

**BEAUTY AND A BROKEN CITY  
WOMEN AND THEIR PUBLICITY IN TIANJIN, 1898-1911**

**A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
BY**

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**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**APRIL 2011**

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## Acknowledgements

This dissertation comes a long way to reach this stage. Time flashes back to a cool autumn day in 1998 when I took a twelve-hour train ride to Tianjin for my college. In the following seven years, Tianjin transformed me from a small-town girl to a knowledge-seeking college student. Meanwhile, this city also cultivated my original wild imagination about the past of this city and of the people who lived in it. Therefore, my first credit goes to the city of Tianjin and the history it owned.

This dissertation cannot be finished without the intellectual enlightenment that I have received in the past years at the University of Minnesota, where I have pursued my doctoral degree. My advisor, Professor Ann Waltner, deserves the most sincere gratitude from me. She becomes a model to me as a scholar who specializes in Chinese history in the American academic world; as a teacher who teaches many creative courses by herself and with her colleagues; as an explorer who experiments with all kinds of wonderful and imaginative collaborations in various disciplines; and as a concerned intellectual who promotes the contact and communication between the two worlds of China and the United States. Around her we have formed a strong family bond—the reading group that Ann initiated more than two decades ago. I exchanged many ideas with the group members, who come from history, literature, art history, mass communication, and musicology, among many others. Many of my texts I used in my dissertation were also translated and polished with the help of Ann and other members. I appreciate all the time with the reading group. I also thank my co-advisor, Professor Edward Farmer, for introducing me about the doctoral program at the UMN during one

of his summer seminar trips in China and for teaching me about the perspectives and approaches of globalization. It is through him that I began to seriously think about China's position in the global world.

I also received numerous encouragement and support from other teachers. Professor Mary Jo Maynes enlightened me, not only with her broad knowledge in her own fields, but also with her abundant curiosity and optimism about comparative fields. She made me realize the significance of comparing China with other parts of the world. Professor Liping Wang teaches me not to forget the academic world in China and my own identity as a Chinese. And in Professor Jason McGrath's class and on other occasions, I am able to look at Chinese history from the perspectives of literature and film. With all these amazing teachers in my life for the past six years, what I have learned is not just the knowledge, the theories, or the approaches. It is far more than that. I have also learned how to be a concerned scholar, a responsible teacher, and a good person.

My dissertation is also generously funded by the Graduate Research Partnership Program Fellowship, the Lothrop Memorial Scholarship, the Chinese Heritage Foundation Fellowship, and the Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship at the University of Minnesota. I gratefully thank the Department of History at the UMN for nourishing this international student from afar.

Lastly, I would like to extend the thank-you list to my friends and colleagues. My journey of exploring this brand new world is not possible without the support of my friends. They helped me go through some tough times of writing and reading; they read chapters and chapters of my dissertation; they encouraged me to enjoy the world outside libraries and books; and they were always here whenever I needed them. I especially

thank Hu Xiangyu and Pan Tsung-Yi, two *shixiong* 師兄 (senior male students) in my doctoral study, who accompanied me for the past six years for my classes and dissertation writing, and who also accompanied me for the past six months for my endless job applications and interviews. I hope that when we three go back to China and Taiwan, we will fulfill our dreams, the ones we had when we first got here.

## **Abstract**

My dissertation is an attempt to explore the ways in which the global-local network impacted diverse women's lives and experiences at the turn of the twentieth century Tianjin, a coastal city in north China. I will especially emphasize two aspects of their experiences in cities: the ways in which women emerged as a public presence in the urban landscape, and the ways in which women's issues became a social phenomenon under the public observation and discussion. To be specific, I focus on three most-debated issues in Tianjin: women's physical body (footbinding), women's education, and women's performance. The three themes had for a long time been rooted in Chinese society and culture and symbolized the normative womanhood or its opposite side. When it came to the modern era, the themes of publicizing women's deformed feet, the transition from private inner chambers to public women's schools, and the extreme publicity of actresses on and off the stage became social issues in Tianjin, with which the city had never dealt before, or at least not to this extent. All the discussions, debates, arguments, and reforms of these issues affected groups of women such as missionary women, educated women, and actresses and dramatically changed their life styles and their identities in the city. New definitions of social and gender norms were forming to discipline women's behaviors and spheres. It is the negotiation between women and the forming norms that a space was created between layers for these women to actually lived with flexibility and agency. Meanwhile, it was also through the discussion, translation, and adaptation of these issues in Tianjin that people were able to articulate and consolidate their own identity as Tianjin natives.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In 1998 when I left my hometown and took a twelve-hour train ride to Tianjin to attend college, I did not expect that more than a decade later I would be sitting at the Wilson Library of the University of Minnesota and working on my dissertation “Beauty and a Broken City: The Publicity of Women in Tianjin, 1898-1911.” My interest in exploring the dynamics between women and city, as my dissertation title shows, first came from my inter-urban and trans-national experience in which I moved upward from a small town in South China to a populous city in North China and then finally to a foreign metropolis in the United States. The escalation and transition of the urban space did not just satisfy my need for knowledge and career, it also shaped my social network, my life style, and my view of the world.

As a historian who almost instinctively shares empathy with the past, I was driven to historicize the relationship between women’s identity formation and city into the past. But which time period? Which city? And which group(s) of women? These were some questions that I had no answers for in 2007 when I left Minnesota for Tianjin to do some preliminary topic and material research. One day when I was sitting at the Rare Book Room of Nankai University Library and flipping through some dusty pictorial magazines of the late Qing (1644-1911) Tianjin, I suddenly realized that women were on almost every page of these magazines, no matter whether the stories themselves were about women or not. One image that impressed me most was a woman standing behind the door of her home and peeking out with curiosity. But the story accompanying that picture had nothing to do with this woman. The illustrator only used this female bystander’s eyes as an artistic presence to guide his readers to “look” at what was

happening. But, this image, as well as others, pushed me to ask the question: back in early twentieth century Tianjin, were women in reality like these women on paper, curious about the outside world, able to walk into the wild wonders of the city, and present in every corner of the urban space? These pictorial magazines, which later became a main source of my dissertation, inspired me to visualize women's urban experience and life styles in early twenty century Tianjin. This is where my dissertation began.

When exploring women's spatial transition from home to city, the first question that we have to think about is the distinction between private and public spheres, which has been a topic of discussion by scholars of various fields.<sup>1</sup> For traditional Chinese women, to stay at home, or specifically to be in their inner chambers without going outside, was considered not only as a manifestation of women's own virtue, but also the moral cornerstone for their men (fathers, husbands, or sons), the family system, and the whole society. In other words, the harmonized private/public spheres symbolized the essence of the traditional cosmology.<sup>2</sup> As many scholars have recently pointed out, however, this seclusion did not mean isolation or suppression. Chinese women, especially those from the upper class, since the seventeenth century had demonstrated a great level of agency through essay writing, poem composing, painting, publishing, and traveling, and the distinction of private and public spheres did not prevent them from exploring the world outside. The notion that Chinese women were oppressed and constrained only to their private spheres was a stereotype constructed from many elements other than a

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief introduction of and critique on this issue in European women's history, see Joan W. Scott and Debra Keates ed., *Going Public: Feminism and the Shifting Boundaries of the Private Sphere* (Urbana and Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004), introduction.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997).

description of women's real life.<sup>3</sup>

One of the major factors that have played a crucial role in defining Chinese women's spheres was the rise of the nation-state and nationalism discourses since the late nineteenth century. At the time when the concepts of nation-state and nationalism were introduced from the Western Europe via Japan to China, China was losing its stance in the new world order of imperialism and national competition.<sup>4</sup> The anxious Chinese male literati sought various proposals to figure out where was the way to go out the crisis. One of the proposals was to take women as both the cause and the cure of the national crisis.

Influenced by this nation-oriented philosophy, Chinese women were described as a group of ladies who were constrained within their inner chamber for long and thus ignorant about the severe national and international situations outside. As a consequence, male literati tried very hard to mobilize women to break the isolation and participate in the nationalist movement. As Joan Judge argues, from the perspective of these male literati, Chinese women were both virgin political actors with unlimited potential for manipulation and a potent symbol capable of integrating nationalism and Confucian familism. Only by developing this conceptualization of women could male literati balance themselves between the Western ideas and China's unique cultural tradition and thus built a new Chinese nation in the world.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that Chinese women were constitutive part of the nationalist movement

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<sup>3</sup> Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), introduction.

<sup>4</sup> Suisheng Zhao, "Chinese Nationalism and Its International Orientations," *Political Science Quarterly* 115: 1 (Spring, 2000), pp. 1-33.

<sup>5</sup> Joan Judge, "Citizens or Mothers of Citizens? Gender and the Meaning of Modern Chinese Citizenship," in Merle Goldman and Elizabeth J. Perry ed., *Changing Meanings of Citizenship in Modern China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 23-43.

essentially changed the ways in which women formed their identity. As Tani Barlow points out, women in the Ming and Qing dynasties were identified within the male-dominated kinship boundaries. There was no such a concept as “woman” but only daughters, wives or mothers.<sup>6</sup> But at the end of the nineteenth century, by contributing to the nationalist movement, women came to be acknowledged as citizens of the nation in addition to members of Confucian families.

This new identity empowered Chinese women to foster their agency and subjectivity. Yet, it also revealed the insufficiency of the nation-state discourse. Women were allowed to walk outside the inner chamber, but that was only for the nation’s public good. Any personal or feminist agenda that contradicted or went beyond the nationalist discourse was suppressed or silenced.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence, the formation of women’s new identity as citizens did not take into account the other categories of social status, family background, age, generation, and occupation.

Meanwhile, this narrative also shadowed or simplified the diverse efforts and means that different social forces invested to reform “Chinese women.” For example, despite the fact that nationalism became the most significant slogan to promote women’s education since the late nineteenth century, this cause was not incorporated into the national educational system until 1907. The gap between nation-state on paper and in reality made it clear that the extent to which women’s schools were developed largely depended on the sources that the local society provided. Therefore, we have to ask what the picture would be like if we stand outside of the framework of nation-state and

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<sup>6</sup> Tani Barlow, “Theorizing Woman: *Funiū, Guojia, Jiating*,” in Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow, eds., *Body, Subject and Power in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 253-289.

<sup>7</sup> Joan Judge, “Talent, Virtue, and the Nation: Chinese Nationalisms and Female Subjectivities in the Early Twentieth Century,” *The American Historical Review*, 106:3 (Jun., 2001), pp. 765-803.

nationalism. This is the big question that my dissertation aims to explore.

In my dissertation, I situate Chinese women in the context of global trends and local society. As one of the most debated topics since the 1960s, globalization has been generally defined as “the process through which sovereign national states are criss-crossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power, orientation, identities, and networks.”<sup>8</sup> If we think of the modern world as such a dynamic network of globalization, then people, capital, technologies, values, and ideas were elements flowing along the network from one point to another. As specifically for China, when China was incorporated into the network at the cost of defeat and compromise, the flows of these sources were transmitted from Europe, the United States, and Japan to China and transplanted in a specific space, like a city, a town, or even a small village, which we shall call “the local,” and which, according to David Strand, was “a concrete embodiment of the larger, necessarily more abstract reality of China.”<sup>9</sup>

The local does not stand at the opposite end of the global but rather these two are “inextricably bound together.”<sup>10</sup> Facing the inflow of the global sources, on the one hand, local society had to change, adjust, and accommodate into the global world, as Ulrich Beck argued, “[for the local culture] there is a compulsion to re-locate de-traditionalized traditions within a global context of exchange, dialogue and

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<sup>8</sup> Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi ed., *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press 1998), p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> David Strand, “A High Place Is No Better than a Low Place: The City in the Making of Modern China,” in Wen-hsin Yeh ed., *Becoming Chinese, Passages to Modernity and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 108.

<sup>10</sup> Mike Featherstone, “Localism, globalism, and cultural identity,” in Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake ed., *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 1996), p.47. Also see Roland Robertson “Glocalization: Time-space and Homogeneity-heterogeneity,” in Mike Featherstone et al. ed., *Global Modernities* (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif. : Sage Publications 1995), p. 35

conflict.”<sup>11</sup> It is through transformation and adaptation that a new local identity was constructed and consolidated. On the other hand, local society and culture became a vehicle to manifest the significance of the global, not only on the grand and abstract scale, but more importantly in ways which went deep into “the insignificant, the routine and the most intimate aspects of life.”<sup>12</sup>

Examining Chinese women from the perspective of the global-local network allows us to see how the categorization and identity of these women is reconsidered. For example, with the Christianization of China under the influence of different missions, female Chinese converts were re-categorized by the missions they belonged to instead of by the blood or marriage connections that had previously been used to define Chinese women. In another case, the anti-footbinding movement, despite the fact that the central government in Beijing issued an imperial edict in 1902 to abolish the custom, due to the different exposure to foreign-initiated anti-footbinding discourse and the various attitudes of local officials and literati, each province, city, or even a small town demonstrated its own attributes in this issue. As a consequence, the groups of women who were targeted, and the justifications and the methods of unbinding their feet were quite different.

To be specific, I situate Chinese women in the context of a city as the convergence of the local and global forces. The preference of city over province or village is facilitated by the abundant previous scholarship on urban studies in the past four decades. While scholars in earlier years intended to understand Chinese cities with the emphasis

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<sup>11</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards A New Modernity* (London; Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1992), p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> Tony Spybey, *Globalization and World Society* (Cambridge, UK; Cambridge, MA, USA: Polity Press, 1996), p. 5.

on politics, revolution, and economy,<sup>13</sup> recently scholars have paid more attention to the diversity and fragmentation of Chinese cities and examined them from the perspectives of social-cultural aspects,<sup>14</sup> physicality and materiality,<sup>15</sup> and media networks.<sup>16</sup> Together scholars have constructed a lively image of Chinese cities, in which diverse social groups were surrounded by architecture and urban facilities and connected by newspaper, drama, novels, and printing machines.

As an active presence in modern Chinese cities, women thus have gained much attention from scholars in history, literature, anthropology, and film studies, to name just a few here. This group of scholars has demonstrated a pioneering spirit in challenging the notions that “woman” as a category was a homogeneous concept and that women as a whole were the suppressed victims of the patriarchy in cities. When they explore women and city in general, they have especially paid attention to gender difference and women’s agency. With the newly discovered materials, methods, and approaches, scholars have emphasized the interplay of gender with other categories, such as class,

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Elvin and G. William Skinner, *The City between Two Worlds* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974); G. William Skinner, *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977); Jean Chesneaux, *The Chinese Labor Movement, 1919-1927*, trans. H. M. Wright (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1968).

<sup>14</sup> Emily Honig, *Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919-1949* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1986); William T. Rowe, *Hankow, Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1984); Mary B. Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang Province, 1865-1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986); Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Marie-Claire Bergere, *The Golden Age of the Chinese Bourgeoisie* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> Lu Hanchao, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), introduction; Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of A New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> E. Perry Link, Jr., *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Alexander Des Forges, “Building Shanghai, One Page at a Time: The Aesthetics of Installment Fiction at the Turn of the Century,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62: 3 (Aug., 2003), pp. 781-810; Joan Judge, *Print and Politics: Shibao and the Culture of Reform in Late Qing China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996); Barbara Mittler, *A Newspaper for China?: Power, Identity, and Change in Shanghai’s News Media, 1872-1912* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004); Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).

occupation, generation, and ethnicity,<sup>17</sup> and articulated women's agency in "respond[ing] to the powerful social forces shaping their lives."<sup>18</sup> The studies on prostitutes and courtesans,<sup>19</sup> female workers in factories,<sup>20</sup> actresses and movie stars,<sup>21</sup> and female activists and politicians,<sup>22</sup> have all together established a solid base to explore diverse groups of women's experience in cities.

While scholars have successfully examined the internal dynamics of certain groups of women and their interaction with the social and cultural surroundings in cities, they have not done so much with the fact that many groups of women actually lived under the same roof and shared the overlapped or even same social networks and sources. Western ladies were frequently invited or hired to teach at Chinese women's schools. Actresses' performance was shared by both genteel women sitting in the balcony and lower-class women sitting in *xichi* 戲池 (teahouse pond, the area in the front of the stage). Respectable female teachers might go shopping at the same store for make-up and dresses as courtesans did. In other words, in modern Chinese cities, the communication and contact between different groups of women was as significant as the internal dynamics of each group. As Hsiung Ping-chen once asked about Jiangnan upper-class

<sup>17</sup> Jinhua Emma Teng, "The Construction of the 'Traditional Chinese Women' in the Western Academy: A Critical Review," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society*, 22:1 (Autumn96), p. 142; Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N Wasserstrom, eds., *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) pp. 5-6.

<sup>18</sup> Christina Gilmartin, et al. ed., *Engendering China: Women, Culture and the State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> Catherine Vance Yeh, "Playing with the Public: Late Qing Courtesans and Their Opera Singer Lovers," in Bryna Goodman and Wendy Larson, eds., *Gender in Motion* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005) pp. 145-168; Idem, *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals, and Entertainment Culture, 1850-1910* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Emily Honig, *Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919-1949*; Lisa Rofel, *Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China after Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Weikun Cheng, "The Challenge of the Actresses: Female Performers and Cultural Alternatives in Early Twentieth Century Beijing and Tianjin," *Modern China* 22: 2. (Apr., 1996): 197-233; Luo Suwen, "Gender on Stage: Actresses in an Actors' World (1895-1930)," in Goodman and Larson, eds., *Gender in Motion*, pp. 75-96.

<sup>22</sup> Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999).

women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, “who and where are the rest of women in that area in that time period?,”<sup>23</sup> we need to think about the possibility of putting diverse groups of women in the same time period and in the same space, so that we can detect the ways in which the flows of the global and local sources reinforced or challenged the diversity of these women and in which the same flows were translated or appropriated among different groups of women.

In order to present the diversity of women in the global and local network, I will take Tianjin at the turn of the twentieth century as the temporal and spatial framework. Before the second half of the nineteenth century, for more than five centuries, Tianjin was considered a significant walled city for its waterways, salt production, and military defense of the capital Beijing. As early as in the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1367), when Tianjin was still a small town, it already became a crucial hub to transport grain from the south via the Grand Canal to Beijing, the capital of the Yuan. In 1404, shortly after the founding of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Tianjin was built into a traditional Chinese city with four city walls. It became prosperous as a center to connect the inland Grand Canal and the sea routes for goods transportation and trade exchange.<sup>24</sup> The boom of trade and business also boosted population migration. According to Xu Shiluan 徐士鑾 (1835-1915), an official who lived in Tianjin after retirement, “ever since the Shunzhi

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<sup>23</sup> Hsiung Ping-chen, “Seeing Neither the Past Nor the Future: The Trouble of Positioning Women in Modern China,” in Mechthild Leutner and Nicola Spakowski, eds., *Women in China: The Republican Period in Historical Perspective* (Münster: Lit, 2005), pp. 15-39.

<sup>24</sup> For a brief history of Tianjin from its earliest years to the middle Qing Dynasty, see Kwan Man Bun, *The Salt Merchants of Tianjin: State-Making and Civil Society in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), pp. 12-26; Luo Shuwei, “Yizuo zhuyou chengyuan de wu chengyuan chengshi: Tianjin chengshi chengzhang de lishi toushi” 一座筑有城垣的無城垣城市——天津城市成長的歷史透視 (A walled city without walls: the historical perspective on the urban growth of Tianjin), *Chengshishi yanjiu* 城市史研究 (Study on Urban History), vol. 1, 1989, pp. 1-9.

reign (1643-1661) [of the Qing Dynasty] (1644-1911), the inhabitants in Tianjin who migrated from different provinces consisted of seventy and eighty percent of the population.”<sup>25</sup>

In the Ming Dynasty, Tianjin also became well-known for its salt production. As salt became the most profitable business monopolized by the government, some merchants became rich by contracting salt transport and sale with the government. For generations, their families became rooted in Tianjin and played a significant role in politics, economy, and culture of the local society.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, due to the geographical proximity to the capital Beijing, Tianjin was also built into a strategic military city to defend the capital. Since the Ming Dynasty, the central governments constantly dispatched a large number of soldiers and generals to Tianjin and escalated its strategic significance for military defense. These soldiers gradually became regular residents of Tianjin and thus colored the city with some militant flavor.<sup>27</sup>

As a traditional Chinese city with its focus on economy, commerce, migration, and military power, Tianjin was transformed after 1860 into a treaty port city, which was defined, according to Joseph Esherick, as “commercial entrepots opened to foreign trade by treaty with the Western powers and Japan, and usually including concession areas governed under foreign consular authority where Chinese sovereignty was severely constrained.”<sup>28</sup> In the year of 1860, when the Qing government was once again defeated

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<sup>25</sup> Xu Shiluan, *Jingxiang bishu* 敬鄉筆述 (The written account of my respected hometown) (Taiwan: Wenhui chubanshe, 1969), p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> Kwan Man Bun, *The Salt Merchants of Tianjin*. In this book, Kwan takes the case study of a group of salt merchants in Tianjin to explore the interplay between the rising local mercantile elites and the state and thus provides a Chinese version of a dynamic civil society in late imperial China.

<sup>27</sup> Kwan Man Bun, “Order in Chaos: Tianjin’s *Hunhunr* and Urban Identity in Modern China,” *Journal of Urban History*, 27:1 (2000), pp. 75-91.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Esherick, “Modernity and Nation in the Chinese City,” in Esherick ed., *Remaking the Chinese City*

by the alliance of the British and French troops, it was forced to sign an unequal treaty with these two countries to beg for peace. One of the articles was to open Tianjin to foreign countries for political, economic, diplomatic and evangelic benefits. Many foreigners, politicians, businessmen, or missionaries, were thrilled about the fact that now they legitimately had the access to such a city with a strong commercial history and a close distance to the capital. As more and more foreigners moved to Tianjin and settled down, Britain, France, and the United States built concessions around the southern city walls of Tianjin. In the next decade, the most developed British concession already built solid and long streets with trees on two sides. Some fancy Western-style houses and hotels also appeared. But at this moment, the majority of foreigners, especially missionaries, still resided in the Chinese area of Tianjin and did not move to the concessions.<sup>29</sup>

The contact between Chinese people and foreigners in the beginning did not go well due to the imposed political power of the Western countries and the misunderstanding of both cultures. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the conflicts between these two sides were everywhere on the Chinese soil. In 1870, one of the most severe conflicts happened in Tianjin when about one hundred and fifty foreigners and Chinese Christian converts were killed by furious local residents because they believed that these foreigners killed Chinese orphans in order to make medicine with these babies' body parts. This was known as Tianjin Massacre.<sup>30</sup> The massacre increased the insecurity of

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(Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> O.D. Rasmussen, *Tientsin: An Illustrated Outline History* (Tianjin: The Tientsin Press, Ltd., 1925), pp. 40-41; 43-44.

<sup>30</sup> For the Tianjin Massacre in particular and Sino-Western conflict in general, see J. K. Fairbank, "Patterns behind the Tientsin Massacre," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 20, no. 3/4 (Dec., 1957), pp. 480-511; O.D. Rasmussen, *Tientsin: An Illustrated Outline History*, pp. 45-53.

foreigners who lived in the Chinese area and they began to move into concessions for the purpose of protection. While the construction of concessions was in progress to accommodate these foreigners, antagonism and suspicion were sowed in the hearts of Tianjin natives. Both foreigners and Tianjin natives lived far away from each other and pretended that the other side did not exist. The Chinese area and the foreign concessions were like two worlds apart. The only exception might be a small group of young Chinese students and teachers who studied and worked at some government-sponsored Western-style schools in the Chinese area. They were standing at the front line of both sides.<sup>31</sup>

In the very beginning of the twentieth century, the mutual isolation between the Chinese area and the foreign community was smashed by the Boxer Rebellion and the subsequent Sino-Western military conflict. In 1900, as a group of Boxers, who were actually peasants from Shandong Province, was approaching north China with the goal of eliminating everything and everyone foreign, they immediately allied with local residents of Tianjin who had held grudges against foreigners for three decades already. Together they attacked the foreign community. Missionaries and Chinese Christians were killed, their property was stolen, and Western-style buildings were burnt. Even a person randomly walking on the streets with a pair of Western glasses was killed for his foreign style. Meanwhile, the foreign legation in Beijing was also surrounded by frenzied Boxers.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> These schools were one integral part of the Self-Strengthening Movement, in which the Qing government initiated to better the military power of the nation. A large pool of young Chinese students was trained in foreign language, technology, weaponry with the guidance of foreign teachers and pro-Western Chinese intellectuals.

<sup>32</sup> The Boxer Rebellion is one of the well-researched topics in the academic worlds of both the United States and China. See Joseph Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Paul Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press,

In June, while the situation was getting worse, a military alliance of Britain, France, Russia, Germany, the United States, Japan, Austria, and Italy fought back. In retaliation, they bombed and took over Tianjin on July 14<sup>th</sup> and proceeded to Beijing to save the besieged foreigners. On August 16<sup>th</sup>, Emperor Guangxu and Empress Dowager Cixi fled from the Forbidden City to Xi'an, which brought an end to the incident. This is called the Gengzi Incident.<sup>33</sup>

The Gengzi Incident fundamentally changed Tianjin and its people. Not only were many Chinese houses torn apart by shells and fire, many dwellings in the foreign concessions were not spared the fate of collateral damage either. The Astor House Hotel was seriously damaged and the Russian Consulate was completely destroyed, just to name a very few here.<sup>34</sup> Other than the physical damage, the Gengzi Incident was also remembered as the climax of Sino-Western conflict. According to a foreigner's observation, "the Siege [of the Boxers] and the conquest [of the Allied Powers] of the City are events of great significance. The Siege was a manifestation of deep anti-foreign sentiment. The conquest of the City was the breaking down of one of the walls of Chinese Cities. China has shown herself incompetent of a *sua sponte* advance."<sup>35</sup>

In the following decade, old concessions in Tianjin were rebuilt from the ruins and new concessions were constructed under the post-1900 treaties signed between the Western winners and the Qing government. In total nine countries—Britain, France,

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1997); Yao Bin, *Quanmin xingxiang zai meiguo: Yihetuan yundong de kuaguo yingxiang* 拳民形象在美國：義和團運動的跨國影響 (The image of the Boxers in the United States: the transnational influence of the Boxer Movement) (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> Gengzi is the Chinese chronological equivalent of 1900 in the Western calendar. For a detailed record of the Gengzi Incident in Tianjin, see O.D. Rasmussen, *Tientsin: An Illustrated Outline History*, pp. 113-127.

<sup>34</sup> For a relatively complete list of damage in both the Chinese area and the foreign concessions, see *Peking and Tientsin Times*, August 25, 1900.

<sup>35</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, June 15, 1901.

Japan, Germany, Belgium, Russia, Austro-Hungary, Italy, and United States (later merged into the British concession)—built up their territories around the old native city of Tianjin. This made Tianjin the Chinese city with the largest number of foreign concessions in China.

The presence of foreign concessions complicated the profile of Tianjin. The total area of foreign concessions was eight times the size of the Chinese area and the number of foreigners in Tianjin proliferated from 620 in 1890 to 6341 in 1906.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, these countries usually built their territories with architectural models, languages, life styles, cultures, and administrations from their home countries. A 1905 account by an American C. H. Robertson gives us a glimpse of what Tianjin looked like with the co-existence of these many foreign concessions.

Just imagine yourself stepping off the Shanghai steamer at the Bund (river dock) and getting into a jinricsha pulled by a strong limbed, scantily clad Chinese coolie. We pass quickly through the clean streets and by the neat building of the English concession (much like a home city). Then we come to the French concession where the conflict of languages is made evident in the struggle for supremacy on the signs between French, English and Chinese. We are soon in the Japanese concession, quite like the others and yet identified by the many Japanese in native costume.<sup>37</sup>

The diverse co-existence among these foreign countries on the one hand, “affected the practices and self-representations of the foreign powers at the local level...Each concession had to represent and negotiate its identity on the ground vis-à-vis other imperial powers.”<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, with the dramatic expansion of the foreign

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<sup>36</sup> Li Jingneng, *Tianjin renkoushi* 天津人口史 (The history of Tianjin's population) (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 1990), p.104.

<sup>37</sup> “A Letter from C. H. Robertson to Mrs. Stewart,” Box “China Correspondences and Reports,” Folder “1905,” Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota.

<sup>38</sup> Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley: University of

community, as more and more Chinese people flowed in for work, education, and religion, the boundary between the Chinese area and the foreign concessions became more penetrable than before.

Meanwhile, on the side of the Chinese area, under the leadership of the newly-appointed Zhili Viceroy and Beiyang Governor Yuan Shikai 袁世凱(1859-1916), the Tianjin government negotiated with the foreign powers for two years to regain the governing control of the occupied native city. In 1902 when the Provisional Government,<sup>39</sup> the governing body of allied foreign powers for the native city, finally agreed to let Yuan Shikai take the city back, he immediately initiated a series of urban reforms to rebuild Tianjin based on Western models. Not only were modern urban utilities, such as tap water, electricity, telephones, and street cars, brought forward and installed; new concepts and systems like patrolling police force, prisons, public libraries and parks, and hygienic system were also introduced and established. Tianjin became a model of a modernized city nationwide.<sup>40</sup>

As the government and concessions were modernizing the urban landscape of the city, the local literati in Tianjin were more anxious to reform the ideas and thoughts of the local people. Traumatized and shocked by the Gengzi Incident in which the city they lived was ransacked and occupied, the literati tried to figure out why this happened only

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California Press, 2004), p.11.

<sup>39</sup> The provisional government of Tianjin was responsible for five major tasks: re-establishing social order, making sanitary precaution, securing the Allied Powers and their supplies, preserving property of the Chinese government and individuals, and preventing potential famine. *Peking and Tientsin Times*, September 1, 1900; O.D. Rasmussen, *Tientsin: An Illustrated Outline History*, pp. 221-230.

<sup>40</sup> Luo Shuwei, *Jindai Tianjin chengshi shi* 近代天津城市史 (The urban history of modern Tianjin) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan chubanshe,1993), pp.292-297; Liu Haiyan, “Zujie, shehui biange yu jindai Tianjin chengshi kongjian de yanbian” 租界、社會變革與近代天津城市空間的演變 (The foreign concessions, social changes and the transformation of the urban space in modern Tianjin), *Tianjin shifan daxue xuebao* 天津師範大學學報 (Journal of Tianjin Normal University), 3(2006), pp.36-41.

to Tianjin. They finally blamed the ignorance of common people for this failure. In their view, only when commoners were enlightened in literacy, education, social norms, and current affairs could the goal of bettering Tianjin in particular, and China in general, be achieved. As a consequence, they appropriated the local sources, social networks, and local government's support to initiate a massive enlightenment movement among commoners. A large number of schools of various types and sizes were built, newspapers and pictorial magazines were published, exhibition halls and newspaper-reading halls were established. Even traditional dramas were imbued with modern ideas.<sup>41</sup>

With the expansion of the foreign community, urban modernization, and a massive enlightenment movement in the first decade of the twentieth century, the city itself represented a convergence of both global trends and local forces. Almost everyone living in this city was under the impact of these changes regardless of their social status, occupation, age, gender, and even nationality. Women were one of the groups that underwent the most dramatic transformations through the global-local network. With the introduction of modern public transport means like rickshaws and electronic cars, they were able to move around in the city, paying visits to friends, meeting friends at restaurants or teahouses, and going shopping at stores like Watson's. Some of them even traveled across cities, provinces, and states by train or boat. While they expanded their spheres of activity beyond the household and enlarged their connections beyond blood and marriage, they became a new public presence in the urban landscape.

Meanwhile, the arrival of Western ladies and the life styles they brought along also

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<sup>41</sup> Li Xiaoti, *Qingmo de xiāncéng shèhuì qǐmēng yùndòng: 1901-1911* 清末的下層社會啓蒙運動 1901-1911 (The enlightenment in the lower class of the society in the late Qing, 1901-1911) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001).

complicated the profile of women in Tianjin. In the earlier years, the majority of Western ladies were wives of missionaries, politicians, and businessmen. Since the very late nineteenth century, young and single women also crossed oceans and settled down in Tianjin as doctors, missionaries, or simply adventurers. Around this group of foreign ladies, schools were built to educate Chinese girls, orphanages were established to take in abandoned baby girls, job opportunities were provided to Chinese women with little access to literacy or means as servants and assistants in Westerners' households, hospitals, and missions.

The impact of the global-local network on women could be fraught with tensions. Confusions, misunderstandings, and even conflicts also came up as the dark side of the communication. For example, single missionary women largely challenged ideas of normative womanhood and femininity in Chinese society. Even though on many occasions they dressed in Chinese-style clothes in order to minimize any inconvenience as a foreigner, they did not have bound feet, after all. Sometimes, when they evangelized in public, they had to "pray, play the guitar and sing hymns in the street," which any decent Chinese woman would never do. Their life style was so peculiar that many Chinese people believed that "one girl must have been very bad indeed to have been sent from her own country so young."<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, the global inflow of materials and ideas that were for and about women also caused tension between Tianjin and other cities. Ideas such as women's education, gender equality, or even dress fashion were usually first introduced from Western Europe or America into Shanghai and then transmitted again to Tianjin. The ways in which

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<sup>42</sup> Pat Barr, *To China with Love: The Lives and Times of Protestant Missionaries in China, 1860-1900* (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1973), p.132.

Tianjin was placed on the secondary layer of the network made people in Tianjin feel complicated about Shanghai. Four decades earlier Shanghai had been only a small fishing village and in no way comparable to Tianjin, but now it was the leading city in China for everything, from textbooks used in women's schools, to fashionable clothes that genteel women wore, and even to the plays that actresses performed at teahouses, just to name a few woman-related issues. People in Tianjin had to look up to Shanghai as a model. The dilemma of following Shanghai while challenging it became an obsession that people in Tianjin never overcame for the whole twentieth century. Yet, this mentality also provided an opportunity to push the local people to seek and consolidate their own identity. They needed to find out what was unique to Tianjin.

My dissertation “Beauty and a Broken City: The Publicity of Women in Tianjin, 1898-1911” is an attempt to explore the ways in which the global-local network impacted diverse women’s lives and experiences at the turn of the twentieth century Tianjin. What I mean by “publicity” here includes two meanings: the ways in which women emerged as a public presence in the urban landscape, and the ways in which women’s issues became a social phenomenon under the public observation and discussion. To be specific, I focus on three most-debated issues in Tianjin: women’s physical body (footbinding), women’s education, and women’s performance. These three themes had long been rooted in Chinese society and culture and symbolized the normative womanhood or its opposite side. When it came to the modern era, the themes of publicizing women’s deformed feet, the transition from private inner chambers to public women’s schools, and the extreme publicity of actresses on and off the stage

became social issues in Tianjin, with which the city had never dealt before, or at least not to this extent. All the discussion, debates, arguments, and reforms of these woman-related issues affected diverse groups of women and dramatically changed their life styles and their identities in the city. New definitions of social and gender norms were forming to discipline women's behaviors and spheres: where women could go and where they could not go in cities, what was acceptable and what was not acceptable in public, what kind of dress was appropriate for what occasions in public, and what kind of women could go to what kind of places.<sup>43</sup> It is the negotiation between women and the forming social and gender norms that a space was created between layers for these women to actually live with flexibility and agency. Meanwhile, it was also through the discussion, translation, and adaptation of these issues in Tianjin that people were able to articulate and consolidate their own identity as Tianjin natives. As a matter of fact, women's education and women's performance became two phenomena that people in Tianjin boasted about even nationwide.

The six chapters of the dissertation are divided into three sections. For the first two chapters, I compare two anti-footbinding associations, one established in 1898 mainly by a group of foreign ladies and one in 1903 by some Chinese local literati. The comparison between the two associations, on the one hand, examines the different discourses and historical contexts before and after 1900 about women's bound feet. On the other hand, it also highlights the connection and overlap in the introduction, translation, and adaptation of the anti-footbinding discourse from global to local, between Westerners

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<sup>43</sup> According to Linda McDowell, "spatial division is a major feature of class differentiation." This means that women from different social classes tend to go different regions in a specific space. As a consequence, various patterns of "class cultures" are usually formed over time in divergent regions. Linda McDowell, *Undoing Place? A Geographical Reader* (London; New York: Arnold; New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), pp. 2-4.

and native Tianjin people.

The next two chapters then move on to discuss a group of educated women, who came to Tianjin in response to the call for women's education. They were usually young and single, and came from the culturally superior areas in the South. They made contribution to women's education in Tianjin by taking teaching positions or enrolling as female students in various women's schools. While the righteous cause empowered them with autonomy and mobility, these ladies had to figure out how to adapt into a new urban space on a daily basis. They were busy moving around in cities, exploring their spheres, and establishing new social networks. While they enjoyed the wild wonders of the city, their respectability was also challenged by their presence in public.

The last two chapters focus on actresses and their public performance and life style. To some extent, actresses were standing on the opposite end of educated women. They usually migrated from the neighboring rural area of Tianjin and many of them were sold or forced into the performance business. While educated women were cautious to minimize their public presence in order to preserve their respectable reputation, actresses had to make public what they had, including their physical bodies, time, and even their life styles, in order to make a living out of the selling of the publicity.

## Part One

### Why Did Women's Bound Feet Matter?



(Figure 1.1: “Tianzu shoulei” 天足受累 (The burden of natural feet), *Xingsu huabao* 醒俗畫報 (Enlightening Customs Pictorial Magazine), date unknown)<sup>1</sup>

One day a young woman in a plain dress shows up at the front door of a hospital in Tianjin. With tears in her eyes and a handkerchief in her hand, the woman begs the doctor (possibly a female missionary doctor) to cut off her feet and replace them with a pair of small wooden feet. The surgery of amputating women's feet was not unusual at this time. Doctors in Western-style hospitals often did so to prevent the gangrene infection caused by inappropriate footbinding process.<sup>2</sup> But it might be the first time

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<sup>1</sup> As the first lithographical pictorial magazine in Tianjin, *Xingsu huabao* was published in 1907 by Wu Zhizhou 吳芷洲 (dates unknown) and Lu Xinnong 陸辛農 (1887-1974). In 1908, it changed its name to *Xinghua huabao* 醒華畫報 (Awaking China Pictorial Magazine) and stopped publishing in 1913. This is the main source in my dissertation to visualize Tianjin's society and culture in the late Qing and early Republican eras. There were also a couple of other pictorial magazines, including *Renjing huabao* 人鏡畫報 (People's Mirror Pictorial Magazine) published in 1907, *Tianjin liangri huabao* 天津兩日畫報 (Tianjin Bi-day Pictorial Magazine) in 1909, and *Zhenghua huabao* 正化畫報 (Rectifying Customs Pictorial Magazine) in 1909. See Mei Suwen, “Jindai Tianjin huabao zhijian shulue” 近代天津畫報知見述略 (A brief introduction of pictorial magazines in modern Tianjin that I have known and seen), Sun Wuchuan et al. ed., *Tianjin chuban shiliao* 天津出版史料 (The historical materials on publication in Tianjin) (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 1994), vol. 7, pp. 112-121. These pictorial magazines were located in the Rare Book Collection at Nankai University Library, Tianjin Library, and Tianjin History Museum. Many of the pages were bound together without dates and issue numbers.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in the Isabella Fisher Hospital for Women and Children in Tianjin, female doctors often received young girls whose feet became affected with gangrene. In order to save their lives, doctors had to amputate their feet or even legs. Margaret Negodaeff-Tomsik, *Honour Due: The Story of Dr. Leonora Howard King* (Ottawa: Canadian Medical Association, 1999), p. 166. Other severe or death-threatening diseases included ulceration, infections,

that doctors were asked to amputate a pair of healthy feet. Why? It turns out that this young woman has just been taken as a concubine by a family. Yet, her husband/master is very upset about her not-small-enough feet and decides to send her back. Left with no choice, this poor woman “came to the hospital and begged the doctor once and again to cut off her two feet and replaced a pair of small wooden feet to please her husband.” Of course the doctor turns down her request and in the end the woman has to leave with regret.

Reading this true story, which took place one century ago, we now cannot know what happened after she went back home. Did her husband send her back or did he change his mind and keep her? All we can see is a picture that is preserved in *Xingshuabao* 醒俗畫報 (Enlightening Customs Pictorial Magazine), a pictorial magazine published in 1907 in Tianjin. In it, this woman is placed on the right part of the picture while three male bystanders look at her from the left side. Among the bystanders, the elder Chinese man with a pair of dark sunglasses and a bamboo-patterned garment plays a dominant role with his active hand gesture, or at least this is what the artist intended to show. Standing beside him are a Chinese young man in similar dress and a Westerner in a Western-style suit, both of whom are standing close and listening to the woman.

The picture and the theme of it have to be understood in the historical context of the anti-footbinding movement at the turn of the twentieth century, when different social groups blamed the practice of footbinding for restraining Chinese women’s physical

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ankle-bones disease, and mortification. See Virginia Chiutin Chau, “The Anti-Footbinding Movement in China, 1850-1912” (Master thesis, Columbia University, 1966), pp. 13-17. In this sense, the amputation of women’s feet was considered by these Western doctors as a cure of these women’s physical bodies with modern medical science in particular and a solution of treating China with modernity in general. This aroused the curiosity about another question: before the introduction of modern surgery and medical knowledge, how Chinese women, who practiced footbinding for over one thousand years, dealt with infection or other relevant problems?

mobility and encumbering the whole nation of China in the world of civilization.

Probably the illustrator himself did not realize that this artistic representation actually epitomized a temporal genealogy of the anti-footbinding movement. Around 1870s, the Westerners, especially missionaries, took the initiative to stigmatize the practice of footbinding for crippling Chinese women's bodies and souls from the perspectives of Christianity, modernity, and Western civilization. It is from this moment that this quiet or even secretive bodily practice within Chinese women's inner chambers suddenly became a significant public issue under debate and discussion. The criticism of the practice was soon taken over by Chinese radical intellectuals and the gentry class in many cities at the turn of the twentieth century as an integral part of an indigenous project of enlightening Chinese people and saving China from crisis. Since the very end of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), the younger generation, which could be represented by the young man in this picture, vehemently tackled the issue when they rose to be a radical force in society. The justification that the younger generation used to oppose footbinding was more personal and worldly than Westerners and the gentry class because they were right in the middle of the dilemma of whom they should choose as soul mates, women still with small tiny feet, women with half-loose feet, or women with natural feet. To extend the temporal line beyond this picture, even now in the twenty-first century, many footbound women still live in rural areas despite the half-century-long anti-footbinding propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party.

As an issue going through the whole twentieth century in China, the dynamics between footbinding and anti-footbinding has also aroused many scholars' interest. The scholarship is generally divided into four theories: fetishism, feminism, bodily practice,

and labor economy. The fetishism theory is represented by Howard Levy, who, along with other similar-minded scholars, argued that footbinding was a practice to arouse Chinese men's sexual desire and imagination by partially deforming women's physical bodies.<sup>3</sup> The danger of objectifying Chinese women and their bodies is to easily remove the sense of history and difference from this practice and identify Chinese women only as passive victims in men's fancy for sex.

Many other scholars have challenged this theory by explicitly stating that it has underestimated the role that Chinese women have played in the painful practice, as Julie Broadwin claims, "we should not discount the agency involved in how women experienced their bound feet simply because they were also conforming to a male requirement."<sup>4</sup> Yang Xingmei, a feminist scholar on footbinding in China, also criticized the fetishism theory by considering footbinding itself as a practice for women to demonstrate their control over their own bodies and their conceptualization of beauty.

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Yet, scholars, such as Dorothy Ko, Yang Nianqun, and Miao Yanwei, are not

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<sup>3</sup> Levy Howard, *The Lotus Lovers: The Complete History of the Curious Erotic Custom of Footbinding in China* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, [1967] 1992); Gao Hongxing, *Chanzu shi* 纏足史 (The history of footbinding) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1995); Gao Shiyu, "Chanzu zaiyi" 纏足再論 (A second thought on footbinding), *Shixue yuekan* 史學月刊 (Journal of historical science), 1999, vol.2, pp. 20-24. An excellent and thorough critique of this theory is argued by Hill Gates's article "Bound Feet: How Sexy were They?" *History of the Family* 13 (2008), pp. 58-70.

<sup>4</sup> Julie Broadwin, "Walking Contradictions: Chinese Women Unbound at the Turn of the Century," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 10:4 (Dec., 1997), p. 419; also see Fan Hong, *Footbinding, Feminism, and Freedom: The Liberation of Women's Bodies in Modern China* (London; Portland, Or.: F. Cass 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Yang Xingmei is now one of the main researchers on footbinding in China and has published a series of articles in top journals for the past decade, including "Wanqing guanyu chanzu yingxiang guojia fuqiang de zhenglun" 晚清關於纏足影響國家富強的爭論 (The debate on how footbinding had impact on the nation's wealth and power in late Qing), *Sichuan daxue xuebao* 四川大學學報 (The Journal of Sichuan University), 2010, vol. 2, pp. 19-28; "Minguo chunian sichuan de fanchanzu huodong (1912-1917): yi guanfang cuoshi weizhu de kaocha" 民國初年四川的反纏足運動 (1912-1917) ——以官方措施為主的考察 (The anti-footbinding movement in Sichuan in the early Republic period (1912-1917): an examination on government policies), *Shehui kexue yanjiu* 社會科學研究 (Social Science Research) 2002, vol. 6, pp. 120-125; "Xiao jiao meichou yu nanquan nüquan" 小腳美醜與男權女權 (The beauty and ugliness of small feet, men's rights and women's rights), *Dushu* 讀書 (Reading), 1999, vol. 10, pp. 15-20, to name just a few that are most relevant to my research.

satisfied with this feminist stance. In Ko's viewpoint, the way to simply look for women's agency in this practice "derives from the power of an ideology of the autonomous individual, which goes hand in hand with a view of the body as a container for the inner self."<sup>6</sup> Therefore, when women claimed freedom or agency, as feminist scholars suggest, during the practices of binding and loosening, they actually fell into the trap of a male-centered ideology which advocated an individualism and liberalism. To challenge this feminist theory, Ko, Yang, and Miao emphasize the physicality and materiality of women's bodies and examine the practice as a field to reflect the diverse negotiation between different genders, social classes, races, and texts.<sup>7</sup>

The third group of scholars is not the only cohort who is skeptical of fetishism and feminist theories on footbinding. Many other scholars in the disciplines of sociology and anthropology also challenged these two theories from the perspective of economic labor. With the possibilities of oral interview and quantitative analysis, scholars such as Hill Gates, Laurel Bossen, and C. Fred Blake believe that footbinding is a practice coming out of the need for women's labor in families and sometimes in agricultural fields.<sup>8</sup> In the majority of the labor which was done indoors by women, as Bossen argued, it

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<sup>6</sup> Dorothy Ko, "Rethinking Sex, Female Agency, and Footbinding," *Jindai zhongguo funishi yanjiu* 近代中國婦女史研究 (Research on Modern Chinese Women's History), 1999, vol. 7, pp. 81-82.

<sup>7</sup> Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2005); Ko, "Bondage in Time: Footbinding and Fashion Theory," in Rey Chow ed., *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field* (Durham, N.C. : Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 199-226; Yang Nianqun, "Cong kexue huayu dao guojia kongzhi" 從科學話語到國家控制 (From scientific discourse to government control), in Wang Min'an ed., *Shenti de wenhua zhengzhixue* 身體的文化政治學 (The cultural politics of the body) (Kaifeng: Henan daxue chubanshe, 2003), pp. 1-50; Miao Yanwei, "Cong shixue keji kan qingmo chanzu" 從視覺科技看清末纏足 (Looking at footbinding from the viewpoint of visual technologies in the late Qing), *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院近代史研究所集刊 (Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica), 2007, vol. 55, pp. 1-45.

<sup>8</sup> Hill Gates, "Footloose in Fujian: Economic Correlates of Footbinding," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 43:1 (Jan., 2001), pp. 130-148; Laurel Bossen, *Chinese women and Rural Development: Sixty Years of Change in Lu Village, Yunnan* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002); C. Fred Blake, "Foot-Binding in Neo-Confucian China and the Appropriation of Female Labor," *Signs*, 19:3 (Spring, 1994), pp. 676-712.

“would be best done with deft hands and dull feet, primarily at home or in nearby fields. It would require dexterity but little pedestrian mobility.”<sup>9</sup> This labor theory convincingly explains why footbinding declined in the twentieth century since women’s labor at home was not needed as much after industrialization was introduced into China.

The lengthy paragraphs I devote to previous scholarship on (anti-) footbinding, on the one hand, indicate the flourishing and diverse research of this subject. On the other hand, I am also able to point out what is missing from the previous scholarship. As many of these scholars are concerned about explaining why footbinding was popular in China and why the practice declined in the last century, they have not paid sufficient attention to the role that anti-footbinding associations played in the abolishment of this practice. In their analysis, compared to the complicated and dynamic pictures of the vicissitudes of footbinding, the anti-footbinding associations are stereotypically described as an inanimate body with a single motto and a monotonous voice of “opposing the practice.” Not to mention that few of them have focused on the internal dynamics within these associations or specific strategies that these associations used to attack the practice.

As a matter of fact, as a major force to advocate the abolition of footbinding, these associations were not homogeneous at all and varied based on geographical location, member background, funding resources, and propaganda strategies. Even within every one of the anti-footbinding associations, members approached this issue differently due to the distinction of gender, nationality, educational background, and social status. In other words, a single motto of saving Chinese women from footbinding did not necessarily result in a kind of homogeneity. The anti-footbinding associations were as

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<sup>9</sup> Bossen, *Chinese women and Rural Development*, p. 43.

multi-dimensioned as the justifications of footbinding. Only when we dig into these associations can we understand the complex or even recurrent battle between footbinding and anti-footbinding. In the two chapters of this section, therefore, I will focus on two anti-footbinding associations in Tianjin, one established in 1898 by Western ladies and the other one in 1903 by Chinese local literati. These two associations, on the one hand, were distinguishable in terms of association ideologies, identity of initiators and members, and the historical contexts of the associations. Yet, on the other hand, they also shared many similar characteristics in terms of how to mobilize the masses to advocate the association mottos.

Taking Tianjin as a case study is both a challenge and a supplement to previous scholarship on this topic. The majority of previous scholarship that touches upon anti-footbinding associations usually focuses on those established by influential historical figures in the South, such as, on the foreign side, Reverend John Macgowan's (?-1922) Heavenly Feet Society in Xiamen, and Mrs. Archibald Little's (1845-1908) Natural Feet Society in Shanghai, and the associations that Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927), Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929), and Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865-1898) established in Guangdong on the Chinese side. Yet, the two Tianjin associations I study here have not gained as much attention and publicity as their counterparts either among contemporaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries or in historiography. At best they could be called two Tianjin associations with organizers and members unknown nationwide but well known locally. It is exactly through this obscurity that we are able to explore how people like them, lacking resources and publicity that popular figures had, participated in the anti-footbinding movement. Meanwhile, as north China

lagged far behind south China in the movement,<sup>10</sup> research on associations in Tianjin can also provide comparative insights into how geographical diversities and local resources made difference to advocate the anti-footbinding discourse.

I will start in the first chapter with the history of Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society in the very late nineteenth century. Despite the fact that it was a branch of the Natural Feet Society in Shanghai, the Society in Tianjin not only epitomized the social and cultural characteristics of the city, it also manifested the internal dynamics of the Society participants in terms of gender, nationality and social hierarchy. Within the Society, Western men, Western women, and Chinese men approached the issue of women's bound feet from perspectives of religious universality, feminism, and familial relationships. In addition, the Society also employed different strategies to publicize the anti-footbinding discourse, including giving lectures in public halls, collaborating with other social associations, playing music, and organizing essay competitions.

Unfortunately, all these efforts did not make the anti-footbinding discourse as widely known as the Natural Feet Society had expected, especially with the interruption of the Gengzi Incident in 1900, in which foreign military forces formed an alliance and occupied Tianjin in order to suppress the Boxer Rebellion. In the post-1900 era, the power to propagandize the anti-footbinding discourse was transited from Westerners to the local elite of Tianjin as the consequence of the 1900 traumatic memory of being attacked and occupied, the orders and investment of various levels of governments, and the burgeoning development of the media business in Tianjin. This is the focus of the

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<sup>10</sup> Min Jie, “Wuxu weixin shiqi buchanzu yundong de quyu, zuzhi he cuoshi” 戊戌維新時期不纏足運動的區域、組織和措施 (The geographical distribution, organizations, and measures of the anti-footbinding movement in the Wuxu Reform era), *Guizhou shehui kexue* 貴州社會科學 (Social Sciences in Guizhou), 1993, vol. 6, pp.100-105.

second chapter. I will also use as a case study, a Tianjin male literatus and his 1903 Commonwealth Natural Feet Society, to explore in detail the ways in which Chinese literati collaborated with and competed against Westerners for resources and strategies of the anti-footbinding movement in the local society.

Meanwhile, as the search for women's own voice and experience has been emphasized in the previous scholarship,<sup>11</sup> I also follow this path and explore the role that Chinese women played in the anti-footbinding movement in Tianjin. Despite the fact that the discourse and movement were targeting Chinese women's bodies, they themselves were obscure and ambivalent in the process.

Before 1900, only a small number of Bible women, who were chosen from Chinese Christian families and trained to read the Bible to other illiterate Chinese women, among many other evangelic assignments, unbound their feet due to the persistent persuasion of the Western female missionaries. There was no sign that upper class women or women beyond the church's influence did so. Intriguingly the 1900 Incident became a life threat to both foot-unbound women and footbound women, the former accused of being foreign by the anti-foreign Boxer rebels and the latter suffering from the violent conquest of Tianjin. After 1900, as the embodiment of their fathers' strong intervention, young daughters of some open-minded advocates were able to loosen the bondage even though in some cases their feet were rebound. Meanwhile, a group of educated women who pioneered in women's education also took initiative in "liberating" their bodies. Interestingly neither group of women wrote about their experience of unbinding. Even

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<sup>11</sup> For example, Julie Broadwin, "Walking Contradictions; Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters*; and Yang Nianqun, "Cong kexue huayu dao guojia kongzhi," to name just a few here.

the educated women, who were capable of writing and publishing, only advocated women's education and gender equality in their public writing and shunned the topic of footbinding.

# **Chapter One**

## **Journey to the East:**

### **Western Representations of Chinese Footbinding**

The cloth is drawn as tightly as the child can bear, leaving the great toe free, but binding all the other toes under the sole of the foot, so as to reduce the width as much as possible, and eventually to make the toes of the left foot peep out at the right side and the toes of the right foot at the left side of the foot, in both cases coming from underneath the sole.<sup>1</sup>

Before Mrs. Archibald Little, the most prominent anti-footbinding activist in China, disclosed the “truth” of the deformation of Chinese women’s feet, Westerners’ conceptualization of this practice actually went through a dramatic change in the past five centuries. As Patricia Ebrey pointed out, since the fourteenth century, the Western representations about Chinese women’s bound foot changed from fashion, seclusion, perversity, deformity, child abuse, to cultural immobility. She argued that the formation of this changing knowledge indicated “[a] cultural imperialism or colonialist discourse, representing another culture is an act of exerting power over it, or a larger imperialist project of controlling and benefiting from Asia.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, it was the ever-changing power dynamics between the West and China that caused the representations of footbinding to vary.

When it came to the nineteenth century, even with the unanimously appalled attitude towards footbinding, as Mrs. Little describes in her account, Westerners, especially missionaries, argued with each other about how to deal with this Chinese practice. Some

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Archibald Little, *Intimate China: The Chinese as I have Seen Them* (London, Hutchinson & co. 1899), p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> Patricia B. Ebrey, “Gender and Sinology: Shifting Western Interpretations of Footbinding, 1300-1890,” *Late Imperial China*, 20:2 (Dec. 1999), pp. 1-34.

missionaries believed that they should leave it untouched in order to minimize the opposition from the Chinese, while other argued that it was against the will of God to deform women's natural feet and insisted on abolishing it.<sup>3</sup>

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the “abolition” group gradually dominated over the “leave it be” group as the consequence of the rise of Social Gospel and the arrival of single women missionaries in China.<sup>4</sup> As the customs in society became the main evangelic target of Social Gospel and single women missionaries gained more access to meet Chinese women who usually stayed in their households, the anti-footbinding movement became a significant component of a larger project to evangelize China. Therefore it is not surprising to see that in the beginning, the anti-footbinding discourse was propagandized along with the Christian teachings through pamphlet distribution and article publication on missionary newspapers.<sup>5</sup>

It was not until 1875 that the first anti-footbinding association was established with the motto of abolishing the practice. In this year, Reverend John Macgowan of London Missionary Society founded the Heavenly Feet Society in Xiamen.<sup>6</sup> According to the regulations, members of the Society had to unbind their daughters' feet and marry these daughters to families within the Society. Meanwhile, membership in the society was indicated by a tally, half of which would be given to the society and half would be retained by the individual members. As Angela Zito argues, even though this Society

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<sup>3</sup> Chou, “The Anti-Footbinding Movement in China,” pp. 34-38.

<sup>4</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, *Chinese women and Christianity, 1860-1927* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1992), p.102.

<sup>5</sup> Wang Peng, “Wanguo gongbao yu Tianzu Hui” 萬國公報與天足會 (*The Global Magazine and the Heavenly Feet Society*), *Guizhou shehui kexue* 貴州社會科學 (*Social Sciences of Guizhou*), 2006, vol. 1, pp. 136-138.

<sup>6</sup> Li Ying, “Jidujiao yu jindai zhongguo de fanchanzu yundong: yi Fujian wei zhongxin” 基督教與中國近代的反纏足運動——以福建為中心 (*Christianity and anti-footbinding movement in modern China: with a case study on Fujian*), *Dongfang luntan* 東方論壇 (*The Orient Forum*), 2004, vol. 4, pp. 95-101; Chau, “The Anti-Footbinding Movement in China,” pp. 43-46.

was to target the custom in Chinese society, it was still influenced by evangelism. As the title of the “Heavenly Feet Society” indicated, footbinding “[was] the interfere with Divine Nature, the damage to the Natural Beauty, which was one of God’s ideals.”<sup>7</sup> The Society developed quickly, probably due to the long exposure of Xiamen with the outside world. According to some sources, there were over 800 members enrolled in the Society in 1894.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, nothing really happened in the next two decades in missionary circles. It was not until in 1895 that Mrs. Archibald Little, the wife of a British merchant, gathered a group of Western ladies and established a Natural Feet Society in Shanghai.<sup>9</sup> Even though some regulations were influenced by Macgowan’s Heavenly Feet Society, Mrs. Little was very explicit about the non-denominational and international attributes of her Society and targeted “a quite different category of persons or high government officials and men and women of wealth and status.”<sup>10</sup> The establishment of the Natural Feet Society, on the one hand, demonstrated the conceptual shift of women’s bodies from Macgowan’s God’s creation to bodily hygiene issue of women.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, as Elisabeth Croll pointed out, this Society also guaranteed Western ladies an opportunity to speak for Chinese women without damaging their reputation, as would have happened if men had spoken for them.<sup>12</sup>

Immediately after the founding of the Natural Feet Society in Shanghai, many

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<sup>7</sup> Angela Zito, “Secularizing the Pain of Footbinding in China: Missionary and Medical Stagings of the Universal Body,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 75:1, (Mar., 2007), pp. 8-11.

<sup>8</sup> *Chinese Recorder*, 1894, vol. 25.

<sup>9</sup> Elisabeth J. Croll, “Like the Chinese Goddess of Mercy: Mrs. Little and the Natural Foot Society,” in David S. G. Goodman ed., *China and the West: Ideas and Activists* (Manchester [England]; New York: Manchester University Press; [New York]: Distributed exclusively in the USA and Canada by St. Martin’s Press, 1990), pp. 41-56.

<sup>10</sup> *North China Herald*, December 17, 1897.

<sup>11</sup> Zito, “Secularizing the Pain of Footbinding in China,” pp. 11-16.

<sup>12</sup> Croll, “Like the Chinese Goddess of Mercy,” pp. 45-47.

branches were established by foreign women in the neighboring area, such as Suzhou, Wuxi, Zhenjiang, Yangzhou, and Nanjing, which, ironically, had since the seventeenth century been the place proud of cultivating the most delicate women's culture, including footbinding. Now this same culture changed from the glory of the past to the shame of the present.

## The Founding of the Natural Feet Society in Tianjin

While foreign ladies were busy with their cause in south China, north China seemed very quiet on this issue. This was probably due to the fact that the missionary enterprise in general in the north lagged far behind that of the south in terms of denominational force and resources. Not to mention that at the very end of the nineteenth century, the central government in Beijing was in pain dealing with the consequences of the 1895 Sino-Japanese war. Footbinding, the woman-related issue, was not able to squeeze into the political agenda. As a result, it was not until early 1898 that a branch of Mrs. Little's Natural Feet Society was established in Tianjin.

Before we move on to explore the Natural Feet Society of Tianjin in detail, we have to spend some space discussing a newspaper *Peking [Beijing] and Tientsin [Tianjin] Times*<sup>13</sup> because it was not only one of the very few extant English-language newspapers covering north China at the turn of the twentieth century, it is also the major primary source I use to explore the Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society in this chapter.

*Peking and Tientsin Times* was established by William Bellingham (?-1895) in the

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<sup>13</sup> Peking and Tientsin were Wade-Giles spellings of Beijing and Tianjin before pinyin system was used in the 1950s in China.

British concession of Tianjin on March 10, 1894 in order to feed the reading and communication needs of the foreigners residing in the north.<sup>14</sup> At that moment, the media business in the foreign community in the north was not as developed as that in the south. According to the editor of *Peking and Tientsin Times*, “the difficulty of establishing an acceptable newspaper for Western readers in this part of the world, is undoubtedly great. The sources from which European or American readers are supplied, exist here only in a very feeble state. The foreign communities are small and scattered, with means of intercommunication hardly equal to those which existed in Europe three centuries ago.”<sup>15</sup> Due to these difficulties, the editor decided to mainly focus on two significant cities in north China, Beijing and Tianjin, the capital city of China and the most flourished treaty port city in the north. This is how the newspaper got its name.

The emphasis on these two cities made this newspaper closer to the political center of China than any foreign press in the south. As a consequence of this geographical advantage, *Peking and Tientsin Times* was covered with numerous “big issues” such as politics, economy, and international relationship of Chinese government. Meanwhile, as a newspaper located in Tianjin, a city with four foreign concessions (Britain, France, Germany, and America) at this moment, it also kept a rich record of local news in the foreign community of Tianjin and thus helped construct a lively picture of these foreigners’ lives on Chinese soil. One part of this picture was the founding of the Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society.

On January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1898, a reader’s letter was published in *Peking and Tientsin Times* proposing to establish a branch Natural Feet Society in Tianjin. According to this reader,

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<sup>14</sup> O.D. Rasmussen, *Tientsin: An Illustrated Outline History*, pp. 109-111.

<sup>15</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, March 10, 1898.

Frederic Brown, Secretary of Tianjin Missionary Association, this idea was encouraged by both Mrs. Little, who “has appealed to one of our number to inaugurate a Branch of the Anti-Footbinding Society in Tianjin,” and a Chinese gentleman residing away from Tianjin who eagerly suggested “forming a Branch to act in harmony with the head society in Shanghai.”<sup>16</sup>

After preparing for one-and-a-half months, the Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society was founded with the inaugural meeting held at the home of Mrs. Mackintosh, the wife of the British Consul H. B. Mackintosh. In this meeting, three persons delivered speeches to the audience: Mr. B. C. George Scott, one of the chairs (the other one is H. B. Mackintosh), Mrs. Lavington Hart, a missionary wife of the London Missionary Society, and Dr. H. Y. Kin, an American-educated Chinese and the Director of Tianjin Medical College—I will come back to discuss the symbolic meaning of these three persons in detail later. At the end of the meeting, a committee of six married foreign ladies (nationality unknown, but highly possible British) was approved by the chair to take charge of the routine affairs and monthly meetings of the Society.<sup>17</sup>

It is worth noticing that the time of establishing this Society also fit perfectly into the cycle of Tianjin. As a port city of commodity transportation and distribution in north China, Tianjin was a seasonal place. In the winter season, usually between October and February, the route connecting the city to the sea for transportation was solidly blocked by ice. According to a foreign traveler’s description, “Towards the end of September the weather becomes wintry, the nights are raw and cold, northerly winds prevail, and in

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<sup>16</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, January 15, 1898.

<sup>17</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, March 5, 1898

October come snow, frost, and ice on the river.”<sup>18</sup> Thus many business exchanges and political travels were postponed. As Tianjin turned into an isolated ice castle in these months, foreigners within the city were pleased to enjoy a long winter break with a variety of entertainment activities such as sports, dance, and concerts.<sup>19</sup> Within the relaxing winter break, the Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society possibly called more attention in the foreign community than otherwise.

With the thawing of ice, the Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society held two big meetings in May and June at the public hall of the Tianjin YMCA (Young Men’s Christian Association) with 190 and 130 Chinese present respectively. Not every one of them was the member of the Society. Usually in order to gain the membership, a person, in most cases Chinese men, had to sign a pledge card at the end of the meeting as a symbolic way to promise the Society that they were “as far as possible to marry women with large feet, induce their wives to unbind, and not to bind their children’s feet.”<sup>20</sup> The members were also responsible for circulating some anti-footbinding literature among their social networks and bringing as many friends as they could into the cause.

If there had been no interruption, the monthly meetings would have continued as planned. Yet, unfortunately, since the July of 1898, the political situations in north China became intense due to the reform launched by the emperor and several Chinese intellectuals in Beijing. The following coup d’etat initiated by the Empress Dowager Cixi and the intensified relationship between Chinese government and foreign powers

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<sup>18</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, September 29, 1900.

<sup>19</sup> For example, in 1898 winter break, the activities recorded in *Peking and Tientsin Times* in the foreign community included Tianjin Public Band (February 1898), the smoking concert (February 1898), winter sports (football and horse racing, February 1898) Children’s Fancy Dress Ball (January and February 1898), Bachelors’ Ball (February 1898), Tianjin Lawn Tennis Club (April 1898), Tientsin Cricket Club(April 1898). For the general leisure activities among foreigners, see O.D. Rasmussen, *Tientsin: An Illustrated Outline History*, pp. 59-61.

<sup>20</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, May 14, 1898.

suddenly occupied every heart of a foreigner and every page of the *Peking and Tientsin Times*. It was almost six months later in December that another brief record of a monthly meeting of the Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society was published in the newspaper.

The situations did not get any better after the 1898 One-Hundred-Day Reform cooled down. Another wave of peasant rebellion, the Boxers, spread from Shandong Province immediately. Again, newspapers were busy observing and recording these peasants and their odd religious practices. Foreigners were occupied with how this group of peasants had impact on their political and economic interests and security in north China. For the whole year of 1899, other than two small meetings among the committee members, there was only one big public meeting held by the Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society in December, the record of which became the last presence of the Society in *Peking and Tientsin Times*. With the 1900 Incident, in which foreign community was devastated in the violent conflicts among Boxers, Chinese troops, and Eight Allied Powers, many foreigners, especially ladies and children, fled from Tianjin to Shanghai, Japan, or farther back to their home country.<sup>21</sup> No foreigners seemed interested in discussing Chinese women's feet as much as they did before 1900. The Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society gradually and quietly disappeared from public eyes.

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<sup>21</sup> After the 1900 Incident, *Peking and Tientsin Times* spent much space recording some foreigners' escaping experience and stories, for example, "An American Version," September 29, 1900; "More Interesting News," October 27, 1900; and "Facts and Versions about Tientsin," October 27, 1900. Later on, the Boxer literature became popular in the United States as many Americans published their memoirs or essays on their experience in the 1900 Incident. It is very interesting to see that the majority of foreigners blamed the Boxers for their damage and suffering and conveniently overlooked the fact that their actual damage was also caused by the attack and bombing of the Allied Force of their own.

## **The Internal Dynamics of the Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society**

As Angela Zito pointed out, the anti-footbinding movement was a process of naturalizing the cultural practice of footbinding into an antithesis between Western civilization and the degraded and maimed culture of China in Westerners' eyes.<sup>22</sup> However, if we have a closer look at the internal dynamics of some anti-footbinding associations, we will find out that this naturalized process did not unify the intentions of those participants of the associations. In other words, the anti-footbinding discourse was not universally conceptualized within the associations due to the difference in gender, nationality, educational background, and social status. Therefore, in this section, I will use the Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society as a case study to explore the diverse perspectives from which Western men, Western women, and Chinese men, comprehended Chinese women's feet and approached this issue.

### ***Western Men: A Religious Universalism***

In all five meetings that were hosted by the Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society, Western men were a small but crucial presence. They were usually invited to chair the meetings by delivering some opening remarks in the beginning and some conclusion sentences at the end.

Table 1.1: The List of the Male Missionary Speakers at the Public Meetings

Time	Chairman's Name	Notes
March 5, 1898	B. C. George Scott	British Consul-General
	H. B. Mackintosh	British Consul
May 14,	Rev. G. W. Clarke	Protestant Mission

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<sup>22</sup> Zito, "Secularizing the Pain of Footbinding in China," p. 3-5.

1898		
June 11, 1898	Rev. G. W. Clarke	Protestant Mission
December 3, 1898	Rev. Jonathan Lees	One of the earliest London Missionary Society members in Tianjin since 1862
December 16, 1898	Rev. F. Brown (“Brown of Tianjin”)	Secretary of Tianjin Missionary Association; Wesleyan Chaplain in the North China Command

The Western men at the public meetings could be roughly divided into two categories: influential politicians or pioneering missionaries. Their presence, according to a journalist, “disabuses the public mind of the idea that this is only a ladies’ society,”<sup>23</sup> which implied that in the popular belief anti-footbinding was still woman’s business. Meanwhile, the connection to these authoritative figures in the fields of politics and religion also augmented the significance of the Natural Feet Society. Especially for the first meeting hosted at Mackintosh’s residence, the reputation of a British Consul made it a significant debut for the Society to be introduced to Tianjin.

The influence of these Western men not only came from their positions in politics and religion, they were also famous as “Old China Hands,” an informal honorary title referring to those who stayed in China long enough to become authorities on Chinese affairs.<sup>24</sup> In Scott’s speech at the inaugural meeting, he claimed that he was,

to a certain extent disqualified for the office inasmuch as he knew very little of the movement; but it was hardly possible for anyone with any claims to humane feelings to have resided for *thirty-one years* in the country without having had his or her sympathies very strongly enlisted by the numberless

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<sup>23</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, February 26, 1898.

<sup>24</sup> Lin Yutang 林語堂 (1895-1976), a reputable cross-cultural Chinese writer, once described a quite ironic image of “the Old China hand” in his book *My Country and My People*, the excerpt of which was collected in Chris Elder ed., *China’s Treaty Ports: Half Love and Half Hate: An Anthology* (Hong Kong; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 31-33.

sufferers from the barbarous, senseless and utterly cruel fashion which it was the object of the [Natural Feet] Society to overthrow.<sup>25</sup> (emphasis mine)

Time mattered as a way to establish a foreigner's authority because it demonstrated an accumulative familiarization with the culture and society of this alien and complex empire. In contrast to Scott's thirty-one years, when Mrs. Lavington Hart delivered her speech on the same meeting, "she felt it tantamount to presumption on her part after *only a five years* residence in the country to speak to those who had such a much longer acquaintance with the subject in hand."<sup>26</sup>(emphasis mine)

Despite the presumptive authority on Chinese issues, these Western men did not actually have very much knowledge of the bound feet due to the strict social seclusion of Chinese women. As a consequence, this paradox pushed them to approach the footbinding issue from a very general or even universal perspective in their few speaking opportunities. In the May meeting, when the Rev. G. W. Clarke took the chair, he opened the proceedings by pointing out "the extreme cruelty of the custom and urged the fact that nothing either in the doctrine of Christianity, Confucius, or Buddha in any way justified it."<sup>27</sup> Juxtaposing Confucianism and Buddhism along with Christianity was a popular strategy to introduce Christianity by educating Chinese with the religions they already knew for the one that they did not. Now once again these missionaries had to find justifications for the anti-footbinding discourse in this universal and cross-religious connection. Then the final conclusion had to be reached for the holiness of human body in Christianity, the cosmology they lived and believed in, as Clarke states, "nothing but man had been created upright, and it was clearly the divine intention for men and

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<sup>25</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, March 5, 1898.

<sup>26</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, March 5, 1898.

<sup>27</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, May 14, 1898.

women to be upright both in body and soul.”<sup>28</sup> In this sense, Chinese women’s body became a site of reflecting God’s creation and the deformation of it was to distort God’s will.

### ***Western Women: Work of Women for Women***

While Western male politicians and missionaries represented themselves as the symbol of authority and universality to approach this issue, Western women in the Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society were more sensitive to the gender politics in this theme. There were about ten Western ladies who actively participated in the Society, the majority of whom were missionary wives. This group of married Western women was a complex presence in the foreign community. According to scholars such as Jane Hunter and Kwok Pei-lan, these women were taught to be submissive, self-denying, and subordinate to both men (their husbands) in marriage and to God in religious belief. Yet, women actually exerted more practical power at home and in field, and often endured even more hardship than their husbands.<sup>29</sup> The consequence of their influence resulted in “the femininizing of the Christian mission.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, May 14, 1898.

<sup>29</sup> Within the household, while their husbands were absent from home for evangelic travels, missionaries wives had to take care of household chores and children while maintaining language learning. For the field work, it included two parts for these wives: women’s work, which was intended to evangelize among women, train Bible Women and pay door-to-door visits to the rural area; and education for girls, which was mainly to establish schools for girls with a Christian-impacted curriculum. Harold S. Matthews, *Seventy-Five Years of the North China Mission* (Beijing: Sheffield Print Shop of Yenching University, 1942), pp. 10-13.

<sup>30</sup> Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984). The research on gender and mission has become a promising scholarly field recently under the influence of feminist theories. Many scholars have paid attention to the ways in which the evangelic work was complicated by adding the perspectives of feminism and women missionary’s experience to the picture. For a general examination of this topic, see Mary Taylor Huber et al. Eds., *Gendered Missions: Women and Men in Missionary Discourse and Practice* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), Fiona Bowie et al eds., *Women and Missions: Past and Present: Anthropological and Historical Perceptions* (Oxford, UK; Providence, R.I. : Berg ; New York: Distributed exclusively in the US and Canada by St. Martin's Press, 1993), Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA : Mercer University Press, 1996), Barbara Welter, “She Hath Done What She Could: Protestant Women’s Missionary Careers in Nineteenth-Century America,” *American Quarterly*, 30:5, Special Issue: Women and Religion (Winter, 1978), pp. 624-638; for China

Influenced by the Christian venture to save women in a heathen land, these missionary wives truly believed that it was their responsibility to speak for Chinese women, who “suffering as a slave or beast, knows not the meaning of womanhood.”<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, as many scholars have pointed out, behind the vest of representing Chinese women, these missionary wives also struggled to change their own sense of inferiority and gained “unexpected authority and opportunities for achievement, adventure, and status.”<sup>32</sup> In this sense, the anti-footbinding movement was not just a battle for Chinese women, it was also for missionary women’s benefit.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, they understood the issue of anti-footbinding from a feminist stance and were concerned about the power politics between men and women in terms of marriage and family life.

In their viewpoint, the reason that this practice was not eradicated was because Chinese men’s meticulous requirement on women’s feet in marriage, as Mrs. Lavington Hart points out in her speech, “the great difficulty in the way of its eradication was the marriage problem with which it was so closely involved in China... So long therefore as men continued to demand lily footed wives, women would aspire to have their feet bound in order to attract good husbands.”<sup>34</sup> Another missionary wife, Mrs. W. H. Smith, even threw some aggressive rhetorical questions to the face of Chinese men present at the meeting, “ask your common-sense whether a wife who could run quickly and fetch you something; who looked healthy and happy instead of tearful and pale; who could

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specific, see Kwok, *Chinese Women and Christianity*; Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, and Jessie Lutz, *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women: Gender, Christianity, and Social Mobility* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Barbara Welter, “She Hath Done What She Could,” p. 630.

<sup>32</sup> Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, p. 51; Kwok, *Chinese women and Christianity*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>33</sup> The role that missionary wives played in the foreign community was relevant to the position of their husbands in the hierarchy. Usually, for the three major classes of foreigners in China, politicians, businessmen, and missionaries, missionaries stood at the bottom level of the hierarchy and thus made their wives under duet inferiority in terms of class and gender. About the three classes, see Chris Elder ed., *China’s Treaty Ports: Half Love and Half Hate: An Anthology*, pp. xxiv-xxv.

<sup>34</sup> *Peking and Tientin Times*, March 5, 1898.

bustle about and look after your children instead of being helplessly carried from place to place, would not be pleasanter.”<sup>35</sup>

To step a little bit further here, this marriage-footbinding connection in later decades became the most dominant discourse to justify the anti-footbinding movement. Especially in the May Fourth Movement in the 1920s, many radical intellectuals, when they were infused with modern ideas at schools in cities, were dissatisfied with their “tearful and pale” wives with bound feet back in villages. This discontent was exactly what Mrs. Smith, along with other Western women, had expected. In this sense, the anti-footbinding sentiment initiated by these foreign women in the late nineteenth century indeed saw the blossom of its seed two decades later. Only what these foreign women did not expect was that instead of saving women from the custom, many May-Fourth intellectuals abandoned or divorced their wives without any hesitation and found new and modern partners in the cities. In this way, were these village wives victims of foreigners’ propaganda on humanity?

Footbinding was not simply a gendered issue. It also aroused a battle between “we European women” and “you Chinese men.” In Mrs. W. H. Smith’s speech, she especially articulated that “it [the issue of bound feet] rests with the men of China not with the women, and that is why we foreign ladies speak and plead with you men instead of going to your wives and sisters and mothers.”<sup>36</sup> Mrs. Hart similarly believed that the first step that the Society must do was “to reach the men; to convince the fathers, and husbands of the land that to have healthy, active, capable wives to care for their houses

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<sup>35</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, May 14, 1898.

<sup>36</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, May 14, 1898.

and families was a far pleasanter ideal than the possession of a fragile, helpless, crippled piece of humanity.”<sup>37</sup>

The confidence that these missionary wives spoke for Chinese women largely came from the power they stood for, Western civilization, as Mrs. Smith openly addressed to Chinese men, “a mutual benefit has resulted from Western interference, and that you personally, in common with your country, are better off in many ways through the acquaintance which we forced upon you.”<sup>38</sup> In this sense, the intervention in Chinese women’s feet was justified as one part of the interference of the West to make China better.

### ***Chinese Men: “[Our Women] Really Listen to Us!”***

Facing this aggressive feminist attitude of Western women, Chinese men were very ambivalent. On the one hand, even though it was hard for Chinese men to tolerate the fact that they had to sit with a group of *Western women* in a public space and listen to their lecture in a condescending tone, these Western ladies were part of the advanced civilization and represented a new type of women who walked free and made their nations stronger.<sup>39</sup> Yet, on the other hand, the feminist stance of these Western women challenged the authority of Chinese men, who assumed to have absolute control over *their* families and *their* women. Footbinding, which was supposed to be a family affair or even a practice within women’s inner chambers, now was exposed in public and used

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<sup>37</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, March 5, 1898.

<sup>38</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, May 14, 1898.

<sup>39</sup> According to Zito, in the eyes of Chinese men, Western women with natural feet were not considered as women since they did not possess the femininity that Chinese society prescribed such as bound feet. Therefore, the process of abolishing footbinding was also a process for Western women to construct a new concept of femininity in China based on the Western model. Zito, “Secularizing the Pain of Footbinding in China,” p.15.

as a weapon by these foreign ladies to attack Chinese concepts of beauty and value.

Therefore, to respond to Western women's call to liberate Chinese women's feet,

Chinese men tried to regain the control of their women.

In the five public meetings, as the consequence of these Western ladies' efforts to call attention to a larger audience, Chinese men largely outnumbered foreigners (no Chinese women were present to participate with men at this moment). Yet, despite the massive presence, only a couple of them, usually the most prestigious ones in this circle, were scheduled to speak after the chair's opening remarks and Western ladies' harangues. If we think about the speech order as a hierarchy of these three groups of people, then it is clear that Chinese men were placed at the bottom of the ladder. Below is a table listing the major speakers in these meetings.

Table 1.2: The Information of the Male Chinese Speakers at the Public Meetings

Time	Name	Note
March 5, 1898	Dr. H. Y. Kin of Tianjin Medical College	Tianjin Medical College was a Western-style school established in Tianjin in 1894.
May 14, 1898	Three students of Dr. Kin	They translated the English speeches into Shanghai and Fujian dialects, and Mandarin
June 11, 1898	The Editor of <i>Guowen bao</i> (Newspaper of National News); Director Wang Xiuzhi 王修直(dates unknown) of the Tianjin University; and Dr. Kin	<i>Guowen bao</i> was published in Tianjin in 1897; Tianjin University was founded in 1895.
December 3, 1898	Mr. Liu Feng-kang; Mr. Kao Tien-chi; and Dr. H. Y. Kin	Mr. Gao was a student in Methodist Theological College of Tianjin and the Second Prize Winner of the Anti-Footbinding Essay Competition
December 16, 1898	Dr. T. Kin of the Tianjin Military College	Tianjin Military College was a Western-style school

	established in 1885.
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As we may see from this table and from the news reports, the majority of these Chinese men were either teachers or students from Western-style colleges in Tianjin, which were established since the 1860s in the Self-Strengthening Movement, a government-initiated movement with the purpose of strengthening military power and weaponry technologies.<sup>40</sup> They represented the early generations of Chinese intellectuals who transited from the traditional civil service examination to Western-style educational training. Many of the teachers even earned degrees from Europe. Even though at this moment, the educational subjects in these schools were still limited to language, military, and weaponry technologies, this group of Chinese men stood at the front of the line to learn Western culture and ideas and to think about the crises of China in the global competition. It is their educational background and the connection with the West that made them win the laurel of “more enlightened men of China” in Westerners’ eyes and the best candidates to advocate the anti-footbinding discourse in the Society.<sup>41</sup> The presence of these new-style intellectuals also made Tianjin distinct from other cities in terms of contributing to the movement. For example, in cities like Shanghai, foreign ladies and reform-minded Chinese literati and officials represented a stronger presence; while in provinces like Hunan and Hubei, the provincial governor Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837-1909) became the leading figure to carry out the anti-footbinding policies from above.

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<sup>40</sup> Zhang Damin, *Tianjin jindai jiaoyu shi* 天津近代教育史 (The history of modern education in Tianjin) (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1993),pp.26-43.

<sup>41</sup> *Peking and Tietsin Times*, February 26, 1898.

The dual identity of these Chinese men between China and the West equipped them with a different perspective on footbinding from Western men's universality and Western women's feminist stance. They usually situated themselves as the insiders of Chinese society and understood women's footbinding with empathy as one indispensable part to maintain the harmonious familial relationship within the framework of normative womanhood. When Dr. T. Kin of the Tianjin Military College spoke at one public meeting, he talked to Chinese women directly even though none of them was present,

You have your parents and parents-in-law to please beside your husbands and brother—more than that—the prevailing customs of the country demands it, which has come down to us for thousands of years, and with your training and education, I don't know how you could do otherwise than to follow the footsteps of your grandmothers.<sup>42</sup>

In other words, Dr. Kin did not simply blame Chinese women for choosing this "uncivilized" practice, nor did he accuse the custom of oppressing women. He situated it more in the framework of women's own tradition and their family duty. Family was where problems arose and it was also where problems could be solved. Dr. Kin proposed that all fathers should "stamp out this cruel habit" for the sake of "the flesh and blood of our own." Meanwhile, they should also raise their boys with "the light of the modern civilization and the moral instruction of Christianity," so that when they grew up as men, they "will surely cast off the old robe and put on the twentieth century garment."<sup>43</sup>

Not only did they exert power over their children's future education, they also demonstrated absolute authority over their women, as Dr. Kin continued to explicitly claim that, "how can we [Chinese men] help to overcome terrible custom; it is for us to

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<sup>42</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, December 16, 1899.

<sup>43</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, December 16, 1899

decide—not for our sisters—they really listen to us!”<sup>44</sup> In this sense, when these Chinese men proposed a new familial dynamics to abolish footbinding, essentially the proposal was to consolidate the authority of these men over their children, their women, and their families.

The authority derived from internal familial politics made these Chinese men ambivalent about Western women’s intervention. On the one hand, they appreciated Western women’s strenuous efforts to save Chinese women from the evil practice and even laurelled them as “the Athena of China.”<sup>45</sup> They also showed admiration to Western women as a new type of women who were able to work and thus contribute to the development of their countries. But, many Chinese men also subtly challenged and resisted the theory of an advanced Western civilization in public meetings. In his speech at the inaugural meeting on March 1<sup>st</sup>, Dr. H. Y. Kin from Tianjin Medical College pointed out that “every nation, civilized or uncivilized, from time immemorial, has followed certain customs more or less distorting the body to please a distorted mind.” As the evidence of his argument, he juxtaposed China’s footbinding with the tattooing of the American Indians, the tight lacing of Europeans, and the blackening of the teeth in Japan. In his viewpoint, countries as advanced as America, Europe, and Japan, still had some customs that were as evil as those from backward China. Interestingly, the three countries he listed here were the main threats to China in the late nineteenth century. He also suggested historicizing these customs and thus dismantles the myth of Western civilization. “All these customs originated in the luxurious lives of monarchs who in time of peace and prosperity had nothing to do but invent some new gratification for

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<sup>44</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, December 16, 1899.

<sup>45</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, March 5, 1898.

their passions and amusement.”<sup>46</sup> Therefore, Western civilization was not essentially different from Chinese civilization in terms of producing and ossifying these evil customs.

### ***Chinese Women: the Subject Spoken for***

Even though Western men, Western women, and Chinese men approached the issue of footbinding from different angles, the attention to Chinese women and their bodies was one thing that they all shared. But the presence of Chinese women in the Tianjin Branch of Natural Feet Society was a very complicated issue. Chinese women were not physically present to participate in any of these public meetings since they were not supposed to mix with Chinese men out of family bonds, not to mention with foreigners.<sup>47</sup> The observance of gender norms resulted in an ironic situation that in all public meetings talking about Chinese women’s bound feet and their pain, they were actually not there. They were spoken for by various groups but they did not speak themselves.

The only chance to compensate for Chinese women’s absence was to organize a woman-only meeting. As Elisabeth Croll pointed out, a meeting for women only was a very modern phenomenon in China. Usually Chinese women, especially those from the upper class, seldom met outside of the household, not to mention for the purpose of unbinding their feet, the private practice of the inner chamber. Therefore, the formality of this kind of meetings in a public space with chairwoman and speeches sometimes

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<sup>46</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, March 5, 1898.

<sup>47</sup> The problem of sexual mixture between men and women in the evangelic work was a big challenge for missionaries. According to Kwok, usually the mission would take three strategies to avoid such mixture, “the prescription of codes of behavior, the institution of some form of partition during worship services, and the organization of separate religious meetings for women.” Kwok, *Chinese women and Christianity*, pp. 71-74.

made them feel strange and novel.<sup>48</sup> But it was an effective means to maintain the seclusion of these women as much as they could. On April 15<sup>th</sup> 1899, the committee of the Natural Feet Society hosted a meeting for women only in the London Mission Chapel in the British Concession. Compared to the long and detailed reports of public meeting that Chinese women were excluded from, the report on the women-only meeting was meagerly short, not to mention that the reporter even spent almost half of the space on describing the interior decoration of the Chapel. This was probably due to the fact that the news reporter, usually a Western man, was absent from the conference.

This meeting was the only one that was held for women in the recorded history of the Natural Feet Society in Tianjin. There were about 150 women present and the whole meeting was conducted in Chinese, which implied that Chinese women outnumbered foreign ladies. In the meeting, other than Mrs. Gammon representing foreign ladies to talk, the rest of the speakers were “four or five native women from the various Missions,”<sup>49</sup> according to the reporter. The way that they were categorized by the religious denominations instead of wives, daughters, or mothers of so and so families indicated a new public identity of these Chinese women.

There were no words of what they thought about footbinding and their own feet except that they all unanimously attacked footbinding as an evil custom at the meeting. The most important thing, other than the stereotypical accusation, was that they all had natural feet, according to the news. Then who were these women? Who were able to unbind their feet and sit with foreign women in the religious Chapel at this moment in

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<sup>48</sup> Croll, “Like the Chinese Goddess of Mercy,” p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, April 15, 1899.

Tianjin? One educated guess is that they were “Bible women” in various religious missions.

According to Kwok Pei-lan, Bible women were first introduced by an American Southern Baptist missionary in Guangzhou and then adopted in other areas as assistants to missionary wives or single woman missionaries for evangelic work. They were usually wives and mothers of employees at missionary households and of Chinese preachers, and patients from missionary hospitals. The majority of them were middle-aged or older women from lower class backgrounds. Widows with no children were most desirable candidates.<sup>50</sup> Their class backgrounds, marital status, and age made them a marginalized group in both the gender system and the society and thus minimized their threat to the society by walking freely to each household and talking to women. In other words, they represented a gendered infrastructure of the Christian cause in China. Bible Women were usually the first group of women who loosened the bondage because this choice was considered as an achievement or a testimony of Western women’s efforts to attack the custom of footbinding.

The speculation that these foot-unbound women were Bible women was verified by another piece of news published in *Peking and Tientsin Times*. In the 1899 North China Women’s Conference, the participants were thrilled by “a great victory over an old woman’s pride.” It turned out that Mrs. Li, who had been a Bible woman in Tianjin for fifteen years, was “at last persuaded to sacrifice, for the sake of example, the Golden Lilies in which she took such pride.” As the consequence of this victory, the mission

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<sup>50</sup> Kwok, *Chinese Women and Christianity*, pp. 80-82.

claimed that “this winter to our great joy four of them [assistants] unbound their feet, so now our Bible woman, assistant, matron, and West Gate assistant all have large feet.”<sup>51</sup>

The fact that Mrs. Li was persuaded to unbind her feet after fifteen-year work as a Bible woman could be read two ways. It showed the persistence of Chinese women like this old Mrs. Li, with the beauty of their “Golden Lilies,” despite the fact that they had been educated by the advanced Western civilization about its evilness for so many years. Meanwhile, it was also clear that Western ladies were patient to crush Chinese women’s pride and reconstruct a kind of aesthetics of their body by continuous persuasion years after years. Therefore, the small feet manifested a negotiation between Chinese women and Western women over their own pride. Unfortunately we do not know if Mrs. Li truly understood the significance of unbound feet and shared the same joy as these missionary ladies, or what kind of pain she had to go through again to reverse the deformation of her feet at this old age.

Ironically Chinese women’s resolution on their own feet in reality—whether they decided to unbind feet or kept the deformation as long as they could, was in a sharp contrast with the image of powerless Chinese women represented at the public meetings. In the speeches delivered by Western men, Western women, and Chinese men, in order to justify the significance of anti-footbinding, these groups usually depicted the absent Chinese women as a group of victims suffering from footbinding and waiting for salvation. Rev. G. W. Clarke recalled the scene in which Chinese women were starving because they were not able to reach the food supplies in a famine due to the bound

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<sup>51</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, December 2, 1899.

feet.<sup>52</sup> In Mrs. Smith's eyes, Chinese women, young or old, were "tearful and pale," "hobbling painfully," and "howling with pain."<sup>53</sup> It is such a paradox that Chinese women had to go through the bodily discipline set up by Western men, Western women, and Chinese men, in order to enjoy the fruit of universal humanity.

## The Publicity of (Anti-) Footbinding in Tianjin before 1900

As the advocates and participants in the Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society clearly realized, as did their comrades elsewhere, the biggest challenge to persuade Chinese women to unbind their feet was the sense of privacy and sexuality around this topic. In this sense, the way that Westerners, especially Western ladies, propagandized the anti-footbinding discourse was to use modern means to smash the privacy of Chinese women and disclose the "truth" behind the embroidered small shoes. As Dorothy Ko and Miao Yanwei demonstrated in their research, with the "hegemonic technology of seeing," including photography, anatomy, and X-ray, foreigners successfully erased the cultural significance of footbinding on Chinese beauty, chastity, and social status and stigmatized this one-thousand-year practice into a degraded and inhumane custom in about fifty years.<sup>54</sup> But, some of these technologies, such as X-ray and photography, were usually employed by those who were known nationwide for their devotion to the anti-footbinding movement, like Mrs. Archibald Little. These means also became more popular in the south where media business and Western technologies were much more widely circulated than those in the north. In the Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet

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<sup>52</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, May 14, 1898.

<sup>53</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, May 14, 1898.

<sup>54</sup> One excellent article to explain the process of stigmatization is written by Miao Yanwei, "Cong shixue keji kan qingmo chanzu," pp. 1-45.

Society, I did not find any evidence to show that the members used any of the technologies mentioned above. Therefore, we have to ask what kind of strategies these men and women in the north used to publicize and stigmatize the practice of footbinding.

### ***From Lady's Drawing-room to the Public Hall of the YMCA***

As I said earlier, the inaugural meeting of the Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society was held at the home of H. B. Mackintosh, the British Consul, whose house was located at the center of the British concession as the symbol of the British Empire. As a custom, it was not unusual for the Consul or other influential politicians to host some events at their houses as a way to elevate the significance. But as for the inaugural meeting of the Society, the news reporter of *Peking and Tientsin Times* especially emphasized that this meeting was hosted in Mrs. Mackintosh's drawing-room.<sup>55</sup> By doing so, the drawing room within a house was described as a woman's place to discuss women's issues.

Later on for the following monthly meetings, the Society moved from the lady's drawing room in the private household to public halls, three in the public hall of the Tianjin YMCA and one in Wesley Chapel, two major public places in the foreign concessions. This spatial transition not only made the Society more public and formal, but more importantly, it also indicated the Western ladies' efforts to get closer to the Chinese community because these two places were located on the margin of the foreign community.

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<sup>55</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, January 20, 1898.

The alliance with the Tianjin YMCA played a crucial role of circulating anti-footbinding discourse among both foreigners and Chinese. When the YMCA members looked for a city to initiate the first branch in China in the early 1890s, they were attracted to Tianjin by the fact that “Tientsin [Tianjin] City is much more progressive, and immensely more subject to, and susceptible of, those changes which make for civilization and Christianization.”<sup>56</sup> As a consequence, the Tianjin YMCA was established in 1895 and remained the only urban YMCA until 1900. Tianjin YMCA shared its motto with the Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society in terms of its resolution of reforming Chinese people’s bodies and souls. Meanwhile, the Tianjin YMCA hall was built away from the geographical center of the foreign community and in the middle zone between the British concession and the Chinese area, which made it closer to Chinese college students, whose schools were all built in the Chinese area. As a consequence, the majority of participants of the Natural Feet Society were members or supporters of the Tianjin YMCA. Their contribution was recognized by the Natural Feet Society in the annual report, “locally some of the best work has been done by the young men of the YMCA who have formed themselves into a Society under the auspices of the Tientsin [Tianjin] Branch of the *Tien Tsu Hui*[Natural Feet Society], and are exercising considerable influence.”<sup>57</sup> The connection with the Tianjin YMCA was a decisive step to publicize the anti-footbinding discourse to a larger audience, especially among the Western-educated Chinese young men, and made it a not-women-only issue anymore.

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<sup>56</sup> “A Letter from Geo. T. Candlin and H.J. Bostwick to Rev. D. Willard Lyon,” Box “China Correspondences and Reports,” Folder “1893-95,” Kautz Family YMCA Archives.

<sup>57</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, March 31, 1899.

### ***The Light Music, the Heavy Pain***

Musical performance was an integral part of public meetings in modern China under the influence of the Christian evangelism. Without exception, the Tianjin Branch of Natural Feet Society always used vocal and instrumental musical programs as a means to attract more audience. When the Society held its first public meeting at the YMCA hall, the news especially articulates that “vocal and instrumental music will be contributed by ladies and gentlemen.”<sup>58</sup> Not to mention that Rev. Jonathan Lees, one active member of the Society, was well-known for his Christian hymn composition.<sup>59</sup> Usually missionary wives were responsible for performing musical programs. So far the women I have traced included Mrs. Gailey and Mrs. Lyon, whose husbands were pioneering missionaries in organizing the Tianjin YMCA.<sup>60</sup> Occasionally, some Chinese men, such as Mr. Wong of the Tianjin Medical College, also played piano to accompany the sung hymns.<sup>61</sup> The instruments were usually introduced from the West. Yet, sometimes a Chinese-style instrument, such as Zither, “an instrument new to most,” was also presented to the Western audience and gained “the most rapturous applause.”<sup>62</sup>

In sharp contrast with the beautiful melody of musical programs and the elegance of Western and Chinese players with delicate instruments, a description of Chinese women’s physical pain and body deformation was also presented to the participants at the public meetings, as frequently as the musical programs. In the inaugural meeting, Dr. Kin from the Tianjin Medical College “entered into a professional description of the

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<sup>58</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, May 7, 1898.

<sup>59</sup> Rev. G. F. Fitch, “Hymns and Hymn-Books for the Chinese,” *The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal*, vol. XXVI, October 1895, no. 10, p. 468.

<sup>60</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, May 14, 1898.

<sup>61</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, June 11, 1898.

<sup>62</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, June 11, 1898.

whole process of binding and its terrible effects,” so much so that the chair thought that “quite sufficient painful detail had been given” and they had to move on to other programs.<sup>63</sup> In the May meeting, when Mrs. H. M. Smith attempted to pass on the physical pain of footbinding to the Chinese men present, she asked them to imagine the pain with their own hands, “instead of merely letting the nails grow you bent back your thumb and doubled in your others fingers and broke the back of the hand and then bound the whole fist very tightly with bandages.”<sup>64</sup> As a consequence, Chinese women’s pain was imagined or conveyed along with the delightful music at these meetings.

### ***Essay Competition***

If the previous strategies of public meetings and musical programs were to recognize the initiators’ efforts, then the essay competition was a window to observe the effect of the propaganda work. The essay competition was first invented by missionaries in China as a means to attract more readers on Christianity. Usually missionaries published an announcement in their newspapers, listing the topics of the competition, the required length, the deadline, and the awards. After some time, the newspapers would report the result of the competition and often publish several of the winners’ articles. The emergence of the essay competition genre was the consequence of the media development and a pool of literati who cultivated the practice of reading newspapers. To them, the essay competition was both an imitation of civil service examination and a channel to communicate with other similar-minded peers crossing geographical boundaries.

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<sup>63</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, March 5, 1898.

<sup>64</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, March 14, 1898.

The Natural Feet Society took over this propaganda strategy and hosted a couple of nationwide essay competitions since its founding in 1895.<sup>65</sup> The competition recorded in *Peking and Tientsin Times* was organized in 1898. According to the reporter, all the essays were first sent to Shanghai and then to Beijing for review after all names and addresses of the authors were sealed and replaced with numbers. In June, the result came out after all the essays were carefully examined by “foreign and Chinese experts” at Beijing. There were about eighty essays received for the 1898 competition. Two months later, after the best three essays were translated into English, they were published in *Peking and Tientsin Times*. Below is a list of three winners and recommended essayists and their background.

Table 1.3: The Information of the 1898 Essay Competition Winners

Name	Identity	Essay No.	Note
Mr. Yang Shen-chun	Editor of <i>Hu Bao</i> (Shanghai Times), Shanghai	82	First Prize Winner
Mr. Liu Yen-u	Student, Tianjin University	62	Second Prize Winner
Mr. Kao Tien-chi	Student, Methodist Theological College of Tianjin	8	Third Prize Winner
Chou Peng-hsiang	YMCA Tianjin	37	From this one on, all essays were highly recommended but were not awarded.
Yao Chang-oiz		49	
Tsin Chi-chuan	London Missionary Society, Beijing	38	
Chea Tzi-nan	Tianjin	10	
Shen I-chou	Tianjin	45	
Wang Sy-shen	Methodist Theological	7	

<sup>65</sup> “Tianzu hui zhengwen qi” 天足會徵文啟 (The announcement of the essay competition of the Natural Feet Society), cited from Zhang Yufa et al. eds., *Jindai zhongguo nvquan yundong shiliao, 1842-1911* 近代中國女權運動史料, 1842-1911 (Documents on the feminist movement in modern China, 1842-1911) (Taibei: Zhuanji wenxue she chubanshe, 1975), vol. 2, pp. 840-841.

In all three essays, all authors unanimously admired the role that the West played in the anti-footbinding movement. Yang Shen-Chun, the editor of *Hu Pao*, a British-sponsored newspaper published in Shanghai since 1882, passionately writes in his essay, “now to our good fortune, worthy scholars from the Great West have established an Anti-footbinding Association, to save the women and girls of our land from the misery of this bondage.”<sup>66</sup> The term “worthy scholars from the Great West” was such an irony because not long ago China was still described as the “Great Middle Kingdom” and was proud of its influence in the world, right like “the Great West” in the nineteenth century. Kao Tien-chi, a student in the Methodist Theological College of Tianjin, also gasps in admiration that “in the kingdoms of the Great West, among both officials and merchants, husband and wife walk together. The grace of movement of these ladies we truly admire.”<sup>67</sup>

While the West represented an ideal image for a better China, Christianity also became a popular theoretical justification for these essayists to oppose the footbinding since this custom was against the completeness of the physical body that God created. Both Yang and Gao referred to the Bible genesis story to denounce the damage of footbinding on women’s bodies, which reflected the influence of Christianity that they were exposed to during work or at school. Kao states since the first sentence of his essay, “from the time that dust was made man, and breath was breathed into his nostrils so that he became a body of flesh and blood, and the rib was taken from Adam’s side to create woman, it may be seen that God made the human form—eyes, ears, hands, feet, the

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<sup>66</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, August 6, 1898.

<sup>67</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, August 6, 1898.

hundred members—all complete.”<sup>68</sup>

Comparing to the two students from Tianjin, Yang from Shanghai demonstrated a closer connection to the Chinese Reformers, who took Shanghai as their base to carry out their reformist visions. Therefore, in Yang’s essay, his justification for anti-footbinding was also imprinted by the reformist discourses of nationalism and women’s productive contribution to the state. Yang argues that,

There is the injury to national prosperity and strength. There is no greater source of prosperity than agriculture, and the foundation of strength must be in education. . . . But the women of China regard only foot-binding as of supreme importance; and because they neither engage in agriculture nor care for education, therefore, of our 400 million, scarcely have we the working usefulness of half that number. How can China be but weak! How can she be but poor!<sup>69</sup>

These reformist discourses were not found anywhere in the Tianjin essays. Instead, Liu and Gao were more driven by practical approaches to eradicate the custom. They brought up some feasible suggestions to achieve the goal, including promoting women’s education, establishing organizations, and pleading for an Imperial edict to abolish the custom from above.

## Conclusion

As we may see from this chapter, the Natural Feet Society in Tianjin was an association that involved various groups of people, including Western male politicians, foreign male missionaries, missionary wives, and Western-educated Chinese men. At the surface glance, this association was about Chinese women’s bound feet and these groups

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<sup>68</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, August 6, 1898.

<sup>69</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, August 6, 1898.

of people approached the issue from their own perspectives. But on the deeper level, the association was more like a miniature involving the dynamics of men and women, the West and China, and even the West itself. While everyone fit into the association by their own stances, they also walked into a white/male-centered hierarchy. In this sense, anti-footbinding was not just about Chinese women's feet, it was also about how these groups of people identified themselves in the power politics.

As for the relationship between the Tianjin Branch and the Shanghai parent association, the Tianjin Branch was an extension of the Shanghai Society in terms of the organization management, such as public meetings, essay competition, and musical programs. Or to put it in a larger picture, both associations did not deviate from the pattern of how the West propagandized their religion and culture in China. But the Tianjin Branch also found its unique way of expansion in the local society by collaborating with the Tianjin YMCA and appealing to a large pool of Western-educated college students and teachers. The Tianjin Branch indeed expanded with all its strategies. In the first public meeting in May at the YMCA hall, there were about 190 Chinese present and this meeting was considered "by far the largest gathering which has taken place in the YMCA building."<sup>70</sup> Half a year later in December, the total number of participants reached to over 400 and the Society had to change the location from the YMCA hall to the larger Wesley Chapel.<sup>71</sup> Even for the women-only meeting in April 1899, there were also over 150 women to participate.<sup>72</sup>

Despite the optimistic rise in numbers, we should not exaggerate the influence of the

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<sup>70</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, May 15, 1898.

<sup>71</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, December 3, 1898.

<sup>72</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, April 15, 1899.

Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society. After all, even the parent association in Shanghai also admitted in its 1898 annual report that “outside the mission field foreigners are not brought into sufficiently close contact with the sufferings and evils of the shocking and degraded custom to feel an ever lively keenness in its suppression.”<sup>73</sup> Not to mention that in Tianjin Chinese young men and teachers from colleges or YMCA only constituted a very small portion of the population in the local society. More importantly, we knew very little about the effects of the anti-footbinding movement in reality. Even the active participant, Dr. T. Kin claimed that “I have not accomplished very much in persuading friends to desist from this evil practice.”<sup>74</sup> From what we can conclude so far, at this moment, the anti-footbinding movement was only limited to an exclusive circle for Western-influenced Chinese men and church-related Chinese women. These two groups, despite their practical roles in the evangelic work, were still marginal in the foreign-centered hierarchy. The anti-footbinding discourse did not reach out of the small circle and into the massive audience at the end of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>73</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, March 31, 1899.

<sup>74</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, December 16, 1899.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Unbinding the Golden Lotus**

#### **The Reconstruction of the Broken City through Women's Feet**

The activism of the Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society in the late nineteenth century was smashed by the 1900 Incident, in which both the foreign community and the Western-style colleges were torn apart by the violence. Fortunately, this did not mean the end of the anti-footbinding movement in Tianjin. On the contrary, right after 1900, another wave of anti-footbinding activity was rising in this city. This time, it was placed in a quite different context from the pre-1900 period. Instead of foreigners' mobilization of a small group of Western-educated college students and teachers, in the post-1900 period, middle and petty local literati took over the liberation of women's feet and built it into a larger indigenous project of enlightening common people and saving China from crisis. This wave of anti-footbinding was motivated by the 1900 traumatic experience, the promotion of central and local government, and the flourishing media network of Tianjin. If in the late nineteenth century, foreigners tended to stigmatize the cultural practice of footbinding into the deformation of women's "natural" body, then, the local literati of Tianjin tried to turn this natural-ness into a cultural symbol of China's failure and Tianjin's defeat.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, the associations of anti-footbinding in the early twentieth century demonstrated contrasting characteristics from the 1898 Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society.

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<sup>1</sup> Angela Zito, "Secularizing the Pain of Footbinding in China: Missionary and Medical Stagings of the Universal Body," p. 16.

## Localizing “National Humiliation” through Women’s Feet after 1900

Despite the fact that the Gengzi Incident in 1900 was called the “national humiliation” in modern Chinese history, it was a very local experience to people in Tianjin, whose daily life was dramatically struck by the Incident. As the last line of defense for the capital Beijing, Tianjin had many times in the past been harassed, threatened and even surrounded by peasant rebels, secret society members, and foreign troops.<sup>2</sup> But, it had never been conquered and smashed like the 1900 Incident. Family property was destroyed and confiscated; loved ones were killed in the canon shots or in the following epidemic; and even the four city walls, which symbolized the physical boundary of the city, were torn down by the foreign forces. All these wretched scenes made literati in Tianjin wonder why this happened and why to Tianjin, as Ding Zhuyuan, an active Chinese medicine doctor in Tianjin, points out, “ever since the disaster of the Gengzi year [1900] in Tianjin, the concern about current affairs finally alarmed many people.”<sup>3</sup>

As the consequence of this traumatized and reflective mentality, the following decade witnessed the local literati’s great efforts to search for solutions for Tianjin and for China. They initiated a massive movement hoping to achieve the enlightenment of

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<sup>2</sup> According to the editor of the 1906 Tianjin gazetteer, there were two major threats to Tianjin and its neighboring counties during the 1850s and 1860s, the Taiping Rebellion and the Nian Rebellion. But the city of Tianjin itself was never attacked by these peasant rebellions. Shen Jiaben et al. eds., *Chongxiu Tianjin fuzhi* 重修天津府志 (The revised version of Tianjin Gazetteer), 1906, vol. 53, p. 1. As for the foreign forces, the most severe attack happened in the Second Opium War in 1858. The foreign military troops did not occupy the city but only destroyed the Qing forts at Dagu, which was not far away from the city of Tianjin.

<sup>3</sup> Ding Zhuyuan, “Jinggao xuejie zhujun, qi’er” 敬告學界諸君，其二 (A warning to gentlemen in the educational circle, the second), first printed in *Zhuyuan baihua bao* 竹園白話報 (The colloquial newspaper of Bamboo Garden), December 4, 1907; later reprinted in *Zhuyuan conghua* 竹園叢話 (The Series of Bamboo Garden), 1923, vol. 3, p.86.

common people, who were to blame for this disaster due to their lack of awareness of what was happening in China and in the world. Local literati not only published all kinds of textual and pictorial newspapers and magazines, but also made efforts to publicize new ideas among the local people through operas, speeches, newspaper-reading halls, and public libraries.<sup>4</sup> Newspapers with titles such as *Xingsu huabao* 醒俗畫報 (Enlightening Customs Pictorial Magazine), *Xinghua huabao* 醒華畫報 (Awaking China Pictorial Magazine), and *Minxing bao* 民興報 (Newspaper of People's Aspirations) were published. The massive movement started with "ignorant people," who were usually lower class people with basic or no literacy. Almost simultaneously it extended to other social groups, including women, merchants, students, officials, or any other social group that was problematic in local literati's eyes. In other words, they considered themselves as the only savior with a sharp self-consciousness to enlighten other people from darkness and ignorance. As a result, we always come across the terms such as "kai minzhi 開民智 (enlightening common people's wisdom)," "kai nüzhi 開女智 (enlightening women's wisdom)," "kai guanzhi 開官智 (enlightening officials' wisdom)," and "kai shangzhi 開商智(enlightening merchants' wisdom)," when we read newspapers and journals of that time. This was where the anti-footbinding discourse fit into the big picture of "enlightening the wisdom" in Tianjin.

There were many justifications to advocate the anti-footbinding discourse. But no one was stronger than the suffering of footbound women in 1900. The 1900 Incident had a huge impact on women's lives in Tianjin. In the "Gengzi literature," a special genre

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<sup>4</sup> Li Xiaoti, *Qingmo de xiaceng shehui qimeng yundong: 1901-1911*.

created to record the 1900 Incident, many authors described the tragedies in which women were raped or killed by the Boxers and foreigners. Tang Diansan once recalls that after the Eight Power Alliance entered the city, “there were numerous women who were raped. In some extreme cases, even young boys could not escape [the fate of being raped.]”<sup>5</sup> The appalling scenes were also testified by foreign missionaries. As Harold Matthews recalled in his book on missionary work in the north, “even up to the beginning of the year 1901 in many sections [of Tianjin] Chinese women could not return to their homes because of roving foreign soldiers.”<sup>6</sup> Other than the fear of being raped, women in Tianjin also went through the hardship that was caused by the violent conflict. When escaping via a water route out of Tianjin, according to a literatus’s recollection, a woman Shen Lin shi (Shen was her husband’s family name and Lin was her natal family name) had to abandon her own daughter to save her brother-in-law’s son since she only had breast milk for one child. Later on, when they escaped to a boat, she cut a piece of flesh from her arm to feed her sick husband. When her husband died, she tried to kill herself but did not succeed.<sup>7</sup> Despite the fact that this story quite fit into the *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 (Biography of Virtuous Women) narrative, which was a conventional writing for recording women’s merits in going through the hardship, the experience of this lady was still appealing to many readers.

Usually women who died in the war chaos or other intense situations were recorded in the local gazetteer as a means to exalt their sacrifice to preserve the woman’s virtues.

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<sup>5</sup> Tang Diansan, “Tianjin quanhuo yiwen” 天津拳禍遺聞 (The anecdotes left over after the Boxer Rebellion in Tianjin), in Liu Mengyang, *Tianjin quanfei bianluan jishi* 天津拳匪變亂記事 (The Account of Rebellious Boxers in Tianjin) (Tianjin: Minxing bao guan, 1910), separated page numbers, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Harold S. Matthews, *Seventy-Five Years of the North China Mission*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>7</sup> Liu Mengyang, “Jincheng xianhou wenjian lu” 津城陷后聞見錄 (The record of what I heard and saw after the fall of Tianjin), Liu Mengyang, *Tianjin quanfei bianluan jishi*, p. 3.

Yet, at the beginning of the twentieth century, influenced by the enlightenment discourse, instead of canonizing virtuous women, local literati in Tianjin accused footbinding as a cause of women's suffering in 1900.<sup>8</sup> In their viewpoint, the need to abolish footbinding was not a humane concern of foreigners, but a lesson that women in Tianjin had to draw from their lived experience: if they did not have bound feet, there might be a chance that these women would have survived. Bi Shoushan, a local scholar of Tianjin, argued that footbinding was the cause responsible for women's death in 1900 regardless their age and social status,

In the year of Gengzi [1900] with the six [sic] allied powers, the big place [Tianjin] was messed up. All men ran away and what was left behind were women with bound feet. Girls of seventeen or eighteen years old went crazy on the streets. They were willing to follow anyone they met. Yet, no one wanted them because they were only burdens [with bound feet]. Not only common people, but also female family members of the officials fled away. At this moment, they wished they had unbound their feet. In peaceful days, they loved small feet. Yet, now they came to regret the small feet.<sup>9</sup>

Liu Mengyang, an influential local literatus in Tianjin and also the main character in this chapter, also recalled how women with small feet suffered from the war, as illustrated in the following pictures in his recollection book *Tianjin quanfei bianluan jishi* 天津拳匪變亂記事 (The Account of Rebellious Boxers in Tianjin).

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<sup>8</sup> After 1900, there were two editions of Tianjin Gazetteer. The first one was published in 1906 and was a revised version of the 1899 gazetteer. Therefore, it did not include the history of the 1900 Incident. In 1915, a group of local celebrities proposed to write a new gazetteer of Tianjin. It took another fifteen years until the new gazetteer was published in 1931. In this edition, the editor Gao Lingwen especially included a section of "martyred women" to publicize 124 women who died in the 1900 Incident. It also listed in detail their names, the names of their fathers and husbands, ages, residential addresses, and their deeds in 1900. The majority of them were commended by the Qing government as the official recognition of their virtuousness. Gao Lingwen, *Tianjin xian xinzhizhi* 天津縣新志 (The New Gazetteer of Tianjin), 1931, section 4, volume 22, pp. 1-7.

<sup>9</sup> *Dagong bao* (L'Impartial), April 20, 1905.



(Figure 2.1: “Chanzu funü cansi zhuang” 纑足婦女慘死狀 (The miserable scene of a footbound woman’s death), from Liu Mengyang, *Tianjin quanfei bianluan jishi*)

In the picture titled “The Miserable Scene of A Footbound Woman’s Death,” a dead woman’s body is lying in the front of a broken city wall with gun smoke around the city. Moreover, the author also draws a little boy in the picture who is sucking his dead mother’s breast for milk or weeping on her body, which indicates the unfulfillment of the woman’s obligation to raise her children. The emphasis of “footbound” in the illustration’s title implied the author’s viewpoint that these women were not only victims of the Sino-Western conflicts, they also suffered from the deformation of their own bodies. To speculate on the picture one step further, when the author drew this picture, did he parallel the relationship between the dead woman and the broken city wall with the power politics between the defeated China and the victory West?

This memory of footbound women’s suffering in 1900 also extended beyond the fall of the Qing empire into the Republican era. A Xin, who worked for the *Social Reform Pictorial Magazine* Agency in the early Republican Tianjin composed a colloquial poem on his painting “The Bitterness of Footbinding,”

Everyone remembers the year of Gengzi [1900],  
When the trouble-making Boxers [rose].  
On the eighth day of the sixth month Tianjin was broken,  
Women and men were escaping.  
It is men who ran fast  
With a couple of steps out of the Gate of Ghost.  
Women were left behind without being cared about,  
They held the wall and leaned against the barrier like cotton.  
In normal times they wanted their feet smaller and smaller,  
At this moment the smaller the feet the more difficult they walked.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, the advocacy of anti-footbinding discourse after 1900 was achieved by the silence of other voices. According to Ida Pruitt's interview with the Ning lao taitai (an old lady with her husband's last name Ning) in Shandong province, where the Boxers originated, some women unbound their feet before 1900 due to their connection with the church or Christian enterprises, like the Bible women I discussed in the previous chapter. But after the rise of the Boxer Rebellion, they began to worry about their natural feet because "for a woman to have natural feet was then a sure sign of being connected with the foreigners,"<sup>11</sup> who became the main target of the Boxers. Therefore, many natural-foot women had to rush to the footbound women's houses and begged for a pair of small shoes as disguise. Unfortunately since I have not found any similar cases in Tianjin, what happened to the Bible women in Tianjin is still a question worth further exploration.

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<sup>10</sup> Axin, "Jinmen lianshi jilue" 津門蓮事紀略 (The brief account of footbinding stories in Tianjin), in Yao Lingxi, *Caifei lu* 采菲錄 (The record of collecting fragrance) (Tianjin: Tianjin shidai gongsi, 1936), p. 50.

<sup>11</sup> Ida Pruitt, *A Daughter of Han: The Autobiography of a Chinese Working Woman* (Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press, [1945]1967), pp. 151-152.

## Publicizing Women's Feet through Media after 1900

After 1900, the developing media business in Tianjin also facilitated the circulation of the anti-footbinding discourse. One of the main newspapers was *Dagong bao* [L'Impartial], which was first published in 1902 in the French concession of Tianjin. Stating that “the purpose of this newspaper is to reform the customs and to enlighten people’s wisdom,”<sup>12</sup> Ying Lianzhi 英斂之 (1867-1926), the manager and a concerned Catholic literatus, made *Dagong bao* a strong base in the massive enlightenment movement in Tianjin and nationwide. Footbinding was on his to-reform list without any doubt. Before 1911 there were totally fifty-one articles published in *Dagong bao* regarding (anti-) footbinding, not including short news reports updating anti-footbinding achievements in other parts of China. This outnumbered the forty anti-footbinding articles published in *Wanguo gongbao* 萬國公報 (The Global Magazine), the first Christian newspaper opposing footbinding in China, between 1875 and 1907.<sup>13</sup>

Not only were there many articles published on anti-footbinding, the language that *Dagong bao* used also mattered. When in 1895 Mrs. Little, the British advocate for anti-footbinding movement in China, was preparing for the anti-footbinding pamphlets, she was debating on what kind of language she would use, the colloquial or the classical, the Shanghai dialect or Mandarin. Finally she decided to use classical Chinese in order to call attention from literati circles.<sup>14</sup> Now the articles published in *Dagong bao* were mixed with both classical and colloquial Chinese. As a new genre appeared at this time

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<sup>12</sup> *Dagong bao*, June 17, 1902.

<sup>13</sup> Wang Lin, *Xixue yu bianfa* 西學與變法 (Western learnings and reform) (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 2004), pp. 329-332.

<sup>14</sup> Mrs. Archibald Little, *Intimate China: The Chinese as I Have Seen Them* (London, Hutchinson & co. 1899), pp. 102-03.

targeting illiterate readers, the colloquial articles outnumbered classical ones, which was consistent with the newspaper's emphasis on enlightening common people's wisdom.

### ***Articles Written in Classical Chinese***

While the first colloquial article on anti-footbinding was published in the first issue of *Dagong bao*, which I will discuss later, it was not until half a year later in early 1903 that the first classical article appeared. As they were not written for the lower class, the authors of these classical Chinese articles usually considered the higher authorities or their peers as readers and proposed many practical solutions to them. On January 4, *Dagong bao* published a proposal of a licentiate (the ones who passed the lowest level of test in the civil service examination system) to Yuan Shikai, the highest authority of Zhili Province and Tianjin, on how to end footbinding. In it, the author proposes a three-level system. On the highest level, the local elite should strictly follow the orders of the government and register women with natural feet, including their names, ages, and addresses. Then after the governor receives the register, he will post these women's names at the front wall of the governmental bureau as a means of commendation.

On the middle level, the author advises that the governor set up different regulations for women with bound feet and those with natural feet. For example, if both kinds of women are summoned to court, those with natural feet are allowed to stand and those with bound feet have to kneel. The author also suggests that the governor should severely prohibit and even arrest those who sell wooden shoe soles, which were used to make tiny shoes, to women.

On the lowest level, the government should send out investigators to each household and fine those who still have daughters' feet bound at home. In addition, the government should categorize these women into debased status and prohibit them from marrying upward.<sup>15</sup>

The authors of these classical articles were dramatically different from the pre-1900 Chinese advocates. Whereas it was Western-style college students and YMCA members who participated in the Tianjin Branch of Natural Feet Society before 1900, at this moment, the new cohort of authors usually identified themselves within the tradition of Chinese literati, as seen from their pen names such as "A Licentiate of Tianjin,"<sup>16</sup> or "The Master of Pity in Jiangnan."<sup>17</sup>

With the shifting identity of these authors, the Christian color before 1900 was replaced by the rise of the Chinese-ness, or even primordial nationalism, at this moment. Even Ying Lianzhi, a Catholic convert who also penned many articles on anti-footbinding, rarely mentioned the influence of the West. This tendency was clearly seen from the editor's comments on the licentiate's proposal.

This thing [foot-binding] seems small. Yet it matters very much....In the era when ten thousand countries are reforming and competing...China cannot survive unless it reforms too. Yet, this ugly custom of footbinding is only unique to China. That is why [China] is laughed at by other countries in five continents. There is not a single benefit but one hundred harms. Why is China willing to waste two million of its people [women] and let them not achieve development and comfort and have to give up their natural duties?<sup>18</sup>

### ***Articles Written in Colloquial Chinese***

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<sup>15</sup> *Dagong bao*, January 4 and 5, 1903.

<sup>16</sup> *Dagong bao*, January 4 and 5, 1903.

<sup>17</sup> *Dagong bao*, January 14, 1903.

<sup>18</sup> *Dagong bao*, January 5, 1903.

As Lin Weihong argues, in the early twentieth century, the nationalist discourse was still a very vague idea in many people's mind and they would not give up a deeply-rooted custom for such a brand new concept.<sup>19</sup> This was indeed true. When the sensational Osaka Expo happened in 1903, Chinese footbound women were exhibited to the whole world as a barbarian species.<sup>20</sup> Chinese literati were frustrated by the coldness of common Chinese people, "as for those who did not read newspapers and women, [they did not care about] whether [China was categorized as] barbarian or not, they still wear clothes and eat meals."<sup>21</sup> Therefore, in order to disseminate the nationalist sentiment down to the lower class, many literati had to speak from daily experience instead of the abstract and grand narrative to convince these "ignorant" people. The consequence of this strategy was the numerous articles written in colloquial Chinese published in *Dagong bao*.

In one article, a literatus Baokui sheng 抱愧生 (The Scholar Who Felt Guilty) expresses his frustration of not being able to unbind his own daughters' feet. According to him, his wife bound the feet of his two daughters the year before. Then, with a great deal of effort to persuade his wife, she finally agreed to unbind the daughters' feet with one condition.

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<sup>19</sup> Lin Weihong, "Qingji de funü bu chanzu yundong" 清季的婦女不纏足運動 (The anti-footbinding movement for women in the late Qing), in Bao Jialin ed., *Zhongguo funü shi lunji* 中國婦女史論集 (The essay collection of Chinese women's history) (Taibei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 1995), vol. 3, p. 194.

<sup>20</sup> For the analysis of the 1903 Osaka Expo in particular and Expo series in the world in general, see Miao Yanwei, "Cong shixue keji kan qingmo chanzu," pp. 30-32; Zhao Youzhi, "Yaoshang guoji wutai: Qingji zhongguo canjia wanguo bolanhui zhi yanjiu (1866-1911)" 躍上國際舞台：清季中國參加萬國博覽會之研究 (1866-1911) (Stepping on the international stage: The research on China's participation in the world Expo in the late Qing Dynasty, 1866-1911), *Guoli Taiwan shifan daxue lishi xuebao* 國立台灣師範大學歷史學報 (Bulletin of Historical Research of National Taiwan Normal University), 1997, vol. 25, pp. 287-344; Alan S. Christy, "The Making of Imperial Subjects in Okinawa," in Tani Barlow, ed., *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 141-169.

<sup>21</sup> *Dagong bao*, March 14, 1903.

The person at home [the author's wife] says, I can unbind [our daughters' feet]. Yet, you [the author] have to convince more families. We can marry them as rewards. If you cannot convince a single family, our two little girls, have to bind their feet again.

I say, if we educate our children well, we will not be afraid of not marrying them out.

The person at home says, don't you know our bad custom? Whenever people discuss the marriage, they do not care if the girl's personality is good or not. They only care about the beauty of their appearance and the size of their feet. If we are the only family with natural-feet daughters, in the future nobody is interested in [marrying] our daughters. For a poor family like ours, can we raise them until they are old?<sup>22</sup>

In order to meet his wife's condition, the author took great pains persuading his neighbors and friends, but in vain. Finally the feet of his two daughters were bound again. At the end, the author sighs that "I always hear people saying, in order to change the custom, we have to start with ourselves. One thing I hate most is footbinding. So I start from my own family, and try to change the bad custom. How could I know that I cannot even do this in my own family? I almost broke up with the person at home because of this."

The author vividly excerpted a dialogue between a husband and a wife in a middle-and lower-class family: the squabble between the couple, the concern about daughters' marriage, and the anxiety about the family's burden to raise two unmarried daughters. This triviality of daily life was the problem that every family who tried to unbind their daughter's feet had to deal with. Meanwhile, while the author demonstrated his frustration in the family and among his social network, he also subtly expressed his powerlessness as a father in the family dynamics and as a man outside the women's practice.

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<sup>22</sup> *Dagong bao*, November 23, 1902.

Not everyone agreed to magnify the significance of anti-footbinding as the Scholar Who Felt Guilty.<sup>23</sup> One day, *Dagong bao* office received a letter from a dissident reader claiming that “your newspaper always publishes articles to persuade women to unbind their feet. I suggest that gentlemen in your newspaper office should step out of this, so that you can save some energy. With the saved energy, you can propose to the country on how to overcome the hard situations at this moment.” The editor responded in colloquial language that, “ever since our newspaper was published, we did not just focus on anti-footbinding. As for the national affairs, there are none we did not discuss. Besides, whether women bind their feet or not, it is not a big deal. Yet, here is the reason. If we cannot accomplish the most trivial things, how can we accomplish big things? That is not going to work.”<sup>24</sup>

With the frequent publications of the colloquial articles, even the editor of *Dagong bao* was content with what was achieved in the anti-footbinding discourse. “Recently as far as Tianjin is concerned, there are already about one hundred families, who no longer bind their daughters’ feet, not to mention other places. I do not dare to say that these people were all convinced by our newspaper. Yet, our newspaper often inspires people. It is hidden power, not weak at all.”<sup>25</sup>

This might be an optimistic exaggeration considering the frustration of the Scholar Who Felt Guilty and the complaint letters sent to the newspaper at the same period.

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<sup>23</sup> According to Yang Xingmei, the debate on whether footbinding was an issue within the inner chamber or it was a cure of China’s crisis had been generated ever since the early days of Christian work in China. After 1895 when China was defeated by Japan and a strong sense of nationalism was triggered, the discussion of footbinding went beyond the Christian community and became a topic discussed by Chinese literati. Yet, Chinese literati never had a unanimous opinion on how significant anti-footbinding should be. Yang Xingmei, “Wanqing guanyu chanzu yingxiang guojia fuqiang de zhenglun,” pp. 23-26.

<sup>24</sup> *Dagong bao*, January 30, 1904.

<sup>25</sup> *Dagong bao*, November 21, 1903.

While the ideas in these colloquial articles were distributed via newspaper circulation, newspaper reading, and public speeches, the literati in Tianjin actually constructed a process of education, in which they employed the language, lived experience, and daily scenes of common people to infuse the grand anti-footbinding discourse into their minds. The local literati were not the only participants in the movement. The government also played a significant role in it.

### **“An Imperial Edict is better than One Thousand Words of Genteel Men”<sup>26</sup>**

The relationship between Chinese women’s bound feet and the Manchu regime had been an issue ever since the early years of the Qing Empire. The throne was always concerned about the tension between the minority but governing Manchus and the populous Han Chinese subjects. One way to discipline the Han Chinese was to discipline their bodies. As a consequence, Chinese men were asked to make their hair queued and Chinese women were asked to unbind their feet. Despite many imperial edicts, the government was never able to abolish footbinding.<sup>27</sup> Scholars like Bao Jialin even argue that these edicts possibly promoted the practice instead since “in response to a perceived threat to Chinese culture from their alien overlords, the Han Chinese may have come to regard small feet as a symbol of cultural and national identity, thus causing them to adhere even more resolutely to the custom.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Dagong bao*, November 24, 1903.

<sup>27</sup> Virginia Chutin Chau, “The Anti-Footbinding Movement in China, 1850-1912,” pp. 10-11.

<sup>28</sup> Bao Jialin, “The Anti-Footbinding Movement in Late Ch’ing China: Indigenous Development and Western Influence,” in *Jindai zhongguo funüshi yanjiu* 近代中國婦女史研究 (Research on Chinese women’s history in modern China), 1994, vol. 2, pp.145-46.

Despite the tension, the authority of government was always a source that anti-footbinding activists sought to support their agendas. In the late nineteenth century, both foreigners and Reformers coincidentally submitted memorials to the highest authority. But neither of them succeeded. The turning point came in 1902, when Empress Dowager Cixi realized that reforms had to be carried out in order to survive, she issued an imperial edict, stating that “for a long time that Han Chinese women have usually bound their feet. This [practice] is against the harmony of *zaowu* 造物(the one who creates). From now on, in order to gradually eradicate the old custom, the genteel families should advise with sincerity [that women should not bind their feet] and make it known to every household.”<sup>29</sup>

The attitude of the highest authority in Beijing had a huge impact on the provincial government. Following the edict, provincial governors in Sichuan, Hubei, Liangjiang, and Guangdong also publicly claimed their financial and propaganda support within their territories for anti-footbinding movement. Some of these official orders were even written in colloquial Chinese and either posted on city walls or printed and distributed among the people.<sup>30</sup> It was not until 1904 that Yuan Shikai, the Zhili Governor and Beiyang Viceroy in the north, published a tract on anti-footbinding. In it, Yuan argues that,

Nowadays women with bound feet are weak in their *qi* and blood. The sons they produce are not strong, either. On the deep level, [women’s bound feet] are relevant to the origin of the rise and fall of the race and the essence of the growth and decline of the talent.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Yao Lingxi, *Caifei lu*, p,58.

<sup>30</sup> *Dagong bao*, March 19, August 18, 1903; June 12, 1905.

<sup>31</sup> Yao Lingxi, *Caifei lu*, pp.58-59.

Then, Yuan Shikai elaborates the necessity of eradicating the custom from four aspects: to preserve women's bodies; to promote women's education; to advocate motherly virtues; and to uphold women's work. He, on the one hand, emphasizes the traditional Confucianism on the completeness of human bodies as a means to demonstrate the filial piety to parents. On the other hand, he also articulates the role that women with unbound feet play in promoting gender equality and advancing China as a nation. Yuan Shikai also took advantage of the media network to publicize his ideas. In 1905, he wrote another article in a Japanese-run newspaper in Beijing. Yuan passionately states that,

Science of the strong nation and the strong race is the universal principle of the world, the universal rule of evolution. Without women, how can we have citizens? If we want to cultivate citizens, we must first cultivate women. If we want to uphold and respect the citizen, we must first uphold and respect the woman.<sup>32</sup>

If we compare these edicts and tracts from the central and provincial governments, it is clear that the central government emphasized the Manchu-Han interaction while the provincial governors tended to articulate how anti-footbinding contributed to the nation and the race.<sup>33</sup> Yuan Shikai, as well as other provincial governors, clearly took over the anti-footbinding discourse that the Reformers used in the late nineteenth century. Ironically these Reformers used to be the governors' political enemies. But now their agendas were legitimately recognized as one integral part of the nation-state strengthening project.

Not only did Yuan Shikai advocate the discourse, he also took actions. According to *Wanguo gongbao*, a journal published in Shanghai, "Yuan Shikai said, in order to

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<sup>32</sup> *Shuntian shibao* 順天時報 (Shuntian Times), July 19, 1905.

<sup>33</sup> Yang Xingmei, "Wanqing guanyu chanzu yingxiang guojia fuqiang de zhenglun," p. 23.

eradicate the ugly custom in the society, unless he unbound women's feet in his own household, otherwise the practice could not be abolished." Then he loosened the bondage of his daughters' feet. The reporter also observes that immediately Yuan's subordinates also followed the exemplary action of Yuan and unbound their daughters' feet. The reporter could not help cheering that "[the practice of unbinding women's feet] was especially popular in the official circle of Tianjin.<sup>34</sup>

Yet, as for officials like Yuan Shikai living in the transitional age, the public image of supporting such a righteous cause was not always consistent with what they actually did in their lives. One of Yuan Shikai's daughters once recalled that after Yuan published the anti-footbinding tract, he took in five concubines in the following years, all of whom had tiny feet without exception.<sup>35</sup> In another piece of the unofficial historical record, Yuan was fascinated with women's small feet and one of his favorite concubines was cherished by him very much for her unique Yangzhou-style bound feet.<sup>36</sup> In my view, this inconsistency was caused by different roles of daughters and concubines in the literati or official families. Daughters were mostly in-process products that reflected their fathers' efforts on how to construct the new womanhood, such as the discourses of anti-footbinding, women's education, or gender equality. But concubines were more private collections of their husband that were already processed by their natal families. Men took them in for who they were, not for who they would be.

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<sup>34</sup> "Tianzu hui xingsheng shuwen" 天足會興盛述聞 (The detailed account of the development of the Natural Feet Society), cited from Zhang Yufa et al eds., *Jindai zhongguo nvquan yundong shiliao*, 1842-1911, vol. 2, p. 871.

<sup>35</sup> Yuan Jingxue, "Wo de fuqin Yuan Shikai" 我的父親袁世凱 (My father Yuan Shikai), in Wu Changyi ed., *Bashisan tian huangdi meng* 八十三天皇帝夢 (The eighty-three days of the emperor dream) (Beijing: Wenshi ziliao chubanshe, 1983), pp.47-48.

<sup>36</sup> Tianshan sheng, *Hongxian gongwei yanshi yanyi* 洪憲宮闈艷史演義 (The unofficially sexual history of the palace of the Hongxian Emperor). The original version was published in the Republican era. Here I cite from the reprinted version published by Dazhong wenyi chubanshe (Beijing) in 1999, pp. 319-320.

What common people were concerned about was not an edict from far away nor high officials' actions of loosening their daughters' feet while taking footbound concubines. They cared more about how the practices of binding and unbinding would impact their actual life, like Scholar Who Felt Guilty and his wife in the previous section who were debating on their daughters' marriage and their livelihood. Therefore, on the lowest level of the governmental authority, the Tianjin magistrate had to interpret the anti-footbinding discourse into an issue that was relevant to everybody's life with a practical attitude.

In 1904, the same year that Yuan Shikai circulated his anti-footbinding tract, Ling Fupeng 凌福彭 (1859-?), the magistrate of Tianjin, also issued an order written in colloquial Chinese, stating that "from now on, for women in your household or the fiancées of your sons, brothers, and nephews, if they want to unbind their feet, you should not stop them." This emphasis on men's control over women within the familial and marital relationships came from nowhere but the local phenomenon, in which "recently in the governmental investigation, I [the magistrate] heard that some women who were already engaged but not yet married followed the instructions of their parents and brothers to unbind their feet. Yet, the families of their future husbands stopped them.<sup>37</sup> It is also very clear that only on the very local level that the authority of the government began, and was able, to intervene with the family affairs.

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<sup>37</sup> *Dagong bao*, May 06, 1904.

## **Liu Mengyang and His Commonwealth Natural Feet Society**

Despite the different emphasis of various levels of authorities on anti-footbinding, local literati in Tianjin were very skeptical about how far these edicts and orders transmitted from above to bottom. As an editorial essay in *Dagong bao* points out, “the imperial order could only reach the upper class and could not become known in the lower class. Once when I argued with people against footbinding, I told them that the court explicitly issued an imperial edict. Those who heard me were shocked and did not believe me.”<sup>38</sup> The lack of systematic and practical propaganda policies of the Qing government to enlighten common people, according to Yang Nianqun, actually created a space for local literati to negotiate with the government for their influence on local society.<sup>39</sup> As a consequence, several anti-footbinding associations were established in Tianjin at the very last decade of the Qing dynasty. The leaders of these associations localized the imperial edicts and governmental orders among common people and attacked the practice of footbinding with their own justifications. It is in this process that local literati gained control over the society and people and became another force of intervention in women’s bodies and family affairs. In this section, I will focus on one anti-footbinding association, the Commonwealth Natural Feet Society, and its organizer Liu Mengyang 劉孟揚 (1877-1943) to analyze the process of intervention and reformation.

### ***Liu Mengyang: Qingxing jushi 清醒居士 (The Awakening Master)***

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<sup>38</sup> *Dagong bao*, July 29, 1903.

<sup>39</sup> Yang Nianqun, “Cong kexue huayu dao guojia kongzhi,” p. 37.

As the eldest son born in a poor Muslim family in 1877, Liu Mengyang also paid attention to Confucian classics study. In his youth, he studied for the civil service examination, but only passed the lowest level in 1897 without any advancement. He also practiced calligraphy as one part of his Confucian curriculum. Despite the strong presence of Western-style colleges in Tianjin in the late nineteenth century, there was no evidence to show that he was exposed to any Western learning.

Liu Mengyang shared many characteristics of the so-called “treaty port intellectuals.” According to Paul Cohen, this group of intellectuals was petty or lower-class Chinese literati and had usually passed the lowest level of civil service examination. They lived and worked in the treaty port cities like Shanghai and Tianjin and intended to make China better with their own agendas.<sup>40</sup> But one attribute that distinguished Liu Mengyang from them was the fact that he was not pushed by livelihood to treaty port cities, like Ying Lianzhi, his close friend and comrade. Instead, he was native to Tianjin. Throughout his life, Liu Mengyang rarely lived outside of Tianjin and the farthest he traveled was to Zhili Province, where Tianjin was located. To him, Tianjin was *the world*.

Bearing this in mind, it is not difficult to understand the significance of the 1900 Incident in his life. Liu Mengyang’s small family business in beef processing and selling collapsed during the conflict between Boxers, foreigners, and the Qing government, like many other native people in Tianjin.<sup>41</sup> Liu himself as a young literatus in his early twenties recorded what he witnessed and heard on a daily basis about this incident. He

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<sup>40</sup> Paul Cohen, *Between Tradition and Modernity: Wang T'ao and Reform in Late Ch'ing China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

<sup>41</sup> Vera Schwarcz, *Time for Telling the Truth is Running out: Conversations with Zhang Shenfu* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 73.

seemed awakened from the Confucian pursuit for official titles and gave himself the style name “the Awakening Master.” This traumatic awakening haunted him for a long time. In 1910 at the tenth anniversary of the 1900 Incident, he published his diary of 1900 as a warning to those who had already forgotten the tragic scenes under the occupation. He states in the preface that “the hearts of people in Tianjin are already dead. Even though the tenth anniversary might slightly touch upon the old feelings, the past is like clouds and smoke passing in front of our eyes and suddenly disappears....Concerned about this, I publish my old writings into this book and distribute in the world. I hope that those who read this book will remember the scene of the past pain in their mind.”<sup>42</sup>

This traumatic experience motivated Liu to actively participate in local affairs. In 1902, Liu Mengyang was recruited by Ying Lianzhi as the second chief editor for *Dagong bao*. This was possibly a strategy on the part of Ying, who as an outsider to Tianjin had to fit in the local society by establishing connections with the locals. But this career provided Liu Mengyang the opportunity of vigorously contributing to and commenting on local politics. Not only did he pen many colloquial articles to reform customs and enlighten the masses, he also made *Dagong bao* the base to promote many local and national events. As his reputation was widely recognized in media circles, he was later invited to work at other newspaper agencies such as *Tianjin shangbao* 天津商報 (Tianjin Commercial News), *Minxing bao* 民興報 (Newspaper of People's Aspirations), *Baihua zaobao* 白話早報 (Colloquial Morning News), *Baihua wanbao* 白話晚報 (Colloquial Evening News), and *Tianjin wubao* 天津午報 (Tianjin Noon

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<sup>42</sup> Liu Mengyang, *Tianjin quanfei bianluan jishi*, preface, pp.1-2.

News).<sup>43</sup> Liu Mengyang also participated in all kinds of local associations, including Shunzhi jinyanhui 順直禁烟會 (Smoking Prohibition Association of Shuntian and Zhili),<sup>44</sup> Tianjin hongshizi hui 天津紅十字會 (Tianjin Branch of Red Cross Association),<sup>45</sup> Yinyue chujin hui 音樂儲金會 (Musical Association to Raise Money),<sup>46</sup> to name just a few in the late Qing and early Republican eras.

In and out of the newspaper work and association activities, Liu Mengyang also sought positions in the local government, one of the dreams that literati like him who had failed in civil service examination could hardly get rid of. He was appointed as advisor to the chief of police of Tianjin in 1905; then vice-chairman of the Tianjin local assembly in 1908. After the fall of the Qing empire, he was appointed the head of the Tianjin local tax office and chief supervisor of all police branches between 1911 and 1917.<sup>47</sup> With all these achievements in media, local associations, and local government in Tianjin, Liu Mengyang transformed himself from a loser in the traditional literati path of civil service examination into one of the most celebrated genteel members of Tianjin society.

### ***The Founding of the Commonwealth Natural Feet Society***

One of Liu Mengyang's contributions to the local society of Tianjin was the establishment of Gongyi tianzu she 公益天足社 (Commonwealth Natural Feet Society) in 1903. As the first indigenous association devoted to opposing footbinding established

<sup>43</sup> Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Tianjinshi weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui ed., *Tianjinjindai renwu lu* 天津近代人物錄 (The biographies of people in modern Tianjin) (Tianjin: Tianjin shi difang shizhi bianxiu weiyuanhui zong bianji shi, 1987), p. 105.

<sup>44</sup> *Dagong bao*, December 6, 1910.

<sup>45</sup> *Dagong bao*, January 18, 1912

<sup>46</sup> *Dagong bao*, June 25, 1915.

<sup>47</sup> *Who's Who in China, 1918-1950* (Hong Kong: Chinese Material Center, 1982), pp. 280-281.

in Tianjin after 1900, this Society provided an opportunity to understand how local literati like Liu Mengyang took the role of intermediary to publicize the grand narrative of anti-footbinding articulated by foreigners, radical Reformers, and government and convey it to common people, or people of the lower class in his own words.

The Commonwealth Natural Feet Society was first named as Independent Natural Feet Society and located in Liu's private household, which was located in the business center, the Needle Market Street, of the Chinese area of Tianjin.<sup>48</sup> Two months later in March, Liu Mengyang changed the name to Commonwealth, taking the meaning that anti-footbinding was a part of the public good. With his position as chief editor of *Dagong bao*, he also published detailed regulations of the society in the newspaper.<sup>49</sup> In these regulations, Liu Mengyang does not use the popular "women's feet--national advancement" discourse to justify his anti-footbinding agenda. Instead he only articulates that he follows the 1902 imperial edict of the Empress Dowager Cixi. As Yang Nianqun argues, by gaining legitimacy from the government, local literati were able to transform their abstract ideas into government actions and thus enlarged their influence in the local society.<sup>50</sup> In other words, the local literati were not speaking for their own benefit, but on behalf of the authorities.

If we compare the Commonwealth Natural Feet Society with those established by foreigners before 1900, we will find that the obligations of the Society members were not essentially different. Members were asked to loosen the feet of their daughters, wives, and other female family members. Meanwhile, Liu also advocated the marriages

<sup>48</sup> *Dagong bao*, January 18, 1903.

<sup>49</sup> One of the attributes of modern association was its marriage to the media network. It was also true for the anti-footbinding movement. For example, the anti-footbinding movement initiated by foreigners was closely connected to *Wanguo gongbao*.

<sup>50</sup> Yang Nianqun, "Cong kexue huayu dao guojia kongzhi," p. 27.

among families in the Society. “Those who are members of the Society have the responsibility of consulting marriage possibilities for each other.”<sup>51</sup> Yet, what made it different from the foreigners’ associations were the rules that Liu Mengyang directly placed on Chinese women as the assumed manifestation of male authority over their women. Liu claims that,

1) the dress of women with unbound feet should follow either the dresses of women in Beijing or the dresses of women in southern provinces. It is at the women’s liberty [to choose from either of these two kinds];

2) for women with unbound feet, it is essential for them to read and understand reason. In the future, if our Society can collect some funds, they will be used to establish a woman’s school especially for women with unbound feet.”<sup>52</sup>

In this sense, the unbinding of women’s feet was not just an opportunity for these men to place their power over women’s physical bodies. Women’s exterior appearance and their inner minds were also under the discipline of these men. Women who unbound their feet enjoyed certain level of liberty as rewards, like choosing from two of the dress styles or going to school. But clearly the liberty should not go beyond what these men had set up for them.

Benefiting from the authorities to found the Commonwealth Natural Feet Society, Liu Mengyang also turned to the government for support and recognition.<sup>53</sup> In November, 1903, Liu Mengyang submitted a memorial to the magistrate of Tianjin to

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<sup>51</sup> *Dagong bao*, March 16, 1903.

<sup>52</sup> *Dagong bao*, March 16, 1903.

<sup>53</sup> As Yang Xingmei argues, the relationship between the state and the literati on anti-footbinding discourse became very complicated in the late Qing. On the one hand, the government did not intend to force people to change this custom. Yet, influenced by the new concepts of nation-state, local literati actually expected more intervention from the authorities. Yang Xingmei, “Yi wangfa yi fengsu: Jindai zhishi fenzi dui guojia ganyu chanzu de chixu huyu,” pp. 57-66.

solicit more attention from the authorities to the anti-footbinding movement.<sup>54</sup> His efforts were recognized as the magistrate commented on his memorial, “as for this licentiate [Liu Mengyang], since he already established the Commonwealth Natural Feet Society, I hope that he will constantly persuade people and we wait to see the actual effect.”<sup>55</sup>

The Commonwealth Natural Feet Society developed very quickly. When the Society was first established, there were about twenty members.<sup>56</sup> In March, when the Society changed its name, there were more than thirty members.<sup>57</sup> The Society ran so well that Zhang Weichen, another local male literatus, had to establish a branch on the Cross Street in the Hedong district of Tianjin in April. There were immediately twenty members enrolled in this branch.<sup>58</sup> Later on, the membership enrollment of the Society went far beyond Tianjin and covered many other provinces. Below is a table indicating the number of the members and their native places.

Table 2.1: The Enrollment of the Commonwealth Natural Feet Society

Tianjin	45
Beijing	6
Fengtian	1
Yanshan	4
Qingyuan	2
Zhuozhu	1
Baodi	1
Shandong	1
Jiangsu	3
Anhui	3
Guangzhou	6
Total	74

<sup>54</sup> *Dagong bao*, November 24, 1903.

<sup>55</sup> *Dagong bao*, November 23, 1903.

<sup>56</sup> *Dagong bao*, March 16, 1903.

<sup>57</sup> *Dagong bao*, March 26, April 8, 1903.

<sup>58</sup> *Dagong bao*, April 1, 1903.

Source: *Dagong bao*, May 19, 1903.

The year 1905 witnessed both the climax and fall of the Society. In May, there were already more than one hundred and thirty families who were enrolled in the Society.<sup>59</sup> But it was also in this year that Liu Mengyang quit his job at *Dagong bao* and became an officer at the Patrolling Police Bureau of Tianjin. With his distance from *Dagong bao*, the news reports regarding his Society also diminished. The Commonwealth Natural Feet Society gradually faded from the news media.

## **The Strategies to Publicize the Anti-Footbinding Movement in the Commonwealth Natural Feet Society**

After Liu Mengyang established the Commonwealth Natural Feet Society, he employed many strategies to publicize the anti-footbinding discourse in the society, including distributing literature, delivering public speeches, and organizing essay competitions. As we may see, all these strategies were already used by Western ladies' Natural Feet Society in the late nineteenth century. Yet, as the social context of the movement changed, and more importantly, as the associations were different in terms of funding, members, and influence, these strategies were also attached new meanings for the movement.

### ***The Distribution and Donation of Anti-Footbinding Literature***

The distribution of literature on certain themes was not a new phenomenon in China. In traditional Chinese society, sutras and morality books were often printed and

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<sup>59</sup> *Dagong bao*, May 31, 1905.

distributed by religious believers and members of the genteel class as a way of earning merit and redemption. When the Natural Feet Society was established in Shanghai, one of its main goals was to widely circulate anti-footbinding pamphlets, the majority of which were written by missionaries and Chinese Christians in classical Chinese. With sufficient funding from missions, there were about 60,500 copies circulated from the parent association in Shanghai to its branches.<sup>60</sup>

Liu Mengyang also distributed anti-footbinding literature, especially with the advantage of printing and circulating through the media networks he worked in. When he published colloquial articles on anti-footbinding in *Dagong bao*, he planned to reprint one thousand copies of these articles on separate sheets and widely distribute them in Tianjin and beyond.<sup>61</sup>

But Liu Mengyang did not possess the same financial capability as the gentry class or the foreigners. Liu himself went through the collapse of the family business in 1900. Meanwhile, he did not collect any money from the Commonwealth Natural Feet Society members lest his reputation of “a poor literatus” be compromised.<sup>62</sup> In one letter to his friend, who asked Liu to print a large number of his anti-footbinding articles, Liu had to refuse because, according to him, “I am only a poor literatus. I could not raise money for the printing and I did not want to beg for donation lest it call forth criticism [on my reputation as a poor literatus].”<sup>63</sup>

The lack of funding resulted in the borrowing of missionary pamphlets on anti-footbinding. In 1905, Zhong Zifeng 仲子鳳 (dates unknown), a Chinese member of

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<sup>60</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, March 31, 1899.

<sup>61</sup> *Dagong bao*, January 13, 1904.

<sup>62</sup> *Dagong bao*, May 31, 1905.

<sup>63</sup> *Dagong bao*, January 13, 1904.

the Presbyterian church and a male teacher in a Christian woman's school in Tianjin, donated many books and pamphlets to Liu Mengyang and his Society, including twelve copies of Yuan Shikai's anti-footbinding tract, two copies of Zhang Zhidong's tract, and one of Ceng Chunxuan's, three most influential provincial governors at that time. Meanwhile, Zhong also gave books such as *Jiubi liangyan* 救弊良言 (Good Words to Rectify the Bad Customs), *Qu'e sushuo* 去惡俗說 (On Eradicating the Evil Custom), *Futan lun* 復坦論 (On Returning to Natural Feet), *Quan fangzu lun* 勸放足論 (On Persuading to Loosen the Feet), *Chanzu liangshuo yanyi* 纏腳兩說演義 (The Unofficial History of Two Theories on Footbinding).<sup>64</sup> All these tracts came from Mrs. Little's Natural Feet Society in Shanghai where she and other foreigners printed these books and sold them at low prices to raise money for the cause.<sup>65</sup> Now due to the lack of money, these books were taken by Chinese literati to work for the indigenous anti-footbinding movement in Tianjin. Liu Mengyang published an announcement in *Dagong bao* and encouraged people who were interested in them to come and take them for free.

Not everyone was as straightforward as Liu and Zhong. A man named Chen Baiquan donated two hundred copies of anti-footbinding tracts to Liu Mengyang and his Society. These copies were mailed out from Yuanfeng hui 源丰润, a high-ranking hotel in Tianjin. In order to show gratitude to this Mr. Chen, Liu Mengyang paid a visit to this hotel, which was not far away from his home. Yet, it turned out that there was no such a person as Mr. Chen ever staying in this hotel. As a result, Liu Mengyang had to publish a

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<sup>64</sup> *Dagong bao*, May 31, 1905.

<sup>65</sup> “Tianzu hui xingsheng shuwen,” in Zhang Yufa ed., *Jindai zhongguo nüquan shiliao*, p. 869.

notice in *Dagong bao* to publicly express his gratitude to Mr. Chen.<sup>66</sup> It is not clear whether Chen Baiquan only asked somebody in the hotel to mail the copies or whether somebody in the hotel did this under the false name of Chen Baiquan. Either way, it only demonstrated the ambivalent attitude of the donor who supported anti-footbinding with sufficient funding but did not really want to come forward to make himself public in the movement.

### ***Public Meetings and Public Speeches***

When Liu Mengyang first founded the Commonwealth Natural Feet Society, he provided that all members should get together twice a year to have public speeches on the anti-footbinding issues and the Society affairs.<sup>67</sup> But he was never able to carry out this provision due to the limited funding. According to Liu's explanation, "I am originally a poor literatus. In order to preserve my reputation, I always keep myself innocent in the money issues. If I hold a meeting, there must be some money put into it....I myself do not have this money.... I myself do not organize any public meetings. Even though I established the Natural Feet Society, it did not qualify as an association."<sup>68</sup> As a consequence, Liu Mengyang had to collaborate with other social groups in Tianjin, one of which was the Tianjin YMCA, the one that the Tianjin Branch of the Natural Feet Society used to work with before 1900.

Interestingly, the first public meeting that Liu Mengyang made was in dialogue with Westerners' agenda on anti-footbinding. In May 1903 when the well-known Mrs. Little came to Tianjin as part of her anti-footbinding tour in China, Liu Mengyang was

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<sup>66</sup> *Dagong bao*, April 6, 1903.

<sup>67</sup> *Dagong bao*, March 16, 1903.

<sup>68</sup> *Dagong bao*, May 31, 1906.

also invited to speak as the head of the Commonwealth Natural Feet Society at the meeting. As a big event in the local society, both *Tianjin Young Men*, the YMCA journal, and *Dagong bao* advertised the meeting on the same day in two languages.<sup>69</sup> At the meeting, which was held in the YMCA hall and for a male audience only, Mrs. Little first spoke to exalt the contribution that provincial governors played in the anti-footbinding movement. Then Mr. Zhong Dongchen from the Tianjin Medical College, Liu Mengyang, a Mr. Zhang, the interpreter for the American Consulate, and Mr. Xu Lingchen, a well-known local literatus, spoke in turn.<sup>70</sup> At the end of the two-hour meeting, the 1902 imperial edict was circulated among the audience.

The next day, Liu Mengyang published his speech in *Dagong bao*, in case that he had not made himself clear the night before. In this essay, Liu Mengyang employed the “half population” theory, one of the most popular discourses then, to justify his idea of anti-footbinding. According to him, as well as many of his contemporaries, Chinese women occupied half of the whole population of China. Yet, because they were restrained by footbinding, they could not contribute to the family economy and even the whole nation. “The two million women all belonged to the category of wasted people. They were stupid and useless.”<sup>71</sup> It is exactly this waste of half of the population that made China lose her stance in global competition.<sup>72</sup> In the speech, he did not hide his low opinion of Chinese women, the same group that he intended to reform.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Dagong bao*, April 25, 1903; *Tientsin Young Men*, no. 12, vol. 11, April 25, 1903.

<sup>70</sup> *Dagong bao*, May 1, 1903.

<sup>71</sup> *Dagong bao*, May 2, 1903.

<sup>72</sup> According to Hill Gates, this theory was flawed by the omission of women’s labor in three aspects. First, the Chinese literati, who recorded women’s lives, did not pay sufficient attention to women’s physical labor. The second is the ambivalent boundary between women’s labor and household work. Thirdly, women’s labor was usually disguised in the form of “obedience.” Hill Gates, “Footloose in Fujian,” pp.131-132.

<sup>73</sup> *Dagong bao*, May 2, 1903.

Liu Mengyang not only criticized Chinese women in his speech, he also conveyed an anti-foreign sentiment in his writing. In one of his articles titled “[The Fact that Chinese] Women did not Bind Their Feet was not Learned from Foreign Women,” Liu Mengyang argues that “ever since our China was established, it has been almost five thousand years. For the bad practice of footbinding, it only has been more than one thousand years. For the rest four thousand years, the grandmothers of our Chinese ancestors, all had big feet. None of them bound their feet. Now whenever we say anti-footbinding, we learn from foreign women. This is indeed nonsense.”<sup>74</sup>

If before 1900 Western-educated Chinese men were slightly ambivalent about how far the Western ladies, the so-called “the Athena of China,” interfered with footbinding, now literati like Liu Mengyang already became very explicitly against the intervention. He tried to situate the practice within China’s history and considered foreign intervention as deviance. If we say that the anti-footbinding movement before 1900 was a process in which foreigners erased the cultural significance of footbinding and infused it with its values of nature and hygiene, now it was the time that Chinese literati reversed the process and changed women’s physical body as an embodiment of Chinese tradition and culture.

### ***Essay Competition***

On March 18, 1903, Liu Mengyang published an announcement in *Dagong bao* stating the start of an essay competition on anti-footbinding. The title of the competition is “the history of women’s footbinding.” The authors are required to elaborate the origin of this custom and the reason why it became such a naturalized phenomenon that people

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<sup>74</sup> *Dagong bao*, January 9, 1904.

did not see it as wrong. The deadline is three weeks hence and the prizes are allotted to three rankings: the first winner gets “a lithographic version of *Qianhou hanshu* 前後漢書 (the Former Han History and the Later Han History),” the second wins a lithographic version of *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (the Romance of Three Kingdoms),” and the third wins “a lithographic version of *Guochao xianzheng shilue* 國朝先正事略 (The Biographies of Officials in the Qing Dynasty).”<sup>75</sup> Almost one month later, the winners were announced as the following table shows,

Table 2.2: The Information of the 1903 Essay Competition Winners

Ranking	Name	Gender	Native Place	Prize
1	Zhu Lianyuan 朱蓮鶯	Female	Haiyan 海鹽	<i>Qianhou hanshu</i>
2	Guo Enze 郭恩澤	Male	Hefei 合肥	<i>Sanguo zhi</i>
3	Xu Qingyong 許慶鏞	Male	Ninghe 寧河	<i>Guochao xianzheng shilue</i>
Honorable No.1	Mianxue Jushi 勉學居士 (Master of Encouraging the Learning)	Male		<i>Wanguo gongfa</i> 萬國公法(The Laws in Ten Thousand Countries)
Honorable No. 2	Wang Peilan 王佩蘭	Female	Zhuji 諸暨	<i>Dalu bao</i> 大陸報 (China Press)
Honorable No.3.	Fensu sheng 憤俗生 (Scholar of Detesting the Custom)	Male	Tianjin 天津	<i>Hubei xuesheng jie</i> 湖北學生界 (The Student Journal of Hubei Province)
Honorable No.4.	Xinxin zi 新子(Scholar	Male		<i>Zhejiang chao</i> 浙江潮 (Zhejiang

<sup>75</sup> *Dagong bao*, March 18, 1903.

	of Newness and Newness)			Tide)
Honorable No.5.	Li Xinmin 李 心民	Male		<i>Jiateng hongzhi yanjiang ji</i> 加藤 弘之演講集 (The Speech Collection of Katō Hiroyuki)
Honorable No.6.	Wang Funu 王福奴	Male		<i>Erbai nianhou zhiwuren</i> 二百年 後之吾人 (Our Nation after Two Hundred Years)

Note: Other than their individual prizes, all these winners received five copies of the 1902 imperial edict and five copies of the regulation of the Commonwealth Natural Feet Society.

Comparing to the essay competition organized by the Natural Feet Society before 1900, the one initiated by the Commonwealth Natural Feet Society demonstrated some differences. First, “women” began to appear as authors, even though we are not sure if they were actually ladies or male literati’s persona. Yet, this might be the competition referees’ intention to seek some authentic voices of women on their own issues. Then it was not surprising to see that the first prize winner went to the lady Zhu Lianyuan, who came from the culturally superior Jiangnan area and whose home region was undergoing thorough foreigner-initiated anti-footbinding propaganda even before 1900. Meanwhile, unlike the pre-1900 competition winners who were usually college students, the male winners in 1903 were not identified with their occupation or educational background but only with their native places, a traditional way for Chinese literati’s self-identification. Some of the male winners even used their style names like Mianxue jushi, Fensu sheng, and Xinxinzi, similar to Liu Mengyang’s style name “the Awakening Master.” Their style names indicated that they were more like Liu Mengyang, who was determined to

reform the customs and to establish a new society by Chinese themselves, than those Western-educated college students and teachers.

In the following months, the top two essays were published in *Dagong bao*. These two essays explicitly demonstrated a philosophy of “Chinese for China,” which became popular after the 1900 Boxer Rebellion in the north. Influenced by this philosophy, the most dramatically changing image in the 1903 competition might be that of “the West.” Before 1900, the essay authors considered the Westerners as the “great scholars from the West” to save China from darkness. Even though some were not completely content with the West’s intervention, the mainstream discourse of the Euro-centrism was not challenged. But, in 1903, this glorified image of the West was largely shaken. Not only was the genesis story of Christianity erased completely, even the Western ladies’ efforts on establishing the Natural Feet Society were replaced by those of the Chinese Reformers, as Zhu Lianyuan, the first prize winner, argues, “the footbinding associations rose since the 1898 Reform. There were about ten more [Natural Feet] Societies responding to the call in Shanghai. Later even though these associations dissolved as they were involved in the political accusation, the general principles were circulated.”<sup>76</sup> This was very consistent with the anti-foreign sentiment that Liu Mengyang articulates in his articles.

These two essays were not just different from the pre-1900 essays, they were also different from each other. There was a gendered dynamics and comparison between these two authors, one female and one male. Guo Enze, the second prize winner from Anhui, especially articulates ways in which footbinding placed restraints on physical

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<sup>76</sup> *Dagong bao*, April 13, 1903.

movement and intelligence of Chinese women. According to him,

As long as women get their feet bound, it is as if they are restraining themselves in the dark room and never see the sun and sky; it is like putting themselves in prison and never become the complete persons. They enter the miserable situations of footbinding when they are young....They become wasted people for their whole lives....Their talent and intelligence are chained and consumed up by footbinding. They cannot focus on learning.<sup>77</sup>

As a consequence, Chinese women only knew how to do some women's work and were able to read a couple of books at best. Thus it was not possible to find a woman who "could understand the rhymes and recite."

Ironically, the first prize winner, Lady Zhu Lianyuan from Haiyan of Zhejiang Province was exactly what Guo describes as "impossible." In Zhu's article, in order to trace the origin of the footbinding, she cited sources from all kinds of classics, including *the Book of Songs*, *Historical Record in the Han Dynasty*, and other literature on footbinding from the Tang Dynasty (618-907) to the Qing Dynasty. Regardless of whether Lady Zhu was a real lady or not, "she" at least intended to identify herself as a woman familiar with all these Chinese classics. When Liu Mengyang commented on this essay, he also points out that "this author did an appropriate citation and a correct annotation. It is not far to see the rise of women's rights in our country."<sup>78</sup>

Meanwhile, Zhu Lianyuan distinguished herself from the victimized image of women in Guo Enze's essay by emphasizing the agency of women and the capability of women speaking for themselves. In her viewpoint, "even though the anti-footbinding associations are established by male comrades, is it better for us women to take the

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<sup>77</sup> *Dagong bao*, July 4, 1903.

<sup>78</sup> *Dagong bao*, April 13, 1903.

liberty and cure ourselves? Even though the harm of footbinding is spoken by others, is it better for us women to speak for ourselves? ”

## **Who Unbound Their Feet?**

With the efforts of the government, media, and associations in Tianjin, the practice of footbinding was reformed gradually. According to a news report in 1904, “In our city [Tianjin], there were already about one hundred families who stopped binding women’s feet with the persuasion of the Commonwealth Natural Feet Society. There were also more than two hundreds of families that were talked [out of the custom of footbinding] by Yan Fansun and other high officials. Ever since the administrators posted the anti-footbinding tract, we heard that there were again many families who followed the edict and stopped binding women’s feet. In total there were about a couple of hundreds of families who did not bind their women’s feet.”<sup>79</sup> Considering many scholars’ pessimistic argument on the very little impact of the anti-footbinding movement on women,<sup>80</sup> how can we read this optimism from the report? If the report was true, then what kind of families took the leading role of unbinding women’s feet? And who were these women who unbound their feet at this moment? These are the questions that this section intends to answer.

### ***Women in the Liu Family***

We have to first explore what happened to women in Liu Mengyang’s family

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<sup>79</sup> *Dagong bao*, June 19, 1904.

<sup>80</sup> For example, Hill Gates argues that in her field work the influence of the anti-footbinding movement was not as strong as scholars expected. “I argue that even indigenous political activism had little direct effect on footbinding.” The anti-footbinding movement was just too far away from these women’s daily life and their marriage choice. Hill Gates, “Footloose in Fujian,” pp. 137.

considering his prominent role in the local anti-footbinding movement. According to his account, right after the 1902 imperial edict, Liu Mengyang unbound the feet of his two little daughters. Unlike The Scholar Who Felt Guilty who failed because of the pressure from his wife, Liu Mengyang showed, or at least tried to demonstrate, his absolute dominance over his family and his authority of shaping the physical body and future of his daughters. The wife of Liu did not speak out at all in his anti-footbinding project. Therefore, when rumor has it that Liu's daughters were bound again, Liu Mengyang was so confident to dispel the rumor that he published an announcement in *Dagong bao* and stated that "if there is anyone who does not believe that my daughters do not bind their feet again, please come to my place at so and so address to examine [their feet]."<sup>81</sup> While this announcement was to convince the readers of his resolution on the issue, he nevertheless opened the door of his household and made his daughters' feet a public object for people, even strangers, to observe.

Liu Mengyang did not only exert the power over his nuclear family, he also had influence on the extended family, especially on his younger sister Liu Qingyang 劉清陽 (1894-1977). As the youngest daughter of the Liu family with four elder brothers and two elder sisters, Liu Qingyang was cherished by the whole family. But, this did not spare her from footbinding.<sup>82</sup> When Liu Mengyang became involved in the anti-footbinding movement in 1903, Liu Qingyang was about nine years old and probably had just bound her feet with the feet bones still not completely deformed. Even though I could not find direct evidence of the unbinding process, it is very possible that

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<sup>81</sup> *Dagong bao*, March 4, 1903.

<sup>82</sup> According to Guan Suowen, Liu's common-law husband Zhang Shenfu's fourth wife, "Liu started out with bound feet." Vera Schwarcz, *Time for Telling the Truth is Running out*, p. 191.

Liu Qingyang was like her brothers' daughters and got her feet unbound, as illustrated from the picture below.<sup>83</sup>



(Figure 2.2: A photo of Liu Qingyang, from Liu Fangqing, “Wo de muqin Liu Qingyang” 我的母親劉清陽 (My mother Liu Qingyang), *Huizu yanjiu* 回族研究 (Journal of Hui Muslim Minority Study), 2005, vol.2, p. 164.)

In this picture, Liu Qingyang is holding a sword and performing a kind of martial art. According to Liu Fangqing, Liu Qingyang's daughter, her mother was good at all kinds of martial arts and maintained physical practices throughout all her life.<sup>84</sup> All these activities were made possible only with her unbound feet. Also in this picture, Liu Qingyang demonstrates herself as a strong and energetic young lady, who was in sharp contrast with the general image of Chinese women with pale faces and weak bodies prevalent at this time.

### ***Teachers and Students in Women's Schools***

Another cohort of women who unbound their feet came from the circle of educated women. Like the anti-footbinding movement, the early modern women's schools in China were first initiated by missionaries. In the beginning, missionary-run women's schools were not unanimous about whether female students should be accepted under

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<sup>83</sup> Vera Schwarcz, *Time for Telling the Truth is Running out*, p. 69.

<sup>84</sup> Vera Schwarcz, *Time Telling the Truth is Running out*, p.70.

the condition of unbinding their feet. It was not until late 1870s that unbound feet or natural feet became a generally accepted rule in these schools.<sup>85</sup>

When the Chinese-run women's schools were established at the very end of the nineteenth century, male literati were clearly aware of the relationship between footbinding and women's education. As one literatus argues in 1903, "in order to strengthen China, we have to make equal the rights between men and women. In order to make equal the rights between men and women, we have to strengthen women's rights. In order to strengthen women's rights, we have to develop women's education. In order to develop women's education, we have to abolish footbinding."<sup>86</sup> This convoluted connection between footbinding, women's education, and China's advancement was very popular in the last decade of the Qing dynasty, as seen from the following picture.



(Figure 2.3: “Wenming yiban” 文明一半 (Half civilized), *Xingsu huabao*, September 27, 1907, vol. 28)

In this picture titled “half civilization”, a group of female students walk on the street to school while they are watched by some male bystanders. As the reporter points

<sup>85</sup> Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission*, pp. 173-176.

<sup>86</sup> *Dagong bao*, April 13, 1903.

out in the text inscribed on the picture, even though these young girls are allowed to attend school and this symbolizes as half way towards the civilized future of China, they have not achieved the full course of civilization because many of them still have their feet bound.

With this expectation of women's education, it is not surprising to see that many female teachers and students were the first group of women who unbound their feet after 1900. According to A Xin, who recorded a detailed account of the footbinding situations in late Qing Tianjin, the first woman who unbound her feet was Lu Chanzai 陸闡哉 (1868-1915), a talented and well-educated lady from a declining upper gentry family.<sup>87</sup> In her middle thirties, Lu was invited to tutor some young girls from important families in Tianjin. Gradually around her a small circle of upper-class and educated women was formed. In order to persuade her students to give up the practice of footbinding as she did, Lu Chanzai repeatedly talked to the families of these students about the benefits of natural feet, "almost like preaching," according to A Xin. As the consequence of her efforts, about sixty or seventy of her students and their friends were able to unbind their feet finally.<sup>88</sup>

This wind later spread from private home schools to public schools. In 1904, when the Tianjin Women's Public School was established, one of the school regulations states that "students who are qualified for enrollment refers to those who do not bind their feet. For those who already bound their feet, they should unbind gradually [after

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<sup>87</sup> For a detailed biography, see Liu Baolian, "Lu Chanzai nǚshi shilue" 陸闡哉女士事略 (The brief record of Madam Lu Chanzai), in *Tianjin lienü shilue* 天津列女事略 (The brief record of virtuous women in Tianjin). This book is a collection of newspaper clippings and does not have publisher and page numbers.

<sup>88</sup> A Xin, "Jinmen Lianshi jilue," *Caifei lu*, p. 51.

they enter the school].”<sup>89</sup> This was testified by A Xin who observed that “when female students [in public schools] come and go, the majority of them wear blue shoes and white socks. Their feet are spread out and their foot soles are flat.”<sup>90</sup> Later on in 1906 when Lu Chanzai became the vice president of Tianjin Natural Feet Society, she often paid visits to public schools to inspect the unbinding situations. In one of her inspection tours, she visited No. 2, No. 3, No. 5, No. 9, and No. 10 Women’s Public Schools and concluded that No. 3 was the best of all these schools.<sup>91</sup>

Despite the gradual disappearance of the practice among these female teachers and students, these women did not write about footbinding, not to mention about how they unbound their own feet. In my reading of *Dagong bao*, *Jin bao* 津報 (Newspaper of Tianjin), and *Minxing bao*, three major newspapers published in Tianjin, and *Zhili jiaoyu zazhi* 直隸教育雜誌 (Journal of education in Zhili Province), a government-sponsored journal in Zhili, I have not found a single article written by these female students and teachers on footbinding. Even such a prolific female writer as Lü Bicheng 呂碧城 (1883-1943), with her sixteen long essays published in *Dagong bao*, the major themes of her writings included women’s education, women’s rights, gender equality, and women’s devotion to the nation. None of these essays was dedicated to anti-footbinding and it only became a side support to her arguments when she explored her major themes. Therefore, we do not even know whether she unbound her feet like Lu Chanzai or whether she and her peers advocated their feminist agendas with their tiny feet. This phenomenon is worth further exploring. So far the explanation I am able to bring up is

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<sup>89</sup> *Dagong bao*, October 3, 1904.

<sup>90</sup> A Xin, “Jinmen Lianshi jilue.” *Caifei lu*, p. 51.

<sup>91</sup> *Dagong bao*, February 7, 1912.

the shifting standard of how to define oneself as a decent woman. If in the traditional society, women were more valued by the size of their feet for their family status, their marriage potential, and the sense of beauty, then in this transitional era, the standard of the womanhood was defined by how much a woman contributed to the new enterprises of women's education or women's rights and how much a woman devoted to the nation.<sup>92</sup>

## Conclusion

As we may see, in the early twentieth century in Tianjin, local male literati became the main force initiating the anti-footbinding movement and publicized the discourse in the society through media networks, association propaganda, and interaction with the government. In their eyes, to loosen women's bound feet was a project that was understood on various levels. On the one hand, they were aware of the significance of unbinding in the larger project to enlighten common people and thus to advance China as a nation in the global order. On the other hand, the enthusiasm that they invested in the movement was also motivated by their local experience. They truly believed that participating in such a movement as anti-footbinding was a means to consolidate and expand their social networks, resources, and influence in the local society to relieve the frustration from the civil service examination and to alternatively fulfill their dream of making their own world better. On the very personal level, these male literati usually first unbound the feet of their female family members and even did not hesitate to make public the unbinding consequence. This revealed the extent to which these men exerted

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<sup>92</sup> The only scholar who has touched upon this question is Yang Nianqun. See Yang, "Cong kexue huayu dao guojia kongzhi," pp. 30, 35.

their control over the practice in the inner chambers and over the publicity of their women. If in the traditional society, women's bound feet were a symbol of the status and of the family's pride, then now the unbound feet conveyed a sense of new-ness and civilization. In this sense, it was not surprising to see that women from the middle and upper literati class were the first group of women to unbind their feet in the post-1900 period.

The anti-footbinding movement dominated by local elite not only demonstrated the means to establish their influence in the local society and in the household, it also reflected the dynamics between them and foreigners in the same community. The local literati explicitly reconstructed a history of binding and unbinding by excluding foreigners' efforts and contribution in it. Yet, the fact that both local literati and foreigners lived in the same city with shared resources and network also made it unavoidable that local literati shared many strategies and resources with the foreigners, such as the YMCA hall and some anti-footbinding pamphlets. Especially due to their limited funding, they were stuck in the dilemma that they had to borrow or even help circulate Western ideas on footbinding despite their attempt to erase the Western influence.

The last thing I will address here is the search for the authenticity of women's voice in binding and unbinding. As we may see from the two chapters, despite the fact that many women indeed unbound their feet, they largely diverged in social status, occupation, family background, and their connections with the anti-footbinding advocates. They loosened the bondage in different contexts and for different reasons. For example, when it was a fashion for female students to have natural feet, courtesans and

actresses were still proud of their tiny feet and considered them as the authenticity of femininity to attract male customers. There seemed to be an underlying competition between these two groups of women on calling public attention from the society, though ironically it was the same group of men who enjoyed these two kinds of beauty. Meanwhile, we have to be cautious about the power exerted over unbinding process. For example, women could only join the civilized world of women's education under the condition that they unbound their feet. Thus was the role that schools played similar to those foreigners or local literati on reforming women's bodies? Or did unbinding reflect the philosophy that women had to transform their bodies in order to achieve the new normative womanhood? If this is true, then what was the difference between binding and unbinding?

## Part Two

### The Deviance of Respectability<sup>1</sup>

Tanggu is very close to Tianjin. One day, the wife of Mr. Fang, who was a secretary at [my] uncle's official bureau, was going to Tianjin. I planned to go with her to visit women's schools. As we were leaving, my uncle scolded me and prevented me from leaving. I was very angry and decided to break off with him. The next day I escaped and boarded the train [to Tianjin]. By chance I met the wife of the Master of Fozhao Lou 佛照樓 (Buddha Light Pavilion)<sup>2</sup> on the train. She took me to her place in Tianjin. Not only did I have no money for travel expenses, I did not even have any luggage. I was young and high-spirited and a risk-taker. I knew that Mrs. Fang was staying at the *Dagong bao* 大公報 (L'Impartial) Headquarters, so I sent her a letter to completely express my feelings. This letter was read by Mr. Ying, the manager of the newspaper. He praised it very much. He came to visit me in person and invited me to go and stay with Mrs. Fang. He also asked me to assist with the editorial work [of this newspaper].<sup>3</sup>

In early twentieth-century China, it was still impossible to imagine that an educated woman like Lü Bicheng 呂碧城 (1883-1943) would act like Nora in *A Doll's House* to run away from home.<sup>4</sup> After all, the majority of Chinese women at that time still abided by the “nei/wai” (inner/outer) boundary and stayed in the inner chamber. But the above passage pinpoints a crucial reason to justify Lü Bicheng's determination: women's

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<sup>1</sup> I borrow this title and many other insights from Ruth-Ellen Joeres's book *Respectability and Deviance: Nineteenth-Century German Women Writers and the Ambiguity of Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Fozhao lou was a high-ranking hotel in the French concession of Tianjin managed by Cantonese merchants. For a brief introduction of this hotel, see Zhang Tao, *Jinmen zaji* 津門雜記 (*The miscellaneous notes of Tianjin*) (Tianjin: Guji chubanshe, 1986), p.141.

<sup>3</sup> Lü Bicheng, “Hongxue yinyuan 鴻雪因緣 (Karma of goose and snow traces),” in *Xinfang ji* 信芳集 (Collection of believing the fragrance) (Beijing, 1929, publisher unknown), p. 73.

<sup>4</sup> Lü Bicheng was born in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province in 1883. With her given name Lanqing, she was known by her style name Bicheng. Lü Bicheng was well-known for her song lyrics writing, devotion to women's education, and translating Buddhist sutras into English in the first half of the twentieth century. In 1943, she died in a Buddhist temple in Hong Kong. For a detailed and informative biography of Lü Bicheng, see Li Baomin, “The Chronological Biography of Lü Bicheng”, in Li Baoming ed., *Lü Bicheng ci jianzhu* 呂碧城詞箋注 (The annotations of Lü Bicheng's song lyrics)(Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001), pp. 566-590. .

education. It is exactly because of her curiosity about women's education in Tianjin that Lü Bicheng took such a reckless action to board a train without any money.

This curiosity about women's education did not just inspire Lü Bicheng. It has also been a main focus of many scholars who have explored this issue from various perspectives. On the one hand, scholars have been almost unanimous that nationalism and state building played a decisive role in promoting women's education since the last decade of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, they have also challenged the stereotype that women were simply passive recipients awaiting being enlightened by male advocates. As a consequence, Chinese women actually established autonomy in raising their own agendas and carrying on the cultural tradition of their own.<sup>5</sup> However, scholars have been too concerned to justify women's agency in their response to the nationalist discourse and therefore overlooked some links between women's education and the nation-state. The first missing link is the role that local society played in promoting women's education. Women's education was not simply a component of the national project, it was also a localized phenomenon. Especially before 1907 when the Qing (1644-1911) court officially integrated women's education into the educational system, the extent to which women's education could be developed largely depended on local resources and support. Moreover, as the majority of scholars have focused on women's education in Shanghai, the most developed treaty-port city in China, there is a

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<sup>5</sup> Joan Judge, "Between Nei and Wai: Chinese Female Students in Japan in the Early Twentieth Century," in Bryna Goodman et al. ed., *Gender in Motion: Divisions of Labor and Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), pp.121-143; Nanxiu Qian, "Revitalizing the Xianyuan (Worthy Ladies) Tradition: Women in the 1898 Reforms," *Modern China*, 29: 4 (Oct., 2003), pp. 399-454.

tendency to generalize Shanghai's model and experience to substitute for other parts of China, especially north China.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, while the main body of the scholarship has paid attention to the philosophical and practical dimensions of women's education, such as how women's education was transformed from the traditional women's learning<sup>7</sup> or how a specific women's school was established,<sup>8</sup> scholars have rarely noticed that the gap between the growth of women's schools and a shortage of female teachers and students actually triggered a wave of women's migration to major cities where sources for establishing women's schools were concentrated. This is what I consider as the second missing link. To fill in the pool of female teachers and students, a group of educated women, usually from lower gentry-official or petty-literati families with various levels of home or school education, had to leave their homes and move to cities to make a living on their own. As a new social group in the metropolitan landscape, these women were usually young, single, and did not have familial, marital or social connections in an alien urban space. These women had to figure out how to adapt into the new situations all by themselves. As a consequence, this process gave them a greater level of autonomy to interact with and integrate into the local society. To these women, what made more sense was probably the daily adaptation into the urban space than their contribution to the grand national salvation project.

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<sup>6</sup> So far there is only one article on women's education in the late Qing dynasty in Beijing written by Chen Pingyuan, "Male Gaze/Female Students: Late Qing Education for Women as Portrayed in Beijing Pictorials, 1902-08," trans. Anne S. Chao, in Nanxiu Qian et al. eds., *Different Worlds of Discourse: Transformations of Gender and Genre in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), pp. 315-347.

<sup>7</sup> Cong Xiaoping, "From Cainü to Nü Jiaoxi: Female Normal Schools and the Transformation of Women's Education in the Late Qing period, 1895-1911," in Nanxiu Qian, eds., *Different Worlds of Discourse*, pp.115-144.

<sup>8</sup> Xia Xiaohong, *Wanqing nixing yu jindai zhongguo* 晚清女性與近代中國 (Women and modern China in the late Qing)(Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2004), pp. 3-37.

To respond to the two missing links in the field of women's education, I explore how the development of women's education in Tianjin between 1900 and 1911 attracted a group of educated women to this city and how these women adapted into the local society. As I argue, during this time, the development of women's education was more guided in the framework of localism than nationalism. Not only did the local government pay great attention to women's education in the Self-Governance Movement, the goal of which was to build an autonomous local governing body in politics, police, economy and culture. But also the local elite were anxious about Tianjin's inferiority to other treaty-port cities, especially Shanghai, and thus took women's education as a means to catch up with Shanghai.

The consequence of the local government and elite's efforts was the emergence of a group of educated women, who either took the position of professional teachers or enrolled to become female students, moved to Tianjin and became a new presence in the urban landscape. I especially emphasize the process in which these educated women adapted into the urban space on a daily basis: how they went out, where they went for entertainment, where they bought daily necessities, and with whom they socialized. One significant attribute of these daily activities was a greater extent to which these educated women were exposed to the public and thus facilitated the formation of a new group of "public women."

To establish a new social network of their own in the new urban space, these women unavoidably interacted with both men and women from various backgrounds and thus the boundaries of their social circle went beyond the limit of family, kin and clan, which defined the traditional concept of women's social sphere. It is through the

transformation from the inner chamber to a bustling world that these educated women constructed a paradoxical identity as public women. On the one hand, they were valued and elevated as contributors to women's education and national crisis. On the other hand, being public nevertheless made them mix with women from lower classes, who had for long been despised for their mobility beyond the boundary of household and mixing with the opposite sex in the society.

## Chapter Three

### From the Inner Chamber to the Bustling World: The Migration of Educated Women

When Lü Bicheng left Tanggu for Tianjin, the development of women's education in China was caught in the dilemma between schools' growth and government's disapproval. Leading intellectuals and reformers such as Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) argued that women's education was both cause and cure of the national crisis that China was going through, "the weakness in this country is rooted in the fact that women are not educated...To strengthen the country, we have to start with women's education."<sup>1</sup> With his passionate theoretical framework, Jing Yuanshan 經元善 (1840-1903), a similar-minded reformer, established Zhongguo nüxue 中國女學 (China Girls' School) at a house in suburban Shanghai in 1898. Wives and daughters of Liang Qichao and his peers, the so-called Reform faction, participated in the management of this school in person.

The China Girls' School existed for only two years before it was closed because of shortage of funding after Jing Yuanshan escaped to Macao to avoid the government's prosecution for his support for the Reformers. Despite the short period, the China Girls' School initiated a pattern that a group of educated women would engage in women's education on their own. With the China Girls' School as "the first sprout out of millet,"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Liang Qichao, "Bianfa tongyi: Lun nüxue 變法通議：論女學 (The general comments on reform: on women's education)," in Zhu Youhuan comp. *Zhongguo jindai xuezhi shiliao* 中國近代學制史料 (The historical materials on educational system in modern China)(Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1983), pp. 869-875.

<sup>2</sup> Shanxi longsou, "Shanghai nǚ xuehui yanshuo" 上海女學會演說 (Speech at the Shanghai Women's Association),

in the following decade, a considerable number of educated women, either as teachers or students, joined the cause.<sup>3</sup> According to a governmental investigation by the Board of Education, up to the year 1907, there were 428 women's schools, 1,501 female teachers, 622 school staff (the majority of them were women), and 15,498 female students.<sup>4</sup>

But in the beginning, the central government was very reluctant to accept this new phenomenon and attempted to maintain women's education within the limit of household as part of the family education. In 1904, the government proclaimed in its new educational regulation that "the aim of teaching is to teach women the principles of being wife and mother...A woman can only be taught at home, either by her mother, or by a governess."<sup>5</sup> It was not until 1907 when the development of women's education became a strong force that could not be dismissed in the society that the government finally officially included women's education in the school system.<sup>6</sup>

Tianjin was one of the pioneering cities that pushed the central government to face the reality of women's education and finally make the official decision. As what I have pointed out in Chapter Two, right after the 1900 Incident, the traumatized local elite initiated a massive enlightenment movement and women were categorized as a social group that needed to be enlightened. It was not only their physical bodies, such as bound

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Xuan bao, vol. 20, June 1902, cited from Xia Xiaohong, *Wanqing nüxing yu jindai zhongguo*, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> For a list of women's schools established before 1908, see Du Xueyuan, *Zhongguo nüzi jiaoyu tongshi* 中國女子教育通史 (The comprehensive history of women's education in China) (Guiyang: Guizhou jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), pp. 326-332.

<sup>4</sup> Xue Bu 學部 (Board of Education) ed., *Guangxu sanshi san nianfen jiaoyu tongji tubiao* 光緒三十三年分教育統計圖表 (The statistical chart of education in the thirty-three year of the Guangxu reign[1907]) (Taibei: Zhongguo chubanshe, 1973). These numbers are calculated from different provinces.

<sup>5</sup> Xue bu, "Mengyang jiajiao he yi" 蒙養家教合一 (Unity of preschool and family education), in Shu Xincheng comp., *Jindai zhongguo jiaoyushi ziliao* 近代中國教育史資料 (The materials on the history of education in modern China) (Beijing: Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1961), vol. 2, p. 388.

<sup>6</sup> Xue bu, "Xue bu zou xiang yi nüzi shifan xuetang zhangcheng zhe (fu zhangcheng)" 學部奏詳議女子師範學堂章程摺(附章程) (The memorial from the board of education on the regulation of women's normal schools) (regulation attached), in Ju Xingui et al. comps. *Shiye jiaoyu, shifan jiaoyu* 實業教育師範教育 (Vocational education and normal education), (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994), p. 575.

feet, that were under the reform, as I have argued in the previous chapter. The reformation of their learning and knowledge was also considered as one integral part of this enlightenment. This is the context in which women's education was originated in Tianjin. This reform first started from a couple of open-minded literati and then gradually called attention from the local government, the highest authorities of which were also eager to recover and strengthen every aspect of Tianjin after 1900. But both forces had to face the severe shortage of female teachers and students due to the fact that, first, women's culture in north China was for a long time considered to be inferior to that of the south, and secondly, no women had had the experience of teaching in women's schools before.

As a consequence, a group of young ladies migrated from the south, usually the Jiangnan area, which was known for its highly developed women's culture, to Tianjin and became either teachers or students in this city. They were usually home educated or had received some level of school education in the south. When they came to Tianjin, they became the first generation of educated women in this brand new cause. With their participation and the support from the local elite and government, in less than a decade, Tianjin became well known among Chinese cities for its women's education. In this chapter, by examining the development of women's education, I will explore the ways in which women's education became a site of contestation of the social forces like local literati, government, and the educated women themselves and the ways in which women's education became a means to articulate the identity of Tianjin in the post-1900 period.

## From Home Education to School Education

Due to the lack of teaching force in the early years, the majority of female teachers were home-educated. The home education they received in their youth not only qualified them to be the early generation of female teachers and thus “paved the way to the rise of modern Chinese female education,”<sup>7</sup> but also became a means to preserve and pass down women’s cultural tradition in the transformation to school education. In this section, I will use the case study of Lü Bicheng and her three sisters Lü Huiru 呂惠如 (1875-1925), Lü Meisun 呂美蓀 (1881-1945) and Lü Kunxiu 呂坤秀 (1888-1914), all coming to Tianjin and becoming female teachers in women’s schools, to examine the trajectory of transformation from educated daughters of the inner chamber to professional teachers in the public domain.<sup>8</sup>

When Lü Bicheng was born in 1883 in Taiyuan, the capital city of Shanxi province, her father Lü Fengqi 呂鳳岐 (1837-1895)<sup>9</sup> was at the peak of his political career as the Education Commissioner of Shanxi Province. The cost of huge investment of energy and time in climbing up on the official ladder was paid by his absence in the early education of his children. He was not willing to spend some time tutoring his two sons, not to mention daughters.<sup>10</sup> Lü Bicheng’s two elder sisters, Huiru and Meisun, who later became well-known female educators, were mostly educated by their mother Yan Shiyu

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<sup>7</sup> Cong Xiaoping, “From Cainü to Nü jiaoxi,” p. 119.

<sup>8</sup> For a brief biography of the three Lü sisters, see Anhuisheng jingdexian renmin zhengfu 安徽省旌德縣人民政府 (The People’s Government of Jingde County in Anhui Province), *Jingde xianzhi* 旌德縣誌 (The county gazetteer of Jingde)(Hefei: huangshan shushe, 1992), pp. 566-567.

<sup>9</sup> For a brief biography of Lü Fengqi, see *Jingde xianzhi*, p. 457.

<sup>10</sup> Lü Fengqi, *Shizhu shan nong xingnian lu* 石柱山農行年錄 (The chronology of a peasant in Shizhu Mountain) (Reprinted on a Republican version, Beijing: Beijing tushuguan)pp. 395-398. A Peasant in Shizhu Mountain 石柱山農 was Lü Fengqi’s style name.

嚴士瑜 (?-1913) and the maternal family. According to Lü Meisun, when she was four years old and her elder sister Huiru ten years old, they were brought by the mother to the maternal grandparents' family in Beijing and were allowed to study with Yan cousins in the family school, using *Three-Character Chant* and *Thousand Character Classic*, two basic classics for children's education.<sup>11</sup>

In 1886, when Lü Bicheng was three years old, Lü Fengqi retired from his position and brought the whole family to a village in Lu'an, Anhui province. Depressed by the deaths of his two sons in the following years, Lü Fengqi began to pay attention to his daughters' education and thus became prominent in the girls' childhood. Not only did the father hire a Lü clan member to impart Confucian classics to three daughters, he also invited a locally known artist to improve his daughter's painting skills.<sup>12</sup>

As for Lü Bicheng herself, father represented a stronger presence in her early education than he did in her two elder sisters' lives. There were only two anecdotes left regarding her early education and both of them were about the guidance of her father. When Lü Bicheng was five years old, one day, she was accompanying her father in the garden. When father saw the weeping willow, he composed one line of a paired couplet "the spring wind blows the willow." Immediately Lü responded with "the autumn rain strikes the Wutong tree."<sup>13</sup> Not only was Lü Bicheng instructed how to compose

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<sup>11</sup> Lü Meisun, "Meisun ziji sansheng yingguo" 美蓀自記三生因果 (The self-account of the karma of my three lives, in *Mianliyuan subi* 茵麗園隨筆 (Essay Collection of Mianli Garden) (Qingdao, publisher unknown, 1941), p. 84. As for an analysis of the significance of *Three-Character Chant* and *Thousand Character Classic* on the children's education, please see Pei-yi Wu, "Education of Children in the Sung," in Wm. Theodore de Bary et al, ed., *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 322-324.

<sup>12</sup> Lü Fengqi, *Shizhu shan nong xingnian lu*, p. 411; for the scope and subject of girl's education, see Susan Mann, "The Education of Daughters in the Mid-Ch'ing Period," in Benjamin Elman and Alexander Woodside eds., *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 20-27.

<sup>13</sup> Guang Tiefu, *Anhui mingyuan shici zhenglue* 安徽名媛詩詞徵略 (A brief poetry collection of famous gentry women in Anhui Province) (Hefei: Huangshan Bookstore, 1986), p. 208. The original version of this book was

couplets and simple poem lines, she was also taught high level of artistic skills by her father. A couple of years later, Lü Fengqi gave Bicheng a mountain-river fan painting and taught her to imitate it.<sup>14</sup> Later on, Lü Bicheng was very proud to claim that her mastery of painting originated from her childhood.<sup>15</sup> The literary and artistic skills were integrated into these young ladies' knowledge system, which was exactly what the home education expected. Brought up in this atmosphere, Lü Bicheng and her sisters enjoyed a high reputation since their girlhood as talented women, the laurel usually awarded to women with high literacy and art skills.<sup>16</sup>

Living in a small village like Lu'an, the inner chamber of the Lü sisters was not isolated from the outside world. Toward the end of his life, Lü Fengqi exhausted his savings to build a new house with a family library of 30,000 volumes.<sup>17</sup> All these books probably were collected during Lü Fengqi's official tenures in provincial cities such as Nanjing and Taiyuan and the Qing capital Beijing. It is very possible that through these books his daughters caught a glimpse of the outside world. Once one of Lü family's relative misunderstood the meaning of “Ouluoba” 歐羅巴, the phonetic transcription of Europe in Chinese, as a kind of carrot porridge when he took the civil service examination. Lü Meisun could not help laughing at his ignorance and told him that “Ouluoba was actually the land in which Britain, Germany and other countries

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published in 1936.

<sup>14</sup> Lü Bicheng, “Erlang shen” 二郎神 (Er-Lang god), in *Xinfang ji*, p.8.

<sup>15</sup> Lü Bicheng, “Yujingyao: Hongshushi shixian huaji wei lù Lindan ti” 玉京謠・紅樹室時賢畫集為陸丹林題(The tune of the jade capital: poem written for Lu Danlin in the *Painting Collection of the Virtuous People of Their Timee at the Red Tree Studio*), in *Xiaozhu ci* 曉珠詞 (The song lyrics of the bright pearls) (Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1970), vol. 2, p. 36.

<sup>16</sup> Dorothy Ko, “Pursuing Talent and Virtue: Education and Gentry Women’s Culture in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century China,” *Late Imperial China*, 13:1 (1992): 22-25.

<sup>17</sup> Lü Bicheng, “Sanzhu mei” 三株媚 (The tune of the charm of three flowers), in *Xinfang ji*, p. 13.

located.”<sup>18</sup> It is not clear through what access Lü Meisun knew the concept of Europe. But, it is safe to argue that the Lü sisters, who lived in the inner chamber, indeed acquired some Western geographical knowledge, which was not a traditional learning subject for elite women at all, so much so that they were able to laugh at a man immersed for years in the civil service examination.

In 1895, Lü Fengqi suddenly died. Without any son to inherit the family property, the widow was forced by Lü clan to give up her inheritance rights and brought four daughters to Lai'an, another village in Anhui Province in which her natal family was located.<sup>19</sup> Shortly thereafter, at the age of twenty, Lü Huiru married a Yan cousin and the couple moved to Tanggu, where her father-in-law/maternal uncle Yan Langxuan 嚴朗軒 (dates unknown) assumed a government position in the salt business. Lü Bicheng, then fourteen, was sent by her mother to join Huiru and the Yan family in Tanggu for better education and life. Lü Bicheng recalled in the 1920s, “I lost my father when I was young and lived with my mother in the village. At that time, my maternal uncle was appointed as an official in Tanggu. My mother asked me to go to live with him in order to have a better education,”<sup>20</sup> Thus, the young Lü Bicheng moved to a new place for education.

Lü Bicheng’s life in Tanggu is somehow mysterious since there are not many materials left by and about her for this period. There is indeed some vague implication that Lü received school education, as her mother had expected. In a recollection written by Lü Bicheng in 1920, when she visited one of her schoolmates who was then a

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<sup>18</sup> Lü Meisun, “Ouluoba zhōu” 歐羅巴洲 (The European continent), in *Mianliyuan suibi*, p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> Lü Meisun, “Meisun ziji sansheng yinguo,” in *Mianliyuan suibi*, pp. 85-86.

<sup>20</sup> Lü Bicheng, “Hongxue yinyuan,” in *Xinfang ji*, p. 73.

headmistress of an elementary school in Tianjin, Lü Bicheng remembered that an official once inspected their school in Tanggu.<sup>21</sup> I have not found any official record so far indicating that there was any women's school in Tanggu at this moment. This school was probably established in the magistrate's office or at least related to the office, so that it became a model school for higher officials to inspect when they passed Tanggu. It is also possible that most of the students in this school were from official or high-class families in Tanggu. Lü Bicheng's uncle was the official in charge of salt production and transportation and the friend of Lü, who was mentioned in Lü's recollection, was able to marry into an official family a couple of years later.

While Lü Huiru and Bicheng lived a secure life, at least on the material level, in Tanggu, their sisters back in the village went through a period of hardship and desperation since they had to largely depend on the Yan family in Lai'an. In around 1902, the second daughter Lü Meisun turned twenty and was considered mature enough to take up the responsibility of supporting the whole family. Therefore, bringing her youngest sister Kunxiu with her, Meisun moved to Shanghai and worked as a female teacher in a girl's school to make a living. At that time, there were only two girl's schools in Shanghai established by Chinese elite: Wuben nǚshù 務本女塾(Nurturing Roots Girls' School) and Aiguo nǚxué 紛國女學 (Patriotic Women's School).<sup>22</sup> It is very possible that Meisun worked at the Wuben Girl's School because Kunxiu also studied in this school.<sup>23</sup> While Lü Meisun was honored by the title of "pioneer of

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<sup>21</sup> Lü Bicheng, "Fangjiu ji" 訪舊記 (The account on visiting an old friend), in *Lü Bicheng ji* 呂碧城集(Collections of Lü Bicheng) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1929), vol.1, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> For a brief introduction of these two schools, see Du Xueyuan, *Zhongguo nǚzì jiaoyu tongshi*, pp. 327-328.

<sup>23</sup> Lü Meisun, "Mumei yinling" 母妹陰靈 (The posthumous spirits of my mother and younger sister), in *Mianliyuan suibi*, pp. 89-90.

women's education" by her contemporaries, she herself was more proud of being able to make a living and support the family by trading what she had learned at home for a job.<sup>24</sup> The motivation of surviving through home education made Lü Meisun distinct from those wives and daughters of the Reform faction I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter in that the latter's devotion to and practice of women's education were largely influenced by their male kin's philosophy on the issue.

Lü Meisun's direct transition from an educated daughter of a rural gentry family to an independent female educator in a metropolis to a larger extent can represent the life trajectory of many of her peers (including her three sisters), who came from the gentry families and made a living as female teachers based on the home education they had received when they were young. Later on, the other three Lü sisters also followed the calls to teach in various women's schools in Tianjin, Nanjing, Fengtian, and Xiamen and gained high reputation as prominent female educators, as one poem published in *Minli bao* indicates, "The three Lü daughters are a miracle of this society. All of them occupy a position in the teaching field as female teachers."<sup>25</sup>

The transformation of the Lü sisters into professional teachers is revealing in many aspects. While many of Lü's predecessors and peers chose to support themselves and their families by weaving at home after they were widowed or orphaned, the development of women's education at the turn of twentieth century provided alternative means for educated women like the Lü sisters to make a living. The home education they received sufficiently justified their capability of teaching young girls in women's

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<sup>24</sup> "Lü nüshi shezhan qunying" 呂女士舌戰群英 (Madame Lü verbally disputes with heroes), *Shuntian shibao*, December 12, 1909.

<sup>25</sup> *Minli bao* 民立报 (Newspaper of People's Independence), April 8, 1911, cited from Li Baomin, *Lü Bicheng cijian zhu*, p. 545-546.

schools. In this sense, women's education in the public domain was a continuity of traditional home education. Meanwhile, home education also guaranteed the early female teachers a certain level of autonomy as independent female educators when they were recognized by the society for their achievements in women's education. This is especially clear in the two elder Lü sisters' case because both of them were married women before or while they were teaching. Lü Huiru became a teacher after her husband died and Lü Meisun got married when she taught in Fengtian. Yet, both of them were more considered educators from the Lü family than wifely teachers under their husbands' names.

## **Women's Education in Tianjin, 1902-1904**

When Lü Bicheng ran away from her uncle's place, she was not at all ignorant about Tianjin in general and women's education in particular. This is firstly due to the geographical proximity between Tanggu and Tianjin. Approximately 76 miles from Tianjin, Tanggu was an important salt and goods transportation center.<sup>26</sup> The convenient geographical location facilitated Lü Bicheng's imagination of the outside world. Some women in Lü Bicheng's life were able to move back and forth between Tanggu and Tianjin by virtue of transportation and therefore possibly brought the first-hand information to Lü. Mrs. Fang, whom Lü Bicheng mentioned in her running-away story in the beginning, traveled back and forth between Tanggu and

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<sup>26</sup> Hou Zhentong, *Ershi shiji chu de Tianjin gaikuang* 二十世紀初的天津概況 (The general outline of Tianjin in early twentieth century) (Tianjin: Tianjinshi defang shizhi bianxiu weiyuanhui zong bianji shi, 1986), pp. 381-384.

Tianjin alone or with her husband.<sup>27</sup> This is precisely why later Lü Bicheng hoped to go with her to Tianjin.

Not only did it facilitate the physical mobility of the informants, Tanggu also brought news to Lü Bicheng through media networks. According to one announcement published on *Dagong bao*, a major newspaper in Tianjin and nationwide, *Dagong bao* Agency usually received twenty kinds of Chinese and foreign newspapers from Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Suzhou in the early twentieth century.<sup>28</sup> It is possible that at least some of these newspapers were distributed in Tanggu. Lü Bicheng herself once claimed that the reason she later converted into a vegetarian could be traced back to one article on the concept of hygiene from “a Shanghai newspaper” that she read in Tanggu.<sup>29</sup> Many of these newspapers not only provided general information on current affairs, government policies, and social situations of various cities and provinces. They also strongly advocated their own agendas, one of which was women’s education. One example to attest to the influence of newspaper on Lü Bicheng’s feminist thoughts is that in the poem she composed the first day of her arrival in Tianjin, she referred to one of the popular Western icons Joan of Arc (1412-1431)<sup>30</sup> in the late Qing to articulate her thoughts on women’s rights.<sup>31</sup> This example shows that even before Lü Bicheng left

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<sup>27</sup> Fang Hao comp. *Ying Lianzhi xiānshēng rìjì yigǎo* 英斂之先生日記遺稿 (The posthumous manuscript of Mr. Ying Lianzhi’s diary) (Taibei: Wenhui chubanshe, 1974), p.818.

<sup>28</sup> *Dagong bao*, June 27, 1902.

<sup>29</sup> Lü Bicheng, “Mōuchuang zhōngguó bāohù dōngwuhuì zhì yuánqǐ” 謀創中國保護動物會之緣起 (The origin of establishing China Animal Protection Association, in *Lü Bicheng ji*, vol. 1, pp. 9-12).

<sup>30</sup> About the significance and symbolism of Joan of Arc in the late Qing dynasty, see Joan Judge, “Expanding the Feminine/National Imaginary: Social and Martial Heroines in Late Qing Women’s Journals,” *Jindai zhōngguó fūnyíshí yanjiu* 近代中國婦女史研究 (Research on women in modern Chinese history), 15(Dec. 2007), pp. 19-24; Joan Judge, “Blended Wish Images: Chinese and Western Exemplary Women at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” in Grace S. Fong et al. eds., *Beyond Tradition and Modernity: Gender, Genre, and Cosmopolitanism in Late Qing China* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 129-130.

<sup>31</sup> *Dagong bao*, May 10, 1904.

Tanggu, she already mastered the main cultural trends in public opinion on women's education and gender equality.

All personal contacts and media networks, to some extent, constructed Lü Bicheng's imagination of the outside world. However, this imaginative world was contrastive to her dependence on the Yan family. Changing from a cherished daughter in a big family to a dependent female relative in the Yan family, Lü Bicheng must have been through a tough time in Tanggu. Poems written in this time period conveyed a strong sense of sorrow and sentiment.<sup>32</sup> The tension between physical constraint and mind imagination finally turned into a conflict between Lü Bicheng and her uncle, in which women's education became the trigger point. So, what was the picture of women's education in Tianjin at this moment?

To some extent, women's education in Tianjin was a hybrid of a localized educational reform and a globalized introduction of European and Japanese models. Women's schools did not develop until after 1900 when Tianjin was occupied by the Alliance of Eight Powers. The response to the occupation was immediate. Yuan Shikai was appointed by the Qing government as the Zhili Governor and Beiyang Viceroy, one of the most influential positions then, and he became devoted to a localized reform called Self-Governance Movement, in which many issues such as government, police, and tax were institutionalized on the local level and thus gained a certain degree of autonomy from the central government.<sup>33</sup> Education was one of these issues. Tianjin

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<sup>32</sup> Lü Bicheng, "Qingping yue" 清平樂 (Tone to Qingping), in Ying Lianzhi comp. Lüshi san zimei ji 呂氏三姊妹集 (Collected works of the three Lü sisters), Song lyrics section of Lü Bicheng (Tianjin: Dagong bao guan, 1905), p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen R. MacKinnon, *Power and Politics in Late Imperial China: Yuan Shi-kai in Beijing and Tianjin, 1901-1908* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 151-175; Guo Jianlin, "Yuan Shikai, Xu Shichang yu Tianjin defang zizhi" 袁世凱、徐世昌與天津地方自治 (Yuan Shikai, Xu Shichang and the self-government in

was well-known for its long tradition on general and professional education. But most schools built before 1900 were political or military oriented and sponsored by the government.<sup>34</sup> During Yuan's tenure in Tianjin, he not only rebuilt colleges and universities which were demolished in the 1900 occupation, but also encouraged personal donation and establishment of different patterns of schools.<sup>35</sup> He himself submitted many memorials to the throne, requesting official recognition of the individuals who advocated the development of educational institutions in Tianjin.<sup>36</sup>

Meanwhile, Yuan Shikai's focus on educational reform coincided with local elite's intention of enlightening people of Tianjin. In their viewpoint, the reason that Tianjin was defeated and humiliated by the foreign powers was the ignorance of local people about what was happening in the world. In order to eradicate the ignorance, attention had to be paid to education. The local elite built various kinds of schools, including those for orphans, children from poor families, apprentice artisans, and illiterates. The funding sources ranged from individual management, to a group of rich elite, to the collaboration between influential literati and government.<sup>37</sup> All these efforts were acknowledged by Yuan Shikai and the Tianjin government. It is no exaggeration to argue that during Yuan's tenure, this city was undergoing a big wave of educational growth. According to an investigation conducted by the Board of Education of the Qing dynasty in 1907, the total number of all kinds of schools in Zhili Province, where Tianjin

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Tianjin), *Lishi jiaoxue* 歷史教學 (History Teaching), 7(2004), pp. 34-38.

<sup>34</sup> Zhang Damin, *Tianjin jindai jiaoyu shi*, pp.26-43.

<sup>35</sup> Zhang Damin, *Tianjin jindai jiaoyu shi*, pp.89-90.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Orb, "Chihli's Academies and Other Schools in the Late Ch'ing: an Institutional Survey," in Paul Cohen and John Schrecker ed., *Reform in Nineteenth-Century China* (Cambridge, Mass. : East Asian Research Center, Harvard University : distributed by Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 231-234; Stephen R. MacKinnon, *Power and Politics in Late Imperial China*, pp. 138-151. As for the general policies rewarding new-style education donators, see Zhang Xiaoli, *Qingmo "xinzheng" shiqi wenhua zhengce* 晚清“新政”時期文化政策 (The cultural policies in the “New Policy” period in the late Qing) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2010), pp. 100-111

<sup>37</sup> Li Xiaoti, *Qingmo de xianceng shehui qimeng yundong: 1901-1911*, pp. 17-162.

was the largest city, was 8,723, and the total number of students was about 164,000, which ranked Zhili the second nationwide. The educational assets were worth 4,800,000 silver dollars and more than in other provinces and cities.<sup>38</sup>

As one part of the localized educational reform, women's education was still in a very primordial stage in the beginning. Before Lü Bicheng arrived in Tianjin in 1904, there was not a single public women's school. The only one that could be loosely called a women's school was the Yan Women's Home School, which was founded by Yan Fansun 嚴范孫 (1860-1929) in his household compound in 1902. A retired high official in Board of Education of the Qing government and an intimate friend of Yuan Shikai, Yan Fansun was well-known in the elite circle of Tianjin for his devotion to education reform.<sup>39</sup> In 1902, after Yan Fansun returned from an educational investigation trip in Japan, he founded the Yan Women's Home School and put into practice his thoughts on women's education.<sup>40</sup> As we can tell from its name, Yan Women's Home School was still mainly a family school with the enrollment largely from daughters, daughters-in-law, and close female relatives of the Yan family. A small number of female students were daughters of the Wang and Han families in Tianjin, both of whom were close friends and enthusiastic supporters of Yan Fansun. The age of these female students ranged between ten and twenty years old. What made this school distinct from traditional women's home education was the new curriculum based on the Japanese model and the mixture of male teachers and female students. Yan Fansun

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<sup>38</sup> Xue Bu ed., *Guangxu sanshi san nianfen jiaoyu tongji tubiao*, p.17

<sup>39</sup> With the case study on Yan Fansun, Kwan Man Bun points out that the local education development since the late nineteenth century in Tianjin was largely promoted, especially with the financial sponsorship and social networks, by the salt merchants in the local society. Kwan, *The Salt Merchants of Tianjin: State-Making and Civil Society in Late Imperial China*, pp. 99-103.

<sup>40</sup> Yan Xiu, *Yan Xiu dongyou riji* 嚴修東遊日記 (The diary on traveling to Japan by Yan Xiu) (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1995), pp.47-48,75-76.

asked his own sons who were educated in Western-style schools to teach English, mathematics and physical education, which were never found in the conventional curriculum for women. Meanwhile, Yan Fansun also invited a Japanese instructor to teach these girls Japanese, singing, and sewing. The textbooks and teaching tools were all brought from Japan by Yan Fansun, which forecast the influence of Japan on women's education in Tianjin in the following decade.<sup>41</sup>

Facing the disadvantaged development of women's education, newspapers in Tianjin demonstrated a strong and passionate public opinion to encourage its development. One of the most influential newspapers that promoted women's education was *Dagong bao*, which was established by Ying Lianzhi 英斂之 (1867-1926), the "Mr. Ying" in Lü Bicheng's runaway story I cited in the beginning of this chapter. To fully understand *Dagong bao*'s public support for women's education, we have to start with a brief introduction of Ying Lianzhi, who not only played a crucial role in Lü's individual life, but also in person contributed greatly to the growth of women's education, among many other agendas, in Tianjin.

Ying Lianzhi, also named Ying Hua 英華, was a plain red banner<sup>42</sup> man born of a poor Manchu family in the suburb of Beijing and also a Catholic convert. In the early years of his life, Ying Lianzhi spent most of his time struggling against poverty. He

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<sup>41</sup> *Dagong bao*, April 13, 1903; Yan Renqing, "Zufu Yan Xiu zai Tianjin chuangban youer jiaoyu de huiyi" 祖父嚴修在天津創辦幼兒教育的回憶 (The recollection on my grandfather Yan Xiu's developing children's education), *Tianjin wenshi ziliao xuan* 天津文史資料選輯 (The selection on history and literature materials in Tianjin), vol. 25, pp. 47-52; Li Dongjun, *Zhongguo sixue bainian ji: Yan Xiu xin sixue yu zhongguo jindai zhengzhi wenhua xinian* 中國私學百年祭：嚴修新私學與中國近代政治文化系年 (The one hundred year anniversary of China's private education: the new private education of Yanxiu and the chronology of political culture in modern China) (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 2004), pp. 111-113.

<sup>42</sup> The plain red banner refers to one of the eight banners of the Manchus, which were the ruling ethnic people of the Qing Dynasty. The eight banners, which were a military-civic unit of the Manchus, included plain red banner, plain yellow banner, plain white banner, plain blue banner, bordered red banner, bordered yellow banner, bordered white banner, and bordered blue banner.

traveled a lot to look for job opportunities and sometimes he even needed to work two or three jobs at the same time to make the ends meet.<sup>43</sup> In 1900 when Beijing and Tianjin were occupied by the Alliance of Eight Powers, Ying Lianzhi was assisting the French Consul with the Yunnan-Vietnam railroad in Mengzi of Yunnan Province. He felt so trapped in the current situation that he decided to go back to the north. “As I first came here, there is not a single true friend that I can depend on. Moreover it is a remote and poor place, everything is expensive. It is also hard to deliver mail [to and out of this place] and there is nothing I can enjoy.”<sup>44</sup>

In 1901, when he left Yunnan and arrived at Tianjin temporarily, one of his old friends, a rich Catholic merchant, Chai Tianchong 柴天寵 (dates unknown) told him that a group of friends planned to publish a newspaper and asked if Ying Lianzhi would like to join in.<sup>45</sup> Ying was more than happy to do this, first, because publishing newspapers was a very popular and modern enterprise at that time. Secondly doing cultural business and being the critical eyes for the government and society was an ideal dream for many Chinese intellectuals, certainly including Ying Lianzhi. For the next whole year, he ran back and forth among Tianjin, Beijing and Shanghai, looking for printing and human resources and funding. On June 17, 1902, *Dagong bao* was published in the French concession of Tianjin with the French title “L’Impartial.” In the next decade, it became one of the most widely circulated newspapers in China. The success of *Dagong bao* also meant a turning point for Ying Lianzhi’s personal life. He

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<sup>43</sup> For example, in 1899 when Ying Lianzhi was in Tianjin, he had to teach at an elementary school while working at a church. Fang Hao, “Ying Lianzhi xiansheng nianpu jiqi sixiang” 英斂之先生年譜及其思想 (The chronological biography and thoughts of Mr. Ying Lianzhi), in *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p. 13.

<sup>44</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p. 121, June 24, 1900.

<sup>45</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p. 242, April 26, 1901.

gradually settled down in Tianjin and his economic and status situations were bettered. The previous sense of self-pity was dispelled completely. Instead, he became a local celebrity in Tianjin and socialized with people from various classes, so busy so that he barely had time to write his diary, a practice he had been doing since the age of sixteen.<sup>46</sup>

Ying Lianzhi was an enthusiastic supporter of women's education. On the personal level, when his younger sister had to make a living by teaching at a women's school in Yanshan 鹰山, Zhili Province, he advanced his wages to buy some daily necessities and saw her off with her fellows.<sup>47</sup> On the intellectual level, Ying Lianzhi was deeply influenced by the Reform faction and demonstrated a positive attitude towards women's education. Therefore, after the founding of *Dagong bao*, he turned this newspaper into a strong base of advocating women's education.

Between the first issue of *Dagong bao* on June 17, 1902 and the year Lü Bicheng arrived in Tianjin in May 1904, there were a total of eighteen long essays published in favor of women's education, not to mention that many short news reports were also published giving updates on women's education throughout the country. The essays were either editorials on the front page, or reader's letters, or enclosures appended to the newspaper written in colloquial Chinese, as seen from the following table.

Table 3.1: The Published Articles on Women's Education on *Dagong bao*, June 1902-September 1903

Date	Title	Type
June 24,	It Matters to Develop Women's Schools, I	enclosure

<sup>46</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p.529.

<sup>47</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, pp. 26-27, October 24-26, 1899.

1902		
June 25, 1902	It Matters to Develop Women's Schools, II	enclosure
July 1, 1902	The Plan to Develop Women's Education in Tianjin	editorial essay
August 12, 1902	On the Development of Women's Education	editorial essay
August 26, 1902	Advise that Chinese People Should Not Look Down Upon Foreigners, I	enclosure
August 27, 1902	Advise that Chinese People Should Not Look Down Upon Foreigners, II	enclosure
September, 21, 1902	It is Better to Use Phonetic Symbol in Promoting Women's Education	editorial essay
October 12, 1902	Methods on Developing Women's Education Based on China's Current Situations, I	enclosure
October 14, 1902	Methods on Developing Women's Education Based on China's Current Situations, II	enclosure
October 16, 1902	Methods on Developing Women's Education Based on China's Current Situations, III	enclosure
October 17, 1902	Methods on Developing Women's Education Based on China's Current Situations, IV	enclosure
November 26, 1902	The Outline of the Significance of Women's Education, I	editorial essay
November 27, 1902	The Outline of the Significance of Women's Education, II	editorial essay
February 9, 1903	The Interpretation on Women	editorial essay
May 28, 1903	The Regulation of The Experimental Women's School in Tianjin	special Issue

June 9, 1903	On Women's Education	editorial essay
June 18, 1903	Women's Obligation, I	enclosure
July 1, 1903	Women's Obligation, II	
July 23, 1903	Public Announcement on the Experimental Women's School	reader's letters
September 8, 1903	On Women's Education	editorial essay

The main theme of these articles essentially did not go beyond the popular discourse to justify the significance of women's education: women were mothers of future citizens; women were not inferior to men intellectually and thus should receive education equal to men; women occupied half of the whole population and thus needed to contribute to the country as well.<sup>48</sup> However, what made these articles distinct from these popular viewpoints was a strong sense of localism and local anxiety: Tianjin was far behind other cities and provinces in terms of the development of women's education. People were especially concerned about the competition against Shanghai, which shared the similar development trajectory with Tianjin. Both cities were treaty-port cities and underwent quick development after they were open to the West. But at this moment, Shanghai seemed to take an early lead on everything.

One week after *Dagong bao* published its first issue, an essay in colloquial Chinese was published targeting the illiterate readers. In this essay, the author proposes that if

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<sup>48</sup> Qiao Suling, *Jiaoyu yu nüxing: jindai zhongguo nüzi jiaoyu yu zhishi nüxing juexing*, 1840-1921 教育與女性：近代中國女子教育與知識女性覺醒 (Education and women: women's education and the awakening of intellectual women in modern China) (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe,2005), pp.112-125.

local people plan to establish women's schools in Tianjin, they have to go looking for donations from the Southerners who lived in Tianjin because "local people in Tianjin do not know the advantage [of establishing women's schools]." With this money, people in Tianjin would go to Shanghai and hire a middle-level female student to take the teaching position in these schools.<sup>49</sup> A couple of days later on July 1, 1902, there was an editorial essay titled "The Plan to Develop Women's Education in Tianjin." In this essay, the author articulates his concerns about Tianjin's inferiority to Shanghai in terms of women's education. As he argues, Shanghai takes the leading role in women's education and this trend spreads southwards to Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Hubei and Guangzhou, four big southern provinces. However, this wind never reaches north China even though Tianjin is a treaty port city as open as Shanghai is.<sup>50</sup> The author further continues to propose in detail how to establish women's schools in Tianjin by referring to the Shanghai model. Not only does he suggest hiring graduates from women's schools in Shanghai, he also recommends copying school regulations and buying textbooks that Shanghai schools used.<sup>51</sup>

The local elite indeed responded to these calls by establishing some experimental women's schools in the Chinese area. On May 28, 1903, a regulation was published in *Dagong bao* titled "The Regulation of The Experimental Women's School in Tianjin." In the beginning of the regulation, the thirteen local initiators expressed their concern about the underdevelopment of women's schools in Tianjin. "Everyone knows that women's education should be developed. From Beijing to provinces in the east and the

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<sup>49</sup> *Dagong bao*, June 25, 1902.

<sup>50</sup> *Dagong bao*, July 1, 1902.

<sup>51</sup> *Dagong bao*, July 1, 1902.

south, every one considers establishing women's schools as a trend. Tianjin is a metropolis in the north. However, there is only one family school in Yan [Fansun]'s home in the western part of Tianjin. This is such regret for the education circle.<sup>52</sup>

Therefore, the thirteen local elite decided to establish four small-scale experimental women's schools in private households in the western and central parts of the Chinese area in the city. The curricula were still conventionally structured, emphasizing women's moral education, household management and primary literacy. The enrollment for each school was limited to five students with clean family background (versus those from prostitute or actress families) and some level of financial security.<sup>53</sup> Two months later, another public notice showed up in *Dagong bao* to encourage more enrollments. It seemed that there were not enough students for each school. Therefore, only two schools in the southern and western part of Gulou, the center of Chinese area, were able to open as scheduled.

In the public notice, the initiators especially provided the specific information about the instructors and students, as seen from below.<sup>54</sup>

Table 3.2: The Information of Teachers and Students of the Experimental Girls' Schools

School names	Instructors, Age and Identity	Students, Age, Home Address, and Identity
Gulou nan nüxue 鼓樓南女學 (Southern Gulou Girls' School)	Lady Liu, 50, mother of Liu Rongsheng, living in the southern area of Gulou	Cao Peihuan, 8, granddaughter of Cao Rongxuan, living in Xiaoliujia hutong
		Huang Shujun, 10, daughter of Huang

<sup>52</sup> *Dagong bao*, May 28, 1903.

<sup>53</sup> *Dagong bao*, May 28, 1903.

<sup>54</sup> *Dagong bao*, July 23, 1903.

		Zhesheng, living in Banqiao hutong
Gulou xi nüxue 鼓樓西女學 (Western Gulou Girls' School)	Madam Chen, 40, wife of Chen Zhepu, living in Dazhalan of the Western area of Gulou	Chen Wan, 12, eldest daughter of Chen Xiaozhuang, living in Dazhalan
		Chen Shu, 8, second daughter of Chen Xiaozhuang, living in Dazhalan
		Xu Shu, 10, second daughter of Xu Daojian, living in western Street of Gulou

The initiators especially addressed three aspects of these female teachers and students: family background, age, and location of their families. As we can see, the teachers were either mother or wife of some male elite and the average age was above forty, the kind of age that made these two women more recognized by their seniority than gender and thus avoided any stigma on their reputation by frequently interacting with the people outside their households. The two schools were centered around the household of the two female teachers, which was different from the traditional patterns of teaching at the students' homes. Now it was the students, rather than teachers, who had to move to a household to be educated. Meanwhile, students were all daughters or grand-daughters of local elite families and the average age was around ten years old. In a loose sense, girls of this age were still able to be considered ungendered educational subjects and this prevented them from being scandalized by being exposed to the

public.<sup>55</sup> The homes of these students were not far away from the teachers' places, only a couple of blocks away. A sedan chair would be able to carry students to "schools" or sometimes they simply walked to schools, as shown in Figure 2.3 in Chapter Two.

## **Women's Education in Tianjin, 1904-1911**

If Lü Bicheng came to Tianjin with Mrs. Fang as she had planned, she must have felt frustrated about the gap between what she read in newspapers and what she saw in reality. Running away from home and looking for women's education, Lü Bicheng could not fit into any of the schools: she was not related to Yan Fansun in any way and she was also too old and advanced for those experimental schools. After she met Ying Lianzhi and expressed her concerns, Ying Lianzhi came up with the idea that they could establish a women's school themselves and then let Lü Bicheng take over it.<sup>56</sup>

In the following two months, Ying and Lü were occupied with the preparation for the new school. Ying and his wife Shuzhong, a daughter of a declining Manchu family, on the one hand, introduced Lü Bicheng to their friends, including respected local elite such as Yan Fansun, government officials, media enterprisers, rich merchants, and even a couple of Japanese who worked at the consulate in the Japanese concession. Despite the variation of the backgrounds, these men shared a devotion to and interest in women's education. On the other hand, Ying Lianzhi also used his own newspaper *Dagong bao* to publicize Lü Bicheng as a young woman who not only excelled at traditional poetry

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<sup>55</sup> Hsiung Ping-chen, *A Tender Voyage: Children and Childhood in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 205-207.

<sup>56</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, pp. 826-829, May 20-24, 1904.

writing, but also possessed new ideas for promoting women's education and thus relieving the national crisis.<sup>57</sup>

Within two months, there were totally thirteen poems and essays published in *Dagong bao* by Lü Bicheng or by local elite who commented on Lü's thoughts and devotion. All the efforts were paid back. Two months later, not only was the school in good shape but also Yuan Shikai, the highest authority of Tianjin, agreed to offer stable financial support to this school, according to Ying Lianzhi's diary, "Governor Yuan [Shikai] agreed to provide one thousand silver dollars as establishment funding and Official Tang [Shaoyi, who took charge of the Bureau of Tianjin Customs] agreed to guarantee one hundred silver dollars every month from Fundraising Bureau as school expenditure."<sup>58</sup>

As the funding problem was solved, the next big challenge was the shortage of female teachers. Since Tianjin was so underdeveloped on women's education, Ying Lianzhi and Lü Bicheng could not find enough women to fill in the teaching positions of the school. Lü Bicheng's two elder sisters decided to give her a hand. Lü Huiru left her husband's family and Lü Meisun quit her teaching job in Shanghai and came to Tianjin. This was still not enough. They then decided to invite female teachers from the developed south, specifically Shanghai. Ying Lianzhi asked his Shanghai connections to see if they could find any appropriate candidates, after all Shanghai was the largest pool of exporting female teachers to other cities and provinces.

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<sup>57</sup> Grace Fong, "Alternative Modernities, or a Classical Woman of Modern China: The Challenging Trajectory of Lü Bicheng's (1883-1943) Life and Song Lyrics," in Grace S. Fong et al. eds., *Beyond Tradition and Modernity: Gender, Genre, and Cosmopolitanism in Late Qing China*, pp. 16-24.

<sup>58</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p. 856, July 18, 1904.

Yet, moving from the developed south to the developing north must have been a big challenge for the southerners considering the difference in dialects, life styles, and customs. At first Ying Lianzhi did not have any luck in finding female teachers. Finally a woman named Huang Shouyuan 黃守淵 (dates unknown) decided to come. A native of Jiading, a city in the Jiangnan area, which was known for its production of talented women since the seventeenth century, Huang Shouyuan grew up in a literary family with a strong influence from her father who “bridged the West and the East and was devoted to education.” In 1902, Huang Shouyuan attended the Education Department of the Wuben Women’s School, where Lü Meisun worked as a teacher. It might have been through Lü Meisun’s connection that Huang Shouyuan, who graduated from this school in 1904 with excellent grades, decided to come to Tianjin.<sup>59</sup> To coordinate with Huang’s arrival, the opening date of the school was even rescheduled from October 23 to November 7, 1904.<sup>60</sup>

On November 7, Tianjin nüzi gongxue 天津女子公學 (Tianjin Women’s Public School) opened. There were about sixty students enrolled in this school, thirty of whom came from cities outside Tianjin.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, the four instructors Lü Huiru, Lü Meisun, Lü Bicheng and Huang Shouyuan all came from outside and moved to Tianjin for women’s education. Later on, two more graduates from the Wuben Women’s School joined the teaching team from Shanghai: Ma Jungan, twenty-two years old, native of Tongcheng, and Chen Xie, twenty-six years old, native in Songjiang and teaching at

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<sup>59</sup> “Ji Nanxiang huanying hui” 記南翔歡迎會 (Account on the welcome meeting at Nanxiang), *Jingzhong ribao* 警鐘日報 (Alarming bell daily), July 30, 1904.

<sup>60</sup> *Dagong bao*, October 21, 1904.

<sup>61</sup> Mrs. Burton St. John, *The China Times Guide to Tientsin and Neighborhood* (The “China Times” Ltd., 1908), p. 18.

Shanghai Silk Weaving School before.<sup>62</sup> Like the Lü sisters and Huang, these two women were not only young and single, but also came from areas well known for women's literary tradition and culture.

Yet, the shortage of female teachers was still a serious problem that prevented the local elite from establishing more women's schools in Tianjin. To solve this problem, two years later after the founding of the Tianjin Women's Public School, Fu Zengxiang 傅增湘 (1872-1949), one of Yuan Shikai's trustworthy consultants and in charge of government's involvement in women's education, founded a women's normal school to especially train female teachers.<sup>63</sup> All female teachers in the Tianjin Women's Public School were jointly teaching in the normal school. The school also invited two Japanese, one American and one German as female teachers.<sup>64</sup>

Women's schools were not only short of female teachers, but also female students. Fu Zengxiang had planned to enroll sixty female students to the normal school but there were simply not enough qualified women in Tianjin to take the call. Therefore, not only did he publish advisements in various newspapers in Tianjin, Beijing, and Shanghai, he also traveled to these cities in person to look for prospective students. In Beijing, only

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<sup>62</sup> *Beiyang nǚ shifan xuetang tongxue lu* 北洋女師範學堂同學錄 (Student records of Beiyang Women Normal School), 1912.

<sup>63</sup> Fu Zengxiang, “Cangyuan jushi liushi zishu” 藏園居士六十自述 (The self-account of the Master of the Cang garden), in *Tianjin wenshi ziliao xuanji*, vol. 72, 1996, pp. 64-67.

<sup>64</sup> “Guangxu sanshier nian ge nǚ xuetang zhiyuan xingming xuesheng renshu qingce” 光緒三十二年各女學堂職員姓名學生人數清冊 (The detailed list of female teachers' names and number of female students in every women's schools in the thirty-second year of the Guangxu reign), *Zhili jiaoyu zazhi* 直隸教育雜誌 (The journal of education in Zhili), vol. 2, 1907; Shen Yiyun, *Yiyun huiyi* 亦雲回憶 (Memoir of [Shen] Yiyun) (Taibei: Zhuanji wenxue chubanshe: jingxiao zhe Shijie wenwu gongyingshe, 1968), pp. 42-43. The presence of foreign ladies at Chinese women's schools is a question that needs more attention and exploration. As far as what I have explored so far, many foreign teachers were introduced by associations like the Tianjin YMCA (Young Men's Christian Associations) to these schools. For example, in a 1908 annual report, Clarence Hovey Robertson, the associate secretary of the Tianjin YMCA, recorded that the Tianjin YMCA introduced Miss Inez Barnes to the North China Normal for Women. “Annual Report, Year Ending September 30, 1908,” Box 143 (YMCA Biographical Files), Folder 36 (Clarence Hovey Robertson). Kautz Family YMCA Archives.

three out of fifty applicants passed the enrollment examination.<sup>65</sup> More students were taken from Shanghai and Jiangsu, Zhejiang provinces, the traditional Jiangnan area. After the examinations and background check, there were about forty female students accepted by the new school. The trip from Shanghai to Tianjin was very harsh to these young ladies, the majority of whom had never taken a long trip before in their life.

According to Shen Yiyun 沈亦雲 (dates unknown), who was a student enrolled in Shanghai for the future-to-be-open Beiyang nüzi shifan xuetang 北洋女子師範學堂 (Beiyang Women's Normal School),

At the end of the summer and the beginning of the autumn of the Bingwu year, the thirty-second year of Guangxu reign [1906], we, about forty people in a large group, took two ships Xinyu and Xinji of China Merchants Steamship Company and began our trip separately. We lived in the compartments with two persons a room and a bunk. I always had sea sickness and sedan chair sickness. It was my first time to take a sea boat, the compartment was not very clean and I felt sicker. The valor I felt when I left home [disappeared]. In the middle of the trip, when I thought of my home, I had to keep the tears to myself and did not want to show my weakness to others. When the boat arrived in Yantai [where we began going into the north]... I heard about the hardships of living in the north and I was very cautious [of what I was going to experience]....Students from Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces were all not able to speak mandarin. Zhou Daoru was the only person who once lived in other places, Hu Peizhi could speak Mandarin because she was native to Anhui Province. We depended on those two...The first day when we arrived in Tianjin, we boarded at the Zizhulin Pier. It was sprinkling [in the beginning], [but] suddenly it was raining cats and dogs. When we arrived at campus, the water was above our knees. This was the first warning that Tianjin gave to us.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> “Kao nü shifan” 考女師範 (Taking entrance exams to the women's normal school), *Shuntian shibao*, June 3, 1906.

<sup>66</sup> Shen Yiyun, *Yiyun huiyi*, pp. 39-40.

Shortly after this group of students arrived in Tianjin, Beiyang Women's Normal School started on June 19, 1906.<sup>67</sup> The presence of such a large number of southern women in school provoked a debate among local elite on whether it is appropriate to use Tianjin's money to educate "people from different provinces."<sup>68</sup> But from a retrospective viewpoint, the founding of this school signified the rising number of female teachers who moved from the south and stayed in the north after graduation.<sup>69</sup>

The establishment of these two public women's schools assured the local elite of Tianjin government's positive attitude towards women's education. Meanwhile, in 1907, the central government also issued a proclamation recognizing women's education as part of the official educational system. Therefore, from the Tianjin Women's Public School in 1904, women's schools mushroomed in Tianjin in the following decade.

According to a 1906 survey on the number of students in Zhili Province, there were 461 female students in Tianjin consisting of 59% of the whole female student population of the province.<sup>70</sup> This large number of female students made Tianjin a model in promoting women's education in Zhili province and north China.<sup>71</sup>

Below is the detailed information on women's schools established in Tianjin between 1904 and 1911. I especially highlight those who moved to Tianjin from other cities and provinces.

Table 3.3: The Information on Women's Schools in Tianjin, 1904-1911

<sup>67</sup> *Dagong bao*, June 19, 1906.

<sup>68</sup> Shen Yiyun, *Yiyun huiyi*, p.41.

<sup>69</sup> Shen Yiyun, *Yiyun huiyi*, p. 41.

<sup>70</sup> "Bensi zuijin diaocha quansheng ge xuetang xuesheng shumu biao" 本司最近調查全省各學堂學生數目表(The chart of the number of students in each school in the Zhili Province recently investigated by the bureau), *Zhili jiaoyu zazhi*, vol. 2, no. 10, 1906.

<sup>71</sup> Han Tiyun, "Lun Zhili xuewu jinbu zhi cidi bing zhu qi fada zhi qiantu" 論直隸學務進步之次第並祝其發達之前途 (On the splendor of the education progress of Zhili Province and congratulations on its flourishing future), *Zhili jiaoyu zazhi*, vol. 2, no. 19, 1906.

Name	Time	Students	Teachers and staff	Notes
Hedong Women's School	Apr. 1904	/	/	
Shushen Women's School (Later changed to Shufan Women's School)	May 1904	20	2	One Miss Zhang (teacher) from Beijing
No. 1 Local Women's School	June 1904	19(or 22)	1	"Local" here means that these schools were funded exclusively by local elite.
Tianjin Women's Public School	Nov. 1904	56	12	Six female teachers came from elsewhere.
Yan Women's School	June 1905	23(or 42)	8	This school was the extension of the Yan Women's Home School in 1902.
No. 2 Local Women's School	Aug. 1905	30	1	
No. 3 Local Women's School	Aug. 1905	13	1	
Beiyang Advanced Women's School	Nov. 1905	78	7	Lu Xingzhou, the general superintendent, came from Nanhai. Three teachers Kuang Wenfang, Wei Xiangqin, Gong Weiban and Zhang Ruolan came from Shandong province. Another teacher Miss Yang

				came from Beijing.
No. 1 Public Women's School	Dec. 1905	42 (or 68)	2	
Puyu Women's School	Mar. 1906	40 (or 120)	5	
No. 2 Public Women's School	Apr. 1906	11(or 61, or 80)	2	
No. 3 Public Women's School	May 1906	80(or 120)	3	
No. 4 Public Women's School	May 1906	20(or 40)	3	
Beiyang Women's Normal School	Aug. 1906	84	33	About forty students came from southern provinces and three came from Beijing.
No. 5 Public Women's School	Aug. 1906	20(or 80)	3	
No. 4 Local Women's School	Apr. 1907	16	3	
No. 6 Public Women's School	Apr. 1907	74	3	
No. 7 Public Women's School	Oct. 1908	40	2	
No. 8 Public Women's School	Dec. 1908	48	2	
No. 9 Public Women's School		34	1	
Beiyang Women's Medical School	1908	9	/	Six students came from Zhili province and one student came from Guangdong province. The schoolmistress Jin

				Yunmei came from Zhejiang Province and was the first Chinese female student studying medicine in America.
No. 10 Public Women's School	1909	/	/	
Beiyang Public Hongwen School	/	80-90	10	

- Sources: 1. “Tianjin xuetang diaochabiao” 天津學堂調查表 (The investigation table of schools in Tianjin), *Zhili jiaoyu zazhi*, vol. 6, 1906.
2. “Guangxu sanshier nian ge nü xuetang zhiyuan xingming xuesheng renshu qingce” *Zhili jiaoyu zazhi* vol. 2, 1907.
3. “Zhili geshu nü xuetang zhiyuan xuesheng yilanbiao” 直隸各屬女學堂職員學生一覽表(A list of female teachers and students in women's schools in Zhili), *Zhili jiaoyu zazhi*, vol. 16, 1907.
4. *Dagong bao*, 1902-1911.
5. *Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌 (*The Eastern Miscellany*), 1904-1911.
6. *Minxing bao* 民興報 (Newspaper of People's Aspirations), 1909-1910.
7. *Jin bao* 津報 (Newspaper of Tianjin), 1905-1909.
8. *Shuntian shibao*, 1905-1911.
9. Hou Zhentong, *Ershi shiji chu de Tianjin gaikuang*, pp. 140, 144-145.
10. Shi Xiaochuan, *Tianjin zhinan*, vol. 3, pp. 8-11.

From the table, it is clear to conclude that women's education in Tianjin between 1904 and 1911 was growing faster than in previous years. Not only were there more types of schools, including local schools funded by local elite, public schools by the government, and private schools by single gentry families, but also women's professional school, such as Beiyang Women's Medical School, also appeared. Meanwhile, almost all the women's schools were located in the Chinese area and far away from foreign concessions. In addition, as the table indicates, to fill in the larger pool of students and teachers, a group of educated women moved from the neighboring

area or the south to a totally new and different urban space either as paid teachers or as enrolled students.

## Conclusion

For this group of women, their emergence in Tianjin was paradoxical as both a hope and a threat: on the one hand, they represented a progressive force that contributed to the national salvation project. But on the other hand, they were also a group of women, young, single and floating in the city without familial or social connections, which had been considered a threat to an ordered society. Many schools thus established strict regulations to discipline these young students in terms of how they should dress and how they should behave.<sup>72</sup> Usually one of the regulations was to prevent students' from freely stepping out of the campus and to attempt to constrain them in a limited school space. For example, one of the regulations of Beiyang Women's Normal School asserts that "[Students] are allowed to go out on the days when there is no class. Yet, they have to come back before the designated time. If there are no relatives living in Tianjin, students are not allowed to stay outside overnight."<sup>73</sup>

Despite all these limits, the campus was nevertheless not, and could not be, isolated from the outside world. Especially at this moment, Tianjin was undergoing a process of urban reconstruction after the 1900 occupation, which provided more alternatives for these educated women in the public domain. They went shopping for daily necessities at

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<sup>72</sup> For example, the school superintendent of the No. 9 Public Women's School in Tianjin required all students to have the fringe hair style. See *Minxing bao*, April 6, 1910. The discipline on women has been a crucial issue since the late Qing dynasty. Even though different parties may have various agendas, women's body has been a main focus of this discipline process. See Louise Edwards, "Policing the Modern Women in Republican China," *Modern China*, 26:2 (Apr., 2000): 115-147.

<sup>73</sup> *Dagong bao*, July 15, 1906.

stores, to buy books or stationary at the bookstores, to watch operas or movies at theatres, to have dinner with friends at restaurants, and to take photos in the photo shops. Without the burden of the family or marriage, these women were like birds let out of cage and demonstrated a greater level of autonomy when they enjoyed the urban experience. Shen Yiyun once recalled that “when I studied at *jiashu* 家塾 (home school), we all used the cheapest brush and ink. After I arrived in Tianjin, I myself went to the bookstore. Even though my poor calligraphy did not deserve it, I bought the high-quality papers and stationary with liberality [with the scholarship she earned at school]. Sometimes, it was nearly a waste.”<sup>74</sup> But this autonomy also increased the extent to which they were exposed to the public society. The paralleled autonomy and publicity became an indispensable component of their identity, which is the main topic discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>74</sup> Shen Yiyun, *Yiyun huiyi*, pp. 41-42.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Wandering in Public**

#### **The Mobility and Urban Experience of Educated Women**

The group of educated women who moved to Tianjin to participate in women's education was relatively young and usually had neither a prominent family background nor connections in the city. They were also different from other women whose families had lived in Tianjin for generations or who married into big merchant or official families in Tianjin. To some extent, this newly formed social group of women gained more autonomy from the firmly established norms for local women in Tianjin than was common for women. The consequence of this autonomy, on the one hand, provided a greater level of freedom with which they were able to adapt into the urban space. Stepping out of the inner chamber, they became newcomers to enjoy the fruits of this urbanization, which was not supposed to be their activity sphere at all in the conventional sense. On the other hand, this autonomy also exposed these women to the public society more than they were supposed to be. This publicity increased the possibility that they were mixing and interacting with men in various situations, which violated the conventional prescription that they were supposed to stay isolated from the other sex and from the public space. In this chapter, by focusing on two aspects of these women's urban experience, the public transportation and leisure activities, I will examine the controversy and contestation in these women's identity formation when they moved around in cities.

The main sources to explore this group of women's urban experience come from

Ying Lianzhi's diary. Ying Lianzhi began to write his diary at around the age of sixteen when he abandoned the military career for literary education.<sup>1</sup> When he first began to record his daily life, Ying Lianzhi used to write down his own thoughts on certain issues and to record his own poems.<sup>2</sup> Later on, his writing became more and more simple, detailed and factual, only recording where he went, who he met, and what he bought and so on. Especially after he became the general manager of *Dagong bao*, since he was so occupied with publishing newspaper and socializing with friends of all circles, he was not even able to maintain this daily practice.

Before Ying Lianzhi met Lü Bicheng in 1904, Ying Lianzhi did not very often record the activities of women who appeared in his life. Even for Shuzhong, his wife, he only occasionally mentioned her individual activities. Yet, this writing style changed dramatically after the day he met Lü Bicheng. Afterwards when Lü's three elder sisters came to Tianjin and joined Lü Bicheng to teach, not only did Ying Lianzhi keep a very detailed record of the Lü sisters, he also wrote down more activities of his wife and other women who helped in the project of establishing women's schools. It is not hard to understand why Ying Lianzhi made this change. Bearing the idea in mind that one day his diary might be read by the later generations, when it became unavoidable to interact with women beyond his family or marriage connections, even if it was for the righteous cause of women's education, he had to be cautious to keep a clear and detailed record, indicating a way of self-explaining his relationship with these outside women. This intentionality, however, provided a good opportunity to explore the daily activities of this group of educated women in the urban space.

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<sup>1</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p. 529.

<sup>2</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p. 529.

## Public Transportation

The first issue in regard of women's mobility is to see how women move. In traditional Chinese society, the main principle used to set up boundary for women's activity sphere was the *nei/wai*(inner/outer) distinction. Under this principle, the isolation of women, especially genteel women, in the inner chamber was considered a manifestation of their virtuousness. Yet, as many scholars have already argued, women in reality actually took many opportunities to cross the boundary. Some women accompanied their husbands or sons to go to official appointments, other women went to pilgrimage trip or outing with female friends or family members.<sup>3</sup> Or even in some extreme cases, women would travel along to send back their late husband's bodies to the hometown or to make a living as professional teachers.<sup>4</sup> On these occasions though women had to travel out, they were very cautious to minimize the contact with the public.

This inner/outer boundary was hardly maintained at the turn of twentieth century, especially by the group of educated women under discussion. Without any familial or marital connections in Tianjin, these women had to take care of their business on their own whenever they paid visits to friends, or run personal errands. Especially to build a new social network, these women had to move beyond the campus and interact with the outside world more frequently than their predecessors did. The shortage of funding and the more chances to go outside made these women choose more convenient and cheaper

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<sup>3</sup> For women in the pilgrimage trip, see Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 182-185; Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chamber*, pp. 219-224.

<sup>4</sup> Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chamber*, pp. 115-142; Susan Mann, "The Virtue of Travel for Women in the Late Empire," in Bryna Goodman etc. ed., *Gender in Motion: Divisions of Labor and Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China*, pp. 55-74.

means to move around. Yet, like their American sisters in the same time period, while they enjoyed the physical convenience on a greater level, this mobility also implied a bigger threat to their virtue and morality.<sup>5</sup> These women had to make balance between freedom of movement and preservation of virtuousness.

## CITY-TO-CITY TRAVEL

When Lü Bicheng traveled from Tanggu to Tianjin, she took the train. In the beginning of twentieth century, there were several ways to make the trip. The most respectable way of traveling to Tianjin for women was to take the horse-drawn carriage along the two sides of the Hai River, the main water system connecting Tanggu and Tianjin.<sup>6</sup> It is not clear how long it would take, but probably less than two days. The carriage was drawn by one or two horses controlled by a groom. A piece of curtain was usually hung down in front of the carriage to prevent women or any other guests sitting inside from being seen by the public. Horse-drawn carriage not only indicated privacy, it also symbolized a high social status. Even if just for renting, it usually cost about three silver dollars one day.<sup>7</sup> For Lü Bicheng, a young dependent woman running away from home without any luggage, horse-drawn carriage was definitely out of her range of possibilities.

Or a boat, which was faster and more convenient than a carriage, is another option. After all, Tianjin and Tanggu were well connected by the water system. As the intersection of both the Grand Canal and sea routes, Tanggu was a transportation center

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<sup>5</sup> For women in the United States as a comparison, see Barbara Welke, *Recasting American Liberty: Gender, Race, Law, and the Railroad Revolution, 1865-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 53-57.

<sup>6</sup> Hou Zhentong, *Ershi shiji chu de Tianjin gaikuang*, pp. 383-384.

<sup>7</sup> Hou Zhentong, *Ershi shiji chu de Tianjin gaikuang*, pp. 97-99.

connecting Tianjin with Northeast, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Qingdao, the major coastal cities of China. When passengers arrived in Tanggu, they would change from sea ships to small flat-bottomed or stream boats and it would take about five hours to arrive at the Zizhulin matou 紫竹林碼頭 (Zizhulin Pier) located on the west bank of the Hai River, along which most foreign piers and companies were built. Foreigners took charge of the majority of the small boats into Tianjin, which were more advanced and faster than those run by the Chinese companies.<sup>8</sup>

However, it is exactly this foreignness attached to the boat transportation that people were concerned about, especially when passengers were elite women. In 1902, when there was a big epidemic in Tianjin, every ship from Tianjin to Yantai, Shandong Province, managed by foreign companies had to be checked to avoid contagion. Rumor said it that every woman had to be examined by foreigners in the nude. One story had it that an official's wife resisted this humiliation and was beaten to death by foreigners and another official's young daughter jumped into the sea out of shame.<sup>9</sup> The rumor became so vivid that a reader's letter had to be published in *Dagong bao* to clarify the misunderstanding. Yet, the idea that elite women had to travel with many people on foreign boats constantly caused panic. Later in 1905 when Lü Meisun had to travel by ship from Tianjin to Shanghai by herself, Ying Lianzhi felt restless about Lü Meisun's trip, "This time, Mei [here refers to Lü Meisun] boarded the ship as a lady of the inner chamber. I was very worried. Therefore I sent her to Tanggu [by taking the same boat

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<sup>8</sup> Hou Zhentong, *Ershi shiji chu de Tianjin gaikuang*, p. 94; Shi Xiaochuan, *Tianjin zhinan* 天津指南 (The guide book for Tianjin) (Tianjin: Tianjin wenming shuju, 1911), vol. 4, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Dagong bao*, August 10, 1902.

with her] and asked people on the ship to take care of her.”<sup>10</sup>

Lü Bicheng did not take the boat either—I will explain the reason later in this section. Instead she took the train to Tianjin. As one of the most controversial public transportations appearing in China since the 1870s, the first train and railway were built in Tianjin in 1884 and was first used to export coal out of a mine in Yanzhuang to Tianjin.<sup>11</sup> Tanggu was the mid-point in the line since 1888.<sup>12</sup> Later when the trains were used to transport passengers, the train carriages were usually divided into four classes and the price ranged from thirty cents to five cents.<sup>13</sup> In 1902, the fourth class was canceled and the price was rising too. The first class cost one hundred fifty cents, the second one hundred cents and the third fifty cents.<sup>14</sup> The first class coach was saved especially for government officials and other influential people and was thus usually decorated with luxuries, such as electric lights and a heating system. The second class coach was much plainer than the first one and only had rows of wooden chairs. The third and fourth classes were targeting poor people and there was nothing inside the coaches.<sup>15</sup>

Since the first day of its appearance, there was a huge uproar over the role that the train played in the society.<sup>16</sup> No matter how hard people argued against each other about

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<sup>10</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, pp. 970-971, March 10, 1905.

<sup>11</sup> Zeng Kunhua, *Zhongguo tielu shi* 中國鐵路史 (The history of China's railroad) (Taibei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1973) p. 45; O.D. Rasmussen, *Tientsin: An Illustrated Outline History*, pp. 67-71.

<sup>12</sup> *Shi bao*, June 12, 1888.

<sup>13</sup> *Shi bao*, June 12, 1888.

<sup>14</sup> *Dagong bao*, July 11, 1902.

<sup>15</sup> Hou Zhentong, *Ershi shiji chu de Tianjin gaikuang*, pp.65-66; *Shi bao*, October 4-5, 1888.

<sup>16</sup> Some reform-minded Chinese, such as Kang Youwei, connected the building of railroad with the national building and they argued that the railroad could better the nation in crisis in terms of economy, military force and commerce. Kang Youwei, “Lun tielu” 論鐵路 (On railway), in *Zhongguo shixuehui* 中國史學會 (The history association of China) ed., *Zhongguo jindaishi ziliaojingkan: Wuxu bianfa* 中國近代史資料叢刊 · 戊戌變法 (The series publication of materials on Chinese modern history: Wuxu reform) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1957), vol. 2, p. 141. On the other side, the opposite voice would assert that railroad destroyed the *qi* of the nation by digging railroad anywhere and would incur the opposition of many commoners whose households, jobs and even ancestor tombs would be disrupted by the railroad. Li Hongzhang, “Haijun hangao” 海軍函稿 (The memorials and letters on the navy), Mi Rucheng ed., *Zhongguo jindai tielu shi ziliaojingkan* 中國近代鐵路史資料 (The materials on the railway

the significance of this transportation, the images that were related to train were usually depicted as masculine. Nobody ever considered women as part of this picture in the beginning.



(Figure 4.1: “Zhongnu nanfan” 罢怒難犯 (It is hard to go against the resentment of the masses). This illustration shows that a political delegation in Tianjin boarding a train to Beijing to send their political petition to the central government in 1910. Many of their passionate comrades are seeing them off at the train station. *Xingsu huabao*, 1910, date unknown)

Women finally showed up at the station and got on the train, along with other passengers. In 1886, only two years after the first train in Tianjin, “according to what the Western newspapers reported, there were more Chinese who wanted to take the train. The manager of railroad therefore charged fees … [The manager] chose different dates to only carry women and children.”<sup>17</sup> The news report indicated that there was a gendered section on the train exclusively for women and children.

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history in modern China) (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1963), vol. 1, p. 149.

<sup>17</sup> *Shen bao*, December 6, 1886.



(Figure 4.2: “Shijin bumei” 拾金不昧 (Not pocketing the money that he picked up). The text in this illustration has nothing to do with women. It talks about a worker in the government bureau who finds a lost wallet at the railway station, which is shown at the lower left part of the illustration. But the illustrator places two Manchu-dressed women at the right part with a male servant, which attests to women’s emergence in the railway station. *Xingsu huabao*, date unknown)

It is very possible that Lü Bicheng took the second class coach, which was more affordable, probably costing only some pocket money. All the passengers were probably came from similar social status or even with the same gender. The construction of such a temporary space only for women, on the one hand, reinforced the social status and identity of these women, making sure that these middle- and upper-class ladies did not mix wildly with people from lower social status, be they men or women. On the other hand, this gender-exclusive space also strengthened, at least temporarily, a sense of sisterhood among these women and projected possibilities of mutual benefit and shelter for a long-term connection, as we see the protection that Lü Bicheng received from the wife of Master of the Buddha Light Pavilion she met on the train.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Both women in Europe and America faced similar challenges as Chinese women did at proximately the same time period. For the scholarship of comparison, see Beth Muellner, “The Deviance of Respectability: Nineteenth-century Transport from A Woman’s Perspective,” in *Journal of Transport History*, 23:1 (Mar. 2002), pp. 37-45; Barbara Welke, *Recasting American Liberty*; and Amy Richter, *Home on the Rails: Women, the Railroad, and the Rise of Public*

Not only was the price affordable, the trip was also much shorter than boat and horse-drawn carriage. It took less than two hours between Tanggu and Tianjin and three hours between Tianjin and Beijing.<sup>19</sup> Other than price and distance, one possible reason of Lü's preference of train to boat was that all train schedules were printed in major newspapers in Tianjin; boat schedules were not.<sup>20</sup> Take *Dagong bao* as one example, since 1902 the first year of its publication, a certain section in the advertisement page listed all train schedules passing through or starting from Tianjin. Since newspaper was a major source for Lü Bicheng to obtain information on the outside world, she must have known which train she would take before she left her uncle's home.

Price, distance and schedule, all these factors made the train preferable to other long-distance transport means for this group of educated women to travel within an appropriate distance. Later when Lü Huiru, the eldest of the Lü sisters, came from Tanggu to Tianjin and joined Lü Bicheng's teaching team, she took the train.<sup>21</sup> When Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875-1907), a radical feminist and revolutionist then in Beijing, paid a visit to Lü Bicheng in Tianjin, she also took the train.<sup>22</sup> Yet, what kind of transportation did these women take after they arrived in Tianjin? In the next section, I will move on to discuss the short-distance transport means within the city.

## RICKSHAW

The twenty-fourth day of the third month of the thirty year of Guangxu

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*Domesticity.*

<sup>19</sup> *Dagong bao*, September 18, 1902.

<sup>20</sup> The earliest schedule I have seen so far was published on *Shi bao* by the railway company. It indicates that the train starts at four p.m. in Tanggu and arrives in Tianjin at six p.m. *Shi bao*, September 15, 1888.

<sup>21</sup> For example, Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiasheng riji yigao*, p. 830, May 27, 1904.

<sup>22</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiasheng riji yigao*, p. 838, June 10, 1904.

Reign. Today it is sunny and bright. After noon, my wife [Shuzhong] brought [Lü] Bicheng, Mrs. Fang and Shenge [Ying's son] and took rickshaws to go out for fun. They went to Jie Garden and then took a small boat back to Chadiankou. Later they took rickshaws to Daily News Agency for a while...  
<sup>23</sup>

The entry was recorded by Ying Lianzhi on the second day of Lü Bicheng's move into the *Dagong bao* Headquarters. Shuzhong hosted Lü Bicheng and Mrs. Fang to go on a pleasure excursion. The *Dagong bao* headquarters was located in the French concession while Jie Garden, a well-known luxurious landscape garden built in 1723 by a rich salt merchant family, was located in the southwestern part of the Chinese area. The journey was not easy. To get to the Jie Garden, these ladies had to head westward to leave the French concession and pass the Japanese concession and then cross half of the Chinese area. The rickshaw made this possible.

The rickshaw was a production of globalization and represented a kind of efficiency in the process of urbanization. In around 1873, it was first introduced from Japan by a French merchant to Shanghai. Not very long after, this foreign-style urban transportation appeared in Tianjin to meet the needs of urbanites for convenience and availability.<sup>24</sup> This kind of vehicle was equipped with two wheels with iron shafts in the center to support the weight of the passenger. This design especially provided security when crossing bumpy roads. A single seat was set above the wheels, sometimes with a piece of convertible canvas sheltering the passenger from sun or rain or public gaze. Rickshaw

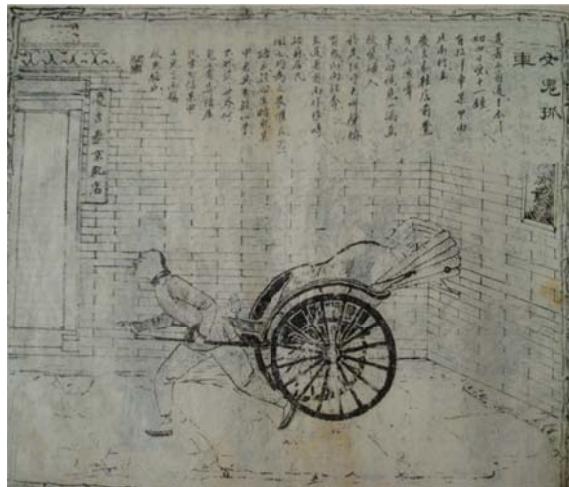
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<sup>23</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p. 819, May 9, 1904.

<sup>24</sup> Liu Haiyan, *Kongjian yu shehui: jindai Tianjin chengshi de yanbian* 空間與社會：近代天津城市的演變(Space and society: the transformation of urban Tianjin in modern time) (Tianjin: Tianjin shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2003), p. 66. The research on rickshaw pullers, their activism, and urban politics has been a well-researched topic recently. See David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1989) and Fung Chi Ming, *Reluctant Heroes: Rickshaw Pullers in Hong Kong and Canton, 1874-1954* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005).

pullers usually stayed on the streets or settled at certain spots for potential business.<sup>25</sup>

This service was very convenient for the customers. They just walked out and called any pullers available.<sup>26</sup> The price was very reasonable, about one or two cents for a mile.<sup>27</sup>



(Figure 4.3: “Nügui zhuache” 女鬼抓車 (A female ghost holding a rickshaw). This is what a rickshaw looked like in the late Qing Tianjin, *Xingsu huabao*, date unknown)

The rickshaw changed how people moved around in a short distance within cities. This is especially clear for men. According to a Japanese investigation of Tianjin in 1909, previously when Chinese high-class men went out, they used to take a sedan chair, horse-drawn carriages or just ride horses. However, in early twentieth century, people liked to take rickshaws since the roads were solid enough after the city was rebuilt and rickshaw was cheaper, more convenient and time-saving.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, in the first decade of twentieth century, the number of rickshaws greatly increased and became the most

<sup>25</sup> *Minxing bao*, April 6, 1910.

<sup>26</sup> Chu Renxun, *Wenjian lu* 聞見錄 (Record of hearing and seeing), vol. 1, p. 41, cited from Liu Haiyan, *Kongjian yu shehui: jindai Tianjin chengshi de yanbian*, p. 67.

<sup>27</sup> Shi Xiaochuan, *Tianjin zhinan*, vol. 4, p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> Hou Zhentong, *Ershi shiji chu de Tianjin gaikuang*, p. 99; Liu Haiyan, “Dianche, gonggong jiaotong yu Tianjin jindai chengshi fazhan” 電車、交通與天津近代城市發展 (Street cars, transportation and the urban development of modern Tianjin), *Shilin* 史林 (Historical Review), vol. 3, 2006, pp. 20-21.

popular transportation vehicle. At about 1906, there were about 2306 rickshaw household, 8802 rickshaw pullers and 6700 rickshaws,<sup>29</sup> which almost doubled the number of rickshaws before 1900.<sup>30</sup> Due to the frequent overstep of boundaries between foreign concessions and Chinese area, the authorities of each area imposed regular monthly fees for each rickshaw. The Chinese area charged forty cents while each foreign concession fifty cents.<sup>31</sup> The rickshaw puller needed to get nine stamps on his license to justify his payment and then he could go anywhere he wanted.<sup>32</sup>

However, this picture was more nuanced for women due to the rickshaw's exposure to public. Women took rickshaws for sightseeing, like the three ladies I mentioned earlier, or they visited friends, ran some errands, and went shopping. When they enjoyed the fresh air and convenience brought by this way of mobility, they were also exposed to the public gaze of various groups. Nobody really publicly criticized or opposed women's taking rickshaw and running over in the cities since rickshaws were too convenient for the daily life. But the public opinion always expressed a very subtle negative attitude towards this issue. Whenever local news reported accidents or injuries caused by rickshaws, if there were any women involved, women were usually depicted as victims in the scenarios. As early as in 1895, when a local resident hired a most trustworthy rickshaw puller to send his niece back to her home, she was abducted and sold off by the puller.<sup>33</sup> In the following illustration, the reporter describes the scene that when a young lady, who is holding her child, takes a rickshaw after she comes out of a teahouse, the

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<sup>29</sup> Hou Zhentong, *Ershi shiji chu de Tianjin gaikuang*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>30</sup> According to an investigation in 1895, there were about 3000 rickshaws in Tianjin. *Zhi bao* 直報 (Zhi newspaper), June 11, 1895.

<sup>31</sup> Hou Zhentong, *Ershi shiji chu de Tianjin gaikuang*, p. 100.

<sup>32</sup> Hou Zhentong, *Ershi shiji chu de Tianjin gaikuang*, p. 101.

<sup>33</sup> *Zhi bao*, February 11, 1895.

rickshaw turns over and the young lady falls on the ground.



(Figure 4.4: “Xingwei shuaishang” 幸未摔傷 (Fortunately no injuries). *Xingshu huabao*, date unknown)

Taking rickshaw was not only a physical threat to women’s bodies. More important, it also implied an indication of lower social status of those women who took it. These women usually included women from poor families (Figure 4.5, a poor old woman in a rickshaw is hit by the carriage of the General Manager of Public Project Bureau), prostitutes (Figure 4.6, when a former prostitute comes back to visit her rescue home, she takes the rickshaw), and actresses (Figure 4.7, two actresses squeeze into one rickshaw and flirt to each other in public. Again they are watched by two male bystanders.).



(Figure 4.5: “Qianche zhijian” 前車之鑒 (Lessons from the front carriage). *Xingshu huabao*, date unknown)



(Figure 4.6: “Jiliang shengju” 濟良盛舉 (The grand achievement of rescuing the ignorant). *Xingshu huabao*, date unknown)



(Figure 4.7: “Shibu yaguan” 實不雅觀 (Truly not decent to watch). *Xingsu huabao*, date unknown)

On the other end of the social ladder, women with high social status usually took a closed horse-drawn carriage when they went out in the city. The majority of these women either came from official families in Tianjin or from big clans which had inhabited Tianjin for generations. Sitting in the carriage enabled them to avoid direct exposure to the public gaze and also demonstrated the social status of their families.<sup>34</sup> In the following illustration, even though the reporter criticizes an official’s wife for violating the national mourning ceremony by wearing make-up, he does convey the information that ladies from official families usually take carriage, “since she takes the horse-drawn carriage, it is without doubt that she must be the wife of a certain official.”

<sup>34</sup> Hou Zhentong, *Ershi shiji chu de Tianjin gaikuang*, p. 97.



(Figure 4.8: “Guosang zhiwen yi” 國喪志聞 (一) (The report of the national mourning ceremony, one). *Xingsu huabao*, 1908, date unknown)

The importance of the carriage as a means of conveyance for elite women is not just reflected through printed periodicals, it was also attested by Ying Lianzhi’s diary. In one of the meetings with local elite men and women to prepare for the establishment of the Tianjin Women’s Public School, Ying Lianzhi mentioned that wives of Fu Zengxiang and Huang Liangchen, both of whom were influential officials in Yuan Shikai’s government, came to his house in horse-drawn carriages.<sup>35</sup> But from Ying Lianzhi’s diary, it is clear to see that for the Lü sisters, Ying’s wife, or their lady friends, whenever they went out, they always took rickshaws. Later when the Lü sisters moved into the school and lived on campus, which was located close to the Tianjin government in the Chinese area, they paid visits to Ying Lianzhi and his wife at the *Dagong bao* Headquarters almost on a daily basis by taking rickshaws.

During the frequent visits, one day in 1906, the rickshaw that Lü Meisun took was hit by a street car and Lü Meisun broke her wrist. The accident not only endangered Lü’s

<sup>35</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p. 827, May 22, 1904.

life, but also evolved into a sensational social event. As Lü Meisun recalled, “due to the fact that I broke my wrist and could not teach, women’s schools in Tianjin and Beijing jointly signed a petition to the government, requesting compensation from the street car company.”<sup>36</sup> In addition to educational circles, the public opinion also sympathized with Lü Meisun’s accident. This time, newspapers did not lampoon the fact that women who took rickshaw should also take the risks that accompanied it, as they always did to other women who were injured in the incidents, such as the woman in Figure 4.4. Instead, after the incident, a news reporter immediately dug into all details and updated the readers. At the end of the article, the reporter commented, “At this moment, women’s education is in the burgeoning stage. Female teachers with wide knowledge and sound scholarship are as rare as phoenix… [Lü Meisun] is strong in nature, knowledgeable and especially outstanding. What she suffered from this incident was also the misfortune of women’s education in China. I believe that this time when the government handles this case, it must not close it with about ten silver dollars which is the common compensation for the injured.”<sup>37</sup> It is clear that in the reporter’s viewpoint, a female teacher was more valuable than a commoner woman if both of them were hit by taking rickshaws. Accordingly, the injury of Lü Meisun was considered as damage to the world of women’s education.

From Ying Lianzhi’s diary, we can draw a chart of where the group of educated women like the Lü sisters went by taking rickshaws.

Table 4.1: The Activities of the Lü Sisters in Tianjin

Category	Activities
Shopping	Stationary stores, book stores, drug

<sup>36</sup> Lü Meisun, “Meisun ziji sansheng yinguo,” *Mianliyuan suibi*, p. 85.

<sup>37</sup> *Dagong bao*, August 24, 1906.

	stores, cloth shops
Dining	Restaurants (Western style and Chinese style)
Sightseeing	City tour and specific sightseeing locations such as railway station
Entertainment	Photography studios, teahouses, circus performances, magic performances
Visit to friends	Private households, newspaper agencies, government bureaus, Japanese Consulate
Education-related activities	Observe other women's schools, visit Kaogong chang 考工廠 (commercial product exhibit hall) and museums

This is only what we know of the three Lü sisters' activities. If we take into account other female teachers and students, the sphere extending beyond the school must be enlarged to a great extent. By taking rickshaws, this group of women went further into every corner of the city: they bought fine paper and ink at stationary stores;<sup>38</sup> they found the latest novels and textbooks, usually transmitted from Shanghai, at bookstores;<sup>39</sup> they went shopping at Guodianjie or Guyijie, two main business streets in the Chinese area, for clothes;<sup>40</sup> they bought daily necessities such as soap or cosmetics at Huichun Drugstore or Watson's Store.<sup>41</sup> Yet, this convenient means of transportation also exposed them to the public gaze and sometimes made it hard to distinguish them from other lower-status women I mentioned earlier. This ambiguity was thus incorporated into their identity during the process they accommodated into the city.

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<sup>38</sup> In around 1911, there were nineteen stationary stores, paper stores and brush and ink stores in Tianjin. Three out of nineteenth were located in the foreign concession. Shi Xiaochuan, *Tianjin Zhinan*, vol. 6, pp. 14-15.

<sup>39</sup> In around 1911, there were twenty-five bookstores in Tianjin. Only two out twenty-five were located in the foreign concessions. Shi Xiaochuan, *Tianjin Zhinan*, vol. 6, pp.13-14.

<sup>40</sup> Shi Xiaochuan, *Tianjin Zhinan*, vol. 6, pp.10-12.

<sup>41</sup> For a list of all kinds of foreign stores, see Hou Zhentong, *Ershi shiji chu de Tianjin gaikuang*, pp. 376-377; Shi Xiaochuan, *Tianjin Zhinan* pp. 15-16.

## **Leisure Activities**

Leisure is the imprint of the city. What kind of leisure activity a city has usually reflects the personality of the city. This is especially true for Tianjin. After 1900, during the reconstruction of the city, many leisure places also emerged. This development indicated a gradual mental recovery of the Tianjin natives, who sought comfort and relaxation out of leisure business. Meanwhile, as many new leisure activities were transported from Japan, Europe, and Shanghai, Tianjin was, once again and even more, connected to the outside world.

Leisure also symbolizes a way of liberation “from restrictive gender roles and social scripts, and thus, a means for empowerment” for women.<sup>42</sup> Especially for this group of educated women who came to Tianjin temporarily, without the burden of family and marriage, to partake all kinds of leisure activities meant a certain degree of autonomy: to manage their own time, to decide where to go for fun and with whom to go. Two of the most popular activities included going to teahouse to watch opera, and taking pictures at photography studios.

### **TEAHOUSE**

On the twenty-third [day of the third month of the thirtieth year of Guangxu], in the afternoon, [I] received a letter from Nüshi Lü Lanqing (呂蘭清女史).<sup>43</sup> I later went to the Tongsheng Hotel<sup>44</sup> and invited her to the teahouse. I waited and went to the theater with her. Later I went back to the

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<sup>42</sup> “Women and Leisure: The Journal of 1,000 Miles Begins with a Single Step,” in Karla A. Henderson et al. ed., *Both Gains and Gaps: Feminist Perspectives on Women’s Leisure* (State College, PA: Venture Pub, 1996), p. 21.

<sup>43</sup> Lanqing was Lü Bicheng’s given name.

<sup>44</sup> So far it is not clear why Lü Bicheng insists that she stays with the wife of the Master of Buddha Light Pavilion, a Cantonese hotel, while in Ying Lianzhi’s record, Lü Bicheng stays at Tongsheng hotel.

headquarters [of *Dagong Bao*].<sup>45</sup>

Going to teahouse to watch opera was one of the leisure activities that this group of educated women did a lot in Tianjin. On the first day Ying met Lü, Ying Lianzhi went to the hotel and invited Lü Bicheng, a woman he had never met before, to watch opera with him and others. Lü Bicheng might have been surprised by Ying's invitation. After all going to a public place like teahouse and mixing with men was considered extremely inappropriate for any genteel woman. In the traditional society, the only opportunity for the majority of genteel women to listen to the opera was limited to the household. An opera troupe was often invited into the household to perform to the whole family, sometimes close friends included, in order to celebrate birthdays or commemorate anniversaries or festivals. Even within the household, it was not appropriate for women to sit in public hall or in the front part of the stage to watch opera. They usually restrained them to the side, often cloistered from the public gaze by a curtain. Even for women of lower class, they still preferred to invite a couple of wandering singers to perform within the household, as described in the following illustration. It is safe to say that to walk out of household and watch opera in the teahouse was considered inappropriate for the majority of Chinese women.

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<sup>45</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p. 818, May 8, 1904.



(Figure 4.9: “Pin’er bujian” 貧而不儉 (Poor yet not frugal). In this illustration, according to the reporter, the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law of a poor family have to pawn their jewelry to invite in a blind singer to sing songs at their home instead of going out. *Xingsu huabao*, October 16, 1907, vol. 32)

Yet, the picture was slightly changed after 1900. Along with the reconstruction of foreign concessions and Chinese area, old teahouses were renovated and new teahouses were built, the majority of which were located in Japanese and French concessions and the Chinese area.<sup>46</sup> Watching opera had been a long tradition for people of Tianjin of all ages, social statuses and both genders. After 1900, with the facility of public transportations and with the rise of many new teahouses, more and more people began to leave their households and enjoy opera at teahouses. People living close would walk. Those who lived farther either took rickshaws or even took street cars when they were put into service after 1906.<sup>47</sup> The teahouse became one of the most burgeoning businesses in Tianjin after 1900.

It is after 1900 that women began to show up in front of the teahouses. Women of lower class or living close to teahouses walked to the place despite the fact that their feet

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<sup>46</sup> *Dagong bao*, November 20, 1903.

<sup>47</sup> *Minxing bao*, July 3, 1909.

might be bound.<sup>48</sup> Women of middle class might take rickshaws, like sometimes Shuzhong or the Lü sisters did.



(Figure 4.10: “Erlao wenming” 二老文明 (Two civilized old men). In this illustration, you can see two types of women coming to the Dangui Teahouse. The woman at the right corner of the illustration might be walking to the teahouse with her tiny bound feet. The woman in the center is taking a rickshaw. *Renjing huabao* 人鏡畫報 (People’s Mirror Pictorial), Tianjin, August 19, 1907)

As more and more women appeared at the teahouse, their presence as audience caused a strong opposition in the society. One literatus wrote a letter to *Dagong bao* and asserted, “Among the negative influences of customs on the society in Tianjin, there are none more serious than going to the temple and watching operas. Among the two, women’s going to the opera watching is more detrimental.”<sup>49</sup> Many essays and news reports were published in newspapers to articulate this argument from different perspectives. Some emphasized the deteriorating impact of operas on women’s morality, as one author articulated in his colloquial speech targeting common people,

The second disadvantage [of watching opera] can be expressed by the word of lust. For those who were relatively experienced, when they watched

<sup>48</sup> *Dagong bao*, March 17, 1906.

<sup>49</sup> *Dagong bao*, March 17, 1906.

this kind of opera, they only considered it as flowers in the mirror and moon in the water. Young students and women were most influenced [by this kind of opera]. Usually [young students] study at schools and women stay in the inner chamber. If they feel confused and let their thoughts run wild by watching the opera once in a while, that not only endangers their good reputation and integrity, but also sets obstacles for their social relationships and knowledge.<sup>50</sup>

This quotation is intriguing in that the author paralleled women with young students, both of whom were confined to a certain space that was not supposed to be interrupted by the romantic and mythic operas in the outside world. Not questioning the power of opera's influence on people at all, the author also implied that women's morality, just like young students' integrity, was vulnerable to such interruption.

Local elites were also concerned about the mixture of men and women in such a public space like teahouse, which was a huge challenge to the normative "inner/outer" boundary. "The space [of the teahouse] was narrow and everybody was sitting on his/her chair. Men and women were sitting mixed and shouting day and night. If [the government] did not stop this as soon as possible, disturbance would certainly arise out of it."<sup>51</sup> This anxiety was not coming from nowhere. As seen in Figure 4.11, one afternoon at about four o'clock, when audience walks out of the Juqing Teahouse, a man named Yao Junqing is standing right outside the teahouse gate and watching women walk out "without his eyes moving at all." The patrolling police officer notices this and admonishes him not to do this. The news reporter criticizes the shameful behavior of Yao. But he ends the news by commenting, "it is true that Yao is flirtatious. But for those women who came to watch operas, they should also feel ashamed. Neither Yao nor these

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<sup>50</sup> *Jin bao* 津報 (Newspaper of Tianjin), October 14, 1905.

<sup>51</sup> *Renjing huabao*, September 29, 1907, vol. 11.

women should complain.”<sup>52</sup> Another reporter even gave a particular nickname “scene viewer” to identify those men who not only watched opera but also watched women in teahouses. In these scene viewers’ eyes, the presence of women was as enjoyable as watching the opera.<sup>53</sup>



(Figure 4.11: “Sanxi zhanban” 散戲站班 (Standing watch after the opera is over).  
*Xingsu huabao*, date unknown)

Other than the concern about the violation of normative moral roles of women, the presence of the educated women also complicated the picture since, first, they confused the class boundary in the public places, and secondly, they were a new social category in the public society, as seen in the following illustration.

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<sup>52</sup> *Xingsu huabao*, date unknown.

<sup>53</sup> *Dagong bao*, March 17, 1906.



(Figure 4.12: “Youshang fenghua” 有傷風化 (Damaging customs). *Xingsu huabao*, date unknown)

In this image, a young lady dressing like a female student appeared in the teahouse. People were skeptical about her identity because, according to the reporter, “her behavior was flirtatious, and her conversations were strange. People around her all despised her.” One bystander said that she was not a female student while the other one said that she graduated from a certain women’s school. At the end of the story, the reporter appealed to investigate who this lady was, because in his opinion “female students should especially value their self-esteem and detest this destructive customs. For a woman who dressed like a female student and went to the teahouse directly with extremely flirtatious behaviors and conversations, she was a stain on women’s circle and damage to the school’s reputation.” Probably it did not matter too much whether this lady was a female student or not. What mattered was the fact that as these educated women went out in public for entertainment, the public opinion had to establish new social and gender norms to put these women under the discipline of the society.

But, the inside of the teahouse was not as motley as many local elite feared. To some extent, it could be called an ordered layout. There were some isolated balconies on

both sides and the back part of the hall. Sometimes, if the teahouse was big enough, the second floor was also separated into many balconies. All these balconies were originally designated for important guests such as rich merchants, local influential gentry or occasionally government officials. After women stepped into the teahouse, they were welcomed to sit in these balconies, which thus complicated the class distinction by adding the gender distinction.<sup>54</sup> Yet, the price to reserve a balcony was not low, approximately three silver dollars for each.<sup>55</sup> For female audience who came from middle or lower class, to spend three silver dollars on one opera performance was beyond their budget. Therefore, a kind of seat called “scattered seat” came into existence. These seats were usually lined up on the sides of the stage but lower than the balconies. The price was more affordable; and it only cost thirty cents a seat.<sup>56</sup> The view was not as good as the balcony or in the front. Yet, this strategy without any doubt increased the visibility of middle or lower class women in the teahouse. As the following picture shows, the teahouse was clearly layered on three levels. Elite women and their families or friends sat in the secluded balconies. Women of relatively lower class sat between the balcony and regular male audience.

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<sup>54</sup> *Dagong bao*, May 5, 1904.

<sup>55</sup> Shi Xiaochuan, *Tianjin zhinan*, vol. 5, p. 9.

<sup>56</sup> Shi Xiaochuan, *Tianjin zhinan*, vol. 5, p. 9.



(Figure 4.13: “Shifei chang” 是非場 (Arena of altercation). *Renjing huabao*, September 29, 1907, vol. 11)

Despite all these controversies on women’s watching opera at the teahouse, Lü Bicheng still went there with Ying Lianzhi and was introduced to Ying’s wife Shuzhong and the wives of Ying’s friends. Afterwards, Lü Bicheng became an active frequenter of teahouses. In the first month of Lü Bicheng’s stay at the *Dagong bao* Headquarters, there were three opera-watching evenings and Lü Bicheng went to two of them.

Table 4.2: The Information on the Teahouse-Going Evenings

Date	Teahouse	Who initiated invitation	Women present	Others	Notes
May 08, 1904	Juqing Teahouse	Ying Lianzhi	Shuzhong, wife of Mao Ruitang, wife of Fang Xiaozhou, wife of Shen Shouqing, Lü Bicheng	Ying Lianzhi	Ying Lianzhi did not join them for the whole play but went back to the Headquarters after he sat in the teahouse for a while.

May 18, 1904	Tianxian Teahouse	Huang Xiaosong	Shuzhong	Huang Xiaoson g, Zhang Daohen g, Zhang Shaoqiu, Ying Lianzhi	Ying Lianzhi in his diary especially mentioned that he and other men were sitting in the front section of the stage, which implied that Shuzhong was not sitting with them.
May 30, 1904	Tianxian Teahouse	Huang Shenzhi's concubin e	Huang Shenzhi's concubine , Shuzhong, Lü Bicheng, Lü Huiru	Ying Lianzhi	After the performance started, Ying Lianzhi left the teahouse to visit his friend Fang Yaoyu and came back to go home with Shuzhong and the Lü sisters.

Usually there were two rounds of performances in each day: one started at noon and ended at four; and one between seven and midnight, which was usually better than the earlier one.<sup>57</sup> According to Ying Lianzhi's diary, this group of women often went to the teahouse at evening, so that they could spend their daytime dealing with other business, such as paying visits to friends, going shopping, reading or writing. For the Lü sisters, they usually came from school after teaching and then joined their friends at the teahouse. For most occasions, it is ladies with higher social status who initiated the invitation to other elite men and women. Women like Lü Bicheng and her sisters as newcomers to Tianjin, never initiated any invitations.

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<sup>57</sup> Shi Xiaochuan, *Tianjin zhinan*, vol.5, p. 9.

It is such a paradox for the group of literati men of Tianjin if we compare what they published in newspapers or spoke at public speeches with what they did in reality. Many literati tried to mobilize the public opinion to oppose women's presence at the teahouse. But the same group of men did not prevent their own wives from going. Sometimes, they even initiated invitations to the wives of their friends, as we see in the first diary entry listed above. Why was that? How did this group of men overcome the anxiety of putting their own women in the mixture with people of different backgrounds and genders?

We need to go back and have a closer reading of the three entries listed above, which conveyed a vague implication of how women fit into the teahouse. On May 8, 1904, Ying Lianzhi was the one who initiated the invitation. Yet, it is Shuzhong, his wife, who accompanied other women at the teahouse, most probably in the balcony considering their social status. Even though later Ying Lianzhi brought Lü Bicheng to Juqing Teahouse, he did not stay there but instead went back to the *Dagong bao* Headquarters and left this group of women in the teahouse. This was a strategy of isolating a group of women in a comparatively cloistered space without the presence of any men. This is supported by the diary entry on May 30, 1904, when Ying Lianzhi accompanied these women to the teahouse, he left earlier to visit a friend. Then at the end of the performance, he came back and accompanied his wife and the Lü sisters to the *Dagong bao* Headquarters. In the opposite case, when Shuzhong was the only women who went to teahouse with Ying Lianzhi and other male friends, she had to sit separately from them, highly possible in the balcony on the side. In all cases, both these men and women tried to construct, or at least consider, the balcony as a uni-sexed space for

women and thus relived the anxiety of mixture of both genders.<sup>58</sup> In addition, Ying Lianzhi's company in the beginning and at the end of the performance also indicated a sense of security to prevent women from any potential dangers out of exposing to the public.

Watching opera was not just a kind of leisure activity resulted from the urban trend and culture. It was also a crucial means to socialize with people from various backgrounds. The function of sociality was especially important to women like the Lü sisters. When they first came to an alien urban space without any familial or social connection, they had to build a new network on their own. The introduction of Lü Bicheng to Shuzhong and other ladies at the teahouse played such a role of initiating a new social network, which usually started with women and then extended to men's circles. In Lü Bicheng's case, this social network was significant because later when Ying and Lü established the Tianjin Public Women's schools, almost all the resources came from this network. Yet, to establish a social network like this through opera watching and other similar activities, this group of women also unavoidably exposed themselves to the public by being mixed with men or for being gazed at by some flirtatious men, thus bringing them under the criticism of the public opinion, “For these wenming nü jiaoxi 文明之女教習 (enlightened female teachers), when nights come, they put on make-up and splendid clothes to watch opera. Why do they do this?”<sup>59</sup> This went contradicted to their identity as “enlightened female teachers” who were supposed

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<sup>58</sup> For example, in one appeal submitted by a literatus Zhang Weichen to the Tianjin government, the author argued that “I believe that if women go to watch opera, they have to sit in the balcony and are not allowed to sit in the scattered seats. For those who do not follow this regulation should be severely punished without exception.” *Dagong bao*, September 8, 1905.

<sup>59</sup> *Shenzhou ribao* 神州日報 (Shenzhou Daily), January 22, 1910.

to set examples for young students on how to behave appropriately in public as participants of a righteous cause.

## PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO



(Figure 4.14: This is a photo of Shuzhong and Lü Bicheng taken in 1904 in Tianjin. From *Lüshi san zimeiji* 呂氏三姊妹集 (Collected Works of the Three Lü Sisters) (Tianjin: Dagong bao guan, 1905).)

On May 9, 1904, on the way back from a city tour of Tianjin, Ying Lianzhi and Shuzhong invited Lü Bicheng to take pictures at Kouno Photography Studio in the Japanese concession, which was not far away from the *Dagong bao* Headquarters. Shuzhong and Lü Bicheng took a picture together.<sup>60</sup> A week later, Ying Lianzhi came to the studio despite the heavy rain of that day and only found blurred images with disappointment.<sup>61</sup> The next day on the way back from Fu Zengxiang's place, Ying Lianzhi, Shuzhong and Lü Bicheng went to the studio and took the pictures again. This

<sup>60</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p. 819, May 9, 1904.

<sup>61</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p. 822, May 4, 1904.

time, Lü Bicheng herself took an individual picture.<sup>62</sup> One of these pictures is what we see in the beginning of the section, the only one that we have from Lü Bicheng's youth.

Taking a picture at the turn of twentieth century was a fashionable leisure activity in a metropolis like Tianjin, which symbolized Chinese connection with the West and the modernity. The earliest extant picture was taken in 1844 when a Frenchman took a picture of one Manchu prince Qiying.<sup>63</sup> It was not until around the 1860s did picture taking become popular among the upper-class literati who were fascinated by this West-introduced technology and who could also afford it.<sup>64</sup> For people like Ying Lianzhi, who was still struggling out of poverty at this moment, this leisure activity was far beyond his imagination. It was not until the very end of the nineteenth century that Ying Lianzhi began to take pictures. In 1899, when Ying Lianzhi was temporarily staying in Shanghai and looking for job opportunities, he went sightseeing in Zhang Garden and first saw a photography shop (照相樓).<sup>65</sup> In 1900, when he tutored a foreigner in Tianjin, he was invited by this foreigner to take a picture with him at a Japanese photography studio on the first day of the year.<sup>66</sup> Afterwards Ying Lianzhi became a big fan of it. Not only did he often take pictures with family and friends, he also frequently exchanged his pictures with friends.<sup>67</sup> Even though the technology was totally new and Western, the practice of exchanging pictures with friends was not a rupture of elite's cultural tradition. Before the advent of the Western technology, middle

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<sup>62</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p.823, May 5, 1904.

<sup>63</sup> Su Zhigang et al. comp. *Zhongguo sheying shi lue* 中國攝影史略 (A brief history of Chinese photography) (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 2009), p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> See Li Changli ed., *Jindai zhongguo shehui wenhua bianqian lu* 近代中國社會文化變遷錄 (The Social and Cultural Transitions of Modern China) (Zhejiang: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1998), p.132.

<sup>65</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p.13, February 19, 1899.

<sup>66</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p. 55, January 1, 1900.

<sup>67</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p. 59-60, January 10-11, 1900.

or upper class literate men used to draw self-portraits and send them to friends to express a sense of attachment and friendship.<sup>68</sup> Now the self-portraits were replaced by a Western and fashionable means. But the meaning of socializing with friends and strengthening the circle connection was not fundamentally changed.<sup>69</sup>

The photography business in Tianjin was not flourishing until after the 1900 Incident. Before 1900, there were only four photography studios. One was established in the southwestern corner of Chinese area, while the other three were open in the French and German concessions.<sup>70</sup> The 1900 occupation hit a big blow to these studios and they were either closed or damaged during the military confrontation. In the post-1900 period, many studios were opened in the Japanese concession. The one Ying Lianzhi went in 1900 and the Kouno Photography Studio Ying and Lü went in 1904 were both managed by Japanese migrants to Tianjin.

There were also some Chinese-run studios in Tianjin. In 1902, Huang Guohua, a Cantonese merchant, established Hengchangtai Photography Studio. In 1904, the shop was taken over by a salt merchant of Tianjin and changed its name to Dingchang. To gain ascendency in the business, Dingchang managers tried every effort to attract customers. They not only provided various kinds of settings such as flowers and trees, birds and animals, natural scenes, Western clothes, Chinese traditional zithers and books,<sup>71</sup> but also gave extra discount to those customers who came on weekends.<sup>72</sup> Dingchang became the top studio to serve the elite and high officials in Tianjin. But

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<sup>68</sup> Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chamber*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>69</sup> Su Zhigang, *Zhongguo sheying shi lue*, p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Su Zhigang, *Zhongguo sheying shi lue*, p.11; Li Yaoting, “Dingzhang: Tianjin lishi zuiji de zhaoxiangguan” 鼎章:天津歷史最久的照相館 (Dingzhang: the photo shop with the longest history in Tianjin), *Tianjin wenshi ziliao xuanji*, 1994, vol. 62, p.161.

<sup>71</sup> Su Zhigang, *Zhongguo sheying shi lue*, p. 14.

<sup>72</sup> *Dagong bao*, November 19, 1902.

smaller studios also attracted customers with their own strategies. A studio named Baochang set up a room especially for women.<sup>73</sup> Another studio Fusheng took a more daring adventure. In order to amplify their reputation, in 1909, the studio owner Yin Shaogeng and his photographers sneaked into the long queue of sending Empress Dowager Cixi's body to her tomb in Hebei Province and were arrested for disturbance and sentenced for ten years.<sup>74</sup>



(Figure 4.15: “Beihai lou quangongchang” 北海樓勸工廠 (Promoting Industry at Beihai building). This is a Chinese-run photography studio in 1907. This studio was built in the northeastern part of the Chinese area and was incorporated as one part of a big commercial center called Shangye quangongchang 商業勸工場 (The Center of Promoting Commerce and Industry). *Renjing huabao*, November 17, 1907, vol. 18)

It is during the burgeoning of the photography business that women appeared as customers. Considering the costly price of this activity, the majority of women who came to studios were from well-off families or with high class background. Sometimes in Shanghai to expand the business, studio owners also invited some popular actresses or

<sup>73</sup> *Dagong bao*, November 23, 1903

<sup>74</sup> Ma Yunzeng et al., *Zhongguo sheying shi*, 1840-1937 中國攝影史 (The history of the photograph in China, 1840-1937) (Beijing: Zhongguo sheying chubanshe, 1987), pp., 70-71.

even high-level courtesans to take pictures as a kind of advertisement.<sup>75</sup> Women usually came with other lady friends or with family members. They told the photographers what kind of settings they would like to set for their pictures. While people in the studio set up the scene and camera for the ladies, women were sitting in a separate room until they were invited to the camera room. They sat in front of the camera with the kind of settings they requested at the back. Sometimes they would hold a necessary accessory, such as a book or a hat, in their hand or on their head. They were asked by the male photographer to either sit or stand with fixed poses and to look at certain direction. The photographer looked at these women through the lens and decided if they still needed some nuanced adjustment of their pose or position.



(Figure 4.16: “Zongsuan wenming” 總算文明 (Finally civilized). In this illustration, three women come to the photography studio and bargain to take a picture at the cost of one silver dollar. Yet, before they leave, they only want to pay eighty cents, which causes a friction between the studio owner and these women. This illustration also gives us a glimpse of the inside of a Chinese-run studio: the male photographer is looking at the three women through the lens, with bamboos and potted plants at the back as set. *Xinghua ribao* 醒華日報 (Enlightening China Daily), December 5, 1910)

<sup>75</sup> Su Zhigang, *Zhongguo sheying shi lue*, p. 14; Ma Yunzeng, *Zhongguo sheying shi*, p. 75.

Usually women had reserved facial and body expression and looked unperturbed when they took pictures, as did Lü Bicheng and Shuzhong. Any smile or dramatic body pose was not possible at all. This, on the one hand, was influenced by the traditional artistic style of portrait painting of women, in which women usually did not express emotion on their face.<sup>76</sup> Meanwhile this kind of pose was also a practical consideration. Since it took a couple of minutes to wait for the exposure, it was not realistic for women to sustain a more lively facial expression or body language for long.<sup>77</sup> This reserved pose was also a direct response to the fact that women in the studio were unavoidably observed by male photographers. By reserving their facial expression and body language, they attempted to minimize the inappropriate direct contact with men. That is probably why when we look at the picture in the beginning of the section, both Shuzhong and Lü Bicheng's eyes are slightly off the center of camera, where male photographers stood.

In this picture, with an empty background, Shuzhong is sitting with her hands crossed on her knees while Bicheng is standing behind but close to Shuzhong. The sit/stand distinction indicates Shuzhong's seniority in age, social status and their relationship. Lü Bicheng's left hand is put on the chair on which Shuzhong sits, indicating an emotional attachment to Shuzhong. It seems that by this posture, Lü Bicheng, or Ying Lianzhi and Shuzhong, was trying to construct an imaginative familial

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<sup>76</sup> Jiang Sishuo, "Goujian xiandai nüxing de meijie shijue xingxiang: yi *Funü shibao* de nüxing sheying xingxiang weili" 構建現代女性的媒介視覺形象——以《婦女時報》的女性攝影形象為例 (To construct the visual media image of modern women: the example of women's photographic images in *Women's Times*), *Funü yanjiu luncong* 婦女研究論叢 (Collection of women's studies), 2(May 2008), p. 61. Chai-Ling Yang also articulates the artistic connection between traditional Chinese portrait painting and modern photography. Chia-Ling Yang, "The Crisis of the Real: Portraiture and Photography in Late Nineteenth-Century Shanghai," Jennifer Purtle and Hans Bjarne Thmosen eds., *Looking Modern: East Asian Visual Culture from Treaty Ports to World War II* (Chicago: Center for the Art of East Asia, University of Chicago: Co-published and distributed by Art Media Resources, 2009), especially pp.23-33.

<sup>77</sup> Su Zhigang, *Zhongguo sheying shi lue*, p. 13.

connection between these two women and thus minimized the threat of Lü as a young single woman running away from home. Lü Bicheng holds a book in her right hand, which is assumed to be arranged by the photographer or Ying Lianzhi who was present when the picture was taken. It is a clear identity marker of Lü Bicheng as a woman of letters. In this picture, the unperturbed face, the reserved pose and the gesture of holding a book added up to the implication that these two women were women from genteel families.

Under the influence of Ying Lianzhi, after Lü Huiru and Lü Meisun came to Tianjin, they both went to the photography studios and left us their pictures. When Lü Meisun came in the winter of 1905, Ying Lianzhi again brought Lü Meisun to the Kouno Photography Studio. In this picture, Lü Meisun is posed in a winter dress with a long white scarf over her neck. She does not look at the front direction but turns her face to the left and looks to a distance. Ying Lianzhi was fond of this picture, “[Lü Meisun] looked straightforward and heroic. She looked like the European noble woman very much. This is because I posed her like this.”<sup>78</sup> Not long after this, Ying Lianzhi brought Lü Huiru, along with Shuzhong, to the Kouno Photography Studio. Lü Huiru and Shuzhong took the picture together, in which both of them are wearing winter coat with shawls.<sup>79</sup> Ying Lianzhi liked this picture a lot and commented in his diary that “the picture that Huiru and my wife took together was excellent and there was no a collective picture as good as this one. This picture had a characteristic of purity and elegance.”<sup>80</sup> In the same year, when Ying Lianzhi decided to publish the writings of the three Lü

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<sup>78</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p. 960, February 14, 1905.

<sup>79</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p. 967, March 3, 1905.

<sup>80</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p. 967, March 3, 1905.

sisters, he included these two pictures and the one I cited in the beginning of this section into the collection *Lüshi san zimei ji*. As the circulation of this collection, readers not only got the chance to read their words, but also were able to see the images of these three women printed on the paper.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, when Ying Lianzhi and Lü Bicheng were trying to establish the Tianjin Women's Public School, Ying Lianzhi used his social networks and media propaganda to publicize Lü as an educated woman devoted to women's education. Lü's photographs were part of this publicity. On May 17, 1904, Zhang Zishou, one of Ying Lianzhi's friends, came to visit him. At that time, Lü Bicheng had already contributed a couple of poems and essays to *Dagong bao*, which articulated her emphasis on women's education and gender equality, and made her well-known to the elite circles in Tianjin. Therefore, at the end of Zhang Zishou's visit, he asked Ying Lianzhi if he could get one copy of Lü's pictures and published it in his newspaper.<sup>81</sup> Even though we do not know who this Zhang Zishou was or which newspaper he worked for, it is very possible that Lü Bicheng's images and ideas were distributed by this way. Two days later, Zhang Shaoqiu, Ying's good friend, came and asked for two copies of Lü's picture; Liu Mengyang, the chief editor of *Dagong bao* and also an advocate on women's rights in Tianjin, asked for one copy; and Zhang Daoheng, another Ying's friend, asked another copy.<sup>82</sup>

It is hard to know what these men did with Lü Bicheng's pictures. But there is an anecdote that gives us a sense of the possible influence that a woman's picture could make. One day Liu Mengyang presented a picture of Qiu Jin to his younger sister Liu

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<sup>81</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p.824, May 17, 1904.

<sup>82</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p.825, May 19, 1904..

Qingyang 劉清揚 (1894-1977). Qiu Jin was of Lü's age and was her close friend. Both of them contributed greatly to women's education, gender equality and national salvation, only Qiu Jin became a revolutionary and took violent actions while Lü Bicheng advocated saving the country by the peaceful means of women's education.<sup>83</sup> Liu Qingyang was encouraged by Qiu Jin's photo and decided to follow her way to participate in the national salvation.<sup>84</sup> A decade later when she grew up, she became one of the early female student activists in the May Fourth Movement. This anecdote proves that indeed some literati collected women's pictures, especially women with extraordinary achievements, as a way to acknowledge their merits.

Not only the individual pictures, Ying Lianzhi also sent a picture of the Tianjin Public Women's School to some newspapers such as *Beiqing Xinbao* 北清新報 (Newspapers of Beiqing) published in Tianjin.<sup>85</sup> Unfortunately I could not find this one. But a couple of years later, as picture taking became more popular and integrated into the printing industry, we finally get the chance to have a glimpse of the inside world of women's schools. In 1911, when *Funü shibao* 婦女時報 (Women's Times), a journal aiming to "instill new knowledge and reform detrimental customs" among middle-and-upper class women,<sup>86</sup> was published in Shanghai, it began to publish women's photos to visualize its aim and to attract more readers.<sup>87</sup> Among the existing twenty issues, there were eight pictures that included students and teachers of Tianjin

<sup>83</sup> Li Youning, *Jindai zhonghua funü zixu shiwen xuan* 近代中華婦女自敘詩文選 (The selection of self-account poetry and essays by modern Chinese women) (Taibei: Lianjing chuban shiye youxian gongsi, 1980), pp.195-196.

<sup>84</sup> Liu Fangqing, "Wode muqin Liu Qingyang" 我的母親劉清揚 (My mother Liu Qingyang), *Huizu yanjiu* 回族研究 (Journal of Hui Muslim Minority Study), 2(2005), p. 164.

<sup>85</sup> Fang Hao, *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p. 967, March 3, 1905.

<sup>86</sup> Song Suhong, *Nüxing meijie: lishi yu chuantong* 女性媒介：歷史與傳統 (Women and media: history and tradition) (Beijing: Zhongguo chuanmei daxue chubanshe, 2006), p.49.

<sup>87</sup> Jiang Sishuo, "Goujie xiandai nüxing de mejie shijue xingxiang," pp. 59-63.

Women's Public School and Tianjin Women's Normal School. The one I use here was taken when Lü Kunxiu, the youngest sister of the four Lü sisters, left her teaching position at the Tianjin Women's Public School. It is clear from this picture that all students are dressing with unity and arrayed in a certain pattern around Lü Kunxiu, who is sitting in the middle with the popular Japanese-style hairstyle and dress for female teachers. By taking picture like this, even though these women did not walk out of campus, they were still watched by the public.



(Figure 4.17: A photo of a teacher and students from Tianjin Women's Public School.  
*Funü shibao* 婦女時報 (Women's Times), 1911, vol. 4)

Similar to watching opera at teahouses, taking picture was also an integral part of women like the Lü sisters' urban experience after they moved to Tianjin. But taking picture was not as controversial as watching opera in that women did not have to mix with many other people in a wild public space. In addition, women conveyed more autonomy in demonstrating when and where they wanted to take pictures, what kind of posture they wanted to pose, and what kind of image they wanted picture-reader to remember.<sup>88</sup> As Yao Daigui argues, "when women fix their images on pictures, this

<sup>88</sup> Su Zhigang, *Zhongguo sheying shilue*, p. 27.

image does not belong to themselves any more. Instead it becomes an image on a picture that can circulate independently.”<sup>89</sup> It is through this independent circulation that the group of women who came to Tianjin for women’s education began to publicize their images as a new type of women who were willing to trade their selective publicity through pictures to propagandize the glorified enterprise.

## **Conclusion:**

This chapter discusses the process in which a group of educated women left their inner chambers and became participants of women’s education in an urban space. As newcomers to the city, these women usually did not have the burden of family or marriage and thus gained certain level of autonomy on dealing with their own business. They were busy figuring out how to adapt into the school and city. Within the school, they were surrounded by new friends, school regulations, new body of knowledge, new roles as teachers and students, and an array of social expectations. Out of the school, there was a bustling world awaiting them: Western-style houses, iron bridges, and foreign concessions; leisure places like bookstores, Chinese and foreign restaurants, and teahouses; and newspapers from Shanghai, Beijing and other cities. With the facility of public transportation, these women’s feet stepped on many corners of the city. A kind of publicity was paralleled with this autonomy. While they were building a network by socializing and interacting with people from different genders and various social

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<sup>89</sup> Yao Daigui, “Zaoqi nüxing xiaoxiangzhao, shenghuozhao de sirenxing yu gonggongxing” 早期女性肖像照、生活照的私人性與公共性 (The privateness and publicness of women’s portrait pictures and life pictures in the early period), in Meng Jian and Stefan Friedrich ed., Tuxiang shidai: shijue wenhua chuanbo de lilun quanshi 图像时代: 视觉文化传播的理论诠释 (The era of image: the theoretical interpretation of the cultural transmission of visuals) (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2005), pp. 176-185.

backgrounds, they were also exposed to the public gaze of the society, either in the direct gaze in public places such as teahouses or in an indirect way of picture circulation. The autonomy and publicity, which were integrated into their new identity as female participants in women's education in cities, represent a hybrid of both hope and threat.

## Part Three

### “Life Itself is a Play”



(Figure 5.1: “Shengguan tu” 升官圖 (The Illustration of an official promotion). This is a satirical illustration drawn in 1907 by Zhang Shouhu 張瘦虎 (dates unknown), an artist in Tianjin. In it, an official, Prince Zaizhen, is kneeling down in front of an actress Yang Cuixi with an official hat at the side of her feet. Due to the censorship in the late Qing, this image was not published immediately. Almost thirty years later in 1936 when the son of Zhang Shouhu found this picture in his father’s legacy, he then published it in a journal in Tianjin. *Yumei huakan* 語美畫刊 (The Pictorial Journal of Yumei), vol. 6, October 14, 1936, p. 3.)

In late April 1907, most major newspapers in China routinely released the official edicts of the Qing government. In one of the edicts, a man named Duan Zhigui 段芝貴 (1869-1925) was appointed as Superintendent of Heilongjiang Province, one of the four crucial positions in the newly reformed officialdom of the Northeastern China.<sup>1</sup> The majority of urbanites who read newspapers did not really care about who this Duan Zhigui was since this high-level official appointment was too far away from their daily life. Half a month later, another imperial edict was issued by the court in the same

<sup>1</sup> *Dagong bao*, *Shen bao*, and *Shuntian shibao* published the imperial edict on April 21, 1907. *Shengjing shibao* 盛京時報 (Shengjing Times) published it on April 23, 1907.

newspapers that Duan Zhigui had been demoted from the not-yet-taken Superintendent position.<sup>2</sup> People became curious: what happened? Why was such a person promoted and demoted in such a short of time? Investigation had revealed that Duan Zhigui, who was only the chief of the Patrolling Police Bureau in Tianjin, bought Yang Cuixi 楊翠喜 (?1888-?), a popular actress in Tianjin, out of the entertainment business and sent her as a personal gift to Zaizhen 載振(1876-1947), a Manchu prince well known for his lascivious reputation, but nevertheless an influential politician in the Qing court. As a result, Duan Zhigui was promoted at such a hilarious pace to the crucial position. But immediately a censor submitted a memorial and accused Duan Zhigui and Zaizhen of corruption and bribery. With the involvement of media networks, this case was never held within the court but escalated as a sensational event in many cities.

While many politicians and officials tended to read this case from the perspective of factionalism within the Qing court and only brushed over Yang's name as an insignificant walk-on part in this serious political scenario, Yang Cuixi became a legend in common people's eyes. Her relationship with Prince Zaizhen was either romanticized into popular fiction<sup>3</sup> or lampooned, as in the picture above. The Yang Cuixi legend did not come from nowhere. It was the consequence of the marriage between urban culture and actress performance in Tianjin. Neither was Yang Cuixi singled out as an exception. She actually epitomized a larger group of women who were left with few choices after moving to cities and had to figure out ways of survival by performing on public stages in the urban entertainment business in early twentieth century.

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<sup>2</sup> *Dagong bao* published it on May 7, 1907 and *Shen bao*, *Shuntian shibao*, and *Shengjing shibao* were one day later.

<sup>3</sup> For example, right after the affair was disclosed, a novel titled *Yang Cuixi* was published. Xileng shanren, *Yang Cuixi* (Xin xiaoshuoshe, 1907), publishing location is unknown.

The early twentieth century, this is the time when there were only a few opportunities open to women in order to survive on their own in cities. Unlike educated women who were qualified to take the glorified roles of female teachers and students at women's schools, women like Yang Cuixi had to sell their performing skills in the entertainment business in order to make a living. As the first generation of actresses in the business in modern times, one feature that made them distinct from other groups of women was the extent to which they became public. This public identity can be understood from three dimensions. Actresses' performance was largely a public demonstration of their physical body and of their interaction with actors on stages and male audience in public places like teahouses. This called forth a huge criticism from the public opinion. In many literati's eyes, actresses deviated from normative women, who were not supposed to work and mix with strange men. As a consequence, actresses were considered as temptations of sexual desire and a threat to the social order, like what Yang Cuixi was labeled, "a monster which led to a panic in political circles."<sup>4</sup>

On the second dimension, it is the same publicity that actresses took to fight against the criticism and gained social recognition of their reputation and performing skills. Not only were they devoted to charitable performance to save natural disaster victims, they also took initiative to justify their participation in and belonging to local society through media. Meanwhile, they also took advantage of alternative performance opportunities to gain profit, skill recognition, and even to change their life and fate. These actresses demonstrated a totally different trajectory from the educated women in how to adapt into the new urban space. While educated women already gained social recognition for their

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<sup>4</sup> Xileng shanren, *Yang Cuixi*, p. 32; *Shenzhou ribao* 神州日報 (Shenzhou Daily), May 19, 1907.

contribution to women's education and national salvation, the publicity of these educated women in society actually placed a challenge to the respectability that they deserved. Yet, for actresses of the same time period, while they did not lack any publicity at all, what they tried hard to get was the recognition of their professional skills and the restoration of normative womanhood.

The public life off the stage, the third dimension of the publicity, might be the most distinct feature that made them different from early generations of actresses in the temporal sense and from other groups of women in the spatial sense. As a new presence embedded in the strong media network in the society, these actresses consciously extended their publicity from stage to their personal lives and constructed themselves as public figures. From what they wore to how they moved about, and where they lived, every aspect of their off-stage life was publicized to a larger audience who was curious about what they looked like when they were not performing. To some extent, these actresses were in the transition from debased women to stars, not only foreshadowing the starization of later generations of performers, but also manifesting a continuity of actress profession and culture.

## **Chapter Five**

### **From Sold Daughters to Popular Actresses: The Emergence of Women's Public Performance**

The public performance by Yang Cuixi and her female peers in early twentieth-century Tianjin has to be situated in both the tradition of women's performance culture in China and the trends of China's urbanization and modernization at this moment. On the one hand, women's public performance was not a totally new social phenomenon in Chinese society. The earliest record could be traced back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907), when women began to perform on public stages for a large number of commoners to make a living. Only in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) Dynasties did actresses begin to fade away from public and their roles were replaced by male actors who impersonated female roles. In this sense the modern actresses could be considered as a continuity and revival of traditional women's performance culture.

On the other hand, the urbanization that many Chinese cities at the turn of the twentieth century were undergoing also contributed to the emergence of actresses at this time period. Not only did the expansion of urban space and the introduction of urban utilities provide the possibilities for the entertainment business to develop and modernize, the population migration to cities and the management of working and leisure time also enlarged the pool of performers and audience.

Tianjin represented a perfect example to explore women's public performance in terms of actresses' own culture tradition and the transformation of the city itself. As a city with the advantage of goods transportation and people migration, Tianjin enjoyed a long history for its high taste of all kinds of performance from everywhere in China. Meanwhile, after the 1900 Gengzi Incident, when both the Chinese area and foreign concessions in Tianjin were under reconstruction, the rising population migration that was needed by the city for the purposes of economy, commerce, education, and labor generated a large pool of men and women who were eager and also able to enjoy public performance in places like teahouses. In order to meet the needs of various urbanites for entertainment and relaxation, many young girls moved from the rural or neighboring areas of Tianjin to the city and became actresses. The ways in which they ended up in this business may vary due to different family backgrounds or unexpected events like natural disasters, political chaos, or wars. But immediately after they entered the business, they had to reconstruct their past, their identity and their social connections in order to survive in the business and in the society.

## **Prostitutes/Singers in Tianjin at the End of Nineteenth Century**

As many scholars have pointed out, as early as in the Shang Dynasty, some young slave girls or female family members of criminals, who were classified into a special debased class *yuehu* 樂戶 (musical household), were trained by their royal masters as private entertainers. In the following dynasties, actresses mostly performed within imperial palaces or rich private households. It is not until the Tang Dynasty that women

showed up on public stages to make a living by performing. The public performance reached its climax in the *zaju* 雜劇 (variety drama) style of the Yuan Dynasty, in which an actress often was seen to perform together with an actor on the stage. Yet, the picture was gradually changed since the Ming dynasty when actresses disappeared from public. As Cheng Weikun argues, this is due to the rise of Neo-Confucianism's opposition to women's publicity on the one hand and the strict control of Ming and Qing governments over actresses and female audience on the other hand. Meanwhile, the growth of courtesan culture, in which women's performance was privatized to a small group of patrons instead of a mass audience, also contributed to the disappearance of actresses.<sup>1</sup> The consequence of actress's withdrawal was the dominance of actors on stage and the impersonation of women by actors in the performance.<sup>2</sup>

It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that women emerged on public stages again in major cities such as Tianjin, Shanghai, and Yingkou.<sup>3</sup> Among them, Tianjin played a vital role in this revival and continuity of the interrupted women's performance. According to a review article on the history of actresses published in the 1920s, the author asserts that "it is from Tianjin that actresses began to flourish. ...Tianjin produced the best actresses."<sup>4</sup> This significant role that Tianjin

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<sup>1</sup> Cheng Weikun, "Nationalists, Feminists, and Petty Urbanites: The Changing Image of Women in Early Twentieth-Century Beijing and Tianjin" (Ph.D. Thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 1995), p. 289.

<sup>2</sup> For a brief history of actresses before the end of nineteenth century, see Cheng Weikun, "Nationalists, Feminists, and Petty Urbanites," pp.286-289. Meanwhile, a number of scholars who work on the general history of Chinese dramas also touch upon actresses' performance in various dynasties, for example, Colin Mackerras's *Chinese Drama: A Historical Survey* (Beijing: New World Press, 1990), William Dolby's *A History of Chinese Drama* (London: Paul Elek, 1976), and Zhou Yibai's *Zhongguo xiju fazhan shi* 中國戲劇發展史 (The history of the development of Chinese drama) (Taibei: Minmian chubanshe, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> Ma Longwen and Mao Dazhi, *Hebei bangzi jianshi* 河北梆子簡史 (A brief history of Hebei Clapper Opera) (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1982),pp.55-56.

<sup>4</sup> *Shen bao*, September 12, 1920.

earned was the consequence of the rich history of performing arts in this city and its urbanization after 1860 when Tianjin was open to the West under unequal treaties.

As a hub connecting Beijing and south China since the Yuan dynasty through the Grand Canal and sea routes, Tianjin became a place of exchanges for all kinds of performing arts. Whenever there were troupes commuting between north and south, Tianjin became a place that they had to pass though.<sup>5</sup> This was especially true in the Qing dynasty when the emperors became big fans of operas. Troupes from Anhui, Zhejiang, Shaanxi, Shanxi, and northeast China scrambled into Beijing competing for the emperors' attention. Tianjin became a beneficiary of this opera prosperity.

As early as in 1635, Kunqu 昆曲 (Kunshan-style Opera), an elegant southern style opera, was already performed in Tianjin.<sup>6</sup> Around 1824, Beijing Opera became very popular in Tianjin and quickly developed in the Tongzhi reign (r. 1861-1875) and Guangxu reign (r. 1875-1908).<sup>7</sup> Yet, both Kunshan-style Opera and Beijing Opera were largely replaced by Bangzi 棍子 (Clapper Opera) in the 1860s, which was named after the two pieces of clappers that performers used for the performance. Clapper Opera, also called Qinqiang 秦腔 (Qin-style tune), originally came from the rural area of Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces. In its climax in the Qianlong reign (r. 1736-1799), Clapper Opera was able to compete against Beijing Opera in Beijing. Since its language was more colloquial than Beijing Opera and Kunshan-style Opera and its plays were more

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<sup>5</sup> Zhongguo xiqu zhi bianji weiyuanhui, *Zhongguo xiqu zhi, Tianjin juan* 中國戲曲志 · 天津卷 (The Account of Operas in China: Tianjin Volume) (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1990), p.6.

<sup>6</sup> *Zhongguo xiqu zhi, Tianjin juan*, p. 69.

<sup>7</sup> *Zhongguo xiqu zhi, Tianjin juan*, p. 71.

relevant to peasants' daily life,<sup>8</sup> it gradually became popular in the villages of Zhili province, including Baodi, Wuqing, Ninghe and Jinghai, which surrounded Tianjin. Since the 1860s, after some troupes moved to Tianjin to perform, Clapper Opera became dominantly popular, so much so that many actors had to integrate Beijing Opera and Clapper Opera into one play to attract the audience.<sup>9</sup> The last kind of opera was called Lianhua lao 蓮花落 (Lotus Flowers Falling Opera). Similar to Clapper Opera, Lotus Flower Falling Opera was originally introduced from northeastern China and became popular in rural areas such as Tangshan, Baodi, Jixian, and Tongzhou of Zhili Province, overlapping with the sphere of Clapper Opera.<sup>10</sup> In the 1880s when Lotus Flowers Falling Opera troupes began to perform in Tianjin, they became the favorite entertainment for lower-class urbanites.

The variety of operas nourished a taste of people in Tianjin for performing arts, so much so that Tianjin became a touchstone for all kinds of operas. According to Xu Ke, a literatus collecting on all kinds of interesting stories and anecdotes, “when the actors in the *liyuan* 梨園 (lit. pear garden, a term specifically refers to the performance business) circle were ready to perform, they had to travel around Beijing and Tianjin to try out their [performance] level. Afterwards when they returned to Beijing and gained a reputation, people began to call them popular actors.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ma Longwen and Mao Dazhi, *Hebei bangzi jianshi*, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Zhongguo xiyou zhi, Tianjin juan*, p. 76.

<sup>10</sup> *Zhongguo xiyou zhi, Tianjin juan*, p. 76; Wang Lin ed., *Pingxi zai Tianjin fazhan jianshi* 評戲在天津發展簡史(The brief history of the development of Pingxi in Tianjin) (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1991), pp. 6-12.

<sup>11</sup> Xu Ke, *Qingbai leichao* 清稗類鈔 (Classified collection of Qing notes), vol.11 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), p.5097.

There is a reason why I spend so much space detailing the history of these kinds of operas in Tianjin. Other than the time difference between these four major operas, there was also a hierarchical difference among the operas and among those who watched these operas. The Kunshan-style opera was considered the most exquisite style in Tianjin. The lines were mostly written in classical Chinese and the plays were performed in southern dialects. As a result, anyone without a high level of literacy was not able to understand the plays at all. This explains why many Kunshan-style plays were mainly performed in the extravagant gardens of rich merchants instead of public places like temples and teahouses.<sup>12</sup> Beijing Opera and Clapper Opera were the two most popular performing arts targeting middle-class audience when they were performed at teahouses. Despite the fact that these two types competed against and integrated with each other, the businesses were exclusively dominated by actors. There was really not a space for women to squeeze into these operas. As a consequence, Lotus Flowers Falling Opera, the lowest type of art targeting the lowest social class, became the break-through point for female performers.

Therefore, it was not surprising to see that after almost two hundred years of absence since the High Qing, the first group of women who stepped on public stages was prostitutes, the debased women in society. According to some scholars, after Lotus Flowers Falling Opera became popular in Tianjin, some profit-driven brothel owners invited a couple of actors of this opera to teach their prostitutes to sing.<sup>13</sup> After a short

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<sup>12</sup> *Zhongguo xiqu zhi, Tianjin juan*, p. 69.

<sup>13</sup> Tong Zhi, “Zaoqi pingju yu sida kunling zai tianjin” 早期評劇與四大坤伶在天津 (The early Ping-style Opera and four actresses in Tianjin), *Tianjin shi wenshi yanjiuguan, Tianjin wenshi* 天津文史 (Literature and history of Tianjin), internal material, vol. 32, 2004, p.79.

period, these prostitutes began to sing at small teahouses. This kind of teahouse, which exclusively hosted prostitutes' singing performance, was called *Laoziguān* 落子館 or *Lianhua lao guan* 蓮花落館 (House of Lotus Flower Falling), the name of which indicated that performers mainly played Lotus Flowers Falling Opera.<sup>14</sup> But after a while, some prostitutes/singers also began to learn simple singing sections of Clapper Opera and even Beijing Opera.<sup>15</sup>

The prostitutes/singers' performance at the Houses of Lotus Flower Falling has to be understood in the general context of teahouse culture in Tianjin. Like women's performance in public, the emergence of teahouses was also a recent phenomenon. Previously in the Yuan and Ming dynasties, people usually went to temple fairs and watched opera performed on the outdoor stages. It was not until in the Daoguang reign of the Qing dynasty, when Tianjin became the commercial center in north China, that indoor teahouses were established. In 1824, according to the observation of a poet, there were already seven teahouses in Tianjin and about fifty actors who performed at these places.<sup>16</sup> The majority of these teahouses were built around the commercial area such as Houjia hou 侯家后 (Behind Hou Family) area and along with the water transportation system in Tianjin. When people frequented teahouses, they only needed to pay for their

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<sup>14</sup> Zhang Zhihan, *Jinmen zayong* 津門雜詠 (The miscellaneous lyrics of Tianjin), in Lei Mengshui et al. ed., *Zhonghua Zhuzhici* 中華竹枝詞 (The bamboo branch poetry of China) (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1996), vol. 1, p. 521.

<sup>15</sup> Zhen Guangjun, "Lun Hebei bangzi nüling de xingshuai" 論河北梆子女伶的興衰 (On the Up and Down of the Hebei Clapper Opera Actresses), *Xiqu yishu* 戲曲藝術 (The Art of Opera), 1(2001), pp. 62-68; Ma Longwen and Mao Dazhi, *Hebei bangzi jianshi*, p. 57.

<sup>16</sup> Cui Xu, *Jinmen baiyong* 津門百詠 (One hundred lyrics of Tianjin), Zhang Jiangcai ed., *Jingjin fengtu congshu* 京津風土叢書 (The series collection of customs in Beijing and Tianjin) (Beijing: Shuangzhao lou, 1938), p. 6.

tea, not for the performance.<sup>17</sup> Usually within teahouses, tea-drinkers, mostly men, sat around a square table and faced each other. By sitting this way, the audience was actually listening to instead of watching the performance.<sup>18</sup>



(Figure 5.2: This is an image of an indoor teahouse in the Guangxu reign (r. 1875-1909). It is not clear in which city this teahouse was located, but we can see that some of the spectators talked to each other and did not pay much attention to the performance. Colin Mackerras, *Chinese Drama: A Historical Survey*, no page number.)

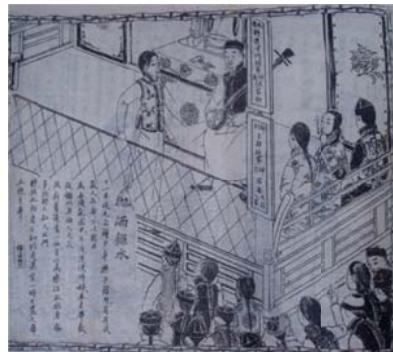
To some extent, this picture was similar to the inside of the Houses of Lotus Flower Falling. Prostitutes' singing was only a supplement to tea drinking in the beginning. When customers came, they were served to sit around a square table with various kinds of teas. The prostitutes/singers usually sat on a bench over the corner of the stage and stood up to sing in turn. Before they sang, a host from the teahouse usually informed the audience which brothel they came from, what their names were, and which song(s) they

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<sup>17</sup> Li Xiangxin, “Jinmen jutan yihua” 津門菊壇軼話 (The anecdotes of Beijing Opera in Tianjin), Tianjinshi zhengxie wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui ed., *Jingju yishu zai Tianjin* 京劇藝術在天津 (The Beijing Opera in Tianjin) (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1995), p.274; Zheng Lishui, “Tianjin de xiyuan” 天津的戲園 (Teahouses in Tianjin), *Tianjin wenshi ziliao xuanji* 天津文史資料選輯 (The selection on history and literature materials in Tianjin), vol. 51, 1990, p.139.

<sup>18</sup> “Tianjin zaoqi de sida mingyuan” 天津早期的四大名園 (The four famous teahouses in early history of Tianjin), Zhou Licheng and Zhou Yanan, *Tianjin lao xiyuan* 天津老戲園 (Old teahouses in Tianjin) (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2005), p. 5.

were going to sing.<sup>19</sup> This was free. But if any spectator wanted to listen to specific songs or specific singers, they had to pay extra money. According to a news reporter's observation, "other than paying for tea drinking among audience, if there was anyone who wanted to listen to singing and recognize the tune, they ordered [singers to sing] a song. As a rule, they needed to pay a thousand Tianjin coppers [which was probably worth a half tael of silver at this time]."<sup>20</sup> Night performance was strongly prohibited by local authorities due to the concern that teahouses might catch fire if they lit candles at night.<sup>21</sup> As a consequence, the Houses of Lotus Flower Falling only hosted two rounds of performance in the day with about ten singers for each round.<sup>22</sup>



(Figure 5.3: “Paosa qiangshui” 抛灑镪水 (Throwing acid). This is what a House of Lotus Flower Falling looks like in the early twentieth century in Tianjin. *Xingshu huabao*, date unknown.)

Not every teahouse hosted prostitutes' singing performance. For major teahouses, such as the best well-known “four big teahouses in Tianjin” (Xiesheng, Xisheng,

<sup>19</sup> Zhang Zhihan, *Jinmen zayong*, in Lei Mengshui et al, ed., *Zhonghua Zhuzhici*, vol.1, p. 522; “Pingxi yu laoziguan” 評戲與落子館 (The Ping-style Opera and the House of Lotus Flower Falling), Zhou Licheng and Zhou Yanan, *Tianjin lao xiyuan*, p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> *Shi bao* 時報 (Times), October 29, 1886. *Shi bao* was a Chinese newspaper co-sponsored by the German and the British in Tianjin between 1886 and 1891.

<sup>21</sup> *Shi bao*, March 16, 1888.

<sup>22</sup> Zhang Tao, *Jinmen zaji*, p. 220.

Jinsheng, and Guangqing), prostitutes' performance seemed to be too vulgar. Thus, big teahouses generally hosted the most popular actors. This pushed the Houses of Lotus Flower Falling business in a disadvantageous position. So the owners had to boost prostitutes' performance as big selling point for the business. According to one news report in 1886, one teahouse, Tianhui xuan 天會軒, was located in Houjiahou, the business center, while another teahouse, Jinhua yuan 金華園, was located in the remote western corner of the city. There was no way that Jinhua yuan could beat Tianhui xuan in business considering its geographical location. But after Jinhua yuan invited some female singers to come, Mr. Yang, the owner, made triple his previous profit. Later, when one of the best singers, Changfu, decided to transfer to Tianhui xuan, Yang was so mad about his loss that he destroyed Changfu's home as revenge.<sup>23</sup> On many occasions, if the business went well, prostitutes would quit sexual service and exclusively sing on stage. Other prostitutes simply took both roles at the same time.

The fact that prostitutes took over the singing performance did not call forth any strong criticism at this moment. On the contrary, they were usually highly appreciated by many spectators. In one of the news reports on singers at the Jinhua yuan teahouse, the author comments that “[the singing prostitutes] sing day and night. Their appearance is like jade, their singing is like pearl. It is very touching [to listen to their songs].”<sup>24</sup> Two months later, Changfu, whose house was destroyed by the Jinhua yuan owner as I mentioned earlier, became prominent among her singing peers. One news reporter of *Shi bao* especially presented a livelier picture of Changfu's physical appearance, posture,

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<sup>23</sup> *Shi bao*, December 24, 1886.

<sup>24</sup> *Shi bao*, October 29, 1886.

and singing capability. “Changfu, among them [the singing prostitutes], is as beautiful as flowers and as elegant as the moon. She is also as smooth as a piece of jade and as round as a pearl....[Even though some people] criticize her for being too corpulent, she is just a little bit too much and she is as soft as without any bones. This is extremely ravishing. Her singing is like flowing cloud and cannot be compared with those inferior.”<sup>25</sup> Even some foreigners commented that plays at the Tianfu Teahouse “are respectable and proper.”<sup>26</sup>

This beautification has to be understood in a historical context of actresses. Previously when actresses were still active on the public stage, it was not rare that they were involved in prostitution. As early as the Yuan Dynasty, it was very common that prostitutes mastered both singing and performing skills.<sup>27</sup> Conventionally and professionally an outstanding actress should possess an ideal appearance, skill, and temperament.<sup>28</sup> Following this historical standard, it is clear to see that there was no essential difference between the comments on actresses in the pre-Qing dynasties and those on the prostitutes/singers in the late nineteenth century. This picture of elegance and artistry, however, was dramatically changed in the early twentieth century.

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<sup>25</sup> *Shi bao*, December 24, 1886.

<sup>26</sup> *Peking and Tientsin Times*, September 17, 1898.

<sup>27</sup> Sun Chongtao and Xu Hongtu, *Xiqu youling shi* 戲曲優伶史 (The history of operas and actors) (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1995), pp. 98-100.

<sup>28</sup> Sun Chongtao and Xu Hongtu, *Xiqu youling shi*, pp. 117-118.

## **The Prelude for Public Performance in the Early Twentieth Century**

Like the ruined city of Tianjin in the 1900 Incident, the picture was also smashed in the early twentieth century in which a prostitute/singer stood on the public stage singing at small teahouses. Instead, as a consequence of accelerated urbanization and commercialization, professionally trained actresses emerged on the public stage and became dominant performers in the business. These actresses were usually young girls from commoner families and entered the business for various reasons. Before they were able to step on stage, they were also harshly trained by troupe masters to whom they belonged. But after they performed, this occupation indeed provided new alternatives for women who moved to cities to make a living.

## **Migration, Entertainment, and Urbanization**

In 1860, when Tianjin was open to the Western countries under unequal treaties, four foreign countries, Britain, France, America, and Germany, built up their concessions around the Chinese area. Before 1900, even though these concessions were already built in a relatively good shape, the majority of common people in the Chinese area considered these concessions alienated from their daily life and did not even think of them as part of Tianjin. In their viewpoint, Tianjin was still the square-shaped city with four city walls surrounding it.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, these foreign concessions all set up

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<sup>29</sup> This mentality was manifested in Ying Lianzhi's experience. In 1900, when he lived in the French concession, he often used the phrase "the city of Tianjin" to refer to the Chinese area. Fang Hao comp. *Ying Lianzhi xiansheng riji yigao*, p. 150, August 22 and 23, 1900.

strict regulations about which business was not allowed to open in their territories. Chinese-style entertainment business, such as brothels, opium houses, and teahouses, were on the top of the prohibition list. The consequence of the alienation and regulations was the fact that almost every one of teahouses, including the Houses of Lotus Flowers Falling, was located in the Chinese area.

After the 1900 Gengzi Incident, both the Chinese area and foreign concessions were substantially developed, as examined in the introduction. On the Chinese side, the local government remodeled the devastated area and even rebuilt a new downtown center in the Chinese area. On the foreign side, another five countries, Japan, Russia, Italy, Belgium, and Austria, added their territories to the previous four countries and made the foreign concessions eight times the size of the pre-1900 period.<sup>30</sup> As the foreign concessions were modernized with new roads built, new urban utilities introduced, and new institutions established, the business center, which used to be located in the Chinese area before 1900, now shifted to the foreign territories. Following this shift, the entertainment business also moved to the concessions, especially to the newly-established ones since they were not as highly regulated as the old ones. A local literatus pointed out that “since Gengzi year [1900], the foreign concessions have been expanding to the southeastern part of Tianjin and the eastern side of Hai River. Singing houses and restaurants were concentrated in this area.”<sup>31</sup>

Interestingly, when teahouses or other entertainment places were built in the new concessions, they were usually built around the intersections of concessions and the

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<sup>30</sup> Luo Shuwei, *Jindai Tianjin chengshi shi*, p. 453.

<sup>31</sup> Wang Shouxun, *Tianjin zhengsu yangji* 天津政俗沿革記 (The history of politics and custom changes in Tianjin), in Lai Xinxia and Guo Fengqi ed., *Tianjin tongzhi* 天津通志 (The comprehensive history of Tianjin) (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 1999), p. 10.

Chinese area. In other words, they were located in the geographically marginalized area with the weakest surveillance from both the Chinese side and the foreign authorities.<sup>32</sup> Since the Chinese area was surrounded by the Japanese and Austrian concessions, many new teahouses were concentrated in the margins of these two territories, such as the Lower Tianxian Teahouse 下天仙茶園 in the Japanese area and the Eastern Tianxian Teahouse 東天仙茶園 in the Austrian area.

Other than the flourishing and shifting of entertainment business, another consequence of urbanization was an increase of migration population, as seen from the following table.

Table 5.1: The Population Statistics of Tianjin, 1848-1910

Year	Chinese area(persons)	Foreign Concessions (persons)	Total
1846	198,715	/	198,715
1903	326,552	unknown	>326,552
1906	356,503	68,053	424,556
1910	549,549	51,883	601,432

Source: 1. *Jinmen baojia tushuo* 津門保甲圖說 (The illustrated history of baojia system in Tianjin);<sup>33</sup>

2. Zhentong, *Ershi shiji chu de Tianjin gaikuang*, pp.16-19;

3. Luo Shuwei, *Jindai Tianjin chengshi shi*, pp. 453-456;

4. *Dagong bao*, October 8, 1905.

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<sup>32</sup> For example, as one of the entertainment areas targeting lowest class in Tianjin, Shanbuguan 三不管 (three who-cares) was located in the intersection of the Chinese area, Japanese, and French concessions and thus was falling out of the hand of these three parties. Usually some wandering performers simply drew a piece of open land and performed in open air. Hershatter explores how many factory workers frequented this area for its cheapness and performance variety. Gail Hershatter, *The Workers of Tianjin, 1900-1949* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1986) pp. 184-189.

<sup>33</sup> The original version was printed in 1854, here is the reprinted version in Lai Xinxia and Guo Fengqi ed., *Tianjin tongzhi* 天津通志 (The comprehensive history of Tianjin) (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 1999), pp. 435-441.

Several reasons explain this large increase of population. On the one hand, the post-1900 period witnessed a wave of industrialization. Especially in the later years between 1906 and 1910, many young peasants from surrounding villages came to Tianjin and became workers in factories.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, some old economic patterns in Tianjin, including handicraft workshops, commercial transaction, and financial exchange, were accelerated by bettered economic situations and also attracted more people to Tianjin for job opportunities.

On the other hand, as Tianjin grew into one of the major cities in north China, it also became the shelter to provide protection for people in adjacent provinces from natural disasters or social disorders.<sup>35</sup> Especially after 1900, when Tianjin became a modernized city, it usually became the first choice of many suffering peasants. According to an influential local literatus of Tianjin, “after Gengzi year [1900], whenever the counties and villages in northern provinces suffered, people [from these provinces] always considered Tianjin as *letu* 樂土 (a land of happiness) [and thus came to Tianjin].”<sup>36</sup>

Among the people who migrated to Tianjin due to these reasons, the majority of them were young, single, and male. They usually took the hardest jobs such as water carriers, rickshaw pullers, street cleaners, luggage porters and factory workers. They lived a very humble life and often did not have a family with them.<sup>37</sup> This caused the imbalance of gender ratio and a frustration of sexual desire and thus called forth the

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<sup>34</sup> Luo Shuwei, *Jindai Tianjin chengshi shi*, p. 434; Gail Hershatter also discusses the similar working migration to Tianjin, but in a relatively late period in the 1920s, see Hershatter, *The Workers of Tianjin, 1900-1949*, pp. 42-81.

<sup>35</sup> Liu Haiyan, *Kongjian yu shehui: jindai Tianjin chengshi de yanbian*, p. 104.

<sup>36</sup> Wang Shouxun, *Tianjin zhengsu yangji*, p.25.

<sup>37</sup> Luo Shuwei, *Tianjin jindai chengshi shi*, pp. 467-468.

flourishing of entertainment business with women involved, such as prostitutes and actresses. As Cheng Weikun argued, “considering the sexual imbalance of the urban population, the lack of mixed-sex patterns of association and recreation, and the frequency of unhappy arranged marriages, it is conceivable that most of the men who went to women’s plays did so to seek relief from their sexual frustration.”<sup>38</sup>

With the presence of a modernized city, a flourishing entertainment business, and an expanding pool of male audience, a large number of actresses appeared on stage in teahouses and became a new scene in the urban landscape. The actresses became so popular that a local literatus could not help lamenting in 1904 that “since the Gengzi year [1900], all teahouses hired actresses to perform on stage. Now if there are no actresses at teahouses, nobody will go and listen to operas.”<sup>39</sup> Another local literatus even estimated that there were about one hundred various-sized teahouses hosting actresses in Tianjin at the end of the Qing dynasty.<sup>40</sup> As the business was expanding, so did the number of actresses. Overcoming the very fragmentary and scant materials on actresses who performed in Tianjin between 1900 and 1912, I am able to locate at least fifty-two actresses and their biographical information, the amount of the information depending on their popularity.

Table 5.2: The List of Early Actresses in Tianjin

Name	Native place	Channel	Debut in Tianjin
Boli Cui 玻璃翠			
Cao Guifen	Wenan County,	Study with a	1897

<sup>38</sup> Cheng Weikun, “The Challenge of the Actresses: Female Performers and Cultural Alternatives in Early Twentieth Century Beijing and Tianjin,” p. 216.

<sup>39</sup> *Dagong bao*, August 24, 1904.

<sup>40</sup> *Minxing bao*, September 17, 1909.

曹桂芬	Hebei Province	master	
Chen Changgeng 陳長庚		Mother invited a tutor to teach her.	
Dingxiang Hua 丁香花			
Du Yunhong 杜雲紅	Jinzhou	Abduction	1904
Du Yunqing 杜雲卿	Shandong	Sold, prostitute	1902
En Xiaofeng 恩曉峰 (1887-1949)	Beijing	Family declination	1902/03
Hua Lianfang 花蓮舫	Tianjin		
Jia Cuiying 賈翠英			
Jiang Guixi 姜桂喜	Tianjin		Late Qing
Jin Cui'e 金翠娥			
Jin Feng'e 金鳳娥			
Jin Yu'e 金玉娥			
Jin Yuemei 金月梅	Shanxi	Sold, prostitute	
Jin Yulan 金玉蘭	Anci County of Hebei Province	Learned with her brother-in-law	
Jiusi hong 九絲紅	Southern suburban of Tianjin		1905
Li Feiying 李飛英			
Lin Fengxian 林鳳仙	Suzhou	Prostitute	
Liu Xikui 劉喜奎	Nampi County of Hebei Province	Poverty	1910
Miao Suzhen 苗素珍	Anci County of Hebei Province		1911
Ning Yuelou 甯月樓			

Ning Xiaolou 甯小樓			
Shen Jingui 沈金桂		Forced by the Gengzi Incident	
Sun Guiqiu 孫桂秋			
Wang Keqin 王克琴	Tianjin	Forced by her aunt	1901
Xian Lingzhi 鮮靈芝	Ninghe County of Hebei Province	Poverty	
Xiao Baicai 小白菜			
Xiao Chunlai 小春蘭			
Xiao Jinfeng 小金鳳	Guangdong	Sold into an actor's family	
Xiao Jingui 小金桂			1911
Xiao Jinchu 小菊處			
Xiao Lanying 小蘭英	Xianghe County of Hebei Province	Introduced by her uncle	1884
Xiao Lingzhi 小靈芝			
Xiao Mantang 小滿堂	Baoding	Sold into a troupe	
Xiao Rongfu 小榮福	Beijing		1905/08
Xiao Sanbao 小三寶		Sold to an actor family	
Xiao Taohong 小桃紅			
Xiao Wukui 小五奎			
Xiao Xiangshui 小香水	Baodi County of Hebei Province	Mother remarried an actor	1909
Xiao Yufeng 筱玉鳳 (1887-? )	Tianjin	Sold into business	
Yang Cuixi 楊翠喜	Tongzhou	Sold by parents	1905

Yin Guifeng 尹桂鳳			
Yin Honglan 尹鴻蘭			
Yun Jinhong 雲金紅			
Zhao Meiying 趙美英	Wuqing County of Hebei Province	Father and uncle were actors	
Zhao Meiyu 趙美玉			
Zhang Fengxian 張鳳仙			1911
Zhang Xiaoxian 張小仙	Tianjin		The end of the Guangxu reign (r. 1875-1908)
Zhao Yanyun 趙豔雲	Southern suburban of Tianjin		1893
Zhao Ziyun 趙紫雲	Fengtian	Prostitute	
Zhu Cuiru 竹翠茹			

Sources: 1. *Dagong bao*;

2. *Minxing bao*;

3. Cheng Weikun, “Nationalists, Feminists, and Petty Urbanites: The Changing Image of Women in Early Twentieth-Century Beijing and Tianjin;”

4. Ma Longwen and Mao Dazhi, *Hebei bangzi jianshi*;

5. Zhongguo xiqu zhi bianji weiyuanhui, *Zhongguo xiqu zhi, Tianjin juan*;

6. Wang Lin ed., *Pingxi zai Tianjin fazhan jianshi*;

7. Tong Zhi, “Zaoqi pingju yu sida kunling zai Tianjin;”

8. Zhen Guangjun, “Lun Hebei bangzi nüling de xingshuai;”

9. Li Xiangxin, “Jinmen jutan yihua;”

10. Tianjinshi zhengxie wenshi ziliaojie weiyuanhui ed., *Jingju yishu zai Tianjin*;

11. Xu Xiaoting, “Shuo kunling;”

12. Qinglin, “Jinmen jushi;”

13. Junyi, “Liyuan jiuhua lu.”

It is clear to see that in terms of origin and professional skills, actresses in the early twentieth century were largely different from prostitutes/sings before 1900. In the following section, I will explore the origin of the actresses in the post-1900 period.

## The Origin of Actresses

The majority of the early-twentieth-century actresses were actually young daughters from peasant or lower-class families in the rural or suburban area of Tianjin. This was consistent with the origin of actors. According to Pan Guangdan's investigation on native places of actors in the Qing dynasty, the majority of them also came from Zhili province, in which Tianjin and Beijing were located.<sup>41</sup> As I said earlier, in the early twentieth century, Tianjin became the major city that provided shelter for people who suffered from natural disasters or social disorders. When their villages were destroyed by flood or drought, some dislocated peasants had to bring their families with them to Tianjin. In many occasions, to make survival for the whole family, penniless peasants had no alternative but to sell their children.

There used to be two common possibilities for young girls to make a living: either sold into households to become maids or into brothels to become prostitutes. Now as performing became a new occupation for women, many young girls were sold into the entertainment business to become actresses.<sup>42</sup> The reputation of an actress was better than that of a prostitute since she did not necessarily need to provide sexual service to survive. Also an actress did not need to do drudgery for the rest of her life as a maid, as

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<sup>41</sup> Pan Guangdan, *Zhongguo lingren xueyuan zhi yanjiu* 中國伶人血緣之研究 (The research on the blood bond of Chinese performers) (Taipei: Wenhui chubanshe, 1984), pp.83-87.

<sup>42</sup> Zhen Guangjun, "Lun Hebei bangzi nüling de xingshuai," pp. 62-63.

shown in the following illustration.<sup>43</sup> In it, when the ragged peasant tries to sell his footbound young daughter, one of the bystanders convinces the father that selling her to be an actress is a better choice than a maid because “now in Tianjin actresses have become very popular. If you sell her to become a maid, she will be a slave all her life. It would be better to teach her to learn performance, so that [it is possible that] she can make a big fortune every day.”



(Figure 5.4: “Pangguan duoshi” 旁觀多事 (The bystanders interfere). *Renjing huabao*, September 29, 1907)

Sometimes, an unexpected social disturbance, such as the Boxer Rebellion, also caused the selling of young girls into the entertainment business. Yang Cuixi was such a case in point. According to fictional accounts featuring her relationship with Prince Zaizhen, Yang was native in Tongzhou, not far from Tianjin. When she was twelve years old, her village was devastated by the Boxer Rebellion. Yang Cuixi was sold twice before she ended up in a Yang family. The foster father Yang Maozun sent her to study with Chen Guobi, a relatively well-known master for his training of young girls into

<sup>43</sup> The comparison was also made in other countries in terms of the alternatives available to working women. In the United States, actresses believed that this occupation was much better than other types of work, such as factory work, because actresses were guaranteed with independence, freedom and dignity. Claudia D. Johnson, *American Actress: Perspective on the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1984), pp.75-76.

actresses. During this selling and buying process, Yang Cuixi lost her birth name, as well as the connection with her biological parents. Her name Yang Cuixi contained two parts: the last name came from her foster father Yang Maozun while the first name Cuixi indicated her ranking among the female disciples of Master Chen.<sup>44</sup>

In very few cases, when some well-off families were in a devastating decline, they had to send their daughters into the business. One of the most prominent actresses, En Xiaofeng 恩曉峰 (1887-1949) embodied this trajectory. En was born into a respectable plain yellow banner Manchu family at Beijing. Like many other Manchu men, En's father was a big fan of Beijing Opera. When the family was well off, the father could even afford inviting an actor as a private tutor to teach young En Xiaofeng as a leisure activity, as many other rich families did. Later, as the family was declining, En Xiaofeng did not have any choice but to change her leisure hobby into a means of survival and began to perform on the public stage as an actress. Since this occupation was considered a stain on the family reputation, En Xiaofeng had to leave Beijing and performed in other cities like Tianjin.<sup>45</sup>

Parents who were forced to sell their daughters into the business by these unexpected reasons deserve sympathy. But since this business made profit so easily, many parents were willing to send their daughters to be trained for performing. According to one piece of local news in *Dagong bao*, when a widow had been remarried for only a couple of days, the new husband already planned on selling the widow's

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<sup>44</sup> Xileng shanren, *Yang Cuixi*, pp. 13-14. According to the accounts, another two female students of Master Chen were Cuifeng and Cuihong, which identified Cuixi as the youngest one in the Cui generation.

<sup>45</sup> Julu, "Nishang yanying lu" 霓裳豔影錄 (The record of colored dress and amorous figure), *Xiju yuekan* 戲劇月刊 (The Monthly Journal of Opera), 1:11(1929), p.7.

daughter to learn singing.<sup>46</sup> In another case, a young girl's mother was so envious of those actresses who made a couple of hundred silver dollars each month that she sent her own daughter to learn opera.<sup>47</sup> The potential profit that an actress could have possibly made overcame the parents' guilt of selling or sending their daughters into this debased business, as one reporter of *Minxing bao* lamented,

Performers supposedly belonged to the debased class. In China, people never considered them commoners. But as actresses became popular and they played licentious plays, in a short moment of striking gong and drum, they were able to make certain amount of money. Poor people, who had a shallow consciousness and were blinded by greed, were envious of actresses. Some bought young girls to learn opera while the others taught young women in their own families to perform... For those who wanted to bear girls, they valued more opera learning than education.<sup>48</sup>

The popularity of actresses not only attracted common families into the business, it also led to a wave of abduction for young girls. In a petition letter written by a concerned literatus to the local government of Tianjin for prohibiting actress performance, he articulates that “after Gengzi [1900], [with the development of actresses] the number of buying and selling young girls is growing. Some kidnappers would abduct girls from common families and sell them to be actresses.”<sup>49</sup>

Selling, buying, and abduction, all these became the shared experience of many actresses in their early life. These scenarios justified actresses' deviance from normative womanhood. The moment when these young girls were forced into the business, they in many occasions lost the biological bond with their parents and families. This made

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<sup>46</sup> *Dagong bao*, September 6, 1903.

<sup>47</sup> *Dagong bao*, December 17, 1904.

<sup>48</sup> *Minxing bao*, April 13, 1910.

<sup>49</sup> *Dagong bao*, September 8, 1905.

actresses distinct from such groups as the educated women I discussed in previous chapters, who were usually identified in a clear familial genealogy despite the fact that they were away from home.

## The Early Training of Actresses

On the other side of the comparison, actresses nevertheless shared many attributes with educated women. Both of them had to trade their professional skills for job opportunities in order to survive in cities. For educated women, their family learning was the sources of their professionalism. Actresses also had to be trained before they stepped on public stages. The majority of girls in the training course were usually young, ranging from five to fifteen years old. At this age, their body was in a flexible and growing shape and thus was easily trained by the master. The type of training they received varied depending on by whom they were trained.

One type of training was simply some rudimentary skill-learning for short-term profit. When some profit-driven people bought in little poor girls, in order to keep the cost low, they usually hired a lower-level actor to teach these girls some songs or easy parts of certain plays. According to Jiao Juyin, an artist and play theoretician in modern China, “Since she was poor, her becoming an actress was accidental. She was trained very unsystematically from some *jianghu* 江湖 (lit. River and Lake, referring to the lower-ranking actors).”<sup>50</sup> By doing this, it took a shorter time for the girls to be able to perform some insignificant roles on public stages and it was quicker for the

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<sup>50</sup> Jiao Juyin, “Zhongguo dangqian zhi xiju” 中國當前之戲劇 (The opera in current China), translated by Dai Mingpei et al., in *Jiao Juyin wenji* 焦菊隱文集 (The collection of Jiao Juyin) (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1995), vol. 1, p.208.

masters to gain small profit. Since the majority of these girls were illiterate, they were taught through oral instructions accompanied with a lot of scolding and beating from the master or the actor, as the following illustration shows. When this young girl Lan was bought by the vicious master Li, who was often involved in women's trafficking, she was still very young and vulnerable. Master Li hired an actor to teach her plays. Yet, since she was too clumsy to learn them, she was frequently beaten by both the actor and Master Li.



(Figure 5.5: “Younü kan lian” 幼女堪憐 (The young girl deserves sympathy).  
Xingsu huabao, date unknown)

The other way of training was more systematic and professional than the first one. Some actors usually bought or contracted some young girls and formed an all-women troupe, the so-called *kunban* 坤班 (women's troupe).<sup>51</sup> The earliest women's troupe that I can find was established by Ning Baoshan 寧寶山 (dates unknown) and his wife in around 1902. Sources suggest that Ning Baoshan bought some girls from the countryside of Tianjin and formed a troupe called Ningjia kunban 寧家坤班 (Ning

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<sup>51</sup> Before Ming dynasty, women's troupes usually belonged to private households. In the Ming dynasty, there were very few professional women's troupes. Occasionally actresses performed with men's troupes. Sun Chongtao and Xu Hongtu, *Xiqu youling shi*, pp. 175-186.

Family Women's Troupe). Some of the disciples, such as Ning Xiaolou and Xiao Lanying, later became the most popular actresses in Tianjin.<sup>52</sup> Another noted women's troupe was Baolai kunban 寶來坤班 (Baolai Women's Troup) established in 1904 or earlier. They traveled between south and north and some actresses in this women's troupe also became prominent in Tianjin.<sup>53</sup>

This practice of actress training was actually borrowed from actor training, in which many young boys were strictly trained by a well-known master for about seven years before they were allowed to step on stages. But the picture was slightly different for a women's troupe. At this moment, popular actors were not willing to teach young girls because, first, they did not have a high opinion of women's performance and, secondly, they were concerned about potential of rumors coming from the mixing of male masters and female students.<sup>54</sup> So the masters of women's troupes were usually retired or less popular actors. Teaching these young girls and making a profit out of them was the extension of their career and life. In addition, unlike each actor's specialization in one role, these young girls were taught to perform at least a couple of roles at the same time, which largely decreased the performing cost. Besides, from the perspective of biology, while teenage actors had to face the challenge of voice change, which sometimes obstructed their performing careers, there was no such obstacle for young girls. Therefore, the time needed to train an actress was shorter than for an actor and the cost was lower.

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<sup>52</sup> Li Xiangxin, “Jinmen jutan yihua,” in *Jingju yishu zai Tianjin*, pp. 289-290.

<sup>53</sup> *Zhongguo xiqu zhi, Tianjin juan*, p. 257.

<sup>54</sup> Xu Xiaoting, “Shuo kunling” 說坤伶 (On actresses), in Zhou Muyun, *Liyuan yingshi* 梨園影事 (History of Chinese drama), no publication information and page number, kept in East Asian Library, University of Minnesota.

The women's troupes played a significant role in constructing an actress's world. Unlike actors, who grew up under the strong family influence for opera performance, these early-twentieth-century actresses were rootless elements with very little familial connection in cities.<sup>55</sup> While many famous actors claimed membership in "influential families of actors," actresses did not enjoy such advantage. A family or familial connection had to be established within the women's troupe. To some extent, a women's troupe was like a constructed family, in which an actress was protected by the troupe owner and in return she served the owner like daughter to father. From the perspective of an actress, she sometimes took the last name after the troupe owner, or she took the stage name based on her position in the troupe. Since she lived with the owner and his family, she usually took care of the household affairs such as cooking, washing, and cleaning. She had to obey the master with absolute subordination.<sup>56</sup>

From the perspective of the troupe owner, he was not only the head of the troupe, but also the head of the household, a father-like figure, providing protection for actresses. When actresses played on stages, no men were allowed to enter the back stage, where the actresses prepared themselves with costumes and cosmetics. If there was any hooligan who tried to harass these women or interrupt the performance, which happened a lot since the hooligans of Tianjin were well-known for their annoying intervention of many local affairs, the owner could hire bouncers to take care of them.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Pan Guangdan, *Zhongguo lingren xueyuan zhi yanjiu*, pp. 207-208.

<sup>56</sup> For example, many actresses often recalled in the early years when they studied with the masters, they had to do many chores for the masters and their families in order to please the masters. Xin Fengxia, *Xin Fengxia huayilu* 新鳳霞回憶錄 (The recollection of Xin Fengxia) (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian chubanshe, 1980), pp. 55-60.

<sup>57</sup> Li Xiangxin, "Jinmen jutan yihua," in *Jingju yishu zai Tianjin*, pp. 289-290.

No matter whether these young girls were slackly trained by *jianghu* actors or by more skillful troupe masters, it was widely accepted, though not universally, in people's mind that women's performance could not be compared to that of actors at this moment. As a literatus and also a fan of actress performance pointed out, "in terms of art, actresses were not as profound as actors....They usually were not capable of performing more important plays and thus this is why they were not highly valued by the society."<sup>58</sup> Paradoxically, in spite of the less professional training, when actresses began to step on stages, they immediately overshadowed actors and dominated the business for next decades, so much so that many actors were forced to leave the business or to play insignificant roles to supplement actresses' performance.<sup>59</sup> The question we have to ask is: if not skills, what made actresses so popular?

## The Debut of Actresses in the Early Twentieth Century

The question why actresses beat up actors in the business with their less exquisite skills has to be understood from two perspectives. In terms of business, as it developed, teahouse owners attempted to maximize profit by attracting as much audience as they could. They not only rearranged seating patterns and installed electric lights, but also took advantage of the cheapness of actresses comparing to the price of actors. All these factors facilitated the frequent presence of actresses in teahouses. As for the actresses, they themselves consciously realized the advantage of naturalistic representation of woman-ness as a way to gain popularity among audience, mostly men. Not only did they

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<sup>58</sup> Xu Xiaoting, "Shuo kunling," in Zhou Muyun, *Liyuan yingshi*, no page number.

<sup>59</sup> Ma Longwen and Mao Dazhi, *Hebei bangzi jianshi*, pp. 89-90.

exhibit their bodies to a larger extent, they also physically interacted with actors in gender-mixed performance.

## Spatial Adjustment of Teahouses

As shown earlier in this chapter, when teahouses first emerged, people frequented there mainly for tea drinking rather than opera listening. Thus where people sat did not really matter since they only paid for tea. At the end of the nineteenth century, when people enjoyed opera performance over tea drinking, teahouse owners began to charge fees based on where a spectator sat since a better seat usually meant a good view of the performance. In a regular teahouse, the best seats were located in the front area of the stage, or balconies on the side of the stage and on the second floor. These seats were usually reserved for the rich and the influential. The rest of the audience usually sat around square tables and faced each other. A world of teahouse was thus divided based on the social status of different spectators.<sup>60</sup>

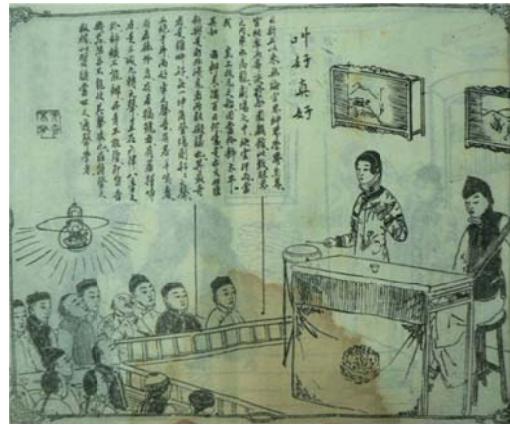
In the beginning of the twentieth century, teahouses owners continued to charge a certain amount of money for seating. Yet, as more and more spectators scrambled into one space, the owner adjusted the seating arrangement in order to fit as many people as it could and made more money out of ticket sale. The large and square tables were replaced by rows of benches or smaller tables, as shown in the following illustration. As a result, the audience now faced the performers more directly. This way of seating made audience *watch* instead of listening to plays.<sup>61</sup> This seating rearrangement was not

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<sup>60</sup> Joshua Goldstein, “From Teahouse to Playhouse: Theaters as Social Texts in Early-Twentieth-Century China,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 62:3 (August, 2003), pp. 754-765.

<sup>61</sup> This physical adjustment did not just happen in Tianjin. At approximately the same time in Beijing, the seating was

necessarily resulted from, or designed for, actress performance. But, it indeed made an actress under a more direct gaze of the audience. Every action of her performance was under closer examination than before. They became the focus of the audience.



(Figure 5.6: “Jiaohao zhenhao” 叫好真好 (Yelling “good” is really good). *Xingshu huabao*, March 1908)

Meanwhile, as you may see from this illustration, as well as many others in this and the next chapter, an electric light is usually highlighted. This is the second change in terms of the physical conditions of teahouses that had an impact on actresses. The use of electric power did not start until after 1900 when foreign concessions were under reconstruction. It was first used in the French concession in 1902 and then spread to other territories quickly.<sup>62</sup> The Chinese area lagged far behind. Despite the fact that the government bureaus began to use electric lights in 1903,<sup>63</sup> they were not widely installed in commoners’ households. According to a news report in 1906, “it has been a couple of years since the Belgian Electric Light and Street Car Company was established.

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also changed this way. Su Yi, *Jingju erbainian gaiguan* 京劇二百年概觀 (A brief overview of Beijing Opera in the two hundred years) (Beijing: Beijing Yanshan chubanshe, 1989), p.59.

<sup>62</sup> *Dagong bao*, June 25, 1902; Luo Shuwei, *Jindai Tianjin chengshi shi*, p. 343.

<sup>63</sup> *Dagong bao*, August 16, 1903.

Yet, there were very few merchants and commoners in the Chinese area who installed electric lights.”<sup>64</sup>

In the eyes’ of teahouse owners, electric light, a kind of modern urban utility, was a means for profit. They quickly installed electric lights in teahouses to replace old-styled candles or kerosene lights. This largely decreased the chance of fire and thus made teahouse a safer place to go. Meanwhile, it also changed the schedule of those who came to watch opera. Previously at the end of the nineteenth century, as night performance was strictly prohibited by the government, there were usually two rounds of performance in day time. Those who had to work in the day frequented teahouses less. But now with the installment of electric lights, night performances were possible. The first round started at noon and ended at about four o’clock. Then the second round started at seven and ended around midnight.

This schedule fit better for spectators in the modern world since their daytime was usually occupied with work. The night performance indeed provided some relaxation for them after a day’s hard work. As Colin Mackerras points out, “When the old theatres had been rebuilt, their managers began making efforts to improve the lighting system. They brought in oil-lamps, torches and eventually electric lights. With the introduction of these innovations the evening, which is after all when people normally take their leisure, became a practicable period for theatrical entertainment.”<sup>65</sup> As more people came to night performances, this made the quality and price of it higher than day performance. According to Shi Xiaochuan, the compiler of the Guide Book to Tianjin,

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<sup>64</sup> “Tianjin shanghui dang’an” 天津商會檔案 (Archives of the Chamber of Commerce in Tianjin), vol. 2188, category 2, kept in the Bureau of Tianjin Archive.

<sup>65</sup> Colin Mackerras, *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times: From 1840 to the Present Day* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), p. 91.

“Usually night performance is a little better than day performance and thus the price is higher.”<sup>66</sup>

The two-shift schedule also changed actresses’ working schedules. Since it was widely accepted by the society that actresses were not comparable to actors, the price of an actress was lower than that of an actor. As Qinglin recalled in his article on the history of performing arts in Tianjin, “the seats sold for actresses’ performance usually are better than actors because teahouse owner like their cheaper contract money and the audience also like the lower price of tickets.”<sup>67</sup> This increased the frequency of actresses’ appearance at teahouses. For example, in the first month of Yang Cuixi’s performance in Eastern Tianxian Teahouse in June-July 1906, she worked seventeen day performances and twenty-four night performances. Sometimes in the weekend or holiday, she had to work continuously for both shifts for consecutive days. None of the actors in the same teahouse worked as frequently as she did.

The cost of such popularity of actresses was paid by their deviance from normative womanhood, in which a decent woman was not supposed to linger outside late, not to mention working with men till midnight. As Jiao Juyin, a theatre critic I mentioned earlier, discussed why actresses were different from other women in the society, he argued that their irregular working schedule was one important factor. “They [the actresses] had a night life. In the morning, while others began to work, they began to rest.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, the author implied the idea that actresses’ working schedule actually had a

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<sup>66</sup> Shi Xiaochuan, *Tianjin zhinan*, vol. 5, p. 9.

<sup>67</sup> Qinglin, “Jinmen jushi” 津門劇事 (The stories in the opera circle in Tianjin), in *Xiju yuekan*, 1:10 (1929), p.2.

<sup>68</sup> Jiao Juyin, “Zhongguo dangqian zhi xiju,” in *Jiao Juyin wenji*, vol. 1, pp. 250-251.

negative impact on their respectability and made them deviant from women of good families.

## From Impersonated Art to the Authenticity of Woman-ness

The other reason that actresses dominated the business was that the audience believed that these women demonstrated a naturalistic representation of their gender. Previously when impersonated actors played on stage, both actors and audience were aware that the “women” were not real women. This consciousness pushed the impersonated actors to act like women as much as they could. Not only did they wear women’s dresses and make-up, more importantly, they also wore wooden stilts to impersonate women’s bound feet.<sup>69</sup> In other words, as Chou Hui-ling argued, their woman-ness “could be put on and taken off, they were manipulated by artists onstage and were recognized by the society as art.”<sup>70</sup>

In the early twentieth century, while actresses stepped on stages, the gender difference was more determined by the biology. While actors took painful efforts to practice walking on small wooden stilts and pretend to be women, being women was somehow self-evident for actresses. This was why when Wang Keqin, the most popular actress in the late Qing Tianjin, always teased the audience with her tiny feet when she performed on the stage.<sup>71</sup> As long as they stood on the stage, every spectator sitting in the teahouse knew that they were real women. This way of performing natural gender

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<sup>69</sup> Huang Yufu, *Jingju, qiao he Zhongguo de xingbie guanxi* 京劇·蹺和中國的性別關係 (Beijing Opera, wooden stilt and the gender relationship in China) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1998), p. 121.

<sup>70</sup> Chou Hui-ling, “Striking Their Own Poses: The History of Cross-Dressing on the Chinese Stage,” *TDR* (1988-), 41:2 (Summer, 1997), p. 134.

<sup>71</sup> A Xin, “Jinmen lianshi jilue,” p. 39.

became a convenient justification for actresses' presence on the stage. As a *Shenbao* news reporter pointed out, "women have soft personality. This is their natural gift. They performed women's plays. This is absolutely natural and is enough to beat actors. [This natural performance] cannot be achieved by actors who tried hard to imitate women by using dress and make-up."<sup>72</sup>

Bearing this in mind, the audience was generally aware that "they enjoyed their [actresses'] beauty, not their skill."<sup>73</sup> Beauty was demonstrated by actresses' physical body. Previously at the end of the nineteenth century, when prostitutes/singers were on stages, they simply stood there singing. Yet, this way of performance was replaced by active movements in the early twentieth century. Actresses began to play more complicated plays with different roles and various movements on stages. All of this made it possible that actresses' physical bodies were more unfolded and exposed in the public eye. According to a recollection of an opera fan, when En Xiaofeng, one of the earliest actresses in Tianjin, was invited to perform at Shanghai, in one of the plays, she "always exposed her right arm. She wore a belly-band in front of her breast with a big red embroidered flower on it." This was much more than an impersonated actor was capable of. Even a prostitute did not dare to expose so much of her body outside the brothel. This exposure indeed worked well to boost her popularity. As the author remembered, "whenever this play was on, the seats must be fully occupied. When the curtain [separating the back stage and the front stage] was just pulled up, the audience began to applaud as loudly as the thunder."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *Shen bao*, March 4, 1025.

<sup>73</sup> Xu Xiaoting, "Shuo kunling," in Zhou Muyun, *Liyuan yingshi*, no publication information.

<sup>74</sup> Meihua guanzhu, "Jubu cuo zhi" 菊部脞志 (The detailed history of the opera), IV, in *Xiju yuekan*, 2:1, 1929.

So far I have not found any direct evidence that En Xiaofeng or other actresses did the same thing in Tianjin at the end of the Qing dynasty. But in the early Republican era, when the play *Tianhe pei* 天河配 (The Match of the Heavenly River) was on in Tianjin, according to an anecdote, seven fairy ladies “were wearing close-fitting gauze dress and playing with each other in a big wooden basin.”<sup>75</sup> Actresses’ natural bodies were also included in the performance and thus became a selling point. It is hard to tell who brought up the idea of exposing women’s bodies, teahouse owners, troupe masters, or actresses themselves. Yet, suffice to say that they were well aware of the advantage of showing actresses’ bodies in an erotic ways to attract the audience, who was able to consume the authentic women’s bodies publicly.

The gender-mixed performance made the scenario more erotic. According to *Dagong bao*, “After Gengzi year [1900], [actors and actresses] became unscrupulous and performed together.”<sup>76</sup> In this kind of performance, actresses not only demonstrated their bodies. They went one step further and had to physically interact with actors on the same stage. From the following picture, it is clear to see that an actress is in the interaction with an actor while they are performing on the stage.

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<sup>75</sup> Zhen Guangjun, “Qianshuo Tianjin caitouxi” 淺說天津彩頭戲 (A brief introduction of prop plays in Tianjin), in *Jingju yishu zai Tianjin*, p. 366.

<sup>76</sup> *Dagong bao*, September 8, 1905.



(Figure 5.7: “Guosang zhiwen, shi” 國喪志聞 (十) (The report of the national mourning ceremony, ten). *Xingsu huabao*, date unknown)

This way of performance resulted in an unavoidable contact of actresses and actors. Sometimes, this contact went so far as to be physical. According to one spectator’s recollection, when he worked at a company in the Japanese concession in Tianjin, he used to watch the gender-mixed performance a lot. In one of the plays, while the actor was chasing the actress on stage, he often used his fan to knock the actress’s hip and chin, which the author thought was “disrespectful and obscene.”<sup>77</sup> Sometimes both sides overdid in the plays and were criticized as “offering a how-to of sexual practice to the public.”<sup>78</sup> Jin Yuemei, another Tianjin actress in the late Qing, once played with an actor in Beijing in the early Republican era, “at the extreme point of loving, they two went so far as to take off their pants.” Finally they were driven off the stage by the person supervising the teahouse.<sup>79</sup> As a consequence, actresses’ performance was often prohibited by the local government. “[when actresses] step on stage, they act

<sup>77</sup> Halaotang, “Huanghua suotan” 黃華瑣談 (Anecdotes in opera circles), *Xiju yuekan*, 2:6 (1930), p.1.

<sup>78</sup> *Dagong bao*, December 8, 1904.

<sup>79</sup> Junyi, “Liyuan jiuhua lu” 梨園舊話錄 (The old record of opera circles), in *Beiyang huabao* 北洋畫報 (Beiyang Pictorial Magazine), October 20, 1934.

contemptibly. Those who watch them are seduced. [Actresses' performance] not only contaminates customs, but also corrupts people's heart.”<sup>80</sup>

The gender-mixed performance not only made plays more sensational, it also shifted the audience's focus from artistic representation to sex-related scenes. For example, in the play *Dapiguan* 大劈棺 (The Coffin Cleaving), a historical figure Zhuangzi tested the chastity of his wife by pretending to be dead and lying in the coffin. The origin focus of this play was the moment when Zhuangzi's wife opened the coffin and suddenly Zhuangzi stood from the coffin and thus scared his wife. But as an actress recalled, “while actresses began to perform, male audience preferred to enjoy more the lovesickness scene of Zhuangzhou's [Zhuangzi] wife in the lonely inner chamber.”<sup>81</sup>

## Conclusion

As seen in this chapter, the emergence of actresses on public stages in early twentieth century Tianjin demonstrated various levels of tension. On the one hand, many extant records about actresses' early years, including selling, abduction, unwillingness, and harsh training, seemed too clearly fit into the stereotypical narrative of victimized women. Sometimes we have to be cautious whether these records were true stories or whether they were written to fulfill various narrators' purposes.<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, this victimized image was paralleled with that of the danger and threat. The fine taste for

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<sup>80</sup> *Dagong bao*, June 21, 1903.

<sup>81</sup> Zhang Zhengfang, “Huigu Shanghai xiju xuexiao” 回顧上海戲劇學校 (A historical review of Shanghai Opera School), in Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshanghuiyi beijingshi weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiuhui, *Jingju tanwang lu san bian* 京劇談往錄三編 (Three volumes of old collections of Beijing Opera) (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1990), p. 32.

<sup>82</sup> Gail Hershatter is concerned about the similar issue in her research on prostitutes in Shanghai. See Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasure: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-century Shanghai*.

different performing arts nourished by the long history of the city did not necessarily guarantee an open attitude towards women's public performance. The audience despised the gender-mixed performance and the excessive body demonstration and interaction of actresses, but this group of dangerous or even seductive women did not stop them from going to teahouse and watching these operas. Within the business itself, though actresses were accused of their crude skills, they still perfectly and easily overwhelmed actors and dominated the business. In this sense, the intertwining and overlap between victim and danger about women's public performance made these actresses the very site to reflect the complicated contestation between the development of the city, the business, and men and women in this bustling world.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Between Consumed and Consumer: Actresses' Stage and Daily Life**

The image of actresses became an important issue in question in the public domain.

As I examined in the previous chapter, the naturalistic representation of these actresses and the gender-mixed performance was only the beginning to arouse the imagination, emotion and sensuality of the audience. What made it worse was the content of the plays actresses performed and the ambivalent attitude of the literati who shaped the public opinion of actresses through media networks. As a consequence, they were described as a group of morally loose or lewd women in the society. However, the extreme exposure to the public that was brought by their profession was a double-edged sword. Actresses also took advantage of their popularity in public to erase the stain on their reputation and even reversed their fate from debased women to respectable performers. They actively participated in the charitable performance and *tanghui xi* 堂會戲 (the hall performance, a kind of performance held at private households), not only challenging the professional tradition, but also bearing the mind of using the media to enhance their popularity and improving their social status.

Meanwhile, the publicity on stage and through performance was also extended to their off-stage life. As an old Chinese saying expresses it, “life itself is a play.” How they managed their working and leisure time, how they moved around in the city, what they wore, and where they lived, on the one hand, became means to construct and articulate their identity as a group of new public women that had never been in the

society before. But on the other hand, to what extent were these women's life styles and activity spheres made them distinct from other groups of women, such as the educated women in Chapters Three and Four, is still a question that needs more consideration and comparison.

## Licentious Plays

Actresses were frequently accused in newspapers of performing “yinxi” 淫戲 (licentious plays). Scholars like Lin Xinghui argue that this kind of play include those which break or challenge the idea of sex segregation and social hierarchy, such as the emperor-subject relationship.<sup>1</sup> But, in the early twentieth century in Tianjin, it seems that the authorities and the public opinion were more concerned about the erotic elements of certain plays than about the social hierarchy threat. According to an official list issued by the Beijing government in 1906, there were twenty-two plays that were labeled as licentious plays. Even though there was not such a list like this in Tianjin, I indeed find that there was some overlap between licentious plays in Tianjin and in Beijing. Therefore, it is safe to argue that this Beijing list conveyed some prevalence in the early twentieth century north China.<sup>2</sup> Below is a brief introduction of those which were labeled as licentious plays in Beijing and Tianjin.

Table 6.1: The List of Licentious Plays in Beijing and Tianjin

Play	Brief plot
Yu linglong 玉玲瓏	A Song prostitute Liang Hongyu elopes with a soldier Han Shian and later they are pardoned by

<sup>1</sup> Lin Xinghui, *You Shen bao xiqu guanggao kan Shanghai jingju fazhan* 由申報戲曲廣告看上海京劇發展(The exploration of the development of Beijing Opera in Shanghai from opera advertisements in *Shen bao*) (Taibei: Liren shuju, 2008), p.205.

<sup>2</sup> *Jin bao*, September 5, 1906.

(Jade tinkling)	fighting against the enemy.
Xiao fangqiu 小放牛 (Cow herding)	A country girl gets lost in the suburb and is guided by a cowboy. They play together for a while before they say goodbye.
Hudie bei 蝴蝶盃 (Butterfly cup)	A young scholar is under an injustice. During his escape, he is saved by two young ladies and marries them both at the end.
Sanyi ji 三疑計 (Three schemes)	A general suspects that his wife has an affair with the family tutor. He sounds out both the tutor and his wife and only finds out that they are innocent.
Cuiping shan 翠屏山 (Green Screen Mountain)	A butcher's wife has an affair with a monk. The sworn brother of the butcher finds it out but is framed by the wife. Only when the sworn brother kills the monk does the butcher find out the truth and kill his wife.
Fanwang gong 梵王宮 (God's Temple)	A young lady feels love sick after she sees a young man at the Fanwang gong. A matchmaker dresses the man into a woman and sends him to meet the young lady at her inner chamber. They spend one night together and then separate.
Mai Yanzhi 賣胭脂 (Selling Rouge)	A down-fallen young scholar one day sees a young girl who sells rouge at a store. He flirts with her and this is found out by her mother. Finally they are allowed to get married.
Guanwang miao 關王廟 (Guanwang Temple)	A prostitute promises to marry the son of a high official. But when he exhausts his money, he is driven out of the brothel by the manager and lives in a temple. The prostitute goes to see him at the temple and gives him some money to use as travel expense to go home.
Xiao Shang fen 小上墳 (Mourning at the Grave)	The wife makes a living by sewing when her husband is away to take civil service exam. After a long time, the wife thinks that the husband is dead and mourns him at the family tomb. But the husband comes back and sees his wife at the tomb. Since they both grow old, they talk to each other to find out who they really are and have a happy life ever after.
Shaohua shan 少華山	A young lady from a scholar's family is taken by a

(Shaohua Mountain)	group of bandits and forced to marry a young scholar. At the wedding night, both of them tell each other that this marriage is against their will. Next day, with the help of the scholar, the young lady leaves the bandit den.
Nü Qixie 女起解 (Female prisoner)	A prostitute is sold to a merchant as a concubine. But the merchant is poisoned to death by his wife and her lover. The prostitute is framed to be the murderer and is sentenced to death. Later in the review, the truth is discovered by a smart official and the prostitute is released.
Mai Ronghua 賣絨花 (Selling velvet flowers)	A rich merchant wants to pull back his younger sister's engagement with a poor scholar. With the help of a smart servant, the scholar finally not only marries two sisters of the rich merchant, but also gets a big fortune from him.
Gan fu 趕府 (Kicking out of the household)	A wicked woman murders her sister-in-law and sells herself into an official family to avoid justice. She sets up to be taken by the official as a concubine but her trick is discovered and she is driven out of the official's household.
Haichao zhu 海潮珠 (Jewelry of ocean wave)	A prince has an affair with the wife of an official. Later on this relationship is discovered. The prince and the wife are killed by the official.
Shi yuzhuo 拾玉鐲 (picking up the jade wristlet)	A young lady is doing embroidery in front of her house and is seen by a young man, who falls in love with her. He drops a jade bracelet and the lady picks it up as a symbol of accepting his love.
Xin'an yi 辛安驛 (Xin'an station)	A young lady dresses up like a man and puts up for the night at a hotel. The daughter of the hotel owner feels in love with "him" and marries "him" by force. On the wedding night, the daughter sees the bound feet of her "husband" and realizes that he is a woman.

As we see from the list, many of the plays publicize women's personal emotions or the private lives of women's inner chambers, such as the love sickness that a young lady

is having in her inner chamber in “Fanwanggong,” the concern that the young sister for her fiancé in “Maironghua,” and the life of a presumable widow in “Xiaoshangfen.” All of these emotions or personal scenes were not supposed to be exposed to men’s gaze in reality.

Not only do they portray the private life of women, many of these plays also focus on the public socialization between women and men, such as prostitutes and their patrons in “Yulinglong” and “Guanwangmiao;” wicked wives with their lovers in “Ganfu” and “Haichaozhu;” the young girl who has to travel alone in men’s dress and is forced to marry a daughter of a hotel owner in “Xin’anyi.” To some extent, these women either break normative womanhood or are known for their loose morality. As Cheng Weikun summarizes, “of the folk songs performed by modern female singers of Tianjin and Beijing, over 70% were love songs, expressing such feelings as looking forward to meeting their boyfriends, hesitation to speak of their amorous affections to their lovers, loneliness and depression caused by the absence of their male companions, and wifely unhappiness aroused by separation from her husband.”<sup>3</sup>

From the perspective of the market, the purpose of popularizing these themes was to attract a larger audience. “If every day [the teahouses just] showed the plays on loyalty, filial piety, and righteousness and did not supplement with humorous jokes and private affairs between two sexes, the audience must not be content.”<sup>4</sup> Now since these “private affairs between two sexes” were represented by two sexes, the sexuality of the

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<sup>3</sup> Cheng Weikun, “Nationalists, Feminists, and Petty Urbanites: The Changing Image of Women in Early Twentieth-Century Beijing and Tianjin,” p.316.

<sup>4</sup> *Jin bao*, January 15, 1907. Some scholars argue that performances demonstrate to common people a ways of life beyond mediocrity. Therefore, while the audience expects some legends from performance, they also do not need to take the burden of this artistic transgression. Xu Min, “Shi, chang, you: wanqing Shanghai shehui shenghuo yipie” 士·娼·優——晚清上海社會生活一瞥 (Literati, prostitutes, and actors: A scene of social life in late Qing Shanghai), in *Shanghai yanjiu luncong* 上海研究論叢 (Papers on Shanghai studies), vol. 9 (1993), p. 46.

characters in the plays was somewhat taken over by actresses. It is thus not surprising to see that actresses became sources of sexual stimulus when they performed licentious plays. According to one author's denunciation, "when men see on the stage real women, who engage in such seductive posturing, how can they fail to be stimulated erotically? If the performance is watched by the unmarried, how cannot they be induced to find their own sexual partners?"<sup>5</sup>

## The Audience

To some extent, the paradox between the rising number of actresses and the strong criticism on their licentious performance reflected the changing composition and ambivalent attitude of the audience.

At the end of the nineteenth century, people who were rich enough usually hosted performances in their private households instead of going out to teahouses. Those who frequented teahouses usually came from lower classes. For example, in September, 1886, a licentiate, who passed the lowest level of civil service examination, from Cangzhou was involved a fight with other spectators at Qingfang Teahouse.<sup>6</sup> Three months later, about five or six soldiers went to the same Qingfang Teahouse and refused to pay, which resulted in a conflict with the teahouse owner's bouncers.<sup>7</sup> In general, at this moment, the audience included soldiers, local hooligans or petty literati. The composition of the audience was the reflection of the city. Tianjin was a city with a large number of soldiers dispatched from the central government in Beijing to protect the capital. During the

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<sup>5</sup> *Shuntian shibao*, December 23, 1912.

<sup>6</sup> *Shi bao*, September 24, 1886.

<sup>7</sup> *Shi bao*, December 20, 1886.

adaptation into the local society, these soldiers, sometimes transforming into local hooligans, became a frequent presence at teahouses.

The scene was dramatically changed in the early twentieth century when Tianjin was transformed from a military defense outpost to a financial and cultural center in north China. As a consequence, the entertainment business, represented by teahouse culture, became a popular leisure activity among urbanites. Meanwhile, as a large population migrated to Tianjin for job opportunities, the composition of the audience also diversified. The number of soldiers decreased. Instead, middle-and-upper literati, young students in new-style schools, workers, and even women of various family backgrounds became the main composition of the audience.

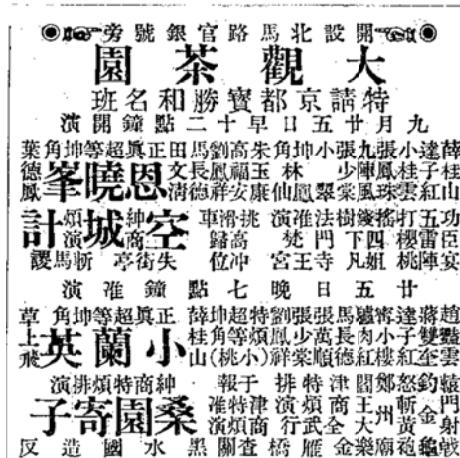
Among the three groups who showed up in the front gate of teahouses, literati played a decisive role in shaping actresses' public image. Qin Shao defines these literati as a group of "new cultural elite" who were eager to enlighten common people by criticizing the moral deterioration and yet they themselves "had not left the decadent past too far behind."<sup>8</sup>

For this group of literati, they were first consumers of teahouse culture. Not only did they themselves frequent teahouses a lot, sometimes with their families, as a means of socializing with friends, as I discussed in Chapter Four. They also appropriated the cultural capital they possessed to promote entertainment business in general and actress's popularity in particular. One such resource is the media network. Previously teahouse owners usually posted programs on the walls of teahouses. Anyone who was interested had to go to the teahouse in person in order to know what was on today. In the

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<sup>8</sup> Qin Shao, "Tempest over teapots: The Vilification of Teahouse Culture in Early Republican China," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 57:4 (November 1998), p.1023.

beginning of the twentieth century, as the media developed, many major newspapers in Tianjin, such as *Dagong bao*, *Minxing bao*, and *Jin bao*, published programs of many teahouses on a daily basis as a means to make profit out of advertisement.<sup>9</sup> As seen from the following illustration, these programs include the name and location of the teahouses, the names of main actors and actresses, and the titles of the plays. Sometimes the price for different seats was also listed. For some popular actresses, usually in front of their names, a short phrase like “[we] especially invited the extremely popular actresses who and who” is added, as shown in the following image. Two actresses, En Xiaofeng and Xiao Lanying, are especially emphasized in larger font.

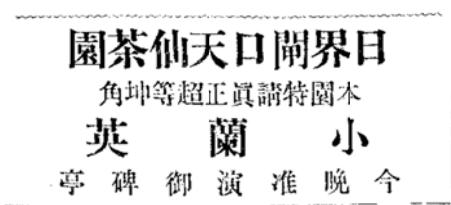


(Figure 6.1: A Daguanyuan Teahouse ad. *Jin bao*, October 23, 1905)

Occasionally, these newspapers were also willing to save space to an especially famous actress with only her name and her play published, as the following advertisement shows. By doing this, the performance of actresses, as well as actors, was

<sup>9</sup> This practice was probably influenced by *Shen bao* in Shanghai. The most comprehensive work on the relationship between opera development, advertisement, and media is Lin Xinghui's *You Shen bao xiqu guanggao kan Shanghai jingju fazhan*. In this monograph, Lin argues that the development of Beijing opera in Shanghai was influenced by the commercialization of the city. From the type of the play, to the physical construction of teahouses, and to the relationship between performance and the authorities, all these aspects represented the gap between popular culture and authority regulation, in which media played a role of intermediating between the two.

integrated into the media network and thus easily spread and transmitted among those who read newspapers.



(Figure 6.2: A Tianxian Teahouse ad. *Jin bao*, January 1, 1906)

Ironically, it is almost the same group of newspaper-reading and teahouse-going literati who savagely accused actresses of being a moral threat to the social order. As Catherine Yeh argues, this was a convenient strategy to restore their capability of manipulating popular discourse against the decline of their social status in a modern world.<sup>10</sup> This restoration theory was especially clear for the literati in Tianjin, who attempted to consolidate their position in the local society of Tianjin. By blaming actresses for the decline of morality in Tianjin, this group of literati demonstrated a strong localism in which they tried efforts to reform the local society for better.

If we read the essays or news reports which berated the detrimental impact of actress's performance on the local society, the majority of this criticism came from the critics' local experience instead of generalization. In one of the colloquial speeches targeting commoners, the author justifies his opposition to actresses' performance by telling a real story in Tianjin in which a mother sold her own daughter into the

<sup>10</sup> Ye Kaidi, “Cong huhuaren dao zhiyin: Qingmo minchu Beijing wenren de wenhua huodong yu danjue de mingxinghua” 從護花人到知音——清末民初北京文人的文化活動與旦角的明星化 (From flower-protectors to confidential friends: the cultural activities of Beijing literati and the starization of female roles in the late Qing and early Republican era), in Chen Pingyuan and David Wang ed., *Beijing: Dushi xiangxiang yu wenhua jiyi* 北京：都市想像與文化記憶 (Beijing: Urban imagination and cultural memory) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005), pp.121-134.

business.<sup>11</sup> In another petition letter written by a literatus to the local authorities proposing to prohibit gender-mixed performance, the author referred to an actress named Jin Hongyu who performed in a teahouse at the Russian concession.<sup>12</sup> In general, these local examples constituted the literati's generalization of actresses' performance and thus justified their goal of purifying the local society.

This sense of localism was also conveyed by a strong comparison between Tianjin and Shanghai among the literati. If in women's education, Shanghai was the role model that Tianjin tried to catch up with, in the issue of actresses' performance, once again Shanghai became the ideal exemplar of how Tianjin should eliminate the vice of the local society. In one of the colloquial speeches published in *Dagong bao*, the author explicitly expresses his frustration on how Tianjin was much worse than Shanghai in terms of gender-mixed performance. The author sighed that "everyone says that these customs in Shanghai are too vulgar. The customs in Tianjin are even worse. In Shanghai, there is never gender-mixed performance. Only in Tianjin, [the gender-mixed performance] goes so bad in past three years....This is one big deficiency in local politics."<sup>13</sup> With the big concern about actress's performance in Tianjin, local literati strongly suggested that the authorities should regulate the business following the example of Shanghai. They proposed that both the Chinese area and foreign concessions should separate actors and actresses into single-sexed teahouses to perform, which were already experimented with in Shanghai and had successfully suppressed the licentious

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<sup>11</sup> *Dagong bao*, December 17, 1904.

<sup>12</sup> *Minxing bao*, July 19, 1909.

<sup>13</sup> *Dagong bao*, August 24, 1904.

customs.<sup>14</sup> The contradiction between a Shanghai without gender-mixed performance and a Shanghai with a regulation on gender-mixed performance was conveniently dismissed by the literati. They only took what they needed to justify necessary regulations on actresses in an attempt to improve the ethics of the local society.

The notorious reputation of an actress was not the one that actresses accepted without any resistance. In fact, the efforts of constructing actresses' public image also came from these women themselves. They attempted to reverse their image by performing *yiwu xi* 義務戲 (charitable plays) and *tanghui xi* 堂會戲 (hall performance), through which actresses enjoyed the fruits of fame and profit, and sometimes even went so far as to change their life trajectories.

## **The Charitable Performance: The Reverse of Actresses' Public Image**

The charitable plays appeared on stages since the middle Qing dynasty as a result of opera popularity. In the beginning, it was a kind of play to help out those less popular actors. They were usually small potatoes and occupied the lowest position in the business. Throughout the whole year, they did not earn enough money to support themselves. So at the end of the lunar year, popular actors always organized one-day, sometimes longer, performances and donated all profit to poor actors for survival. Later on, as opera became more popular and as actors made efforts to engage with local social affairs, they began to perform charitable plays in the name of saving people from natural

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<sup>14</sup> *Dagong bao*, April 2, April 2, 1905; September 8, 1905.

disasters. Only the best actors were invited for these plays since they were the guarantee of ticket income, which was donated to the victims.<sup>15</sup>

After actresses appeared in the beginning of the twentieth century, when there were charitable plays on in Tianjin, they usually did not play significant roles since they were considered as professionally inferior to actors. In 1907, when Jiangsu province suffered from flood, literati in Tianjin initiated a movement to collect money to save the victims. One part of the donation movement was to perform charitable plays since this was the most efficient way to attract a large number of people to public places like teahouses. When people came to teahouses, literate men usually made public speeches to evoke sympathy from the audience, followed by actors and actresses' performance on the stage.<sup>16</sup> The length of the play varied from one night to several nights of one week. At this moment, literati played a more crucial role in terms of publicizing the event and inviting famous troupes. Actresses were not specifically articulated in the movement.<sup>17</sup>

Two years later, when there was another famine disaster in Gansu province, another relief movement was initiated by the similar pattern. Yet, this time, actresses became more prominent than they had been two years earlier. One of the leading actresses was Jin Yuemei. Jin was native to Shanxi and had been sold a couple of times when she was young. During the selling process, she was even sold into brothels and became a prostitute for some time. She came to Tianjin at around thirteen years old and became

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<sup>15</sup> Zhang Faying, *Zhongguo xibanshi* 中國戲班史 (The history of drama troupe in China) (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2003), pp. 467-472; Su Yi, *Jingju erbainian gaiguan*, pp. 202-204.

<sup>16</sup> Li Xiaoti argues that the use of teahouse or playhouse was one important means for literati to enlighten commoners in the massive enlightenment movement in the late Qing dynasty. The theme was not just the charitable relief, but also extended to others such as anti-footbinding, anti-opium smoking, and patriotism. Li further asserts that to some extent the way literati made public speeches in these public spaces were not essentially different from players' performance. Li Xiaoti, *Qingmo de xiāncéng shèhuì qíměng yùndòng: 1901-1911*, pp.108-162.

<sup>17</sup> *Minxing bao*, July 29, 1909.

quite a famous actress at Eastern Tianxian Teahouse.<sup>18</sup> On June 31, 1909, when Jin Yuemei performed a new play at Eastern Tianxian Teahouse, according to the reporter, since her performance was so moving, in one of the scenes, when the character, a young lady from a down fallen family had to beg on street (here the stage) for money to bury her father, “the audience tossed silver dollars on the stage.” At the end of the play, it turns out that she in total collected twenty silver dollars from the audience. In order to show her sympathy with the suffering in Gansu province, she posted an announcement on one side of the stage pillar and made it public that she was going to donate all this money to help relieve the natural disaster. “With the help of you gentlemen, I collected twenty dollars and will donate it to relieve the drought in Gansu Province.”<sup>19</sup>

On that night, Liu Mengyang, then the general manager of *Minxing bao*, was present at the teahouse and witnessed the whole story. Later, when Liu came back from teahouse and told the story to Guo Xinpei, the chief editor of the newspaper, Guo felt complicated emotions. On the one hand, according to Guo, it has been a while since the news on the Gansu disaster had been released, yet there were only very few who donated money. Now it was because of an actress’s performance that people became so active in donating money.<sup>20</sup> Ironically, the very publicity of actresses that was criticized now became an efficient means to relieve people’s sufferings.

It is also since then that actresses took initiative to mobilize the public opinion to reverse the negative image through media. Immediately following Jin Yuemei’s public donation, she announced that she would perform another charitable play to donate more

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<sup>18</sup> *Zhongguo xiqu zhi, Tianjin juan*, p. 421.

<sup>19</sup> *Minxing bao*, July 12, 1909.

<sup>20</sup> *Minxing bao*, July 13, 1909.

money. Yet, due to a foot injury, she did not get chance to keep her promise. What Jin Yuemei did was send forty dollars to the *Minxing bao* Agency and claimed this amount of money as the compensation of her promise. Meanwhile she also wrote a letter to the chief editor and explained her situation, which was published on the newspaper. The letter was short, only three lines long. Yet, this letter helped Jin Yuemei construct her public image as an actress who “valued righteousness.”<sup>21</sup>

At that time, in order to avoid any donation misappropriation and to encourage more people to donate, newspaper agencies usually listed the names of donors and the amount of money they donated in newspapers. Along with her short note, Jin Yuemei’s name and her forty dollars were also listed in *Minxing bao*, along with Zhang Yunfang, a prostitute who donated one dollar, You Zijun, the general manager of a foreign company who donated five dollars, and other two gentlemen who donated two dollars and half dollar respectively.<sup>22</sup> The large amount of money indicated the popularity of Jin in particular and the profit of a leading actress might have earned in the business in general. The way her name was juxtaposed with a prostitute and other three respectable gentlemen implied that the social status distinction was diminished in such a dramatic social event.

Following Jin Yuemei, another actress Shen Jingui also wrote a letter to *Minxing bao*, along with the money she donated. Comparing to the popularity of Jin Yuemei, Shen Jingui represented more a lower-ranking actress in many aspects. This letter was much longer than Jin Yuemei’s because Shen not only expressed her enthusiasm to help the famine victims, but also introduced herself to the public. Her letter was written in

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<sup>21</sup> *Minxing bao*, July 21, 1909.

<sup>22</sup> *Minxing bao*, July 21, 1909.

decent classical Chinese, which indicated that she received certain level of education, if indeed she wrote the letter herself. Even if she did not write this by herself, she clearly knew the significance of having it written well in classical Chinese as a channel to construct her public image.

According to her letter, as a young girl from a respectable family in Beijing, she became an actress after 1900 when she was forced to leave Beijing due to the Boxer Rebellion. In order to make a living and support her old parents and younger sisters, a cliché that many actresses used to justify their reluctant entry into the business, she learned some performing skills and began to perform at various teahouses. “In the disaster of the Boxer Rebellion, I fled to Tianjin. I have parents above and weak sisters below. The family of a couple of mouths was waiting to be fed. Without any choice, I had to learn performance with masters and played at various teahouses. I made the ends meet by what I earned.”<sup>23</sup> With the self-introduction, this letter was more a self-advertisement to the public than a donating note.

The fact that Shen performed at various teahouses implied that she was one of the lower-ranking cohorts or even extra ladies. The top ranking actresses usually performed at one teahouse for a long time since they could attract enough audience to make profit. Yet, the lower-ranking actresses had to find insignificant roles at different teahouses in order to make ends meet. Also in Shen’s letter, she claimed that the amount of money “three *liang*, three *qian*, and six *fen*” was donated by pawning her jewelry. This small amount of money and the way she gathered all this money was also in consistent with her ranking in the business. Both Jin Yuemei and Shen Jingui’s strategies indicated that

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<sup>23</sup> *Minxing bao*, July 25, 1909.

for the first time actresses in Tianjin were conscious of using media network to publicize their self-image as a group of women contributing to local affairs.

## The Hall Performance

If by performing charitable plays, actresses reversed their public reputation, then by participating in the hall performance, they changed their social status with more fame and profit. Sometimes, it was even possible that they were able to know the richest and the most influential persons in the local society and thus changed their life trajectories.

The hall performance originally was a kind of semi-private and semi-public entertaining activity hosted by officials or the influential at their private households since the middle Qing dynasty. Famous performers and their troupes were invited in to perform for a specific audience, usually family, relatives, and friends of the household head. Only invited guests were able to watch the performance. Yet, as the authorities strictly regulated such extravagant plays in officials' household, this performance was gradually taken over by merchants at their guild halls.<sup>24</sup> As a communal space appeared since the Ming Dynasty, the guild halls were built by a group of merchants who did business at some commercial cities or the capital in order to promote the connection of these sojourners.

The guild hall was multi-functional. Not only did it provide regular lodging space for the sojourning merchants. It was also the general organization and activity space for

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<sup>24</sup> Zhang Faying, *Zhongguo xiban shi*, pp. 283-285; Kwan Man Bun also explores the relationship between merchants and their extravagant sponsorship to some public festival celebration with opera performance in the late imperial China. See Kwan, *The Salt Merchants of Tianjin: State-Making and Civil Society in Late Imperial China*, pp. 85-88.

the chamber of commerce from the same county, city or even province.<sup>25</sup> On special occasions such as important holidays, the anniversary of the chamber of commerce, or even special days for certain provinces where the guild hall merchants came from, usually the head of the guild hall would organize the merchants to have a big banquet. One important part of the banquet was to invite troupes to perform on the guild hall opera stage especially built for such occasions. These merchants were willing to spend a big amount of money on the performance and thus only the best actors and troupes were invited to perform in the halls.<sup>26</sup> In other words, the hall performance was first of all a serious recognition of these actors' performing skills.

As one of the commercial centers in north China, Tianjin witnessed the emergence of many magnificent guild halls since the middle Qing dynasty. The earliest guild hall was built by a group of Guangdong merchants in 1739. Before 1900, there were about fourteen halls that were built for different groups of merchants. The majority of them had performance stage attached to the hall building to host opera performance.<sup>27</sup>

The hall performance was important to actresses in many ways. It was not only the recognition of their performing skills since only the best performers were invited. It was also a source of profit. Usually when actresses performed at teahouses, the money they earned entirely depended on how many tickets were sold. In addition, this income had to be shared among leading actresses, troupe masters, and teahouse owners. Yet, for the

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<sup>25</sup> Wang Qiang, *Huiguan, xitai yu xiju* 會館戲臺與戲劇 (Guild halls, performing stages, and operas) (Taibei: Wenjin chubanshe, 2000), p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Zhang Faying, *Zhongguo xiban shi*, p.283

<sup>27</sup> Luo Shuwei, *Jindai Tianjin chengshi shi*, p. 269; Li Xiangxin, "Jinmen juhua yishi," in *Jingju zai Tianjin*, p.295; Wang Qiang, *Huiguan, xitai yu xiju*, pp. 129-130.

guild hall performance, for one night, they sometimes got twice or even three times of the amount they gained at the teahouse.<sup>28</sup>

The hall performance was also where actresses were able to intersect their life with the circles that they were never able to get involved in at public teahouses. The affair between Yang Cuixi and Prince Zaizhen was such a case in point. According to a literatus's recollection, Yang Cuixi was invited by Yuan Shikai and his subordinates to perform at the welcome dinner for Prince Zaizhen at Zhongzhou Guild Hall.<sup>29</sup> This anecdote is credible to some extent because government officials had been strictly prohibited from going to public places like teahouses since the eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup> In comparison, the guild hall was an ideal place that an actress was able to meet a royal prince without putting the officials in trouble.

The Zhongzhou Guild Hall was built after Yuan Shikai took over the position of Governor-General of Zhili Province. Native to Henan province, where Zhongzhou was located, Yuan Shikai financially supported the construction of Zhongzhou Guild Hall as his unofficial socializing place.<sup>31</sup> There he invited local friends and officials, or he unofficially hosted a Manchu prince by inviting actresses for performance. It is under such circumstances that Yang Cuixi met Zaizhen. According to the anecdote, in the middle of the extravagant banquet, “actress Yang Cuixi came to perform. She was extremely enchanting. Everyone paid attention to her. The Prince was delighted and pleased and could not help responding to the rhythm [of Yang’s performance].” Later,

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<sup>28</sup> Luo Shuwei, *Jindai Tianjin chengshi shi*, pp. 619-620; Li Yingbin, “Tianjin de tanghui xi” 天津的堂會戲 (The hall performance in Tianjin), in *Jingju yishu zai Tianjin*, p. 362.

<sup>29</sup> Liu Tiren, *Yici lu* 異辭錄 (The collection of heterodox) (Taiyuan: Shanxi guji chubanshe, 1996), pp. 193-194.

<sup>30</sup> Colin Mackerras, *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times: From 1840 to the Present Day*, p.90. Zhou Huabin, *Jingdu gu xilou* 京都古戲樓 (Old theaters of the capital)(Beijing: Haiyang chubanshe, 1993), p. 80.

<sup>31</sup> Li Xiangxin, “Jinmen juhua yishi,” in *Jingju zai Tianjin*, p.297.

Duan Zhigui spent three thousand and five hundred silver dollars to buy Yang's contract with the teahouse and sent her to Prince Zaizhen. Without the hall performance, there would have been no chance that Yang Cuixi would have met Prince Zaizhen and got herself out of the business.

In general, actresses represented a group of paradoxical women in the society: on the one hand, they were criticized for moral degeneracy. On the other hand, these women indeed tried hard to reverse this public image and even to change their life trajectories. Either side of this image was closely related to their career: public performance on stage. What did actresses look like when they were not performing on stage? What kind of daily life did they have off the stage? This is another level of their publicity, the main focus of the next segment.

## Actresses off the Stage

Actresses in general had to spend much of their working time on stage. This made them deviant from normative womanhood, with which respectable Chinese women usually lived within inner chambers without going out. Not only was their performance publicized on stage, their private life often received as much exposure to the public as their careers.<sup>32</sup> The extreme case was the *Qiju zhu* genre 起居注 (Record of Daily Life) developed in the 1920s, in which every detail of a famous actress's daily life, what they wore, where they went, who they met, what they had for dinner, etc., was recorded and published by some newspapers to satisfy the readers' curiosity. Unfortunately, for the

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<sup>32</sup> Juliet Blair, "Private Parts in Public Places: The Case of Actresses," in Shirley Ardener ed., *Woman and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps* (Oxford, Providence: Berg, 1993), p.200.

historians, back to early the twentieth century, while actresses in Tianjin still struggled between popularity and criticism, their private life did not gain so much attention as their posterity in the “Record of Daily Life” genre. Yet, this is the embryonic period in which actresses were transforming from a group of debased women into social stars. The way in which their private life was publicized indeed played a decisive role in shaping later generations’ life styles. In this segment, I will mainly focus on four aspects of actresses’ personal life: schedule, clothing, transportation, and housing.

The biggest challenge in exploring these questions is the shortage of materials. The majority of materials on early actresses focused on criticism. There was only very fragmentary information on their daily lives. What I am doing is to construct these daily aspects with the comparative knowledge of those of actors and later generations of actresses. There are a couple of reasons for this strategy. First, opera performance was a profession with a long history. Even though the emergence of actresses was a very recent phenomenon, many of the actresses’ lives and practices did not go beyond the tradition of the profession itself. This is why I believe from the lives of actors we can have a rough configuration of early actresses. Secondly, even though we know very little about early actresses’ life, we know much more about actresses in later generations, who were under the close examination of the society from every angle. As the continuity through generations, there must be some characteristics that many actresses shared in common.

## Schedule

To discuss actresses' daily life, we have to first explore their schedule: how much time on stage and how much time off stage. Unlike female teachers, who usually worked in the day for regular hours, actresses did not have such a regular schedule. Their off-stage time was largely decided by their on-stage time. As I said earlier, actresses' working schedule was largely impacted by the two-shift schedule: twelve o'clock at noon till around four o'clock in the afternoon, and seven o'clock in the evening and till around midnight.

Here is the schedule of two actresses, Wang Keqin and Yang Cuixi, when they performed at the Eastern Tianxian Teahouse in the Japanese concession in 1906. Wang Keqin and Yang Cuixi represented two different cohorts of actresses: while Wang Keqin at this time had already become famous, Yang Cuixi had just begun her career at this teahouse. June 30 was the first day she performed on stage.

Table 6.2: The Performance Schedules of Wang Keqin and Yang Cuixi, 1906

Date	12p.m.-4p.m.		7p.m.-12p.m.	
	Wang Keqin	Yang Cuxi	Wang Keqin	Yang Cuixi
June 30 (Saturday)	N	N	Y	Y
July 1	Y	Y	N	N
July 2	Y	N	N	Y
July 3	Y	N	N	Y
July 4	N	N	Y	Y

July 5	Y	Y	Y	N
July 6	Y	Y	Y	Y
July 7 (Saturday)	Y	N	N	Y
July 8	Y	Y	Y	Y
July 9	N	N	Y	Y
July 10	Y	N	N	Y
July 11	Y	N	N	Y
July 12	N	Y	Y	N
July 13	N	Y	Y	N
July 14(Saturday)	Y	Y	Y	Y
July 15	Y	Y	Y	Y
July 16	N	N	N	Y
July 17	Y	N	N	Y
July 19	Y	Y	N	N
July 20	Y	Y	N	N
July 21(Saturday)	Y	Y	Y	Y
July 22	Y	Y	Y	Y
July 23	N	N	Y	Y
July 24	N	N	Y	Y
July 25	N	N	Y	Y
July 26	Y	Y	Y	Y
July 27	Y	Y	Y	Y
July 28 (Saturday)	Y	Y	Y	Y
July 29	Y	Y	Y	Y
July 30	Y	Y	Y	Y

July 31	N	N	N	Y
Total	21	17	19	24

Note: The newspaper of June 18 is missing.

Sources: *Jin bao*, June 30-July 31, 1906.

From this table, we can have a better sense of how much time these two actresses spent on stage at teahouses. For the month, Wang Keqin performed forty shifts (twenty-one day shifts and nineteen night shifts) and Yang Cuixi forty-one shifts (seventeen day shifts and twenty-four night shifts). They usually did not perform two shifts on the same day. Yet, when it came to Friday, Saturday and Sunday, they performed more frequently than week days. Especially between July 27 and July 30, both of them had to perform two shifts for the whole four days.

Comparatively speaking, among the two actresses, Yang Cuixi performed more night shifts and fewer day shifts than Wang Keqin did. This could be explained from two aspects. From the teahouse owner's viewpoint, this might be a strategy for business: to use Wang Keqin, who was more popular than Yang Cuixi at this moment, to maintain ticket sales during the day since less audience came for the day shift than for the night shift; and to use Yang Cuixi, a new face, to boost the night business. Also from the perspective of the actresses, the reason Wang Keqin was absent more from night shifts was probably because she was invited to play at hall performances since she enjoyed a high level of popularity.

If a popular actress performed a night shift, when she got back to her place, it was already past midnight. She slept for some hours. When she woke up at around ten o'clock, she usually practiced singing and performing for a couple of hours. If she did

not have a day shift, she had some time in early afternoon to take care of her own affairs before she was ready for next night shift. If she performed the day shift, when it was done at around four, she usually spent the rest of the night either socializing with her patrons at their households or restaurants or went to the hall performance.

Yet, for those lower-ranking actresses, since they had to look for slots at various teahouses to squeeze in, their schedule was very unpredictable and they had to run back and forth between different plays and teahouses. The tight schedule could be seen from the following illustration. When Liu San bought two young girls into his house and trained them for performance, in the morning, the girls performed at Tiangui Teahouse and in the evening they did so at Qingchun Teahouse, both of which were not major ones in Tianjin. In their spare time, they could not have a break but instead had to learn new plays. “Whenever they did not match the tone of the play, Liu San beat them heavily. When this happened, their cry would spread out of the household and people often stopped and watched.”



(Figure 6.3: “Shangxin canmu” 傷心慘目 (Breaking the heart and torturing the eyes). *Xingsu huabao*, date unknown)

## Clothing

Within such a limited off-stage schedule, clothing was probably one of the major focuses that many actresses were obsessed about. They usually bought and wore extravagant or splendid clothes when they had some time off in the day. This was first a professional extension from their on-stage performance. When famous actresses performed on stage, the clothes they wore were usually bought by themselves. The more fantastic the clothes were, the better chance they were able to attract the audience. The majority of actresses' income was spent on costumes, so much so that it became a burden to many actresses.<sup>33</sup>

This clothing-constructed popularity did not just end on stage. In their daily life, actresses also needed to become eye-catchers as a supplementary means to the popularity on stage. Clothing played such a role since it was an explicit demonstration of their presence as public figures. In one anecdote, during Yang Cuixi's prime time, whenever she went, she always dressed in magnificent clothes, so much so that the mother of Jin Yulan, the star-to-be, was so envious that she sent young Yulan to learn the Clapper Opera.<sup>34</sup>

The reason that an actress, especially a high-ranking one, paid so much attention to clothing was not only because it was a way to demonstrate her position in the business. More importantly, her dressing was also an occupational signifier. Actually how

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<sup>33</sup> This is not unique to actresses in China. Actually many actresses in Western countries also experienced the same problems, like the costume crisis of Russian actresses. Catherine A. Schuler, *Women in Russian Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 31-35.

<sup>34</sup> Xu Ke, *Qingbai leichao*, vol. 11, p. 5148.

performers should dress was always under the regulation of the authority. In the Yuan Dynasty, the government designated a special style of clothing for both actors and actresses.<sup>35</sup> Yet, in the beginning of twentieth century, the distinction was made not by the authorities but by actresses' clear consciousness of differentiating them from other groups of women, such as commoner women or female students. "Even though the clothes and decorations they wear off the stage are similar to common women, the style and design are usually special and different. [The style and design] are distinct from those of common women, nor are they similar to the dresses of prostitutes."<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately I did not find any photograph left of the early actresses. But we can still glean some clues from the contemporary pictorial magazines.



<sup>35</sup> Sun Chongtao and Xu Hongtu, "Introduction," *Qinglou ji jianzhu* 青楼集笺注 (Annotation on green bower collection) (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1990), pp. 13-14.

<sup>36</sup> Yunshi, *Funiu zhi baimian guan* 婦女之百面觀 (The one hundred faces of women) (Shanghai: Wenyi bianyishe, 1917), vol.3, p. 55.

(Figure 6.4: “Zhang Fengxian xingjiang shoupin” 張鳳仙行將受聘 (Zhang Fengxian is going to be engaged). *Xinghua ribao*, date unknown)

The illustration here provides an example of how an actress dressed in the late Qing. It tells a story that Zhang Fengxian, a popular actress at that moment, was originally engaged to an actor. Yet, her mother favored another man from a foreign company who was financially more promising than the actor. As you may see from this image, Zhang Fenxiang standing on the left is depicted in a flower-patterned dress. Zhang was not the only one with this patterned dress. Actually in every illustration with actresses in pictorial magazines in Tianjin at this time, whether they are at home or in public, their dresses are usually drawn with different flower patterns. Even though we have to be cautious about the gap between how actresses actually dressed in reality and how they are depicted in pictures, the information conveyed by this kind of stereotypical drawing is still convincing to argue that dressing was a code to distinguish the different identity of actresses from other groups of women, such as female students who were under the strict clothing regulation for plain dress, as seen in the following picture.



(Figure 6.5: A graduation photo of Beiyang Nüzi Gongxue 北洋女子公學 (Beiyang Women's Public School, formally Tianjin Women's Public School) in 1911. *Funiu shibao*, 1911, vol.5)

In order to meet the great need for clothing and decoration, actresses must have frequented clothing shops more often than women of other social groups. They could buy the highest-quality silk and cloth at some Chinese shops with a long-term trustworthy reputation. These shops were mainly located in the Guyi Jie 估衣街 (Clothing Evaluation Street) and Guodian Jie 鐮店街 (Pan Store Street), two major business streets in the Chinese area. The shops usually bought in silk from Jiangsu and Hangzhou, areas well known for their good-quality silk products.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, the dressmakers at these shops borrowed stylish patterns from Shanghai, the most fashionable city in China.

But for cosmetics and decoration, they might go shopping at Western-style stores such as Zhongxi da yaofang 中西大藥房 (The Sino-Western Drugstore), Huichun da yaofang 回春大藥房 (The Recurrent Spring Drugstore)<sup>38</sup> and Watson's Drugstore. In these stores, Western products, such as French perfume, imported soaps, and all kinds of make-up, were the most popular items. Some stores like Zhongwai shoushi hang 中外首饰行 (The Sino-Foreign Jewelry Store), also sold high-quality diamond rings and earrings.<sup>39</sup> The locations of these stores varied. Some were located in the business streets at the Chinese area. Some, like the Watson's Drugstore, were located in the

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<sup>37</sup> *Jin bao*, October 13, 1905.

<sup>38</sup> *Jin bao*, October 23, 1905.

<sup>39</sup> *Jin bao*, October 13, 1905.

British concession.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, in order to catch up with the fashion, whenever there was time available in the day, actresses were busy going from store to store. This brought up another question: how they moved around in cities.

## Transportation

For the very little time that actresses had to go out to take care of their personal affairs such as shopping, the most convenient transportation was the rickshaw. As I pointed out in the Chapter Four on educated women, this means of transportation was not only cheap and available, but also exposed passengers to the public eye. This kind of publicity was exactly what actresses needed to supplement their publicity on stage. In the following illustration, when a young lady, once again in a patterned dress, and an old lady were taking rickshaws, the bystanders immediately recognized that this young lady as the most popular actress Zhang Fengxian. Not only did the bystanders recognize her. Two patrolling policemen also did. They stopped the rickshaws and brought Zhang Fengxian and her mother to the police station for questioning. According to the text, it turns out that the teahouse owner bought a lawsuit against Zhang after she ended a contract with the teahouse.

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<sup>40</sup> *Minxing bao*, July 3, 1909.



(Figure 6.6: “You yi Xiao Lianfen” 又一小蓮芬 (Another Xiao Lianfen). *Xingshu huabao*, date unknown)

In another case, when En Xiaofeng took a rickshaw, she ended up in a fight with the rickshaw puller and scratched him on the face. Both of them were brought to the police station.<sup>41</sup> Both cases, in which different actresses took rickshaws and ended up in the police station, to some extent, implied a sense of threat of these actresses’ publicity to the social order.

Other than rickshaws, the horse-drawn carriage was another transport means that was also connected to actresses. But the scenario of carriages was totally different from rickshaws. Similar to the regulation on performers’ dress, previous governments also prohibited performers from riding in carriages.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, at the beginning of twentieth century, there was no single case I know of in which an actress took carriage all by herself. Instead, she usually took carriage with her patrons, admirers and inviters. If the rickshaw was for personal business, the carriage was usually connected to their career and business. According to an unofficial story about Yang Cuixi, she was favored

<sup>41</sup> *Dagong bao*, May 27, 1903.

<sup>42</sup> Sun Chongtao and Xu Hongtu, “Introduction,” in *Qinglou ji jianzhu*, pp. 13-14.

by one rich merchant Wang Yisun 王益孫 (dates unknown). As a way of both showing off Wang's wealth and their relationship, Wang and Yang "sit in the horse-drawn carriage together every day and flirt on the streets."<sup>43</sup>

Not only in the leisurely social life, if an actress was invited to have dinner with her patrons or to perform at private households or guild halls, it was usually considered a loss of face for both actresses and hosts if the invited actresses took a rickshaw. In the invitation, what mattered was not convenience, but the demonstration of the status of both actresses and inviters. Those who initiated invitation were either rich or influential. To send out a horse-drawn carriage to welcome the most popular actress was a signifier of his social status and wealth. For the actress who was invited, she was recognized by the high level of her profession and thus the carriage also reflected her status in the business.

## Housing

When actresses were invited to have dinner or to play at guild halls, they were usually picked up by the horse-drawn carriage from their houses instead of teahouses. Thus where actresses lived also mattered. For middle- and lower-ranking troupes, what the troupe owners usually did was to rent big traditional-style compounds with many separate rooms. Actors and actresses might live in different rooms. But as a whole, they lived within the same compound. One or two persons were hired to do cleaning and cooking for the whole troupe. The compound should not be far away from teahouses or the places where they performed. Sometimes, when the performance at the teahouse was

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<sup>43</sup> *Shengjing shibao*, May 15, 1907.

over, a troupe owner would lead all his actors and actresses walk back to the compound, their home.

This way of housing had some impacts on actresses. First, the fact that actresses lived with actors within the same compound further tarnished their reputation by mixing with men off the stage. Sometimes in order to avoid or diminish such stigmas, many actresses were more inclined to marry actors who stayed in the same troupe and lived in the same compound. The marriage might be promoted by the fact that they contacted each other on the daily basis. After the marriage, they were able to live together legitimately. The other impact was that some young girls who lived around the compound were often attracted by the daily practice of the troupe and thus gradually began to learn opera and joined the business.

Yet, for those higher-ranking actors and actresses, the situations were slightly different. In order to match their position in business, they usually left the troupe compound and rented or bought a house of their own. This was called *siyu* 私寓(private household). The private household was more important for actresses than actors. By living in a private household, these women were actually able to live in a space similar to the inner chamber of literati women, or at least they attempted to construct their household that way.

In the following illustration, the actress Wang Keqin planned to donate some money to flood victims. Yet, she was stopped by her foster mother from going because, in the author's eyes, her mother only considered Wang Keqin as a source of money and did not want her to participate in such charitable event.



(Figure 6.7: “Lengxue dongwu” 冷血動物 (Cold-blooded animals). *Xingsu huabao*, date unknown)

This illustration is revealing in many ways. It touches upon the complicated relationship between actresses and their foster mothers. It also reveals that Wang Keqin wears a flowered pattern dress. Yet, this picture gives readers a glimpse of the inner chamber of actresses. From the curtain where Wang Keqin stands, the space is divided into two parts: the space where Wang Keqin’s mother is talking to the person who comes to invite Wang to the charitable play is considered as guest room in regular households to host guests. Half of the curtain is pulled up, so that readers can see some paintings on the wall, a chair, and a corner of a table. The other half conveniently blocks readers’ eyes from peering too deeply into the inner chamber of an actress.

But finally the media satisfied readers’ curiosity of what an actress’s private households looked like. In the following illustration, the artist goes one step further and completely lifts up the curtain in an actress’s room. This image informs readers of how a mediocre doctor exacerbates Jin Yuemei’s illness. According to this news report, Jin Yuemei lives in a private household in Hebei District, which was the newly developed

urban center of the Chinese area in Tianjin after 1900.<sup>44</sup> One day, she feels severely sick, so much so that her servant has to invite a doctor to come to her house for a visit very late at night. In this image, both the doctor and a medicine-delivery man are sitting at Jin Yuemei's inner room at night. The doctor is even sitting on her bed to feel the pulse. Once again, Jin Yuemei wears a flowery outfit even though she sits on bed.



(Figure 6.8: “Yongyi ezha” 廉醫訛詐 (The mediocre doctor exhorts). *Xingshu huabao*, date unknown)

To some extent, the actresses' inner chambers demonstrated their efforts to restore normative womanhood. As the last shelter from the outside world, they intended to live like any decent woman in the society. Yet, the publicity of their inner chamber in newspapers severely challenged their intention. The inner chamber also became one part of their publicity. The rooms could be publicized as readers wanted or as reporters

<sup>44</sup> Dongfang zazhi 東方雜志 (*The Eastern Miscellany*), 1905, vol. 7, p. 71; Luo Shuwei, *Jindai Tianjin chengshi shi*, p. 336, 357; Zhang Huateng, *Beiyang jituan jueqi yanjiu* 北洋集團崛起研究 (The research on the rise of Beiyang Group) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), p. 153.

wanted. In public opinion, there was no such thing as privacy for actresses, a group of women well known for their publicity.

## Conclusion

In order to have a better understanding of actresses in the early twentieth century in Tianjin, we have to contextualize them in the tradition of performing arts and in the landscape of the city. The early-twentieth-century actresses in Tianjin were more considered as a continuity or revival of a long performing tradition for both actors and actresses in previous dynasties. To some extent, these women preserved training patterns, practice, skills, and life styles of their predecessors. Yet, this continuity also symbolizes a sense of transition. These actresses were conscious of what made them distinct from their predecessors. Their bodies and interaction with actors on stages were consumed by a larger audience in a commercialized society. Meanwhile, a flourishing media network facilitated their presence in the business and publicized their private life. This is how they foreshadowed the later generations of female stars in the society.

In addition, from the perspective of spatiality, the actresses could not be separated from the city itself. Urban expansion, commercialized entertainment business, remodeled teahouses, and a mass audience, all of which contributed to the boom of actresses and their performance at teahouses. When they were on stage, not only did they boldly demonstrate their bodies, they also physically flirted with actors as a selling point, as observed from every angle of male teahouse-goers. This publicity was criticized for being deviant from normative womanhood and thus constituted a threat to the moral decline of the local society. Yet, despite the attack from public opinion,

actresses still tried hard to gain respectability by performing charitable plays and to gain fame and profit by doing hall performance. They demonstrated a great deal of agency in reversing the detrimental public image of them.

## Epilogue

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.<sup>1</sup>

Chaos, ambiguity, joy and confusion. What Charles Dickens used to describe the eighteenth-century Western Europe is also applicable to Chinese women at the turn of the twentieth century, when they were undergoing the dramatic transformation of the world they lived. China was embedded deeper in the world order of the imperialism. The cities in China, especially those in the coastal area, were undergoing the huge expansion of urbanization and modernization. The cultural enterprises and media network involved many people, literate or illiterate, rich or poor, rural or urban, men or women, into this imagined community at an unprecedented pace. Suddenly it seemed that it was impossible for Chinese women to stay in their small world of the inner chamber and maintain seclusion from the outside, as their predecessors had been doing before. This dissertation is, therefore, a preliminary inquiry into the ways in which Chinese women responded to, participated in, and challenged the transformations they had to go through, all the chaos, ambiguity, joy, and confusion.

This dissertation situates diverse groups of women in the urban context of Tianjin at the turn of the twentieth century China. The two major factors, city and woman, complicated each other at this moment. The city of Tianjin itself climbed to the climax

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, LLC, 1988), p. 3.

of both globalization and localization. The four-decades-long efforts that Westerners made since 1860 to settle down in this northern coastal Chinese city was smashed, or at least, heavily shaken by the Boxer Rebellion and the subsequent Allied Powers' attack with extreme violence and brutality in the very early twentieth century. In the following decade, with the (re-) construction of foreign concessions and the reform or restructuring of the Chinese area, this city, on the one hand, became one of the most modernized cities in China with the influx of all kinds of materials and utilities from the global network. On the other hand, it also turned into one of the few Chinese cities to seek for a strong local identity in order to distinguish itself from other modernized Chinese cities like Shanghai.

As this dissertation shows, women's life and experience in Tianjin was closely intertwined with the city itself. With the facility of public transport and the development of urbanization, women became quite obvious in the urban space as they embraced the wonders of the city. Consequently, Tianjin had to adjust itself to prepare for these newcomers since in the beginning women were not included in the urban planning. Teahouse owners set up separate seats for women. Photography studios had extra rooms to host female customers. New rules had to be established on what female students or actresses should dress or how they should behave. In other words, women's public presence in Tianjin initiated a process for the city itself to change.

Meanwhile, women in Tianjin also became the site to manifest or restructure the power politics or social relations in the city. The discussion on women's bound feet by Westerners, local Chinese literati, and local government reflected the contestation among each social force on how and to what extent they intervened with Chinese

women's private practice, family hierarchy, and even the fate of the nation with the social resources they each owned. The discussion of women's education and women's public performance were essentially about how the local society responded and adjusted to the new social phenomenon of "public women." Especially with the media networks of newspapers, pictorial magazines, pamphlets, public speeches, and plays, the discussion of women-related issues went as wide as these women's physical presence in Tianjin. In this sense, women were one integral part of Tianjin's history, as significant as the urban transformation and the interplay between global inflows and local forces.

If we switch the lens and look at women through Tianjin, this dissertation also draws a vivid picture of women's history at the turn of the twentieth century. When the Natural-Feet Society was founded by a group of Western ladies in Tianjin in 1898, Chinese women appeared in the scenario as passive victims with faint or even silenced voices. We could only catch one or two glimpses of a small number of Bible women. Later on, at the time when Liu Mengyang established his Commonwealth Natural Feet Society, not only women's voice appeared in newspapers (despite the controversy of the authentic gender of the author), some pioneering women also began to unbind their own feet. Then the story diverged into two directions. Educated women considered the unbinding process of their new identity as contributors to the race and the nation while actresses persisted on binding as the means to articulate their authentic gender roles on stage. At this moment, these women began to publicly consolidate their different identities with their own actions and choices.

Meanwhile, Tianjin also became the locality to demonstrate the different types of women's migration at this time. Western ladies crossed the Pacific Ocean and settled

down in Tianjin, a city that the majority of their sisters at home countries had not heard of nor were they concerned about. It was also during the migration that many of these foreign women changed themselves too, either from rural girls or urban ladies, from single to married, or from financially dependent to working for their own income. As important as these status changes, if not more significant, many Western women reconstructed their own identity during the contact and contrast with women in China. The physical restraint of footbound Chinese women, the underdevelopment of women's education, and the dependence of Chinese women on their families, provided opportunities for these Western ladies to strive not only for the Chinese women but also for themselves.

Tianjin also reflected the domestic migration of Chinese women. For educated women, they moved to Tianjin usually from a culturally superior area of China, such as the Jiangnan area. Not only did they have to overcome the difficulties of language, diet, or life style, they also had to figure out how to survive and live in a totally new urban space on their own. For better or for worse, the fast urban transformation made these women's experience more complicated. They were like walking on ice and carefully maintained or adjusted their respectable norm roles during the transition from inner chamber to city. The strategy that they used most frequently was to construct a woman-exclusive space in public spaces, like trains or teahouses, or in public images, like pictures. For another group of women at the other end of the social ladder, actresses usually moved from the rural area of Tianjin and performed on stage in public. For the purpose of their occupation and survival, these women were more concerned about how to get rid of the rural sense of their identity and become urban. From the plays they

performed, to the extravagant clothes they wore, to the splendid life style they fostered, actresses, especially the famous ones, not only successfully crossed the rural-urban line, but also projected the possibility of social status reversion from debased women to female stars of later generations.

In the year of 1911, when the Xinhai Revolution happened in Wuchang, the first class of female students at Beiyang Women's Public School graduated. Many of them chose to stay in the north and disseminated what they had learned at school to more young ladies. Lü Bicheng, the most crucial female educator in Tianjin, quit her headmistress position in Beiyang Women's Public School. The next year, the radical revolutionaries, who played a crucial role in the 1911 Revolution, declared the founding of the Republic of China. Immediately the competition between Sun Yat-sen 孫中山 (1866-1925) and Yuan Shikai for the presidency of the new Republic triggered a military mutiny in Tianjin, which was said to have been used by Yuan Shikai to consolidate his power in the north. Twelve years after the Gengzi Incident, once again, the city of Tianjin was ruined by bullets and ransacking. Afterwards, a group of actresses of Tianjin was invited by teahouse owners at Beijing to perform and first introduced women's public performance after it had been banned in the capital for almost two hundred years. The history of women and city had turned to a new page.

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