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Embodying Modernity: Humor, Gender Politics, and Popular Culture in Republican Guangzhou

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Embodying Modernity:

Humor, Gender Politics, and Popular Culture in Republican Guangzhou

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

Roanna Yuk-Heng Cheung

2016
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Embodying Modernity:

Humor, Gender Politics, and Popular Culture in Republican Guangzhou

by

Roanna Yuk-Heng Cheung

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Andrea Sue Goldman, Chair

My dissertation analyzes the representations of gender in cartoons and popular literature in 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou as a window onto the intersection among gender, humor, and identity construction in Republican-era (1911-1949) China. During this period, Guangzhou, among other cities, saw a proliferation of comical works that created an affective community in which both authors and audiences could enjoy, question, or escape from their urban experiences. The scenes and stories represented often exploited gendered characters, motifs, and tropes to express political dissent, to advocate for modern progress, or to caution against moral decadence. While previous scholarship explores the ways in which issues such as footbinding and prostitution became discursive fields in which nationalism and modernity were debated in early twentieth century China, the role that humor played in various gendered debates has been largely overlooked. My study fills this void by emphasizing the ways in which humor was mobilized to
respond to changing relations between men and women, the private and the public, state and society, local and national cultures, and China and the global community.

Through close reading of a wide assortment of textual and visual materials—newspapers, popular fiction, cartoon magazines, local opera scripts, and advertisements—I reconstruct the competing discourses on gender ideals and urban life lying below the surface of playful banter or satirical sketches. In particular, I focus on the locally specific elements of humor, such as the use of Cantonese dialect and cultural phenomena particular to the city, to demonstrate the ways in which such commentary participated in, withdrew from, or competed against the conception of a broader national entity at different historical moments. I also use the iconic Modern Girl (and the Modern Boy, her male counterpart) as a category of analysis to reveal not only the masculine construction of local humor and identity, but also the shared but uneven colonial influence and channels of global exchange that linked different cities around the world commercially, visually, and ideologically. My project contributes to the field of modern Chinese history by interrogating the interplay between humor and gender in the conceptions of cosmopolitan modernity and China’s place in the world in local society.
The dissertation of Roanna Yuk-Heng Cheung is approved.

Roy Bin Wong

Ellen C. Dubois

Hui-Shu Lee

Andrea Sue Goldman, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2016
In loving memory of my grandmother, Chung Yu Chan (1925-2016)
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Finally, I dedicate this work to my dearest grandmother Chung Yu Chan, who passed away this year. She has always encouraged me to pursue my dreams and stood behind me. She will be greatly missed and never forgotten.
Vita

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“Flower Market: Representations of Working Women in Early Twentieth Century South China,” presentation at the Western Association of Women Historians (WAWH) Annual Conference, May 12-14, 2016


After 1933, in the literary world of Guangzhou, a little flower bloomed, and that was the birth of *youmo* [humor]. In China, Mr. Lin Yutang of *Analects Fortnightly* first promoted *youmo*, and its popularity spread across the country… The popularity of *youmo* spread to Guangzhou very early… Youths who are relatively sensible will not fall into such a trap, since, after all, [those who employ] *youmo* are willing to forgo their integrity in order to cater to lowly tastes. These authors are like clowns on the theatrical stage, who paint their noses white and jump about on the stage. Even if they can induce the laughter of the audience at the moment, the audience will forget about them afterwards. The lowliest, basest materials are trotted out, not even comparing to what is written by Lin Yutang, for they are fanciful and incredibly absurd. How [are these authors] different from the male storytellers in the teahouses and opium dens, or the blind male singers who play wooden-fish tunes? Such things should not be allowed in our times, especially in Guangzhou. Otherwise, the wasteland of the literary world of the south will be strewn with infinite thorn bushes.¹

In 1934, not long after the term, “humor,” translated by the Western-educated writer Lin Yutang 林語堂 (1895-1976) as *youmo* 幽默, widely circulated and became a subject of heated discussion across the country, a middle school student named Guo Zhifu published a piece titled, “‘Humor’ in Guangzhou,” to warn local writers not to follow Lin Yutang’s lead. Guo Zhifu argues that “humor” as a literary mode debases the tastes of both the authors and their audience by engaging in crass topics such as women’s buttocks, smoking, and farts. These subject matters, Guo reasons, cannot help reform society; they do nothing but induce meaningless laughter and

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¹ Guo Zhifu 郭直夫, “Youmo zai Guangzhou” 「幽默」在廣州 [“Humor” in Guangzhou], *Yizhong xuesheng* 一中
In addition, Guo compares authors who incorporate humor into their works to male storytellers (*gonggu sinsang* 講古先生) and blind male singers playing wooden-fish tunes (*cheong mukyu manggong* 唱木魚盲公). These were lower class entertainers commonly seen in Guangzhou who not only were poorly educated but also desperately tried to cater to popular taste in order to make a living. Through a stark contrast between the lowly, vulgar, and profit-oriented nature of male entertainers, and the austere, socially engaged literary style that local youths are advised to adopt, Guo Zhifu projects his ideal of modern male authorship and defines the domain of literary production in gendered terms. Even though the writer himself is only a middle school student, his criticism of the *youmo* phenomenon speaks to important questions about the production and reception of comic cultures and authorial gender identity in Republican China. Besides the influence of Lin Yutang and his magazine *Analects Fortnightly*, what were the contexts that led to the production and circulation of humor in modern Guangzhou? In what ways did writers and artists employ techniques and tropes of humor that may have incited amusement, emulation, disapproval or other responses in local society? How was gender featured in the local use of humor, and what does that tell us about the gender identity of the authors and the imagining of a local and yet also Chinese modernity?

Modern Girls, Modern Boys, and Colonial Modernity in Guangzhou

My dissertation investigates representations of gender (with an emphasis on women) in the popular culture of 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou (a.k.a. Canton), the provincial capital of Guangdong and a major trading port with the West since the eighteenth century, as a window onto the relationship between gender and humor and the construction of an urban modernity in

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2 Ibid., 195.
Republican-era (1911-1949) China. By extension, I examine the cultural production and discursive forces at work in early twentieth-century China as processes embedded in a larger transnational network of capitalist economy, imperialist expansion, and translingual knowledge exchange, or what has been called “colonial modernity.” Here, modernity is not conceived as a set of historical phenomena that initially developed in Euro-American metropoles and only spread to the rest of the world through the workings of colonial enterprises. Neither do I propose an alternative version of modernity that is uniquely Chinese and can only be explained within a strictly nationalist framework. Instead, I emphasize how knowledge systems, print culture, visual trends, and gender ideologies traveled between the metropoles and colonial sites like Guangzhou, testifying that “the modernity of non-European colonies is as indisputable as the colonial core of European modernity.”

To reveal these transnational circuits of technology, media, trade, and commodity production that were at work in modern China, I evoke the Modern Girl as a category of analysis. A groundbreaking study on this subject, Modern Girl Around the World, demonstrates that the iconic Modern Girl, the flapper with bobbed hair, painted face, and elongated body, appeared in advertisements, cartoons, and films almost simultaneously in Shanghai, Tokyo, New York and other major cities in the world during the period between the First World War and the Second World War. In the case of China, for instance, the de rigueur Modern Girl-style manifested in the qipao 旗袍 (lit. banner gown) dress and high-heel shoes, a look that was “so widely adopted by women of diverse social groups… that by the 1930s it had become a passport

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4 Ibid., 1.
to opportunity and a dress code of necessity for young female city dwellers.”

This research points to the ways in which the Modern Girl signified the shared but uneven colonial influence and channels of global exchange that linked different cities around the world commercially, visually, and ideologically. Studying the Modern Girl’s appearance in 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou allows me to situate local developments of nationalist, gender, and class ideology in the broader, worldwide traffic of popular media, commercial capitalism, discourses of female sexuality, and modern aesthetics. My study further examines the largely overlooked figure of the Modern Boy, the fashion-loving dandy and male counterpart of the Modern Girl, whose representations were almost as ubiquitous and correspondingly reveal discourses of masculinity, aesthetics, local and national identity, and modernity.

My analysis of both Modern Girls and Modern Boys teases out the intertwined relationships between local developments, transregional movements of people, cultural commodities and ideas, and the international context of colonial modernity. Modern Girls and Modern Boys in Guangzhou were often identified and depicted with locally specific terms and features (see Chapters 2 and 3). Modern Girls and Modern Boys were also patrons to local entertainment such as Cantonese opera, a native theatrical form that starting in the Republican period had begun to undergo innovations by incorporating the newest technology for visual and

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audio effects and Western musical instrumentation.\textsuperscript{7} Their appearances and tastes were therefore domesticated not only by other observers’ use of Cantonese slang, but also by their interest in a hybrid art form. In addition, these young men and women were noted for emulating the fashions and trends of other major cities such as Shanghai and the nearby British colony of Hong Kong. Modern Girls and Modern Boys in Guangzhou also showed an explicit interest in all things Western and were perceived as frivolous and shallow, a trait that also characterized their counterparts around the world. Altogether, their representations captured the transnational travel of things, technology, and knowledge down to the local level in an age of modern capitalism.

One of the questions central to my study is how different gendered identities, personas, and categories relationally define, overlap with, dialectically oppose, or contradict one another within intellectual and popular cultural circles of Republican Guangzhou. Scholars have long contended that the New Woman figure was often evoked to channel the nationalist agenda and progressive gender ideals of intellectuals, in contrast to the Modern Girl icon that embodied sexual decadence and the corrupting influence of Western capitalism. Nonetheless, their representations also share striking similarities, including their modern appearance, background in new-style education, and support for notions of free love.\textsuperscript{8} More notably, both types of women represent ambivalences in the gender ideologies of male intellectuals and popular cultural agents alike, as women were often expected to be fashionably Westernized but modest, politically conscious yet domestically oriented, advocating free love while remaining sexually chaste.

Similarly, representations of Modern Boys, whose pursuit of fashion trends and interest in

\textsuperscript{7} For the innovations in Cantonese opera during the Republican period, see Virgil K. Y. Ho, \textit{Understanding Canton: Rethinking Popular Culture in the Republican Period} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 314-16.

\textsuperscript{8} Sarah E. Stevens, “Figuring Modernity: The New Woman and the Modern Girl in Republican China,” \textit{National Women’s Studies Association Journal} 15, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 86-89. Some scholars point out that the similarities and differences between these two feminine tropes could be found in the literary and visual cultures of modern societies across the world. See The Modern Girl Around the World Research Group, \textit{The Modern Girl Around the World}, 9-10.
Western culture were compromised by undesirable qualities such as effeminacy and shallowness, demonstrate the conflicting notions of masculinity advanced by educated elites and popular writers and artists. Adding to this complex repertoire of gendered tropes is the figure of the middle-aged male urbanite, mostly accompanied by his traditional looking yet fierce wife. His outdated fashion, knowledge, and ideologies provide amusing contrast to his lustful behavior and lack of self-restraint. Through depictions of these perceived epitomes of China’s past and problematic paths to modernity, popular cultural commentators sought to construct their own predominantly masculine modern selfhood, which as a result turned out to be constantly in flux. Moreover, popular cultural agents tended to create and play with multiple, hyperbolic gendered role-types, including the male cross-dresser, the old lady (who turns out to be a male writer), and the henpecked husband, self-parodies of which complicated the understanding of their visions for femininity and masculinity in Republican Guangzhou.

Using female (as well as male) imagery as my source of analysis, my study focuses, in particular, on the relationship between humor and gender in the popular culture of Republican Guangzhou. In doing so, it adds to the scholarship on gender as a signifier of urban life and the nation in modern China. The history of modern China has long been dominated by the literary account of the New Culture movement, narrated as a tale of imperialistic oppressions, failed struggles and dreams, and blood and tears of people from all social strata, all of which were often represented in highly gendered terms. From the tragic figure of Lu Xun’s Sister Xianglin in his famous short story “New Year’s Sacrifice” to the independent, educated yet emotionally conflicted and willful Miss Sophie created by Ding Ling, women became synecdoche for China’s suffering and hopelessness, serving as the primary vehicle to deliver the authors’ critical stance against “old” China or disillusionment toward China’s present. I challenge this notion of
women as the tragic embodiment of “old” and modern China by revealing an important, often untold aspect of the story of Republican China, in which Modern Girls and Modern Boys, along with other gendered characters, take the center stage and perform different kinds of comedies. Romancing in public, pursuing the latest fashion, fighting with their spouses, or facing gender inequities in the modern workplace constitute some of the most popular plotlines of the farces enacted by these figures. These comical narratives present a world vastly different from the grim portrayals in New Culture literature, and in turn allow the readers to engage with and reimagine social realities through a playful, gendered lens. Not only did the individual, mundane concerns of male and female urbanites become the main focus, they were also depicted in an exaggerated fashion and addressed with mostly futile, albeit hilarious, solutions to highlight the excitement, alienation, and frustrations that characterized life in a metropolis. Nonetheless, these comical figures are similar to Sister Xianglin or Miss Sophie as an embodiment of certain visions of China’s past, present or prospective future. In the popular cultural world of Guangzhou, the authors’ vision could range from the celebration of the triumph of Western cultures and ideals, to fear of social unrest and the breach of habitual gender norms. Studying such figures, the comedic tropes and the media in which they appear, their authorship, and the broader readership, provides an alternative perspective from which to understand the values, tastes, and identity formation of writers and artists in modern China, a historical narrative that has long been overshadowed by the New Culture discourse.

Previous scholarship has tried to unpack the “woman’s question” in late Qing and Republican China to account for the ways in which gender became intertwined with the representation of the modern nation-state. For instance, much research has been done on how issues such as girls’ education, motherhood, footbinding, and prostitution became discursive
fields in which nationalism and modernity were debated in early twentieth-century China. Most of the time, however, these studies adopt the serious tone of government authorities and intellectuals under investigation; the role that humor played in various gendered debates has been largely neglected. Parodies and caricatures related to these debates, if ever mentioned, are usually added as a side note rather than analyzed as important voices that might influence a broader mass audience or potentially challenge the authority of political leaders. My dissertation seeks to fill this void by placing humor at the center of gender history in modern China. I seek to understand how humor was mobilized to respond to changing relations between men and women, the private and the public, state and society, local and national cultures, and China and the global community.

Theories of Humor

I employ humor as an umbrella term that embodies the many creative modes engaged by popular cultural agents to induce laughter, including jokes, satire, parody, and wit. Since popular writers and artists were known for exploring different personas and creative formats, I seek to broaden the scope of my research materials to include both the textual forms including informal prose essays and short stories and visual media such as cartoons. This approach allows me to identify gendered themes featured prominently, and through sheer quantity, alone, clearly well-

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9 For the changing perceptions of girls’ education in turn-of-the-century China, see Xiaoping Cong, “From ‘Cainü’ to ‘Nü Jiaoxi’: Female Normal Schools and the Transformation of Women’s Education in the Late Qing Period, 1895-1911,” in Different Worlds of Discourse: Transformations of Gender and Genre in Late Qing and Early Republican China, ed. Nanxiu Qian, Grace S. Fong, and Richard J. Smith (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 115-46. For the conceptions of motherhood in the late Qing educational and intellectual circles, see Joan Judge, The Precious Raft of History: The Past, the West, and the Woman Question in China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 107-38. An analysis of footbinding as the quintessential manifestation of China’s national weakness and also a point of entry for envisioning a new China can be seen in Dorothy Ko, Cinderella’s Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 9-68. For the changing views toward and national debate on prostitution in the Republican era, see Gail Hershatter, Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
received across the popular cultural landscape of modern Guangzhou. Historians and literary scholars have provided insights on which terms adequately designate comic cultures in Chinese history. Christopher Rea uses the word “laughter” to capture various modes of comedic expressions from amusement, farce to ridicule, particularly because the corresponding Chinese character *xiao* 笑 “has multiple possible meanings as a verb (to laugh, to smile, to mock), as a descriptor (laughable, ridiculous, derisive), and as a noun (laughter, smile, joke, jest).” Other scholars tend to focus their research on specific forms of comedy emblematic of a historical era and locale, such as the exposé novels of the late Qing, the culture of leisure encapsulated in informal prose essays in the Republican era, amusement culture and caricatures in early twentieth-century Shanghai, and satirical literature in wartime Chongqing. While my study surveys a variety of textual and visual forms of comedy, I choose to employ the Western-derived term “humor,” rather than neutral words such as “laughter,” to emphasize the modernity and transnationalism of the styles, thematic choices, and production pertaining to these works. Originally signifying the physiological components within the human body that correspond to specific temperaments, the notion of humor as discursive comedy gradually took shape and

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became the defining trait of modern selfhood, including the conception of political liberty and economic individualism, in Europe and later the United States.\textsuperscript{12} The translation of and debate on humor spearheaded by Lin Yutang starting in the late 1920s further points to a key moment in the conception of modern selfhood, affect, and national identity in China, which was part of a larger conversation in cities across the globe and revealing the travel of and cross-cultural linkages behind modern discourses and ideologies.\textsuperscript{13} Of course, to some writers in Guangzhou, this neologism represented not a progressive ideology intended to edify or uplift the Chinese masses, but a variety of lowbrow, vulgar comedy sanctioned by debauched intellectuals such as Lin Yutang to corrupt popular tastes. Bearing in mind the different ways in which the word “humor” was interpreted in the local and national contexts, I will use this term in order to highlight the modernity, and the transregional and transnational linkages, of various discourses and popular cultural phenomena under investigation in this study.

I emphasize three theoretical interpretations of humor that are relevant to the present study, namely: feelings of superiority, tactics of resistance, and social corrective. While these understandings of humor may seem to contradict one another, they can be evoked to provide plausible explanations for stories that were worded or portrayed in ambiguous ways. The superiority approach to humor is most famously brought up by English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) in a discussion of human nature in his masterpiece, \textit{The Leviathan}. Hobbes argues that laughter is mainly caused by the rise of “sudden glory” upon observing the

\textsuperscript{12} For the development of the discourses of humor in modern Europe and United States, see Daniel Wickberg, \textit{The Senses of Humor: Self and Laughter in Modern America} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 13-45.

\textsuperscript{13} Qian Suoqiao, “Discovering Humour in Modern China: The Launching of the \textit{Analects Fortnightly} Journal and the ‘Year of Humour’ (1933),” in \textit{Humour in Chinese Life and Letters: Classical and Traditional Approaches}, ed. Jocelyn Chey and Jessica Milner Davis (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 210-18. For a full discussion of the translation, theorization and debate of humor by Lin Yutang and his \textit{Analects Fortnightly} group, see Rea, \textit{The Age of Irreverence}, 132-58.
imperfections of others. Similarly, in *Passions of the Souls*, a philosophy tract that examines types of human emotions, French thinker René Descartes (1596-1650) considers derision or scorn as a combination of joy and hatred that arises when one encounters those with physical defects or social defamation. These insights might aid us in understanding, for instance, the motives behind Republican Guangzhou popular writers and cartoonists’ mockery of Modern Boys and Modern Girls who blindly pursue the latest trends or the middle-aged husbands who feared their domineering wives. By making fun of these imagined others, the authors thus asserted their positions as socially superior cultural arbiters.

Such use of humor from a superior standpoint became especially gendered when considering the frequent occurrences of women as the objects, rather than the subjects and producers, of laughter. In a seminal work, *Women and Comedy*, the editors underline the ways in which the feminine was often associated with things that were “irrational, paradoxical, illogical, incoherent, fallacious, or inappropriate,” all of which also characterize the substance of comedy. Consequently, as I will point out throughout my study, reducing women to the butt of jokes is the principal means through which male writers and artists bolster their sense of superiority and help circumscribe the production and reception of humor as a predominantly masculine space.

Humor can also be used as an important field of social resistance. From the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thinkers including Herbert Spencer (1802-1903) and Sigmund

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Freud (1856-1939) tended to view the act of laughing as a means of releasing repressed energy and a safety valve that prevented dangerous social tensions and conflicts. In contrast, Michel De Certeau (1925-1986) challenges the relief theory by arguing that ordinary people often evoke play as a tactic to navigate the rigid territories guarded by political and social elites, to carve out creative space of their own, and, ultimately, to survive within or even resist against established structures. This concept of play as a space-making and confrontational mechanism rings true in the popular culture of Republican Guangzhou, as local popular writers and cartoonists expressed dissatisfaction with the ruling elites using critiques and parodies of gender policies, thus overturning the definitions of sexual mores and local modernity which previously had been discursive fields dominated by the government and intellectuals.

The defiant potential of humor notwithstanding, comedy can also serve as a corrective that keeps citizens in check within the acceptable parameters of sociocultural and gender conduct. This theory was mainly put forth by Henri Bergson (1859-1941), who believed that “being intended to humble, [laughter] must make a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed, [and] by laughter, society avenges itself for the liberties taken with it.” Together with the superiority theory, Bergson’s concept of laughter helps highlight the ways in which humorists could act as proponents of perceived social norms by exposing people whose “mechanical inelasticity” rendered them incapable of observing and adapting to the

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environment. This type of comedy falls under the category of what Simon Critchley terms “reactionary humor” or the “comedy of recognition” that “simply seeks to reinforce consensus and in no way seeks to criticize the established order or change the situation in which we find ourselves.” In the case of Republican Guangzhou, the satire of professional women’s sexual transgression serves as lucid examples of the use of such humor to expose the ways in which women stepped outside social expectations and to, potentially, constrain them.

My study also emphasizes that humor constitutes a lived experience through which the agents and recipients resonate in a historically and geographically situated context. Scholars have long debated whether there exists a unique “Chinese” sense of humor that predated and somehow survived the coming of the West and remained central to the understanding of Chinese identity and culture. For instance, C. T. Hsia maintains that the Chinese people only inherited an immature, unsophisticated laughter rather than a true sense of humor compared to Westerners due to the lack of humane education and the Confucian emphasis on li (ritual propriety). Henry Wells’ study compares and contrasts comedic expressions in various visual and literary forms of China and the West to highlight a rich tradition of Chinese humor in the premodern period. Nevertheless, neither Hsia nor Wells took into account the social environment of a given historical moment that colored the forms, styles, usages and critical receptions of humor in their discussions. For instance, the ways in which new comedic forms, such as cartoons or slapstick films, were imported and later evolved in early twentieth-century China certainly reveals the complicated processes of cultural exchange between China and Euro-America, often via the

20 Ibid., 18-22.
mediation of Japan. Cross-cultural interactions as such challenge the overly simplified and essentialist binary of humorous traditions from Oriental and Occidental civilizations presented by Hsia and Wells.

Recent scholarship accentuates the importance of situating humor in its historical time-space. This approach can help document continuities and changes in the tastes and social attitudes of a society across time, and write the history of China back into a global narrative by identifying the travel and development of comedic ideas and forms. In his monograph, *The Age of Irreverence*, Christopher Rea compellingly argues that even within China itself, “the comic cultures of [the early twentieth century] were too heterogeneous to be reducible to a cozy sense of humor defined by ethnicity or nationality.”24 It is suggested that within the cultural terrain of modern China there already existed numerous comedic communities that were further divided by their linguistic features, media, and ideological concerns, to name a few; it would be hard to group such cacophonous laughers into a single category of Chinese humor. The two-volume series, *Humour in Chinese Life and Letters*, edited by Jocelyn Chey and Jessica Milner Davis, similarly points to the fact that “while technical aspects of the Chinese language influence the mode or expression of humour, they do not affect its substance, nor are they responsible for any unique or absolutely different ‘Chinese’ quality of humour.”25 Such a perspective leads to their wide selection of essays ranging from humor in Chinese medicine, Confucian and Daoist classics, to the elements of play in cartoons, Cantopop, and internet spoof that spanned time and

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space and were increasingly involved in the flowering of a global humor culture.\textsuperscript{26} My work, too, seeks to contextualize the use of humor in informal prose essays, cartoons, and other media of 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou in order to come to a more nuanced understanding of the identity construction processes and visions for modernity in local society in a particular historical moment. Even as I assert the local specificity of humor, I reject the assertion of an inherent, transhistorical sense of Cantonese humor that remains miraculously unaffected throughout the long twentieth century or is unequivocally present in the popular culture of Cantonese-speaking communities today.

Guangzhou: The Treaty Port and “Cradle of Chinese Revolution”

To understand the complex interplay between humor, gender, and colonial modernity in Republican China, I situate my study in Guangzhou, a treaty port and metropolis of the south that was vastly different from its northern counterparts in terms of administrative structures, geographical settings, and cultural milieu. In order to distinguish the unique historical experience of China under Euro-American and Japanese imperialism from the colonial rule in India, scholars have used the term semicolonialism to highlight the “the multiple, layered, intensified, as well as incomplete and fragmentary nature of China’s colonial structure.”\textsuperscript{27} Late Qing and Republican Shanghai has become a popular subject of scholarly inquiry as a prototypical example of China’s semicolonial condition and the site where China’s cosmopolitan modernity

\textsuperscript{26} For the volume on humor in modern China, see Jocelyn Chey and Jessica Milner Davis, eds., \textit{Humour in Chinese Life and Letters: Resistance and Control in Modern Times} (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013).

was imagined and produced discursively. These studies effectively paint Shanghai as the meeting ground of unequal geopolitical forces, people from all social strata, and ideas from colonial and colonized communities. It was a space where festive urbanism and the bitter experiences of the urban poor overlapped. An extraordinary amount of scholarly attention has also been devoted to women in Shanghai, who were more often than not portrayed by contemporaries as the embodiment of the city’s progressive development and the emblem of moral decadence. However, the undue focus on Shanghai’s cultural, social, and political history inevitably obscures the fact that each major treaty port in China encountered foreign imperialism in different ways. Alternatively, in a study of the evolving concept of hygiene in late Qing and Republican Tianjin, Ruth Rogaski proposes the term “hypercolony” to differentiate Tianjin’s status from other treaty ports as the home to up to eight Euro-American and Japanese settlements. Her concept speaks to how differences in the colonial histories among the treaty


29 For a study of Shanghai as the gathering place of different worlds and competing ideologies since the late Qing, see Yue Meng, *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). Whereas Meng’s study is primarily concerned with Shanghai’s history as a discursive construction, Hanchao Lu’s work provides a rare glimpse into the lived experiences of lower class urbanites in Republican Shanghai. See Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

30 Emily Honig’s research on female workers in Shanghai has been considered a pioneering study in the field of Chinese gender and labor history, for she overthrows previous assumptions about the power of class in the mobilization of workers and emphasizes alternative factors such as native-place connections and traditional sisterhood that were much more meaningful to the female workers and ultimately constituted their identity. See Emily Honig, *Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992). Gail Hershatter’s book offers one of the most comprehensive overviews of the multiple, conflicting discourses surrounding prostitution in Republican and Mao-era Shanghai. See Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*. The alluring female imagery in calendar posters (*yuefenpai*), one of the earliest examples of modern advertisement, has long been a favorite subject of scholarly inquiry. For a study of these images in Republican Shanghai, see Ellen J. Laing, *Selling Happiness: Calendar Posters and Visual Cultures in Early-Twentieth Century Shanghai* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

ports in China led to locally embedded developments that cannot simply be summed up by the findings in Shanghai studies.

My study shifts the scholarly discourse on colonialism and modernity in China southward to Guangzhou, which provides yet another contrast to the well-studied case of Shanghai and Rogaski’s Tianjin. Unlike these cities, the management of which was divided between Chinese and foreign imperialist authorities, Guangzhou was open to Euro-American and Japanese influence yet firmly under Chinese governance. During the Second Opium War (1856-1860), the British and French allied army occupied the city of Guangzhou and acquired the area of Shameen 沙面, an islet located on the Pearl River south of the city, to build a colonial concession.32 Throughout the late Qing and Republican periods, Shameen was connected to the mainland only by two stone bridges, while the rest of Guangzhou was fully controlled by Chinese authorities (Figure 1). With the exception of Chinese employees, such as workers and servants, the Shameen foreign concession area could not be accessed, let alone become a site of residence, by Chinese in the city. Compared to the vast foreign population in Shanghai, which amounted to over thirty thousand by 1921, the number of foreigners in Guangzhou was only around sixteen hundred in the same year, a fact that aptly reflects Shanghai’s insurmountable status as Republican China’s financial, industrial, and cultural center.33 The presence of foreign imperialist power in Guangzhou was therefore not as looming as in other treaty ports, even though clashes between the Chinese and the foreign colonizers were not uncommon, the most

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memorable of which were the Shakee Incident on June 23, 1925 and the yearlong Guangzhou-Hong Kong General Strike from 1925 to 1926.\(^{34}\) The segregation between Chinese and foreign populations in Guangzhou may possibly explain the unique flourishing of a local identity as proud residents in a place that branded itself both as a model city of China and the cradle of Chinese revolution, a pride that came to color many sociocultural aspects of local life.

Moreover, Guangzhou was in geographic proximity to the British colony Hong Kong, and the two cities were strongly tied by trade, transregional migration, and shared linguistic and cultural features. While Shanghai stood as the epitome of Westernized modernity in the lower Yangzi delta area and the rest of China and continued to attract constant flows of immigrants, Hong Kong surely served as an equally influential model of modernization in the eyes of Guangzhou residents.\(^{35}\)

A change of focus from Shanghai to Guangzhou also offers new perspectives on the heterogeneous expressions of colonial modernity and comic culture in local settings, since the Guangdong region was home to folk and vernacular traditions that contributed to the construction of a distinct regional identity and helped shape the cultural milieu of Guangzhou. Throughout the late imperial era, Guangdong intellectuals who were ridiculed for the purported backwardness of their hometown constantly wrestled with their legitimate place in the cultural landscape of the Chinese empire.\(^{36}\) For instance, the Cantonese dialect had long been regarded as barbaric, vulgar, and cacophonous by northern sojourners, proof of the perceived lowly culture in

\(^{34}\) For a thorough account of the Shakee Incident and the Guangzhou-Hong Kong General Strike, see Michael T. Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China: Canton, 1900-1927* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 143-76.

\(^{35}\) This is supported by Virgil Ho’s discussion of Guangzhou residents’ generally favorable attitude toward British Hong Kong during the Republican period. See Ho, *Understanding Canton*, 53-59.

\(^{36}\) May-bo Ching, *Diyu wenhua yu guojia rentong: Wanqing yilai “Guangdong wenhua” guan de xingcheng* [Local culture and state recognition: The formation of Cantonese cultural identity since the late Qing] (Beijing: Xinhua shudian, 2006), 165-66.
Guangdong. Nonetheless, Guangdong scholars painstakingly defended the legitimacy of their dialect, and by extension their native identity, through writing and collecting vernacular literature, songs and operas, including sanjidi 三及第 (three-tiered) narratives, muyushu 木魚書 (lit. wooden-fish book) ballads, and Cantonese opera. In the early twentieth century, educated elites in Guangdong, many of whom participated in revolutionary activities and state-building efforts, also began to see their regional culture as an embodiment of the essence of the entire Chinese civilization. Guangzhou soon became the home to the first modernist government in China and was known as the “cradle of Chinese revolution,” especially because it served as the political base of the Nationalist Party (a.k.a. Guomindang) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in their preparation for the Northern Expedition (1923-1928). Consequently, Guangdong natives celebrated this revolutionary heritage of their home region and proudly expressed their desire to build a strong Chinese nation-state and become its modern citizens, a project in which they saw Guangdong playing a vital part. It can be argued that these distinctive characteristics of local identity and culture set Guangzhou apart from Shanghai and other treaty ports. Here, I apply the concept of colonial modernity to Guangzhou, a city that deserves more scholarly attention, in order to understand the connectedness between its locally inspired practices and larger patterns of political, economic, and cultural transformations that arose simultaneously from multiple locales around the globe. My proposed study will contribute to the history of print media and visual cultures in cities of Republican China by using the case study of Guangzhou to

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37 Ibid., 111-12.
38 For an in-depth discussion of the use of vernacular Cantonese in various texts, see May-bo Ching, “The Use of Written Cantonese in Entertainment Texts,” in The Hong Kong - Guangdong Film Connection, ed. Ain-Ling Wong (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2005), 276-89.
39 For an analysis of the fiscal and sociopolitical reforms launched by the newly established Guangzhou Nationalist government in the 1920s and the opposition of the merchant community, see Tsin, Nation, Governance and Modernity, 51-114. A study of the Northern Expedition can be found in C. Martin Wilbur, The Nationalist Revolution, 1923-1928 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
provide new understanding of the relationship between state control, popular culture, discourses on gender and sexuality, and nation-building in modern China.

In addition to challenging the Shanghai-centered nature of Republican history scholarship, my research also seeks to widen the scope of Guangzhou studies, which have mostly been limited to the city’s political and social history. Past scholarship on this city tends to be politically oriented due to Guangzhou’s association with the major rebellions, revolutions, and social movements that engendered the modern Chinese nation-state. Some have studied other aspects of Guangzhou society, such as urban planning, public health, religious life, and rickshaw pullers, to illuminate the local manifestations of modernization processes and relationships among the government, social elites and commoners in Republican China. One of the most comprehensive works on Guangzhou’s popular culture and urban life is Virgil Ho’s *Understanding Canton*. Arguably the first scholarly attempt to reconstruct the lives of urban dwellers in Republican-era Guangzhou, Ho’s monograph explores a range of issues such as

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40 For example, see Frederic Wakeman Jr.’s study of the relations between the Chinese authorities and British community in Guangzhou at the eve of the Taiping Rebellion in *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China, 1839-1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966). For a study of political changes in Guangzhou from the late Qing up to the end of the Northern Expedition, see Tsing, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity*. A discussion of the mass women’s movement in Guangdong province during the preparation of the Northern Expedition under the Nationalists and the CCP can be seen in Christina K. Gilmartin, *Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 148-73. For a discussion of the competitions among political authorities and commercial elites through the case study of a Guangdong official who helped launch the provincial investment program by reforming the sugar industry, see Emily M. Hill, *Smokeless Sugar: The Death of a Provincial Bureaucrat and the Construction of China’s National Economy* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010).

popular perceptions of the urban-rural divide and Western influence, social problems such as opium and prostitution, and the rise of Cantonese opera as a form of popular entertainment.\(^{42}\)

The most commendable aspect of Ho’s study is the breadth of primary sources consulted, ranging from government documents, various types of official, commercial, and tabloid newspapers and magazines, to city guides and even private essays written by middle school students in Republican Guangzhou. His excellent command of historical materials allows him to capture the nuances in perceptions about and complicated nature of the transformation in local society rather than turning to sweeping generalizations such as modernization or urbanization for historical explanations. Despite Ho’s extensive use of primary sources, however, his project marks only the beginning of scholarly effort to examine the popular culture of Republican Guangzhou through a critical lens. His reading of textual and visual materials resembles the approach of New Social History, for he tends to treat his sources as unambiguous reflections of social reality rather than cultural constructions. In addition, when Ho makes references to images from a local cartoon pictorial, they are treated as illustration.\(^{43}\) The absence of visual analysis betrays Ho’s literary bias and is unfortunate given the fact that the visual medium had such strong potential to reach out to and communicate effectively with the illiterate lower classes that his book sets out to study. While acknowledging the unprecedented contributions of Understanding Canton to the historical reconstruction of urban life and popular mindset in Republican Guangzhou, I build upon Ho’s work and seek to address Guangzhou popular culture by engaging critically with the visual aspects of the local discourses on modernity.

The works of Xavier Paules, in contrast, combine the use of textual and visual analysis, with an attention to both social reality and its representational manifestations. For instance, one

\(^{42}\) Ho, Understanding Canton.

\(^{43}\) See for example, ibid., 38 & 250.
of Paules’ articles, which investigates the discourses on opium smoking and gambling in Republican Guangzhou, provides an in-depth analysis of government policies and propaganda, newspapers, and other local publications, all of which are also carefully supported by historical contextualization and statistical facts.\textsuperscript{44} Moreover, his discussion of the use of Yuehua News, which differed from other local newspapers in its reliance on police records, offers innovative insights on the paper’s authorship, readership, and social milieu.\textsuperscript{45} This provides an exemplary model for historians to reconstruct the history of a modern Chinese city by looking closely at the editorial policies, style, and content of a single publication. However, similar to Ho, Paules only touches upon certain gender issues in local society. He fails to acknowledge the ways in which gender permeates all aspects of the sociopolitical and cultural history of modern Guangzhou, especially the gender construction of the local authorship behind the historical sources. My dissertation, in contrast, scrutinizes the textual and visual sources of Guangzhou popular culture through a gendered lens by addressing holistically the gendered themes, expressions, and characters in these sources, as well as the predominantly masculine authorial identity of the popular writers and artists.

Angelina Chin’s book, \textit{Bound to Emancipate}, offers yet another way to study the history of Guangzhou in the Republican period. Rather than concentrating on the developments of one city, she chooses to provide a comparative analysis of the social regulations and discourses of


women in both Guangzhou and Hong Kong during the 1920s and 1930s. Her work thus persuasively demonstrates the ways in which the differences in political administration and governing ideology affected how categories of women were constructed, interpreted, and controlled. In addition, Chin skillfully traces the discursive developments revolving around female bodies, such as the rhetoric of emancipation (jiefang) in social policies, and the change of focus from fensu (outmoded traditional customs) to fenghua (social climate) in moral reform campaign. Another major strength of her study is her ability to identify three types of female service laborers reflective of changing gender relations and conceptions of femininity and occupying the popular imagination of the two cities, namely, guji (blind female singers), nüling (female singers), and nü zhaodai (waitresses). These findings provide some of the key building blocks for my study, which also engages similar questions about notions of female sexuality, representations of women’s increasing visibility in public life, and the changing relationship between state and society in modern Guangzhou.

Nonetheless, my project diverges from Chin’s book mainly because her sources are also predominantly textual and seldom point to the variety of ways in which Guangzhou women left traces in the visual culture during this period. While one chapter of Chin’s book is devoted to a discussion of the popular press and celebrity culture of female singers and teahouse waitresses in the 1920s and 1930s, the rest of her work relies heavily upon a top-down approach that draws materials from state policies and government records on the female subjects. Instead, my work shifts the role of the popular cultural agents to the center stage; these commentators provide an alternative vision of the discourses on gender and modernity in Guangzhou. By prioritizing the

46 Chin, Bound to Emancipate.
48 Ibid., 99-128.
popular cultural sources through the use of both visual and textual materials, I also seek to interrogate the relationship between humor and gender. This will be achieved by taking a close look at the ways in which the prevalent use of certain tropes, expressions, and characters in the comic culture were intimately tied not only to the gender norms of local society, but also to the masculine identity and social networks of the authors.

A Masculine Mode of Humor

My research also seeks to reveal the use of humor in Republican Guangzhou as an inherently masculine act. This was primarily defined by men’s privilege to tell jokes, their self-proclaimed role as arbiters of feminine behavior and virtues, and their attempt to build a homosocial community with each other and with their audience through banter, gossip, and the marginalization of perceived others. In late imperial China, orthodox literary culture was dictated on masculine ideals, such as political commitment to the state via studying Confucian classics and succeeding in civil service examinations. Besides writing didactic philosophical tracts or political essays, men of letters could also turn to laughter for the purposes of philosophical reflection, sociopolitical critiques, or leisure and entertainment. This is not to say that educated women in the past did not use wit or satire in their literary activities. Examples to the contrary can be seen in the “willow catkin” child prodigies whose dazzling talent and quick-witted, mischievous personality greatly delighted their kin, or wives that enjoyed witty conversations over literature with their husbands. Nevertheless, the license to engage in lighthearted jokes or unrelenting mockery remained in the masculine domain, whereas educated women were often

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constrained by additional burdens of showcasing feminine virtues such as moral rectitude and tranquility, even when they were allowed to write.\textsuperscript{50} This gender divide seems to coincide with the use of humor in nineteenth and early twentieth-century America, where “the male perception of the female as guardian and embodiment of the genteel tradition allowed men to claim the freedom to be the opposite: the joking ‘bad boy’ who rebelled against official social norms.”\textsuperscript{51}

These trends largely persisted into the late Qing and Republican periods, for studies of satirical fiction, informal essays, and cartoons indicate that these fields of literary or artistic production were male-dominated territories that mostly reflected the concerns, tastes, and visions of educated men living in a transitional, tumultuous age.\textsuperscript{52} While an increasing number of women writers, women’s journals, and women cartoonists began to join these discursive fields of leisure and comedy, their styles and voices did not always depart significantly from those of male writers and artists solely by virtue of their gender.\textsuperscript{53} By analyzing the known examples of

\textsuperscript{50} In her study of the mothers, daughters and female kin of an educated elite family in the Qing dynasty, Susan Mann points out that women writers often practiced self-censorship in their selection of subject matters and language, resulting in the absence of themes such as footbinding. See Susan Mann, The Talented Women of the Zhang Family (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 166-68. The same can, perhaps, be inferred about the relatively infrequent use of satire in women’s writings, as women were discouraged from composing commentaries on the outer political realm.

\textsuperscript{51} Nancy A. Walker, A Very Serious Thing: Women’s Humor and American Culture (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 43.

\textsuperscript{52} For an analysis of late Qing exposé fiction and the male authors’ changing views and stylistic approaches to social realities, see Wang, Fin-de-siècle Splendor, 183-251. For a discussion of the marginalization of female writings in the informal prose essay genre in the Republic period, see Charles A. Laughlin, The Literature of Leisure and Chinese Modernity (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 170. For the Shanghai male cartoonists’ styles and prominent themes in their works, see Ellen J. Laing, “Shanghai Manhua, the Neo-Sensationist School of Literature, and Scenes of Urban Life,” Modern Chinese Literature and Culture (Oct. 2010), accessed September 7, 2016, http://u.osu.edu/mclc/online-series/shanghai-manhua/.

\textsuperscript{53} For a discussion of the satirical fiction by women writers in wartime China, see Amy Dooling, Women’s Literary Feminism in Twentieth-Century China (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 137-70. For an example of women’s journals in the Republican era, see an analysis of the gender ideals in the Linglong magazine in Barbara Mittler, “In Spite of Gentility: Women and Men in Linglong (Elegance), a 1930s Women’s Magazine,” in The Quest for Gentility in China: Negotiations Beyond Gender and Class, ed. Daria Berg and Chloe Starr (New York: Routledge Group, 2007), 208-34. For a discussion of a female cartoonist, Liang Baibo 梁白波 and her comic strip Miss Honeybee, see Sakamoto Hiroko 坂元ひろ子, “Manga hyouhou ni miru Shanhai modan gaaru” 著画表現に見る
popular writers and artists in Republican Guangzhou and their authorial self-presentation, I highlight the ways in which male authors claimed an almost exclusive monopoly over the production of popular culture; these local practices paralleled trends in other cities in Republican China.

Another characteristic of the masculine mode of local humor was the authors’ propensity to prescribe standards for femininity. It is true that educated women in the late imperial period had already played an active role in delineating the feminine virtues that paid homage to orthodox Confucian gender norms and at the same time assumed significant power as moral exemplars in the family order. In the Republican era, women’s claim over the definitions of gendered morality further extended to the public realm, where female partisan leaders, students, and social activists competed with male officials and intellectuals over the direction and agenda of the feminist movement. Nevertheless, in subsequent chapters, I demonstrate that male writers and artists in the popular cultural realm faced little competition from female counterparts in their decision to use gender issues and representations to deliver jokes. While the ultimate target of ridicule may not necessarily have been the women (and in some cases, men) that appeared in these works, the choice to communicate a message through their representations could still result in a policing effect upon the ideals of femininity or masculinity.

Furthermore, the adoption of feminine pennames and voices also underlines local male authors’ tendencies to dictate the discussions of gender in the popular cultural world. Since the

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54 For instance, see the discussion of writings by Qing-dynasty exemplary women (liênû) and the moral authority that they asserted in Binbin Yang, *Heroines of the Qing: Exemplary Women Tell Their Stories* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016).
literary culture of late imperial China was largely prescribed by and for male elites, women writers were accustomed to assuming masculine authorial voice and style that would not seem problematic or transgressive in the eyes of male connoisseurs. Male writers had also been borrowing the feminine voice or conditions of women’s plight to express their discontent with social problems, as evidenced by Li Sao or Dream of the Red Chamber. In the late Qing and Republican eras, as female education and writing became publicly accepted, the appropriation of feminine styles and pseudonyms was also increasingly commonplace among male writer circles, a fact that enhanced the cultural and social significance of female authorship and lent an aura of authenticity to men’s writing. In the case of Guangzhou, however, I argue that the prevalent use of feminine personas did not necessarily reflect genuine interests in promoting women’s employment or gender equality, but mainly exposed the authors’ desires to attract attention or dominate the debate on gender issues with multiple personas.

The formation of a social and imagined community both among the authors and between the authors and their intended audience constitutes the third characteristic of local humor that was masculine in nature. Both elite and popular writers and artists in late imperial and Republican times were known for developing friendships, which form an important backdrop to understanding their works. Whether exchanging works as tokens of friendship, organizing


56 Dooling, Women’s Literary Feminism, 25.


58 For examples of male bonding among literati circles in the Ming dynasty, see Martin W. Huang, ed., Male Friendship in Ming China (Boston: Brill, 2007). For an in-depth study of the role of friendship in an artists’ identity, social standing, and practice, see Craig Clunas, Elegant Debts: The Social Art of Wen Zhengming, 1470-1559 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004). For networking and literary activities among male intellectuals in the Republican era, see Michel Hockx and Kirk A. Denton, eds., Literary Societies in Republican China (Lanham:
social clubs, gathering at banquets, or working together on scholarly or artistic projects, these activities and creative collaborations helped define educated men’s public reputation and elite status, and in turn became a crucial part of their gender identity. As Ming literary scholar Martin Huang acutely remarks, friendship provided an important lens for understanding the masculinity of late Ming intellectuals that “was mostly likely a homosocial enactment: what mattered most to a man was the scrutiny and judgments of other men.” Similarly, I propose that the popular cultural agents in Guangzhou sought to engage both in social or creative activities with one another in real life, and in amusing conversations--through banter or exaggeratedly heated opinions--on paper. Providing titillating images of women or the latest gossip, these authors also circumscribed a community of shared knowledge, or masculine pride, with their readers. By emphasizing these highly gendered aspects of local humor, I seek to add to existing studies on the literature of leisure, satirical fiction, or cartoons that have mostly read the authors’ use of female pseudonyms and imageries as isolated from these authors’ background, self-image, or social ties.

Chapter Organization

This study is divided into five chapters, starting with a historical overview of the popular culture in modern Guangzhou and then moving to gendered tropes and themes prominently seen in the 1920s and 1930s. The first chapter traces the making of the popular cultural industry and the identity formation of popular writers and artists in Guangzhou vis-à-vis the evolving cultural politics and the formation of the Chinese nation-state from the late Qing into the Republican

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Lexington Books, 2008). For an example of a friendship between artists in the Republican era, see Claire Roberts, *Friendship in Art: Fou Lei and Huang Binhong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010).

period. I also provide a glimpse into the careers, styles, self-presentation of local popular cultural agents by examining the professional life of two brothers Huang Huanwu 黃幻吾 and Huang Huanniao 黃幻鳥 in the 1920s and the 1930s. Since the Huang brothers experimented with most of the sources and themes examined in my dissertation, an analysis of their background and styles helps explain the historical context in which such comedic works were conceived, produced, and circulated. Their uses of pseudonyms and real names in various settings also indicate the frequent crossover between popular and elite cultures and blurred boundaries between normative roles of men and women among local circles of writers and artists. Moreover, I show that central to their identities as modern urbanites and cultural commentators was a deep-seated concern with the legitimacy of Guangzhou culture within the broader cultural landscape of the Chinese nation.

The second chapter examines popular representations of mixed-sex socialization in 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou to highlight the place of gender performance in the image of the city—even the province—which claimed to be both the cradle of the Chinese revolution and a stronghold of moral restorationism. After delineating the intellectual discourse of and government policies regulating gender integration in Republican Guangzhou, I focus on the popular cultural portrayals of the various forms of physical intimacy between the sexes as a contested field for the construction of modernity, erotic fantasy, and resistance to state control.

Chapter 3 explores the discourses on male beauty and the construction of masculinity in 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou. By analyzing various models of masculine appearance proposed by the government authorities, the commercial campaigns, and popular cultural agents, I expose the fluidity and performativity of gender categories and the conflicting visions for urban
modernity and nationalism in local society. I also intend to expand the scholarship on the Modern Girl by reconstructing the imagery of her little-studied male counterpart, the Modern Boy, through which some of these masculine ideals were channeled.

In the fourth chapter, I trace the clashing views on marriage and gender roles in early twentieth-century China through the lens of the enduring theme of henpecked husbands and shrewish wives in Republican-era Guangzhou. I analyze the newly developed themes and expressions in henpecking stories particular to this period, which resulted from the emergent ideals of gender equality, romantic love, monogamy, and the small-family ideal. I also take the conventional trope of the philandering husband and jealous wife as a point of departure to analyze the historical changes and continuities in the practices of polygamy and prostitution in local society.

The fifth chapter interrogates portrayals of occupations specific to women and the important role these depictions played in the popular visions for urban modernity. I first investigate the popular portrayals of long-standing female occupations that were considered traditional and backward, particularly female domestic helpers. I then turn to both the official discourse on and popular depictions of new-style female occupations to reveal historical continuities and discontinuities in the ideals of gender division of labor and feminine sexual virtue; and I read these changes in light of overlapping tensions between the New Woman and Modern Girl stereotypes. Through close analysis of the relevant sardonic commentary, I tease out the contradictory notions of modern femininity, class relations, regional identity, and national economic interests from the local context.

Through this study of the gendered representations commonly featured in the cartoons
and popular literature of Republican-era Guangzhou, then, I explore the ways in which humor and gender intersect in the discussion of a broad range of ideals, including public morality, fashion, marriage, and gender division of labor. I argue that these humorous and sexually charged texts and images became a venue through which the self-perceptions of the authors, the image of the city, and the questions of Chinese nationhood and modernity, were negotiated in playful yet emotionally engaging ways. Throughout the chapters, I identify the flamboyant Modern Girl as a unifying thread that reveals both an interest in uncontrolled female sexuality in the popular culture of Republican Guangzhou, and—as embedded in the circulation and consumption of her imagery—the sociocultural, ideological, and artistic linkages between Guangzhou, other major Chinese cities, and global visual culture.
Chapter 1  A Historical Overview of Popular Cultural Production in Republican Guangzhou

The 1920s and 1930s have often been characterized by Chinese historians as the golden age of informal prose essays (xiaopin wen 小品文) and cartoons. This was especially so for Guangzhou, where popular literature and cartoons proliferated. Indeed, a circle of writers and artists who specialized in such works arose. Not only did they benefit from advances in printing and visual technologies that drew a broader, less-educated audience to the consumption of their works, but they were also able to find inspiration from the novel, even bizarre, social phenomena happening around the city. Accompanying the development of their careers was also the construction of a group identity that blurred the lines between sophistication and vulgarity, decency and immorality, and seriousness and levity in terms of style, and between social-mindedness and commercial profit in terms of motive. This chapter examines the historical contexts and governmental policies that gave rise to and at the same time were shaped by the appearance of these popular writers and artists; it also addresses the self-contradictory identity reflected in their works. Moreover, I examine the ways in which their authorial images reveal a deep-seated concern with the legitimacy of Guangzhou culture within the broader cultural landscape of the Chinese nation.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part delineates the historical contour of the developments in printing technology and popular press in late Qing and early Republican Guangdong. In the second part, I provide a general overview of the self-identity articulated by popular cultural agents in light of changing censorship rules by the government authorities. Through a case study of Huang Huanwu 黃幻吾 (1906-1985) and Huang Huanniao 黃幻鳥 (dates unknown), brothers who may have adopted the collective pseudonym, A’laohuan 阿老幻,
and worked as writers, cartoonists, commercial artists, art editors, and art school instructors during the 1920s and 1930s, the third section offers a more in-depth analysis of the multifarious careers and self-identities of popular cultural agents in Guangzhou. Together, this discussion seeks to pave the way for subsequent chapters by sketching a portrait of the popular cultural agents’ background, style, and image, and by explaining the historical backdrop against which the gendered representations and themes in their humorous works were created and disseminated.

My decision to include both popular literature and artworks, especially *xiaopin wen* and cartoons is as follows. Scholars usually choose to focus on only one of these genres due to the vast differences in cultural legacies, stylistic elements, and modes of reading. Nonetheless, I propose a cross-media approach and utilize both the textual and visual materials of Guangzhou popular culture. My interest in gendered representations dictates that these genres need to be closely examined since many themes were commonly featured in popular literature and cartoons, both of which were avidly consumed by the local readers. In addition, some of the popular cultural agents, such as the Huang brothers, are also known to have produced informal prose essays, vernacular fiction, and cartoons, making their backgrounds, stylistic features, and self-perceptions indispensible from the histories and characteristics of both representational genres. Although throughout the subsequent chapters I will also make use of other popular media, such as Cantonese opera, with which some authors also experimented, I refrain from comprehensive analysis of those genres here, mainly due to the scarcity of the extant materials and the limitations in my ability to reconstruct various aspects of their production, performance, distribution, and reception.
Starting in the late Qing, newspapers, magazines, and other printed books proliferated alongside the sociopolitical turmoil and cultural transformation of urban centers. Print culture in modern China experienced a wholesale vernacular revolution both textually and visually that not only brought the latest information and knowledge into the purview of a general audience, but also reshaped the ways in which the readers understood the world. In the case of Guangdong, the Cantonese dialect was extensively incorporated in the fiction, newspaper commentaries, informal prose essays, and cartoon captions, helping to foster a distinct local culture and identity. The introduction of new visual technologies, literary, and art forms further created new possibilities for the local audience to experience and relate to the changing social milieu. In addition, local intellectuals involved in the newspaper industry specifically situated their native region as the birthplace of the Chinese revolution and invested in a simultaneously patriotic and particularistic pride and promotion of local place. This revolutionary heritage would have an impact upon popular cultural production, with which an increasing number of local writers and artists could making a living and cultivate a new, albeit complex, self-identity.

One of the unique features of newspapers in late Qing and early Republican Guangdong was the extensive use of vernacular Cantonese. While written Cantonese was used both by the marginally educated, such as Daoist ritual practitioners or Cantonese opera playwrights, and the highly educated, such as the men of letters who penned the famous yueou 粵謠 (Cantonese ditties), throughout the Qing dynasty, the cultural legitimacy of the local dialect had always been challenged and debated. Only in the late Qing was the written form of the local dialect formally

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60 Ching, *Diyu wenhua*, 119-38.
acknowledged by scholars such as Huang Zunxian (1848-1905) and frequently evoked as the means to promoting social change to a broader local audience.\textsuperscript{61} For example, many newspapers founded by anti-Manchu revolutionaries, including \textit{It Matters News} (\textit{You suowei bao} 所謂報, pub. 1905) and \textit{Guangdong Vernacular News} (\textit{Guangdong baihua bao} 廣東白話報, pub. 1907), were known for employing the Cantonese dialect in news reports, prose essays, fiction, and the \textit{yueou} genre.\textsuperscript{62} The prevalent use of the dialect reflects the editors’ intent not only to celebrate their regional culture through circumscription of an exclusive Cantonese-speaking readership, but also to introduce the latest knowledge, news stories, and hearsay from other parts of the world in an easily accessible language. Moreover, by emphasizing the cultural and literary significance of their local dialect, these editors aimed to rally support from residents in Guangzhou, the British colony Hong Kong, and the greater Guangdong region against the central Manchu government.\textsuperscript{63} This trend was evidently inherited by journalists, popular writers and cartoonists in the Republican period, reflecting continued transformation of the attitude of men of learning toward the use of Cantonese dialect: it no longer represented backward culture but instead signified regional solidarity and pride.

Late Qing newspapers in the greater Guangdong region also utilized the newest visual forms and technologies to experiment with and transform the world that would be seen by their

\textsuperscript{61} Don Snow, \textit{Cantonese as Written Language: The Growth of a Written Chinese Vernacular} (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 30. For a broader discussion of the mass education and enlightenment campaign in the late Qing, see Hsiao-t‘i Li 李孝悌, \textit{Qingmo de xiaceng shehui qimeng yundong, 1901–1911} 清末的下層社會啟蒙運動, 1901-1911 [Lower class enlightenment in the late Qing period, 1901–1911] (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan, 1992).


\textsuperscript{63} Ching, \textit{Diyu wenhua}, 161-62.
audiences. The introduction of lithographic printing to Guangzhou in 1831 by Protestant missionaries not only helped reduce the cost of newspaper publications and other printed materials, but also greatly improved the accuracy of the texts and images that were reproduced. Lithographic technology also created possibilities for a new form of mass media publication, that is, pictorials that were intended to lure an audience with a great number of attractive illustrations, often times followed by captions written in the Cantonese dialect. Editors of pictorial newspapers such as the *Current Affairs Pictorial* (*Shishi huabao* 時事畫報, pub. 1905) and *Feasting on Spectacles Pictorial* (*Shangqi huabao* 賞奇畫報, pub. 1907) justified their extensive use of illustrations by suggesting that images were the best tool to enlighten the masses with new knowledge. Since illustrations in these pictorial newspapers mainly aimed to satirize government corruption, traditional customs, and new happenings in society, they are commonly seen as predecessors to cartoons in modern China. The advent of lithographic printing also significantly transformed a popular visual genre, pictorial advertisements, demonstrating the flourishing of advertising as a new commercial enterprise. While pictorial advertisements had a long history in China and had appeared in the forms of merchandise wrapping paper and publishers’ sketches and emblems, during the late Qing advertising images selling different

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goods were often placed on a single page and financially supported by the companies of these products.\(^{67}\) In addition, commercial photography took root and gained increasing popularity in Guangzhou and Hong Kong beginning in 1844, leading to the proliferation and circulation of photographs as gifts, postcards, or advertisements, and fundamentally altering how reality was perceived and interpreted.\(^{68}\) These new media and technologies, in turn, had the effect of opening the eyes of the common people to a greater variety of visual imagery and helping to domesticate the outside world, be it journalistic reports, commercial goods, or fresh faces in the entertainment industry.

The vernacularization of texts and images in the newspaper industry of the greater Guangdong region during the late Qing continued into the Republican era, notably demonstrated by the prevalence of informal prose essays and the high tide of cartoon art development. Anxious to reform Chinese society in the wake of escalating foreign invasion and domestic crisis, intellectuals based largely at Beijing University waged the New Culture Movement (1917-1927), which criticized the purportedly outdated, rigid Confucian traditions, including the use of classical Chinese, and favored writing in the vernacular language. The desire to modernize Chinese literature and express one’s spontaneous, unrestrained emotions in writing gave rise to a peculiar product called the *xiaopin wen*, a genre that quickly dominated the literary market in the 1920s and became “a substantial component of the literary practice of most every major modern

\(^{67}\) For a discussion of pictorial advertisements in Guangzhou newspapers during the late Qing, with a particular focus on medicine and foreign imports, see Jiang Jianguo 蔣建國, *Baojie jiuwen: jiu Guangzhou de baozhi yu xinwen* 報界舊聞：舊廣州的報紙與新聞 [Old anecdotes from the newspaper industry: newspapers and journalism in old Guangzhou] (Guangzhou: Nanfang ribao chubanshe, 2007), 244-65. For a history of pictorial advertisements up to the late Qing and particularly in Shanghai, see Laing, *Selling Happiness*, 11-20.

Chinese writer.” 69 Paying homage to a long history of leisure literature during the late imperial era that mocked rigid Confucian morality and emphasized the pleasures of an emotionally fulfilling private life, *xiaopin wen* writers in Republican China combined the use of classical and vernacular Chinese to depict concrete everyday experiences in a modern industrialized world. In particular, the Western-educated intellectual and founder of the journal *Analects Fortnightly*, Lin Yutang, was noted for creating new trends in the *xiaopin* literary scene by promoting humor and enjoyment as discursive practices. 70 In spite of vehement attacks from opponents, especially left-wing writers who proposed that modern Chinese literature should retain a socially or historically redemptive function, many of these critics themselves actually published informal prose essays, thus testifying to the versatility of this genre. 71 Similarly, *xiaopin wen* was widely practiced by writers (and even artists) of all kinds in Guangzhou and proliferated in major and tabloid newspapers and magazines throughout the 1920s and 1930s. These essay writers often turned their playful gaze on trivial matters that made up the urban life experience in Guangzhou. Such a focus surely reflects what literary scholar Charles Laughlin terms “the aesthetic of the everyday,” which appealed to the reader by potentially “posing a serious challenge to abstract discourses…[and yielding] deep insights through their meditation on the subtle and complex meanings and connections of apparently insignificant objects and incidents.” 72 Furthermore, they incorporated Cantonese slang to bring out the vivid and artless nature of their literary expressions and to resonate with the local audience. The unique subgenre that grew out of their combined use of


70 For a detailed analysis of Lin Yutang’s editorial and writing styles related to the *xiaopin wen* genre, see ibid., 103-35.

71 For an example of the criticisms against the *xiaopin wen* genre, see the attack launched by the left-wing literary journal *Venus (Taibai 太白)* in 1935 in ibid., 135-138. Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) was one of the most well-known critics of *xiaopin wen* who perhaps contradicted himself and actively engaged in writing in this genre. See Ibid., 11.

72 Ibid., 77-78.
Cantonese dialect, classical Chinese, and vernacular Chinese in their essays was known as “three-tier” (sanjid) literature and, as literary scholar Don Snow has noted, “allows the writer to make radical shifts in tone and to create linguistic incongruity that is both arresting and amusing.”73 The emphasis on Guangzhou localism and the use of written Cantonese would be integral to the complicated story of the constant struggle between the interests in local cultural subjects seemingly unrelated to politics and the call for national strengthening and unity in the identity construction of these writers.

In the visual culture of Republican Guangzhou, cartoons gained widespread acceptance as they featured simplified—often exaggerated—visual composition, played on engaging themes such as political satire and gender relations, and offered quick and easy access for entertainment. Historians have attributed the origin of Chinese cartoons to the lithographic illustrations in late Qing pictorials and Western humor magazines such as Punch from Britain and Puck from the United States.74 First appearing as single-panel works, cartoons in Guangzhou began to be produced as multi-panel comic strips in the late 1920s and 1930s, arguably following the launching of the first cartoon magazine, The Sketch (Banjiao manhua 半角漫畫, pub. 1929-1936). More importantly, artists in Guangzhou also eagerly read cartoon magazines published in Shanghai and tried to emulate the techniques and storylines adopted by Shanghai cartoonists. Even The Sketch adopted its English title from the Shanghai cartoon magazine Shanghai Sketch (Shanghai manhua 上海漫畫, pub. 1928-1930). The influence of Shanghai notwithstanding, cartoons in 1930s Guangzhou still displayed distinctively local features, as they were usually

73 Snow, Cantonese as written language, 127.

74 Lent, Asian Comics, 41-42. On a detailed study of the earliest Chinese cartoon magazines that bore traces of direct influence from these Euro-American sources, see Christopher G. Rea, “He’ll Roast All Subjects that May Need the Roasting: Puck and Mr. Punch in Nineteenth-Century China,” in Asian Punches: A Transcultural Affair, ed. Hans Harder and Barbara Mittler (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2013), 389-422.
paired with captions written in the Cantonese dialect and depicted themes particular to the city of Guangzhou. Their production, circulation, and consumption, subjects that will be covered in greater detail in the following two sections, reveal a little known story in the history of local art, which is usually dominated by the triumph and significance of high art genres such as the Lingnan School of painting.

Equally important to the historical developments of popular literature and art in late Qing and Republican Guangzhou were the image of the city, which was gradually transformed into the revolutionary capital of modern China, and the subsequent enhancement of nationalistic pride in the identity of local intellectuals. As previously noted, many newspaper editors, novelists, and artists in late Qing Guangdong, including Huang Shizhong 黃世仲 (1872-1913), Gao Jianfu 高劍父 (1879-1951), and Pan Dawei 潘達微 (1881-1929), were avid supporters of Sun Yat-sen and members of his Revolutionary Alliance. The city of Guangzhou and the nearby British colony Hong Kong were the bases of their revolutionary activities and the places of publications for their newspapers and works, through which their political messages were disseminated. During the Republican period, the close liaison between the city and revolutionary spirit became even more pronounced, especially when Guangzhou was chosen as the political base for the preparation of the Northern Expedition led by the Nationalists and the CCP to extinguish the regional warlords and reunify China. The reputation of their city as the “cradle of the Chinese revolution” was subsequently celebrated and vehemently safeguarded by local intellectuals and journalists. For instance, editors of major local newspapers, such as the Canton Republican Daily and Citizens’ News, all showed their ardent support for the Northern Expedition by publishing political propaganda for this campaign. Nevertheless, there existed a complicated

75 Liang, Guangzhou baoye, 103-8, 110-11.
ideological relationship between pride in a local city and commitment to the greater nation, as the former could oppose or be subsumed by the latter. As will be analyzed in the next section, Guangzhou popular writers and artists were caught in a dilemma between painstakingly defending the city’s cultural legitimacy by highlighting its service to the larger national entity and the pursuit of profit and interests in matters that were less political and yet quintessentially part of the local condition.

Part II  Say What You Can: Government Censorship and Self-Presentation of Popular Cultural Agents in 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou

In 1933, a writer with the pseudonym Liaodiao 獬刁 gave the following advice to other writers in the magazine, The Canton Miscellany,

There are many things in Guangzhou that can be talked about. If you are not afraid of sacrificing the thing that you eat with (i.e., your head), you can talk without end about [things in Guangzhou]. However, since everybody considers that thing one eats with valuable, even if there are things to talk about, nobody dares to talk about them recklessly. My life is worthless, but I dare not lose it recklessly, so before I begin writing, I want to give all my literary friends a special warning ahead of time: just because there are things to talk about, does not necessarily mean that you can talk about them. Just because there are things that can be talked about, does not necessarily mean that you should talk about them. Be prudent; say what you can, and do not say what you cannot. That thing you eat with is important; it will be too late to regret it [once it is gone].

廣州可講的事很多，如果你不怕犧牲那個吃飯東西就可以使你講之不盡，不過人人都視那吃飯東西很珍貴，縱使有可講之事也不敢亂講，獠刁老命雖賤，究竟不敢胡亂犧牲，故未落筆之先，特先謹告於各文友諸君曰：可講之事，未必能講；能講之事，未必應講，審慎從事，應講則講，不應講則不必講，吃飯東西要緊，後悔晚矣。

76 Liaodiao獠刁, “Ying jiang ze jiang” 傾講則講 [Say what you can], Guangzhou zazhi 廣州雜誌 [The Canton Miscellany], March 15, 1933, 23.
In this passage, the author mocks his own inability—or unwillingness, to be more precise—to offend the government authorities with his writing, by doing a word play on the available subject matters in the city that can be, or should be, publicly discussed. Since Liaodiao was known for his incisive style that utilized “playful banter and angry curses” (xixiao numa 嘻笑怒罵), the fact that he would caution other contributors against saying things that should not be said points to larger questions about the government’s censorship policies and the creative freedom and self-identity of popular cultural agents.77 Taking the contradictions between Liaodiao’s clever warning about government control and his critical writing style into account, this section contextualizes the construction of self-image by Guangzhou popular writers and artists against the backdrop of the changing censorship by the political authorities during the 1920s and 1930s. I first briefly delineate the history of press censorship in Republican Guangzhou to demonstrate the various ways in which the warlord regimes and/or the provincial government attempted to regulate public opinion and strengthen its power in an age of political fragmentation. I then turn to the conflicting self-image presented by popular writers and cartoonists—as both critic of social ills and profit-oriented hack—which ultimately contributed to the multiple perceptions of Guangdong regional culture within in the larger national landscape. Their identity construction also involved strategies through which popular writers and artists attempted to cope with the government policies, including their use of pseudonyms and gendered themes, all of which became avenues through which to express creative freedom or indirectly vent frustration against perceived government tyranny.

77 The comment on Liaodiao’s writing style can be found in Chuixian zhe 垂涎者, “Guangzhou wentan zuozhe zalu” 廣州文壇作者雜錄 [An assorted record of the writers in the Guangzhou literary circle], Guangzhou zazhi, January 1, 1934, 20.
In the 1910s and 1920s, the governance of Guangdong province constantly changed hands due to military conflicts among warlords, who sought to exert censorship control over public opinion so as to shore up their political legitimacy. For instance, Long Jiguang 龍濟光 (1867-1925), a warlord who supported Yuan Shikai’s restoration of monarchy and was given control over the Guangdong region during Yuan’s rule from 1912 to 1916, would remove news items from the papers that were deemed unfavorable and ruthlessly detain and execute newspaper editors and journalists.\(^78\) When the long-time opponent of Sun Yat-sen and promoter of Guangdong independence Chen Jiongming 陳炯明 (1878-1933) seized control of the province for seven months between 1922 and 1923, he only allowed newspapers to publish news released by a government-approved news agency, and would prohibit nonlocal newspapers containing critical opinions from entering the city.\(^79\) Due to the lack of centralized rule, military strongmen who ruled over Guangdong could thus monopolize the news industry and punish editors and journalists at will.

Nonetheless, after the central Guomindang regime was established in Nanjing in 1927 upon the successful culmination of the National Revolution, the provincial authorities in Guangdong began to publicize systematic regulations over the mass media. In July 1928, the provincial government passed the “Directive on Publication Censorship” (shencha chuban wu banfa 審查出版物辦法), which dictated newspapers and magazine publishers to send two copies to each township or county’s Party Affairs Advisory Committee for inspection; any contents deemed “reactionary or obstructive to party affairs and governance” could potentially lead to a


\(^79\) Ibid., 142-43.
warning, confiscation, suspension, or even arrest of the staff. Three months later, the provincial Education Bureau also introduced additional guidelines for popular textual and visual materials such as fiction, songbooks, magazines, cartoons, and newspaper supplements, known as “Regulations Governing the Censorship on Reading Materials for Commoners” (shencha pingmin duwu guicheng 審查平民讀物規程). This set of regulations mandated that popular cultural publications should not violate the principles of the Nationalist Party or harm social customs (fengsu 風俗), but should instead benefit the moral cultivation and knowledge acquisition of commoners. These newly implemented measures can be explained by the recent breakup of the First United Front between the Nationalists and the Communists and the failed Communist uprising and its bloody aftermath in Guangzhou in December 1927. Increased censorship control clearly demonstrates the government’s pressing concerns with purging the Communists in the city and consolidating the Nationalist Party’s authority.

One incident that reveals how the censorship law was enforced by the municipal government at this time took place in November 1928 when the supplement of a local newspaper, Phenomenal News, published a special issue on the Guangdong Eleventh Track Meet. Rong Wenxi 容文喜 (c.1901-1930), who signed articles with his literary name Longjing 龍井 (lit. Dragon Well) and once worked as the editor of the Hong Kong branch of Phenomenal News

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81 Guangdong shengzhengfu mishuchu, “Guangdong jiaoyuting shencha pingmin duwu guicheng” 廣東教育廳審查平民讀物規程 [Regulations governing the censorship on reading materials for commoners issued by the Guangdong Education Bureau], Guangdong shengzhengfu zhoubao 廣東省政府週報 [Weekly Gazette of the Guangdong Provincial Government], October 22, 1928, 24.

82 A brief discussion of the 1927 Communist Uprising can be found in Tsin, Nation, Governance, and Modernity, 172-73.
supplement, contributed an informal prose essay poking fun at the renowned poet and Head of the provincial Education Bureau Huang Jie 黃節 (1873-1935) who participated in a special race of politicians during the track meet. Attributing Huang Jie’s defeat to his weight, which resulted from the fact that “the honorable Mr. [Huang] seldom engages in physical education [but instead prefers to] vigorously study literature” (先生之跑，所以最落伍者，先生之體甚肥胖，且先生手湧事體育，研鑽文學), Rong Wenxi sarcastically crafts an image of Huang as an unfit, old-fashioned scholar unsuitable for office in a modern province. Rong Wenxi’s colleague Liang Dusun 梁度孫 (years unknown), commonly identified by his pseudonym Mortar (Pojipao 迫擊炮), chose to depict the beautiful, exposed legs of female athletes from an all girl’s secondary school that adopted shorts as part of their sports uniform during the track meet, and concluded his article with the playful remark,

I have also heard the honorable Mr. Huang Jie’s opinion that “it is important for skirts to be long, and even so they are not as good as trousers.” I wonder if Mr. Huang, who wore a long gown to the opening ceremony, felt a stirring inside, sighed sentimentally, and became concerned after seeing [the exposed legs of the female athletes]?  

然吾又聞之黃公晦聞之主張，裙長為貴，猶不及袴，不知長衣而參與開幕典禮之我公，對是能毋有動於中，而感慨繫之耳？

83 Longjing’s personal name and dates appeared in his obituary after he passed away on March 12, 1930. See Liao Shiru 廖式如 et al., “Rong Wenxi jun aiqi” 容文喜君哀啟 [Obituary for Rong Wenxi], Guomin xinwen 國民新聞 [Citizens’ News], March 15, 1930, 1.2. The fact that he had edited the Hong Kong Branch of the Phenomenal News supplement was mentioned in Heimeigui 黑玫瑰 [Black Rose], “Dai bianji yan” 代編輯言 [A word in the place of the editors], Xianxiang bao 現象報, April 20, 1928, 7. For a brief biography of Huang Jie, see Guangdongsheng difang shizhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, Guangdong shengzhi: jiaoyu zhi 廣東省志：教育志 [Guangdong Provincial Gazetteer: A Record on Education] (Guangzhou: Guangdong remin chubanshe, 1995), 47.

84 Longjing 龍井, “Yaoren saipao zhi Huang Jie” 要人賽跑之黃節 [Huang Jie in the special race of politicians], Xianxiang bao 現象報 [Phenomenal News], November 3, 1928, 7.

85 Pojipao 迫擊炮 [Mortar], “Yishu zhi tui” 藝術之腿 [Aesthetic legs], Xianxiang bao 現象報, November 3, 1928, 7. Mortar’s real name Liang Dusun was revealed in his short biography in Chuixian zhe, “Guangzhou wentan jizhe” 廣東省志：教育志 [Guangzhou Provincial Gazetteer: A Record on Education], July 1, 1934, 14.
Liang’s insinuation of Huang Jie’s moral pretense can hardly be missed. Little did the writers know that these articles would incur the wrath of Huang Jie, who decided to notify the City Council. This incident created serious trouble for the newspaper. It was later reported that the Chief of the Propaganda Subsection of the Police Department, Wang Jishu, invited the editor of the *Phenomenal News* supplement, Xue Boxian 薛伯賢 (years unknown, also identified by his pseudonym Blind Man or Manggong 盲公), Rong Wenxi, and Liang Dusun to dinner on the pretext that he needed help from the three with launching a new tabloid newspaper. The three were immediately arrested and brought back for interrogation after the meal, and *Phenomenal News* was suspended for fifteen days, charged with publishing slander and overt sexual content.

According to a letter written to Rong Wenxi after the arrest by his close friend and local writer Li Jian’er 李健兒 (1895-1941), the three were imprisoned for twenty days and eventually released after being found not guilty. In this instance, the satire of government officials was treated much more seriously than sexualized portrayals of women. Indeed, the editor and writers might not have been imprisoned had it not been for the mention of Huang Jie’s name. The punishment was nonetheless considerably lighter than the treatment newspaper personnel often received during the 1910s and early 1920s.

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86 Hehe 赫赫, “Guangzhou daibu jizhe zhi xiangqing” 廣州逮捕記者之詳情 [The detailed circumstances regarding the arrest of journalists in Guangzhou], *Nanyang shangbao* 南洋商報 [South Seas Commercial News], November 17, 1928, 11. Note that in this report Blind Man’s real name is identified as Xue Aixi 薛愛茜 while Mortar’s name is given as Liang Shiyang 梁士揚. Alternatively, the report by the Shanghai-based *Shenbao* refers to Blind Man as Xue Boxian. See Anonymous, “Yuesheng jinwen” 粵省近聞 [Recent news from Guangdong province], *Shenbao* 申報, November 8, 1928, 7.

87 Hehe, “Guangzhou daibu jizhe zhi xiangqing.” Note that the version presented by *Shenbao* is much briefer and only cites the charge of sexually immoral content as the reason for their arrest. See Anonymous, “Yuesheng jinwen.”

88 Li Jian’er, *Li Jian’er wengao* 李健兒文稿 [The manuscripts of Li Jian’er] (Hong Kong: publisher unknown, 1932), 15a-16a.
Due to the factional struggles within the Nationalist Party, military general Chen Jitang (1890-1954) was able to assume leadership of a new Southwest Military Branch Council with the backing of top Guomindang officials of Cantonese origin who opposed Chiang Kai-shek; Chen came to oversee affairs in the south semi-independently from the central Nanjing government.\(^8^9\) Even though the central regime issued the “Publication Laws” in December 1930, a set of stipulations that regulated the ways in which newspapers, magazines, and printed books were to be registered, written, and distributed, the Guangdong government under Chen Jitang’s rule still set up their own censorship organization in December 1932 called “The Southwest Publication Censorship Committee“ (xinan chubanwu shencha weiyuanhui 西南出版物審查會) to enforce further control.\(^9^0\) Additional regulations, such as the “Provisional Statutes for Publication Censorship” (Shencha chubanwu zanxing tiaoli 審查出版物暫行條例) in 1932 and the “Standards for Censoring and Monitoring Major and Tabloid Newspapers” (Shencha qudi daxiao ribao biaozhun) which was further amended in 1935, were also promulgated.\(^9^1\) These regulations granted the provincial government closer supervision over the circulation of printed materials and further specified the contents that were forbidden, including top military secrets,

\(^8^9\) Hill, *Smokeless Sugar*, 50-51.


\(^9^1\) For the *Provisional Statutes for Publication Censorship*, see Guangdong sheng zhengfu mishuchu, “Zhongguo Guomindang geji dangbu shencha chubanwu zanxing tiaoli” 中國國民黨西南各級黨部審查出版物暫行條例 [Provisional Statutes for Publication Censorship for the party organs at various levels of the Southwest branch of the Nationalist Party of China], *Guangdong shengzhengfu gongbao 廣東省政府公報* 204 (Nov. 1932): 1-2. For the amended version of the “Standards for Censoring and Monitoring Major and Tabloid Newspapers,” see Guangdong sheng zhengfu mishuchu, “Lingfa xiuzheng shencha qudi daxiao ribao biaozhun” 今發修正審查取締大小日報標準 [Order issued for amending the Standards for Censoring and Monitoring Major and Tabloid Newspapers], *Guangdong shengzhengfu gongbao* 298 (Jun. 1935): 104-6.
news regarding illicit sexual affairs or suicide, and sexually titillating texts or images. Over the years the trend toward purging politically suspicious or sexually inappropriate elements in the publication censorship realm seemed to grow stronger. This tendency clearly points to the ongoing fenghua 風化 (social customs) protection campaign launched by the Chen Jitang regime to police the minds and bodies of individual citizens and strengthen his political authority vis-à-vis the central government.\(^{92}\)

To what extent journalists, popular writers, and artists could enjoy freedom of expressions during the 1930s is difficult to gauge. Historians have indicated that pictorials and tabloid newspapers were in sharp decline after 1929 due to the strict censorship laws.\(^ {93}\) Some news reports also suggest that books and pictures viewed as obscene were repeatedly banned or even burned during this period.\(^ {94}\) In addition, there were instances in which informal prose essays, cartoons, or serialized fiction published in newspapers were visibly cut short or fully deleted as a result of the censorship, to the point that in one case the editor had to find another short story as a replacement and apologize to the readers.\(^ {95}\) However, as will be evident in the

\(^{92}\) For a detailed discussion of the fenghua protection campaign during Chen Jitang’s rule, see Chin, *Bound to Emancipate*, 129-52.

\(^{93}\) For the banning of tabloid newspapers, see Jin Bingliang 金炳亮, “Minguo shiqi Guangdong de chuban guanli” 民國時期廣東的出版管理 [The management of publications in Republican-era Guangdong], *Guangdong shizhi 廣東史志* [Historical Records of Guangdong] Z1 (1995): 117. Also, see Chin, *Bound to Emancipate*, 116. This trend might be a result of the special order issued by the Guangzhou Municipal Police Department which stated that all tabloid newspapers were harmful to social morality and would be strictly prohibited. See Guangzhou tebieshi zhengfu, “Yanjin ge xiaobao chuban” 嚴禁各小報出版 [The prohibition of publications of all tabloid newspapers], *Guangzhoushi shizheng gongbao* 廣州市市政公報 [The Guangzhou Municipal Gazette] 351 (Apr. 1930): 35.

\(^{94}\) For example, see Anonymous, “Jinjue xiaobao yihou fenhui yinshu” 禁絕小報焚毁淫書 [The burning and destruction of obscene books since tabloid newspapers were prohibited], *Gongping bao 公評報* [Fair Review News], February 4, 1930, 3.1. A writer also notices the gradual disappearance of obscene illustrated fictions under strict government censorship, although s/he expresses concern with the popularity of obscene songs that spread among lower class men and women alike. See Yuanxian 圓先, “Lianhuantu xiaoshuo yu liqu” 連環圖小說與俚曲 [Illustrated fictions and folk songs], *Yuehua bao 越華報* [Yuehua News], June 4, 1931, 1.
remainder of this dissertation, major newspapers continued to report news pertaining to illicit sexual liaisons, so much so that a contemporary commentator makes the sarcastic remark “in each entire issue of a newspaper, only the social news can attract my attention because those portrayals are even more thorough than obscene books.”

Images of fully undressed women, such as Figures 2 and 3, could be published in the cartoon magazine *The Sketch*, which had to undergo approval by the Censorship Committee, perhaps because these images were classified not as obscenity but as art or advertisement, respectively. Furthermore, political satire of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek (Figure 4) or warlords in other regions (Figure 5) apparently went unchecked, most likely a result of the separatist stance of the Chen Jitang regime. Of course, caricatures like Figure 4 could be a tongue-in-cheek insinuation of the mounting political problems, such as the irritating mosquito-like Communists that the Guangdong provincial government also had failed to eradicate. Overall, in spite of the strict censorship regulations, the government surely relaxed control over newspaper and magazine publications from time to time for undeclared reasons and only banned overtly sexual or politically incorrect content.

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95 A writer who complained about newspaper censorship by the Guangzhou Municipal Police Department had his article cut short by the editor, who ended the article with ellipses and a short explanation that " [the rest] is taken out by the editor." See Taixu 太虛 [Illusion], “Jiancha xinwen” 檢查新聞 [Censorship on newspapers], *Guomin xinwen*, December 10, 1930, 2.3. Cartoons published by the supplement of *Guohua News* were also censored for consecutive days because of their satire of “common social phenomena,” prompting the editor to ask for contributions that “focus on being funny (huajia xing 滑稽性) instead.” See Editor, “Daiyou” 代郵 [Editorial], *Guohua bao* 國華報 [Guohua News], July 11, 1935, 1.4. In addition, a serialized fiction titled *The Wandering Son* (Liuli zhizi 流離之子) was also taken out by the censor for consecutive days, and the editor commented that they were forced to use a short story as a replacement. See Editor, “Qishi” 啓事 [Notice], *Guohua bao*, July 3, 1935, 2.1.

96 Bujia 卜加, “Guangzhou baozhi de youdian” 廣州報紙的優點 [The strengths of newspapers in Guangzhou], *Guangzhou zazhi*, April 1, 1934, 2.

97 The covers of the issues in which these images were published bear the license number issued by the Southwest Publication Censorship Committee.
The tightened control over freedom of press and creative expression shaped the popular cultural agents’ self-perceptions. They often presented themselves as caught between merely working for profit through portraying trivial subject matters and harboring serious commitment to the betterment of social welfare. Some authors did, indeed, take delight in the everyday experiences that formed the focal point of their informal prose essays or cartoons. For instance, an author depicts a lively scene in a local teahouse where customers fought over dim sum dishes instead of waiting for their order. At the end he delightfully admits, “needless to say, I also share their hobby of enjoying morning tea. If someone asks me whether I have joined such fights before, I dare not deny it.”98 His attention to trivial details and enjoyment of leisure pursuits characterized the spirit of xiaopin wen as an alternative mode of modern Chinese literature. Other popular writers and cartoonists, however, considered their crafts a commercially oriented practice, an idea that was sometimes brought up in a playful manner, while at other times begrudgingly regretted. “Writers for newspaper butts” (bao pigu wenren 報屁股文人), a label commonly associated with writers contributing informal prose essays to the supplement column, became the subject of satire by an author in one instance.99 Taking the term “butt” in the literal sense, the writer proposes that the newspapers depend on their “rear ends” to make a profit just like male prostitutes, noting that often times what comes out of the “buttocks” is unbearably smelly but also intoxicating and therefore able to attract a loyal following. The homoerotic gloss on the profession suggests a sense of self-debasement, possibly even a loss of

98 Huang Xiao'er 黃小二, "Guangzhou shehui sumiao (qi)" 廣州社會素描（七）[A sketch of Guangzhou society: part seven], Chengbao 誠報 [Candid News], December 20, 1933, 4.

99 Cuiying 萃英, “Baopigu de yanjiu” 報屁股的研究 [A study of the newspaper butts], Guangzhou minguo ribao 廣州民國日報 [The Canton Republican Daily], July 9, 1927, 11. The invention of this term could be traced to Bi Yihong 毕倚虹 (1892-1926), a novelist and journalist at the early Republican Shanghai daily newspaper, Shibao 時報 (Times), who allegedly nicknamed the supplement the “newspaper butts.” See Bao Tianxiao 包天笑, “Shibao de bianzhi” 時報的編制 [The composition of Shibao], in Chuanyinglou huiyilu 釧影樓回憶錄 [Reminiscences of the Bracelet Shadow Chamber] (Hong Kong: Dahua chubanshe, 1971), 350.
masculine prowess, in the face of economic pressure in a capitalist society, all of which shaped the writers’ identities. Written in the *xiaopin wen* format and published in the supplement of *Canton Republican Daily*, this essay can be read both as a sardonic self-parody and a mocking commentary on the editors and audience’s questionable motives and tastes.

Likewise, the trade of popular artists was also viewed as shamelessly profit driven by contemporary observers. For instance, the popular cultural agent A’laohuan, whose background will be analyzed in full in the third section, offers a playful sketch of local cartoonists,

The plants and trees in the Central Park have come into bloom in recent days... and so, the young men and women who come and go have become so attached to and fascinated by the scenery that they are reluctant to leave the park. There are artists who are extremely savvy and good at finding material and seizing upon opportunities... Crowding the park all day long, the artists furtively stand behind the trees and take the opportunity to create sketches of the human body with pencil and sketchbook. Even those with just one eye or the pock-marked get drawn into their sketchbooks, so how could they not capture the appearances of beautiful women? ... As one who frequents Central Park to appreciate the plants and forgets to return home, I will tell it to you straight: please beware of people with a pencil and a sketchbook: they will hold a cartoon exhibition [with what they have drawn someday].

This passage mocks popular artists in Guangzhou for brazenly feeding on the physical intimacies of couples in the park as a source of creative materials. Moreover, the popular writer Liaodiao also sarcastically observes that lately there had been intense competition among local

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100 Central Park (*Zhongyang gongyuan* 中央公園) was opened in 1921 as part of the modern urbanization project attempting to provide public space for citizens and to reform citizens’ conduct. See Delin Lai, “Renewing, Remapping, and Redefining Guangzhou,” 144.

101 A'laohuan, “Liuxin zhongyang gongyuan nei meishu jia ‘linli’” 留心中央公園內美術家「林立」 [Beware of the artists who are crowding Central Park], *Guomin xinwen*, October 29, 1927, 11. Some of the Chinese characters marked as X were illegible due to the printing quality or damages in the original newspaper.
portraiture artists who tried to beat the prices of others or warn their customers that their rivals are “fake artists.” By comparing these artists to the nationally renowned painters Liu Haisu and Xu Beihong, whose debate in the 1920s mainly centered on issues of artistic philosophy and the future of the Chinese nation, the author aims to highlight the excessively commercialized and trivial nature of the local artists.

Awareness of and frustration over government censorship was perhaps most central to the self-identity of popular writers and cartoonists in Republican Guangzhou. In a series of essays on the secrets to success for xiaopin wen writers, the author Lude claims that a friend once taught him how to blackmail men of wealth and fame by writing criticisms of them. Even though Lude claimed to want to give it a try, he eventually decided to write about romance and celebrities in show business instead after he found out that one of the writers who pursued this path suffered “getting hit in the chest a few times, being fed shit (chiguojiciheyefan 吃過幾次荷葉飯, lit. being fed lotus leaf sticky rice) a few times, and almost getting shot (chilelianzigeng 吃了蓮子羹, lit. being fed lotus sweet soup) once.” By using Cantonese slangs, such as “lotus leaf sticky rice” and “lotus sweet soup,” the author paints a vivid picture of the potential heightened danger of writing critical informal prose essays, and indirectly vents his discontent at the suppression of creative freedom under the current political system. Similarly, another writer under the pseudonym Black Rose laments that informal prose essays, which are meant to be satirical and might cover any subject from government agencies to the bottom of society, could stir up so much anger and controversy that a newspaper editor had to hire a legal consultant to

102 Liaodiao, “Kelian de yishujia” 可憐的藝術家 [The poor artists], Guangzhou zazhi, December 15, 1933, 3.
104 Lude 魯德, “Zhe liangnian lai” 這兩年來 [For the past two years], Guangzhou zazhi, January 1, 1934, 13.
settle the potential disputes.\textsuperscript{105} In both instances, it is clear that the authors are both proud of the potential influence that their humorous works provoke and at the same time make playful note of, or even express dismay at, the retribution that they might encounter from the government or other parties, which ultimately limited their creativity.

Another humorous take on the newspaper editors and writers’ dilemma between pursuing profit and following censorship laws also appeared in the form of comic strip (Figure 6). The story begins with Old Master (\textit{Lao fuzi} 老夫子) and his friend Old Lu’s plan to follow the recent trend and launch a tabloid newspaper to make a profit. The contrast is sharply drawn between Old Master’s first attempt at editorship, during which he publishes as well as collects articles on Confucian virtues but ultimately fails to attract a readership, and the second issue edited by Old Lu that sells many copies due to its racy content. Their newspaper, however, cannot escape the fate of censorship and is shut down. By simply placing a notice from the Social Bureau on the door of the newspaper office in the last panel of the cartoon, the artists have created a subtle visual cue to contrast the crowd of men flooding the office in the previous panel. Indeed, the closure notice is part of the visual background rather than comic strip text, thereby avoiding censorship. In this way the authors manage to amplify the irony of how Old Master and his friend made a living out of popular topics at the risk of offending the government’s sensitivity.

Even though most popular writers and artists seemed to view themselves and their peers as commercially oriented, they also conveyed, albeit in a comical tone, a sense of serious commitment to expose social problems. For instance, the \textit{Canton Miscellany} once listed a series of principles regarding their publications that reads,

\textsuperscript{105} Heimeigui, \textquote{Xiaopin wenzi yu changnian falü guwen} [Informal prose and long-term legal consultants], \textit{Xianxiang bao}, June 18, 1928, 7.
[We] do not publish foreign-imported trash. [We] do not publish decadent writings. [We] do not talk nonsense that does not come from the heart. [We] do not cover up and waste good materials that have been published elsewhere. [We] do not reject authors of little fame. [We] do not engage excessively in propaganda like others. [We] do not solicit an excessive amount of advertisements. [We] do not criticize those not worthy of criticism.

不刊載外國垃圾，不刊載墮落文字，不亂講本心說話，不埋沒好的冷飯，不拒絕無名作者，不學人過事宣傳，不招登多量廣告，不攻擊不值得攻擊的人

The tone of these principles is clearly an imitation of Lin Yutang’s famous “Ten Commandments” for the contributors to his humor magazine, *Analects Fortnightly*, which were intended for “the serious promotion of the expression of the independent free spirit through the form best suited to it, the short informal essay.” Similarly, the principles endorsed by the *Canton Miscellany* group stress a spirit of objectivity and sincerity directed towards people and social phenomena needing to be addressed and taunt other newspapers or magazines that might publish writings and images primarily based on the national origin or the authors’ reputation. At the same time, the *Canton Miscellany* group admits that they are not opposed to propaganda or advertisements so long as they are used in moderation. In spite of the undeniably commercialized nature of their works, the writers and artists in this magazine still strive to project an image as forthright, socially engaged critics cloaking themselves in lighthearted language.

Most of the writers and artists established multiple personas, which became a creative strategy to dance around the boundary between highbrow and “lowbrow” content. For example, Blind Man, the editor of the supplement for *Phenomenal News* who was imbricated in the track meet case with his colleagues Longjing and Mortar, was known to sign his personal name Xue Boxian in articles published in the New Literature section that appears on the front page of the

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106 Editor, “Biaoyu zhilei” 標語之類 [Slogans], *Guangzhou zazhi*, June 1, 1934, cover page.

paper. He also published, under his personal name, a collection of short prose essays and poems titled *Crimson Leaves*, which was written in the vernacular standard Mandarin style advocated by the New Culture Movement. In contrast, the articles published in the supplement page of *Phenomenal News* under his pseudonym, “Blind Man,” followed the three-tier style combining Cantonese slang, classical Chinese, and vernacular Mandarin. Whether or not writers and artists assumed pseudonyms to hide their true identity from the watchful eyes of the government remains difficult to trace. Nonetheless, it can be inferred that writers and artists like Xue Boxian might use multiple personas to carve out different spaces for creative literary or artistic expressions.

Another element of play was the gendered personas that some were known to have adopted to invoke the reader’s interests and promote sales. By masquerading as female in their authorial personas, the male authors were afforded the opportunity to tap into the predominantly masculine mode of local humor. In the case of Old Lady Historian (*Taishipo 太史婆*), a popular writer who contributed to the supplements of *Citizens’ News*, *Canton Republican Daily*, and *Fair Review News*, “she” consciously leaves traces of a feminine persona in many of “her” writings. For example, in an essay titled, “Farewell Remarks by Old Lady Historian,” the author explains one of “her” reasons for returning to “her” hometown to be “her” disdain for women’s modern fashion, because “I, this old woman whose words are trite and whose heart is obsolete, consider clothes that expose one’s flesh to be [a symbol of] a demon seductress and short hair that does

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108 For example, see Xue Boxian, “Women de hua” 我們的話 [Our words], *Xianxiang bao*, April 2, 1928, 1.


110 For a typical piece written by Blind Man in the three-tier style, see Manggon 盲公 [Blind Man], “Nüsheng neixiang de yuanyin” 女生內向的原因 [The reasons for women’s introversion], *Xianxiang bao*, March 27, 1928, 7.
not exceed one’s neck to be [a symbol of] cross-dressing as a man.”111 The self-denigrating appellation “this old woman” (*laoshen* 老身), a label reserved for women of advanced age, is evoked by the author to emphasize “her” gendered and aged identity and provides a humorous contrast to the allegedly bewildering fashion trends favored by younger women. Other ways in which the author possibly exploited this gendered persona for a playful twist include inventing another persona, that of Old Lady Historian’s husband, “Old Man Historian” (*Taishilao* 太史佬), and using “his” voice to lament Old Lady Historian’s jealous and shrewish nature, which prevented him from taking a concubine even though they had no offspring because their “children” had passed away.112 As will be discussed further in Chapter 4, the henpecking theme was immensely well-received among the readership of popular literature and cartoons in Republican Guangzhou, a fact possibly resulting in the author’s crafting of a domineering side to Old Lady Historian along with the creation of a “Old Man Historian” persona. Other writers also contributed to the fashioning of an absurdly elderly and feminine persona of Old Lady Historian by, for instance, describing “her” as a talkative busybody (*sangu liupo* 三姑六婆, lit. three aunties and six grannies) who spreads nonsense on the pages of the newspaper butts rather than enjoying a restful old age.113 Using the term “three aunties and six grannies,” a traditional expression that originally labels women in disreputable professions and is extended to cover any lower-class women prone to gossip, this article jokingly associates Old Lady Historian’s prolific popular works and writing style with a female stereotype.

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111 *Taishipo* 太史婆 [Old Lady Historian], “Taishipo linbie zengyan” [Farewell remarks by Old Lady Historian], *Guomin xinwen*, July 9, 1927, 11.

112 *Taishilao* 太史佬 [Old Man Historian], “Zhidian nan” 支店難 [The difficulty of opening a branch a.k.a. obtaining a concubine], *Guomin xinwen*, July 21, 1927, 11.

While there is no extant evidence from the years during which Old Lady Historian was active to testify to “her” actual identity, it was later exposed by a writer who published a series of essays in a Hong Kong newspaper in the 1980s, also under the pseudonym Old Lady Historian, who reminisced about his journalistic career some fifty years earlier. Claiming that he had only recently adopted the pseudonym “Old Lady Historian,” and was thus not the same as the xiaopin wen writer Old Lady Historian in the 1920s and 1930s, the author suggests that the earlier Old Lady Historian was in fact Dai Kebian 戴可編 (years unknown), a native of Foshan county in the Guangdong province and one of the many descendants of the late Qing Minister of Rites Dai Hongci 戴鴻慈 (1853-1910) who worked in the newspaper business. Not much else is known about Dai Kebian other than the fact that he also edited the first page of the newspaper Fair Review News in the 1930s but found a new job as the manager of a store after he fled to Hong Kong in 1938 when Guangzhou was occupied by the Japanese army. Since the actual age, gender, and life course of Dai Kebian was vastly different from his literary persona of Old Lady Historian, we can surmise that many aspects of this persona were invented to correspond to trends and themes relating to women and popular at the time, such as women’s fashion or henpecking stories. His motives, to the extent that they can be discerned, seem to depart from those of the male reformers in the late Qing or elite writers throughout the Republican era, who were interested in adopting feminine pennames to create feminine voices in their newspapers and journals as signs of progress in the women's movement in support of strengthening the Chinese

114 Taishipo 太史婆, “Taishipo shi maopaihuo” 太史婆是冒牌貨 [I, Old Lady Historian, am an imposter], Zhongbao 中報 [China News], March 13, 1983, page unknown. The fact that several descendants of Dai Hongci engaged in the newspaper industry is mentioned in Taishipo, “Guangdong baoren chu Foshan” 廣東報人出佛山 [Guangdong newspaper journalists and writers that originated from Foshan], Zhongbao, July 4, 1983, page unknown.
nation-state. Instead, popular writers like Dai Kebian seem to have constructed such personas to provide alternative, playful angles from which to comment on various modern-day social phenomena. Their ability to move between gendered personas and lampoon their invented female selves also speaks to the creative liberty that male authors enjoyed in the masculine community of local humor, a discursive and social group largely void of women popular writers and artists.

In addition, the strategy of creative borrowing, sometimes viewed as lacking in originality, also became part of the popular writers and artists’ self-perception in Republican Guangzhou. Editors of the supplements were especially noted for their tendency to borrow articles and images from other newspapers. Yang Liu 楊柳 (years unknown), the editor of Canton Miscellany, openly defended his use of articles that had already been published in other newspapers by arguing, “I believe good essays should be publicized and introduced and that cutting and pasting should not be seen as a debased, immoral act.” Popular writers in his magazine and other publications, in contrast, seemed less sympathetic to such an editorial strategy. For instance, on his experiences over the past two years as an informal prose writer, Lude recalls an anecdote in which he saw an editor of a local newspaper supplement at a used book stall carrying a bag of Shanghai magazines such as Saturday (Libailiu 禮拜六), Violet (Ziluolan 紫羅蘭), and Semi-monthly (Banyue 半月). When asked where he was going, the editor replied that he was going to “hire Shanghai journalists,” while in actuality Lude later

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116 Bianzhe 編者 [Editor], “Jiang liangju” 讲兩句 [Uttering a sentence or two], Guangzhou zazhi, March 15, 1933, 8.

117 Lude, “Zhe liangnian lai,” Guangzhou zazhi, November 1, 1933, 8.
discovered that the editor purchased the magazines in order to cut and paste articles to publish in his own supplement section under different titles and bylines, or by adding the phrase “so-and-so contributed from Shanghai.” The phrase “hiring Shanghai journalists” serves to accentuate and poke fun at the illegitimate means through which the editor claimed ownership over materials published elsewhere. Additionally, this story also reveals the processes of traveling and recycling of print culture among Chinese cities in the Republican era.

For the popular writers themselves, the act of creative borrowing was not only commonplace but also subject to satirical comment within the writers’ circle, even though those who were committed to the protection of their own works could not escape from others’ sarcasm. A writer cautions other xiaopin wen contributors of a special type of plagiarizers called the “newspaper rascals” (baogun 報棍) who would intentionally “plagiarize” an article that was lucky enough to have been published and then contribute it under a different pseudonym to another newspaper. He could later send a letter under his real name to the editor and expose the purported plagiarism so that his writing would appear to be worthy of illicit appropriation. Two days after the appearance of this piece, another writer submitted an article that ironically highlights the danger of plagiarizers taking advantage of the defeat of “newspaper rascals,” since the plagiarizers could now rebuke anyone who accused them of borrowing by labeling him a “newspaper rascal” in return. The only solution left, this author proposes, is that editors expose every plagiarism scheme without revealing the name of the original author, and in so doing neither the plagiarizer nor any potential “newspaper rascal” would benefit. Together, these

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119 Qixin 奇心, “Dadao baogun hou yao yanfang chaoxijia cuanru” 打倒報棍以後要嚴防抄襲家竄入 [After defeating the “newspaper rascals,” we should carefully prevent the plagiarizers from sneaking in], Guangzhou minguo ribao, May 25, 1927, 11.
two essays portray the newspaper supplement page as a chaotic field in which every xiaopin wen writer could potentially play tricks, expose evildoings, or laugh at all parties involved, all under the guise of pseudonyms and multiple personas.

Nonetheless, taking charge of one’s intellectual property was regarded as equally absurd, especially for popular writers whose conservative stance was unpopular among some of their peers. One of the most widely cited examples was the phrase “do not reprint” (buxu zhuanzai 不许轉載) that a writer from Sanshui county of the Guangdong province, Li Jian’er, inserted at the end of his articles. This was considered as such a self-aggrandizing move that another writer, who signs his name “Worshipper” to show his alleged adoration of Li Jian’er, mockingly praises Li’s signature “do not reprint” phrase as “the standard of a literary giant,” since the works of other writers apparently lack the quality worthy of reprinting. Lude also tells a joke about how the editor who cut and pasted articles from Shanghai magazines, also learned from Li Jian’er’s “no-reprintism” by putting the phrase at the end of his newly formulated essays, in order to inspire awe from readers just like they would for Li’s articles. Needless to say, the protective gesture of Li Jian’er, who believed his works were ripe for plagiarism, proves to be self-important rather than justified in the eyes of contemporary observers. The mockery directed at Li Jian’er may also have been on account of his conformist point-of-view, such as his acclamation for the British administration in Hong Kong in an essay commemorating his visit to the colony shortly after the yearlong Guangzhou-Hong Kong strike starting in 1925, which infuriated

120 Chongbaizhe 崇拜者 [Worshipper], “Biaozhun wenhao yu wenhao biaozhun” 標準文豪與文豪標準 [A typical literary giant and the standard of a literary giant], Guangzhou zazhi, June 1, 1933, 16-18.
121 Lude, “Zhe liangnian lai,” November 1, 1933, 8.
journalists sympathizing with the strikers.¹²² Li Jian’er’s widely known phrase was found to be laughable, in other words, as much on account of his politics (his favorable portrayal of the British colonizers) as for his literary pretensions. Together with the caricature of plagiarizers, the satire of so-called “no-reprintism” seems to demonstrate the ways in which popular writers struggled to find meaning in what constituted authentic local culture, which might further be grist of local pride.

Cartoonists, too, also left visual and textual traces in their strategies of creative borrowing, hinting at the transregional circulation of artistic practices and local vernacular expressions. An example can be seen in a cartoon titled, “Human Meat Market” (Renrou shichang 人肉市場), drawn by Lu Shaofei 魯少飛 (1903-1995) and published in the Shanghai Sketch in 1929 (Figure 7).¹²³ This image represents the Shanghai cartoonist’s visual commentary on urban life and the commodification of female flesh, and cartoons of this sort constituted the bulk of the contents found in this magazine. Lu Shaofei depicts a visual metaphor in which a stout female butcher cuts up women’s bodies into pieces and sells them to men like the meat of animals. The grotesque, salacious nature of this image is underlined by the artist’s use of dark, austere colors, short diagonal lines that draw attention to the texture of the human flesh, and soft rounded lines for the supple female breasts, buttocks, and their discarded skin and intestines in the bucket. As the title suggested, this cartoon serves as an allegorical criticism of the horrors and cruelty of “selling human flesh” (mairou), which was essentially a euphemism for prostitution. Curiously, a similar image titled “Meat Market” (Roushi 肉市, Figure 8) appeared in The Sketch in

¹²² Journalists such as Zhang Qingquan 張清泉 (years unknown) were particularly outspoken against the commemorative essays that overlooked the sufferings of the strikers. See the entry on Zhang Qingquan in Chuxixianzhe, “Guangzhou wentan zuozhe zalu,” March 15, 1934, 20. A discussion of the Guangzhou-Hong Kong strike can be found in Tsin, Nation, Governance, and Modernity, 146-69.

¹²³ For the background of Shanghai Sketch, see Sakamoto, “Manga hyoushou ni miru Shanhai modan gaaru,” 120-21.
Guangzhou four years later, a fact that suggests a broader pattern of copying or emulation between the two locales.

Compared to Lu Shaofei’s cartoon, “Meat Market” chooses to deliver the message against human corruption and sexual depravity in a stylistically simplified manner, while being no less compelling. For instance, the plump woman sitting at the counter of the butcher shop resembles the earring-wearing, rounded-chin butcher in Lu Shaofei’s work, representing the figure of brothel madam who was often accused of sex trafficking and abuse of women. In the place of the grotesque, dismembered female body parts, the Guangzhou cartoonist depics legs in high heels perhaps to evoke one of the main characteristics of the iconic Modern Girl, who was often conflated with clandestine prostitutes. Moreover, the man who has taken a woman’s leg away in Lu Shaofei’s cartoon is replaced by a dog, the longing gaze of which similarly serves to satirize male lust. Perhaps, the artist of the latter “Meat Market” took creative license with Lu Shaofei’s work and added his own personal touches to underline a discourse of female dehumanization caused by modern prostitution. Whether directly influenced or not, surely this was just one expression of a common concern circulated in multiple discursive and artistic genres at the time. The similarities between the two images confirm the broader patterns of cross-regional artistic exchange and gendered representations in urban centers in Republican China.

The serialized cartoon, Mr. Wang (Wang Xiansheng 王先生), penned by one of the most accomplished cartoonist in modern Chinese history, Ye Qianyu 葉淺予 (1907-1995), was not only extensively read by residents in many Chinese cities but also inspired emulation by popular artists in Guangzhou. We can assume that readers in Guangzhou were able to purchase Shanghai cartoon pictorials such as Shanghai Sketch, where the works of cartoonists such as the
aforementioned Lu Shaofei and Ye Qianyu were featured. The Guangzhou-based newspaper *Guohua News* also started to publish Ye Qianyu’s *Mr. Wang* beginning in 1934, and explained their choice in an announcement stating that they were particularly attracted to *Mr. Wang*’s popularity and Ye Qianyu’s masterful techniques and humorous storylines. The widespread appeal of *Mr. Wang* perhaps also lies in its protagonist of the same name, who, “by turns a moralist and hedonist, [played] into stereotypes about the ‘typical’ Shanghainese that had been well established in the popular literature of recent decades”; this figure likewise struck a chord with the urbanite readers in Guangzhou. The success of *Mr. Wang* might have inspired the creators of a local serialized comic strip entitled *Old Master*, which features a similar set of characters. The protagonist is a middle-aged man native to Guangzhou whose personal name is Sheng 勝 (same pronunciation as Mr. Wang’s Sheng 盛) and whose personality is also both hypocritically moralistic and perfidious. Similar to Mr. Wang, Old Master also has a domineering, traditional-looking wife, and a daughter modern in her appearance and lifestyle. Moreover, *Old Master*’s plots resemble those of *Mr. Wang* as they revolved around farcical anecdotes that nevertheless epitomized the lived experiences of urban dwellers. His various escapades included attempts to make a fortune via illicit schemes, wriggling out of unfavorable circumstances, or doing battle with his wife (who strove to contain his perennial search for extramarital affairs). One of the most direct bits of evidence demonstrating *Mr. Wang*’s influence on *Old Master* can be observed in the latter’s adoption of the curse word, “matepi” 媽特皮 (exact meaning unknown), in one episode in which the male protagonist tries to take care of his sick wife but ends up injuring himself many times in the process (Figure 9). While curse words

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124 Anonymous, “Benbao zengkan changqi manhua” 本報增刊長期漫畫 [Our newspaper will publish an additional serialized comic strip], *Guohua bao*, July 7, 1934, 1.2.

such as “diu na ma” (lit. fxxk your mother) existed in the Cantonese dialect and were incorporated into the dialogues of previous episodes of *Old Master*, not to mention other local serialized comic strips such as *Boss He* and *Dr. Zhang*, the authors’ decision to use a nonlocal curse word in this particular episode of *Old Master* seems difficult to explain. One possible contributing factor may have been an episode of *Mr. Wang* published in *Guohua News* only two days earlier (Figure 10), in which the male protagonist also utters the curse during a fight with his wife. It can be inferred that the artists of *Old Master* tried to learn from the commercially lucrative *Mr. Wang* and create a comic strip similar in character types, storylines, and even some of the words conveyed by the characters, although many of the particular details and expressions were still adapted to the Guangzhou context.

Even though their self-perceptions often exude concern with lack of originality and cultural inferiority in comparison with Shanghai writers and artists, in some instances popular writers and artists also exhibited pride in their local culture and in the revolutionary reputation of Guangzhou. One writer observes that when a non-native traveler first came to Guangzhou and started to read the supplements of local newspapers, it was as though s/he was trapped inside a labyrinth because all the informal prose essays had undergone the process of Canton-ization (*yueyan hua*). Instead of criticizing the exclusive nature of these informal prose essays for driving away readers unfamiliar with the dialect, the writer praises these works for “bringing out the beauty of folk [customs]” and giving readers an opportunity to study the folk literature of Guangdong province. The author is drawing a connection between the use of Cantonese dialect

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126 A popular writer playfully renders the expression *diu na ma* as “a unique product of the Cantonese and can neither be appropriated nor emulated” since it was “representative of the Guangdong [spirit].” See Erjin 阿今, “*Diu na ma* zai Beiping” *刁那媽在北平* [When “fxxk your mother” traveled to Beijing], *Guangzhou zazhi*, April 15, 1933, 1-2.

127 Guai 怪, “*Xiaopin wenzi de yueyan hua* [The “Canton-ization” of informal prose essays], *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, November 5, 1927, 11.
in local *xiaopin wen* and the folk studies movement, during which advocates of the New Culture Movement started to pay attention to the voices of the common people and turned to folk songs, legends, and myths in local regions as the pure, unaffected source of inspiration for reforming modern Chinese literature.\(^{128}\) By considering local *xiaopin wen* as the emblem of folk literature in the Guangdong region, the writer, then, clearly takes pride in the popular cultural production of the locale, which he urges the nonnative readers to study more closely. This further demonstrates the lasting influence of late Qing intellectuals who employed vernacular Cantonese in their literary and journalistic endeavors as a display of regional solidarity.

Some went to a greater extent to showcase their support for the revolutionary legacy of the city. In 1933, *The Canton Miscellany* devoted to a special issue to kapok, the official flower of Guangzhou that symbolizes its status as the birthplace of the Chinese revolution. In this issue, twenty-four pieces of informal prose essays, short fiction, poems, paintings and cartoons revolving around the kapok flower were carefully selected and published. The editor claims that this special issue is intended to “deepen local residents’ impression [of the kapok flower]” and stimulating their patriotic spirits.\(^{129}\) One of the articles published in this special issue, titled “My Opinion on the Adoption of Kapok as Guangzhou’s Official Flower,” further highlights the ways in which the kapok’s exuberance, beauty, and ubiquity best represent the heroic spirit of the Guangdong people and the principle of egalitarianism advocated by Sun Yat-sen.\(^{130}\) These writers and artists, in all likelihood, were striving to build upon the revolutionary heritage of native heroes such as Sun Yat-sen and fashion a group identity as patriotic citizens of


\(^{129}\) See the explanatory note on this special issue penned by the editor Yang Liu 楊柳, “Lüe tan jiju” 略談幾句 [Just to say a few words], *Guangzhou zazhi*, February 15, 1933, 1.

\(^{130}\) Xiyuan 西園, “Caiyong hongmianhua wei Guangzhou shihua zhi wojian” 採用紅棉花為廣州市花之我見 [My opinion on the adoption of kapok as Guangzhou’s official flower], *Guangzhou zazhi*, February 15, 1933, 1-2.
Guangzhou city, perhaps partly in the hope that readers would take their work more seriously. Their display of nationalistic fervor, nonetheless, points to the complexity of their self-images, for they might find it necessary both to make profit by depicting seemingly mundane matters that characterized the modern experience of local urbangies and to celebrate the city’s revolutionary tradition.

From the caricature of their commercial motives to their acts of creative borrowing, the thematic focus of informal prose essayists and cartoonists mainly resulted from popular tastes and tightening government censorship. Despite these realistic concerns and restraints, none of these writers and artists could avoid questions of and concerns with political apathy and cultural inferiority. Their self-portrayals as culturally debased and frustrated over the lack of creative freedom, which were often wrapped in playful banter and sarcasm, ultimately points to the political rivalry between the government authorities stationed in Nanjing and Guangzhou and between state and society, as well as the transregional and intralocal circulation of ideas, tastes, and artistic practices. In addition, these writers and artists’ occasional display of regional and nationalistic spirit further demonstrate the uneasy struggles between the need to justify the worth of their works and the image of their city as a locale connected to the nationwide folk studies movement and as the revolutionary capital of a modern Chinese nation-state: they were forced to explain away interests in local cultural expressions and urban experiences not directly connected to politics.

Part III Popular Cultural Entrepreneurship: A Case Study of Huang Huanwu and Huang Huanniao
The following section dissects in greater detail the trajectory of the brothers Huang Huanwu and Huang Huanniao, whose popular cultural and commercial art careers reached their heights during the 1920s and 1930s. Their works in multiple genres—including xiaopin wen, popular fiction, cartoons, and advertisements—serve as materials for this dissertation. By reconstructing a timeline of the Huang brothers’ professional lives, I seek to investigate the background, self-images, visions, themes of interest, and lived experiences of popular cultural entrepreneurs so as to provide better understanding of their textual and artistic compositions and the popular cultural industry in Republican-era Guangzhou. The Huang Brothers’ multifarious careers correspond to many of the characteristics of popular writers and artists discussed above: their productions crossed the boundary between highbrow and vernacular essay writing and art; they took on multiple personas through the use of pseudonyms, and there was always a commercial orientation to their works. Finally, the Huang brothers used their popular cultural enterprises to channel both regional pride and nationalist sentiments, which was complicatedly intertwined with their self-perceptions as commercial writers and artists.

Since the elder brother, Huanwu, gained the official recognition of the Communist government as a celebrated flower-and-bird painter after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (1949–present), many of his extant works have been published in art albums, which also record his early life in some detail. According to one preface, Huanwu, whose personal name was Han 罕, was born in Xinhui 新會 County, Guangdong province in 1906.131 Growing up, he started to take an interest in drawing and would trace the images of New Year

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131 Tai Haihua 邰海華, “Yingxionghua kai mantian hong: pingjie Huang Huanwu de shengping ji qi huihua yishu” 英雄花開漫天紅：黃幻吾的生平及其繪畫藝術 [The sky is tinted red by blooming kapok flowers: an introduction and evaluation of Huang Huanwu’s life and painting arts], preface to Huang Huanwu huaji 黃幻吾畫集 [Art album of Huang Huanwu], by Huang Huanwu (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1983), i.
greeting cards sent from overseas and cigarette cards. It was also reported that at the age of 11 Huanwu began to learn drawing from a lithographic version of the Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting (Jieziyuan huapu 芥子園畫譜), which according to historian Geremie Barmé was “one of the most important and popular art primers [in] near universal use since the eighteenth century.” Shortly after, at the age of 12, Huanwu began to study under a figure painter in his hometown until his family relocated to the city of Guangzhou two years later. There, Huanwu entered a secondary school and, according to another biography, was taught by an art instructor who had studied abroad and was an expert on both Chinese traditional art and Western-style painting. At the age of 18, after his secondary school graduation, Huanwu worked in the art department of a printing house and learned the trade of the printing industry, while also studying classical Chinese literature and copying the art and calligraphy of Chinese masters such as Wang Hui 王翬 (1632-1717), Ding Jing 丁敬 (1695-1765), Wu Rangzhi 吳讓之 (1799-1870), Zhao Zhiqian 趙之謙 (1829-1884), and Wu Changshuo 吳昌碩 (1884-1927). During this time, he

132 Ibid. Cigarette cards were collectibles included in each pack of cigarettes that featured different kinds of Chinese-style or Westernized images and could be exchanged for money or a prize once the collector was able to gather the entire set. See Weipin Tsai, “Having it all: Patriotism and Gracious Living in Shenbao’s Tobacco advertisements, 1919-1937,” in Creating Chinese Modernity: Knowledge and Everyday Life, 1900-1940, ed. Peter G. Zarrow (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006), 121 n.8. For the circulation and collecting practices of cigarette cards in Guangzhou, see Nanfang dushi bao and Guangdong shengli zhongshan tushuguan, et al. Guangzhou jiwen: ting baozhi jiang guoqu de gushi 廣州舊聞：聽報紙講過去的故事 [Old anecdotes of Guangzhou: hearing stories from the past from the newspaper] (Guangzhou: Nanfang ribao chubanshe, 2007), 166-71.

133 Tai, preface to Huang Huanwu huaji, i. Barmé also suggests that artists such as Feng Zikai began their art training by learning from the manual. See Geremie R. Barmé, An Artistic Exile: A Life of Feng Zikai (1898-1975) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 21.

134 Tai, preface to Huang Huanwu huaji, i.


also met an unidentified British missionary who taught him the techniques of watercolor, gouache, and oil painting. It is even suggested that Huanwu became the student of founders of the Lingnan school, Gao Jianfu 高奇峰 (1889-1933), and Chen Shuren 陳樹人 (1884-1948), who had returned to Guangzhou from Shanghai in the late 1910s to establish an institutional foundation for their artistic careers. Huanwu arguably inherited their syncretic approach to modern Chinese art by combining the strengths of Guangdong flower-and-bird painting tradition, Japanese painting, and Western realism.

Conversely, very little is known about the early life of the younger brother Huanniao besides what can be gathered from Huanwu’s biography. According to the “imposter” Old Lady Historian’s recollections, when he met Huanniao during the 1930s, the latter was in his twenties, which would place Huanniao’s birth year somewhere in between 1907 and the 1910s. It can be surmised that Huanniao was relatively young when the Huang family moved from their hometown Xinhui County to Guangzhou, and like his elder brother also received some schooling in the provincial capital. The “imposter” Old Lady Historian also claims that Huanniao was a

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137 Tai, preface to Huang Huanwu huaji, i. Yang, Zhongguo xiandai huajia zhuany, 1: 340.

138 Tai, preface to Huang Huanwu huaji, i-ii. For the reasons behind the Gao brothers’ return to Guangzhou, see Ralph Croizier, Art and Revolution in Modern China: The Lingnan (Cantonese) School of Painting, 1906-1951 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 83-88.

139 Tai, preface to Huang Huanwu huaji, ii. Yang, Zhongguo xiandai huajia zhuany, 1: 340.

140 Taishipo, “Huanwu Huanniao liang huajia” 幻吾幻鳥兩畫家 [The two artists Huanwu and Huanniao], Zhongbao, April 17, 1985, page unknown.
student of the landscape painter Li Yaoping 李瑶屏 (1883-1937), who co-founded the National Painting Research Society and taught at different art academies.\(^{141}\) It is reasonable to infer that Huanniao was artistically influenced by his elder brother, based on the close partnership that the two developed later in life.

The late 1920s and 1930s, a period when the Huang brothers made their fame in the local popular literature and art circle, is almost completely omitted from Huanwu’s official biographies, a fact that can be attributed to the greater weight placed on his developments and accomplishments as a “highbrow” painter. Starting in at least 1927, Huanwu (possibly with the help of Huanniao) contributed numerous informal prose essays under the pseudonym A’laohuan to the supplements of major newspapers, including the *Citizens’ News* and *Phenomenal News*.\(^{142}\) These essays were typically rewarded from two jiao to one yuan depending on their quality and content.\(^{143}\) One such essay was even submitted to and published by a Singapore-based newspaper, *South Seas Commercial News*, after its initial appearance in the *Citizens’ News* two months earlier.\(^{144}\) Huanwu also published a fiction serial under his real name in *Citizens’ News* titled *The Abandonment of Love* (*qing’ai zhi sheli* 情愛之捨離), only parts of which survived. Perhaps on account of the connections that he had cultivated during his employment at the printing house, he

\(^{141}\) Ibid. For a brief biography of Li Yaoping, see Li Jian’er 李健兒, *Guangdong xiandai huaren zhuanye* 廣東現代畫人傳 [Biographies of contemporary Guangdong painters] (Hong Kong: Guangwen shuju, 1941), 36-37. Interestingly, the National Painting Research Society was one of the major opponents against the artistic reform of traditional Chinese painting proposed by the Lingnan school. See Croizier, *Art and Revolution*, 109.

\(^{142}\) The fact that A’laohuan was the pseudonym of at least one of the Huang brothers can be testified by an editor’s note addressing directly to Huang Huanwu when A’laohuan started to write for the supplement of *Citizens’ News*. See Bianzhe 編者 [Editor], “Daiyou” 代郵 [Editorial], *Guomin xinwen*, June 7, 1927, 11.

\(^{143}\) See Anonymous, “Benlan zhenghao jianli” 本欄徵稿簡例 [Brief rules for contribution solicitation in our supplement], *Xianxiang bao*, April 21, 1928, 7.

\(^{144}\) The article was first published in *Citizens’ News* as A’laohuan, “Guangyin buluokong de jieshao” 光陰不落空的介紹 [An introduction to a wise use of time], *Guomin xinwen*, August 26, 1927, 11. It was later published again with the same title and content in *South Seas Commercial News* as A’laohuan, “Guangyin buluokong de jieshao” 光陰不落空的介紹 [An introduction to a wise use of time], *Nanyang shangbao*, October 22, 1927, 22.
also served as the editor of the supplement, titled “Little Guangzhou,” of *Canton Republican Daily*.\(^{145}\) Meanwhile, Huanwu’s career as a commercial artist took flight, drawing illustrations for various columns in the newspapers (Figures 11 and 12) and advertisements (Figure 13). Based on the essays that A’laohuan wrote regarding his working experiences in a portraiture shop, the Huang brothers may also have opened a portraiture shop in the Western Suburb area of the city around 1927.\(^{146}\) According to one account, A’laohuan indicates that he started a portraiture shop to compete with the photograph studios that charged a much higher price, and his business thrived to such a degree that he had to raise prices just to cut back on his clientele. The portraiture shop, then, may have become an important source of income for the Huang brothers, who might otherwise have run into financial difficulties by relying on *xiaopin wen* writing or illustration work alone. However, it is highly probably that the portraiture business did not last long, for the Communist Uprising in December 1927, an event that A’laohuan reminisced about in an article with much fear and helplessness, was known to have caused considerable destruction in the city and might have forced the Huang brothers to abandon their shop or even flee the city temporarily.\(^{147}\)

During the 1930s, the younger brother, Huanniao, began to make a name for himself in the world of commercial art. During his employment as the art editor at one of Guangzhou’s most widely circulated newspapers, *Guohua News*, Huanniao produced numerous artworks that ranged from illustrations for various columns (Figure 14) and serialized fiction (Figure 15) to

\(^{145}\) A’laohuan’s editorship was mentioned in Huqin 胡琴, “Daoyu 跚餘 [Dance trivia], *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, December 10, 1927, 11.

\(^{146}\) A’laohuan, “Wei guominshijie zuozhe zaoxiang ji 造像記 [A record on portraiture-making for the writers in the ‘Citizens’ World’ supplement], *Guomin xinwen*, June 27, 1927, 11. Also, see A’laohuan, “Xiexiang de yimu ban 造相的一幕半 [One and a half scene of portraiture-making], *Guomin xinwen*, July 16, 1927, 11.

\(^{147}\) A’laohuan, “E han cencen lu 额汗涔涔錄 [A record of dripping sweat from the forehead], *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, December 23, 1927, 8.
single-panel cartoons (Figure 16), the serialized comic strip *Old Master* (Figures 6 and 9), an illustrated anecdote series called *Humorous Talk, Humorous Drawing* (Figure 17) and advertisements (Figure 18). His graphic style was purportedly influenced by the German Dada cartoonist George Grosz, who was known for his forceful line drawings and sardonic commentary of the social ills in the Weimar Republic and emerging Nazism.\(^{148}\) As Figure 18 clearly suggests, Huanniao was also working for his elder brother Huanwu’s advertising agency, which was established no later than the early 1930s. Besides the numerous advertisements by the agency, it also offered commercial art lessons in a variety of subjects and promised “a successful and high-paying career after graduation.”\(^{149}\) Some of the artists working for Huanwu’s agency, such as Cui Bingheng 崔秉亨 (years unknown) and Yao Yuedong 姚岳東 (years unknown), also contributed cartoons or illustrations for various columns in *Guohua News*, among other newspapers.\(^{150}\) In addition, Huanwu’s art academy recruited renowned local artists such as Huanniao’s teacher, Li Yaoping, to serve as both the Dean of Academic Affairs and instructor, and solicited the backing of social elites including the revolutionary and educator, Xie Yingbo 謝英伯 (1883-1939), and the former Head of the Social Bureau, Wu Boliang 伍伯良 (1893-1965),

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\(^{149}\) Courses offered by Huanwu’s school included “commercial advertisements,” “industrial graphic design,” “political propaganda,” “journalistic drawing,” and “advertisement art crash course.” See “Advertisement of recruitment for the Huanwu Advertisement Art Academy,” *Guohua bao*, February 17, 1935, 1.3. See also “Advertisement of recruitment for the Huanwu Advertisement Art Academy,” *Guohua bao*, February 18, 1935, 1.3. The promise of a lucrative career can be found in “Advertisement for the Huanwu Advertisement Art Agency,” *Guohua bao*, June 25, 1933, 2.3.

\(^{150}\) Cui Bingheng and Yao Yuedong’s names appeared on a list of commercial artists employed by the agency in “Advertisement for the Huanwu Advertising Agency in 1933,” *Guohua bao*, February 24, 1933, 1.2. Cui Bingheng designed the illustration for the “New Field” supplement of *Guohua news* on July 11, 1933, while Yao Yuedong published a single-panel cartoon titled “Gold-testing Stone” in *Guohua news* on October 11, 1935.
to serve on the board of directors.\textsuperscript{151} The scale of operation of Huanwu’s advertisement agency and art school is further testified to by their need to hire several female secretarial staff in 1933, who were expected to have “graduated from secondary school and be experienced in bookkeeping and accounting.”\textsuperscript{152} Even though the Huang brothers no longer engaged in \textit{xiaopin wen} writing under the pseudonym of A’laohuan, they were able to perfect their skills in various artistic genres and developed a broad social network that, in turn, significantly contributed to their commercial success.

The year 1936 marked the first apex of Huanwu’s achievement in the field of high art. On January 1, Huanwu held a personal exhibition of his landscape paintings in the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) building on the Canton Bund; and a visitor observed that “[his exhibited paintings] were in both the Chinese and the Western styles, all of which were exquisite and refined.”\textsuperscript{153} Huanwu also helped organize the third annual exhibition of the Art Wind Society (\textit{Yifeng she} 藝風社), an artist organization based in Hangzhou that gained national prominence, which was held in Guangzhou in June 1936. Huanwu exhibited ten Chinese-style paintings and five oil paintings alongside famed artists from other parts of the country.\textsuperscript{154} He also penned an article for the society’s official journal, \textit{Art Wind}, acclaiming the exhibition as an

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\textsuperscript{151} For Li Yaoping’s involvement in the art academy as the Dean of Academic Affairs, see “Advertisement of recruitment for the Huanwu Advertisement Art Academy,” \textit{Guohua bao}, January 18, 1935, 1.3. For his employment as an instructor, see “Advertisement of recruitment for the Huanwu Advertisement Art Academy,” \textit{Guohua bao}, April 8, 1935, 2.1. For Xie Boying and Wu Boliang’s roles in the academy, see “Advertisement of recruitment for the Huanwu Advertisement Art Academy,” \textit{Guohua bao}, March 19, 1935, 2.1.


\textsuperscript{153} Zhang Zhen 張震, “Yuandan Qingnianhui guanhua ji” 元旦青年會觀畫記 [A record of attending an art exhibition in the YMCA on New Year’s Day], \textit{Guohua bao}, January 5, 1936, 1.4.

\textsuperscript{154} See “Yifengshe disanjie zhanlanhui chupin mulu” 藝風社第三屆展覽會出品目錄 [Table of contents for the exhibits in the Art Wind Society Third Annual Exhibition], \textit{Yifeng} 藝風 [Art Wind] 4, no. 5-6 (Sep. 1936): 98-99, 106.
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unprecedented occasion for the nation as a whole and for the city of Guangzhou in particular, which served as cradle of the Chinese revolution and Chinese modern art, alike. The positive accolades from viewers and the connections he secured with the national artist circle all point to his rise to fame as a sophisticated painter, in addition to his already prosperous advertising and popular art career.

Through the use of different personas, it is clear that the Huang brothers also adopted the strategy of traversing the line between what was considered highbrow and popular. For example, the pseudonym A'laohuan was employed exclusively in the realm of informal prose essays, even though A'laohuan's alternative identity as an artist was equally pronounced and often pointed out by fellow writers. Similarly, Huanniao's signatures for his cartoons, advertisements, and illustrations mostly involved his personal name, likely because his works during his art editorship at *Guohua News* were commercially oriented or popular in nature. On the contrary, Huanwu would sign his fiction, paintings, and formal writing (such as the piece he wrote for the Art Wind Society) with his full name, possibly indicating his desire to be identified as a serious writer and artist on these occasions. The different authorial constructs that the Huang brothers fashioned for their works reflect their expertise in multiple literary and artistic genres and their ability to transcend the divide between the highbrow and vernacular.

The Huang brothers had also frequently evoked feminine subjects in their popular literature and artwork, perhaps in order to cater to audience interest. Albeit short-lived, Huanwu

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156 For example, in an article that lists the various interests and peculiarities of writers in the supplement of *Phenomenal News*, the author identifies A’laohuan’s hobby as “drawing.” See Liangzai Bofu 靚仔伯父, “Benlan zuoze zhi tebie shihao” 本欄作者之特別嗜好 [The special interests of writers in this column], *Xianshang bao*, April 24, 1928, 7. Another writer also provides an exaggerated description of A’laohuan’s artist lifestyle and art studio. See Fangdajing 放大鏡 [Magnifying Glass], “Benlan zuoze shenghuo zhi zhaopian: A 'laohuan” 本欄作者生活之照片－阿老幻 [A photograph of the life of a writer in this column, A’laohuan], *Guomin xinwen*, November 7, 1927, 11.
(and possibly Huanniao) created a feminine persona, “Mrs. Huan” (Huan Furen 幻夫人), when penning xiaopin wen articles during the latter half of the 1920s. This persona was credited as the author of several essays involving topics related to women such as the benefits of wearing high heels or the latest trends in handkerchiefs. Here, the fact that “Mrs. Huan” was evoked does not necessarily mean the author(s) were trying to cater to a female audience, but instead might suggest their attempt to make use of the newly emerged occupational category of “women writers” to attract readers’ attention. Additionally, the Huang brothers were fond of depicting modern feminine subjects such as female nudes (Figures 11 and 14). This could be attributed to changing gender and aesthetic ideologies of the Republican period, under which female nudes took on the new meanings as the emblem of sophisticated Western high art, a modern discourse of physical fitness and beauty, and the endorsement of female independence and strength, charges of licentious desires long associated with such images notwithstanding. The Modern Girl icon was equally ubiquitous in the works produced by Huanwu and Huanniao (Figures 13, 16 and 18), for reasons that will be further explicated in the following chapters. Suffice it to say that evolving gender dynamics, fashion trends, and Western imports and culture surely shaped audience taste, partly dictating the choices of imagery and themes that the Huang brothers made for their popular literary and visual compositions.

157 See Huan Furen 幻夫人 [Mrs. Huan], “Nüzai zhuo gaogenxie liyi” 女仔著高跟鞋利益 [The benefits of women’s wearing high heels], Guomin xinwen, August 15, 1927, 11. Also, see Huan Furen, “Zuijin shoujinzai bianhua zhi diaocha” 最近手巾仔變化之調查 [A study of the recent changes in handkerchief fashion], Guomin xinwen, August 19, 1927, 11.

Much like their peers, the Huang brothers did not shy away from self-deprecation but instead openly satirized themselves as unskilled, commercially driven speculators. In one instance, A’laohuan comments that those who draw cartoons only do so because they do not know how to draw properly, although the Huang brothers would draw countless cartoons over the years.159 A’laohuan also takes a playful look at the work of commercial portraiture artists by depicting an imaginary scene in which a female customer at a portraiture shop is first quoted a price based on her weight. Later during the session, the portrait artist is said to be so concentrated on his work that he even includes the pimple on the woman’s face and the dirt on her shoe into the portrait, eventually irritating the customer who insists upon the erasure of such imperfections. The slyness of the artist, combined with the vanity of the female customer, is therefore intended to lampoon the superficiality of the profession in which the Huang brothers engaged and in which they were imbricated on a daily basis.160

The identity of the Huang brothers was further complicated by their assertion of regionalist and nationalist sentiment, the multiple layers of which in large part corresponded to the various personas that writers and artists constructed when speaking to different audiences. One of the illustrations that Huanniao drew for the supplement section of Guohua News (Figure 14), for instance, features a nude woman, whose face is hidden from the audience by of her long cascading hair, and is kneeling with her hand in a washbasin. The intricate motifs on the panel behind the woman and the incense burning next to her seem to indicate that she is undergoing some kind of religious ritual, while the dark flow under her feet possibly signifies gushing blood. The use of geometric shapes and curvy lines suggest a strong Art Deco influence on Huanniao’s style, which was popular in China during the 1920s and 1930s, although other than its decorative

159 A’laohuan 阿老幻, ”Manhua” 漫畫 [Cartoon], Guomin xinwen, September 14, 1927, 11.
160 A’laohuan, “Xiexiang de yimu ban.”
function the message behind this image is rather unclear. Fortunately, for the reader, Huanniao wrote an explanation for the image, thereby offering a rare glimpse into his artistic vision and self-image:

The illustration published today depicts a nude woman with untied natural and soft hair and a sandalwood incense burner on her side. Kneeling to pray, she places her hands gently into a washbasin for cleansing. From a quick glance at this image, one can hardly find any meaning, but if you contemplate carefully you will understand the implicit significance. Day and night we live in a human world full of darkness, chaos, and anxiety; we are bound by monetary pursuits and sexual desires. For people like us who are tightly fettered, how can we purify our hearts? We can only bare ourselves and pray to the gods of the universe. [That way] we can cleanse and purify our sinful hearts, making everything new: a new environment, a new society, a new China, a new family, a new world, and a completely renewed “New Field” [column].

Clearly, in addition to making ends meet via his artistic works, Huanniao longs to inspire his audience to achieve self-enlightenment and make their own hearts, their surroundings, the local society, and even the entire nation anew. He seems to harbor strong attachment to the city and the country and a sense of responsibility for social betterment. A similar expression of nationalistic fervor can also be discovered in some of the advertisements produced by Huanwu’s advertising agency and art academy. As an example, in the aftermath of the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in September 1931, the Huanwu Advertising Agency decided to establish an

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“Anti-Japanese Movement Committee” and create cartoons in support of the movement. By claiming that “this time the Japanese imperialists plotted to devour and occupy our land, murder our countrymen, and burn and plunder our treasury… every citizen of our nation is enraged,” Huanwu clearly intends to stimulate the patriotic sentiments of his audience. The agency further publicly announced that they could freely supply cartoons to newspapers or magazines across the country in need of nationalistic propaganda, and listed specific guidelines for publications regarding the request of free cartoons. In so doing, Huanwu seems to mold the image of his agency into that of a patriotic, philanthropic organization willing to contribute to the cause of national salvation. Even though most of the Huang brothers’ works tend to be commercially driven, and their self-representations sometimes confirm such an orientation, these examples reveal the nuances of the public image that they attempted to project, and speaks to the long-standing entanglement between the local culture and nationally minded discourse among Guangdong intellectuals.

The outbreak of the War of Resistance against the Japanese (1937-1945) marked a turning point in not only the history of modern China, but also the career trajectories of the popular cultural agents discussed in this chapter. Many writers and artists had to flee to Hong Kong after the Japanese occupation of Guangzhou in 1938, but continued to engage in the production of literature and cartoons to support the national salvation movement. For example, after relocating to Hong Kong, Huanniao participated in an anti-Japanese cartoon exhibition in 1939 organized by the Hong Kong branch of the National Cartoonist Association (Quanguo

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163 “Huanwu Guanggaoshe xueyuan kangri yundong wei yuanhui xuan chuan bu gongying quanguo gedi chuban wu fanri manhua qishi” 幻吾廣告社學員抗日運動委員會宣傳部供應全國各地出版物反日漫畫啓事 [Notice from the Propaganda Department of the Students’ Anti-Japanese Movement Committee of Huanwu Advertising Agency to supply anti-Japanese cartoons to publications across the country], Guohua bao, October 2, 1931, 2.4.
manhuajia xiehui Xianggang fenhui 全國漫畫家協會香港分會), which had been set up by Shanghai cartoonists Ye Qianyu and others.\textsuperscript{164} However, his life was tragically cut short during the war when he contracted an illness but did not have enough money to acquire medical treatment.\textsuperscript{165} The writer and journalist Li Jian’er met an even more dramatic end to his life. He was known to have refused to collaborate with the Japanese authorities who demanded he work as the editor of a newspaper after Hong Kong was occupied in 1941. To show his nationalistic sentiment, Li Jian’er eventually committed suicide by jumping off the building.\textsuperscript{166} On the contrary, Huanwu was invited to hold exhibitions in countries in southeast Asia starting in the winter of 1937 and only returned to Shanghai in the fall of 1941 in the middle of the war.\textsuperscript{167} According to his biography, he resided in Japanese-occupied Shanghai for the remainder of the war and only taught art lessons for a living due to his reluctance to collaborate with the occupation government.\textsuperscript{168} The prosperous career that he and his brother enjoyed as commercial artists under the urbanized milieu of interwar Guangzhou thus came to an end. What lingered was the pressing need to sacrifice their interest in private pleasures as topics for their literary and artistic endeavors in the face of the call for national salvation and unity.

\textsuperscript{164} Anonymous, “Xiandai manhua zhanlan jin kaimu” 現代漫畫展覽今開幕 [The Modern Cartoon Exhibition has now opened], Shenbao, May 7, 1939, 5. Yuan Xiaolun 袁小倫, Yuegang kangzhan wenhuashi lungao 粵港抗戰文 化史論稿 [Draft manuscript on the cultural history of the War of Resistance in Guangdong and Hong Kong] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2005), 131-32.

\textsuperscript{165} Taishipo, “Yi laoyou Huang Huanniao” 憶老友黃幻鳥 [Reminiscing an old friend Huang Huanniao], Zhongbao, December 25, 1982, page unknown.

\textsuperscript{166} Sanshui difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., Sanshui xianzhi 三水縣志 [Gazetteer of Sanshui county] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1995), 1336.

\textsuperscript{167} Yang, Zhongguo xiandai huajia zhuan, 1: 341. The dates of his travel are recorded in an article that he wrote in Shanghai after his return from his trip. See Huang Huanwu, “Huiyu suibi” 繪餘隨筆 [Random jottings in the leisure after painting], Yong'an yuekan 永安月刊 [Wing On Monthly], April 1, 1942, 25.

\textsuperscript{168} Yang, Zhongguo xiandai huajia zhuan, 1: 341.
Chapter 2  Open Socialization, Forbidden Desires: The Politics of Mixed-Sex Contact and the Female Body

In June 1934, when the government prohibited mixed-sex swimming in Guangzhou, the news stirred up heated discussions in the media across the country. Taunting the local authorities as “driving backwards [on the road to progress]” and “extremely inane,” writers in other cities emphasized the importance of maintaining open contact between the sexes in order to modernize gender relations in a new age. ¹⁶⁹ These cultural commentators found it especially bizarre that such policies on gender interaction had become increasingly restrictive in a city that had served as one of the earliest trading ports with the West and that later became known as “the cradle of the Chinese revolution.” One author even composed a rhyming ditty to ridicule the inconsistent stance of the government officials, who showed no tolerance for contact between the sexes but seemed rather lenient toward social problems such as gambling and opium smoking. ¹⁷⁰

They’ve posted the decrees separating men from women; 男女大防禁令公
Be it swimming, walking, living, or eating, there’s no doing it in pairs. 泳行住食不能同
[But] there is another haven in which to amuse yourselves: 洞天別有供遊遨
Inside the opium dens and gambling lairs! 盡在烟巢賭窟中

Such social commentaries reflect larger discourses about the female body and gender boundaries that came to be associated with the image of Guangzhou in the bourgeoning Chinese nation-state. Comparatively, critiques of government policies on the local level, though not


¹⁷⁰ Afeng 阿鳳, “Yuesheng de si butong zhuyi” 粵省的四不同主義 [The four anti-co-isms in Guangdong province], Shenbao, August 11, 1934, 18.
entirely absent, were far fewer in number, possibly due to media censorship in Guangzhou. Nevertheless, a rich body of textual and visual sources managed to escape government restrictions to comment on or caricature different ways of holding hands, kissing, and dancing, which allow us a glimpse into local attitudes toward physical contact between the sexes. Notwithstanding the contradictions and multiple interpretations in the reading of these materials, these seemingly trivial depictions of local residents’ romantic gestures and lifestyles suggest the writers and artists’ implicit attempts to redraw the gender boundaries prescribed by the government authorities, all the while—consciously or not—defining their identities as modern citizens of Guangzhou.

This chapter examines the debate surrounding opening socialization between the sexes to tease out the contested meanings of wo(men)’s bodies and the construction of a modern citizen as defined by gendered sociability among different power-holders and cultural commentators in the 1920s and 1930s. By extension, I seek to highlight the rhetorical usage of gender in the production of a regional identity and of Chinese modernity as a whole. The first part of this chapter reviews the literature on the ideological production of gendered spheres and the chastity culture in the Qing dynasty, adding to it a special emphasis on how this played out in peripheral regions such as Guangdong. I show that during the late imperial era women’s body had long been a site where meanings of personal dignity, family honor, regional identity, and cultural orthodoxy were defined, negotiated, and sometimes even challenged. The politics of chastity and gender interaction also became the platform through which women spoke as historical subjects, albeit often through the mediation and translation of male family members, officials, or other learned commentators.
In the second part, I focus on the intellectual discourse of open socialization and government policies regulating contact between the sexes in Republican Guangzhou, with particular attention on the increasingly popular activity of social dancing. I start with an overview of the dominant discourse of open socialization in the New Culture Movement and the introduction of this concept to Guangzhou. Then, through an analysis of government regulations and policies on gender interaction, I argue that individual acts of male-female socialization gained political significance as local authorities sought to increase their power through policing the bodies of local citizens. Nonetheless, the inherent contradictions rooted in the intellectual discourse and the government policies, such as the unclear boundary between progressive open socialization and sexual immorality, often led to intense debates and the authorities’ limited capacity to enforce such regulations.

The third section draws attention to the popular response to the various forms of physical contact between men and women. I argue that popular writers and cartoonists’ interest in this topic reveals the ways in which they sought to satirize a modern city characterized by open socialization, to poke fun at male (or even female) lust, and to project their dissatisfaction with government interference. In these textual and visual renderings, Modern Girls were frequently featured as unattainable objects of desire with their insatiable materialistic demands, capricious attitudes and transgressive sexuality. Even though the authors’ views of these women seemed predominantly critical, the Modern Girls’ practices are still discernable through their represented images and challenge the commentators’ monopoly over the interpretation of mixed-sex contact.

Part I  Performing Chastity: Gender Interaction and Feminine Virtue in the Qing Dynasty
Throughout the late imperial period, Confucian didactic texts prescribed separation between the inner and outer domains and limited interaction between the two sexes. This by no means rendered women completely confined or passive, for women were often charged with (or took upon themselves) the responsibility of maintaining gender norms through their practice of chastity. In reality, when the gender boundary was breached or their reputations threatened, women who demonstrated exemplary behavior by committing suicide to defend their chastity were praised in public and might even earn imperial recognition. This section surveys the parameters of male-female interaction in the Qing dynasty by investigating the didactic definitions and the contestations of female chastity in social reality. In particular, I highlight that women’s acts not only allowed a rare glimpse into their subjectivity when their voices were otherwise muted in the historical sources, but also served as the building block for the Qing imperial order through their public displays of private virtues.

Gender historians of late imperial China have observed that the gendered spatial distinctions of the inner and outer domains and the active role women played in the defense of their chastity were promoted not as private matters, but had weighty sociopolitical significance. Neo-Confucian philosophers starting from the Song dynasty promoted strict segregation between the inner and outer spaces over which women and men presided in their everyday activities, division of labor, and ritualistic status.171 The inner quarters of the house were also metaphorically associated with women’s bodies, hence shielded from the outside world to

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minimize physical contact between the sexes and ensure a husband’s sexual monopoly over his wife and concubines. However, the two spheres were not completely exclusive but formed a series of nested circles that “[defined] and [constituted] each other according to shifting contexts and perspectives.” In economic, cultural, and social terms, the significance of women’s lives and labor extended far beyond the inner quarters and was intimately connected to the functioning and well-being of the public world. As a result, their spatial seclusion by no means limited their social engagement, but rather turned their manifestation of exemplar behavior, such as sexual fidelity, into the focal point through which public morality and male literati identity were actively defined.

During the Qing dynasty, as women’s chastity gained new political weight, their virtue became the means through which the patrilineal kinship system was uphold, sexual mores protected, and the legitimacy of regional identity advocated in the imperial landscape. Qing historians have convincingly demonstrated that the so-called cult of chastity reached its zenith in the Manchu dynasty when the state actively took over the role of defining the parameters of and awards for virtuous widowhood, going so far as praising these faithful wives (and in many cases, fiancés) as model subjects for the rest of the empire. Building upon their Ming predecessors’ belief in patrilineality in the promotion of widow chastity, the Qing rulers incorporated the cult into their civilizing mission when they strove to remake the conquered people in the newly

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172 Ko, Teachers of the Inner Chambers, 13.

173 For women’s economic production and the creation of worth and virtue in late imperial neo-Confucian scholastic discourse, see Bray, Technology and Gender, 237-72. For the publication of women’s writings and the construction of their subjective position, see, for example, Ellen Widmer and Kang-I Sun Chang, eds., Writing Women in Late Imperial China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

captured frontiers into loyal subjects of the empire. At the same time, local gazetteers and random jottings (biji 筆記) written by male literati in peripheries such as the Guangdong region emphasized the chaste behavior of local widows and maidens, both in the distant and recent past. This was part of a strategy to testify to the cultural legitimacy of their region by showcasing their mastery of Confucian orthodox traditions identified with the imperial center, a practice further demonstrated in the evidential studies scholarship produced by the local Xuehaitang Academy. The stories of chaste wives and fiancées recorded in these gazetteers and random jottings usually highlight the difficult circumstances surrounding these women, such as war, poverty, or sexual violence, to contextualize their extraordinary virtues demonstrated through perseverance or even suicide. Following the historical precedents for biographies of exemplary women, these tales were hardly innovative in their content, but instead could be read as the authors’ efforts to demonstrate the moral propriety of local society and identify with the imperial Confucian culture through women’s bodies and deeds.

Despite the official norms and didactic texts on gendered spatial separation and female chastity, the occurrence of mixed-sex contact was much more frequent, especially among the

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175 On the discourse and the execution of this “moral transformation” (jiaohua) campaign, see Theiss, Disgraceful Matters, 39-54.

176 For chaste martyrs in a local gazetteer from the late Qing period, see for instance, Dai Zhaochen 戴肇辰, et al., Guangzhou fuzhi 廣州府志 [The Gazetteer of the Department of Guangzhou] (Guangzhou: Yuexiu shuyuan, 1879; reprint, Shanghai: Shandian shudian chubanshe, 2003), 142:1-159:22. For stories of chaste exemplars in eighteenth-century Guangdong, see, for example, Fan Duan’ang 范端昂, Yuezhong jianwen 粵中見聞 [Things seen and heard inside Guangdong] (Fogang: Guangdong gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1988), 222-26.

177 For a case study of Xuehaitang as a mid-Qing institution that produced evidential scholarship and regional symbols to glorify both imperial culture and local identity, see Steven B. Miles, The Sea of Learning: Mobility and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Guangzhou (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006).

178 Susan Mann suggests that biographies of exemplary women in Chinese history were usually structured around dramatic turning points in women’s lives followed by their shrewd and virtuous decision-making and dutiful role performance as daughter, fiancé, wife, and mother. See Susan Mann, “Biographical Sources and Silences,” in Beyond Exemplary Tales: Women’s Biography in Chinese History, ed. Joan Judge and Ying Hu (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 19-35.
lower classes since poorer families could hardly afford to enforce such ideals in reality. This, in turn, created space and pressure for women to showcase their virtues, as the responsibility to protect their family and personal honor were laid on their shoulders when mixed-sex contact was inevitable. Matthew Sommer’s study of legal definitions of male and female sexuality in the Qing dynasty confirms that the judicial system placed the burden of proof on the female victim, and she was required to demonstrate her resistance and chaste resolve to the utmost level.179 Because of such pressure, many women chose to resort to extreme measures and committed suicide even in situations that—to our eyes (and even to those of Qing jurists)—hardly seemed necessary.180 The women’s vehement desire to testify to their sexual integrity suggests both their potential transgression of the Confucian gender hierarchy via moral agency and control over their own bodies, and conformity to its patriarchal values. As I will make clear in the next two sections, even though new ideas about physical contact between the sexes were introduced in the subsequent period, the norms regarding male-female socialization reflected lasting traces of the Qing dynasty chastity culture and similar tensions among different power-holders over the cultural and sociopolitical meanings of mixed-sex contact, which thereby had the potential to restrain the ways in which women could lay claim to their own bodies. Nevertheless, women in the Republican era continued to find ways to exert their agency even through their represented images, not unlike like their predecessors in the late imperial era.

Part II A Revolution Yet to Succeed? Government Policies on Mixed-Sex Contact in Republican Guangzhou

179 For instance, see the discussion of women’s role in sexual offences in Sommer, *Sex, Law and Society*, 66-113.

180 For a detailed discussion of cases in which women committed suicide after unwanted sexual contact, and the varying interpretations and judgments of the court, see Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters*, 167-210.
During the Republican era, when everything associated with the imperial past was labeled as feudal and backward, how did the government in Guangzhou view and regulate the previously taboo subject of mixed-sex contact? The answer is actually complex, as the local authorities continued to maintain tight control over citizens’ bodies and public conduct throughout the 1920s and 1930s, even moving toward a stance of increasing conservatism. Local state regulations, however, were neither completely straightforward nor effectively enforced at all times, a fact that came under heavy attack and playful ridicule by writers and cartoonists in the local area and beyond. I start this section by delineating the intellectual discourse of open socialization articulated by thinkers of the New Culture Movement that supported gender integration in public as a crucial component of the national strengthening project. I then turn to the government stipulations on various forms of mixed-sex contact as a result of this newly emerged discourse of open socialization, such as men and women dancing or swimming together, as the venue through which the local state attempted to construct a modern city and increase their power to compete with other political players by policing bodies of male and female citizens.

While social activists had begun advocating for free-choice marriage and female liberation in the late Qing, it was not until the Republican era that the concept of open socialization supporting the freedom of men and women to mingle in public gained widespread popularity. This concept emerged as part of their gender and family reform agenda to serve the Chinese nation-state building project. Eager to find a solution to remedy the national weaknesses against foreign invasion and domestic crisis, a generation of young Chinese intellectuals

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181 Historian Xia Xiaohong argues that the ideas of freedom in romance and marriage were circulated in intellectual circles during the late Qing period, and the chances for elite men and women to socialize in public increased due to new opportunities for women to pursue public education and venture outside the household. However, their marriage practices seemed to follow the traditional pattern of parental arrangement, even if men’s criteria for their prospective wives were sometimes modernized to include a background in new-style education or natural feet. See Xia Xiaohong 夏曉虹, *Wanqing nüxing yu jindai zhongguo 晚清女性與近代中國 [Women in late Qing and modern China]* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2001), 38-66.
launched the New Culture Movement in the late 1910s and criticized the Confucian family system for enslaving the Chinese people and causing the perceived problems of the country. In particular, the issue of female chastity came under severe attack as a cruel custom that had turned women into men’s private possessions throughout Chinese history and damaged harmonious human relations by holding men and women to different standards of sexual morality. These intellectuals, in turn, advocated for open socialization (shejiao gongkai 社交公開), a concept that was imported from the West, as the solution for the cultural constraints and gender barriers that characterized China’s past. For instance, one of the contributors to the influential New Youth magazine, Yang Chaosheng, views chastity as a moral defect caused by Confucian ethics (lijiao 礼教, lit. ritualistic dogma) that only unfairly subjected women’s behavior to public scrutiny while male promiscuity was left unchecked. He also stresses that women were full-functioning individuals who possessed personhood (renge 人格) just like men, and thus should not be repressed by spatial segregation and false morality. By criticizing the pretentious nature of the “ritualistic barriers” put up by Confucian thinkers, the author lays out his defense for the freedom to socialize between the sexes as an expression of genuine human emotions that would lead to true liberty and happiness in individual lives and, by extension, the larger society.


184 Independent personhood was a concept popular in the New Culture Movement that marked men and women’s essential qualities as human beings, such as their rights to participate in the public realm and individual freedom to pursue happiness. Zheng Wang also argues that “achieving independent personhood (duli renge) was soon to become the hallmark of May Fourth feminism.” For a full discussion, see Wang, Women in the Chinese Enlightenment, 53-54.
Yang Chaosheng’s article gained prevalent support among the New Culture circle, and this discourse of open socialization soon entered the lexicon of urban societies such as Guangzhou. Curiously, the local advocates of this discourse never actually deny the ethical necessity of chastity, but instead emphasize the value of this concept by making fidelity a requirement for both sexes. Some seem so concerned with the possibility of the new generation becoming morally loose that they argue open socialization should be intended for men and women’s equal access to and participation in work and social life alone, making sure to steer clear of any taint of sexuality. As Historian Tani Barlow compellingly indicates, it was common for supporters of open socialization to find it less difficult to attack the perceived problems in the Confucian gender system than to identify the positive outcomes and parameters of unrestrained, innate sexuality. These opinions speak to a lack of consensus regarding the definition of sexual propriety and the extent of acceptable open socialization among even seemingly progressive intellectuals.

Similarly, the sexual ambiguities embedded in the intellectual discourse of open socialization and the conservative stance often adopted by its supporters paralleled the ideology underlying the government policies on mixed-sex socialization in Republican Guangzhou. These regulations were fraught with contradictions and wavered between liberal and conservative measures, reflecting the government’s uneasy struggle with their attempts to establish the public image of Guangzhou and police the local citizenry by defining the parameters of modern life.

185 For instance, a writer named Lang Qingxiao 郎擎霄 (dates unknown) published a three-part series on the discourse of open socialization in a major newspaper in Guangzhou in 1924. See Lang Qingxiao 郎擎霄, “Nannü shejiao zhi woguan” 男女社交之我觀 [My opinions on the socialization between men and women], Guangzhou minguo ribao, April 20, 1924, 5. Also, see Lang Qingxiao, “Nannü shejiao zhi woguan,” Guangzhou minguo ribao, May 4, 1924, 5. Lang Qingxiao, “Nannü shejiao zhi woguan,” Guangzhou minguo ribao, May 11, 1924, 4.


Since the establishment of the Guangzhou municipal government in 1921, the local ruling elites painstakingly tried to build up Guangzhou as a modern city, and one of the means through which this new image was constructed was gender reform and social campaigns. Alongside the preparatory campaign for the Northern Expedition in the mid-1920s, a mass women’s mobilization drive was initiated by female leaders in the Nationalist and the Communist parties to increase the political consciousness of local female residents and raise awareness of issues pertaining to gender inequality.\(^{188}\) Since the status of women was intimately tied to the strength of a nation, the sociopolitical support of the female masses was considered crucial for the success of the Northern Expedition campaign and the reputation of Guangzhou as a revolutionary capital. To further reform the local residents and modernize the city, the municipal government also waged a “natural breast” (\textit{tianru 天乳}) campaign in the late 1920s that sought to eradicate the perceived feudal custom of breastbinding in order to liberate women’s body and promote a new, scientifically based discourse of health and beauty.\(^{189}\) These ostensibly progressive movements, however, remained controversial, for the ultimate goal of subjecting women’s activism and bodies to a greater cause of national liberation rather than the betterment of women’s own lives often resulted in ineffective policies or eventual marginalization of gender issues. Ultimately, it can be argued that gender reforms became the means rather than the end goal through which the local municipal government imagined and constructed a modern metropolis and reinforced its political authority over individual citizens.

\(^{188}\) For an in-depth discussion of the mass women’s movement in mid-1920s Guangzhou that extended to the rest of the province, see Christina K. Gilmartin, 	extit{Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 148-73.

\(^{189}\) For a comprehensive analysis of the anti-breastbinding movement in Republican Guangzhou, see Chin, 	extit{Bound to Emancipate}, 78-85.
After the Northern Expedition, and following the establishment of the Nanjing central regime in 1927, the Guangzhou municipal government began to adopt an increasingly uncompromising approach to the regulations regarding gender mores. This reflects both the conventional stance of the central authorities that triggered down to the local level, and the power struggle between the provincial government and the state over the control of the bodies of local citizenry. In 1928, under the order of the central government, the municipal government promulgated the “Police Contravention Punishment Law” (Weijing fafa 违警罰法), which allowed the police to detain “those who engage in licentious speech or behavior on the street or in public places” for up to fifteen days and impose a fine of up to fifteen yuan. Even though historian Michael Ng argues that the misdemeanors listed in this regulation were deliberately separated from more serious crimes that would involve trials in court, it still points to the government’s heightened concerns with the moral conduct of individual male and female citizens. Beginning in the 1930s, under the reign of the warlord Chen Jitang, who usurped power and ruled the province semi-independently from the central government, the government in Guangdong province notably tightened its hand over minute aspects of citizens’ gendered appearance and conduct. This partly resulted from the nationwide social campaign called the New Life Movement (Xinshenghuo yundong 新生活運動), a campaign launched by the central government aiming to reform the physical, moral, and spiritual health of the Chinese citizenry by

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190 Guangzhou shizhengfu, “Weijing fafa (Guomin zhengfu gongbu)” 違警罰法（國民政府公佈） [The Police Contravention Punishment Law as promulgated by the Central Government], Guangzhoushi shizheng gongbao [The Guangzhou municipal gazette], November 24, 1928, 22.

revitalizing traditional Confucian doctrines in a new modern framework. The New Life Movement led to the promulgation of a wide range of social, cultural, and behavioral policies, such as an “Honor Confucius and Read the Classics” movement, prohibitions against opium-smoking, footbinding, and spitting, and policing of questionable sexual relations, all of which in turn upheld the Confucian principles of *li* (ritual decorum), *yi* (uprightness), *lian* (integrity), *chi* (sense of shame). Chen Jitang, a cultural conservative, was said to have responded to the New Life Movement enthusiastically despite his political rivalry with the central Nationalist leaders.

New policies issued by the Guangdong authorities, including the abolition of outlandish attire especially targeting women, and the prohibition of men and women swimming together, are so extreme that they exemplify not only the local government’s conformity to central government order but also its vehement desire to outdo other cities in this moral crusade.

The political salience of gender policing and the paradoxical effect upon the women’s liberation movement could be seen in the government policies on mixed-sex socialization, especially social dancing and other forms of modern entertainment. The introduction of social dancing in Guangzhou can be traced to at least 1926, the time at which the Northern Expedition army had just left the city after several years of preparative training and propaganda campaigns,

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193 For example, Chen later promoted the “Honor Confucius and Read the Classics” movement in 1935 by ordering all government employees and school teachers to read the Confucian canon and set up special Confucian classics lectures. See Xu Shunying 徐舜英, “Chen Jitang ticang ‘dujing’ de qianyin houguo” 陳濟棠提倡“讀經”的前因後果 [The causes and consequences of Chen Jitang’s endorsement of the Read the Classics movement], in *Guangzhou wenshi ziliao cungao xuanbian* 廣州文史資料存稿選編 [Selected anthology of collected papers from the Journal of Guangzhou culture and history], ed. Guangzhou shizhengxie xuexi he wenshi ziliao weiyuan hui (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2008), 1: 335-36.

194 For a full discussion of the abolition of outlandish attire in mid-1930s Guangzhou, see Chin, *Bound to Emancipate*, 143-47.
thus endowing Guangzhou with fame as the revolutionary capital of China.\footnote{A popular writer Huqin even traced the first appearance of social dancing to 1922, when he saw a ballroom dancing performance in which men danced with paper dolls at the Municipal Normal School. See Huqin, “Daoyu.”} In that year, both the celebration of the Double Tenth [National Day of the Republic] and the commemoration of the deceased Sun Yat-sen’s birthday took the form of ballroom dances organized by the China Music Association (\textit{Guangzhou zhonghua yinyuehui} 廣州中華音樂會) in the Xihao Hotel.\footnote{Ho, \textit{Understanding Canton}, 65.} It was also said that top government officials such as Sun Ke 孫科 (1895-1973), Wu Chaoshu 伍朝樞 (1887-1934), and Wu Tiecheng 吳鐵城 (1893-1953) attempted to take private dance lessons so that they could properly socialize with foreign visitors in dance receptions.\footnote{Ibid.} Private dance parties by invitation only were also held by wealthy elites.\footnote{For instance, see Mengsheng 昏生, “Wuchang shiling” 舞場拾零 [Random talk of a dance party], \textit{Guomin xinwen}, March 25, 1927, 8.} As social dancing was received with such enthusiasm by political leaders and the local populace, investors (names untraceable) seized the chance to rent the vacant space of a clan’s ancestral temple and construct a hotel with a dance hall and Western-style restaurant named the Citizen Garden (\textit{Guomin huayuan} 國民花園), which officially opened on December 3, 1927. To lure the crowd, the owner of Citizen Garden even ran an advertisement in the \textit{Canton Republican Daily} (Figure 19) a month before its commencement, boasting that they would offer “singing and dancing to celebrate peace and prosperity- this is the entertainment that the masses in the revolutionary capital deserve. Come to the Citizen Garden and you will be 120 percent satisfied!” From the name Citizen Garden to the advertisement, it is clear that the owner tried to cater to not only an audience eager to engage in social dancing, but also to the local government by tapping into the patriotic slogans of the day designed to boost Guangzhou’s public image. The reasons behind the government’s initial
support for social dancing are unknown. One could infer that dancing, as a Western import and
in conjunction with the liberal intellectual discourse of open socialization that had been in
circulation since the early 1920s, delivered a promise to turn Guangzhou into a modern city,
which might have contributed to the acceptance of this new form of public association between
the sexes.

To the dismay of local dance enthusiasts, the municipal police department placed a ban
on social dancing in February 1928, only two months after Citizen Garden was opened. The
government retrospectively framed the ban as an issue of public security, stating that the Citizen
Garden was located near the military bureaus of the government and the ban was issued to
protect passers-by, especially since the Communist Uprising had just occurred in December
1927. However, the Canton Republican Daily painted quite a different picture. When a
merchant Ou Facheng pleaded with the police department to lift the ban and restore the dance
hall business in March 1928, it was reported that the Garrison Commander and Chief of Police
Deng Shizeng 鄧世增 (1886-1954) insisted on maintaining the ban on social dancing, which was
regarded as a matter of public morality, in order to “salvage [the city] from decadent customs
and preserve social order.” The reason why the police department suddenly decided to turn its
back on social dancing incited speculation from the Tianjin-based newspaper Beiyang Pictorial,
claiming that Mrs. Li Jishen 李濟深, the wife of a regional military commander, was so shocked
by the shameless sight of physical contact between men and women in the dance hall of Citizen

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200 Anonymous, “buzhun huifu tiaowu yingye” 不准恢復跳舞營業 [The restoration of dance hall operation is forbidden], Guangzhou minguo ribao, March 19, 1928, 6.
Garden that she persuaded Li Jishen to order the prohibition of social dancing.\textsuperscript{201} Despite its obviously sensational and unverifiable nature, this hearsay still vividly captures the doubt that some government officials might have cast on such an intimate form of mixed-sex socialization.

Ironically, the practice of social dancing was so popular among the upper class that the government chose not to rule out private dancing completely and to issue special permissions for public dance balls from time to time, a fact that demonstrates the inconsistencies in their definition of social morality in mixed-sex contact. It was noted by contemporary observers that the government actually allowed dancing in private gatherings, even though the police would sometimes interfere out of the belief that their supervisors could not tolerate any form of dancing.\textsuperscript{202} Dance schools were also opened throughout the 1930s, some of which were located in the Shameen foreign concession area and became a haven for dance lovers, for it was outside the jurisdiction of the Chinese government.\textsuperscript{203} In addition to the acquiescence to private dancing, the government would also occasionally give “special permission” (tezhun 特准) for public dance events, some of which would be held at the Citizen Garden. For instance, only three months after the Citizen Garden was forced to suspend its dance hall operation, the government approved a charity masquerade dance party organized by the Guangzhou Municipal Normal

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\footnote{201} Xiaoke 箫客, “Guangzhou jinwu suoyin” 廣州禁舞索隱 [Searching for the hidden reason behind the ban on social dancing in Guangzhou], Beiyang huabao [Beiyang Pictorial], August 4, 1928, 2.

\footnote{202} Chenshuo 臣朔, “Tiaowu sichao” 跳舞思潮 [Thoughts on dancing], Xianxiang bao, May 21, 1928, 7. For examples of private dancing that continued into the 1930s, see the dance party hosted by a local socialite in her private estate in Guzi 骨子, “Yuandan guanwu ji” 元旦觀舞紀 [A record of observing a New Year’s dance party], Yuehua bao, January 9, 1930, 1. Also, an author reported a friend attending a party held in a private estate in the western part of the city in Youlong 遊龍, “Modeng yanxie” 摩登豔屑 [A modern, amorous trinket], Guohua bao, July 31, 1933, 1.1.

\footnote{203} Nianhua weixiao 抉花微笑 [Picking a flower and smiling], “Guangguailuli zhi wuku” 光怪陸離之舞窟 [Outlandish dancing “dens”], Gongping bao, May 11, 1930, 2.3. There was a dance school in the Shameen area that even ran advertisements in the local major newspapers, boasting that they hired experienced teachers of western and local origins. For example, see Anonymous, “Advertisement for the Shameen Society for the Art of Dancing,” Gongping bao, April 6, 1932, 3.2.
\end{footnotes}
School to be held at the venue in May 1928.\textsuperscript{204} After the construction of the auditorium for the Citizen Physical Education Association (\textit{guomin tiyuhui} 國民體育會), a local organization that promoted physical culture and martial arts for the purpose of national strengthening, was completed on February 2, 1929, a semipublic dance ball was again permitted by the government to celebrate its commencement.\textsuperscript{205} In the first half of the 1930s, semipublic and public dance balls were periodically sanctioned by the authorities and even widely advertised in the newspapers, to the extent that a commentator concluded, “how fortunate there were often special permissions [for dance balls] and dance parties held by various organizations… dancing partners do not have to regret that their skills are going to waste.”\textsuperscript{206} The occasional leniency that the government showed to dance lovers notwithstanding, requests for the temporary lifting of the ban on dancing or the opening of dance schools were also frequently rejected, the logic behind which was equally bewildering to local residents.\textsuperscript{207} Since the ban on social dancing in early 1928, the government clearly wavered between conceding to popular demand for a perceived

\textsuperscript{204} Heimeigui, “Guomin huayuan yangmeituqi” 國民花園揚眉吐氣 [The Citizen Garden should feel elated now], \textit{Xianxiang bao}, May 22, 1928, 7.

\textsuperscript{205} See Minyan 敏言, “Guotihui wuchang suoji” 國體會舞場瑣記 [Miscellaneous records of the dance ball at the Citizen Physical Education Association Auditorium], \textit{Guohua bao}, February 7, 1929, 1. Also, see Jiang 經, “Chun hui yangshi zhi tiaowukuang” 春回羊石之跳舞狂 [The spring has returned to the hearts of dance fanatics in Guangzhou], \textit{Guohua bao}, February 12, 1929, 1. There was another dance party held in the Citizen Physical Education Association Auditorium in September 1929, the reason for which was not specified. See Zhonggongpao 中宮砲, “Guotihui guanwu ji” 國體會觀舞記 [A record of observing the dance party at the Citizen Physical Education Association Auditorium], \textit{Gongping bao}, September 18, 1929, 8.

\textsuperscript{206} The quote is cited from Damoxian 達摩仙, “Guantiao ji” 觀跳記 [A record of observing dance parties], \textit{Yuehua bao}, February 1, 1931, 1. For an example of semipublic dance parties in the 1930s, see the Christmas dance parties held in Shamen, the foreign concession, and various schools in Beidou 北斗, “Yedan xuhua” 耶誕絮話 [Miscellaneous talk on Christmas], \textit{Guohua bao}, December 25, 1935, 1. For dance balls that were publicly advertised, see Anonymous, “Advertisement for the Citizen Garden dance ball,” \textit{Yuehua bao}, July 27, 1930, 5.

\textsuperscript{207} For example, a dance party to celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival at the Citizen Garden was declined by the authorities in 1929. See Jianzhe 健者, “Guomin Huayuan zhongqiu bawu” 國民花園中秋罷舞 [Banning the Mid-Autumn dance party at the Citizen Garden], \textit{Gongping bao}, September 23, 1929, 8. For a case of dance school application turned down by the police department, see Anonymous, “Tiaowuhua Shiduoli chengqing sheli chuanxisuo, gong'anju pichi buzhun” 跳舞花士鐸梨呈請設立傳習所,公安局批斥不准 [Dance expert “Shiduoli” applied for opening a dance school; the Police Department refused], \textit{Guomin xinwen}, February 22, 1930, 2.3.
Westernized, modern entertainment and maintaining strict standards of social morality. The popular responses toward the intermittent government ban on social dancing will be discussed in the third section, but suffice it to say that the government was using the power to lift or enforce the prohibition of dancing to establish its authority over the Chinese population in the city, despite the lack of clarity in its definition over modernity and sexual morals.

Around the same time, the local police also began to track down men and women displaying intimate behavior in public with the authority recently bestowed by the aforementioned 1928 “Police Contravention Punishment Law.” One of the places that frequently became the site of conflicts between the police and civilians was the automobile, since *doufeng* 兜風 (going for a ride) gained increasing popularity among men and women as a leisure activity.²⁰⁸ In one case, the police saw a middle-age man driving in a car with a short-haired young woman and together “showing myriad kinds of disgraceful acts,” and he decided to stop the car and take the couple back to the station for interrogation.²⁰⁹ Even though the couple, who turned out to be a man and his concubine, denied the charges of unabashed intimacy but instead claimed that they were leaning on one another to alleviate the dizziness caused by the uneven road conditions, the police officer insisted on what he saw as irrefutable proof of their sexual indecency and imposed a fine of two *yuan*. Contrary to the intellectual discourse of open socialization from late 1910s to mid-1920s, the understanding of mixed-sex contact in public was dramatically transformed to that of licentious affronts to social customs, to the extent that the quasi-marital relationship between the suspects did not exonerate them. While the penalty

²⁰⁸ Many popular writers discussed the best ways to go for a ride for men and women in Guangzhou during this period. For example, see Zhizhi 支支, “Laqinglu buyiyu doufeng shuo”臘靑路不宜於兜風說 [A discussion of why it is not suitable to go for a ride on asphalt roads], *Guomin xinwen*, July 7, 1927, 11.

²⁰⁹ Xiu 修, “Qiche shang you faxian nannü xiaxie; yunlang qiyin lu buping” 汽車上又發現男女狎褻；暈浪豈因路不平 [Discovering another case of men and women frolicking in the car- did they feel dizzy because of the uneven road condition?], *Yuehua bao*, June 19, 1930, 6.
imposed on these offenders was usually much lighter than that in sexual harassment cases, it still signaled the government’s sexualizing gaze on individual bodies when men and women appeared in the same space together. In addition, the male drivers and female companions under arrest usually talked back by defending their own innocence, and in one case they even accused the police officer of attempting to sexually harass the women in the car. Ironically, the government’s interpretation of public intimacy between men and women as sexual misconduct rather than open socialization could sometimes be appropriated by civilians to challenge—albeit unsuccessfully—the police in return.

Starting in the mid-1930s, the government’s conservative measures over mixed-sex socialization seemed to have reached a new peak, as men and women swimming and walking arm-in-arm together in public became the targets of attack. Swimming, unlike social dancing, was commonly associated with the physical culture of the Chinese nation that “[became] a physically experienced link between citizens’ dual responsibilities- to keep healthy and fit in body and mind and to work and unite with their fellow Chinese.” This sport was therefore both incorporated into school curriculums and generally supported by the local government. By the early 1930s there were two public swimming pools in the Dongshan and Liwan areas of

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210 In comparison, male offenders in sexual harassment cases were usually detained for a night as a punishment. See for example, Xiao 小, “Yinghuayuan shaonian tiaoxi funü; egui di wei yiye dawen” 影畫院少年調戲婦女；餓鬼抵餵一夜大蚊 [Young man sexually harassing a woman in the cinema; such a hungry ghost deserves to feed the mosquitoes for a night], Yuehua bao, May 4, 1930, 6. Also, see Xin 信, “Dengtu tiaoxi funü zhi changjue; mianpi tai hou buzhixiu” 登徒調戲婦女之猖獗；面皮太厚不知羞 [Philanderer sexually harassing a woman outrageously, having no shame at all], Yuehua bao, June 4, 1931, 6.

211 See Xiu 修, “Youfa chezhong zhi buduan nannü; shiqian yizhi you hefang” 又罰車中之不端男女；十千一擲又何妨 [Punishing indecent men and women in the car again; how would they care throwing ten thousand yuan away for penalty?], Yuehua bao, May 2, 1930, 6.

212 Andrew D. Morris, Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 48.

213 Nanfang dushi bao, Guangzhou jiwen, 188.
the city, and multiple private swimming pools in the Shameen concession area and schools that offered swimming lessons, all of which made swimming either a necessary skill to master or a favorite pastime for the local populace. Nevertheless, the governmental backing for public swimming was abated by the intensified concern with sexual mingling in the pools. In June 1934, the provincial government approved a petition submitted by Commanding General of the Provincial Navy Zhang Zhiying 張之英 (1891-1954) to impose sexual segregation in all swimming areas of the city. This policy entailed separating men and women into different public swimming pools, or putting up barriers in the ocean pools so that people of the opposite sex could not see each other while swimming. In addition, in July 1934, a month after the passage of the sexual segregation in swimming regulation, Zheng Ridong 鄭日東 (1909-?), head of the Provincial Waterway Supervision and Distribution Bureau and the nephew-in-law of Chen Jitang, presented to the provincial government an even more restrictive proposal to prohibit men and women walking arm-in-arm on the streets. These political leaders regarded men and

214 Ibid., 186.

215 Anonymous, “Guangzhou nannü haibin nan gong youyong shenzhi xiangwang yi buke; Yuefu weichi fenghua zhi yiban” 广州男女海濱難共游泳甚至相望亦不可；粵府維持風化之一斑 [Men and women in Guangzhou can neither swim together in the ocean nor look at one another from afar; this is one aspect of the Guangdong government’s maintenance of social customs], *Nanyang Shangbao*, June 14, 1934, 2. Also, see Anonymous, “Yue jin nannü tongyong bing jiang qudi zhishou tongxing” 粵禁男女同泳並將取締執手同行 [The Guangdong government bans men and women swimming together and will soon prohibit walking arm-in-arm together], *Shenbao*, July 11, 1934, 9.

216 Anonymous, “Guangzhou nannü haibin nan gong youyong.” According to the “imposter” Old Lady Historian, the local government forced men and women to swim in different swimming pools in the mid-1930s, and used bamboo poles to create a boundary between the sexes in ocean pools. See Taishipo, “Guangdong fugu de guaishi” 廣東復古的怪事 [Strange happenings in the Restoration of Antiquity Movement in Guangdong], *Zhongbao*, February 11, 1985, page unknown.

217 Anonymous, “Yue jin nannü tongxing zhi wenzhang; sheng hedupei juzhang zhi tiaochen” 粵禁男女同行之文章, 省河督配局長之條陳 [An essay in which Guangdong bans men and women walking together in public; The memorandum presented by the Head of the Provincial Waterway Supervision and Distribution Bureau], *Shenbao*, July 17, 1934, 10. It should be noted that shortly after Zheng Ridong’s proposal, in late July 1934, a civilian named Huang Weixin 黃維新 (dates unknown) went even further to petition for the prohibition of men and women riding in the same car, dining in the same space, lodging in the same hotel, or watching film in the same cinema together.
women swimming and walking in public together as manifestations of a moral decline attributable to Guangdong’s early exposure to the West, and they often cited archaic allusions from the Confucian classics to substantiate their claims. Furthermore, by drawing attention to the future of the Nationalist party-state and the public image of Guangdong province, these officials attempted to raise their political legitimacy not only in local society but also to a transregional audience through the platform of mixed-sex contact. Although in direct opposition to the liberal spirit of the New Culture discourse on open socialization, such commentaries reveal the traces of influence from the aforementioned New Life Movement and allow a glimpse into the local government’s power struggle with the central authorities in their zealous effort to uphold social morality and exert further political control.

In spite of the highly ambitious goals of the government authorities to end moral demise by separating the sexes in various public arenas, these proposals and regulations ran into problems. For instance, Zheng Ridong’s petition forbidding men and women from walking in public together was never approved by his superiors, and Zheng himself was said to have withdrawn his petition by making a public announcement soon afterwards.218 Perhaps the petition was never legalized due to the fact that top officials would also have been prohibited from appearing in public with their wives or concubines. In addition, the policy of sexual

See Anonymous, “Huang Weixin cheng Guangdong zhengyanhui qingchang nannü youbie wan tuifeng; nannü shoushou buqin sandai zhi feng chongjian yu jinri” 黃維新呈廣東政研會請倡男女有別挽頹風,男女授受不親三代之風重見於今日 [Huang Weixin presented a proposal for gender separation and moral rectification to the Guangdong Political Study Committee; The ancient custom of men and women avoiding intimate contact reappears in the present age], Nanyang Shangbao, July 23, 1934, 18.

218 See Anonymous, “Qudi nannü tongxing tiaochen, Zhengweihui pi yi “cun” zi, you tuoyin qingnian nannü ke wuyou yi” 取締男女同行條陳，政委會批一“存”字,有拖癮青年男女可無憂矣 [The memorandum on prohibiting men and women walking together: the Political Committee gave a one word instruction “overruled,” and the young men and women fond of “hitching” can now be carefree], Nanyang shangbao, July 25, 1934, 17. One tabloid writer speculates that Zheng Ridong repealed his petition in order to appease his enraged, domineering wife. See Ji Huanjin 計宦今, “Changjin nannü tongxing zhi Zheng Ridong” 倡禁男女同行之鄭日東 [Zheng Ridong: the endorser of the ban on men and women walking together in public], Laoshihua [Candid Talk] 45 (1934): 175.
segregation in swimming was apparently only enforced for a period of time, for by September 1934, a writer was already reporting that there were men and women “frolicking in water” (xishui 嬉水) in major swimming pools throughout the city. By May 1935, it was further suggested that “the ban on mixed-sex swimming has already been relaxed and the romantic tales of mandarin ducks playing in water are again widely circulated.” Whether the government lacked the financial resources to enforce this regulation or the will to neglect popular resistance is difficult to discern. Nonetheless, together with the ban on social dancing, the regulation of swimming and petition to forbid mixed-sex walking in public reveal the political authorities’ increasingly vehement control over the definitions of sexual morality and the individual bodies of male and female citizens, in an attempt to rival the power holders of other regions in China. Little did they expect a third competing force—the popular cultural commentators in local society—to put forth their own interpretations of sexual ethics in a modern age.

Part III The “Missy Movement”: Popular Portrayals of Mixed-Sex Socialization

How did the popular writers and artists perceive and represent the discourse of open socialization, as manifested in social activities such as dancing and swimming? This section draws attention to three types of popular cultural portrayals of physical intimacies between men and women, namely, a satirical vision of modern Guangzhou as a city of open socialization, parodies of male sexual desire, and political dissent. In the first category, popular writers and cartoonists tended to pose as insiders of modern dating rituals and various entertainments as the means to mock the new sociocultural phenomena and the young men and women who blindly

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followed these trends. At the same time, the fact that many authors claimed to have participated in the new dating culture complicated their attempts to project superiority over their objects of satire, turning their works into a double parody of both the self and the imagined others. The mixed-sex contact that they were fond of depicting also tend to lampoon male lust and its various manifestations, including ogling and groping women under the pretext of open socialization. In addition, women, especially the Modern Girls, were also portrayed as desiring subjects who often initiated intimate contact with the opposite sex in public. Viewed together, the first two types of comic portrayals were not so much a celebration of the discourse of open socialization as ambivalent, even conformist, takes on the consequences of mixed-sex contact. In contrast, some authors also voiced their grievances against the government through their discussions of mixed-sex socialization, especially after the bans on social dancing and swimming were issued. It should be noted that these three types of messages sometimes overlapped in the textual and visual representations. Moreover, the incessant discussions of dating, dancing and swimming, especially under the increasingly conservative government policies in the 1930s, suggest a gap between representation and the lived experiences of local residents. Nonetheless, the popular cultural portrayals remain useful tools to gauge popular taste and the writers and artists’ attitude toward their self-identity, sexual norms, and modernity in the local context.

Under the new social milieu of the Republican era, when the cult of chastity and strict sexual segregation were eradicated, the exploration of scenarios involving physical contact between the sexes proliferated in popular literature and artworks in Guangzhou. Popular cultural commentators played with the discourse of open socialization by feeding on the unclear definitions of public intimacies that surfaced in both intellectual discussion and government policies. For example, the slang “hitching” (tuo 拖, or to in Cantonese pronunciation), usually
found in phrases such as dating (pakto 拍拖) or holding hands (toshau 拖手), became one of the most frequently seen buzzwords in informal prose essays and cartoons in this period to show their interest in public physicality between men and women. A writer using the pseudonym Autumn Sound contributed a Cantonese ditty (yueou) titled, “The Word ‘Hitching,’” that exaggerates the modernity of the city as encapsulated in the sight of young couples dating in public,221

Hitching, how unbelievable,
Hitching, how totally trendy,
The entire Guangzhou city is now hitch-ed
[Men and women] act lovey-dovey on the street
[And call each other] sweet nicknames in the park

The word ‘hitching,’ is getting quite popular now. Look at [couples] holding hands in the park and romancing in secret. Then look at the street, [where you may] bump into people who turn out to be couples. Nowadays it is a civilized world, indeed! Of course [hitching] is the right thing to do. [Who is] still talking about things like ‘men and women should not be close to one another?’ Nobody wants to listen to that anymore. Alas! Who can say for sure? A pair [of lovers] can make a great sight. One day it may lead to complete hitch-ification of this great city of Guangzhou.

Δ 不可思議的拖
Δ 絕頂時髦的拖
Δ 廣州市完全拖化
Δ 馬路上的卿卿我我
Δ 公園裡的妹妹哥哥
拖一個字, 現在幾咁時興。你睇公園攜手，秘密談情，又睇馬路碰埋，都係成對倩影。家陣文明世界啲，正係理所當然 (平讀)，重講乜男女授受不親，令人嘅厭聽。唉！唔話得定，一啤真好景，日後怕喺整到完全拖化喇，在呢個廣州大城。

221 Qiusheng 秋聲 [Autumn Sound], “Tuo yige zi” 拖一個字 [The word hitching], Xianxiang bao, August 22, 1927, 8. Cantonese ditties, also known as Cantonese songs or Cantonese tunes, are a musical genre accompanied by the Chinese lute instrument-pipa-and written in vernacular Cantonese. For an in-depth discussion of Cantonese ditties and other local song texts, see May-bo Ching, “Literary, Ethnic or Territorial? Definitions of Guangdong Culture in the Late Qing and the Early Republic,” in Unity and Diversity: Local Cultures and Identities in China, ed. Tao Tao Liu and David Faure (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1996), 51-66.
Traditionally written as love songs and performed by local singers, Cantonese ditties often appeared in the format of limericks and were published in special columns of daily newspapers in Republican-era Guangzhou and Hong Kong, commenting on government policies or current affairs.\(^{222}\) In this particular instance, the unmistakable popularity of mixed sex contact is presented by the author through a dramatized panorama of the city, in which dating couples were popping up every way one turned. The combined use of rhymes and Cantonese slang also highlights the locally specific nature of such a trendy and seemingly progressive practice. By predicting the city’s future of “complete hitchi-fication,” the author seems to mock the reputation of this revolutionary capital, in which young men and women were more preoccupied with calling each other sweet nicknames than their duties as citizens.

Additionally, popular writers and artists took keen interest in specific forms of physical contact now permitted in an ostensibly liberal social environment. Cartoons and informal prose essays on the different ways of holding hands, kissing, and other types of physical touch abounded in the 1920s, and even in the reactionary 1930s. For example, a cartoon titled “The Appropriate Ways of Hitching” (Figure 20), makes use of humorous wordplay and features various modes of holding hands and locking arms between lovers, completed with descriptions that employ the local dialect and reflect distinctive local cultural practices. The images are drawn in minimalist, unfinished strokes, the facial features of the couples deliberately omitted, which have the effect of amplifying the humor of the text and image. In addition, the drawings are positioned above or beneath the captions, in a zigzag progression from right to left, possibly to denote the increase in physical contact that accompanies the temporal advancement of a

\(^{222}\) For an example of Hong Kong newspapers featuring Cantonese ditties, see an analysis of Hong Kong Evening News (Xiangjiang wanbao 香江晚報) in Peter Yeung, Jiushukan zhong de Xianggang shenshi 舊書刊中的香港身世 [Old publications: Window of the past Hong Kong society] (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2014), 186-97.
romantic relationship. In particular, the “Chinese cruller” (*zaguei* 榨鬼) position, a vivid depiction of a couple’s interlocking fingers, was a popular slang alluding to clingy couples and had appeared in numerous essays and even limericks since the 1920s. The local flavor of these descriptions is even more pronounced in the “water-buying” position, which refers to the Cantonese funerary ritual in which a filial son fetches water while others throw paper money into the river, and afterwards he goes home to cleanse the corpse of the deceased. By evoking this trope of a filial son’s devotion to his departed parent, the cartoonist pokes fun at a couple’s intense infatuation with one another, an implication that could only be understood by the local readership due to the invocation of dialect. By providing hyperbolic, tongue-in-cheek observations of modern dating rituals, the cartoonist mocks young men and women who eagerly embraced new forms of public intimacy. The locally specific allusions further circumscribed an exclusive world within which the discourse of open socialization was dramatically presented and ridiculed by the popular writers and artists.

The popular cultural interpretation of open socialization was even placed in a transnational setting, possibly revealing another cartoonist’s attempt to poke fun at Guangzhou’s image as a modern city filled with new western goods and ideas. For instance, titled “Four Kinds of Foreign Products” (Figure 21), the cartoon portrays four different ways in which men and women socialize in public and moves from smaller body parts to the entire body, a visual

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223 This word is interchangeable with *yauzaguei* 油炸鬼 (Chinese cruller). For the usage of this slang in limericks, see for example Meihen 眉痕, “Tuo hou” 拖後 [After hands were held], *Guomin xinwen*, May 20, 1927, 11. Also, see Dongfang Chenshuo 東方臣朔, “Tuo de yuyan” 拖的預言 [A prophecy for hitching], *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, June 7, 1927, 11. Apparently, the same author wrote another limerick around the same time and published it in a different newspaper; see “Shi youzhagui huai suo tuo” 食油炸鬼懷所拖 [Reminiscing my be-hitched while eating a Chinese cruller], *Guomin xinwen*, June 14, 1927, 11. In the dancing world in late 1920s Guangzhou, duo-dancing between a man and a woman was also known as “the Chinese cruller dance.” See for example, the dance repertoire section in Heimeigui, “Meiguihua pian” 玫瑰花片 [Rose petals], *Xianxiang bao*, April 21, 1928, 7.

224 For a detailed description of this practice, see Goran Aijmer and Virgil K. Ho, *Cantonese Society in a Time of Change* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2000), 174-75.
technique that serves to amplify the seemingly sensational nature of mixed-sex physical contact. The unusual openness of bodily touch between men and women is further indicated by the title, for foreign import is originally a term that denotes Euro-American and Japanese goods. The usage of this term casts mixed-sex contact as just one more cultural commodity exchanged between Guangzhou and the foreign world. Whether the cartoonist supports the concept of open socialization, however, is open to question, for the author seems to intentionally distort the proportion and shape of body parts to present the men and women’s interaction as an amusing spectacle. Each image is also paired with a caption written in the Cantonese dialect, which again anchors the “imported” discourse of open socialization in the local soil. In sum, while this cartoon marks the bodily contact between men and women as a site of local borrowing and translation of foreign culture, it clearly lampoons the implications of such cultural exchanges as exotic and unnatural.

Many writers and artists also collectively label the modern dating scene as “The Missy Movement” (Misi yundong 蜜絲運動, sometimes abbreviated as miyun 蜜運) and sought to give out tried-and-true advice on relationships with the opposite sex. Modern Girls, the so-called “missies” in the movement, were fantasized both as the eventual prize for the suitors and as arbiters who ruthlessly judged the suitors’ qualities and material assets. Most authors emphasize the leadership role that men would take in the Missy movement by cautioning their readers, either in an ironic or didactic tone, about the high cost of dating and marital life and recommending financial independence as a basic requirement for any prospective participant in the movement.225 The responsibilities to pursue the lover, bear the cost of the romantic

225 For an exaggerated calculation of the dating expenses, see Xuying 旭瑩, “Misi yundong qinei zhi xiaofeibiao” 蜜絲運動期內之銷費表 [A chart of expenditure for the duration of the Missy Movement], Xianxiang bao, July 9, 1927, 8. Another example of a young man forced to spend great sums of money to court his lover can be found in Erlimabei 爾里馬卑, “Miyun ji” 蜜運記 [A Record of Missy Movement], Guangzhou zazhi, January 1, 1934, 8. A
rendezvous, and define the contours of a relationship, were all placed on the men, while women often remained the objects of desire to which only the fittest survivors of the Missy Movement could lay claim. Nevertheless, some regard gender equity as one of the defining traits of the Missy Movement, since men and women could now freely socialize, and one writer even went as far as to suggest that women should initiate the movement. There seems to be unanimous consensus among the authors that the movement was indeed dictated by the Modern Girls, for many complained about the exacting requirements that these women held for their lovers, such as good looks, sophisticated taste, wealth, athletic skills, and an educational background from abroad. Modern Girls’ capricious nature and love of money were further believed to be the main cause of suicides by male youths who failed to live up to their unachievable ideals.

Portrayed both as the tantalizing reward of a male-dominated Missy Movement and as merciless manipulators who toyed with men’s feelings, the Modern Girl figure in tales of the “Missy Movement” is indeed full of internal contradictions. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, most writers and cartoonists did not identify themselves as Modern Boys, whom they relentlessly

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226 See for example, Rushi wo wen 如是我聞 [Thus I have heard], “Miyun” 密運 [The Missy Movement], Guomin xinwen, January 8, 1930, 1.1. For the argument in support of women leading the Missy Movement and against male dominance, see Susi 素絲, “Suowei misi yundong zhe dang yi fangeming lunzui” 所謂蜜絲運動者當以反革命論罪 [The so-called Missy Movement activists should be punished as anti-revolutionaries], Guomin xinwen, July 23, 1927, 11.

227 See Xianfengdui 先鋒隊 [Vanguard], “Chaliu yu miyun” 插柳與蜜運 [The Missy Movement: A futile endeavor?], Guomin xinwen, April 11, 1930, 1.1. Alternatively, a writer playfully proffered a measurement chart for the progress of the Missy Movement so that male suitors would not easily commit suicide after being rejected by the women. See Hongwan 虹灣, “Xinfaming miyun celiangbiao” 新發明蜜運測量表 [A newly invented Missy Movement measurement chart], Guomin xinwen, July 30, 1927, 11.
ridiculed. In this case, however, their self-image seemed to overlap with the representations of the Modern Boy, who was forced to define his masculine subject position by pursuing the Modern Girl, often becoming her pathetic plaything.

As creative solutions, authors who claimed to be tired of the constant rejections and fastidious personalities of the Modern Girls, advocated for the benefits of celibacy by establishing a so-called “Bachelor-ism Youth Corps” (gualao zhuyi qingniantuan 寡佬主義青年團), a term that makes a playful reference to the political ideologies and movements ending with “-ism” popular in the Republican period.229 Alternatively, others argued that their chances of finding a mate were much more hopeful if they returned to the traditional practice of matchmaking and arranged marriage under a rivaling “Endorsing the Palm Fan Movement” (yonghu kuishan yundong 擁護葵扇運動; palm fan was a euphemism for matchmakers in the Cantonese dialect).230 While these terms can be interpreted as mockery of the writers’ willful and materialistic Modern Girl lovers, they are also intended as a self-parody of the alleged disillusionment that motivated these young men to form “political” alliances.

At the same time, popular cultural commentators often made fun of ignorant or licentious men who were too desperate to get near a woman or who did not know how to behave in a civilized manner. For instance, an article admonishes the aspiring adherents of the Missy Movement to pursue a woman for a limited period of time, stay away from any women who attracted a large

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229 On the “Bachelor-ism Youth Corps,” see for example, Bozai 波仔, “Jiaru Gualao Zhuyi Qingniantuan zhi xinli” [The psychology behind joining the “Bachelor-ism Youth Corps”], Guomin xinwen, June 9, 1927, 11.

230 On the “Endorsing the Palm Fan Movement,” see, for instance, Huhua 護花, “Yongkui shi women de xin chulu” [Endorsing the Palm Fan is our new solution], Guomin xinwen, August 23, 1927, 11.
following of pursuers, and focus on one target at a time. These rules were set against the countertypes of boorish men prone to misinterpret women’s signal or womanizers who played with multiple women’s feelings like a fisherman catching his prey, neither of whom should enjoy the privilege of being a part of the movement. A’laohuan, the pseudonym of Huanwu and possibly his brother Huanniao discussed in Chapter 1, teaches the reader the correct ways to eat Western-style cuisine as the necessary step to impress the ladies on a date. The actual tips, however, include spreading butter on the date’s face and one’s own hair as a beauty touchup, and brushing one’s shoes with a baguette. These lighthearted jokes dramatize the consequences of acting like country bumpkins and forgoing the precious chance to display one’s familiarity with Western dining etiquettes in front of the “missies.” The parody of men out of touch with the art of modern romance also becomes the focus of a short fiction, “The Missy Movement Carried Out by a Bookworm,” in which the male protagonist He Shuchi 何書癡 (lit. He, the Bookworm) who lived in the countryside and continued to observe Confucian rituals, fell in love with his female neighbor Lingxian, a modern woman from Guangzhou. Even though Lingxian took no interest in a traditional Confucian scholar like Shuchi and politely rebuffed his friend Mr. Chen, who served as a go-between, Shuchi stubbornly persisted to follow Lingxian when she moved back to Guangzhou. Under Mr. Chen’s advice and auspices, Shuchi takes Lingxian to “lodge at a hotel, eat western-style cuisine, watch a movie and a Cantonese opera performance, and go for a drive in an automobile.” Shuchi is eventually rejected again because Lingxian suspects him to be a

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232 A’laohuan 阿老幻, “Zhidao miyun qingnian shi xicai de yifengxin” 指導蜜運青年食西菜的一封信 [A letter on guiding the youth participants of the Missy Movement how to eat western-style cuisine], Guomin xinwen, July 18, 1927, 11.

233 Bailiansheng 百鍊生, “Shuchi miyun” 書癡蜜運 [The Missy Movement carried out by a bookworm], Guohua bao, January 12, 1936, 4.2.
“pineapple chicken” (*bolo gai* 波羅雞), a local slang that derides shameless, clingy men who took advantage of others. A recalcitrant, old-fashioned bigot who did not take no for an answer but instead pursued a woman using the money of a friend, He Shuchi can thus be considered a stereotypical antihero destined to fail in the Missy Movement.

If some parodies of boorish men were intended to distinguish the superior masculine identity of the authors, other accounts in fact turned these writers into objects of laughter. For example, a writer under the pseudonym Spareribs teases another writer Mortar (penname of Liang Dusun; see Chapter 1 for the story of his arrest) for boasting about his successes in the Missy Movement.\(^{234}\) Even though Mortar claimed to have won over his love interests, Spareribs observes that,

[Mortar] never ceases to fixate on the Missy Movement, and engages in discovering [new] targets every day. His residence (*paochang* 砲廠, lit. Mortar factory) is located on Xingchang Street. [When he] leaves [his home, he looks around for targets] like a mortar shooting toward the sky and targeting the birds haphazardly. Sometimes, [he] “leisurely” gazes afar from his balcony, much like a searchlight under the ocean. However, he has had no luck in target practice yet.

Written in the three-tier style that combines the use of classical and vernacular Chinese and the Cantonese dialect, this passage vividly depicts Mortar’s foolishly desperate attempts to find love despite his pompous claims of earlier success. Spareribs further suggests that when he went to watch a film with Mortar, Mortar happened to spot several young women who entered the theater before them. Anxious to meet the ladies, Mortar was said to have purchased the most expensive tickets, rushed to the top floor, and jumped to the first row from the back after he

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\(^{234}\) *Paobing pai paigu* 砲兵排骨排 [Spareribs from the Mortar Platoon], “Pojipao yu miyun” 迫擊炮與密運 [*Mortar and the Missy Movement*, *Guomin xinwen*, June 28, 1927, 11.]
located the women in the dark. This portrayal therefore differs from the aforementioned accounts of boorish men in the movement, as the author satirizes a fellow writer for his impetuous behavior. As participants of the so-called “Missy Movement,” popular cultural commentators were also bound by dating etiquettes and hence could turn to themselves as sources of ridicule.

The stories of uncouth suitors in many ways paralleled the satirical portrayals of male lechers who ogled, tried to get near, or even groped women under the pretext of open socialization. In a typical account with the title, “A Record of Getting Rejected on the Hunt for Beauty,” a young man donning a western suit follows two fashionable women all the way from the cinema to their home and does not desist until the women dump water from their balcony to chase him away.\(^{235}\) Sharp comparison is hence set up between the clumsiness and wishful yearning of the young man despite his modern appearance and the tantalizing, trendy Modern Girls, who only appear to be within reach of licentious men. Ironically, popular writers showed no hesitation in utilizing the scandalized, erotic potential of such stories to lure their readers. They readily concocted provocative titles that included local slangs associated with taking advantage of women, such as “absorbing oil” (sokyau 索油, to take advantage), even when the sexual content was deliberately minimized.\(^{236}\) Likewise, newspaper journalists in this period also had the tendency to emphasize the presence of female victims or employed sensational vocabulary in headlines in order to attract the readers’ attention.\(^{237}\) Despite the use of modest

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\(^{235}\) Xuguo 絮果, “Lieyan pengding ji” 獵豔碰釘紀 [A record of getting rejected on the hunt for beauty], Yuehua bao, October 25, 1930, 1.

\(^{236}\) For example, see Yari 亞日, “Suoyou beiru you yizong” 索油被辱又一宗 [Another case of humiliation after a failed attempt at absorbing oil], Yuehua bao, February 3, 1930, 1.

\(^{237}\) Historian Barbara Mittler suggests that such a technique could be traced to the late Qing period, when journalists and editors of Shanghai’s major newspaper of Shenbao readily incorporated catchy phrases and gendered innuendo in their article titles. See Barbara Mittler, A Newspaper for China? Power, Identity, and Change in Shanghai’s News Media, 1872-1912 (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 289. For contemporary newspaper reports with suggestive titles, see for example, anonymous, “Dengtuzi lieyan: baoshou juling zhi zhang, suoyou changjue
language in the actual content, perhaps due to the fear of government censorship, the use of slangs associated with fondling women parts that appeared in the titles helped create the illusion of erotic exposé, thereby complicating the authors’ attempt to make fun of or critique the male protagonists’ inappropriate sexual advances.

Not unlike popular literature and newspaper reports, cartoons also portray racy scenes of men groping women. Depicting couples in popular settings where mixed-sex socialization would take place, such as date scenes (Figure 22) or social dancing (Figure 23), these works often capture a frozen moment of intimate touch without explanation of what comes before or after, perhaps with the intent of focusing the viewer’s gaze entirely on where the men are placing their hands: the women’s buttocks. One of the most telling examples is a cartoon titled “Appreciating the Moon” (Figure 24), in which the author depicts a woman leaning on her lover by a lake that sparkles under the moonlight. What makes this seemingly romantic and innocent scene controversial, however, is the male lover’s hand on the woman’s buttocks, which alludes to his sexual transgression under the guise of open socialization. The cartoonist cleverly makes the big, round moon the focal point of the image that contrasts the man’s almost unnoticeable hand, perhaps to illustrate the illicit nature of his act. A connection between the natural scenery and the man’s promiscuity is further suggested by the title, for the moon is a pun for the buttocks in the Cantonese dialect, the humorous rendering of which intends to provoke laughter from the local audience.²³⁸ As a result, while this cartoon can be read as a critique of the new forms of sexual misbehavior perpetrated by men in modern times, the pun arguably lessens the seriousness of

²³⁸ For a similar reference to women’s buttocks as the moon, see Lao Toutuo 老頭陀, “Laoshi laoyue ji” 老師撈月記 [The record of a teacher grasping at a woman’s buttocks], Yuehua bao, February 22, 1928, 1.
accusation and allows the audience to enjoy a good laugh without challenging the status quo of women’s sexual objectification.

In these popular portrayals of mixed-sex socialization as erotic stimuli, Modern Girls again appear as controversial figures. After all, occasionally they initiate physical contact with the men, a representation that seems to express reservations for women’s sexual power. In an imaginary scene of a film shooting (Figure 25), the cartoonist Huanniao depicts a fashionably dressed actress who gladly responds to an upcoming kiss scene by suggesting to the film director that she does not want to be tied up at all. The actress’s appearance can be associated with the iconic Modern Girl, as she wears a wavy bobbed hairstyle, tight-fitting qipao dress, and high heels, visual cues that are very likely intended to hint at her equally unabashed attitude toward sex. The author further uses the male director’s hand as a visual prop to draw the viewer’s attention to the actress’s voluptuous figure and enticing pose on the sofa. Even without the presence of the actor who is about to perform the intimate scene, the actress’ desperate longing for the actor’s touch, to the extent that she has no need to be tied down, suggests that she is fully confident in her sexuality and not shy of expressing her sexual desire.

If the Modern Girl actress in the cartoon only eagerly awaits the kiss scene, there were portrayals in which Modern Girls approached men physically. One day, while visiting the rooftop amusement garden of The Sun (Daxin 大新) Department Store to watch Cantonese opera, a male writer pen-named Aya purportedly met two Modern Girls who smiled at him, sat down and tried to take over the author’s seat by pressing their bodies against him and later offering him a cigarette.\footnote{Aya 阿涯, “Jiujiang shifou yanyu ne?” 究竟是否豔遇呢？ [Was it indeed an amorous encounter?] Xianxiang bao, August 16, 1927, 8.} The author highlights these women’s modern appearance by using the term “Bobbed-Heads” (jejitau 椰衣頭, lit. Coconut shell head) to comment on their hairstyle, which
also becomes the explanation for their transgression of gender boundary and personal space. At the end, the author comes to the wry conclusion, “even though I was suspicious of their motives at first and did not pay attention to them, now that I think of it, were they hitting on me and suggesting an amorous encounter (yanyu 豔遇)?” While the author seems to advise his male readers to enjoy women’s physical advances, it is clear that he actually questions the appropriateness of these women’s behavior. In a playful tone, this essay hints at the potential anxiety and loss of power that modern men experienced in this increasingly liberal social environment. By reinforcing the trope of Modern Girls as seductresses and modern men as playthings, these writings and cartoons thus employ satire to point out the potential problems caused by female empowerment and the discourse of open socialization.

A third category of popular representations of open socialization was political commentary on hotly debated issues such as social dancing and men and women swimming together. Through these commentaries, popular writers and cartoonists vied with the government over the definitions of sexual propriety and local modernity. As discussed above, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, public interest in social dancing remained unabated in spite of the government ban, and writers and cartoonists catered to popular taste by delving into this subject prolifically, to the extent that there were specialty magazines such as *Leisure* (Youyou 優游) with columns devoted to the topic. Even though most writers chose to quench their readers’ thirst by reporting on the latest news or gossip in the dancing world of Shanghai or Hong Kong, or by reminiscing about dance parties that they had attended before the ban or after the ban had been temporarily

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240 *Jejitau*, sometimes rendered as *jehok* 椰殼 (lit. coconut shell) or *jesing* 椰升 (lit. coconut shell), are Cantonese slang that denote the latest fashion of the bobbed hairstyle and become synonyms for the Modern Girls in Guangzhou. For references to these terms, see for example a Cantonese ditty on women’s hairstyle and modernity, Cainanke 采南客, “Yueou ‘Wenming nüzi’” 粵謳－文明女子 [Cantonese ditty “Modern Women”], *Xianxiang bao*, November 2, 1928, 8. Also, see Junzi renye 君子人也, “Modingyou zhi haoyu” 摩頂友之豪語 [The bold words of a hairdresser], *Yinjing ribao* 銀晶日報 [The Silver Crystal Daily], May 1, 1930, 1.1.
lifted, some indirectly signaled their disapproval of the perceived government overreach.\textsuperscript{241} Immediately after the ban on social dancing was issued in February 1928, one author wrote sarcastically, “is [the government official who issued the ban on dancing] a retrograde or Qing loyalist? It cannot be!”\textsuperscript{242} Invoking Sun Yat-sen’s famous adage, “revolution is not yet complete; all our comrades should strive on,” the writer deadpans that the revolutionary youths of this city should concentrate on their tasks rather than dancing with girls, eventually concluding, “the heck with dancing… let’s ban it!” By emphasizing the image of Guangzhou as the cradle of Chinese revolution, the author plays the role of a government cheerleader in order to satirize the government’s reactionary stance. For this author, the ban on social dancing was incompatible with both the modernity of dancing and the status of Guangzhou as a world-class city led by progressive, foreign-educated politicians like Sun.

The sporadic lifting of the ban on social dancing similarly provoked the suspicion and mockery of popular writers, who suggest that the term “social dancing” should be replaced with “special permission,” and characterize the political authorities as “those who are above the masses by their ability to ban and grant permissions.”\textsuperscript{243} (能禁之，能準之，是在民之上者) After a special permission was granted for a masquerade dance party to be held in Citizen Garden in 1928, a writer makes a joke that “in the past, [it is said that] Guan Gong would feel itchy in his butt after he didn’t ride the horse for a long time. [I wonder] if dancers will feel itchy in his butt after he didn’t ride the horse for a long time. [I wonder] if dancers will feel itchy

\textsuperscript{241} For anecdotal reports on the dance halls in Hong Kong, see for instance, Zhengzhasheng (jizigang) 撼扎生寄自港 [Zhengzhasheng reporting from Hong Kong], “Xiangdao wuxing diandian lu” 香島舞星點點錄 [The bits and pieces on Hong Kong dancing girls], Guohua bao, November 19, 1933, 1.1. For the happenings in Shanghai, see, for example, Laohuang 老黃, “Hu wuyuan zhi jingzheng” 滬舞院之競爭 [The competitions among dance halls in Shanghai], February 16, 1935, 1.1.

\textsuperscript{242} Yidian 託願, “Jinwu zhitiao guan” 禁舞止跳觀 [My opinion on the ban on dancing], Xianxiang bao, March 10, 1928, 7.

\textsuperscript{243} Heimeigui, “Tezhun! Tezhun! Te tezhun!” 特準！特準！特特準！ [Special permission! Special permission! A very special permission!] Xianxiang bao, June 12, 1928, 7. Also, see Chenshuo, “Tiaowu sichao.”
in the sole of their feet not having danced after such a long time?

By comparing a famous deified general from the third century to local dance enthusiasts, this author seeks to underline a similar incongruity between the government’s permanent ban on social dancing and the progressive tides of the modern world. The same sentiment was expressed by another author when the government gave special permission to a Double Tenth National Day celebration ball in 1930. If the provincial government considered dancing a sexually promiscuous activity due to the conservative local customs, the author reasons, the entertainment should be permanently banned; instead, the vacillation between special permission and prohibition is completely incomprehensible. Altogether, these criticisms reflect the popular discontent with government supervision of modern entertainment and proffer alternative attitudes toward mixed-sex socialization. Unlike the portrayals of Modern Girls in the “Missy Movement,” in which the authors seemed to side with the reactionary government in their definition of proper femininity, these instances challenge rather than affirm state-sponsored sexual norms through the expression of sarcasm.

If the ban on social dancing was considered absurd or retrogressive, what was deemed even more unacceptable was the 1934 prohibition against men and women swimming together in public, which resulted in both parody and lengthy diatribe from local popular cultural commentators. One writer begins by feigning support for the government decision as a time-

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244 Heimeigui, “Guomin huayuan yangmei tuqi” 國民花園揚眉吐氣 [The Citizen Garden will stand tall and feel proud], Xianxiang bao, May 22, 1928, 7.

245 Dujuan 杜鵑 [Cuckoo], “Tiaowu yitian” 跳舞一天 [Dancing for a day], Guomin xinwen, October 8, 1930, 2.3.
honored, regional symbol of public decency. The author then goes on to reveal his (her) disapproval later in the essay with a wisecracking portrayal of the swimming pool now “purified” from purported sexual decadence:

As soon as the prohibition is issued, Modern Boys and Girls will shake their heads and sigh, resenting the ruthlessness of the authorities… Those who were swimming partners in the past are now a short distance away yet poles apart (zhichi tianya 咫尺天涯); who can teach him (her) the techniques of breaststroke and backstroke?… Raising [their] eyes to look at the swimming pool, there are people of the same sex only; who can be a bosom friend (zhiyin 知音) swims a hundred yard together for competition? Reminiscing the past and lamenting the present, they must have harbored endless lingering thoughts.

In this instance, the author lampoons both the young men and women who are at a loss after the new policy has been promulgated and the state for interfering with individual freedoms. While the young swimmers—more interested in companionship than exercise—have misinterpreted the true meaning of sport, the state’s fastidious morality is equally problematic, hence the double irony.

In contrast, another article titled, “A Discussion of the Sexual Segregation of Swimming,” offers an open denunciation of the government’s reactionary measure. The author Luo Wenxi 駱文熙 (1899-?) was remembered as an athlete and sports journalist who actively promoted local physical culture, and therefore it is perhaps no surprise that he opposes the government policy by

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246 Baiyi 白衣, “Nannü fenyong zhi wojian” 男女分泳之我見 [My opinion on the sexual segregation of swimming], Yuehua bao, June 22, 1934, 1.

247 Luo Wenxi 駱文熙, “Nannü fenyong yi” 男女分泳議 [A discussion of the sexual segregation of swimming], Guangzhou zazhi, July 1, 1934, 7.
insisting that swimming was an exercise regimen that would not be affected by gender integration. Paradoxically, Luo does not seem to have a clear definition of what constitutes legitimate contact between the sexes, as he proposes a hierarchy of modern entertainment by placing swimming and other sports on the top and social dancing on the lower strata, arguing that the latter might lead to potential corruption of social morals. In spite of the ambiguities in his understanding of mixed-sex socialization, Luo Wenxi urged the government to leave the individual swimmers alone, as the overemphasis on sexual propriety in public places might actually worsen the situation by making people unnecessarily conscious about their conduct. Using sarcasm, the author later maintains that unless the government officials attempted to mandate all swimmers wear masks and avoid eye contact while swimming, it would be impossible to achieve the desired results with such a policy. Luo Wenxi’s defense of gender integration is therefore a peculiar combination of a state-endorsed perspective, as seen in his opinion of social dancing, and a liberal view of contact between men and women influenced by the New Culture legacy, in which he carefully invokes both the trope of physical culture as nationalist ideology and also the inviolability of personal autonomy. Even though these opponents of the government’s policy on gender segregation in swimming might sometimes side with the political authorities or chose not to voice their concerns openly, their attempts to compete for the definition of gender respectability of swimming, the limits of government interference, and individual rights are evident.

Conclusion Open Socialization as a Regional Emblem

248 For a short biography of Luo Wenxi, who also wrote under the pseudonym Tangke 唐克, see Chuixian zhe, “Guangzhou wentan zuozhe zalu,” Guangzhou zazhi, June 1, 1934, 18.
As demonstrated at the beginning of this chapter, the debate on open socialization, and the state-society tug-of-war regarding gender policies in Guangzhou, were situated in a broader context of increasingly conservative political culture that characterized the Nanjing Decade (1927-1937). These local phenomena incurred poignant attacks from writers in other major cities, including from the radical and most well-known writer in modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun. Furthermore, the happenings in Guangzhou were linked to similar regulations in places such as Beijing, where social dancing or gender integration at the cinema were heavily regulated. One writer in Shenbao even playfully remarked that “the social customs in the north and the south of China appear to be contagious, for not long after Guangzhou banned the co-swimming of men and women Beijing followed suit.” His caustic comment suggested a national landscape of moral conservatism that was incongruent with societal progress. Such criticism was even shared by intellectuals in the overseas Chinese diaspora community, as a contributor to the Singapore-based Commercial News of the Southern Seas derides the Guangdong provincial leaders for “having the leisure to care about gender morality when they should be preoccupied with governmental affairs.” While detailed analysis of the transregional and diasporic conceptions of a Cantonese identity through the lens of the gender segregation policies is beyond the scope of the present study, it is clear that the association of mixed-sex interaction with the reputation of a region gained widespread currency. This can perhaps explain the vigorous effort by both the

249 Hsu Hui-chi 許慧琦, Nala zai zhongguo: xinnüxing de suzao ji qi yanbian, 1900s-1930s 娜拉在中國：新女性形象的塑造及其演變, 1900s-1930s [Nora in China: the image-making and evolution of the new woman, 1900s-1930s] (Taipei: Guolin zhengzhi daxue lishi xuexi, 2003), 303-6.

250 The mention of sexual segregation in swimming in Guangzhou and Beijing is embedded in a larger discussion of the abolition of strange attire campaign in these cities in late 1935. Mengruo 夢若, “Qizhuang yifu youshang fenghua ma?” 奇裝異服有傷風化嗎 [Does outlandish attire harm social customs?] Shenbao, September 11, 1935, 17.

251 Xiaojin 小晉, “Jinzhi nannü tongxing an” 禁止男女同行案 [The case of prohibiting men and women to walk in public together], Nanyang shangbao, July 12, 1934, 3.
local state and society to delineate the contours of gender norms in order to construct the desired image of the city.

The linkage between physical contact between the sexes and the standing of a particular region in the moral geography of the country is hardly a new trend in the Republican era, however. It can certainly be traced to the chastity culture of the late imperial period, which was enthusiastically endorsed by educated commentators in Guangdong in order to promote their cultural legitimacy and assimilation into the Qing empire. Similarly, the Modern Girls who proclaimed ownership over their bodies and who seductively and transgressively returned the gaze of the leering men, in many ways resembled Qing dynasty women whose agency and active corporeal control were often masked by their seemingly tragic fate of suicide as chaste martyrs. Nonetheless, the unprecedented New Culture discourse of open socialization and various newly available forms of mixed-sex interaction created room for both local men and women to exercise their individual autonomy. Popular writers and cartoonists also seized the chance to proffer their own playful visions of sexual propriety, cosmopolitan modernity, and Guangzhou’s place in the nation, which ranged from satire of modern dating culture to parody of sexual misconduct and mockery of government policies. At the same time, the government’s attempts to define sexual morality and exert control over the physical contact between men and women not only testifies to the frequent changes of and struggles among the political regimes in the 1920s and 1930s, but also reveals the contested nature of the issues surrounding open socialization. Open socialization thus became a discursive field in which multiple social forces vied for cultural authority with varying degree of success.
Chapter 3  Fashioning Masculinities: The Modern Boy, Consumption, and Beauty Culture

Starting in the mid-1920s, cultural commentators in Guangzhou engaged in debates not only about women’s liberation but also about the changing definitions of masculinity. In particular, men’s pursuit of fashion and use of cosmetic products, and the legitimacy of these acts, attracted considerable public attention and became a favorite subject of parody by cartoonists and popular writers. For instance, one author published an article titled “Feminization” in 1925,

Slicked back hair, powdered faces, and perfume are the sole means by which women enhance their appearance and titillate [men’s] desires. But recently men [have begun to] follow their example. Are men and women of the same mind? Absolutely not. Those among women who have been baptized in new knowledge (shouguo wenming xili 受過文明洗禮) have come to realize that they have been treated as men’s playthings. They strive to liberate themselves from the shackles of family, to keep social interactions [between the sexes] open, and to seek freedom for marriage and divorce. Therefore, cowardly men, with no power to subdue [women], follow women’s example of wearing slicked back hair, powdered faces, and perfume, worshipping women (baidao yu shiliuqun xia 拜倒於石榴裙下) and obeying their every command, as the sole means by which they wish to subdue women’s resistance. I have no proper name for this phenomenon, but to call it feminization.252

油頭粉面，香氣襲人，乃婦女之助長顏色撩人情意之惟一手段。而近日男子仿而效之，莫非男女則同一心理乎？非也。

女子之受過文明洗禮者，對於男子之玩弄，漸已覺悟，對於家庭之束縛，力求解放，對於社會之交際，取乎公開，對於婚姻之離合，純取自由。於是懦性之男子，自以無力折服，乃仿用女子，油頭粉面香氣襲人之唯一手段，拜倒於石榴裙下，唯命是聽，冀折服女子之反抗力。吾無以名之，名之曰婦女化。

In this passage, beautifying practices adopted by men are seen as a weapon by which to gain the upper hand in the gender war. As men became overpowered by women activists who campaigned for gender equality, they had to put on makeup and perfume in order to woo their enemy and reclaim their superior position, only to realize that such a strategy actually made them

252 Wenying 文影, “Funü hua” 婦女化 [Feminization], Guomin xinwen, September 29, 1925, 8.
weaker and submissive to women. Even though not every artist and writer agreed with this interpretation of men’s physical self-improvement practices, there seemed to be an emerging consensus in the 1920s and 1930s that women’s increasing presence in public space and pursuit of equal rights had driven masculinity into crisis, giving rise to bizarre phenomena such as men’s use of cosmetic products. These phenomena, in turn, invited government regulation and social critique.

This chapter explores the multi-layered discourse of male beauty that constituted an important part of the construction of modern masculinities in Republican Guangzhou. Previous studies mostly focus on issues of gender politics, aesthetic ideology, and the commercial culture associated with the Modern Girl figure. The image of the Modern Boy is usually mentioned as the counterpart of the Modern Girl but scarcely receives scholarly attention. This study seeks to fill that void, reconstructing representations of the Modern Boy in Republican China by looking at his appearance in cartoons, advertisements, and textual sources such as government regulations and newspaper articles in 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou. I posit that not unlike female appearance, male beauty was closely tied to dialectic tensions within the discourse of modernity, between progress and moral decadence, the public and the private, and nationalism and individualism. These tensions were made manifest in men’s sartorial and cosmetic choices, as they faced the dilemma of whether they should maintain a masculine façade consisting of frugality and patriotic consumption of national products, or pursue the latest, western trends at the risk of being associated with effeminacy. Altogether, I highlight the fluidity of gender

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253 One of the major exceptions is Hsiao-yen Peng’s study of dandies in early twentieth century Shanghai, Tokyo, and Paris, although she separates the figure of dandy from that of the Modern Boy and argues that the former is the creating force behind transcultural modernity while the latter only follows the trends. In Guangzhou, the term “dandy” is interchangeable with other words that connote Modern Boy and is often used derisively, therefore I choose not to separate these two figures in my study. See Hsiao-yen Peng, Dandyism and Transcultural Modernity: The Dandy, The Flâneur, and The Translator in 1930s Shanghai, Tokyo, and Paris (New York: Routlege, 2010).
constructs in the local beauty culture. Through analyzing portrayals of men’s attire and beautifying practices, I challenge the usual assumptions of female imagery as evidence of the objectification of women under the male gaze by examining how, for example, certain images turn both men and women into objects of desire or, potentially, subject men to a feminizing gaze.

Three types of sources are employed to frame my analysis of male beauty and the ideas of modernity in 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou. First, I analyze government regulations on male appearance in order to reveal the political authorities’ interpretations of normative manhood, which was defined as militaristic, modest, and fully in service to the Chinese nation-state. Such an attempt to police individual bodies was prompted by the state’s desire to maintain power in an age of political fragmentation. Second, my study of advertisements with the Modern Boy imagery indicates that a competing vision of masculinity was proffered, supporting individual freedom, delicate attention to one’s body, cultivation of Westernized taste, and pursuit of novelty. Even though these commercial campaigns might be better characterized as dramatizing an idealistic modern lifestyle rather than reflecting social reality, they still constitute “a basis for plausible inference about popular attitude and values” because of the need to resonate with and move an audience. Third, I survey the informal prose essays and cartoons that seemed to find both the government and commercial discourses on male fashion great sources of amusement.

These contemporary commentators often turned to exaggeration and mockery rather than take a definite stance on such issues. As indicated in the introduction, some writers and artists resorted to satirical depictions of fashionable men in order to express feelings of superiority. Others might have played with different gendered personae to challenge the government’s policies on male appearance and resist the politically hegemonic conceptions of masculinity and

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nationalism. Conversely, parodies of Modern Boys may also have served as a social corrective that kept people from overstepping gender boundaries. Due to the murkiness in the identity of each individual writer and artist, I refrain from making suggestions about linkages between authorial intent and background; instead, I view these materials as a collective response to the gender ideologies imposed by both state power and capitalist commercial enterprise and those who blindly followed such social ideals.

An explanation about the usage of the conceptual category Modern Boy seems warranted. Known as mobo in Japan or modan ppoi in colonial Korea, the Modern Boy was a pan-Asian cultural phenomenon in the interwar period and commonly imagined as a young man who dressed himself in Western attire, worshipped Western consumer goods, frequented Western-style cafes or modern entertainment venues, and was vacuous, hedonist, and promiscuous.\(^{255}\) In the context of Guangzhou, local writers labeled fashionably Westernized young men modeng nanxing 摩登男性 or modeng qingnian 摩登青年, and also employed a wide range of local slang to describe them as will be elaborated upon in the third section.\(^{256}\) As my analysis of male beauty product advertisements and other images will demonstrate, the imagery of fashionable men in Guangzhou corresponds to the Modern Boy prototype described by their Japanese and Korean contemporaries. Here I draw on the theoretical framework of the Modern Girl Around the World

\(^{255}\) The Dictionary of Ultramodern Words published in Japan in 1930 characterized the Modern Boy as “a young man who is flashy and follows the latest fads, sports a silk handkerchief in his breast pocket, wears bell-bottomed trousers, and is a kind of hooligan.” See Barbara Sato, The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 63-65. Similar references to the fashionable appearance and decadent behavior of Modern Boy in colonial Korea can be found in Jennifer J. Jung-Kim, “Gender and Modernity in Colonial Korea” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2005), 292-95.

\(^{256}\) For the first reference, see Laohe 老和, “Modeng nanxing zhuangshi mantan” 摩登男性裝飾漫談 [Random discussion of Modern Boys’ attires and accessories], Guohua bao, July 15, 1933, 1.1. For the latter reference, see the story of a married woman who aspired to become an actress and later demanded to divorce her husband after beginning to date “modern youths” in Anonymous, “Zongqi xue dianying, cucheng eguo, shaofu pinhan jiatao” 縱妻學電影促成惡果 少婦姘漢挾逃 [Indulging one’s wife to enter the film industry leads to disastrous consequences, as the young married woman runs away with her illicit lover], Guomin xinwen, February 9, 1935, 7.
Research Group, which uses the iconic Modern Girl as a heuristic device for connective comparison by locating her appearances across the globe using visual markers associated with her style and analyzing how the cultural production and discursive forces at work in local areas reflect processes embedded in a larger transnational network of capitalist economy, colonial expansion, and translingual knowledge exchange.\(^\text{257}\) This methodology provides a useful lens for examining the Modern Boy, since his visual representations likewise appeared simultaneously in different parts of the world during the interwar era, thereby allowing us to put developments of Guangzhou in conversation with similar phenomena in other cities around the globe.

Nonetheless, references to Modern Boys tend to be fewer in number and almost always appear in conjunction with the much more desired and disputed counterpart, the Modern Girl. Be they male cross-dressers arrested by the police or stylish men dating beautiful women in male beauty product advertisements, the construction of the Modern Boy’s image, as well as other competing discourses of masculinity, were actively shaped by that of the Modern Girl, to the extent that Modern Boys sometimes appeared as an afterthought or accessories of these women. The term Modern Boy, therefore, serves not just as a convenient category of analysis for a specific type of Westernized modern masculinity associated with capitalist consumer culture, but also as a signifier of changing gender relations and public anxiety over a purported feminization of men.

Part I  Contested Symbols: Historical Overview and Government Regulations on Male Appearance in Republican Guangzhou

The increasing public attention to changes in male appearance was rooted in a context of rising consumerism and the development of Guangzhou as a modern urban space, which led both

to aspirations of progress and social unease with the corrupting influence of modernization. Since 1921, when the first modern government was established in Guangzhou, the city had become the showcase of urban administration for the rest of China, and large-scale urbanization projects such as building infrastructure, high-rise architecture, and public parks, were subsequently launched to accommodate the needs of the expanding urban population and generate civic consciousness.\textsuperscript{258} Although the 1920s was marked by social upheavals such as labor strikes and military conflicts between warlords, all of which stifled economic growth and political stability, the city entered into an era of relative peace and economic restoration when Chen Jitang gradually took control of the province between 1929 and 1936.\textsuperscript{259} As a result of these developments, an urban middle class began to emerge, which indulged itself in the pleasures offered by the city by spending leisure hours on savoring Western cuisine, dancing, watching films, and pursuing the latest fashions.\textsuperscript{260} The proliferation of advertisements also fulfilled and stimulated a demand for commodity consumption; these images served as sites to display the new public image of Guangzhou.\textsuperscript{261} Paradoxically, some local intellectuals also bemoaned the perilous impact of the alluring cityscape as “threatening the moral souls of its inhabitants, and causing environmental pollution, social inequalities, the collapse of traditional moral codes, and the demise of simple and harmonious human relations.”\textsuperscript{262} Viewed in this light, the imagery of Modern Boys in Guangzhou, represented either as progressive followers of Tsin, \textit{Nation, Governance, and Modernity}, 52-53. Also, see Ho, \textit{Understanding Canton}, 36-37.

\textsuperscript{258} Tsin, \textit{Nation, Governance, and Modernity}, 52-53. Also, see Ho, \textit{Understanding Canton}, 36-37.

\textsuperscript{259} Nonetheless, some scholars argue that much of the provincial revenue under Chen’s rule was extracted to fund his military expenditure. See Alfred H. Y. Lin, “Building and Funding a Warlord Regime: The Experience of Chen Jitang in Guangdong, 1929-1936,” \textit{Modern China} 28, no. 2 (Apr. 2002): 177-212.

\textsuperscript{260} Ho, \textit{Understanding Canton}, 63-69.


\textsuperscript{262} Ho, \textit{Understanding Canton}, 13.
Western vestimentary and beauty culture or as fallen men who gave in to the decadent atmosphere of modern cities and ceded their masculinity by blurring gender boundaries with their dress and conduct, also embodied the dual perceptions of modernity. As a consequence, the growing interest in the new, seemingly outrageous fashions on men’s bodies can be seen as responses to the urbanization processes in the city and the rise of an urban middle class that was busy to show off its cosmopolitan identity.

Existing scholarship has demonstrated that male dress played an integral part in the modernization project in countries across East Asia. For instance, Western-style attire, including western suits and military uniforms, were quickly adopted by the Japanese ruling elites at the beginning of the Meiji restoration (1868-1912). Likewise, government leaders abandoned their official robes and donned Western costumes and accessories in formal occasions when the Republic of China was founded in 1911. These choices resulted from the belief that attire stood as a signifier not only of individual deportment and conduct, but also of civilizational development. As the new fashions began to trickle down to individual men and women, the government found a vested interest in regulating their appearances in order to project their political ideologies and remold their subjects into loyal citizens of modern China. When the Nationalist Party defeated northern warlords and established the central regime in Nanjing in 1928, their desire to cement their political power and advance their modernization agenda was

263 Barbara Molony, “Gender, Citizenship and Dress in Modernizing Japan,” in The Politics of Dress in Asia and the Americas, ed. by Mina Roces and Louise Edwards (Eastbourne, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2007), 82-83. The notion that male attire was associated with the display of political power also rings true in European history. For instance, when the three-piece suit was first introduced to the sartorial world in seventeenth-century England, it assumed the political significance of modesty, dignity and productivity that allowed male monarchs and aristocrats to assert their masculine identity and ruling legitimacy by setting themselves part from the decadent French or wasteful women. See David Kuchta, The Three-piece Suit and Modern Masculinity: England, 1550-1850 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

also shown by the promulgation of a new “Clothing Law” in 1929, which was supported by the Guangdong provincial government. This new legislation obliged men to wear black jackets (gua 襦) and blue long gowns made of silk, hemp, cotton or wool for formal meetings and western suits for occasions that involved international guests.265 In addition, male civil servants were to wear black Sun Yat-sen suits in the winter and white ones in the summer made of silk, hemp, cotton or wool of modest quality.266 Except for the suits, which were restricted to special occasions with foreign visitors, all the clothing items were to use domestically produced fabrics.267 With the goal of standardizing men’s attire in formal occasions and workplaces that represent the government, the Clothing Law constructed an image of normative male appearance that valued modesty in design and color, and patriotic support of the domestic economy.

Nevertheless, the extent to which the Clothing Law was efficiently executed and faithfully observed in the lives of the ordinary citizens remains a question, for the Guangdong Provincial Government repeatedly brought up the subject in the subsequent years while supplementing the law with detailed rules. In March 1930, the Party Department of the Provincial Government commanded the party officials and cadres of each city and county government to wear Sun Yat-sen suits made of domestically produced fabric as their uniforms.268 Five years later, the Southwest Committee of Political Affairs, a party organ established by Chen

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265 Guangdong shengzhengfu mishuchu, “Fuzhi tiaoli (Guofu gongbu)” 服制條例（國府公佈）[The Clothing Law as promulgated by the Central Government], Guangdong shengzhengfu zhoubao, May 6, 1929, 7-8. The original document was published as Zhonghua guomin zhengfu xingzhengyuan, “Fuzhi tiaoli” 服制條例 [Clothing Law], Xingzhengyuan gongbao 行政院公報 [Gazette of the Executive Yuan], April 20, 1929, 10-15.

266 Guangdong Shengzhengfu, “Fuzhi Tiaoli (Guofu Gongbu),” 8. For the possible origins of the Sun Yat-sen suit, see Finnane, Changing Clothes in China, 182-84.

267 Guangdong shengzhengfu mishuchu, “Fuzhi Tiaoli (Guofu Gongbu),” 8.

268 Anonymous, “Sheng dangbu tongling Ge xianshi dangwu gongzuo renyuan chuanzhuo zhifu,” 省黨部通令各縣市黨務工作人員穿著制服 [The Party Department of the Provincial Government ordered the staff in each county and city government to wear Uniforms], Guangzhou minguo ribao, March 25, 1930, 4.1.
Jitang, demanded again that civil servants in all departments of the government wear uniforms made of white cloth in the summer and of blue or black cloth in the winter instead of wearing western suits or long gowns. Male government staff had been the targets of these legal orders probably because they, above everyone else, were expected to be loyal to the nation and exemplary in their conduct. Nonetheless, male civil servants also adopted sartorial choices that required repeated admonitions from the authorities, such as wearing attire other than their uniforms, making use of foreign-imported fabrics, or displaying colors considered immodest.

The provincial government’s attempt to enhance its authority over regional affairs independently from the central Nanjing regime can be seen in its additional stipulations on clothing. In August 1935, under the counsel of Chen Jitang, the government issued the “Standard for Everyday Attire” (Richang fuzhuang biaozhun 日常服装標準), under which male citizens were mandated to consume domestically produced fabric and wear long gowns with hems at least below the knees and above the ankles, while public display of their bodies was prohibited at all times. The call for support of national products had by now been a recurring theme that anticipated not only civil servants, but also ordinary people to cultivate the virtues of frugality and patriotism even in their quotidian decisions and outward appearances. The hem length of the long gown and the ban on the exposure of bare flesh, which had more to do with regulating female sexuality, may have also targeted men in an effort to promote personal hygiene and public decorum. Shortly after the “Standard for Everyday Attire” was enacted, the Education Bureau issued an order in October 1935 to oblige students to wear clothing made of domestically

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269 Anonymous, “Gongwu renyuan yili chuanzhuo zhifu yue xiayue shixing,” 公務人員一律穿著制服約下月實行 [The order on all civil servants’ wearing of uniforms will be implemented around next month], Guangzhou minguo ribao, July 31, 1935, 2.2.

270 Guangdong shengzhengfu mishuchu, “Chaofa richang fuzhuang biaozhun” 抄發日常服裝標準 [Issuing the Standard for Everyday Attire], Guangdong shengzhengfu gongbao, August 20, 1935, 30-35.
produced fabric, to prohibit their display of luxurious attire and accessories, and to specifically compel male students to keep their hair shorter than five centimeters in accordance with the rules of military training.\textsuperscript{271} These dressed codes were enacted for the goal of “promoting the frugality of [the people in] one province in order to awaken the spirits of people in the nation” (\textit{tichang yisheng zhi puhou, ji huanqi yiguo zhi renxin} 提倡一省之樸厚，即喚起一國之人心) and “saving [people from] degenerate customs” (\textit{wan tuifeng} 挽頹風). These were the slogans of the reactionary \textit{fenghua} campaign launched by Chen Jitang’s regime as part of his effort to tighten control over his territory and monitor public morality.\textsuperscript{272} Perhaps to a lesser extent than the female body, regulation of male appearance still served as one means by which the government struggled to demonstrate power through the inculcation of frugality, cleanliness, and nationalistic spirit into the lives of its citizens.

In spite of the impressive slogans, the government seemed to have limited success in the process of legal enforcement, as episodes of individual resistance abounded in newspaper essays. As an example, male students were repeatedly discovered to have challenged the requirement to keep their hair short. One writer observed that a male student was so attached to his Western hairstyle that he asked an old man to attend the school registration on his behalf, hoping to avoid inspection from school authorities.\textsuperscript{273} Moreover, upon entering the summer military training camp that asked the participants to submit photographs of themselves with short hair, many male students were said to be reluctant to let go of their fashionable American hairstyle (\textit{huaqi zhuang

\textsuperscript{271} Guangdongsheng jiaoyuju, “Tongchi qudi nannü xuesheng fuyong shechi fushi” 通取締男女學生服用奢侈裝飾 [A general order on the abolition of extravagant costumes and accessories of male and female students], \textit{Guangdong shengzhengfu gongbao}, October 10, 1935, 77-78.

\textsuperscript{272} This campaign included the abolition of prostitution and the rule of strict censorship over politically subversive or sexually explicit printed material. See Chin, \textit{Bound to Emancipate}, 140-41.

\textsuperscript{273} Pujian Zhuxie 蒲劍誅邪, “Sheng Yizhong ruxue ji” 省一中入學記 [A record of back-to-school day at the Provincial First Middle School], \textit{Guohua bao}, February 14, 1935, 1.1.
花旗裝, known as slicked back hair in the present) to such an extent that they paid the photo studio to fake the pictures.\textsuperscript{274} The fact that the male students went to such extreme measures to protect their hairstyles—even at the risk of school detention or expulsion—reveals the contested understandings of male beauty in modern Guangzhou.

The regulations also put into spotlight the debate over Western attire and Chinese-style clothing that had already begun in the late Qing and early Republican period. Henrietta Harrison’s study of male fashion in the initial years of the Republic suggests that Western-style suits, hats, and etiquette were in vogue due to their symbolic qualities of freedom and egalitarianism, all of which were deemed desirable by the new Chinese citizenry eager to catch up with the West.\textsuperscript{275} Over the years, long gowns and Sun Yat-sen suits emerged as respectable alternatives to western suits, and were imbued with a multitude of political and social meanings according to different power holders and commentators.\textsuperscript{276} Prominent leaders and intellectuals, including the diplomat and early leader for the National Products Preservation Association Wu Tingfang 伍廷芳 (1842-1922), and writers Lin Yutang and Lu Xun, all touted the superiority of Chinese clothing to western suits because of convenience, comfort, and personal hygiene.\textsuperscript{277} This debate ensued on the local level as informal prose writers compared these clothing styles in terms of stylishness, economy, comfort and patriotism. One writer laments that western suits

\textsuperscript{274} Beidou 北斗, “Shuqi jixun suoxun” 暑期集訓瑣訊 [Minor news in regard to the summer training camp], \textit{Guohua bao}, April 24, 1936, 1.4.

\textsuperscript{275} Harrison, \textit{The Making of the Republican Citizen}, 49-60.

\textsuperscript{276} A discussion of the significance imbued with the long gown and the Sun Yat-sen suit can be found in Finnane, \textit{Changing Clothes in China}, 184-86.

\textsuperscript{277} For Wu Tingfang’s arguments, see Karl Gerth, \textit{China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation} (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 113-14. For Lin Yutang’s criticism of western suit and praise for Chinese clothing, see Lin Yutang, “Lun xizhuang” 論西裝 [A discussion on western suits], \textit{Lunyu 論語} [The Analects Fortnightly], April 16, 1934, 706-8. For Lu Xun’s opinions, see Lu Xun, “Yangfu de moluo” 洋服的沒落 [The decline of the suit], \textit{Shenbao}, April 25, 1934, 15.

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lacked resilience in different weather and most of suit accessories, such as buttons on the sleeves and suspenders, were utterly impractical.\(^{278}\) While admitting that western suits had their merits compared to long gowns, which had to be worn as a full set to maintain a civilized appearance, the author believes that the former style should be reformed in order to improve its functionality.

Adding a lighthearted tone to the conversation, another writer boasts of the superiority of long gowns by suggesting that western suits are not only terrifyingly imposing and expensive, but also painstakingly inconvenient, especially when one needs to “relieve oneself really badly.”\(^{279}\)

Amidst this cacophony of opinions on male clothing was the unspoken consensus that western suits, as uncomfortable and cumbersome as they appeared, could not be completely discarded in favor of the seemingly patriotic appearance offered by long gowns or Sun Yat-sen suits due to the vestimentary standards of the hegemonic West. Not surprisingly, this underlying assumption echoed the government regulations that stressed the necessity of western suits, especially on formal occasions, despite repeated calls for the consumption of nationally produced cloth.

One of the offences that men could commit, but which was never stated in the dress codes, was to wear women’s clothing and accessories in public. On one occasion, a young man who cross-dressed as a woman by wearing a long *qipao* and makeup walked slowly down the street and was followed by some several hundreds of onlookers.\(^{280}\) When the police arrested him for impeding traffic, it turned out that the young man had been hired by two other men who were placing a bet on how many people a male cross-dresser could attract. This was apparently not an

\(^{278}\) Gongsong 攻頌, “Xizhuang de hua” 西裝的話 [Speaking of western suits], *Guohua bao*, April 9, 1935, 1.1.

\(^{279}\) Wei lai kai wuji shinai 未來嘅無稽師奶 [The Future Wife of Mr. Nonsense], “Changshan mei” 長衫美 [The beauty of long gowns], *Xianxiang bao*, June 18, 1928, 7. Mr. Nonsense (*Wuji xiansheng* 無稽先生) was a regular contributor to the supplement of *Phenomenal News* in the late 1920s.

\(^{280}\) Anonymous, “Nanren ban nizhuang cideng suowi youshang fenghua” 男人扮女裝 此等所為 有傷風化 [A man cross-dressed as a woman: Such a behavior was harmful to social customs], *Guomin xinwen*, March 14, 1930, 2.3.
isolated incident, for in another case the police spotted a pair of young men, one of whom
dressed as a fashionable young lady and the other as a maidservant, carrying two black vinyl
dolls on their backs and walking down the street, also followed by a large crowd. The one who
pretended to be a stylish young woman was perhaps more outrageous in his appearance than the
young man in the previous account, for he was reported to have been wearing “a fuschia-colored
Indian silk qipao, a pair of nude-colored long stockings, and a pair of apple-green high heels.”
This array of eye-catching colors was purportedly chosen on purpose, for the two men later
explained that they were ordered by their boss at a photo studio to dress up as women and
advertise for the store by drawing public attention.

In both instances, it is clear that men donning women’s clothing was conceived as no
more than a frivolous practice employed to garner attention, whether by mischievous men
involved in a bet or to increase the publicity for a store. Moreover, the police named the cross-
dressers’ misdemeanors “harming social customs” (youshang fenghua 有傷風化), the same
phrase usually evoked to criticize the indecent exposure of the female body or physical contact
between the sexes in public. It is most likely that the misdemeanor fell under the category of
wearing “outlandish attire” (qizhuang yifu 奇裝異服) in the 1928 “Police Contravention
Punishment Law” cited in Chapter 2, although the definitions of outlandish attire remained
ambiguous in the legislation.

It might be interpreted that cross-dressing (beyond the theatrical stage) was regarded by
the authorities as an attack on normative masculinity, the performance of which was predicated
on vestimentary signs such as long gowns or Sun Yat-sen suits of modest colors. As the attire

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281 Anonymous, “Huazhuang youjie bei jing nahuo” 化妝遊街 被警拿獲 [Cross-dressers parading on the street and
being arrested by the police], Guomin xinwen, July 15, 1930, 2.2.

282 Guangzhou shizhengfu, “Weijing fafa (Guomin zhengfu gongbu),” 22.
and accessories chosen by these cross-dressers were items associated with the controversial Modern Girl style, their expressions of femininity might also have compounded the perceived threat to gender norms and social morality. Nonetheless, as historian Antonia Finnane has argued in her study of gender and fashion in China, “gender roles and dress codes were in a state of massive upheaval during the twentieth century,” and the government’s attempt to define and normalize the appearance of men and women would continue to face opposition from other social forces.

Part II  To All the Dashing Lads in the World who Love Beauty: The Modern Boy and Consumer Culture in Local Advertisements

The dress codes for men suggest that the political leaders may well have had the Modern Boy figure in mind and were trying to construct a countertype in their regulations. In contrast, advertisements of male cosmetic products carefully constructed and vehemently promoted the image of the Modern Boy in order to influence the sartorial and beauty preferences of local men. While pictorial advertisements in China, such as paper-wrappers and handbills, could be dated to the Song dynasty (960-1279), this practice became increasingly widespread and diversified following the rise of popular press in the nineteenth century. Although it may be difficult to trace the first extant example of modern pictorial advertisements in Guangzhou, advertising images for pharmaceutical, tobacco, and cosmetic products could already be found in abundance.

283 The criticism of Modern Girl as embedded in the nationalist or anticolonial projects of different countries around the globe is a well-documented theme in the scholarship on Modern Girl. See The Modern Girl Around the World Research Group, *The Modern Girl Around the World*, 17.


285 The phrase “to all the dashing lads in the world who love beauty” (*jiyu tianxia aimei zhi meinanzi* 寄語天下愛美之美男子) can be found in the captions of the William Aqua Velva ad (Figure 27).

in illustrated newspapers by the 1900s. In addition to the lithographic printing technology, western techniques including saturation advertising in which illustrations of different merchandise are placed on the same newspaper page, had been adopted. Foreign firms such as the British American Tobacco (BAT) Company were also known for their extensive investment in advertising, so much so that “the walls of [Guangzhou] City and the delta towns are literally covered with the brightly colored [BAT] advertisement posters.” In the 1920s and 1930s, the local advertising industry came to maturation, as some companies and newspapers had established their own advertising departments even as commercial artists like the Huang Brothers, discussed in Chapter 1, opened studios and contracted work independently. At the same time, advertisements of all kinds began to adopt the sexy Modern Girl icon that in many ways embodied “the ascendant elite’s new social relations (small families, companionate marriage, possessive individualism, and so on), and social practices (scientific birth control, domestic hygiene, professional training, and so on).” These trends extended beyond the city of Guangzhou and were concurrently popular in other urban centers such as Shanghai, Tokyo, and

287 For examples of pictorial advertisements in two leading Guangzhou illustrated newspapers in the 1900s, *Current Affairs Pictorial* and *Feasting on Spectacles Pictorial*, see Guangdong shengli Zhongshan tushuguan, *Jiuyue baitai*, 235-65.

288 The same was found to be the case for the *Dianshizhai huabao*, the illustrated supplement for late Qing Shanghai’s leading newspaper *Shenbao*. See Laing, *Selling Happiness*, 19-20.


Gyeongseong (present-day Seoul), due to the flow of commodities, printing technology, aesthetic taste, and gender ideology in an age marked by capitalism and colonial domination.\textsuperscript{291}

What often escapes scholarly attention is the fact that the Modern Boy also graces the advertisements of toiletries, clothing brands, and tobacco products. As avid trend followers just like their female counterparts, the boys flaunt the latest models of hats, shoes, golden wristwatches, and western suits, with a touch of makeup on their faces and hair cream on their heads. These emerging new fashions began to obscure the relationship between appearance and gender intelligibility, giving rise to a modern male beauty that altered established practices of connoisseurship in which beautifully dressed women became objects of desire under the male gaze. For instance, a 1934 Richard Hudnut vanishing cream ad (Figure 26) shows a young man in his morning jacket trying to apply the product in front of a large vanity mirror. While both the landscape painting on the wall and the mirror serve to bestow a Westernized aura to the image and denote the refined taste of the upper class, the latter was also a highly popular prop in paintings and advertisements featuring women across the globe, which signified both narcissism as a feminine vice and self-knowledge and ownership.\textsuperscript{292} Like their female counterparts in advertisements with such placement of mirrors, the male figure in this ad seems to enjoy using the product with the aid of the mirror for self-cultivation and bodily pleasure, the benefits of which are also promoted in the text. The imagery of the Modern Boy in advertisements also


\textsuperscript{292} For a detailed study of the relationship between women and mirrors in art, see Diana Tietjens Meyers, Gender in the Mirror: Cultural Imagery and Women’s Agency (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). For the placement of vanity mirrors in advertisements of the Chinese Modern Girl, see Barlow, “Buying in,” 295.
displays supposedly feminine attributes in a 1932 Williams Aqua Velva aftershave ad (Figure 27), in which a gorgeously dressed couple engage in an affectionate conversation in a room decorated with luxurious western furniture. Even though the woman, with her short, permed hair, tight-fitting qipao, and fur-collared coat in her left hand, matches the fashionable Modern Girl prototype, she turns her sexy backside to the audience and directs the viewers’ gaze toward her lover, indicating that the Modern Boy, just like her, should also be seen as an object of desire. In addition, the girl approaches the boy boldly with longing gaze and the tender words, “the skin of your face is so delicate and smooth! I love you and especially enjoy touching the skin of your face.” In the face of her blatant declaration of love, the boy slightly covers his rouged lips with his left hand as a possible sign of coyness. He further directs the viewer’s attention to the product in his right hand by introducing its magical effect, stating that it would help produce a radiant and elegant glow on one’s face and inspire admiration and delight from others. The message is clear: in order to win over the Modern Girl, an irresistible object of desire herself, men also need to enhance their physical attractiveness and satisfy the gaze of others.

The notion that Modern Boys enhance their appearances to please the gaze of Modern Girls and win over their affection is commonly promoted by advertisements of both male and female beauty products. It can be argued that Modern Boys mainly act as the accessories of the Modern Girl by complementing her beauty and forwardness, without which their sense of belonging and identity would be lost. A case in point is a 1933 Richard Hudnut hair cream ad (Figure 28), titled “The Last Step of [Your] Beauty Routine,” featuring a young man slicking back his hair and a beautiful woman gazing at him with an admiring smile. By emphasizing that “everybody pays attention to one’s hair,” the caption points to the spectatorial gaze that characterizes the modern world and judges the aspiring Modern Boy audience relentlessly.
Contrary to conventional wisdom that posits an omnipresent gaze that closely scrutinizes the characters in advertisements as a predominantly male gaze, it is a Modern Girl with her signature bobbed hairstyle who is staring at and evaluating the appearance of the Modern Boy. To earn not just anybody’s approval but particularly the appreciation of their female counterparts is therefore proposed as a top priority of men wishing to succeed in the modern age. Even in female beauty product advertisements, such as a 1936 Dr. Gleason freckle cream ad (Figure 29), which presents a multi-paneled comic strip in which a Modern Girl successfully gets rid of her blemishes and triumphantly reenters her social circle, seems to turn the Modern Boys into mere props in the woman’s struggle for self-realization. While it is true that the male gaze constitutes part of the public scrutiny over the female protagonist’s skin condition, which determines her popularity, the Modern Boys are only featured in the first and final panel of the story and appear in packs as admirers of the Modern Girl whose correct use of the product keeps her skin impeccable. Again, it is unmistakably evident that once the Modern Girls masters the right kind of modern feminine appearance, the Modern Boys serve as mere objects of these women’s desire and passive competitors for their attention.

The reception of these advertisements by local audiences is difficult to gauge. As historian Kathy Peiss points out, beauty product companies in the United States began to target domestic male clientele in the 1920s and 1930s. However, men were generally resistant or reluctant to admit their use of cosmetic products, due to the “insinuations of frivolity, weakness, and homosexuality.” In the case of Guangzhou, anecdotal evidence suggests that young male

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293 For a discussion of the watchful male gaze in female beauty product advertisements in early twentieth-century United States, see Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 175-79.


295 Ibid., 159-61.
students were avid consumers of “talcum powder, vanishing cream, Hazeline [cream] and perfume, possessing every cosmetic product that one expects to find.” Another popular writer also notes that some men decided not to wear hats to go with their western suits in order to show off their use of expensive Staccomb or Richard Hudnut Three Flowers hair cream. Besides these examples, scarce mention is made of men’s use of such products, demonstrating the likelihood that the advertisements did not easily translate into commercial success or men’s unequivocal embracement of new beauty practices. Granted their limitations, these images may still have inculcated a commercialized vision for Westernized, modern masculinity among the local male readership. Together they point to the complex gendered meanings in the act of self-care, and help reverse the visual economy ordered by the normative sexual hierarchy. This is in part achieved by aiming to heighten men’s consciousness of their appearance as something requiring constant upkeep and social approval.

Part III Emulating the Unattainable? The Modern Boy in Guangzhou Popular Culture

The capitalist ideology of male beauty as a commercial product, available for purchase and within reach, contrasts sharply with the masculine ideal of local popular culture. The latter appears to be ambiguous, heatedly contested, but ultimately unachievable for male fashion followers who were doomed to failure in one way or another. Both informal prose writers and cartoonists accept that the appearance of local men, in addition to their conduct, was considered an important yardstick for judging their “modernness.” Inability to reach either goal would in turn incite criticism or laughter. For example, those who tried to show off their fashion

296 Ming 命, “Sushe li de chengji” 宿舍裡的成績 [The achievements inside a student dormitory], Guangzhou minguo ribao, December 1, 1926, 4.

297 Yaxiao 鴨笑, “San ding yi ban: yang qi fu er tu qi tou” 三丁一板:洋其服而禿其頭 [A tune with four beats: Westernizing their clothes but leaving their heads empty], Xianxiang bao, March 29, 1928, 7.
consciousness but wore western suits without hats, or wore hats after the street lamps went out, were ridiculed for their misinterpretation of foreign dress protocols.\textsuperscript{298} In these cases, the appropriateness of men’s attire was often measured in terms of Western dress codes, which constituted a hegemonic indicator for Chinese men’s ability to catch up with the modern age.

By the same token, those who showed little interest in anything other than Western fashions and commodities were relentlessly mocked, as testified to by a 1932 caricature titled “The Yearnings of Modern Youths” (Figure 30). A young man is lying comfortably on a red chaise lounge, an excessively large head placed disproportionately on his body and occupying half of the image. Comically distorted, his facial features are drawn as things desired by the young man and intimately connected to his sensory organs. According to the caption:

\begin{quote}
His brain- loves to dream about riding on an automobile  
His eyes- always ogle female celebrities  
His ears- love to hear the sound of foreign currency  
His nose- enjoys smoking foreign cigarettes  
His mouth- likes to say sweet nothings  
His body- takes pleasure in wearing western suits  
His hand- always holds a foreign fountain pen  
His feet- enjoy wearing foreign leather shoes  
His entire self- cannot endure hardships but only enjoys comfort.
\end{quote}

Yaxiao, “San ding yi ban.” Pojipao, “Deng hou mao” 燈後帽 [Wearing hats after the lights were out], \textit{Guomin xinwen}, July 5, 1927, 11.
The underlying message that Modern Boys were blind worshippers of foreign imports and good-for-nothings who lacked resolve or self-discipline cannot be clearer. Similarly, in newspapers reports and popular literature during this period, slang that was used to identify fashionable men in Guangzhou, such as Egg Tart (tantat 蛋撻, a transliteration of Dandy), Skinny Melon (seuk gua 削瓜, meaning a thin, handsome-looking man), Skinny Boy (seuk chai 削仔, similar to seuk gua), or dude in a western suit (saicheong yau 西裝友) carried derogatory connotations. In a typical example, a writer encountered a young man on a public bus who sat on the writer’s lap in the hope of getting the writer’s seat, started smoking, and made the writer extremely uncomfortable. Without elaborating upon the man’s outfit, the author simply chooses to label him “Skinny Melon and dude in a western suit” to show his contempt for the man’s lack of civilized behavior despite his stylish appearance. These descriptions resemble the mocking portrayals of male lechers who tried to take advantage of women in the “Missy Movement,” analyzed in Chapter 2. Under the watchful eyes of social observers, these Modern-Boy emulators thus always seem to fall short of living up to the expectations for supposedly authentic Modern Boys in the West. They either wear the wrong combination of clothes or, in spite of their a la mode appearances, they act boorishly or indolently in public.

The pairing of Modern Boys and Modern Girls in cartoons also underlines the conflation between young men and women’s appearances, behaviors, and identities in local society. However, while the Modern Boy’s yearning for the gaze and admiration of his female counterpart is depicted as a positive motivating force in the advertisements, popular artists could hardly hide their disapproval for Modern Boys, who are invariably shown to be shallow or

299 For example, a writer under the penname Soy Sauce Poet (Chiyou Shiren 醬油詩人) uses the term “Skinny-Boy-cum-Egg-Tarts” in an essay “Xin shenghuo” 新生活 [New Life], Guangzhou zazhi, June 1, 1934, 15.

300 Yuge 羽哥, “Jingshen wenming” 精神文明 [Spiritual civilization], Xianxiang bao, April 26, 1928, 7.
avaricious. In a cartoon titled “The Circulation of Money” (Figure 31), a trendy young woman occupies the center of the image and takes money from an old man on her right while handing cash to a well-groomed young man on her left. Borrowing an economic concept, the artist skillfully lampoons the Modern Girl’s financial dealings as triggered by the indecent circulation of her desire. Curiously, the Modern Boy positioned on the left is given a set of lips in the same shape as the ones of the Modern Girl, therefore standing in sharp contrast to the old man wearing a beard, an outmoded skullcap, and long gown. Even if the relationship between the Modern Girl and Modern Boy is unspecified, his greedy acquisition of money, especially from a woman, is implied to be as problematic as the Modern Girl’s exploitative treatment of the old man.

If greediness is a commonly shared feature between the Modern Girl and Modern Boy in this image, Modern Boys are also treated as passive playthings devoid of humanity by the Modern Girls in other representations. An example can be seen in Figure 32, in which two Modern Girls are walking arm in arm with a set of Westernized outfit, including a fedora and western suit with a necktie, typically donned by Modern Boys in that period. By depicting this Modern Boy as a pathetic set of attire and manipulated by his two blind admirers, the artist not only directs his (her) criticism at the superficial taste that is believed to characterize the Modern Girls, but also questions the potential loss of power by young men who fervently pursue fashion. As accomplices to the Modern Girl’s rapacious endeavors, or as accessories with which such a woman showed off in public, the imagery of the Modern Boy shares the derogatory connotations associated with the Modern Girl. As a consequence, the Modern Boy risks the danger of double feminization as he is conflated with the Modern Girl in his appearance yet maneuvered by her in the realm of gender politics.
The relationship between male beauty and effeminacy was also an ongoing and hotly debated subject throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Artists, too, chose to visualize this theme, as, for example, in a cartoon titled, “A Feminized Young Man” (Figure 33). Drawn in sketchy, soft lines and simplified details, a youth wearing a western suit, hat and pointy shoes and carrying a stick on his left arm is standing under a tree and looking at his reflection in the compact mirror in his palm. While his costume characterizes him as a Modern Boy, the artist underlines his delicate chin, curly hair, and the curvy contour of his bottom, all of which resemble how female body parts were usually portrayed. The fact that he is gazing into a mirror, possibly to reapply his makeup, points to his self-consciousness of appearance, which was projected in advertisements in this period, such as Figure 26, as a defining characteristic of all modern men. The woman in the backdrop is depicted with even scantier details and flat, disconnected strokes, providing an intriguing contrast to the sexualized body of the youth. The gender confusion embodied by this youth’s appearance thus results from the striking similarities between his attributes as a Modern Boy and the qualities of beautiful women.

The exaggerated curves on the youth’s body in Figure 33 appear to be a widely discussed theme in textual sources during this period as evidence of the feminizing tendency of men. The idea of quxian mei (曲線美, lit. the beauty of curves), a euphemism for nudity, developed alongside the emergence of a new occupation for women since the 1910s when art academies began to hire nude models for practicing Western-style drawings.\textsuperscript{301} This new phenomenon caused strong reactions and heated debates in the society regarding whether women’s nude bodies should be treated as a form of high art or sexual impropriety. Following the precedent of

Liu Haisu’s Shanghai Art College, the Municipal Art Academy in Guangzhou, headed by the Japan-trained artist Hu Gentian 胡根天 (1892-1985), also began to hire nude models in 1924. Although local authorities eventually acquiesced to this practice, it initially provoked police suspicion and accusations of exerting a perverting influence on public morality.\(^{302}\) The history of female nudity in Chinese art is certainly beyond the scope of the present study. Nevertheless, what is noteworthy for my investigation of male beauty in late 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou is the fact that writers and cartoonists also began to pay increasing attention to the curves on men’s bodies. For instance, one writer noticed an increasingly popular outfit worn by men that resembled women’s undergarments (xiэyi 褻衣), with tops tight enough to show the curves of their bodies and trousers long and wide like women’s skirts.\(^{303}\) By disparagingly calling the new style xiezhuang 褻裝 (lit. an outfit similar to undergarments) of male freaks (yaonanzi 妖男子), the author suggests that accentuating the curves of their bodies falls under the category of feminine beauty and is unbefitting for men.

These critiques of the Modern Boy’s appearance, behavior, and excessive femininity were often wrapped in ridicule and satire, possibly designed to enhance the authors and their audience’s sense of superiority and to establish a clear boundary between acceptable traits of male and female beauty. As discussed in Chapter 2, informal prose writers and cartoonists often constructed stereotypes of ignorant bumpkins or womanizers as counterexamples in the Missy Movement. Combined with depictions of male fashion, such stereotypes were often encapsulated in the popular image of aspiring Modern Boys, whose fashionably outlandish appearance and

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\(^{302}\) Hu Gentian 胡根天, “Ji quanguo zuizao yijian gongli meishxuexiao de chuangli he fazhan fengbo” 記全國最早一間美術學校的創立和發展風波 [A Record of the turbulences over the establishment and development of the first public art academy in China], Guangzhou wenshi ziliao 27 (Sep. 1982): 78-79.

\(^{303}\) Wanzhang 萬丈, “Yaonanzi de xiezhuang” 妖男子的褻裝 [The undergarment-like outfit of male freaks], Xianxiang bao, November 14, 1927, 8.
lazy, uncivilized behavior served to reinforce the feelings of superiority shared by the authors and their audiences. Moreover, by mocking the curves on the boys’ bodies as feminine and freakish, these authors were using humor to impose definitions of what male appearance was not to be. Ironically, some of these authors seem to believe that objective standards of male dress and conduct were faithfully observed in the West. Others might have failed to propose straightforward guidelines for the appearance and behavior of the ideal modern man. In other words, it is precisely the laughable imagery of the Modern Boy (and the Modern Girl) that gave substance to their superior self-understanding; the potential overlap between the Modern Boy and their own definition of modern manhood was conveniently overlooked.

Nonetheless, not all cartoonists and writers supported the attempt to distinguish male and female beauty by making fun of curves on male bodies. Instead, some tried to reinterpret the discourse of quxian mei (or quxian more broadly) and infer, often in a comical tone, that beauty should not be the monopoly of women but equally shared between the sexes. In cartoons titled “Four Types of Curves” (Figure 34) and “Five Types of Curves” (Figure 35), the artists exaggerate the curvy lines of the body parts on various people, such as pregnant women or old men with hunched backs. Instead of featuring the expected female nudes, these cartoons aim to poke fun at the high art tradition with the display of the ordinary and the grotesque. A writer who allegedly had a discussion with his friend about the current condition of quxian mei in China concludes that “the aesthetic standard of our country is just the opposite of that of Europe and America, for the most important components of quxian mei [in China] are the hunched back, the drooping head, and bent arms… Those who possess this type [of beauty] are mostly men, especially dirty old men.”

This statement offers a witty send up of the imported Western idea

304 Huangtang jizhe 荒唐記者, “Quxian mei ji qita” 曲線美及其他 [The beauty of curves and other kinds of beauty], Guangzhou mingguo ribao, January 28, 1928, 4.
of *quxian mei*. Forgoing its common understanding as female nudity, the writer offers up instead, in a somewhat self-deprecating fashion, the curves on male bodies, which he suggests is a kind of *quxianmei* with “Chinese characteristics.”

Other commentators, too, invoked humor to probe the blurring of gender boundaries in the new profession of modeling. In a tongue-in-cheek essay titled, “A Story of a Failed Interview for Male Modeling,” an author recommends himself to be the model for his artist friend because he proposes that male bodies are just as beautiful. He tries to convince his friend by arguing, “my body is indeed that of a dirty old man, and certainly possesses more curves than young men, while both my face and body have accumulated many holes that can also be taken as curves.” To create humor and strike a chord with the local readership, the author uses the Cantonese slang *lo hang* 老坑 (dirty old man; lit. “old hole”) as a self-description and also as a pun for the holes on his face and body that can be viewed as curves. To exaggerate his confidence in the suitability of men, especially himself, to serve as models, the author even reinterprets the word “model” as *motelao* (模特佬, or *mo tak lo* in Cantonese) to be used exclusively for male models. Curiously, it was noted by another author that male modeling did become increasingly universal in Guangzhou by the mid-1930s. The main reasons for their popularity were that “men’s strong bodies are imposing, muscular and distinctly beautiful for artistic purposes, and [artists who are] familiar with sketches of nudes have already become tired of [drawing female nudes].” In the opinion of this author, the widespread practice of male modeling was just a natural course of events in the development of artistic practices in Guangzhou, since the male body had surpassed *quxian mei*, the conventional standard of beauty.

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305 Ami 阿彌, “Motelao yingzheng shibai ji” 模特佬應徵失敗紀 [A story of failed interview for male modeling], *Guomin xinwen*, June 3, 1927, 11.

306 Liangdiguan 量地官, “Nan mote’er shenghuo jintan” 男模特兒生活近談 [Discussion of the lives of male models in recent times], *Guohua bao*, November 30, 1935, 1.4.
for models. As a result, while some considered *quxian mei* an insult to masculine identity when shown on men’s bodies, others creatively reexamined, mocked, and even reversed this standard of beauty.

Concerns about the slippage between male beauty and feminization unveil deeper insecurities over the performativity of gender roles in the local beauty culture, as exemplified in a lively debate between two writers in late 1927. A writer with the pseudonym Rouge Red (*Yanzhi Hong* 胭脂紅), who claimed to be a woman, first published an essay to lament Guangzhou men’s recent violation of the essential boundary between the two genders.\(^{307}\) As an example, Rouge Red accuses men of wearing women’s clothes, putting on makeup, developing a timid personality and walking at a slow pace. Male actors playing female roles in opera, although hardly a new development, are also cited by Rouge Red as a proof of the feminizing trend in the city.\(^{308}\) In particular, Rouge Red singles out the Cantonese opera superstar *Xue Juexian* 薛覺先 (1904-1956) as the chief culprit. What Rouge Red did not mention is the fact that *Xue Juexian* was renowned for his superb performances in a variety of male and female roles and had broad appeal among both male and female audiences.\(^{309}\) The author’s outcry, even if exaggerated, might have captured the public anxiety surrounding the strong resemblance, and possible gender confusion, between the Modern Boys and cross-dressing male actors.

To mock the distressed tone and double standard of Rouge Red, an author writing under the pseudonym Bumblebee (*Da huangfeng* 大黃蜂) comments on the masculinization of

\(^{307}\) *Yanzhi hong* 胭脂紅, “Nüxinghua de Guangzhou nanzi” 女性化的廣州男子 [Feminized Guangzhou men], *Guomin xinwen*, October 22, 1927, 10.


Guangzhou women in reply. Bumblebee points out that women, possibly including “Miss” Rouge Red, have also crossed the line by cutting their hair short and wearing long gowns and even military uniforms, all of which were things that only men could do in the past.  

Bumblebee also contradicts Rouge Red by arguing that female actresses playing male roles in opera are equally blameworthy for inducing other women to act like men. Furthermore, Bumblebee makes a reference to the natural breast movement in mid-1920s Guangzhou, indicating that local women are already daring enough to unbind their breasts and challenge men’s monopoly over going topless. What may happen next, Bumblebee playfully predicts, is that men will have to bare the lower parts of their bodies in order to defeat the ladies and reclaim their manhood. Of course, it is entirely possible that the writers themselves are undertaking gendered personas just as they accuse those of the opposite sex for causing gender confusion. As a result, both the reinterpreted discourse of quxian mei on male bodies and the debate between Rouge Red and Bumblebee, call the visible signs of gender identity into question. Rather than constructing a masculine ideal through the mockery of Modern Boys as materialistic, discourteous and feminized, these portrayals cleverly demonstrate that one’s gender role was neither innate nor easily determined by vestimentary codes or behavior. 

One of the most telling examples that testifies to the gender performativity in the fashion and beauty culture in Guangzhou is an author who wrote under the pseudonym Miss Apple (Misi Pingguo 密斯蘋果). Based in Hong Kong, Miss Apple contributed a series of articles titled, “A Record of Ashes from the Apple’s Boudoir,” to a Guangzhou newspaper to discuss her daily life, 

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310 Da huangfeng 大黃蜂, “Faqi huo lai zuo zhepian nanxinghua de Guangzhou nüzi” 發起火來作這篇男性化的廣州女子[Composing this article- The masculinization of Guangzhou women- with anger], Guomin xinwen, October 27, 1927, 10.
her choice of home furnishings, and her delicate thoughts.\textsuperscript{311} Readers’ impression of Miss Apple’s femininity were surely also be reinforced by an article that reported Miss Apple’s fondness for wearing high heels.\textsuperscript{312} However, one writer eventually proclaimed that Miss Apple was actually a man who enjoyed wearing women’s attire and envied their lithe deportment.\textsuperscript{313}

Not only had Miss Apple found it desirable to become a beautiful woman, she actually found being a fashionable man troublesome because everyone would call her an “Egg Tart” and split their sides in laughter. Again, since the actual name and background of Miss Apple cannot be known, it would be futile to assess the veracity of such stories. However, guessing at “her” true identity was also a popular game that other writers invite their readers to participate, and pointed to the formation of a play culture that characterized entertainment-driven modern metropolises like Guangzhou. Moreover, if read against the news reports cited earlier, the construction and playful discussions of Miss Apple’s persona seem to resist the government’s ban on male cross-dressers by insinuating that individual men might hold standards of beauty different from the politically sanctioned masculine appearance. To borrow Michel De Certeau’s concept, the ruse of Miss Apple’s persona, however short-lived and insignificant, could be seen as a tactic of the powerless to carve out space within a dominant discursive system by indirectly questioning the hegemonic masculine norms.\textsuperscript{314}

\textsuperscript{311} For instance, see Misi Pingguo 密斯蘋果 [Miss Apple], “Pinggui chenlu” 蘋閨塵錄 [A record of ashes from the apple’s boudoir], \textit{Xianxiang bao}, May 2, 1928, 7. Also, Misi Pingguo, “Pinggui chenlu,” \textit{Xianxiang bao}, May 12, 1928, 7.

\textsuperscript{312} Liangzai Bofu, “Benlan zuozhe zhi tebie shihao.”

\textsuperscript{313} A’laoyi 阿老亦, “Benlan zuozhe de jiepou” 本欄作者的解剖 [A dissection of the writers in this column], \textit{Xianxiang bao}, May 26, 1928, 7.

\textsuperscript{314} For a discussion of ruse and trickery as tactics of the weak, see De Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life}, 29-42, 52-56.
In addition to fighting off the feminizing trend that some accused the Modern Boys of spreading in the city, men in Guangzhou were charged with the responsibility of practicing frugality and purchasing national products as patriotic consumers. As suggested earlier, various dress codes issued by the government in the 1920s and 1930s all stressed the importance of wearing attire made of domestically produced material. The special emphasis placed on the national origin of the fabric was the result of the national goods (guohuo 國貨) movement, which targeted foreign products (yanghuo 洋貨) that were said to have enslaved Chinese consumers as worshippers of foreign imperialistic culture and driven Chinese manufacturers and merchants out of business.315 In this movement, women were often portrayed as wasteful customers in love with foreign imports who needed to be educated in order to become patriotic in their consumption behavior.316 During the conservative New Life Movement in the 1930s, the purchase of national goods and the abolition of luxurious lifestyles were on its top agenda, and the provincial government in Guangdong soon followed suit by enacting a campaign for national products in 1933.317 Aspiring Modern Boys might have been caught in a predicament, since as men they were burdened to a greater extent than women to enact public displays of model behavior.

This dilemma is satirized in numerous cartoons titled “Recycling Used Items” that proliferated during this period. These cartoons might be read as creative responses of ordinary men to balance governmental requirements for frugality with their love of fashion. For instance, one cartoon (Figure 36) portrays a man in a western suit who puts his shoelace to new use by wearing it as a necktie. Drawn with thick, dark lines, the artist has omitted several details such as

315 Gerth, China Made.
316 Ibid., 285-332.
317 Chin, Bound to Emancipate, 142.
the upper half of the man’s face and his lower body, but instead puts special emphasis on the
man’s rouged lips and the thin, straight shoelace under his stiff collar. The beautifully shaped
lips possibly denote the loving care that the man has devoted to his body and serves to provide a
sharp contrast to his use of a shoelace as a necktie, which violates the vestimentary rules of
proper attire in the west. This cartoon thus offers a humorous depiction of a Modern Boy’s desire
to look sharp, which has been compromised because of the requirement for frugality.

Another struggle between the pursuit of fashionability and the need to maintain thriftiness
is captured in an episode of a popular cartoon series called *Boss He (He Laoban 何老板)* (Figure
37) by the artist Bai Yunlong 白雲龍 (dates unknown). The protagonist Boss He finds his friend
Old Wang wearing a western suit earlier in the day and changing into a long gown later the same
day, and eventually discovers Old Wang’s secret visits to a pawn shop, which explain his ability
to own two sets of nice attire. In five out of six of the panels, the artist places skyscrapers in the
background to denote the Guangzhou cityscape and create an atmosphere of modern
cosmopolitanism. Old Wang’s proud postures before his secrets are divulged by Boss He
indicate his confidence in his identity as a posh urbanite and the importance of dress as a
signifier of status and face. However, when Boss He points his finger at Old Wang in the final
panel and makes fun of his visits to the pawn shop, Old Wang’s hat jumps toward the air,
creating a moment of dramatic tension and highlighting his embarrassment at getting caught for
his deceptive act of alternating fine clothes. The earlier posture of self-importance and later
expression of surprise and shame altogether satirize the difficulty that a local man faced when
balancing his longing for an appearance of high status and style with managing his economic
resources.
Mockery of the practice of frugality is pushed to its limit in an episode of a serialized comic strip, Dr. Zhang (Zhang Boshi 張博士) (Figure 38). The protagonist Dr. Zhang, an educated middle-aged man who works as an elementary school principal and aspires to become part of the upper class society, is always shown to be wearing western suits. One day he decides to answer the call for patriotic consumption and adopt a long gown as his attire. Since his needed two sets of new long gowns will cost too much money, Dr. Zhang finds the perfect excuse from a speech given by General Feng Yuxiang 馮玉祥 (1882-1948), in which Feng advocates the use of less cloth in the making of long gowns so that more money can be contributed to the army to save the nation. In the end, Dr. Zhang delightedly follows General Feng’s advice and walks proudly on the street wearing a long gown with a noticeably short hemline. In the first panel, a large crowd of passers-by who wear long gowns and modest-looking qipao signifies the social pressure that forces Dr. Zhang to give up his western suit, which is no longer fashionable because it is tainted by its foreign origin. The passers-by later turn into a smiling crowd who show their approval of Dr. Zhang’s new long gown in the last panel. This transformation highlights the fact that modern men, who are always critically evaluated by others, need to be conscious of their appearance and do their best to satisfy the gaze of other people. Ironically, Dr. Zhang’s cloth-saving strategy adopted from General Feng’s speech aimed to serve his selfish desires to save money for himself instead of any sincere wish to contribute to the movement of national products and national salvation. Additionally, even if his short trousers are made with less cloth and awkwardly expose his ankles, the national origin of his attire is more important to the public than his appearance. This comical contradiction again reveals the near irreconcilability of fashion and frugality in men’s sartorial options during this period.
Conclusion

This chapter has examined the perceptions of male appearance in late 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou represented by three types of discourses. On one pole of the spectrum, the Guangdong provincial government put forth an image of frugally, hygienically, and patriotically dressed men in the enactment of sumptuary regulations. These dress codes became one of the means by which the government sought to reinforce its control over local citizens’ bodies and gender norms independently from the central regime in Nanjing. Nonetheless, incidences in which individual men defended their stylistic preferences at the risk of punishment indicate the limited success of the government’s effort to indoctrinate such an ideal. The government’s regulations also point to the debate over western and Chinese-style clothing and a universe of sartorial signs that local men had to navigate in an uncertain age of colonial modernity. The public spectacles of cross-dressing men, however uncommon, also highlight the gender ambiguity in vestimentary practices that the government failed to envision when they wrote the clothing laws.

On the other end, commercial advertisements presented a completely different vision of masculinity epitomized by the imagery of the Modern Boy. In these images, men were often represented in ways similar to depictions of fashionable women. For instance, they were shown to be enjoying a luxurious lifestyle with western goods and nourishing their bodies with devoted attention. While the ultimate goal of becoming physically attractive through the use of the advertised products was to obtain their objects of desire, the Modern Girls, the imagery of the Modern Boy also became objectified and fetishized in the process. The new commodity culture that developed alongside these advertisements, therefore, had the potential effect of interweaving capitalist consumer ideology with the gendered aesthetics of modern Guangzhou.
Popular writers and cartoonists playfully commented on government-sanctioned protocols of male dress, standards of male beauty in commercial campaigns, and most notably the Modern Boy aspirants who were caught between these conflicting demands. Some chose to highlight the tacit superior masculine identity possessed by the authors and the readers through wry ridicule of Modern Boys. Others sought to delineate the boundary between acceptable male and female physical traits by noting—tongue-in-cheek—the curves of male bodies and so throwing into question the valorization of quxianmei. To be sure, while these satirical interpretations of male beauty were not universally embraced by all writers and cartoonists, many of these public discussions and representations were used as tactics in resisting the prevailing gender norms and aesthetic ideals. This highly instable, contingent nature of male beauty and gender roles thus rendered futile any man’s efforts to conform to the government-endorsed masculine ideal or to the image of the Modern Boy in advertisements. Pulled between these two regimes of fashion, the local men become objects of laughter and a favorite subject for writers and cartoonists. Some of these writers, as we have seen, played with multiple gendered personas themselves, perhaps to provoke the interest of the reading public. Altogether, the image of the Modern Boy becomes a chief venue through which the contradictory expectations for Guangzhou men were proposed, experimented, satirized and tactically resisted during the 1920s and 1930s.
In Republican Guangzhou, commentary and jokes on henpecking figured prominently in the discussions and representations of marital relations that centered on issues of gender equality and individual freedom to marry and divorce. Readers could easily find stories in which a childless husband desired to take a young, beautiful concubine but dared not to disobey his ugly, aging, barren but abusive wife. A typical piece is as follows,

Chen, a middle school teacher in Guangzhou, was always afraid of his wife. His coworker, Mr. So-and-So, gave him a couplet that read: “only one who can endure the hardest of hardships can become a man above all men.” Chen gladly hung the couplet in his room. One day, his friend Mr. He came over for a chat, and laughingly said to Chen, “do you know how this couplet should be interpreted?” Chen asked him how. Mr. He said, “It is saying that only if you can endure the hardships of your wife’s twisting your ear and having you kneel as a punishment, can you become a man above your wife.” Chen’s face turned red, and he hastily tore down the couplet and threw it into the fire. Mr. He laughed out loud and left.

In this passage, the author has left out details of the wife’s personality and behavior, possibly because focusing on the husband’s fear proves more than enough for the comic effect.

“Becoming a man above all men,” a phrase traditionally employed to encourage scholars to

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318 Here the author originally uses the term Jichang pi 季常癖 (lit. Jichang’s idiosyncrasy) to highlight the man’s fear of his wife. This term alludes to the story of Chen Jichang 陳季常, a Northern Song intellectual mainly known for his henpecked personality. His friend, the eminent literatus Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), once composed a satirical poem that describes Chen Jichang’s wife as “a lioness of Hedong” whose sudden roar makes the husband’s cane fall out of his hand while his heart sinks (忽聞河東獅子吼，拄杖落手心茫然). The expressions “lioness of Hedong” and “Jichang’s idiosyncrasy” both became widely used throughout Chinese history, including during the Republican period, to make fun of shrewish wives and cowardly husbands.

319 Erjin, “Aide kuzhongku fangwei renshangren jie” 捱得苦中苦方為人上人解 [How to interpret “only a man who can endure the hardest of hardships can become a man above all men”], Guangzhou zazhi, March 15, 1934, 7.
endure the difficulties of studying the classics in order to pass the civil service examination, is
given a new, humorous twist. A true man is no longer measured by his knowledge or standing in
the public world, but instead by his ability to survive under a domineering wife. The explicit
parody of cowardly men and implicit criticism of fierce women embedded in this story were
nothing new, for they had been well-loved themes throughout the history of Chinese literature.
What, then, makes their continual appearance at this particular historical juncture and
geographical location—Republican-era Guangzhou—distinctive, and worthy of in-depth
investigation?

This chapter explores the enduringly popular theme of henpecking in 1920s and 1930s
Guangzhou, in which the stereotypical pair of middle-aged philandering husband and shrewish
wife is joined by younger couples well-versed in newly introduced concepts of gender equality
and marital love. Through this repertoire of familiar and newly invented characters, local writers
and cartoonists offer their satirical vision of modern Guangzhou, where new culture and political
authorities somehow always managed to strip its urban residents (especially men) of their power,
as epitomized by the henpecked husband. The first part of this chapter draws attention to the
historical origins of henpecking stories in the late imperial period as a reflection of the prevailing
Confucian gender ideals and other competing voices within this system.320 I first discuss the
underlying Confucian gender principles, such as patrilineal family, the separation between inner
and outer spheres, and the feminine ethics of “Thrice Followings and Four Virtues,” all of which
reinforced a hierarchical relationship in marriage and gender division of space and labor. I then
proceed to offer a general overview of the portrayals of shrewish wives and their husbands; I

320 My decision to begin with the late imperial period instead of earlier dynasties derives from historian Yenna Wu’s
observation that the shrews and their husbands had taken center stage of full-scale comedy and satire in numerous
literary works especially in Ming and Qing times. See Yenna Wu, The Chinese Virago: A Literary Theme,
(Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1995), 9.
posit that these authors intended not only to criticize women’s treachery and domination that led
to gender imbalance and familial and social crisis, but also to mock the husbands’ inabilities to
manage their households and control their excessive sexual desire. Subtle variations on the
Confucian gender ideals, including the cult of emotion in Ming and Qing times and the
subsequent emergence of the companionate marriage ideal, will also be addressed in order to
explain the multilayered representations of the shrewish wife against the flexibility and
adaptability of the Confucian gender system, which allowed room for women to maneuver
between prescribed ideal and actual practice.

The second section focuses on the new themes, genres, and expressions in the stories of
henpecking in 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou as a window onto the evolving conceptions of
gender boundaries and conjugal relations in the Republican period. One of the most noticeable
differences from what was found in the late imperial period was the reversal of gender roles,
especially the division of labor between the husband and the wife. The use of a language of love
as a justification for female jealousy also became increasingly common in the stories of
dominant wives. The new angles from which these stories were depicted resulted largely from
the newly emerged idea of gender equality and a new discourse of sentiment that revolved
around romantic love, monogamy, and the small family ideal. Some authors depict lighthearted,
amusing anecdotes of henpecking as a celebration of the new concepts that help improve marital
relations. Others, however, deliver a satirical view of the city in which the changing cultural and
political milieu led to the disruption of family relations and suppression of free speech, all
through the lens of the husband’s pitiful struggle to please his increasingly empowered wife.

Since the majority of henpecking stories in Republican Guangzhou still involve the
conventional battle between a philandering husband and his jealous wife, the third section takes
them as the popular writers and artists’ responses to the social, legal, and ideological changes (or lack thereof) in longstanding customs of concubinage and prostitution in this period. I first discuss the social and legal reform of these practices in Republican Guangzhou and the Guomindang regime in Nanjing. I then explore the authorial intent and presentation techniques in the henpecking stories involving these two themes. I posit that by satirizing the wife’s lack of Confucian feminine virtues and the husband’s inability to restrain his lust, the authors make use of what Simon Critchley characterizes as “reactionary humor,” and in large part acknowledged the gender ideologies from the late imperial period. The category of Modern Girl constantly evoked by cartoonists further reveals the inherent contradictions of the gender ideologies promoted by intellectuals in the New Culture Movement, since she usually appears in the form of love interest or mistress and exacerbates the problems in marriage by contrasting with the ugly, vicious, and obsolete wife. Nonetheless, some of these works defend the wife’s control over the husband’s wanton sexual activities as a necessary means of protecting family resources from the extravagant flower world. Altogether, the constant defeat of the philandering husband once again embodied the estrangement experienced by male residents in the city, as these husbands were confronted during their sexual escapades by threats of sexually transmitted diseases and police intervention.

This chapter explores a range of visual and textual sources in which the henpecking theme was featured, including cartoons, advertisements, short stories, newspaper reports, operatic scripts, and popular expressions in the Cantonese dialect. Among all the genres surveyed in this chapter, comic strips stand out as a uniquely modern media through which we can examine the continuities and changes in the portrayals of henpecking in the Republican era. In the comic strips, henpecking, one of the most frequently featured themes, was enriched with
visual interest. Whereas literary works deliver the intended message through text, comic strips rely on the innovative blend of words and image to produce meaning and bring characters to life. In particular, speech balloons that depict the characters’ dialogue heightened the visual impact by contributing to a unified optic structure under which both the characters’ actions and spoken words could be read simultaneously. Moreover, the use of successive panels as narrative breakdown allows the artist to effortlessly introduce and control time in the story as the means to build to a climax or crack a joke. The interest in struggles in everyday life and the visuality of the cartoons further allow the artists to reach to a wider audience. These unique aspects of the comic strips heightened the humor and had a more profound impact on the seeing subjects by vividly presenting the graphic details of and inviting the readers to vicariously engage in this spectacle-like, age-old battle of the sexes.

Part I  How the Battle Began: Taming the Shrews in Late Imperial China

In the late imperial period, Confucian orthodoxy endorsing patrilineal kinship, separate gendered spheres, and the feminine virtues of gentility and domesticity defined the parameters in which men and women conducted their family life, engaged in social activities and labor, and used space. The patrilineal tradition that had originated in the early imperial period prioritized kinship ties and family interests over that of individuals and emphasized the procreation of sons through which the family line and property would pass. The preference for a male heir eventually made way for concubinage, which was deemed necessary for patrilineal succession and
permitted when the principal wife was barren, even though in practice most male elites did not follow this rule when taking concubines.\(^{321}\)

In addition, men and women under the Confucian gender system were to preside over outer and inner domains in which they undertook their respective duties. Women were expected to limit their sphere of activities within their family compound and assume the domestic responsibilities of reproduction, childrearing, and household management, all of which would keep their husbands worry-free and able to concentrate on outward pursuits, such as moral cultivation through the classics and political governance. Of course, as my analysis of the chastity culture in the late imperial period in Chapter 2 has demonstrated, the inner and outer domains were by no means strictly separated. Seemingly private matters such as marital relations and a man’s ability to order his family carried wider political significance in public discourses.

The dictum “Thrice Followings and Four Virtues” (sancong side 三從四德) on which numerous precepts and instruction manuals for women were modeled, served to reinforce the gender hierarchy in familial and marriage relationships and inculcate the values of female gentility and domesticity. Originating in the Book of Rites, Thrice Followings meant that a woman was to follow her father when she was an unmarried daughter, to follow her husband after she married, and to follow her son upon being widowed.\(^{322}\) The Four Virtues, namely, women’s morality, speech, countenance, and work, were compiled from the Han dynasty female historian Ban Zhao’s Lessons for Women (Nü Jie 女誡), initially written to admonish her daughters to manage their future households and serve their husbands and in-laws with deference,

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\(^{321}\) Under the legislations of Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, with minor variations, concubinage was only permitted under the circumstances that a principal wife over forty sui failed to produce a son, and violators would be punished with forty slashes of light bamboo. See Kathryn Bernhardt, Women and Property in China, 960-1949 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 161-62. Ages in Chinese antiquity were calculated by the means of sui. For instance, a child was born at one sui, and one sui would be added at each New Year.

humility, chastity, and diligence. These two sets of teachings placed emphasis on the inward, family orientation of women’s lives and the authority of the husbands during the marriage, much like how subjects should treat their ruler. Needless to say, the actual power that a wife held might not be as limited as it seemed in the classics, depending on her social class, age, and position in the family, among many other factors.

The aforementioned Confucian gender mores perhaps explained the abundance of domineering palace women and shrewish wives featured in biographies, historical records, and literary works, since these women constituted a ready source of negative examples to educate readers about standards for proper femininity. Some of these women, though appearing to be harsh and relentless at first, were actually praised for their ability to discipline and transform prodigal husbands. Most others, however, were clearly considered a threat to the male-dominated society, even if their jealousy and violence were exaggerated to serve the authors’ didactic message. One of the most common traits of shrewish wives was their jealousy toward concubines and maidservants favored by their husbands. A shrew in late imperial Chinese literature was typically barren, making her objection to her husband’s access to other women unjustifiable according to Confucian patrilineal values. If strictly forbidding their husbands to take a concubine or flirt with a maidservant had little effect, many would vent their anger on the concubine or the maid with physical and verbal abuse. If elite men had enough trouble accepting their wives’ hostility toward concubinage, others expressions of female transgressions, such as bossiness and violence against the husband and lack of filial piety toward parents-in-law,

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324 For stories in which strong-willed wives helped their scoundrel husbands pass the civil service examination or attain virtues, see Wu, The Chinese Virago, 187-90.

325 Ebrey, Inner Quarters, 168.
were deemed even more intolerable. In the more extreme cases, epitomized by the infamous heroine Xue Sujie in the Ming novel *Tales of Marriage Destinies* (*Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳), the wives would order their spouses around like a servant, aggressively curse and beat their husbands, and go out with other women without their husbands’ consent.326 Even more deplorable was their open defiance to their parents-in-law and intentional neglect of the mourning rites for these elders after their deaths.327 Depictions of such disrespectful attitudes and obnoxious behaviors were obviously inflated with a heavy undertone of moral didacticism, but they nonetheless betrayed the overwhelming anxiety of male writers toward potential breach of gender propriety, marital hierarchy, and harmony within a family compound in the face of the realities of everyday life.

Although marital trouble belonged to the realm of the inner sphere and the wife became the usual target for blame, the husband also attracted criticism and mockery when he submitted to his wife and failed to contain her overbearing spirit, not to mention violent acts. In the attempt to save face and explain such an unnatural situation, commentators in the late imperial period speculated on the following reasons for a husband’s fear of his wife: infatuation with her beauty, reliance on the wealth of the wife’s natal family or her control over household finances, or the wife’s secure status in the family due to having given birth to a son.328 Precisely because a male head of the family was vested with de facto power according to Confucian ethics, the phenomena of henpecking and the absence of domestic peace signaled an overturning of marital hierarchy and the blurring of inner and outer domains, thereby constituting a serious problem in the eyes of

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326 Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 129-33.

327 Ibid., 129-30.

moralists and a scandalous subject in countless literary works. This does not imply that husbands were given unlimited freedom to do as they pleased, for Confucian classics also stressed the importance of self-restraint in one’s moral cultivation and warned against men’s excessive lust. *The Golden Lotus* (*Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅) and *Tales of Marriage Destinies* can both be read as cautionary tales about the tragic fates of male protagonists whose self-indulgence and irresponsibility led to uncontrollable disasters, further mirrored by their wives and concubines’ shrewish nature. Moreover, in the Confucian conception, family was seen as a microcosm of the state, in which a fierce and jealous wife was associated with a treacherous official, while marital problems were used as a metaphor for greater chaos in the public realm. A husband’s inability to manage his familial affairs often became the explanation for his lack of political expertise. Based on these grounds, ethical treatises and fiction both explicitly and implicitly attacked husbands’ obedience to their wives and urged them to assume the moral responsibility of asserting their authority, overseeing their families, and maintaining proper gender boundaries to ensure social order.

In spite of the predominantly negative portrayals of female jealousy in stories of henpecking, starting in the seventeenth century a number of writers did produce a slightly more humanized image of the shrew, and sometimes even offered sympathy for her plight. One of the most widely cited example is the Qing philosopher Yu Zhengxie 俞正燮 (1775-1840), who

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329 Wife beating, on the other hand, was often considered necessary discipline and could possibly go unpunished in court. See for instance Ebrey, *Inner Quarters*, 162.


331 One of the best examples is an episode in *Marriage Destinies*, in which the male protagonist Di Xichen is dismissed from his political post because the women in his household have been seen playing on swings, an act that was considered improper; later the protagonist is seen getting beaten by his wife Xue Sujie in front of the yamen. See Epstein, *Competing Discourses*, 128.

remarked that female jealousy was a natural response to concubinage; if a wife was devoid of such emotions, he averred, the entire family would deteriorate. The defense of dominant wives was perhaps a result of the new philosophical and sociocultural trends in Ming and Qing times, such as the cult of emotion (qing 情) and the companionate marriage ideal, further indicating the resilience of the Confucian gender system, which made room for women to exercise and negotiate for power within a marriage.

Nevertheless, these developments by no means indicate an increased affirmation of gender equality or the empowerment of women. Dorothy Ko suggests that the cult of qing did not serve as a gender equalizer but instead had the effect of reinforcing gender stereotypes that associated women with domesticity and emotionality, even though both traits had accrued positive meanings. These limitations (at least as viewed through a modern, feminist lens) notwithstanding, the widespread belief in the sanctity of qing made romantic and sexual love compatible with marriage, in which some wives obtained gratification, even if the basic premises of the marriage institution, including the acceptance of concubinage, remained unchallenged.

Part II  In the Name of Love: New Motifs in Local Henpecking Farce

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333 Ibid., 50.

334 Intellectuals in the late Ming period advocated a renewed focus on expression of individual desires and the vitality of everyday life, a movement termed by historians as the “cult of qing.” The notion that qing should be reciprocal also made the ideal of companionate marriage desirable and allowed some elite women to lead emotionally fulfilling lives. See Ko, Teachers of the Inner Chambers, 180-85. Scholars in the Qing dynasty continued to promote the expressions of emotions and desires that, when properly controlled and channeled, might help bring about a morally upright and gratifying lifestyle. Furthermore, examples of companionate marriage in elite families abounded and attested to the popular currency of women’s learning and the cult of qing having extended into the Qing dynasty. See Epstein, Competing Discourses, 79-87. Also, see Hoi Ling Lui, “The Marital Sentiment of Li Shangzhang and Qian Yunsu: A Case Study of Companionate Marriage in Qing China,” Journal of Chinese Studies 50 (2010): 189-217.

335 Ko, Teachers of the Inner Chambers, 110-12.
During the Republican era, fascination with the phenomenon of henpecking seemed to have grown as seen in cartoons, informal prose essays, and fiction, and the portrayals of and underlying messages about matrimony and femininity underwent significant changes. This section turns to the new perspectives and subjects broached in stories about henpecking in 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou, including the reversed gender roles and the language of love in defense of female jealousy. These new themes were arguably predicated on a new discourse of *qing* and the small family ideal advocated by Republican intellectuals in an attempt to break away from allegedly corrupted Confucian customs. However, many authors apparently viewed the new social milieu as contributing to the feelings of helplessness and disillusionment experienced by the male residents in modern Guangzhou, the experiences of whom were encapsulated in the parody of the henpecked husbands.

Since the end of the Qing dynasty, Chinese intellectuals began to search for solutions to save their disintegrating country, one of which they believed lay in the liberation of women. Borrowing from the west the concepts of human rights, individualism, and equality between men and women, reformist intellectuals upheld the rights and citizenship of women who, as half the population, might greatly contribute to the cause of nation building. Some of the rights to which they believed women were entitled included suffrage, public education, and freedom of marriage. Writers in the late Qing also blamed the Confucian orthodoxy for the problems plaguing the imperial state and intended to revive social relations under such a system by articulating a new discourse of *qing*, arguably in continuation of late Ming and High Qing precedents, which acknowledged the interiority and moral authority of human emotions.

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After the founding of the new Republic in 1911, the debate on the “woman question” and the new discourse of *qing* continued to evolve and arguably climaxed in the New Culture Movement. The New Culturalists fervently denounced the Confucian family system as a feudal institution that suppressed individual happiness and freedom, and subjugated women to cruel customs such as footbinding and concubinage. These intellectuals called not only for women’s equal rights with men to receive education and work outside the home (a subject that will be explored in Chapter 5), but also for women’s attainment of independent selfhood. The emphasis on individualism also marked the essence of the new discourse of *qing* in the first decades of the twentieth century, which built upon the Western notion of romantic love and was characterized by individual autonomy and desires. In addition to the concept of open socialization investigated in Chapter 2, an outgrowth of this new discourse of *qing* was the small family (*xiao jiating* 小家庭) ideal that aimed to free individual men and women from the shackles of the traditional family system, whether arranged marriage, concubinage, parental tyranny, or a husband’s authority over his wife. Even though these new ideological formations of gender and family were not without their controversies or limitations, they set the background to understanding the changes in the henpecking theme in the Republican period, especially the emphasis on reversal of gender roles and the language of love.

The influence of the gender and family discourses of the late Qing and the New Culture era can be seen in the theme of gender role inversion in the henpecking stories of Republican Guangzhou. The parody of cowardly husbands who would serve their wives by doing house

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chores was not entirely unheard of in the late imperial period, but such portrayals arguably became more widespread in the Republican era. In her study of the imagery of the Chinese Modern Girl, Madeleine Dong argues that cartoonists in Shanghai often characterized the modern experience of urban men and women by the reversal of power relations and gender roles. While women were often depicted in social settings, men in these works often seemed to lead a routine, home-based lifestyle by taking care of household chores and worrying about the expenses accrued by their wives.

The satire of the new ideology of spousal equality through gender role reversal also became a trademark of henpecking stories in the city of Guangzhou. For instance, in one particular episode of Huang Huanniao’s illustrated anecdote series, titled “The Strategy of Controlling Husbands,” a young wife, Mrs. Wu, teaches her friend Mrs. Wang that the best way to control her husband while going out is to keep the children at home and have him take care of them (Figure 39). Although the text does not provide any information about the women’s background, the artist and young Huang brother Huanniao dropped subtle hints by portraying them dressed in qipao with elaborate patterns and holding clutch purses. Together with their fashionable hairstyles and makeup, these women’s outfits can be associated with the image of the Modern Girl. This visual allusion was consistent with the women’s conduct, since they had gone out of their house, socialized in public, and boldly displayed their desires to dominate their husbands. If their entry into public and subsequent obscuring of the traditional boundary between the inner and outer domains were supported by the spirit of their age, it becomes rather ironic that Mrs. Wu uses the responsibility of caring for the children as the means to restrain her husband. Though women’s confinement to the home was criticized by the New Culturalists as a burden that the oppressive Confucian patriarchy placed on women, Mrs. Wu is now binding her

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husband to the home with the same “shackles.” In this way, the author satirizes the unclear
definition of spousal equality in contemporary family discourses through a case of wifely
dominance, reversed gender division of labor, and gender disparity. The apparent absence of the
husband from the story also indicates his loss of power, reflecting, perhaps, the emotional state
of male residents in a polarizing society like Guangzhou.

Cowardly, servile husbands who managed the household under their wives’ control were
also turned into creative personas by authors to mock women’s new social roles, changing
marital relations, and even the government’s tightening control over public opinion. One of the
popular writers that contributed to Phenomenal News in the late 1920s adopted the pseudonym
Light Bulb (Din dang daam 電燈膽) to signal his outspoken personality and caustic remarks on
political affairs. His only weakness, however, was his fear of his wife, who also wrote essays in
this column under the pseudonym Mrs. Bedside Light Switch (Taitai congtauzaï 太太床頭掣) to
express her views on her husband and womanhood in general. Just as what a light switch would
do to an electric light, Mrs. Light Switch claims that she intends to restrain Light Bulb’s blunt
political opinion so that he could stay alive by not offending anyone.343 Her open “interference”
allegedly inspired another writer in the column to laugh at the henpecked Light Bulb, who could
no longer write freely and was forced to serve his wife by doing various house chores, such as
giving her massages, serving her dinner, cleaning shoes, and folding clothes.344 The emphasis on
house chores was therefore intended to make fun of women’s increasing power, which in this
case trapped a radical writer within the inner domain. Moreover, Mrs. Bedside Light Switch’s
control over her husband’s writing on a symbolic level echoed the local government’s censorship

343 Taitai Congtauzaï 太太床頭掣, “Chuangtouche de renwu” 床頭掣的任務 [The responsibilities of a Bedside
Light Switch], Xianxiang bao, May 16, 1928, 7.

344 A’laoyi, “Benlan zuozhe jiepou (er)” 本欄作者解剖（二）[A dissection of the writers in this column, part 2]
Xianxiang bao, May 29, 1928, 7.
over publications, which had begun to tighten in the late 1920s (see Chapter 1). In this case, male writers’ gradual loss of free speech is mirrored in gendered terms by the alleged power imbalance between the henpecked Light Bulb and his wife.

Modern men’s powerlessness due to their purportedly homebound role in a modern marriage, such as worrying about their wives’ expenditures, is further illustrated by contemporary writings. For example, a writer sarcastically argues that when a wife asks for money to buy clothes or jewelry, her husband should be overjoyed instead of feeling bitter, and try to satisfy her every wish, even to the extent of borrowing money, pawning, or selling his property. The reason for joy, the author continues, is the husband’s implicit victory over the wife as a result of her pursuit of beauty. Instead of outwardly condemning a wife’s consumption patterns as a challenge to the husband’s authority over household finance, the author suggests that her eagerness for self-adornment was actually a sign of submission. To help turn a husband’s possible frustration into self-consolation, the author even brings up the Western theory of Social Darwinism. He argues that while men treated women equally from the beginning, some started to develop a taste in women based on appearances due to the emergence of social class, and women had to enhance their looks in order to avoid elimination. By persuading a husband to consider his wife’s desire for modern commodities a tacit acceptance of his authoritative position, this essay might be read as a parody of men who attempted to relieve their new found anxiety over women’s augmented power and demands within marriage. The borrowi

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345 Wuqing 無卿, “Nüzi xi zhuangshi jiushi qufu” 女子喜裝飾就是屈伏 [A woman’s love of adornment is a sign of submission], Xianxiang bao, April 17, 1929, 7.
A husband’s subordination to his wife and futile attempts to fulfill the wife’s incessant desires for consumer goods were vividly depicted by the serialized comic strip *Boss He* (Figure 40). Set against the backdrop of the worldwide economic depression of the 1930s, the episode opens with Boss He’s effort to take advantage of the price drop in the silk market and gain his wife Madam Fang’s favor by purchasing a bolt of silk. After buying a color that failed to suit Madam Fang’s liking, Boss He thought of a scheme to dye the silk in Madam Fang’s preferred hue and then present it to her as brand new merchandise. However, he was not successful in fooling Madam Fang, who insisted in accompanying him to the store, causing Boss He’s anxious exclamation, “*Aiya!* How difficult it is to be a husband!” The characters’ dialogue accentuates Boss He’s complacency over his ostensibly clever purchase and trickery, and Madam Fang’s picky and officious manner. In addition, the artist successfully illustrates Madam Fang’s ascendancy in the marriage with several visual cues. In both the third and the sixth panels that are juxtaposed vertically and denote sudden turns of events in the story, Boss He is seen exiting the door with a worried facial expression, a similarity that was probably intended by the cartoonist to highlight Boss He’s repeated frustration caused by Madam Fang’s demands. Madam Fang’s stature in most of the panels is also slightly taller than Boss He and her body postures more commanding than his, characteristics that seem to defy the conventional visual markers of gender and status in paintings and photography. The combined result is a caricature of a modern man’s subservient role in his marriage under his wife’s enhanced authority and fastidious tastes, a fact that resulted from and reflected the concerns with the new gender and family ideology in the Republican period. Here, Madam Fang’s consumption behavior was also an example of the stereotypical view of modern femininity in this period. Women were often regarded as greedy, irrational worshippers of trendy consumer goods that depleted the family.
economy in an age plagued by the worldwide Great Depression. As a result, in addition to the wife’s strong personality, the husband in a modern marriage also had to deal with the undesirable effects of capitalistic consumerism.

Boss He’s willingness to show his wife affection through gift-giving can also be understood as a product of the new discourse of qing in Republican times, which gave new meanings to the gender dynamics in henpecking stories. Although a small number of late imperial intellectuals who were considered protofeminists by historians rationalized female jealousy as natural emotions in polygamous marriages, the idea that a wife’s jealousy or a husband’s fear of his wife represents genuine love or respect was more widely evoked during the Republican era. For example, Soy Sauce Poet, a regular contributor to The Canton Miscellany, proudly flaunts his fear of his wife in almost all of his works, exemplified by his reluctance to disturb her sleep or reliance on his wife for financial assistance.  

Even though their marriage seems to be traditionally arranged and his wife is portrayed with Confucian feminine virtues, such as meekness, patience, and diligence in domestic work, Soy Sauce Poet still evokes the language of love to explain his fear of his wife, “Alas! How could there be any heavenly principles if I do not love such a [good] wife? From love springs respect and from respect springs fear, so this is where my fear of my wife is founded.”

He concludes his spousal affection and henpecked nature with a humorous ditty.

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346 For example, see Chiyou shiren, “Oucheng” 偶成 [Offhand composition], Guangzhou zazhi, May 15, 1934, 8-9. Also, see Chiyou shiren, “Huanji yiri ji” 換季一日記 [A one-Day record of changing garments at the turn of the seasons], Guangzhou zazhi, June 1, 1934, 6. Chiyou shiren, “Xin shenghuo.”

347 Chiyou shiren, “Huanji yiri ji.”

348 Ibid.
People in this world are always prone to quarrel

How can I be afraid of my wife for no reason at all?

How gentle, how pretty she is!

Who can [resist loving her] just like Brother Jichang?

The poet denies cowardice as the root of his fear but instead speak of love and respect for his virtuous and beautiful wife as a natural, heavenly sanctioned result.

While Soy Sauce Poet ascribes the source of his love for his wife to her worthy conduct, some writers believed that female jealousy or dominance were also acceptable in a modern marriage as proof of genuine love that required the husbands’ respect in return. In a story in which the wife got jealous and started to doubt her husband’s fidelity after discovering a photograph of a female celebrity in the husband’s drawer, the author describes her behavior as the consequence of her love for her husband. Even though her overreaction to the photograph betrays her ignorance of modern star culture and lack of trust for her husband, the author seems to excuse her dramatic attitude, as her love expressed through jealousy keeps her husband in place and helps sustain their marriage. Endorsing the principle of spousal equality, another author also views the fear of one’s wife as a natural outcome of love rather than an expression of reverence for one’s superior in hierarchical relationships such as those between parents and children or teachers and students. Love is furthermore embraced as a necessary ingredient for successful marriages by helping to maintain domestic harmony and turning the marriage into an enjoyable romantic comedy, in which the husband willingly yields to the charms of his beloved wife. In other words, the author does not see henpecking as the unnatural reversal of marital hierarchy but highly encouraged it as the expression of a husband’s love for his wife, which

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349 Yagua 亞瓜, “Xiangpian zhi lei” 相片之累 [Trouble caused by a photograph], Yuehua bao, February 16, 1928, 1.

350 Mengqi 夢綺, “Paqi suibi” 怕妻隨筆 [Casual jottings on henpecking], Xianxiang bao, March 2, 1930, 1.
substantiates and enriches a relationship now organized around the modern concept of spousal equality.

Some writers even went so far with the idea of love and gender equality as to introduce the use of contracts in a marriage. For instance, one author wrote of a widower who insisted upon choosing a widow as his remarriage partner because he preferred someone with a similar background. Together they were said to have built a family based on mutual love and understanding. The author proceeds to indicate that they also drew up a contract in order to uphold spousal equality and keep their marriage fresh. For instance, it stipulated that both the husband and the wife should practice calligraphy and write an essay every day, and the husband would neither go to parties without the wife’s company nor summon courtesans. The contract also stated that bedroom furniture was to be rearranged every ten days to produce a pleasant change of environment, while the husband and wife’s outer garments were to be changed every three days. It is clear that the author not only praises the open-mindedness of the husband, who remarries a widow on his own initiative, but also finds their marriage contract, which follows the ideal of reciprocal love in their social and cultural activities (including other Western notions such as personal hygiene), exemplary. The husband’s intentional avoidance of provoking the wife’s jealousy, though not indicated explicitly, is taken into account in the contract as a show of respect for the wife and approved of by the author. The theme of marital love, then, communicated these commentators’ endorsement of the new discourses, providing a contrast to other authors’ satire of the gender reversal in family relations and modern men’s seeming sudden loss of power due to the changing cultural and political climates in the city.

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351 Shengteng 聖藤, “Fuqi jian de xinqi gongyue” 夫妻間的新奇公約 [A novel contract between a husband and a wife], Guangzhou mingguo ribao, May 23, 1927, 11.
Part III Old Wine in a New Bottle? The Questions of Polygamy and Prostitution in Henpecking Stories

Despite the rise of new gender discourses, social reform movements, and marriage and family legislation, the bulk of the stories with henpecking themes in Republican Guangzhou still surrounded the conventional battle between a philandering husband and his jealous wife. In these cases, the wife’s image was often vilified compared to her younger counterparts. Thus, I will now turn to the themes of concubinage and prostitution in henpecking stories that survived the late imperial period and were repackaged with new significance in Republican Guangzhou. The persistence of these themes and the conventional images of the husband and the wife were embedded in the social, legal, and ideological transformations (and their limitations) in the Republican marriage institution and sex market. In addition, the satirical trope of the middle-aged henpecked husband also conveyed an indirect critique of the problems of an urban society, such as venereal diseases and policing, which posed threats to its male residents.

During the Republican era, the issues of concubinage and prostitution were at the heart of the reform agenda in the social and political movements in Guangzhou. For instance, during the mid-1920s, in the mass women's movement that was organized to rally local women's support for the Northern Expedition, feminist activists strove to raise awareness of gender issues such as the abolition of polygamy and prostitution.352 Continuing the effort to politicize gender issues was the Social Customs Reform in the late 1920s, a campaign that targeted various practices that hindered the process of modernization in the city and ultimately corrupted the entire Chinese race.353 Social practices that affected women, including concubinage and prostitution, which were condemned for stripping women of their independent personhood and enslaving them as

352 Elizabeth Croll, Feminism and Socialism in China (New York: Routledge, 1978), 124-25.
353 Chin, Bound to Emancipate, 80-81.
men’s playthings, made up half the agenda of the Social Customs Reform Bureau.\textsuperscript{354}

While the municipal government passed an ordinance in 1927 that outlawed the enslavement of maidservants (\textit{binü} 婢女) and forbid them to marry as concubines, a more extensive effort to combat the practice of concubinage was launched throughout the country in 1930, when the Civil Code was promulgated by the central government and identified the taking of concubines as a legal ground for divorce.\textsuperscript{355} The lawmakers of the Civil Code were believed to have intentionally created a loophole for husbands with concubines to remain unpunished by placing the offense under the category of adultery instead of bigamy. Nonetheless, legal historian Margaret Kuo acknowledges individual women’s initiatives in using the law in their favor and successfully obtaining marital separation and financial compensations from their disloyal husbands, a feat that would have been unthinkable to their late imperial counterparts.\textsuperscript{356}

In addition, the regulation of prostitution continued to be an objective in the Guangzhou government’s social reform campaigns throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Measures to tackle this perceived problem included taxation, licensing, and later registration and rehabilitation, although many feminists and social commentators openly disagreed with these official policies.\textsuperscript{357} These gender reform initiatives conveyed the New Culture rhetoric of gender equality, monogamy, and


\textsuperscript{357} For an analysis of the changes of official policies regarding prostitution in 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou, see Chin, \textit{Bound to Emancipate}, 85-93, 135-40.
female emancipation as the means of national advancement and social progress. They also revealed the desires of the political leaders to promote Guangzhou’s image as the revolutionary capital of China and a modern metropolis.

In spite of the government leaders’ grandiose claims and seeming determination to pursue gender reform, various factors contributed to their limited success. The definitions of the causes of such social problems as concubinage and prostitution often wavered between the evil social institutions that victimized women and women’s own moral deficiency, thereby rendering the target of reform inconsistent and the measures ineffective. As top-ranking officials and social elites continued to take concubines or frequent brothels, these practices were encouraged to persist, making abolition impossible. The subordination of the feminist agenda to the national cause, or the male leadership’s tendency to overlook gender issues in their social campaigns, further explains the continued existence of these social customs. The henpecking stories centering on spousal conflicts over concubinage and prostitution thus reflect popular perceptions of such enduring practices in the contexts of the gender and social reforms of the 1920s and 1930s.

It is obvious that the majority of the henpecking accounts in Republican Guangzhou followed their late imperial precedents: they criticized the wife’s dominance over the husband and her overpowering jealousy, especially given that she failed to give birth to a son. Such a choice of focus was evident in Cantonese opera. As an effortless way to create laughter or tension in the story, henpecking appears to be a commonly employed trope in this operatic

358 Ibid., 93.
360 This trend was especially evident during the preparation for the Northern Expedition. See Gilmartin, Engendering the Chinese Revolution, 158-59, 161-62.
A critically acclaimed play titled *Poisonous Rose (Du meigui 毒玫瑰)* and performed by the Cantonese opera superstar Xue Juexian was no exception.

Set in the year 1927, *Poisonous Rose* revolves around the femme fatale Yang Meigui 楊玫瑰’s treacherous schemes to destroy women favored by her husband, Li Boquan. In a nutshell, the plot reveals that many years past, Yang Meigui had ordered the family servant Li Zhongren to secretly murder the concubine He Yingmei’s children and send her to an asylum. Ironically, Li Boquan continued to live in oblivion and later took a fancy to a courtesan named White Rose (Bai Meigui 白玫瑰), who is revealed to be his long lost daughter given birth to by the concubine and saved from death by the loyal servant Li Zhongren. Although the rest of the story focuses on the love triangle among White Rose and two young elite men—the lawyer Hua Cuihun and the doctor Chen Chaoming (who later turns out to be her long lost brother), Yang Meigui’s animosity against White Rose serves to motivate the plot. For instance, she pretends to consent to her husband’s request to take White Rose as a concubine, but secretly tries to poison White Rose with a rose bouquet sent by Doctor Chen, a vicious plan that causes great misunderstanding between White Rose and her two young suitors. Adding to her image as a fierce and evil wife was Yang Meigui’s secret identity as the female leader of a treasonous Rose Party (*Meigui Dang 玫瑰黨*) that plotted against the government, a detail that reflected the underlying belief inherited

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361 For instance, in the play *Distress over a Betrayed Lover’s Letter*, which centers on the relationship between General Xiao Ziying and his lover Hua Qiuyu, Hua Qiuyu was initially going to become the concubine of Duke Lao Shaonian. However, after the duke’s shrewish wife found out about his affair, the next scene uses the comic routine of henpecking stories in which the two returned home and bickered over the husband’s philandering and the proper gender roles in a marriage. See *Changduan xiaolang yizhi* 腸斷蕭郎一紙書 [Distress over a betrayed lover’s letter] (Hong Kong: Nange chubanshe, date unknown), 10-13.

362 *Du meigui* 毒玫瑰 [Poisonous rose] (Guangzhou: Yuequ yanjiu chubanshe, date unknown), 6.

363 Ibid., 7-9, 64.

364 Ibid., 24-5, 39-40.
from the late imperial period of female dominance in the family as an analogy for chaos in the political realm. Though situated in a modern setting, the play in fact adopted familiar themes from the tales of shrewish wives in earlier periods, as it presents a cautionary tale about the dire consequences of allowing a wife to control the husband.

Whereas Poisonous Rose posits a dichotomy between good and evil and encourages the audience to detest the arch villain Yang Meigui, many cartoons also continued the conventional treatment of shrewish wives by dramatizing their jealousy, and even violence; but, perhaps reflective of the different medium, they solely focus on comedy rather than melodrama. For instance, the perennial battle between a lustful middle-aged teacher who is dying to take a concubine and his jealous wife constitutes the main thrust of Mr. Taishi (Taishi xiansheng 太史先生), a serialized comic strip published in The Sketch. The wife, Mrs. Taishi, might be seen as a quintessential virago, not unlike Yang Meigui and the wives in literary works from the late imperial period, as she forbids Mr. Taishi to take a concubine despite her infertility. Her controlling and violent nature is further manifested by her punishment for Mr. Taishi after catching his secret attempts to sleep with the concubine of the principal of his school (Figure 41). She first forces Mr. Taishi to put his head and arms under a stool and walk like a field-plowing ox, and then begins to burn his buttocks when he slows down. In spite of the sheer cruelty of her actions, the artist skillfully combined the graphics and the text written in the Cantonese dialect to produce a comic effect. For example, disconnected curves are drawn around Mr. Taishi’s body in order to denote his trembling, while stars and puffs of air that signify the intensity of Mrs. Taishi’s torture are placed next to his buttocks and heels in the last two panels. What is more, Mr. Taishi’s excruciating scream in the last panel, in which he addresses Mrs. Taishi as “Your

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365 Ibid., 45.
“Highness” to beg for mercy, is intended to induce laughter from the Cantonese-speaking audience at Mr. Taishi’s pathetic defeat, for “Your Highness” is a title commonly used by henpecked husbands for their wives in the local dialect. The graphic representations of Mrs. Taishi’s spite and violence, therefore, serve less to condemn her lack of Confucian feminine qualities than to resurrect and poke fun at the wives’ seemingly perennial battle with their lustful husbands.

The wives’ desperate attempts to monitor and confine their husbands are further exaggerated and ridiculed in a single-panel cartoon titled, “A Bed that Prevents the Husband from Sleeping Around (Figure 42).” Here, a middle-aged woman stands next to a coffin-shaped bed made of hard steel and secured with roofing nails, and stares anxiously into a hole in the bed, where a man’s face is half-exposed. Wearing a sexy night gown with her arms exposed and her hair in a fashionable bob, the woman might be trying to emulate the appearance of the Modern Girl in order to seduce her husband, though her age, outfit, and plump body are apparently no match for the portrait of a young female nude on the wall, which symbolizes the threat of the husband’s sexual affairs. Most importantly, the bed that was shaped as a coffin reflects the artist’s ironic message that there is no other way for the wife to tackle the husband’s infidelity other than death. This symbolic castration is similar to a strategy adopted by shrewish wives in late imperial novels such as the Marriage Destinies and Vinegar Gourd (Cu Hulu), in which the husband’s sexual organ was marked every day as the means to keep his sexual activities in check. The use of coffin as a prop was perhaps even more shocking and offensive than the marking of the husband’s penis, since death is an inauspicious subject matter that people

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366 For instance, the aforementioned Soy Sauce Poet also addresses his wife as “Milady, Your Highness” in one of his limericks. See again Chiyou Shiren, “Oucheng.” Also, see Li Boquan’s reference to his wife Yang Meigui as “Her Highness” in Du meigui, 9.

367 McMahon, Misers, Shrews and Polygamists, 80.
in south China ordinarily tried to avoid. Interestingly enough, whereas a coffin in real life will be removed from the community as soon as it is sealed, the wife chooses not only to keep the coffin but also sleep next to the would-be dead husband, further suggesting her dilemma between putting the husband’s sexual energy to death once and for all and keeping him as a marriage partner.\(^368\) The placement of the coffin-shaped bed also stands in contrast to the leather shoes that are thrown on the floor in a haphazard manner to indicate the husband’s wandering heart and restless spirit. Instead of leaving her husband home to take care of the chores as the means of exerting control, like what the young wife in Figure 39 has suggested, this wife seems to be at her wit’s end and can only trap her husband in the coffin-shaped bed while luring him with her fading charm.

What seems to be central to the Republican writers and cartoonists’ critiques, however, is the husbands’ inability to curb their improper desires or maintain domestic peace. In the play *Poisonous Rose*, the playwright seems to be equally critical of Li Boquan, who causes his concubine He Yingmei lifelong suffering—to borrow He Yingmei’s words in the opening scene—by impregnating her when she is still a family maidservant and leaving her to the devices of Yang Meigui just before childbirth, while he embarks upon an official trip to the capital.\(^369\) His obliviousness and unceasing lust are further exposed when he courts the courtesan White Rose, who turns out to be the daughter that he abandoned. Even more ironic is the fact that Li Boquan is so afraid of getting caught by his wife for summoning White Rose to a drinking party that he asks his friend, Jin Songlun, to do so on his behalf even at the risk of becoming a


\(^{369}\) *Du meigui*, 2-3.
laughing stock by all of his friends for being henpecked.\textsuperscript{370} The Confucian critique of sexual indulgence and the inability to put one’s family in order is very much at the center of this Republican-era play, in which the husband and father Li Boquan, as much as Yang Meigui, seems to be held responsible for He Yingmei and her children’s tragic fate.

The insatiable lust of henpecked husbands that results in domestic strife is also mocked in contemporary newspaper reports that employ vivid expressions in the Cantonese dialect to depict the men’s philandering ways. For instance, a dandy surnamed Liang is described as having a quirk for “stewing marine worms” (\textit{dan wocung} 燉禾蟲), a visually unappealing yet tasty local dish that became a euphemism for having sex with blind female singers.\textsuperscript{371} After his wife discovers his affair with a blind female singer and forbids him to go out at night, the henpecked Liang dares not disobey, but gradually loses his appetite and becomes emaciated due to his intense longing for his lover. In order to “preserve his life,” Liang begs his wife to allow the blind female singer to enter their family as a concubine, and his wish is eventually granted. Here, eating marine worms becomes a metaphor for Liang’s appetite for abnormal sexual encounters upon which his life allegedly depended. Together with the “happy” ending that the author congratulates in a sarcastic tone, Liang’s incontrollable lust stands in stark contrast to his fear of his wife and serves as the author’s ultimate target of ridicule.

The insatiable male desire against which the shrewish wife guarded was also an all-time favorite of Huang Huanniao and his collaborator Yiren, who added visual interest to magnify the irony and breathe new life into the theme. The male protagonist of their serial comic strip \textit{Old

\textsuperscript{370} Ibid., 8-9.

\textsuperscript{371} Anonymous, “Wankuzi yinbing shi hechong, xingde laoqi neng tiliang” 纏緒子因病食禾蟲，幸得老妻能體諒 [A dandy eats marine worms as a quirk; Fortunately his old wife understands], \textit{Yuehua bao}, February 4, 1930, 6. For a discussion of the rise of blind female singers in the public space of Guangzhou and their popular representations, see Chin, \textit{Bound to Emancipate}, 104-5.
Master, who is constantly sneaking out of his house to escape the watchful eyes of his wife, Madam Ma, and fool around with other women, spots a middle-age prostitute on the street and finds her quite attractive (Figure 43). When he brings the prostitute to a hotel room, she turns out to be Madam Ma in disguise, and she is furious about his previous denials of sexual liaisons with prostitutes. The ironic twist in the story lies in Old Master’s excessive lust that takes away his discernment and drives him to lust after even a middle-aged prostitute, who, in fact, turns out to be his lawfully wedded wife.

A similar plot is adopted by a writer in a short fiction “The Part-Time Job of a Wife.” In this story, a wealthy man Liao Bosheng, who has a beautiful, virtuous wife and a son, gradually grows tired of his marriage after ten years and plans to take a concubine even more gorgeous than his wife. Only on his wedding night does he discover that the concubine with whom he is infatuated turns out to be his wife, who has concealed her appearance with heavy makeup. Similar to how Old Master is fooled by Madam Ma, it seems rather curious that Liao Bosheng fails to recognize his “concubine,” a fact that can only be explained as a comment on the men’s insatiable greed and subsequent blindness.

In these stories, the Modern Girl figure, who is supposedly an embodiment of the new ideologies of female emancipation and spousal equality, usually appears in the form of lovers or mistresses with whom the wives were forced to compete in these stories. Historians have long since indicated that the gender discourses in the New Culture Movement were articulated mainly by educated male elites and intended to serve their own purposes, including self-emancipation from family control, building a new nation-state, and creating a generation of modern women to

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372 Song Liulang 宋六郎, “Furen zhi jianzhi” 夫人之兼職 [The part-time job of a wife], Guohua bao, February 27, 1936, 4.2.
become their ideal companions.\textsuperscript{373} Using women’s perceived suffering as a metaphorical device in their vision for their new selfhood and a new China, male intellectuals in the New Culture Movement failed to provide a clear roadmap for women’s liberation. Indeed, they often complained bitterly about their wives arranged by their parents as ignorant, unattractive, and no longer compatible to their new, modern identities, and looked for younger educated women familiar with the ideas and trends of the modern age as replacements. The inherent conflicts within the new gender and family discourses were exposed by the young, pretty, and fashionable female characters associated with the Modern Girl in the henpecking stories: the Modern Girl was employed mainly as an object of desire that presented a threat to the wives and created problems within marriages.

A case in point is an episode in \textit{Old Master} in which the protagonist treats two of his girlfriends to watch Cantonese opera and runs out of money to get another ticket for his wife, Madam Ma (Figure 44). Even though Old Master initially pawned his newly sewn long gown to pay for the show and a late night snack, the unexpected appearances of his girlfriends, one after another, clearly ruined his plan and forced him to forfeit all his money in order to show off his generosity. Wearing a bobbed hairstyle, \textit{qipao} dresses, and high heels, Old Master’s girlfriends are clearly styled as Modern Girls, and their behavior further affirms this identification. These two women’s expertise in dealing with men points to the advent of a new dating culture as the prelude for modern marriages, usually characterized as the Missy Movement (discussed in Chapter 2). In his study of American modern women in the early twentieth century, Joshua Zeitz suggests that along with urbanization and women’s entry into the workforce emerged a new system of romance and sexuality in which working women who enjoyed greater social freedom but could hardly make ends meet would go on dates and carefully calculate the degree of

intimacy needed in return for the men’s treating. The episode of *Old Master* reflects a similar change in the gender relations of Republican China, where men were expected to pursue their romantic interests before the marriage and treat them on dates in order to demonstrate their modernity and sincerity. While the difficulty of satisfying a Modern Girl lover was the main focus of the complaints by the alleged male participants in the Missy Movement, the creators of *Old Master* also highlight the marital trouble stirred up by these young women. For instance, the modern look of the two girlfriends and the new dating ritual make the way Madam Ma interacts with Old Master in the last three panels laughable. Entering into the scene in the same way as the two girlfriends, Madam Ma actually stands in contrast to the two women in her traditional garments and shorter stature because of her flat shoes. Moreover, even though she is clearly entitled to Old Master’s treating, Madam Ma is deprived of this privilege, thanks to her two competitors and the new dating culture in which Old Master is forced to participate in order to win their favor. The new gender ideologies that were supposedly intended to grant women additional freedom and empowerment, therefore, failed to deliver their promise to wives like Madam Ma, who still had no better way to deal with the threats in their marriage than to twist husbands’ ears and forbid them to fool around. In these wives’ opinion, and, as implicit in the humorous treatment of the subject by the cartoonists, many modern men may have agreed, the Modern Girls were essentially no different from concubines or courtesans.

Although most of the henpecking stories in Republican Guangzhou, like the literature of late imperial times, continued to portray the themes of concubinage and prostitution that provoked the wives’ jealousy, some choose to adopt a playful tone to indirectly resist the notion that female dominance was a vice. An example was a popular local saying, “those who fear their

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wives will get rich” (*pa laopo hui fada* 怕老婆會發達), often used by henpecked husbands as a self-justification or by writers who proposed that it was better to stay home with one’s wife than to take in a concubine or squander money in a brothel.\(^{375}\) When asked by a reader who wonders if he has remained poor throughout his life because he is not afraid of his wife, an advice columnist with the pen name A’Mutt 阿乜 asks jokingly in return whether the reader is a licentious man.\(^{376}\) According to A’Mutt, lustful men can save money by submitting to their wives and refraining from drinking with prostitutes, going to dance halls, or keeping mistresses. Delivered as a joke, the columnist’s opinion nonetheless helps rationalize the wife’s control over the husband’s reckless behavior and challenge the prevailing ideology of wifely domination as a threat to family harmony. Although the origin of this “getting rich by fearing your wife” saying cannot be traced, it is highly probable that it was affected by the small family ideal and the anti-prostitution discourse debated and circulated in this period. In their discussions of the small family model, intellectuals in the New Culture Movement often attacked concubinage and prostitution not only for their violation of monogamous marriages but also as wasteful customs that deprived the family of its resources and, by extension, depleted the national economy.\(^{377}\) Reform writers in the 1930s also viewed prostitution “as an institution that consumed without producing, leading to the waste of social resources.”\(^{378}\) Evoked variously as self-parody, satire of henpecked husbands in general, or positive evidence for gender equality, this expression may

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\(^{375}\) For instance, an office clerk surnamed Zhang had to go home early after work in order to please his wife. When inquired by others whether he was henpecked, Zhang agreed by saying that “only those who fear their wives can get rich.” See Lanting Ke 閔亭客, “Younü tongche sheng wuhui” 有女同車生誤會 [A Misunderstanding Caused by Taking the Bus with Another Woman], *Yuehua bao*, November 29, 1929, 1.

\(^{376}\) A’Mutt 阿乜, “A’Mutt xinxiang” 阿乜信箱 [A’Mutt’s mailbox], *Guomin xinwen*, December 25, 1934, 4.

\(^{377}\) Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State*, 47.

reflect the influence of the government and intellectual stances on the issues of concubinage and prostitution during this period.

Governmental propaganda on prostitution in 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou, including propagation of the notion of prostitutes as disease-carriers and the policing of citizens’ bodies as the necessary measures to control sexual mores, have also left a mark upon the henpecking stories, especially the comic strip *Old Master*. In one of his attempts to fool around behind his wife’s back, because his “old hag is so fierce and does not allow [him] to take concubines,” Old Master rents a hotel room and brings different prostitutes to sleep with him every night (Figure 45). Though he tells the manager that the prostitutes are his wife and concubines at first, the manager grows suspicious and contacts the police, who catch Old Master soliciting a prostitute on the street and finally make an arrest in the hotel room. In the fifth panel, where Old Master chats up a prostitute, the artist humorously places an advertisement for gonorrhea pills on the background wall. A similar visual prop of a syphilis treatment advertisement is used in the fifth panel of Figure 43, in which Madam Ma dresses herself as a prostitute and awaits her lascivious husband on the street. The insertion of these advertisements into the visual field shows the artists’ awareness of the anti-prostitution reformist discourse in modern China that associated sex-workers with venereal diseases and moral contamination against the progress of the local citizenry.\(^\text{379}\) During this period, drug advertisements commonly featured erotic images of female bodies. While some of the advertisements, such as the ones discussed in Ruth Rogaski’s study of Republican Tianjin, were intended to display women’s bodies as objects of beauty and health,

\(^{379}\) Ibid., 226-41.
others, echoing slogans in the anti-prostitution campaign, might have served to remind readers of the unclean sexuality of the prostitutes.\textsuperscript{380}

These conflicting discourses of modern female sexuality and hygiene were often times less strictly divided but simultaneously embedded in the female imagery in the advertisements. A dermatologic medicine advertisement published in \textit{The Sketch} (Figure 3) helps illustrate the ways in which these seemingly dichotomous discourses of modern female sexuality are embodied in the same imagery. Here, a beautiful young woman is portrayed with a high nose, full, rouged lips, and perfectly proportioned bare breasts that are protruding due to her relaxed posture. Even when naked, this woman still embodies contemporary fashion trends such as the bobbed hairstyle, chic makeup, and a bracelet on her wrist, all of which were the trademark of a Modern Girl.\textsuperscript{381} Though this female figure appears confident and fully in control of her sexuality, her right arm alluringly leads the viewer’s gaze to the big, block characters on the left that seem to convey a different message. “A beauty and sex dermatologic specialty medicine,” the brand promises to cure various types of ills, some of which were said to be common problems faced by men who frequented the brothels. Moreover, these diseases are all written in the Cantonese dialect, a fact that is perhaps intended to alert the local audience of the threats that this modern woman imposed on the physical and moral hygiene of their particular society. The Modern Girl figure in this marketing campaign thus serves as an embodiment of the dualistic trope of modernity, as an exotically glamorous and progressive experience \textit{and} as a corrupting influence that jeopardized the bodily and moral health of the local citizenry.

These linkages are to be expected, given the fact that images of modern women circulated during the Republican era were actually heavily influenced by the courtesan journals

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{380} Rogaski, \textit{Hygienic Modernity}, 230-33.

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{381} Lee, \textit{Shanghai Modern}, 195.
in the late Qing.\textsuperscript{382} Even though publishers of high-class journals such as \textit{The Young Companion} made conscious attempts to “reinvest the female body with an entirely new meaning and ethical value,” the good and the “evil” women would continue to be conflated in the advertising culture since both types of imagery contained commercial value. The conflation of good and bad female sexuality commonly seen in advertisements is perhaps also hinted in Figure 43, where Madam Ma’s ruse blurred the boundary between moral uprightness and immorality. Even if the placement of these advertisements in the cartoons is probably geared towards satirizing Old Master’s lust, it can be argued that the artists are questioning the unclear definitions of good women and prostitutes based on their outward appearance. Moreover, through the placement of drug advertisements for sexually transmitted diseases, the cartoonists may also have wished to portray modern Guangzhou as an alluringly dangerous city, in which modern men, much like the henpecked husbands, could easily fall prey.

The police interference in Old Master’s sexual encounter with a prostitute in Figure 45 is also tied to the spirit of governmental reform over gender relations and sexuality in 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou. Since the government relied on licensing as a form of control over prostitution, they gradually shifted their blame to the so-called clandestine prostitutes (\textit{sichang} 私娼) for corrupting social morality and targeted this group of sex workers in order to placate local feminists and anti-prostitution reformists who called for thorough abolition.\textsuperscript{383} Hotels, therefore, became a site of governmental scrutiny where even husbands and wives displaying semi-public affection were subject to police arrests and interrogation, not unlike how couples

\textsuperscript{382} Ibid., 73. For a study of the courtesan culture in the late Qing, see Catherine V. Yeh, \textit{Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals, and the Entertainment Culture, 1850-1910} (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2005).

\textsuperscript{383} Chin, \textit{Bound to Emancipate}, 89-90.
going for a ride were treated as discussed in Chapter 2.\textsuperscript{384} Although this strategy was hardly effective in eliminating unlicensed prostitution, the local government’s desire to enhance its power through the policing of individual bodies of the citizens might have been fulfilled in other areas of local life. For instance, many news stories reporting the battles between jealous wives and their henpecked husbands’ new concubines or lovers ended in the summoning of the police, a trend that demonstrates the local populace’s increasing dependence on the authorities, instead of traditional arbiters such as elders in a clan, to resolve their family problems in the modern age.\textsuperscript{385} Of course, the appearance of the police in this episode of \textit{Old Master} does not necessarily serve as the artist’s support for governmental reform. Alternatively, it might be read as an implicit criticism of the government’s intrusion into the private life of the citizens, similar to the suppression of public opinion indirectly protested by writers in other henpecking stories.

Conclusion

The henpecking stories that were widely circulated in Republican-era Guangzhou constitute an arena onto which different visions for gender and family from the past and present were proffered or ridiculed. On the one hand, Confucian gender norms that disapproved of female dominance and men’s sexual abandon and cowardice had left a lasting impact upon accounts of henpecked husbands in Republican times. These ideologies were by no means rigid

\textsuperscript{384} For instance, see Xing 星, “Lüdian zhong keyi fufu beibu” [A suspicious couple arrested in the hotel], \textit{Yuehua bao}, March 8, 1930, 6. See also Xiu 修, “Juqu jizhu jiudian zhi nannü” [Arresting a man and a woman who stay at a hotel], \textit{Yuehua bao}, June 10, 1931, 6. For a case in which the suspects were a man and his concubine, see Anonymous, “Fufu tongyu lüdian shou xianyi” [A couple staying together in a hotel was suspected], \textit{Yuehua bao}, March 17, 1930, 6.

\textsuperscript{385} In a typical example, a jealous wife brought her female relatives and friends to her husband’s lover’s house in order to find her husband. After she hit the lover with a bamboo chair and caused her serious injury, the lover immediately summoned the police, although the husband begged the police not to arrest his wife and the police eventually decided to leave them alone. See Leng 冷, “Hanfu tidou reqi fengbo, Hedongshi ji zuo jiexiaqiu” [A fierce wife stirred up trouble when catching her husband’s affair; The lioness almost became a prisoner], \textit{Yuehua bao}, February 3, 1930, 6.
or unchanging, for within the Confucian gender system had emerged the cult of *qing*, which attested to the freedom and affection that women could enjoy. On the other hand, Republican Guangzhou visual and textual representations of henpecking stories were also enriched by new concepts of gender equality, monogamy and the conjugal family, and social reform on concubinage and prostitution advocated by New Cultural intellectuals and local political authorities. In addition to these newly emerged notions, modern media such as cartoons, advertisements, and newspaper reports served to complicate the discourses on modern marriage by employing the henpecking theme and, in some cases, imagery of female bodies for entertainment and commercial purposes. As a result, one must caution against interpreting the new themes, such as gender role inversion and the language of love as a justification for female jealousy, as an indication of progress in the feminist movement in the Republican era. On the contrary, many of these henpecking stories, with motifs old and new, provide a satirical take on the alienation experienced by urban residents due to the problems of modernization and cultural and political reform. For example, while modern husbands had to assume house chores in the name of spousal equality, middle-aged wives were forced to compete with fashionable young women who were supposedly supporters of New Culture ideologies. Instead of evoking the tradition/modernity binary that does not do justice to the persistence of certain motifs and underlying messages in these stories, I suggest reading these accounts as the authors’ attempts to make sense of and negotiate their identities in the changing environment of Republican Guangzhou. Their works were, therefore, as much a response to women’s apparently increasing social visibility and initiatives as to the modernization processes in the city.
In a modern city like Guangzhou, nothing animated the experiences of the local dwellers more than the working women who peopled the shops, offices, restaurants and other venues of public life. An unnamed artist who signed his (her) name Ng Ching Mon captured just such sensations in a cartoon titled, “The Flower Market (Figure 46),” which portrays four pots of sumptuous flowers displayed on a brick platform with the word “metropolis” (*dushi* 都市). With different shapes and petal arrangements, these flowers represent four kinds of female occupations: female hairdressers, opium den waitresses, high-class call girls, and teahouse waitresses. Since the nicknames attached to these occupations each contain the word “flower,” the artist is drawing a rather obvious connection between image and text. Occupying most of the space in the picture, the luxuriantly blooming flowers denote the popularity of these professions that epitomized the urban environment of Guangzhou. These “flowers,” it should be noted, are planted in pots labeled by their places of work rather than in the soil. The author might have viewed these professions as houseplants that were grown at the whims of the planters rather than wild flowers freely blooming in nature. The word, “flower,” which has long been associated with prostitution in the Chinese language, further alludes to the complicated relationship between sex and female labor in the eyes of the artist.  

This cartoon raises important questions in regard to the perceptions of gender boundaries, division of labor, and urban modernity in Republican-era Guangzhou: among all the professions undertaken by women, why did the author choose to focus on their employment in the service industry to represent the city, labeled by the artist as a “flower market?” What does the intentional omission of certain types of women’s work, such as...
female domestic help, reveal about the popular cultural framing of sex, labor, and female emancipation? What do the conflation of certain female occupations and sex work tell us about historical continuity and changes in the discourse on women’s roles in public?

To place the metaphor of the “flower market” back into its historical context, this chapter interrogates the representations of female occupations and the integral part these portrayals played in the cultural construction of urban modernity in 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou. The first section traces the historical roots of these phenomena by explicating Confucian thought on women’s work and categories of public women in Guangdong province in the late Qing period. As will become evident, expectations for and representations of working women in Republican Guangzhou retained significant traces of late imperial precedent and the ideological and social contexts that gave rise to such public women.

The second section pays close attention to official discourse of working women in Republican Guangzhou and popular portrayals of existing female occupations that were considered backward, particularly female domestic helpers (majie 媽姐). I posit that the government-endorsed ideal overlaps with the New Woman (xin nüxing 新女性) prototype and seems to exclude any line of work that was deemed traditional or tainted with the reputation of sexual immorality. Not surprisingly, existing categories of working women such as female domestic helpers were absent from the official discourse, a fact that paralleled the unfavorable portrayals of such women in popular cultural sources. Moreover, popular writers and artists often associated female domestic helpers with the practice of delayed transfer marriage and sworn spinsterhood (a practice which had originated in the Pearl River Delta region), undesirable customs that caused Guangdong or even all of China to lag behind. Even as this line of work had created room for female financial autonomy, it was at odds with the pro-reproduction stance of
the modern state and became the target of ridicule in the popular cultural imagination. By adopting a gossip-like, satirical approach to the lives of majie, popular cultural commentators upheld the gender status quo and created an imagined community among audiences through shared local knowledge and self-pride.

In the third section, I tackle the popular representations of new-style working women in Republican Guangzhou. Compared to the official ideology that ranked working women based on the gender division of labor and sexual purity, the popular cultural portrayals made no such distinctions and associated all modern-style working women with the flamboyant Modern Girl icon. These authors challenged the reformist discourse by channeling sexual fantasy and parodying male desire through the representations of working women and reaffirmed the existing gender hierarchy through their use of humor. Such representations could also be employed a tactic of resistance against perceived government oppressiveness.

Previous studies have laid significant groundwork in analyzing the newly emerged discourse of female occupations in the Republic period, showing that it was integral to the nation-building project of modern China. In particular, scholars such as Zheng Wang, Ling-ling Lien, and Emily Honig place their emphasis on the agency of women by reconstructing the voices, lives, and daily struggles of upper-class career women and ordinary female workers. Other historians have investigated the sexualized imagery of working women to highlight the

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387 For a discussion of the discourse on female occupations and intellectuals’ conflicting views toward women, sexual morality, and paid labor in the Republican era, see Bryna Goodman, “The Vocational Woman and the Elusiveness of 'Personhood' in Early Republican China,” in Gender in Motion: Divisions of Labor and Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China, ed. Bryna Goodman and Wendy Larson, 265-86 (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005). Barbara Mittler also analyzes this discourse through a case study of the women’s magazine, Linglong. See Mittler, “In Spite of Gentility,” 208-234. Xiaoping Cong explores the ideology and changing approaches of successive regimes toward the training of female teachers in the late Qing and Republican periods in Xiaoping Cong, Teachers' Schools and the Making of the Modern Chinese Nation-State, 1897-1937 (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia Press, 2007).

underlying male anxiety toward female empowerment and the volatile modernization process of their social surroundings. Since these scholarly works draw their materials mainly from the city of Shanghai, my chapter builds upon their rich and highly informative findings but shifts the focus southward to Guangzhou, with particular emphasis on the female professions that were locally specific, thereby adding a more nuanced understanding of the aforementioned discourse in Republican China.

The pioneering study on female occupations in early twentieth century Guangzhou is Angelina Chin’s *Bound to Emancipate*. She devotes one chapter to discussion of the rise of female service laborers in the 1920s and 1930s and the growing public frustration with purported female sexual excess and moral decline in these cities. Building upon her research on this subject, my study offers a comparative analysis of working women not only according to their occupations, but also based on the characteristics that their representations shared with the categories of New Women, Modern Girls, or allegedly “traditional” women. By so doing, I aim to put the locally specific portrayals of elite career women and lower-class female laborers in conversation with larger discourses of modern femininity in circulation in Republican China.

**Part I Transgressing Boundaries: Categories of Public Women in Qing Dynasty Guangdong**

To reconstruct the Republican discourse on female occupations, and understand the emphasis that reformist intellectuals, popular writers, and cartoonists placed on women in certain professions, it is necessary to first consider images of public women in the textual and visual sources in Qing dynasty Guangdong. Here I define the term “public women” as those who crossed the gender boundary by involving themselves in the public world of men and were

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390 Chin, *Bound to Emancipate*. 
almost always subject to criticism for violating Confucian norms of work and gender propriety. These norms were not unchanging; as the gender ideology in the late Qing period transformed alongside the political and social turmoil, more women received new-style education and ventured into the public world to pursue careers. Among the categories of public women that existed in the Qing dynasty, I will focus on two types that were arguably the most widely discussed, namely courtesans and female laborers from the Pearl River Delta area who practiced delayed transfer marriage or sworn spinsterhood. Representations of the longest-existing type of public women, courtesans, also underwent transformation toward the end of the dynasty, when the emergence of the popular press gave rise to their new status as proto-modern celebrities. Along with the changing perceptions of courtesans came another group of public women who attracted media attention: female workers in silk factories. These women’s activism in labor protests led to debate on the rightful place of women in a changing society, thereby revealing new conceptions of gender, space, marriage, and regional identity in the transitional late Qing period.

Under the Confucian gender system, women’s sphere of activities was secluded from the outside world, and their responsibilities in life revolved around their role in the patrilineal kinship structure that would change according to their marital status. The spatial division and patrilineal system that defined their duties by no means rendered women oppressed victims of patriarchy, as numerous studies on late imperial Chinese women successfully demonstrate the value placed on women’s labor and the rich culture and emotional ties women produced and shared with one another. For instance, one of the four feminine virtues prescribed by Han dynasty female historian Ban Zhao’s *Lessons for Women* is diligent work (*gong* 工).³⁹¹

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³⁹¹ Ban Zhao, “Lessons for Women.”
Industriousness was later emphasized by Qing dynasty statecraft writers as an essential quality of wise wives and mothers in support of their family’s economic survival. Often referring to the classical phrase “men plow and women weave” (nangeng nüzhi 男耕女織), the Qing government considered home spinning, weaving, and embroidery as the ideal womanly work that would not only cultivate women’s moral character but also help sustain the country’s agrarian economy through the gender division of labor. However, in practice the labor in which women engaged differed depending on their social class, and only those in elite families could live up to the state-sponsored ideal and perfect their skills in embroidery. Commoner women were confined to labor-intensive tasks in silk production and other lines of work that helped sustain household finances under the commercialization of economy. Moreover, many commoner women were required to work outside of their homes from time to time, even though they aspired to the behavior of upper class women and would dress unassumingly so as to avoid contact with men. Considered as indispensible assets of their families, women’s labor was nonetheless subject to class-specific financial circumstances that determined their respective tasks and the extent of their mobility.

Opposite to the virtuous women who labored with their own hands and stayed within their family compounds were mobile women outside of the Confucian kinship structure, the most frequently represented and discussed examples of whom were courtesans. Selling their talents

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392 Mann, Precious Records, 148-65.
393 Ibid.
394 Ibid., 159.
395 Francesca Bray distinguishes the government-endorsed ideology and the mindset of the profit-driven commoner families by labeling the former type of female labor “womanly work” and the latter “woman’s work.” See Bray, Technology and Gender, 256-60.
396 Ibid., 132, 143-44.
and bodies for a living outside of marriage, courtesans in the Qing dynasty were criticized for their indolence, moral indecency, and disloyalty to the family. Nonetheless, toward the end of the Qing dynasty, the representations of courtesan entertainment underwent sweeping changes and became a flashpoint for modernizing impulses in major cities such as Shanghai and Guangzhou. Catherine Yeh’s studies effectively outlines the symbiotic relationship between the emerging print industry and the figure of the courtesan that modernized Shanghai urban culture by introducing Western products and taste into the world of affluence and leisure, in turn, remolding the status of the courtesan into a proto-modern, countrywide celebrity. The courtesan’s refashioned image increased business opportunities and opened new doors of possibilities for women’s public role. Laikwan Pang further elaborates upon the performative and advertising capacity of photography that Shanghai courtesans utilized to create a new public persona, combining tradition and modernity and appealing to potential patrons, many of whom were drawn from the new bourgeoisie class.

Following Shanghai’s lead, Guangzhou in the late Qing also saw the rise of a new courtesan culture prompted by and at the same time shaping the developing popular press, resulting in the increased visibility of women in public both as agents producing changes and objects of connoisseurship. For instance, Heavenly Delight News (Tianqu bao 天趣報, pub. 1905-1911), a popular tabloid newspaper, presented the latest news of the brothel world in Guangzhou and Hong Kong and supported new possibilities for the ways in which the audience could fantasize, see, and interact with the courtesans, whose anecdotes and images were now

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397 Mann, Precious Records, 121. Nonetheless, Gail Hershatter points out that courtesanship was intimately tied to kinship, as some madams purchased young girls to raise as adopted daughters and future courtesans, while courtesans might also train their daughters for this profession. See Hershatter, Dangerous Pleasures, 75-76.

398 Yeh, Shanghai Love.

399 Pang, The Distorting Mirror, 69-81.
reproduced and circulated in large quantities thanks to the advent of the new printing technology. In addition, photographs of courtesans were regularly published and sometimes given out as free gifts to the readers, allowing for these women’s public self-staging even as it led to the objectification of their image, both of which contributed to and benefited from a burgeoning commodity culture. Under the sponsorship of local merchants and brothels, Heavenly Delight News also launched “flower list” (huabang 花榜) competitions starting in 1907, in which courtesans were evaluated based on the categories of beauty and talent, and those who received the most recommendations were awarded the same honorary titles as top-ranking imperial scholars in the civil service examination. The winners in these contests, who received extensive coverage in Heavenly Delight News, not only helped boost newspaper sales but also enjoyed an upsurge in their popularity to the extent that some became the concubines of wealthy men. Such contests continued into the early Republican period and were renamed, with a modern twist, “flower kingdom elections” (huaguoxuanju 花国选举), bestowing the champions leadership titles in the Republican government such as “president” or “premier,” although these events were officially banned in 1926 due to intense objections from local feminist leaders. These phenomena pointed to the formation of a culture of spectacle in which images of women became widely accessible and were treated as objects of commercial value and sexual fantasy.

400 For the background and content of The Heavenly Delight News, see Liang, Guangzhou Baoye, 30.


402 Ibid., 130-34.

403 Elizabeth Remick, Regulating Prostitution in China: Gender and Local State Building, 1900-1937 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 116-19. Also, see Nanfang dushi bao, et al., Guangzhou Jiuwen, 56-61. The notion that acing the “flower kingdom election” validated the credentials of a courtesan was channeled into popular works during this period; as proof of her beauty and fame, White Rose, the female protagonist of the Cantonese Opera Poisonous Rose analyzed in Chapter 4, was said to be the Flower Kingdom President. See Du meigui, 4-5.
although one should not neglect the courtesans’ active participation in the production, staging, and distribution of such imagery for their own gains. The influence of this culture of spectacle upon modern female occupations will be elaborated upon in Part III.

As the late Qing era also saw the mechanization of the silk industry in Guangdong, women started to enter factories as workers. This, too, attracted public attention. The incipient feminist reforms in the late Qing that began to support women’s education and employment coincided with new developments in sericulture in Guangdong. The introduction of new silk reeling technologies in the Pearl River Delta region during the late nineteenth century, such as the steam-powered filature and treadle-reeling machine, brought skilled female laborers out of their family enterprises into factories.404 Meanwhile, despite the new possibilities of work and public activism available to women, their proper social role was still heatedly contested, as intellectuals’ conceptualization of women’s virtue, talent, heroism, motherhood, and political engagement could range from complete adherence to Confucian principles to the valorization of the new to the utmost degree.405 It is therefore not surprising that female factory workers became a subject of public discussion. The point of contention, however, lay not only in the legitimacy of their employment, but also in their liaison with the notorious marital patterns of their native area.

One of the earliest pictorial newspapers in Guangdong, Feasting on Spectacles Pictorial, provides a rare glimpse into the visual imagining of this new social figure. This publication prioritized reporting spectacles to spread new knowledge about the world and satisfy a sense of curiosity of its urbanite audience, and it attempted to reach potential lower class readers by


405 For a thorough discussion of various types of femininities put forth by intellectuals in the late Qing, see Joan Judge, The Precious Raft of History.
blending text with image. In its search for novelty, women were often seen as newsworthy subjects, perhaps due to their unprecedented public presence and allegedly scandalous behavior.

In a report titled, “Female Workers Made Disturbances,” which narrates a labor strike by women working in a silk factory in the Pearl River Delta area, the artist Yin Guan 尹煥 (1856-1930) depicts a lively scene of confrontation in which a female crowd standing outside a compound point their fingers, glare at, and rebuke the management at the door (Figure 47). This line drawing presents naturalistic details of the social surroundings and individualized human expressions to capture the drama of the labor protest. The entrance of the factory, to which the reader’s eyes are directed, serves as a visual divider of the inner and outer spaces, emphasizing the mobility and feisty behavior of the women demonstrators. The pole-carrier under the tree who appears to be hard at work further contrasts with the women’s transgression of traditional gender boundaries and their disreputable indolence. If women’s employment at an industrial enterprise was unusual enough for readers at that time, the fact that they intentionally chose to strike and cause social unrest was definitely scandalous and great material for boosting newspaper sales. Perhaps to add to the sensational value of this image, the author comments in the caption,

[Factory employment as silk-reelers] can also be considered as an economic privilege of womankind… but in all things under heaven, there are always advantages and disadvantages that counterbalance each other. Many women from the Shunde area can live on their own labor, and in principle this is an incredibly worthy endeavor, but because of this, [they] often develop the terrible habit of returning to their natal family after marriage and never coming back.

亦婦女輩一大利權也……天下事，利弊恆有相倚伏，順邑婦女多能自食其力，本絕佳事，而每緣此釀成歸寧不返惡習。

406 See the “Explanations on how to read the publication in the first issue” (chuankan shili 創刊釋例) of Feasting on Spectacles Pictorial, cited in Liang, Guangzhou Baoye, 38.

407 For a biography of the artist Yin Guan, see Li, Guangdong xiandai huaren zhuan, 20-22.
Despite the ostensibly celebratory commentary on women’s employment, the author questions the degree of mobility and independence that this gives to women by criticizing their refusal to settle in their husbands’ families. This practice, known as buluojia 不落家 or “delayed transfer marriage” in English-language scholarship, had long been a characteristic of the Pearl River Delta area and denigrated as an immoral marital custom. Since at least the Ming dynasty, women in the Pearl River Delta region had participated in a marital practice in which they immediately went back to their natal family after their wedding and did not assume virilocal residence until they were pregnant. Many of these bridemaids’ prolonged stays in their natal households were welcomed, since they were expected to continue to contribute their income to their parents. A large number of women also chose to declare their pursuit of lifelong spinsterhood by participating in a hairdressing ritual known as shuqi 梳起, in order to avoid the obligations of marriage and maintain an independent lifestyle. The rise of mechanized silk factories, in which bridemaids and sworn spinsteres were viewed as preferred employees, most likely contributed to longer duration of the bridemaids’ uxorilocal residence or to their ultimate refusal to settle in their husbands’ families, in addition to their augmented economic autonomy and physical mobility. As a result, the author’s statement reflect the deep-seated concerns of Confucian-minded officials and intellectuals in the Qing dynasty—especially those outside of the region—who had always criticized this custom as infringing upon ritual and gender propriety. We can thus infer that public attitude toward women’s increasing visibility

408 Stockard, Daughters of the Canton Delta, 1-30.

409 Similar to the bridemaids in delayed transfer marriages, sworn spinsteres (zishu 自梳女) financially supported their families by working in silk factories or as domestic helpers in wealthy households in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, or even southeast Asia. See ibid., 70-101.

410 Ibid., 102-16.
remained ambivalent, although such concerns were voiced mainly through the allegedly immoral marriage practice of these factory women.

Part II Women on the Edge: Popular Portraits of Female Domestic Helpers in Republican Guangzhou

During the Republican era, alongside the establishment of modern infrastructures and the promotion of Western-imported ideas such as gender equality and nationalism, Guangzhou saw the emergence of a “female occupation movement.” The government officials and intellectuals behind this campaign built upon the support for women’s education and employment in the late Qing era and put forth an ideal of professional women, who shared significant similarities with the New Woman figure and were mainly defined by a background in new-style education, self-sufficient lifestyle, diligence, and dedication to serving the nation. As a result, any type of working women who had already existed prior to the Republican period, such as female domestic helpers, were marginalized from this discourse, as they could not be conveniently placed into the emancipatory logic of the modernizing state.

This section analyzes the imagery of female domestic helpers in the popular culture against the backdrop of the official female occupation movement, in order to unpack the complex understandings of marriage, female sexuality, female labor, class structure, and legitimate regional culture. Popular cultural commentators often satirized majie not only for their alleged sexual misconduct and crossing of class boundaries, but also for their economic independence, which threatened the commentators’ conceptions of the modern family and normative reproduction. The female domestic helpers were also denounced for their illicit trafficking in young girls as maidservants, a fact that uncovers an intriguing hierarchy of
women’s liberation according to the women’s age, occupation, and agency. The sarcastic tone notwithstanding, the authors’ interest primarily lies in luring the readers’ attention with the female domestic helpers’ exotic sexual lifestyle; they concentrate, especially, on stories of the domestic helpers’ homoerotic relations with their mistresses or other lower class women. These accounts of *majie* were often printed in tabloid newspapers with the purpose of triggering the readers’ prurient interest and solidifying an imagined sense of communal ties between the teller and audience for such hearsay. The commentators’ satirical stance was therefore to a large extent geared toward affirming their own moral pride and confining these women to their proper place in history, rather than proposing a feasible path toward gender reform and social progress.

New Culture intellectuals identified economic dependence as a key element of the “women’s problem,” which in turn constituted the core of their attacks against the Confucian system for causing China to lag behind the rest of the world. According to their explanations, women had been reduced to men’s slaves and playthings in the old society, resulting in their lack of personhood, which was manifested by an absence of individual consciousness, literacy, and financial self-sufficiency.411 Education and career development, which would grant women independent personhood, make them the equals of men, and help support the national economy, therefore, became the defining traits of the New Woman figure and also the top priorities in the New Culture advocates’ call for women’s emancipation. In so doing, the New Culture intellectuals also challenged the traditional gender division of labor by endorsing women’s physical mobility and entry into all sectors of the public workforce, since they argued for women’s capacity to carry out job responsibilities that had long been exclusively assigned to the outer, male domain. The ideal of professional women thus created was part and parcel to the New Woman project aimed to transform the female masses into educated, independent citizens

of the modern Chinese nation-state who would “pursue a human life unrestricted by centuries-old gender norms.”

These new ideologies regarding female occupations were further elaborated in the agenda of the feminist movement in Guangzhou during the 1920s. During the mid-1920s, in the midst of the mass women's movement that formed part of the preparatory campaign for the Northern Expedition, female occupation was repeatedly brought up as a crucial issue for the success of the movement. For instance, Liu Hengjing (1902-?), a Columbia University graduate who served as the secretary of the Women’s Department in the Guomindang Central Bureau, published an article in the government-funded Canton Republican Daily in 1926 to promote an “occupation movement” (zhiye yundong) in order to materialize their call for equal rights for women in the workplace. Outlining women’s subjugation and pitiful reliance on their husbands in the traditional society, Liu stresses the promotion and acquisition of occupations as the necessary means to women’s emancipation. She also criticizes male monopoly over most jobs and finds it important to lift the monopoly by allowing women to enter these fields so that they can secure financial independence. Most significantly, Liu urges the local government bureaus to hire female clerks, a strategy that she argues will turn the city of Guangzhou into a leading example for the rest of the nation. Women’s occupations were viewed not only as the marker of women’s new personhood and gender equality, but also as the emblem of a modern city that would inspire emulation in others.


413 Gender equality in wages was one of the main slogans in the Women’s Day celebrations in Guangzhou during the preparation for the Northern Expedition. See Gilmartin, Engendering the Chinese Revolution, 153.

During the 1930s, women’s work was still generally encouraged, as testified to by the government order issued in 1931 that mandated each bureau of the provincial government to hire more female employees, and by the number of women in different job positions and female students enrolled in the normal schools and professional training schools in the government-sponsored 1935 *Guangzhou Yearbook.* However, the underlying ideology seems to have taken a conservative turn. For instance, three female professional training schools offered courses that were traditionally deemed suitable for women, such as embroidery, Western-style tailoring, and handicrafts, while other professional training schools that specialized in sports, agriculture, commerce, journalism, and engineering seldom recruited female students. These trends likely were influenced by the regional warlord Chen Jitang’s conservative stance favoring the restoration of Confucian teachings as a source of spiritual renewal and targeting perceived moral decay at all levels of local society. Chen specifically separated the purposes of education for men and women, believing that the latter should be trained to excel in domestic management and childrearing in order to serve the Chinese nation-state by becoming virtuous wives and good

415 Guangdong shengzhengfu 廣東省政府 [Guangdong Provincial Government], “Tongchi duoliang luyong nüzhiziyuan” 通飭多量錄用女職員 [A general order for our government bureaus to hire female employees in greater number], *Guangdong shengzhengfu gongbao* Guangdong shengzhengfu gongbao, June 24, 1931, 30. Out of the female population numbered at 448923 in Guangzhou in the year 1932, roughly 30 percent (133166) were reported as working or attending schools, and the statistics were as follows: 1319 were government clerks, 960 peasants, 2164 teachers, 993 store clerks, 4602 merchants, 50331 factory workers, 842 clergywomen (*zongjiaojia* 宗教家), 2466 freelancers (*ziyouye* 自由業), 779 in “other miscellaneous professions,” 25375 students, 43278 making a living on boats (out of which 709 worked in boat brothels), and 57 working without permanent residence. See Guangzhou nianjian bianzuan weiyuanhui, "Renkou" 人口 [Population], vol. 4 of *Guangzhou nianjian*, 12-24. From 1931 to 1933, it was estimated that 596 women graduated from professional training schools, and 210 women graduated from normal schools. See the three statistical charts from 1931 to 1933 in Guangzhou nianjian bianzuan weiyuanhui, "Jiaoyu" 教育 [Education], vol. 12 of *Guangzhou nianjian*, 38-39.


417 Chen Jitang was most renowned for his endorsement for using Confucian classics as the curriculum in elementary and middle schools and for restoring the rituals for Confucius. For his arguments in regard to the reform of a person’s mind based on Confucian principles for different occupational groups, see Chen Jitang, “Xinli gaizao” 心理改造 [The reformation of the mind], in *Chen Jitang yanjiu ziliao: 1928-1936* 陳濟棠研究資料: 1928-1936 [Research Materials on Chen Jitang: 1928-1936], ed. Guangdong sheng dang’an guan (Guangzhou: Guangdong sheng dang’an guan, 1985), 238-71.
mothers (xianqi liangmu 賢妻良母). As Ling-ling Lien’s study of career women in Republican China reveals, this celebration of “healthy motherhood” as an educational goal and objective of party-led women’s work was not a phenomenon specific to Guangzhou but occurred throughout the nation. Such conservative gender ideals were in fact part of the New Life Movement initiated by the Guomindang central regime in Nanjing, which promoted the restoration of Confucian ethics in order to strengthen the Chinese nation-state.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, an existing category of working women—the female domestic helpers—is evidently missing in the flower market analogy. They are also omitted from the governmental discourse on female occupations, perhaps due to the fact that, in spite of their financial autonomy, they could not fulfill the modernist ideals of female emancipation and professional womanhood. Variously known as majie, female servants (yongfu 傭婦), or the black-garment brigade (wuyidui 烏衣隊), these women were seen as sisters of the silk factory workers in the Pearl River Delta area examined in the first section and likewise noted for their marginal status from the orthodox family structure. One of the most notable characteristics of female domestic helpers was their appearance, which embodied not only their

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418 Chen Jitang, “Jiaoyujie ying zhuyi de jidian yaoyi” 教育界應注意的幾點要義 [Several key points that deserve the attention of the education field], in Chen Jitang yanjiu ziliao: 1928-1936, 325. Combining two separate terms in circulation since the imperial period to imbue traditional womanly virtues with nationalist desires, the phrase xianqi liangmu constructs an ideal modern woman who maintains a hygienic, happy household with a contented husband and healthy children as a fulfillment of her citizenship duties. For its definitions, usage, and connections with other family and educational ideologies in the Republican period, see Helen N. Schneider, Keeping the Nation's House: Domestic Management and the Making of Modern China (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 27-29, 66-70.

419 Lien, “Searching for the ‘New Womanhood’,” 91-140.

occupational identity but also their marginal status as sworn spinster, and sometimes even an imagined sexual adventurism. A rare example of the visual representation of *majie* can be seen in the illustration to a series of two articles titled, “A Record of the Myriad Peculiarities of Female Domestic Helpers (Figure 48).” A brush-and-ink line drawing in the style of the beauty painting tradition, this image portrays a young woman wearing a black blouse, black trousers and black flats, with her hair tied into a chignon. In local society, her all-black outfit was commonly known as the “*majie* outfit” and corresponds to the term “black-garment brigade,” a label used by contemporary observers to visually identify women in this occupational group.421 This attire sets her apart from the trendy appearance of female students, wives from wealthy families, or actresses, all of whom wore clothes and accessories associated with the fashionable Modern Girl.422 If the woman’s black attire represents a line of work that is seemingly out of touch with the modern world, her liminality is further reinforced by the chignon, the mark of sworn spinsters who were separated from the orthodox family structure. Paradoxically, the artist of this image chooses to accentuate the curve of the woman’s bottom, perhaps to hint at the purportedly licentious nature of female domestic helpers.

The emphasis on the woman’s voluptuous buttocks and allusion to her promiscuity in this image are not coincidental, for many popular writers were fond of commenting on the female domestic helpers’ sexual transgressions. In a discussion of different kinds of *majie* according to

421 For the use of the term “*majie* outfit,” see, for example, the news story on a female domestic helper suspected by the police for clandestine prostitution in Anonymous, “jingcha soucha lüdian huo yanhua, dasan daoyou wushui yinyuan” [The police arrested an opium den waitress in the hotel, and disrupted the fleeting intimacy of the opium addicts], *Yuehua bao*, May 10, 1930, 6. The label “black-garment brigade” is evoked in, for example, Gengming 庚明, “yuesu nüyong zhi qubie” [The distinctions among the female domestic helpers in the Guangdong tradition], *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, August 5, 1925, 4.

422 For a comparison of outfits worn by different types of local women, see Xiaobailian 小白臉 [Pretty Boy], “Guangzhou funü mianmianguan” [Various perspectives on women in Guangzhou], *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, May 30, 1925, 4. A similar comparison was later made in Shubo 叔波, “Jindai funü zhi zhuangshu” [Women’s attire in recent years], *Yuehua bao*, May 11, 1930, 1.
their age, experience, and responsibilities, the author mentions a type called the “personal maid” (jinshen 近身), who was in charge of dressing the mistress’s hair but would often “gain the favor of the master who ‘orders her to make his bed,’ and seize the chance to eventually marry him (sheung lo heung 上爐香, lit. to make an incense offering).”\footnote{Gengming, “yuesu nüyong zhi qubie.” The bed-making phrase refers to a famous line spoken by the male protagonist Zhang Sheng from the Yuan-dynasty drama \textit{Story of the Western Wing} to show his affection for his lover Cui Yingying’s maidservant Crimson. See Wang Shifu, \textit{The Story of the Western Wing}, trans. Stephen H. West and Wilt L. Idema (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 129.} To vividly represent the personal maid’s seduction and cunning, the writer evokes a Cantonese slang “to make an incense offering,” which originally refers to a prostitute leaving her profession to marry into a commoner household.\footnote{For a discussion of this slang, see Cheng Po Hung 尹寶鴻, \textit{Xiangjiang fengyue: Xianggang de zaoqi changji changsuo} 香江風月：香港的早期娼妓場所 [Early brothels in Hong Kong] (Hong Kong: The University of Hong Kong University Museum and Art Gallery, 2003), 57.} This mockery of the majie’s “upward mobility” is also found in an article on the various types of lower-class women who became concubines of wealthy men in Guangzhou. In addition to women from poor families, indentured maidservants, prostitutes, and female singers, female domestic helpers were also listed as one of the possible candidates with whom their masters would “bestow their favor and engage in flirtatious and abandoned acts, thus turning into laughing stalks of newspapers.”\footnote{Wugong 武功, “Naqie tan” 納妾談 [A discussion of concubinage], \textit{Guangzhou minguo ribao}, September 18, 1925, 9.} The rise in the majie’s status was particularly ridiculed in this case, for it resulted from dissipation and illicit liaison with their masters. Even though these writers never explicitly stated the reason behind their disapproval of these women’s affairs with their masters, it may be inferred that they applied the same standard of female chastity toward all women, working or not.

Additionally, what the authors often found ironic was the fact that female domestic helpers were so erotically driven that they always seemed to succumb to temptation and break
their vows of spinsterhood. In a story titled, “the Abridged Biography of Rooster Spirit,” the author narrates two female domestic helpers who fell for their sweet-talking, licentious master nicknamed Rooster Spirit (Sang gai ching 生雞精, a Cantonese slang for womanizer). The first female domestic helper was initially able to refuse the advances of Rooster Spirit, but she later acceded to his wishes after he promised to pay her two hundred foreign silver dollars, only to realize that she had been cheated and lost her virginity to a scoundrel. The next female domestic helper was not only impregnated by Rooster Spirit but also became sexually involved with his son when the son came home for vacation. By clearly spelling out the two woman’s identity as sworn spinsters, the writer lampoons the breach of their celibacy pledge, as they are unable to discern Rooster Spirit’s deceitfulness or to withstand sexual desire.

Although the New Culture discourse encouraged women to obtain economic autonomy by entering the workforce, the popular writers almost always portray the self-sufficiency of the majie in a negative light and deride these women’s seemingly backward practices of delayed transfer marriage and sworn spinsterhood. One author expresses such a belief in an essay on the financial hardships of majie specializing in dressing women’s hair at a time when many women have started to cut their hair short. This type of majie, known as hairdressing servants (shuyong 梳傭), were hired not only by households in need of domestic services but also by individual customers who relied on their hairdressing skills. Even though hairdressing servants had once been able to save money and make an independent living, due to the dwindling demand for their expertise their income was reduced significantly, a fact that leads to the author’s

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427 Feiying 飛鷹 [Flying Eagle], “Shuyong kouzhong zhi zoutouwulu 梳傭口中之走頭無路 [The quandary according to the Hairdressing Servants], Yuehua bao, July 25, 1930, 1.
conclusion, “perhaps this can curtail the horrid customs of celibacy and delayed transfer
marriage.” (今後或因此影響，而減少此等不嫁及不落家之惡習也) Women’s financial
independence was not an asset that inspired praise from this author, but a problematic trait
resulting in their alienation from the orthodox family system.

A linkage between women’s self-sufficiency and insubordination is also emphasized in a
short story titled, “A Loving Mother,” in which a merchant Li Dahong marries a woman from the
neighboring village named Chen Lianying. Chen had previously made a good living and would
have become a sworn spinster had she not been forced by her mother to get married. Even
after she got married, Chen Lianying continued to reside in her natal residence and refuse to
settle in Li Dahong’s household, only visiting them on Dahong’s mother’s birthday or other
occasions. Only with a scheme devised by Li Dahong’s mother, in which she pretended to be ill
and summoned her daughter-in-law to take care of her, was the Li family able to coerce Lianying
to cohabitate. They further resort to surrounding her with snakes to bring about the
consummation of the marriage. This uneasy process of taming a financially independent and
strong-willed woman eventually concludes with a happy ending in which the couple finally lived
together, “respecting and loving one another deeply.”

It becomes clear that the regional customs of sworn spinsterhood and delayed transfer
marriage, even if they granted women substantial self-support, were still viewed unfavorably by
the local popular writers as impediments to a successful, sexually and emotionally fulfilled
modern marriage. These notions can be attributed to the emergence of the “small family” model
analyzed in Chapter 4. Scholar Susan Glosser argues that even if this new family discourse
supported spousal equality, individualism, monogamy, and free-choice marriage on the surface,

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428 Santan 三潭, “Cimu 慈母 [A loving mother], Guohua bao, December 3, 1933, 2.2.
it primarily served to refashion the male intellectuals into patriarchs of their small families rather than empowering women. Individual women who challenged the normative family system, such as the sworn spinsters or bridgedaughters practicing delayed transfer marriage, were considered threats to these educated men’s newly secured patriarchal authority. Since women’s financial autonomy was celebrated by the discourse on women’s work, these authors had to resort to other means to disparage their independence, including the emphasis on the backwardness of the marital customs and the plight of the husbands who allegedly lost their sexual privileges and dignity. Moreover, as women’s bodies took on greater political significance as mothers of the nation’s future citizens in late Qing and Republican China, celibate, mobile, and economically independent women had no place under the pro-reproduction, eugenistic blueprint of the state and many intellectuals. This, too, may help us understand the popular writers’ portrayals of female domestic helpers. The adverse views toward majie’s financial independence, then, exposed tensions within the larger discourses on women’s work, modern manhood, marriage and family, and reproduction.

Female domestic helpers’ economic independence was also deemed deplorable due to the belief that they were actively involved in the trafficking in young girls as indentured maidservants (also known as mui tsai 妹仔 or binü). This popular cultural conviction is precisely summed up in a local slang, “entering the city to purchase a mui tsai, and leaving the city to have a secret affair” (yup sing mai mui, ceot sing biu wui 入城買妹，出城標會), which underlines the female domestic helpers’ two most despicable deeds: their exploitation of young girls for

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429 Glosser, Chinese Visions of Family and State, 12.

commercial profit and their own pursuit of illicit sexual liaisons. Indeed, the female domestic helpers were often accused of buying and raising young girls and selling them for a much higher price as concubines or indentured maidservants when the girls reached a certain age, a crime that tainted the majie’s façade of financial independence. Angelina Chin’s study reveals that the image of mui tsai was formulated to represent China’s feudal, barbaric past, as something desperately in need of reform. Female domestic helpers, although also a preexisting, “backward” occupational group, seldom assumed the role of helpless victims in such accounts, but rather are primarily blamed as the perpetrators of the suffering of mui tsai. Not unlike the stereotypical relationship between greedy madams and vulnerable prostitutes, this dichotomy of the evil majie and the helpless mui tsai reflects a hierarchy of women’s emancipation. As they tended to be older and possessed some degree of authority and independence, the female domestic helpers could hardly fit into any of the forward-looking discourses for women and the imagined future of the city or the Chinese nation-state. Hence, their emancipatory potential was largely overlooked. Influenced, possibly, by the official discourse on mui tsai, the popular cultural commentators evoked the imagery of the female domestic helpers not only to incite sympathy for the victimized maidservants, but also to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the occupations and financial gains of such women.

More often, the authors treat female domestic helpers as sexually exotic beings and are

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431 See Xiaobailian, “Guangzhou funü mianmianguan.” This phrase is alternatively rendered as “leaving the city to purchase a mui tsai, and entering the city to have a secret affair.” See for instance, Chanchisheng 懺癡生, “Anchang shenghuo yu guai xianxiang (er)” 暗娼生活與怪現象（二）[The lives of clandestine prostitutes and bizarre phenomena: Part II], Yuehua bao, September 10, 1930, 1.

432 Feiyi, “Shuyong kouzhong zhi zoutouwulu.” See also, Chinong 癡儂, “Yongfu zhi xiezhen” 傭婦之寫真 [A portrait of female domestic helpers], Guangzhou minguo ribao, January 8, 1926, 9.

433 Chin, Bound to Emancipate, 39-64, 73-77.

434 For the binary of abusive madams and helpless prostitutes in Republican Guangzhou popular culture, see Ho, Understanding Canton, 241-48.
particularly eager to expose their homoerotic trysts. In the first part of the two-article series “A Record of the Myriad Peculiarities of Female Domestic Helpers,” the author offers an anecdote on the sexual life of the young woman A’shun, who used to be the lover of an old majie, A’sai.\footnote{Xinggong 醒公, “Sanjiao shi zhi tongxing’ai,” 三角式之同性愛 [A homosexual love triangle], Zhujiang xingqi huabao 9 (1928): 4.} When A’sai found out that A’shun also developed intimacy with A’shun’s mistress employer, a concubine who had lost the favor of her husband, A’sai was thrilled that she got to sleep with another young woman sharing the same interest. The three swore sisterhood and vowed to neither part with one another nor have sex with men. Nevertheless, A’shun soon fell in love with an unmarried military officer, inciting intense jealousy of A’sai. After A’sai storms into A’shun’s residence and lashes out against A’shun, the officer also turns furious and abandons A’shun. This story aims to ridicule not only the sexually unchecked attitudes of the three women, who cannot be satisfied by just one partner, but also the unusual sexual predilections of A’sai. Described as old, ugly and licentious, A’sai’s imagery is similar to that of the male patrons of teahouse waitresses or female singers.\footnote{For a discussion of stereotypical fans of female singers, who were sometimes known as “big uncles” (dajiu 大舅), see Chin, \emph{Bound to Emancipate}, 114-15.} It may well be the frequent crossing of gendered stereotypes that made such stories provocative and entertaining.

The homosexual relations among female domestic helpers and their mistresses is further explored by the author of an essay titled, “A Sketch of Lesbian Love,” who suggests that the majie often traveled from the Western Suburb area of Guangzhou where they worked, to a particular old bookstalls inside the city to purchase dildos.\footnote{Huangcheng 黃橙, “Tongxing lian’ai de sumiao” 同性戀愛的素描 [A sketch of lesbian love], Guangzhou zazhi, January 1, 1934, 11.} To signal the owner of the bookstall her true intent, the majie would purportedly put down her lacquer basket and lift her thumb and
pinky, a gesture which indicated the size of the dildo she desired. The mysterious aura surrounding the majie’s sex life has the effect of exoticizing these women’s image and providing vicarious excitement for the readers.

In an effort to explain the homosexual “tendencies” of female domestic helpers, the author further evokes the tropes of female independence, marriage customs, and regional culture,

Eight or nine out of ten female domestic helpers came from Shunde [county], because many Shunde women claim celibacy, or what is commonly known as “sworn spinsterhood.” Why do they claim celibacy? Perhaps half of them have inherited this custom, and the other half are compelled by their surroundings. As a result, the practice of lesbian love is very popular among Shunde women… If some of them were arranged by their parents to marry a husband, they would rather return to their natal family and pay to get a concubine for their husbands… This is for no other reason than their lesbian confidants, and also because of their independence, [acquired through their jobs as] silk reelers, so that they did not have to count on men for a living. It can be said that the practice of lesbian love is entirely caused by people like these female domestic helpers. Those who have such predilections, such as wives, young married women, concubines, and young maidens, are all infected by domestic helpers. The infectiousness of lesbianism is far greater than the infectiousness of an epidemic.438

In this passage, the author identifies majie as the main perpetrator of female-female relations and further attributes this phenomenon to the marital traditions of Shunde county and the financial autonomy of majie. Female domestic helpers’ main problem, for the author, was their infringement upon the orthodox family system by spreading this unsavory habit to women of good families. More than just a sexually aberrant creature, the female domestic helper figure therefore embodied the deplorable customs of Guangdong’s past, which were at odds with the

438 Ibid., 10.
modernizing trends of the city and the nation-state. In this particular exposition, the author seems to have little interest in the elimination or reform of this practice. Rather, he assumes the role of an ethnographer who reports exotic, albeit backward, customs to the readers, buttressing his own authorial superiority by creating stark contrasts between masculinity and femininity, heterosexuality and homosexuality, educated and unenlightened, and modernity and tradition.

It should be noted that many of the aforementioned accounts on majie were published in tabloid newspapers that also featured gossip columns about courtesans and female singers. As Angelina Chin has noted, the surge of tabloid news in Republican Guangzhou was rooted in “the intense commercialization, beginning in the 1920s, which brought about a service industry that became attentive to feminine aesthetics.” Tabloid writers tend to showcase their insider knowledge of public women’s whereabouts to fulfill the modern readers’ quest for novelty and prurience. As an example of the similarities between the ways majie and sex workers were portrayed, articles discussing different kinds of female domestic helpers largely resembled brothel guidebooks, which provided classification and ranking of prostitutes. Even though their mocking tone toward majie’s sexual degradation, their image as an outdated regional tradition, and their employers’ uncontrollable lust, can hardly be mistaken, these accounts also betray an intimate connection among sex, gossip, class and the burgeoning popular press in a modern city like Guangzhou. In other words, it was precisely the allegedly shameful secrets of these working women, along with their counterparts in other fields of employment, that enabled the authors to reap commercial benefit. These writers’ use of satire, which served to reinforce orthodox gender norms by denying majie a place in proper femininity, the modern family model,

439 Chin, Bound to Emancipate, 106.

440 For a discussion of brothel guidebooks and the meanings behind their classification scheme in Republican Shanghai, see Hershatter, Dangerous Pleasures, 35.
or the official discourse of women’s liberation, must therefore be understood within the context of the commercial orientation of their work.

The interest in majie was hardly a local phenomenon but gained currency across the broader cultural landscape of Republican China. In an ethnographic record published in the 1920s that includes peoples and customs across the country, the author and famous poet Hu Pu’an 胡樸安 (1878-1947) sensationalized the conduct of majie in Guangdong, who allegedly lured their mistresses to run away from home and to engage in immoral deeds, including parading out in the open in sumptuous attire and flirting with passers-by in the hopes of initiating an illicit affair. This entry serves to highlight the sexual abnormality that not only came to signify the occupational identity of female domestic helpers, but also symbolized an entire region. In spite of the government authorities and intellectuals’ effort to promote the ideal of working women and build up the city’s image, what people outside of the province found interesting and representative of local income-producing women proved quite the contrary.

Part III Feasting on Flowers? Representations of New-Style Working Women in Republican Guangzhou

If female domestic helpers were mainly sidelined by the official discourse on working women, the government policies on and popular perceptions of new-style working women reflected the inherent tensions within the discourse. On one hand, many political leaders in Guangzhou criticized certain new-style women’s work, such as waitressing, as controversial or morally questionable. On the other hand, popular writers and artists portrayed all new-style

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441 Hu Pu’an 胡樸安, “Guangdong zhi majie” 廣東之媽姐 [Female domestic helpers of Guangdong], in Zhonghua quanhuo fengsu zhi 中華全國風俗志 [The all-China record of customs], ed. Hu Pu’an (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1986), 2: 375-76.
working women as infamous, transgressive Modern Girls. Their depictions demonstrate the emergence of what I call a “culture of exhibition” that encouraged the vicarious consumption of the female flesh and the continuous conflation of women’s work and public appearance with prostitution. The general message disseminated seems to discourage women from working outside of their homes by portraying them as prostitutes or exaggerating sexual scandals in which they were allegedly involved. At the same time, the textual and visual portrayals ridicule a seemingly uncontrollable outpouring of male desire that has tainted the original motivation behind the push for women to take up an occupation. The subjective experiences and voices of working women seemed ultimately lost and diluted, but borrowing Miriam Silverberg’s arguments about café waitresses in early twentieth century Japan, I will try to recover the ways in which these Guangzhou women “articulated [their] own sensual desires and [their] protests against the constraints of [their] workplace.”

As indicated above, the local government had generally encouraged women to enter the workforce in the 1920s and 1930s. Nonetheless, it had denounced and repeatedly banned certain new-style female occupations, one of the most notable instances of which was waitressing. Such condemnations perhaps resulted from the failure of these lines of work to fulfill the New Woman ideal. For instance, in 1922, when a ban on teahouse waitresses was issued by the provincial government, a group of protesters consisting of feminist activists and labor representatives came into conflict with the officials. Due to the rise of teahouses and restaurants as major entertainment venues in the city, female entertainers and waitresses were subsequently hired to


\[443\] Anonymous, “Guangdong nüzi zhiye zhi dayundong, qingyuan kaifang chashi núzhaozai” 廣東女子職業之大運動，請願開放茶室女招待 [The grand movement of female occupations in Guangdong: Calling for the reemployment of teahouse waitresses], Shenbao, March 2, 1922, 7.
attract male customers. Feminist leaders, initially advocating for women’s employment in these venues as an important step toward self-independence, became greatly frustrated by the governmental ban on teahouse waitresses and the subsequent arrest of teahouse owners who continued to hire women as chefs. In the ensuing debate between government officials and female service laborers represented by feminist advocates, the former insisted that they, as firm believers in the New Culture discourse, also supported the expansion of women’s occupations, but found it necessary to prohibit teahouse waitresses in order to protect women’s personhood since many men could easily seize the chance to make sexual advances on these women. By suggesting that there were many other career options for these now unemployed women, the officials therefore clearly drew a boundary between waitressing as a sexually disreputable occupation and other seemingly respectable professions. The feminist advocates, however, did not accept the officials’ explanations but rather emphasized their own authority as the spokespersons for women’s welfare. They retorted that most waitresses were hardworking, morally upright women, and the male customers who sexually harassed the waitresses should receive the punishment instead. What was more, these feminist leaders disagreed with the officials’ class and gender division of labor, maintaining that waitressing was just as honorable as becoming doctors and nurses, especially if male teahouse servers were allowed to keep their jobs. These women’s leaders further regarded Guangzhou as a model city where the principle of gender equality was dutifully observed, and warned the government authorities to safeguard this local tradition by respecting the teahouse waitresses’ right to work.

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444 Chin, *Bound to Emancipate*, 99. Chin also theorizes a chronological trajectory for the development of female service laborers and suggests that waitresses appeared in the mid to late 1920s following the dwindling popularity of female singers in Ibid., 101. However, an article published in the *Canton Republican Daily* states that waitresses were already hired in large numbers starting in 1920. See A’xiang 阿翔, “Niannian lai Guangzhou chalou jinhua xiaoshi” [A brief history of evolution in Guangzhou teahouses in the Recent Twenty Years], *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, May 13, 1925, 4.
From this heated exchange of opinions, it is clear that both sides utilized New Culture terminology such as “personhood” and “women’s emancipation” to buttress their legitimacy as guardians of a modernist discourse that promised not only gender equality but also progress in local society. In spite of their opposing views toward the gender and class divisions of labor, it can also be argued that the ideal of sexual morality still plays an important role for both camps in defining the appropriateness of women’s work. For instance, even the feminist leaders who declared waitressing a decent occupation still painstakingly underlined the sexual integrity of these women and dismissed those who allegedly worked as clandestine prostitutes as a rare minority. This debate hence demonstrates the conflicting aspects of the discourse of working women that at once inspired women to earn respect by entering the workforce but also placed their sexuality under intense public scrutiny. Additionally, in her discussion of the contradictions within the construction of selfhood for the female protagonists in Ding Ling’s stories, Tani Barlow proposes that New Women in the 1920s and 1930s were expected to become both desired objects and desiring subjects that learned to challenge masculine dominance.445 New Women were thus caught in a dilemma, as they were unable to either reject their sexuality or embrace the society’s call for their bodily emancipation. In addition, historian Bryna Goodman convincingly suggests that even if women decided to pursue careers that were seemingly honorable and beneficial to national progress, they were by default “tainted both by the erotic effect of their appearance in public and the stain of their desire for money.”446 It was perhaps for these reasons that both the political authorities and feminist advocates in the 1922 teahouse waitress controversy delineated appropriate female occupations along the lines of the New


446 Goodman, “The Vocational Woman,” 276. For an example of professional women who encountered sexual scandals and underwent intense public debates, see Goodman’s analysis of the suicide of a female secretary named Xi Shangzhen in ibid., 272-81.
Woman ideal; women’s moral reputations had to remain unquestionably chaste as they stepped into public space.

Whereas the official discourse presents a purified image of working women and excludes new-style female occupations that were deemed sexually immodest, popular writers and artists chose to conflate all newly emerged women’s work with the Modern Girl prototype. One of the most conspicuous ways in which all new-style working women were associated with the Modern Girl in local popular culture is that these women were often depicted as donning the signature Modern Girl look. For example, the female store clerk and female secretary in artist Huang Huanniao’s illustrated anecdotes series (Figures 49 and 50) are both seen with a bobbed hairstyle and form-fitting qipao dress that accentuates their breasts and exposes their arms. Their appearance was essentially no different from that of the teahouse waitress featured in a cartoon titled, “The Ubiquitous Appearance of Camellias (Figure 51).” The conscious choice of these artists to portray their female characters in the Modern Girl style underscores a blurring of class and status lines that the new-style women’s work entailed and, perhaps, a belief in the inherent sexual and financial immodesty of all working women. The linkages between the Modern Girl icon and new career opportunities for women were brought up by commentators not only in Guangzhou but also in other major cities in East Asia, such as Shanghai and Tokyo, pointing to the transnational reach of reformist ideologies, capitalist economic forces, and resistance to both.

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447 Camellia, or chahua 茶花, is a euphemism for teahouse waitresses.

448 Lingling Lien argues that career women in Republican Shanghai were similarly viewed as “flower vases,” or fashionable yet frivolous modern women. See Lien, “Searching for the ‘New Womanhood’,” 60-69, 186-87. Miriam Silverberg also argued that there was significant overlap between the intellectual discourse on the Modern Girl and on working women in pre-World War II Japan. See Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense*, 66-67.
Popular authors evoked the Modern Girl figure in their portrayals of the supposedly reputable, upper-middle class professional women to make fun of the government-sponsored New Woman ideal. An illustrative example can be seen in a satirical commentary on the female clerks in a department store. Although the store was known for its endorsement of the women’s occupation movement, the author points out that there are three things still needed by the store in order to better support their female employees, namely a mirror for these women’s beautifying routine, a meeting room for their private rendezvous with their male friends, and a sizable mailbox due to the massive influx of fan mail. Even though the writer argues that these items could help improve women’s efficiency at work, one cannot miss his insinuation that the female store clerks are obsessed with their appearances and sexually loose.

Another poignant attack on the perceived vanity and lewdness of career women was inspired by a governmental prohibition on outlandish attire and makeup by female clerks in the Financial Bureau in 1933. Under Chen Jitang’s regime, which supported the Nanjing government’s New Life Movement, women’s appearance became one of the authorities’ principal targets. One of the government’s main arguments is that the personhood of the female staff would be damaged by their immodest dress and makeup. However, the writer Liaodiao retorts that it would be futile to target female government staff for moral rectification, especially those who were upper-class wives and mistresses working just to kill time and more concerned about their looks than their personhood, job security, or the image of the government.

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449 Wuji xiansheng 無稽先生 [Mr. Nonsense], “Nüzi shangdian yingshe de sanjian shiwu” 女子商店應設的三件事物 [Three items needed in a store that hires women], Xianxiang bao, April 26, 1928, 7.

450 A full discussion of this campaign against outlandish attire can be found in Chin, Bound to Emancipate, 143-44.
This satirical critique of female government staff was nonetheless a veiled attack against the ineffective and overpowering government policies that aimed to control every aspect of citizens’ lives. For instance, the author ridicules the government’s use of the phrase “washing away makeup and extravagance” (xijing qianhua 洗淨鉛華) as an admonition for female clerks, since this matched a line spoken by the male protagonist of a Cantonese opera to urge a courtesan to leave her trade. By borrowing a line from the regional opera and delivering his message in highly gendered terms, the author thus successfully accentuates the irony of the government’s excessive concerns with seemingly trivial matters of private citizens.

The perception of all working women as Modern Girls is also conveyed by popular writers and artists’ countless portrayals of women in the public sector as objects on display. A “culture of exhibition,” influenced by the developing popular press and the modernization of courtesan entertainment in the late Qing era, had matured and come into full force during the 1920s and 1930s, by which time advertisements featured the sexy Modern Girl and transferred “an intangible promise of carnal pleasure, a girl, onto a seemingly tangible object, the transnational, corporate, commercial commodity.”

The proliferation of commercial advertisements, especially those using the Modern Girl iconography, seems to have influenced the ways in which the public saw, talked about, and consumed the image of working women. To many, the greatest accomplishment of female employment was not so much the advancement of women’s rights as relocation of female bodies from the hidden inner chambers into public view,

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451 Liaodiao, “Caiting quan nüzhiyuan xijing qianhua” 財廳勸女職員洗淨鉛華 [The Financial Bureau urged women staff to wash away their makeup], Guangzhou zazhi, September 1, 1933, 9-10.

452 The original line reads as “washing away makeup and extravagance and willingly sending away the visitors” (xijing qianhua gan xieke 洗淨鉛華甘謝客) and, according to the author, appears in the Cantonese opera Song of Exile (Ketu qiuhen 客途秋恨).

thus making access to women (visual, at least) widely available. For instance, an artist depicted a flirtatious scene in which several men wearing stylish hats and western suits turn their heads toward the display window of a hat store to look at a female employee hanging up a sign reading, “Come take a look.” The visual and verbal pun is accentuated by her skirt having been flipped over by one of the hats on display (Figure 52). Under the provocative title, “Come take a look,” which resonates with the sign, this cartoon pokes fun at the sexualized nature of women’s work in the service industry. It plays off the multiple layers of looks and objects on display. The first look is the female employee’s gaze at the hanging sign, denoting her concentration on her work and oblivion to her surroundings. The artist has incorporated subtle irony into the appearance of the woman, which is closely identified with the Modern Girl, possibly suggesting a preoccupation with her own appearance. As mentioned above, such a trait signified frivolity and unprofessionalism to many contemporary government authorities and intellectuals, and provides a contrast to the undivided focus in her gaze. The controversial nature of her work is also manifested by the accidental exposure of her legs, a fact that turns the woman into one of the commodities on display along with the products sold by the store. This incident puts into debate the purpose of her employment, especially when male passers-by look into the window, surely more interested in her bare legs than the hats. This second type of look(ing) represents male lust, which was, ironically, aroused by the increasing visibility of women in public space. Consequently, the objectified working female subject and the male onlookers all become the artist’s targets of parody and raise questions about female sexuality in the public world and both men and women’s participation in the changing economy. This parody can be characterized as “reactionary humor,” as the artist seems to embrace the conventional Confucian ideologies of women’s public presence as problematic and the masculine virtue of sexual restraint.
Central to this culture of spectacle was the assumption that female employment became an effective business promotion strategy due to the uncontrollable male desire incited by the sight of attractive women in public. Noting the seemingly sudden explosion of female employees in the service industry, a contributor to The Candid News proffered a tongue-in-cheek suggestion, Nowadays it is very commonplace to see people making money by hiring female employees. Pharmacies hire women, Western clothing stores hire women, and bookstores hire women... Even teahouses find it profitable to hire women to sell cigarettes and cosmetics. It occurred to me, since women can serve in bathhouses, it would be even better to hire women as attendants in public restrooms. In this way, each public restroom could gain an additional fifty tons of excrement a day, and wouldn’t that increase the profits of the night soil carriers? Indirectly, the government’s taxation revenue for “shit” would be even more substantial, because some people only take a crap once every few days; I’m one of them, for example. But if there were women in the public restrooms, I swear I would visit ten times a day without minding the stench. And when I didn’t have anything to crap, I’d eat more... In the future, all “enterprises” likely will be done by women; and what will be left for men to do? Mining and farming.454

現在利用女人掙錢的人,普遍極了。藥局僱女人,洋服店僱女人,書店僱女人。⋯⋯甚至在茶樓裡兜售香煙化妝品之類的東西也以女人為妙。我想,浴室既可以也用女人來伺候,廁所也僱用女人來管理倒好。如此,包管每間廁所每日可以多得屎五十噸,承辦糞溺的人,不是收入更大?而間接,政府在『糞』一項的餉也更可觀了,因為,有些人數天才嘔屎一次的,譬如我就是。如果廁所有女人,我發誓一天勞駕十次,臭也不怕。無得嘔時,多吃東西⋯⋯將來,一切『企業』大概都是女人幹的了。男人幹什麼呢?礦裡,田裡。

This passage pokes fun at not only the employers who hired working women for the sake of profit, but also the licentious male customers who would be drawn to any stores or enterprises served by women. The author even ridicules the municipal government’s infamous excrement revenue policy, implying that the authorities, just like the private employers, were preoccupied with their own financial gains instead of dedicating to the improvement of the citizens’

454 Awei 阿微, “Xianhua duoti” 閒話多提 [Bringing up random things more frequently], Chengbao, December 28, 1933, 3.
The working women put on display, their employers, the male clients, and even the municipal government, were thus all implicated in this bizarre culture of exhibition that, according to the writer, would ultimately seep into all career fields in modern Guangzhou.

Beyond the spectacle culture, the popular cultural portrayals of new-style women’s careers were best represented by the metaphor of “flower market” due to the conflation of all working women with prostitutes. In this instance, lower class women who served in the service industry and entertainment venues were perhaps more susceptible to such portrayals, even though middle-class women such as store clerks and government staff were also satirized for their sexual promiscuity, as previously noted. Writing under his nom-de-plume “Feng Fu of the World of Liquor” (Jiuzhong Feng Fu 酒中馮婦), a longtime newspaperman, novelist and popular writer Kong Zhongnan 孔仲南 (dates unknown) once painted a rosy picture of his visit to a hair salon staffed by women in an article published in the Canton Miscellany. A traditionally male-dominated business, hair salons started to hire female employees in 1931, a change much welcomed by Kong Zhongnan, who claimed to be tired of the low-quality haircuts and shaving jobs performed by men. Even though the author did not want to be perceived by others as a lecher whose sole motive in frequenting an all-woman hair salon was to chase after the “hair flowers” (nickname for female hairdressers), he eventually decided to give it a try, and was pleasantly surprised by this experience.

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455 Scholar Jui-kun Chou argues that although the municipal government promoted a series of modernization reform for night soil collection and public restroom renovation in the 1920s and 1930s, local citizens often complained bitterly about the excrement tax or the slow progress that led to the perennially unsanitary conditions of public facilities. For a full analysis see Chou, “Gonggong weisheng yu Guangzhou chengshi xiandaihua (1901-1930s),” 102-10.

456 Jiuzhong Feng Fu 酒中馮婦, ”Anhua jianfa ji”安華剪髮記 [An account of getting a haircut at the Anhua salon], Guangzhou zazhi, May 15, 1933, 9.

457 For a history of hair salons in modern Guangzhou, see Zhu Youpeng 朱由彭 et al., “Mingshi tan lifa” 名師談理髮 [Hairdressing from the experts’ point of view], Guangzhou wensh ziliao 39 (Mar. 1989): 142-60.
The one who cut my hair was a woman eighteen to twenty-two years of age. Refined as a round pearl and smooth jade, even though she is not [as beautiful as] a peony, she is still [as charming as] spring scenery (taohong liulü 桃紅柳綠, lit. red peach blossoms and green willows) and definitely not a vulgar beauty (guzihua 鼓子花, lit. bindweed). Extending her delicate hand to [cut my hair] with scissors, she was careful and gentle in her gestures, so different from the clumsy, smelly men whose behavior was reckless. In addition, [adorned] with shiny golden and jade bracelets and a necklace, she wore bright face powder and her skin exuded a fragrance, penetrating my senses. Compared to the stinking sweat and uncleanliness of the male hairdressers, there is an immeasurable difference. Although [I had to pay] an additional twenty cents from my humble wallet, it was definitely worth it.

It is worth noting that Kong Zhongnan depicts the modern occupation of female hairdressers with a repertoire of classical tropes often employed in late imperial courtesan literature. For instance, his hierarchical analogy between beautiful women and flowers resembled the ranking of courtesans, especially when he evokes the term “bindweed” that traditionally signified an unattractive prostitute. The only difference between female hairdressers and prostitutes with whom they were conflated was perhaps the fact that their charm and courteous service were compared to and preferred over the filth and carelessness of their male counterparts, though not every writer might agree with this observation. As a result, working women in the Republican period had the additional burden of competing with their male counterparts, and the association of these women’s images with elegant courtesans seemed to work in their favor, at least in this particular account.

In contrast, some associated women’s employment in the service and entertainment sectors with the seedier side of prostitution, arguing that it signaled a downfall of women’s status.

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458 For example, despite the general impression that female hairdressers treated their customers more gently than male hairdressers, a writer argued that female hairdressers actually charged twice the fee but were just as reckless as the men. See Yousi 游絲, “Nüfajiang ziwei” 女理髮匠滋味 [A taste of female hairdressers], Chengbao, December 21, 1933, 3.
and moral character. In a short story titled, “After Her Hair was Permed,” the protagonist Zhang A’li who used to be beautiful, intelligent, and virtuous, experienced just such a turn of fate when she became romantically involved with a classmate in her secondary school who was wealthy but already married.\(^{459}\) When her lover passed away due to an illness, his wife refused to let A’li live with their family, and A’li was left with no choice but to work as a waitress and support the son she bore with her late lover. A’li was said to have become increasingly flirtatious and obsessed with her looks as she started her new job and gained popularity. Her ultimate downfall, however, came when, in order to attract even more customers, she had her hair permed at a salon. Little did she know that she would eventually pay a price for her pursuit of the latest fashion, for the newest cosmetologic technology apparently had the side effect of driving a person insane. In many ways, A’li descent to the bottom of society and moral collapse resembles the cautionary tale of prostitutes who originally came from a good family background but were gradually corrupted by their line of work. The author nevertheless modernizes the content of this account by adding the use of scientific technology to expose A’li’s tragic flaws, and by creating a subtle linkage between the Modern Girl hairstyle, A’li’s questionable work ethic, and her moral downturn (based upon the conventional prostitute narrative).

What is more, popular cultural commentators tend to highlight the exchangeability of female occupations in the service and entertainment industry due to the geographical and social mobility of lower class women. Similar to the gossip about female domestic helpers, this type of account was also commonly found in tabloid newspapers. One tabloid writer observes that at different times throughout the 1920s and 1930s, when the government banned the hiring of waitresses, some business owners tried to avoid prosecution by hiring an all-female staff and

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\(^{459}\) Hanying 漢英, “Yunfa yihou” 熨髮以後 [After her hair was permed], *Guohua bao*, June 14, 1936, 4.2.
claiming their endorsement for working women; and it was extremely common for restaurant, teahouse, and opium den owners to hire women under other titles such as cashiers, noodle or dessert servers, and cigarette sellers. These strategic moves rendered the occupational identity of female employees in the service and entertainment sectors fluid. In another account, a contributor to the tabloid illustrated newspaper *Haizhu Weekly Pictorial* discusses the life of a female singer He Yaliang, who is depicted as a promiscuous woman fond of socializing with other lower-class female busybodies (*sangu liupo*). He Yaliang first goes to a theatrical troupe to learn the arts of a female opera actress, but after her sexual relationships with different men are reported to the police and the troupe is disbanded, she becomes a teahouse waitress and later a singer, engaging in numerous love affairs along the way. Even though she never sinks into prostitution, He Yaliang’s frequent occupational changes are depicted as directly linked to her overactive sexuality. In other cases, writers observed that prostitutes became waitresses when business in the brothels dwindled, and it was also allegedly prevalent for waitresses or other types of female servers to sink back into the debauched life of prostitution. These tabloid writers often turned a sexualizing, mocking gaze on these women by erasing the differences between women’s work in the service industry and sex work. Moreover, by circulating hearsay

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460 On the opening of a teahouse fully staffed by women, see “Nüzhaoadai youlai huodong” 女招待又來活動 [Here come the waitresses again], *Xianxiang bao*, December 13, 1924, 2.1. On hiring women as cashiers, noodle servers and cigarette sellers in teahouses, see Pan Ying 潘應, “Gouxin doujiao zhi zhaolaishu” 勾心鬥角之招徠術 [A business promotion strategy that involves intense machinations], *Yuehua bao*, February 28, 1930, 1. For another account of female cigarette sellers in teahouses, also see Fogong, “Bianxiang de nüzhaoadai.” On hiring women to make and serve desserts in opium dens, see Basu 拔俗, “Biantai yanhua” 變態煙花 [Opium den waitresses in disguise], *Guohua bao*, March 29, 1935, 1.1.


462 On prostitutes who became waitresses, see, for instance, “Jinu jizi kaishe yandian” 妓女集資開設晏店 [Prostitutes raised funds to open a lunch restaurant], *Xianxiang bao*, December 13, 1924, 2.1. On female servers who turned into prostitutes, see for instance the story of Chen Liumei in Hechao 鶴嘲, “Gaixing jiehun zhì yiwén” 改姓結婚之異聞 [The strange tale of changing one’s surname when marrying], *Yuehua bao*, January 9, 1930, 1.
about mobile women in the service and entertainment industries, they also built an intimate community with their audience based on shared knowledge, albeit at the women’s expense. The culture of exhibition, the use of tropes commonly found in courtesan literature and cautionary tales of prostitution, and emphasis on the fluidity among various female careers and prostitution altogether linked all working women, and to a greater extent lower class female servers and entertainers, to the Modern Girl, subject to the sexualizing gaze and ridicule by male writers and artists.

Even though almost all of these materials were penned by men, in which the voices of women under representations were mediated, interpreted and also manipulated, it can be argued that these women were highly independent subjects who not only conformed to but at times resisted the commodity culture and gender expectations placed upon them. Some of these women were even portrayed as models of patriotism in contrast to the weak, indulgent men who were dragging China behind. In a short story titled, “The New Camellia,” a young dandy named Bihuasheng 筆花生 spends all his leisure hours frequenting teahouses and restaurants, and later starts pursing a beautiful waitress named A’hua. After proposing to A’hua, who agreed to meet him in a hotel, Bihuasheng is elated by the thought that he could finally have sex with her; little does he expect that A’hua would give him a lecture on the importance of national salvation. Criticizing Bihuasheng for wasting his life and his father’s money on entertainment, A’hua laments that she has to work as a waitress to take care of her elderly father and sick mother; if given the chance, she would rather go to the battlefield and fight the enemy. Ashamed of his indulgence and touched by A’hua’s patriotic spirit, Bihuasheng eventually rectifies his past errors and joins the army. Although A’hua is portrayed more as a helper to awaken patriotism in

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the politically backward male protagonist, her image resembles that of the New Woman who dared to express her own voice and was acutely aware of the national crisis in spite of her limited and objectified working conditions. “The New Camellia” further reflects considerable overlap between the imagery of the New Woman and the Modern Girl, as encapsulated by the title that marks A’hua as an enlightened teahouse “flower.” Indeed, historians have noted the numerous similarities shared by the two, as “New Women were often avid consumers and passionate advocates of ‘free love,’ and Modern Girls embraced a variety of political projects including socialism and nationalism.”464 As scholar Sarah Stevens astutely observes, the New Woman and Modern Girl figures in fact “can only be distinguished by a close investigation of their functions within the literary text,” as the former often symbolizes the bright side of modernity and the latter the anxiety and estrangement produced by urban life.465 The tensions and commonalities between the two figures reveal the difficulty in defining a modern working woman, whose appearance, class status, education, political aspiration, work ethics, and sexuality became points of contention by government officials, feminist leaders, and popular writers and artists.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to explore the portrayals of women’s work in the government discourse and popular culture of 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou to demonstrate the contested ideals surrounding female sexual propriety, emancipation, class relations, gender division of labor, and the image of the city in the local writings and artworks. In many ways, the representations of working women in Republican Guangzhou reflected the gender ideology, regional economy,


visual trends, and print culture surrounding public women in late imperial Guangdong. For example, innovations in courtesan entertainment led to the emergence of a culture of exhibition that profoundly shaped how working women were perceived. Highlighting their economic independence and unorthodox marital customs, late Qing discussions of female workers in the silk factories of the Pearl River Delta area also foreshadowed the predominantly derogatory attitudes toward the female domestic helpers in modern Guangzhou.

Relatively new to the Republican period was the rise of a professional woman ideal that was integral to the fashioning of the New Woman figure sanctioned by both the New Culture intellectuals and the political authorities in 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou. As the epitome of modern femininity, a professional woman was required to display a new-style education, financial independence, and personhood. Missing from this officially sanctioned image of working women were their “traditional” counterparts, such as the female domestic helpers, whose financial autonomy and celibacy provoked ridicule and flights of sexual fantasy from popular cultural commentators. Rather than celebrated as a solution to the patriarchal domination of women or female economic dependence, majie were instead mocked, accused of engaging in sexual affairs with their masters, participation in the trafficking in young girls, and even homosexual practices. Their marginal status from the orthodox family structure ironically came into conflict with the new family model and pro-reproduction stance of the state and intellectuals. Unlike the indentured maidservants, the Modern Girl, and the New Woman, all of whom shared a place in the hierarchy of female emancipation, the female domestic helpers were evoked mainly as a living testimony to Guangdong and the nation’s backward past. This might explain why they were excluded from the alluring image of the flower market in modern Guangzhou in popular cultural imagination. Nonetheless, in the representations of majie, the authors often
turned to gossip stories that continued to blur the lines between all female occupations and sex work. This serves as proof of a booming popular press that was synergic with female employment and modernization; the new-style press further enabled authors to construct an imagined community with readers based on insider knowledge and the marginalization of working women.

Moreover, I argue that the government-supported image of professional women was rife with contradictions. As the analysis of the 1922 debate on teahouse waitresses has demonstrated, sexual integrity seemed to remain one of most important yardsticks for the legitimacy of women’s work. Perhaps partly an effort to lampoon the official discourse, popular cultural commentators instead associated all new-style working women with the flirtatious, flamboyant Modern Girl. Through the culture of exhibition and the flower-market metaphor, these authors effectively established a connection between female employment and the sexualized and objectified nature of their public appearance as the inevitable consequences of the capitalist commodity culture that characterized modern Guangzhou. However, there could also be exceptions to the trend, for some lower-class working women, such as the female protagonist of the short story “New Camellia,” could demonstrate their political consciousness and resemble a New Woman despite the sexual notoriety of their line of work. Ultimately, these official and popular representations of women’s work speak both to the considerable fluidity between various models of femininity and to conflicting visions for urban modernity in Republican Guangzhou.
Conclusion

My dissertation sets out to address the questions: does gender have a history? If so, does it have a funny story to tell? And who thought it was funny, and why? In recent decades Chinese historians have begun to answer the first question in the affirmative by studying women’s identities, representations, and past experiences, which challenge a simplistic, misleading notion of “thousands of years of female suffering” as a characterization of traditional Chinese society. Many scholars also interrogate the simple binary of male/female by studying various models and conceptions of masculinities and femininities in different spatial and temporal contexts of China. Nevertheless, the ways in which humor played a part in the (de)construction of gender ideals, identities, and relations have remained largely unexamined. There were notable exceptions, including studies on the humorous tradition of henpecking in late imperial Chinese literature, and the use of gendered stereotypes in Republican Shanghai cartoon caricatures. Through a broad survey of popular cultural genres, my dissertation has explored the intersected relationship between gender and humor that structured the ways in which local writers and artists viewed and depicted reality, engaged their intended audience, and positioned themselves amidst the sociopolitical turmoil and cultural clashes of Republican Guangzhou. Furthermore, by studying the comedic aspects of gender history in modern Guangzhou, I approach the construction of regional identity and nationalism in local society from a bottom-up, non-elite perspective.

My focus on the use of humor in 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou sheds light on a different set of sociocultural commentaries which have previously been elided, subsumed, or vehemently opposed by the totalizing New Culture discourse. Characterized by scholars as a dominant response to modernity, the New Culture movement emphasized China’s civilizational inferiority,
and proposed rationality, scientific progress, and mass education as the necessary steps for China to become a strong nation. This promotion of nation-state building was also contingent upon the denial of all things in China’s past, even if they nonetheless might have contributed to the modern experience. In this process, gender became a discursive category through which the New Culture intellectuals articulated their understandings of China’s past, present, and potential future. Although female emancipation and gender equality were proposed as the prerequisite for the construction of a new Chinese nation, they were often subjected to the greater goal of national strengthening rather than pursued as end goals in their own. During the 1920s and 1930s, while the Nationalist Party and the CCP may have held different ideas about the path to national strengthening, their aims of making China a modern nation and the ways in which they employed gender for ideological and political ends remained strikingly similar.

In contrast, the popular cultural commentaries in Guangzhou—consciously or not—encompassed a far more ambiguous outlook on modernity, which both embraced and questioned the consequences of social change. Cutting across the political divisions of the left and the right, they visualized paths to the future that might include either a return to an idealized past or an intensification of progressive reform. In addition, the local identity projected by these commentators might reinforce the formation of an exclusive, Cantonese-speaking community, or serve a larger national culture built upon the revolutionary heritage of the city. Confucian ethics and Social Darwinist theory might be evoked and advocated by the same author, just as phrases in classical Chinese, vernacular Chinese, and the Cantonese dialect could share the same page.


467 Wang, Women in the Chinese Enlightenment, 47-48.

468 Ibid., 215-17, 339-40.
The lack of clarity, consistency, or ideological leaning was further complemented by the use of pseudonyms that allowed the writers and artists to navigate between multiple personas, create imagined dialogues or even engage in self-parody, all the while catering to the tastes of different audiences. At the same time, the popular cultural agents in Guangzhou shared one important similarity with the New Culture intellectuals, for they also chose to communicate their jokes, enjoyment of private leisure, or satire through gendered themes, expressions, and pictorial representations. In contrast, sometimes, to the New Culturalists who evoked gender mainly to advocate for national strengthening, these popular writers and artists used this trope for a different goal. Rather than promoting substantial change for the cause of gender equality, they might aim to endorse the New Culture ideology, challenge existing social structures, cast doubt upon government policies, or to construct a modern masculine self-identity by marginalizing other men and women. With the signifier of gender as their common denominator, these popular cultural commentaries thus offer an alternative angle to investigate the diverse discursive constructions of modernity at work in Republican China. Overlapping, mutually influencing, but also constantly competing with one another, these discourses defied simplified categorizations based on the authors’ ideological positions or political affiliations.

However, this is not to suggest that the popular cultural works in 1920s and 1930s Guangzhou were necessarily apolitical, for their content reflected the political tides of local society and beyond. Over time, the popular cultural commentators were silenced by censorship laws and had to avoid overtly political material that affronted the government authorities, a trend that characterized the Nanjing decade. Nonetheless, the 1930s saw an unprecedented flourishing of cartoon art that opened new doors for popular cultural agents with artistic expertise to not only make ends meet but also reach a larger audience. The continued use of gendered imagery in both
decades became one strategy through which popular writers and artists were able to sell their message more profitably or mask their grievances against the government. In spite of the relatively uninterrupted prosperity and popularity of popular cultural works in these periods, the outbreak of the War of Resistance against the Japanese signaled a rupture in the stylistic propensity and careers of many of these authors. If their popular discourse on gender, modernity, and nationhood could, to certain extent, coexist with the dominant New Culture ideology or governmental discourse before, it came to be subsumed by the wartime call for national salvation, and the writers or artists who chose to continue their previous styles and messages risked being attacked by their compatriots or having to submit to the rule of the puppet regime.

Furthermore, my research points to the transnational nature of the relationship between humor and gender in Republican Guangzhou. One of the most popular characters that appeared in local popular literature and cartoons was the Modern Girl, who was often accompanied by her male counterpart, the Modern Boy. With her painted face, bobbed haircut, stylish attire, and outrageous lifestyle, the girl stood as a colorful symbol of all the temptations and traps that illustrated urban life in Republican Guangzhou, especially from a male perspective. Not only does she dictate the outcome of modern romances and initiate physical contact with men, both willing and unsuspecting, she also controls her cowardly spouse or threatens middle-aged women by shamelessly dating their husbands. She might also decorate the workplace as a flower vase; or her greed and sexual appetite might move her to prostitution, all of which enhanced the author and audience’s sense of moral superiority while at the same time satisfying their prurience. Moreover, the male counterpart—the Modern Boy—represented a questionable type of modern masculinity in popular imagination. He was frequently equated with the imagery of the Modern Girl and considered even more problematic, as he suffered double feminization—his
own masculinity called into question even as he was subject to the Modern Girl’s manipulation. These popular understandings of the Modern Girl and the Modern Boy were nonetheless influenced by and overlapped with the advertising campaigns that linked the associated imagery with purchasable products and the appeal of hygiene, social progress, and Westernized modernity. Together, the imagery reveals both the dialectical tensions between modernization and perceived sociocultural degradation in local society and the transnational traffic of commodities, gender ideologies, cultural tastes, notions of romance, marriage, class and labor in cities around the world as a result of colonial and capitalist expansion. At the same time, adding to the studies on Modern Girl or other categories of modern womanhood, my study emphasizes how the Modern Girl and the Modern Boy came to be employed as instruments of humor communicating popular writers’ and cartoonists’ frustration and fascination with the modern age. Compared to the works of high-minded intellectuals, these portrayals often appeared less serious in tone, less morally and teleologically definitive, but no less emotionally engaging or socially critical.

While the history of gender does have a humorous narrative to tell, especially in Republican China, my study of the popular cultural production has uncovered a predominantly masculine mode of local humor that informs almost all of the sources in this study. My findings have revealed that local male authors dominated the newly emerged print and press cultures and, by extension, the privilege to tell jokes. Even though evidence suggests that there were women writers and cartoonists who contributed to the local newspapers and magazines, male writers and artists claimed an unchallenged monopoly over these occupational groups. Their authorial images, including the self-deprecating notion of “writing for the newspaper’s butt” (with male homoerotic overtones), also betrayed a strong masculine identity torn between commercial profit
and social engagement. While it is impossible to trace the stylistic and ideological differences between men and women’s popular writings and cartoons due to the pervasive use of pseudonyms and lack of biographical information for most, it may be deduced that this male-dictated creative and connoisseurial culture in effect discouraged female participation or consumption.

In addition, local male writers and cartoonists extensively employed imagery of women as both instruments and targets of their humor, thereby projecting into the public arena powerful norms for femininity. Most of their works tend to lampoon women from both ends of the extremes; middle-aged fierce wives or female domestic helpers were depicted as equally ludicrous as the transgressive Modern Girls. Men who did not fit the authors’ masculine ideal, such as henpecked husbands or the Modern Boy, were also characterized as weak or effeminate and therefore became the source of parody in ways similar to the satire of their female counterparts. These depictions, in turn, helped satirize the current state of society, encompassing both disdain for China’s unwanted traditions and fear of the modernizing pace of the city. Even though these portrayals of women (and often times men) were evoked as a vehicle to express humor but did not necessarily turn out to be the actual focus of the authors’ message, the subsequent increase in the appearance and circulation of gendered images could still impose a disciplining effect on ideals of femininity, as well as masculinity. For instance, the satire of the government’s ban on sexual integration in swimming, which was conveyed through the alleged bewilderment and yearnings of Modern Girl and Modern Boy swimmers, had the potential to caution readers against mistaking a modern sport with the opportunity to socialize with the opposite sex. By turning a playful gaze on both the women and men under depiction and the intended targets behind these jokes, the authors could possibly enhance the appeal of their works.
for commercial profit. Political commentary and profit in such works, in other words, were not mutually exclusive.

Another way in which popular writers and artists in Guangzhou sought to claim exclusive rights over the contours of gender norms was their play with gendered pseudonyms and personas. We have seen various scenarios in which authors with feminine pseudonyms discussed women’s fashions, debated with male writers over the issues of male femininity or female masculinity, or publicly cautioned their henpecked writer-husbands. However, this trend is complicated in light of the relative scarcity of female writers and cartoonists in the local popular cultural circles. Even though the feminine personas seemed to reflect the shared concerns and interests in issues of gender equality at first glance, they were largely manipulated by male authors to set the agenda according to their own liking and intended to attract male audience through the lure of female images and tropes. This strategy became central to a masculine mode of play, and served to take discursive power away from potential female authors or artists.

The male writers and cartoonists in Republican Guangzhou further created their own humorous culture by solidifying a homosocial bond with fellow authors and their intended readers. These writers and artists not only engaged in games and lighthearted banter with one another on paper, but also visited teahouses, brothels, and publishing houses for social and work-related engagements. Whereas their friendships in real life were formed in masculine social spaces that may have appeared unwelcoming to female peers, their bonding mechanisms in the popular cultural world and use of humor also mutually reinforced one another. For instance, the “bachelorism corps” movement playfully launched by some of these popular writers projected a shared image, albeit intentionally exaggerated, as modern youths rejected by willful Modern Girls. This humorous tactic strengthened the ties among the authors not only by distinguishing
them from the feminine others, but also by enhancing the popularity of their works that would subsequently increase their group interdependence.

Furthermore, this community of fun was established between male authors and their intended male audience through the circulation of novel ideas, gossip, and desires. Former scholarship has explored the ways in which popular fiction and the press turned late Qing and Republican Shanghai into a playground. This was an imaginary space where notions of tradition and modernity were mixed to provide male readers vicarious pleasures of trying out new ideas, many of which were encapsulated in women’s representations, without necessarily abandoning familiar ways of life. Similarly, the popular literature and cartoons in Republican Guangzhou often introduced new trends that readers could voyeuristically experience through the eyes and ears of the author or the characters in the stories. Many of these trends were related to women’s issues and gender relations, invoking the readers’ curiosity about new-style marriage and divorce, social dancing, new types of women’s work, and the latest fashion in modern cities such as Paris or Shanghai. Besides these bewilderingly new trends to which readers were exposed, scandalous stories of public women were also circulated between the creators and readers. The exchange of news about women and their sexualized imagery, in turn, helped build a shared identity among the authors and their presumed male readers as consumers, connoisseurs, or critics of the modern world without the need to commit to progressive agendas such as female emancipation or gender equality in real life.

This masculine mode of humor thus provides a glimpse into the ways in which gender functioned in social networking, the formation of an entertainment culture, performative

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469 For the consumption of popular fiction in late Qing and Republican Shanghai as a vicarious experiment with new ideas, see Perry Link, Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 57-58, 228-30. For a discussion of the close relationship among male writers, the popular press, and courtesans and the creation of a playground culture in late Qing Shanghai, see Yeh, Shanghai Love.
identities, and power struggles among government authorities, intellectuals, and popular writers and artists. While some of these developments were specific to the context of Guangzhou as the revolutionary capital undergoing intense modernization, others can be identified as broader sociocultural and political patterns characteristic to Chinese cities of the Republican period.
Figure 1  *Yuedong Shengcheng Tu* 粵東省城圖 [Map of Guangzhou, Provincial Capital of Guangdong]. Guangzhou: Yangcheng Chengtiange Dianshi Shuju, 1900. The foreign concession area, Shameen, is the half-moon-shaped island separated from the rest of the city in the lower left-hand corner.
Figure 2  Lin Langsha 林浪沙, “Sketch of a Nude,” Banjiao manhua 128 (Jan. 19, 1935): 4.

**Horizontal texts (from right to left)**

Beauty and Sex Dermatologic Specialty Medicine  
Six-Two-Three Chinese Medicine  
General Distributor: Li’an Pharmacy, Wanfu East Road, Guangzhou

**Vertical texts (from top to bottom, right to left)**

[Curing] Infection between the toes, body odor, heat rash, scrotum eczema, keratosis pilaris, rosacea, acne, itchy skin.
Figure 4  Zhu, “The Generalissimo and Mosquitoes,” *Banjiao manhua* 72 (Nov. 5, 1932): 5.

(Character on the lower left-hand corner)

Communist (*gong* 共)
Figure 5  Jiao Ye 姣葉, “Han [Fuqu] and Liu [Zhennian] performing together the ruse of ‘Pang Lingming carrying his coffin and fighting to death,” Banjiao manhua 73 (Nov. 12, 1932): 1.  

470 The two warlords portrayed in this cartoon, Han Fuqu 韓復渠 (1890-1938) and Liu Zhennian 劉珍年 (1898-1935), fought between September and November 1932, leading to Liu’s defeat and Han Fuqu’s consolidation of power in the Shandong region. The ruse of Pang Lingming is a reference to a story in the Romance of the Three Kingdoms, in which general Pang De 龐德 carried his coffin to the battlefield as a sign of his resolve and loyalty to Cao Cao and fought Guan Yu courageously.
1. Old Lu, tabloid newspapers are very popular these days. I am sure we can make fortune. Let’s launch one together!
2. I am well versed in the Four Books and Five Classics, and [the writings of] Laozi. I will be a very popular editor for sure.
3. The New Tabloid News, First Issue
   Editor Old Master Sheng
   The Theory of Ritual Propriety, Rectitude, Honesty and Sense of Shame
   The Discourse of Filiality, Brotherly Love, Loyalty and Trustworthiness
   Thoughts on the Decline in Social Morality
4. We couldn’t sell one single copy when you were editor for the first issue. Let me be the editor for this issue and see what happens!
   Editor Lu Jiu
   Sexual Hygiene
   A Study of Sexology
   The Art of Romance
   Food and Sex
   The Question of Man and Woman
6. Old Master, after I took over the editorship, we have been selling so many copies that the newspaper vendors are crowding our office.
7. (Censored and Banned by the Social Bureau The Social Bureau announced…)

1. 阿陸，近來小報非常流行，相信可以賺錢，我們來合辦一間吧
2. 四書五經老子無一不熟，我做編輯定必人人歡迎
3. （新小報 創刊號 編輯 老子勝 禮義廉恥論 孝悌忠信說 道德衰落有感）
4. 第一期你做編輯一張也賣不去，這期讓我來編輯，且看何如！
5. （新小報第二期 陸久主編 男性衛生 性學研究 戀愛術 食與性 男女問題）
6. 老夫子，我一接手編輯便一紙風行，你看的報販擠得水泄不通。
7. （社會局查封 社會局佈告……）
Figure 7  Lu Shaofei, “Human Meat Market,” *Shanghai manhua* 40 (Jan. 19, 1929): front cover.
Figure 8  Futefu 富特夫, “Meat Market,” Banjiao manhua 102 (Jul. 22, 1933): p. 2.
1. (Madam Ma) I am having a bad headache and can’t move. Go make some oatmeal for me.
   (Old Master) are you feeling hungry?
2. (Kitchen God, Determiner of Good Fortune)
3. *Matepi*, I don't believe it that I can’t start a fire! Let me blow again really hard.
4. Oh no! The charcoal dust just got into my eyes. How can I see now?
5. Ouch! How come I just hit my head?
6. I cannot see with my eyes, and you cannot move. Let’s go to the hospital together.

1. （馬氏）我頭痛得很，行不動了。你和我去煮些麥片給我吃罷。
（老夫子）你覺得飢餓麼？
2. （定福灶）
3. 馬特皮，我總不信燒不著火，我用猛力再吹你一口氣。
4. 糟了，炭灰撞入眼睛，怎看得見東西。
5. 哎喲，怎麼又碰著了頭顱
6. 我眼看不見，你又行不動，我們一同到醫院去吧。
Figure 10  Ye Qianyu 葉淺予, “Mr. Wang,” Guohua bao, June 9, 1936, 1.4.

1-3. (No dialogue)
4. (Mr. Wang) Matepi!
(Mrs. Wang) You deserve to be cut a thousand times!
5-8. (No dialogue)

1-3. (No dialogue)
4. (王先生) 媽特皮!
(王夫人) 殺千刀!
5-8. (No dialogue)
Figure 11  Huanwu, “Illustration to the ‘Commentary from the Masses’ Column,” *Guomin xinwen*, November 24, 1927, 12.
Figure 12  Huanwu, “Illustration to the ‘Little Guangzhou’ supplement,” Guangzhou minguo ribao, November 30, 1927, 11.
Illnesses begin [with] minor [symptoms]
Even though cholera begins [with] minor [symptoms], it can lead to death in only three hours.
It is better to take, as soon as possible,
The Chen Liuqi Brand ‘Relieving the Masses’ Medicine Syrup
 curing the emergent symptoms of cholera
Each bottle costs 1 hao, and is available in many stores
Headquarters- Guangzhou Shanmulan area, Western Bureau of Telephone Service, no. 780
霍亂之起雖微，惟三小時可以殺命，宜急服

陳六奇濟眾水 專治霍亂急症

每樽一毫 各處均有代售
總藥行 廣州杉木欄 電話西局 七百八十號

Horizontal texts (from right to left, on the bottom right hand corner)

Danger
危險

Signature (vertical, on the bottom right hand corner)

Huanwu
幻吾
Figure 14  Huanniao, “Illustration to the supplement ‘New Field,’” *Guohua bao*, May 19, 1931, 1.1.
Figure 15 Huang Huanniao, “Illustration to Ren Huhua’s Miss Killer,” Guohua bao, October 12, 1934, 2.2.
Figure 16    Huanniao, “Choices,” *Guohua bao*, August 21, 1931, 1.1.

Text (top to bottom)

(On top of the women’s head)
Feminine charm 色

(On top of the moneybag)
Wealth 財

(On the hand)
Temptation of profit 利惑
Figure 17  Huang Huanniao, “Humorous Talk, Humorous Drawing,” Guohua bao, October 12, 1934, 2.1.

(Illustrated by Huang Huanniao
Humorous Talk, Humorous Drawing)

(No. 39  Gritting One’s Teeth)

There were a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law who were widowed. The mother-in-law always told the daughter-in-law that widows should grit their teeth and endure hardships in life. Soon after, the mother-in-law had illicit liaisons with someone. When the daughter-in-law accused her with the words she spoke before, the mother-in-law opened her mouth to show the daughter-in-law, saying, “see, I can’t grit my teeth because there are none left!”

(Refer to the Selected Jokes from the Bitter Tea Studio\textsuperscript{471})

\textsuperscript{471} The Selected Jokes from the Bitter Tea Studio (Kucha’an xiaohuaxuan 苦茶庵笑話選) was compiled by writer Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1967) in 1933, mainly drawing from late imperial era sources. See Rea, The Age of Irreverence, 33-34.
Figure 18    Huanniao, “Advertisement for Airplane Brand Condensed Milk,” Guohua bao, March 27, 1933, 1.2.

Horizontal texts (from right to left, top to bottom)

Produced by the China Southern Condensed Milk Company
Airplane Brand Condensed Milk
General factory: Zhiyi Street, Foshan; Headquarters: Haizhu Road, Guangzhou; Telephone number: 16248

中國南方煉乳公司出品
飛機牌煉乳
總廠佛山直義街 總行廣州海珠路 電話一六二四八

Vertical texts (from top to bottom, right to left)

An authentic national product and rare find for infant nourishment

The classic Airplane brand condensed milk has been examined and certified by the Public Health Bureau as meeting the highest standards. Its quality is pure and its taste full-flavored. Infants who consume it will become strong, energetic, and grow quickly. It far surpasses foreign goods. Anyone who loves to consume national products should try it.

完全國貨育嬰珍品
飛機老牌煉乳經衛生局化驗合格認為最高標準之煉乳品質純潔滋味豐富嬰兒食之能使強壯活潑發育迅速勝舶來之品愛用國貨諸君請嘗試之
Signatures (vertical, right to left)

Huanniao

Produced by the Huanwu Advertising Agency

幻鳥
Singing and dancing to celebrate peace and prosperity!
This is the entertainment that the masses in the revolutionary capital (lit. under the revolutionary flag) deserve.
Come to the Citizen Garden and you will be 120 percent satisfied!

This is a preview for [the Citizen Garden which will be] opened soon.

Respectfully,
Citizen Garden of the South Shore area, Guangzhou

歌舞昇平！
是革命旗幟下底民衆們應有的娛樂。
到國民花園去，能令你們得著百二十分的滿意！
開幕在即，先此預告。
廣州南堤國民花園謹啟
The Foot Drill Position
(Function) Suitable during the period of mutual admiration; this is a way to show the other party respect.
(Note) your attitude [should be] serious and your pace orderly.

The Chinese Cruller Position
(Function) Suitable for first love. It is particularly sweet [when your] palms and the back of your hands are joined.
(Note) as a pair the shape resembles a Chinese Cruller.

The Water-Buying Position
(Function) Suitable while sitting in front of flowers and under the moon, talking to each other harmoniously and eagerly.
(Note) In the posture of a filial son [holding a bowl to fetch water]

The Woolly Grass Flower Position
(Function) Suitable during the period of romantic passion, [signaling] “we are never going to separate!”
(Note) the two arms should twist and come into contact as if a woolly grass flower [is being] separated

The Pulling-an-Ox Position
(Function) Suitable when engaged or after getting married. As she holds onto him forcefully, he can no longer…
(Note) In the posture of a shepherd boy pulling an ox.

The Taking-a-Criminal-into-Custody Position
Suitable for traveling or long-distance journey. This is a man’s duty.
(Note) The posture is meaningful, and should be no different from and exactly the same as [an officer] taking a criminal into custody.

“操步式”
（功用）宜於相慕時期，對對方能表示著尊重。
（註）態度嚴肅，步法要有秩序。

“榨鬼式”
（功用）宜於初戀，手心與手背相連，特別甜蜜。
（註）雙雙形如榨鬼。

“買水式”
（功用）宜於花前月下，和語正濃。
（註）作挾孝子狀

“茅花式”
（功用）宜於熱戀時期，「我倆永不不再分離！」
（註）兩臂扭搭若脫茅花狀

“牽牛式”
（功用）適宜於訂婚或結婚之後，她緊牵著他，使他不能再……
（註）牧童牽牛狀

“押犯式”
宜於旅行或遠行，這是男子的義務
（註）形狀有意義要與押犯無異吻合
Figure 21  H, “Four Kinds of Foreign Products,” *Banjiao manhua* 63 (Aug. 13, 1932): 4.
Four kinds of foreign products pertaining to the body

1. Shaking hands
2. Holding arms
3. Locking lips
4. Touching bellies

肉體上的四種外貨
1. 手拜手
2. 臂孖臂
3. 咀叮咀
4. 肚黐肚
Figure 22  Gao Guting 高古亭, “The Mate of a Companion,” *Banjiao manhua* 72 (Nov. 5, 1932): 3.
Figure 23  Shidan is but [Whatever], “His Hand while Dancing,” *Banjiao manhua* 66 (Sep. 17, 1932): 3.
Figure 24  Aiqing 愛情 [Love], “Appreciating the Moon,” Banjiao manhua 63 (Aug. 13, 1932): 3.
Director: Miss Wang! In this scene a young man will rush into your room, tie you up with a rope, and then embrace and kiss you recklessly.

Actress: is this young man the handsome Film Emperor (a.k.a. Best Actor)?

Director: Yes he is. Why?

Actress: Then he doesn’t have to tie me up.
Figure 26  Anonymous, “Advertisement for Richard Hudnut Three Flowers Vanishing Cream,” Guohua bao, October 12, 1934, 2.2.
Figure 27  Anonymous, “Advertisement for Williams Aqua Velva,” *Guohua bao*, January 29, 1932, 2.2.
Figure 29    Anonymous, “Advertisement for Dr. Gleason Freckle Cream,” *Guohua bao*, May 4, 1936, 3.2.
Figure 30  Anonymous, “The Yearnings of Modern youths,” *Banjiao manhua* 82 (Jan. 28, 1932): 5.

His brain- loves to dream about riding on an automobile
His eyes- always ogle female celebrities
His ears- love to hear the sound of foreign currency
His nose- enjoys smoking foreign cigarettes
His mouth- likes to say sweet nothings
His body- takes pleasure in wearing western suits
His hand- always holds a foreign fountain pen
His entire self- cannot endure hardships but only enjoys comfort
腦－愛想坐汽車
眼－常看女明星
耳－喜聽洋錢聲
鼻－樂吸洋紙煙
口－好大談戀愛
身－歡喜穿洋服
手－長拿洋水筆
足－悅 穿洋革履
全身－吃不得苦好安逸
Figure 31 Ranmei 然美, “The Circulation of Money,” Banjiao manhua 74 (Nov. 19, 1932): 6.
Figure 32    Liu Bai 劉白, “Only Seeing the Beautiful Clothes but not the Person,” Banjiao manhua 61 (Jul. 30, 1932): 6.
Figure 33  Qiuhua 秋花, “A Feminized Young Man,” Banjiao manhua 70 (Oct. 22, 1932): 7.
Figure 34  FKY, “Four Types of Curves,” Banjiao manhua 77 (Dec. 10, 1932): 2.
Figure 35  Jiande 見得, “Five Types of Curves,” Guangzhou zazhi, December 15, 1933, 2.
Figure 36  Anonymous, “Recycling Old Items: Shoelace,” Banjiao manhua 101 (Jul. 15, 1934): 2.
1. Old Wang has all of a sudden become westernized. How impressive!

2. I have just pawned the trench coat and got back my long gown. Now I can dress stylishly in another way. That’s enough to make Old He envious!

3. Hey! I just saw him wearing a trench coat. But now all of a sudden, he is wearing a long gown. So many variations… What kind of trick is he trying to pull?

4. (Tiancheng Pawn Shop) Ohh! That’s the trick that he is playing.

5. (Old Wang) Mr. Fatso, I am wearing a western suit this time.
   
   (Boss He) My dear brother, you are indeed very stylish!

6. But unfortunately, you have to constantly put on the show of “raising the stone lion and viewing the painting!”

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472 Raising the stone lion and viewing the painting is a traditional Cantonese opera trope and as a Cantonese idiom refers to going to the pawn shop.
1. Under the national salvation movement and the call for cultural restoration, those who wear western suits have become the minority!

2. I will no longer wear western suits from now on!

3. To have new Chinese clothing made, I need at least two sets and the cost is certainly expensive. How difficult!

4. (Feng Yuxiang stated, “The attire of people in our nation is in urgent need of reform. Cutting the long gown one foot shorter can save a large amount of materials. The money for [buying] buttons that each person saves every year can be used for purchasing a bullet. As a result, in the event of war against foreign invaders, there will be four hundred million additional bullets every year, and at least fifty million enemies can be killed.”)

5. I will practice Mr. Feng’s policy of cutting the clothing short!

6. Who says that I am not supporting national salvation?
Mrs. Wang said, “I have always admired your expertise in the strategy of controlling husbands. When you go out, is there any way to control your husband?” Mrs. Wu answered, “That is very easy. All I need to do is to leave my children home, and let him take care of them!”
Figure 40  Bai Yunlong, “Boss He,” *Guohua bao*, October 14, 1935, 1.4.

1. (Boss He) With the current depressed market, the price of silk this has dropped dramatically!
   (Madam Fang) Go and buy a bolt of fabric for me then!
2. (Beauty Silk Shop)
   (Boss He) This bolt of luxurious fabric must catch your fancy!
   (Madam Fang) I don’t like indigo. Get a bolt in blue instead!
3. I don’t have money to buy another bolt, and there is no exchange after purchase for the silk. But I still have to curry favor with her. What should I do?
4. Fortunately, I’ve hit upon an ingenuous idea! Indigo comes from blue, so if I dye it blue, I can hide it from her for sure!
5. (Boss He) I think you should be very satisfied this time!
   (Madam Fang) You idiot! This is an old bolt of silk dyed another color. Can’t you see that?
6. (Madam Fang) I will go with you and have a talk with the shop!
   (Boss He) Aiya! It is not easy to be a husband!

1. （何老板）在不景氣籠罩下的市場，今年綢緞又大跌價了！
   （方氏）那麼，你替我剪套衣料回來吧！
2. （美麗綢緞）
   （何老板）這襲華貴衣料，想你一定歡喜的！
   （方氏）蟹青色我不合意，另買藍色的回來吧！
3. 再買沒有錢，綢緞出門不換，又要博她的歡心，叫我如何是好？
4. 價値想出這條妙計，青出於藍，翻染藍色一定瞞得過她！
5. （何老板）這回想你沒有不滿意了！
   （方氏）你真蠢才！這是翻染舊東西，還看不出麼？
6. （方氏）我要和你去向他辦個交涉！
   （何老板）啊呀！做丈夫真不容易！
1. Aiya! When did you come here? I don’t dare [to do it] any more, Your Highness! Let go of me! Please stop hitting me!

2. Sister, do not be afraid. I have got him under control. If this rascal dares to come to you, I will take his skin off.

3. Hey, A’zhen, what a great help you are! You have sweet-talked him so convincingly! Mrs. Taishi will punish him tonight for sure.

4. (Mrs. Taishi) Let me lock the door before I take your skin off. You have always lied to me and fooled around.
   (Mr. Taishi) Oh no! How could I get into such trouble? It must be the principal who told her…

5. You are so fickle! You won’t know what death means unless you go through hardships. You will know when you pretend to be a field-plowing ox. Hurry up and act like an ox plowing the fields! Keep moving! [How come] you stopped moving? I will burn you with a stick of firewood.

6. (Mr. Taishi) This is too painful, Your Highness! You are burning my buttocks to ashes! I can’t move anymore!
(Mrs. Taishi) If I don’t burn your buttocks, [people] might think that I am overindulging you.

1. 哎咁，乜你幾時來左呢處嘅？唔敢咯皇帝，饒過我啦，唔好打咯
2. 大姐，唔駛慌咧，我管著佢咯，個死佬竟敢來搵你，我就揃左佢層皮
3. 吓，阿瓊，你真係幫得手，佢得佢似模似樣，太史婆今晚梗係泡製佢定嘅
4. （太史婆）等我閂實度門至來碌你層皮，成日暝我去攪三攪四
5. （太史先生）衰晒，乜咁撞板咁嘅，梗係校長講⋯⋯
6. 你咁生心，未辛苦過唔知死，要你做下牛至知道，快的做牛耕田呀，走嘅嘅，
   唔走呀，我搵柴燒佢嘅
7. （太史先生）好辛苦呀皇帝，你燒到我個屎忽都爛晒咯，我走唔郁嘅
8. （太史婆）唔燒爛你個屎忽，都唔知以為我唔知幾上味你
Figure 42  Honghai 宏海, “A Bed that Prevents the Husband from Sleeping Around,” *Banjiao manhua* 105 (Sep. 23, 1933): 2.
1. (Madam Ma) Every night you lie to me that you are going to a friend’s to play mahjong, but A’Lu told me that you are actually sleeping with prostitutes. You are getting foolish as you grow old! 
   (Old Master) Nonsense! What kind of evidence do you have?
2. (Madam Ma) I haven’t seen anything with my own eyes, so I can’t argue with you. Forget about it! 
   (Old Master) Why do you have to blame me for everything? How can you falsely accuse me with a one-sided statement?
3. With nothing but my clever tongue, I have gotten around the Tigress! From now on I have nothing to fear anymore! 
4. This [prostitute] is a little older but still retains her charm. I must try!
5. (Hotel)
6. This time can you fool me again?

1. （馬氏）你晚晚都騙我說去朋友處打牌，阿陸告訴我其實是去宿娼，你越老越糊塗了！
2. （老夫子）胡說！有什麼證據？
3. （馬氏）我沒親眼看見，辯你不過，算數吧！
4. （老夫子）何用算頭算尾，只據一面之辭，怎可誣人入罪
5. 只憑三寸不爛之舌，雌老虎沒奈我何，此後老子有恃無恐了！
6. 這個雖然徐娘半老，但是丰韻猶存，倒要試試
7. （客棧）
8. 這回還賴得過我麼？
1. (Pawn shop)
   The newly sewn long gown was pawned only for four and a half silver dollars and merely enough for a show at the Haizhu Great Theater and a late night snack.
2. Old Master, what a coincidence! Are you going to treat me to the show?
3. I can’t be stingy in front of my girlfriend. Excuse me, one more ticket please!
4. Old Master, it is better to meet by coincidence than with formal invitation. Tonight you should treat me to the show, should you not?
5. It is true that one misfortune invites another. Excuse me, one more ticket!
6. Buy a ticket for me!
7. Go and buy it yourself. I just spent all my money!
8. You have money to treat your girlfriends but not me? Nonsense! Are you blaming me for getting in your way?

1. （押）新做一件長袍只當四洋半，僅夠今晚去海珠大舞台和一餐消夜
2. 老夫子，巧極了，請看戲嗎？
3. 在女朋友面前不好認衰公，夥計，再要一張票！
4. 老夫子，相請不如偶遇，今晚你該請看戲了？
5. 真正倒霉接一連二，夥計再要一張！
6. 買張票給我！
7. 你自己買吧，我的錢剛剛用光！
8. 請女朋友有錢，買票給我有錢，豈有此理，嫌我看住馬腳嗎？
Figure 45   Huang Huanniao and Yiren, “Old Master,” Guohua bao, July 17, 1935, 1.4.

1. My old hag is so fierce and doesn’t allow me to take concubines! This time I can’t miss this chance.
   (Rooms for rent—do not inquire if without a spouse; additional cost when sharing a room)
2. (Manager) Do you have a spouse?
   (Old Master) Yes, yes, I have many!
3. (No dialogue)
4. This dirty old man… How strange! Why is he with different women every night?
5. (No dialogue)
6. Fxxk! Hiding a clandestine prostitute? Now off to the police station!

1. 黃臉婆這樣惡，立妾侍又不得，這回機會不可錯過
   （有房出租，非眷莫問，同房加租）
2. （經理）有家眷沒有？
   （老夫子）有，有，有很多！
3. （無對話）
4. 這個老坑，真是奇怪，為什麼一晚一個女人
5. （無對話）
6. 媽的，暗藏私娼！到局裡去！
Figure 46   Ng Ching Mon, “Flower Market,” *Guohua bao*, April 14, 1935, 1.1.

(Translation)
(Vertical texts, top to down, right to left)

Teahouse waitress (*Chahua*, lit. Camellia or Teahouse Flower)  
High-class call girl (*Jiaojihua*, lit. Social Flower)  
Waitress at opium den (*Yanhua*, lit. Fireworks or Smoke Flower)  
Female hairdresser (*Fahua*, lit. Hair Flower)

(Horizontal texts, right to left, top to bottom)

XXX Day and Night Grand Teahouse  
XXX Amusement Hall  
XXX High-class Opium Rehabilitation Room  
XXX Modern Hair Salon

THE METROPOLIS
Figure 47  Yin Guan 尹爟. “Female Workers Caused Disturbances,” *Shangqi huabao* 15 (1906): page unknown.

(Right) Yin Guan (Seal)

(Left, on the walls of the factory entrance)
Guangchang Silk Factory
If seeking [to develop] industrial enterprises
The factory production must not be interrupted
The most profitable region of sericulture in our Guangdong is definitely the Shunde and Ronggui area, where there are a great number of silk factories. Silk-reeling all depends on female workers, and each factory employs some several hundreds of people. This can also be [considered as] an economic privilege of the womankind. Recently, the female workers suddenly stopped working and asked demanded a pay raise, gathering a crowd to make disturbances day after day. They would intercept and beat any of their coworkers who went to work as usual. They were especially disruptive when they blockaded the Guangchang factory on the twenty-first and the Yongchangcheng factory on the twenty-third. Bad elements took advantage of this to conspire to rob the factories. All these silk factories (lit. factories with silk-reeling machines) were in dire circumstances.

(Note) [The reporter] remarks: in all things under heaven, there are always advantages and disadvantages that counterbalance one another. Many women from the Shunde area can live on their own labor. This ought to be a good thing, but because of this [they] often develop the depraved habit of returning to their natal family after marriage and never coming back. We especially hope that this incident can be quickly resolved by capable officials, without impeding the production of the silk factories or, by extension, impacting our banking enterprises.
Figure 48    Art Department, “Illustration to A Record of the Myriad Peculiarities of Female Domestic Helpers,” Zhujian xingqi huabao 9 (1928): 4.
Manager: That customer who just [left]- you sent him away with a big smile! How much did he spend on the things he bought here?

Saleswoman: [He] did not buy anything, but asked me out to a movie at eight-thirty tonight.
Manager So-and-so always dictates his letters to his female secretary. One day, after the manager dictated half of a letter, he suddenly farted. The female secretary could only pretend that she did not notice anything. But the manager farted a few more times, and the female secretary became impatient, saying, “you do not have to say it multiple times. I understood you after the first time.”
Figure 51  Anonymous, “The Ubiquitous Presence of Camellias,” *Guohua bao*, July 6, 1935, 1.4.
Figure 52 Ranmei, “Come Take a Look,” *Banjiao manhua* 63 (Aug. 13, 1932): 2.

(Hanging sign)
Come take a look
歡迎參觀

(Name of the store, next to the sales clerk)
New World Hat Factory
新大陸帽廠
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