husbands both in social practice and literary representation. Women came to unite with each other to punish difficult husbands by means of violence. Together they constituted a symbolic shrewish wife who dared to reveal, rebel, and rule.

Mao Zedong’s ideas on women’s, especially, wives’ rights soon appeared in the Party’s legislation on marriage. In November 1931, soon after the establishment of the Chinese Soviet Republic in Jiangxi, the regime promulgated its Marriage Regulations (*Zhonghua Suweiai gongheguo hunyin tiaoli* 中華蘇維埃共和國婚姻條例). “It was China’s first modern marriage law” that was later developed into the Chinese Soviet Marriage Law of 1934 and the Marriage Law of the People’s Republic of China of

⁴⁶⁴ Mao Zedong, “Report,” 46.

1950.⁴⁶⁵ The Regulations outlawd concubinage and granted wives the freedom of divorce.

It prescribed protection for divorced women by making concrete stipulations about a divorced man's responsibilities toward his former wife and children.⁴⁶⁶

The law on freedom of divorce was meant to resolve the marriage issue for the “middle and poor peasants” (*zhongnong pinnong* 中農貧農). At the beginning, even before the official promulgation of the law in 1931, the policy did work to attack traditional practices such as polygamy and bride-buying in the countryside, and make marriage truly possible for peasants, especially those who were poor.⁴⁶⁷ However, the peasants soon realized that the equal freedom to divorce was also pulling their wives away from them. There were peasants who now protested that revolution was eliminating everything including their wives (*laopo dou gediao le* 老婆都革掉了).⁴⁶⁸

The concerns of the peasants were not baseless. There emerged an “anarchist chaos” (*wu zhengfu zhuyi de hunluan zhuangtai* 無政府主義的混亂狀態) after the

⁴⁶⁵ Kazuko, *Chinese Women*, 152.

⁴⁶⁶ Women's freedom of divorce was also included in the family law of the Nationalist government. Compared to the regulations in the Soviet Republic, the law under the Nationalist regime lacked honesty in giving women real power in divorce. Kazuko, *Chinese Women*, 153. For a summary of the Nationalist “family law,” see M. J. Meijer, *Marriage Law and Policy in the Chinese People's Republic* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1971), 26-29.

⁴⁶⁷ Mao Zedong in his *Xingguo diaocha* 興國調查 (Xingguo investigation; 1930) reported that within two months after the government promulgated laws on the freedom of marriage, the majority of the middle and poor peasants in the investigated area all found wives. See Mao Zedong, “Xingguo diaocha,” in *Mao Zedong Nongcun Diaocha Wenji* 毛澤東農村調查文集 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1982), 222-23. For an English translation of this report, see “Xingguo Investigation,” in Schram, *Mao's Road to Power*, vol. 3.

⁴⁶⁸ Zhang Huaiwan 張懷萬, “Zhang Huaiwan xunshi ganxi'nan baogao” 張懷萬巡視贛西南報告, in *Jiangxi sheng dang'an guan* 江西省檔案館, ed., *Zhongyang geming genjudi shiliao xuanbian* 中央革命根據地史料選編, vo.1 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1982), 192-93; Mao Zedong, “Xunwu diaocha” 尋烏調查, in *Mao Zedong Nongcun Diaocha Wenji*, 177-81. For an English translation of “Xunwu diaocha,” see “Xunwu Investigation,” in Schram, *Mao's Road to Power*, vol. 3.

promotion of the freedom of marriage and divorce.⁴⁶⁹ In some areas of the Chinese Soviet Republic, there was even a period of sexual anarchy during which the government had to deal with venereal diseases.⁴⁷⁰ Wives were criticized for taking marriage as a game because they got divorced, remarried, and divorced again too frequently.⁴⁷¹ There were also wives who took advantage of the women's movement to frame their husbands. One case reported that some wives in the Chinese Soviet Republic, in response to their husbands' demands that they report their daily outings, told the government that the men forbade them from going outside; as a result, the husbands were put under detention for days.⁴⁷² The women were aggressively acting out their power over their husbands, claiming their rights to speech and sexual autonomy. The Party somehow played the guardian of that power.

Articles from the early 1940s that summarized the women's movement made it apparent that the Party had been behind the wives' transgressive practices. According to Cai Chang 蔡暢 (1900-1990), a Chinese politician and women's rights activist, the Communist women's movement from the late 1930s to the early 1940s had been led by

⁴⁶⁹ See “Xiangganbian suqu funü gongzuo jue'an” 湘贛邊蘇區婦女工作決案, in Quanguo fulian fuyun shi 全國婦聯婦運史, ed., *Zhongguo Funü Yundong Lishi Ziliao* (1927-1937) 中國婦女運動歷史資料 (1927 - 1937) (Beijing: Zhongguo funü chubanshe, 1991), 157.

⁴⁷⁰ Zhu Xiaodong 朱曉東, “Tongguo hunyin de zhili — 1930 nian-1950 nian geming shiqi de hunyin he funü jiefang faling zhong de celüe yu shenti” 通過婚姻的治理—1930年 - 1950年革命時期的婚姻和婦女解放法令中的策略與身體, *Beida falü pinglun* 北大法律評論, vol.4, no.2 (2001), 398.

⁴⁷¹ Pu Anxiu 浦安修 noted that a woman in Pingshan County 平山縣 divorced five times in three years; another woman in Zuoquan County 左權縣 divorced one month after the marriage. See Pu Anxiu, “Wu nian lai huabei kangri minzhu genjudi funü yundong de chubu zongjie” 五年來華北抗日民主根據地婦女運動的初步總結, in Quanguo fulian fuyun shi, *Zhongguo Funü Yundong Lishi Ziliao* (1937-1945), 711.

⁴⁷² “Gandongbei funü gongzuo” 贛東北婦女工作, *Funü tongxun* 婦女通訊, no.1 (May 23, 1932), cited from He Youliang 何友良, *Zhongguo Suweiai quyu shehui biandongshi* 中國蘇維埃區域社會變動史 (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1996), 183.

the intellectuals-turned female cadres (*zhishifenzi chushen de nü ganbu* 知識份子出身的女幹部). Cai criticized these women, led by the biased feminism (*pianmian de “funü zhuyi”* 片面的“婦女主義”), saying they knew only to recite slogans such as “freedom of marriage” (*hunyin ziyou* 婚姻自由), “economic independence” (*jingji duli* 經濟獨立), and “opposing four oppressions” (*fandui sichong yapo* 反對四重壓迫); their petty bourgeois feminism “favored the wives but castigated the husbands” (*piantan qizi, zhongze zhangfu* 偏袒妻子, 重責丈夫) and “protected the daughters-in-law but chastised the parents-in-law” (*piantan xifu, zhongze gongpo* 偏袒媳婦, 重責公婆).⁴⁷³

Opposing and abusing husbands and parents-in-law were typical sins of the traditional shrew. While Cai Chang distanced feminism from the goals of the Party by labeling it as bourgeois because of its tendency towards independence (*xiang dang nao dulixing* 向黨鬧獨立性),⁴⁷⁴ she could not conceal the fact that radical feminism was actually what the Party originally advocated for women's movement in the countryside. The concept of women's “turning over” exactly targeted oppressive husbands and parents-in-law, rather the landlords. This approach was also apparent in the Yan'an literature in which turning-over stories centered around familial tensions rather than class struggles. In other words, during the early stage of the Communist women's movement, the Party directed and facilitated the women's rising up as unruly shrewish wives. In certain cases, such as the Gold Flower's story to be discussed soon, the Party literally

⁴⁷³ Cai Chang 蔡暢, “Yingjie funü gongzuo de xin fangxiang”迎接婦女工作的新方向, in Quanguo fulian fuyun shi, *Zhongguo Funü Yundong Lishi Ziliao* (1937-1945), 650.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 651.

used the model of a shrew in the depictions of female cadres intruding into the peasants' homes and disciplining the husbands by means of verbal and physical violence.

The Party's utilization of the shrew energy was not only apparent in the manners of the women cadres, but also directly visible in the Party's attitudes toward real shrews in the countryside. Several documents reveal that the Party favored the transgressive bravery of lascivious women and integrated their unruly energy into its campaigns. In 1943, Pu Anxiu 浦安修 (1918-1991), the wife of the Party leader Peng Dehuai 彭德懷 (1898-1974), wrote a summary of the women's movement in the Northern anti-Japanese democratic base for the preceding five years (*Wunian lai huabei kangri minzhu genjudi funü yundong de chubu zongjie* 五年來華北抗日民主根據地婦女運動的初步總結). She mentioned that during the first stage of the women's movement (from 1938 to early 1940), the dissolute (*fengliu* 風流) women in the villages had played a notable role in promulgating Communist ideology on gender reform.⁴⁷⁵

According to Pu, those women were labeled "tramp" in society (*po xie* 破鞋, literally, broken shoes. *Po xie* is a common term in informal Chinese referring to wanton women or unlicensed prostitutes). However, these women were usually the ones who dared to speak and act (*ganyu shuohua xingshi* 敢於說話行事) and opened themselves to new ideas (*rongyi jieshou xin sixiang* 容易接受新思想). These attributes Pu mentioned were typical traits of the old shrew. In the eyes of the Communists, the shrewish attributes came to be conducive to revolution. Based on the article, Pu and her colleagues had made special effort (*zhengqu* 爭取) to have those women help with the work of the women's association. These formerly disparaged women helped disseminate new terms

⁴⁷⁵ Pu Anxiu, "Wu nian lai," 685.

such as “gender equality” (*nannü pingdeng* 男女平等) and “women’s liberation” (*funü jiefang* 婦女解放) in the countryside, which influenced the ordinary women (*yingxiang le yiban funü* 影響了一般婦女).⁴⁷⁶

At the end of Pu’s comment on the wanton but useful women, she admitted that including those women in the women’s association was also risky because their unscrupulous manners (*liumang zuofeng* 流氓作風) had caused the masses to misunderstand the Party. She proposed that those women should be transformed (*gaizao* 改造) in order to better work for the Party.⁴⁷⁷ Based on Pu’s article, what she meant by “*gaizao*” was to have the women give up their sexual liberty but still keep their bravery. Clearly, the Party was cautious about shrewish energy. This mild caution only served to underscore the progressive potential inherent in shrewish women: the shrew figures were closer and more easily adapted to revolutionary ideals; their unruliness made it irresistible for the Party to invite them on board, even at the expense of its own moral image.

A similar case about the role that licentious women played in Communist movement came from the discussions on the issue of illicit sex (*piban* 皮伴).⁴⁷⁸ In 1941, *Qiqi yuekan* 七七月刊 published an article entitled “Two Practical Problems to Notice in the Current Women’s Movement (Excerpt)” (*Dangqian funü yundong zhong liangge xuyao zhuyi de shiji wenti (jielu)* 當前婦女運動中兩個需要注意的實際問題 (節錄)) by Meng Zhaoyi 孟昭毅 and Wang Qing 王清. In addition to the issue of the women’s

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 685.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ The original term should be *pipan* 皮伴 instead of *piban*. The term was mainly used in Wuhan dialect to refer to illicit sexual relationships.

united front in the anti-Japanese movement, *piban* was listed as the other most urgent problem in the countryside. According to the article, *piban* referred to unlawful sexual relationships occurring before marriage, during marriage, and after marriage (widowhood). The article focused on extramarital affairs and criticized wives who abused their freedom of divorce to pursue sexual affairs (*ziyou gao piban* 自由搞皮伴).⁴⁷⁹ It denounced the “*piban* women” (*piban funü* 皮伴婦女; in Pu Anxiu’s article, these women were called “*po xie*” or “*xingluan de funü*” 性亂的婦女, literally, sexually unruly women) for trying to solve their marriage problems through illegitimate sex.

In addition to these criticisms, the article recognized the benefits that those unruly women brought to the Communist cause. Comparing *piban* women with the “well-behaved and dutiful (*laoshi benfen* 老實本分)” women in the countryside, the article acknowledged that the loose women had a greater ability to carry out tasks for the Communist movement. They were highly mobile (*daochu paozhe gongzuo* 到處跑著工作) and liked to take the lead (*xihuan da xianfeng, kai toupao* 喜歡打先鋒, 開頭炮). Those characteristics made the *piban* women, though morally problematic, “a necessary force in breaking the trail” (*shaobuliao tamen kailu* 少不了她们开路) for women’s liberation. The loose women were so visible in the women’s movement that the masses even mistook the women’s association as “a club for wanton women” (*piban funü de jituan* 皮伴婦女的集團).

⁴⁷⁹ Meng Zhaoyi 孟昭毅 and Wang Qing 王清, “Dangqian funü yundong zhong liangge xuyao zhuyi de shiji wenti (jielu)” 當前婦女運動中兩個需要注意的實際問題（節錄）, in Quanguo fulian fuyun shi, *Zhongguo Funü Yundong Lishi Ziliao* (1937-1945), 528.

No matter how the Party used the women tactically, both articles foregrounded the loose women (shrews) as the pioneering vanguards of the new women favored by the Communist ideology. Therefore, the notion of *fanshen*, central to the Communist women's movement, should not be merely understood as the wives' rebellion against domestic oppressions. It also indicated a "turning-over" in female types. The shrews had been repressed as a negative type in literary and social conventions. But the Communist movement granted them an opportunity to turn over as a model more useful and politically desired than the conventionally virtuous women types.

"The Yan'an Way" and the Gold Flower's Story

The two articles on the loose women both spoke to the changing policy of the Party on the women's movement. Starting from 1941, the Communist Party executed a series of new policies on politics, economics, and culture in the Shan'ganning Border Region (*Shan'ganning bianqu* 陝甘寧邊區). The reform is commonly referred to as "the Yan'an Way."⁴⁸⁰ As part of the Yan'an Rectification Movement (*Yan'an zhengfeng yundong* 延安整風運動) starting from early 1942, the focus of women's movement shifted from radical feminism to family harmony (*jiating hemu* 家庭和睦), from women's freedom to divorce to rights to participate in social economic production.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁸⁰ Mark Selden, *The Yenan Way in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); *China in Revolution: The Yenan Way Revisited* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995).

⁴⁸¹ Author unknown, *Zhongguo funü da fanshen* 中國婦女大翻身 (Hong Kong: Xin minzhu chubanshe, 1949), 2. This shift is also mentioned in Peng Dehuai 彭德懷, "Guanyu huabei genjudi gongzuo de baogao" 關於華北根據地工作的報告, in *Gongfei huoguo shiliao huibian* 共匪禍國史料彙編, vol.3 (Taipei: Zhonghua minguo kaiguo wushinian wenxian bianzuan weiyuanhui, 1964); Anna Louise Strong, *The Chinese Conquer China* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1949), 170; Pu Anxiu, "Wu nian lai," 701-702.

The change of direction in women's movement was partly based on the different nature of the women in the Northern countryside. "Unlike the 'formidable' women of South China," women in these Northern areas within an apparently more closed society "refused to accept" progressive slogans such as "Freedom in marriage," "Economic independence," and "Oppose the four oppressions."⁴⁸² The pressure coming from the male peasants also pushed the Party to adjust its radical gesture. During the Chinese Soviet period, the marriage legislations and the wives' asserting their powers had created much controversy among the peasants and cadres. Some male peasants rose up to express discontent. Negative descriptions of women as cunning, cruel, and immoral beings were circulated as a means for the peasants to say no to the Party's laws.⁴⁸³

Facing the danger of losing the peasants, the CCP quickly shifted to emphasize the importance of family prosperity. The Party leader Zhou Enlai 周恩來 (1898-1976) published an article in 1942 entitled "On 'good wife and wise mother' and motherhood" (*Lun "xianqi liangmu" yu muzhi* 論 "賢妻良母" 與母職). While the article recognized women's freedom in gaining social and political status, it was not divorced from late Qing and early Republican reformist discourses that prioritized maternal duties for women.⁴⁸⁴ In 1943, the Party also issued a new decision on the women's movement which was drafted by the Women's Committee of the Central Committee of CCP and revised by Mao Zedong himself. The decision highlighted economic production as the foremost task of the women's movement and stipulated that women's pursuit of freedom

⁴⁸² Kazuko, *Chinese Women*, 166.

⁴⁸³ Zhu Xiaodong, "Tongguo," 389-91.

⁴⁸⁴ Zhou Enlai 周恩來, "Lun 'xianqi liangmu' yu muzhi" 論"賢妻良母"與母職, in Quanguo fulian fuyun shi, *Zhongguo Funü Yundong Lishi Ziliao* (1937-1945).

from oppression should be preconditioned by a well-functioning family life (*funü jiqi jiating de shenghuo dou guo de hao* 婦女及其家庭的生活都過得好).⁴⁸⁵

The CCP had a clear call to bring back family unity and happiness. However, social and literary practices seemed still to follow the path of radical feminism. The rest of this chapter will look at a real-life case of the Gold Flower's story and the Yan'an literature. It will examine how social practices and literary representations during the transitioning 1940s still favored images of defiant wives and treated the theme of family harmony as implicit only.

In the section “The Revolt of Women,” in Jack Belden’s *China Shakes the World*, he retells a story of Gold Flower 金花, a peasant girl who was interviewed by him. Under family pressure, Gold Flower had to give up her lover and marry an old and ugly man in 1942. Her willfulness was met with her husband’s brutal violence and abuse from her family-in-law. Things began to change when “in August 1945, a small unit of the 8th Route Army entered Gold Flower’s village.” The Party cadres organized a Women’s Association and encouraged every woman in the village to pursue the right to equality. After the standard procedure of “telling bitterness and sufferings,” Gold Flower came to realize the injustice of men’s power over women. The women in the Women’s Association then decided to “alleviate her [Gold Flower’s] sorry life.”⁴⁸⁶ Their means were quite violent.

⁴⁸⁵ “Zhongguo gongchandang zhongyang weiyuanhui guanyu ge kangri genjudi muqian funü gongzuo fangzhen de jueding” 中國共產黨中央委員會關於各抗日根據地目前婦女工作方針的決定, in Quanguo fulian fuyun shi, *Zhongguo Funü Yundong Lishi Ziliao* (1937-1945), 648.

⁴⁸⁶ Jack Belden, *China Shakes the World* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), 289-90.

At the time Gold Flower's husband was doing business in other cities, so the women decided to start with her father-in-law. When four women showed up at the door and interrogated him about his mistreatment of Gold Flower, the old man was astonished and immediately drove them away. "One girl went away. The others fell into silence. In a moment the girl came back with fifteen more women. They were all carrying clubs and ropes. The old man was startled."⁴⁸⁷ Upon his refusal to change his mind, the women bound him up "like a fish in a net." The man was then "held a prisoner for two days" before the women held a meeting against him. Women at the meeting wanted to beat the man. A cadre calmed them down and decided to have the man confess first. The old man responded with "deliberate roughness," forcing Gold Flower to tell his sins to his face. When Gold Flower was speaking, the women were quite agitated.

The crowd groaned. In the heavy swelling voices, the sound of shuffling feet could be heard. Gold Flower felt herself being pushed aside. A fat girl was at her elbow and others were crowding close. 'Let us spit in his face,' said the fat girl. She drew back her lips over her gums and spat between the old man's eyes. Others darted in, spat in his face, and darted away again. The roar of voices grew louder. The old man remained standing with his face red and his beard matted with saliva. His knees were trembling and he looked such a poor object that the women laughed and their grumbling and groaning grew quieter.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 290.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 293.

These roaring and spitting women were acting in the ways of the traditional shrew. They brought their anger out in a repulsive way that mixed justice and violence, discipline and pollution, high goals and low morals. While Gold Flower alone was limited in her ability to rebel, the women together constituted a heightened model of the shrew able to punish any man through their collective shrewishness. As one of the women cadres commented on Gold Flower, “Alone, she cannot fight. But with us she can fight all bad husbands.”⁴⁸⁹

When Gold Flower later lured her husband home, the shrews’ violence escalated. With the triumph over the old man, the women became even more confident in asserting their cruelty. In confronting Gold Flower’s husband, the women used typical shrewish methods such as face-slapping, name calling, bodily abuse, and roaring and shrieking. When they hit the man, the scene greatly echoed moments of shrews’ barbarism in traditional literature:

As if by a signal, all the women pushed forward at once. Gold Flower quickly went in back of her husband. The crowd fell on him, howling, knocked him to the ground, then jumped on him with their feet. Several women fell with him, their hands thrashing wildly. Those in the rear leaped in, tore at his clothing, then seized his bare flesh in their hands and began twisting and squeezing till his blood flowed from many scratches. Those who could not get close, dove under the rest and seized Chang’s [the man’s] legs, sinking their teeth in his flesh.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 301.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 302.

This passage strikes one for the explicit eagerness of the women to use violence to discipline the husband. The passage is compellingly thorough in its elaboration of the violent details. If the story is narrated by Gold Flower herself, why did she dwell on those violent moments in her story-telling? She might be appalled by the undisguised shrewish conduct of the women activists. But based on the story, it is more likely that it was exactly the openly displayed force of female violence that assured her of the credibility of the Party. When her father-in-law was bound up and taken away, her response was: “So this is what happiness is! She thought. At last she believed in the 8th Route Army.”⁴⁹¹ When her husband surrendered to the women’s violence and claimed he would reform himself, she lauded, “How strong was her Women’s Association, the Communist party, the 8th Route Army!”⁴⁹² It was through violence that the Party proved to her its capability to save women from domestic oppression.

The role of violence was ambiguous. While men’s violence at home was denounced as a form of oppression, women’s violence was sanctioned as just revenge. By first describing the cruelty of the male family members, the “turning-over” stories legitimated the shrewish energy of the women as a righteous embodiment of the will and force of the Party. In other words, the Party foregrounded male violence so that there could be a legitimate base for the call for violent shrews. Gold Flower fit in the role of the traditional shrewish wife for her apparent disobedience to her husband and parents-in-law. The women from the Women’s Association further completed Gold Flower’s image as a shrew by compensating for her deficiency in physical strength and brutality.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 290.

⁴⁹² Ibid., 303.

The women together rebelled in the way of the traditional shrew, and in the name of the Party. Gold Flower's husband, who had worked in KMT-dominated areas, identified the unruliness of his wife and other women as particularly a CCP thing. He commented that, "you see in the 8th Route areas women have become crazy. They don't obey men."⁴⁹³ He told Gold Flower that he did not care about Mao Zedong nor the turning-over movement for the women. After the man declared that he would go back to Tianjin to live under the KMT regime and take another wife, Gold Flower announced her determination to divorce him.

The next day, Gold Flower's husband fled, after "forty howling women" "chased him for three miles through the fields." The women swore to catch the man someday and "bite him to death." Gold Flower, directed by the district magistrate, gave a speech to the village women. Her speech and her story ended with the call: "Go home and make your husbands participate in the 8th Route Army!"⁴⁹⁴ Husband-disciplining was channeled into a progressive agenda; the shrews' power was sanctioned and sublimated.

Gold Flower's story, though occurring in the late 1940s, diverged distinctively from "the Yan'an Way." It did not emphasize family harmony. The means of the Women's Association was clearly radical rather than collaborative. Current scholarship has considered Gold Flower's story as pointing to typical features of the CCP's earlier radical feminism.⁴⁹⁵ This story exposes readers to the details of the Party's radical means,

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 305.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 307.

⁴⁹⁵ He Guimei 賀桂梅, "'Yan'an daolu' zhong de xingbie wenti—jieji yu xingbie yiti de lishi sikao" "延安道路"中的性別問題——階級與性別議題的歷史思考, *Nankai xuebao* 南開學報, no.6 (2006), 18.

even though the discursive trend at the time had already shifted to censuring the domestic radicalism.

This explicit radicalness in Gold Flower's story is also what attracted Jack Belden. He thought "it reveals more clearly than a dozen speeches by Mao Zedong just what are some of the techniques of the Chinese Communist party and why they were able to win so many people to their cause."⁴⁹⁶ Violence is one of the practical techniques that reflected the determination of the Party and the actual effect of the women's movement. Through the shrewish violence, the Party demonstrated the real possibility of empowering the women to overturn the hegemony of the men. With shrewish behavior and discourse, women's power came to be a tangible representation of the force of the Party.

"The Yan'an Way" and the Yan'an Literature

With the intimidating Communist women at the center, Gold Flower's story somehow testified to the ineffectiveness of the Yan'an new policy in changing actual social practices. In literature produced in Yan'an and the Shan'ganning Border Region, the Yan'an Way emphasizing family harmony was also absent or represented in an unsuccessful manner. In contrast to the ease of making a change in policy, the Yan'an literature reflected the difficulty for authors to embrace the transition from radical feminism to the call for family happiness. Literary works produced in Yan'an struggled to seek a way to solve the dilemma created by the Party policies. How could a rebellious wife be at the same time a contributor to marital harmony? How could a woman

⁴⁹⁶ Belden, *China Shakes*, 276.

awakened by the Party's call against domestic oppression become emancipated without hurting her man's feelings or threatening the old order of the family? How could the Party reconcile women's liberation with its grand goal of mobilizing the peasants?

The Yan'an literature did not provide a solution. Similar to Gold Flower's story, the majority of the Yan'an texts dismissed the call of the Yan'an Way, but centered on domestic violence and the wives' process of turning over. There was no apparent change in literature after the coming of the new policy around 1943. The wives are still represented as revolutionary and dominant in the families. The only notable difference was that in some literature written after 1943 milder means began to replace the earlier radical techniques used by the wives. The wives came to express their dissatisfaction by snubbing their husbands rather than directly walking out on them. The wives abandoned their husbands spiritually after actual divorce was discouraged. Yet as to be analyzed, the issue of family harmony was only poorly or tentatively addressed. The Yan'an literature after 1943 still represented the Party as an intruder into the peasants' familial lives due to its promotion of women's liberation. Later Great Leap literature revisited the conflict between empowered wives and complaining husbands, and was able to provide a more mature solution.

The Yan'an literature celebrated rebellious wives as revolutionary models for the rural new women. Only a few stories adopted a conservative or even misogynist perspective on women, such as the short story *Xiangzhang fufu* 鄉長夫婦 (The township

head and his wife; 1941) published in *Jiefang ribao* 解放日報 (The liberation daily).⁴⁹⁷

The majority of works of the Yan'an area depicted women as disobedient wives or spirited leaders. The husbands are violent, backward, or anti-revolutionary, having no say in the wives' decisions.

Liang Yan's 梁彥 *Mo mai nü* 磨麥女 (The wheat-grinding girl; 1940) depicts Guiying's 桂英 transition from an oppressed wife and daughter-in-law to a woman pursuing individual freedom and gender equality. The discussions of the women cadres next door expose Guiying to a mixture of progressive notions including "freedom and liberation" (*zizhuyufeng* 自由解放), "pioneering" (*xianfeng* 先鋒), "women going to school" (*funü shangxue* 婦女上學), "women participating in politics" (*funü canzheng* 婦女參政), and also "Mao Zedong" (毛澤東). As a piece that won first place in the Yan'an May Fourth Youth Writing Competition (*Yan'an "wu si" qingnian wenyi zhengwen* 延安“五四”青年文藝徵文) in 1941, the text revisited the May Fourth Nora model, using it as a starting point for constructing Guiying's emancipation. At the end of the story, Guiying leaves a note and runs away from her abusive parents-in-law in a Nora style. This Yan'an Nora tale is unlike the May Fourth stories in which the Noras do not know where to go after slamming the door. It is also unlike the post-May Fourth leftist stories which end with only vague allusions to revolution. This Yan'an story closes cheerfully with a Communist vision: the evil parents-in-law are brought to public trial; Guiying cuts her hair and becomes one of the women cadres.

⁴⁹⁷ In *Xiangzhang fufu*, the township head associates his wife with the category of the reactionary "dirty matters" (*zang dongxi* 鱐東西). The woman is sexually attractive and cares less about the *gongjia* than about their own family. See Hong Liu 洪流, "Xiangzhang fufu" 鄉長夫婦, in *Yan'an wenyi congshu* 延安文藝叢書, vol.2 (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1984).

Mo mai nü establishes a boundary between the Communist revolutionary femininity and the ordinary untransformed femininity. While Guiying is depicted positively in her journey to Communism, she is too weepy. She cries frequently in the story from fear or excitement, which differentiates her from the Communist female cadres who are calm, tough, and masculine. The images of the masculine Comrade Zhang (*youdian nanzi qigai de Zhang* 有點男子氣概的章) and the plump Comrade Wu (*pangpang de Wu* 胖胖的伍) present a new face of femininity Guiying is not familiar with. She wakes up at midnight after her meeting with Zhang and Wu. The unusually healthy looks (*lianse dou name jiankang* 臉色都那麼健康) of the two women make her too excited to fall asleep. The next morning, Guiying oversleeps. Her mother-in-law shouts, “who did you sleep with so comfortably last night that you can’t even get up in the morning?”⁴⁹⁸ The curse refers to the Party as a potential seducer that lures good women away. In other Yan'an stories, it is also common to see the intruding threat of the Party as embodied in the strong and sexually suggestive bonding in female comradeship.

In Gold Flower’s story, the women bond together to form a violent shrew (*hanfu*); in rumors and gossip, revolutionary women were likened to morally loose and lascivious women (*yinfu*); in *Mo mai nü*, the women cadres are referred to as “bitches” (*biaozi 媚子*) by Guiying’s mother-in-law for enlightening Guiying and intervening in their family life. The collective force of the women is compelling. If an individual woman might be too afraid to assert her power (as in the case of Gold Flower and Guiying), through women’s bonding she is able to experience the power of shrews in a united effort. The CCP

⁴⁹⁸ Liang Yan 梁彦, “*Mo mai nü*” 磨麥女, in *Yan'an wenyi congshu*, vol.2, 158.

legitimated the shrew's power through a form of political collectivity in the name of revolution.

In addition to *Mo mai nü*, the representations of familial situations in the Yan'an literature written before 1943 centered around domestic oppression and the image of the Party/government (the *gong* 公) as the intruder. Liu Qing's 柳青 *Xishi* 喜事 (The wedding; 1942) foregrounds the disturbance that the Communist promotion of women's rights exerts on the marriage of ordinary peasants. The story is about the second wedding of Zhao Cai'er 招財兒. His first wife Wei Lanying 魏蘭英 had joined the Red Army, cut her hair, and terminated the marriage through her right to divorce.

Wei's father-in-law comments that the divorce is "the first disadvantage of the new society" (*xin shehui li, zhe pashi tou yiyang bu haochu* 新社會里，這怕是頭一樣不好處), a veiled criticism of the Party's polices on women. The revolutionary Wei is also quite shrewish. Rumor has it that although Zhao Cai'er has beaten Wei a couple of times, he always ends up being beaten by her. For characters like Wei's father-in-law, her unruliness clearly has to do with the Party. He publicly blames the Party for giving her thoughts of divorce (*beihou haiyou gongjia de dianzi* 背後還有公家的點子).

The text tries to redeem the Party from its reputation as a destroyer of peasant marriage. Another character in the story pushes all the responsibility for marital problems onto Wei Lanying alone, denouncing her for rejecting the government's mediation. But eventually the text fails to reconcile women's empowerment with the caring image of the Party. At the end, Zhao Cai'er's new wife, after beating Zhao and being beaten by her father-in-law, runs away. The villagers think that she must have run away to the government, a place that "even bound-feet wives know to go to in order to argue"

(xianzai lian xiaojiao poyi yehui zhaodao shuoli de difang 現在連小腳婆姨也會找到說理的地方).⁴⁹⁹ The Party is referred to as the destination for a run-away Nora, the potential eloper, the promoter and protector of a shrewish wife who abandons her family. The conflict between women's liberation and the image of the Party remained unresolved.

Among the few stories that did present marital harmony, the solutions in the texts tend to be superficial. The stories either feature an abrupt change of the oppressive husbands or achieve resolution at the expense of the wives' rebellious spirit. The short story *Fufu* 夫婦 (The husband and wife; 1941) depicts the transformation of a couple from oppressor and slave to equal and happy lovers with the aid of the Party. At the beginning, the stubborn husband is against the Party for criticizing him for beating his wife. But this does not grow into a conflict. The husband soon finds out that his wife is changing after receiving education in Yan'an. The couple starts to feel real love towards each other. In contrast to other awakened women who rise up to rebel against their husbands, the wife in *Fufu* uses what she has learned at a Yan'an university to write to her husband that "I am not willing to divorce."⁵⁰⁰ By toning down the fierceness of the wife and the difficulty of transforming a violent husband, this story offered a superficial solution to the dilemma between women's emancipation and family harmony.

Written in 1943, Kong Jue's 孔厥 *Yige nüren fanshen de gushi* 一個女人翻身的故事 (The story of a woman's turning over; 1943) resolves this dilemma through class differentiation. As a biography of Zhe Juying 折聚英, a model of new woman during the

⁴⁹⁹ Liu Qing 柳青, "Xi shi" 喜事, in *Yan'an wenyi congshu*, vol.2, 451.

⁵⁰⁰ Zhuang Qidong 莊啟東, "Fufu" 夫婦, in *Yan'an wenyi congshu*, vol.2, 227.

Rectification Movement and a female senator in the border region, the story does not undermine the wife's rebellion. Nor does it embrace the scenario of contrived family harmony. Zhe Juying's abandonment of her husband is justified in the text by portraying her husband as a class enemy who deserves to be divorced.⁵⁰¹

In the later Yan'an literature of the late 1940s, the treatment of a couple's relationship became subtler as divorce became less preferred as a means for resolving marital issues. Yet as I have found, even if divorce was not encouraged as a means for the women to assert their rebellious stance, the female characters still find their own ways to symbolically abandon their husbands. The wife in Pan Zhiting's 潘之汀 *Manzi fufu* 滿子夫婦 (The Manzi couple; 1945) treats her husband with utter indifference. When the man asks what leaves her dissatisfied, she simply replies "nothing." It is through the Communist instructors at the local school that the wife begins to realize her fault in "disliking and avoiding her husband" (*xianqi zhangfu de xinli he taidu* 嫌棄丈夫的心理和態度).⁵⁰² She finally takes the initiative to reunite with him. Every night, the couple studies together and sleeps together. The text they study, on "planning and considering housework, becoming united and harmonious" (*moulü jiawu, tuanje hemu* 謀慮家務, 團結和睦), is explicit propaganda of the Yan'an police on family harmony. In the story, the Party intervenes at the critical moment to keep the wife's dissatisfaction from developing into a rebellion or a divorce. The intervention of the *gong* is represented as not a threat to but a guardian of the individual's family order.

⁵⁰¹ Kong Jue 孔厥, "Yige nüren fanshen de gushi" 一個女人翻身的故事, in *Yan'an wenyi congshu*, vol.3.

⁵⁰² Pan Zhiting 潘之汀, "Manzi fufu" 滿子夫婦, in *Yan'an wenyi congshu*, vol.3, 294.

The Party's image as an intruder was further whitewashed in Gu Jin's 古今 *Xin guiju* 新規矩 (The new rule; 1947). Similar to the wife in *Manzi fufu*, Jiu'er 九兒 feels dissatisfied soon after her marriage with a businessman Zou Zhusan 鄒祝三. In response to her husband's constant questioning, Jiu'er complains that marriage prevents her from joining the women's school and the women's production team. Zou Zhusan is a practical and conservative man who strongly believes that women's place should be inside the home. He draws a clear line between *gongjia ren* and *laobaixing* 老百姓 (the masses). To him, being a *gongjia ren* will destroy his life: "What we ordinary people fear the most is to become associated with the Party!" ("*Women laobaixing, zuipa de shi dang gongjia ren!*" 我們老百姓，最怕的是當公家人！)⁵⁰³ He does not allow Jiu'er to go to the women's school, because his friend Shopkeeper Wang 王掌櫃 has warned him that education will necessarily cause one to become a *gongjia ren*. He also thinks it is too risky for married women to go to school because the male teachers are all bad (*nan jiaoyuan quanshi xie huai jiahuo* 男教員全是些壞傢伙).

The conflicts between the Party and the masses are addressed through the character Zou Zhusan. His wife Jiu'er, who firmly follows the Party, first snubs him and then dismisses his objection and leaves for school every day. Jiu'er abandons her backward husband both symbolically and physically, leaving him with the fear that she will eventually run away with the *gongjia*. The first half of the story enacts the common scenario in the earlier Yan'an literature that the wife is much more awakened and leaves

⁵⁰³ Gu Jin 古今, "Xin guiju" 新規矩, in *Yan'an wenyi congshu*, vol.3, 446.

the husband behind. Yet in what remains the story takes special effort to try to conform to the changed rules of the Party.

First, the story further justifies the Party's intervention in domestic violence. Out of a sense of failure to stop Jiu'er from going to school, Zou Zhusan pinches and beats her in the night. Jiu'er cannot bear it and brings the issue to the government. After a talk with the local leaders, Zou does not dare beat Jiu'er again. Unlike earlier texts where domestic violence exists before the coming of the Party, in *Xin guiju* the husband does not use violence until the wife asserts her will to follow the call of the *gongjia*. The text therefore treats domestic violence as a means used by backward husbands to oppose and take revenge on the Party. In a twist on the usual way of depicting domestic violence, the Party in this story redeems its identity as an intruder to present itself as a legitimate guardian of family harmony. With the presence of a hostile husband, the Party is entitled to step in to regulate the violence.

Second, the story also rewrites the usual plot of the wife's running away. In the earlier texts, either explicitly or implicitly, the wife's decision to join the Party is given as the reason for her to run away. The Party is responsible for causing these revolutionary women to be perceived as "wanton women" (*piban funü* 皮伴婦女) in popular understandings. However, *Xin guiju* presents this scenario as the ungrounded and paranoid suspicion of the husband. Although Zou Zhusan has ceased to beat Jiu'er, he is still uneasy about her association with the *gongjia*. One day, he storms into the district government, reporting that Jiu'er is missing. He angrily implies that it must have to do with the male teachers at the women's school. Exceeding all other husbands in the Yan'an literature who are abandoned by their wives, Zou Zhusan directs his anger

directly at the rules of the Party. He shouts indignantly, “District Chief, you tell me, if our border region has this new rule!” (*kan bianqu youmei zhege xin guiju!* 看邊區有沒這個新規矩！)⁵⁰⁴ For the first time, an “abandoned” husband is voicing defiance against the Party: Is it one of the new rules that a wife can throw over her husband? Does the Party aid and abet adultery so publicly?

Zou Zhusan’s challenge to the District Chief quickly proves to be based on his fear of losing Jiu’er. On his way home, he discovers several surprises. He finds that the male teacher is not missing, but is calmly sitting in the school office. He hears from someone that his friend Shopkeeper Wang is actually a spy working for the Nationalist Party. When arriving at home, he is surprised to see Jiu’er, who had been away to send off her girlfriend to the Suide Women’s School (*suide nüxiao* 綏德女校). All these discoveries shock Zou Zhusan. He repeatedly hits himself on the forehead, blaming his “old and wicked brain” (*jiu naojin* 舊腦筋; *gui naojin* 鬼腦筋) for misunderstanding the rules of the border region. In the end, he accepts the Party and joins the struggle against his former friend Shopkeeper Wang.

Through a dramatic turn in the plot line, with the return of his wife and the exposure of his friend as a spy, the husband assures himself of the credibility of the Party. He comes to understand that the *Gongjia* is not against the masses, nor will it steal his wife away. The Party finally redeems itself by successfully convincing and converting a dissident. It is noteworthy that what convinces the husband of his wife’s fidelity is the fact that she had been away to see a female friend. Eliminating the political and even the sexual edge of female comradeship apparent in the earlier texts (such as Gold Flower’s

⁵⁰⁴ Gu Jin, “Xin guiju,” 450.

story and *Mo mai nü*), this story returns female bonding to a harmless, comforting place.

To the husband, sisterhood is merely sisterhood, rather than a symbol of political engagement or a sign of adultery.

Written in 1947, *Xin guiju* finally restores all transgressive roles and character relationships back to a safe position. Family order is sustained while the Communist path is espoused. From the early 1930s to the late 1940s, all the struggles in the leftist writings about how best to depict a rebellious wife paved the way for later socialist constructions of the strong wives. In the Great Leap literature of the late 1950s and early 1960s, the literary handling of marital battles became more skillful in warding off potential objections from the male peasants. The awakened wives no longer had to abandon their backward husbands in order to be able to join the Communist cause. The women came to be more legitimately disobedient as wives at home and more empowered as leaders in public social movements. Socialist texts presented a firmer grasp of the values of shrewish qualities in building the next model of China's new woman.

CHAPTER V

EPILOGUE: POLA WOMANHOOD AND THE GREAT LEAP NEW WOMAN

Starting from the late Qing, the appropriate behavior of Chinese women had been publicly debated by male intellectuals who hoped to establish reformist credentials. Women's flaws were linked closely with the downfall of the nation. In a 1906 article on establishing vocational training centers for women criminals, the author criticized women's wicked natures (*e'gen xing* 惡根性) in a harsh, disciplinary tone. The wicked natures the article analyzed include: brazenness (*hanxing* 悍性), jealousy (*duxing* 嫉性), indolence (*duoxing* 惰性), and promiscuity (*yinxing* 淫性).⁵⁰⁵ Traditionally, those features were closely associated with the shrew, the embodiment of the failed models of Confucian femininity. The author treated these shrewish attributes as the starting point for revolutionizing Chinese women and the nation. In a way the future of the nation was envisioned as contingent upon the elimination of shrews.

However, as my study shows, rather than dying out as China entered modernity, shrewish behaviors survived into the twentieth century at both the representational and the experiential levels. For many modern cultural figures, repulsive shrews not only did not require discipline and repression, but even needed to be revitalized as a powerful, iconoclastic force against traditional values. Under the chaotic status quo of the early Republican society, the male intellectuals recognized that traditional modes of women's virtue would never work to help women break out of their traditional roles. Some degree

⁵⁰⁵ Author unknown, “Lun she nüfan xiysisuo” 論設女犯習藝所, *Shuntian shibao* 順天時報 (June 12 and 13, 1906), reprinted in Li Youning 李又寧 and Zhang Yufa 張玉法, eds., *Jindai Zhongguo nüquan yundong shiliao (1842-1911)* 近代中國女權運動史料 (1842-1911) (Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue she, 1975), 710-11.

of shrewish behavior and discourse was needed for women to achieve substantial progress in social, cultural, and gender reforms.

Shrewish attributes were being seen in a new light. Women's violence, jealousy, and promiscuity were tolerated, revalued, or even celebrated as symbols of a modern rebellious spirit. Even as male intellectuals formulated women's unruliness as problematic in order to claim their superior roles as enlighteners and guardians of social order, they also urgently needed that disruptive energy to strengthen their revolutionary ideology. They changed the face of femininity so that shrew discourses and behaviors could be employed as a legitimate revolutionary stance. As women's acts of transgression were interpreted as expressions of their agency and empowerment, women borrowed the behaviors associated with traditional shrews to transform themselves into righteous suffragettes, Noras, and Communist revolutionaries of the new era. These modern cultural figures claimed to invent their models of new womanhood as distinct from traditional female types. But in actuality many of these new women constructions were based either on existing shrew figures in premodern texts or integrated recognized qualities of the traditional shrew.

The ensuing socialist era continued to take shrew images and tropes as an inspiration for creating socialist heroines. The 1950 Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China accorded women genuine freedom of marriage and divorce and supported them to participate in social production. The law, criticized as the "Women's Law," was harshly opposed by peasants and even the Party cadres. Bloody and tragic conflicts occurred as women struggled to free themselves from husbands and other forms

of constraining familial ties.⁵⁰⁶ Dismissing women's traditional domestic roles, the ideology of the new China placed great emphasis on women's roles in the public sphere as social workers. Policies and discourses defined the ideal socialist new women as the ones who actively joined production and political activities.⁵⁰⁷ During the 1950s, the Party also mobilized the mass media to circulate icons of female model workers typified by the *nüjie diyi* 女界第一 (literally, the first in the women's world, or the "first women"), who were recognized as China's "first female tractor driver, train conductor, streetcar driver, welder and so on."⁵⁰⁸ The proletarian-based socialist new woman was designated through her connections to machinery, labor skills, and political consciousness.

All these efforts prefigured the wave of women's empowerment which reached its apogee during the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961). In the late 1950s, China faced a crisis in its external relationship with the Soviet Union and in internal conflicts and upheavals such as the Anti-Rightist Movement (*fan you yundong* 反右運動) in 1957. In 1958 the CCP Chairman Mao Zedong launched the Great Leap Forward, an all-out campaign, to boost China's agricultural and industrial power so that it could "leap" into socialism in the shortest possible time. One distinctive feature of the campaign is that it made women "leap" to the foreground in state propaganda. The demands for enlisting the

⁵⁰⁶ For the implementation and impact of the Marriage Law of 1950, see Kazuko, *Chinese Women*, 176-86.

⁵⁰⁷ See, for example, "Zhongguo funü yundong dangqian renwu de jueyi" 中國婦女運動當前任務的決議 passed in *Zhongguo funü diyici quanguo daibiao dahui* 中國婦女第一次全國代表大會 (the first Chinese women's all-China representative meeting) in 1949, republished in *Xin Zhongguo funü* 新中國婦女, no.1 (July 20, 1949), as well as Mao Zedong's epigraph to the first issue of *Xin Zhongguo funü* in 1949.

⁵⁰⁸ Tina Mai Chen, "Female Icons, Feminist Iconography? Socialist Rhetoric and Women's Agency in 1950s China," *Gender & History*, vol.15 no.2 (August, 2003), 271.

largest possible workforce in agricultural production and construction projects liberated peasant women from their primary role as housewives.

Although the Party policies during the 1930s and '40s had also called on women to leave home to participate in the life of the *gongjia*, the Great Leap ideology featured a different take on women's roles and their family relations. In the Yan'an literature, the awakened wives look up to the female cadres for models of progressive thought and conduct. Typically, these cadres are previously awakened wives who had run away from their marriages. These earlier Communist writings present family life as a hindrance to women's public revolutionary careers. The positive women characters are depicted as either having cut off ties to family or are struggling between staying at home and running away to join the revolution. This tension between their private and public roles resulted in the imbalance of women's power inside and outside the household. In the Yan'an literature, a woman can't be a wife and a cadre simultaneously. To assume a powerful leadership position in public she has first to abandon her role as a wife. Even if the story *Xin guiju* seems to reconcile the two options, it still holds back from giving public power to Jiu'er, who is transformed into an empowered follower but not a commanding female leader in the Communist course.

In contrast, in the Great Leap literature the Party seems more confident in its ability to erase the tensions between women's private and public identities, and the literature discards the strategy of having women running away from their homes. The new heroines are able to alter gender relations in and out of the home. They become leaders both at home and in the public campaign. Even though the peasant husbands are still backward or less progressive than their wives, they are now easily handled or

transformed. No longer are the husbands a genuine obstruction to the Communist campaigns. Domestic conflicts are used to strengthen the progressive image of the rural women in this new ideological world.

Women's abilities and energy are at the center of Great Leap fiction. Authors celebrated the remarkable visibility of women by directly using the names of their heroines in the story titles. Stories such as *Hei Feng* 黑鳳 (Hei Feng; 1963) by Wang Wenshi, *Xueying xue chui* 雪英學炊 (Xueying learns to cook; 1959) by Duan Quanfa 段荃法, and *Li Shuangshuang xiaozhuan* 李雙雙小傳 (A brief biography of Li Shuangshuang; 1960) by Li Zhun all foreground women's subjectivity and construct their individualist identities by using the names of the female protagonists as the titles. Other works, though not using the names of the female heroes in the titles, celebrate the bond between women. For example, Wang Wenshi's *Xin jieshi de huoban* 新結識的夥伴 (The newly-made friends; 1958), as reflected in the story title, depicts the friendship and competition between the female leaders of two women's production teams.

In order to promote the new public roles given to women in Great Leap ideology, the Great Leap texts appropriated the defiance of the traditional shrew against the domestic family order and channeled her previously destructive energy into a constructive force for the public campaign. Two textual details typify the Great Leap rehabilitation of the shrew trope. One is the use of *pola* as a positive term and quality designating the ideal womanhood in the Great Leap Forward. The other is the revival of the stock situation of the pairing of shrewish wives and henpecked husbands to extol the rise of the Great Leap wives.

The introduction of this dissertation mapped out the trajectory of how the term *pola* developed from being demeaning because of its association with shrews in traditional texts to being a positive term used to describe desired qualities for the modern new women. Starting from Mao Dun who explicitly claimed *pola* as crucial for the leftist revolutionary womanhood in the 1930s, politicians and intellectuals of the next two decades further elevated the *pola* model of womanly behavior to be indispensable for the ideal socialist new woman.

In the Great Leap fiction, Hei Feng, whose name bears clear reference to Wang Xifeng in *Honglou meng*, resembles Xifeng's *pola* womanhood for her similar ambitious drive (*ganjin chongtian* 幹勁冲天) to insert herself into the masculine world.⁵⁰⁹ Zhang Layue 張臘月, one of the female leaders in *Xin jieshi de huoban* is vulgar and masculinized. She is feisty like a lion (*xiang shizi yiban pola* 象獅子一般潑辣), has a loud voice (*gao houlong da sangzi* 高喉嚨大嗓子) and a temper like a firecracker that goes off once lit (*huopao xingzi, yi dian jiu xiang* 火炮性子, 一點就響). She has dark color and brawny hands (*cuzhuang de shou* 粗壯的手), and feels no qualms about revealing her whole arm in public. Vulgar like a man, or more than a man, Zhang Layue is described the equal of three or five ordinary men.⁵¹⁰ While in traditional literature animalistic associations and masculine features were used to deride the transgressive nature of shrews, this Great Leap new woman is favorably masculinized and described as a lion to laud her unconventional strength.

⁵⁰⁹ Wang Wenshi 王汶石, *Hei Feng* 黑鳳 (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1963), 11.

⁵¹⁰ Wang Wenshi, “Xin jieshi de huoban” 新結識的夥伴, *Renmin wenxue* 人民文學, no.12 (1958), 19, 22.

In addition to being granted a new form of public power, these women characters also challenge the conventional marital hierarchy at home. Except for Hei Feng who is unmarried, other Great Leap heroines are dominating their husbands who play backward, submissive, and feminized roles. In terms of plot, characterization, and the entertaining effect, stories of the Great Leap retain aspects of the traditional literature of the shrewish wives and henpecked husbands.

In *Xin jieshi de huoban*, when Zhang Layue first meets her competitor Wu Shulan 吳淑蘭, she quickly brings Wu's attention to the reversal of gender stereotypes between husband and wife. She asks if Wu's husband is holding her back (*la houtui* 拉後腿) in her public job. She complains that although in the past it was usually the wives who held their husbands back, now it is really the opposite situation. After hearing that Wu's husband is a Party member, Zhang warns her that there are also Party members who hold their wives back. She then boasts about her own achievement in successfully transforming her husband who is also a Party member but used to interfere with her career. "To our own men," Zhang tells Wu, "we should often use disciplines." (*dui ziji de nanren, yao jingchang jiaoyu* 對自己的男人，要經常教育).⁵¹¹ Women now assume the role of instructor and disciplinarian, both in and out of the household. Although wifely rule and subjugation of husbands is a common theme in shrew stories, Zhang Layue's domination is depicted here with delight and admiration. The wife embodies the will of the state; therefore, her shrewishness contributes to the new gendered order rather than destroying it. Henpecked husbands in traditional literature were often derided or denounced for their failure to maintain normal gender hierarchy and family order. In this

⁵¹¹ Wang Wenshi, "Xin jieshi," 19.

socialist text, Zhang Layue's husband further loses ground to defend for himself, because he is not against a woman but an ideology. The couple's personal conflict signals the battle between progressive and regressive (or conservative) approaches to the grand movement.

After talking about husbands, Zhang Layue leads Wu Shulan to her home. There Wu is startled (*jingya* 驚訝) by the dominion Zhang has over her husband. She interrupts his talk at will and orders him around as though he were a servant. She even boasts through her facial expressions that she has a really obedient husband (*kan ta duo tinghua* 看他多聽話). This reversed marital hierarchy appears quite unfamiliar to Wu Shulan. In the text, Wu is referred to as a conventional good woman (*renjia shuo de nazhong hao nüren* 人家說的那種好女人), who follows the traditional norms of wifely obedience. Wu is feminine and conventionally virtuous, while Zhang is contrastingly masculine, aggressive, and therefore “bad” (*huai* 壞). However, the traditionally good qualities of women appear outmoded in the new era; the bad type of woman from a normative perspective is praised as the Great Leap exemplary hero. At the end of the story, Wu Shulan comes to enjoy her public career more than her domestic life. She puts more energy into leading her production team than caring about her husband. Her change makes Zhang Layue joke that Wu is actually a quite bad woman (*dinghuai de nüren* 頂壞的女人).⁵¹²

The female characters in *Xin jieshi de huoban* take pride in being bad models for other women to follow. The “bad girl” identity indicates their brave divorce from the past

⁵¹² Ibid., 23.

norms and their embrace of the new, progressive ideology. Similar to the protagonist Pan Jinlian in Ouyang Yuqian's play, the women no longer find these bad girl labels degrading. When the former bad behavior is made into the newly-promoted good behavior, identifying with the bad is to align oneself with the powerful. *Pola* womanhood and shrewish wifedom are claimed as empowering badges of honor that progressive women are, and should be, eager to wear.

Another Great Leap story *Xueying xuechui* also inverts marital hierarchy to grant the title heroine Xueying, a female leader in the local commune, continuous authority both in public and at home. Xueying is outspoken, hard-working, and resilient. Huaiyuan 懷元, Xueying's husband, is formulaically short-sighted, selfish, and slow in understanding the urgency of improving the public canteen. He complains about and interferes with his wife's public work. Since the husband's grievance symbolizes the potential dissatisfaction of the masses toward the Great Leap campaign, he must be subjugated and transformed. The beginning of the story prefigures the possibility of husband disciplining by depicting the reversed roles of the couple. When Xueying is attending a public meeting, she sends Huaiyuan back home to get her jacket. Similar to Zhang Layue's husband in *Xin jieshi de huoban*, this man takes orders from his wife, and is associated with the inner sphere and domestic service. People at the meeting all make fun that Xueying's power is so great that she is even followed by her own personal supplier of provisions (*yunliang guan* 運糧官). Throughout the text, Huaiyuan is frequently mocked as henpecked and emasculated. At the end, all his discontent and desire to change Xueying are quenched when a Party leader and a peasant woman both criticize his objections as "holding his wife back" (*la houtui*). He finally comes to terms

with his role as a submissive follower under the leadership of Xueying as both a cadre and a wife.

By employing the stock model of shrewish wives and henpecked husbands, the Great Leap texts avoid dealing with the husbands' objections to the collective path apparent in the Yan'an stories. The husbands in the Great Leap stories, even if presented as arrogant and much less progressive at the beginning, all end up being obedient and whole-heartedly endorsing their wives'/the Party's policies. Among the Great Leap texts, *Li Shuangshuang xiaozhuan* is the most exemplary in celebrating this new marital model, as inspired by and rooted in the old pattern of shrew literature. The rest of this epilogue will look at the multi-layered engagement of *Li Shuangshuang xiaozhuan* with the trope of the shrew. The text showcases the force of a *pola* socialist new woman in revolutionizing both the marital structure and women's profile in public.

A milestone of Great Leap fiction, *Li Shuangshuang xiaozhuan* was the most widely read and acclaimed literary text of the period.⁵¹³ Written in 1959 by Li Zhun, a "village fiction writer" (*xiangtu zuojia* 鄉土作家), the story was based on the author's experience in the countryside in 1958. The earliest version of the story was written in March 1959 and appeared in the 1977 collection of Li Zhun's stories. In 1960 the premier national literary journal *Renmin wenxue* 人民文學 (People's Literature) published *Li Shuangshuang xiaozhuan*, a revised version of the 1959 text. The story was next adapted into a film in 1962 and an illustrated storybook (*lianhuān huà* 連環畫) in 1963. Scholarship to date has focused attention on the variations among the three versions of *Li*

⁵¹³ Based on Richard King's interviews with the author Li Zhun, Li "believed that the story was reprinted over 400 times in numerous editions and read by 300 million people." See Richard King, ed., *Heroes of China's Great Leap Forward: Two Stories* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 8.

Shuangshuang xiaozhuan as a story, a film, and a comic book. Little attention has been paid to the changes between the two story versions.⁵¹⁴ From Li Zhun's original text to the *Renmin wenzxue* version, the additions, deletions, and alterations reflect the ideological moulding of a text to make it speak to the Great Leap spirit and its expectations for a new socialist woman.

Li Shuangshuang 李雙雙, like the “first women” promoted in the media during the 1950s, has ambitions to succeed in fields that were previously dominated by the men. She is described as having a peppery temper (*huo lala de xingzi* 火辣辣的性子), a fast tongue (*zui tai kuai* 嘴太快), and a spirited energy (*you guzi chongjin* 有股子衝勁).⁵¹⁵ She is unhappy as a housewife raising children and serving her overbearing husband Sun Xiwang 孫喜旺. She becomes literate after attending night-classes, a skill which positions her to emerge as a heroic model during the Great Leap Forward. When the Party branch of the local commune calls on the masses to Bloom and Contend (*mingfang* 鳴放) in order to find solutions for the labor shortage, Shuangshuang puts up a big-character poster (*dazi bao* 大字報) proposing a collective canteen so that young wives can free themselves to participate in the public workforce. Shuangshuang's idea is supported by the local officials and she starts to work outside her home. Compared to the activist Shuangshuang, her husband Xiwang is much more old-fashioned. He does not understand the revolutionary mission or his wife's desire to break from the confines of

⁵¹⁴ For comparisons among the three versions, see King, *Milestones*, 79-80, 85-90; King, *Heroes*, 8; Krista Van Fleit Hang, *Literature the People Love: Reading Chinese Texts from the Early Maoist Period (1949-1966)* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 58-69. For a brief comparison of the two story versions in 1959 and 1960, see King, *Milestones*, 79-80.

⁵¹⁵ Li Zhun 李準, “Li Shuangshuang xiaozhuan” 李雙雙小傳, *Renmin wenzxue*, no.3 (1960), 12, 13.

the home. There is constant bickering and squabbling between the two before Xiwang is finally transformed and begins to admire and emulate Shuangshuang's achievement.

The *Renmin wenzue* version keeps the background story of the couple as it was written in the 1959 original text. An oppressed wife, Shuangshuang had been suffering Xiwang's beatings ever since she married him. Echoing the common pattern in the Yan'an literature, *Li Shuangshuang xiaozhuan* attributes the wife's empowerment to the effect of the Party's marriage laws. Xiwang dares not beat Shuangshuang again because he fears that she will divorce him. When Shuangshuang is pregnant and receives support from the local Party cadres, she starts to show her rebellious and even fiery nature. Xiwang no longer tries to control over his wife. He even gets beaten by Shuangshuang when he intentionally tries to disturb her. His patriarchal privilege further breaks down during the collectivization movement (*hezuo hua* 合作化). Shuangshuang's share of the workload gives her a firm footing in the household. During the Great Leap Forward, her wifely authority culminates in her increasing mobility and power in the public sphere. Similar to several cases discussed in Chapter IV about Communist new women, Shuangshuang is also made a shrew by the Party. Inspired by its ideology and fortified by the Party's laws and policies, she grows from a persecuted wife to a forceful rebel able to fight back verbally, physically, and mentally. As described in the text, it is the Great Leap Forward that "makes Shuangshuang leap out" (*ba Shuangshuang gei "yue" chulai le* 把雙雙給“躍”出來了).⁵¹⁶ The leap of the time parallels and justifies the social raise in status of the women. While China is being vaulted into its status as a super power, Shuangshuang is catapulted into being a Party-identified shrew.

⁵¹⁶ Li Zhun, "Li Shuangshuang," 11.

In order to foreground women's leaping forward, the *Renmin wenzxue* revision differs from the 1959 version to grant power to women. In Shuangshuang's poster doggerel, the last line is changed from the slogan "women can hold up half the sky" (*funü neng ding ban'ge tian* 婦女能頂半個天) to "we women dare to challenge the men" (*gan he tamen nanren lai tiaozhan* 敢和他們男人來挑戰).⁵¹⁷ With this change, Shuangshuang is not only making an individual claim rather than repeating the slogan, but also announcing domestic competition between the sexes instead of collaboration. Women, no longer satisfied with the role of "the other half," are directly challenging male superiority. This single revision sets the tone of the *Renmin wenzxue* version in which women are given greater credibility and ability over the men.

In comparison to the film adaptation and the storybook, the stories highlight women's power and women's homosocial bonding. There are no negative female characters in the story versions and the identities of Shuangshuang and her female colleagues are emphasized as "young wives" (*nianqing xifu* 年輕媳婦). In contrast to the plot development in the film and storybook in which Shuangshuang has to direct part of her attention to some female adversaries, the only task that she and the other women have in the story versions is to deal with the backward men at home and at work. A core scene shows the confrontation between Shuangshuang and Xiwang; that this scene received only minor changes in the *Renmin wenzxue* revision, indicates the Party's ideological endorsement of Shuangshuang's feisty behavior in her quarrel with Xiwang.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 12. For the 1959 version, see Li Zhun, "Li Shuangshuang xiaozhuan," in *Li Shuangshuang xiaozhuan* (Beijing: Renmin wenzxue chubanshe, 1977), 333.

The couple quarrels about Shuangshuang's domestic responsibilities after she participates in the village work of digging the irrigation channel. Shuangshuang's life has become busier since she has to work outside and cook for the family. One day she returns home a little late and is furious to find that the children are crying for food while Xiwang is lying on the bed smoking. Shuangshuang asks why Xiwang has not at least got the dough ready for the noodles. Xiwang responds with contempt: "Ai! I just couldn't start that. Cooking is a woman's job. If I cook for you now, before you know it you'll be getting me to wash diapers!"⁵¹⁸ Shuangshuang gets really vexed. After a couple more exchanges, she throws down the kitchen knife with a clang, slumps down angrily on the doorstep, and starts to cry. However, this Shuangshuang's dramatic performance does not threaten Xiwang. He gets off the bed and starts to cook the noodles Shuangshuang has sliced for him. While the noodles are boiling, he minces some garlic and adds a little vinegar. As the wailing of Shuangshuang becomes more anguished, he pounds away at the garlic even more heavily. Both garlic and vinegar are known for their pungent smells. This detail of him adding garlic and vinegar symbolizes the man's piquant jealousy toward his wife's selfless public service, as well as his stubborn, patriarchal desire to confine Shuangshuang to the home.

In the face of Xiwang's offense, Shuangshuang becomes infuriated. She grounds her teeth while watching Xiwang prepare his noodles. Then "she rushes over and delivers two vicious punches to Xiwang's spine." Xiwang yells that Shuangshuang is overturning the domestic order (*fan tian* 反天) and turns around to hit her. But Shuangshuang immediately "grabs hold of him and gives him a shove that pushes him out of the house

⁵¹⁸ Li Zhun, "Li Shuangshuang," 14. Translation with slight modification from King, "A Brief Biography of Li Shuangshuang," in *Heroes*, 15-61, see page 24.

and leaves him sprawling on the ground in the courtyard.” Seeing Xiwang sprawled on the ground, Shuangshuang cannot help but burst into laughter. “She laughs so hard she shakes the tears off her face and onto the ground.”⁵¹⁹

This scene highlights Shuangshuang’s unruly nature by depicting her sharp tongue, irascibility, violence, and dramatic mood swings. Her “sudden braying laughter” after seeing her husband fall is an unexpected sign of her subjectivity.⁵²⁰ Her lack of empathy for her husband not only indicates that Shuangshuang has taken on the role of a shrewish wife, but shows that she has become a spokesperson for socialist ideology in disciplining and deriding those who are less progressive or are counter-revolutionary. If a woman’s uncontrolled or inappropriate laughter suggests a threat to conventional order and male dominance,⁵²¹ Shuangshuang’s abrupt and loud laugh is a clear attack on the traditional patriarchal mentality that Xiwang embodies. Socialist ideology employs the bold transgressive behaviors of the shrew to laugh off the threat of the old ideology which is rendered harmless.

When adapting the story into the film *Li Shuangshuang* (Li Shuangshuang; 1962), the director Lu Ren 魯勣 (1912-2002) described Shuangshuang’s shove of her husband as an attack on both Xiwang’s body and his ideology. As Lu Ren saw it, knocking over both the man and his ideas (*ba ta de ren he sixiang dou tui le ge yangmian chaotian* 把他的人和思想都推了個仰面朝天), was emblematic of the conflict between collectivism

⁵¹⁹ Li Zhun, “Li Shuangshuang,” 14. English translation see King, “A Brief Biography,” 25.

⁵²⁰ King, *Milestones*, 87.

⁵²¹ Richard King has linked Shuangshuang’s laughing to the transgressive laughter of two traditional female characters Li Cuilian 李翠蓮 and Yingning 嫵寧. See King, *Milestones*, 82-84, for his analysis on the women’s threatening male dominance, see page 84. Also see Kathleen Rowe, *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

(*jiti zhuyi* 集體主義) and individualism (*geren zhuyi* 個人主義).⁵²² According to Zhang Ruifang 張瑞芳 (1918-2012), the famous actress who played Li Shuangshuang in the film, the audience had difficulty accepting Shuangshuang's dramatic laugh. When playing the role, Zhang intentionally "chose a loud voice and infectious laughter as physical expressions for her forthright character."⁵²³ However, she received letters from the audience complaining that it is too inhuman (*tai bujin renqing* 太不近人情) for Shuangshuang to laugh like that after pushing her husband to the ground. Zhang herself also admitted that Shuangshuang's action is somehow illogical, because her first reaction, when seeing Xiwang's fall to the ground, should be to pull him up and treat his pains.⁵²⁴

Li Shuangshuang, indeed, deviates from the accepted norms of wifely behavior. Some peasant viewers even suggested that this scene of confrontation should be cut from the movie because it was excessive (*youdian guofen* 有點過分) to have Shuangshuang push Xiwang to the ground. They argued that a woman beating a man should not be equated with a woman taking on a revolutionary identity.⁵²⁵ The public was clearly imagining Li Shuangshuang based on their cultural familiarity with a more traditional model of a good wife. What the public did not realize, however, was that these shrewish

⁵²² Lu Ren 魯韌, "Li Shuangshuang de daoyan fenxi he gousi" 《李雙雙》的導演分析和構思, in *Li Shuangshuang—cong xiaoshuo dao dianying* 李雙雙—從小說到電影 (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1963), 222.

⁵²³ Lu Xiaoning, "Zhang Ruifang: Modelling the Socialist Red Star," in Mary Farquhar and Yingjin Zhang, eds., *Chinese Film Stars* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 103.

⁵²⁴ Zhang Ruifang 張瑞芳, "Banyan Li Shuangshuang de jidian tihui" 扮演李雙雙的幾點體會, in *Li Shuangshuang—cong xiaoshuo dao dianying*, 264.

⁵²⁵ "Li Shuangshuang gei women dailai le shenme?" 《李雙雙》給我們帶來了什麼? , published in *Renmin ribao* 人民日報 (November 29, 1962), cited from *Li Shuangshuang—cong xiaoshuo dao dianying*, 412.

qualities that they found unseemly in Li Shuangshuang were exactly what the state was promoting as desirable for the Great Leap new women.

The *Renmin wenzue* version, to further celebrate Shuangshuang's empowerment, greatly revises the plotline about the canteen work. Xiwang, after serving as the first cook at the commune canteen, is misled by a kinsman and misuses public supplies for a private event. In the 1959 version, the local officials decide to find someone to work with Xiwang and lead him. Shuangshuang recommends herself and the couple starts to work together at the canteen. However, in the *Renmin wenzue* revision Shuangshuang replaces Xiwang, pushing him to the pig farm where Shuangshuang had been working. The couple, assigned different territories, shifts from being collaborators to being public competitors. By pushing Xiwang away, the *Renmin wenzue* version erases any possibility of a man's contribution in the canteen achievement. The canteen becomes a stage to showcase the hard work and creativity of the women alone.

The *Renmin wenzue* text foregrounds the heroic achievements of the women by depicting their long night-shifts, their mastery of new technology, and their innovations to the machinery. It eliminates Xiwang by either directly deleting Xiwang's actions and speeches or by reassigning those to the female characters. Even Xiwang's invention of the new pancake stove showing his progressive collaboration in the 1959 version gets attributed to Shuangshuang. Men's contributions are dismissed in order to maximize women's potential to serve the Great Leap mission.

In accordance with the erasure of Xiwang from the central plot line about the development of the canteen, the *Renmin wenzue* text also converts any references to both genders to female-only pronouns. For example, "Shuangshuang and others"

(*Shuangshuang he dajia* 雙雙和大家) becomes “several women” (*jige funü* 幾個婦女); “Shuangshuang and Xiwang, Guiying” (*Shuangshuang he Xiwang, Guiying* 雙雙和喜旺, 桂英) is reduced to “Shuangshuang and Guiying” (*Shuangshuang he Guiying* 雙雙和桂英); The gender-neutral pronoun “they” (*tamen* 他們) is changed to the specific “they, the women” (*tamen* 她們). The women are given prominence at the level of both plot and language. Xiwang is relegated to the background where he eventually sings the praises of his wife.⁵²⁶ Shuangshuang’s displays of increasing affection toward Xiwang (“*wo bi yiqian geng ai ni*” “我比以前更愛你”) after witnessing his improvement are completely omitted from the 1959 text, leaving the *Renmin wenzxue* version to end with Xiwang’s serious vow that “I’ll certainly try to keep up with you!”⁵²⁷ Private romance within marriage gives way to competition and power struggles in the public realm. Political progressiveness has replaced intimacy in attaining and maintaining marital satisfaction.

In multiple ways the text *Li Shuangshuang xiaozhuan* positively engages with the type and trope of the shrew. First of all, some real-life models of peasant women inspired the characterization of Li Shuangshuang. According to Richard King’s interviews of the author Li Zhun, a direct source of inspiration came from a village woman the author met in the late 1950s at an office of Nanyang County in Henan. As recalled by Li Zhun, the woman was “young,” “very pretty,” but “straightforward and feisty.” She came to

⁵²⁶ Li Zhun, “Li Shuangshuang,” 23. Also, Xiwang starts to address his wife by her name, no longer referring to her as “the one in my home” (*an nage wuli ren* 僅那個屋裡人), “Little Chrysanthemum’s mother” (*an xiaoju ta ma* 僅小菊她媽), or “the one that cooks for me” (*an zuofan de* 僅做飯的). This change of language indicates that Xiwang finally comes to embrace Shuangshuang’s independence and public identity.

⁵²⁷ Li Zhun, “Li Shuangshuang,” 27. English translation see King, “A Brief Biography,” 61.

complain about her husband who had been elected accountant by the village but was too timid to take the job. She declared that she had been insisting her husband get the job. During her tirade, she even shouted at the phone when it rang.⁵²⁸ This village woman conforms to the image of the traditional shrewish wife: she is pretty, loud, bold, domineering, and good at subjecting her husband to public humiliation. The only difference is that her shrewishness serves the goals of the Great Leap Forward. When a shrewish wife polices her husband for the benefit of the nation, she is not repudiated but celebrated, not subjugated but sublimated.

In his own articles discussing his creation of Li Shuangshuang, Li Zhun also referred to several other peasant women he encountered during his visit in Henan.⁵²⁹ In his descriptions of the shared characteristics of these women, some terms stand out as echoing the qualities of the traditional shrew. He celebrated these women for their “feisty, bold, and sharp” character (*pola fengli* 潑辣鋒利; *pola dadan* 潑辣大膽) and “frank and outspoken” nature (*xinzhi koukuai* 心直口快).⁵³⁰ Considering that those attributes were associated only with shrews in traditional texts, Li Zhun’s affirmative usage of them points to a process of ideological elevation and purification of the disparaged female qualities during the early socialist period. *Pola* womanhood, once a form of dangerous transgressions of Confucian norms, has been transformed into a desirable manifestation of the radical values of the Great Leap ideology.

⁵²⁸ For descriptions of the author’s encounter with the village woman, see King, *Heroes*, 7; King, *Milestones*, 81-82.

⁵²⁹ Li Zhun, “Wo xi’ai nongcun xinren” 我喜愛農村新人 and “Xiang xin renwu jingshen shijie xuexi tansuo” 向新人物精神世界學習探索, in *Li Shuangshuang—cong xiaoshuo dao dianying*.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 202, 214.

Li Shuangshuang's character can be traced to the realities of the peasant women at the time, as well as traditional Chinese and Western literary sources. Li Zhun referenced the following literary works as influencing his creation of his heroine: *Kuaizui Li Cuilian ji* 快嘴李翠蓮記 (Story of the sharp-tongued Li Cuilian), *Yingning* 嬰寧 (Yingning), *Ye guniang Bala* 野姑娘芭拉 (literally, “the wild girl Bara”; it should refer to the 1949 Czechoslovak film *Divá Bára*, also known as *The Wild Bára*), *Ka'er man* 卡爾曼 (this is clearly a translation of *Carmen*, but it is unclear which version of *Carmen* Li Zhun saw or read), and Lu Xun's *Lihun* 離婚 (Divorce; 1925).⁵³¹

These literary sources come from different time periods and cultures, but they share one thing in common: their heroines are all unruly, transgressive, and carnivalesque. These controversial female characters were constantly subjected to criticism. Li Cuilian, the defiant daughter and wife originally appearing in a Tang dynasty transformation text (*bianwen* 變文), is satirized in *Kuaizui Li Cuilian ji* for her unwomanly features which include garrulity, irascibility, and violence.⁵³² Yingning, the giggling heroine in the eighteenth-century *Liaozhai zhiyi* tale though delightful for her childlike, mirthful, and filial natures, is a fox-spirit and “a threat to male dominance.”⁵³³ The modern text *Lihun* depicts the peasant wife Aigu 愛姑 as both attacking and submitting to feudal norms.

Even though each of these texts in some ways disparage their female protagonists, Li Zhun still used them as sources for his heroic Li Shuangshuang. As pointed out by

⁵³¹ Ibid., 214.

⁵³² For the plot and a brief analysis of the Li Cuilian story, see Wu, *The Chinese Virago*, 166-69. For English translation of the story, see H. C. Chang, “The Shrew,” in *Chinese Literature: Popular Fiction and Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973).

⁵³³ King, *Milestones*, 84.

Krista Hang, “this combination of revolutionary narratives and past literary forms gave rise to unexpected images and characters, some of which were acceptable and others that faced criticism.”⁵³⁴ Li Shuangshuang unexpectedly combines socialist progressiveness and traditionally disparaged shrewish qualities. However, the bifurcated split between the ideological, high-profile celebration of Shuangshuang’s feistiness and the unease of the audience concerning the appropriateness of her *pola* womanhood points to the limits of the state’s efforts to co-opt the traditional shrew for its revolutionary goals. Likely due to the fact that these literary sources “might not have been thought suitable as models for a new socialist woman,” Li Zhun was unwilling to reveal his literary sources until thirty years after he wrote the story.⁵³⁵

The cinematic adaption of *Li Shuangshuang xiaozhuan* also makes clear that the characterization of Li Shuangshuang as an exemplary socialist woman is grafted onto the traditional shrew. Some scholars have pointed out that the image of Li Shuangshuang is clearly a combination of the shrew (*pofu*) and the female knight-errant (*xianii* 俠女) of traditional literature.⁵³⁶ In addition to analyzing the content, recent scholarship has also noted the gendered dimension in the format of the film, such as the use of the folk tradition *erren* 二人 (literally, “two persons,” known as “two-person play” or “double-

⁵³⁴ Hang, *Literature*, 9.

⁵³⁵ King, *Heroes*, 8. According to Richard King, Li Zhun first admitted the source of Li Cuilian in his interview with him in 1993. Given that Li Zhun had clearly mentioned these sources in the article I cite here from the 1963 collection, King is either ignorant of this article or is referring to some unclear events happening during the 1960s that might have silenced Li Zhun and made him unable to admit those seemingly unlikely sources for decades.

⁵³⁶ Li Xujian 李修建, “Gongheguo qianqi dianying zhong de nüxing xingxiang” 共和國前期電影中的女性形象, *Changsha ligong daxue xuebao (sheke ban)* 長沙理工大學學報（社科版）, no.1 (2008).

role play” in Chinese folk performance).⁵³⁷ Since in *erren* the female lead always has the upper hand as a strong role pitted against the clownish, powerless male lead, *erren* is deemed as an “invisible structure” (*yinxing jiegou* 隱形結構) that underpins the comical conflict between Shuangshuang and Xiwang in the film.⁵³⁸ By adapting the *erren* mode, the film visualizes the power reversal between husband and wife and makes female empowerment visually recognizable and palatable to viewers.

When Zhang Ruifang played Li Shuangshuang in the film, she needed to experiment to find the right measure of *pola*. As she wrote, Zhang’s biggest concern when she took the role was how to act out the *pola* womanhood. She recalled, when Li Zhun was considering her for the role of Shuangshuang, his only hesitation was whether Zhang Ruifang could be *pola* enough for the role (*zhishi danxin wo nengfou pola de chulai* 只是擔心我能否潑辣得出來).⁵³⁹ In order to meet the demand for a *pola* model of the new woman on screen, Zhang Ruifang put a lot of effort into her performance. For example, she practiced her enunciation when saying the lines so that she could sound like a sharp-tongued and fast-thinking (*zuikuai bujia sisuo* 嘴快不加思索) young woman.⁵⁴⁰ She blamed herself for not being able to present Shuangshuang’s *pola* nature when she played a scene in which Shuangshuang is wiping the sweat off her face with a handkerchief. She hoped that, instead of gracefully fanning her face with the

⁵³⁷ Chen Sihe 陳思和, *Zhongguo dangdai wenxueshi jiaocheng* 中國當代文學史教程 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2004), 49-50. Chen’s idea is also acknowledged in: Hang, *Literature*, 67, 71-2; King, *Milestones*, 90.

⁵³⁸ Chen Sihe, *Zhongguo*, 49.

⁵³⁹ Zhang Ruifang, “Banyan,” 233.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 240.

handkerchief, she could have used more strength in wiping off the sweat so that her action could be *pola* (*dongzuo ruguo pola yixie* 動作如果潑辣一些).⁵⁴¹

During the process of shooting the film, Zhang Ruifang was constantly struggling to find the right way to perform *pola*. How to successfully and appropriately bring Shuangshuang's *pola* to the screen was her major concern. Based on her own narration, she sometimes blamed herself for not being able to give full expression to Shuangshuang's *pola* nature. Some in the production crew were impatient with her efforts to focus on Shuangshuang's combativeness and *pola* character (*guang qiangdiao Shuangshuang douzhengxing qiang he xingge pola* 光強調雙雙鬥爭性強和性格潑辣).⁵⁴² She was constantly reminded by everyone not to be too fierce (*dajia zong tixing wo bie tai xiong* 大家總提醒我別太凶).⁵⁴³

As discussed earlier, when Jiang Qing played Nora in 1935 the audience urged her to go even fiercer, but the socialist producers of *Li Shuangshuang* were consciously trying to get Zhang Ruifang to temper her fierceness. This change of expectation can be explained by the mission of the film; along with other comedies produced after the disaster of the Great Leap Forward, *Li Shuangshuang* was to bring healing, and relax and entertain the audience.⁵⁴⁴ However, I argue that the difference also reflects a changing relationship of shrewhood to the political and cultural zietgeist. Unlike the premodern

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 248-49.

⁵⁴² Ibid., 240.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 242.

⁵⁴⁴ For information about these comic films produced in the interlude after the Great Leap Forward and before the later more intense movements, see King, *Milestones*, 86; Krista Van Fleit Hang, "Zhong Xinghuo: Communist Film Worker," in Farquhar and Zhang, eds., *Chinese Film Stars*, 109; Hang, *Literature*, 20-21, 63, 123.

context in which the shrew was treated as alien and adverse to Confucian ideology, May Fourth writers began to appropriate shrewish energy to motivate women to break from tradition. The socialist ideology of the Great Leap Forward further appropriated the revolutionary spirit of shrews as a model for progressive women. Now aligned with the state ideology, *pola* womanhood was celebrated as beneficial to the goals of the state rather than being something that needed to be policed or punished.

As shrewish qualities became more integral to the socialist new woman models, the shrew seemed to lose her radical edge. As someone coopted into state ideology, the socialist shrew was not free to act out in pursuit of her own goals, but needed to follow the lead of the state in determining the limits of her transgressive actions. Even the actress Zhang Ruifang needed to negotiate her interpretation in order to conform to the current ideological expectations. *Pola* womanhood was handled with care and compromises. The state was fully aware of what was at stake in its endeavor to reclaim previously negative shrewish qualities. As Zhang Ruifang recalled, she had to insert feminine tenderness into her feisty performance (*pola dadan zhong kandao ta nüxing de wencun* 激辣大膽中看到她女性的溫存) so that her Shuangshuang would not be perceived as a “wicked shrew” (*e poniang* 惡婆娘) detested by everyone for her cruelty (*shui douhui yanwu ta de hengbao* 誰都會厭惡她的橫暴).⁵⁴⁵

The Great Leap ideology rehabilitated shrew images and tropes selectively and strategically. The unstable boundary between the Li Shuangshuang and the detested “*e poniang*” marks the ideological intention of differentiating progressive female models from backward ones, even though the two types share many qualities of *pola* womanhood.

⁵⁴⁵ Zhang Ruifang, “Banyan,” 245.

In order to make this distinction legible to all audiences, many Great Leap stories make use of negative female characters to serve as foils to the heroines so that the audience could easily tell when the *pola* womanhood is viewed positively. For example, the Old Granny Wu (*Lao Wupo* 老吳婆) in *Xueying xuechui* is definitely *pola*, but she comes from the less progressive class of the rich and middle peasant (*fuyu zhongnong* 富裕中農) and does things only for her own benefit. The film and storybook adaptations of *Li Shuangshuang xiaozhuan* created two women who are adversaries of Shuangshuang; predictably, these women use their *pola* manner to oppose the campaign rather than to serve it.

These textual designs indicate that if a *pola* woman uses her unruly energy to counteract antirevolutionary forces, she is a new woman; if she pits herself against progressive causes, she is no more than a traditional shrew. Essentially Shuangshuang and her opponents are all *pola*, but the causes they serve determine their ideological meaning as either progressive or backward. A critic commented in 1962 that *pola* women and bold personalities can develop in two ways: the negative variants defend individualism (*weihu geren zhuyi* 維護個人主義) and this kind of people are inherently weak even though their appearance is fierce; examples of this type of character are Zhao Shuli's 趙樹理 Chang Youli 常有理 and Xiaotui Teng 小腿疼 who are both typical shrews. The other type of strong women defend collectivism (*wei hu jiti zhuyi* 維護集體主義) without a care for their personal gain or loss.⁵⁴⁶ A woman's political standing determines the nature of her *pola* attributes. Some peasant women were receptive to this

⁵⁴⁶ Ma Tieding 馬鐵丁, “Dagong wusi jianyi yongwei” 大公無私見義勇為, published in *Zhongguo qingnian* 中國青年, no.23 (1962), cited from *Li Shuangshuang—cong xiaoshuo dao dianying*, 335.

ideological model and when trying to convince others that Shuangshuang's *pola* womanhood was different from the stereotypical negative model, they too mentioned Shuangshuang's commitment to collectivism. One peasant woman was quoted as saying she could not agree that Shuangshuang is a detestable shrew because she cares a lot about collective matters (*dui jiti de shiqing shifen guanxin* 對集體的事情十分關心).⁵⁴⁷ A male peasant justified Shuangshuang's offensive temper (*piqi tai "chong"* 脾氣太“沖”) by recognizing her eagerness to protect collective benefits (*weihu jiti de liyi* 維護集體的利益).⁵⁴⁸

Collective, ideological interests were used to legitimate shrewish behaviors. As we have seen, this was not new. Before the May Fourth era, the early radical suffragettes proudly adapted violence in order to publicize their collective goal of gender equality. During the May Fourth era, new culture intellectuals rehabilitated shrew archetypes and attributes in the service of their ideological battle against feudal values. Butterfly writers used the images of modern-day shrews to articulate a collective ambivalence about the new women. After the May Fourth era, non-leftist writings playfully incorporated shrew tropes as a means of resolving matters of collective concern about national destiny and citizenship. The early Communist discourses promoted a new model of the shrew to contribute to, as well as challenge, the cause of the peasant uprisings and the women's movement.

⁵⁴⁷ “Sheyuan qi kua Shuangshuang hao, reai jiti pinde gao” 社員齊夸雙雙好，熱愛集體品德高, published in *Shanxi ribao* 山西日報 (December 15, 1962), cited from *Li Shuangshuang—cong xiaoshuo dao dianying*, 417.

⁵⁴⁸ “Li Shuangshuang shi sheyuan de hao bangyang” 李雙雙是社員的好榜樣, published in *Hubei ribao* 湖北日報 (December 12, 1962), cited from *Li Shuangshuang—cong xiaoshuo dao dianying*, 420.

As I have shown, shrews did not die out as China entered the modern era. *Pola* womanhood was continuously revisited and repurposed after the collapse of imperial China. A most recent revival can be seen in the widespread enthusiasm for the image of the *nü hanzi* 女漢子 (literally, “female man.”) It means “manly woman,” or “a woman who is more like a real man than a man.”⁵⁴⁹ in mainland “internet fiction” (*wangluo xiaoshuo* 網絡小說) and TV drama. Those tough, independent, and physically strong women powerfully echo the “iron girl” (*tie guniang* 鐵姑娘) ideal popularized during the Cultural Revolution. The “iron girl” was quickly dismissed after the Cultural Revolution as being emblematic of the excesses of Maoist ideology. Cultural figures in post-Mao China turned their backs on masculine womanhood and began to return feminine features back to Chinese definitions of the modern woman. This raises the question of why, twenty-first century Chinese popular culture is reviving the *tie guniang* in the updated and more versatile *nü hanzi*? What cultural shibboleth requires *pola* womanhood to lead the attack? What can *pola* woman do for today’s cultural tensions and for women themselves? When public discourses again deliberately mix the images of *nü hanzi* with *pofu* in contemporary media, is this another call for us to once again face the ambiguous nature of the shrew, as a type that is both demeaning and empowering to women? I hope to explore these questions in future studies on the reconfiguring of the shrew in contemporary Chinese culture.

⁵⁴⁹ Sandy To, *China's Leftover Women: Late Marriage among Professional Women and its Consequences* (Abingdon: Rutledge, 2015), 51.

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