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**Nation, Fashion and Women's Everyday
Lives:
Breast-binding in China, 1910s-1970s**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2017

Department of History
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Abstract

This thesis explores how nationalism, fashion and women's everyday lives intersect with each other from the 1910s to the 1970s in China, with a specific focus on the female breast and the practice of breast-binding. Since the late Qing period, breast-binding was reported as a new fashion trend among urban women. An anti-breast-binding movement followed up in 1927, with important male and female elites criticising this practice from various aspects of nationalism, emancipation, aesthetics, and women's health. From the late 1930s to the 1940s, there seemed a moment breast-binding faded away from mainstream practice. Yet after the 1950s, it appeared again and the practice remained common among women from various backgrounds until the end of the Mao era. Why did women continue to bind their breasts from the 1910s to the 1970s, despite the tremendous social, cultural and political changes throughout this period? Fully recognising the complexity of this issue, I argue that throughout this period, the female body was constructed as an index to women's emancipation, fashion development, and nationalist or communist ideology. Women's bodily choices were largely dependent on peer pressure, which derived from contemporaneous fashion, ideology and the ambiguous yet persistent shame of the female body.

Based on a wide range of sources including periodicals, archives, memoirs, artifacts, visual materials, literature and oral histories, this research provides fresh methodological and historical insights into women's history. Chronologically, while existing scholarship tends to regard Republican and Communist China as two separate and distinct eras, this project examines the long-term change as well as the continuities throughout the two eras from the perspective of the female body, which will shed new light on our knowledge about nationalism, sexuality, fashion and women's daily lives in modern Chinese history.

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 ‘People of the world unite and defeat the American invaders and all their running dogs!’
- Figure 5-6 Jiang Yingli with her colleagues posturing as militia, January 30, 1970. Courtesy of Jiang Yingli.
- Figure 6-1 Zhang Shuo with her boyfriend (who later became her husband) in 1979. Courtesy of Zhang Shuo.
- Figure 6-2 Wu Yinyan and her friends in the 2000s. Courtesy of Wu Yinyan.
- Figure 6-3 Stills from *Xiaojie* 小街 (Narrow Street). Yang Yanjin 楊延晉. *Shanghai dianying zhipianchang*, 1981.

Introduction

Because female clothes were very tight, we had to tighten our breasts in order to be beautiful. We had to arrest the growth of the body in order to look slim. So we attempted to bind our breasts tight and had to bear the pain ... if we let the breasts grow, we would be laughed at by others, including men and women, and would not receive any support. In contrast, others, men and women, would admire our bound breasts.¹

The Ladies Journal, 1927

My breasts grew very quickly after I got my first menstruation. The brassiere was so tight that I could not breathe from time to time, and then I undid two buttons. When it still did not work, I unbuttoned more. However, my sister would warn me not to do so, otherwise the breasts would grow. At night, I wished to take it off, but my sister stopped me from doing so because the breasts would grow without the vest.²

Wang Yulu, born in 1957

I have always been intrigued by my memories of adolescence, which motivated my interest in researching the practice of breast-binding and its history. Every weekend, when I visited my grandmother, who was born in Liaoning, she would mock me at the door with strange smiles at my growing breasts. She would comment that my breasts were too large, and I should bow my chest, although even after many years, during my academic visit to Tel Aviv University in Israel in 2016, local Israeli women told me that my breasts were not big at all according to their standards. Eventually my grandmother gave up, as I was rebellious and persistent in straightening my chest, and considered her too old-fashioned and ‘feudal’ (*fengjian* 封建). Although she did not have the bound feet with broken bones typical still for many rural women of her generation, her mother nevertheless forced her to wear very tight socks and small shoes in order to restrict the free development of her feet. Therefore she disliked my large feet, which I could understand because of the notorious history of foot-binding. However, her attitude towards my chest kept

¹ Xia Kepei, “Lun funü shuxiong de miuwu,” *Fun üzazhi* 13, no. 7 (July 1927): 27.

² Interview with Wang Yulu.

puzzling me until the time when I did my Master's dissertation about women's magazines in the Republican era, when I found out that many women used tight undergarments to bind their chests flat, as a flat chest was deemed beautiful during that time. Why did women of my grandmother's generation consider flat chests beautiful? Why did they bind their breasts? These questions have not yet been satisfactorily answered.

As my research continued, I found that many women of my mother's generation also bound their breasts when they were young, yet my mother had never told me this. Among many of my interviewees, it is very common that their daughters did not know anything about their practices of breast-binding. This detail of history has been lost not only in grand narratives, but also in the memories that are passed on by generations. As shown in the quotes at the beginning of this dissertation, women's testimonies of breast-binding from the Republican to the Communist period bear surprising similarities. Thus my research questions expanded to cover this observation: Why did women continue to bind their breasts from the 1910s to the 1970s, despite the tremendous social, cultural and political changes throughout this period?

Similar to other bodily practices, breast-binding was on the one hand, situated in and shaped by specific social and cultural contexts, and on the other hand, experienced by numerous, individual women who practised it. Moreover, breast-binding, different from foot-binding, is not an exclusively Chinese or historical phenomenon. A small number of contemporary women, at least from the English-speaking countries, Japan, Taiwan and Africa, are still practising it for various reasons. In the English-speaking world, one can find many webpages instructing women on how to bind their breasts. Their target readers are mostly lesbians and other women who often simply wish to counter the mainstream of big-breasted female bodies.³ A documentary about the New Marilyn Nightclub in Tokyo shows one of the female hosts wearing a tight vest every day in order to look like a man, as the hosts are women who choose to live as men (Figure 0-1). In her study of

³ "Breast Binding Safety," *Go Ask Alice!*, 2016, <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/breast-binding-safety>, accessed August 19, 2016; Lane Moore, "A Complete Beginner's Guide to Chest Binding," *Cosmopolitan*, March 21, 2016, <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/news/a55546/how-to-bind-your-chest/>, accessed August 19, 2016.

masculine girls in one junior high school in Taiwan, Wu Yihui shows that girls who are deviant from the feminine gender norm – mainly tomboys – would secretly bind their breasts because they did not like feminine body curves.⁴ Throughout West Africa, the practice of breast-ironing is common, which means “an object is used to massage, pound, or press the breasts flat”. This practice is usually conducted by family members, caretakers, nurses, friends or neighbors to girls around eight to twelve years old. The most common reason of this practice is that breasts can stimulate men’s sexual desires.⁵ So the issue at stake here is not only culture-specific, but also generally gender-relevant as the presentation of the female breasts is crucial to the construction of female identities, which is far beyond the scope of this study.

The practice of breast-binding discussed in this dissertation happened under the specific historical context in China from the 1910s to the 1970s. This period witnessed breast-binding entering into and disappearing from the public and political sphere, and femininity was going through continuous redefinitions. The government banned breast-binding, eminent scholars and literati discussed breast-binding, schools educated girls to abandon this practice, popular culture constantly constructed the most fashionable ways to show one’s figure, emerging commercial cultures provided new luxury items such as brassieres that made the curvy female body possible, and women had to choose their own ways of presenting their body in such a complex context.

In this dissertation, I aim to explore various issues related to the practice of breast-binding, from the social pressures that drove women to engage in this practice, to women’s subjective choices and emotions related to it. The nation, fashion and individual experiences will serve as my three major themes and analytical tools. More specifically, I ask why and how the nation interfered with the seemingly private female breasts, how fashion trends shaped the female body, why and how women bound or unbound their breasts, how their intimate bodily experiences impacted their domestic and public roles, and how women exercised their agency

⁴ Wu Yihui, “Yanggang shaonü guozhong xiaoyuan xingbie caoyan de xushi yanjiu” (Ph.D. Thesis, National Taiwan Normal University, 2011).

⁵ Rebecca Tapscott, “Understanding Breast ‘Ironing’: A Study of the Methods, Motivations, and Outcomes of Breast Flattening Practices in Cameroon” (Somerville: Feinstein International Center, May 2012), i–ii, <http://fic.tufts.edu/publication-item/understanding-breast-ironing/>, accessed February 3, 2017.

through bodily practices. My main observation is that although it seemed that breast-binding faded away in the 1940s, there is no linear development of this practice, breast-binding and unbinding coexisted throughout this period. Thus the aim of this dissertation is not to provide a linear narrative of breast-binding, or -unbinding; rather, it aims to examine the practice of breastbinding through looking at the cultural production, gender relations and interactions between individuals and society during this historical period, and thus unravel the complexities, consistencies and inconsistencies of the practice.

I argue that throughout this period, the female body was constructed as an index to women's emancipation, evolution of fashion, and nationalist and Communist ideology. While the nation reinforced its authority by interfere people's everyday lives, fashion trends, largely influenced by transnational cultural flows and the aspiration for social distinction, challenged national authority. Women's bodily choices were largely the result of peer pressure, which was itself derived from contemporaneous fashion, ideology and the ambiguous yet persistent morality of the female body. However, it also should be noted here that women did not all make the same bodily choices. Depending on their bodily developments, family backgrounds, personal capabilities of accessing modern commodities, sex education and personal determination, women's choices were also personal and diverse.

The geographical focus of this dissertation is not the entire Chinese territory either in the Republican or Communist period. Instead, I mainly concentrate on a few big cities – Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangzhou and the immediate outskirts of these cities. However, one has to keep in mind that even though the sources, such as popular magazines and newspapers, were published in publishing centres such as Shanghai, Tianjin, Beijing and Guangzhou, their contributors might come from all over the country, and at least as importantly, their influence went far beyond those urban centres. Furthermore, although I focus on these big cities, the practice of breast-binding was certainly not limited to these locations. Therefore I also use sources from Shaanxi, Anhui, Jiangsu, Heilongjiang, Jilin and Sichuan provinces as they are available. Ethnically, the majority of my data is on Han Chinese women. The bodily practices of ethnic minorities are not a major concern of this dissertation.

This research builds on decades of research on Chinese gender and body histories. In what follows, I will locate this project within the existing literature, focusing on the three themes introduced above, and further elaborate my questions.

Nationalism and Emancipation

Earlier research on the female body in China was preoccupied with foot-binding, especially the elite-led ‘anti-foot-binding movement’ in the name of nationalism at the turn of the century. Many scholars shared the same attitudes towards foot-binding with the late Qing and Republican activists, regarding foot-binding as evil, abnormal, brutal, and eulogising women’s emancipation from foot-binding.⁶ In addition, anti-foot-binding activists believed bound-feet women were too feeble to bear healthy future citizens. Published in 1937, Chen Dongyuan’s account of Chinese women’s history portrays Chinese women as victims of the patriarchal society who need to be liberated.⁷ This theme of women’s emancipation and their systematic oppression continued to influence women’s studies for decades. Foot-binding, the cult of chastity, arranged marriage, polygamy, the deprivation of women’s inheritance, and women’s economic dependence on men, all seemed to prove that Chinese women lived under inhuman conditions.⁸ Earlier scholarship predominantly focused on how women’s emancipative activities were forced under the context of national crisis at the turn of the twentieth century. The subjects of their research were predominantly male elites and a handful of female elites such as Qiu Jin, and their activities in the name of ‘strengthening the nation and race’.⁹

⁶ Liu Handong, “Chan zu: jixing shenmei wenhua xinli pouxi,” in *Huaxia nixing zhi mi: Zhongguo funü yanjiu lunji* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1990), 124–54; Lin Weihong, “Qingji de funü bu chan zu yundong,” in *Zhongguo funüshi lunji di-san ji* (Taipei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 1993), 183–246; Gao Hongxing, *Chan zushi* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1995); Hong Fan, *Footbinding, Feminism, and Freedom: The Liberation of Women’s Bodies in Modern China* (London: Frank Cass, 1997); Liang Jinghe, *Jindai Zhongguo lousu wenhua shanbian yanjiu*, (Beijing: Shoudu shifan daxue chubanshe, 2009, first published in 1998); Ping Wang, *Aching for Beauty: Footbinding in China* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

⁷ Chen Dongyuan, *Zhongguo funü shenghuoshi* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937).

⁸ Elisabeth Croll, *Feminism and Socialism in China* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011, first published in 1978); Bao Jialin, “Xuyan,” in *Zhongguo funüshi lunji* (Taipei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 1992, first published in 1979), 1–9; Kazuko Ono, *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

⁹ Bao Jialin, “Xinhai geming shiqi de funü sixiang,” in *Zhongguo funüshi lunji*, ed. Bao Jialin (Taipei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 1992, first published in 1979), 266–95; Bao Jialin, “Qiu jin yu qingmo funü yundong,” in *Zhongguo funüshi lunji*, ed. Bao Jialin (Taipei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 1992, first published in 1979), 346–82; Bao Jialin, “Minchu de funü sixiang,” in *Zhongguo funüshi lunji xujì*, ed. Bao Jialin (Taipei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 1991), 305–36; Lü Shipeng, “Xinhai qian shi yu nian jian

This master narrative that had evolved from studying the history of gender through political movements, political thought and elite writings from a nationalist perspective has been criticised for overlooking women's subjectivities and agency. In her study of Chinese female students in Japan, Joan Judge argues that existing scholarship focused exclusively on their nationalist and political thoughts and activities, overlooking individual women's personal autonomy and other aspects of their lives such as their studies and their relations with local Japanese.¹⁰ Wang Zheng attempts to reconcile women's agency and the function of nationalism, arguing that male elites used women as tools for national revival, whereas women also used nationalism as a vehicle to accelerate their independence. Women entered in the political realm through nationalism, and thereafter they could pursue other goals.¹¹ Lydia H. Liu argues that male elites' nationalist feminist thinking did not challenge the existing male dominance or patriarchal social structure.¹² She challenges the link between nationalist discourse and women's subjectivities by asking: "Has the notion of national identity ever been contested by alternative narratives of the self? If so, what historical possibilities arise as a result of their engagement and contention?"¹³ Zheng Yongfu and Lü Meiyi's work discusses women and the nation by tracing the genealogy of the expressions 'female citizens' (*nüguomin* 女國民) and 'mother of the citizens' (*guomin zhimu* 國民之母), yet they also suggest that linking women with nation restricts our understanding of women's self-development.¹⁴ You Jianming argues that the discourse on *jianmei* (health and beauty) in the Republican period went beyond the nationalist discourse of female sports, and instead involved

nüxue de changdao," in *Zhongguo fun üshi lunji di-san ji* (Taipei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 1993), 247–62; Xia Xiaohong, *Wanqing wenren fun üguan* (Beijing: Zuoqia chubanshe, 1995).

¹⁰ Joan Judge, "Beyond Nationalism: Gender and the Chinese Student Experience in Japan in the Early 20th Century," in *Wu sheng zhi sheng: jindai Zhongguo de fun üyu guojia (1600-1950)*, ed. Luo Jiurong and Lü Miaofen (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 2003), 359–393.

¹¹ Zheng Wang, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999); Wang Zheng, Liu He, and Ko Dorothy, "Cong nüjiezhong dao nan jie zhong: nanxing zhuti, guozu zhuyi yu xiandaixing," in *Shehui xingbie*, vol. 2 (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2004), 49.

¹² Wang , Liu, and Ko, "Cong nüjiezhong dao nan jie zhong," 53.

¹³ Lydia H. Liu, "The Female Body and Nationalist Discourse: Manchuria in Xiao Hong's Field of Life and Death," in *Body, Subject & Power in China*, ed. Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 157.

¹⁴ Zheng Yongfu and Lü Meiyi, 'Guanyu jindai Zhongguo "nüguomin" guannian de lishi kaocha', *Shanxi shida xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 32, no. 4 (July 2005): 58–63.

more discussion of women's daily bodily care, which attracted more female readers.¹⁵

The relation between the nation and women's emancipation under Communist rule is a recurrent research topic. Scholars had several debates concerning this issue. Some affirm the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment during this period.¹⁶ However, critiques of gender equality in the Mao era also proliferate in recent research. Li Xiaojiang argues that in China women's emancipation was more advanced than in the rest of the world. Under the Communist regime women had gained tremendous legal, economic and educational equality, yet their femininity and the continuation of gender inequality within families were ignored by Communist politics. In Li's view, women behaved masculinely, without realising the implications of essential physical differences between men and women.¹⁷ Wang Zheng believes that Li Xiaojiang's emphasis on gender differences could reinforce the foundations of patriarchal society, suggesting instead that the image of the 'iron woman' has challenged the boundaries of femininity and masculinity.¹⁸ The crucial issue of the debate between Li Xiaojiang and Wang Zheng lies in the definition of femininity and masculinity. Whereas Li Xiaojiang believes femininity is essentialised and determined by one's sex, Wang Zheng argues that femininity is contingent on the social construction of women. How breast-binding redefined femininity and masculinity in the Communist period will be discussed in chapter five.

In recent years, more scholars started questioning the view that the Communist regime had fundamentally emancipated women. Gilmartin argues that the Communist Party did not challenge the patriarchal structures inside the party.¹⁹ While motivating women to enter into the male workplace, the CCP still considered

¹⁵ You Jianming, "Jindai Zhongguo nüzi jianmei de lunshu (1920-1940 niandai)," in *Wu sheng zhi sheng (2): jindai Zhongguo de funü yu shehui, 1600-1950*, ed. You Jianming (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 2003), 141-172.

¹⁶ Croll, *Feminism and Socialism in China*.

¹⁷ Li Xiaojiang, "Daixu: funü yanjiu zai Zhongguo," in *Huaxia nüxing zhi mi: Zhongguo funü yanjiu lunji*, ed. Li Xiaojiang (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1990), 1-12; Li Xiaojiang, *Jiedu nüren* (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1999).

¹⁸ Wang Zheng, "Qianyi shehui xingbie xue zai Zhongguo de fazhan," *Shehuixue yanjiu*, no. 5 (2001): 34-44.

¹⁹ Christina Gilmartin, "Gender in the Formation of a Communist Body Politic," *Modern China* 19, no. 3 (July 1993): 299-329.

domestic work as the responsibility of women, and thus created a socialist patriarchy.²⁰ In her essay on women, state and family, Tani Barlow uses the intersection of gender and class for an analysis of the early CCP. She points out that since the very early stage of CCP history, the party clearly distinguished their definition of ‘women’ from that in the GMD region. The word ‘*nixing*’ represented bourgeois women, who were consumed in modernist and sexual discourses. In contrast, the word ‘*funü*’ was inscribed with Maoist notions of production and reproduction.²¹ Barlow argues that although the CCP was determined to emancipate women, women from different classes were treated with biases. Wang Xiangxian argues that during the Sino-Japanese War in the CCP-occupied Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei border area, women’s revolution was subordinated to class revolution, and women’s gender subjectivities were criticised as ‘bourgeois feminism’.²² How the female body fit into this revolutionary and emancipational discourse will be discussed in chapter four and five.

With the proliferation of studies on gender and the body in the last decade, the practice of breast-binding has attracted more scholarly attention. Several studies regard the anti-breast-binding campaign as an emancipative and patriotic movement. Wu Hao analyses unbound breasts from a fashion history perspective; Liu Zhenggang and Zeng Fanhua study this campaign as a political movement; Zeng Yue examines visual representations from the perspective of art history, yet they all argue that breast-binding was a sign of women’s oppression, and women stopped binding their breasts predominantly because of the women’s emancipation movement, mostly led by male elites who criticised breast-binding in the name of ‘strengthening the nation and race’.²³ Historian Liang Jinghe categorised breast-

²⁰ Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family, and Peasant Revolution in China* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Judith Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

²¹ Tani E. Barlow, “Theorizing Woman: Funü, Guojia, Jiating,” in *Body, Subject & Power in China*, ed. Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 253–90.

²² Wang Xiangxian, “Zhishi, zhutixing yu genjudi funü yundong: yi kangzhan shiqi de jinchaji bianqu wei anli,” in *Shehui xingbie*, vol. 2 (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2004), 61–83.

²³ Wu Hao, *Duhui yunshang: xishuo Zhongguo funü fushi yu shenti geming (1911-1935)* (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 2006); Liu Zhenggang and Zeng Fanhua, “Jiefang rufang de jiannan: Minguo shiqi ‘tianru yundong’ tanxi,” *Funü yanjiu luncong*, no. 5 (September 2010): 66–72; Zeng Yue, *Shehui, shenti, xingbie: jindai Zhongguo nixing tuxiang shenti de jiefang yu jingyu* (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2014).

binding as one of the many Chinese ‘corrupt customs’ (*lousu* 陋俗).²⁴ This approach tends to neglect women’s subjective bodily experiences, which leads to a limited understanding of women’s motivations to bind their breasts and the persistence of this practice despite the political bans. In addition, because of this neglect these studies draw the wrong conclusion that women had actually stopped binding their breasts after the anti-breast-binding campaign.

In terms of the implementation of the breast-binding ban, You Jianming did some interesting archival research of the implementation of the ban in girls’ schools.²⁵ However, You’s focus is on the schools and their disrespect towards the students, without examining how the female students responded. This dissertation further follows up this line of enquiry through examining the perspective of female students, their attitudes towards the ban and their choices to continue binding their breasts or not, in order to ask to what extent female students accepted the nationalist discourse. I am asking: Did the anti-breast-binding discourse deliver a fair image of women? What were their reasons for unbinding their breasts? How to compare the anti-breast-binding campaign with the anti-foot binding campaign? How effective was the anti-breast-binding campaign?

Very little work has explored breast-binding in the Communist period, presumably due to the sharp decline in written and visual materials on this topic after the establishment of the PRC. Harriet Evans has raised this issue by using journal articles in her analysis of discourse of sexuality and gender since 1949, pointing out that anti-breast-binding was part of the official discourse of sexuality in the 1950s. Evans argues that sexual discourse from 1949 to 1966 was highly politicised. The idea that women were biologically vulnerable, and that they were more responsible for sexual morality and domestic affairs was endorsed and reinforced by the official discourse. Evans also points out that breast-binding was still discussed in the 1990s, indicating that the practice had not ceased by that time.²⁶ However, Evan’s discussion of breast-binding in the 1950s is embedded in her discussion of sexuality

²⁴ Liang, *Jindai Zhongguo lousu wenhua shanbian yanjiu*.

²⁵ You Jianming, *Yundongchang neiwai: jindai huadong diqu de nizhi tiyu* (Taipei: Zhongyong yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 2009).

²⁶ Harriet Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China: Dominant Discourses of Female Sexuality and Gender since 1949* (Oxford: Polity, 1997), 69–70.

from 1949 to the 1990s in general; she does not examine the continuity and change of the breast-binding discourse from the previous Republican era. In addition, Evans draws her conclusions based on the study of published sources, which cannot explain the reason why women practised breast-binding, women's daily experiences of breast-binding, the implementation of unbinding campaigns in schools, as well as the influence of the changing style of clothes on this matter. In this dissertation, I will explore the potential complexities of the nationalist discourse, policies and anti-breast-binding movements. My study of breast-binding asks: How did breast-binding become a public and political issue in both Republican and Communist China?

Fashion and the Modern Girls

Leo Ou-fan Lee's study of Shanghai's urban modernity initiated a wave of research into the consumer culture of Republican China, and one key feature of this modernity was the emergence and the consumption of 'modern girls'.²⁷ Beautiful women were portrayed and photographed to appear in calendar posters and pictorials. On the one hand, they were purchased as commodities by those who were eager to consume the beauty of the female body. On the other hand, they also provided essential fashion information to urban girls.²⁸ During the Republican period, women's hairstyles, the length of the *qipao*, the usage of stockings, the designs of shoes and hats etc., were all discussed in popular journals. Women's fashion changed rapidly, and fashionable outfits would be completely different every few years.²⁹ Antonia Finnane observes that 'natural feet' had been quickly accepted in urban areas by the 1920s, whereas 'natural breasts' took much longer for women to adopt. Finnane argues that this was because the unbound breast required new

²⁷ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

²⁸ Ellen Johnston Laing, *Selling Happiness: Calendar Posters and Visual Culture in Early-Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004); Yingjin Zhang, "Artwork, Commodity, Event: Representations of the Female Body in Modern Chinese Pictorials," in *Visual Culture in Shanghai 1850s-1930s*, ed. Jason C Kuo (Washington, D.C: New Academia Publishing, 2007), 121-161; Sun Liying, "1920 niandai Shanghai de huajia, zhishi fenzi yu luoti shijue wenhua: yi Zhang Jingsheng 'luoti yanjiu' wei zhongxin," *Qinghua zhongwen xuebao*, no. 10 (December 2013): 287-340.

²⁹ Wu, *Duhui yunshang*; Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

undergarment technology and new sartorial technology for the production of women's dresses,³⁰ which is questionable, as I will discuss in chapter three.

In her study of images of women in Late Qing and Republican China, Zeng Yue devoted one chapter to breast-binding alongside her discussions on foot-binding, nudity, costume, women and family, and the New Women. Methodologically, Zeng's visual analysis of women's bodily shapes and postures from Tany dynasty to late Qing period is fascinating, which inspires me to analyse further women's postures through visual materials. In her research on breast-binding, Zeng argues that modern Chinese women had duplicated Western ideas, dresses, bodily postures etc. comprehensively, which is misleading as I will argue in chapter three that women adopted Western ideas selectively. Zeng believes that women's bodily postures completely changed both in visual representations and in reality.³¹ Zeng fails to notice the gap between representations and women's practices. In this dissertation, I will ask: Did the changes in image and reality happen at the same time? Was there a rupture between graphic representations and women's daily experience?

Jun Lei's recent article about breast-binding in the 1930s argues that the popularisation of the aesthetics of flat chests in China and the West in the 1920s and 1930s was due to the global spread of ideas about gender equality and visual materials of women.³² Although the aesthetics of flat chests emerged almost simultaneously in Republican China and the West, I will argue in chapter three that their logics bore few similarities. Whereas in the West flat chests represented women's liberation, in Republican China, they mainly embodied women's embarrassment of their bodies due to aesthetics and morality of the female body that existed in China long before the twentieth century. The usages of Western women's images in Chinese media sometimes delivered completely different meanings from their original contexts.

The consumption of fashionable modern girls was intensely sexualised. You Jianming points out that the aesthetic of female athletes was constructed from the

³⁰ Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China*, 163.

³¹ Zeng, *Shehui, shenti, xingbie*, 4-5.

³² Jun Lei, "Natural Curves: Breast-Binding and Changing Aesthetics of the Female Body in China of the Early Twentieth Century," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2015).

perspective of the male gaze.³³ Even in women's magazines such as *Linglong*, male editors sexualised the female body.³⁴ Wang Zheng argues although male elites promoted coeducation in the name of gender equality or nationalism, their real motivation was their desire of having female classmates, yet this point has been neglected in historical writings.³⁵ In this dissertation, I will explore the sexualisation of the female breasts in popular discourse, which reveals the complexity and diversity of the Republican feminist discourse. The sexualisation of the female body in the Republican period was also bitterly criticised under the Communist regime, as evidence of the corrupt bourgeois lifestyles that allegedly characterised that period.

In terms of women's dress and women's representation, Emily Honig points out that for most Chinese and Western observers, the Communist period rejected femininity and created gender-neutral representations of women.³⁶ However, this is also challenged in recent research. Hung-Yok Ip examines fashion in Communist culture in pre-Cultural Revolution China, arguing that revolutionaries, both men and women, appreciated beauty in the broad sense. Women dress fashionably in the name of revolution when carrying out activities in the GMD region. Revolutionary male elites also had an appetite for fashionable urban women, even though this was contradictory to their own propaganda.³⁷ However, Ip's article focuses exclusively on revolutionary elite women, such as Jiang Qing, Deng Yingchao, Song Qingling, Yang Zhishui, Wang Guangmei and Bai Yang. Although it is convincing that these women always had the wills and ways to achieve beauty, their decorations were nevertheless only used in the GMD region before 1949, or to meet foreign guests in post-1949 occasions. Approaching the 1960s, these outfits received more critiques, which will be discussed in chapter four. Many of the Communist female elites were greatly criticised during the Cultural Revolution, and were categorised as new ruling elites. In addition, Ip does not touch on the daily stress of appearances that ordinary women faced during Mao's era.

³³ You, "Jindai Zhongguo nǚzi jianmei de lunshu."

³⁴ Zhang Peilin, "Xingwenhua yu qikan chuban: yi *Linglong* (1931-1937) weili," *Jindai Zhongguo jin üshi yanjiu*, no. 25 (June 2015): 119–94.

³⁵ Wang, Liu, and Ko, "Cong nǚjiezhong dao nan jie zhong," 39.

³⁶ Emily Honig, "Maoist Mappings of Gender: Reassessing the Red Guards," in *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, ed. Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2002), 255–57.

³⁷ Hung-Yok Ip, "Fashioning Appearances: Feminine Beauty in Chinese Communist Revolutionary Culture," *Modern China* 29, no. 3 (2003): 329–61.

Therefore, a study that covers both the Republican and Communist periods, pre- and post-Cultural Revolution, is essential to understand the continuities and changes of women's attitudes towards beauty and bodily practices. In this dissertation, I will ask: How was the female bodily shape represented? Did the practice of breast-binding shift because of new fashion trends? To what extent was the anti-breast-binding campaign sexualising the female body? Does this conflict with notions of female virtue? What was the relation between reproductive body and sexual body?

Women's Voice and Agency

The nationalist and fashion approaches can only tell us about the aspirations of certain elite groups, yet how women experienced their bodies is missing from above studies. More recently, research on women and gender history shifted the focus to a more bottom-up approach, studying women's everyday experiences, their emotions and their struggles under broader social and cultural contexts. This trend was marked with Dorothy Ko's *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* and Patricia Ebrey's *The Inner Quarters*, which analyse women's talents, writings, their roles at home, and their daily lives in late Ming and early Qing dynasty, and Song dynasty respectively.³⁸ Wang Zheng's work *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment* studies women's agencies in the intellectual and political spheres.³⁹ You Jianming's recent work on women's sports provides a good example of combining discourse analysis and the history of women's sports, showing how female athletes challenged the nationalist grand narratives through their daily training and competitions.⁴⁰ Methodologically, apart from analysing women's writings, since the late 1980s, historians have made great efforts to collect 'women's voices' through oral history projects.⁴¹

³⁸ Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993).

³⁹ Wang, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*.

⁴⁰ You, *Yundongchang neiwai*.

⁴¹ Emily Honig, *Personal Voices: Chinese Women in the 1980's* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); Li Xiaojang, ed., *Rang nüren ziji shuohua*, vol. 1–4 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2003); Luo Jiurong, You Jianming, and Qu Haiyuan, eds., *Fenghuo suiyue xia de Zhongguo funü fangwen jilu* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 2004); You Jianming, Huang Mingming, Zheng

In her study of foot-binding, Dorothy Ko offers inspiring ideas of ‘women’s voices’. Although Ko is sceptical of the authenticity of ‘women’s voices’, she nevertheless analyses female teachers in the seventeenth century and foot-binding from the perspective of women’s subjectivities. She argues that firstly, women with bound feet did a huge variety of domestic work and many had been talented writers, rather than being oppressed, immobile, unproductive and ignorant, as the May-Fourth view of history often claimed.⁴² Secondly, as an everyday experience, foot-binding was never a homogenous phenomenon, but differed according to class and region. Foot-binding was a symbol of women’s status, as women from higher social classes could bind their feet smaller. Thirdly, foot-binding existed for hundreds of years, not only because of men’s desire, but it also resulted from women’s collaboration. Finally, Ko suggests that the political movement of anti-foot-binding ignored women’s bodily difficulties in the name of emancipation and national honour. Once the feet had been bound successfully, unbinding would cause women tremendous pain. Although many women unbound their feet due to government enforcement, they had to bind them again secretly due to the pain of unbinding.⁴³

Ko’s study, however, fails to include one crucial dimension of the study of the body: age, as if women’s bodily practices and perceptions were consistent during their lifetimes. Ko addresses women’s agency through their competitions of feet, and life-long maintenance. However, she overlooks the coercive power of forcing women into this practice at a very early age, as foot-binding started when girls were aged from five to ten, when they did not have the physical or mental power to resist their parents. Ko does not explain at what point in women’s lives they stopped resisting foot-binding and turned it into competitions of fashionable feet. In this study of breast-binding, it is very clear that women mostly practised breast-binding at a certain age range in their lives, before getting married or having children. The practice also varied depending on women’s age. The double standard of breasts

Lirong, *Chuncan daosi sifangjin: Shao Menglan n iishi fangwen jilu* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 2005).

⁴² Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 1–9.

⁴³ Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella’s Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2007).

between married and unmarried women was closely related to women's age, which will be discussed in following chapters.

Jun Lei argues that breast-binding “signifies the increasing aspiration among Chinese new women to exert control over their own bodies and their surroundings”, because women, particularly educated women, bound their breasts in order not to look like ‘milk bottles’ but independent individuals. In contrast, unbound breasts signified women's identities as either mothers of the nation, whose natural breasts made their breast-feeding possible, or as sexual playthings, who seduced men with their ample breasts.⁴⁴ However, Lei's argument is problematic because firstly, the two primary sources she uses to support this argument do not mention anything about breast-binding. One of the articles, rather, is about a married woman who has several children and wishes to be more independent rather than doing domestic work all day long.⁴⁵ As mentioned above, the majority of women would stop breast-binding after getting married or having children, therefore a married woman's statement of resisting being a ‘milk bottle’ does not indicate that she uses breast-binding to “exert control over their own bodies and their surroundings”. The other article is about the general awakening of women's self-awareness and subjectivities,⁴⁶ which might not necessarily mean that women bound their breasts because of a spirit of independence. Secondly, Lei does not explain her usage of the term ‘agency’, and she does not explore further the coercive factors that influenced women's decisions. It is true as Jun Lei writes that “[m]any educated young women who lived in early twentieth-century China faced the dilemma: to bind or not to bind”, yet Lei's interpretation overgeneralises women's choices in the dilemma. I would further ask: Is it possible to make such distinctions of body controllers, and mothers of the nation/sexual playthings? Why did women wish to ‘exert control over their bodies’? What if they wished to control their bodies because of sexual conservativeness? How do we explain women who actively participated in the anti-breast-binding campaigns? How to locate their agency? Did they regard themselves as mothers of the nation or sexual objects?

⁴⁴ Lei, “Natural Curves.”

⁴⁵ Huang Xiufen, “Shengyu de jiqi yao zuodao jishi weizhi ne,” *Fun ü zazhi* 17, no. 1 (January, 1931): 221–23.

⁴⁶ Wang Chuncui, “Nüxuesheng de guoqu xianzai ji jianglai,” *Fun ü zazhi* 11, no. 6 (June, 1925): 1090–99.

In her study of fashion and politics in Guangzhou during the Cultural Revolution, Sun Peidong notices the practice of breast-binding, and she Sun explains by flattening their breasts, women did not show their femininities during that time.⁴⁷ This suggestion, however, simplifies women's diverse experiences. In my dissertation, I explore women's understanding of gender identity and femininity in order to answer the question: Did women bind their breasts in order to be gender-neutral?

Li Yinhe's *Love and Sexuality of Chinese Women* also has a section on breast-binding among women who grew up during the Maoist period, arguing it was due to the sexual repression during the Maoist period, which was ultimately the result of thousands of years of Confucianism and decades of revolutionary ideology.⁴⁸ However, Li Yinhe does not explain in which ways Confucianism and revolutionary ideology impacted on women's daily lives. In analysing women's personal accounts, I ask: How did women from different classes perceive their bodies? What factors influenced women's choices of breast-binding and unbinding?

Theorising Body and Gender

From the late 1970s, the study of the human body has increasingly attracted historians' attention. In this section, I shall explore two clusters of the key concepts of the body that inform my research. The first cluster includes the concepts of discipline and resistance, agency and coercion. The second includes embodiment, habitus, and performance. Instead of regarding these concepts as unrelated, the following discussion will also discuss the inter-relation of these concepts.

Discipline/Resistance, Agency/Coercion

In *The History of Sexuality and Discipline and Punish*, Foucault suggested that the individual body and life are strictly under the governance and control of the

⁴⁷ Sun Peidong, *Shishang yu zhengzhi: Guangdong minzhong richang zhuozhuang shishang (1966-1976)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2013).

⁴⁸ Lin Yinhe, *Zhongguo nüxing de ganqing yu xing* (Beijing: Jinri zhongguo chubanshe, 1998), 24–26.

authorities. The body, according to Foucault, is something “docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” in every society by “constraints, prohibitions or obligations”.⁴⁹ Foucault’s idea of discipline is particularly useful to analyse the cultural and social construction of the body from a top-down direction in my research. Various power agents such as the government, eminent intellectuals, school teachers, medical experts, editors and authors all participated in disciplining the female breasts. The concept of ‘discipline’ provides a useful tool for the analysis of the hidden agenda of the nationalist, scientific and liberating discourse.

Foucault’s view has been criticised for over-emphasising the regulation of the body, neglecting the agency and resistance of those whose bodies are disciplined. In feminist theory, agency has long been ascribed to female bodies as a form of empowerment of women that allows them to challenge the patriarchal knowledge, values and social structures.⁵⁰ The term agency had been predominantly used to indicate a certain form of resistance.

However, this usage of agency has been challenged firstly for being over-optimistic about women’s autonomy and for overlooking the coercive power of other individuals, the state, the economy and beliefs. Sociologist Kathy Davis clarifies that individual agency does not equal ‘free choice’, because a world with absolute freedom does not exist. Individual agency is always intertwined with power and constraints.⁵¹ Madhock, Philips and Wilson argue that while underlining “agency of those presumed to lack it” is still important, it could not be fairly understood without considering “its relationships to power” and their “mutual entwinement”.⁵² The emphasis on agency by feminist scholars is rooted in their efforts to rescue women

⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1981, first published in 1976 in French); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995, first published in 1975 in French), 136.

⁵⁰ Alexandra Howson, *Embodying Gender* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005), 133; Mary Evans, “The Meanings of Agency,” in *Gender, Agency and Coercion*, ed. Sumi Madhock, Anne Philips, and Kalpana Wilson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 56.

⁵¹ Kathy Davis, *Dubious Equalities and Embodied Differences: Cultural Studies on Cosmetic Surgery* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 12.

⁵² Sumi Madhock, Anne Philips, and Kalpana Wilson, “Afterword,” in *Gender, Agency and Coercion*, ed. Sumi Madhock, Anne Philips, and Kalpana Wilson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 259–61.

from the ‘passive victim’ model, which nevertheless leads to another problematic situation of feminist research as quoted:

It becomes clear that the language of agency lends itself to multiple distortions and co-options. Development agencies reject images of women as passive victims but then move seamlessly on to equally racialised representations of them as neo-liberal heroines who will single-handedly effect development...Post-feminists celebrate the engagement of girls and women in making their own lives but then seem to reject *any* understanding of victimisation, coercion, or domination. When left as a simpler assertion of the capacity to act, the emphasis on agency alone encourages complacency about the power relations that frame all activity and can lead to uncritical endorsements of individual efficacy and choice.⁵³

Instead of the dichotomy of agent or victim, they highlight “the complex ways in which agency and coercion are entwined, often in a non-antithetical relationship”.⁵⁴ In her book of cosmetic surgery in contemporary China, Wen Hua admits by having cosmetic surgery, women exercise their agency within a given social structure rather than challenging it.⁵⁵

Therefore apart from identifying women’s agency, it is equally important to recognise the constraints that limit women’s choices, which come in various forms from multiple sources. In the case of breast-binding, control came from the nation, fashion, women’s friends, passers-by on the street, conventional aesthetics, and the expectation of chastity. Choosing any one of those factors (for example the nation), and claiming that women were resisting that, might ignore other aspects of that complex set of power relations. This would lead to an over-optimistic view of female resistance as in Lei Jun’s article. Lei neglected other sources of control that were far more important in women’s daily lives.

⁵³ Ibid., 259.

⁵⁴ Sumi Madhock, Anne Philips, and Kalpana Wilson, “Introduction,” in *Gender, Agency and Coercion*, ed. Sumi Madhock, Anne Philips, and Kalpana Wilson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 3.

⁵⁵ Hua Wen, *Buying Beauty: Cosmetic Surgery in China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 206–7.

In addition, the idea that agency stands only for acts of autonomy and resistance is challenged. Other forms of agency such as speech and silence are introduced.⁵⁶ In her recently finished PhD thesis, Shen Yang introduces another form of agency, ‘coping’, which means acts of non-resistance that neither challenge nor resist the existing hegemonic powers.⁵⁷ If we take acts of non-resistance as forms of agency, agency might imply all the actions and non-actions that do not completely obey the power relations. Shen Yang further explains that agency implies that a subject has the intention to make her/his life better and tries to change a situation. But the question is in what way somebody wants to change the situation? To what extent does one have to make a compromise with the hegemonic power in that process of change?

If we take multiple coercive powers into consideration, there are examples where in a single event, both the agency of ‘resistance’ and ‘non-resistance’ can be found. In her research on breast-binding in Republican China, Lei Jun suggests that women exercised their agencies by binding their breasts in order to enter into the public sphere. However, if we take the concept of ‘resistant agency’ and ‘non-resistant agency’ into account, we might find that Lei only tells part of the story. Women who bound their breasts also colluded with the patriarchal society that cherished women’s chastity. The action of entering the public sphere shows women’s agency, yet the action of breast-binding does not transcend the patriarchal system, and thus can only be categorised as ‘non-resistant’ agency. I would argue in the study of the body, if we use the concept of ‘agency’, it is vitally important to distinguish between different forms of agency, as different forms of agency encode different intentions, actions, consequences, and one’s relations with the wider context. The concept of different forms of agency is useful to avoid a simple victimisation of breast-binding women, and provides a tool to understand women’s various situations. However, I am not interested in categorising different kinds of women’s agency per se. Instead, I aim to explore the meaning of women’s actions in

⁵⁶ Sumi Madhock, “Action, Agency, Coercion: Reframing Agency for Oppressive Contexts,” in *Gender, Agency and Coercion*, ed. Sumi Madhock, Anne Philips, and Kalpana Wilson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 102–21.

⁵⁷ Yang Shen, “Transforming Life in China: Gendered Experiences of Restaurant Workers in Shanghai” (Ph.D. thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2015), 66.

specific contexts and an analysis of the particular social and political power configurations that women were challenging or compromising with.

These complex relations between agency and coercion will be addressed in the analysis of women's practices of breast-binding, with the purpose of figuring out how women exercised their agency, what form of agency they exercised, as well as the coercive structures they were living in. By exercising their agency, women always dealt with different constraints, and any action could be read as resisting one form of control, yet colluding with another one at the same time. By going out with bound breasts, women violated the nationalist ban on breast-binding, yet they did not resist the social convention of gender conservativeness and sexual morality. The action of violating the political ban meant conforming to long-standing social conventions, which was a more practical and appropriate way to cope with the situation. The violation of political instructions only proves that social and moral norms were more powerful than the political discourses.

Embodiment, Habitus and Performance

While Foucault has been criticised for focusing on “what is done to the body rather than on what the body does”,⁵⁸ Bourdieu and Butler's theory of embodiment, habitus and performance particularly probes bodily practice, and seeks to reconcile the binary between social discipline and bodily practice.

Firstly, disciplining only works through embodiment, and embodied knowledge has the potential to reshape knowledge. Shifting the focus from the top-down approach of discipline, in order to figure out how disciplines actually work on individuals, Bourdieu suggests that it is only through exercises in specific time and space that rules became effective. Individuals' understandings of the rules are embodied, rather than abstract representations.⁵⁹ Apart from reacting to the constructed knowledge mechanically, agents also participate in producing, interpreting and reinterpreting knowledge, meanings and constrictions. The process

⁵⁸ Bryan. S Turner, *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory*, 2nd ed (London: SAGE, 1996, first edition published in 1984), 33.

⁵⁹ Charles Taylor, “To Follow a Rule,” in *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Shusterman (Oxford, Malden: Blackwell, 1999), 34, 39.

of creation of a system constitutes a course of collective history, which is acquired by the negotiations of individual histories. Individuals create their histories for the sake of practice, rather than for the sake of pure knowledge.⁶⁰ This inspires me to read the breast-binding discourse in relation to the actual practice, and look at their complex relations. For example, the shifting practice of upper-middle class women reshaped the stereotyped discourse of the body. From the 1910s to the late 1920s, most essays criticised urban upper-middle class women for binding their breasts, which indicated their vain pursuit of beauty, whereas during the 1930s to the 1940s, when fewer upper-middle class women would bind their breasts, the press started to criticise the ignorant and backward rural women for doing so. This shift indicates that the bodily practice also reshapes social values and customs.

Secondly, all the knowledge of individuals, including their knowledge of self/interpersonal relationship/local, national and transnational world is embodied. Therefore through the study of embodiment, we could achieve a subtle understanding of what kind of knowledge individuals internalised. “[T]he physical characteristics of our own bodies, our mannerisms, shape, size, habits and movements, contribute to and shape our perceptions and interactions with others in everyday life. Indeed, we see the world and operate within it from the particular vantage point of our own body, and so embodiment is a critical component of social interaction.”⁶¹ The way that one acts, moves, behaves in public space – “whether I am ‘macho’ or timid or eager to please or calm and unflappable” could reveal one’s most subtle yet pervasive attitudes to the outside world.⁶² This inspires me to look at women’s (as well as male elites’) attitudes to and knowledge of sexuality, aesthetics, class distinctions, hygiene, ideologies, etc. through breast-binding. By exploring how women considered the what and why of things that were tolerable or taboo, we can gain a better understanding of the gap between what was advocated and what was practised.

⁶⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000, first published in 1979 in French), 469.

⁶¹ Alexandra Howson, *The Body in Society: An Introduction*, 1 edition (Cambridge; Malden: Polity Press, 2003), 2.

⁶² Taylor, “To Follow a Rule,” 35.

Thirdly, knowledge could be collectively embodied. “[O]ur ability to grasp directions and follow rules is to a large degree embodied...My embodied understanding doesn’t exist only in me as an individual agent; it also exists in me as the co-agent of common actions.”⁶³ This idea of common actions is particularly important, as it suggests a way to find shared mentalities through individual bodies.

In addition, embodiment is classified, but the classification is under continuous negotiation. Bourdieu suggests that the trivial things in daily lives such as diet, dancing, tastes of music, and dressing could all be factors that distinguish people from different classes. However, the classification is not a stable one. “[T]he social agents whom the sociologist classifies are producers not only of classifiable acts but also of acts of classification which are themselves classified.”⁶⁴ The body has a certain ‘cultural capital’ that would reinforce and reshape the classification of a society. This point encourages me to consider to what extent women used their bodies as ‘cultural capital’ to construct their self-identity and to distinguish themselves from others. The classification is not necessarily made by economic status, but also by educational level and family background. In the case of breast-binding, women’s class differentiations were made through their personal prioritising of these factors. Women from the same economic class might have different bodily practices, as they might portray their bodies according to their different background that could distinguish them. Women managed their bodies in order to be acceptable by society, yet distinguishable from other classes. In the Communist period, the diversified and personalised class distinctions created enormous difficulties for the Communists to define a fixed bodily norm.

While the idea of embodiment provides a tool to link collective habitus and individuals, Judith Butler’s idea of performance helps me to investigate the subjectivities of women. According to Butler, the meaning of men, women and gender is not singular. The sexual differences are not fixed, but are continuously

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 469.

constituted by individuals' performative acts, which are inevitably shaped by socially shared and historically constructed politics.⁶⁵

Gender is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy. Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, but if this continuous act is mistaken for a natural or linguistic given, power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds.⁶⁶

To conclude this theoretical section, although this thesis attempts to outline the political and discursive control of the female body, it sees the 'discipline and resistance' binary as problematic. It points out that the bodily practice was also multi-layered and cannot only be explained by either obedience or resistance. The attempts to identify women's agency in certain respects should not downplay the collusiveness of their performance in others. If we regard the political or discursive authority as top-down disciplines, the practices of individual women are not necessarily from the bottom-up direction. In other words, if we consider the discipline and representations of the female body as a one-way street that aimed at channelling female practice, female practice did not simply reverse it into a two-way street, rather, it was multi-way. In one single action, we can find both obedience and resistance, or neither of them. Therefore I emphasise more the bodily performance, which indicates the various practices of women that do not necessarily fit in the category of either obedience or resistance. I will further ask: Why did women perform in a certain way? What do these performances tell us about what they feared or felt encouraged to do? What knowledge did their performances embody? Was there any change and evolution of their bodily performance? What knowledge did these changes embody?

Methods and Sources

⁶⁵ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 529–30.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 531.

This dissertation uses a wide range of sources, including periodicals, visual materials, literature, autobiographies, memoirs, historical archives, oral histories and artifacts. Firstly, I trace the changing and continuous attitudes towards breast-binding and the aesthetics of the female body through analysing texts and images. A big portion of this kind of sources is Republican and Communist periodicals, including major newspapers, women's periodicals, medical periodicals and pictorials. The most cited periodicals are *Shenbao* 申報, *Beiyang huabao* 北洋畫報, *Funü zazhi* 婦女雜誌, *Furen huabao* 婦人畫報, *Linglong* 玲瓏, *Shidai manhua* 時代漫畫, *Renmin ribao* 人民日報, *Guangming ribao* 光明日報, *Jiefang ribao* 解放日報, *Yangcheng wanbao* 羊城晚報, *Zhongguo qingnian* 中國青年 and *Zhongguo funü* 中國婦女. What I'm looking for in the breast-binding writings is not only the elites' doctrines towards women about what should or should not be done to their bodies, but also importantly, the shared common ethics and practices of women during that time.

I find the method of reading Republican journals promoted by a group of researchers through the project *A New Approach to the Popular Press in China: Gender and Cultural Production, 1904-1937* especially inspiring. The research group developed a methodology of 'horizontal' and 'vertical' reading, which means on the one hand, researchers should explore one theme in different journals and study the journals in their own historical context, and on the other, particular themes should be examined over certain continuous period.⁶⁷ By the same token, I suggest that breast-binding should be studied horizontally, in order to understand this practice in its specific historical context. I should also explore it vertically, which allows us to trace continuities and changes of this practice in the long term.

Secondly, in order to probe into women's experiences of breast-binding, I use women's accounts in periodicals, autobiographies and memoirs. In addition, I conducted 39 semi-structured interviews with women born between 1914 and 1959 from Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Rugao and Daqing.⁶⁸ I contacted my interviewees

⁶⁷ Doris Sung, Liying Sun, and Matthias Arnold, "The Birth of a Database of Historical Periodicals: Chinese Women's Magazines in the Late Qing and Early Republican Period," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 33, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 227.

⁶⁸ Rugao, a city in northern Jiangsu Province, commonly called Village of Longevity, where many people lived until their 90s and even 100s. Daqing, a socialist oil industrial city constructed since 1959 in northeast China. The woman I interviewed in Daqing all did heavy labour jobs as workers.

through Women's Federations, nursing homes, Chinese researchers, friends and family. Occasionally, I used the snowball method, asking my interviewees to introduce their friends to me. I selected my interviewees from a wide range of backgrounds. Their occupations include peasant, worker, teacher, academic researcher, civil servant, doctor, technician, journalist, editor, etc. Their family backgrounds also varied from peasants, workers, merchants, GMD or CCP high officials and literati. In each interview, I would first introduce myself and the aim of the project – to study the changes of women's clothes and bodily shapes since the 1910s to the 1970s. I would ask my interviewee to briefly introduce her family background, education, occupation and marital status. Then I asked them to recall their daily clothes of their early years, and would thus touch upon the question of undergarment and their bodily experiences of breasts and menstruation. In contrast to my expectations, many women enthusiastically shared their intimate experiences and stories of their bodies, rather than avoiding talking about this topic. For the interviews conducted up to August 2013 I had asked my interviewees for verbal consent. I then designed a consent form for the following interviews. The interviewees could choose to use their real names or not, as stated in the consent form in the appendix.

The aim of the interviews is threefold: firstly, to see if women practised breast-binding or not; secondly, to know if and when the brassiere was adopted by Chinese women; thirdly, to explore their attitudes towards their bodies, especially breasts. Some of the women who were born in the 1910s and 1920s were not in good health and had memory and hearing problems, yet they could still recall some of their childhood and puberty experiences. For those women who did not practise breast-binding, the interviews focused on their knowledge of breast-binding, their perception of the bodily shape, their personal undergarments, and their attitudes towards women with flat chests and plump breasts. With women who had bound their breasts, the interviews focused on their experiences of breast-binding, and their attitudes towards the female body. The interview questions and a full list of interviewees are listed as appendices.

Structure of the Thesis

The main body of the thesis is divided into five chronologically and thematically arranged chapters.

Chapter one fleshes out the moral, aesthetic, and medical background of the practice of breast-binding, from the Song dynasty to the early Republican period. Although the origin of breast-binding is difficult, if not impossible, to trace, this chapter argues that the aesthetics and morality that supports this practice has a long history in China. By scrutinising a wide range of pre-modern texts on female virtues, physiognomy and novels, this chapter looks at how the female breasts were utilised in the teaching of sexual morality. The second part of the chapter examines how the female body was represented in visual materials from the Song Dynasty to Republican China, and what the dominant aesthetics of the female breasts during this period was. Thirdly, this chapter investigates how ordinary people understood the link between breasts and female virtue through their understanding of the female body in popular medicine.

Chapter two discusses the many facets of nationalism in the anti-breast-binding campaign. This chapter argues that the anti-breast-binding discourse was highly nationalistic; however the power of nationalism was on the one hand, very limited in regulating women's practices, and on the other hand, undermined by the sexualisation of the female breasts. Through looking at the anti-breast-binding campaign and popular medical discourse, I shall first discuss why and how breast-binding became a public and political concern. In what follows, I shall look at the reception and implementation of the anti-breast-binding ban in order to examine women's embodiment of various ideas. The third part of this chapter shifts its focus on three preeminent literati: Hu Shi, Zhang Jingsheng and Lu Xun. It examines how they advocated the unbinding of breasts for nationalist purposes, and how their voices deconstructed the nationalist discourse by stimulating discussions in the lowbrow tabloids in sexual and erotic ways.

Chapter three traces changing fashions of the female body, especially feminine curves, from the early Republican era to the 1940s. It argues that with the shifting of the ideal of female beauty from flat-chested bodies to curvaceous ones in urban areas, many women actively sought ways to enlarge their breasts, yet ordinary

women's attitudes towards the breasts were quite diverse, depending on their education, family background and social class. Through examining texts and visual materials on the beauty of the female body, this chapter firstly looks at how the ideal of female beauty changed in this period. The second part of this chapter explores how women managed their bodies through sartorial changes, sports, bodily therapy, medicine etc. Similar to other fashion trends, the curvy female body was also limited to certain social classes, thus the third part of the chapter discusses how the female breasts were 'classified' through fashion trends, how ample breasts became symbols of the urban upper class women, and how ordinary women distinguished themselves from other social classes through their bodily experiences.

Chapter four deals with the construction and negotiation of the proper female body in the early PRC, arguing that the previously fashionable ideal of the curvy body was reversed in the Communist period. Through regulating people's dress, the nation regulated women's bodies by imposing its ideology on a personal level. By looking at the discussion of beauty, dress reform and the class characteristics of dress in Communist periodicals, this chapter discusses the relation between proletarian aesthetics and Communist ideology. The first years of the socialist regime allowed space for designers and ordinary people to embrace fashion trends that were claimed opposing to the socialist ideology, yet through the discussion of proletarian aesthetics, Communist ideology was further consolidated. In addition, the final part of this chapter examines how the new ideal of the Communist female body was constructed through analysing various Communist novels and visual materials.

The last chapter, chapter five, examines women's experiences of breast-binding and unbinding during the Mao era. I argue that women's choices regarding breast-binding can only be understood by thoroughly examining their sexual education, sexual morality, peer pressures, their sense of beauty and the various forms of potential violence around them. By binding their breasts, women created not only a gender-neutral body, but also a redefined femininity. By unbinding their breasts, they constantly adjusted their bodies according to changing circumstances. This chapter asks why breast-binding continued to be practised under the Communist regime despite the radical changes in the social and political environment from Republican to Communist China. The first part of this chapter scrutinises the anti-

breast-binding activities in the early PRC, finding many similarities to the Republican nationalist and hygienic discourse. Also similar to the nationalist discourse, the Communist anti-breast-binding activities had very limited influence on women's practice of breast-binding. The following parts of the chapter examine the reasons why women bound their breasts, from various aspects of their personal lives.

Chapter 1 Morality and Aesthetics of Breast-Binding

As early as 1911, *Shenbao* published an editorial criticising the fashion trend of breast-binding. The editor claimed that “recently tight and small clothes became popular among women...and women have to use towels (*fujin* 幅巾) to flatten their chests as the Chinese custom regards flat chests as beautiful”.¹ The popularity of breast-binding at that time is quite visible through photographs of women. Almost all of the young women who could afford to have their picture taken at that time presented a straight-lined body, or slightly bowed posture, as the cases of Shanghai courtesans (Figure 1-1), Chiang Kai-shek’s concubine Chen Jieru (Figure 1-2), and Yang Buwei, a prominent director of a girls’ school (Figure 1-3) show. Highly visible due to the deployment of photography, at the turn of the twentieth century, courtesans were the trend leaders at least in metropolitan Shanghai.² In Republican periodicals, breast-binding was widely documented at least in Guangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing, Jiangsu and Anhui. This chapter aims to trace the morality and aesthetics behind this practice, from the pre-modern period to the early Republican era.

1.1 Breasts and Gender Morality

The origin of breast-binding has puzzled both Republican and contemporary scholars. Some Republican writers argued that breast-binding had been practised for hundreds and thousands of years, but without giving much evidence for this claim.³ In contrast, other Republican writers like sexologist Zhang Jingsheng 張競生 (1888-1970)⁴ and the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly novelist Bao Tianxiao 包天笑 (1876-1973) claimed that breast-binding was a relatively new phenomenon that had existed only for a couple of decades. Zhang Jingsheng’s statement was based on a conversation

¹ Tegong, “Bianji yutan,” *Shenbao*, September 26, 1911.

² Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Catherine Vance Yeh, *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals, and Entertainment Culture, 1850-1910* (Seattle, London: University of Washington Press, 2006).

³ Liu Yulun, “Wei tichang tianru yundong gao geming funü,” in *Fengsu gaige congkan*, 1930; Ma Kaiyu, “Shuxiong leru,” *Zhongguo weisheng zazhi er nian quanji*, 1931, 306–8.

⁴ For a detailed biography of Zhang Jingsheng, see Jiang Xiaoyuan, “Zhang Jingsheng qiren qishi,” in *Xingshi* (Taipei: Dala chuban gufen youxian gongsi, 2005), 9–23. Leon Rocha, “Sex, Eugenics, Aesthetics, Utopia in the Life and Work of Zhang Jingsheng 張競生 (1888-1970)” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2010).

with his elder friend. Bao Tianxiao said that women did not wear the breast-binding vest until recently based on his observation.⁵

More recent research traces the origins of breast-binding based on sartorial evidence of undergarments from pre-modern China. Zeng Yue argues that breast-binding was practised at least since the late Ming dynasty, because then women started to wear strapless vests. These vests would not fit well on the body unless women bound their breasts tight (as shown in Figure 1-4).⁶ Several other fashion historians also take the same stand.⁷ However, this argument is debatable because firstly, how widely this kind of vests were used is not clear; and secondly, women might tighten the vests in order to fit them to their bodies, yet the degree of tightness is still uncertain. Did they bind their breasts completely flat in the way the late Qing and Republican women presented their bodies? Or did they just tighten the vests without the intention to show a straight-lined body? These questions still remain unanswered.

In her new research on breast-binding, Lei Jun argues that undergarments in pre-modern China were not used for binding breasts. The names of these undergarments – *dudou* 肚兜 (stomach wrap), *zhuyao* 主腰 (waist controller), *moxiong* 抹胸 (chest cover), *pafu* 帕腹 (abdomen kerchief), *baofu* 包腹 (abdomen hugger), *xinyi* 心衣 (heart cloth) – did not suggest the action of binding. Therefore Lei believes that breast-binding was a new phenomenon starting from the late nineteenth century.⁸ This argument is problematic because firstly, it assumes that the names of the undergarments would have indicated their functions. However, if we take a look at the names of the undergarment used for breast-binding in the Republican period, *xiao majia* 小马甲 (little vest), *xiao banbi* 小半臂 (little upper arm), and *xiao shan* 小衫 (little shirt), then none of them indicates the action of ‘binding’, yet they were used for that purpose. Secondly, the assumption that breast-binding must have been documented in texts if the practice existed is also

⁵ Zhang Jingsheng, “Danai fuxing,” *Xinwenhua* 1, no. 5 (1927): 1–7; Tianxiao, “Liushi nian lai zhuangfuzhi,” *Zazhi* 15, no. 3 (1945): 28.

⁶ Zeng, *Shehui, shenti, xingbie*, 60.

⁷ Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China*; Li Desheng, *Yanhua Zhongguo: xiri modeng nilang* (Nanchang: Jiangxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 2009), 33–34.

⁸ Lei, “Natural Curves,” 171–72.

questionable. This view has been challenged by Dorothy Ko, who suggests that the most intimate bodily knowledge might well not be written about, or just selectively written about.⁹ In researching foot-binding in the pre-modern period, Dorothy Ko finds it extremely difficult to locate women's own testimonies. Women writing on their breasts were even rarer, as breasts might have been regarded a more trivial and intimate subject. As I will discuss in chapter five, there is little written evidence suggesting that women bound their breasts after mid-1950s, and very few women would record their breast-binding experiences in written form. However, women did bind their breasts in their daily lives. It was done secretly, and most commonly among adolescent girls and very young women.

I would suggest that it is likely that women bound their breasts since the Ming dynasty, as there is evidence of undergarments that would have made that possible, yet it is difficult to draw any definitive conclusion as to the scale of the practice. The usage of these undergarments could vary quite a lot from one woman to the next, but there is no evidence, in particular women's own testimony about how they used these undergarments. Even if one assumes that the practice started in Ming times, it might not have been practised as consistently as foot-binding, yet it is possible that more women felt compelled to do so during morally more conservative periods and in more conservative areas.

Given the lack of persuasive evidence that would make it possible to trace the exact origin of breast-binding, it might be more useful to examine the meaning and morality of female breasts in pre-modern China. In fact, moral norms supporting a flat chest had long existed. In books that taught female virtues, guidelines of women's bodily postures such as gait, gesture, dress and makeup constitute essential parts. The general idea was that women should behave quietly, calmly and serenely. Since the Tang dynasty, women were told to lower their heads when seeing strangers. Women who did not behave in this way would disgrace their families and would be mocked as dogs and rats.¹⁰ A prominent Ming scholar Lü Kun 呂坤 (1536-1618) drafted an essay rebuking 37 kinds of women, one of them was "arrogant women",

⁹ Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters*.

¹⁰ Song Ruo xin, "Nü lunyu," in *Nüjie: fun ü de guifan*, ed. Zhang Fuqing (Beijing: Zhongyang min zu daxue chubanshe, 1996), 16.

who he described as having “big eyes and high chests”, not bowing in front of their parents-in-law, nor respecting their sisters-in-law.¹¹ Women who swung their bodies while walking were considered demons in the late Qing period.¹² In daily etiquette, bowing represented modesty and humbleness. For both men and women, the posture of a slight bow was appropriate in daily practice, especially in the presence of elder people.

In the analysis of chests and breasts (*xiang xiongru* 相胸乳) in the widely circulated Song dynasty text *The Complete Collection of Miraculous Physiognomy* (*Shenxiang quanbian* 神相全編), the author claims that “men having high chests were foolish, and women with high chests were lascivious” (*nan ang ze yu, nü ang ze yin* 男昂則愚，女昂則淫).¹³ Therefore the posture of slight bowing became common among women from well-to-do families as well as courtesans. In the detailed description of Shanghai courtesans’ lives in the late Qing novel *Biographies of Shanghai Flowers* (*Haishanghua liezhuan* 海上花列傳), different from the delicate and elegant Shanghai courtesans, low-class Cantonese prostitutes were depicted awkward and blunt for their strange dressing styles and body postures. Specifically, they straightened their backs while walking (*jiatingle beiliangjin* 夾挺了背梁筋), which was unusual for traditional beauties. Zhang Ailing, translator of this novel from Wu dialect into Mandarin, explains that ‘traditional women’ (*chuantong nixing* 傳統女性) would bow their chests (*wei fu* 微俯) and stick their necks out like wild geese (*tan yan boer* 探雁脖兒).¹⁴ In this way, they did not highlight their chests or breasts.

In addition to bodily postures, the norm to cover and conceal the body more generally is also evident. Decent women were warned not to expose their skin or undergarments (*xieyi* 褻衣), especially their chests and arms (*chi xiong tan bo* 赤胸袒膊). No matter how warm they were after hours of diligent work, they should still

¹¹ Lü Kun, “Guijie,” in *Nüjie: fun ü de guifan*, ed. Zhang Fuqing (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 1996), 86–89.

¹² He Ruilin, “Funü yi shuo xiao,” in *Nüjie: fun ü de guifan*, ed. Zhang Fuqing (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 1996), 149.

¹³ Chen Tuan, *Shenxiang quanbian* (Suzhou: Sanluozhai, 1797), chap.9.

¹⁴ Han Bangqing, *Haishang hualuo: guoyu haishanghua liezhuan II*, trans. Zhang Ailing (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe chuban jituan, 2011), 179, 185.

keep the sense of shame and not take off their clothes.¹⁵ These two essays were written in a very simple and memorable style, and perhaps were designed for lower class women, who could not afford servants to do their housework. The sentence “no decent women expose their skin” indicates that there was a clear dress code to distinguish different classes. There must have been women who would take off their outfit while working, certainly in the countryside, hence the instruction that disapproved of the habit. It conveys the message that the female body should not be exposed even within the domestic sphere.

Visual materials also provide evidence for the stigmatisation of the female breasts. In his research on the body in various Chinese art forms including literati paintings, woodblock paintings and erotic paintings from the fourth to the seventeenth century, John Hay points out that the anatomical shape and surface of the human body were ‘invisible’ in Chinese painting, as opposed to the Western nude tradition. Bodily ornaments such as sartorial features, instead of the physical body, signified one’s social and cultural status in Chinese art; therefore the physiological features of the body were not represented. This is not because of the lack of sophisticated artistic technology of light and shadow in China, but rather due to the ontological understanding of the body.¹⁶ In Hay’s reading of the evidence, the body itself was meaningless for the Chinese audience of the time, and it was the clothes that conveyed cultural meaning. This ‘body invisibility’ in pre-modern China remains unchallenged in some research on the body in Republican China.¹⁷ Gabrielle Steiger Levine, however, through examining the representations of Zhong Kui the demon king of death, beggars and other street characters, contests the concept of the ‘invisible body’, pointing out that “the naked body signified various forms of deviance from the normative social and moral order which defined traditional China and its inhabitants.”¹⁸ Basing on visual evidence, Zeng Yue suggested that the female breasts were associated with licentiousness and vulgarity since the Song

¹⁵ Yiming, “Nü xun yueyan,” in *Nijie: fun ü de guifan*, ed. Zhang Fuqing (Beijing: Zhongyang min zu daxue chubanshe, 1996), 317; Yiming, “Guimen yaoze,” in *Nijie: fun ü de guifan*, ed. Zhang Fuqing (Beijing: Zhongyang min zu daxue chubanshe, 1996), 338–49.

¹⁶ John Hay, “The Body Invisible in Chinese Art?,” in *Body, Subject & Power in China*, ed. Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 42–77.

¹⁷ Zhang, “Artwork, Commodity, Event”; Lei, “Natural Curves,” 175.

¹⁸ Garielle Steiger Levine, “Deviance and Disorder: The Naked Body in Chinese Art” (MA thesis, McGill University, 2008), 5.

dynasty, and it was only in the 1920s and 1930s that this stigma was replaced by a new notion of an emancipative, healthy and curvy female body.¹⁹ Further to these distinctions of class and time, I would argue that the female body, unlike John Hay suggests, forms part of the Chinese cultural semiotic system. Visible breasts signified the violation of the gender norms of decent women.

Although it is true that in pre-modern visual materials the anatomical correct female body was still ‘invisible’, these representations were nevertheless far from homogeneous. Poor, old women and female social outcasts such as beggars, deviant, vulgar or immoral women, were attributed with visible bodies, and especially with plump breasts. Figure 1-5 portrays the notorious Sun Erniang in the novel *Outlaws of the March*. Nicknamed as the ‘she-monster of the sea’, Sun runs a tavern selling buns with human flesh fillings. When the tiger-killing hero Wu Song first sees her, she is described as follows:

[B]eside the door sat a woman and she was robed in a green robe and on her head were many yellow glittering ornaments of gold. Over her ears she had thrust wild flowers...She wore girdled about her a thin silk skirt of a deep red colour. All over her face she had spread powder and paint and her gown was open at the bosom so that her inner garment showed a pale peach hue. Across the top of this garment was a row of gold buttons, each like to the other.²⁰

The picture probably depicts the scene when Wu Song finds a pubic hair in the bun, and questions the meat to Sun Erniang, who answers it is pure beef. A closer reading of the picture reminds us that the three persons in the picture have completely different bodies. The man in the centre of the picture, Wu Song, the enormously brave, strong and hulking ex-constable, is not only characterised through his clothes, but also through the depiction of his body, with lines showing his strong and hairy muscles on arms and legs. Levine argues the bodies of demons and beggars were represented like that in pre-modern Chinese visual culture, signifying the deviation from the social norm. This illustration of Wu Song further adds strong heroes to this

¹⁹ Zeng, *Shehui, shenti, xingbie*, 62-64.

²⁰ Pearl S. Buck, trans., *All Men Are Brothers* (London: Methuen, 1937), 471–72. I have compared the three main translations of *Shui hu zhuan* by Pearl Bucks, J.H. Jackson and Sidney Shapiro, and find Buck’s translation of this paragraph is the most accurate with Sun Erniang’s garments and body.

deviant category.²¹ I would suggest that apart from the demons and beggars, any other groups who did not belong to the literati and scholar class, or those who disobeyed and violated the social order, like Wu Song, all could be found represented with a ‘visible body’. The person on the far left is probably a man of letters, wearing the ordinary robes that most men from the literati class would wear at that time.

Sun Erniang, behind the counter, has a big mouth and broad shoulders. The size of her entire figure is not much slimmer than the hero Wu Song’s, indicating her plumpness and strength. She does not confine herself to the inner quarters, as decent women should do. What’s more, the bottle of drugged wine, one Chinese chopper, and a piece of rib – supposedly, human rib – lying on the counter indicate her savageness. Later in the story, she even takes off her robe and uses her bare arms to pick up the supposedly poisoned and unconscious Wu Song. Sun Erniang’s behaviour violated gender boundaries, which confined women to act virtuously and within the inner quarters. Hence she deserves a depiction with such a body, not in the manner of beauties or virtuous women. Her plump figure, especially the large breasts, symbolises her vulgar, merciless and shrewish characteristics and her disobedience to orthodox gender norms.

Apart from popular wood block illustrations for novels, *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (*lien iǝhuan* 列女傳) – a book inculcates women with regulations for their daily lives, and ultimately aims for shaping Chinese morality – pays attentions on women’s body. Women who exposed their bodies improperly were criticised in the book. The first version of these biographies was completed in 34 BC, and initiated a distinct genre of historical writings.²² The Ming woodblock edition was illustrated by the famous painter Qiu Ying (about 1494-1552) who had expertise in painting beautiful women. Figure 1-4 depicts the story of Emperor Ming of the Song (reign 465-472), who organised a banquet with naked girls dancing for entertainment. The Empress Minggong, on the far right of the picture, covers her face with a fan, utterly appalled by the scene. The emperor was so irritated that he

²¹ Levine, “Deviance and Disorder.”

²² Joan Judge and Ying Hu, “Introduction,” in *Beyond Exemplar Tales: Women’s Biography in Chinese History*, ed. Joan Judge and Ying Hu (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2011), 1–3.

had the empress kicked out of the room. The image of the woman exposing her upper body, with her tiny breasts fully visible, was used to criticise the dissolute emperor, and warn all the virtuous women to learn from Empress Minggong.

Linking big breasts with sexual morality continued until the Republican era. During that period, articles from journals such as *Linglong* even purported to provide medical evidence to support the claim that small chests were signs of virginity, which was a major concern of both men and women. Men wrote to periodicals expressing their confusion in distinguishing virgins from non-virgins, while female virgins were troubled over being considered otherwise by men. These articles were often contradictory and full of quack medical knowledge. On the one hand, they said that breasts of virgins were firm and small. There was one small hard core (*ruhe* 乳核) in the lower part of the breasts next to the nipples. The usage ‘*ruhe*’ here is particularly peculiar, because ‘*ruhe*’ in late Imperial Chinese medical writings usually refers to a breast nodule.²³ In this context, however, it is more plausible that the use of this word ‘*ruhe*’ was meant to emphasise that the breasts of virgins should be firm and hard. The front part of the breasts should be shaped like lemons. After women got married, this hard core would gradually soften and eventually disappear, and the breasts would become flaccid. The nipples of virgins were crimson, yet after sex the colour would turn into dark purple. Only after women had breastfed children, their breasts would become saggy. On the other hand, they stated that this rule should not be uniformly applied to every woman, and that the appearance of the breasts also depended on how strong or fat a woman was. Nevertheless, soft breasts without these ‘hard cores’ might be regarded as strong evidence that the woman had been ‘men’s plaything’ (*nanzi zhi wanwu* 男子之玩物), indicating a woman had been sexually active. The author of one of these articles claimed that he had consulted professional medical practitioners.²⁴ These articles also told readers not to care about their wives’ virginity; they should instead ask themselves if they were virgin men. They nevertheless devoted far more space to rules for judging a

²³ Yi-Li Wu, “Body, Gender, and Disease: The Female Breast in Late Imperial Chinese Medicine,” *Late Imperial China* 32, no. 1 (2011): 88.

²⁴ “Rufang neng fou bianbie chunü zhi zhenyin,” *Zhongguo sheying xuehui huobao* 5, no. 201 (1929): 3; Sancao, “Bianbie chunü de changshi,” *Linglong* 1, no. 32 (October 21, 1932): 1231–33.

woman's virginity.²⁵ According to these articles about the features of virgins, big and soft breasts did not fit in the typical bodily shape of virgins.

In 1932, a 16-year-old girl Cao Xiuying wrote to *Linglong*, pouring out her great concern with her brother's recent marriage. The letter was later published under the title: '*My brother got married last night and wanted to divorce his wife this morning because her breasts are big and soft*'. Cao Xiuying's brother was betrothed to a twenty-three-year-old woman. As in other arranged marriages, they had not seen each other before their marriage. On the morning after their marriage, her brother felt so much agony that he even cried to his mother asking for a divorce. Based on evidence that, firstly, the woman's hymen was broken, and secondly, her breasts were big and soft, rather than firm and solid, her brother concluded that his wife was not a virgin before their marriage. The woman even confessed to her new husband that she once had a lover, but all they did was touching and kissing. She even agreed to get divorced if the brother insisted, as long as her maiden family and the matchmaker were not informed. In the editor Zhenling's reply letter, she said that Xiuying's brother's decision of divorce on the morning after their marriage was certainly because he did not have an alternative choice, implying that his arguments about her virginity might be reasonable. The editor continued to blame the evil of arranged marriages that brought young people such suffering. She believed that the marriage was arranged in a rush because his mother hoped for grandchildren urgently. The brother was also blamed for his carelessness in agreeing to marry someone he had never met.²⁶

The editor Zhengling recommended Cao and her brother to read the articles about how to identify virgins, and suggested that it was not solid to judge if a woman was a virgin or not by evidence of the hymen and breasts. But the wife's confession of having touched and kissed a lover seemed to confirm she was unchaste. In addition, the wife's her acceptance of secret divorce confirmed her regret and embarrassment of having pre-marriage sex, and also probably her wish to continue the romance with her ex-lover. If they could come to the conclusion that she was not

²⁵ "Rufang neng fou bianbie chunü zhi zhenyin"; "bianbie chunü de changshi."

²⁶ Cao Xiuying and Zhenling, "Gege zuoye jiehun jinchen lihun yuanyin: liang ru you da you ruan," *Linglong*, no. 46 (February 3, 1932): 1852-54.

a virgin before marriage, they should get a divorce through traditional or legal means.²⁷ Therefore, the *Linglong* editor Zhenling seemed not agree with the warning for men not to care about women's virginity raised in other articles. This attitude might only be regarded as a 'politically correct' attitude conforming to the trend of modernisation and women's emancipation. In fact, such vaguely described features of breasts of virgins provided rules to judge women, and in a highly subjective way that ultimately, the editorial attitude remained ambiguous and thus not only reinforced the cult for virginity, but also put women with 'improperly' shaped breasts in precarious situations.

1.2 Flat Chest Aesthetics

Although the Chinese ideal of beauty varied throughout history, since Song times (960-1276), the dominant view shared by elites was that women should be "delicate, reticent and stationary", and foot-binding was among the methods to achieve this.²⁸ Zhang Ailing once wrote that the traditional Chinese beauty should be "petite and slender", and have "sloping shoulders, narrow waist, and flat chest".²⁹ According to Zhou Jianren, the idea that certain parts of the natural body, such as the breasts and the bottom, were not considered beautiful but ugly and disgusting, was largely shared by Chinese people.³⁰ In visualisations of female bodies, women were depicted in a slightly curvy manner in Tang figure paintings, and some of them even showed women's cleavages. However, since the Song dynasty, there was an obvious tendency to portray women with straight-lined bodies, and delicate manners (Figure 1-6). In the illustrated novel *Outlaws of the Marsh*, whereas the social outcast Sun Erniang was portrayed with excessive breasts, the desirable high-class courtesan Li Shishi was portrayed as a typical beauty, slim and tender, with cherry lips and sloping shoulders (Figure 1-7). The passage describing Li reads:

"She was a lovely sight, her cheeks as rosy as dew-drenched apples, her waist as supple as a willow swaying in the breeze, a veritable Heavenly Maid, more

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, 41.

²⁹ Ailing Zhang, "A Chronicle of Changing Clothes," trans. Andrew F. Jones, *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 11, no. 2 (2003): 429.

³⁰ Zhou, 'Shuxiong xiguan yu xingzhishi', 14.

beautiful than a Moon Fairy. Her skirt swirled as she glided lightly into the room.”³¹

Courtesans, although sexually immoral, were also highly educated and desirable, and provided the only chance for literati to seek romantic relationships. In fact, according to art historian James Cahill, the subjects of the majority of the paintings of beautiful women (*meiren hua* 美人畫) since the late Ming period were courtesans. Although with a great deal of seductive symbols, the actual figure of these beautiful women did not appear to have voluptuous breasts.³² Staying in the inner quarters, with a seven-stringed zither aside and a landscape painting hanging in the centre of the room, Li Shishi is portrayed with considerable cultural sophistication, which enables her to provide cultured companionship to high-class literati, especially her secret lover, the emperor.

Even in erotic paintings from the Qing dynasty, the slim and breastless female body was dominant.³³ The bodies of men and women were depicted in similar shapes, and the means to identify gender were from their hairstyles, clothes, feet and genitals. The breast shapes of men and women could be extremely similar. The painter of Figure 1-8 used shadow technique to construct more three-dimensional breasts, yet in the picture, men’s breasts and women’s breasts did not appear differently, except that men’s breasts were in a slightly darker colour. However, in very rare cases, women in erotic pictures were extremely plump, as in the sketch of Yang Yuhuan, the famous concubine of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang (Figure 1-9). The sketch was signed by Gai Qi, a Manchu artist who was known for his expertise in painting beauties. Most of his paintings, including erotic ones, were in accordance with the slim beauty norm with this one exception. Yang Yuhuan was famous for her plump figure, as there was a consensus that the Tang dynasty

³¹ Sidney Shapiro, trans., *Outlaws of the Marsh*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1980), 1281.

³² James Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure: Vernacular Painting in High Qing China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 145–97.

³³ Hay, “The Body Invisible in Chinese Art?”; Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 14. Contrary to the ostensible asceticism in the Qing dynasty, in practice “erotic stories and memoirs continued to be very popular”, despite the Kangxi Emperor issued a ban of pornography, burning erotic books and illustrations, and punishing publishers, sellers and owners of such items. See: Ferdinand M. Bertholet, *Concubines and Courtesans: Women in Chinese Erotic Art* (Munich, London: Prestel, 2011), 55.

appreciated plump beauties. Her breasts were enormous, similar to her abdomen, yet peculiarly, her feet were rather small, as if they had been bound. In fact, foot-binding only became popular centuries after Yang's death. Therefore this picture mixed an imagination of the Tang beauty and the Qing aesthetics of small-footed women. Therefore in typical Qing erotic paintings, viewers would not find a plump female body as in Figure 1-9, and the most common female body were delicate, sometimes with naked yet tiny breasts.

What the pre-modern visual materials do not represent is an anatomical female curve constituted by the breasts, waist and hips. Even with plump breasts, artists did not seem to have had any intention to depict a curved body. The features signifying the female gender also seemingly showed the more alluring features of the female body such as the relatively slim figure, the white skin, the sloping shoulders, moderate breasts, round abdomen, and circular-cone shaped legs that highlighted the bound feet. What generated the sexual allure of the breasts was the 'soft and luscious' texture, and a skin that was white, rather than the shape of the breasts.³⁴

In the late nineteenth century, Chinese literati noted that Western women were essentially different from the flat-chested Chinese women. The contrast between the body of Chinese women and Western women was even dramatised by the commonly used Western corsets at that time. The following Shanghai bamboo-twig ballad³⁵ published in 1887 about Western prostitutes in Shanghai provides an example:

泰西婦女不知嬌，
雙乳高堆束細腰。
客至恒供香餅酒，
風琴咿呀手親調。³⁶

³⁴ Hay, "The Body Invisible in Chinese Art?," 56.

³⁵ The bamboo-twig ballad (*zhu zhi ci* 竹枝詞) is a form of folk song popular across China. The time of its initiation remains unknown, yet it was recorded since the Tang dynasty (618-907). Originally the bamboo-twig ballads were collected and compiled by musical officials, and later literati also often wrote in this form. It was considered as a genre describing popular customs. See: Lei Mengshui et al., eds., *Zhonghua zhuzhici*, vol. 1-6 (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1996).

³⁶ Chenqiao, "Shenjiang baiyong," in *Shanghai yangchang zhuzhici*, ed. Gu Bingquan (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1996), 92.

Western women do not know how to be tender,
Their breasts are tall and erect, and their waists are bound slender.
They always provide champagne when a guest comes,
And play the organ squeakily.

The poem pointed out that Western women did not know how to behave decently, and in particular how to look charming; instead they would erect their breasts and bind their waists, which would only enhance the dominance of the breasts even more. Following established customs and aesthetics, in early Republican China, flat-chested women were still considered beautiful, whereas the Western custom was essentially different in this matter.³⁷ Conversely, foreigners perceived Chinese women as flat chested. In 1925, *Shenbao* reported a hilarious story. At a dinner organised by a Westerner, all the guests were required to dress up as Chinese – for example, men should dress in long robes. On her arrival, one Western woman did not bind her chest, and therefore she was not allowed to eat until she did so.³⁸ Interestingly, the article did not mention that women should make their feet small, presumably because in the mid-1920s Shanghai, women no longer had bound feet, so their bound chests were deemed as the most noticeable bodily feature.

The non-curved female body was still a dominant feature of portraiture at the beginning of the twentieth century in visual materials such as magazine covers, calendar posters and periodical illustrations. A 1915 cover of *Funü zazhi* shows a scene entitled *Morning Study in the Boudoir* (*lan gui qing ke* 蘭閨清課) (Figure 1-10), implying the woman in the picture is a diligent female student. Although the referred space is the feminine inner quarter, the drooping plant suggests that she is probably sitting in her family yard, which links to the space outside home. Concentrated on her studies, she represents the early generation of the New Women who studied not only for their personal independence but also for the revival of the nation. Figure 1-11 is a calendar poster that functioned as an advertisement for perfume. The style of this picture echoes with the above-mentioned late Ming and Qing paintings of beauties, with the woman holding a fan, standing in a space decorated with delicate items such as books, flowers, antiques and ceramics,

³⁷ Tegong, “Bianji yutan.”

³⁸ Cai Anfu, “Xiren yanke qushi,” *Shenbao*, November 23, 1925.

indicating that she is well educated and has a refined taste. Whereas the background of this picture reflects the taste of beauty paintings in the Ming and Qing dynasties, the calendar posters generally utilised beautiful women for commercial interests. The model of the calendar poster (Figure 1-12) might be an actress, as her image greatly resembled the photograph of the famous Peking Opera actress Xin Yanqiu 新豔秋 (1910-2008) (Figure 1-12). Although Xin Yanqiu's photo was published one year after the production of this calendar poster, it is highly likely that the painter of this poster created this image according to similar photographs of other actresses. Figure 1-13 is drawn by the New Sensationalist cartoonist Guo Jianying, titled *Depression of Youth* (*qingchun de fanmen* 青春的煩悶).³⁹ Different from the other two women, this woman, I propose, is a 'modern girl' (*modeng xiaojie* 摩登小姐), who received considerable criticism in the 1930s for being indulgent in her relationships, appearances and entertainment habits without compassion for the poor or engagement for the grand project of nation building. The girl in this image wears bobbed hair and a *qipao* à la mode, emotionally vexed, possibly annoyed by her own relational difficulties. In these pictures produced from 1915 to 1928, women's hairstyles evolved from plaits with short fringes fashionable around the 1900s to 1910s, to buns behind the heads with fringes at the centre of the forehead from the late 1910s to mid-1920s, and then short hair since the late 1920s. Their dress changed from jackets with high collars and trousers to loose-sleeve jackets, short vests and ankle-length skirts, and then to the long-sleeved one-piece *qipao*.⁴⁰ The proportion of their faces and bodies shifted from large faces to smaller faces. However, despite the changes, these women were all portrayed with extremely thin chests, sloping shoulders and, in most cases, slightly bowing their chests and heads, which was a standard way to portray women from the 1910s to the 1920s.

The textual, visual, medical, and moral traditions outlined above formed the basis for the practice of breast-binding that flourished in the early Republican period. The size of women's breasts reflected their standard of chastity. Some men believed

³⁹ Guo Jianying (1907-1979), a cartoonist who graduated from St. John's University in 1931, was active in the popular press from 1928 to 1935 in Shanghai, before he shifted his career into diplomacy in 1935 and subsequently into business in 1937. See: Xu Minghan, "Modeng shenghuo de manhua ji qi 'wu-yiyi': Guo Jianying yu Shanghai xinganjuapai (1927-1935)" (MA thesis, National Chiao Tung University, 2009).

⁴⁰ For the evolution of hairstyles and dresses, see: Wu, *Duhui yunshang*, 33-34, 59-63, 109-27, 143-47, 152-53.

women with dilated (*pengzhang* 膨脹) breasts were not virgins, assuming that they either have been married or have had illicit partners.⁴¹ Zhang Jingsheng even claimed that breast-binding was first practised by courtesans and prostitutes. The most important reasons were that on the one hand, prostitutes did not want to be mocked as ‘working hard’, and secondly, they wished to attract clients by conforming to shared standards of beauty that included flat chests – the symbol of virginity.⁴² Sticking out the chest (*tingxiang turu* 挺胸凸乳) like Western women was likely to be mocked by passers-by in the 1920s.⁴³ Zhou Jianren wrote that the idea that a woman who was holding up her head and throwing out her chest was bad-looking was so widely shared in Chinese society, regardless of class, that he observed a female servant shouting at her teenage daughter for raising her head and throwing out her chest, saying “women should lower their heads whereas men should raise their heads (*ditou nizhi yangtou han* 低頭女子仰頭漢)”.⁴⁴ Being elegant, placid and fragile, speaking softly, walking slowly in small strides, were all considered as feminine norm (*nüyang* 女樣).⁴⁵

The increasing public visibility of women may have contributed to disposing women even more towards breast-binding, and also made the issue of breast-binding more visible to the public. With more opportunities of studying and working outside of the family home, women attracted more public attention to their roles at home, at school and in the workplace. Their bodily appearances were also intensively discussed in periodicals and daily conversations. This only increased the pressure on women to conform to established norms. Since Lingnan University became a mixed-sex university in 1915 and Peking University in 1922, many primary schools, secondary schools and universities began to recruit both male and female students.⁴⁶ In the mixed-sex schools, female students bound their breasts in order to avoid male students’ ridicule. Women’s behaviour and appearance were under others’ gaze – male teachers and male students. Female students should be cautious of contact with

⁴¹ Hong Meiyong, “Nüzi de shuxiong wenti,” *Fun ü gongming*, no. 55 (1931): 15–18; Chen Biyun, “Xing de xuanze zhi jinhua guan,” *Dongfang zazhi* 30, no. 19 (1933): 11–12.

⁴² Zhang, “Danai fuxing,” 3.

⁴³ Zhang Shewo, “Hubin suiganlu,” *Shenbao*, April 25, 1920.

⁴⁴ Zhou, “Shuxiong xiguan yu xing zhishi.”

⁴⁵ Bo Ken, “Nü xuesheng yu tiyu,” *Fun ü zazhi* 11, no. 6 (June 1925): 989–90.

⁴⁶ Du Xueyuan, “Zhongguo nannü fenxiao yu tongxiao zhi zheng de licheng, zhuyao fenqi ji qishi,” *Sichuan wenli xueyuan xuebao (shehui kexue)* 16, no. 6 (November 2006): 86.

their male classmates, as they could easily be accused of being frivolous and promiscuous simply by communicating with male students. Just talking or communicating by letter with male students might ruin the reputation of female students. Male students usually outnumbered females, and sometimes there was only one female student in a class. It became embarrassing for them to ask questions to teachers or talk to classmates.⁴⁷ In this sense, female students bound their breasts because they needed it in order to face their teachers and classmates in their school lives and avoid embarrassment.

In 1924 the feminist Lu Lihua, the founder and headmaster of Liangjiang Women's Physical Education Normal School in Shanghai, conducted a calculation (*tongji* 統計) of one hundred women in Central Park (*zhongyang gongyuan* 中央公園) and French Park (*Faguo gongyuan* 法國公園), finding that ninety percent of the women were bowing their chests and lowering their heads, with only a few standing up straight.⁴⁸ These observations proved that women from various classes embodied the morality of being virtuous, chaste and respectful by conforming to traditionally endorsed behavioural patterns. However, Lu Lihua criticised this phenomenon by suggesting breast-binding was unhealthy and advocated for the liberation of the breasts, which indicated the transition to the period that breast-binding became associated with outdated customs. This will be discussed in the following two chapters.

Conclusion

By tracing the visual and textual tradition of the female body, this chapter demonstrates that since the Song dynasty, there had been a sexual morality that disciplined women's presentation of their breasts. In pre-modern visual sources, flat-chested women were beautiful and attractive, whereas women with big breasts represented their deviance from the gender norm. Both the morality and aesthetics of flat chest continued to be influential in the Republican era. In the 1920s and early 1930s, some still considered small breasts were signs of chastity, both morally and medically. Flat chests were fashionable and proper for young and unmarried women, and big breasts symbolised women's sexual experiences.

⁴⁷ Qingshi Nüshi, "Nannü tongxue de wo," *Fun üzazhi* 11, no. 10 (October 1925): 1633–35.

⁴⁸ Lu Lihua, "Zhongguo nüzi tiyu zhi xianzai yu jianglai," *Jiaoyu yu rensheng*, no. 48 (1924): 642.

Chapter 2 Beyond the Nation: the Anti-Breast-Binding Campaign

The intimate yet visible practice of breast-binding soon attracted pervasive critique since the mid-1910s, not only from male literati and doctors, but also female elites, and in particular feminist activists, most of whom adopted nationalistic, emancipative and hygienic approaches throughout the Republican period. They published articles, disseminated anti-breast-binding slogans, made public speeches or broadcast radio programmes. It is not uncommon to see this kind of critique imbedded in essays on female beauty, blaming women for the demise of the nation: “This general weakness of women...on personal level, harmed their health, faded their beauty and dissipated their energy; with regard to the general situation, they lost the vitality of the entire nation, created cowardly and useless citizens, who either would die without any dignity, or wait to be slaves without a country (*wang guo nu wang guo nu* 亡國奴).”¹ Many essays suggested that emancipating the body was a prerequisite of freeing women’s minds and elevating their social status – and in extension the status of the nation. As long as women did not emancipate their own bodies, they did not deserve full gender equality in terms of education, occupation and political rights, nor could they devote their lives to the task of national salvation. One writer even used Mengzi’s critiques of male literati towards women, suggesting women were discriminated because they did not respect themselves (*ren bi zi ru, er hou ren ru zhi* 人必自侮，而後人侮之), as they repressed their breasts for the sake of beauty.² Feminists considered breast-binding as a practice aimed at pleasuring men, and men used this trick to enslave women. Similar to foot-binding, breast-binding indicated that women were considered subordinate to men. Women should take their bodily development as their social responsibility, and take that responsibility to serve the society and the country.³ Liberated women should have short hair, unbound feet and breasts; they should not have ear-piercings, and not wear makeup or high heels.⁴

¹ Qian Yiwei, ‘Nüzi de jiankang mei,’ *Qingnian jiankang banyuekan* 1, no. 4 (1935): 12.

² Xia, “Lun funü shuxiong de miuwu”; Tang Huapu, “Shuxiong de huanhai,” *Funü zazhi* 13, no. 7 (July 1927): 30–31; Zuo Tianmin, “Chan zu yu shuxiong shi zhenzheng de meiguan me,” *Shizhao yuebao* 23, no. 9 (1928): 30–31; Xu Zhimo, “Congmang shenghuo zhong de xianxiang: duoban guanyu nüzi,” *Suzhou nüzi zhongxue yuekan* 1, no. 9 (December 1929): 4–12; Hong, “Nüzi de shuxiong wenti”; An Neng, “Women yao yi dui danainai,” *Shidai zhi mei*, no. 11 (1934): A-42.

³ Feiqian, ‘Chan zu, shuxiong he chuaner,’ *Geming de funü*, no. 8 (1927): 14–15; Hong, ‘Nüzi de shuxiong wenti.’

⁴ Ziyu, “Shuxiong yu gaogexie (xia),” *Qingnian jiankang banyuekan* 1, no. 3 (1935): 14; Lanping, “Woguo xianxing fa shang zhi funü baohu,” *Dongfang zazhi* 34, no. 5 (1937): 95–100.

Lu Lihua argued that foreigners despised Chinese women because of their bowing postures.⁵ As a teacher of physical education, she suggested that a strong physical body would not only benefit women's knowledge, morality, career, human rights, income, marriage, family, but also society, patriotic campaigns, and the Chinese race. In her view, the previously short Japanese had become much taller through physical training and eugenics, which was part of the reason of Japan's political and military strength.⁶ Because Chinese women were educated to behave in an elegant and refined manner according to ritual and social institutions (*lijiao* 禮教), they were weaker than men.⁷ Lu Lihua's anti-breast-binding attitude was both rooted in the intellectual discourse of the 'Sick Man of Asia' (*dongya bingfu* 東亞病夫) and the May Fourth call for 'strengthening the nation and race'. At the turn of the century, China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) came as a shock to China's political class. It was a manifestation of Japan's transition from a culturally inferior 'small island country' to a superior modern nation. According to Yang Ruisong's research, in December 1894, *Wanguo Gongbao* 萬國公報 translated a French commentary on the Sino-Japanese War, saying that now China was yet another 'Sick Man of the Far East'. Thereafter the 'Sick Man in Asia' became omnipresent as a Western representation of China in the periodical press. After this war the phrase 'Sick Man of Asia' triggered a deep sense of national humiliation that still persists to some extent and could even be found in the contemporary discourse of the Beijing Olympics.⁸

Although the Western usage of the epithet 'Sick Man' referred to many countries, including Ottoman Turkey, Mexico, and Morocco and pointed to their weakness as nations, Liang Qichao (梁啟超 1873-1929) argued that it referred to the unhealthy bodies of the Chinese people. Through linking the natural bodies of the Chinese people to the inferiority of the Chinese nation, Liang suggested everyone's physical body was the living symbol of an inferior culture and nation. From this point of view, the 'weak' bodies of the Chinese people literally embodied China's

⁵ Lu Lihua, 'Nüzi tigemei yu rensheng,' *Shenbao*, January 7, 1926, 20.

⁶ Lu, "Zhongguo nüzi tiyu zhi xianzai yu jianglai."

⁷ Lu, 'Nüzi tigemei yu rensheng.'

⁸ Yang Ruisong, "Xiangxiang minzu chiru: jindai Zhongguo sixiang wenhuashi shang de 'dongya bingfu'," *Zhengzhi daxue lishi xuebao* 23 (May 2005): 1-44.

national weakness, and the reform of these bodies became a central topic of debate throughout the first half of the twentieth century.⁹ It was in this context that customs that presumably harmed the body, such as opium consumption and foot-binding, became a mental scar for Chinese intellectuals, as these epitomised the causes of China's national weakness and humiliation. Thus strengthening the body became a way to strengthen the nation, and it became everyone's responsibility, but most importantly, women's responsibility. Liang's concerns about the physical strength of Chinese people, especially the Chinese women, continued to influence intellectuals in the following decades.

Basing on the nationalist discourse, an anti-breast-binding campaign happened in the late 1920s, banning women from binding their breasts. During the campaign, people from a wide range of backgrounds and motivations were involved, behaving strikingly differently according to different rationales. The main agents in this campaign include: 1) male elites who actively supported the anti-breast-binding campaign; 2) feminists who were against breast-binding; 3) those who practised breast-binding: courtesans, female stars, and female students, some of whom later also campaigned against the practice; 4) government officials who issued anti-breast-binding bans and legislation; 5) medical practitioners; 6) members of the general public who wrote to periodicals expressing their anti-breast-binding views; 7) school teachers and inspectors; 8) tabloid journalists who were excited about the discussions of breasts; 9) periodical readers. Liying Sun explained in her paper, the identities of different agents in a specific field of cultural production were not static; instead, their identities might overlap or change.¹⁰ For example, all the first eight kinds of agents were also potentially periodical readers, who in turn also contributed to the discursive production. I would suggest that the interaction of these agents created a multi-dimensional anti-breast-binding campaign. This chapter will firstly examine the official-led breast-binding ban and its implementations. Secondly, it explores how the public medical discourse concluded that breast-binding had devastating health consequences to women, which was one of the most frequently mentioned reasons of the anti-breast-binding campaign. Finally, it examines the different voices

⁹ Yang, 'Xiangxiang minzu chiru'.

¹⁰ Sun, "1920 niandai Shanghai de huajia, zhishi fenzi yu luoti shijue wenhua," 292-93.

of three preeminent scholars during this campaign, and their unexpected influence in the production of a nationalist discourse.

2.1 The ‘Natural Breast Movement’

On 7 July 1927, Zhu Jiahua 朱家驊 (1893-1963), the acting chairman of the Guangdong provincial government’s standing committee and commissioner of civil affairs, announced that the practice of breast-binding was forbidden in the name of Sun Yat-sen’s spirit of nationalism. The full text of the ban was published in *Guangzhou Minguo ribao* 廣州民國日報 the next day, arguing that breast-binding was harmful to women’s and infants’ health, and was therefore weakening the nation and race. Women who bound their breasts should be fined 50 yuan.¹¹ This was a huge amount of money. During the 1920s and 1930s, the lowest monthly income for a government official was 50 yuan. The average income was around 36 yuan for a middle school teacher, 26 yuan for a male worker, 12 yuan for a female worker.¹² Hsiao-Pei Yen argues that the breast-binding ban demonstrated “the Nationalist government’s concern for improving women’s health”.¹³ However, under the wider political context of the White Terror at this time, the reason why the government issued this ban, I would argue, was not because of government’s collective decision, but Zhu Jiahua’s personal and political aspiration.

Zhu Jiahua had always been keen on modernising Chinese lifestyles, including hygienic habits, sports and superstitions. The issue of the breast-binding ban was consistent with his other bills and part of his personal aspirations for modern China. Zhu, born in a merchant family in Wuxing in Zhejiang province, had embraced the revolution since a very young age. He cut his plait off in 1906 when he was fourteen years old. During his years at Tongji German Medical School (*Tongji dewen yi xuexiao* 同濟德文醫學校), he initiated Chinese Dare-to-Die Corps (*Zhongguo gansituan* 中國敢死團) in 1910 in solidarity with the nationalist revolution. After finishing his PhD in geology in Germany, he taught at Peking

¹¹ “Zhu Jiahua tiyi jing funü shuxiong,” *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, August 8, 1927, 5.

¹² Ci Hongfei, “Ersanshi niandai jiaoshi, gongwuyuan gongzi ji shenghuo zhuangkuang kao,” *Jindaishi yanjiu*, no. 3 (1994): 285–91.

¹³ Hsiao-Pei Yen, ‘Body Politics, Modernity and National Salvation: The Modern Girl and the New Life Movement,’ *Asian Studies Review*, no. 29 (June 2005): 177.

University since 1924. In June 1926, he fled to Guangzhou to work at Sun Yat-sen University, due to his participation in the anti-warlord and anti-imperialist demonstration on 18 March. Zhu was a steadfast GMD party member, who firmly opposed Communism. After the April 12 Incident – the GMD’s suppression of Communists – in Shanghai, he stepped into politics and participated in purging the CCP in Guangdong. In May 1927, he was appointed as acting chief of the Department of Civil Affairs.¹⁴ One of his predecessors, Gu Yingfen 古應芬 (1873-1931), a senior member of the GMD, mainly focused his work on the administration of local finance, business, police, military and philanthropy. Unlike Gu, during Zhu Jiahua’s three-month term of office, apart from replacing Communist local officials, he also proposed bills against superstition and geomancy, suggested to ban drinking and smoking among the youth, and drafted regulations for a public cemetery.¹⁵ The White Terror provided a superb incentive for Zhu to do so. The GMD government might embrace such trivial proposals that could actually distract people’s attention from the political purges ongoing at the same time.

Zhu Jiahua’s bill against breast-binding seemed only to have received very limited success politically. Shortly after Zhu Jiahua’s ban, the Women’s Division in the GMD Central Executive Committee included anti-breast-binding in their slogans, among other tasks of abolishing meaningless decorations, prostitution, supporting gender equality and monogamy.¹⁶ There is little evidence that Zhu’s successors continued to carry out his policies or ideas at all until late 1928.¹⁷ It was said that among all of Zhu’s bills, only the one on anti-breast-binding received a lot of criticism from officials. Zhu had to send some civil servants to local cities and counties to assist the implementation of this bill, presumably because otherwise it would have been totally ignored. Even though some elite women responded to this

¹⁴ Hu Songping, *Zhu Jiahua xiansheng nianpu* (Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 1969), 1–18.

¹⁵ Wang Meijia, ed., *Minguo shiqi Guangdong sheng zhengfu dangan shiliao xuanbian*, vol. 1 (Guangzhou: Guangdong sheng danganguan, 1987), 1–112; Wang Meijia, ed., “Guangdong sheng zhengfu weiyuanhui di-sanshisan ci huiyi lu,” in *Minguo shiqi Guangdong sheng zhengfu dangan shiliao xuanbian*, vol. 1 (Guangzhou: Guangdong sheng danganguan, 1987), 136–37; Wang Meijia, ed., “Guangdong sheng zhengfu weiyuanhui di-sanshier ci huiyi jilu,” in *Minguo shiqi Guangdong sheng zhengfu dangan shiliao xuanbian*, vol. 1 (Guangzhou: Guangdong sheng danganguan, 1987), 132–36.

¹⁶ Zhongguo Guomindang zhongyang zhixing weiyuanhui funübu xuanchuanke, “Funü yundong kouhao”, October 14, 1927, Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan jindaishi yanjiusuo danganshi, Zhongguo Guomindang wu bu dangan, Document No. 10276.

¹⁷ Wang, *Minguo shiqi Guangdong sheng zhengfu dangan shiliao xuanbian*, 1:143–388.

bill and abandoned the practice of breast-binding,¹⁸ it is highly doubtful if any police actually acted on this issue during Zhu Jiahua's three-month term of office, as this was a period of great turmoil for the GMD government, which attempted to concentrate its resources on purging the CCP.

Zhu Jiahua's ban nevertheless attracted citizens' letters, and a 'natural breast movement' (*tianru yundong* 天乳運動) was discussed extensively in the press.¹⁹ The very words 'natural breast' (*tianru* 天乳) echoed with the 'natural feet' or 'heavenly feet' (*tianzu* 天足) used in the late nineteenth century campaigns against 'bound feet' (*chanzu* 纏足 or *guozu* 裹足). In 1875, Rev. John MacGowan, an English missionary from the London Missionary Society, established the first 'Heavenly Foot Society' in the treaty port Amoy. This is the earliest documented use of the term '*tianzu*' – natural or 'heavenly' foot. MacGowan conferred the Christian doctrine into the notion of 'Heavenly Foot' by arguing that the feet were given by Heaven, a similar power as God.²⁰ It was not until 1895, when Mrs Alicia Little established the Natural Feet Society (*tianzuhui* 天足会) in Shanghai that the words 'natural foot' became more frequently used in the Chinese debate.²¹ Subsequently, Chinese male elites turned the idea of 'natural feet' into a nationalist discourse, in the name of national revival.²² By the 1920s, the expression 'natural foot' had become rooted in the Chinese language, and the emergence of the 'natural breast' was clearly borrowed from it. As 'bound feet' could easily pull the trigger of the national trauma of 'Sick Man in Asia', and 'natural feet' could save the country from humiliation, the linguistic appropriation of 'natural breast' reminded everybody who came across this expression of similar implications. In addition, the linguistic appropriation could also

¹⁸ Chen Shaoxian, "Yinian Zhu Liugong de fengfan," *Zhuanji wenxue* 29, no. 6 (December 1976).

¹⁹ Wu Chuzhang, "Cheng wei qing lijn funü shuxiong shi," August 10, 1927, *Zhongguo shehui ke xue yuan jindaishi yanjiusuo danganshi*, *Zhongguo Guomindang wu bu dangan*, Document No. 16297; "Tianru yundong," *Beiyang huabao*, no. 108 (July 13, 1927): 3; "Funüjie ying gankuai qilai shixing tianru yundong," *Minguo ribao xiandai qingnian*, July 23, 1927, 120–21; Liu Yulun, "Wei tichang tianru yundong gao geming funü," in *Fengsu gaige congkan*, ed. Fengsu gaige weiyuanhui (Guangzhou: Guangzhou tebie shi dangbu xuanchuan bu, 1930), 207–8.

²⁰ Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters*, 14–16. The Chinese name of 'Heavenly Foot Society' was *jie chanzu hui* 戒纏足会, the word 'Heavenly Foot' was translated into *tianzu*. Although the word *tian* 天 in Chinese means both 'heaven' and 'nature', at this stage *tianzu* meant the foot given by heaven, rather than 'natural foot'.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²² *Ibid.*, 18–23.

result in exaggerating the detrimental effects of binding the breasts on women's health, by arguing any action not 'natural' would be vitally harmful.

So it is not surprising that two years after Zhu's ban, another Nationalist official brought this issue up again with much harsher words. In December 1929, Guo Lin 郭璘, a School Inspector of Changde County in Hunan province, submitted another anti-breast-binding bill. It was widely distributed to many provinces and cities including Hebei, Liaoning, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Nanjing and Shantou,²³ and later included in the *Compilation of legal documents in Republican China*.²⁴ It said:

乃各校女教職員亦多染此陋習，暗資表率。是女校不啻為女青年自殺之地，教職員無殊與間接持刀之人。多招一般女生即多增一分罪過。多設一女學校，即多製造一殺人場。民族將由是益衰，國亡勢將無日。

Female teachers in all schools also have been infected by this corrupt custom, which secretly sets models for the students. Thus girls' schools are like places for young women to kill themselves, and the teachers are no different from those who indirectly hold the knives. Every additional female student adds one more sin. Every additional girls' school makes one more place of murder. The nation will get weaker because of this and the state will decline and fall soon.²⁵

Ostensibly, this paragraph repeated the urgency of stopping the custom of breast-binding by analogising breast-binding with suicide, and the tolerance of breast-binding with murder. It could also be read as a misogynous disapproval of women's education. Guo Lin's motion was part of the criticism of the 'New Woman' since the

²³ "Hebei sheng minzhengting xunling minzi di-yiyiliuwu hao," *Hebei sheng zhengfu gongbao*, no. 518 (1929): 7; "Liaoning sheng jiaoyuting xunling zi di-yiba hao," *Liaoning jiaoyu gongbao*, no. 1 (1930): 13–14; "Zhejiang sheng minzhengting xunling di-siqiqi hao," *Zhejiang minzheng yuekan*, no. 26 (1930): 310–11; "Chajin nüzi shuxiong," *Jiangsu sheng zhengfu gongbao*, no. 329 (1930): 15–16; "Chajin nüzi shuxiong an," *Shoudu shizheng gongbao*, no. 51 (1930): 37–38; "Bugao fengling jinzhi nüzi shuxiong chanzu shuyao chuaner you," *Shantou shizheng gongbao*, no. 53 (1930).

²⁴ Lifayuan bianyichu, ed., 'Jin zhi nüzi shuxiong ling: minguo shiba nian shier yue jiaoyu neizheng liang bu huiling gongbu,' in *Zhonghua Minguo fagui huibian*, vol. 6 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1934), 834–35.

²⁵ 'Hebei sheng minzhengting xunling minzi di yiyiliuwu hao'.

late 1920s, when the political context became more conservative.²⁶ Male writers, socialist feminists and some female students suggested that educated women were not synonymous with the ‘New Woman’, arguing that female students had many defects, including their ways of dressing, consuming and socialising.²⁷ The most important element of a real ‘New Woman’ was that she must participate in reforming family and society.²⁸ Guo Lin’s ban shows a strong hostility to female students who did not protect their bodies for the sake of the nation. Therefore their education was useless and even as evil as a crime.

Many other anti-breast-binding essays bore a similarly hostile tone to women. Breast-binding women were described as “wanton women who dressed up like demons” (*yinfu yao qi zhuangshu* 淫婦妖其裝束).²⁹ They were described as living in jails, and the little vests were their shackles. Even in hell, there would be no more severe torture.³⁰ A high school student, Wu Chuzhang, claimed that the demographic decline since the Qianlong period was *entirely* due to the underdevelopment of individuals’ reproductive organs. Breast-binding further “placed their descendants on the field of death” (*qifei zhi zisun yu sidi ye* 豈非置子孫于死地也).³¹ When the population decreased, women had the responsibility to strengthen their bodies and raise healthy offspring, by firstly untying their breasts.³² These kinds of accusations penetrated and shaped the discourse on the body from the late Qing to the Republican period. Concerns about women’s health thus turned into extremely misogynistic rhetoric.

Very few essays were sympathetic to women who bound their breasts. Zhou Jianren³³ suggested that in order to abandon the custom of breast-binding, ideas of sexuality needed to be reformed, which was difficult as they were deep-rooted in the

²⁶ Louise Edwards, ‘Policing the Modern Woman in Republican China,’ *Modern China* 26, no. 2 (April 2000): 115–47.

²⁷ Wang Pingling, “Xinfūnu de renge wenti,” *Fun ü zazhi* 7, no. 10 (October 1921): 10–15; Xu Yasheng, “Xinnūzi de zeren,” *Fun ü zazhi* 14, no. 12 (December 1928): 7–12.

²⁸ Yun Fang, ‘Xinfūnu suo yinggai chanchu de ji zhong liegenxing’, *Fun ü zazhi* 6, no. 9 (September 1920): 3–8.

²⁹ Dong Jingxi, “Jinggao chanxiong nūzi,” *Fun ü zazhi* 3, no. 12 (December 1917): 14.

³⁰ Xia Fuxin, “Feizhi chanxiong yundong,” *Chenbao fujian*, no. 58 (1926): 27–28.

³¹ Wu, “Cheng wei qing lijin funü shuxiong shi.”

³² Zhao Ridong, “Nūzi shuxiong yu minzu zhuyi,” *Xiangzhong xuesheng*, no. 1 (20-23): 1929.

³³ Zhou Jianren 周建人 (1888-1984) is a younger brother to Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren. He kept writing on women’s movement, botany and evolutionism.

general public.³⁴ The poet Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 commented that it would take another three or four generations to fully emancipate the female body, as he knew some young women who still felt embarrassed about their bodies.³⁵ Zhou Jianren proposed to introduce sexual education for middle school girls, as he figured that the fundamental cause of breast-binding was their ignorance of their own physiology. If the concept regarding breasts as ‘indecent’ disappeared, breast-binding would no longer exist.³⁶ Yet neither Zhu Jiahua’s nor any of the following bans mentioned sexual education; instead, they took arbitrary approaches requiring local police and school authorities to punish those with bound breasts.

Considering that the ban against foot-binding was implemented only with huge difficulties, to what extent the anti-breast-binding ban was effective is questionable.³⁷ Three years after Zhu Jiahua’s ban, the practice of breast-binding could still be found in girls’ schools. The Songjiang Girls’ School in Shanghai (*Songjiang nǚzhong* 松江女中) documented their little vest confiscation activities in great detail. From the end of 1928, the little vest became the subject of surprise checks in this school. On 4 January 1929, six Disciplinary Committee members (*xundao weiyuan* 訓導委員) went into female students’ dormitories and found more than 90 little vests and little shirts; they confiscated the little vests and asked students to enlarge the little shirts.³⁸ You Jianming argues that similar to the process of abolishing foot-binding, the check of the little vests in female students’ dormitories did not respect women’s individual rights and privacy.³⁹ But when we look at the reports more thoroughly, we might find that the implementation did imply far more than the authorities’ disciplinary measures and disrespect for individual women. Instead, female students themselves were elected to monitor on others’ practices of breast-binding.

Zhang Baojuan, a student at Songjiang School, was elected as a municipal policewoman who worked at the school level at the beginning of 1930. This implies

³⁴ Zhou, “Shuxiong xiguan yu xingzhishi.”

³⁵ Xu, “Congmang shenghuo zhong de xianxiang,” 10.

³⁶ Zhou, Jianren (pseudonym: Jian meng), “Zai lun shuxiong xiguan yu xingzhishi,” *Fun üzazhi* 9, no. 8 (August 1923): 19–21.

³⁷ Ko, *Cinderella’s Sisters*, 109–44.

³⁸ You, *Yundongchang neiwai*, 106.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

that the municipal police did not have to carry out the checks on their own. Instead, they used student agents to implement local policies at school. Zhang Baojuan said her work was meant to enhance the well-being of the citizens – in fact, students. The major work she had done was to organise student pickets (*jiucha gu* 纠察股) to monitor students' behaviours. Since February, selected student pickets started maintaining order at school events at Songjiang School on a daily basis. They sanctioned any behaviour that violated the school regulations and published the records on the noticeboards. On 3 March 1930, the pickets made a few sets of regulations including not wearing any sort of tight clothes. On 15 April, they further agreed that tight 'little vests' with many buttons hanging outside, in wardrobes, or even the ones worn by students should be confiscated. On the evening of the same day, the pickets confiscated a number of little vests in an inspection, deciding they would repeat this inspection twice per day thereafter. Hence we should not regard the female students as passive recipients of the breast-binding ban, nor should we regard them as a homogenous group. Although in 1929 it was the teachers who firstly intervened in the issue of breast-binding, in 1930 it was the students who issued regulations against breast-binding.

More than one month later, in the third meeting of the pickets, they decided firstly that the teacher (*xundaochu* 訓導處) and student pickets should inspect the little vests together. The students would only be given short notice on the date of the inspection. Their second decision was that student pickets should also monitor each other, and make records if a student picket had violated the regulations.⁴⁰ If we link these two decisions together, we could conjecture that the confiscation of little vests did not go well, even under the pickets' twice-daily inspections. Students who asked for the schoolteachers' help must have been strongly against breast-binding. However, it is possible that other pickets might find it difficult to give up their own little vests, and only carried out the inspections perfunctorily. It is also possible that the students would help each other to hide their clothes, so that the pickets could not find them through their routine inspections. Instead of assuming that female students reacted towards the breast-binding ban in the same manner, in reality they held different beliefs and took different actions.

⁴⁰ Zhang Baojuan, 'Gonganju gongzuo baogao,' *Songjiang n izhong xiaokan*, no. 12 (June 1930): 8–10.

The story of Yang Zilie 楊子烈 (1902-1994) further reveals the subtleties of women's actions regarding breast-binding. Born in Zaoyang County in Hubei, Yang Zilie went to the Women's Normal School in Wuchang when she was fifteen years old. At the age of seventeen, she started to bind her breasts as all her classmates did. After the May Fourth Movement, Yang read in the periodicals about the harm done by breast-binding, and destroyed her little vest. Some of her classmates followed her example, while others did not.⁴¹ So how can we explain the different reactions of these women? Could we say that Yang was brainwashed by the May Fourth nationalist and hygienic discourse, while others were confident enough to decide over their bodies themselves? Yang was a student who read newspapers and magazines widely, was enthusiastic about revolution and hygiene, yet she also confirmed the difficulties in unbinding her breasts, which were not only caused by other female students, but also by the school teachers. Yang's experiences of breast-(un)binding happened around 1919 and 1920, when anti-breast-binding articles had already widely published. However, If one female student unbound her breasts, female teachers at school would shake their heads, and male teachers would also ignore her, presumably because not all the teachers could fully accept the 'liberated breasts'. In their studies of breast-binding, You Jianming and Jun Lei adopt the 'discipline and resistance' model, which regarded anti-breast-binding as discipline, and breast-binding as resistance. I would argue that this model could not explain Yang Zilie's experience.

In Yang Zilie's school, the teachers did not play their roles in regulating breast-binding as advocated by the nationalist articles against it. I would suggest that this cannot be understood as resistance to the nationalist discourse, but rather as persistence of existing gender norms and the weakness of nationalist discourse. The teachers' passive attitudes towards breast-binding did not lead to the continued disciplining of students; instead, they were tolerant towards both practices – binding or not binding the breasts. This reaffirms the fact that teachers in the school must have noted the anti-breast-binding discourse, yet not enough for them to take any actions. The school did not impose a rigid top-down discipline in this case – perhaps

⁴¹ Yang Zilie, *Zhang Guotao furen huiyilu* (Jiulong: Zilian chubanshe, 1970), 76–77.

more school would do so after the government issued anti-breast-binding ban in the late 1920s – but rather permitted a certain freedom of choice to students under a context where traditional sexual morality and nationalism contested each other.

The behaviour of the students, on the other hand, was also quite varied and ambiguous. For example, although Yang Zilie was ‘brave’ enough to abandon breast-binding, which she thought limited her breath, neither she herself nor her classmates dared to cut their hair. Short hair was also considered hygienic and timesaving for women, yet they believed it would be too troublesome and scandalous. Teachers would be too bashful to talk about breasts with students, yet they would be able to interfere with the issue of short hair straightforwardly. Therefore the students suffered more pressure of cutting their hair short than liberating their breasts. By unbinding their breasts, Yang and her classmates embodied the nationalist discourse of hygiene, yet they still operated under certain limitations. Unbinding the breasts did not bring the kind of ‘liberation’ to them that the nationalist discourse expected. Their classmates who did not unbind their breasts might well have considered unbinding breasts as ‘troublesome and scandalous’. They did not bind their breasts because they wanted to be considered as independent women who were more than milk bottles as Jun Lei argues;⁴² instead, they bound their breasts for a realistic reason – to avoid embarrassment. Why were they embarrassed because of their breasts? I would suggest it was due to the sexual morality and the stigma linked to big breasts discussed in chapter one, lack of education of physiology, and the taboo of discussions about the body at school. The action of binding breasts was for the sake of pragmatism, it simply meant following an established behavioural norm that was perhaps regarded as more persistent than volatile politics. It is not the intention of this thesis to endorse either of these women’s choices, as their behaviours cannot be categorised simply as ‘resistance’ or ‘obedience’. Their control of their bodies should only be understood as embodiments of the multi-layered discourse of nationalism and sexuality. The interactions between the grand narrative of the nation, the school authorities and fellow female students were fluid and multi-dimensional.

2.2 Hygienic Breasts

⁴² Lei, “Natural Curves.”

The racist and nationalistic discourse of the anti-breast-binding campaign had an important hygienic basis, namely that breast-binding was considered severely harmful to women's health. According to an intern doctor Guo Youqing, a large number of women were affected by breast-binding, including one quarter of his supervisor's female patients.⁴³ Zhu Jiahua and many others believed that breast-binding was more harmful to women than foot-binding, because it injured the lungs and other internal organs that were core to one's health, leading to pulmonary diseases and a general weakness of the body, whereas foot-binding merely damaged the feet.⁴⁴ A short story about a woman who died of breast-binding sensationally warned any other women who followed suit.⁴⁵ However, existing studies of breast-binding have rarely discussed the medical basis of this anti-breast-binding discourse.⁴⁶ I would suggest that a careful unravelling of the medical and hygienic terms and language used against breast-binding would help us to debunk the myths behind the claimed modern and scientific medical rationales. Apart from hygienic columns in women's journals, many popular hygienic journals, including *Dazhong yikan* 大眾醫刊, *Xin yiren* 新醫人, *Guangji yikan* 廣濟醫刊, *Kangjian zazhi* 康健雜誌, *Tongsu yishi yuekan* 通俗醫事月刊, *Funü yixue zazhi* 婦女醫學雜誌, *Yiyao changshi bao* 醫藥常識報, *Jiating yiyao changshi* 家庭醫藥常識, *Yiyao guwen* 醫藥顧問, *Weishengbao* 衛生報, etc. all published articles about the damage caused by breast-binding, written by professional medical practitioners, journalists and readers. My question in this section is: how did the medical journals justify the idea that breast-binding was more harmful than foot-binding, and even life-threatening?

Abdominal breathing

⁴³ Guo Youqing, 'Guanyu funü fubu de shishi,' *Shenghuo zhoukan* 5, no. 24 (1932): 397.

⁴⁴ Shen Weizhen, "Lun xiaobanbi yu nüzi tiyu," *Funü zazhi* 1, no. 1 (January 1915): 1–2; Lin Shuhua, "Duiyu nüjie shenti canhui zhi gaige lun," *Funü zazhi* 1, no. 12 (December 1915): 4–6; Cai Dun, "Lun nüzi xiaomajia zhi hai," *Jiangsu sheng li di-er nüzi shifan xuexiao xiaoyouhui kan*, no. 10 (1920): 21–22; Suying, "Jinggao nüxuesheng: chanxiong de haichu," *Funü zazhi* 7, no. 2 (February 1921): 110; Tang, "Shuxiong de huanhai"; "Zhu Jiahua tiyi jinge funü shuxiong"; Zhang Senyu, "Funü shuxiong zhi hai," *Xinyi yu shehui huikan*, no. 1 (1928): 390–91; Cao Jintang, "Shuru zhi hai," *Dachangshi*, no. 16 (1928): 2.

⁴⁵ Ruyin, 'Shuxiong er si de nüzi,' *Jiefang huabao*, no. 15 (1921): 5–7.

⁴⁶ Angelina Chin, *Bound to Emancipate: Working Women and Urban Citizenship in Early Twentieth-Century China and Hong Kong* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Polymorts: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 79–80; Sun, "1920 niandai Shanghai de huajia, zhishi fenzi yu luoti shijue wenhua," 315–16; Zeng, *Shehui, shenti, xingbie*; Lei, "Natural Curves."

The Republican medical journals believed that men and women have different breathing mechanisms. Many claimed that physiology taught that ‘men use abdominal breathing (*fushi huxi* 腹式呼吸), whereas women use chest breathing (*xiongshi huxi* 胸式呼吸)’.⁴⁷ A certain Dr Qiu Jingzhou explained that the contractions and dilations of the chest for men were due to the ups and downs of the diaphragm (Figure 2-1, left), whereas for women, they were due to the ups and downs of the breastbone and ribs (Figure 2-1, right). Figure 2-2 depicted the abnormal condition (*biantai* 變態) of a woman breathing with bound breasts, where the chest was suppressed, limiting the body’s vital capacity and thus leading to sickness.⁴⁸ This theory also had a range of variations. Some claimed that women relied mainly on chest breathing while using abdominal breathing subsidiarily.⁴⁹ Zhang Jingsheng even suggested that women would develop ‘shoulder breathing’ (*jianshi huxi* 肩式呼吸) if they bound their breasts.⁵⁰ All of them believed that breast-binding could lead to severe difficulties in women’s breathing, because it bound precisely the part that women used to breathe – the chest. Breathing difficulties are understandable, as female students like Yang Zilie had admitted.⁵¹ But how harmful was it for women’s health? What are the meanings of these terms? How did they enter in the anti-breast-binding discourse?

In fact, abdominal breathing itself has a long history in Chinese religious practices, both Daoist and Buddhist. Breathing techniques were basic meditational practices used to heal, to achieve body cultivation (*yangsheng* 養生) and immortality.⁵² Daoist bodily skills including gymnastics, breathing and alchemy could be found as early as the Han dynasty in the second century BC, for which evidence was found in the Mawangdui tomb.⁵³ As early as in the Song dynasty, bodily training techniques including ‘mantra recitation, breath control, sitting

⁴⁷ Yu Chengzhi, “Nütongbao ceng zhuyi zhe san jian shiqing me: fufen chanzu shuxiong,” *Tongsu yishi yuekan* 1, no. 1 (October 1919): 20; Shiru, “Funü shuxiong wenti zhi jiantao,” *Fangzhou*, no. 5 (October 1934): 28–29.

⁴⁸ Qiu Jingzhou, “Shuxiong yu fangxiong,” *Kangjian zazhi* 1, no. 7 (November 1933): 7.

⁴⁹ Li Shulan, ‘Shuxiong jiu shi zisha,’ *Tianjin tebieshi weishengju yuekan* 1, no. 2 (1929): 19; Shen Youdong, ‘Shuxiong de hai,’ *Ershi yuekan* 1, no. 3–4 (1929): 35.

⁵⁰ Zhang, “Danai fuxing,” 3.

⁵¹ Yang, *Zhang Guotao furen huiyilu*, 76.

⁵² Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 318–61.

⁵³ Bertholet, *Concubines and Courtesans*, 14.

meditation, healing techniques and martial arts' had been pervasive in society.⁵⁴ Although there were various methods of breathing, abdominal breathing is one of the basic methods. The method requires inhaling air, holding the breath for a moment, then exhaling with two thirds of the air, and swallowing the remaining third of breath into the stomach and the lower abdomen.⁵⁵ In the Republican era, a wide range of redemptive societies had millions of followers, and breathing training was the basic step for further practices.⁵⁶ So why was abdominal breathing put forward against breast-binding? Why is the ancient religious method relevant to breast-binding in the modern medical discourse? Why was abdominal breathing considered to be an exclusively male thing?

Although the breathing techniques had a long history in China, the term abdominal breathing '*fushi huxi* 腹式呼吸' was new in the Republican era. Not surprisingly, it was a term coined in Japan and reintroduced in China in the 1910s.⁵⁷ The abdominal breathing method also has a long history in Japanese healing and religious practices, especially in the Zen practice that developed in Japan after the dissemination of Buddhism in Japan from the Tang period. Many Zen masters considered it as vitally important to push forward the abdomen during the practice.⁵⁸ During the Meiji period, when a public health system was first introduced by the Japanese government, Western medicine was considered the only legitimate form of medicine, and Eastern medicine was being eschewed as unscientific. However, since the turn of the twentieth century, a wide range of traditional healing techniques, including meditation techniques, attracted increasing attention from medical practitioners. Around 1905, Torajiro Okada started to promote and revive traditional medications and healing methods, including breathing techniques, and suggested that the correct breathing was to use the lower abdomen. This was followed by a great many similar publications, which all continued to use the word '*tanden* 丹田' to

⁵⁴ David Palmer, *Qigong Fever: Body, Science and Utopia in China* (London: Hurst & Company, 2007), 11.

⁵⁵ Min Zhiting et al., eds., *Zhongguo daojiao dacidian* (Taizhong: dongjiu qiye chuban youxian gongsi, 1996), 738.

⁵⁶ Palmer, *Qigong Fever*, 12.

⁵⁷ For detailed study of the reimport of Japanese kanji to China, see Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

⁵⁸ Kaiten Nukariya and Tsung-mi, *The Religion of the Samurai: A Study of Zen Philosophy and Discipline in China and Japan* (London, Totowa: Luzac; Rowman & Littlefield, 1973), 190–92.

refer to the abdomen.⁵⁹ While traditional healing methods became popular, in the 1910s the physician Futaki Kenzō 二木謙三 (1873-1966) reinvented the abdominal breathing method and gave it a scientific terminology.⁶⁰ Futaki, who had studied contagious diseases in Germany, invented the term ‘*fukushiki kokyū* 腹式呼吸’ (abdominal breathing).⁶¹ The word *fuku* 腹 had more concrete anatomical meanings than *tanden* in Japanese medicine. *Fuku* was used in Japanese anatomy books to refer to the area of the abdomen at least since the early nineteenth century, as Figure 2-3 depicts. After Japanese refashioning of this ancient method with modern scientific language, Chinese medical journals quickly accepted this idea and translated Futaki’s theory shortly after its publication in 1911.

Futaki also introduced ‘chest breathing’ and ‘apex of lung breathing’, and the latter was distorted into ‘shoulder breathing’ by Zhang Jingsheng. However, Futaki did not suggest that there was a natural gendered difference of abdominal breathing. He said that the abdominal breathing could be limited if men sit indolently, or women bowed too much. In Japan, women bowed a lot as daily etiquette, which limited the breathing space in their abdomens. So there were fewer women than men who could breathe abdominally. He also suggested that women’s lack of the ability of abdominal breathing was a sign of superior culture, as the only race where men and women were equally good at abdominal breathing was the black race, who never used bowing as etiquette, or corsets to limit their abdominal spaces. In other words, Futaki believed that the reason women in Japan and the West tended to have difficulties in abdominal breathing was due to their cultural sophistication.⁶² While translating Futaki’s work, Chinese medical practitioners never mentioned the cultural and racial superiority marked by women’s bodily confinements. Instead, their focus was on the natural differences between men and women in breathing.

In fact, if we look at Figure 2-2, the abnormal breathing of women with bound breasts actually greatly resembles Figure 2-4, showing the bodily shape of

⁵⁹ Hiroo Sasaki, ‘Changes in the Values about Body and Health along with Modernization of Japan in 1910’s,’ *International Journal of Eastern Sports & Physical Education* 5, no. 1 (2007): 1–10.

⁶⁰ A short introduction of Futaki’s life could be found: Louis Frederic, *Japan Encyclopedia*, trans. Kathe Roth (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 225.

⁶¹ Futaki Kenzō, *Fukushiki Kokyū* (Tokyo: Bunhoshidou, 1911).

⁶² Futaki Kenzō, “Fushi huxi ji qiya zengjin fa,” trans. He Huankui, *Yiyao xuebao* 3, no. 8 (1911): 32, 38.

abdominal breathing published in a Japanese body cultivation book. According to Futaki, bowing limited women's abdominal breathing, whereas his Chinese counterparts tended to claim that women could not breathe abdominally at all. In other words, the Chinese doctors did not fully accept the Japanese theory of abdominal breathing. Their understanding of the physical abdomen was gendered.

I would further argue the Republican writings of gendered breathing modes were rooted from gendered understandings of Daoist breathing techniques. Daoist texts of practice prior to the Qing period believed the nature of men was *yang* 陽, and that of women was *yin* 陰.⁶³ They admit that the practices of men and women are broadly alike with only slight differences (*datong xiaoyi* 大同小異). The breathing techniques for men and women differed at the beginning of their practice, when men should focus on abdominal breathing, while women should focus on the areas around the chest. As was written in a Daoist text: "Men's lives rely on the abdomen, women's lives rely on the chest" (*nanzi zhi ming zai dantian, nizi zhiming zai rufang* 男子之命在丹田, 女子之命在乳房).⁶⁴ The word *rufang* (breasts) in this sentence does not mean breasts, but the space of the heart between the two breasts. Before practising the same techniques with men, women should first achieve a stage that their menstruations ceased (*zhan chilong* 斬赤龍, literally means 'chopping the red dragon') and their breasts were as flat as those of men.⁶⁵ Thereafter, women should reach a level where they could also practise abdominal breathing. Therefore the different techniques that men and women should adopt during the practice did not suggest that men were born with abdominal breathing, while women were born with chest breathing, yet the differences between men and women might not be that 'slight' as the texts suggested, which provides the ground for gendered readings of these techniques.

To conclude, neither the traditional Daoist practice nor Futaki Kenzō suggested men were naturally born with abdominal breathing, which could only be achieved by training and practice regardless of gender. However, both Futaki and

⁶³ Catherine Despeux, 'Women in Daoism,' in *Daoism Handbook*, ed. Livia Kohn (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2000), 406.

⁶⁴ Min et al., *Zhongguo daojiao dacidian*, 150.

⁶⁵ Min et al., *Zhongguo daojiao dacidian*, 204–5.

Daoist practice addressed the fact that women had more obstacles in training themselves into abdominal breathing. These concepts were distorted into essential breathing differences between men and women by the anti-breast-binding articles in the dissemination of these methods and texts. In fact, many articles just take the essential gender differences of breathing for granted, without giving much evidences.

Tuberculosis⁶⁶

Breast-binding was also claimed to cause tuberculosis easily, as binding the chest tightly limited the space for the lungs, and the pulmonary alveolus could not stretch fully in inhalation.⁶⁷ Tuberculosis, in both China and Japan, became the metaphor for the weakness of the country in the first half of the twentieth century.⁶⁸ From the 1910s to 1950s, the death toll of tuberculosis in Japan was more than 100,000 per year.⁶⁹ In China, tuberculosis was believed to be one of the three most widespread diseases, together with hookworm disease and syphilis.⁷⁰ In Japan, while some physicians such as Kitazato Shibasaburo promoted abdomen breathing to kill the tubercular bacteria and cure tuberculosis, Futaki believed that abdominal breathing would prevent tuberculosis.⁷¹ Whether this method was accepted and used in China to fight off tuberculosis is beyond the scope of this dissertation; nevertheless, the idea that breast-binding could create space for tuberculosis had spread widely.

The developing germ theory in the 1880s shifted Chinese knowledge of illness with the notion of ‘contagion (*chuanran* 傳染)’.⁷² General knowledge of hygiene recognised that contagion was the cause of infectious disease, and gives suggestions of how to avoid it.⁷³ Although the term tuberculosis was a modern scientific one, its connotations still bore much of the traditional understanding of

⁶⁶ *feijiehe* 肺結核, also usually called as consumption *feibing* 肺病, *feilao* 肺癆, *laobing* 癆病 in Chinese.

⁶⁷ Shen, “Lun xiaobanbi yu nüzi tiyu”; Zhou, “Shuxiong xiguan yu xingzhishi”; Hu Hongjun, “Xin Zhuang yu weisheng,” *Jiating yiyao changshi*, no. 13 (1933): 17–18; Zhao Ziqin, “Shuru zhi hai,” *Weisheng zazhi*, no. 26 (1935): 33.

⁶⁸ David Der-wei Wang, *Lishi yu guaishou: lishi, baoli, xushi* (Taipei: Maitian chuban, 2004), 81–82.

⁶⁹ Ikeda Kazuo (2003), cited from Sasaki, ‘Changes in the Values about Body and Health along with Modernization of Japan in 1910’s,’ 5.

⁷⁰ China Medical Commission of the Rockefeller Foundation, *Medicine in China* (New York: University of Chicago Press, 1914), 2.

⁷¹ Kitazato Shibasaburo, *Hai no kenkoho* (Tokyo: Kobundo, 1910).

⁷² Andrew Schonebaum, ‘Vectors of Contagion and Tuberculosis in Modern Chinese Literature,’ *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 17–46.

⁷³ Yao, “Xiongfei de baohu changshi,” *Linglong* 3, no. 11 (April 12, 1933): 414.

feilao 肺癆.⁷⁴ Contagion “was never the only cause of the spread of any disorder. A polluted location, the weak physical constitution of the victim, bad geomancy of a residence or moral flaws or wrongdoings were equally valid or more important causes.”⁷⁵ This especially explains why articles on popular medicine accused breast-binding to contribute to the spread of tuberculosis, because by binding their breasts, women would end up with a tubercular physique (*laobing de tige* 癆病的體格) or a general weak physical condition.⁷⁶ Women were morally wrong, not in a sexual immoral way, but for not keeping their body in the best condition for the nation, and ignorance of physical knowledge.

Having tuberculosis also runs the risk of infecting one’s child, which would also eventually weaken the nation and exterminate the race.⁷⁷ If one woman was infected by tuberculosis, she would make at least one or two relatives or friends catch it. So “if breast-binding directly killed one, who knows how many it could kill indirectly?” The author further pointed out that if one killed oneself, the society would lose one producer, but also one consumer. Breast-binding was worse, because the society would lose one producer, as a breast-binding woman was not able to produce anything, but would still have one consumer, as breast-binding was not sufficient to really kill a woman.⁷⁸ Therefore by linking breast-binding with tuberculosis, women again became the targets of nationalist criticism because they were ignorant of hygiene and irresponsible for the country.

Reproductivity

Perhaps most importantly, breast-binding was blamed for jeopardising breastfeeding, thus destroying the future citizens.⁷⁹ Damaging the breasts by binding them too tightly could result in the inversion of nipples, blocking of mammary

⁷⁴ Schonebaum, ‘Vectors of Contagion and Tuberculosis in Modern Chinese Literature.’

⁷⁵ Angela Ki Che Leung, “Evolution of the Idea of Chuanran Contagion in Imperial China,” in *Health and Hygiene in Chinese East Asia: Policies and Publics in the Long Twentieth Century*, ed. Angela Ki Che Leung and Charlotte Furth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 44.

⁷⁶ Yu, “Nütongbao ceng zhuyi zhe san jian shiqing me”; Gufeng, “Bu xiong,” *Shenghuo zhoukan* 4, no. 47 (1929): 536; “Guomin weisheng changshi jiangtan,” *Yishi gonglun* 3, no. 2 (1935): 24; Ziyu, “Shuxiong yu gaogenxie (shang),” *Qingnian jiankang banyuekan* 1, no. 2 (1935): 16.

⁷⁷ Shen, “Lun xiaobanbi yu nüzi tiyu.”

⁷⁸ Shulan, ‘Shuxiong jiu shi zisha,’ 19.

⁷⁹ Qiu, “Shuxiong yu fangxiong”; You Xuezhou, “Shuru zhi hai,” *Changshou*, no. 147 (1935): 371; Yiming, “Lun nüzi shuru zhi hai,” *Xingfu zazhi* 2, no. 9 (1936): 46–47.

glands and breast tumours.⁸⁰ Articles making such arguments were usually based on wild fantasies or farfetched and slippery deductions, rather than on rigorous experimental or empirical studies. A close reading of one article in *Tongsu yishi yuekan* will be useful to understand their logic. Firstly, the author said that nipples were the first to be affected by breast-binding, because nipples grew on top of the breasts, particularly sticking out. Because of this, breast-binding would “inevitably” (*bu de bu* 不得不) inverse the nipples inside. Here all the cause and effect justification was the shapes of nipples and breasts, and the word ‘inevitably’ without giving any other solid evidence.

Next, the author suggested that “over time” (*jiu er jiu zhi* 久而久之), the nipples would be inversed inside “naturally”. Then, after giving birth, the milk would accumulate in the blocked mammary glands. No matter if sucked by a person or pulled by medical equipment, the breast would “never” return to its original state, “eventually” it would develop mastitis.⁸¹ Again, the author did not specify how long it would take for the nipples to be inversed permanently, or the probability of the development of these diseases. The article conveyed the impression that all the breast-binding women would contract breast diseases. Similar medical articles were published repetitively, without mentioning that all the alleged diseases may also depend on women’s individual physiques, on how tightly breasts were bound, and the duration of the binding. As will be discussed in chapter five, women might loosen their breast-bindings if they were too tight, and the duration of their practices varied from just several months to years. Among all the women that I interviewed, only one attributed her nipple inversion on her left breast to her early years of breast-binding.⁸²

The anxieties of breastfeeding resulted from the infant mortality rate in China, which was claimed three times higher than Western countries by Dr Mao Xian. Unsurprisingly, breast-binding was deemed responsible. Bound breasts could hardly

⁸⁰ Xia, “Lun funü shuxiong de miuwu”; Feng Wenrui, “Xiazi nainai zhifa,” *Jiating yiyao changshi*, no. 13 (1933): 24; Yanfu, “Gansu jie jue xiaomajia,” *Nizi yuekan* 1, no. 8 (1933): 36–37; Fengji, “Shuru yu xiarutou,” *Xingfu zazhi* 2, no. 9 (1936): 49–50.

⁸¹ Yusan, ‘Shuxiong de yutan,’ *Tongsu yishi yuekan* 1, no. 3 (1919): 53.

⁸² Interview with Shi Aihua.

produce milk, which led to infants' malnutrition and immature deaths.⁸³ The concerns for infants were ultimately linked to the anxieties of the strength of the nation. Mao Xian continued to suggest that as China was still an impoverished country, the imperative task was to abolish the most harmful customs that would cost least, which included breast-binding.⁸⁴ Hence, although breast-binding might indeed result in illness and thus seemed to be motivated by a concern for women's health, the medical and hygienic discourse was more intertwined with nationalist pursuits.

For a woman who could not breastfeed her children, she had two other choices if she could afford, yet neither of the choices was regarded as proper mothering. Firstly, she could choose milk powder, which would be very expensive for the majority of families. Secondly, she could hire a wet nurse. Although hiring wet nurses was quite common in the imperial and Republican eras, many argued that women who did not breastfeed their own children were unqualified as mothers, as they had not fulfilled their motherly duties (*muzhi* 母職).⁸⁵ In early imperial periods, wet nurses were treated as respectable women. They only received limited criticism when they overstepped gender and class boundaries, and participated in power struggles. Hardly anyone would criticise them for the quality of their milk or their conscientiousness.⁸⁶ In contrast, the Republican discourses considered wet nurses ignorant, uneducated, unhealthy or malnourished, and ill-mannered, which could do great harm to or even kill the infants. Not to mention that they could carry infectious diseases such as syphilis.⁸⁷ There were also a good many stories of cunning and cruel peasant wet nurses who harmed children deliberately, because they were not satisfied with the payment, or they had arguments with the parents.⁸⁸ The transformation of attitudes towards wet nurses was also due to the nationalist anxieties about the future generation.

⁸³ Mao Xian, 'Nüzi shu xiong yu guomin jian kang,' *Ningbo shizheng yuekan* 3, no. 7–8 (1930): 7–8.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Li Wenrui, 'Shu xiong wenti,' *Xinyiren* 1, no. 3 (1923): 15–16.

⁸⁶ Li Zhende, *Nüren de Zhongguo yiliaoshi: hantang zhijian de jian kang zhaogu yu xingbie* (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 2008), 205–46.

⁸⁷ Wang Liangyu, "Wuyong gu rumu shuo," *Qingnian zazhi*, 1915; Shi Guofan, "Guyong rumu wenti," *Xinyiren*, 1923; Yu Renfeng, "Zenyang xuanze naima," *Fuying weisheng*, 1946.

⁸⁸ Zhang Letian, 'Rumu,' *Siming*, 1926.

Breast-binding allegedly also affected menstruation, and therefore women's reproductivity. After binding her breasts for twenty days, a female student Wang Aizhen reported to experience chest pain, anorexia, and even amenorrhea. A doctor suggested breast-binding was the cause of all her symptoms. Keeping her breasts unbound for more than ten days, all her symptoms were gone, and she had her menstruation back. The author of this story further explained Wang's suffering with Chinese medicine. The upper body was divided into three parts in Chinese medicine, called 'three burners' (*sanjiao* 三焦): upper burner (*shangjiao* 上焦) – around heart and chest; middle burner (*zhongjiao* 中焦) – around the stomach; and lower burner (*xiajiao* 下焦) – including the urinary organs (Figure 2-5). Although there were various divergences of this concept, most of the pre-modern Chinese practitioners had a consensus that the three burners functioned as channels of fluids.⁸⁹ Wang Aizhen's upper burner was suppressed, so her lower burner would be blocked.⁹⁰ This story was especially suspicious, because Wang Aizhen only missed her menstruation for twenty days, it could hardly be addressed as 'amenorrhea'. It could be just an irregular period due to other reasons. The real motivation of this article was also to warn women that breast-binding would not only harm the individual's health, but also weaken the nation and race.⁹¹

The linkage between nationalism and women's breast-feeding ability did have some woman's endorsements. In one rare case, a woman Jing Xia linked her reproductive body to the nation. Influenced by her classmates when she was a female student, Jing Xia bound her breasts tightly every day, which led to nipple depression. When she breastfed her son, her son made a great effort to suck but failed to get any milk. She had no choice but to have her five-year-old niece suck. Although the nipple was eventually sucked out, her skin was injured and bleeding and her breasts were swollen. She shed tears because of the pain of feeding her son. However, she did not have enough milk for her son and seeing her son getting thinner and his voice getting fainter, she was heartbroken. This painful experience recalled the school life

⁸⁹ Li Jianmin, 'Dumai yu Zhongguo zaoqi yangsheng shijian: qijing bamai de xin yanjiu zhi er,' in *xingbie, shenti yu yiliao*, ed. Li Zhende (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 2008), 22–23.

⁹⁰ Lanying, 'Shuxiong de weixian,' *Yiyao changshi bao*, no. 6 (February 2, 1930): 1.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

to her; at that time she followed others and wore the little vest every day.⁹² From this detail we can see that breast-binding was a collective practice of all her classmates at that time. At the end of the essay, Jing Xia warned the other ‘sisters’ not to bind their breasts in order to care for the children, love the society and country and avoid hiring a wet nurse. She recalled that in her joyful student life, Jing Xia dreamed of establishing a family and improving the race, yet because of breast-binding she failed in both tasks.⁹³

Her concerns of the nation could be understood in two ways. On the one hand, through the link between personal childbirth and the nation, the author linked herself as a woman to a broader national agenda, which nevertheless enabled her to see herself beyond the scope of the family. The nationalist concerns of women’s health to the nation, which was internalised among women, provided a new linkage between women and the public domain. However, this linkage was imaginary; women could not directly participate in any public capacity by reproducing healthy children. On the other hand, obviously, her school-time dream of improving the race did not prevent her binding her breasts. The breast-binding practices of Jing Xia and her classmates did not shift due to the nationalist discourse against breast-binding. The nationalist concerns did not affect her until she got a real problem in her daily life: the experience of breastfeeding. Therefore I would argue that nationalism did influence women to some extent, yet women’s control of their bodies was much more closely linked to their personal and intimate experiences.

Therefore the Republican medical and hygienic understandings of the female breasts were based on selective and gendered readings of traditional and transnational texts, which eventually turned into hybrids of pre-modern Chinese medicine, Daoist and Buddhist practices, the Japanese scientific reinvention of the traditional bodily techniques, and Western medicine. The accusations of breast-binding based on breathing methods were imbued with contradictions and ambiguities. The pharmacists publishing articles in journals seemed not to have clear knowledge of breathing mechanics or human anatomy. In the anti-breast-binding campaign, politicians, scholars and contributors to popular periodicals all accused

⁹² Jing Xia, “Shuxiong hou de buru,” *Xin Shanghai*, September 1926, 57–59.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 58.

breast-binding of weakening the nation and race, based on medical evidence. However, this section demonstrates that the medical evidence of the harmfulness of breast-binding was questionable, to say the least, and also created as part of the nationalist discourse. Almost all of the articles in popular medical magazines were preoccupied with the issue of women's health and national strength. Under this context, the medical consequences of breast-binding were undoubtedly exaggerated, locating women as the group responsible for the national crisis. For individual women, the chaotic medical discourse might precisely prove its unreliability, therefore to what extent women really accepted the argument that breast-binding was life-threatening was doubtful.

2.3 Big Breastism: Scholars and Tabloids

This section shifts its attention to three eminent scholars – Zhang Jingsheng, Hu Shi 胡適, and Lu Xun 魯迅 – and their activities related to the anti-breast-binding campaign. Zhang Jingsheng received his PhD in Philosophy from the University of Lyon in 1919, actively advocating sexology, birth control, eugenics and population control since the 1920s since his return to China. His course in Peking University and subsequent book *Aesthetic Outlook of Life* (*Mei de rensheng guan* 美的人生觀) was a huge success which received positive recommendations from Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren 周作人. His edited book *Sex Histories* (*Xingshi* 性史) contained several solicited papers of people's sexual lives. The book received unforeseen popularity, yet it was soon banned under the pressure of many prominent intellectuals such as Zhang Boling. This book brought him abundant condemnation and forced him to leave Peking University.⁹⁴ Hu Shi, a leading intellectual in the May Fourth and New Cultural Movement, actively participated in literature reform and advocated liberalism. Lu Xun, one of the most important and respected writers in the Republican era, was famous for his social criticism and left-wing thinking. How did these three vastly different scholars enter into the discussions of breast-binding? Did they attempt to emancipate women from the bodily oppressions of

⁹⁴ Jiang, “Zhang Jingsheng qiren qishi.” Rocha, “Sex, Eugenics, Aesthetics, Utopia in the Life and Work of Zhang Jingsheng (1888-1970).”

breast-binding? How influential were their writings or speeches? How to position them in the anti-breast-binding campaign?

Zhang Jingsheng firstly raised a theory of ‘Big Breast Renaissance (*danai fuxing* 大奶復興)’ in early 1927.⁹⁵ The combination of ‘big breast’ and ‘renaissance’ created an absolute astonishment. Breast, especially ‘big breast’, was perceived as vulgar and immoral as mentioned in chapter one; ‘renaissance’ was often followed by adjectives like ‘national’, ‘racial’ and ‘cultural’. Therefore by inventing this term, Zhang Jingsheng actually equalled the importance of ‘big breast’ with national honour. He believed that breast-binding made women’s social responsibilities – producing fine offspring – hopeless.⁹⁶ In this sense, Zhang Jingsheng attempted to persuade women to consider their behaviours for the sake of the nation.

Undeniably, the term ‘big breast renaissance’ also created ambiguous feelings of amusement, excitement, and suggestiveness. Apart from reproduction, Zhang believed women also had other responsibilities: to sexually please themselves and their partners. Big breasts would be essential for this purpose. Sex, as ‘Dr Sex’ Zhang Jingsheng affirmed, was one of the most enjoyable things in one’s life. By binding their chests, women limited their sexual desires to a minimum, which was equivalent to suicide. What’s worse, women also committed the evil crime of killing men, as their limited ability to experience sexual pleasure would also reduce men’s pleasures.⁹⁷ Although Zhang Jingsheng acknowledged women’s subjectivity of desire, encouraging them to pursue their sexuality, he nevertheless just assumed that women could not be satisfied with bound breasts. But in fact, according to Zhang, it was men that women could not please with bound breasts, especially men like Zhang, who repetitively expressed his admiration for well developed Western women. Arguably, this theory of sexual pleasure only reassured Zhang Jingsheng’s arbitrary imagination of female sexuality, and his own desire for big breasts.

Zhang Jingsheng also connected the breasts with women’s minds. He suggested smart women’s spirits (*xinling* 心靈) lived in the vulva, yet the smarter

⁹⁵ Zhang, “Danai fuxing.”

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

women kept their spirits in their breasts, because breasts connected to their uterus and sexual nerves.⁹⁸ Zhang also considered that apart from sexual activities, women only had boring and lonely lives.⁹⁹ By linking women's intelligence with their genitals, Zhang limited women to being pure sexual objects whose entire spiritual happiness depended on how skilfully they managed their sexual lives. This was not even the most stunning point that Zhang made on sexuality. For example, he believed that genitals could breathe, which was criticised for being utterly ridiculous and unscientific. In the public mind, Zhang Jingsheng was the one who could talk sheer nonsense on sexuality.

Zhang Jingsheng's usage of sexuality was problematic, as sexuality could be very personal and diverse, especially during the time of transition. Zhang was so notorious for his sexual nonsense and obscene talk that someone even faked an article under his name, saying that Zhang delivered a speech in Shantou advocating the necessity of a flat chest because it could arouse men's desires.¹⁰⁰ Zhang Jingsheng believed big breasts were desirable, yet his rivals could well argue that Zhang Jingsheng himself argued the opposite. The provocativeness of the little vest was well documented in the novelist Bao Tianxiao's fiction *The Story of a Noble Family* (*jinfen shijia* 金粉世家).¹⁰¹ The novel was published in 1942, recounting a story that happened in the early 1920s. The female protagonist Ruchun works as a cashier in a noodle restaurant owned by her father in Shanghai. She falls in love with a cook in the restaurant, Jin Asong. After a few dates, she goes to Asong's place for dinner. It is midnight when Ruchun gets drunk, yet she does not want to go back home.

原來當時女界中，尚未流行穿旗袍，如春姐今天穿的是淡西湖色熟羅的衫子。可是衫子裏面是一個小馬甲，裹得緊緊的想一個炮仗，因為當時青年女子的乳部，是未肯解放的。這時她外面衫子的鈕釦，鬆了幾個，

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Jingsheng, "Shiye Shanghai liumang de yi zhong," *Xinwenhua* 1, no. 2 (1927): 157.

¹⁰⁰ Zhang Jingsheng, "Lun xiaoshan zhi biyao: Zhang Jingsheng zai Shantou jiaohui yanjiang," *Huanzhou banyuekan* 1, no. 8(2) (1927): 390–93.

¹⁰¹ The name is the same as Zhang Henshui's famous novel.

裏面卻還是扣得緊緊，暗示教阿松解裏面的釦子，她胸前的肌肉是豐腴的，釦子一解，肌肉就飛跳出來了。

The *Qipao* was not fashionable among women at that time. Today sister Ruchun wore a light blue silk jacket. However, inside the silk is a little vest, wrapping the body as tight as a firecracker, because young women then would not liberate their breasts. At this moment, a few buttons of her jacket were loose, yet the little vest was still tightly fastened, giving Asong a hint to untie the buttons. The muscles on her chest were full and round. Once the buttons were undone they would bounce out in no time.¹⁰²

The novelist Bao commented that Ruchun's behaviour confirmed that she is seducing Asong. Although to our contemporary readers Zhang Jingsheng's attempt to persuade his Chinese readers that big breasts were desirable seems peculiar, we have to bear in mind that flat chest and the tight little vest were equally provocative in the 1920s.

Actually Zhang had long been impersonated, with dozens of *Sexual Histories* published under his name, exploiting it for profit.¹⁰³ The forged article about breast-binding just further defamed Zhang's scientific attitudes towards sexuality. Zhang Jingsheng was furious about this rumour, claiming he was the first man in China who opposed breast-binding strongly, and the one who faked this article was an intellectual hoodlum.¹⁰⁴ However, given all the sexual nonsense he introduced, it would not be that suprising if he really advocated for the little vest. The influence of Zhang Jingsheng's 'Big Breast Restoration' is difficult to assess, yet it certainly objectified and sexulised the female body.

In contrast, Hu Shi's 'Big Breastism' was propagated repetitively until the 1940s, and even nowadays. In 1927, Hu made a speech 'On Big Breastism' (*danainai zhuyi* 大奶奶主義) to the newly graduated female students at the

¹⁰² Tianxiao, "Jinfen Shijia 1," *Xiaoshuo yuebao*, no. 25 (1942): 87.

¹⁰³ Peng Xiaoyan, "Zhang Jingsheng de Xingshi: seqing hai shi xingxue?," *Dushu*, no. 8 (2005): 156-61.

¹⁰⁴ "Shiye shanghai liumang de yi zhong."

McTyeire School (中西女塾 *zhongxi nishu*) in Shanghai, advocating that women should liberate their breasts. He argued that Chinese female students did not deserve to be mothers due to the practice of breast-binding, which was a serious problem for the race and nation.¹⁰⁵ This ‘Big Breastism’, I would argue, was due to Hu Shi’s long interest in women and body issues back to his days at Connell University from 1910 to 1915. During his studies overseas, Hu Shi exercised in the gym regularly, and believed that physical exercise enabled him to be more energetic.¹⁰⁶ In a self-reflective entry in his diary on 18 February 1915, Hu Shi cited Confucius’ disciple Zengzi in his diary: “A scholar should have no grand and firm resolutions, as he bears heavy responsibilities through a long struggle. Isn’t it a heavy responsibility of pursuing general benevolence? Isn’t a long way to strive for ideals until death puts an end?” Hu Shi wrote that in order to achieve this way of life, he must aim at three things. The first one was a ‘healthy body’. ‘Indomitable spirits’ and ‘extensive knowledge and profound scholarship’ only came as secondary and tertiary objectives.¹⁰⁷ Hu Shi’s interest in training the body was rooted in the Late Qing and Early Republican ‘strengthening the nation and race’ discourse, then mixed with his personal bodily experiences, he continued to propagate this discourse to the general public. Therefore the anti-breast-binding discourse should not be viewed as a top-down discipline towards women. Instead, it was constantly shaped and reshaped by recipients and producers of this discourse.

Hu Shi was also famous for actively supporting women’s movements. He deemed the Chinese society as a paralysed society, as half of the people did not have freedom or the expectation of self-development.¹⁰⁸ In his daily conversations, Hu discussed women’s issues with friends, and claimed that women should emancipate themselves both physically and spiritually.¹⁰⁹ Hu Shi’s opposition to breast-binding was for the sake of women’s emancipation, China’s nation-building, health and hygienic discourse. However, why did Hu Shi choose the term ‘big breastism’? Hu Shi was well known for his position in the ‘problems and isms’ debate in the New

¹⁰⁵ Lin Zecang, “Zhongxi nüshu biye zhi,” *Shenbao*, June 27, 1927, 16; Wu, *Duhui yunshang*, 198.

¹⁰⁶ Jiang Yongzhen, *Shewo qishui: Hu Shi (I) puyu chengbi* (Beijing: Xinxing chubanshe, 2011), 89.

¹⁰⁷ Hu Shi, ‘Zike,’ in *Hu Shi liuxue riji (3)*, Hu Shi zuopinji 36 (Taipei: Yuanliu chuban gongsi, 1994), 3.

¹⁰⁸ Hu Shi, ‘Nüzi wenti (1),’ *Fun üzazhi* 13, no. 5 (May 1922): 6–9; Hu Shi, ‘Nüzi wenti de kaiduan,’ *Fun üzazhi* 8, no. 10 (October 1922): 125–28.

¹⁰⁹ Hu Shi, ‘Nüzi wenti (1)’.

Cultural Movement. He criticised intellectual indulgence in empty talk about various ‘isms’ and attempting to solve the national crisis with a totalistic solution, yet seldom touching upon the real social problems:¹¹⁰

我們不去研究人力車夫的生計，卻去高談社會主義；不去研究女子如何解放，家庭制度如何救正，卻去高談公妻主義和自由戀愛；不去研究安福部如何解散，不去研究南北問題如何解決，卻去高談無政府主義；我們還要得意揚揚誇口道，「我們所談的是根本解決」。老實說罷，這是自欺欺人的夢話！

Instead of researching the livelihood of rickshaw pullers, we spout on about socialism; instead of researching how women should be emancipated, and the family system should be adjusted, we spout on about cenogamy and freedom of love; instead of researching how to dismiss the Anfu club, or how to solve the division between north and south, we spout on anarchism; we then boast with immense pleasure: ‘We are talking about a fundamental solution.’ To be honest, this is deceptive dream talking!¹¹¹

Ironically, although Hu was critical to ‘isms’, in opposition to breast-binding, he invented another ‘ism’. To be sure, the ‘big breastism’ was in no way as grand and rich an ‘ism’ as Marxism or anarchism. It was possible that Hu Shi used his prominence on the issue of ‘problems and isms’ to draw the public’s attention to this issue, by bringing out a bold and eye-catching term – another ‘ism’. During his speech, the female students were reported all to have blushed with embarrassment. The usage of the reduplicated word *nainai* instead of *nai* to refer to the breasts contained a hint of intimacy. Connecting the intimate word *nainai* and the grand ‘ism’, ‘big-breastism’ also created astonishment, embarrassment, amusement and sexual implications.

Unlike Zhang Jingsheng, Hu Shi was not obsessed with sexual liberation and the pursuit of pleasure, yet the term ‘big-breastism’ nevertheless triggered a side

¹¹⁰ Lin Yusheng, “‘Wenti yu zhuyi’ lunbian de lishi yiyi,” *Ershiyi shiji*, no. 8 (1991): 15–20.

¹¹¹ Hu Shi, “Duo yanjiu xie wenti, shao tan xie ‘zhuyi,’” *Meizhou pinglun*, no. 31 (1919): 1.

effect of a booming of witty essays on breasts in pictorials and tabloids, which Hu Shi might well have foreseen in the context of the rapid development of a new culture of humorous writing in Republican China. A few years after 1911, jokes flourished in periodicals in columns widely available, serving as ‘miscellany’ and ‘space fillers’, as well as appearing in humour collections. They were written by prominent writers such as Zhou Zuoren, Zheng Yimei 鄭逸梅, Xu Zhuodai 徐卓呆, and writers and readers who were not well known. Historian Christopher Rea calls this period ‘a Republic of jokes’. Many of the joke collections were consumed and replaced quickly, using rough paper and rough binding.¹¹²

Articles that followed Hu Shi’s ‘big breastism’ were mostly of these kinds of witty essays and stories. One author narrated that policemen in the Shanghai concessions once saw a woman with extremely oversized clothes and high breasts. They stopped and checked this woman, and finding that her breasts felt like metal, required her to take off her clothes. It turned out the woman carried two pistols and two hundred bullets with her, and presumably many were placed around her chest. After this, the police decided to recruit female policewomen in order to keep an eye on suspicious women’s breasts.¹¹³ The authenticity of this story is doubtful, yet it provides multiple ways to understand the big breasts. Firstly, it could be a mockery towards the ‘big breasts’ and the emancipation of breast-binding, because women just disguised their bodies in order to look like an emancipated woman. Secondly, it could convey the fear of the liberated women, who were so dangerous that they would use their bodies to participate in public affairs, assassinations, or even wars.

The famous humour writer Xu Zhuodai wrote an article dividing breasts into a wide range of categories. The highest ones were described as two mountains that stretched into the clouds, and there was one highway in between the two, which was called the Advanced School (*qianjin pai* 前進派). Women with one bigger and one smaller breast were called the Gourd school (*hulu pai* 葫蘆派). The breasts neither too big nor small were called Mandarin Duck and Butterfly school (*yuanyang hudie pai* 鴛鴦蝴蝶派). Obese women with breasts without clear lines between the two

¹¹² Christopher Rea, *The Age of Irreverence: A New History of Laughter in China* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 28–37.

¹¹³ Chichisheng, ‘Danainai zhi mimi,’ *Xiaguang huabao* 1, no. 6 (1928).

breasts were called the United School (*tongyi pai* 統一派). Those where only the nipples could be seen, not the shape of the breasts, were called the Eye School (*yanjing pai* 眼睛派). There were also the Umbrella School (*yangsan pai* 陽傘派), the Cow Dung School (*niufen pai* 牛糞派), the Ordinary School (*pingfan pai* 平凡派), the Bread School (*mianbao pai* 麵包派) etc.¹¹⁴ Another poem describing enormous breasts was published in a tabloid called *Lianyi zhiyou* 聯益之友:

大奶奶

奶奶不尋常，堪稱奶奶王。
上開兩桌飯，下漏十缸漿。
三十寸面積，卅五鎊重量。
英倫到中國，窒斷大西洋。

Big breasts

Extraordinary breasts,
Could be ranked as the king of breasts.
Two tables of meals could be placed on them,
Ten vats of milk flowed under them.
A surface thirty *cun* large,
Heavy forty-five pounds.
From England to China,
Obstructing the Atlantic Ocean.¹¹⁵

In this poem, women's breasts were so massive they could even block the Atlantic Ocean, which could be read as a male fantasy of desire, or fear of the female body, or mockery of the anti-breast-binding activists. These authors might have been, as Angelina Chin suggested, "using the occasion to write titillating and explicit prose about women's breasts, in the process mocking the hypocrisy of crusaders for women's rights".¹¹⁶ These mockeries enabled the idea of 'big breasts' to be circulated more widely, yet none of them mentioned big breasts were beneficial to the

¹¹⁴ Xu Zhuodai, 'Danainai zhuyi,' *Leguan*, no. 1 (1941): 17–19.

¹¹⁵ Danweng, 'Danainai,' *Lianyi zhi you*, no. 84 (1928): 2.

¹¹⁶ Chin, *Bound to Emancipate*, 82–83.

nation. Therefore they weakened Hu Shi's point on nation building by rechanneling the press into focusing on the sexualised female body.

Although some of the jokes were written with intentions to provoke progress and reform, they were also criticised for encouraging "a culture of blithe irreverence that was more concerned with the funny than the true".¹¹⁷ This is precisely why Lu Xun was cynical about all the 'natural breast' rhetorics. Lu Xun's *Concerns about Natural Breasts* commented that the 'natural breast movement' had just resulted in some witty and amusing remarks, which satisfied the literati's curiosities, and nothing else.¹¹⁸ For Lu Xun, the proliferation of jokes and jokesters was "an omen that the end was nigh: everyone would ultimately be consumed by their bullshit".¹¹⁹

Instead, Lu Xun recounted one story he had read in the news: short hair was popular in one place at a certain time, but then another army conquered that place. The new lords pulled the hair of short-haired women and cut off their breasts.¹²⁰ Lu Xun might have meant a Hunan woman, Wang Suzhen, who returned to her village after her studies as a 'New Woman', wearing a *qipao* and short hair, and choosing her fiancé without parental arrangement. She organised a women's union, persuading other women to cut their hair off and to unbind their feet, and proclaim the law of freedom of divorce if their husbands took a concubine.¹²¹ After the Nationalist military entered the town, Wang Suzhen's neighbours brought them to her:

The soldiers were all about her, men soldiers and one girl agitator...The soldiers shouted many bad words at her till they stirred their rage up. Then they cut her to pieces with knives and bayonets. They began with her breasts then they cut off her arms, they cut off many pieces.¹²²

Wang Suzhen had irritated her neighbours and the armies by not obeying local women's morality, challenging men's privileges in marriage, and advocating

¹¹⁷ Rea, *The Age of Irreverence*, 38–39.

¹¹⁸ Lu Xun, 'You tianru,' *Yusi*, no. 152 (October 8, 1927): 7–9.

¹¹⁹ Rea, *The Age of Irreverence*, 40.

¹²⁰ Lu Xun, 'You tianru.'

¹²¹ Anna Louise Strong, *China's Millions: The Revolutionary Struggles from 1927 to 1935* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936), 137–45.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 145–46.

women's equal rights with men. Therefore the punishment of cutting off her breasts, according to Lu Xun, was a warning to her aspiration of imitating men.¹²³ Only by cutting off a woman's breasts, women became the same as men. So breasts reminded women of their bodily differences, women should never imagine themselves as equal to men. This created a special dilemma for women. Binding breasts could mean chastity, yet it could also mean an intention to imitate men. In contrast, big breasts were the sign of a slut, yet it could also mean that women wished to become good mothers and did not have the aspiration to transcend the gender hierarchy. It seemed that how women were treated in response to their bodies depended on luck and circumstances, as there were so many contradictory standards coexisting simultaneously.

The violence that happened to Wang Suzhen was not unique. During these turbulent years, news about violence towards women, rape and dismembering of the body was prevalent. Perpetrators were the various conflicting militaries, bandits, Communists and the Japanese alike. Especially after the second Sino-Japanese War, women, especially women from rural areas, had to disguise themselves as men in order to avoid fatal tragedies.¹²⁴ One woman in rural Jiangsu province said that when the Japanese came, they had to bow their chests and hide their breasts.¹²⁵ Therefore, no matter how the intellectuals advocated for the 'natural breast', real world women lived in was the most relevant stimulus for their actions.

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the nationalist anti-breast-binding campaign happened in the context of a wave of anti-breast-binding discourse that went far beyond concerns about nationalism and women's emancipation. Indeed, it formed a hybrid and contested field combining nationalist accusations, religious meditation, Chinese medicine, modern Japanese medicine, quack medicines, and sexualized mockeries, which could both enhance and weaken the cogency of nationalism and emancipation. Women, on the other hand, acted according to their own bodily experiences, and only linked

¹²³ Lu Xun, 'You tianru.'

¹²⁴ Luo, You, and Qu, *Fenghuo sui yue xia de Zhongguo fun üfangwen jilu*, 49.

¹²⁵ Interview with Sun Yulan.

their behaviours to the nationalist discourse when they felt that this was useful for themselves. The outside gaze, peer pressure, personal bodily experiences and the danger of violence were the more important motives for women to act. While urban middle- and upper- class women were mostly affected by school inspections, concerns about personal hygiene and sexual harassment, women from more remote and rural areas faced more severe physical violence, which sometimes meant life and death.

Chapter 3 Fashion, Body Management and Class from the 1920s to the 1940s

Although bans and laws had been issued against breast-binding, the more effective driving power for women to abandon this custom was the changing aesthetics. This chapter focuses on the fashion dimension of the promotion of unbound breasts, as well as the related phenomenon of a woman's appearance, or her ability to conform to changing ideals of beauty as a marker of class. In her research on foot-binding, Ko argues that foot-binding had become unpopular partially because of fashion trends and the fact that it ceased to symbolise class prestige, rather than due to political campaigns.¹ Similarly, changing ideals of beauty, the rise of consumer culture, fashion trends in metropolises such as Shanghai, Beijing and Tianjin, and increasing communication with the world, had all reshaped common attitudes towards female breasts. Although the process of reshaping also meant a process of contesting attitudes, one thing was for sure, that breasts became a recurrent topic that writers and painters touched upon. In fact, breasts were so frequently discussed that we might see an obsession with breasts in the Republican popular periodicals.

This chapter firstly examines the ideal beauty as depicted in calendar posters, women's magazines, fashion magazines, and pictorials from the 1920s to the 1940s. Through an analysis of text and images, it aims to illustrate the changing image of the ideal beauty, focusing specifically on women's bodily shapes in order to examine how big breasts were fashionised in the 1930s and 1940s. Secondly, accompanying this changing ideal, body disciplines including sartorial reform, sports, diet, etc. were advocated and popularised in the press. This part explores how women used modern products to shape their bodies according to the new ideal, such as the fashionable brassiere that functioned as a tool of 'enhancing' women's breasts. Finally, I shall discuss how women from different classes were portrayed in periodicals and how they perceived their bodies. Breast-binding was usually considered an exclusively urban phenomenon, but in some cases it was also described as a practice among women from rural areas. Although the scale of breast-binding is very difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain, a close reading of texts and images suggests that the shape of the breast was a symbol of different classes in visual and textual representations,

¹ Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters*, 11.

and thus played a significant role in women's understanding of class identity and their perception of other classes.

3.1 Fashioning the Curvaceous Beauty

As discussed in chapter one, since the Song dynasty, the aesthetics of flat-chested women had been dominant, and this was still the case in the early Republican period. In Guo Jianying's cartoon *Depression of Youth* (Figure 1-13) discussed in chapter one, the young woman was depicted extremely slim with a flat chest. However, if we take a further look at it, interestingly, in the background of the cartoon, in the young woman's room hangs a painting of a plump nude woman, with ample breasts. This picture should be read in the context of the proliferation of nudity in China's visual culture of the late 1920s, when nudity was used to symbolise beauty and health.² The startling contrast between the plump figure and marked breasts of the nude woman in the background and the hollow chest of the modern girl presents a transitional period when different aesthetics of the ideal beauty were contested. The aesthetic of the flat-chested female body was attacked and challenged recurrently from the 1910s in newspapers, women's magazines, pictorials and books that studied beauty, reaching its peak in the 1930s. Essays about beauty standards thrived, examining the traditional 'beauty of sickness' (*bingtai mei* 病態美), and new ideas of 'natural beauty' (*ziran mei* 自然美), 'curvaceous beauty' (*quxian mei* 曲線美), 'beauty of the human body' (*rentai mei* 人體美), 'beauty of the female body' (*nixing mei* 女性美), 'healthy beauty' (*jiankang mei* 健康美), 'robust beauty' (*jian mei* 健美), etc. The obsession with beauty was partly influenced by Cai Yuanpei's aesthetic education. His idea of 'pure aesthetics' rendered 'beauty' into an abstract concept and ultimate goal in itself.³ Yunxiang Gao argues that the life reform movement in Europe and North America, Hollywood stars and Weimar racial science and medicine shaped the construction of the ideal of 'robust beauty' of sportswomen in the 1930s in *Linglong*.⁴ Liying Sun has analysed how 'Dr Sex' Zhang Jingsheng used Western

² Sun, "1920 niandai Shanghai de huajia, zhishi fenzi yu luoti shijue wenhua," 297–98.

³ *Ibid.*, 301–2.

⁴ Yunxiang Gao, "Nationalist and Feminist Discourses on Jianmei (Robust Beauty) during China's 'National Crisis' in the 1930s," in *Translating Feminisms in China: A Special Issue of Gender & History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 104–37.

nude art to justify the plump and curvy female body.⁵ In this section, I shall further explore the interactions of these dispersed standards of beauty in relation to the female breasts.

Influenced by Western racial and eugenic theories, many Republican writers believed that beauty could be measured scientifically, and thus they enthusiastically established new standards of beauty. A great many discussions of beauty standards were rooted in deep concerns about the evolution of the Chinese race. Believing in the superior nature of the white race, writers always judged Chinese bodies as inferior. In 1933, Yu Jifan 俞寄凡 (1891-1968), an artist and educationist, published a book entitled *Research on the Beauty of the Human Body* (*rentimei zhi yanjiu* 人體美之研究). This was the first systematic study of the aesthetics of the human body in China, as opposed to the Western world where there were many works of this kind, as Yu claimed.⁶ In his book, Yu compared Western and Chinese bodies:

The Chinese are the yellow race, so we are indeed inferior to the white Westerners as far as the colour of the skin is concerned. In terms of the body, the noses of the Chinese are too flat, the cheekbones are too high, the arms and legs are too short, the ratio of shoulder, chest and abdomen is undesirable, the skin is too dark and yellow, and its colour is not transparent. Even in the case of actors and actresses who earn their lives through the beauty of their body, only their faces could be considered as beautiful. If we take notice of the length of their arms and legs, the shape of their chests, abdomen, bones and muscles, they could hardly be considered beautiful. Only strong men, athletes and soldiers might have better bodies than ordinary Chinese. Current students who pay attention to physical education might have beautiful bodies...Most Chinese are not of a strong physique.⁷

Zhang Jingsheng also adopted an ethnological approach and racial theories popular at the time and compared Chinese people's bodies with other races in his writing

⁵ Sun, '1920 niandai Shanghai de huajia, zhishi fenzi yu luoti shijue wenhua.'

⁶ Yu Jifan, *Rentimei zhi yanjiu*, (Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu wenxian chubanshe, 2012, first published in 1933).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

about bodily beauty. In terms of Chinese women's beauty, he suggested the foremost problem for Chinese women was their flat chests. He advocated women's 'natural beauty' and 'natural curves', suggesting that "the two breasts stand tall above the chest, and together with the curvy bottom they form the curvy beauty; this is the beauty of women".⁸ Zhang Jingsheng had long been an admirer of Western women who had 'natural curves'. Ironically, Zhang Jingsheng might not have realised that there is no such thing as a 'natural' body, as the body is always developed under a certain social context. The curvy Western female body was also constructed under the condition of a social preference for big breasts.

For Yu Jifan, Zhang Jingsheng and many other Chinese writers, the bodies of Chinese women were not as beautiful as those of Western women. Yu Jifan suggested that the faces of Chinese women were perhaps more beautiful than those of Westerners, yet as far as the body was concerned, for example the chest, abdomen, arms, legs and the ratio of those parts, Chinese women were not comparable.⁹ In one word, the entire body of Chinese, from skin colour to muscles, from stature to bodily proportions, from bodily shape to facial expression, was inferior to that of Westerners, and specifically the white race.¹⁰ It was believed that Western women had great beauty because they tightened their waists slim and had a wide pelvis. Japanese women did not have curvaceous beauty because their legs were too short and their pelvis was too narrow. The oversized hips of black women harmed their beauty. Chinese women, in contrast, only had slightly curvy waists, and therefore they were in a more advantageous position than Japanese women, yet far disadvantageous than Western women. Therefore Chinese women should work on their body in order to get a curvaceous body shape and catch up with their Western counterparts.

Apart from Hollywood stars, Western sportswomen, and nude photographs of Western women as discussed by Yunxiang Gao and Liying Sun, writers also frequently referred to ancient Greek examples in order to demonstrate the beauty of health and strength, and considered the bodies of Chinese, both men and women,

⁸ Zhang Jingsheng, "Xingmei," *Xinwenhua* 1, no. 6 (1927): 5.

⁹ Yu, *Reintime zhi yanjiu*, 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11–12.

inferior to their Western counterparts. Yu's book presented his genuine admiration of nudity and the promotion of the Olympics that encouraged physical training in Ancient Greece,¹¹ as well as many other authors. Yu Jifan cited a wide range of nineteenth century Western anthropologists, psychologists, anthropometrists, philosophers and artists who actively studied the beauty of the human body. In his analysis, their research firstly attempted to prove the disastrous effects of corsets; secondly, it promoted Greek statuesque bodies as part of the Renaissance project, which presented timeless norms of beauty; and thirdly, non-white races all deviated from this Greek norm of beauty.¹²

Chinese authors seldom acknowledged other ongoing fashion trends in Europe – e.g. the flappers who popularised straight-lined bodies during the 1920s and 1930s (Figure 3-1). They failed to notice that the fashionable curvy body in the Western context also waxed and waned in its long history.¹³ Especially in America, prior to the age of flappers, feminists replaced their S-shape dresses with more comfortable Oriental-style ones that created straight bodily silhouettes. The Turkish bloomer and Japanese kimono both brought influential changes in American women's fashion.¹⁴ While in Republican China, apart from criticising tight-lacing that harmed the female body, Chinese authors did not seem to be aware of some Western women's efforts in flattening their chests. Cartoonist Wang Zimei pointed out that Western women did not interfere with the free development of their breasts, not so much for the sake of breastfeeding, but for the beauty of the natural curve.¹⁵ I would further suggest that the main reason why Republican elites created a timeless Western female bodily curve (Figure 3-2) as a standard for Chinese women to follow was linked to their racial anxieties.

The concept of 'healthy beauty' was also raised in the discussions of changing aesthetics against the foil of traditional aesthetics that appreciated Xi Shi

¹¹ Yu, *Reintime zhi yanjiu*, 9–11.

¹² Ken Montague, "The Aesthetics of Hygiene: Aesthetic Dress, Modernity, and the Body as Sign," *Journal of Design History* 7, no. 2 (January 1994): 91–112; Michael Hau, *The Cult of Health and Beauty in Germany* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 5, 83.

¹³ Marilyn Yalom, *A History of the Breast* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 162.

¹⁴ Einav Rabinovitch-Fox, '[Re]Fashioning the New Woman: Women's Dress, the Oriental Style, and the Construction of American Feminist Imagery in the 1910s.', *Journal of Women's History* 27, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 14–36.

¹⁵ Wang Zimei, 'Ru fang pian', *Zhongguo manhua* (March 1935).

and Lin Daiyu,¹⁶ famous for their frail beauty of sentimentality and sickness. This old ideal of fragile beauty was challenged by arguments that a healthy woman did not mean she was hideous, rough or disagreeable. In contrast, health and beauty could coexist.¹⁷ The beauty of postures, gestures and body movements even depended on one's health.¹⁸ In one story of a Danish girl, Miss Estrid Ott, who had hiked alone through many countries including America, the UK, Korea and Russia, the author wrote: "This kind of woman not only makes our Chinese home-stay women ashamed, but also our strong and healthy (*qiangjian* 強健) men".¹⁹ In one author's view, the definition of healthy beauty was eightfold: 1. Let all parts of the body grow naturally; 2. Let the entire body fully develop; 3. Muscles have to be firm; 4. Have a healthy physique; 5. Rosy cheek; 6. Clean body; 7. All the instruments that oppress the body have to be removed including breast-binding and waist-binding; 8. All the unnecessary decorations have to be abolished.²⁰ Breast-binding was denounced to be devastating for women's beauty of health and strength.²¹

Breast-binding was also condemned because it was considered a form of 'decorative beauty', rather than beauty of 'nature'. For some writers, makeup, jewellery, expensive imported clothes, stockings, high-heeled shoes, as well as bound feet were all artificial decorations, and a woman who applied these could not be considered beautiful.²² Beauty, as one author claimed, was produced by nature, which had a universal standard. The author drew an analogy between the beauty of women and that of plants, arguing that it would be easy to tell the more beautiful one between an apricot tree and a jujube tree, so that a woman whose body had grown naturally without any decoration would be universally considered beautiful.²³ Those women who wasted their time in meticulously dressing up to please men were just

¹⁶ Xi Shi (506 BC-?) is one of the four most renowned Chinese beauties in the history. It was rumored Xi Shi looked more beautiful when she felt sick than she was healthy. Lin Daiyu is a fictional character in one of the best appraised novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, known by her fragile beauty.

¹⁷ Gu Xueqiu, "Funü de jian kang mei," *Fun ü gongming* 2, no. 6 (1933): 34-35; Jianyin, "Guanyu Zhongguo de nüxing mei," *Libailiu*, no. 542 (1934): 153; Qian, "Nüzi de jian kang mei," 11.

¹⁸ Wei Yin, 'Nüxing jian kang mei,' *Ziluolan*, no. 9 (1943): 19.

¹⁹ Lu Yu, 'Tubu lüxing shijie zhi shaonü', *Fun ü zazhi* 7, no. 9 (September 1921): 87.

²⁰ Xingshan, 'Zengjin nüxing jian kang mei,' *Changshoubao* 4, no. 11 (1935): 194 - 195.

²¹ 'Shetuan xiaoxi: nüqingnianhui xukai donglingying hui,' *Shenbao*, January 30, 1924.

²² Jin Shiyin, "Huifu zhen nüxing mei," *Fun ü gongming*, no. 25 (1930): 15-19; Zuiyue, "Tichang 'tianran mei'," *Fun ü shenghuo* 1, no. 11 (1932): 247.

²³ Jin, 'Huifu zhen nüxing mei.'

playthings for men.²⁴ Some even argued that decorations were ‘unnatural disguises’, which were immoral due to deceitful motivations.²⁵ Beauty, according to Cai Yuanpei’s influential educational concept, should be only for its own sake, rather than to please anybody else. In order to be beautiful, women should not sacrifice their natural postures, and breast-binding obviously would damage women’s natural body. However, the meaning of ‘natural beauty’ these authors had in mind was not to leave the body as it is, rather, ‘natural body’ meant a well-developed sporty body, which could only be gained through bodily discipline such as sports and diet. In order to be ‘natural’, women had to abandon their bodily habits, and to learn new techniques to be ‘natural’.

Based on the discussion of these nineteenth century Western texts, anthropometrical methods were used to define beauty, assigning detailed measurements to the ideal beauty. Bodily beauty, especially the beauty of the female body, could be scientifically measured. A certain Sun Fuxi said the science of beauty was like botany that helped to distinguish the different parts of the body, such as the stamen, pistil and ovary of a flower.²⁶ A wide range of measurements providing standards for the ideal body was produced and repeatedly quoted. Unsurprisingly, most of these were drawn from the white specimen.²⁷ The deficiencies of Asian women included large faces, short legs, and for Chinese women specifically, their compressed breasts. The measurements of Annette Kellermann (1886-1975), the American swimming athlete, were recommended as the ‘ideal ratio of femininity’, by not only male artists like Yu Jifan, but also devoted feminists like Chen Yongsheng.²⁸ According to these standards, ‘naturally’ developed breasts would measure five to six inches in diameter and two to three inches in height.²⁹

However, on the other hand, men were also sometimes shocked by Western middle-aged women with big breasts that were more than one *chi* in height (*qi*

²⁴ Jin Shiyin, “Huifu zhen nüxing mei (Xu),” *Fun ü gongming*, no. 26 (1930): 11 - 16.

²⁵ Wei, ‘Nüxing jiankangmei,’ 19.

²⁶ Sun Fuxi, ‘Shen me shi nüxing mei,’ *Xinn üxing* 1, no. 5 (1926): 360.

²⁷ Guan Yansheng, ‘Nüxingmei de kexue de fenxi,’ in *Mei zhi chuangzao* (Shanghai: Liangyou tushu gongsi, 1935), 14 - 17.

²⁸ Wang, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment*, 259–87; Andrew D. Morris, *Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2004), 92; Yu, *Reintime zhi yanjiu*, 101–2.

²⁹ Jiang Zilan, ‘Nüzi de rufang,’ *Linglong* 1, no. 25 (September 2, 1931): 916–17.

xiongtang tuchu guo chi 其胸膛凸出過尺).³⁰ So for some men, Chinese women should refer to the Japanese standard that applied to Oriental women:

33 centimetres in chest circumference, 5 centimetres in height, 4 centimetres in diameter.³¹ The colour of the areola should be carnation. The shape of the breasts should be hemispherical. The diameter of the nipples should be 1 centimetre. Breasts like those were the most beautiful and standard.³²

Women's breasts of this size seemed to be as perfect as Venus, and should not get any larger. Any further enlargement of the breasts was considered to be 'taking a false step' (*shizu* 失足) and 'miserable' (*canzhuang* 慘狀).³³ Combining these two sets of standards, women's breasts should neither be too flat nor too ample, therefore the beauty of 'natural breasts' was a self-contradictory concept. The 'natural' body was not to be the most beautiful one, rather the 'natural' body that would fit these standards. By adopting Western and Japanese standards, the elite writers subconsciously endorsed the sense of racial superiority that implied in those Western and Japanese writings, and expressed their anxiety about the inferiority of the Chinese race. The fact that not only male authors but also feminists participated in this discursive production of the 'ideal body ratio' challenges the idea that advocacy against breast-binding was driven by powerful men who were eager to manipulate the female body and modifying the Chinese race. Instead, female feminists such as Cheng Yongsheng and Lu Lihua also participated in this body reform project. For them, bodily reform was a science, and a tool that could improve women's lives.

For those who wrote on the aesthetics of the female body, both in Western and Japanese standard, the one element that seemed universally essential to the ideal modern beauty was well-developed breasts. All the different standards of beauty reached a consensus that well-developed breasts were natural, hygienic, healthy, and scientifically indexed. With the influx and dissemination of these views, the

³⁰ Wu Yue, 'Zhongguo funü qi zhuyi shuxiong shi hai,' *Kuaiile jiating* 1, no. 13 (1923): 17. 1 Chi=30.3cm.

³¹ Perhaps the author made a mistake here. 4 centimetres in radius seems more reasonable.

³² Ouwaiou, 'Zhonghua ernü mei zhi gebie shenpan,' in *Zhifeng de chengshi: Furen Huabao zhi fengjing*, ed. Chen Zishan (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 2004), 70–74.

³³ *Ibid.*

traditional Chinese beauty of a fragile body was replaced by the ideal of the curvy beauty – ample yet reasonably sized breasts and hips and a slim waist. This new ideal of ‘natural breasts’ is reflected in posters and magazine covers from the 1930s, which show numerous visual representations of women, both Chinese and Western, with full breasts. Women with plump breasts were used in calendar posters and advertisements for commercial products (Figure 3-3, 3-4). Western women, especially Hollywood stars in postures protruding their breasts, frequently appeared in pictorials (Figure 3-5). Photographs of healthy sportswomen, especially female swimmers with curvy bodies, were common (Figure 3-6). Even in woodprint erotic illustrations, women started to be portrayed with slight curves, as in the illustrated edition of the late-Ming novel *The Carnal Prayer Mat* (*Rou pu tuan* 肉蒲團) published in 1947 (Figure 3-7).

This new aesthetics of healthy and well-shaped natural breasts was closely followed by the eroticising of the breasts. As mentioned above, prior to the 1920s, desirable women were not portrayed with big breasts or a curvy body. Several scholars have demonstrated that instead bound feet played an important role in pre-modern sexuality. However, this changed in this period, as Zhang Jingsheng advocated that big breasts would increase sexual satisfaction. Female breasts started to be scrutinised with great sexual attention, as well as criticism. The caption of the actress Li Zhuozhuo reads: ‘Who could resist the temptation of such a curvy body?’ (Figure 3-6). Figure 3-8 depicts an elderly hypercritical scholar’s behaviour in visiting exhibitions. During the daytime, the scholar in a robe with glasses only appreciates the traditional Chinese paintings, and refuses to be distracted by Western style nudes. However, at night, he sneaks into the exhibition room, using an electric torch and magnifier to only peek at the female breasts. Thus in advocating the beauty of the curvy body, the female body was once again under the sexualised male gaze. It also indicates that although the female breasts were sexually attractive, old-fashioned men still denied admitting it openly. Gazing at female breasts was still something embarrassing.

Following this line of depiction, it is not surprising that big and visible female breasts continued to be considered immoral in some cases, which was a

continuity from the pre-modern era, despite this aesthetic shift that appreciated big breasts and curvy bodies. The immoral woman who exposed her upper body to allure the emperor in *Biographies of Exemplary Women* discussed in chapter one could still be found in story-telling genres in the Republican period. Firstly published in the travel magazine *Lixing zazhi* in 1935 by the famous romance writer Zhang Henshui, *Shanghai Express (Ping-Hu tongche)* was later published as a book and reprinted at least nine times until 1947.³⁴ In this novel the male protagonist, Hu Ziyun, a bank manager who slept in the first-class carriage, met a woman Liu Xichun on the train from Beijing to Shanghai. This is what Hu Ziyun saw when he met her in the dining car:

“By now she had taken off the dark fur coat with the high collar and sat there wearing a purplish red cheongsam (*qipao*). The sleeve openings and borders were decorated with white trim, the sleeves were cut high, the waist was form-fitting, and beneath the front one could make out the clear outlines of full breasts. Although this cheongsam wasn't in the latest style, its colour and the feminine figure it enclosed combined to lend it a provocative air.”³⁵

When Hu started chatting with Xichun, he found out that she was the niece-in-law of a friend with whom he had long lost touch. She travelled alone to Shanghai, intending to end her unhappy marriage. She had all the ways of a liberal modern woman: smoking cigarettes, drinking coffee, speaking English, reading English books, and talking with men in a natural and easy attitude. Unable to find an empty berth in the first-class section, she was going to spend the night sitting in the dining car. Hu Ziyun offered the empty berth in his cabin; however, it was against the regulations on the train that male and female strangers stayed in one room. Hu persuaded Xichun to move into his cabin nevertheless, and he chats and eats with her. Xichun gets attracted to him and agrees to date him without requiring any promises from him – which Hu Ziyun thought is typical behaviour of a modern girl. After one big hangover on the train, Hu Ziyun gets up only to find that all of his cash, stocks and bonds had gone. Ten years later, Hu Ziyun ended up as a jobless poor man who

³⁴ Zhang Henshui, *Ping-Hu tongche*, 9th ed. (Shanghai: Baixin shudian, 1947, first published in 1935).

³⁵ Zhang Henshui, *Shanghai Express*, trans. William A. Lyell (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997).

could hardly afford a third-class ticket. In the story, Xichun's appearance is very symbolic: her full breasts implied the deception of the modern woman, who was beautiful on the surface, but immoral inside (Figure 3-9).

Therefore, I would suggest that from late imperial China to Republican China, the female body went through a major change that fashioned women's bodily curves. The previously immoral women's signifier – big breasts – was attributed with more diverse and contradictory meanings: modern, sexual, desirable, even revolutionary,³⁶ yet still sometimes immoral and dangerous. The link between breasts and immorality as in late imperial China did not completely disappear. For mainstream men and women who tended towards conservatism, for example, who were not revolutionary or morally depraved, the ideal of the flat-chested beauty might have not have changed at all. Almost invisible breasts still stood for modesty and proper sexual morals. Of course, there were girls who pursued the fashion ideal of curvy body, yet this courageous fashion was not necessarily for everyone, as will be discussed in the next section. However, in this visually and discursively complex period, one point is certain, that breasts were far more visible than in previous periods.

3.2 Managing the Modern Body

In her study of beauty, health and fitness in Britain from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska uses the idea of 'managing the body', which is defined as "the practice of a regimen to cultivate beauty, health, and fitness by means of dietary reform, gymnastics, sports and athletic exercise, exposure of the skin to sun and air, personal cleanliness and dress reform".³⁷ Strikingly similar, in Republican China, men and women also attempted to manage their bodies through much the same regimen including clothes reform, posture adjustment, sports, breathing fresh air, showering regularly, sleeping well and taking a nutritious diet.³⁸ By looking at this regimen closely, this section

³⁶ Chen Jianhua's research on Mao Dun convincingly argues that for Mao Dun, ample breasts symbolised the spirit of emancipation, freedom and revolution. Chen Jianhua, *Geming yu xingshi: Maodun zaoqi xiaoshuo de xiandaixing zhankai* (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2007), 220-59.

³⁷ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.

³⁸ Shi Dong, 'Jiankang yu funü,' *Kangjian shijie* 1, no. 1 (1935): 23 - 25.

examines ways of reshaping the female body, and to what extent these methods were accessible to women.

In order to cultivate a curvaceous body, women should first stop suppressing their chests, abandon traditional undergarments such as the little vest, and adopt the Western brassiere, which functioned as a support for the breasts. In 1927, *Beiyang huabao* published a visual introduction of the evolution of women's top undergarments in China (Figure 3-10). The first picture in this series shows the traditional Chinese top undergarment, the *dudou*, 'a sort of apron for the upper body, which is frequently depicted on adults in erotic paintings of the late imperial period (Figure 3-11), and more generally on children'; since women's clothes in the nineteenth century were relatively loose, the *dudou* was quite convenient for daily use.³⁹ According to the accompanying article, the one on the bottom left shows an undergarment that was widely worn in north China, using straps to tighten the piece together in front of the chest and on the shoulder, but had become old-fashioned by 1927. The tube-top depicted in the image in the middle of the upper row was widely adopted in the eastern parts of Guangdong province. The one in the middle bottom was relatively less used. The one on the upper right was called the 'little vest' (*xiaomajia* 小马甲 in Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, *xiaokanjian* 小坎肩 in North China, and *beixinzai* 背心仔 in Canton). It was invented around 1900 and was firstly used among women from well-to-do families and then spread to women from other social classes. The author Wanxiang gezhu explained in the accompanied article that the excessive buttons on the front functioned to suppress the chest.⁴⁰ The bottom right picture shows the most fashionable of women's undergarments at the time, with excessive buttons on the side of the body and two straps on the shoulder, which was only used by fashionable women. Different from the corset, none of the undergarments introduced above would serve the function of upholding or supporting the breasts, rather to keep warm and some of them to repress the breasts.

In order to avoid damages caused by breast-binding, many articles suggested that women should adopt new forms of undergarment, and the Western-style brassiere became an ideal replacement. Early in 1914, French-style women's top

³⁹ Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China*, 162.

⁴⁰ Wanxiang gezhu, 'Zhongguo siaoshan yange tushuo (xia),' *Beiyang huabao*, June 19, 1927.

undergarments were sold by foreign companies in the foreign concessions in Shanghai.⁴¹ However, it is unknown whether the companies also targeted Chinese women as their customers or not. From 1927, following the visual report on women's top undergarments, *Beiyang huabao* started to promote Western-style brassieres. Famous for publishing pictures of Western nudes and Chinese beauties, *Beiyang huabao*'s promotion of brassieres also proved their enthusiasm for introducing the new 'Western civilisation'. Series of illustrations of Western women in brassieres in the flapper fashion appeared for months (Figure 3-12, left). Most illustrations of this kind in *Beiyang huabao* were presumably from newspaper clippings of Western periodicals that were available to the editors. Ironically, in the Western context brassieres were designed to flatten the breasts, not to emphasise the breasts as the corsets had done. Since the early 1920s, fashion in France had shown a preference for flat-chested women who became fashionable after the war, a fashion that continued throughout the twenties.⁴² Adopting this kind of brassiere symbolised women's bodily emancipation, as represented in Figure 3-12 (right) that shows a woman with a straight-lined body throwing away all her old-fashioned, constraining undergarments, accompanied by a caption saying 'This New Luxurious Freedom!'⁴³ In the Europe-American context, the brassiere meant another kind of liberation that emancipated women from the suppression of the corset. However, not every woman found the brassiere as 'liberating' as this image presents, as at least some women in the US found brassieres uncomfortable because they suppressed the chest.⁴⁴

In Republican China, editors and writers had increasing access to Western fashion magazines and pictorials, due to their increasing mobility and the import of these publications. I would suggest that editors and writers must have read about the ongoing flapper fashion in Europe and America, as shown in the caption of Figure 3-13. However, it was seldom mentioned in Chinese fashion magazines and pictorials, which I would suggest was because the flapper fashion did not fit in their agenda of promoting big breasts. In the Chinese context, brassieres were advertised for exactly the opposite purpose – to emancipate women from repressing their breasts. According to the caption of Figure 3-14, 'the two cups of the brassiere were

⁴¹ Pan Zhou, trans., 'Shanghai xifu xin zhuangshipin yishu,' *Xiangyan zazhi* 1, no. 1 (1914): 73–74.

⁴² Yalom, *A History of the Breast*, 174, 176.

⁴³ Yalom, *A History of the Breast*.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 176.

introduced to place and support the breasts, without constraining the chest'. Therefore the functions of the same garment brassiere were entirely different in China and the West, although they both liberated women from previous suppression.

Photographs of female movie stars wearing new-style undergarments, especially brassieres, could be found in periodicals throughout the 1930s, which presented a new trend of undergarment fashion. On the left side of Figure 3-15, the model wears a set of undergarments which the editor believed were most suitable for the *qipao*. The editor also suggested that the garment in the middle should be worn inside an evening dress that could reveal the embroidery on the chest. The one on the right side could be used as a pyjama. The words in the brackets read that the producer of those undergarments was Yongtai 永泰 Company on Tongfu Road, between Nanjing West Road and Yan'an Middle Road, one of the most commercialised areas in Shanghai. Following the opening of Tongfu Theatre in Tongfu Road in the early 1930s, many food shops, cotton cloth shops and grocers started their business in this street, which became a famous women's clothing street. Established in 1931 at 323 Tongfu Road, Yongtai Undergarment Company (*Yongtai neiyi shanghang* 永泰內衣商行) produced embroidered T-shirts, dresses, pyjamas, brassieres, short pants, etc. Apart from ready-made clothes, they also provided tailor-made solutions. Inside the store, they had a fitting room so that the clothes could be measured and fitted. Many of the shop assistants could speak foreign languages in order to meet the needs of their foreign customers.⁴⁵ Yongtai specialised in undergarment production, and due to its high quality, many foreigners and women from higher social classes used to shop there.⁴⁶

A wide range of high-quality underwear was sold in Shanghai in the 1930s, including drawers, brassieres, combination petticoats, chemises, slips and corsets.⁴⁷ After the October Revolution in 1917, a large number of Russian immigrants, mainly

⁴⁵ Cheng Shujun, 'Xiuyi zhisheng: yongtai fushi shangdian,' in *Zhonghua laozihao*, ed. Zhang Shuping and Zhang Zhijun, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongguo qingongye chubanshe, 1993), 300; Luo Suwen, *Nixing yu jindai Zhongguo shehui* (Shanghai: Shanghai ren min chubanshe, 1996), 320.

⁴⁶ Shanghai shi difangzhi bangongshi, 'Shimen yilu funü fushijie,' *Shanghai shi difangzhi bangongshi*, <http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node2245/node66046/node66065/node66271/node66288/userobject/1ai61880.html>, accessed February 22, 2014.

⁴⁷ Zhang Lilan, 'Liuxingjie de beixiju,' in *Mei zhi chuangzao* (Shanghai: Liangyou tushu gongsi, 1935), 3.

aristocratic refugees, settled in Avenue Joffre (*Xiafeilu* 霞飛路, today's Huaihai Road) in the French Concession and started their businesses. Since the early 1920s, the Russian aristocracies established a vast amount of businesses. For example, between 1926 and 1928, more than 100 Russian shops opened in Avenue Joffre. By the 1930s this street had developed into one of Shanghai's most important commercial districts.⁴⁸ In the early 1930s, a small brassiere shop named Fayi 發藝 was opened by Russian immigrants targeting foreigners, as well as Chinese women from well-to-do families and female movie stars. Originally it only had two sewing machines and produced brassieres to order.⁴⁹ The names of the celebrities who lived in Avenue Joffre were endless. A great number of important politicians, high military officials, rich entrepreneurs, scholars and artists lived there, including, to name just a few, Sun Zhongshan, Huang Xing, Chen Qimei, Duan Qirui, He Yingqin, Li Zongren, Dai Jitao, Jiang Jingguo, Jiang Weiguo, Xu Beihong, Feng Zikai, Ba Jin and Yu Dafu. Many prominent women such as Song Qingling, Xu Guangping and actress Wang Renmei were also among those celebrities who once lived in this road.⁵⁰ The Russian brassiere shops probably targeted those upper class women, providing convenient access to this fashionable form of undergarment.

An essay entitled *Flirtation in Avenue Joffre* describes women's undergarments displayed in the shopping windows in the street, as well as cosmetics. Avenue Joffre, according to the author, was a place full of flirtation. Dancing girls, waitresses and female servants all wandered on the street waiting for romance. Their tools of flirtation were their big breasts, although Chinese women's breasts could never compare with those of Russian women.⁵¹ The commercial Avenue Joffre, therefore, was described as a space that surged with desire, and female breasts were central to this commercial modernity.

⁴⁸ Xiong Yuezhi, 'Bainian huaihailu huace gaishu,' *Shanghaishi difangzhi bangongshi*, <http://shtong.gov.cn/node2/node70393/node70403/node72480/node72482/userobject1ai80898.html>, accessed May 21, 2014.

⁴⁹ Shanghaishi difangzhi bangongshi, 'Duling Shishang de Duo Gongneng Shangyejie,' *Shanghaishi Difangzhi Bangongshi*, <http://shtong.gov.cn/node2/node71994/node71995/node71997/node72017/node72036/userobject1ai77431.html>, accessed May 21, 2014; Shanghaishi difangzhi bangongshi, 'Zhonghua Laozihao,' *Shanghaishi Difangzhi Bangongshi*, <http://shtong.gov.cn/node2/node4/node2249/luwan/node36332/node36357/node62656/userobject1ai21300.html>, accessed May 21, 2014.

⁵⁰ Xiong, 'Bainian huaihailu huace gaishu.'

⁵¹ Huazi, 'Xiafeilushang de flirtation,' *Shidai manhua*, no. 7 (July 20, 1934).

According to Shanghai city maps, by 1948, at least four brassiere shops had opened in Lin Sen Middle Road (previously Avenue Joffre),⁵² including Fayi, Gujin 古今, Mm Mary (*meili naizhao* 美麗奶罩) and American Brassiere (*meiguo naizhao* 美國奶罩), alongside six other general undergarment shops.⁵³ Mm Mary was opened by an English man called M.H. Jack in 679 Linsen Middle Road. It featured a wide range of items that contemporary brassiere shops are still using: a display window with four large panes of glass and two small ones, which was presumably used to display its products to create easy access and attract potential customers; one glass counter, displaying their products in store; one neon light, a necessary decoration at night; and one advertisement board, probably used to update information about new products and prices.⁵⁴ Windows or glass displays, advertisements and neon light illuminations were used by the famous four department stores in Shanghai from the 1910s to the 1930s, as their marketing strategies to attract customers. By distinguishing their styles from previous independent specialised stores, the four department stores created a new commercial culture.⁵⁵ By the end of the 1940s, the Mm Mary brassiere shop was entirely integrated into this commercial culture. Brassieres were displayed in the windows and glass counters, enabling customers to scrutinise these intimate undergarments publicly, and sparkled under neon lights at night.

The promotion of the brassiere was still haunted by male desire. The cartoon ‘*Aspects of Modern Lives of the Two Sexes*’ depicts a male shop assistant who offers a female customer to try the lingerie on for free (Figure 3-16). The *qipao* on the woman is depicted as semi-transparent, through which her breast lines and the contour of her pubis could be seen. Transparent *qipao* were not uncommon during

⁵² Previously Avenue Joffre, renamed as Lin Sen Middle Road in 1945, in memory of the Chairman of the National Government Lin Sen (1868-1943). Now Huaihai Middle Road (*Huaihai zhonglu* 淮海中路).

⁵³ Shanghaishi luwanqu dangan ju (guan) and Shanghaishi luwanqu difangzhi bangongshi, *Huaihailu bainian xiezheng* (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2001), 206, 209, 210–12.

⁵⁴ “Meili naizhao Shangdian,” December 1961, Shanghai danganguan, Document No. B123-5-526; “Meili naizhao shangdian quanbu caichan,” n.d., Shanghai danganguan, Document No. B128-2-537.

⁵⁵ Wellington K.K. Chan, ‘Selling Goods and Promoting a New Commercial Culture: The Four Premier Department Stores on Nanjing Road, 1917-1937,’ in *Inventing Nanjing Road: Commercial Culture in Shanghai, 1900-1945*, ed. Sherman Cochran (Ithaca: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1999), 32–35.

the Republican period. They were usually made from delicate materials and worn by fashionable women, although another layer of underskirt was used inside the transparent *qipao* (Figure 3-20(c) is an example). The woman in the cartoon has short permed hair, her breasts and hips are extremely ample, probably a wealthy wife or a concubine. How likely it was that a male assistant worked in a female lingerie department needs further study. Yet in this picture, the male assistant signifies general male desire for the female body – which was then seen as a key part of ‘modern life’. A male assistant’s economic and social status could never enable him to afford a wife or girlfriend like the woman in the picture, yet he still could taste his desire as an assistant, because ‘modern’ women do not care, or are used to being served by male lingerie assistants. Apart from this bald and ugly assistant, the woman is also gazed at by the readers of this cartoon, who could consume her body in the name of modernity. In the glass counter, a female model is displayed, wearing a brassiere. It is unlikely that a real shop would have had such a model, as judging from its size it seems too small to display a real brassiere. So it is possible that the author of this cartoon added it for metaphoric purposes. I would suggest that the woman in the *qipao* and the model on display formed a mutual reference. The model signifies the undressed female customer, and vice versa. In this way, the cartoon satisfies readers’ imaginations of the naked female body.

While the above cartoon indicates ‘modern’ men’s attention to the female undergarments, in his humouristic instructions of the ways to live a modern life, Guo Jianying lectured girls to be more attentive to their underwear, because there is a great chance that they might be under scrutiny of men.⁵⁶ It would be disastrous if a girl a man dated wore underwear made from home-woven cloth under a silk *qipao*.⁵⁷ In other words, fashionable underwear was essential for one to qualify as a ‘modern girl’ and a sexually attractive woman. Brassieres were not only new goods, but also became part of Shanghai’s commercial modernity, constituting an essential aspect of the lifestyle of the modern woman. The traditional scholar in Figure 3-17, wearing a hat and robe, mistakes his daughter’s brassiere as a pair of glasses. The caption explains that the father makes that mistake because he is short-sighted, but in fact he

⁵⁶ Jianying, ‘Modeng shenghuoxue jiangzuo,’ *Furen huabao*, no. 13 (1933): 15.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

could not recognise the brassiere most likely because he is too old-fashioned to have seen one before.

However, it was very expensive to become such a ‘modern girl’. In a piece about the estimated cost of spring clothing, the brassiere was listed among other essentials such as leather shoes, stockings, garters, a coat, gloves, etc. (Figure 3-18). The considerable amount of 52 silver yuan was suggested as the lower limit for the essential equipment of a ‘modern woman’ (*modeng nizi* 摩登女子). Brassieres did not become popular goods for ordinary women in China, not least because Western-style undergarments were sold in department stores at a very high price.⁵⁸ Most Chinese undergarment factories produced men’s shirts such as Xinguang Undergarment Company (*Xinguang neiyichang* 新光內衣廠) and China A.B.C. Underwear Weaving Mill, (*Zhongguo neiyi zhibuchang youxian gongsi* 中國內衣織布廠有限公司). They also produced sleeveless undershirts (*hanshan* 汗衫) for men and women, as well as children. It is not clear to what scale brassieres were produced by those companies. A catalogue of the production by A.B.C. Company in 1928 only included women’s underwear without specifying the exact style, which suggests that brassieres were not adopted on a large scale. Ladies’ undershirts were sold at 2.25 to 2.5 yuan (元) in 1928.⁵⁹ That amount of money in 1928 could buy a fine wadded cotton jacket, a dozen ‘brilliant’ lamps, two *chi* of Hangchow satin, or 1/4 *shi* of good rice.⁶⁰ Several years later in 1934, a brassiere would cost 2.25 silver yuan (Figure 3-18). According to the Shanghai price index in May 1934, one kilogram of wheat flour cost 0.09 yuan, and 1 kilogram of bean oil cost 0.232 yuan, while a pair of men’s cotton stockings cost 0.29 yuan.⁶¹ In fact the consumption of ready-made underwear was a luxury for many workers, male and female, in cities like Shanghai, Beijing and Tianjin. Very few families would buy sleeveless undershirts and

⁵⁸ ‘Maoda xinhua youda,’ *Shenbao*, January 8, 1931.

⁵⁹ “Zhongguo jingji tongji yanjiusuo dangan - gongye, shougongye: Shanghai neiyi zhizaoye,” 1928, Shanghai shekeyuan jingjishisuo dangan, Document No. 04-273. p. 14-15.

⁶⁰ ‘Shanghai lingshou wujia biao,’ *Shanghai wujia yuebao* 4, no. 6 (June 1928): 8–13. 1 Shi=60 Kilograms.

⁶¹ ‘Shanghai lingshou wujia biao,’ *Shanghai wujia yuebao* 10, no. 5 (May 1934): 19.

women's underwear. A worker's family in Shanghai would only spent 0.22 yuan on undergarments per year on average in 1930.⁶²

In 1936, according to a Chinese source, a cheap brassiere was sold for 2 to 6.5 dollars in the US, with the more delicate ones costing up to 25 dollars, and the average price was around 10 dollars. In Chinese currency, it would cost 7 yuan on average, only affordable for affluent women who were eager to keep up with the latest fashion.⁶³ According to a group interview of ten female elementary school teachers done by *Fun ü shenghuo* in 1936, most of them had 10 to 30 yuan income per month, with two exceptions: one who earned 3 yuan per month, similar to a domestic servant, and one who earned 55 yuan per month.⁶⁴ So on average, a 7 yuan brassiere would have been quite expensive for most of the elementary school teachers. Cheap, low-quality brassieres were also produced by small workshops, yet they were believed not to follow women's curvaceous body, and thus to damage women's bodily development. According to the editor, for those who wished to be as posh as the most fashionable American women, a cheap brassiere was certainly not an option. Instead, women could make their own brassieres in higher quality.⁶⁵

Spontaneously, alternatives to these expensive fashionable products were promoted. Feeling the urgency of promoting self-made brassieres, as they believed self-made ones had better quality than the cheap ones on market, one author in a monthly women's magazine *Fangzhou* 方舟 wrote an article that explained how to sew a brassiere (Figure 3-19). The picture on the top shows a paper template for sewing a brassiere, and the one on the bottom shows the semi-finished product.⁶⁶ In women's daily lives, self-made brassieres were a viable alternative for those who could not afford to buy one. Shi Hanmei, born in July 1929 in Shanghai in a scholarly family, wore a vest when she was a little girl, and after she became a teenager, she started to wear self-made brassieres. She studied in a missionary school

⁶² Yang Ximeng, "Shanghai gongren shenghuo chengdu de yige yanjiu," in *Minguo shiqi shehui diaocha congbian (yibian) chengshi (laogong) shenghuo juan* (Fuzhou: Haixia chubanshe, 2014), 322.

⁶³ 'Jianmei de neiyi,' *Fangzhou* no. 26 (July 1936): 24.

⁶⁴ Qian, 'Zhengzha zai zhiye zhanxian shang de xiaoxue jiaoshi,' *Fun ü shenghuo* 1, no. 1 (July 1935): 113–22.

⁶⁵ 'Jianmei de neiyi,' 24–25.

⁶⁶ Cun 寸, a unit of length in China, which equals 3 $\frac{1}{3}$ cm.

to the third grade, when the Sino-Japanese War began. The situation of her middle-upper class family changed after her father was killed by the Japanese at the very beginning of the war. While all her uncles went to the battlefield, Shi and her mother sought refuge in her grandmother's home, somewhere at the outskirts of Shanghai. She had to work as a peddler to support her family. Her clothes were all handmade by her mother and herself, including undergarments. When her cousin from Shanghai visited her, she noticed their brassieres, which were bought in stores, and made her own brassiere in the similar style.⁶⁷

In her memoir, Qi Bangyuan 齊邦媛 recalled her Shanghai cultural shock in 1946, when she was 22 years old. Qi was born in Tieling, Liaoning province in 1924 in a family that had produced government officials for eight generations. Her father Qi Shiyong 齊世英 was a high official in the Nationalist government. Qi Bangyuan lived in Nanjing from 1930 to 1937 with her father. After the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War, Qi's high school was transferred to Chongqing, and Qi moved there with her family. Subsequently, she was admitted by Wuhan University in Leshan, Sichuan province. As a girl from a high-ranking official family who had lived in Nanjing for several years, she never felt that she fell out of fashion in the remote county, as all her classmates wore clothes similar to hers – a waistless *qipao* and shoes with tyre/rubber soles (*chetaidi* 車胎底). This changed, however, when in the summer of 1946 the college student Qi Bangyuan went to Shanghai with her admirer Mr Yu in order to transfer to Nanjing to reunite with her father. She stayed with Mr Yu's sister, who looked at Qi's clothes in astonishment when they first met. Right away, on the afternoon following Qi's arrival, she accompanied her to go shopping. Before they left, she forced Qi to wear her light-colour summer shoes. For the first time in her life, Qi bought some fashionable dresses, a beige shirt and an ochre skirt. Qi recalled that none of her classmates had brassieres, as they all sewed their own undershirts and underpants.⁶⁸ It could be inferred this was the first time that Qi saw a brassiere, although she did not mention it explicitly. Apart from the *qipao*, dress and shoes, the brassiere was also a symbol of Shanghai's modernity for Qi. With all the new clothes, Qi felt extremely uncomfortable for a few days,

⁶⁷ Interviews with Shi Hanmei.

⁶⁸ Qi Bangyuan, *Juluhe* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2011), 156–57.

whereas Mr Yu's sister praised her for her modern look.⁶⁹ After spending several years in Chongqing and Leshan, Qi Bangyuan was no longer the urban girl who had lived in Nanjing, but had become a fashionable girl following the latest Shanghai standard – a move that was epitomised by wearing a Western bra.

Not only undergarments, but also the changing outer garments for women changed the ways women presented their bodies, especially their breasts. According to research on pre-modern Chinese garments, the beauty of traditional garments lies in the extensive embroideries and the collocation of colours. Although there were a few clothes reforms in pre-modern China, the basic form of oversized clothes and flat cutting (*pingmian jiancai* 平面剪裁) persisted (Figure 3-20a).⁷⁰ Chinese tailors had never showed any interest in highlighting women's bodies, as their Western counterparts did. The Chinese felt that it was 'natural' that their bodies were submerged under their clothes without emphasising their physical features.⁷¹

From the final years of the Qing dynasty, dress reformers changed the loose and oversized garments into more body-fitting ones, in the name of emancipating the body by allowing convenient movements through fitting dresses.⁷² This reform, of course, happened only in urban areas. However, this reform was attacked for going too far. The reformed women's dress was too tight to preserve women's health, as in this Shanghai bamboo-twig ballad:

新式衣衫孰剪裁，
這般窄小不應該。
倘逢腹內孩兒大，
鈕釦全然鈕不來。

Who tailored the new style dresses?

⁶⁹ Ibid., 157.

⁷⁰ Flat cutting means when the tailors cut the cloth, they put it flat on a table and cut it without the intention of making the clothes fit to a person's body. In the West, tailors traditionally cut the clothes on a model, in order to make the product close-fit. See: Zhu Xiaoen, "Zhongguo jindai fushi biange yu gudai fushi biange zhi bijiao," *Ningbo daxue xuebao*, no. 2 (2010): 127; Zhou Meng, *Chuantong yu shishang: Zhongxi fushi fengge jiedu* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2011).

⁷¹ Liu Yunhua, *Hongbang caifeng yanjiu* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2010), 106.

⁷² Sha Enpu, 'Fuzhuang tan,' *Xinjiating*, August 1932, 6–7.

They should not be this narrow.
If a woman was heavily pregnant,
She could not fasten the buttons.⁷³

In the early 1920s, many articles suggested that women's dress should be reformed again. If dresses did not show women's bodily shapes clearly, women might not feel forced to bind their breasts.⁷⁴ In order to show women's curvy bodylines, gradually the waistline of the *qipao* was narrowed, though only by one *cun*.⁷⁵ The reform of the chest line needed more sophisticated sartorial technological reform – the dart. Although *qipao* styles constantly changed between the 1910s to the 1930s in Beijing and Shanghai, the main differences were on the width and length of the hem and sleeve, the height of the collar, the pattern and texture of clothes, etc., but the basic techniques of tailoring the *qipao* did not change until the 1930s.⁷⁶ The dart, a Western sartorial invention, which reflected their three-dimensional tailoring tradition, had never been used in traditional Chinese costumes (Figure 3-20, a and b).⁷⁷ Finanne believes that darts only appeared in China since the 1950s, and this is why before that women's dresses mostly only presented a straight-lined body.⁷⁸ However, the fact is that darts were used in China much earlier than that. The above-mentioned method of tailoring brassieres is just one example (Figure 3-19).

In this technological reform of the *qipao*, Ningbo tailors in Shanghai, the so-called Red Gang Tailors (*hongbang caifeng* 紅幫裁縫) played an important role. Jin Taijun, a Ningbo tailor from Hongxiang Costume Company (*hongxiang shizhuang gongsi* 鴻翔時裝公司), the earliest Chinese tailor company in Shanghai that exclusively produced dresses for women, recalled as early as in 1925 how chest darts were gradually adopted by the company for the purpose of emphasising women's breasts. In the 1930s and 1940s, waist darts were added, and set-in sleeves were used instead of raglan sleeves. Therefore their *qipao* could fit the chest, waist, shoulder

⁷³ Zhu Wenbing, 'Haishang zhuzhici,' in *Shanghai yangchang zhuzhici*, ed. Gu Bingquan (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1996, first published in 1909), 193.

⁷⁴ Zhou, Jianren (pseudonym: Jian Meng), "Zai lun shuxiong xiguan yu xingzhishi," 20–21.

⁷⁵ Liu Yu, *Zhongguo qipao wenhuashi* (Shanghai: shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 2011), 79.

⁷⁶ Liu, *Zhongguo qipao wenhuashi*.

⁷⁷ Liu, *Hongbang Caifeng Yanjiu*, 106.

⁷⁸ Finanne, *Changing Clothes in China*, 163.

and axilla better than the flat-cut ones.⁷⁹ After 1939 particularly, the three-dimensional *qipao* became more popular in Shanghai.⁸⁰ Figure 3-20c shows a *qipao* with adopted set-in sleeves, yet without darts, made in Shanghai in the 1920s or 1930s. The difference between the chest line and the waistline is extremely small – only 4cm. In contrast, a *qipao* made in 1948 in Beijing was designed with an obvious curve, and chest darts could be found (Figure 3-20d).

This does not mean that all *qipao* were made with the new technology. *Qipao* companies such as Hongxiang specifically targeted women from well-to-do families and famous film stars and women from political circles, including the Song sisters, Wang Guangmei and Hu Die.⁸¹ Tailored *qipao* were still beyond the affordability of many women, who would choose cheaper homemade *qipao*. According to a tailor's instruction published in 1941, the method of making a one-piece women's dress without any darts was still being taught. Firstly, the cloth should be folded both vertically and horizontally, and then the line drawn as shown. After that, all one needed to do was to cut this piece of cloth, a collar and an opening, then sew the front and back together (Figure 3-21).⁸² This method was far less time-consuming and demanding, and could thus be widely used by women who sewed their own garments, either because of a less advantageous financial situation, or the necessity of the wartime situation.

While this sartorial reform helped to liberate the female breast, it took more for women to be able to achieve beautiful curvy bodies. Women were also expected to work on their bodies. Daily bodily management, covering all aspects from posture and physical training to sleep, therapy and medication, was introduced. The first thing women should do was to stop bowing their chests – which they did because they were ashamed of their breasts – but that did not come easily. The cover of the first issue of *Linglong* shows a typical image (Figure 3-22). The woman in the photo

⁷⁹ Liu, *Hongbang caifeng yanjiu*, 190.

⁸⁰ Mingxin Bao, "Shanghai fashion in the 1930s," in *Shanghai Modern: 1919 - 1945*, ed. Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, Lum Ken, and Shengtian Zheng (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 323; Liu, *Zhongguo qipao wenhuashi*, 89, 115–16.

⁸¹ Shanghaiishi difangzhi bangongshi, 'Hongxiang Shizhuang Gongsi,' *Shanghaiishi Difangzhi Bangongshi*,

<http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node4429/node70349/node70380/node70384/node70390/userobject1ai70499.html>, accessed March 19, 2015; Liu, *Hongbang caifeng yanjiu*, 114.

⁸² He Yuan, *Caifeng dayao* (Kunming: Zhonghua shuju, 1941), 74.

Ms Zhou Shuheng, born into a rich stamp merchant family, looked fashionable with permed hair, exquisite makeup, fine jewellery and an exceptionally delicate dress. The photo was obviously a portrait taken in a studio by a professional photographer. In the photo, she slightly bowed her head and placed her arm in front of her chest. This posture most likely was designed by the photographer in order to show an image of her gentle personality, which was commonly seen in the 1930s pictorials. Although at that time a curvaceous body shape was becoming fashionable and beautiful, Ms Zhou's dress was not designed to show a curvaceous body shape. Possibly, Ms Zhou had been binding her breasts for a long period, and even if she did not, or if she 'naturally' had small breasts, she showed no intention to present a curvaceous body image as the fashion trend dictated, nor was she trendy and courageous enough to behave like the film stars to wear padded brassieres. This attitude is also manifested in many contemporaneous photographs. Until the 1930s, photos of women in magazines often presented women – even famous actresses and basketball players – lowering their heads, bowing their chests (Figure 3-23), or covering their chests with all sorts of means. Therefore new 'hygienic customs' included straightening the chest and spine.⁸³ Exercise was recommended in order to achieve a natural curvaceous spine and elegant posture.⁸⁴

By the 1930s, while some women remained reluctant to present their curvy bodies, there were other urban women who did not feel shame of their breasts and considered well-rounded breasts beautiful. This is expressed explicitly in readers' letters in *Linglong* and in the editor's medical correspondence in *Funü shenghuo*.⁸⁵ These columns were designed to answer the questions about their bodies readers were most concerned about, and which they were too embarrassed to raise elsewhere. Although readers' letters are often considered problematic sources, as it is almost impossible to ascertain their authenticity, the fact that letters enquiring about breast enlargement methods can be found recurrently in both of the journals meant at least that editors considered large breasts fashionable, and readers were also willing to

⁸³ "Weisheng xiguan," *Liangyou*, no.67 (July 1932): 18

⁸⁴ Yu, *Reintime zhi yanjiu*, 65–68.

⁸⁵ Different from *Linglong*, a fashion magazine focused on women's love life, film stars, and fashion trends, *Funü shenghuo* was a left-wing women's journal that advocated anti-Japanese resistance movements and sympathised with lower class women. Its editor-in-chief, Shen Zijiu 沈兹九 (1898-1989), joined the Communist Party in 1939 and married a famous Communist writer Hu Yuzhi 胡愈之 (1896-1986). *Funü shenghuo* also paid great attention to women's health.

learn about methods of enlargement. Most importantly, it shows that this was an issue that garnered considerable public interest. Sensitive and intimate issues in readers' letters were raised in both of the magazines, such as sexual satisfaction, contraception methods, masturbation, rupture of hymen, etc., and breast enlargement seemed not out of the ordinary in this context.

Contradictory to some belief that small breasts were symbols of virginity as mentioned in chapter one, small breasts were also considered unhealthy by some medical practitioners. Dr Wu Manqing, a private clinic gynaecologist graduated from the University of Hamburg, and editor of a column Doctor's Room (*zhenchashi* 診察室) in the magazine *Funü shenghuo*, believed that flat chests were signs of underlying health issues. One reader wrote to the magazine saying she had a big belly but undeveloped breasts and buttocks.⁸⁶ Another wrote that although she didn't wear the little vest, her breasts did not develop well. Dr Wu Manqing confirmed that if a woman did not have a chronic disease, she would certainly have developed breasts and buttocks.⁸⁷ Dr Wu Manqing explains in some cases, underdeveloped breasts were not merely caused by breast-binding, but could also be caused by chronic disease, for example, tuberculosis, endocrine disorders, or even diabetes.⁸⁸ In most of these medical suggestions, the professionals believed that small breasts meant unhealthy, without mentioning that some women did indeed have naturally small breasts even without binding. An exception of *Linglong* editor's suggestion to a Hong Kong reader will be discussed later in this chapter.

A certain twenty-three years old Wu Jingming asked the editor in *Linglong*: "Three months after my infant died, my breasts have become flat, which makes me lose my female beauty. I was wondering if there is any method to recover them".⁸⁹ The reason why Ms Wu Jingming mentioned her loss of infant is uncertain, probably wishing to give the editor further information about her bodily conditions – that she stopped breastfeeding three months ago. The editor did not mention anything about

⁸⁶ Shen Gong, Wu Manqing, and Bogen, "Zhenchashi," *Funüshenghuo* 3, no. 12 (January 1937): 54–55; Wu Manqing, "Zhenchashi," *Funüshenghuo* 4, no. 11 (June 16, 1937): 47–48.

⁸⁷ Shen Gong, Wu Manqing, and Wu Lin, "Zhenchashi," *Funüshenghuo* 3, no. 12 (January 1937): 55.

⁸⁸ Luo Yeyuan and Wu Manqing, "Zhenchashi," *Funüshenghuo* 3, no. 9 (November 1936): 56; *ibid.*, 56; Wu Manqing, "Zhenchashi," *Funüshenghuo* 4, no. 3 (February 1937): 56.

⁸⁹ Wu Jingming and Zhenling, 'Ruhe fengying pingtan de rufang', *Linglong* 6, no. 25 (1936): 1927–1928.

her infant loss either, and suggested her using cold water to rub her breasts every day for three to four months. Editor Zhenling told a certain Ms Peizhen to practise deep breathing and callisthenics for twenty minutes every morning, and then take a shower. After that she should gently apply olive oil to her breasts. In addition, she should wear supportive undergarments. In this way, she could expect her breasts to get larger shortly.⁹⁰ Several readers asked whether it would help if they ate some female hormone (*nüyong shengzhisu* 女用生殖素). Dr Wu Manqing warned the reader that the actual effectiveness of female hormone was suspicious. However, if one wished to try this method, she'd better take a product from Schering AG, a German pharmaceutical company (*Deguo xianling yanghang* 德國先靈洋行).⁹¹ Their product Progynon had greatly reduced the price of female hormone products in the European and American markets, yet according to Dr Wu it was still much more expensive than similar Chinese products.⁹² Dr Wu did not explain why she recommended the German medicine even though there were similar Chinese products, presumably because of the general trust in foreign products during the Republican period.⁹³ Further, women should also work on their bodies through diet. The ones with breasts too big should avoid fat meat, oil, sugar and cakes. On the contrary, the ones who have small breasts should eat more of those.⁹⁴

All of the above methods targeted only urban upper-middle class women. Firstly, they were economically demanding. One would have to be able to afford a private shower at home, the expensive supportive brassiere, the pricy German-produced female hormone, and fat meat, oil, sugar and cakes as daily diet, even during the war in the 1940s. Secondly, women had to have time to work on their bodies daily and diligently. The female model working with dumbbells to develop her breasts in Figure 3-24 wears permed hair and a sports suit, indicating she was one of the modern fashionable girls. In addition, some methods required women to have open minds towards Western bodily cultivation culture. In Europe, cold

⁹⁰ Zhenling, 'Weishenme liangfeng bugao?', *Linglong*, May 20, 1931.

⁹¹ Shen Gong, Wu Manqing, and Peng Hua, "Zhenchashi," *Fun ü shenghuo* 3, no. 12 (January 1937): 53–54; Wu, "Zhenchashi," June 16, 1937.

⁹² Christopher Kobrak, *National Cultures and International Competition: The Experience of Schering AG, 1851-1950* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 164–65.

⁹³ Karl Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 19–20.

⁹⁴ Lianzi, 'Nüxingmei de zhongxindian: xiongtun fadafa,' *Jianlimei*, no. 2 (December 1941): 25–26.

showers were advocated to stimulate the blood circulation and metabolism of the body.⁹⁵ Yet in China, rubbing the breasts with cold water contradicted Chinese medicine, according to which women should avoid cold water as much as possible to cultivate their bodily energy. In other words, if a woman was not lucky enough to have big breasts naturally, cultivating them required a lifestyle that was only possible and affordable for a minority of urban upper class women in terms of cultural attitudes and economical affordability.

Mechanical devices of body therapy were also introduced as a means to create a buxom body shape, as shown in Figure 3-25. The caption reads: “It is possible for women with flat breasts to have treatment. Doctors advise them to use electronic massage. This kind of body therapeutic equipment is already widely on sale in foreign countries now.” The author of the article said although they did not advocate this method, it might be very useful for those who suffered accidents and had ruined their appearances, or for women who were aging and no longer desirable. They also warn the readers of the risks in taking this treatment, as patients in Europe and America also were very careful with choosing surgery.⁹⁶ This device was called ‘le massosein’. It was produced in France and designed with three functions, according to a French advertisement. Firstly, it stimulated the breast; secondly, it made them prettier by stimulating the glands; and thirdly, it prevented too exaggerated development.⁹⁷ In addition, it did not work with electricity, as the Chinese explanation suggested, but rather with water connected to a tap for cold water massage (Figure 3-26, 3-27). Advocates of this device could be seen in major periodicals in France in the 1930s. The editors of *Shidai* must have seen this picture in a French magazine and republished it as part of an article educating women about new developments in body therapy. It is unknown if the product ever reached China, nor indeed how wide-spread its use was in France, yet the way it was introduced nevertheless suggests that larger breasts were desirable.

However, the breast-enlarging methods were only considered proper for married women, according to the *Linglong* editors. A single 23-year-old reader from

⁹⁵ John Hassan, *A History of Water in Modern England and Wales* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 12.

⁹⁶ Meng Lan, ‘Jiankangmei yu zhiliaomei,’ *Shidai tuhua banyuekan* 7, no. 6 (January 16, 1935): 9.

⁹⁷ “Le Massosein,” *Le Figaro Illustré*, April 1935, 56.

Hong Kong wrote to *Linglong* complaining that although she was a strong and skilful athlete, her chest was flat. As discussed in section 1, the discussions on beauty encouraged women to participate in sports, rendering the impression that sportswomen had ideal bodies with full breasts. However, this young girl found herself to be the opposite. She sought for methods to enlarge her breasts, but felt too embarrassed to ask doctors. The editor replied that although big breasts looked nicer, she should be proud of herself because of her health and strength rather than worrying about the size of her breasts. The editor suggested that although it was possible to enlarge her breasts through massage, it was not proper for unmarried women, as naturally developed breasts were firm. If she massaged her breasts, they would look like a young married woman's flabby breasts. The editor consoled her that her wish would be realised after her marriage.⁹⁸ Here the author might have referred to the idea that sexual activity would soften and enlarge the breasts, as discussed in chapter one. Therefore, it would be improper for her to do so.

With the development of changing aesthetics and the whole regimen of body management, by the 1930s fashionable curvaceous bodies could be commonly seen in the streets of Shanghai. Male writers observed women with delight, saying: "Women imprisoned their breasts before, but recently our (women's) breasts were amnestied from prison and had been boosting to grow. We now have the breasts that women all over the world have and need."⁹⁹ The unbound breasts therefore not only fashioned for the beauty, but also satisfied the aspiration of catching up with the world, and healing the traumatised male elites' racial anxiety.

3.3 Embodying Class

Similar to foot-binding, the origin and popularisation of breast-binding is very difficult to trace, as discussed in Chapter one. Narrations of breast-binding from Republican periodicals were often repeated and copied by journal editors and essay writers, yet they were also frequently contradictory. What kind of women practised breast-binding? This question was answered strikingly differently at different times

⁹⁸ Xianggang duzhe RC and Zhenling, 'Nüyundongyuan rufang taixiao', *Linglong* 6, no. 33 (1936): 2556–2557.

⁹⁹ Ouwaiou, 'Zhonghua ernü mei zhi gebie shenpan,' 73.

or by different observers. In 1915, Shen Weizhen, a dormitory manager of a girls' school in Shanghai, claimed that breast-binding was newly invented among female students.¹⁰⁰ Another teacher from a female school in Guangdong province noticed that breast-binding was adopted exclusively by those who had access to Western knowledge, probably because they were obsessed with the sartorial fashion of narrow and tight clothes; in contrast, it could not be found in remote rural areas.¹⁰¹ Until the late 1920s, breast-binding was still considered to be popular among urban middle and upper class women and female students.¹⁰²

When urban women were criticised for breast-binding, rural women were often used as examples of being 'natural' and 'healthy' regarding their breasts.¹⁰³ During the 1930s, the debate on the practice of breast-binding gradually changed to the exact opposite. Although critiques of urban women practising breast-binding could still be seen in periodicals,¹⁰⁴ it became more common to excoriate rural women for binding their breasts, who were too ignorant and stubborn (*wanyu buling* 頑愚不靈) to know that breast-binding was killing them.¹⁰⁵ According to an eyewitness in Hangzhou women all presented their curvy body, with breasts pointed, whereas in rural areas or smaller counties, women were all flat-chested.¹⁰⁶ In the late 1930s, urban women even started to wear padded brassieres.¹⁰⁷ Bound breasts did not embody beauty any more, and instead became a symbol of the backwardness of women from the countryside, perhaps another case of the delayed arrival of a fashion trend. Women from rural areas who still practised breast-binding faced more hostility. According to the observations of one Lü Biqing, "urban women were fond of Western dress and socialising and thus did not bind their breasts; the most repulsive women were those who came from rural areas, who commanded their daughters to bind their breasts because of customs and ethics".¹⁰⁸ Lü's description

¹⁰⁰ Shen, "Lun xiaobanbi yu nüzi tiyu," 1.

¹⁰¹ Lin, "Duiyu nüjie shenti canhui zhi gaige lun," 5.

¹⁰² Zhou, "Zai lun shuxiong xiguan yu xingzhishi"; Zuo, "Chanzu yu shuxiong shi zhenzheng de meiguan me."

¹⁰³ Zhang, "Hubin suiganlu."

¹⁰⁴ Shiru, "Funü shuxiong wenti zhi jiantao."

¹⁰⁵ Lin Lianying, 'Funü shuxiong yu shuyao zhi qiyuan,' *Linglong* 3, no. 42 (November 29, 1933): 2319–20; Zhao Nanren, 'Jianmei yu rufang jiefang,' *Linglong* 6, no. 19 (May 20, 1936): 1417–18; Fang, 'Funü shuru,' *Jiating xingqi* 1, no. 41 (September 6, 1936): 1.

¹⁰⁶ Qiu, "Shuxiong yu fangxiong," 1.

¹⁰⁷ Liu Shaoqi, "Nüxing neiyi de jinhuashi," *Sanliujiu huabao* 2, no. 12 (1940): 14.

¹⁰⁸ Lü Biqing, 'Tantan nüzi shuxiong zhibi,' *Dazhong yikan*, no. 13 (1931): 53.

showed that the previously fashionable breast-binding seemed to have become the habit of a country bumpkin. The ‘rural women’ these writers referred to were mainly the lower class of rural women without any sort of education, who were ignorant and backward. Figure 3-28 photographed a rural woman wearing a little vest, which, as the caption suggested, was ‘most harmful’ to women’s bodies. Photographs of this kind are rare, as criticisms towards urban women’s breast-binding were mostly accompanied by hand-drawn illustrations of women in their undergarments with hardly any photographs. They were photographed perhaps by a journalist who probably did not ask for their consent and pictured them as negative examples. The two women were from the east of Huangpu River, a rural area near the main city of Shanghai. The fact that they wore undergarments outside confirmed their lower class identities, as this would have been unthinkable for urban middle-upper class women.

Women from different class backgrounds were represented with different bodily shapes, as in the example of Guo Jianying’s depiction of three kinds of beauty in a series of cartoons (Figure 3-29 ‘*Searching for beauty in the streets of Shanghai*’). Guo wandered in the streets of Shanghai, seeking different kinds of beauty and taking sketches of them. The first one was a girl selling orchids at a market, who represented the beauty of traditional Chineseness. The second one was a girl worker, one of the urban proletariat. The third one was a modern beauty. Guo claimed that beauty of modernity required not only a fashionable appearance, but also wisdom inside. However, the three kinds of beauty embodied three women from distinct class backgrounds, peddlers from rural areas, urban working class women, and women from the middle and upper classes. They are visually distinct through their hairstyles, clothes and body shapes. The girl selling orchids wore her hair in a bun, a traditional Chinese hairstyle, and probably wore jacket and trousers made from home-woven cloth. The working class girl had a long plait and could afford a jacket with stripes. The modern woman, on the other hand, had her hair permed and wore a typical dress for urban women, the *qipao*. Apart from all the above, another remarkable difference in their appearance was their body shape. The bodies of the first two women were portrayed slightly curved without specific efforts on their breasts, whereas the depiction of the ‘modern girl’ emphasised her breasts and presented an obvious curvaceous body. The three sketches suggest that women from different classes were

observed to have different shapes of body, and ample breasts were one of the most obvious symbols of the modern girl.

This difference could be seen clearly from photos of the famous film star Ruan Lingyu. Comparing one that captured her role as a rural woman who worked diligently on the farm in the film *A Sea of Fragrant Snow* (*xiangxuehai* 香雪海) (Figure 3-30 left) with her portrait in a magazine, wearing a tight *qipao* that highlighted her figure (Figure 3-30 right), clearly demonstrates that the loose jacket of rural women could hardly show a woman's figure. Whether one had a visibly curvy figure did not only depend on her body development, but also on the style of her dresses, which in turn was a function of a woman's social class.

A cartoon by Guo Jianying entitled *Life in Shanghai* recorded the following conversation: 'Has your maid from the countryside got used to life in Shanghai?' 'Yeah, almost, she hasn't worn the little vest these few days' (Figure 3-31).¹⁰⁹ As most of Guo's manhua were published in the early 1930s, the cartoon reveals that in the 1930s Shanghai breast-binding had become a symbol of country bumpkins. The girl depicted in this cartoon was a maidservant who had just come from the countryside, in a short-sleeve jacket and short trousers. This kind of two-part clothes was typically and exclusively worn by rural women during the 1930s, as urban women would wear *qipao* or, in the case of young girls, student uniforms. One can easily tell whether a woman on the street was from the city or the countryside with a simple glance at her dress.¹¹⁰ However, some details of the girl's appearance presented variations from typical rural girls. She had bobbed hair, which was a clear symbol of an urban woman, as most country girls would have long plaits. Her jacket was made of flower print cloth rather than hand-woven plain cloth, and the sleeve of the jacket was above her elbows, shorter than normal ones. These could all be signs of a rural girl becoming more modern in the city. The reason the servant took off the little vest would either be embarrassment of being different from all other girls in Shanghai, or catching the fashion trend. Apparently the little vest was one symbol of

¹⁰⁹ Guo Jianying, 'Shanghai shenghuo', in *Modeng Shanghai: sanshi niandai yangchang baijing*, ed. Chen Zishan (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2001), 36.

¹¹⁰ Interviews with Shi Hanmei.

her rural identity according to her mistress, and abandoning it would be part of getting used to life in Shanghai.

The caption shows that the mistress tightly observed every single change of the rural servant, even to the detail of undergarment. Perhaps the *qipao* was the obvious fashion of urban women, but what distinguishes them from the rural women also included other subtle objects such as underwear. It is impossible to know where Guo Jianying heard this story, or whether he had made it up. In any case, it indicates that women's underwear was under other people's gaze, including fashionable women, rural girls and male elites such as Guo, although underwear was supposed to be intimate. The title *Life in Shanghai* suggests that the little vest was not something that fashionable and modern Shanghai women would use, and it was not part of the Shanghai lifestyle.

Guo Jianying, as a fashionista, advocated for brassieres in various articles, yet this cartoon actually exaggerated the fact that little vests were only worn by rural bumpkins. In fact, in the 1930s, many women from middle and upper classes still wore the little vest, such as Wang Suzhen (born in 1923 in a merchant family in Shanghai), Chen Xuan (born in 1925 in a scholar family in Shanghai) and Sun Rufen (born in 1924 in Beijing), although none of them bound their breasts, and Chen Xuan started to wear brassieres since she was a teenager.¹¹¹ Essentially different from foot-binding, breast-binding could not be judged only by the attire – the little vest. Whether or not women had bound their breasts depended on how tight they wore them. Although the little vest seemed not fashionable for Guo Jianying, and perhaps many upper class women and female stars used brassieres, the fact that some middle class women from urban areas still wore the little vest meant that the choices of undergarment varied from one to another.

According to Luo Suwen's study of fashion in Shanghai, its hinterland, and more remote areas in China in the 1930s, she found that while the *qipao* was the symbol of Shanghai modernity, in hinterland China many women still bound their feet, and in remote areas women from minority nationalities had the custom of facial

¹¹¹ Interviews Wang Suzhen, Chen Xuan and Sun Rufen.

tattoo.¹¹² It is true that in some rural areas not far away from Shanghai, foot-binding was still popular in the 1920s and 1930s. Zhang Jinfeng was born in the northern part of Jiangsu province (*subei* 蘇北) in 1920, which was considered to be more backward than the lower Yangzi region – Jiangnan (江南). In the 1920s, many girls there were still forced to bind their feet. Zhang Jinfeng was one of them. She only stopped binding her feet several years later as her father, a barber working in Shanghai, found out that fashionable Shanghai women had long stopped this custom. Many other girls of her age were not that lucky and had their feet bound for a lifetime. Zhang wore the *dudou* as undergarment. For her, breast-binding was a fashion of urban girls, whereas girls from the countryside seldom cared about their breasts.¹¹³

Some women from marginalised social and economic classes did not wear undergarments at all. He Meiqi, born in 1938 in Shanghai, a child worker in Shanghai since she was six years old, did not wear any undergarments until the early 1980s. Before 1949, almost all of her clothes were donated.¹¹⁴ Born in the late 1930s in Nanjing, Li Wenhua's family could hardly dress her warmly, not to mention luxurious undergarments.¹¹⁵ Suffering from poverty and starvation during her early years up until the 1960s, He Meiqi seldom saw women with large breasts. She got the impression that prior to 1949 and even until the 1960s, women were all very thin and that it would have been impossible for them to have a curvy figure, especially during the Great Famine.¹¹⁶ For those women who were busy working hard simply to get food and keep warm, they did not give much thought to their appearance in terms of fashion (Figure 3-32).¹¹⁷

Undergarments also functioned as a tool to establish social distinctions. On the one hand, Shi Hanmei, the above-mentioned woman born into a scholarly family from Shanghai, suggested that in the countryside women still wore the little vest, as they did not have the means to buy brassieres, whereas Shanghai was an entirely

¹¹² Luo Suwen, "Chipao, tensoku, irezumi: kindai no Chuugokujin ha nyoshou no karada to soshoku wo dou mi ta ka," *Josei rekishi bunka kenkyuusho kiyou*, no. 9 (March 2001).

¹¹³ Interview with Zhang Jinfeng.

¹¹⁴ Interview with He Meiqi.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Li Wenhua.

¹¹⁶ Interview with He Meiqi.

¹¹⁷ Interview with He Meiqi.

different matter.¹¹⁸ Shi Hanmei recalled that she had never worn a *dudou*: “It’s only for the country folk. People from Pudong (east of Huangpu River) are still wearing *dudou* nowadays.”¹¹⁹ By distinguishing herself from the country folks, Shi emphasised her urban identity, which is more open, stylish and progressive. For her, the brassiere was a symbol of a Shanghai woman, whereas the *dudou* represented the countryside. On the other hand, Shi Hanmei suggested that she did not wear tight dresses that revealed one’s bodily shape, which were exclusively for prostitutes and dancing girls. Instead, she wore loose *qipao*, as other ordinary schoolgirls.¹²⁰ No matter what women from different places and classes actually wore, the intimate underwear was a signifier of class distinctions in Shi Hanmei’s narrative. Wearing self-made brassieres identified her with the upper class Shanghai modern girls, and not wearing tight dresses meant she was a decent woman. “In the 1930s, clearly, China was a place where women could be categorized as modern or not modern, and clothing was a major signifier of the position a woman occupied on the spectrum of modernity.”¹²¹ Among the symbols that signified modern women, the *qipao*, high heels and bobbed hair were the most significant ones. Often the garment underneath was neglected by fashion or clothing history, even though it also played an important role of class distinction and self-identification, if in a more intimate and subtle way.

While breasts were a symbol of fashion and modernity for urban women, they were discussed overwhelmingly with regard to their physiological function by lower class women – wet nurses. The main reasons for hiring a wet nurse were, firstly, that caring for children was too troublesome for mothers’ travels and entertainments;¹²² secondly, as the film star Gao Qianping 高倩蘋 confessed, breastfeeding would have had a devastating effect on her beauty;¹²³ and thirdly, hiring a wet nurse was a symbol of family wealth and thus a simple matter of prestige.¹²⁴ Although mothers were preached to feed their children on their own, for those who could afford wet nurses, the nationalist hygienic discourse on

¹¹⁸ Interviews with Shi Hanmei.

¹¹⁹ Interviews with Shi Hanmei.

¹²⁰ Interview with Shi Hanmei.

¹²¹ Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China*, 5.

¹²² Li Yuchun, “Rumu zhi jianbie yu jinji,” *Changshou*, 1935, 8; Fu Jiren, “Tan gu naima,” *Fuying weisheng*, 1945.

¹²³ Shi Jihong, “Gei muqin men,” *Furen huabao*, no. 12 (1934): 7.

¹²⁴ Yan Ying, ‘Naima,’ *Shenbao*, November 19, 1946.

‘strengthening the nation and race’ did not shift their choices of avoiding breastfeeding.

Since the late 1910s, exceedingly detailed and precise criteria for the selection of wet nurses were discussed in the press. A wet nurse should be reasonably healthy and strong. If she had more than one child, the hirer should examine the development of her children, and she could only be qualified if all of her children were healthy. The most suitable wet nurses should be the ones who had given birth to their second child, and the best milk came after six weeks of her labour. She should definitely not have lung disease, syphilis, gonorrhoea, epilepsy, beriberi, heart disease, kidney disease, or even dental decay. She should be young, preferably between fifteen and thirty. If possible, the milk should be examined under the microscope to test for any impurities. Her breasts should be hemispherically or conically shaped, elastic, and glossy. In other words, an ideal wet nurse should not only be healthy, but also eat a healthy diet, which was unaffordable for those women who were seeking employment as a wet nurse. Her milk should eject out if one pressed the nipple. She should also have an agreeable personality. Her living and eating styles should also be closely monitored, as these would affect the infant. She should not be addicted to smoking or drinking. Multiple miscarriages or premature births raised the suspicion of having syphilis. She should be loyal, caring, patient and honest.¹²⁵ Some even asked medical professionals to select a wet nurse for them.¹²⁶ The employer should check if her nipples and areola were dark red instead of pink, which indicated the wet nurse had recently given birth to a child.¹²⁷

Figure 3-33 vividly depicts the uneven power relation between a wet nurse and her potential employers. The potential wet nurse is clearly from a rural, lower class family, judging from her appearance: the old-fashioned bun hairstyle, jacket and trousers, and bound feet. The old man in the middle, not sure if the father or

¹²⁵ Shi, “Guyong rumu wenti,” 3; Bao Jiexu, “Gu naima yingdang zenmeyang zhuyi,” *Tongsu yishi yuekan*, no. 1 (October 1919): 34–35; Li Jiannong, “Jianding rumu de jianyifa,” *Fun ü zazhi*, December 1927; Su Yizhen, “Rumu xuanzefa,” *Dachangshi*, September 25, 1930; Deng Yuanhe, “Rumu zhi xuanze ji xuanyong hou zhi zhuyi,” *Shehui yibao*, no. 154 (1931): 2647 – 2648; Zhong Zhihe, “Xuanze rumu zhi yaojue,” *Xiandai fumu* 1, no. 1 (1933): 36–37; Li, “Rumu zhi jianbie yu jinji,” 9; Pei Di, “Ruer yingyang yu rumu xuanze,” *Fun ü zazhi (Beijing)*, 1943, 39.

¹²⁶ Jiang Zhenxun, “Dairen xuanze rumu zhi biao zhun,” *Xinyi yu shehui huikan*, 1934.

¹²⁷ Zhu Jun, “Guyong rumu ying zhuyi de san jian shi,” *Jiating xingqi* 1, no. 10 (March 1, 1936): 14.

grandfather of the infant, stared at her breasts, not only with judgemental eyes of the quality of her breasts, but also with sexual lust. The wet nurse seems terrified by this scrutiny, yet could not refuse this opportunity, as presumably she has a baby in the countryside to bring up. The middle-upper class woman holding the infant shows a curvy body revealed from her *qipao*, despising the rural woman, perhaps due to the rustic outfit and manner, yet she has to bear someone like her to stay in the house because she needed the physical labour. The same female breasts, therefore, for middle-upper class women represented beauty and class prestige, and for lower class women, they functioned as ways of maintaining the minimum survival of their own families.

3.4 Conclusion

From the late 1920s to the 1940s, urban fashion changed from the norm of flat chest to curvaceous bodily shapes. The changing connotations of breast-binding demonstrate that the female body was constructed and encoded by a changing society, and the natural body always changed along with the cultural meanings imposed on it from outside. The concept of ‘beauty’ only found itself ambiguous by definition, sometimes using the Greek statue-like bodies as ‘natural’, sometimes admitting that not all the ‘natural bodies’ would look like that. Although usually periodical essays described the abandoning of breast-binding and the development of undergarments as linear developments, actually in practice neither of them is true. A variety of practices coexisted. Some women showed no evidence of being influenced by the ‘Natural Breast Movement’, whereas some pursued methods to enlarge their breasts, or at least sought advice on how to do that. The consumption of different kinds of undergarments such as the *dudou*, the little vest and the brassiere created some distinctions between women from different classes, though not clear-cut ones. Not all urban women wore the same kind of undergarments, nor did all the rural women. However, undergarments functioned as distinctions between urban and rural women. Curvaceous women were only associated with urban fashionable women; in contrast, when we look at women from the less privileged classes, their bodies were more linked to notions of ‘backwardness’, ‘strength’, ‘nature’, ‘fertility’ and ‘poverty’, yet seldom to sexual attraction. This class would be used as weapons during the Communist period, when women were criticised for dressing up in

bourgeois styles, including deliberately showing their curvaceous figure, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 Negotiating Body and Dress under Communist Rule

On 1 October 1949, Wei Junyi, a Communist writer and editor, took off her hand-woven cloth garment, and donned her official-made plain yellow uniform. Together with her colleagues, they marched towards the Gate of Heavenly Peace to attend the Founding Ceremony of the PRC, stared at by crowds of ordinary citizens.¹ This kind of baggy fatigues was worn by all the Communists at that time, as they were provided for free by the special supply system up until 1955. The only difference in uniforms between high officials and everybody else – the ‘masses’ – was the quality of cloth.² The baggy uniforms replaced the previously fashionable *qipao* and Western suits, creating what Antonia Finnane defined as ‘a new look for new China’.³ The cadre’s uniform triggered a new fashion trend, as it symbolised the female cadres’ enormous prestige, including their high positions in the new government and in the society, their economic independence, and their high levels of supply. By adopting the loose and unshapely Communist costume, the curvy female body shaped during the Republican era lost its vestimentary necessity. This chapter explores the interplay of official regulations on clothes and official discourses on the female body under Communist rule, before and after 1949. It aims to reveal how beauty and body, especially the previously fashionable curvaceous bodily shape during the Republican era, was redefined, through examining socialist discourse including official periodicals, literature, visual materials and sartorial designs. I argue that under Communist rule, the female body, beauty and dress were all defined as symbols of ideology. Therefore women’s choices of attire and ways of presenting their body were highly limited and had to conform to the ‘proletarian’ spirit.

4.1 Left-Wing Critiques on the Curvy Body

Since the Republican era, the full breast became a symbol of some women’s more prestigious social class, which drew a great amount of criticism from left-wing literati, artists and activists. While well-off urban women were concerned about the

¹ Wei Junyi, “Tiananmen qingsi,” in *Sishui liunian* (changsha: Hunan ren min chubanshe, 1981), 157–58.

² Aiping Mu, *Vermilion Gate* (London: Abacus, 2002), 17–18.

³ Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China*, 201.

beauty of their breasts, rural women were portrayed as living in hell, seeking a livelihood by selling their breast milk, living as slaves of the rich. Lower class wet nurses gained great sympathy from some left-wing writers due to their diligent work yet bitter misfortune. A great number of essays and novels narrated stories of wet nurses being ill-treated by their employers, and in many cases, their own children got seriously sick or died due to the absence of the mother.⁴ One wet nurse abandoned her own child because of poverty, yet she got fired in the end as the female employer feared her unpleasant looks would influence the child.⁵ One poem about wet nurses questioned: when will the poor in hell finally be freed?⁶ Tao Xingzhi (1891-1946), a renowned educationist, once wrote a poem for Children's Day, describing an infant crying of hunger because his/her mother had become a wet nurse in a wealthy family. Greatly sympathising with the left-behind child, Tao questioned: whose Children's Day was it?⁷ Apparently, Tao's answer would be it was for the children from the wealthy family that could afford wet nurses. The existence of wet nurses was an incontrovertible proof of class divisions and the bodily exploitation of lower class women.

In addition, in Republican period, the fact that women from different social classes had different bodies had already inspired visual representations of inequality and injustice. Entitled *Effective Fund Raising*, Figure 4-1 presents the sheer differences between an elderly poor woman, presumably a famine refugee, and a well-shaped young woman raising funds for refugees. Most probably, the old woman would not be qualified as a fund-raiser, instead, she might just be a begger. With permed hair, makeup, earrings, full breasts and hips, high heels, and dressed only in a brassiere and shorts, the young woman attracts a large amount of funds from wealthy men. In contrast, the old woman in the back could hardly attract any donation. She is aged and skinny. The child in her arm is probably her grandchild, judging from her age. The mother of the child might have been working as a wet

⁴ Chang Yu, "Rumu," *Minguo ribao juewu*, September 1, 1924; Wang Wanrong, "Naima," *Zhenhua nixuexiao jikan* 1, no. 2 (1934): 77-80; "Rumu," *Laoshihua*, 1934; Ling Shuhua, "Naima," *Wenyi yuekan* 8, no. 4 (1936): 11 - 20; Zhu Yonghe, "Naima," *Zhuxing yiyaoakan*, no. 6-7 (1945): 53-54; Lin Shao, "Di-yi ge rumu," *Fun üzazhi (Beijing)* 4, no. 9 (1943): 14-15.

⁵ Xu Baoshan, "Naima," *Huangzhong* 1, no. 2 (1932): 8-12.

⁶ The original Chinese reads: '唉地獄下貧苦的窮人，何時才得翻身?'. Lü Shaoguang, "Naima," *Shige yuebao* 1, no. 4 (1934): 7 - 8.

⁷ Tao Zhixing, "Ertongjie xiangei naima de popo de shi," *Budao Zazhi*, 1936.

nurse in other wealthy families, or has lost contact during a flight from a famine. The child opens his/her mouth widely and raises his/her hand, presumably crying for food. Although the old woman's chest is exposed, her breasts are sagging and shrunken, only providing some soothing for the child. Similar images done by left-wing artists of women with sagging breasts and children could be seen repetitively during the Republican China, providing visual evidence of the unbearable living conditions of the poor.

The stark contrast between the lives of the rich and those of the poor led to a strong disapproval of urban women on the pages of left-wing and Communist periodicals, which in turn led to the disapproval of curvy bodies – seen as representative of those privileged urban women – in the Communist regions. The class distinctions that shaped women's personal identities bore more significant ideological meanings in the Communist regions, as the Communists claimed to represent the interests of those who had lives of hardship and toil because of their exploitation by the upper and upper-middle classes.

Since the Yan'an period, the 'curvaceous beauty' of the female body in a tight-fitting *qipao* had come to symbolise upper and upper-middle class women in the GMD region. A Beijing lawyer with the pseudonym Yafu portrayed a utopian image of the Liberated Zone (*jiefangqu* 解放區) ruled by the CCP in Shanxi and Hebei provinces after a short visit in 1946. He found that not only corrupted officials, traitors, illiterate youths, prostitutes, gamblers, beggars, adulterous women and heresies had been stamped out, but also he could hardly find anyone wearing 'bizarre dresses swaggering on the streets' (*qizhuang yifu zhaoyao guoshi zhe* 奇裝異服招搖過市者).⁸ Published in the Communist Party newspaper *People's Daily*, his article was rather self-propaganda. But still, it indicates that in the Liberated Zones, the Communist Party attempted to establish a completely different visual and vestimentary code in accordance to their political principles, expressing a preference for rural over urban women. The Ruan Lingyu style of beauty mentioned in chapter three was widely criticised by official publications. When the journalist Luoyue visited Fuyang Middle School in Hebei province, he/she noticed firstly that rural

⁸ 'Beiping minglushi zanyang jiefangqu minzhu shenghuo,' *Renmin ribao*, August 2, 1946, 1.

girls did the same physical labour as men, including cultivating wasteland, and carrying and transporting bricks. Secondly, rural women looked austere and strong. In the mind of the journalist, a working rural girl wearing a white short gown and purple flower trousers made of hand-woven cloth contrasted strikingly with the ‘modern misses’ in the GMD regions, who wore high-heeled shoes, long *qipao* and makeup. When they walked, they deliberately showed their curvaceous bodies and frail figures.⁹ However, as discussed in chapter three, the promotion of the ‘curvaceous body’ was meant to create a strong and healthy body, which was the opposite of ‘frail figures’. In combining ‘curvaceous bodies’ and ‘frail figures’, the journalist Luoyue apparently misinterpreted the construction of the ‘curvaceous body’. It is possible that this journalist assigned the two contradictory female bodies to the same category, because he/she thought that women who cultivated ‘curvaceous bodies’ and ‘frail figures’ did so in order to be sexually attractive. In contrast, the appearance of those rural women signified their spirit of not pursuing superficial and ostentatious fashions. The body became a signifier not only for class differentiation, but also for different ideologies.

This symbolic meaning becomes clearer if we examine women who lived in both GMD and Communist regions. A great number of young university students and female cadres in the Liberation Zone were born in the GMD region, flocking to Yan’an in pursuit of their dreams of communism and revolution during the late 1930s. Many of them had experiences of wearing *qipao* or other sorts of ‘bizarre’ clothes. Wei Junyi 韋君宜 (1917-2002), born in a GMD official family in Beijing and a student of the then most prestigious university in China, Tsinghua University, ran away from her ‘anti-revolutionary’ parents in 1939 to join the Communists in Yan’an. She described her first impression of Yan’an in her autobiographical novel *The Path of Lusha* (*Lusha de lu* 露沙的路) as follows:

Almost ninety percent of the people walking in the streets wore military uniforms, some with the ‘Eighth Road Army’ badge. The remaining ten percent were peasants with white towels on their heads. No one wore gowns

⁹ Luoyue, “Ji Fuyang Zhongxue zhanlanhui,” *Renmin ribao*, September 29, 1946.

or mandarin jackets, as commonly seen in other towns. No one! She saw it!
No one was unrevolutionary!¹⁰

As all the other urban girls, the first thing Lusha (the female protagonist of this novel, modeled after Wei Junyi) did after arrival was to take off her *qipao* and grab a grey military uniform, which she then found was too sloppy to look valiant and bright.¹¹ As discussed above, a *qipao* did not necessarily show a curvy figure unless it had darts, yet in the Communist region, there was no possibility to wear a *qipao* at all. The official uniforms were oversized and non-fitting jackets and trousers, which according to Wei Junyi were not designed to present women's feminine figures. Wei was certainly not the only one; Deng Yingchao, one of the most important female cadres, also carefully changed her dress in GMD and Communist regions. In the GMD region, she was dressed in a *qipao* as her work involved meeting various kinds of people, whereas in the Communist region, she wore cadres' jackets and trousers (Figure 4-2).

In 1950, shortly after the establishment of the PRC, Mao Dun, the Republican writer who had portrayed well-developed female breasts as emblems of modern women, dramatically changed his attitude towards the female body for the political purpose of opposing the American imperialist culture. Mao Dun proposed that individualism, modern art, liberal lifestyles, philistine philosophy, and especially what he saw as American pornographic/erotic (*seqing* 色情) art that paraded thighs and breasts, were all imperialist weapons.¹² In an essay written as part of a series of essays attacking American lifestyles after the breakout of the Korean War written by prominent writers such as Lao She and Ding Ling, Mao Dun pointed out that America only contributed two things to the world: one destroys the flesh, and the other destroys the spirit. He included materialism, carnalism and adventurism among the latter. Among the former, appreciation of soft breasts and beautiful thighs, forming part of the 'American lifestyle', were listed. Coca-Cola, nylon socks and

¹⁰ Wei Junyi, "Lusha de lu," in *Si tong lu • Lusha de lu* (Beijing: Wenhua Yishu Chubanshe, 1994), 207–8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 209, 211.

¹² Mao Dun, "Haixu zhunbei changqi er jianjue de douzheng, wei 'Wusi' sanshi zhounian jinian zuo," *Renmin ribao*, May 4, 1949, 5.

bullet brassieres all corroded the American youth, luring them into sensory stimuli.¹³ The purpose of distributing these things to the rest of the world was to corrode the youth in other countries.¹⁴ By juxtaposing brassieres with other corruptive products, Mao Dun certainly sensed the more conservative atmosphere in the new PRC, and changed his narratives of the female body drastically. The debates about female body and the Communist ideology will be further discussed in next two sections.

4.2 Female Body, Clothes Reform and Class System

From the 1950s to mid-1960s, Communist discourse also devoted great efforts to the discussion of people's dress. This section explores how people negotiated the female body and clothes with Communist politics in the 1950s. It traces how artists and ordinary people strove for more freedom in presenting their bodies in the 1956 reform, and how it ended up after the Anti-Rightist Campaign.

In her discussion of nationalism during the Republican period, Henrietta Harrison points out that the Republican government was enthusiastic in creating all sorts of symbols of the nation.¹⁵ Right after driving away the GMD government from mainland China, the PRC government likewise immediately faced this issue of establishing their national symbols and characteristics, which included people's appearances. What was the definition of a proletarian appearance? Could the proletariat wear suits and *qipao*? The debates around these topics presented the socialist dilemma of defining beauty.

Dirtiness was said to be in the nature of the proletariat. Among the guerrillas Sichuan province during the Civil War, militiamen and militiawomen even had a competition of who had the most lice – 'revolutionary insects' – on their bodies and clothes. Jung Chang's mother was forced to make endless self-criticisms because of her unproletarian manner – being too clean and washing every day.¹⁶ After the

¹³ Mao Dun used "*boli naizhao* 玻璃奶罩", it is most likely a transliteration of 'bullet brassiere', or it could be a translation of hour-glass brassiere.

¹⁴ Mao Dun, "Boluo 'mengmian qiangdao' de mianju," *Renmin wenxue*, no. 12 (1950): 8–10.

¹⁵ Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁶ Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), 218.

establishment of the PRC, people often thought that only untidy clothes and messy hair could represent workers and peasants. Unlike the ‘misses’, middle and upper class women who strove for tidiness and hygiene, the proletariat repulsed those things.¹⁷ This idea was challenged by party officials such as Dong Chuncai, who argued that although previously workers and peasants could not afford to make any efforts to be neat and tidy, it did not mean that they hated tidiness. Dong hoped that with the Liberation and the supposed huge economic development, ordinary workers and peasants would have the resources for being clean and hygienic.¹⁸ Unfortunately, Dong’s wish did not materialise; with the exploitation of agriculture, the majority of peasants in China remained dirt poor. As a result, they still did not have the resources to work on their appearance. Instead of changing this situation, many accepted the logic that the rich should appear similar to the poor in order to be politically progressive.

In the early 1950s, “the most common dress for housewives in Beijing was the plain cotton *qipao*, close-fitting, with a high neck and slit skirt, which was the standard costume for Chinese women.” (Figure 4-3)¹⁹ However, this changed rapidly in the first few years after 1949. *Qipao*, signifiers of the old society, waned sharply in the public sphere, replaced by jackets and trousers. Female comrades, workers, teachers and students slowly stopped wearing *qipao*. Artist and designer Yu Feng said right after Liberation, a woman in a *qipao* was regarded as despicable.²⁰ Cadres’ dress (*ganbufu* 干部服) became enormously popular regardless of one’s occupation, age and gender without official orders and national promotion.²¹ Even female peasants were proud of wearing uniforms.²² Instead of wearing her favourite pale blue gown, Jung Chang’s mother started to wear a blue ‘Lenin suit’ in 1949, “a uniform for government employees that had a double-breasted jacket tucked in at the waist and was worn over baggy trousers.”²³

¹⁷ Dong Chuncai, “Zhuyi quanmian fazhan, zengjin xuesheng jiankang,” *Renmin jiaoyu* 3, no. 4 (August 1951): 17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Mu, *Vermilion Gate*, 6.

²⁰ Yu Feng, “Jintian de funü fuzhuang wenti,” *Xinzhongguo funü*, no. 65 (March 1955): 31–32. Yu Feng (1916–2007), artist, studied oil painting with Xu Beihong. She became a left-wing journalist during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

²¹ Ding Zheng, “Tan fuzhuang de bianhua he fuzhuang gaijin wenti,” *Meishu*, no. 4 (1956): 7.

²² Yu, “Jintian de funü fuzhuang wenti.”

²³ Chang, *Wild Swans*, 177.

The popularity of cadre's dress lies in many aspects. Firstly, Yu Feng suggested after the Liberation, women all imitated revolutionary women's attire – jackets and trousers. While revolutionary women wore jackets and trousers due to the convenience during the wartime, women imitated this style after the Liberation because it became trendy. Therefore these clothes signified revolutionary women's glories, which were much admired by the majority of women.²⁴ Secondly, the costume symbolised working people standing up and pursuing their freedom, and represented the New Socialist China, ideological progress, austerity and frugality. Thirdly, the uniforms were practical and multifunctional; they could be worn as a shirt in summer and outer garment (*zhaoshan* 罩衫) for the other seasons. The dark colour also suited workers, as stains did not stand out on the dark colour, and the colour was suitable for frequent rewashes.²⁵ In addition, it not only embodied women's revolutionary spirit and revolution experiences, but also their privileges as revolutionaries.

Another and perhaps more important reason of the popularity and the pervasive acceptance of uniforms all over the country was the huge pressure of conformity and people's fear of being criticised for having bourgeois lifestyles.²⁶ From October 1954 to July 1955, a campaign of 'cultivating Communist morality among the youth, and resisting corrosion of bourgeois ideology' was carried out in schools, factories, and local Party and government organisations in 135 cities in China. Official documents pointed out that ignorance of morality education among the youth was a great loophole in the competition of winning over the country's youth from the bourgeoisie. The Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League considered it was necessary to carry out such a project, as class struggle became intensified and complicated.²⁷ Some suggested the government should supervise young people 24 hours a day instead of eight, in order

²⁴ Yu, "Jintian de funü fuzhuang wenti."

²⁵ Ding, "Tan fuzhuang de bianhua he fuzhuang gaijin wenti."

²⁶ Yu, "Jintian de funü fuzhuang wenti."

²⁷ Qingniantuan zhongyang shujichu, "Qingniantuan zhongyang shujichu guanyu kaizhan peiyang qingnian gongchan zhuyi daode, dizhi zichan jieji sixiang qinshi de gongzuo de zongjie baogao," in *Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian*, ed. Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, vol. 7 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2011), 149–158?

to prevent them from degeneration.²⁸ The Local Communist Youth League started to organise youth activities during festivals and vacations, and supervise every aspect of their lives including relationships and marriages.²⁹ Through this project, the government penetrated more into young people's personal lives.

This project aimed to assist young people to distinguish the essence of the 'old' and the 'new' moralities. However, the 'old' and 'new' was only loosely defined. In the vague and confusing definition, loving the Communist Party, loving workers and peasants, loving work, obeying discipline, loyalty and honesty, leading a simple and hard-working life were essential. In this political environment, youth were called to remain vigilant, and look upon everything through the perspective of class struggle.³⁰ Revolutionary youth should focus more on political struggles, land reform, suppressions of counter-revolutionaries, the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea (Korean War), rather than merely care about one's personal matters, such as relationships, families and income – and appearances.³¹ Although it was inappropriate to consider harmless personal habits and interests as expressions of corrupt morality, the document indicated that it was even worse to lump common moral corruption together with counter-revolutionary crimes.³² Accusations of an innocent person could be forgiven, yet failing to identify a counter-revolutionary was unpardonable. In some cases, listening to music, imitating actors, collecting stamps, making flowers and leaves into bookmarks, eating better, wearing flower-patterned blouses, having personal career ambitions... were all considered to reflect bourgeois spirits.³³ So on the one hand, theoretically, 'moral corruption' should be kept separate from political judgements. On the other hand, in many cases, the outward signs of moral corruption were interpreted as reflections of political problems. This contradiction further continued in the 1950s, presenting great uncertainty of the outcome of one's behaviours, and thus greater pressure for ordinary people to conform to the more rigid standards.

²⁸ Liu Daosheng, "Peiyang qingnian gongchan zhuyi de daode, fandui zichan jieji sixiang de fushi," *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 21 (November 1, 1954): 2.

²⁹ Qingniantuan zhongyang shujichu, "Qingniantuan zhongyang shujichu," 152.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

³¹ "Zhuyi shenghuo wenti he guanxin zhengzhi douzheng," *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 70 (July 14, 1951): 2–3.

³² Qingniantuan zhongyang shujichu, "Qingniantuan zhongyang Shujichu," 154.

³³ "Bu yao luankou zichan jieji sixiang de maozi," *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 3 (February 1, 1955): 32; Wei Junyi, "Cong huayifu de wenti tanqi," *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 5 (March 1, 1955): 21–23.

Under this political environment, dress also became sensitive and political. One's dress and appearance were tightly monitored and deviations from the norm were punished publicly and privately by one's leaders, colleagues, neighbours, families and friends. A large number of readers wrote to official periodicals, telling of their experiences of being criticised because of their clothes. In 1955, a female member of the museum staff in Shenyang wore a *qipao* to work. The director of the museum told her that it would be better not to wear a *qipao*, because as a member of the Communist Youth League, her dress would create a bad influence on the masses.³⁴ Once a female cadre in Chongqing wore a green dress with an embroidered border to work, and was criticised for not showing austerity and having a bourgeois spirit. She did not dare to wear that dress thereafter.³⁵ A school director in Liaoning warned that colourful dresses could distract students from their studies, so none of the female teachers dared to wear colourful dresses.³⁶ Another Sichuanese female worker's dresses caused her great trouble. A local blackboard newspaper publicised that she wore a red sweater and a corduroy vest. She was accused of being vulgar, pursuing superficial beauty that was internally filthy.³⁷ A reader Xiao Ling found that not only her colleagues from her department commented on her *qipao* sarcastically, saying that she could be qualified as a 'female *avant-garde*', and she looked like an old-fashioned miss instead of a revolutionary comrade. Her colleagues from other departments also paid her many visits just in order to see her in her *qipao*. To her surprise, one week later, she even received a letter from a friend who lived in another city, advising her to dress plainly and modestly. Her supervisor who had praised her for being hard-working two weeks ago started to warn her to focus on work rather than her personal life.³⁸

In addition, dressing inappropriately could obstruct one's career as well. Wang Mei, a female worker in Jiangxi, was not only criticised for her dresses in their

³⁴ Chunfeng, "Guniangmen, chuanqi nimen xiai de fuzhuang ba!," *Guangming ribao*, February 26, 1956, 2.

³⁵ Zhang Hong, "Rang xinzhongguo funü yi tian bi yi tian meili qilai," *Guangming ribao*, February 26, 1956, 2.

³⁶ Yan Wu, "Nüjiaoshi chuan huayifu neng yingxiang jiaoxue xiaoguo ma?," *Guangming ribao*, February 26, 1956, 2.

³⁷ Yu Yongnian, "Weishenme yao ba wo 'saochuqu'??," *Guangming ribao*, February 26, 1956, 2.

³⁸ Xiao Ling, "Yi jian huaqipao yinqi de fengbo," *Zhongguo fun ü*, April 1956, 18–19.

fortnightly life inspection meetings, but also rejected to become a member in the Labour Union.³⁹ A poem said that international friends also questioned why Chinese women did not wear colourful clothes. Women wore the blue jacket to hide colourful clothes, as they were afraid of being denounced to be frivolous and have bourgeois thoughts.⁴⁰

The mid 1950s went through a transition from the austere and radical first years to a quite remarkable change towards freedom of choices around 1956. The above readers' letters all criticised the tendency that presenting colourful dresses as if they would contradict with the Communist ideology, demonstrating official tolerance for a forthcoming dress reform that demanded a larger variety of dress style, especially women's. Similar as in the Soviet Union, readers' letters were published highly selectively during the Communist China, in order to foreshadow the following policies and support the official discourse.⁴¹ In 1956, artists, scholars and ordinary people made the first effort to reform the monotonous Socialist dress styles, and keep the clothes tradition from the Republican period – especially the *qipao*.

On 1 February 1956, the New Democratic Central Committee of the Communist Youth League (NDCCCYL) and the National Democratic Women's Federation (NDWF) held a symposium on the issue of dress. A consensus was reached, saying that styles and the colour of dresses at that time were too monotonous, which could not reflect people's great and happy lives. They claimed that dresses should change according to three standards: economical, practical and beautiful. The secretary of NDCCCYL then encouraged young men and women to take the lead in beautifying their dresses.⁴² Wearing colourful dresses and skirts was considered beautiful, and women were encouraged to do so. Designs of new styles of clothes were carried out immediately as planned projects. On 11 February 1956, Yu

³⁹ Wang Mei, "Wo yinwei chuanle piaoliang yifu er buneng jiaru gonghui," *Guangming ribao*, February 26, 1956, 2.

⁴⁰ Wan Shan, "Huabu de fanmen," *Xinzhongguo fun ü*, no. 68 (June 1955): 29.

⁴¹ Lynne Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women's Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922-53* (Basingstoke: Macmillan in association with Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Birmingham, 1999).

⁴² Xinhuashe, "Gaijin fuzhuang shiyang zengjia fuzhuang sec'ai: tuanzhongyang he quanguo fulian juxing fuzhuang wenti zuotanhui," *Guangming ribao*, February 1, 1956, 1.

Feng, Zhang Guangyu and twelve other artists participated in a design symposium, and decided that each artist had to design at least five styles of dresses by 20 February. Eventually, sixty out of all the designs would be exhibited in a Costume Exhibition in Beijing that March.⁴³ In the following exhibitions in Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and several other cities, *qipao*, Soviet Union style one-piece dress (*bulaji* 布拉吉), jacket and skirts were all presented (Figure 4-4). Two pieces of *qipao* in Figure 4-4 and the flower-patterned top were all quite tight fitted and showed a curvy figure. Pleats and darts were used to tailor women's waistlines (Figure 4-5, 4-6). However, these clothes were not designed for daily use, most of them were designed for special occasions during weekends, holidays and festivals.⁴⁴ The femininity of these women was not presented with sexual allure as the Republican film star Ruan Lingyu (Figure 3-30). The woman in Figure 4-7 wore a *qipao* that was exhibited in 1956. The *qipao* presented her bodily curve without tightening her chest, waist and buttocks too much. She seems like a dignified, confident woman, full of energy and expectation in the socialist society.

Although artists such as Yu Feng and Zhang Guangyu could design new styles of clothes at short notice, the full legitimisation of their designs did not come easily. In the dress reform symposium, attendants pointed out that the true obstacle of dress reform was the fact that beautiful dresses had been given the label of capitalist extravagance and decadence.⁴⁵ However, they failed to provide a concrete guide or standard to distinguish socialist dresses and capitalist dresses. In the following years, official periodicals devoted great efforts to the redefinition of socialist beauty in relation to bourgeois beauty. The discussion was often self-contradictory, and the terminology inconsistent.

Firstly, the definition of beauty was inconsistent. On the one hand, some articles believed beauty was not exclusively for the bourgeois class, but could also be appreciated by the proletariat. The basic premise of this argument was that beauty was once exclusively for the bourgeois class, and only their dresses could be

⁴³ Xinhuashe, "Meishujia jiang sheji 60 zhong xinying fuzhuang," *Renmin huabao*, February 13, 1956, 2.

⁴⁴ "Fuzhuang zhanlan," *Renmin huabao*, May 1956, 28–29.

⁴⁵ Xinhuashe, "Gaijin fuzhuang shiyang zengjia fuzhuang seci."

considered beautiful.⁴⁶ If this premise was tenable, the question is how could the proletariat enjoy bourgeois beauty without becoming bourgeois themselves? On the other hand, some affirmed proletariats also had a sense of beauty, yet that bourgeois beauty and proletarian beauty were intrinsically different. Then how to distinguish the two kinds of aesthetics became problematic. Some argued that proletarian beauty was the beauty of austerity, whereas the bourgeois aesthetics appreciated extravagance, waste and ostentation.⁴⁷ Wei Junyi argued proletarian standards of beauty were fundamentally more advanced. Bourgeois dancers dressed like prostitutes and twisted their bodies in a way that humiliated women and humankind. The beauty of the bourgeoisie was lopsided, morbid and abnormal. Their love was obscene, desperate and dispirited. All of these should be criticised, whereas the Communist aesthetics and love were positive and progressive.⁴⁸ The two kinds of aesthetics were too confusing for people to distinguish, which led to a question: what kinds of clothes were bourgeois? Was it right to label skirts, flower-patterned clothes and *qipao* as bourgeois?

Some denied the classification of clothes; for example, Yu Feng opposed ascribing class attributes to clothes. It was misguided to believe that blue and grey were proletarian, whereas other colours and patterns were bourgeois.⁴⁹ However, Yu Feng's views were not accepted by other authors, who attempted to find clothes in accordance with socialist aesthetics. One author said skirts met the standards of this 'beauty of austerity', therefore should not be opposed.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, others could also argue that skirts did not qualify for 'austerity', as they were ostentatious. In fact, since the early PRC, the term 'beauty' itself was also deemed bourgeois. In Yang Mo's novel *Song of the Youth* (*Qingchun zhige* 青春之歌), the female protagonist Lin Daojing was walking one night, escaping from Guomindang's chase, she felt the night in the countryside was unbelievably beautiful. Yet suddenly she suppressed this thought, as the appreciation of beauty of nature was 'bourgeois'. She questioned herself: "when could you be as healthy as workers and farmers, rather than being

⁴⁶ Ma Tieding, "Funü yingdang chuan qunzi," *Guangming ribao*, March 6, 1955, 2; "Meihua fuzhuang," *Guangming ribao*, March 20, 1956, 1; "Fuzhuang zhanlan."

⁴⁷ Ma, "Funü yingdang chuan qunzi."

⁴⁸ Wei, "Cong huayifu de wenti tanqi."

⁴⁹ Yu, "Jintian de funü fuzhuang wenti."

⁵⁰ Ma, "Funü yingdang chuan qunzi."

romantic as a poet?”⁵¹ Yu Feng, as well as others who participated in the 1956 debate did not actually challenge the idea that that a romantic sense of beauty was considered somewhat ‘sick’. Therefore they could only come up with abstract and obscure definitions of bourgeois and proletarian aesthetics, which were very difficult and ambiguous to apply to particular clothes.

Secondly, whether it was acceptable for people to seek better clothing was hotly debated. Some believed the proletariat’s wishes for better lives should not be equated to the greed and extravagance of the bourgeoisie. With the prosperous economic development of the PRC, people wished to enhance their living standard including their dress styles.⁵² Beautiful clothes became affordable for the ‘proletariat’.⁵³ Therefore if people dressed in colourful dresses and *qipao* that did not necessarily reflect their ‘bourgeois’ spirit.⁵⁴ However, one could easily refute this point by saying that the socialist economy had not been fully developed yet, even if someone who had more financial resources should not seek too much pleasure for themselves. Instead, they should lead hard-working and simple lives and deposit their money in banks in support of the national construction.⁵⁵

Thirdly, the correlation between one’s appearance and one’s class-consciousness was not challenged fundamentally. Some articles attempted to draw a rational line between the variations of personality and a bourgeoisie spirit, suggesting it was reasonable to dress better, and that this should not be regarded as counter-revolutionary.⁵⁶ However, most of the articles did not fully deny the possibility of judging people by appearances. For example, Yu Feng still thought that one could pursue a bourgeois lifestyle by seeking to be good-looking.⁵⁷

Last but not least, they failed to propose valid strategies for those who faced others’ critiques in their daily life. Yu Feng claimed that if one worked hard, strived

⁵¹ Yang Mo, *Qingchun zhi ge* (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1960), 348.

⁵² Ma, “Funü yingdang chuan qunzi”; “Meihua fuzhuang”; “Fuzhuang zhanlan”; Xiao, “Yi jian huaqipao yinqi de fengbo.”

⁵³ Xu Youying and Wang Wenyue, “Chuan huayifu shi bu shi zichan jieji sixiang,” *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 22 (November 16, 1954): 32.

⁵⁴ Ma, “Funü yingdang chuan qunzi”; “Meihua fuzhuang”; “Fuzhuang zhanlan.”

⁵⁵ Xu and Wang, “Chuan huayifu shi bu shi zichan jieji sixiang.”

⁵⁶ “Bu yao luankou zichan jieji sixiang de mao zi.”

⁵⁷ Yu, “Jintian de funü fuzhuang wenti.”

for political progress, he/she should not worry about others' critiques of their clothes.⁵⁸ Another author encouraged women to ignore others' critiques and dress beautifully as they wish.⁵⁹ Wei Junyi suggested people should calculate what material was affordable and reasonable under economic circumstances at that time. As long as it was affordable on average, wearing colourful clothes should not be criticised for 'being bourgeois'.⁶⁰ None of the authors had the courage to challenge the rigorous monitoring and punishment for one's dress. It would be unreasonable to expect them to do so, as the supervision was considered to be one of the advantages of socialist society – the Party and country took care of every aspect of one's life to forestall one's depravity. But in any case, as long as the authorities still had the right to interfere in one's personal dress preferences, all of the above methods would be ineffective. Perhaps one could ignore others' critiques, but with the price of having one's career wrecked by one's appearance, or being labelled as bourgeoisie. Therefore although new styles of dresses were available, people's choices of dress decreased due to the omnipresent judgments by one's peers, supervisors and colleagues.

The *qipao* continued to be a contentious garment. People speaking in its favour justified it for two reasons. Firstly, *qipao* was a traditional Chinese garment, revealing the beauty of traditional Chinese women. Secondly, *qipao* was more cloth saving. The cloth for making one women's suit would be enough to tailor two *qipao*, and the cloth for the *qipao* was much cheaper than that for the suit.⁶¹ However, it also had several serious drawbacks. One major problem of the *qipao* was its close fitting. In contrast to previous decades, socialist aesthetics did not appreciate the curvy bodylines of women.⁶² Even the dress reformer Yu Feng considered that tight dresses were not conceived as beautiful, and had a negative impact on socialist female youth.⁶³ In addition, as the *qipao* was worn mostly by urban girls in the previous era, it was not 'revolutionary' enough for the new period. Furthermore, the *qipao* did not meet the demand of socialist workers, whose costumes should be

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Wan, "Huabu de fanmen."

⁶⁰ Wei, "Cong huayifu de wenti tanqi."

⁶¹ Xiao, "Yi jian huaqipao yinqi de fengbo."

⁶² Jizhe, "Qunzhong duiyu gaijin fuzhuang de yijian," *Meishu*, no. 4 (1956): 10–11.

⁶³ Yu Feng, "Fayang fuzhuang de minzu fengge," *Meishu*, no. 4 (1956): 12.

designed for the convenience of labour.⁶⁴ Up until the early 1960s, *qipao* could still be seen in periodicals. Yet it could hardly be seen in the streets any longer.⁶⁵ Articles in *Renmin ribao* said that the *qipao* was ‘out of fashion’, and new Western forms of suits and dresses were *à la mode*. A ‘garment hospital’ opened in Shanghai that aimed to alter old-fashioned clothes into the new styles.⁶⁶ A sartorial guide for altering old clothes into new ones offered a wide range of methods that could change a *qipao* into blouses, skirts, girls’ dresses, and even men’s shorts (Figure 4-8). Assuming that men would not wear bright colours or flower-patterned shorts, we could infer the shorts were altered from a dark colour plain *qipao*. It means regardless of cloth colour, the style of *qipao* ceased to be popular.

Since the beginning of 1957, periodical discourse turned to criticise the trend of wearing fashionable dresses, which has to be examined under the context of the political campaign happened that year. A local factory secretary of the Youth League Committee complained that she could not bear the sight of a worker named Li Ying any longer as she paid excessive attention to her appearance, although she did not have any shortcomings in her work. She bought too many clothes despite the fact that her clothes were enough for her to wear for years. The secretary believed Li Ying was influenced by the periodical promotion of flower-patterned clothes, which also caused a similar phenomenon all over the country.⁶⁷ The cloth reform was called to an end in 1957 due to various reasons, such as Anti-Rightists campaign. Antonia Finnane suggests the decline of wearing colourful dresses was partly because of the economic decline in China since 1957.⁶⁸ The government urged the people to ‘practise strict economising, and build the country with diligence and thrift’ (*lixing jieyue, qinjian jianguo* 厲行節約，勤儉建國).⁶⁹

It was true that the foremost concern for costume design in the early Communist period was to utilise the limited cloth resources most efficiently, and beauty was left as a secondary concern. Institutes of design spent great efforts in

⁶⁴ Qiu Di, “Tantan fuzhuang de shiyang,” *Meishu*, no. 4 (1956): 14.

⁶⁵ Interview with Li Jinying.

⁶⁶ Ye Shitao, “Fuzhuang yiyuan,” *Renmin ribao*, October 13, 1958, 2.

⁶⁷ Suyi, “Zhezhong fengqi shi zhengchang de ma?,” *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 2 (January 16, 1957): last page.

⁶⁸ Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China*, 220-21.

⁶⁹ Yang Xinmin, “Yitiao kuzi,” *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 13 (July 1, 1957): 39-40.

economising the usage of cloth, developing new methods that could save 0.5 or even just 0.1 chi of material (Figure 4-9). Some aimed to achieve one hundred percent utilisation of material, or at least ninety-nine percent.⁷⁰ However, the economic crisis did not explain the decline of the *qipao* and other patterned clothes, because in terms of its use of material, the *qipao* was economic – especially needed during the years of economic hardship.⁷¹ Plus, flower-patterned clothes might be cheaper than plain ones, so they did not contradict frugality.⁷² I would argue the reason for the decline of the *qipao* and patterned clothes was not the economic crisis, but was their symbolic meanings. In the Communist period, no matter if cheap or expensive, *qipao* and patterned cloth did not symbolise frugality or austerity, which was only embodied by plain cloth and baggy Communist clothes.

Zhang Chi argues that the reform might well have ended without the economic reasons, because the pursuit of personal aesthetics contradicted with national aesthetics, and the reform styles of clothes continued to symbolise luxury and counter revolutionary ideas.⁷³ I would argue that the underlying problem was that ‘proletarian beauty’ and ‘bourgeois beauty’ were intrinsically undefinable, as beauty was a subjective judgment contingent on not only the political culture, but also one’s personal experiences and preferences. Intellectuals and readers all conducted a mission impossible: to proletarianise clothing that was previously only affordable by people from well-to-do families. It was also a self-contradictory mission. The classification of proletarian beauty and bourgeois beauty required a clear, stable and practical distinction between the two, assuming there was an eternal and universal standard, whereas the dress reformers aimed to transcend these gaps. The Communist official periodicals made great efforts in defining the official Communist beauty, and only found that effort void. The standards they used for Communist aesthetics – austerity, frugality and beauty – were all intangible and subject to interpretation. Eventually, the discussion became a game of words. Practically for ordinary people, the most straightforward way to avoid being criticised was to refrain from potentially bourgeois garments such as *qipao* and

⁷⁰ Hai Shan, “Tantan jieyue mianbu de fangfa,” *Fuzhuang yanjiu*, no. 3 (August 1960): last page.

⁷¹ “Mantan qipao,” *Fuzhuang yanjiu*, no. 4 (1960): 2–3.

⁷² Xu and Wang, “Chuan huayifu shi bu shi zichan jieji sixiang.”

⁷³ Zhang Chi, “‘Chazi yanhong’ de huiguang fanzhao: ‘meihua fuzhuang’ yundong (1955-1957) chutan,” in *Hunyin jiating xingbie Yanjiu*, 3, ed. Liang Jinghe (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2013), 67–74.

patterned clothes. Therefore the discussions of the classification itself would eventually lead to the end of the clothes reform, which also carried a foreshadowing of what was to follow later in the 1960s.

The following almost prophetic essay was published in 1956, narrating a conversation between two teachers regarding the clothes reform.

Teacher B: Teachers should not wear too colourful, bright or distracting clothes.

Teacher A: Could you give some examples of this kind of clothes?

Teacher B: As I'm not a designer, I don't know exactly. However, psychologically, bright colours such as red and green should not be worn, as they could excite the students; decorations including birds, beasts, worms, fish, figures, flowers, grasses and all sorts of patterns should be avoided; the shape of the clothes should not be peculiar; the style of clothes should not be too varied.

Teacher A: According to these standards, only the grey uniform is ideal.⁷⁴

Advocating for curvy bodies might also be politically dangerous. In the Anti-Rightist campaign, Zhong Dianfei (鐘惦棐), a film critic, was harshly criticised for his shooting of exposed female bodies. He was reported to have insisted on an actress wearing a bikini rather than a long-sleeved jacket and trousers, and criticised a talented young actress for not having a curvaceous body (*tixing bugou quxian* 體形不夠曲線). All these comments were regarded as 'shameless'.⁷⁵ The consequences were harsh. Fifteen struggle meetings were held against Zhong Dianfei in the Ministry of Culture Auditorium from 4 August to 27 September 1957. His family was ejected from their official flat to a crowded shabby house, shared with many other families. Subsequently, Zhong Dianfei was sent to a farm in Hebei province to clean toilets, and later in 1971 he was transferred to a farm in Tianjin continuing the same kind of job.⁷⁶ Whether Zhong Dianfei had actually said those things is not

⁷⁴ Zhang Yin, "Jiaoshi yu fuzhuang," *Guangming ribao*, March 20, 1956, 3.

⁷⁵ "Fandang luogu qiaopole haixiang juantu chonglai: Zhong Dianfei fandang huodong you gaocuo," *Renmin ribao*, August 16, 1957.

⁷⁶ Luo Xuepeng, "Zhong Dianfei yu dianying de luogu," *Bainianchao*, no. 5 (2008): 58.

known, and it was possible that he was framed because one of his earlier articles had challenged and agitated the authorities on propagandist films.⁷⁷ According to Yu Feng, Zhong Dianfei was labelled as a Rightist because he gave Jiang Qing many suggestions when they were on their fieldwork to investigate the film *Wu Xun Zhuan* 武訓傳, which was considered as challenging Jiang Qing's authority.⁷⁸ However, it was certain from the report that ideas of dressing up in bikinis, or deliberately showing a curvaceous body, were linked to the bourgeoisie spirit that did not represent workers, peasants and soldiers.

These criticisms of the 'curvaceous beauty' were also used as rhetorical tools in China's unstable diplomatic relations with other countries. In March 1957, one article in *Renmin Ribao* cited Khrushchev: "We will not imitate Paris fashion because our big cotton-padded jackets cover our curved beauty." The article eulogised him and promoted study from his socialist ideology.⁷⁹ On the other hand, in January 1959, one article denounced a popular sport, hula-hoop, in Yugoslavia, claiming that hula-hoop dancing was a tool for promulgating eroticism in Capitalist countries. The fact that people wearing swimming suits swinging their bodies ultimately disgusted the author, who also criticised Yugoslavia media for propagating hula-hoop as it could build women's curvaceous body.⁸⁰

In the early 1950s, the revolutionary suits became fashionable in urban area, which also became the most political correct way to dress. Artists, literati and ordinary people all expressed their wishes for greater diversity of ways to dress up and to present their bodies, however, the idea that one's appearances reflected one's revolutionary attitudes remained unchallenged. The previous fashionable *qipao* and curvaceous bodily shape became the targets of criticism. Especially after the Anti-Rightist campaign, curvaceous bodily shape became rather politically incorrect.

4.3 Regulating the Body Through Dress

⁷⁷ Zhong Dianfei, "Dianying de luogu," *Wenyibao*, December 15, 1956. Reprinted in *Wenhuibao*, December 12, 1956.

⁷⁸ Yu Feng, *Shijian de qiopian* (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu, 1994), 113–14.

⁷⁹ "Yangcheng qinjian banshi de shehui fengqi, xiang puzhang langfei de xingwei zuo douzheng: Du Zhonghe de fayan," *Renmin ribao*, March 23, 1957.

⁸⁰ Xinhuashe, "Yi chuanbo 'meiguo shenghuo fangshi' wei jiren: nan baokan dali xuanyang hulaquanwu," *Renmin ribao*, January 7, 1959.

Under the context of dress reform, the above-mentioned conversation between teacher A and B was sarcastic about the conservative opinions about the Communist dress code. However, this sarcasm gradually turned into bitter reality towards the mid-1960s. This section examines how the body and clothes were debated in the mid 1960s, shortly before the Cultural Revolution. I would argue that by disciplining people's dress, the state continued to pay close attention to the control of the correct way for men and women to deal with their bodies in the 1960s. Different from the 1956 dress reform, which was led by elites, the debate of 'peculiar dresses' (*qizhuang yifu* 奇裝異服) in 1964 encouraged people from all walks of life and all over the country to participate. In other words, the issue of body and dress became politically relevant to every single one in the society.

In 1964, resistance to 'peculiar dresses' was discussed intensively in major periodicals in China. The discussion was triggered by Gaomei Costume Shop in Shanghai that rejected a female customer's order of a pair of trousers tight in the buttock region and with narrow legs. The shop assistant considered the woman's demand 'bizarre'. The customer asked: "How could narrow trousers represent a bourgeois spirit? How could it change good social custom? Do I become a hooligan because of wearing narrow trousers?" In response, the shop staff insisted that the trousers that the customer required were too tight to be beautiful. One shop assistant wrote a letter to *Jiefang ribao* in Shanghai on this matter, which was later published in the newspaper.⁸¹ The editor praised staff in Gaomei for their sense of responsibility to the country and people. Greatly different from the clothes reform discourse during 1955-1957, editors of *Jiefang ribao* commented firmly that the style of clothes was by no means a small matter; instead, it was a major issue relating to resisting the bourgeois spirit and lifestyles. It was believed that one's choice of preferable clothes must have a limitation, and therefore a broader discussion among readers was stimulated on the topic of 'how to draw the lines [between beautiful and peculiar clothes]? (*jiexian yinggai zenyang hua* 界線應該怎樣劃)'.⁸²

⁸¹ Gu Zhihui, "Gaomei fuzhuangdian zhigong yongyu baohu shehui haofengqi: jianjue jujue caizhi qizhuang yifu," *Jiefang ribao*, June 7, 1964, 2.

⁸² "Yinggai zenyang duidai zhege wenti?," *Jiefang ribao*, June 7, 1964, 2.

Although most people deemed narrow-legged trousers ugly, the author of one article called them ‘innovative things’ (*xinsheng shiwu* 新生事物).⁸³ He/she criticised peculiar dresses as the product of the decadent capitalist culture of the beat generation (*kuadiao de yidai* 垮掉的一代). Thus the reasons why tight trousers became popular and fashionable should be examined under the domestic and global contexts. Globally, tight trousers were at the time fashionable in the West, as well as in Hong Kong. Sun Peidong’s research on fashion in Guangdong during 1966 and 1976 revealed that people in Guangdong had more channels and resources to gain access to Hong Kong fashion. It is possible that the global fashion of tight trousers reached mainland China through limited connections with Hong Kong. Domestically, from 1961 to 1965, with rapid economic development, more skilled industrial workers in urban areas forged a distinctive social group that undermined the solidarity of the working class identity. Instead of pursuing increasing production, the urban masses tended to focus more on the increase of their income in order to enjoy new material pleasures. It seems that a ‘bourgeois spirit’ could be found frequently among the masses. Jia Honghai said he heard someone talking in a park: “Working is too hard, being a cadre is too troublesome, better be Li Taibai who travelled around various scenic spots!” Jia Honghai was so angry about this thought, as working for the new society should be the happiest work to do. Tang Yiming suggested young workers were very picky with their jobs, only wishing to do the technical work with more money.⁸⁴ People benefited from the economic development, with social and medical privileges were referred by Zhou Enlai as the ‘new bourgeois elements’, and even ‘new exploiters’.⁸⁵ In rural areas, “traditional religious festivals, money marriages, superstitious cults, extravagant spending on holidays, and gambling, as well as a sharp decline in the ideological zeal of rural cadres” had all been revived.⁸⁶ To counter that trend, in late 1962, Mao stepped out and launched the ‘Socialist Education Movement’ which lasted until 1965. Issues of dress should be examined within this context of the ideological campaign against the re-emerging ‘bourgeois’ lifestyle.

⁸³ Xin Cun, “Shi meili, hai shi chou?” *Jiefang ribao*, September 13, 1964, 2.

⁸⁴ Jia Honghai et al., “Dui dajiatan de jianyi,” *Jiefang ribao*, October 11, 1964, 5.

⁸⁵ Maurice Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*, 3rd ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1999, first edition published in 1977), 266.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

After launching the debate on ‘how to draw the lines’, *Jiefang ribao* claimed to have received more than 1,690 responses.⁸⁷ Readers from all walks of life had written letters to *Jiefang ribao*, including government cadres, Party members, university students, teachers, costume shop assistants, tailors, workers etc. Other important official newspapers also joined in this discussion, including *Renmin ribao* and Guangzhou’s *Yangcheng wanbao*. Many local Party branches launched discussions within their work unit, encouraging the youth to debate this issue, in order to enable them to distinguish between truth and falsehood, and eventually enhance their revolutionary understanding.⁸⁸ Debates on ‘peculiar costumes’ soon spread across the country.

Although some readers considered it was wrong to judge a person by what he/she wore, newspaper editors obviously favoured the opposite point of view, arguing that standards of beauty and dress were intrinsically classified. Different views of beauty were actually determined by one’s social class and lifestyle, and one’s dress preferences could reflect his/her mentality.⁸⁹ By the same token, fashionable dresses in a society were a mirror of a particular social atmosphere. The ‘peculiar clothes’ were the products of rotten capitalism, which fitted the hollow demands and decadent lifestyles of the exploiting class and hoodlums. Tight trousers were worn in American films, and were obscene and devastating to the youth.⁹⁰ In the US, the author claimed, topless female swimmers exposed their breasts in public.⁹¹ Peculiar dresses, just like morphine and opium, matched the debauched lives of the exploiting class and their decadent and empty psyche.⁹² Accepting Western fashionable dresses was believed to be part of the American Peaceful

⁸⁷ “Jianjue dizhi zichan jieji sixiang he shenghuo fangshi de qinshi: dajiatan duzhe zuotan cong cizhuang yifu yinqi de yilun,” *Jiefang ribao*, October 11, 1964, 5.

⁸⁸ Xinhuashe shanghai, “Shanghai guangda renmin jiji canjia dizhi qizhuang yifu de taolun: fayang wuchan jieji youliang chuantong fandui zichan jieji zuofeng,” *Renmin ribao*, November 14, 1964.

⁸⁹ Wang Linghan, “Yizhuo he sixiang de guanxi,” *Jiefang ribao*, September 18, 1964, 3; Chen Youqing, “Biao yu li,” *Jiefang ribao*, September 18, 1964, 3; Xinhuashe shanghai, “Shanghai guangda renmin jiji canjia dizhi qizhuang yifu de taolun.”

⁹⁰ Xinhuashe shanghai, “Shanghai guangda renmin jiji canjia dizhi qizhuang yifu de taolun.”

⁹¹ Guangzhou fuzhuang jishu xuexizu, “Fuzhuang de duoyang yu guaiyang,” *Yangcheng wanbao*, November 18, 1964, 3.

⁹² Cui Hong, “‘Shimao’ yu ‘guban’: zaiyi ‘dizhi qizhuang yifu’ de yiyi,” *Yangcheng wanbao*, December 6, 1964, 3.

Evolution Strategy and cultural invasion.⁹³ Peculiar dresses, alongside other trifles, were weapons of the capitalists in the war of scrambling the youth.⁹⁴ Some felt that only a small group of people dressed peculiarly, which was harmless to the society at large. However, others pointed out that this was not the correct attitude. The fondness for peculiar dresses should be eliminated at once if any hints appeared, otherwise it could infect more people like germs.⁹⁵ Therefore people should always be alert to the continuous attacks of a bourgeois lifestyle, otherwise they would get used to peculiar or ‘modern’ (*modeng* 摩登) appearances and fail in the battle with the bourgeoisie.⁹⁶ Different from the 1956 dress reform, the editors of these newspapers clearly favoured essays criticising on ‘peculiar dresses’, instead of attempting to expand the sartorial choices of ordinary people.

One socialist cadre wrote to the Gaomei Costume Shop manager saying that he read the news report of Gaomei five times, and he would study the spirit of changing prevailing habits and customs of the Gaomei Costume Shop.⁹⁷ The fact that even a socialist cadre needed to study the case of Gaomei shows that actually traditions were very difficult to change. One worker admitted that his sense of class struggle had flagged during the past few years. He even suggested that “peculiar dresses would not be peculiar if everyone got used to them”. Then through “recalling the sorrows of the past and savouring the joys of the present” (*yi ku si tian* 憶苦思甜), he realised that deep in his thoughts he suffered from the malignant tumour of the bourgeois spirit.⁹⁸ Another worker Lu Yongcheng, author of *Do Clothes Have Class Character?* was also re-educated by his colleagues and the Party. Older workers recalled the clothes of workers prior to the Liberation, which made Lu Yongcheng realise that clothes had class character.⁹⁹

⁹³ Cheng Jidong and Gu Zhihui, “Qizhuang yifu shi zenme huishi,” *Jiefang ribao*, August 5, 1964, 2; Zhou Zijin, “Zhe bushi ‘xinshiyang’!,” *Jiefang ribao*, August 5, 1964, 2; Cui Hong, “Shuo chuanyi de ‘ziyou’: San yi ‘dizhi qizhuang yifu’ zhong de yiyi,” *Yangcheng wanbao*, December 7, 1964, 3.

⁹⁴ Wang, “Yizhuo he sixiang de guanxi.”

⁹⁵ Cui Hong, “Du ‘shaoshao wuhai lun’,” *Yangcheng wanbao*, December 3, 1964, 3.

⁹⁶ Beixiu lifating, “Cong jianguai buguai dao yiguai weimei, shuoming le shenme wenti?,” *Yangcheng wanbao*, November 22, 1964, 3.

⁹⁷ Cai Huikang, “Shi juda guwu, yao genghao nuli,” *Jiefang ribao*, October 11, 1964, 5.

⁹⁸ Shu Zhen, “Shi wo de ganqing qile bianhua,” *Jiefang ribao*, October 11, 1964, 5.

⁹⁹ Lu Yongcheng, “Gei wo shangle yi tang jieji jiaoyu ke,” *Jiefang ribao*, October 11, 1964, 5.

However, what kind of clothes were harmful to the society was subject to individual interpretation. Some readers said wearing narrow trousers and pointed shoes was a personal preference, as these kinds of clothes could be considered beautiful by some,¹⁰⁰ whereas others felt they were ugly and peculiar.¹⁰¹ Some believed that one's appearance should not be linked to one's class origin,¹⁰² whereas others might judge this issue from a completely opposite angle, suggesting different classes had different needs. 'Proletarians' pursued healthy, beautiful and practical clothes, while the bourgeoisie preferred peculiar and weird ones. Therefore different styles of clothes actually implied class differences and class struggles.¹⁰³ In one word, the differences between 'beautiful' and 'peculiar' could never be defined clearly, as they were dependent on subjective judgments. In order to be politically correct, one could only avoid those that might have a slight possibility to be 'peculiar'.

Readers' letters also suggested that socialist commerce (*shangye* 商業), in contradistinction to capitalist commerce, did not merely involve money-goods relationship. Many argued that socialist shops should follow a central principle – not making goods that harmed positive social customs (*shehui fengshang* 社會風尚),¹⁰⁴ which actually implied to accuse the selling tight trousers as an immoral behaviour. Capitalist costume shops designed all sorts of peculiar dresses, meeting the needs of the exploiting class's decayed lives for the purpose of maximum profits. Capitalist shop owners were all too greedy to reject the unreasonable orders of the customers, and one could buy anything with money, whereas socialist shops took responsibility for their customers, the society and socialism. To their understanding, selling products was part of the socialist revolution, which did not only aim for profits. The shop assistants had the responsibility to direct the expenses and lifestyles of their customers, as well as to advocate for the new socialist conventions. Not selling peculiar dresses protected customers' mental health from being corrupted by the

¹⁰⁰ Lu Yongcheng, "Chuanyifu ye you jiejixing ma?," *Jiefang ribao*, June 12, 1964, 2.

¹⁰¹ Zhou Ruijin, "Guangda qunzhong reqing zhichi gaomei zhigong: zanyang tamen weihu shehui haofengqi," *Jiefang ribao*, June 12, 1964, 2.

¹⁰² Lu, "Chuanyifu ye you jiejixing ma."

¹⁰³ Chen Sushi, "Manzu shenmeyang de xuyao?," *Jiefang ribao*, June 12, 1964, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Hu Yumin, "'Siban' he linghuo," *Jiefang ribao*, June 7, 1964, 2; Liu Chaojun, "Liang jian 'fenneishi'," *Jiefang ribao*, June 7, 1964, 2.

bourgeois spirit.¹⁰⁵ Later in July, *Jiefang ribao* published a leading editorial on the front page of the newspaper that confirmed the ideas that socialist commerce was highly political, stating “staff and workers in commercial organisations should be activists of reforming prevailing habits and customs”.¹⁰⁶ An advanced socialist commercial economy was therefore constructed by periodicals, as it did not put profit as its foremost consideration; on the contrary, it had a higher spiritual and political goal – socialist revolution. In addition, customers should also be grateful to the socialist shop assistants who not only sold them products, but also cared about their spiritual health. Reports also claimed that Gaomei’s daily turnover rose by fifty percent compared to the previous Sunday, and showed a thirty-four percent increase in monthly turnover, because their firm stood by the socialist values and attracted a large number of customers.¹⁰⁷ Later in the year, tailors in Guangzhou also vowed not to make peculiar dresses, and to persuade customers not to wear them.¹⁰⁸

Readers’ letters to *Jiefang ribao* conclude that although there was a variety in range of peculiar dresses, the essence of them was the peculiar shapes that provoked sensuality. Peculiar dresses were ‘décolleté, tight-wrapping, close-fitting and narrow-cut’, products of capitalism.¹⁰⁹ *Yangcheng wanbao* defined the features of peculiar dresses as threefold: firstly, they were flirtatious, designed to stimulate others’ sexual desire; secondly, they were harmful to health; thirdly, they were imitations of Western fashion, which was fundamentally opposed to the austere and hard-working socialist styles.¹¹⁰ Low neckline dresses and tight top garments that deliberately narrowed the waistline and highlighted the breasts fitted into this category of ‘peculiar dress’. Women who wore these kinds of clothes had been degenerated by capitalist thoughts, idling all day seducing the capitalists.¹¹¹ By defining tight garments as ‘peculiar dress’, this set of rules of dressing up actually

¹⁰⁵ Cao Nanxiong, “Bu jinjin shi zuo maimai,” *Jiefang ribao*, June 20, 1964, 4; Wang Jinyuan, “‘Fuqian’ ‘jiaohuo’ zhijian,” *Jiefang ribao*, June 20, 1964, 4. Wang Jinyuan (1947-), a student in Journalism in Fudan University at that time.

¹⁰⁶ “Shangye zhigong yao zuo yifeng yisu de jiji fenzi,” *Jiefang ribao*, July 13, 1964, 1.

¹⁰⁷ Zhou, “Guangda qunzhong reqing zhichi gaomei zhigong”; “Jiji manzu guangda guke de zhengdang aihao he xuyao: ‘gaomei’ you sheji chu sanshi zhong fuzhuang xinshiyang,” *Jiefang ribao*, July 16, 1964, 2.

¹⁰⁸ Guangzhou fuzhuang jishu xuexizu, “Fuzhuang de duoyang yu guaiyang.”

¹⁰⁹ Cheng and Gu, “Qizhuang yifu shi zenme huishi.”

¹¹⁰ Guangzhou fuzhuang jishu xuexizu, “Fuzhuang de duoyang yu guaiyang.”

¹¹¹ Guanqun fuzhuangshe jishuzu, “Xinshhui de fuzhuangshi, jianjue bu zuo qizhuang yifu!” *Yangcheng wanbao*, November 20, 1964, 3.

fulfilled the function to regulate how women should present their bodies. The idea that big and visible breasts were eyesores showed continuity from pre-modern and Republican sexual morality.

So in the early 1960s, close-fitting dresses, including the *qipao* that was very trendy during the Republican era, were under accusation again after the short reform in 1956.¹¹² As an *avant-garde* in the tailoring industry in Shanghai during the Republican era, Hongxiang Costume Company had gained substantial profits mainly due to its innovative technique – adopting darts in *qipao* in order to produce a close-fitting costume that presented a curvy body, as mentioned in chapter three. One tailor Gong Yingwu, who had worked at Hongxiang for twenty-eight years, also joined the discussion about ‘peculiar dresses’. Written in a Communist style, Gong described his experience in the ‘old’ society in great agony, portraying himself as a victim of capitalism. Making peculiar dresses with narrow waists and exposed shoulders, Gong felt mentally disturbed because he could not reject their requirements at the risk of losing his job. Recalling the fashion show held by Hongxiang, he described how all of the models dressed like demons (*yaoxing guaizhuang* 妖形怪状) to attract compradors, bureaucrats and capitalists.¹¹³ In other words, Gong – thoroughly transformed to fit into the new regime – would certainly reject orders of narrow waistline costumes under the socialist society where money could not buy everything.

Photographers also wrote to newspapers, speaking out against the philistine photography that had a bad influence on the social atmosphere. One local Party secretary of the photography industry in Xuhui district in Shanghai suggested that in the old society, their customers were exclusively debutantes, courtesans and playboys, whereas in the new society, most of their customers were the working people, requiring upright and healthy photographs. However, a small number of customers still appreciated the aesthetics of the old society, and brought photographs of movie stars of capitalist countries, requiring the photo studio to take photos showing similar, peculiar postures. On one occasion, this secretary went to a local photo studio, and found a photograph of a woman who highlighted her breasts in

¹¹² Cheng and Gu, “Qizhuang yifu shi zen me huisi.”

¹¹³ Gong Yingwu, “‘Shougong’ yinggai wei shui fuwu, qizhong kule wo zizhi,” *Jiefang ribao*, June 25, 1964, 2.

“unhealthy” (*bu jiankang* 不健康) ways. He felt both sad and alerted by this photograph. Afterwards, he organised a symposium with all of the photographers in that district. Photographers were reported to regret their previous works, explaining that they had not realised that the camera was a tool of transforming social customs. Some photographers who had worked in the Republican era confessed that they could not distinguish between socialist and capitalist aesthetics. The new standards for photography should be ‘upright’ and ‘beautiful’. Similar to tailors, photographers also bore responsibility for social customs, and should direct their customers’ requirements of photos. After the symposium, all the studios replaced pictures of women with jewellery, heavy makeup and colourful dresses with model workers and advanced individuals in their display windows.¹¹⁴ The question is: how was it possible at all that in the year 1964 pictures of women with jewellery could be displayed in photographic studios?

Overall, these descriptions suggest that the core feature of ‘peculiar clothes’ was tightness or exposedness, which meant that they showed the contours of the human body. For men and women, tight trousers were not permitted, and for women specifically, tight tops or clothes with too much exposure were also forbidden. The standards of clothes were highly gendered in order to create an asexual body. Therefore through informal discussions of the clothes, official discourse actually regulated all the gendered bodies and controlled the ways women presented their bodies.

The fact that tight clothes were predominately worn by women from exploiting classes in the ‘old’ society was also a marker of its sin. Gong Yingwu, the above-mentioned tailor, was so proud that around forty to fifty thousands ‘proletarian sisters’ had worn their products, whereas in the ‘old’ society they only served the rich.¹¹⁵ Gong proposed new standards of clothes for his ‘proletarian sisters’, which should allow “arms to reach highly and bodies to squat down freely”.¹¹⁶ These were the requirements of female workers who needed loose clothes

¹¹⁴ Ji Yangshun, “Yao jiaoyu zhigong bazhu ‘guankou’,” *Jiefang ribao*, July 16, 1964, 2.

¹¹⁵ Gong, “‘Shougong’ yinggai wei shui fuwu.”

¹¹⁶ “*Shou neng qing de gao, shenti dun de xia* 手能擎得高，身體蹲得下”

comfortable for physical labour.¹¹⁷ Clearly, the *qipao* that limited the walking pace for women did not comply with this standard of free movement, which only represented the aesthetics and interests of the exploiting class women. In her research into Sun Yat-sen suits, Verity Wilson argues that despite Western influence and the Soviet Union's sanction, it was worn by Mao and widely accepted in China because of its resemblance to the unisex jackets and trousers worn by Chinese peasants. Likewise, I would argue that the reason uniforms became an acceptable costume for women in Communist China was partly due to its parallel with peasant women's loose tops and trousers. Ideologically, it was in line with the proletarian policy, and practically, it was suitable for both domestic work and heavy labour, and, most importantly, it was the only politically safe attire. This sartorial standard both defined and limited women as social constructors without any clothing demands outside of work. Their bodies should only be presented in relation to work. The clothes reform discourse in the mid-1950s, legitimised people wearing their favourite clothes other than uniforms during weekends, holidays and festivals. However, the 'anti-peculiar-dress' discourse in 1964 eliminated these possibilities. The possibility of clothes other than work uniforms, or possibility of presenting their body in a slightly sexual way were denied for women from all walks of life, no matter if she was a female worker or a female cadre.

Paying too much attention on one's clothes, could be detrimental to one's study and career, according to many reader's own stories. One worker in Guangzhou recounted that his exam marks were excellent while in junior high school before he got acquainted with several 'cowboys' (*niuzai* 牛仔) and 'cowgirls' (*niunü* 牛女) – literally meant the hoodlums under that context – on the street. He imitated their appearance, dressing in narrow trousers, big check shirts, and pointed shoes. Eventually, he failed in five subjects at the end of that semester and dropped his study. Afterwards he became an apprentice in a shipyard. He skipped his work frequently, squandering time on his dress and dawdling with his friends on the street. Being educated by the Party, he realised he was not qualified as a dedicated and altruistic socialist worker, and then he dyed all his clothes into plain colours and revised them into simple styles with two exceptions, which he wished to exhibit in the

¹¹⁷ Gong, "‘Shougong’ yinggai wei shui fuwu."

shipyard in order to remind his coworkers of how ‘peculiar dresses’ had harmed his life.¹¹⁸ The degeneration of another female worker, Liang, was recounted alongside this article. Growing up as an orphan, Liang was allotted as a worker by the country, yet she was not grateful. She was deeply engrossed in dressing-up, so that she could not accomplish her work. In the end, she started stealing from her coworkers due to shortage of money, and left the factory. The author warned readers that they had to take preventive measures to avoid being affected by bourgeois thinking, and that only then one could see through the enemy’s deceptions.¹¹⁹ The issue of ‘peculiar dresses’ therefore was not a personal and aesthetic issue. Instead, it could lead to one’s or even a group of people’s degeneration. The importance of this issue, also justified the political and social intervene into this private personal choices.

A cartoon entitled ‘Such a style of dress’ was juxtaposed to these two articles, portraying a fashionable woman with a Barbie-like body (Figure 4-10). Her living space is entirely occupied by mirrors, cosmetics, dressing table, wardrobe, clothes and washbasin, representing that there is nothing else but appearances in her spiritual world. The raised eyebrows and round lips reveal that she wears heavy makeup, deemed unnatural and immoral in the Communist discourse. She has to use two mirrors for her permed long hair, while many families did not have their own mirrors during the Communist period.¹²⁰ Her tight-fitted top with *qipao*-style collar, Western-style coat, and super-slim jeans magnify her extreme curvy silhouette. Her posture deliberately emphasised her voluptuous figure. Apparently, she seems to enjoy tight-fitting garments, as another dress on the hanger is most likely to be a close-fit frock. This self-indulgent woman shares great similarities with the American Barbie-like women, embodying the corrupted American lifestyles. Although the author of this cartoon did not comment on the dress style in detail, the tone of this image was utterly judgmental. If we link the titles of the cartoon and the article together, it reads, “such peculiar dress style destroyed me”. On the other hand, proper dress was drawn as in Figure 4-11, a loose jacket that did not show women’s bodily figures. The woman in this figure looks dignified with short hair and in plain uniform. Although there are minute shadows on her chest and waist, her bodily

¹¹⁸ Huang Jianting, “Zhuiqiu qizhuang yifu haile wo,” *Yangcheng wanbao*, December 25, 1964, 3.

¹¹⁹ Hai Tao, “Ta shi zenyang duoluo de,” *Yangcheng wanbao*, December 25, 1964, 3.

¹²⁰ Interview with Jiang Yingli.

shape is covered by her loose garment. The only feature of her body that signifies her gender is her sloping shoulder, which is considered beautiful according to traditional aesthetics. In addition, this style was also cloth saving, in keeping with the socialist morality of austerity. Through the narrative and visual representations, *Yangcheng wanbao* educated all its readers to choose the proper and healthy plain styles of dress, and not pay too much attention on their appearances.

Again, as in the anti-beast-binding discourse of the 1920s, doctors also participated in the discussions of peculiar dresses. A certain Dr Chen suggested that peculiar dresses would not only destroy one's spirit, but also one's physical health. He cited an English doctor's critiques of European women, who were in frail health due to their excessively tight dresses. He duplicated a certain Dr Dickinson's x-ray pictures of a normal thoracic cavity and an abnormal one (Figure 4-12). Chen asserted that wearing narrow-waist tops could lead to various medical conditions, including dislocations of internal organs, extravasated blood in abdominal and pelvic cavities, constipation, dysmenorrhea etc. Peculiar dresses that highlighted certain parts of the body could cause body deformations. He confirmed that this kind of body deformation was commonly seen among European bourgeois women.¹²¹ Dr Chen's appropriation of the medical image was completely out-dated, as the phenomenon he mentioned, most likely to be tight-lacing, had long stopped being practised in Europe for at least half a century by the 1960s. Similar images of Figure 4-12 were extensively published in nineteenth-century European medical books and journals.¹²² In addition, women needed steel bone corsets to tight-lace in Europe, which did not exist in Communist China. The peculiar tops that were being criticized were tighter than the bagging uniforms, but nothing comparable with tight-lacing, and could hardly lead to any of the medical conditions that Dr Chen mentioned. Dr Chen's article was virtually useless for women's health, but only served as rhetoric that prevented women from wearing tight dresses.

Peculiar dresses were not only considered harmful to individuals, but also to the socialist society. Workers paying excessive attention to their appearance spent

¹²¹ Chenyisheng, "Qizhuang yifu zhi hai: tantan yizhuo weisheng," *Yangcheng wanbao*, November 19, 1964, 3.

¹²² Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2001), 69.

less time and energy for their work. A worker Xu Weigao started wearing peculiar dresses since middle school, therefore he did not perform well academically. He eventually went to a steel mill thanks to the Party. However, he did not appreciate the Party's concerns for him, and spent more money on peculiar dresses. He also gambled because his salary was not enough for his luxurious lifestyle: going to the cinema and coffee shops frequently with his girlfriend. He always snapped during work, which eventually led to the waste of steel, causing great loss to the country.¹²³ Xu summarised his experience:

無產階級思想鬆一鬆，資產階級思想攻一攻。缺口已經打破，就會蔓延、擴大。由一條小小的褲子可以發展到一整套奇形怪狀的裝束，有生活作風問題可以發展到思想發霉以致妨害生產。我，就是這樣逐步發展起來的呵！

As soon as the Communist spirit loosens a bit, the Capitalist spirit attacks. Once one's thoughts have a broken edge, it would spread and extend. A pair of insignificant trousers could lead to a whole range of strange and grotesquely shaped dresses. The issue of one's lifestyle could poison one's thoughts and ultimately harm production. This is just how I have become what I am!¹²⁴

In the clothes reform from 1955 to 1957, beautiful dresses were justified as symbols of the socialist development and people's pursuit of happy lives. However, this point received more criticism in 1964. Some argued that plain clothes could show the great development of the socialist society, because in the old society many did not have any clothes at all.¹²⁵ This was raised again in a film *Never Forget the Lesson* directed by famous director Xie Tieli (Figure 4-13). This film tells the story of a worker Ding Shaochun, who spent a large amount of money on his suit. Dressing up distracted Ding Shaochun from working, and almost led to the destruction of an electricity generator. He finally realised the significance of clothes and determined to reform himself. Ding Shaochun's mother-in-law was portrayed as

¹²³ Xu Weigao, "Wo chuan xiaojiao kuzi de qianhou," *Jiefang ribao*, July 23, 1964, 2.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

a selfish, cunning and ostentatious woman, who owned a small seafood shop prior to the Liberation. In order to buy the suit for her son-in-law Ding Shaochun, she borrowed money from the factory, charged Ding Shaochun's reparation of electrical machines, and sold the ducks that Ding Shaochun hunted, which was all contradictory to the socialist spirit. In one scene, she has a controversy with Ding Shaochun's grandfather, a poor peasant in the old society. She asks: "It doesn't matter if the youth dress up. [The general discourse] praised for the happy lives in the new society." Ding's grandfather asks another question in reply: "Then what is our life now? When I was his age I could only wear pieces of gunny sacking." This question was particularly powerful, because it denies the possibility of people wearing nice clothes in pursuit of happy lives, which in itself denies the happiness of the lives at that time. Having enough clothes for everybody meant more happiness than having nice clothes for a small group of people in the old society.

Through various channels of educating people the danger of wearing peculiar dresses – mobilising them to reflect on the Gaomei event and their personal experiences, encouraging them to recount or exaggerate their painful experiences of degeneration, writing medical suggestions, producing films about the harm of paying too much attentions on dresses – the debate around peculiar dresses ended up with conclusions that this kind of clothes was not only detrimental to individuals, but also to the socialist society as a whole. Tight garments and visible breasts were criticised for two reasons. On the one hand, big female breasts had long been considered signs of immorality – only indecent women would highlight their breasts in order to seduce men – as discussed in chapter one and three, continued in the Communist society. On the other hand, in the Republican era when curvaceous body became fashionable, some women from the affluent families would dress tight *qipao* to highlight their figures. This group of women was criticised for being bourgeois in the PRC, together with their life styles. In other words, whatever fashionable in the GMD region in the Republican period, would almost inevitably be attacked under Communist rule.

4.4 Symbolising the Old and the New

This section explores the portrait of women and the female body in Communist literature and visual arts, which were crucial propaganda tools during that period. The analysis of the symbolic meanings of these materials helps us to unravel the Communist imagination of a proper female body. Four literary case studies are analysed in this section, including *Song of Youth* (*qingchun zhige* 青春之歌), *Morning in Shanghai* (*Shanghai de zaochen* 上海的早晨), *Lofty White Poplar* (*gaogao de baiyangshu* 高高的白楊樹) and *Smashing the Vast Waves of the East China Sea* (*taping Donghai wan qing lang* 踏平東海萬頃浪). The visual materials analysed here are drawn from official journals, which were the only legitimate periodicals during Communist China, and were designed to reach a large readership. I argue that the construction of the female body in these novels consolidated the socialist imagination of female norms. Written with a crystal-clear consciousness of class, the novels describe women's clothes, their bodily shapes and their breasts according to strict patterns that represent their different class origins.

In her highly successful novel *Song of Youth* first published in 1958, Yang Mo 楊沫 (1914-1995) tells the story of the transformation of the female protagonist Lin Daojing from being a bourgeois student into a mature revolutionary. Based on the female author Yang Mo's own experiences, the main story is set in Beijing from the Mukden Incident in 1931 to the December 9 Movement in 1935, when the anti-Japanese movement developed throughout China. In this novel of revolutionary youth, women's clothes have a crucial role in story telling through linking one's spirits with one's appearances. The author clearly attributed the delicate *qipao* to characters of upper class urban girls, film stars, fallen women and prostitutes. In contrast, indanthrene (*yindanshilin* 陰丹士林) *qipao*, which are plain light blue cloth *qipao* commonly worn by innocent female students, and jackets and trousers by rural women. The heroine of the novel, Lin Daojing, repeatedly expresses her dislike of the *qipao*. Before joining in the revolution, Lin Daojing lives together with her first lover, Yu Yongze, the son of a landlord. As a disciple of Hu Shi, an opponent of socialism, Yu Yongze is a young pedant who is indifferent to the revolution and indulges himself in Chinese textual criticism (*kaoju* 考據). Although Lin Daojing feels suffocated living with Yu, she is too indecisive to leave him. One thing that Lin Daojing detests about Yu Yongze is his excessive interest in her appearance. For

example, Yu considers Lin Daojing's shoulder a bit too wide and her mouth not small enough, which means that she fails to meet the standards of traditional Chinese aesthetics of sloping shoulders and petite cherry-like mouth. He also imagines buying her delicate gowns after his graduation. Lin Daojing feels that she is treated like a plaything, and is utterly disgusted by Yu.¹²⁶ For a progressive young woman, Lin Daojing feels the exclusive attention to her external appearance makes Yu a boring and hideous man. On another night, Lin Daojing plans to sneak out and post Communist leaflets in the street; however, she is not satisfied with her disguise until she sees her landlady in a tight-fitting pink gown. Then she decides to disguise herself as a coquettish woman, or probably a streetwalker. She dresses herself with a viridescent *qipao* that her lover Yu Yongze ordered for her, pulls on flesh-tinted stockings, and applies a red lipstick. The landlady is under the impression that Lin Daojing is going out for an affair.¹²⁷ This shows that to the author, tight-fitting clothes and makeup signify women behaving improperly – prostitutes or adulterers. The fact this appearance conceals Lin Daojing's identity as a pro-Communist means that Communist women did not dress in this way.

Afterwards, Lin Daojing leaves Yu Yongze, goes to jail because of her revolutionary activities, and works in a remote village, as assigned by the Party. Then Lin Daojing returns to Beiping to continue her underground work. She meets Bai Liping, a previous friend who has inspired Lin Daojing to join the revolution. However, Bai Liping has turned into a different person, a bourgeois actress wearing bright red lipstick, tight fine gauze *qipao*, strong perfume and a pair of pearl earrings. Later, Bai Liping drags Lin Daojing to the dance hall in Beijing Hotel. Seeing all the 'monstrous' dancing girls, Lin Daojing feels dizzy and recalls the images of the peasants in that remote village.¹²⁸ In a word, except indanthrene blue *qipao*, all other kinds of expensive, figure-revealing *qipao* were not revolutionary, and were exclusively worn by bourgeois women. This is hardly the truth what happened in the Republican era, yet it is what the novel attempts to make its readers believe. The writer Yang Mo makes more efforts in attributing her characters with more symbolic and ideological meanings, rather than recounting a historical accurate story.

¹²⁶ Yang, *Qingchun zhi ge*, 162.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 356, 362–63.

Published in 1958 and 1962, *Morning in Shanghai* is written by Zhou Erfu 周而復 (1914-2004), a left-wing writer active since the 1930s. The novel narrates the ‘reform’ of Shanghai’s national bourgeoisie in the Three Anti/Five Anti Campaigns and Public-Private Joint Management Campaign in the 1950s. During these campaigns, privately owned businesses were supervised by the Party leadership and bought by the state step by step at low prices and interest. As a vice director of the Propaganda Department in Shanghai and the United Front Work Department (*tongzhanbu* 統戰部) of the Shanghai Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China, Zhou Erfu participated in these campaigns and closely observed those who were involved.¹²⁹

In this novel, the *qipao* symbolises the remaining relics of Shanghai’s metropolitan culture. Shanghai bourgeois women who wear *qipao* continue to seek lives of pleasure and comfort, too stubborn to accept socialist values. One of the male protagonists Xu Yide was the general manager of Hujiang Cotton Mill in Shanghai. Xu Yide once provided financial aid to a bourgeois girl Lin Wanzhi’s college study, yet he ceases the patronage as Lin has many admirers. Afterwards Lin moves in with Xu and marries him as his second concubine. As Xu Yide discourages Lin Wanzhi to go outside the home, Lin is described as a caged bird, feeling bored of the extravagant but meaningless life, and longing for the outside world. Although she is Xu’s most favoured woman, Xu hardly discusses any business, political and social news with her. In this extreme boredom, Lin is seduced by Xu Yide’s business friend, Feng Yongxiang. On the day of the beginning of their romance, Lin wears:

an apple-green venetian dress [*qipao*] with side-slits under a short sleeveless jacket, also of apple-green venetian but differing from the dress [*qipao*] in that it was edged with a whitish-green border; on her feet were low, soft-

¹²⁹ Originally Zhou planned to write four volumes, yet only the first two volumes were published before the Cultural Revolution, in 1958 and 1962 respectively. Although he finished the third and fourth volumes in 1965 and 1966, they were eventually published partially in periodicals in 1979 and in volumes in 1980. This section focuses on the first editions of his first two volumes, as they represent the author’s immediate observations of the newly established PRC. The author kept revising subsequent editions of the novel, for example, in the second edition of the first volume published in 1962 a plot of a landlord’s rape of a peasant woman was deleted. Wu Xiuming and Guo Chuanmei, “Yangchang yifeng yu gaizao yundong jiaozhi de aimei lishi: chongdu shanghai de zaochen,” *Fujian luntan renwen shehui kexue ban*, no. 6 (2008): 91–97.

soled slippers of white silk embroidered with a pair of red phoenixes. She walked in slowly, step by step, with bent head; her waved hair, faintly yellowed at the tips from the application of curling-irons, was held an overall impression of gentleness and although her head was bent, Feng Yung-hsiang could see from an oblique view of her face that she was very beautiful.¹³⁰

Body-revealing *qipao* are also commonly worn by another kind of ‘evil remnants of the old society’ – dancing girls and prostitutes. Xu Aiqing, a dancing girl in a ballroom called the Seventh Heaven (*qichongtian* 七重天), seduces a Party official Chief Zhang from northern Jiangsu province, who comes to Shanghai to purchase medicines for local hospitals. At first, he hesitates to do business with Zhu Yannian, a capitalist who runs a pharmacy that provides fake and expired medicines to various buyers including the People’s Volunteer Army fighting in Korea. Zhu Yannian corrupts Chief Zhang with money and women. Wearing georgette *qipao* with red peonies pattern, Xu Aiqing invites Chief Zhang to dance with her, and spends a night with him.¹³¹ Chief Zhang eventually degenerates into a corrupted official and invests the entire public fund in Zhu Yannian’s pharmacy, only to find fake and expired medicines. The *qipao* and Zhang Aiqing’s body were crucial for officials’ corruption, which reinforced the concept that the *qipao* and women’s sexual body were evil and dangerous for the socialist society.

In contrast, female party members and workers never appear in *qipao*. The Secretary of Hujiang Cotton Mill Party Branch and Chairman of the Labour Union, Yu Jing, wears a grey Lenin suit, which is slightly creased on the left side, as if she is too busy to squander any time on her appearance. Her hair is not permed, and she does not wear any makeup, yet she is full of youthful energy.¹³² Female Communist cadres would not spend time on their appearance, nor do they pay attention to their looks, because they have more important things to do – building the socialist society.

¹³⁰ Zhou Erfu, *Morning in Shanghai*, trans. A.C. Barnes, vol. 1 (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1962), 109. Here I quoted Barnes’s translation of this paragraph. Other translations from the novel are mine.

¹³¹ Zhou Erfu, *Shanghai de zaochen*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1958), 177–78.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 1:108.

In addition, the female body was also described with significant differences among revolutionary and non-revolutionary women. Ma Lilin, Zhu Yannian's second wife, is a previous dancing girl of The Paramount (*bailemen* 百樂門), one of the most famous dance halls in Republican Shanghai. After Zhu's criminal behaviour being disclosed by his assistant Tong Jin, Zhu proposed to his wife to seduce Tong Jin in order to dishonour him. Ma Lilin invites Tong Jin into her bedchamber, wearing a cambric nightgown with flouncing on the neck and cuffs:

One of her top buttons is not buckled, and a part of jade-like bosomy chest is exposed...She is lying on her bed, like a water lily in a lotus pond, sending forth a refreshing and delicate fragrance.¹³³

Tong Jin is further dazed by Ma's soft curvy body, which is revealed through her semi-transparent nightgown.¹³⁴ In this plot, the author illustrates the female curvy body and breasts as dangerous weapons that could be used to corrupt a progressive worker. In contrast, decent and righteous female cadres and workers do not exhibit their bodies seductively. The display of Ma Lilin's body proves firstly, the craftiness of the capitalists, and secondly, the steadfastness of the progressive worker Tong Jin, who successfully resisted the despicable dancer's seduction.

While women who belong to the evil old society dress in *qipao* and had dangerous alluring bodies, the following two novels demonstrate what female proletarians and revolutionaries should look like. Ru Zhijuan 茹誌鵬 (1925-1998) is a female writer famous for her psychological short novels. She joined the Communist New Fourth Army in 1943 and started writing afterwards. Her short story *Lofty White Poplar* was published in 1959, telling a metaphoric story of several women with identical names. The narrator of the story, "I", had once been a young frontline nurse during the Civil War (War of Liberation in Communist parlance), guided under a senior nurse named Zhang Aizhen. Zhang is a strong, resourceful and courageous woman, who can manage to do three people's workload when the number of injured soldiers far exceeded the capacity of available staff. The description of Zhang's appearance is provided as follows:

¹³³ Zhou Erfu, *Shanghai de zaochen*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zuoqia chubanshe, 1962), 277-78.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:284.

She hardly speaks anything, and looks like forty or fiftyish although she is about her late thirties. She is hunchbacked, with grey hair, yet her body is sturdy, and her hands are even stronger than men's.¹³⁵

Zhang Aizhen's personal history is a mystery to her comrades. The narrator finds that Sister Zhang might have been named Xiaofeng, who was sold to a landlord as a young girl. Her mother died of agony due to the landlord's abuse of Xiaofeng. She was then resold to a nunnery doing heavy physical labour. Details of Zhang's appearance and her premature aging signify her sufferings in the evil old society and her hard work in frontline hospitals. Her brawny body indicates her proletarian family origin, presumably her labour in the farm and her rich experiences in her career as a Communist. She deserves to be written about and admired merely for her devotion to communism, regardless of her aging. "I", the first person narrator, loses Sister Zhang's whereabouts after one severe battle. After the Liberation, "I" goes back to the village to look for her, yet no one knows if she is alive or not.

Incidentally, "I" finds two other women also named Zhang Aizhen, one of whom is a seventeen or eighteen year old girl. She is enthusiastic about raising rabbits, dreaming to contribute to the country with more rabbit hair production than cotton. On the first time they meet, this young girl pleads with "I" to help her with the rabbit breeding, though "I" knows nothing about it.

Her face is swarthy and rosy with chubby cheeks. She ties parts of her short hair into a plait, which is sticking up on one side of her head. Her rounded shoulder is wrapped tightly in a short-sleeved flower-patterned jacket. Her smiling black eyes follow my face.¹³⁶

Although her dream seems unrealistic, she is permitted to carry out this experimental breeding due to her enthusiasm for the socialist society. While she is working,

¹³⁵ Ru Zhijuan, "Gaogao de baiyangshu," in *Baihehua* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1978), 78–79.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

Her cheeks turn red, wearing an extremely oversized coarse blue jacket with the sleeves rolled up highly.¹³⁷

According to traditional Chinese aesthetics, beauties should have white skin and sloping shoulders, whereas this young Zhang Aizhen's swarthy skin and rounded shoulder are contrary to these standards. These features indicate she is a vigorous socialist youth, and a good hand at farm work. Certainly she never wears a *qipao* or any sort of urban dresses, her best piece of clothing is a flower-patterned jacket, worn on formal occasions.¹³⁸

The second Zhang Zizhen that "I" finds is a Party member and a model worker in wheat cultivation. Before leaving the village, "I" also finds an indenture indicating that a certain Jiang Yuezhen was sold at the age of twenty-one, which could have been Zhang Aizhen. In the end, the author writes that who Zhang Aizhen was, Xiaofeng or Jiang Yuezhen was not important any more. The important point is that her dreams have been realised – the socialist country has been established and all the bitterness has gone. The Zhang Aizhen with her strong body and sturdy hands embodies women from all walks of life, including those who were sold to landlords before Liberation, those who fought for their Communist country, those who enthusiastically built the new society. Zhang Aizhen is shaped into an exemplary female socialist pioneer, whose appearance is essentially strong and robust, who would physically devote her labour, herself, to the building of socialism, without any indication of sexual attractiveness.

Lu Zhuguo 陸柱國 (1928-), who joined in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1948, and served as a journalist in the party-owned Xinhua News Agency gives an excellent example of how the feminine bodies of Communist heroines are described. His *Smashing the Vast Waves of the East China Sea* published in 1958 narrates the heroic fights of PRC soldiers in the Battle of Yijiangshan Islands, a conflict between PRC and ROC (Republic of China) over the Yijiangshan Islands in January 1955. The PRC came out of the battle victorious.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 86.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 94.

The narrative of this novel moves with interspersed flashbacks. One of the male protagonists, Lei Zhenlin, often recalls his memory during the War of Liberation. At the age of 18, he was already a platoon leader, who only accepted young and robust soldiers in his platoon. One day, he reluctantly took on an extremely skinny soldier as his platoon sergeant due to his political commissar's command. This soldier, Gao Shan, was said to be a brave one, who was going to commit suicide after all of the rest of the squad were killed during a three-day battle. In a subsequent battle, Gao Shan was critically wounded because of covering Lei Zhenlin. Feeling remorseful and uneasy, Lei Zhenlin visited Gao in the combat hospital. To his great astonishment, he found that:

under the white undergarments the silhouettes of a young girl's breasts undulated hazily, like distant mountains in the fog.¹³⁹

Gao Shan turns out to be a Hua Mulan-like heroine. Lei Zhenlin was so embarrassed, as he lit a cigarette nakedly in front of Gao Shan. However, Gao Shan did not seem to be bothered at all, concerned more with the war and victory. Later on, the two were committed to each other with affection, and promised to be each other's companion after the Liberation. However, Lei Zhenlin got wounded again and rumour spread that he might be dead. Losing touch with each other for years, Lei Zhenlin patiently waited for the day of their reunion. In the Battle of Yijiangshan Islands, Lei heard that Gao Shan had been single all these years, waiting for his news. They reunited and fought the battle together again.

The descriptions of the heroine Gao Shan's body serve as the announcement of her gender. The author draws an analogy between her body and distanced mountains in the fog, portraying a mysterious yet noble image. Mountains are grand and sturdy, representing Gao Shan's strong faith in the Communist revolution. The fog that conceals the mountains indicates Lei Zhenlin observed her body with great respect. Her physical femininity – her bodily shape and her breasts – do not indicate sexual allure between the two. Although Lei might be attracted by Gao's feminine

¹³⁹ Lu Zhuguo, *Taping donghai wan qing lang* (Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyishe, 1958), 69.

body, which is described in quite subdued language, he also quickly restrains his emotion by turning his head back. Affections basing on sensational attractions are considered shameful. Lei and Gao's relation is rooted in their but their common and sublime goal – the victory of the Communist army. Gao Shan's sacred, pure and aesthetic female body beauty symbolises the pure love between the two revolutionary soldiers who put the nation in first place. Through describing different kinds of women with different bodies and appearances, the above novels published after the establishment of PRC present clear linkage between one's outfit and one's revolutionary spirit. The *qipao*, women's exposed bodies, especially the breasts are the symbols of old society, whereas in the Communist society, women are strong and healthy, and even their feminine body – the breasts – should be presented in decent manners.

Different from the impression that representations of women in the 1950s and 1960s were ambiguous in gender,¹⁴⁰ actually women with plump breasts and figures could be seen in many visual materials, mostly paintings of rural women (Figure 4-14). Whether they were perceived as sexually attractive depends on the viewers' ways of looking, yet they were clearly not designed or drawn for the purpose of sexual arousal. Figure 4-14 depicts six female peasants collaborating in the cotton harvest, all of whom were portrayed with healthy and plump bodies. The caption reads: "Men work the land, women tend the cotton, building up a family fortune by labour; Collaborating and helping each other as one, clothes and food are not difficult."¹⁴¹ The style of the painting resembles greatly with the New Years painting, which were used widely as propitious signs. However, in the pre-modern New Years painting, rural women seldom appeared as leading roles. The fact that this figure depicts rural women happened in the context of Communist Party's propaganda on women's emancipation. This figure underlines the strength of rural women, praising them as the vigorous contributors to the newly established socialist nation. Their plump figures manifest the economic abundance of the New China,

¹⁴⁰ Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China*, 70.

¹⁴¹ The Chinese reads: "男耕田，女務棉，發家致富靠生產；合力互助齊心干，穿衣吃飯不困難。"

where peasants lead happy lives with adequate supply of food and clothes, whereas the old society only drove people into poverty and starvation.

Figure 4-15 shows a peasant woman studying while breastfeeding her child. The painting is titled *Testing mother* (*kaokao mama* 考考媽媽), painted by a female artist Jiang Yan 姜燕. Produced with traditional Chinese methods, the content of this painting is quite innovative from the Republican visual sources. The title refers to the girl on the left with a book who gives a quiz to her mother. Presumably, her mother was illiterate before the Liberation. After 1949, she finally has the chance to study, probably from the local Women's Federation, or local night school, because the Party promotes Eliminating Illiteracy Movement right after the Liberation. The family seems comfortably off, with vegetables in the basket hanging on the window, and infant's clothes in the small basket on the heatable brick bed. Both adults and children are dressed tidily and colourfully. Linens extend on the bed neatly. Thick duvets keep the family warm at night. Unlike the above-mentioned Republican portrayals of breastfeeding women, mostly wet nurses, or women who suffered great poverty, this breastfeeding woman enjoys her maternity. If we compare the breastfeeding woman in Figure 4-1 and Figure 4-15, the fact that the rural woman in Figure 4-15 breastfeeds her child cozily at home indicates that firstly, peasant women do not have to serve as wet nurses of the rich any more; and secondly, women from the peasant class now break away from the agony, poverty and humiliation of the past, now living peaceful and enriched lives. The illustrating of her breasts is legitimised by her identities as a mother who breastfeeds her child, a socialist learner who seeks progress, and a glorious peasant who works for the country. The ideal Communist beauty should be diligent, revolutionary, healthy, strong, yet not sexually attractive.

From the above cases, we could see that the female body in Communist literature and visual arts is highly symbolic and ideological. The *qipao*, seductive female breasts and an alluring curvy body all belong to the symbolic repertoire of non-Communist and non-revolutionary women. The ones who wear *qipao* in Communist literature include Bai Liping, an actress who did not support the revolution; Lin Wanzhi, a concubine of a capitalist; Ma Lilin, a Shanghai dancer; Xu

Aiqing, a dancer and a prostitute. In contrast, all the female revolutionaries pay little attention to their looks. Their bodies were only described as embodiments of their revolutionary spirit, as well as manifestos of the prosperous Communist country.

4.5 Conclusion

Discussions of body and dress in the early Communist period were deeply linked to the political environment, where the state spent great efforts in mobilising youth into the service of the country. Overall, the ‘curvaceous beauty’ which was promoted by male elites under the GMD rule from the 1920s to the 1940s was not in favour over the history of the Communist party. A curvaceous beauty could only be shown in the tight-cut *qipao*, which was widely and exclusively worn by urban elite women, thus it became a symbol of the bourgeois class and spirit. I argue that while discussing the body became more sensitive and taboo, restrictions of dress indirectly disciplined women’s body and sexuality. These restrictions on dress further reinforced the taboo of body. However unclear Chinese socialists were when it came to the dressing styles of the ‘socialist woman’, the bourgeois model – tight and body silhouette revealing garments, especially the tight *qipao* – was obviously inappropriate. In the early 1950s, the line between ‘proletarian beauty’ and ‘bourgeois beauty’ was quite blurry. Yet through numerous discussions in newspapers and magazines, and literal and visual representations of women, towards the mid-1960s, people should be able to take a firm and clear-cut stand under political pressures. For the sake of pragmatism, eventually the politically correct proletarian beauty left few variations of dress styles to women.

Chapter 5 Growing up in Mao's China: Experiences of breast-(un)binding

Born in Liaoning province in 1952 into a worker's family, and subsequently moved to a newly established oilfield Daqing in Heilongjiang province in 1963, Xu Mingzhi spent most of her life in the northeast part of China. During her early years, same as all her other girlfriends, she bound her breasts with a piece of white cloth and wore very loose garments. In the northeast, the wind is always strong throughout the year. When it comes, girls would all walk following the wind instead of going against it, picking up their tops, as the blowing wind would show their figures.¹ Although many official publications opposed breast-binding in the 1950s, these articles did not shift its practice by women from various class, educational and regional backgrounds, in different phases during Mao's China. Out of the twenty-seven interviewees who were born between 1938 and 1959, experiencing their adolescent years after the establishment of PRC, eight of them explicitly recalled they had never worn tight undergarments to bind their breasts or bowed their chests in order to avoid embarrassment. Among them, He Meiqi (born in 1938), Wu Yinyan (born in 1955), Cui Xueqin (born in 1956) and Jin Zhinan (born in 1956) said their breasts did not develop to the extent to bother them; Jin Xiaowen (born in 1959) did not consciously pay attention to her bodily development; Li Rufen (born in 1938), Yao Ligan (born in 1939), Fei Yichun (born in 1943) consciously distinguished themselves from others as the more emancipated women.

However, with my limited interviews, it would be inappropriate to overgeneralise this practice. The scope of this practice remains unknown hitherto, which requires a wider investigation of a larger population. The aim of this chapter is rather to probe women's subjective experiences of their bodies, their practice of breast-(un)binding, and broader social and political factors that formed women's experiences and choices. I ask the following questions in this chapter: How did the Communist discourse discuss breast-binding? Why did women bind their breasts? How did breast-binding influence their gender identities? How did women's memories of their bodies influence their understandings of Mao's era? I argue the experience of breast-binding presents women's anxieties of their bodies, due to

¹ Interview with Xu Mingzhi 2013.

various factors such as sexual education, sexual morality, aesthetics, fashion trends, ideology and violence. Their memories of the bodily experiences also shaped their understanding of the turbulent period.

Chronologically, this chapter does not focus on a particular phase of Mao's China periodised according to political campaigns, nor does it focus on a regional-based approach. Historian Gail Hershatter has demonstrated that in women's lives, political events and official periodisation did not mark the same importance to them as in the official historiography. Women's memories were more related to their personal experiences, such as marriage, births, education etc., rather than the grand history events.² In her research on the mass line of Communist Party, political scientist Liu Yu found that in everyday political persuasions, the techniques that the Party employed had continued since the early 1940s to Mao's death.³ In my following analysis, I will show that women's testimonies, including oral histories and memoirs, proved that breast-binding also bore continuities during different phases in Mao's China.

It is worth mentioning that in this chapter I use the term Cultural Revolution in a narrow sense, referring to 1966 to 1969. Cultural Revolution was officially announced to be ended in 1969, thereafter 'Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement'. It was not until a few years after Mao's death, the Communist Party officially defined the ten years from 1966 to 1976 as the 'Cultural Revolution', as an undeniable historical decision and truth.⁴ Actually scholarships published well before 1981 on Communist China almost all consider that the

² Gail Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China's Collective Past* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2011).

³ Yu Liu, "From the Mass Line to the Mao Cult: The Production of Legitimate Dictatorship in Revolutionary China" (Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 2006); Yu Liu, "Maoist Discourse and the Mobilization of Emotions in Revolutionary China," *Modern China* 36, no. 3 (2010): 329–362.

⁴ For the periodisation of the Cultural Revolution, see "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China," 1981, <https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/cpc/history/01.htm>, accessed August 20, 2016; Michel Bonnin, *The Lost Generation: The Rustication of China's Educated Youth (1968-1980)*, trans. Krystyna Horko (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2013); Rebecca E. Karl, *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth-Century World: A Concise History* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 119.

Cultural Revolution was from 1966 to 1969.⁵ In my interviews, not infrequently, interviewees did not remember which year the Cultural Revolution ended, or they considered the Cultural Revolution ended before ‘Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement’. In Mao’s era, numerous campaigns waxed and waned,⁶ leaving ordinary people with generally unsettled feelings, which was another reason that I shall narrate women’s stories following their own logic necessarily without tying them to the periodisation imposed by party historiography.

5.1 Unbind Breasts for Chairman Mao

In the early 1950s, articles on breast-binding and breast health were published in official periodicals, among a rich body of published materials related to sexuality, for the purpose of directing the general public with scientific knowledge and channelling them into the healthy lifestyles that regarded work as their prime desire.⁷ I argue this was a continuity of the Republican hygienic and nationalist discourse, though mixed with socialist aspirations. One important realm of anti-breast-binding publications was the Women’s Federation led *Xinzhongguo fun ü*. Launched in 1949, *Xinzhongguo fun ü* (renamed into *Zhongguo fun ü* in 1955) was chief-edited by Shen Zijiu, the previous chief editor of *Fun ü shenghuo* (1935-1941), a left-wing feminist and writer with rich experience within the publishing industry during the Republican era. The structure of *Xinzhongguo fun ü* greatly resembled *Fun ü shenghuo*, dividing each issue with sections on national and international politics and current affairs, readers’ debates, novels, childcare and domestic management, medicine and hygiene etc. Even the size of the journals, the quality of paper, the total pages per issue, and the designs of the covers were extremely similar. Both of them published essays on basic physiology and reader-doctor correspondence, discussing sexuality-related medical issues including menstruation, hymen, contraception, abortion, pregnancy, breast development and breast-binding.

⁵ Paul J. Hiniker, *Revolutionary Ideology & Chinese Reality: Dissonance under Mao* (Beverly Hills, London: Sage Publications, 1977); Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*; Croll, *Feminism and Socialism in China*.

⁶ For a brief descriptions of all the major campaigns, see: Liu, “From the Mass Line to the Mao Cult,” 422–34.

⁷ Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China*.

The Republican era discourse had long been advocating for women's emancipation from harmful practices such as foot-binding and breast-binding, both for the sake of their health and for the health of the future citizens. Anti-breast-binding articles in the early PRC also adopted this hygienic and nationalist approach. Professional doctors continued to write essays in *Xinzhongguo fun ü*, teaching women that breast-binding could lead to various medical conditions including abnormal body development, crater nipples, lack of milk after childbirth, or in extreme cases, no milk at all. Therefore women should not wear tight vests, especially during puberty or after marriage in order to secure breast milk for the infants.⁸ According to a gynaecologist Xu Linle, women felt ashamed of their 'ugly' breasts, as plump breasts were considered signs of sexual immorality by society. Xu Linle criticised this attitude to be the remnants of the 'feudal society', where women had been devastated by customs like breast-binding. In the new society, women should emancipate themselves and exercise for a strong and beautiful body.⁹ All of these comments greatly resembled the anti-breast-binding discourse from the 1910s to the 1940s in women's journals, and medical periodicals such as *Fun ü zazhi* and *Dazhong yikan*. *Xinzhongguo fun ü* continued to position the journal as women's life coach, bearing the mission of enlightening the ignorant Chinese women.

In the early years of the 1950s, anti-breast-binding activities took place across the country. Similar to the Republican anti-breast-binding movement, it was also promoted by political call for adolescent hygiene. In 1950, Mao wrote to the Education Minister Ma Xulun instructing that students all over the country should pursue health as their primary objective and study as the second goal (*jiankang diyi, xuexi dier* 健康第一，學習第二).¹⁰ From then on this guiding principle was widely propagandised. In the First National Secondary Educational Congress (*diyici quanguo zhongdeng jiaoyu huiyi* 第一次全国中等教育会议), Ma Xulun urged local educationists to carry out this policy among students.¹¹ Afterwards, media discourse

⁸ Xu Linle, "Weishenme nai hui shao," *Xinzhongguo fun ü*, no. 58 (August 1954): 28; Mu Sheng, "Rutou aoxian," *Zhongguo fun ü*, no. 131 (August 1959): 21.

⁹ Xu Linle, "Rufang de fayü," *Zhongguo fun ü*, no. 106 (June 1958): 24.

¹⁰ Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, ed., "Zhi Ma Xulun 1950 nian 6 yue 19 ri," in *Mao Zedong shuxin xuanji* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 351; Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, ed., "Zhi Ma Xulun 1951 nian 1 yue 15 ri," in *Mao Zedong shuxin xuanji* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 351.

¹¹ "Di-yi ci quanguo zhongdeng jiaoyu huiyi kaimu," *Renmin ribao*, March 20, 1951, 1.

advocated for paying attention to young people's health for the purpose of contributing to the socialist nation more effectively. After the following health investigations done by local schools and governments, the media portrayed a negative image of students' health status. In major universities, in Beijing and Shanghai, five to ten percent of students had tuberculosis; trachoma, tuberculosis and digestive system problems were also pervasive among secondary students; strikingly, twenty-five to forty percent of girls suffer from menstruation disorders.¹² Results showed that poor health on average was believed to be caused by malnutrition, long study hours, lack of physical exercise etc. The new government was determined to improve the health of young students and workers, which was greatly damaged by the evil old society and the GMD government. Some expressed their doubts towards this policy, as they believed studying and working contributed to the country, and physical training was merely for personal interests. This point of view was refuted by suggestions that health was the prerequisite for building the socialist society, so ultimately people with good health would accelerate the process of socialist building.¹³ Individual health was not a personal matter, it was deemed as treasures and resources of the socialist country, therefore everyone had the responsibility to work on their body in order to serve the country.

Among all the negative influences on health, breast-binding was responsible for girls' health status. A left-wing educationist Dong Chuncai (1905-1990), who had followed Tao Xingzhi and his rural education campaigns in the 1930s, reported many girls still had the evil custom of breast-binding in Northeast Normal School in Shenyang.¹⁴ In addition, readers from Hebei, Yunnan and Beijing all wrote to *Zhongguo qingnian* complaining about the issue of breast-binding. According to a report of Huanxi Elementary School in north Jiangsu, ninety percent of eighty-six girls above thirteen years old had bound their breasts. The author of the report said most of the girls considered breasts ugly, either influenced by their mothers, or by

¹² Peng Qingzhao, "Xiaochu hushi jian kang de sixiang," *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 61 (March 27, 1951): 21.

¹³ "Qingnian yao you jian kang de shenti," *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 61 (March 27, 1951): 3; Peng, "Xiaochu hushi jian kang de sixiang"; Xie Zhiyi, "Beijing Shili Di-Yi Nüzi Zhong xue kaishi zhongshi xuesheng jian kang wenti," *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 61 (March 27, 1951): 24-25.

¹⁴ Dong, "Zhuyi quanmian fazhan," 13.

their peers. Female students were afraid of being ridiculed by passers-by on the street, or by male students at school.¹⁵

After the health investigation, education of unbinding breasts took place in many schools across the country. In an elementary school in Yixing county, Jiangsu province, teachers instructed the students to stop breast-binding and to place health as their foremost concern, as taught by Chairman Mao. A number of girls untied their breast-binding after classes of women's hygiene, where teachers lectured that shame of breasts was a poison of the old society. As some girls still feared being mocked by male students, teachers also educated male students that a girl's body was naturally different from a boy's, hence they should not laugh at the girls' efforts in pursuing health. This event gained such great success that after three days all of the girls untied their breasts with only one exception. This girl took off her little vest during the days of inspection, yet she wore it again after a few days. In a following health check, the teacher found out her secret because of her low vital capacity. The teacher then encouraged her to abandon the little vest completely. The school report suggested 'almost' nobody bound their breasts any longer.¹⁶ From the equivocally worded report, we infer that the school could not completely control the practice of breast-binding. Although they educated girl students several times, it would be difficult for them to notice those who secretly used this practice again afterwards.

In another case, teachers in Yuhuangya Elementary School in Hebei province also supervised the untie-breast-binding activities. A report states that nineteen students who abandoned breast-binding repented for their previous behaviour: "Previously we damaged our health by binding our breasts for beauty. We really let Chairman Mao down (*duibuqi Mao zhuxi* 對不起毛主席)!"¹⁷ Maoist doctrine played a crucial role in abandoning breast-binding in terms of motivating schools to investigate this matter. However, schools could only effectively persuade female students if they conducted physiology education and reduced the risk for girls to be mocked.

¹⁵ Xu Yimin and Yang Yunting, "Women zhongshi le nüsheng de weisheng baojian gongzuo," *Jiangsu jiaoyu*, no. 10 (October 25, 1953): 16.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Xiao Feng and Huang Shuze, "Fandui shuxiong," *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 4 (February 16, 1953): 23–24.

Apart from the hygienic warnings, breast-binding also needed to be eliminated for the sake of socialist construction,¹⁸ as female labour was an essential resource for the country's recovery from war and its ambitious plans of development. The National Women's Federation urged all local Women's Federations to mobilise rural women into agricultural and handicraft production. Local female cadres should educate and assist women to overcome all kinds of difficulties that obstructed them from production, including domestic violence, childcare, foot-binding and breast-binding.¹⁹ Writers denounced breast-binding from a class struggle perspective. The exploiting class considered breast-binding as beautiful, because they did not have to work for their livelihood and therefore despised strong working women (*laodong funü* 勞動婦女). Secondly, the exploiting class disrespected women and treated women as playthings, hence they promoted the 'beauty of sickness' (*bingtaimei* 病態美), fragile figure and willowy waist, whereas the beauty of health, dark skin and brawny arms were considered to be boorish.

In order to mobilise women to do sports and strengthen their bodies, the favour for slim and delicate women was denounced. The working people were proud of labour and treated the two genders as equal, so they believed health was beauty.²⁰ While the Republican discourse urged women to take responsibility to work on their bodies because they were mothers of the future citizens, the Communist discourse continued nationalist indoctrinations, encouraging women to exercise their bodies in order to build the socialist society.²¹ Breast-binding was categorised the same as foot-binding – bandage of the old feudal society, which destroyed women's bodies and needed to be eliminated.²² The aims of untying the breast-binding extended the Republican nationalist discourse.

5.2 Knowledge and practice

¹⁸ Yun, "Zhuyi duanlian shenti, zuo yi ge jiankang de xinfunü," *Xinzhongguo funü*, January 1952, 19.

¹⁹ "Quanguo fulian zhishi ge ji fulian fadong nongcun funü canjia shengchan yundong," *Renmin ribao*, April 15, 1951, 2.

²⁰ Xiao and Huang, "Fandui shuxiong?"; Wu Shengguang and Ma Xu, "Yinggai zenyang zhengque duidai shengli shang de yixie tedian?," *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 13 (July 1, 1954): 33.

²¹ Yun, "Zhuyi duanlian shenti."

²² "Shandong sheng renmin zhengfu guanyu 1950 nian weisheng gongzuo de zhishi," *Shandong zhengbao*, no. 2 (1950): 87.

The anti-breast-binding discourse in the 1950s, however, did not shift women's practices. Most women started binding their breasts when their body started to develop from the age of about twelve to sixteen. Ling Ling was born in 1943 Shanghai, her father worked as a typesetter for an English newspaper. After 1949, her father lost his job. As the single daughter, Ling Ling supported her family by working in a factory in Shanghai when she was seventeen, after her father was sent to Xinjiang. During her adolescent years, Ling Ling felt ashamed about her breasts, which indicated she had become an adult. Although she admitted that her breasts were not big, she also felt the necessity of hiding them and bowing her chest while walking. She felt that when she was turning into an adult, she should keep some distance from boys. It was only after she went to work that she felt more comfortable about her body.²³ Many shared the same feelings when their bodies started to develop.²⁴ For these women, breast-binding or bowing chests was only practised for a relatively short period of time, starting from puberty and lasting for a few months, whereas others would have bound their breasts for years, up until they had to breastfeed their children.

The anxiety about bodily development among adolescent girls is not only found in Mao's China. Psychological researches conducted under the contemporary contexts in the United States and United Kingdom also found that adolescent girls might have difficulties in accepting their bodily changes. Breast development was problematic among other things such as menstruation and the growth of pubic hair. Although the year of puberty might differ in various ethnical groups, the twenty percent of girls who go through early maturity often have more concerns relating to their bodies.²⁵ In schools in the United Kingdom, the size of the breasts significantly influenced schoolgirls' participation in compulsory sports. Girls with larger breasts were more concerned about breasts bouncing during sports.²⁶ Although breast

²³ Interview with Ling Ling.

²⁴ Interviews with Zhao Xiulin, Wang Yudan, Qiao Xiuhua, Tang Haifeng.

²⁵ Alice Michael and Jacquelynne S. Eccles, "When Coming of Age Means Coming Undone: Links between Puberty and Psychosocial Adjustment among European American and African American Girls," in *Gender Differences at Puberty*, ed. Chris Hayward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 277–304.

²⁶ Joanna Scurr et al., "The Influence of the Breast on Sport and Exercise Participation in School Girls in the United Kingdom," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 58, no. 2 (2016): 167–73.

development could enable girls to feel more positive, the early matured girls also found they were teased by their parents and peers.²⁷ According to another research, “the most common psychological reactions by girls to teasing are embarrassment and anger.”²⁸ Therefore the changes of body became troublesome only due to the social interactions that adolescent girls experienced.

Teenagers reported experiencing embarrassment more than once a week. Embarrassment greatly influenced the social behaviours of the ones who were embarrassed, as well as the audience.²⁹ Two major explanations for the reasons of embarrassment have been raised. The first believes the care about others’ evaluation of one’s social behaviours creates embarrassment. The second holds that the fear of indecisiveness and uncertainty in social interactions is the reason for embarrassment.³⁰ In this sense, the pubertal bodily changes would bring psychological changes. Chinese women’s experiences resembled the adolescent embarrassment.

One way to relieve the adolescent anxieties of body development was to provide girls with information of the body;³¹ however, in Mao’s China women’s access to bodily knowledge was extremely limited.³² Despite the fact that booklets and articles on sex education were not infrequently published before the Cultural Revolution,³³ and Premier Zhou Enlai underlined the significance of sex education on various occasions between 1949 and 1976, and publications on this topic resumed gradually since 1973, the implementation of sex education was extremely limited.

²⁷ Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, “Pubertal Processes and Girls’ Psychological Adaptation,” in *Biological-Psychosocial Interactions in Early Adolescence*, ed. Richard M Lerner and Terry T Foch (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1987), 123–53; Jeanne Brooks-Gunn et al., “The Experience of Breast Development and Girls’ Stories about the Purchase of a Bra,” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 23, no. 5 (October 1994): 539–65.

²⁸ Thomas P Gullotta, Gerald R Adams, and Carol A Markstrom, *The Adolescent Experience*, 4th ed. (San Diego, London, Boston, New York, Sydney, Tokyo, Toronto: Academic Press, 1999, first edition published in 1983), 131.

²⁹ Rowland S. Miller, “Embarrassment and Social Behavior,” in *Self-Conscious Emotions: The Psychology of Shame, Guilt, Embarrassment, and Pride*, ed. June Price Tangney and Kurt W. Fischer (New York, London: Guilford Press, 1995), 322.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 323–24.

³¹ Scurr et al., “The Influence of the Breast on Sport and Exercise Participation in School Girls in the United Kingdom.”

³² Li, *Zhongguo n üxing de ganqing yu xing*.

³³ Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China*, 441–44.

Some schools just tore the pages of sex education from textbooks.³⁴ In reality, many women had very limited access to knowledge of physiology, both at school and at home. Most of my interviewees did not know about menstruation until one day they went through it, which would usually cause confusion, panic and anxiety. Most likely, the only knowledge of menstruation they obtained was how to use sanitary pads (*yuejingdai* 月經帶).³⁵

Sex was a taboo subject. In her early years as a Red Guard, Rea Yang considered “sex was bourgeois...something very dirty and ugly”. This was reinforced by the state discourse that in books and films sex was never related to the revolutionaries, but only to the enemies. It was not until she went to a farm in northeast China and was assigned the job of monitoring copulation of boars and sows, that she finally understood sex.³⁶ Some women would have to wait until their wedding night to find out. It was not unusual for a woman to storm out of the house on her wedding night, claiming the insulting behaviour of her husband.³⁷

Sex education was extremely rare during Mao’s China, though it was taught in some middle schools after the mid-1970s due to Zhou Enlai’s instruction. Growing up in Beijing, Jin Xiaowen vividly remembered her physiology class. On that day, all of a sudden, male classmates were driven away from the classroom, and the teacher began to lecture about uterus and menstruation. Both the teacher and students were left in extreme embarrassment. After decades, Jin still remembered the teacher’s wording, saying that after the ovulation, the lack of ‘one element’ prevented women getting pregnant.³⁸ Jin’s experience is similar to women’s memories of sexual education in post-war Taiwan, where women could not

³⁴ Ye Gongshao, “Zhongguo xuexiao xingjiaoyu dui qingnianren shengli xinli de yingxiang ji xingjiaoyu diwei,” in *Zhongmei fun ü wenti taolunhui lunwenji* (Beijing: Zhongguo fun ü chubanshe, 1991), 221–25; Peikuan Yao, “The Study and Practice of Adolescent Sex Education in China,” in *SASS PAPERS*, ed. Editorial Board of SASS PAPERS of Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, trans. Tian Guopei, vol. 4 (Shanghai: The Publishing House of Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 1992), 443–56; Wang Zhiqiang, “Diebian: xinzhongguo xingjiaoyu licheng zonglan,” *Kaoshi Zhoukan*, no. 50 (2011): 197.

³⁵ A reusable sanitary pad made of cloth, and has a strap that could be fixed on the waist.

³⁶ Rea Yang, *Spider Eaters: A Memoir* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 196.

³⁷ Interview with Jin Xiaowen.

³⁸ Interview with Jin Xiaowen.

remember the exact content of the classes, yet they remembered the tense atmosphere in the classes.³⁹

The focus of local Women's Federations was greatly on mobilising women into work, and not women's health issues, such as menstruation, pregnancy and breastfeeding. Kimberley Manning found that in rural areas in Henan and Jiangsu, local women who suffered from great poverty, family abuse or were child brides, were chosen and mobilised by higher Women's Federations, which aimed to transfer the most deprived groups of women to the highest position. The local female leaders mostly worked extremely hard, and were not sympathetic to women who would avoid excessive work. They believed these women were lazy, and they did not pay much attention on women's health.⁴⁰ In the limited protection of women's health, childbirth, post-natal care and menstruation were of the most concern, issues on breasts were not mentioned at all. For some of the pro-revolution local cadres, women's issues were so trivial compared to the socialist construction⁴¹, and there was no mention of the care of women's breasts.

While sex education was absent at school, domestic education became supplementary. Knowledge of the female body was crucial in preventing women from breast-binding. Li Rufen, born in 1938 in a merchant's family in Shanghai, recalled some of her classmates in her secondary school had bound their breasts, yet she did not because she considered herself different, a more 'emancipated' woman. She subscribed to *Zhongguo qingnianbao* when she was an undergraduate in the late 1950s, and went to the cinema frequently.⁴² Yao Lingan emphasised that she came from a well-educated family background. Her mother was a teacher. Her family was open-minded and did not hold these 'feudal values'. Yet at the same time, she did not wear improper dress, such as tight *qipao* which opened high at the thigh.⁴³ Fei Yuchun was born in Shanghai in a doctor's family. Her father was a trained private doctor, and her mother was a pharmacist. Influenced by her parents, she later studied

³⁹ Li Zhende, "Taiwan shengli weisheng jiaoyu zhongde xing, shengzhi yu xingbie (1945-1968)," *Jindai Zhongguo fun üshi yanjiu*, no. 22 (December 2013): 118.

⁴⁰ Kimberley Ens Manning, "The Gendered Politics of Woman-Work: Rethinking Radicalism in the Great Leap Forward," *Modern China* 32, no. 3 (July 2006): 349–84.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 368.

⁴² Interview with Li Rufen.

⁴³ Interview with Yao Lingan.

medicine at university and became a doctor. During her puberty, her mother taught her to notice if there were any lumps in her breasts while showering. Her mother also reminded her and her sisters to straighten their backs to avoid hunchbacks. Therefore she never felt the need to bow her chest while growing up.⁴⁴

One solution to untying breast-binding was to wear a brassiere, which was still not possible for every woman due to economic circumstances in the Communist period. Li Rufen recalled that in the 1950s a brassiere cost her 3 to 4 yuan, yet one portion of noodles (*yangchunmian* 陽春麵) only cost 1 jiao. One brassiere equalled thirty or forty lunches outside, thus most of her friends wouldn't be able to afford one.⁴⁵ In the 1960s in Shanghai, one of Li Jinying's classmates – a very young girl about seven to nine years old – occasionally went to elementary school without wearing any top, as her family was in such poverty that she had to share clothes with her siblings.⁴⁶ Things did not change much in the 1970s, when Jiang Siwei started working in a factory in Shanghai with a monthly wage of 17.84 yuan. Having to support her family, Jiang Siwei only had 5 yuan to spend per month. She clearly remembered that one brassiere cost 1.08 yuan, almost one fifth of her monthly expense. Similar to the Republican era, women usually bought one brassiere and made similar ones by themselves.⁴⁷ The brassiere also functioned differently as the Republican discourse would have hoped. Zhao Xiulin said they did not wear a brassiere in order to highlight their breasts. Instead, for many women, the brassiere also functioned as a tool to conceal or stabilise the breasts, simply to avoid embarrassment while doing sports.⁴⁸

Breast-binding, however, should be located in an ambiguous sexual environment. On the surface there was a certain prudishness, yet it was thoroughly undermined by the actual behaviour of (young) people. Research of history of sex in the Maoist period in the past two decades demonstrated that the sexual lives of ordinary Chinese, workers, peasants, students, sent-down youth, and especially the high officials, were far from ascetic and homogeneous. Emily Honig suggests that

⁴⁴ Interview with Fei Yichun.

⁴⁵ Interview with Li Rufen.

⁴⁶ Interview with Li Jinying.

⁴⁷ Interview with Jiang Siwei and Ling Ling.

⁴⁸ Interview with Zhao Xiulin

things that were previously assumed to have only happened before 1949 and after the reform and opening-up period actually also happened during the Cultural Revolution.⁴⁹ The intimate life of sent-down youth described by Wendy Larson was unprecedentedly wild. Among the sent-down youth, sex before marriage, accidental pregnancies, secret abortions, and even co-habitation were not uncommon.⁵⁰

However, I would suggest that the sexual behaviour of sent-down youth could not equal with the knowledge of the body. Actually even these young men and women had sexual relations, their knowledge of the body and sex were commonly gained through the ‘unofficial’ channel. The scarcity of information led to an increasing curiosity of the body. In many later novels, a detail could often be found that people were eager to read the few pages of sexual health in underground physical hygiene books.⁵¹ Sent-down female youth were also highly vulnerable to rape or coercive relationships. Red Guards women were especially targeted by Red Guards or local men because they were far away from their parents or other sort of protection.⁵² In addition, even if many were involved in sexual relationships, sex was still not openly discussed, and could be used as weapons of shame, exchange and threat. In fact, according to many memoirs, many relationships could only end up in tragedy, depending on the time, place, policy changes and the ones who were in charge of the cases. Young people who were caught having sex were openly denounced, humiliated, and transferred to different working units or places. Women who got pregnant before marriage might be granted an abortion, yet both sides would still be ‘separated, criticised, and punished’, losing their chances of returning to the city for good. In other cases, they might be forced to marry and stay in the countryside.⁵³ Thus, the various sexual relations among sent-down youth could not downplay the repression of sexuality during Mao’s period. It rather demonstrated that sexual repression could not prevent young men and women from temptation. Breast-binding women might be in a different social group from those who were tempted to have sexual lives. In fact, women who had bound their breasts often

⁴⁹ Emily Honig, “Socialist Sex: The Cultural Revolution Revisited,” *Modern China* 29, no. 2 (April 2003): 171.

⁵⁰ Wendy Larson, “Never This Wild: Sexing the Cultural Revolution,” *Modern China* 25, no. 4 (October 1999): 423–50.

⁵¹ Interview with Jin Xiaowen.

⁵² Honig, “Socialist Sex.”

⁵³ Bonnin, *The Lost Generation*, 319–28.

presented disapproval to those who would show a slight feminine bodily line, or slight pursuit of beauty.⁵⁴ Plus, it was also possible that women bound their breasts in order to show a proper figure publicly, and might behave differently in private.

In addition, breast-binding was not a fixed practice among all teenage girls. Born in 1959 in Beijing, Jin Xiaowen had never bound her breasts. She recalled that she did not have the conscious conception of body before entering into university. She recalled two stories during her college years in Peking University from 1978 to 1982:

“One experience deeply impressed me. It was my first year in college, I remembered... (a girl who was American) studied in Peking University, blonde, wearing two plaits (a typical hairstyle for girls during the 1960s and 70s). Her body was very flattened, because she was born and raised in China... All the others gossiped about her, as she was a complete foreigner, yet also a complete Chinese. I thought she was not in any way different from us, and I didn't feel anything at that time, until one day I bumped into a girl's breast when I turned back while buying food in the dining hall. It was extremely soft. Then truly, I trembled at once and looked back at her. She should be a returned overseas Chinese, or BBC (British Born Chinese), who was born and brought up abroad. She looks exactly like Chinese, but she had a non-Chinese body.”

Jin Xiaowen continued to explain the meanings of the two stories to her:

“I understood my experience once after I saw her: why did I experience this, and how did my arm touch a breast (laugh)? Either because she didn't wear a bra, or because her breasts were uncommonly well developed. Prior to that, I could never have that kind of experience. Although I did not have a lesbian experience, girls were very close (when I grew up). They all hugged and embraced (*loulou baobao* 搂搂抱抱) each other, which could be suspected as lesbianism from current standard. However, you had never felt her body

⁵⁴ Interview with Wu Yinyan.

(breasts). Because of the overseas Chinese girl's body, I thought about the American girl's body. Then I realised that body was not about race and nature, it was about culture.”⁵⁵

Working in humanities academia, Jin Xiaowen was quite acute in recalling her experience. Such a detailed and subtle event might flash and leave no trace in others' memories. When she was a teenager, she did not pay specific attention to her breasts, as she had other problems to worry about: she was far too tall compared to other girls. The female body was strange and distant to her, and it seems she had never thought of a feminine body. For her, the flat body was normal, an appearance all Chinese girls shared in her previous knowledge system. The breast was a crucial symbol of essential difference between Chinese and non-Chinese girls. The rediscovery of breasts proved the absence of breasts in her experience, which she suggested was because of cultural differences. Another fact is that Jin Xiaowen's breasts did not develop enough to bother her. She did not find it necessary to wear a brassiere until the early 1990s when she arrived in America, and felt the milk-heavy diet had changed her figure.⁵⁶

5.3 Beauty, Ideology and Femininity

The psychological researches could only explain the feelings of anxiety and embarrassment that women felt, yet they could not explain the reason why women adopted breast-binding as a specific solution. The practice of breast-binding should also be examined under the social and historical circumstances in Mao's era. Recent research had demonstrated the perception that women in Mao's China did not appreciate feminine beauty was problematic. Instead, they had the desire for beauty in a broader sense that might be deviant Republican mainstream urban fashion, or the fashion nowadays that focuses on the sexual allure of women. Women also had alternative tactics to pursue beauty. For example, they would use scarfs, fringes and gauze masks, and replaceable collars for decorations.⁵⁷ This section intends to discuss how aesthetics and ideology shaped the practice of breast-binding, and

⁵⁵ Interview with Jin Xiaowen.

⁵⁶ Interview with Jin Xiaowen.

⁵⁷ Ip, "Fashioning Appearances"; Sun, *Shishang Yu Zhengzhi*. Interviews with Jin Xiaowen, Wu Yinyan, Cui Xueqin and Zhang Shuo.

women's femininities. As a set of acceptable or ideal practices contingent on social contexts, femininity was constantly subject to change. It not only refers to the female bodily appearance, but also indicates a repertoire of rules of social behaviours. I argue that instead of creating gender-neutral bodies, breast-binding has more subtleties in defining beauty and femininity.

Flat chest, according to many women, was beautiful and favourable, and on the contrary, large breasts were ugly and shameful. Usually, women use the word ‘好看 *haokan*’ (good looking) instead of ‘美 *mei*’ (beautiful) to express their preferences.⁵⁸ The meaning of ‘good looking’ is more ambiguous than ‘beautiful’, which not only signifies feminine beauty, but also indicates moral propriety. For many women, the body which caused the least shame and embarrassment could be considered as good-looking. Born in 1949 in a merchant's family in Beijing, Xu Shulan went to a prestigious girls' junior high school in 1963. Xu Shulan remembered wearing colourful one-piece dresses before 1963. However, after the start of junior high school, she mostly only wore white shirts and blue trousers, occasionally coloured skirts, as all her other classmates dressed in the same style (Figure 5-1). The white shirts made the management of nipples necessary.⁵⁹ When her body went through pubertal development, she did not want her breasts to develop. Even in a single-sex school, Xu also bound her breasts, “using a piece of white cloth to sew a little garment and tie the chest flat”. She wore the little garment day and night, and bound it even tighter during the physical education class to avoid breast bounce. Most of her classmates did the same. Xu Shulan says: “It's a competition. You would do the same as all the others did it.”⁶⁰ She wore this little garment during her three years of resettlement in the countryside (*chadui* 插隊). Until the age of twenty-three, Xu attended a normal school. She stopped breast-binding at that time because an onsite doctor warned her about the potential health issues of breast-

⁵⁸ Interviews with Li Rufen, He Meiqi, Ju Fengzhu, Xu Mingzhi, Xu Yueqiu, Jiang Yingli, Li Jinying, Shi Aihua.

⁵⁹ The concern of nipples could also be found in interview with Ling Ling.

⁶⁰ Interview with Xu Shulan.

binding.⁶¹ Among my interviewees, Xu was one of those who had practised breast-binding much longer than the others, for almost nine years.

Xu Shulan's sense of embarrassment of the breasts was rooted from gendered morality that dated long before the establishment of PRC discussed in chapters one and two, which believed large breasts were symbols of lasciviousness. Despite the fact that breast-binding became unfashionable in the 1930s and 1940s, it seemed that the notion that large breasts indicated improper sexual behaviour did not disappear. Ju Fengzhu, born in 1939 in a suburban industrial area in Shanghai in a technician's family, recalled if an unmarried woman had big breasts, others would mock that: "The girl has not been here yet, but you can already see her breasts in front of male cadres."⁶² Others might also comment this girl had been touched by men.⁶³ From Xu Mingzhi's experience, flat chest meant a girl of good behaviour. If a girl had bulging breasts, people would comment: "She doesn't look like a girl. She's like an old pussy (*lao niangmener* 老娘們兒)".⁶⁴ It was almost unbearable for girls to receive this kind of comment, because it gave a hint that the girl was not sexually moderate and might have lost her virginity. In contrast, after marriage and especially breastfeeding, women did not have to bother about them anymore.⁶⁵ Thus, by breast-binding, some women did not imitate men's bodies; in contrast, they were learning how to become proper women. Therefore I would argue that in Mao's China, some women bound their breasts in order to create a well-behaved chaste female body.

In addition, a politically correct femininity also required women to be cautious of their breasts. Xu Shulan said: "If you did not bind them flat, people would consider that you had the bad bourgeois spirit (*zichan jieji huai sixiang* 資產階級壞思想). So we all did it secretly."⁶⁶ Xu Shulan's concern was also shared by many other women. Looking in a mirror publicly, checked jacket, clothes with narrow waists, long hair, love affairs in novels, even discussions on beauty, would

⁶¹ During the Cultural Revolution, millions of youth ceased education and were sent to rural areas in order to study from peasants. For a detailed history of the Cultural Revolution, see Jiaqi Yan and Gao Gao, *Wenge Shi Nian de "Zhongguo"* (Hong Kong: Lishi yanjiushe, 1989).

⁶² Interview with Ju Fengzhu. The Chinese reads: "人還沒到，這個東西就跑到男同志前面去了".

⁶³ Interview with Ju Fengzhu.

⁶⁴ Interview with Xu Mingzhi.

⁶⁵ Interview with Xu Mingzhi, Xu Yueqiu, Jiang Yingli, Shi Aihua.

⁶⁶ Interview with Xu Shulan 2013.

all be condemned as ‘bourgeois’.⁶⁷ What were bourgeois spirits? Why did large breasts symbolise bourgeoisie? What were the consequences of being bourgeoisies?

A brief discussion of class and cultural symbols in Mao’s China is called for at this juncture. Although class distinctions were omnipresent in Mao’s era, they were nevertheless far from clearly defined. According to Maurice Meisner, there were at least three different sources of classification. Firstly, the social structure that the New China inherited from the old society, identifying the urban middle class as bourgeoisies; secondly, right before the Cultural Revolution, Mao redefined the new bureaucratic ruling class and new social elites as new bourgeoisie class; thirdly, one’s class status was not static, yet could be changed through one’s political consciousness and behaviours. The ambiguity brought great divisions and confusions. One could easily adopt different versions of classification on various occasions. During the Cultural Revolution especially, individuals could be easily ‘labelled as class enemies on a variety of theoretical and political grounds’.⁶⁸

People’s bourgeois spirits were also judged by details in their lifestyles. Throughout the entire history of the Communist Party, it attempted to create cultural symbols to represent its values and beliefs. As Elizabeth Perry suggests: “The role of cultural positioning, or the strategic deployment of a range of symbolic resources (religion, ritual, rhetoric, dress, drama, art, and so on)” was central to political persuasion.⁶⁹ The most apparent characteristics of bourgeois class were trivial things in one’s lifestyle such as “street names, fashions, hairstyles, public discourse, daily formalities and rituals, traditional architecture, long-standing conventions”, which all became things to be wiped out especially since the Cultural Revolution.⁷⁰ In the political sphere, Mao himself also used trivial things, such as his food preferences, as political metaphors on various occasions, paving ways for his new policies, demonstrating his moral superiority of living a frugal life as the most powerful man in the country during the Great Famine, simplifying ideologies to people with limited

⁶⁷ Chang, *Wild Swans*, 523; Mu, *Vermilion Gate*, 294. Interview with Guo Youxin 2013, Zhang Shuo 2015.

⁶⁸ Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*, 308.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Perry, *Anyuan: Mining China’s Revolutionary Tradition* (Berkeley, New York, London: University of California Press, 2012), 4.

⁷⁰ Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 195.

education.⁷¹ In a word, during the Mao era, nothing was trivial, and the ‘trivialities’ became the essential to determine one’s political consciousness, including women’s body and the female breasts.

Ordinary women who found it impossible to know what exactly was ‘bourgeois’ also categorised specific lifestyles, such as dressing beautifully, drinking coffee, watching films, and listening to Western music or radio as typical traits of bourgeois spirits.⁷² As Wei Junyi writes, people did not know what was bourgeois culture, yet they knew for sure that they should follow the Party closely, and they should oppose whatever the Party opposed. For Wei Junyi, the majority of the Chinese people did not yet have the bourgeois thinking that they should oppose, so they could only protest against university education, foreign books, nice dresses etc.⁷³ The poorer one was, the more revolutionary one was.⁷⁴

A further examination of women’s interviews and Maoist discourse reveals that large and sexual breasts, and curvy bodily lines that conveyed sexual connotations, were criticised not only as bourgeoisie, but also as symbols of the Rightists and Soviet Revisionism. Many of the Rightists were intellectuals who might have a delicate preference for clothing, which could easily be considered as drifting apart from the working class folk. The so-called Rightists’ discontent with worker’s uniform and peasants’ cotton padded jackets was considered as an attack against the Socialist China.⁷⁵ In 1967, when the Sino-Soviet relation was on the brink of collapse, an article in *Renmin ribao* referred to an international fashion show in the Soviet Union as the most repulsive performance of the ‘most repulsive civilization on earth’. The parallel fashion exhibition presented low-cut evening dresses, short skirts, oversized coats and tight trousers, which were deemed ‘demon-like’. The article claimed that the fashion exhibition symbolised the Soviet Union’s degeneration to the capitalist power, the Soviet revisionism (*suxiu* 蘇修) zealously embraced Western peculiar clothes and reflected their capitalist nature.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Hanchao Lu, “The taste of Chairman Mao: The Quotidian as Statecraft in the Great Leap Forward and Its Aftermath,” *Modern China* 41, no. 5 (2015): 539–72.

⁷² Interview with Ling Ling.

⁷³ Wei Junyi, *Si tong lu* (Beijing: Shiyue wenyi chubanshe, 1998), 110–11.

⁷⁴ Interview with Guo Youxin.

⁷⁵ Yuan Mei, “Toufa, fuzhuang, mei,” *Renmin ribao*, April 20, 1964.

⁷⁶ “Xifang de shizhuang he pantu de linghun,” *Renmin ribao*, September 23, 1967.

Confusion reigned. Some women did not even distinguish the concepts of feudalism, capitalism and revisionism; instead, they used the acronym ‘封資修 *fengzixiu*’ to refer all that was not proletarian. Jiang Yingli said: “How dare you present a curvy body. That was *fengzixiu*!”⁷⁷ Ordinary women instead followed what everyone else wore, which determined the common dressing rules.⁷⁸ Some put patches on their clothes in order to look ‘proletarian’.⁷⁹

Contradictory and ambiguous, the definitions of ‘feudalism’ and ‘bourgeoisie’ left women no clear-cut rules to adhere to. In their daily lives, most of them simply dressed in what all the others wore. Paradoxically, breast-binding was long condemned as ‘feudal remnants’ since the 1950s until the 1970s in official discourse. However, very few women would consider breast-binding as ‘feudal’ while practising it. I would argue this is because firstly, women used the word ‘feudalism’ without understanding its meaning. Secondly, behaving according to the pre-existing conservative ‘feudal’ norm (breast-binding) was much safer than behaving like ‘bourgeoisies’ who highlighted their breasts. Thirdly, the ‘unbinding breasts for Chairman Mao’ rhetoric had little influence on the vast majority of women’s daily lives. A woman had a particular dilemma that if she did not manage her big breasts, she would be gossiped about both as an ‘immoral girl’ and a ‘bourgeoisie’. Although the idea of women’s chastity was officially deemed ‘feudal thoughts’, yet one should not behave without considering it. Firstly, the idea of chaste still played an important role in evaluating a woman. Secondly, one who did not care much about chastity could easily be labelled as bourgeois individualism, putting their personal pleasures before the socialist construction. As historian Lu Hanchao argues, “[d]espite Mao Zedong’s declaration that China had abandoned ‘feudalism’ – the Marxist label for China’s imperial past – and his often dismissive attitude towards established culture, much of his political ideology and practices were deeply embedded in the traditions he claimed to reject.”⁸⁰ The pre-existing social norm converged with the ‘anti-bourgeois’ movement, and left the so-called

⁷⁷ Interview with Jiang Yingli.

⁷⁸ Chang, *Wild Swans*, 523.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 383.

⁸⁰ Lu, “The Tastes of Chairman Mao,” 540.

‘feudal thoughts’ with little challenge during the Maoist era. Breast-binding thus created a femininity that was not ‘bourgeois’.

In the 1960s, women remembered that *qipao* and skirts became less visible on the street. Especially after the start of the Cultural Revolution, many women just wore plain shirts.⁸¹ During a time when other colourful dress became taboo, dressing in military uniforms became a fashion trend especially among the younger generation. Serving in the military was the most prestigious occupation among the younger generation, especially during the Cultural Revolution. A liberation Army soldier was ‘[o]ne of the heroes admired by all’.⁸² Wu Yinyan’s parents were high officials in the central intelligence agency, who were not discriminated against during the Cultural Revolution. Therefore she was lucky to get into the army, a dream for so many girls, as there was no better choice for young urban students. Very few women were as lucky as Wu Yinyan, many of her friends could not get into the army due to their parents’ political issues.⁸³

For girls, wearing military uniform was a competition of fashion. Wearing the most desirable uniform every day, Wu Yinyan was believed to be one of the best young women in the country. Real military uniform was very difficult to obtain at that time, which was a privilege of those from an army family background, as well as a symbol of a revolutionary. Unable to get military uniforms, another woman Zhang Shuo – whose parents worked at *Renmin ribao* and Party School of the Central Committee of CPC – bought a lot of green and yellow chemical dyes, and spent days dyeing all of her clothes and handkerchiefs into the military green.⁸⁴ Dyed military uniforms were regarded as lacking ‘the haughty air of the elite, and their green was often not quite the right shade.’⁸⁵ Unlike others who chose to wear homemade uniforms, Xu Shulan only wished to wear an authentic army uniform. Later on, when she had military training, the platoon leader of her unit gave her one as a present. She liked it so much that she fondly kept it in the wardrobe and seldom wore it.

⁸¹ Chang, *Wild Swans*, 350. Interview with Li Jinying.

⁸² Ji-li Jiang, *Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Harper Trophy, 1997),

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⁸³ Interview with Wu Yinyan.

⁸⁴ Interview with Zhang Shuo.

⁸⁵ Chang, *Wild Swans*, 492.

Nevertheless, none of the uniform was designed to fit one's body, usually the military uniforms were extremely baggy (Figure 5-2), unlike the ones in the films like the *Red Detachment of Women* (*hongse niangzijun* 紅色娘子軍, Figure 5-3). In Wu Yinyan's memory, they did not have the concept of fitted clothes at all. The only decoration of the uniform, the belt, could only be worn in the morning exercise or muster drills, and was forbidden at other times.⁸⁶ Presumably because the belt could draw attention to one's figure. Mu Aiping's father was a high military official in Beijing. Although her father's summer uniform jacket was too big for her, even on top of her padded winter jacket, she still was deeply envied by her peers.⁸⁷ As long as it was the 'authentic' army uniform, it did not matter if it was too loose or oversized. "It's like wearing the big brands today," Xu Shulan said.⁸⁸

For some women, military fashion also required them to flatten their chests. Many of the women I interviewed suggest that because of the frugality of their childhood, girls could not develop a plump body like those of the post-1980s generation. Wang Yulu had a harder time than those women when she was young. She was fatter than other girls and her body developed more quickly than her peers. Born in a military family, Wang Yulu travelled a lot during her early time, but spent most of her childhood and adolescent years in Xi'an. Once her breasts could be seen, she was so anxious that she started to think what to do to flatten them. She bought brassieres from a local shop, as her mother was too busy with work to sew one for her and luckily the family could afford the expense on brassieres, which was a privilege compared to her classmates who were from the rural areas. The brassiere she bought was actually a large vest, which was made from white cotton cloth, long to the waistline with more than ten buttons in front of the chest. The brassiere was designed with two cups, but the first thing Wang Yulu did when she got home was to sew the cups flat. Her elder sister showed her how to sew the cups without leaving a noticeable seam, and monitored her to wear it day and night.

The outfits of Wang Yulu were also designed not to show her bodyline. She recalled the girls all wore very loose garments, and their winter cotton padded coats

⁸⁶ Interview with Wu Yinyan.

⁸⁷ Mu, *Vermilion Gate*, 283.

⁸⁸ Interview with Xu Shulan.

were so large that the hems of the coats would curl up, so that the bodyline could not be seen. Wang Yulu repeatedly cited Chairman Mao's famous quote that daughters of China should 'prefer hardy uniforms to colourful silk'. To her understanding, Chairman Mao required girls to dress like boys, which meant their chest had to be flattened.⁸⁹ As early as 1919, Mao had expressed his rejection of women's hairstyles, skirts, jewellery, and bound feet, and the solution of women's emancipation was to establish a women's army.⁹⁰ This poem was first published in 1963, and was widely cited later on and became a popular slogan for women:

Early rays of sun illumine the parade grounds
and these handsome girls heroic in the wind,
with rifles five feet long.
Daughters of China with a marvellous will,
you prefer hardy uniforms to colourful silk.⁹¹

The military uniform popularity was further affirmed by Mao in various occasions and directions,⁹² and promoted by the 'model plays'. During a time of strict censorship in all cultural products, 'model plays' were the only few operas that could be played during the Cultural Revolution. Out of the eight most widely staged model plays, seven portrayed the heroic Party members or the Liberation army during the Sino-Japanese war (1937-1945), Chinese Revolution (1946-1949) and the Korean War (1950-1953). The operas were made into films and records and were played all over the country. Posters of the model plays were so omnipresent that they became a standard visual representation. Actors dressed in military uniforms (Figure 5-4) and local militias holding their weapons (Figure 5-5) looked bellicose, upright and invincible, ready for battle at any moment. In people's daily lives, they dressed up like militias and went to studios to have photos taken in a similar style (Figure 5-6). In Xu Shulan's impression, all the films she watched during the Cultural Revolution were presented as if without women.⁹³ Certainly that was not the case.

⁸⁹ Interview with Wang Yulu.

⁹⁰ Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China*, 230-31.

⁹¹ First published in Mao zedong, *Maozhuxi shici* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1963). The translation is cited from: Mao Zedong, *The Poems of Mao Tse-Tung*, trans. Willis Barnstone (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 98-99.

⁹² Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China*, 234-35.

⁹³ Interview with Xu Shulan.

By ‘without women’ Xu Shulan actually meant that there were no women in a feminine and sexually attractive way. Women in the cultural products were either heroines or the victims of the old society.

Some women deliberately covered their body and blurred their gender identities to be more revolutionary. Raised with equal opportunity of education and gender equal discourse, many urban women found that their gender identities were either not relevant to them at all or awakened in a painful way their private experiences. They consciously rejected the concept of being a girl or a woman:

“[w]e would not wear skirts, blouses, and sandals. Anything that would make girls look like girls was bourgeois. We covered up our bodies so completely that I almost forgot I was a girl. I was a Red Guard. Others were Red Guards too. And that was it.”⁹⁴

June Chang believed that girls did not have much possibility to behave femininely in the Cultural Revolution, except for a few who would manage to wear their clothes with careful thoughts.⁹⁵ Wang Zheng expressed her friends’ discontent of being called ‘women’ in the late 1970s. A female youth (*qingnian* 青年) means an unmarried woman, who was potentially linked to future professional occupations. Being a woman usually referred to a married woman, who lost her individuality and was often associated with housewives surrounded with children, dishes and clothes.⁹⁶ Performing girly would deprive women of their privileged positions of being a youth, thus some of them would consciously choose not to do so. Large breasts, to some women, only belong to ‘married women’, rather than ‘young women’. As Ju Fengzhu suggested, only breastfeeding women had large breasts, especially the uneducated lower class rural women, who usually had many children and could “throw their breasts behind their backs”. Wearing a tight vest meant civilization, and higher level of beauty.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Yang, *Spider Eaters: A Memoir*, 135.

⁹⁵ Chang, *Wild Swans*, 422, 460.

⁹⁶ Zheng Wang, “Call Me ‘qingnian’ but Not ‘funü’: A Maoist Youth in Retrospect,” in *Some of Us: Chinese Women Growing up in the Mao Era*, ed. Xueping Zhong, Zheng Wang, and Di Bai (New Brunswick, New Jersey, London: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 27–52.

⁹⁷ Interview with Li Meijuan, Ju Fengzhu.

By binding her breasts, Wang Yulu attempted to pursue the masculinity that Chairman Mao required, yet she also constantly negotiated with this doctrine female ideal. After Wang Yulu watched the ballet *Red Detachment of Women*, she finally found an excuse for her to loosen her little garment a bit, as actors in the ballet showed their figures by wearing belts.⁹⁸ Wang Yulu's breast-binding was highly performative, as she did not fully believe the idea that flat chest was beautiful or persist in pursuing the revolutionary ideal. She bound her breasts out of peer and sibling pressure, but at the same time constantly sought chances to unbind them.

For other women, breast-binding also marked a division of public and private spaces. Although Xu Shulan said on the one hand, flat chest was beautiful, girls competed with each other in breast-binding. Yet on the other hand, her intuition of beauty also made her not bind her chest that tight.⁹⁹ Mu Aiping, a daughter of a high military official, did consider tight clothes were beautiful, yet she did not dare to wear them outside. She just wore tight sweaters inside a baggy outfit.¹⁰⁰ Therefore the purpose of breast-binding was to present a publicly acceptable femininity, to demonstrate that one was a decent girl, at least ostensibly. Therefore breast-binding also differed greatly from individual to individual in different spaces, as contradictory aesthetics coexisted among women.

The Republican and Communist anti-breast-binding discourse usually regarded breast-binding as a life-threatening practice. Women were portrayed so stubborn that they would not change the practice even if it caused serious health issues. However, in reality, women were quite flexible with their bodies, and constantly negotiated their bodily presence with their circumstances. Firstly, they adjusted the little vest as their body developed. When Ju Fengzhu's body started to develop when she was thirteen, her grandmother made her tight vests. Although they were usually very tight, her grandmother also adjusted the size of the vest while her chest grew. For Ju, breast-binding was essentially different from foot-binding; the

⁹⁸ Interview with Wang Yulu.

⁹⁹ Interview with Xu Shulan.

¹⁰⁰ Conversation with Mu Aiping February 2014.

latter was rigid, whereas the former was flexible.¹⁰¹ Secondly, not all women who bound their breasts would cause much pain on their bodies, nor difficulties in breathing.¹⁰² Thirdly, the length of breast-binding also varied from several months to years, up to breastfeeding. Most women would stop breast-binding after they entered into workplaces.¹⁰³ Because women would adjust their bound breasts, only one of my interviewees, Shi Aihua, said breast-binding caused one of her breasts to have nipple depression.¹⁰⁴ Others said the only consequence of breast-binding was that their breasts did not develop firm and pointed; instead, some of them commented women of their generation had breasts flat, not at the centre, but to the sides of their chests.¹⁰⁵

5.4 Violence

Although women like Xu Shulan admitted that she also considered curvy body was beautiful, she nevertheless bound her breasts until the age of twenty-three. I would argue that the reasons women embodied that aesthetics was also due to coercion – daily potential danger of rhetorical, physical and institutional violence towards their appearances. Violent language that referred to women’s chastity could also be found everywhere. Jin Xiaowen remembered that in her middle school experience, girls were especially vulnerable for rhetoric insult, which indicated their sexual activities. Among those words, ‘broken vase’ (*sui tanzi* 碎壇子) disturbed her the most, and eventually after many years she found out it means a girl who was raped or who lost her virginity, ultimately worthless like a broken vase.¹⁰⁶ Other words include female demons (*nüyaoting* 女妖精), stinky beauty (*choumei* 臭美), seeking in the limelight (*chu fengtou* 出風頭), showing off (*xianbai* 顯擺).¹⁰⁷ Although the cult of chastity belonged to the ‘four olds’ (*sijiu* 四舊),¹⁰⁸ one of Mao’s famous essays *In Memory of Bethune* (*jinian baiqiuen* 紀念白求恩), which was one of the three essays required to be recited by all Chinese, said that one should have “moral integrity and above

¹⁰¹ Interview with Ju Fengzhu.

¹⁰² Interview with Qiao Xiuhua, Tang Haifeng.

¹⁰³ Interview with Qiao Xiuhua.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Shi Aihua.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Xu Mingzhi, Ying Peizhen, Wang Yulu.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Jin Xiaowen.

¹⁰⁷ Interviews with Jin Zhinan, Cui Xueqin.

¹⁰⁸ The “four olds” includes old thought, culture, custom and practices. One of the major aims of the Cultural Revolution was to sweep the “four olds” out of the society, according to state propo ganda.

vulgar interests”.¹⁰⁹ Vulgar interests no doubt means the sexual desires outside marital relations. Hence chastity was valued in the defence of Chairman Mao. Thus the comments of being an ‘old pussy’ condemned their debauched behaviour. It was practical for girls to cover their bodies up in order to avoid the rhetorical violence towards them.

The rhetorical and physical violence were nonetheless based on the violence of gazing. In his study of Western art, John Berger argues that in Western painting, “men act and women appear. Men look at women.” Women also look at themselves as males, and in this way a woman objectivises herself as a vision.¹¹⁰ In her study of the veil of Muslim women, Katherine Bullock develops Berger’s argument further, considering both men and women are gazers towards women with male desire.¹¹¹ I would argue that in the Communist period, women were gazing at each other, not through the eyes of ‘male desire’, but through the eyes of ‘chastity’.

Firstly, women were gazed upon by men and women, young and old. Women’s reluctance to participate in sports due to breast bounce in the Republican era continued in Mao’s China. Zhao Xiulin attended a sports team in Henan province when she was a teenager. Although male athletes and female athletes were trained separately, male athletes would mock female athletes who had big breasts while jogging, even from a distance.¹¹² Born in the 1950s in Changchun, Li Meijuan had to bow her chest while walking. She even did not dare to run when she was almost late for school, as she could not bear boys’ laughter because of her joggling chest.¹¹³ For the girls who grew up in the fifties and sixties, the stares of boys also drove them to manage their bodies in a certain way.

¹⁰⁹ Mao Zedong, “In Memory of Norman Bethune,” *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_25.htm, accessed August 20, 2016.

¹¹⁰ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Paris, London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 2008, first published in 1972).

¹¹¹ Katherine Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical & Modern Stereotypes*, 2nd ed. (London, Washington: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2007, first edition published in 2002), 187.

¹¹² Interview with Zhao Xiulin.

¹¹³ Interview with Li Meijuan.

Secondly, women gazed upon themselves with a sense of shame. Jin Zhinan, born in Yu Lin, Shaanxi in a well-off family, was proud that she did not bind her breasts, because only her rural classmates did that. However, at the age of twenty-seven or twenty-eight, after getting married, Jin Zhinan was so ashamed (*xiu* 羞) and scared (*haipa* 害怕) of her first pregnancy that she bound her belly in order to keep others in the dark. At first she wound her body with coarse cotton, then she made a bellyband with a row of buttons. While interviewing, another woman Wu Yinyan questioned her about the reasons for doing so, because according to her experience, as long as one was married, legitimate pregnancy should not be embarrassing. Jin Zhinan thought the legitimacy of the pregnancy was irrelevant, she simply thought pregnancy was ugly (*nankan* 難看). She attributed her behaviour to the local backwardness of the small and remote county in Shaanxi.¹¹⁴ The shamefulness of pregnancy could also be found in suburban districts of Shanghai, as Shi Aihua recalls in her stories.¹¹⁵ The sense of shame of pregnancy, I would argue, is because it proved one's sexual relationship. Even after legitimate marriage, the visibility of having had sex was somehow embarrassing to women.

Thirdly, they were also gazers of their peers, which created peer pressure in women's daily social networks. In Mao's era, in many northern provinces, people shared public baths, which created a space where women could closely observe each other. Zhao Xiulin observed other girls wearing the tight vests in the public baths.¹¹⁶ In Heilongjiang, Xu Xiaoying remembered, there was a female worker in her canteen who had exceptionally big breasts. When she showered in the public baths, all the old ladies would have looked at her and gossiped: "How big her breasts are, as if she had fed several babies." Xu Xiaoying also watched this woman while showering, saying that she had bound her chest so hard that a deep mark was visible on her back.¹¹⁷ In light of the absence of physical knowledge, girls shared their individual experiences in private between their closest friends, and gossiping about other girls. The 'little garment' that proved a beginning point of adolescent development was gossiped about among girls. One of Xu Mingzhi's friends often

¹¹⁴ Interview with Jin Zhina.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Shi Aihua.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Zhao Xiulin.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Xu Xiaoying.

pretended to greet other girls casually by patting them on their shoulders; in this way she could know whether or not the girls had started wearing the little garment.¹¹⁸

Shi Aihua grew up in Chongming, a county in Shanghai. Her father worked in a small local shop, and all her siblings were peasants. After the Cultural Revolution, sent-down youth arrived in Chongming, who were observed closely by local peasants. Wearing red trousers was deemed hooliganism, as well as those who had big breasts. Being gazed at by the peasants, the sent-down youth were also cautious about their behaviour, not sticking their breasts out.¹¹⁹ If a woman dressed well, others would believe that she attempted to seduce men, and she was certainly sexually immoral.¹²⁰ Wang Yulu had a girl classmate who did not flatten her breasts, or even touch and play with her breasts at school, which was quite astonishing to her classmates. This girl was eventually isolated by all of the others. Wang realised that girls had to be careful with their bodies.¹²¹ Wu Yinyan said people would definitely think nasty things if an unmarried girl had large breasts.¹²²

After the breakout of the Cultural Revolution, inappropriate appearances would further bring physical violence. One of the most striking things happened in the Cultural Revolution that Xu Shulan still recalled is the violent event that happened to one of her high school teachers in Beijing. One day, the teacher confronted a group of Red Guards during her pregnancy. They cut her trousers open from the bottom to the top in public because they were too tight. Seeing her weeping and sitting in the corridor, unable to go home, Xu Shulan, a student in that school, hesitated if she should help the teacher up and eventually walked away after carefully looking around. She was too afraid of being bullied by the Red Guards, which was likely to happen if she helped the teacher.¹²³ Similar stories happened in Shanghai and Guangdong. Cheng Nien witnessed Red Guards shouting at a pretty girl: “Why do you wear shoes with pointed end? Why do you wear slacks with narrow legs?” They removed her shoes, and cut her slacks open with laughing and

¹¹⁸ Interview with Xu Mingzhi.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Shi Aihua.

¹²⁰ Interview with Li Jinying.

¹²¹ Interview with Wang Yulu.

¹²² Interview with Wu Yinyan.

¹²³ Interview with Xu Shulan.

jeering audiences.¹²⁴ Fei Yichun liked to dress in narrow trousers, which she believed fitted her petite figure best. After the breakout of the Cultural Revolution, her mother bought her a pair of loose trousers immediately, knowing the violence on the street in Shanghai. The trousers looked like somebody had lent them to Fei, but her mother said: “You’re safe now.”¹²⁵ In Guangdong, Red Guards would stay in department stores and on the streets, measuring the legs of people’s trousers with a rice wine bottle. If the bottle could not fit in the leg, they would cut off the bottom of the trouser leg.¹²⁶

Since the early PRC, lifestyle articles such as clothes were frequently debated in periodicals. In the 1960s, articles in *Renmin ribao* suggested that the struggle of costume was by no means a minor issue, but instead it was a reflection of class struggle.¹²⁷ The link between costume and class struggle was significant as it legitimised the violence against the ones who did not dress properly. In November 1964, *Renmin Ribao* published an article criticising peculiar costume, including tight trousers. The report was arranged at the top of the second page on *Renmin ribao*, right after the front page that covered high ranking Party leaders’ activities, with the title in large font. Reading *Renmin ribao* could be challenging for common people, not only because the rate of literacy was still relatively low at that time, but also it required close reading between the lines, which was a test of an individual’s political sensitivity. Even the details such as the order of leaders in an article could indicate who would be the next state target.¹²⁸ Arranging the article on the ‘peculiar costume’ (*qizhuang yifu* 奇裝異服) in such an eye-catching position indicates that people’s appearances had been scrutinised by the state power. If Xu Shulan’s teacher and the girl in Cheng Nien’s memoir had any political sensitivity, they probably would not wear that kind of tight trousers on the street after the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.

¹²⁴ Nien Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai* (London: Grafton Books, 1986), 58–59.

¹²⁵ Interview with Fei Yichun.

¹²⁶ Sun Peidong, “Kujiao shangde jieji douzheng: wenge shiqi guangdong de qizhuangyifu yu guojia guixun,” *Kaifang shidai*, no. 6 (2010).

¹²⁷ Xinhuashe shanghai, “Shanghai guangda renmin jiji canjia dizhi qizhuang yifu de taolun.”

¹²⁸ Gao Hua, *Geming niandai* (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2012).

Clothes, as part of people's appearance, were closely associated with people's political attitudes, class origins and personal histories. Xu Shulan said that tight garments were only tolerated for wear by returned overseas Chinese. For others, tight trousers were an obvious symbol of the bourgeoisie.¹²⁹ Two years prior to the Cultural Revolution, *Renmin ribao* had already distinguished the differences between returned overseas Chinese and the others. An article said: "Permed hair does not indicate that one's thoughts were bourgeois...some of our patriotic fellow countrymen who previously lived overseas dressed differently from those who lived in the country just because they were accustomed to that". However, the article still despised those who over-emphasised their appearance: "Nowadays, an optimistic and hard-working person would certainly not waste time on such troublesome and peculiar hairstyles." Although such articles always started with "we could not judge a person's thought according to one's hairstyle and dress", they would confirm that it would be dangerous to pursue appearances as their goals of lives.¹³⁰

The Cultural Revolution was marked by its violence on a large scale in the country. Young Red Guards "abused, beat and tortured their teachers, classmates, neighbours, sometimes even their parents; drove them to suicide, or murdered them; and wrote about it afterwards in tones of perplexity as to how it all happened".¹³¹ Labelling people's appearances to Rightists, the conspiracy of America's cultural invasion and the degeneration of the Soviet Union was significant to regulate people's daily dress, and empowered the Red Guards who were eager to struggle against the class enemies, or could be conveniently used to target someone as a class enemy if he/she did not dress according to the normal dress code.

Physical violence on the grounds of dress code was not rare during the Cultural Revolution, and women were especially vulnerable with improper dressing.¹³² The story of 'tight trousers' eventually linked to all kinds of tight garments, including tight tops for women. Mu Aiping recalled that one of her father's colleagues was brought down because his daughter dressed in tight clothes, indicating that she was sexually immoral. Mu Aiping also admits that, in this case, clothes might be an

¹²⁹ Interview with Xu Shulan.

¹³⁰ Mei, "Toufa, fuzhuang, mei."

¹³¹ Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China*, 229.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 228.

excuse of power struggle, if nobody wished to struggle against him, he would not step down for this reason.¹³³ Similar to sexual behaviours, Mao had also admitted that he just used it as a tool to target his enemies. The sexual behaviour per se was not problematic for him.¹³⁴ Yet for ordinary people, not wearing tight clothes became intuition for many of them.

Comparing all sorts of other violence, Zhang Shuo was fairly calm when the Red Guards cut her plaits off when she was about thirteen. She was living in the compound of Party School of the Central Committee of CCP, as her mother worked there. Having witnessed so many neighbours and friends of her parents being criticised, denounced and beaten, some of whom committed suicide, some of her classmates separated from their parents, looked down upon, isolated and spit on by their peers, Zhang Shuo felt quite indifferent when her plaits were cut off by the Red Guards in front of a crowd in Wangfujing. For her, the violence towards her outfit was endurable, comparing all the tragedies she had witnessed.¹³⁵ Yet it is also possible that the memory was so difficult to recall that she made the story tolerable for herself.

Facing various and omnipresent pressures of violence, women who grew up in the Communist period were well trained to be cautious towards their appearance. However, the standards of proletarian and bourgeois beauty also changed constantly, therefore they had to adjust their appearance according to the most acceptable ideals.

5.5 Feudal (*fengjian* 封建) and Chineseness: Memory of the Body

When talking about their past bodily experiences, women also projected their understanding of that historical period. Although flat chest was considered a fashionable practice among girls in Mao's era, retrospectively some women recall it with great negative judgments. When Xu Mingzhi described her experience of breast-binding, she constantly used the word 'feudal':

¹³³ Conversation with Mu Aiping.

¹³⁴ Zhisui Li, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* (New York: Random House, 1994).

¹³⁵ Interview with Zhang Shuo.

People from the old days were so feudal. We would never let others see when we were changing. We washed the little garments secretly. When we hung out these clothes (the little garments), we would first hang it on the rope, and hang an outfit on top in order to cover them. They should not be hung there publicly and seen by others. All of us did that. It was very feudal.¹³⁶

Li Meijuan, born in the 1950s in Jilin, had an interesting conversation with her ninety years old mother-in-law Wang Suzhen, who was raised in Shanghai in a well-to-do merchant's family. When Li Meijuan talked about breast-binding in the 1960s, Wang Suzhen was greatly confused:

Wang Suzhen: We didn't bind breasts (when we were young).

Li Meijuan: That was in your time. I was in my time.

Wang Suzhen: Your time should be after my time (so it should be more progressive).

Li Meijuan: Yes indeed! So on the contrary we had the feudal thoughts!

Recalling her memories of breast-binding, Li Meijuan had difficulties in understanding the reasons for this practice which was pervasive among girls. She could only explain it with the 'feudal' relationships between boys and girls. In 1968, when she enrolled in a junior high school, girls and boys stopped talking to each other. In the classroom, girls sat with girls and boys sat with boys. If two girls were seated in front of two boys, they even wouldn't dare to turn their heads. Any girl who talked to boys in private would be considered as a female hoodlum.¹³⁷

This kind of gender segregation was recalled by many women with some extent of variations throughout Mao's era. Wu Yinyan did not even talk to her brothers outside the family.¹³⁸ In the 1950s Shanghai, Wang Yudan recalled in her secondary school, if there were only girls in the classroom, the first boy who entered the room would be jeered by others.¹³⁹ In her junior high school in Xi'an, Wang Yulu was seated with a boy for three years without talking to each other. Sometimes

¹³⁶ Interview with Xu Mingzhi.

¹³⁷ Interview with Wang Suzhen and Li Meijuan.

¹³⁸ Interview with Wu yinyan.

¹³⁹ Interview with Wang Yudan.

when Wang Yulu had difficulties in study, she would stare at the boy's workbook, and then the boy would push his workbook to Wang Yulu's side. That was all their communications.¹⁴⁰ In Xu Mingzhi's experience, gender segregation began from elementary school:

We were very feudal at that time. Unlike boys and girls nowadays, who were always wild. When we were at school, we all drew a line in the middle of the desk (between boys and girls), and nobody should cross the border...When we were in the third or fourth grade in elementary school, whenever seeing a boy, girls will walk around without saying a single word.¹⁴¹

It was impossible to figure out where Xu Mingzhi and Li Meijuan learnt the word 'feudal', as it was used extensively during the Cultural Revolution as a conceptual tool to criticise the old society, referring to the Confucian ideology that legitimised imperial authority and patriarchy. Through all sorts of channels, 'feudal' was used intensively in daily settings. When Xu Mingzhi learnt and used the word during her early years, she never applied it to the newly established PRC, which was supposed to sweep all the 'feudal' spirits out of the society.

In her research into rural women in Shaanxi in the 1950s, Gail Hershatter presents although officially the so-called 'feudal' female virtues, such as gender segregation, arranged marriage, not remarrying after being widowed, were opposed after 1949, at grassroots level women stuck to these preexisting norms, and the local revolutionary honour was partly built on the 'feudal virtues'.¹⁴² In other words, the understanding of 'feudal virtues' and the practice of opposing them could be discrepant from the state propaganda. The practice of breast-binding also presents a continuity of aesthetics derived from pre-PRC sexual morality. Hershatter finds although 'feudalism' signified to the whole set of unequal social rules existed before 1949, women's usage of 'feudalism' was 'all about gendered experience centred on the domestic realm, both before and after the revolutionary divide known as

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Wang Yulu.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Xu Mingzhi.

¹⁴² Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory*, 65–95.

liberation'.¹⁴³ The things that women described as feudalism include confining girls to the home, buying child brides, mistreating daughters-in-law and foot-binding before 1949, and preventing daughters-in-law from attending literacy classes, and the feeling of embarrassment in a male-dominant public space.¹⁴⁴

In my research, women's usage of 'feudal' had specific meanings, which refers to gender segregation between boys and girls and sexual conservativeness. When talking about *fengjian*, Xu Shulan said her mother was '*fengjian*' because she sent her daughters to girls' schools and sons to boy's schools, instead of co-educational ones.¹⁴⁵ Tang Haifeng's mother made her wear very tight vests when she was a teenager. Tang commented that her mother and teachers were '*fengjian*' because they required girls to behave properly as girls should do.¹⁴⁶ The fact that many women considered breast-binding as feudal proves that women practised it more often out of conservative sexual morality rather than the pursuit of revolution. The usage of *fengjian* presents an irony to women who went through the supposed most revolutionary years, and they considered the period as conservative due to their bodily experiences.

5.6 Conclusion

Without denying the possibility that breast-binding was used by women to achieve a masculine appearance, more often breast-binding presented a wide variety of femininities. By practising breast-binding, women performed the specific proper femininity – beautiful, sexually modest, chaste, revolutionary, proletarian and tasteful. Women had their distinctive sense of beauty, which was inherited from the pre-Communist China, and influenced by the military culture and limited choices available. Breast-binding in many ways resembled the practice in the Republican period. The Communist discourse on breast-binding shows great continuity to the previous nationalist discourse of the Republican era. Like foot-binding, breast-binding was under the attack of the May Fourth views of history, being denounced as feudal remnants. Similar to the Republican nationalist discourse against breast-

¹⁴³ Judge, "Beyond Nationalism," 269.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 269–70.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Xu Shulan.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Tang Haifeng.

binding, the Communist anti-breast-binding discourse also achieved little influence in women's daily lives. Together with political pressures and various forms of violence, women had more limited choices in presenting their bodies. However, women also closely examined the changes in their circumstances, and would adjust their bodily performance accordingly. Breast-binding was in many ways more flexible than the Republican and Communist discourse had portrayed. In addition, women's sense of beauty impacted on their understandings of Mao's era, enabling them to realise that Mao's era perhaps was even more conservative than the 'old society'.

Conclusion

I

After Mao's death in 1976 and the launch of the Reform and Opening Up policy in 1978, more information about the body and more choices of undergarments for women's consumption became available. In the early 1980s, articles promoting the beauty of the curvaceous body reappeared in periodicals.¹ Many women's experience of their bodies came as a kind of cultural shock. Zhang Naihua bound her breasts when she was a sent-down youth in Jilin province after the Cultural Revolution. In 1982, when she went back to the city and started teaching at a university, one of her students complained to her that life in the countryside had ruined her figure. That was the first time in her life that she encountered a concrete expression of the existence of a feminine curvaceous bodily shape.²

The limited choices of decoration in Mao's era triggered both resistance and continuity of women's attitudes towards fashion, and the curvy female body thereafter. Some women started to wear clothes that were as fashionable and colourful as possible.³ Zhang Shuo made her own dresses in 1979 after going back to Beijing from Heilongjiang Production and Construction Corps. One of her dresses was rather figure-revealing as in Figure 6-1, and some of her friends also praised her nice figure. Others found it difficult to adjust to the sudden changes. When Xu Mingzhi and her friends shopped for brassieres during the Maoist era, they went to the local store secretly, without attracting any others' attention. The brassieres were kept behind the counter and could only be brought out by the shop assistants, with a very limited range of sizes. They wouldn't even imagine trying it on.⁴ From the early 1980s onwards, brassieres started to be an essential item in department stores.⁵ Xu Mingzhi could not adapt to the new ways of selling brassieres by displaying and hanging them up publicly in the department stores.⁶ Xu Shulan had been too

¹ Xiugen, "Tan tixingmei," *Jiangsu tiyu keji*, no. 3 (1981): 44; Tian Yupu, "Tantan zoulu de zitamei," *Beijing tiyu*, no. 3 (1981): 45.

² Naihua Zhang, "In a World Together yet Apart: Urban and Rural Women Coming of Age in the Seventies," in *Some of Us: Chinese Women Growing up in the Mao Era*, ed. Xueping Zhong, Zheng Wang, and Di Bai (New Brunswick, New Jersey, London: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 16.

³ Interviews with Jiang Yingli, Wu Yinyan.

⁴ Interview with Xu Mingzhi.

⁵ Huang Guizhi and Tao Pengde, "Jiaqiang xiaoshangpin jingying de yixiang cuoshi," *Beijing shangxueyuan yuebao*, no. 3 (1982): 52–55.

⁶ Interview with Xu Mingzhi.

embarrassed to shop for brassieres, and instead her sister would shop for her, or more recently she wore her daughter's unwanted ones.⁷ Chest exposure, tight tops and short skirts were also criticised by many women. Wu Yinyan recalled that after one gathering of her fellow soldiers, the straps of her bra were exposed due to her relatively wide neckline. Although Wu Yinyan did not think of it as a problem, as she considered herself more open and bold in dressing after years of wearing plain clothes, all her friends considered exposing the straps was inappropriate, and helped her to tuck them into her dress (Figure 6-2). Therefore, the tendency to conceal one's feminine body is ingrained in many women's minds even years after the strict official regulation of body and dress had ceased.

Breast-binding was used in literature and visual art to depict the conservativeness of that period. In the famous film *Narrow Street* (*Xiaojie* 小街, 1981), the female protagonist comes from an anti-revolutionary family. Her father was a music professor, who was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, and her mother could not get any medical help while suffering from severe sickness. Her hair was cut off by the enthusiastic revolutionaries, and thereafter she dressed as a boy in order to cover her identity as a woman. She told the male protagonist: "Every time when I looked into the mirror, I felt so scared to see a person who looks like neither a man nor a woman." When she says this, she recalls a scene of binding her chest (Figure 6-3). She tied one end of a lengthy piece of cloth to the leg of a table, and winds the cloth to her chest. When she saw herself in the mirror, she screamed and smashed the mirror. The scream symbolised the depression that people felt under those political and social circumstances. The practice of breast-binding was attributed to this constrained period, when some women had no choice but to hide their gender identities. Writer Zhai Yongming recalls in her memoir that many girls in Chengdu bound their breasts in the way shown in the film.⁸

However, breast-binding seems not to have terminated after the Cultural Revolution. An article published in 1992 says that in Yishui county, Shandong province, girls who bound their breasts were forty-seven percent among fourteen

⁷ Interview with Xu Shulan.

⁸ Zhai Yongming, "Qingchun wunai," in *Qishi qiandai*, ed. Beidao and Li Tuo (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2008), 503–27.

years olds, fifty-nine percent among fifteen years olds, and sixty-nine percent among sixteen years olds.⁹ Breast-binding was still portrayed as “a remnant of feudal thoughts” (*fengjian de canyu sixiang* 封建的殘餘思想). Articles opposing breast-binding among adolescent girls could be found even in the 2000s.¹⁰ The physical development during one’s puberty was not only an issue of the early twentieth century, or the Maoist era; instead, the bodily changes during puberty could generate anxieties among different cultures. As Jin Xiaowen commented, the issue of the body persisted, the difference is that now girls would have more ways to get support for their bodily development, whereas her generation could expect none of it.

II

This dissertation has studied the practice of breast-binding from late Qing to the end of the Mao’s era. The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the relation between nation, fashion and women’s intimate bodily experiences through the case of breast-binding. It reveals the tension between the three factors at certain historical junctures, and the continuities and changes of each factor over time.

Throughout the periods of Republican and Communist China, the government’s efforts of regulating women’s bodies never ceased, either through bans and laws, or through the disciplines of clothes. In the Republican era, breast-binding was criticised as it harmed the modern nation building. Women were considered as both female citizens and the mother of future citizens, who should work on their bodies in order to ‘strengthen the nation and race’. This nationalist and hygienic discourse continued into the Communist period. Women were mobilised into building the new socialist society, and they were responsible for working on their health to be qualified socialist builders. From the Republican to the Communist period, the state had always considered the female body as a resource for nation-building. The health of women was not only a personal matter, but more importantly, a national matter. Through issuing bans, charging fines, promoting the ideal female

⁹ Wang Xinghua, “Nongcun zhongxue ying jiaqiang dui nüsheng qingchunqi weisheng jiaoyu gongzuo,” *Zhongguo xiaoyi*, no. 1 (1992): 32.

¹⁰ Rong Xiaoxiang, “Ruzhao shi you, shuxiong shi di,” *Zhonghua jiajiao*, no. 1 (2002): 41; Lian Xiaohua, “Shaonü shuxiong youhai jiankang ma,” *Weisheng yu shenghuo bao*, December 29, 2003, 12; Yuhan, “Qingchunqi nühai ji shuxiong shuyao,” *Jiefangjun jiankang*, no. 3 (2004): 33.

bodies in the press, Republican and Communist governments kept disciplining women's bodies and dress in support of their respective political agendas.

However, although the nationalist and hygienic discourse extended through the two periods, the ideal of beauty was reversed dramatically. Through reflecting the traditional Chinese frail beauty, introducing the Western racial science of beauty and health, increasing visual representations of the curvy female body, the curvaceous bodily silhouette was constructed as the ideal of beauty in the Republican era. However, this ideal was not accepted by all, the more conservative ones still held the view that big-breasted women were sexually immoral. Only some open-minded middle and upper class women, dancing girls and female movie stars consciously presented their curvy bodies publicly. It was also criticised by left-wing scholars and the Communist discourse since the 1930s, which became an indictment of the bourgeoisie after 1949, especially after the mid-1960s, when the exposure of bodily shapes was strictly regulated. The sheer contrast between the bodies of middle and upper class women and lower class women before 1949 was used as a political tool thereafter. In this sense, the experience of Communist China was deeply rooted in the Republican era.

Theoretically, this dissertation also demonstrates that the concepts of 'discipline and resistance' and 'agency and coercion' should be examined in full recognition of highly complex historical contexts. Although the nation continued to regard the female body as a national asset and attempted to discipline the female body, the diversity of discourse in the Republican era and Mao's China before the mid-1960s often negotiated, if not challenged or distorted the nationalist propaganda. In Republican China, the female breasts were eroticised, which undermined the power of nationalist propaganda, as discussed in chapter two. Chapter four demonstrates that in early Communist China, although curvy bodylines were criticised for being 'bourgeois', artists designed dresses with curvy lines in the name of celebrating the happy lives in Communist society. In literature and the visual arts, curvy female bodies were still presented, although in the majority of cases it was not used to describe righteous and revolutionary female cadres. I have therefore argued that although official or mainstream discourse attempted to channel audience's practices, a closer reading of texts reveals much more diverse attitudes.

While some scholars argue that by binding their breasts, women resisted the nationalist discipline and exerted their agency, I argue that women's choices of breast-binding were more complex and cannot be subsumed in the notion of resistance. The reasons why women did not yield to the nationalist ban were mostly because they had a wide range of other matters to consider, such as sexual morality, peer pressures, violence and fashion trends, as discussed in chapter two, three and five. It has been argued in this thesis that the most definitive element of women's decision was peer pressure, which nevertheless was derived from the social and cultural context.

One shared reason for breast-binding among women was that plump breasts indicated sexual immorality from the 1910s to the 1970s. Because of this subtle bodily morality, through the Republican to Communist era, women continued to suffer physical and rhetorical violence towards what was considered as inappropriate bodily expressions. Although the standard of beauty constantly changed, the traditional morality of beauty was left with very limited changes. As Bourdieu suggests, trivial things like bodily postures are indeed more inert to change. The aesthetics and morality of bodily shapes were handed down at home between mothers and daughters, propagated through visual and literal portraits of women, shaped during the interaction between women and men, old and young, in private and public spheres, which was more powerful than nationalist or political discourses. Therefore in the Republican era, by continuing to bind their breasts, women colluded with the more conservative sexual morality, because ignoring the nationalist breast-binding ban would cause less harm to them. In the Communist period, women bound their breasts in order to construct their roles as chaste and decent proletarians. In one word, women did not simply 'resist' the regulations of their bodies, but rather managing their bodies out of pragmatism. Therefore women exerted their agency through judging what was the best suitable way to present their bodies.

Women's choices of breast-binding and unbinding can be better explained by concepts of 'embodiment', 'habitus' and 'performance'. By breast-binding and unbinding, women collectively embodied their knowledge and understanding of themselves, interpersonal relationships, the local, national and transnational world.

The persistence of breast-binding proves that the state's regulations on women's body were far less influential than the traditional sexual morality – the 'habitus' that was deep-rooted in women's daily lives. In women's quotidian experiences, their breasts and undergarments served as marks of their identities. Through performing their bodies, they performed their identities. Women embodied the national ideals, fashion trends, and morality. Through carefully presenting their bodily shapes and choosing undergarments, they defined themselves as patriotic, middle class decent women, virtuous girls and revolutionary youth. Through various acts, they also distinguished themselves from others while at the same time finding ways to cope with their respective social and political environments.

Through examining the representations and practices of breast-binding, this thesis thus helps us to understand the broader continuities and changes from Republican to Communist China, ordinary people's daily experiences of the two periods, and the theoretical frameworks of gender and body. It proves that although the political context changed dramatically from Republican to Communist China, some aspects of pre-modern sexual morality stayed almost static. Ordinary women's bodily experiences bore great similarities before and after 1949. While some colluded with dominant discourses, others also attempted to negotiate more space for their personal choices by resisting the social norms tacitly.

Appendix

1. Illustrations



Figure 0-1 Still from *Shinjuku Boys*. Longinotto Kim and Williams Jano. Twentieth Century Vixen, 1996.



Figure 1-1 Courtesans from late Qing or early Republican period. In Wu Hao, *Duhui yunshang: xishuo Zhongguo fun ü fushi yu shenti geming (1911-1935)*, 47. Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 2006.



Figure 1-2 Photography of Chiang Kai-shek and Chen Jieru. In: *Jiang Jieshi tuzhuan*, edited by Shi Yonggang and Yang, 39. Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi chubanshe, 2005.



Figure 1-3 Photography of Yang Buwei. In: Yang Buwei, *Yi ge nüren de zizhuan*. Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe, 1983.

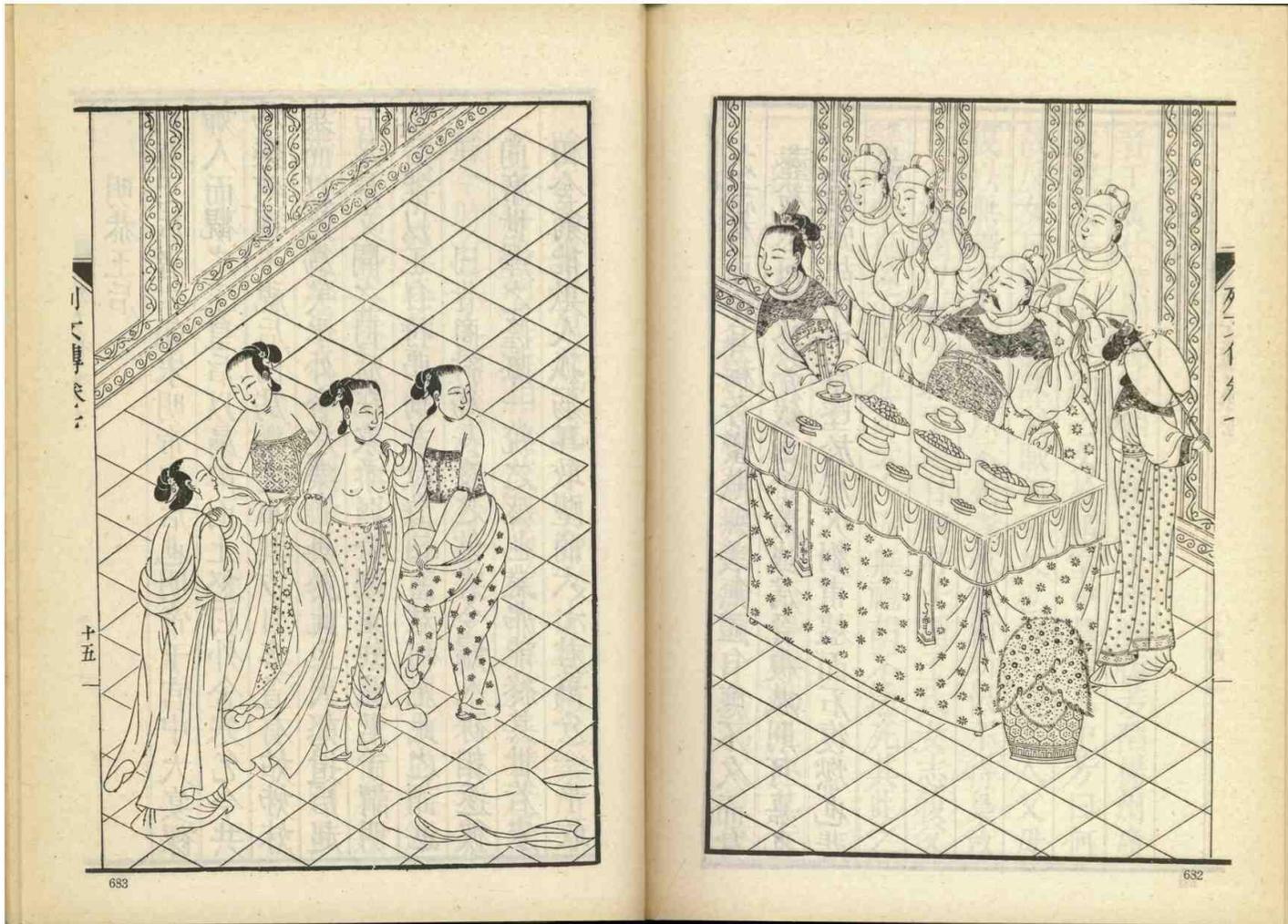


Figure 1-4 Illustration of “Empress Minggong”. In *Huitu lien izhuan*, edited by Wangshi, illustrated by Qiu Ying, 682-683. Taipei: Haifeng shudian, 1971.

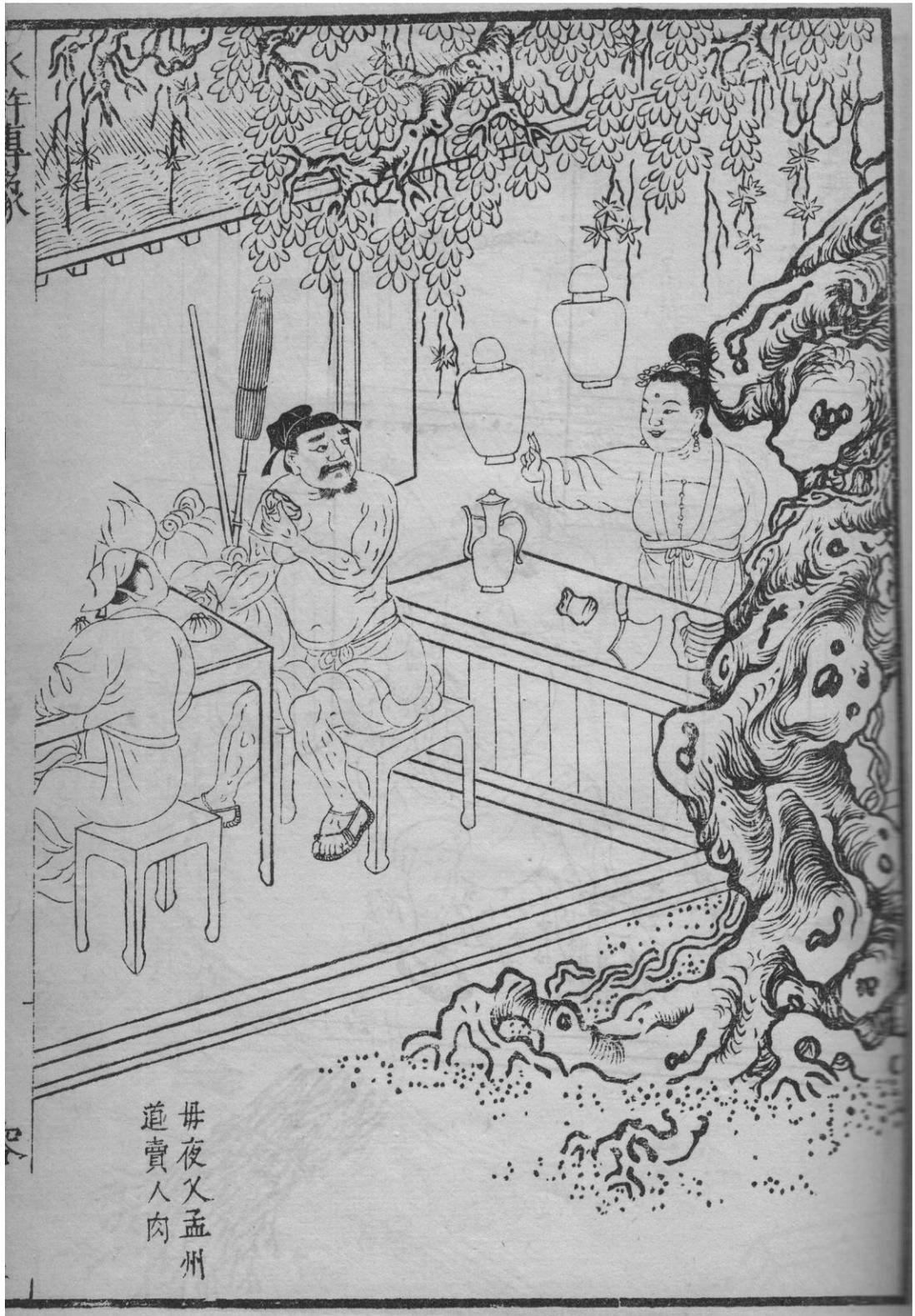


Figure 1-5 "She-Monster of the Sea Sells Human Flesh on Mengzhou Road." In *Ming Rongxingtang ke Shuihuzhuan tu*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965.



Figure 1-6 Anonymous (formerly attributed to Wang Qihan), “Women and Children by Lotus Pond.” In *Masterpieces of Chinese Painting*, edited by Wu Tung, 214. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1996.



Figure 1-7 "Yan Qing meets the Emperor at a moonlit night." In: *Ming Rongxingtang ke Shuihuzhuan tu*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965.



Figure 1-8 One painting from an album with 12 paintings in gold paint and other pigments on black/green lacquer, late nineteenth century. In: Ferdinand M. Bertholet, *Concubines and Courtesans: Women in Chinese Erotic Art*, 181. Munich, London: Prestel, 2011.



Figure 1-9 Pen and ink sketch on paper, ascribed to the workshop of Gaiqi (1773-1828). In: Bertholet, *Concubines and Courtesans*, 88.

婦女雜誌

中華民國四年一月五日

郵務局特准掛號認爲新聞紙類

第一卷第一號



上海商務印書館發行

(蘭閨清課)
THE LADIES' JOURNAL (Chinese Monthly)

Figure 1-10 "Morning Study in the Boudoir." Cover of *Fun üzazhi* 1, no. 1 (January 1915).

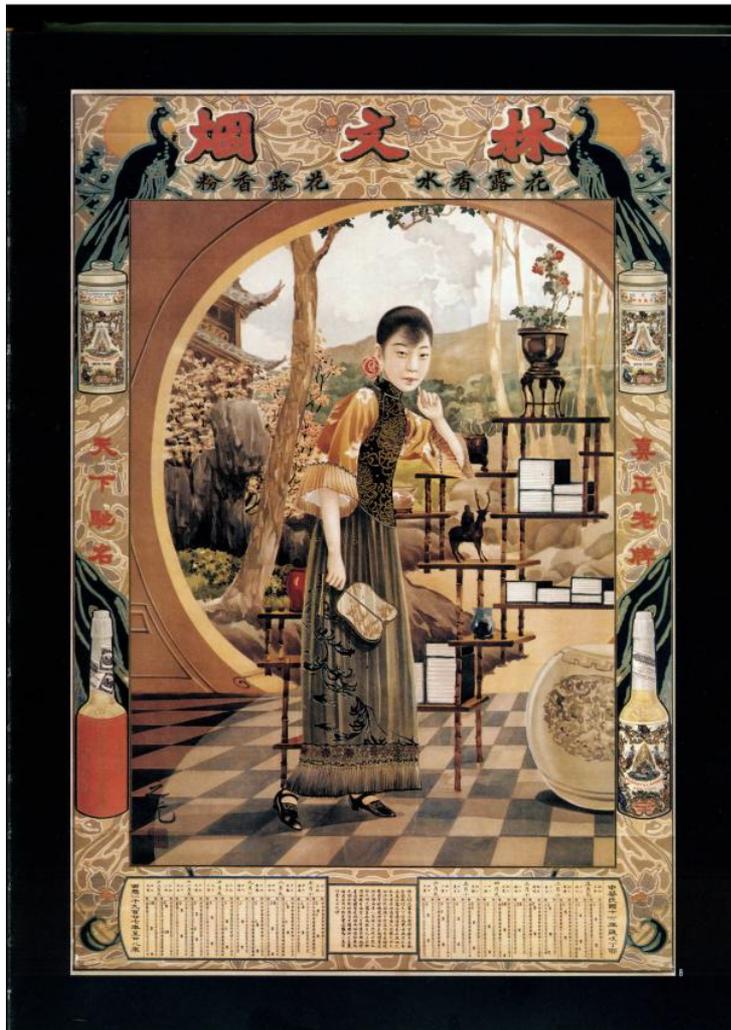


Figure 1-11 Calendar poster produced in 1927. In: *Duhui modeng: yuefenpai, 1910s-1930s*. Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1994.



Figure 1-12 “Actress Xin Yanqiu in daily attire.”
Beiyang huabao, no. 180
 (April 18, 1928).

誌 雜 女 婦



作 英 建 郭

閱 煩 的 春 青

號 三 第

卷 四 十 第

Figure 1-11 Guo Jianying 郭建英, "Qingchun de fanmen 青春的煩悶 (Depression of Youth)." *Fun ü zazhi* 14, no. 3 (March 1928).

型吸呼之女男 FIG. 1

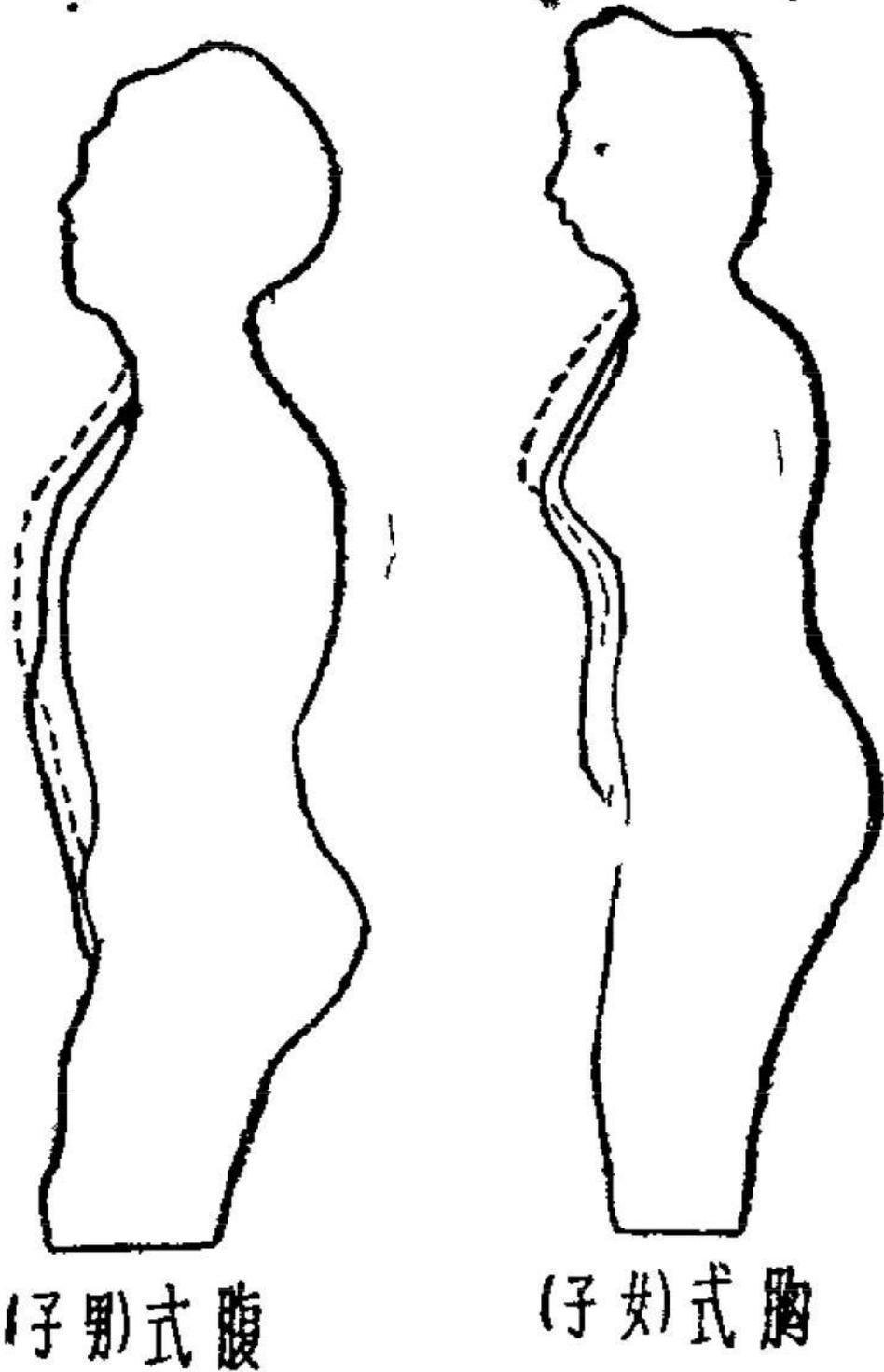


Figure 2-1 "Breathing mechanisms of men and women." *Kangjian zazhi* 1, no.7 (November 1933): 7.

圖二第
果結之吸呼基肺用而胸束因

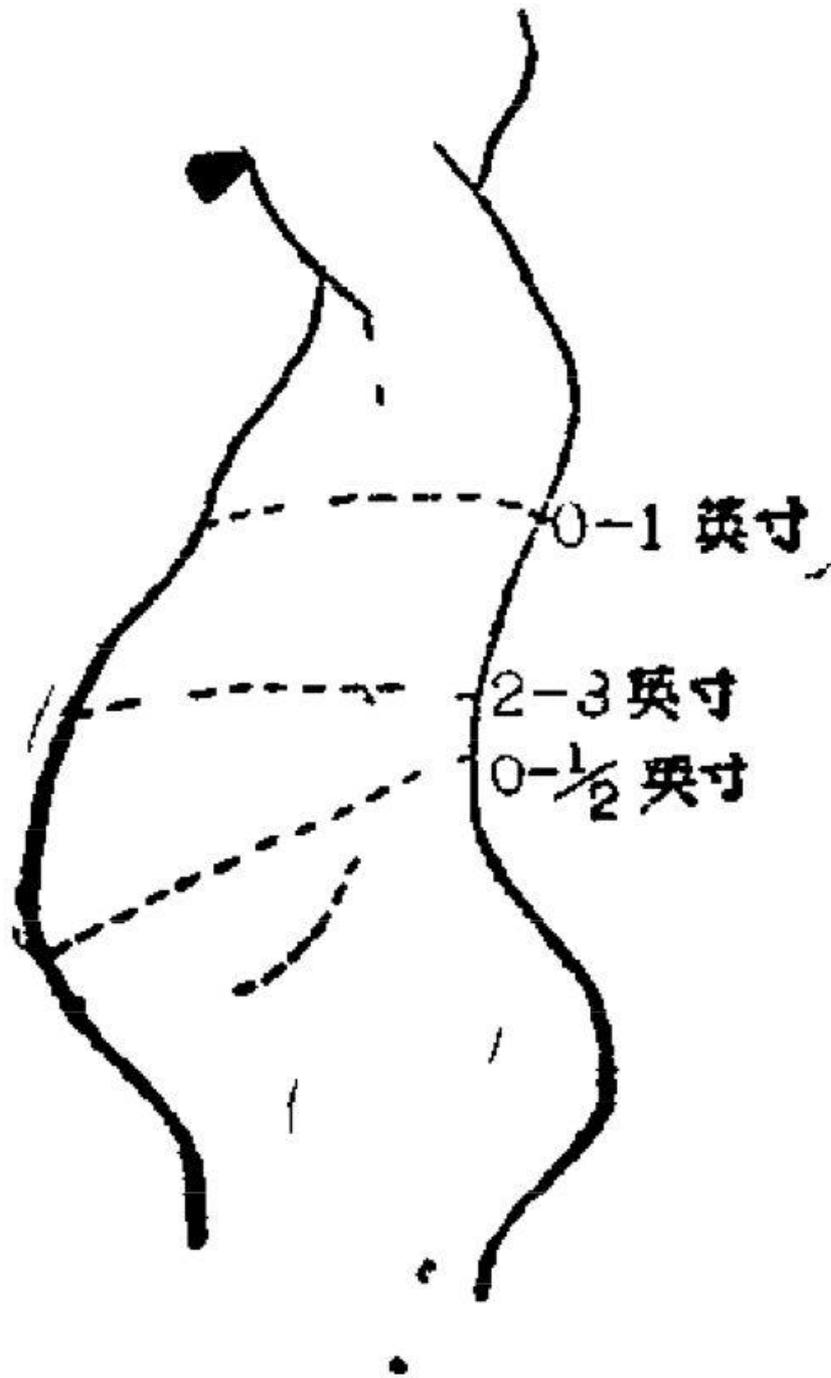


Figure 2-12 "The result of using the lower part of lung to breathe because of breast-binding."
Kangjian zazhi 1, no. 7 (November 1933): 7.

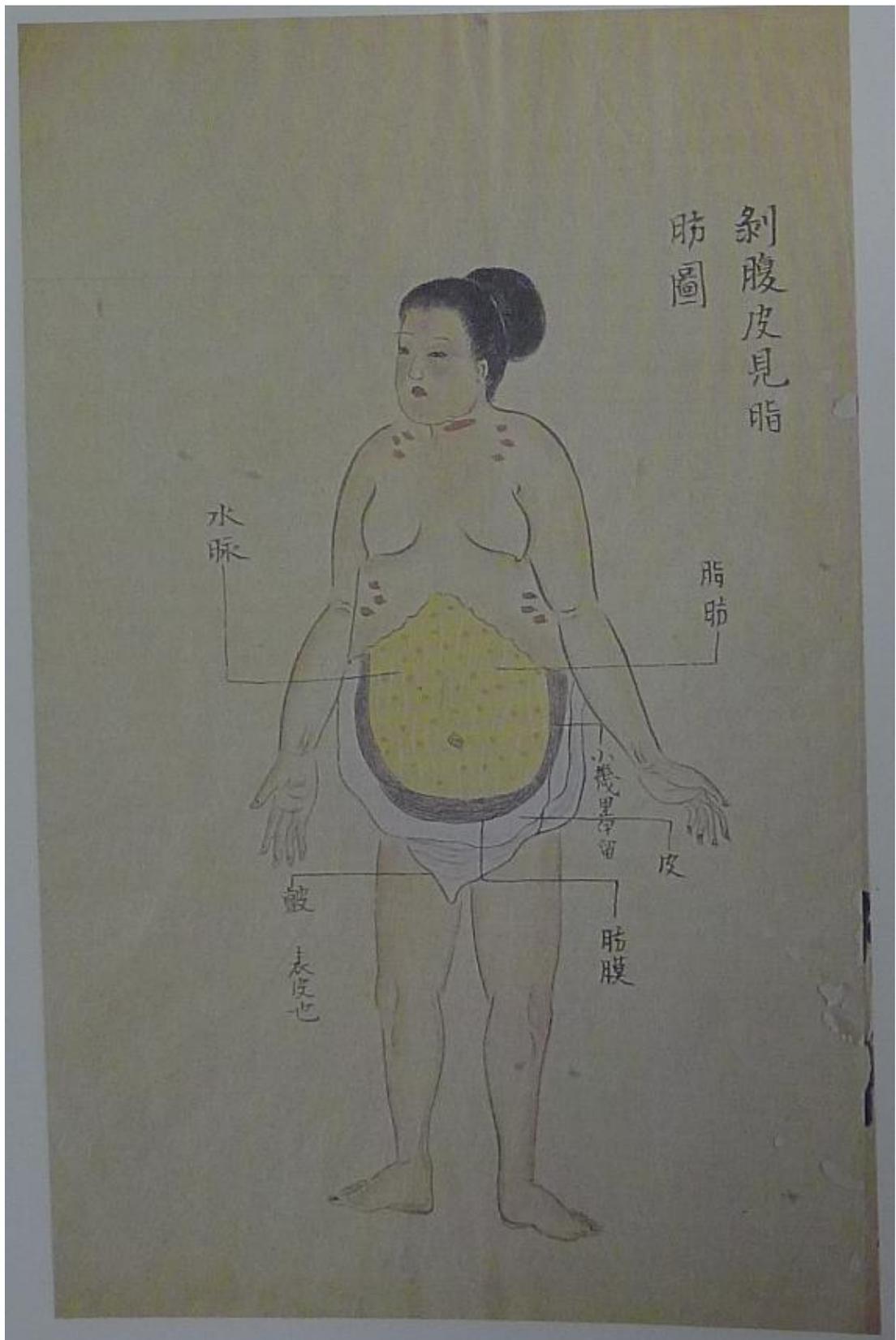


Figure 2-13 “Illustration of cellulite under the abdominal skin.” In: *Zuroku Nihon iji bunka shiryō shūsei*, vol 2, edited by Nihon ishi gakkai, 103. Tokyo: Sanichi Shobō, 1977, first published in 1823.



[Figure 2] Reisai Fujita

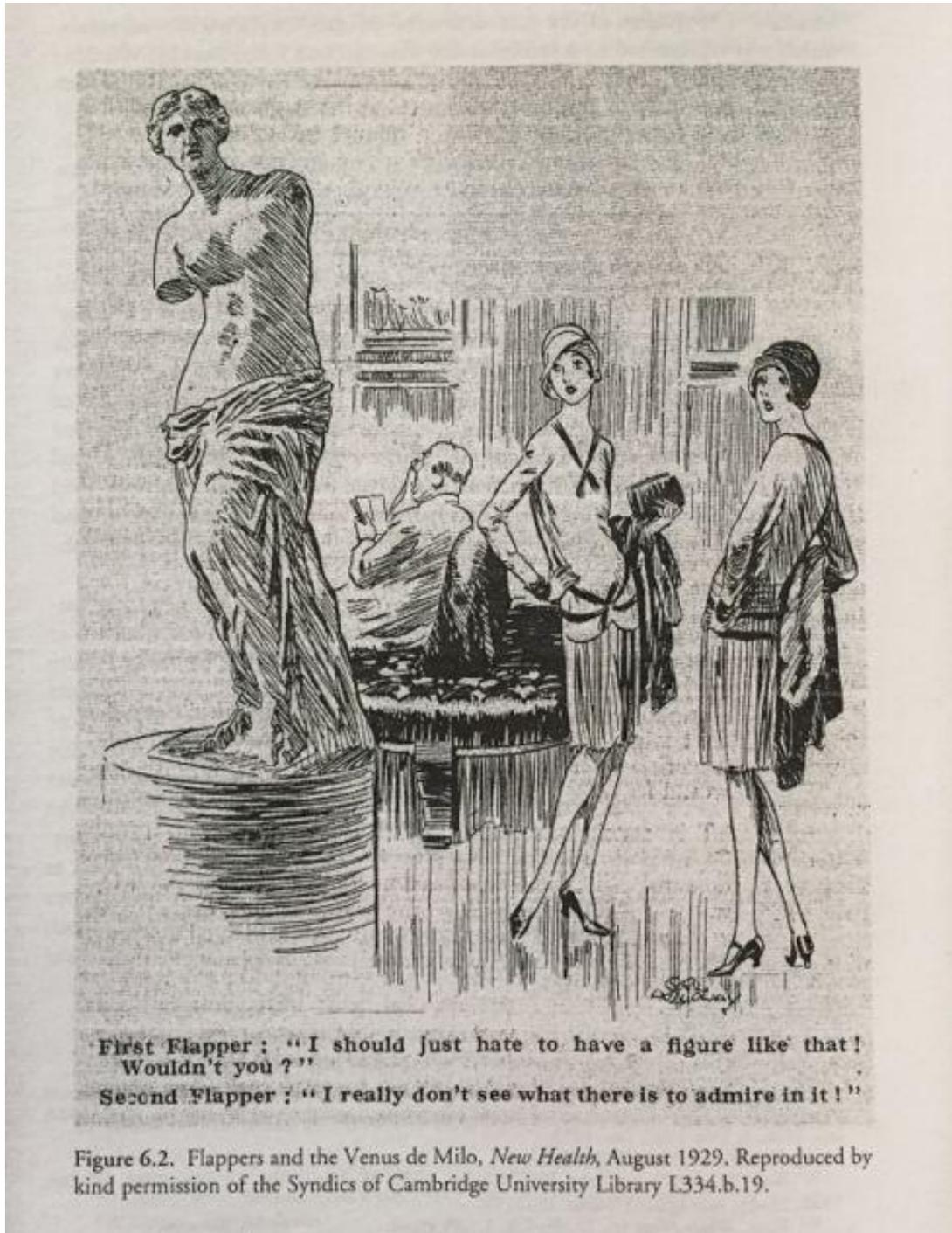
Propose of Fujita Meditation Cure Method

Figure 2-14 “Propose of Fujita Meditation Cure Method.” In Sasaki Hiroo, “Changes in the Values about Body and Health along with Modernization of Japan in 1910’s.” *International Journal of Eastern Sports & Physical Education* 5, no.1 (2007): 1-10.



圖8 三焦在《內經》是消化、代謝的臟腑，主要處理水穀之氣。到了《難經》則與下焦原氣(腎氣)的觀念連繫起來。《難經·六十六難》：
 「三焦者，原氣之別使也。」即三焦是原氣別行之管道。
 (張介賓，《類經圖翼》[台北：新文豐出版公司，1976]，頁81)

Figure 2-5 Illustration of three burners. In Li, Jian min, "Dumai yu Zhongguo zaoqi yangsheng shijian: qijing bamai de xinyanjiu zhi er." In *Xingbie, shenti yu yiliao*, edited by Li Zhende, 49. Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 2008.



First Flapper : "I should just hate to have a figure like that!
Wouldn't you?"
Second Flapper : "I really don't see what there is to admire in it!"

Figure 6.2. Flappers and the Venus de Milo, *New Health*, August 1929. Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library L334.b.19.

Figure 3-1 "Flappers and the Venus de Milo." In Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain 1880-1939*, 273. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.



維娜絲型之變遷

維娜絲(Venus)是在希臘神話裏的美與愛的女神，原稱阿富羅底(Aphrodite)，這女神底由來原有種種傳說，依普通所知，說是為克洛那斯所殺的烏蘭那絲的血，點落在海上，潮泡聚集而從其中生出來的。自希臘時代至現今，她被視為美的象徵，美女的同義語。維娜絲之美，即是古今女子極頂的美，不過女性美原是跟時代而變遷者，於是維娜絲型的美，也跟着時代與環境而變遷。

在詩人的口中，在畫家的眼底，在雕塑師刀的鑿下，女性美發揚得至矣盡矣；而且，將來還要不斷地破發揚着。
女性美是一部分藝術家活動的源泉。沒有對於女性美的衝動和憧憬，藝術之花會萎枯了大半。
從人類有史以來，不，還在歷史以前的混沌的古代，女性美是人類可珍貴可欣嘉的發現。
可是，時代的變遷，民族的換，階級的消長，風俗習慣的移轉使女性美受着無限的變形。

東方民族愛好恬靜的美，西方民族崇尚生動活潑的美。
貴族女子講究矜持。市民社會的女子誇耀浮華，農村女子則愛好天真。
希臘的雕塑有健康美，中世紀的藝術則有不食人間煙火之概，文藝復興的幾位大師把女性美帶回人間，北歐的畫師表現着農村女性底典型，十八世紀的法國畫家饒有涉寵頹廢的氣息。
現在，交通便利，地域的隔阂短縮，巴黎的流行可以傳到東亞，好萊塢的風尚可以支配世界，女性美也漸漸有了統一的傾向。
現在的女性，可以游泳，可以賽跑，可以架飛機，可以打高爾夫球，所以女性美走向健康活動的路途上去。(文·鄭君平)

Figure 3-2 "The evolution of Venus." *Furen huabao*, no. 20 (August 1934).



Figure 3-3 Advertisement poster produced in 1934. In: *Duhui modeng*.



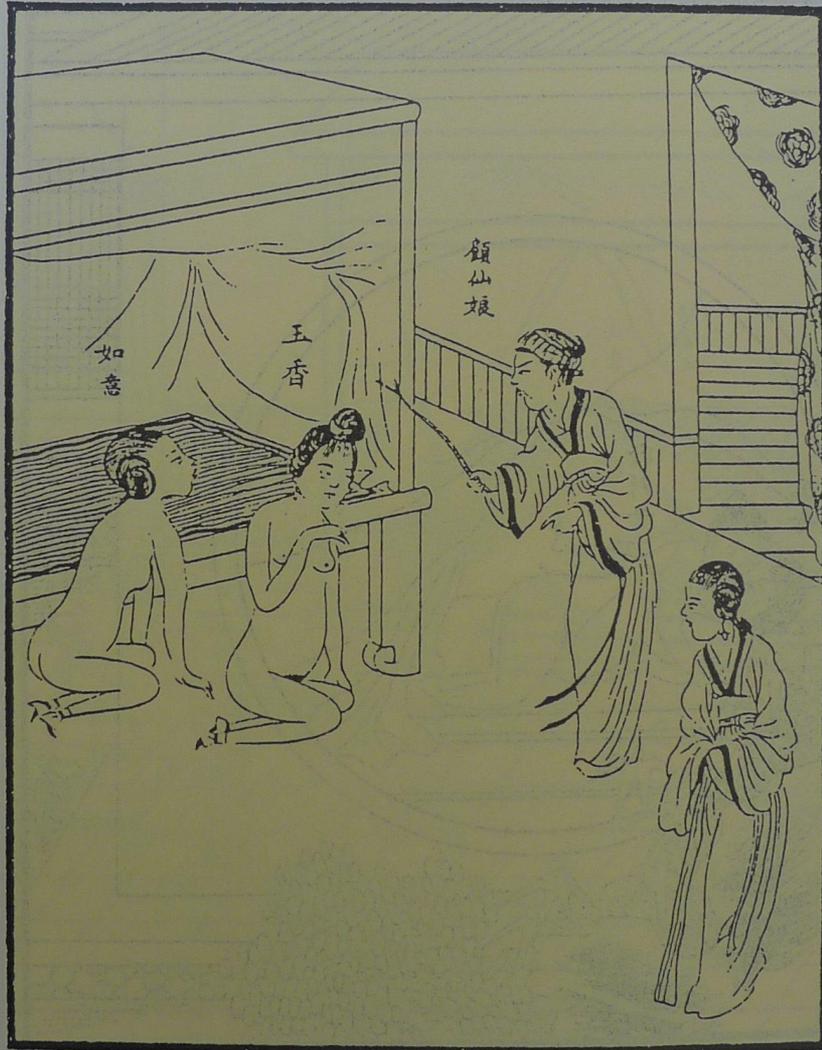
Figure 3-4 Advertisement. *Shenbao tuhua tekan*, no. 213 (August 6, 1936).



Figure 3-5 Illustrations of famous Chinese and Western actresses. *Shidai* 4, no. 8 (June 16, 1936).



Figure 3-6 "The temptation of water." *Furen huabao*, no. 20 (August 1934).



寫春園本卷四前圖像之九

Figure 3-7 Illustration in *Rouputuan* (The Carnal Prayer Mat). Taipei: Taiwan daying baike, 1994, first published in 1947.

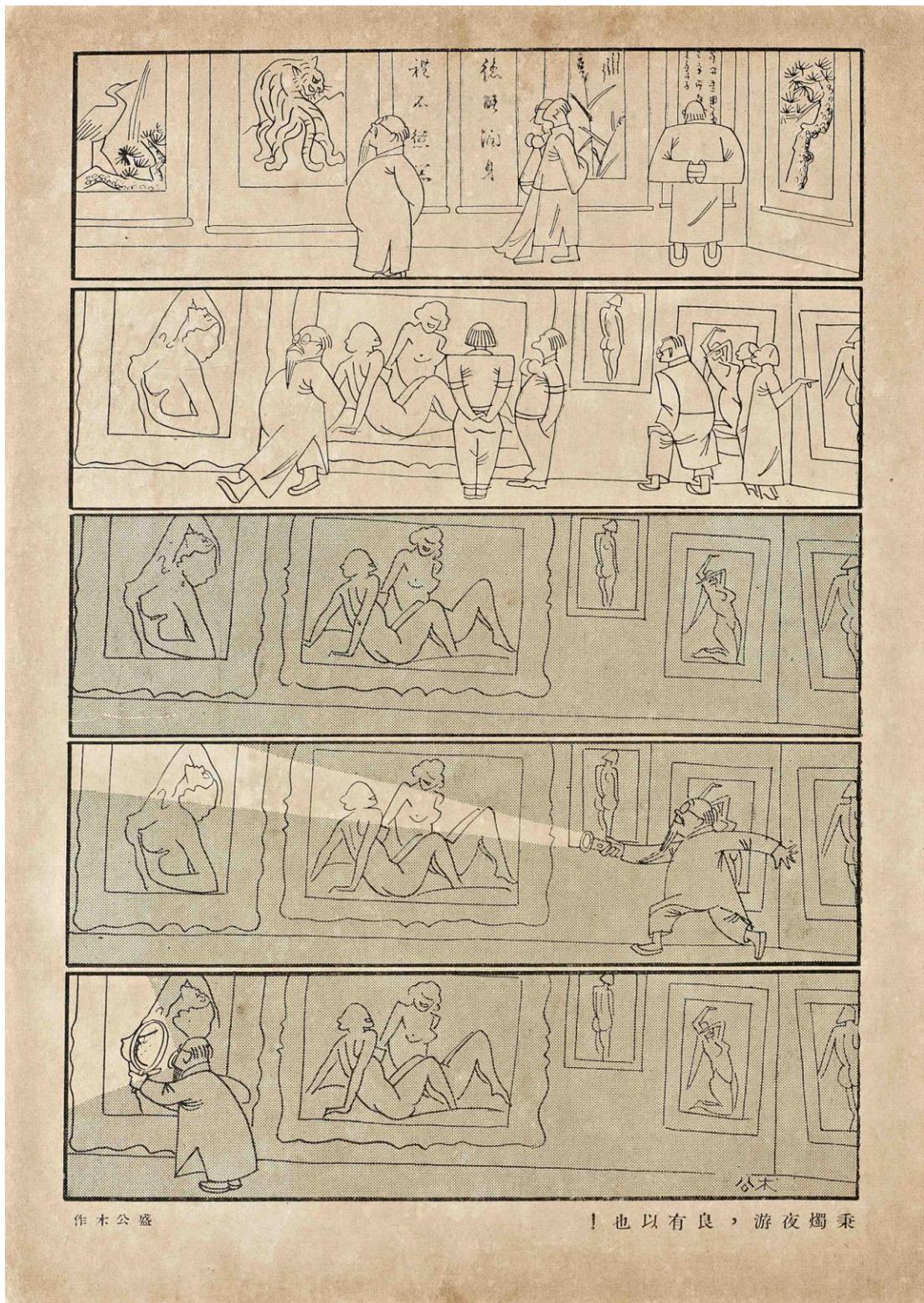


Figure 3-8 Sheng Gongmu, "It is perfectly reasonable to hold a candle and touring at night!" *Shidai manhua*, no. 10 (October 12, 1934), 14.



Figure 3-9 Cover of *Ping-Hu tongche* (Shanghai Express), 9th ed. Shanghai: Baixin shudian, 1947, first published in 1935.

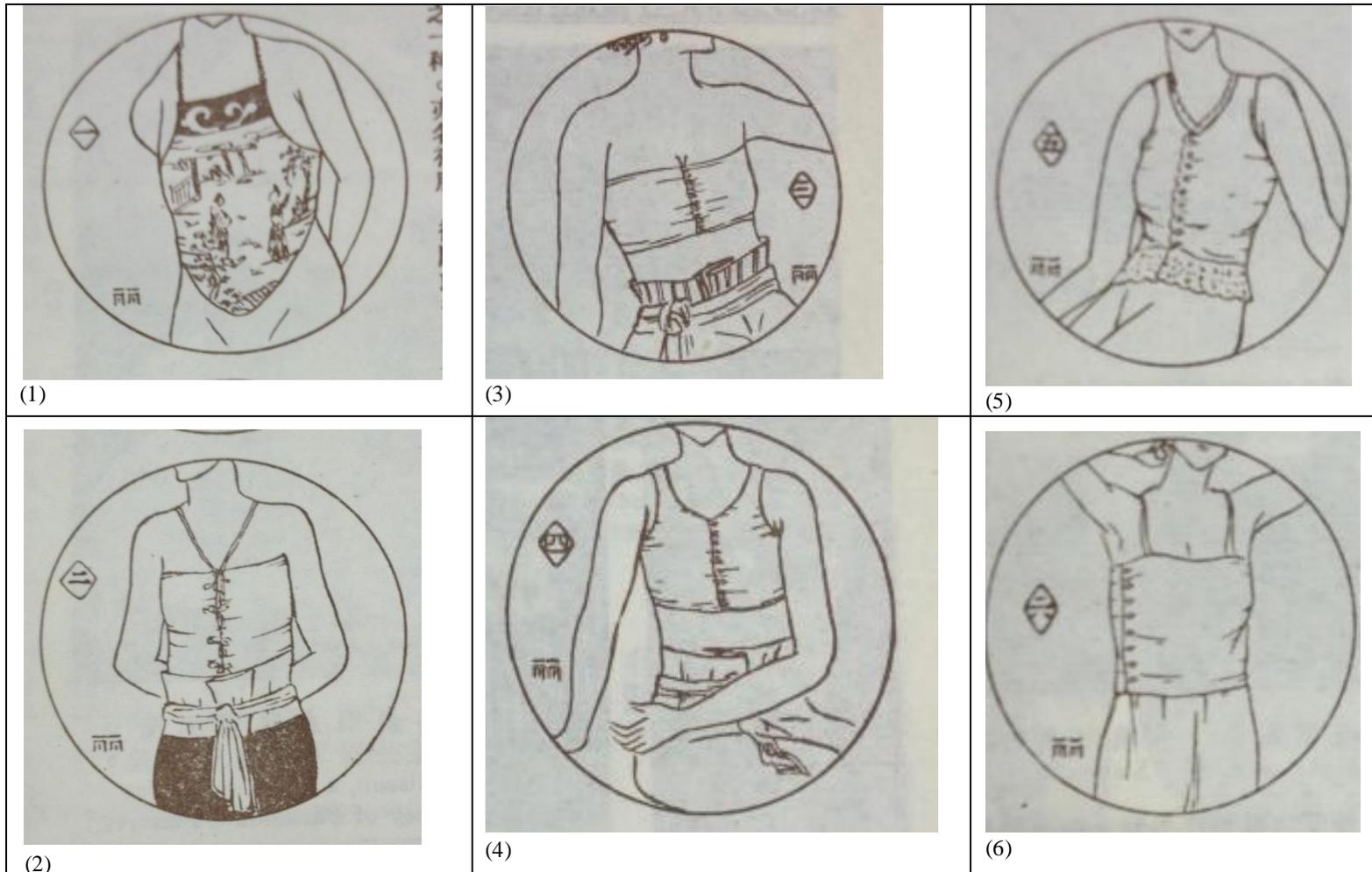


Figure 3-10 (1) and (2), Wanxiang gezhu, “The evolution of Chinese undergarments.” *Beiyang huabao*, no. 93 (June 8, 1927): 4. (3) and (4), Wanxiang gezhu, “The evolution of Chinese undergarments (2).” *Beiyang huabao*, no. 98 (June 25, 1927): 4. (5) and (6), Wanxiang gezhu, “The evolution of Chinese undergarments (3).” *Beiyang huabao*, no. 99 (June 29, 1927): 4.



Figure 3-11 One painting from an album of seven silk paintings, mid-nineteenth century. In: Ferdinand M. Bertholet, *Gardens of Pleasure: Eroticism and Art in China*. Munich, Berlin, London and New York: Prestel, 2003.



Figure 3-12 Left, “Women’s Clothes: Western Women’s Brassieres and Waist Clothes.” *Beiyang huabao*, no. 121 (September 17, 1927): 3. Right, Scanties advertisement, 1928. In Yalom Marilyn, *A History of the Breast*, 175. New York: Ballantine Books, 1998.



Figure 3-13 “The 3 Points of Modern Chinese Flappers: Bobbed Hair, Free Breast and Natural Feet.” *Beiyang huabao* no. 205 (July 21, 1928): 2.



Figure 3-14 “Construction of Brassiere.” *Beiyang huabao*, no. 130 (October 19, 1927): 4.



Figure 3-15 Left, “Underwear.” *Shidai 2*, no. 10 (July 16, 1932). Right, movie star Tan Xuerong, *Shidai 8*, no. 2 (1935).



Figure 3-16 Xu Ruoming, "Thorough Preferential Treatments to Costumers." *Shidai manhua*, no. 38 (May 20, 1937).

The shop assistant: 'I can assemble the best-fitting brassiere for you. You can try it out right in front of me without extra fee!'

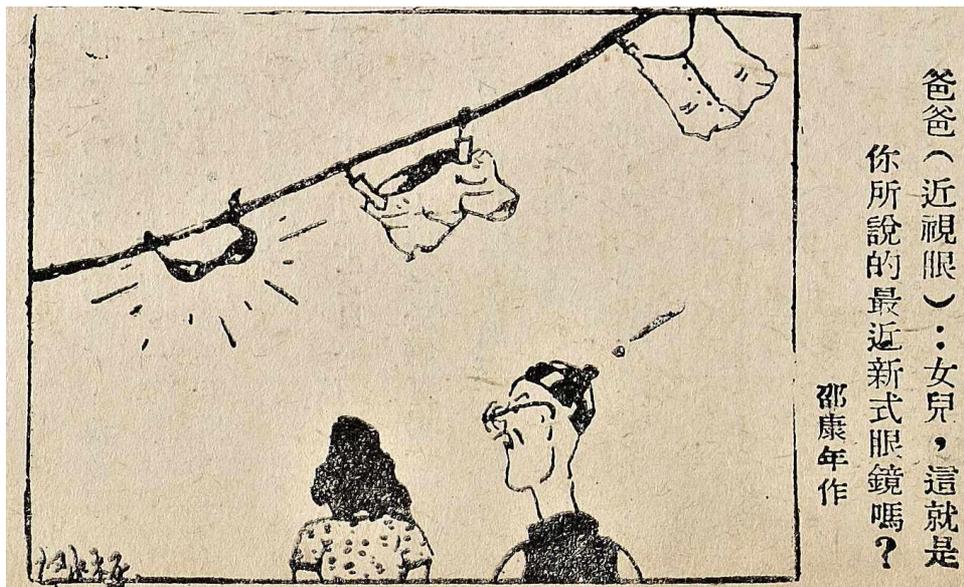


Figure 3-17 Shao Kangnian, Untitled. *Shidai manhua*, no. 34 (January 20, 1937).

Father (short sighted): 'My daughter, is this the most up-to-date style of glasses you mentioned?'

摩登女子最低的費用

春裝的估價

深黃色紋皮皮鞋	一雙	六·五〇元
雪牙色蠶絲襪	一雙	一·二〇元
奶罩	一只	二·二五元
衛生褲	一件	八〇元
吊襪帶	一副	三·〇〇元
紉縵緹夾袍	一件	八·二〇元
春季短大衣	一件	一六·〇〇元
白雞皮手套	一副	二·八〇元
面友 (Face Friend)	一瓶	七五元
臘脂	一盒	五〇元
可的牌 (Coty) 粉	一匣	一·四五元
唇膏	一匣	五〇元
皮包	一隻	二·五〇元
電燙髮		五·〇〇元
鉛筆	一支	二〇元
蜜	一瓶	四〇元

共計上海通用銀元五十二元另伍分

費志仁女士作

Figure 3-18 "Estimated Cost of Spring Clothing." *Shidai manhua*, no. 1 (April 15, 1934).

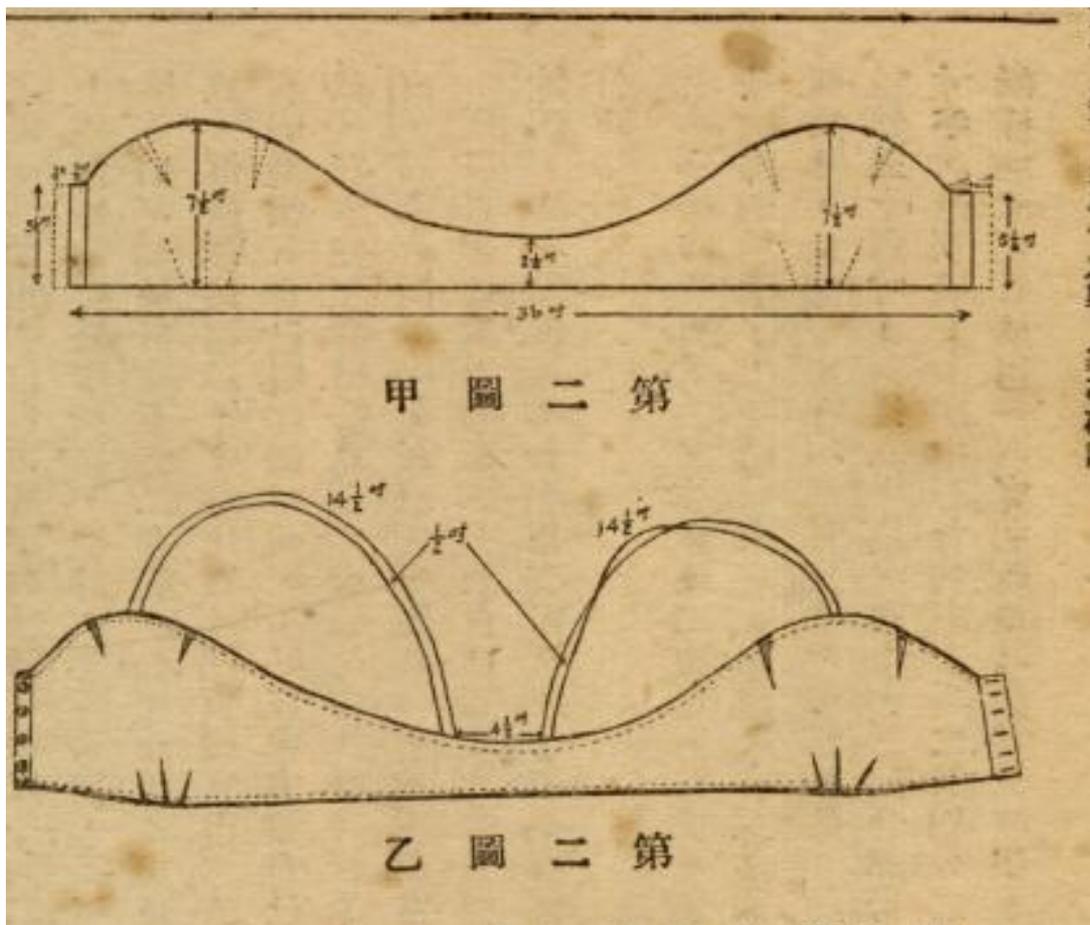


Figure 3-19 Untitled, an instruction of making a modern brassiere at home. *Fangzhou*, no. 26 (Jul 1936): 23.



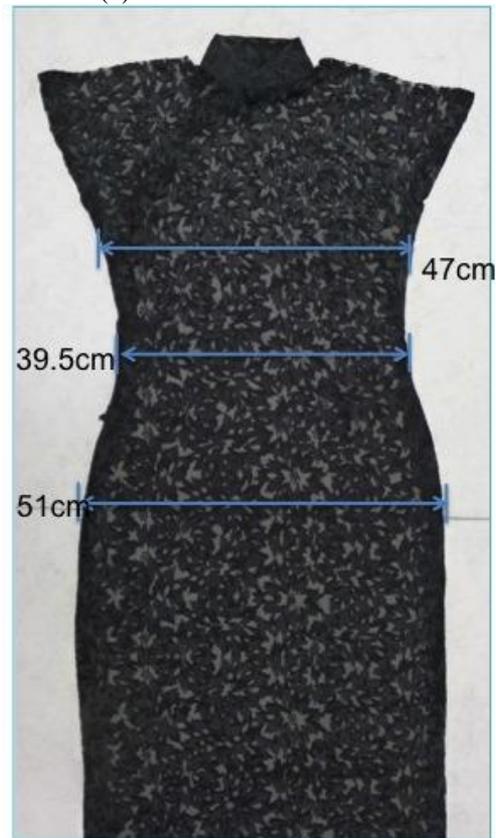
(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

Figure 3-20 (a) “Deep red lined gown with eight roundels of plums, orchids, bamboo and chrysanthemums in silk embroidery for an empress or imperial concubine from the Daoguang reign.” In *Tianchao yiguan: Gugong Bowuyuan cang Qingdai gongting fushi jingpinzha*, edited by Yan Yong and Fang Hongjun, 65. Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2008. (b) Jacket worn by Han Chinese women in the 1920s, V&A, catalogue number: FE.62-1995; (C) *Qipao* made in the 1920s-1930s, Shanghai. V&A, catalogue number: FE.8-2009; (d) *Qipao* made in 1948, Beijing. V&A, catalogue number: FE.24:1,2-1991.

18. 女子短袖挖襟衣的裁縫法

〔材料〕 藍布或其他衣料，其長為身長之一倍，與衣料色彩相仿之衣綫。

〔工具〕 尺，剪刀，粉袋，縫針。

〔工作方法〕

1. 先把衣料依長度對摺，次再照寬度對摺，如第五十六圖之(1)。
2. 照第五十六圖(1)之虛綫裁出，裁好後把裁出之衣片向左右展開，並照第五十六圖(2)的式樣開領圈及挖大襟。

3. 把餘料裁出裏襟，及滾領、鈕扣等用之斜條。

4. 裁領頭及貼邊，裁好後就把二袖裝貼

邊。

5. 把裏襟用盤骨縫法縫接，並把大襟、下

擺等處各裝貼邊。

第五十六圖

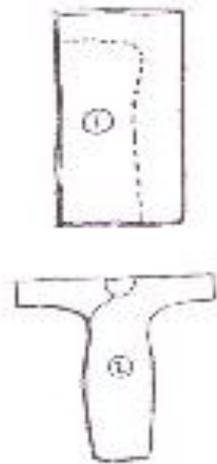


Figure 3-21 "Sewing Method for Women's Short-Sleeved Gown." In He Yuan, *Cai Feng Dayao*, 74. Kunming: Zhonghua shuju, 1941.



Figure 3-22 “Ms Zhou Shuheng, Daughter of Stamp’s King Zhou Jinjue, Shortly to Get Married.” Cover of *Linglong* 1, no. 1 (March 18, 1931).



Figure 3-23 “Recent Photo of the Captain of our city’s Black and White Basketball Team Ms Deng Wanzhu in Our City.” *Beiyang huabao*, no. 1103 (June 19, 1934): 2.

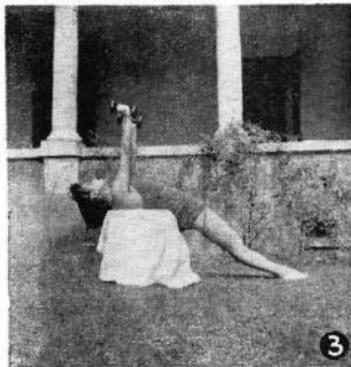
女性美中心點——胸臀發達法

蓮子

在這世界上，有兩個地方的女子，特別地具有吸引力。有許多遊歷家們到那邊去旅行的目的，並不是爲了欣賞美麗的山岳，海洋，却是爲了欣賞那些美麗的人體曲綫。這兩個地方就是巴里島(Bali)與檀香山(Hawaii)。

巴里島與檀香山的女子爲什麼那樣地動人呢？前者具有世界上發達最完美的胸部，後者則以她們曲綫豐滿的臀部見稱於世。她們把女性美的中心點——胸臀兩部發達完美了，他們怎會不動人呢？

其實我們並不一定要在巴里島與檀香山，才能找到美麗的女子，我們也不一定生長在那邊，才會美麗起來。我們要知道使她們美麗的原因是運動與自然的生活。巴里島的女子絕不把她們的胸部緊束起來，以妨礙其自然的生長。同時在她們的生活，工作和遊戲時盡量地讓這些部份的肌肉得到活動的機會。檀香山的女子是以善跳草裙舞著名的，而草裙舞正是發達臀部的一種很好的運動。所以我們假如能讓我們的胸，臀也獲得充份和適當的運動，牠們怎會不發達呢？現在請讓我來介紹幾種最有效的運動方式：



運動表現者——傅娜麗女士

發達胸部的運動

女性的胸，其實可分爲兩部：乳房與胸肌。在外表上看，乳房似乎就是胸的全部了。其實乳房形態與曲綫的美麗與否，與胸肌的發達程度有極大的關係。乳房的主要組織是脂肪與乳腺。雖然一個人體格的大小與其乳房的大小，沒有一定的比例，可是一般講來，脂肪質多些的女子，當有較大的乳房。身體瘦小的，乳房也常較小。所以你的乳房若有過大與過小的現象，那麼除運動之外，對於食物還需加以注意。脂肪已過多的，應少食肥肉，油，糖，澱粉及一切糕餅等類的食物。脂肪過少的，則可盡量多食些。乳房的型，則視於各人的骨骼而定，不過因爲乳房是附着在胸肌上的緣故，胸肌的發達與否對於乳房的形質，都有顯著的影響。所以基本的工作，還要來做下列幾種運動：

運動一——立正，兩臂向兩側伸出，和地成一平行綫。兩手握拳，手心向下，然後徐徐用力向上舉起，至於手心向上爲止。當兩臂徐徐用力往上舉起時，拳宜握緊，同力時吸氣。放下時拳宜放鬆，同時將氣呼出(如圖一)。連續做八次，稍事休息，再做八次。

Figure 3-24 Lianzi, "The Crucial Point of Feminine Beauty: Methods to Develop Chests and Buttocks." *Jianlimei*, no. 2 (December 1941): 25-26.



Figure 3-25 "Healthy beauty and therapeutic beauty." *Shidai* 7, no.6 (January 16, 1935).

**Le Raffermisssement
des Seins**

par l'effusion rapide d'eau froide sous pression

Permet de se doucher facilement sans se mouiller.

Provoque la contraction des fibres musculaires des glandes mammaires, sans toucher à la pointe sensible des seins.

**L'Auto-doucheur
Clarks PM. pour seins
normaux... 110 fr.**

**L'Auto-doucheur
Clarks GM. pour poi-
trines fortes. 125 fr.**

ou combiné avec

Le Traitement Numidien de Clarks
qui procure à toutes, en peu de temps, une poitrine idéale
Seins de Marbre, durcis, raffermiss, embellis
Numidien de Clarks, complet seul. 30 fr. franco.
RAYON F. I.

LABORATOIRES G. CLARKS
16 bis, Rue Vivienne - PARIS

La photo montre l'appareil auto-doucheur. D'une grande facilité d'emploi, l'eau arrive sous pression par le tube de caoutchouc qui s'adapte facilement à n'importe quel robinet.

Figure 3-26 Le Massosein. *Le Figaro Illustré*, September 1933, 444.

ORGUEIL de la FEMME...

DE BEAUX SEINS

Vous le pouvez. Le voulez-vous ?

Les seins, lorsqu'ils ne sont pas soignés fléchissent rapidement, surtout après l'allaitement, ou sont envahis par la graisse. **La nouvelle méthode de massage en vase clos par l'eau froide** donne d'excellents résultats.

RAFFERMIT les seins affaissés par son action régénératrice des muscles suspenseurs.

EMBELLIT les poitrines insuffisantes qu'elle développe par son action stimulante sur les glandes.

ÉVITE LE DÉVELOPPEMENT EXAGÉRÉ chez les femmes fortes en aidant à l'élimination des graisses.

**Rien n'est plus simple à faire chez soi
avec LE MASSOSEIN**

qui s'adapte instantanément sur n'importe quel robinet et que toute femme devrait avoir chez elle.

Aucune éclaboussure, aucun refroidissement à craindre, le corps n'étant pas mouillé.

— VOICI L'AVIS D'UN GRAND MÉDECIN —

« Nous avons pu constater les merveilleux résultats qu'on peut attendre du massage de la poitrine et spécialement du massage en vase clos par l'eau froide sous pression. Le traitement est à recommander dans tous les cas de diminution de résistance des tissus musculaires ainsi que de relâchement des glandes mammaires notamment après l'allaitement. » (Commun. Congrès Paris 1924).

**Votre intérêt est de vous renseigner
GRATUITEMENT**

en remplissant ce bon ou en le recopiant et en l'adressant sous enveloppe fermée aux Établissements ADAMS (Service R. S.), 8, quai Jules-Courmont, LYON, toute lectrice de ce journal recevra sous pli discret la brochure intitulée : **BEAUTÉ et FERMETÉ des SEINS** par le MASSOSEIN

Nom _____

Adresse (complète) _____

En vente dans les grandes pharmacies.
Démonstration, et Agence à Paris :
10, rue Grange-Batelière.

Figure 3-27 Le Massosein. *Le Figaro Illustré*, April 1935, 56.



Figure 3-28 “Women from east of the Huangpu River bind their breasts; the woman on the left wears a little vest, which damages the body severely, and the woman on the right wears a traditional *dudou*, which is looser.” *Tuhua shibao*, no. 659 (1930): 3.

求於上海的市街上

建英

富於現代美的女子，想起來總不會缺牙吧。可是事實却相反。即便像上海這麼物質文明發展到極度的都市中，要找一個富於現代感覺的，在她臉上閃耀着睿智，優美的性格與柔和的情感的富於內容美的女子，却是個很不容易的事情。現代美決不是祇在外觀上加以摩登的修飾，就會簡單地產生的東西。它須由女子內心美和外部美綜合的結晶。它須和基於個人廣博的學識，豐富的情感，和顯明而健全的性格。所以要找一個真實的現代美，決不能發見在舞女或其他無教養而愚笨的女子身上。她們不過是在美觀的木偶上加以不甚調勻的羅士氣的摩登裝飾的女子；她們無內容的臉之表情，全沒有深度的眼眸之銳光，和低於卑俗的談話與淺薄的舉止，祇足以感動一般無知識的愚蠢之男子形而下的情慾而已。



這樣嚴格地批判起來，中國都市女子的大部，尚未到了可認為具有現代美的培域。中國女子需要教養與豐富的生活經驗，不然，祇求外觀上的向上，僅能助長她們卑俗而淺薄的美而已。

在晚上二三個小時的舞場與街頭的徘徊，我祇遇見了一位似合於上列條件的富於現代美的中年女子，上圖是她的印象素描。

求於上海的市街上

建英

最美麗的花草往往是生長於污穢的泥堆裏的，我於是跑出了南市，向楊樹浦的貧民窟驅了汽車，想找幾個中國無產階級中的美女。

那時已到了六時，工廠的汽笛悲哀地反響於上海港的四月之青空下。從各大工廠的大門，吐出一堆堆瘦乏了的男女。他們在談笑之臉上，深深地投着悽慘的陰暗。被揮取着血汗，但他們尚不自覺地供給着他們剝蝕在肉體中的枯黃了的血液。



建英

的女工談笑着，好像百合花般淨淨的美麗。天真的臉容，對照着她樸實的衣衫更見憐愛。健全地發達了的肉體以淡紅色的感覺顯露在短小的衣褲間。一條蓬鬆的長髮垂在背後，多麼令人懷戀的長髮啊。我把那瞬間得到的印象，就畫在紙上，吩咐車夫開離回家去，回憶着留有長髮時代的中國姑娘的美麗。

求於上海的市街上

建英

被歐美習俗深染了的上海街頭上，欲覓求一個純粹的中國女子固有的美，確是一件不易的事情。徘徊了租界繁華的街上許久，我失望地跑到南市的陋巷中。這裏，上海租界的文化好像不能感驗般，尤保持着素樸而簡陋的街道。行路的人們，都呈着平安的臉容，遲遲地步行着。沒有人看講的嬰孩，毫不覺恐懼和焦慮般遊玩在屋簷下。我感到他們恬靜而安適的人生底氣息。



突然，在眼前走來一個賣蘭花的姑娘！我終於發現了我所覓求着的姑娘！一個中國的美麗的姑娘！不加修飾的臉上，溫柔地反映着桃紅色的兩頰。鵝蛋形的臉型，柳葉眉和尖長的眼睛，櫻桃形的小小的嘴唇，我覺得正在賞覽着一個古畫中之美女。

Figure 3-29 Jianying, "Pursuits in the Streets of Shanghai." *Furen huabao*, no.17 (April 1934): 11-15.

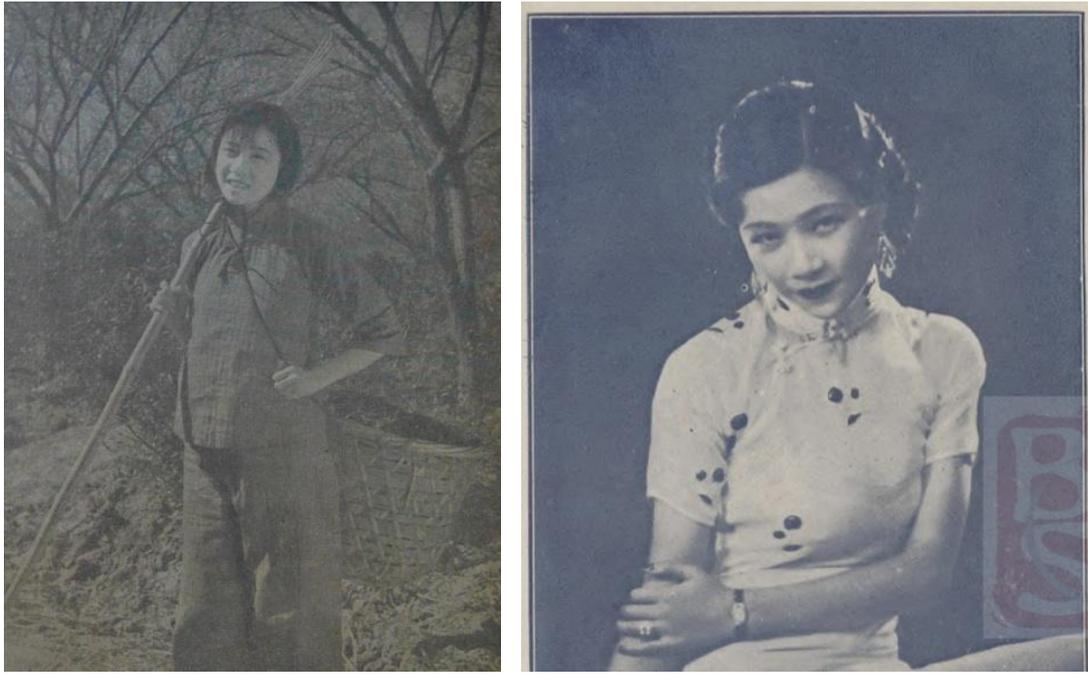


Figure 3-30 Film star Ruan Lingyu. Left, *Wenhua*, no. 50 (September 1934): 47. Right, *Lewen* 1, no. 6 (1935): 13.



Figure 3-31 Guo Jianying, "Life in Shanghai." In: *Modeng Shanghai*, edited by Chen Zishan, 36. Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2001.



俞風

！行才點一胖該應兒特模做說思意的我！了線曲的肉有沒太惜可，唉：家畫

！啊有才找去中姐小太太裏樓洋到非除您那！生先：兒特模

Figure 3-32 Yu Feng, Untitled. *Shidai manhua*, no. 24 (December 20, 1935).

'Painter: Alas, it's a shame that the body does not have a sensational curve! I mean models should be a bit fatter!

Model: Sir, then you have to go for the madams and misses living in the Western style mansions!'



圖工。試媽奶 ↑

Figure 3-33 "Illustration of a Wet-nurse in Job Interview." *Sanliujiu huabao* 8, no.11 (1941).



Figure 4-1 Shaofei, "Effective Fund Raising." *Shidai manhua* no. 2 (February 20, 1934).



288 周恩来、董必武在梅园会见外国友人。
(1946年)

289 周恩来、邓颖超在梅园与外国记者谈话。
(1946年10月)

290 送走了客人之后留影。(1946年)

290



230 1945年8月15日,日本政府宣布无条件投降后,中共中央立即决定抽调大批高级干部至华北和东北开展工作。本图后排为第一批乘美军运输机由延安飞太行解放区转各地的高级干部林彪(右五)、张际春(右六)等十一人,背上降落伞上机前与前排欢送人员叶剑英(右二)、彭真(右六)等留影。(1945年8月)

231 左起:邓颖超、曾宪植、夏之栩等在杨家岭。(1945年)

Figure 4-2 Above, "Photograph after Seeing All the Guests Off."¹ In: *Lishi de jiaoyin: Tong Xiaopeng sheying ziliao xuanji*, Fig. 290. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990.

Below, "From Left: Deng Yingchao, Zeng Xianzhi, Xia Zhixu in Yangjialing"². In: *Lishi de jiaoyin*, Fig. 231.

¹ They were in Chongqing.

² Yangjialing, a village in Yan'an.

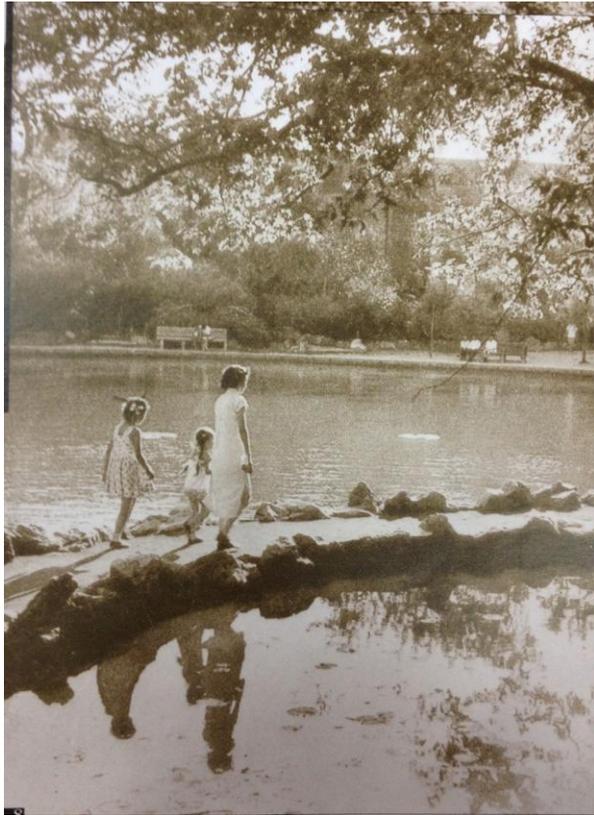


Figure 4-3 “One corner of Gujiazhai Park, Shanghai, mid 1950s.” In: *Huaihailu Bainian Xiezhen*, edited by Shanghaishi luwanqu dangan ju (guan), and Shanghaishi luwanqu difangzhi bangongshi, 15. Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2001.



Figure 4-4 “Clothes Exhibition.” *Renmin huabao*, May 1956, 28-29.

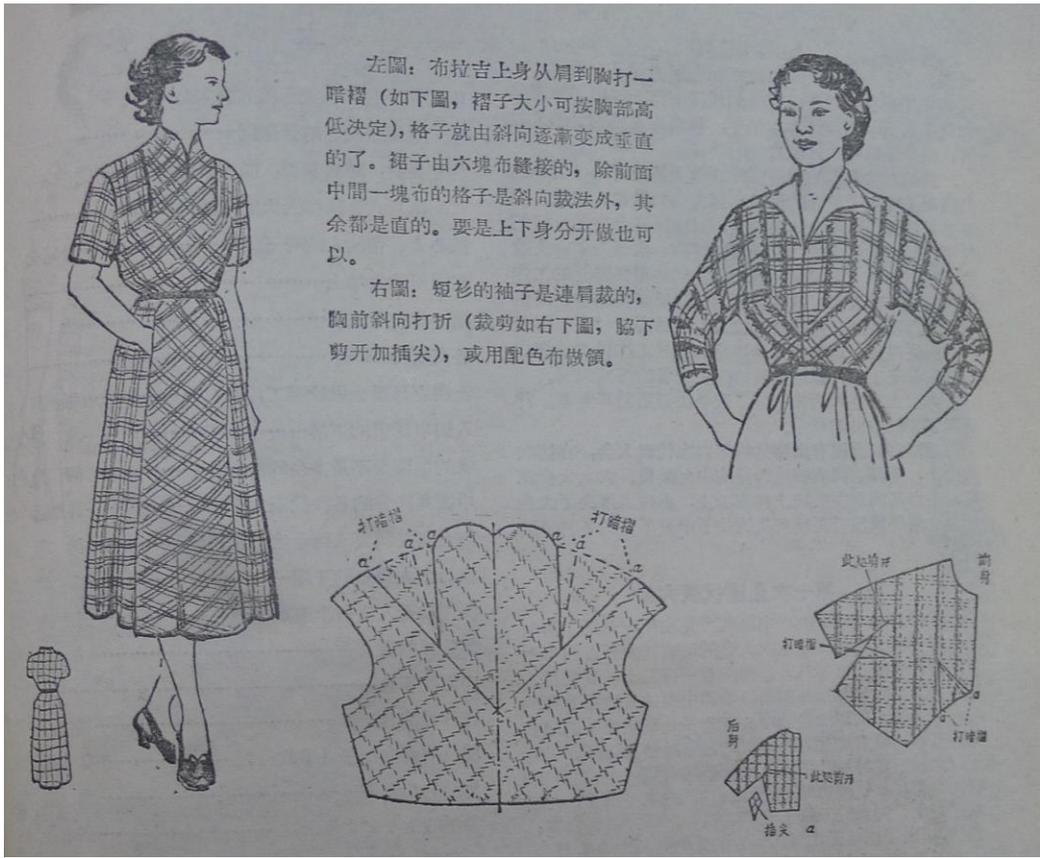


Figure 4-5 "Clothes styles of Checked Fabrics." *Zhongguo fun ü*, October 1956, 31.



Figure 4-6 Untitled, designs of women's clothes. *Fuzhuang yanjiu*, no. 2 (May 1960): 15, 28.



Figure 4-7 “Displayed *qipao* no. 44.” In: *Funü ertong fuzhuang zhanlanhui huace*, edited by Shanghai shi funü ertong fuzhuang zhanlanhui (Shanghai: Shanghaishi funü ertong fuzhuang zhanlanhui, 1956).

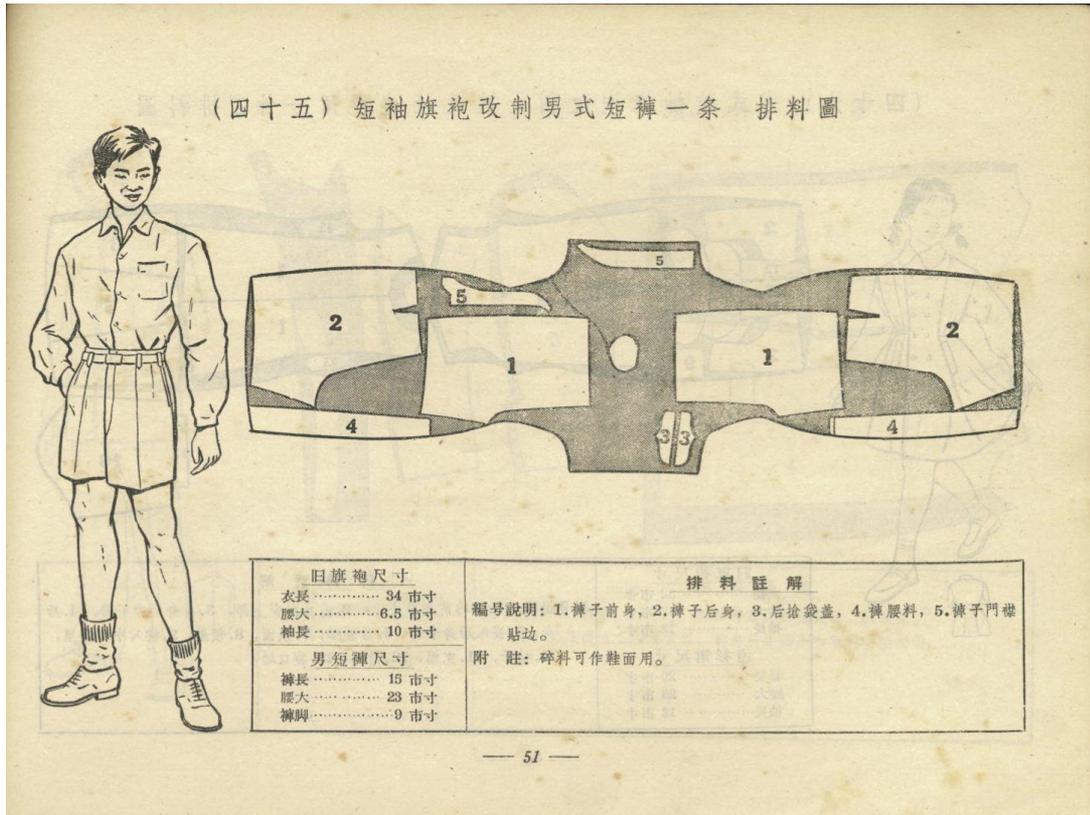


Figure 4-8 “Men’s Short Altered from Short-Sleeve *Qipao*.” In: *Jiuyi gai xinzhuang*, edited by Shanghai fuzhuang gongsi. Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 1957.

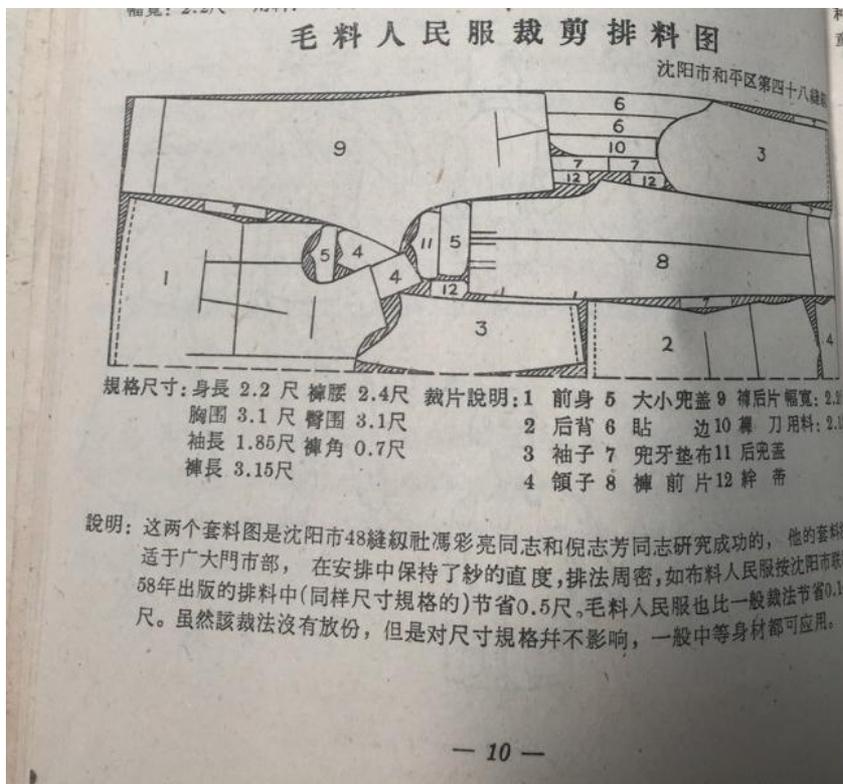


Figure 4-9 “Illustration of material arrangement of woolen Renmin suit.” *Fuzhuang yanjiu*, no. 1 (February 1960): 10.

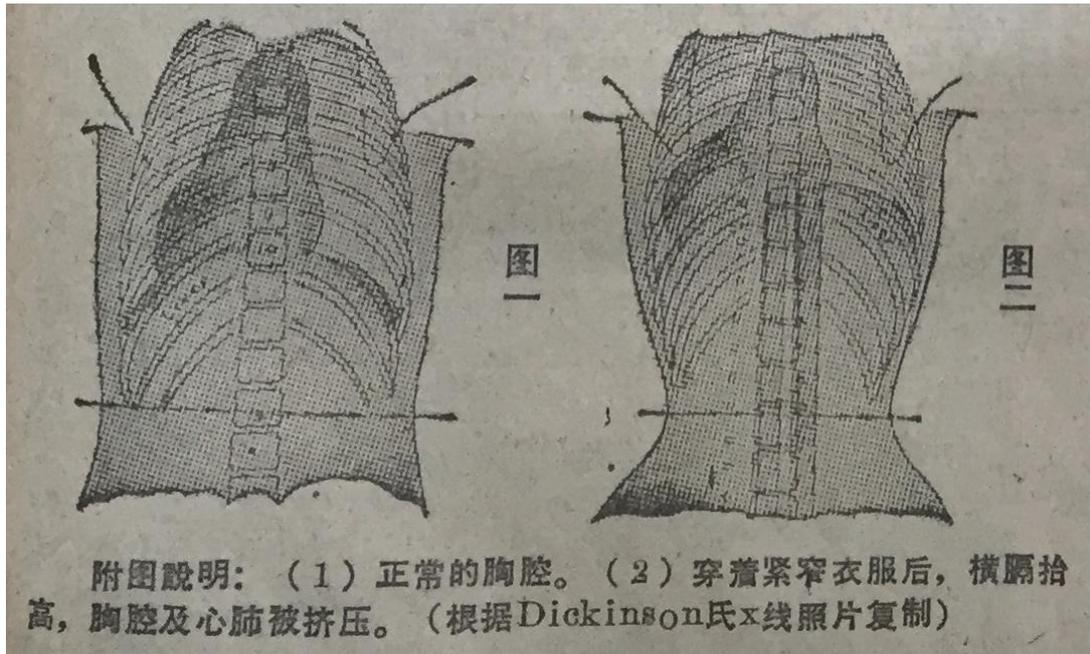


Figure 4-12 Untitled, illustration of women who wears corset. *Yangcheng wanbao*, November 19, 1964, 3.

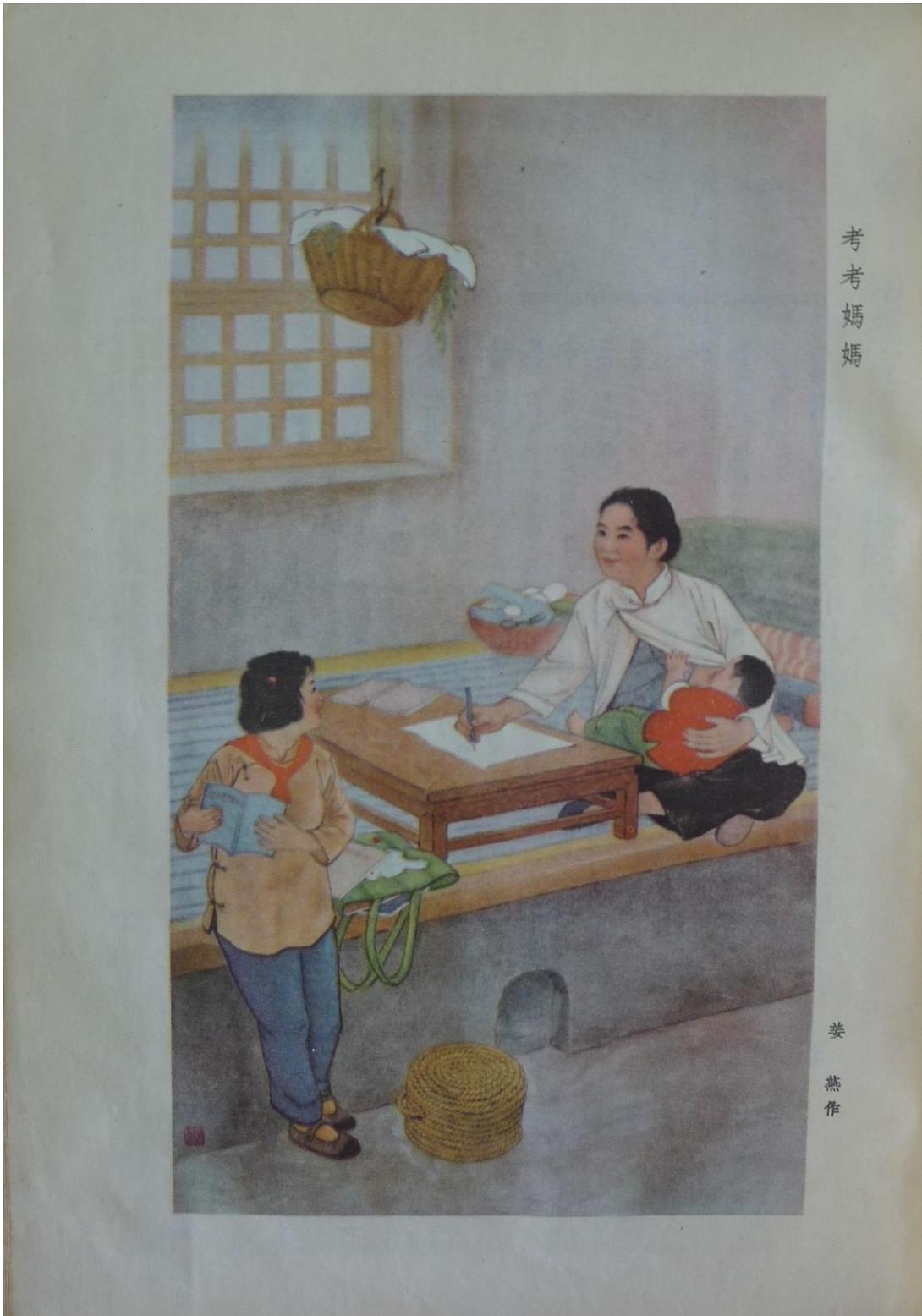




Figure 4-13 Stills from *Never Forget the Lesson*. Xie Teili. Beijing dianying zhipianchang, 1964.



Figure 4-14 "Illustration of Picking Cotton." *Xinzhongguo fun ii*, no.8 (1950).



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Figure 4-15 Jiang Yan, "Testing Mom." *Zhongguo qingnian*, no. 23 (December 1, 1953).



Figure 5-1 Xu Shulan and her junior high school classmates in front of Tiananmen Square, 1968. They all wore shirts and trousers. Courtesy of Xu Shulan.

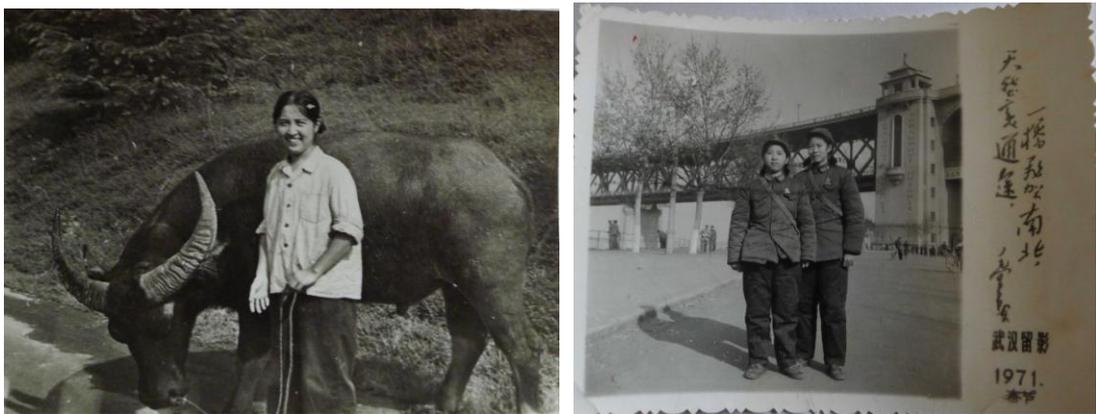


Figure 5-2 Left, Wu Yinyan grazed a cow while in the army in 1974. Right, Wu Yinyan and her friend in military uniforms, 1971. Courtesy of Wu Yinyan.



Figure 5-3 Poster of ballet *Red Detachment of Women*. In: Stewart Fraser, *100 Great Chinese Posters*, 25. New York: Images Graphiques, 1977.



Figure 5-4 Zhang Yaxin¹. "Raid on the White Tiger Regiment," 1971.
http://www.seegallery.net/artist/artist_work.aspx?id=59. Accessed on November 15, 2013.

¹ Zhang Yaxin (1933-) is a photographer of Xinhua News Agency from 1963 to 1978. He was assigned to shoot the "model plays" during the Cultural Revolution.



Figure 5-5 Poster. In: *Catalogue of Vintage Chinese Posters C. 1939-1990: Sale 583*, edited by Bloomsbury Auctions, 108. London: Bloomsbury Auctions, 2006.
 'People of the world unite and defeat the American invaders and all their running dogs!'



Figure 5-6 Jiang Yingli with her colleagues posturing as militia, January 30, 1970. Courtesy of Jiang Yingli.



Figure 6-1 Zhang Shuo with her boyfriend (who later became her husband) in 1979. Courtesy of Zhang Shuo.



Figure 6-2 Wu Yinyan and her friends in the 2000s. Courtesy of Wu Yinyan.



Figure 6-3 Stills from *Narrow street*. Yang Yanjin. Shanghai dianying zhipianchang, 1981.

2. Translation of Lu Xun's *Concerns about Natural Breasts*

Shuntian shibao published a piece of news that Ms Ouyang Xiaolan, the director of Picai Hutong Girls' Attached Middle School in Beijing, did not allow girls with short hair to register for examinations, therefore many of them could only bemoan their insignificance at this prohibition. Yes, things happen that way. The girls could do nothing about it. However, girls with natural feet still can take exams, so I think there is hope. Yet girls with natural feet are also too 'new'.

Men and women have suffered a lot from their hair-related karma in their previous lives. We can certainly see this if we are familiar with things happened since the late Ming period. During the Late Qing period, I suffered a lot from not having a queue, so I am not in favour of women cutting their hair short. People in Beijing cut off their queues by the orders from Yuan Shikai 袁世凱. Yet apart from orders, there might also be swords following behind. Otherwise, perhaps all of men in Beijing would still have queues by now. It is the same with women's hair cutting, it always needs an emperor (or somebody with a different title) issuing an order that everybody has to cut their hair in order to make it happen. Of course, even then many will be unhappy about this, but they will do it anyway because of fear. A year or so later, people will have forgotten why they did it; and after two years, we have arrived in a world in which everybody thinks that women should not have long hair. At that time, girls with long hair will worry about not being able to sit for examinations. If only some people say some reasons and want to change, then [hair cutting] will never get succeed.

Yet some of the people in charge now also advocate that women should cut their hair. It is a shame that they could not hold their ground stably. In the same place, A comes after B is gone, and C comes after A is gone. A favours short hair and cuts off women's hair, whereas C requires long hair and kills women with short hair. These several years seem to be a period of disasters for the youth, especially women. According to a newspaper report, short hair was once advocated in one place, but then another army conquered that place. The new lords slowly pulled up the hair of short-hair women and cut off their breasts. This is a punishment which proves that people all over the nation now have accepted men's short hair, though women are not allowed to follow suit. Cutting off women's breasts was meant to make women look

like men, thus punishing them for their rash imitations of men. In comparison, isn't Ms Ouyang Xiaolan not too stern?

Breast-binding is prohibited in Guangzhou this year. Whoever violates that ban is subject to a fine of fifty yuan. It is called 'Natural Breast Movement' by the press. Somebody found it pity that it was not Fan Zengxiang 樊增祥¹ who issued the orders. There is not a word like 'Euryale ferox pulp'² in the ban, which could hardly satisfy the literati and intellectuals. Apart from that, there are some witty articles and comical commentaries in periodicals. I think that is all there is in history.

I also had imaginary fears before, worrying that maybe educated Chinese women will lose their capabilities of breast-feeding in the future, and that every family should hire a wet nurse. However, it is useless to attack breast-binding. Firstly, social ideas should be reformed to go easy on breasts. Secondly, clothes should be reformed. The upper garment should be stuffed in the skirts. *Qipao* and short upper clothes are not suitable for the emancipation of breasts, as they are lifted up below the breasts. They are not convenient to wear, nor beautiful.

There is another big problem: will big breasts become a crime and as a result, will girls with big breasts have no place to study? Before the Republican China was established, only those who were not intellectuals, peasants, workers or merchants, were not allowed to take exams. Principally speaking, if it is a crime for women to cut their hair because this eliminates the difference between men and women, then it should bring merit to increase the difference between the sexes by having natural breasts. But there are many things in the world that people cannot argue with words. One will always need imperial orders or wield the sword of command.

¹ Fan Zengxiang (1846-1931), a Late Qing and Republican official and highly productive writer, was famous for writing romantic writing. For a biography of Fan, see Xu Youchun, Cai Hongyuan, and Zhou Guangpei, et al., eds., 'Fan Fanshan', in *Minguo renwu da cidian* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei ren min chubanshe, 1991), 1392.

² “雞頭肉” in the original text. “雞頭” means *Euryale ferox*, also refers to a woman's teats. See Yutang Lin, “Lin Yutang's Chinese-English Dictionary of Modern Usage” (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1972), 1190.

Otherwise, there are ‘criminals for having short hair’ now, and besides, ‘criminals with natural breasts’ should be added, or perhaps ‘criminals with natural feet’. Alas, a woman has so many parts to her body, life is very hard indeed.

If we disregard reform, evolution and the like, and just consider [women’s] safety, I think that the best thing to do for female students would be to wear long hair, bind their breasts, and half-bind their feet (which were bound and then unbound, also called civilized feet). This is because wherever I went, regardless of what different flags people upheld, I never heard of people who would hate this kind of women.

3. Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. 基本生活經歷（出生地點、家庭條件、學習工作經歷、結婚生子的年齡等）
2. 您小學和中學都穿什麼式樣的衣服？有哪件衣服印象深刻嘛？
3. 當時什麼樣子的衣服流行、好看？
4. 穿什麼樣的內衣？第一次見到胸罩是什麼時候？穿過胸罩嘛？
5. 有穿過緊身的內衣把胸部壓平嗎？為什麼？
6. 要突出胸部的線條嘛？胸部突出會遭人議論嘛？
7. 您和同學、姐妹或父母會議論其他女性的穿著嘛？
8. 您上過生理衛生課嘛？對生理知識有瞭解嘛？
9. 覺得自己和男同學有什麼不同？
10. 男女同學交流多嗎？
11. 會模仿電影里的穿著嘛？
12. 農村/城市的穿著是否不同？怎樣不同？
13. 穿著不對會被批判嘛？
14. 做重體力活對身體、衣著有影響嗎？

4. List of Interviews

	Name	Year of Birth	Place of Birth	Education	Occupation	Time of Interview	Place of Interview	Real name /Pseudonym
1.	Sun Huiyun 孫慧云	1924	Beijing	College	Civil Servant, retired	29 Jan 13	Beijing	Pseudonym
2.	Wang Suzhen 王素真 Li Meijuan 李美娟	1923 1950s	Shanghai Jilin, later moved to Shanghai for college	College College		08 Jun 13	Shanghai	Real name Pseudonym
3.	Zhang Jinfeng 張金鳳 (音)	1920	Rugao	None	Peasant	22 Jun 13	Rugao, Jiangsu	Real name
4.	Xu Jinzhi 許金枝	Over 90 years old 1940s	Rugao	Elementary school None	Peasant	22 Jun 13	Rugao, Jiangsu	Pseudonym
5.	Shen Guixian 沈桂仙 with her granddaughter	Over 90 years old	Rugao	None	Peasant	22 Jun 13	Rugao, Jiangsu	Pseudonym
6.	Sun Yulan 孫玉蘭	1914	Rugao	None	Peasant	22 Jun 13	Rugao, Jiangsu	Pseudonym
7.	Li Rufen 李如芬	1938	Shanghai	College		24 Jun 13	Phone interview	Pseudonym
8.	Chen Xuan 陳鋤 and her nurse	1925 1955 or 1956	Shanghai	College	Teacher, retired	24 Jun 13 27 Jun 13	Shanghai	Real name

9.	Shi Hanmei 時涵梅	1929 or 1930	Shanghai	College	Teacher, retired	24 Jun 13 27 Jun 13	Shanghai	Pseudonym
10	Li Jinying 李錦英	1957	Shanghai	Technical school (TS)	Worker	30 Jun 13	Shanghai	Real name
11	Shi Aihua 施愛華	1956	Chongming	Junior high school (JHS)	Peasant/Worker			Pseudonym
12	He Meiqi 何美琪	1938	Shanghai					Real name
13	Yao Lingan 姚齡安	1939	Shanghai	College		30 Jun 13	Shanghai	Pseudonym
14	He Cuiqiao 何翠巧	1931 or 1932	Nanjing			05 Jul 13	Nanjing	Pseudonym
15	Li Wenhua 李文華	1930s	Nanjing		Shop Assistant, retired	05 Jul 13	Nanjing	Real name
16	Xu Mingzhi 徐明芝	1952	Liaoning	JHS	Worker, retired	09 Aug 13	Daqing	Real name
17	Jiang Yingli 江英麗	1952	Shanghai	JHS	Worker, retired	10 Aug 13	Daqing	Real name
	Yin Peizhen 尹佩珍	1952			Worker, retired			Pseudonym
	Xu Mingying 徐明英	1959	Liaoning	721 University	Accountant			Real name
18	Jin Xiaowen 金曉文	1959	Beijing	College	Professor	15 Aug 13	Beijing	Pseudonym
19	Wang Yulu 王瑜露	1957			Laboratory Technician, retired	23 Aug 13	Beijing	Pseudonym
20	Xu Shulan 徐書蘭	1949	Beijing	Normal School	High School Teacher	26 Aug 13	Beijing	Pseudonym
21	Xu Yueqiu 許月秋	1952	Yichun, Heilongjiang	JHS	Worker, later became accountant	13 Dec 13	Daqing	Pseudonym
(10)	Li Jinying 李錦英	1957				17 Dec 13	Shanghai	Real name
(11)	Shi Aihua 施愛華	1956						Pseudonym
22	Zhao Xiulin 趙秀琳	1946	Chongqing, moved to	JHS, Physical	Worker	18 Dec 13	Shanghai	Pseudonym

			Henan in 1950	Education School				
23	Wang Yudan 王玉丹	1943	Shanghai	Diploma	Chemist	18 Dec 13	Shanghai	Pseudonym
24	Ju Fengzhu 璩鳳珠	1939	Shanghai	JHS	Civil servant	18 Dec 13	Shanghai	Real name
25	Qiao Xiuhua 喬秀華	1944	Shanghai	JHS	Peasant/Accountant/ 生產隊長/Civil servant	18 Dec 13	Shanghai	Real name
26	Tang Haifeng 唐海峰	1948	Bengbu, moved to Tongling, Anhui around 1953	Normal School/Open University	Elementary school teacher, retired	18 Dec 13	Shanghai	Real name
27	Jiang Siwei 蔣嗣韡	1955	Shanghai	721 U	Worker/Civil servant	19 Dec 13	Shanghai	Real name
28	Ling Ling 矜矜	1943	Shanghai	Technical secondary school	Technical archivist	19 Dec 13	Shanghai	Nick name
29	Song Shunyun 宋順云	1919	Shanghai		Civil servant, retired	19 Dec 13	Shanghai	Real name
30	Fei Yichun 費憶春	1943	Shanghai, moved to Jiangxi in 1967 and Chongqing in 1970	Medical School	Doctor, retired	20 Dec 13	Shanghai	Real name
31	Wu Yinyan 武銀燕	1955	Anshan, moved to Beijing in 1966,	Military Medical School	Civil servant, retired	24 Dec 13	Beijing	Real name

			became a soldier in 1970, back to Beijing in 1985					
32	Cui Xueqin 崔雪琴	1956	Beijing, moved to Hanzhong in 1969, Xi'an in 1972	Diploma	Admin/Teacher	24 Dec 13	Beijing	Pseudonym
33	Pei Zhinan 金之南	1956	Yulin, Shanxi, moved to Fugu county in 1971	Open University	Admin/Civil servant in Women's Federation in Fugu, Shaanxi	24 Dec 13	Beijing	Pseudonym
34	Guo Youxin 郭幼新	1954	Jiangxi, moved to Beijing in 1959		Teacher, retired	25 Dec 13	Beijing	Real name
35	Yin Chengfang 殷成芳	1953	Beijing, became sent-down youth in Heilongjiang after 1969		Teacher, retired	27 Dec 13	Beijing	Pseudonym
36	Yang Yixiang 楊益香	1956	Beijing		Worker, retired	27 Dec 13	Beijing	Pseudonym
37	Wei Lianzhi 韋蓮芝	1952	Beijing	JHS	Worker, retired	28 Dec 13	Beijing	Real name

38	Gu Yameng 顧雅夢	1921	Beijing	College	Editor, retired	30 Dec 13	Beijing	Pseudonym
39	Zhang Shuo 張朔	1953	Beijing, became sent-down youth in Heilongjiang from 1969 to 1977/78		Journalist, retired	14 Apr 15	Beijing	Real name

5. Consent Form

口述史访谈同意书

首先，感谢您抽出宝贵的时间来参与这次访谈。此次访谈的内容将成为本人博士论文研究的资料来源之一。结合使用档案、报纸杂志、回忆录、文学作品等资料，此项研究将探索 1910 至 1980 年代的女性服饰变化，尤其是曲线美的沿革。这次访谈并不会直接使您获益，但您分享的回忆将成为历史记录的一部分，使人们对 1910-80 年代的日常生活有更深入的理解。

访问者：

英国伦敦大学亚非学院历史系博士生焦霖。如果您有任何问题，可以随时和访问者联系：

邮箱：lin_jiao@soas.ac.uk

QQ: 86487485

电话：+0086-135 8181 2682 (中)

+0044-746 2115 880 (英)

访谈过程：

访谈大约进行一个小时。此次访谈会涉及到被访者的衣着服饰经验，以及其它相关的经历。访谈中，被访者会被问及年龄、家庭状况、人生经历等基本信息。此外，被访者在访谈中可能会被问及其它问题。

访谈将会被录音，部分录音可能会被转换成文字稿件。谈话的内容将被用于本人博士论文中，也有可能在今后发表为论文或书籍。然而，您有权拒绝被录音，以及拒绝把录音转换成文字稿。此外，您有权在研究的任何一个阶段中选择退出，这样，您的任何信息将不会被包括在这项研究中。

保密

如果您选择使用您的真实姓名，在今后发表的相关研究中，您的真实姓名将会被引用。

如果您选择匿名，在本人的博士论文，以及今后发表的相关研究中，您的信息都会以匿名的形式出现。

声明同意

1. 我同意参与这次口述史访谈，并同意访问者在研究中使用访谈内容。关于保密，我选择：
 我同意访问者在博士论文，以及相关论文或书籍中，引用我的真实姓名。
 我希望访问者在博士论文，以及相关论文或书籍中，匿名使用我提供的信息。
2. 您是否同意将访谈录音收录于伦敦大学亚非学院档案馆中，作为历史素材？
 同意 不同意
3. 您是否同意访问者将翻拍的照片使用于博士论文，以及其相关论文或书籍中？
 同意 不同意

被访者： _____

日期： _____

访问者： _____

日期： _____

跟踪访谈

本人很乐意与您保持联系，如果您同意被进一步访谈，可以在下面留下您的联系方式：

电话： _____ 邮箱： _____ QQ: _____

其它： _____

再次感谢您同意参加上述访谈。请您留一份访谈同意书作为备份，谢谢！

6. Samples of Interview Transcripts

6.1 Shi Hanmei and Chen Xuan

24 June, 2013, Shanghai

焦：您裹過小腳嗎？

陳錫：我沒有包過小腳。我爸爸是大學教授，我自己是中學老師。我四歲就上學了。我上的新式的學堂。清心女中，後來震旦大學。小的時候我上幼兒園，有一個保姆陪我去的。

焦：您是媽媽餵奶還是奶媽餵奶？

陳：我吃的媽媽的奶，別的奶媽我都不要。

焦：您今年多大？

時涵梅：85.

焦：您是上海人麼？

時：上海人。

焦：您從小上學麼？

時：上學，從小就上學。

焦：您的家庭是什麼樣的？父母是做什麼的？

時：我爸爸是做雕刻的，做藝術品的。我媽媽是教師。我外公家裡都是讀書人，本來老早呢，我們家是做官的，七代做官的，後來不做了，做官沒有意思了，開始做生意了。

焦：幾歲上學？

時：六歲上一年級下，上沒有上。

焦：上的是新式學堂麼？

時：上的是教會學校。我們每個禮拜有一個禮拜，有聖經課，不及格要留級的。

焦：在您那個時代，上海已經不裹腳了吧？

時：老早就不纏了，我媽媽都沒纏過，我就更沒有了。我外婆也沒有，原來的小腳放掉了。

焦：您家一直在上海麼？

時：我養在上海，外婆呢就住在上海和江蘇交界的一條公路旁邊。我小的時候教會學校讀到三年級，日本人打進來了。八一三曉得吧？日本人打到我們上海來。我爸爸被日本人打死了，我們一家人都抗日的。爸爸被打死了，幾個舅舅也都去打日本人了，都出去了。我外公逃走了，那個時候家里不像樣。我舅舅都是上海大學的畢業生。

焦：您有幾個兄弟姐妹？

時：我們家就兩個呀，我爸爸老早死了嘛，我是老大。後來我到了崑山，在上海旁邊一條公路的旁邊，就在上海旁邊。後來和他們出去逃難，逃到蘇州，那個時候沒有書念了。我們家都是教師，有多少教師都講不清的。後來我就唸書了。

焦：您知道當時女生有束胸麼？要把胸纏得很緊？

時：有有有。老早不可以的，胸部高起來不可以的，沒胸看不到，穿小的背心。鄉下可能要胸的，上海不要的，要穿小一點兒的背心，稍微小一點兒的背心。要平的。

保姆：我姐姐們，我媽媽們都穿，我自己都縫過，穿過。現在都要鼓起來。

時：上海沒有解放的時候呢，國民黨的時候，已經沒有小背心了，上海已經不穿小背心了，已經穿胸罩了，我也穿胸罩了。1937年的時候，上海已經不穿小背心了，農村裏面可能還穿的。1937年以前，女生還是穿小背心的。

焦：您沒穿過小背心？

時：沒穿過。

焦：胸罩可以在商場買到的？

時：商場買得到，也可以訂做，我是自己做的。

焦：您那會兒胸部大的，有曲線條的算是好看麼？

時：那個時候已經有線條了。線條是上海，農村是沒有的。這個時候的女孩子穿什麼最好看了，西裝褲，最好看，最時髦。41年42年都是穿西裝褲最漂亮。上海穿旗袍也漂亮的，不過大家都穿的，小孩子也穿，老太也穿，都穿旗袍，也沒什麼好看。穿西裝最漂亮。穿高跟鞋，很時髦的。汽車很少了，出去都坐黃包車。

焦：會看畫報麼？

時：畫報看得不多，也有的。

焦：看電影麼？

時：我們住在學校裡不出去，電影有的，我們難得去看一次。我總叫媽媽去看美國的動畫片，米老鼠。愛情片老早也有的，家長不許我們看。小說也有的，張恨水，家裡不許看。我小時候看三國志的，紅樓夢也不許看的，水滸，三國演義，儒林外史，聊齋，西遊記。紅樓夢我也自己偷著看的。

焦：看茅盾老舍麼？

時：不看。後來念中學的時候看了，四幾年，在太倉的時候，念師範。初中在嘉定。

焦：您念的是女子學校麼？

時：不是不是，男女合校。

焦：女生有沒有忌諱自己曲線條的身體？

時：沒有。那個時候我們穿的衣服也沒什麼的，我們都穿校服。校服有兩種。初中的時候校服是童子軍衣服，後來大了，高中，就不穿了。

焦：童子軍的衣服是什麼樣的？

時：黃色的，一個上衣，一個裙子。後來呢，穿藍顏色的，夏天呢淡藍色，冬天麼穿深的藍顏色。頭髮要剪到耳朵這裡的，不可以留長的，有人監督的。我在學校裡就給人理髮。

焦：高中穿什麼？

時：高中穿旗袍呀。

焦：旗袍是很收身的麼？

時：不是，很收身的人，上海都是這種比較，妓女啊，舞女啊，穿的。我們學生呢旗袍穿得比較大一點點，很寬鬆的。

焦：所以看不太出的？

時：看不出的，什麼性感不性感，有嘛總歸有一點，也不是像現在這樣子的。

焦：旗袍自己在家做麼？

時：我們都是自己做的，我媽媽會做，我也會做。

我媽媽是大家小姐，我這裡就不是了，日本人來了，我家里就剩我媽媽我外婆和我了，男孩子都去打日本人了。

旗袍有腰身的。陰丹士林是冬天穿的。夏天穿淺色。

我們上體育課嘛，就不穿旗袍了，就穿裙子，女生都穿裙子的，裙褲，燈籠褲。我們不穿短褲，有的人家穿短褲。長短都叫西裝褲。

焦：體育課是女老師麼？

時：體育課我們分開上的，女的是女老師上，男的是男老師上。內容不一樣。女生的體育客籃球也打，但是規則不一樣。後來解放以後規則就變了。體育課的內容和現在差不多，鉛球，但是游泳我們沒有。

焦：媽媽教女孩兒走路的姿態麼？要挺胸抬頭麼？還是要含點兒胸？

時：沒有沒有，我們家裡沒有教過，都順其自然了。我們家裡女孩子走路不要低頭的，那成什麼樣子。老早女孩子不許出去玩的，女孩子在家裡做做事，不要出去玩兒出去瘋的。

焦：鄉下的衣服？

時：短的，冬天就棉襖的，對襟的比較少。我們上海穿棉的旗袍。這個衣服就是勞動人民穿的。寫字間的，銀行裏面啊，都不穿這個的。所以走在路上一看，就知道這個人是做什麼的。

焦：您知道鄉下女人裡面怎麼穿麼？

時：緊身衣服，緊身背心。她們沒有胸罩，就穿背心。我們上海穿胸罩的。城市和農村總是有差別的。我們這裡差別小一點，陶行知先生老早就在這邊建學

校了，就比較開放，農民學知識比較早。比起江北，江南這一帶（開放的）。江北兩樣的。上海兩樣的。外國人來去很多的。

焦：您家庭里有小孩兒，是找奶媽麼？還是自己喂？

時：有錢人家找奶媽，沒有錢人家自己喂。我不是奶媽喂的，我是媽媽喂的。奶媽不好的，小孩子要吃自己媽媽的奶好呀，媽媽和孩子一起成長。懂的人家都不請奶媽，那麼真正有錢人家就請奶媽。

焦：有錢人家覺得自己餵奶不好麼？

時：不好看呀！自己餵奶了，不好看了，人的樣子變了，胸的形狀不一樣了。沒有餵過奶的神氣呀。

曲線條美的也有人提倡的，但是一般人家都不這樣的。上海老早妓女很多呀，走在大街上一看就看出來了。穿著總是有點兒妖了，很緊啊，走路扭啊，講話麼嘍得不得了。一般的人家不是這樣子的。一般我們這樣家庭的女的，出去工作就是做教師，醫生。去銀行都是做花瓶。

我48年工作，29年7月出生。工作了一年解放了。我在楊浦區的吳東工人文化宮的小學工作。

陳錫：沒有束胸。沒有聽說過束胸。

焦：您小的時候穿肚兜麼？

陳錫：不穿的，小肚兜從來沒穿過，小肚兜是農村人穿的，浦東到現在該穿肚兜呢。我小的時候就是穿背心，袖子沒有的，當中有鈕釦。那時候小嘞，十幾歲以後就買胸罩穿了。

陳錫：震旦大學中文系。

教會學校，小學的時候，穿一件藍色的揹帶裙，上面嗎穿一件襯衫。

保姆：我今年58歲，我跟著我姐姐長大，我姐姐就穿背心，捆緊了，平了纔好看。那女孩子胸大的也要使勁兒捆平了。越大，越要捆得緊，越小越不用捆，反正看不出來。那肯定疼。我就撿姐姐們的小背心穿，我自己也穿過，自己到了二十幾歲就穿胸罩了。胸罩買不起，我就自己縫胸罩。我家是河南的。農村買不起胸罩。

6.2 Zhang Shuo

14 April, 2015, Beijing

焦：我研究的主要就是曲線美的問題，涉及到服裝和身體的問題。

張朔：1953年11月9號，在北京的協和醫院出生的。林巧稚大夫給我媽媽接生的。從出生後，十個月開始，就在中央黨校這個特定的大院裡，裏面什麼都有。那裡的工作人員都是從早忙到晚，加班加點，要麼就是下放，要麼就是搞四清。所以解決孩子的後顧之憂的，就有一個特別正規龐大的托兒系統。像我們都是十個月就在託兒所了。我媽媽是中央黨校的，我爸爸是在城裡，人民出版社。中央黨校在西郊，頤和園對面。中央黨校一直都是一個挺左的地兒。我媽媽最早是那兒的翻譯組組長，主要就是因為蘇聯專家大批地到中國來，特別緊缺一批做翻譯的人才。蘇聯專家到這兒來都是要講課的，我媽媽後來就是給蘇聯的哲學專家，講大課的，一千多人，俄文的同聲翻譯。她那會兒是特招，從上海特招到人民大學，速成班，學了八個多月的俄文，就去做哲學的同聲翻譯，裏面有多少概念術語。她當時是速成班的班長，最優秀的，很多人都翻譯不了的，她因為聰明又刻苦，她原來是浙大教育心理系的，後來又因為參加地下黨，肄業，又被捕，又去打遊擊。她經歷特別傳奇，有本書。因為這個，她本來已經分配在慈溪縣委，做縣委秘書，然後她看到這個消息，也還是想上學。她從浙大肄業，被捕這一系列的變故，她還是希望上學。最後領導同意了，她就跟著人大這個大隊長，帶著幾百人，到人大，集訓，培養一批頂級的俄文人才。說當時好多女孩子等於學完就上崗，翻譯不出來，都急得哭。八個月，但是是蘇聯人來教。從幾百人中挑出十個人進速成班，她又是速成班的班長。他們班特別逗，他們蘇聯老師不會中文，他們直接聽俄文還聽不懂。但是那個俄文老師會法文，他們年齡相差幾十歲，有一個年齡挺大的，會法文，結果他就變成了翻譯，俄文老師和他用法文交流，他再翻譯成中文，就這樣，這個速成班。他們現在班裏面還有一個，一直留在人民大學任教，現在都一百零幾歲了。我媽媽也留在人民大學教書了，後來也因為緊急需要這些人才，沒辦法，把她調在中央黨校了。我媽媽也算倖存者吧。當時的中央黨校，像艾思奇，楊獻珍。中央黨校那個時候理論嘛，主要哲學教研室是很內什麼的。我媽媽是哲學教研室專屬的同聲翻譯，任何重要的，包括蘇聯中共和咱們談，都是她去翻譯，這都是絕對保密的，很多機密的，因為別人翻譯不出來。就等於除了哲學大課的，其它的都是她。楊獻珍都來就是因為“合二而一”嘛，批判運動，牽連了很多人。就那場運動，有一百多個人都被調離黨校，遣返回原籍。我就記得楊獻珍是我媽媽的領導，他是降了五級，撤職，遣返回原籍，文革開始時就被投入大獄。所有這些人的子女，我們都是一個學校的，包括艾思奇的子女，楊獻珍不知道，都是我們的同學，我們都在一個學校裡頭。受牽連的很多人，孫甯寧，她爸爸當年是哲學教研室的副主任，我媽媽的頂頭上司，都是因為“合二而一”這個批判運動，不光是受牽連。我和孫甯寧一直是同班同學。孫定國生了五個孩子，我是副班長，經常因為他不完成作業，我就揪著他。還有上課了，他還沒起床，我就把他從宿舍里光著腳揪過來。經常有這種衝突，很熟悉的。有一天放學，孫定國就在前面走。好像是被遣返回原籍，但又有什麼事兒把他叫回來（北京）。後來我看到一些資料，肯定是受盡侮辱，包括康生。康生是特別壞，包括他老婆在中央黨校也是特別壞。孫甯寧已經都走了，結果他爸爸又回來了。我就走在後面，看他特別沉重，我本來可以走到他前

面，但沒有。我印象特別深，他穿了一個毛 B 級的中山裝似的，然後他爸爸是比較胖，比較黑，有點兒橫肉的那種，比較嚴肅的一個人，也是一代挺了不得的哲人。他在前面走，背著個皮箱，咋咋咋，咋咋咋。我在後面跟著，他在岔路口就往家走，我也回家。孫甯寧的爸爸是不又要走了？結果第二天，就聽說他爸爸自殺了。對我來說，那時才 11 歲，還是很震撼的。有一陣子我不太喜歡他爸爸，因為他表示對孩子喜歡吧，他老愛掐。“哎，小蘇”，就掐一下，可煩可煩了。我說：“我還看見他了呢。”印象特別深，那是 64 年。

65 年我媽媽也被遣返回杭州，幸虧我爸爸單位，人民出版社，堅決不放我爸爸，我爸爸是很骨幹的，他領導堅決不放。但不放他的話，我媽媽又要被遣返回杭州，然後他們就做出了決定，就把我媽媽也留在了人民出版社。等於救了我媽媽。文革開始不久，這是不是和你問的沒關係？我就記得我們家來了一個阿姨，在我們家還住來著，哭哭啼啼的。後來我才知道，她丈夫也是因為楊獻珍這件事兒，被遣返回原籍杭州的，和我媽媽是同鄉，也是同事。文革開始不久就被打死了。然後陸續地，我又聽說我發小，也是寄宿的，和我在一個班，在一個屋住著，也是我媽媽同事的孩子，黎明，都能查到，跳井自殺了。然後又過了不久，我們家樓上，二樓有個岳 zhao 伯伯，特別好，每次見面都特別和藹可親，每次見面都給我糖吃，也是，跳湖自殺了，人工湖，在黨校。後來我看資料，他那麼平和的一個人，是被康生的老婆迫害的。康生老婆，曹軼歐吧，在中央黨校幹了好多壞事兒。哎呀，這都是特別親的人。我媽媽還有個同事，叫 Luo Guoying，據說文化大革命之後，自殺沒成，抬著去批鬥。後來又給投入大獄，後來又出了好多書，他一直是艾思奇的秘書。艾思奇是特別有名的哲學家，當時被故意搞成楊獻珍的對立面了。艾思奇也特別了不得，他的學問也是……，66 年突然心髒病去世了。在哲學史上，他的大眾哲學，當時都說要普及呀，他是一個開拓者。搞哲學的都知道艾思奇，也都知道楊獻珍的那一場“合二而一”的批判運動，是很有名的。因為這個，死了很多人。沒有死的，也都扒了三層皮，活過來的，都是倖存者。我覺得我媽媽也算是倖存者。她當時如果真的去了杭州，肯定比別人還要慘。那個人到了杭州，還在出版社任過職。像我媽媽，歷史上還坐過牢，

焦：在國民黨那兒坐過牢？那肯定會被打成特務……

張：對對對。就是很多事兒，你要看那本書就明白了，比較坎坷。我媽媽僥倖留在北京，還真是挺幸運。她要是留在地方，那就根本不可能了。那時候我叔叔嬸嬸是田漢的女兒女婿，都在文化單位，打得一塌糊塗，也是倖存。當時也是死去活來。那場劫難，對老一輩，和對我們的人生都有影響，很多是改變了你的人生軌跡的。

焦：您講講小學和中學都穿什麼樣式的衣服？

張：小學的時候，那時候都是住校嘛，衣服都是比較統一的。老師說必須要內衣內褲，所以很多人挺羨慕我的。就是那些不住校的，偶爾也有不住校的，比如家裡奶奶姥姥都在的時候。我們住校的必須得有幾身衣服，棉毛衫棉毛褲，內褲。好多家庭困難的，那個時候幹部也不是家庭都富裕的。他們都是外婆或者奶奶用手縫的，布的襯褲、褲衩。可是我們因為住校，每個禮拜要換一次衣服，都是集體拿去洗的。要求都得是什麼樣的內衣褲，都要縫上名字，好區分。然後我記得我小時候沒覺得有什麼大不了的。他們就說：“張小蘇你可夠

闊氣的，還穿棉毛褲呢！”針織的棉毛褲，要買的。他們都是拿布，自己縫的。“穿棉毛褲怎麼了？”因為是要買的，就覺得你挺酷的，挺高級的。但因為那時候是住校時候要求的，不一定是棉毛褲，但我媽媽不會做，所以我們呢，不管怎麼樣都得買。那時候褲衩也都是針織的。他們都是布的做的。當時還被覺得挺奢侈的那種感覺。那時候作為女孩子，特別想穿花衣服。但我下面是幾個弟弟，我媽媽買衣服的時候她總要考慮到弟弟，傳下去。一般我記得我穿的衣服都屬於男孩兒女孩兒都能穿的。不管是外套，褲子，都是藍的，白的，灰的。從小學開始，中央黨校附小。在黨校裏面，幼兒園，小學都在裏面，也在住校。那會兒大傢伙兒都穿得差不多，誰褲子稍微瘦一點兒，或者誰褲子稍微肥一點兒，都是很敏感的問題。就覺得和別人不一樣了。那時候我們有的女孩兒，我們都穿白襯衫嘛，她那個腰上捏了點兒褶子，掐腰了，就覺得是很新鮮的事兒。也有的還故意說：“什麼呀，還掐個腰！”有一點兒變化，大家會很敏感。因為當時衣服的式樣，都是很一般的，差不多的式樣。所以後來我就記得，我媽媽拿來一塊布，我們要入隊了，必須要穿白襯衫藍褲子，那時候都是統一的。我媽媽當時就到西苑商場買了一匹布，當時她考慮到便宜啊，處理啊。但是不符合要求，一般白襯衫要求必須是平紋的，結果呢，我媽媽覺得那個布又結實又好看，是帶那個有點兒針織的楞楞兒。後來在外面裁縫做的，一塊五還是五毛，都不記得了，很便宜。做了以後，入隊的時候，穿這件衣服的時候，還被老師批評了，覺得怎麼會拿這種布呢，要和你媽媽說。我說這不是白顏色的嗎，白顏色的也不行啊，人家都是平紋的，你這還那麼多道道。我和我媽媽說了，我媽媽說，白顏色就可以了麼，哪兒那麼多要求，怎麼可能再做一件呢。我前幾天拿到那塊府綢布，府綢是棉布的一個種類。棉布還有平紋斜紋，斜紋還分好幾種，雙面斜紋，然後就線呢。我們當時穿棉布的時候，誰穿個線呢的外套，就覺得聽高級的了。府綢現在也是做高檔襯衫的料，過去那就是很普通的。和棉布相比，更細膩一點，一般都是做襯衫多，甚至可以做個薄外套。屬於好一點兒的面料，比平紋布結實。我覺得我的褲子都是藍褲子，在幼兒園，我們老師要求我們都要做揹帶褲。所謂揹帶褲，揹帶都在前面，鬆緊帶在後面，腰上有兩個釦子，一解開，就可以上廁所。我媽媽一次就給我買了兩條。然後我記得一條是綠格的，一條是紫格格的。那時候穿到幼兒園的班級裡頭，大家就覺得挺羨慕的。因為大夥兒都沒有什麼花色。

焦：您什麼時候搬到人民出版社這邊？

張：我媽媽 65 年就搬到人民出版社了，就進城了。我呢，因為成績特別好，學校認為我很有可能考上 101 中學，101 中學在我們那片兒是很重點的學校。很多學校以能考上 101 中學來衡量你的教學質量。老師認為我是能考上 101 中學很重要的一個人，所以也和我媽媽談。我媽媽就覺得我們家附近雖然也有好的中學，但不多，還是覺得如果能考上 101 的話，是挺好的。所以我就沒走，還留在那兒而，住在同學家，想繼續完成學業。考上中學再說。之後很短的時間，也就一年就文化大革命了。也開始斗老師什麼的，就停課了。不知道你對老三屆有多少瞭解，我們是 69 屆。69 屆其實是很特殊的一屆人，什麼都趕上了。小學六年級，趕上文革鬧革命，停了兩年課。然後匆匆地，上了一年課，就發了畢業證，算初中畢業了。然後就基本上，一鍋端到農村去了。屬於“連根拔起”的一代，就給你摔到內蒙古兵團，黑龍江插隊，就不管你了，自生自滅。

焦：您哪年插隊？

張：69年插隊。都是文化最差，複課的一年多也沒怎麼學習。我所能記得的英文，就是兩句話，一個是 Long Live Chairman Mao，一個就是 Strike, Strike, let's go on strike，罷工，罷工，讓我們一起罷工。其它的，包括數學，都是蜻蜓點水。然後就一直也在複課鬧革命，經常是寫批判稿，批判老師，這個老師有什麼歷史問題，參加過 San qing tuan。經常組織我們演節目，就到人多的地方，到了北京站，就“嘩”清場，清出一片地來。好多人等火車沒事兒干也就在看我們，“我們二十四中，初三一班毛澤東思想宣傳隊現在開始戰鬥！”噹噹啾啾……音樂開始起，就開始演節目的。都是：毛主席教導我們說造反有理！都是這個。要唱歌就是“反帝必反修，反個蘇修狗頭……”到處去演節目，跑到廣場，跑到車站，百貨大樓……就開始戰鬥了。因為我個高嘛，總是擺姿勢，要麼就是端著槍的，要麼就是跟上的，要麼就是指著的，都是這些。每次都是：“開始戰鬥！”就開始敲鑼敲鼓，然後就“殺！”，然後就三個人先殺上來來。全是殺。我們當時要翻著跟頭上來，練側手翻，一殺就翻著上去了。中學你說能幹嘛，開批判會……

我66年上中學，但沒上成嘛。但我特別幸運，有一點，文革開始后，大家就開始斗校長，斗老師……校長夫婦兩個是和我父母特別熟特別好的朋友。而且呢，校長的丈夫是我媽的同事。我們家住一層，他們家住三層。校長好像是後來才調到我們學校的，很漂亮，很能幹的一個四川人。文化大革命的時候，就開始斗校長，哎呀我真的是看不下去。因為他們好像是年齡很大纔有了一個女兒，女兒很小很可愛，玲玲。很多同學就在玲玲回家的路上，吐她吐沫。斗校長，按著頭什麼的，我當時看了就特別難受。當天晚上就開始做噩夢。就這個原因，讓我決定不在學校了，就收拾好東西。那時候爸媽也開始擔心，我就從西郊回到了城裡。我就和黨校的，就等於結束了。中間也回去過，就覺得太不一樣了，原來在班級里比較土的，學習不好的，結果都成了戴著紅衛兵袖章，特狂的那種。因為我們班裡很多高幹子弟嘛，因為是中央黨校嘛，一般的幹部都是挺了不得的。原來班級里牛的現在都慫了，家長都挨整了。這段時間，你知道我在家裡幹什麼嘛？我也沒有學校，也沒有老師。

焦：你回來學校沒有管你嘛？

張：沒有。可是我學籍還在那兒，城裡也沒有我能去的學校。我就在家待著，沒事兒干。那時候都說穿綠軍裝好，可是我們家裡沒有一件綠軍裝。除了藍的，就是白的。然後就開始研究怎麼染衣服，要用小蘇打、鹽，我就跑化工店，去買染料，想買軍綠的燃料。可是化工店沒有軍綠的染料，就先買綠的，再買黃的，再琢磨怎麼把它們配到一起，能讓它是軍綠的顏色。然後就把我們家，先是我自己的，只要是染上顏色的，比如淺色的，白的，或者是淡藍的，都給染成軍綠色。那時候解放軍多內什麼（），可是我們家又沒有當兵的，搞不到軍裝。就自己染唄，染完之後，發現哎呀這次偏綠了，那下次就加點兒黃。就在家染。後來染到什麼程度，沒什麼可染的了，就把白手絹也都染成軍綠色了。成天就琢磨這些事兒，染衣服染了好長時間。後來我發現化工店還有賣小蘇打的，有賣糖精的，嘿，又看偏方說可以做汽水，就又開始用糖精和小蘇打做汽水。總覺得氣兒不足。其實我這人是有娃娃癖的，那時候就仍然有那個娃娃癖。沒事兒干，我們家那會兒就住東堂子衚衕，除了衚衕口再走一點兒路就是王府井，沒事兒就在王府井轉轉。要不後來怎麼辮子也讓人剪了呢。

焦：您講講這個吧。

張：就在王府井轉，說是買毛主席像章，其實我是站在王府井那個賣玩具的櫃檯那兒，我就不走。那時候娃娃很有限了，就在那兒看娃娃。就看看娃娃的衣服怎麼做，回家就拿布頭縫娃娃的衣服。每次出去轉都是說哎，去買毛主席像章吧。其實第一，毛主席像章也沒那麼好買，曾經去買過，排了一晚上的隊，每人只能買一個。我自己小心思里，我和別人都不講，我去市場看，有陶瓷的，身上用麥麩子塞滿，但是手腳和頭都是陶瓷的燒的裝上去的，有倆眼兒，縫上。這個是能摔碎的。我那時候自己有個娃娃，還有個兔子。總能夢到娃娃活了。那天也是假裝去買毛主席像章，實際上是去東東市場去看娃娃。自己還給它做衣服。那天就看王府井門前特別熱鬧，一幫紅衛兵放著喇叭，就放反帝必反修的那個（音樂）。那是最熱鬧的地方，紅衛兵就在那兒喊口號，周圍就里三層外三層的，那時候人也沒什麼事兒。他們就喊：剪那個削蘿蔔頭褲子的！那時候，誰要是穿一條褲子，有褲線，那時候就不得了了。所謂削蘿蔔頭的褲子，就是褲線筆挺的褲子。北京話，削蘿蔔，就是直上直下。那時候，能愛美的地方太少了，但是愛美之心是有的。有些人就把很普通的褲子，也沒有熨斗，在半干不濕的狀態下，都是純棉的褲子，穿的確良褲子可是不得了的事兒。最高級最講究的叫毛B級，就是純毛的，織成的斜紋的，不得了的，很貴的。一般都是純棉的褲子，純棉褲子除了平紋，就是卡其布，一般的都是單面的卡其布。雙面卡其，就是要加厚的。棉褲子出褲線很不容易，動一動就圓了。很多愛美的，講究的人就在衣服半干的時候，疊出褲線，放在床底壓出褲線。而且是每天都要放在床底壓。還有的時候，有的比較講究的，拿個搪瓷缸，倒上開水。這樣不就熱了嘛，就在褲線那兒熨。穿上褲線的褲子就顯得人的腿特別修長，而且好看。管褲線筆挺的褲子，北京叫蘿蔔褲。“哎呦，可以嗨，今兒咱褲子是蘿蔔褲呀。”意思就是褲線筆挺。反正也是誇你，也不是誇你。言外之意，就是得瑟，臭美。

焦：那這到底是誇你還是不是呀？

張：那個時候如果你太愛美了，就不能誇你了。大忌。就得低調美才行。像咱們現在，低調奢華似的。剪火箭頭的皮鞋。尖皮鞋叫火箭頭，那時候就是說一般的都是布鞋、懶漢鞋棉鞋都是白塑料底的，圓的。穿皮鞋的人就很少，尖頭皮鞋的就更少了。一個是錢得富裕，銀子得夠，再一個是比較講究的人。我呢，是最不喜歡尖皮鞋的，因為幾個腳趾頭都是齊的，我要是穿尖皮鞋得讓出去兩三個號。但有的人覺得那個時髦。我們去看的時候，他們正在剪一個尖皮鞋。

焦：還是有賣的？

張：有賣的呀，也有文革前賣的。也不像現在這麼時髦，就是當時都是大圓頭。現在圓頭比那個時髦，休閒又舒服。那時候就覺得那個就不得了了，而且覺得很奢侈。好好的布鞋，買三雙才能買一雙皮鞋，而且還要讓出去兩三個號。

焦：文革期間有賣的麼？

張：文革呀，分很多階段。尖皮鞋肯定是沒賣的了。後來就變成圓皮鞋，再後來就變成三接頭。到七幾年的時候，78年的時候，三接頭成了一個時髦的象

徵。那時候這個是最時髦的。沒地兒買去。一般都是出國的。你要出國，單位就要給你開一個證明，那會兒穿的都特別差。有了這個證明，才能去出國人員服務部，才能買到。可以到紅都服裝店去定做西裝。到出國人員服務部去買這個三接頭的皮鞋。一看到三接頭，就是，呦出過國，或者你們家有人出過國。那個時候，要說去買的確良，是個挺大的事兒，現在誰還穿呀。的確良一是熨個褲線，可以長時間不倒，化纖的嘛；又結實；摸著細滑的感覺，那個時候覺得那感覺真好，現在覺得那感覺真不好。誰穿個的確良襯衫，也是挺大一個事兒。當然，文革剛開始時候，要破四舊嘛，任何和美有關的事兒，都要破。我們過去的時候，他們正在剪一個尖皮鞋，應該是個二十出頭的男孩兒，穿個淺咖色的襯衫。現在看來都不算尖，但那個時候就是和普通的鞋形不太一樣，就讓他脫下來，就把尖頭，剪得動剪不動的，就給你破壞了。周圍一群人就啪啪鼓掌，“好！好！”然後就開始喊口號了。我們本來也在看，覺得稀奇，誰穿火箭頭皮鞋呀，誰穿削蘿蔔頭褲子呀，也很好奇。他們都是穿著黃軍裝，戴著帽子，扎著武裝帶 - 那時的標準打扮。紅衛兵，回力白球鞋，一身軍裝估計也不是真的，估計也和我的差不多，染的或者什麼的。黃皮帶一扎，紅衛兵袖章，那都很狂了。我們都夠不著，因為爸媽都在挨整呢。然後我到了那兒，就一下子把我揪過去了：“什麼出身？”其實那會兒我爸我媽都揪出來了，但我也不能說我是內什麼啊，我就硬著頭皮。

焦：他們算什麼出身？

張：革幹（革命幹部）。因為我爸也是抗戰的時候參加革命的嘛。

“革幹。”那還好點兒。

“小同學，知道鄧拓嘛？”

我說：“嗯，知道。”

“三家村知道？鄧拓知道是吧？”

“知道知道。”

“鄧拓寫過一首詩，裏面提到四個字 - 少女秀髮。少女呢，就你這年齡。秀髮呢，就你這麼長的頭髮。就是長頭髮。所以，凡是敵人擁護的，我們就要反對。凡是敵人反對的，我們就要擁護。哎，誰那兒有剪子？”“我這兒有我這兒有！”

他們就拿剪子，“剪了啊，資產階級欣賞的咱們就一定得把它幹掉。”倆人特興奮，一人揪著我一個頭髮，咻咻就剪了。剪了以後，一個長，一個短。

焦：當時您什麼心情？

張：我這人從小就挺淡定的。其實在去之前，已經開始再說不能留長髮了。但是我實在捨不得我留了這麼多年的長髮。我還不是長頭髮（披著）去的，我還是把頭髮給包包頭，就等於把長辮子揪成好幾節兒，而且還特意翻了翻我媽的包，找出了兩根紅頭繩，紅毛線。把我的包包頭扎上了。就覺得可以了，已經挺革命的了。第一，沒長髮長辮子甩著；第二我還拿紅毛線，那不就已經和革命挺靠的了麼。

焦：紅毛線算革命嘛？

張：算！那時候，什麼都得紅。文化大革命開始，就認可兩種顏色，一個就是紅，一個就是軍綠。所以就扎上了，結果還讓人一眼看穿了，看出是長鞭子，所以咻咻剪了。還一長一短，變成兩個刷子就回來了。而且我特別不喜歡刷子

那個感覺，扎脖子。乾脆就剪成短頭髮了。那時候小朋友告訴我，可以這麼（在頭頂右側斜著）扎一個辮子，因為這樣順手啊。他們就說：“不行，不能這麼扎！爭當革命小左派。”所以要扎在左邊。然後就很不情願地變成了那樣。我當時還不到13歲。但是我就特別淡定。我覺得是因為在中央黨校，我媽媽這件事情，差點兒遣返走了，再加上孫定國死了的那件事，而且黨校里，文革時又聽說黎明叔叔跳井什麼的。這些事兒都聽說了。包括後來發生在我們家的事兒也讓我淡定了。我們那個時候住在人民出版社院裡，和我爸爸特別好的一個屬下，結果他居然把我們家，我爸我媽當時覺得有些東西留著不是太好不合適，就把有些材料撕碎了，扔垃圾箱裏了。然後就被我們院裡，我爸爸特別看重和器重的一個下屬，一張一張把它拼起來，然後交到？？？，舉報了。又發現我們家每天都有人輪流地排港，偷聽。我那個時候的心情，我已經就是，我又是老大，還要保護弟弟們，爸爸媽媽還老不在家。老是搞運動，給關起來。後來就不回家了，成天就給關起來了。所以我還要擔當我弟弟（的責任），就這種感覺。我覺得我那時候就特淡定了。所以他們當時剪我頭髮的時候，我就站在那兒沒動。他們在那兒鼓掌什麼的，我就是面無表情。然後我就走了。當然回來了，別的小夥伴說：“張小蘇頭髮被剪了。”好多人來看，我都特別淡然。我覺得就是因為我經歷過了，不是像一般女孩子那樣，會哭喊會掙扎，沒有，特別淡然，和我年齡不太相符。但我覺得就是因為先前這些事兒。從64年，一直到66年六七月份，大概這個樣子，文化大革命最猖狂最鬧騰的那一陣兒。我能看見玲玲，那麼可愛的小女孩兒被一幫孩子圍著吐唾沫，那種屈辱，特別刺傷我，所以做惡夢嘛，加上很多自殺的。所以我爸我媽那時候，就互相總打氣。有時候當著我們的面說，我爸爸說：“李？啊，我們約好，無論遇到什麼情況，無論如何不要自殺。”你想我們樓上多少自殺的，那都是知識份子，太自尊了。Li Ming, 64年到66年都挺過來了，可是後來為什麼自殺了呢。好像就是因為挨鬥的時候，他的兒子，好像小名叫牛牛，上來踢了他兩腳。當天晚上，這個就受不了了。我一個特別好的朋友，發小。我和Huang Hui是同年同月生的……他爸爸就是愛說話，但非常有才，被打成右派。她媽媽就是普通幹部，但都是大戶人家出來的嘛，長得漂亮，大眼睛，還彈得一手好鋼琴。他爸爸很早就被關起來了。他爸爸有時候回來想看看女兒兒子，她媽媽又特別革命，那個時候沒辦法，又不讓他看。兩個人在外面，huang hui還過去了，還不理她爸，就扭著頭。印象特別深，他爸爸就在那兒哭。他特別早，可能63年就被遣返回四川了。她走的時候，我們倆就抱在一起哭。在通信里，她和我說，她哥哥在武鬥的時候被打死了。她哥哥也特別漂亮。她媽媽精神失常，失蹤了。當時我就說你到北京來吧，到我們家來躲躲。後來67 68年她來了。特別慘。這些同學，父母都不是一般人，結果都特別慘。她後來的經歷就更傳奇了，她學的是外語，就叛逃走了，在四川外語學院。認識了一個美國老太太，在七十年代末八十年代初給她發了邀請函，她就跟著旅行團去了美國，帶著200美金，就再也沒回來。後來她媽媽找到了，病也治好了，還寫了書。她在美國好像結了兩次婚，又離婚，現在在拉斯維加斯的賭場發牌，完全不一樣了（57分）。……人生軌跡和性格都完全改變了。……她有她可愛的一方面，也有她滄桑的一方面，但和她的經歷，沒有受到很好的教育都有很多關係。

焦：當時女孩覺得穿什麼衣服能夠體現女孩兒美嘛？

張：那時候啊，說美，是個挺大的忌諱。我印象特別深，我們院裡一個小夥伴，也是發小，小學初中都在一塊兒，到兵團也在一個連。然後我送給她一條頭巾，都是三角的。她就不太會戴，戴得特別靠前，我就跟她開了個玩笑，她是個特別左的人，我們所有小夥伴里，只有他爸爸是工農幹部，總務科科長，所以沒受衝擊，她就覺得她比我們高一頭，因為我們爸爸都受衝擊，不是走資派就是臭老九。我們一個宿舍，一共四個人，只有她出身沒有問題，所以她就比較左。“我出身算革干也行，算工人也行，算貧下中農，也行！”就這樣，特別狂的那種。我就送她一個頭巾，因為當時我在大地裡幹活兒嘛，她當老師，我就覺得她戴比我戴更好點兒。後來我就說：“Zhang Ping，你頭巾戴得太靠前了，不好看，有點兒像雞媽媽，動畫片里那種雞媽媽。”當時她就特別嚴肅地回頭看了我一眼，一臉正氣，說：“老太太喝粥，無恥下流！”所以這個歇後語到現在我都記得。就說她頭巾沒戴好，就想那個時候人的思想，左到什麼程度。

焦：什麼時候的事兒？

張：這是在兵團了。但那時候人的意識就是這樣。“曲線美”這幾個字是不能提的，而且沒有概念。什麼叫曲線美？那個時候女孩子看到自己發育了，覺得是很恥辱的一件事兒。那時候的概念和現在完全不一樣。他們覺得女孩子越像男人越好，沒有胸是最好的，有胸鼓鼓囊囊的，太丟人了。所以那時候也沒有賣胸罩的，一般都是發現自己開始發育了，很多人是拿布條把胸都纏起來。

焦：是纏得一圈一圈的嘛？

張：是是是。是真的。我都纏過。因為我也沒胸罩，上體育課呢，穿個背心，一跑步會顛顛顛的，不好看。我小學六年級就開始發育了，我個高。我們那時候可能因為是中央黨校，吃得比較好，沒捱過餓，因為我們都吃食堂，管夠。像我們自助餐一樣。發給你一份，不夠還可以舉手：“老師，還要！”老師就再給你添。中央黨校在這方面還是比較優越的，自然災害的時候，頂多就是以前我們從來沒吃過窩窩頭，那時候開始吃窩窩頭了，頂多就是這樣。我們不花錢，也不會花錢，但我們吃，沒有餓過肚子，而且還要保證營養。那都是中共中央高級黨校，所以沒有（餓）這個概念。所以我覺得我們班，當時發育得都比較早。那時候是這樣，我記得我們班有個叫 Ma Lirui 的，長得比較胖，白白胖胖的。她四年級的時候，上體育課就突然不上了，後來我們隱隱約約才知道，她來例假了，就不能上體育課了。你知道當時給我們的感受是什麼嘛，包括男生，都不敢大聲說，但都知道他來例假了。男生：“真髒，真噁心！”，覺得這種生理現象是臟，噁心的。女生也覺得：“呦，來內個啦！”都覺得好像和自己沒關似的，她也確實早，可能是因為胖。後來陸陸續續地，有幾個，都來了。然後就覺得，可別輪到自己，覺得如臨大敵。本來很正常的事情，就弄得很不正常。我就記得我到六年級的時候，就開始發育了。兩個覺得特別那個，一個是穿著白襯衫，沒有花的，有時候會露出兩個小黑頭，乳頭會露出來，兩個小尖尖，就鼓起來了，就覺得不應該鼓，平平的纔好。所以就會到醫務室，磨，磨來一卷繃帶，就紗布。忘了當時怎麼和老師說的了，反正是磨來一卷繃帶回來，就自己纏上。那時候確實也沒有乳罩，也沒有小孩兒的乳罩，沒有。而且也沒有能讓你稍微……稍微有點兒發育，你跑的時候就會覺得顛顛顛，特別不喜歡這種感覺。所以曲線，那時候沒有概念，是絕對沒有概念的。“曲線美”在生活上根本提不上來的。後來我記得越來越發育了，第一呢，

覺得乳頭黑黑的要遮住，第二呢它老顛顛顛，第三又不想讓它長太快。所以後來我們怎麼著呢，那時候媽媽有胸罩，都是布的，拼成幾塊，拼出一個小窩窩來，那種。我記得我還算挺巧的，就把我媽媽的胸罩拿來。

焦：您媽媽知道嘛？

張：她肯定也不知道，因為我那時候沒事兒干嘛。家裡肯定有富裕的胸罩，就照著她那個胸罩，就比著剪。我們家有縫紉機。我後來是自己雜的，後來很多年之後，我拿出來，很驚異，覺得自己真的是砸得很不錯。你想，能把布的砸出來，還有個小窩。布的不像我們現在的，還有鬆緊帶，那麼舒服，但布的能夠給你勒得固定得很緊，就不會來回晃，而且前面如果是雙層的，就能把頭擋住。後來就是自己做的胸罩，但也從來不會有突出曲線美的感覺，只是讓它第一別露黑頭，第二別顛顛顛，第三別長太大。就想能控制著點兒，能兜住，別讓它長太大。

焦：您周圍同學都這樣嘛？

張：基本上，也有傻傻的。像我還是有點兒保護意識啊，有點兒想法。很多人就任其自然，不拿它當回事兒。甚至都不懂得害羞，有時候換衣服，啪就脫下來，啪就穿上了，沒有什麼概念。說是買個胸罩，為了讓胸形好看，為了突出胸，那個時候就是一丁點兒一丁點兒都沒有。我都是超前了，好多人都是，放任自流吧，它長是它自己的事兒。後來我到了美國。那是 86 年了，我的老闆，她的胸罩，就是一個鋼圈，我當管家，幫她整理。然後前面就是薄薄呢絨的，根本擋不住乳頭什麼的。我還挺奇怪的。她好像和我說，美國人好像挺喜歡乳頭那個尖尖的感覺的。就是兩層薄薄呢絨，透的，我覺得這種乳罩戴著它幹嘛呀，覺得特奇怪。那就很不一樣了。慢慢地曲線美這種感覺，可能也就是 80 年代以後才一點點有的。

焦：您纏繃帶、白布，饒了多久？

張：也纏了有挺長時間呢，後來發現纏著繃帶一點兒都不舒服，喘不上氣，特別難受，也饒了幾個月。後來就多穿幾個背心。

焦：自己買白布嘛？

張：沒有，翻家裡的包袱，自己做胸罩。我算很超前的了，加上我動手能力也比較強，而且喜歡動手，覺得有挑戰性的東西都想去做。多年前我收拾東西的時候，收拾出來了當時做的胸罩，自己欣賞了半天，覺得做得太好了。做了好幾個，而且顏色還不都是白的。有點兒像拼布似的，釦子還釘了好幾個，有松有緊的。上海蝴蝶牌縫紉機（1：16：16）……“坐三輪車，像個資本家太太。”……那時候太左了。

到兵團的時候，還是很左呢，穿花衣服啊什麼的都是受那什麼的。我中學時候，最好看的，最狂的是一身藍。那時候誰要是能穿一身藍卡其的，覺得是最好看、最狂的。

焦：當時人特別喜歡用“狂”這個字？

張：對，尤其是北京人。說狂肯能代表很多意思，一個是覺得你挺高大上的，一個是覺得你挺時髦的，挺強勢的，挺棒的。一個字裏面（挺多含義），特別

愛用這個字。“露怯”就覺得自己有點兒小丟人了或怎麼著的。那時候的語言和現在有些區別，每個時代都有自己的語言。我們中學的時候，穿一身藍，哎呦太狂了。當然軍裝是，淘弄不到，那時候要是能穿軍裝，那簡直是，像我們這種出身的，能參軍？不敢想。能參軍的，得是三代，根紅苗正，那才行呢。那時候花衣服可能就沒有，花衣服就露個領子，外面都穿黑的灰的，照相的時候脫下來，曬一曬，覺得挺美的。

那個時候最興假領子，都是上海那邊傳過來的。北京人比較粗，沒有這個意識，上海人就做這種小假領子。後來發展到假襯衫，布的，半截的，好看的布，小花布，小格子布，小線呢，那就不得了了。然後就是，上海人還會假毛衣，你以為他穿著毛衣呢，但其實就那麼一點兒。北京人戴脖套，就是為了暖和。還有假棉毛衫，什麼都是假的。後來我兵團探親的時候，到杭州去看我外公外婆，然後就路過一個小店，全是賣假領子的，各種假領子，還挺便宜的。我那次，一次就買了五個假領子。然後，在別人眼裡，簡直（好看）。我們幹活兒的時候，沒人注意你美不美。看完活兒，洗涮完，然後去吃飯，吃飯的時候，男生女生有點兒交集。從宿舍走去食堂，再從食堂走回來。我每天都能換個假領子，就像換了件新衣服，哎呀，慕煞多少男生女生呀。後來，我發現上海人穿個白毛衣，我說你白毛衣真好看！大家就笑，是假的……全是假的。我們那兒的上海知青就給這個織，給那個織假領子。我記得給我織了一個，水仙花的，人家給我了一些紗線，是工廠工作的手套，把手套拆了，一股里有五六根，給我織了個水仙花的假領子。

焦：您小學中學，知青的時候，男女同學之間交流會沒有問題嘛？

張：有問題呀。那個時候，絕對是男女授受不親。到兵團好一些了，在小學、中學的時候，男生和女生不講話的。要是誰和誰講話了，就會有人議論：

“呦，那誰那麼沒羞沒臊的。是不跟那誰對上眼了？”我們那兒有一個同學特別招人恨，他特別注意觀察這些，然後在底下散佈這些言論。“哎哎，我今天看見那誰誰誰”（兩手食指接觸示意），就會這樣。那時候絕對是不說話的，男女生很少有交集。我們是男女同班的。除非有什麼集體活動，比如像我是副班長，班長是男生，我們就有點兒交流，但僅此而已，很少深入地交集，比如在一起幹嘛，特別分男女界限。而且加上有那麼多第三隻眼盯著你，不光是說，有時候還傳紙條，畫上，這樣。我從兵團回來後，我弟弟可能都上中學了，有一次和我吵架，就說：“哼，說不定你都有男的了呢！”就好像是多不好的一件事兒似的。

哪像現在，一會兒一起唱歌去吧，一起生日 party 了，絕對沒有。那也是一種扭曲的、被壓抑的，或者是不正常的。

焦：胸部發育時候被人看到，會有人笑話嘛？

張：會。女生和女生之間：“哎呦，你這頭都露出來了，真難看。”“哎呦，你這怎麼發育那麼大了。”誰發育得早或者大，被看出來，是個特別不光彩的事兒。而且不是說不善良，就是覺得這事兒不好，這事兒挺丟人的。

焦：有生理衛生課嘛？

張：沒有。我們那個時候是最左的時候，最最壓抑扭曲的時候讓我們趕上了。

焦：那您媽媽會講嘛？

張：我媽媽會。我媽媽會說，如果流血了，你要告訴我。我媽媽提前把例假帶都給我準備好了。說女孩子都是這樣的，也沒有什麼。但一定要注意衛生。我媽媽還是知道的，盆一定要是單個的，每天都要洗。洗的時候一定要是開水晾涼了。另外我們住校的時候，學校裡也特別逗，每天晚上，可能也是消過毒的，老師會發一條紗布做的方巾，一人一條發給你，排著隊，有一張洗屁股的床，就和現在婦科檢查的似的，一個椅子，下面是盆，每個人排隊上去，腳放在兩邊，老師拿一個大溫水壺，沖一下。沖完了，自己拿著毛巾擦一下，下來走了。然後下一個再上去，老師再給沖一沖。我們住校的地方，就注意到女孩子的這個（衛生），還是有的。因為我們畢竟是個正規的，要住校嘛，好像我們從很小就有了，每天晚上都有。原來是老師給擦，後來我們都覺得老師太使勁兒了，疼，後來我們都要求自己擦了。那也是比較特殊的一個學校吧。就和現在的婦科檢查床一樣。

焦：您媽媽沒和您講過做胸罩的事兒？

張：沒有，她沒時間，這個就比較一般了。

焦：到了兵團會更開放一點兒麼？

張：好像也沒太大關係。第一連隊裡不具備洗澡的條件，我們洗澡都是收工以後，打水在屋子裏擦一擦就完了。

焦：那會兒關注胸罩的問題嘛？

張：關注呀。那會兒就可以買胸罩了，但我也自己做，到老鄉家，借個縫紉機，就自己做。但是我看也有的外地知青也不戴，穿背心就完了。

焦：還會覺得羞恥嘛？

張：沒人關注這個事兒，沒人說誰大誰小什麼的。這個話題好像不太被談論，忌諱。美、性，都挺忌諱的。當時啊，戴胸罩的，都是挺講究的。好多人都不戴，覺得麻煩不麻煩啊，有時候還要讓別人給系釦子。“戴它幹嘛。”東北呢，也是氣候原因，冷，穿得多，沒有機會穿裙子，夏天早晚溫差也大，穿少了蚊子也叮。頂多那時候開始愛美，就是到北京給我帶瓶“面友”，塗上之後有點兒發白。不是“萬紫千紅”，就是蛤蜊油。

焦：會模仿紅色娘子軍嘛？

張：那時候只想模仿她們的舞蹈，女兵出征什麼的。關於穿著，頂多就是往軍裝上靠靠，其它的不敢想。在那種時候，天還不亮就起來了，吃飯幹活兒，回來時候天都黑了。那時候的口號是“活著干，死了算。”成天就在地裡幹活兒。

焦：相當鐵姑娘？

張：是的。而且不給你多餘的時間，總想著怎麼幹好活兒，怎麼改造自己。都很虔誠的，都覺得是應該的，是努力的方向。哪敢想自己美呀什麼的，愛美之心肯定也有，但真是顧不上，也沒地兒給你美。冬天頭巾，有陣子特別時興彩

虹頭巾，紅一條紫一條的，說是上海的，就讓上海知青帶一條。後來就興“特裡寧” - 呢絨的褲子。

焦：您什麼時候開始穿收身、顯示身材的衣服？

張：應該是 70 年代末，返程以後。開始上班了，也自己做衣服。那時候我在青年出版社上班，做了一條滌卡的裙子。找裁縫裁的，回來自己砸上的，那也是我回來后第一條連衣裙。然後都說我身材好，那時候覺得胸是胸、腰是腰，覺得效果還不錯，但也沒有“曲線美”這個概念。這也是我第一條裙子，除了很小的時候穿過，後來就再沒穿過裙子。

焦：襯衫也不收腰的？

張：沒有啊。但也會在白襯衫上砸一點兒腰身。在兵團的時候，我那個白襯衫買的是部隊裡多餘的襯衫。本身部隊的女襯衫就有點兒收腰的，領子還不是一字領，是尖領子。我穿那個襯衫以後，他們都覺得特別好看。後來就給了我另外一個發小，她也覺得特好。因為那會兒都是直筒，稍稍有點兒腰就覺得好看。小時候的一條裙子……五歲……我媽媽第一筆稿費買的

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