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Articles

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- Leon Rocha

Confessions of a Dance Hostess: Social Dancing in Shanghai and Self-Portrayals of Hostess-Writers, 1930-1949
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(This article was retracted on 25 May 2022)

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The *British Journal of Chinese Studies* is a biannual, peer-reviewed, fully open access e-journal published by the British Association for Chinese Studies. We publish research on China, broadly defined, spanning the disciplines of the arts, humanities, and social sciences. We are interested in work on all time periods, but encourage contributors to establish contemporary relevance in their arguments. Engagement with Chinese language sources is essential to all research published in the journal. We are particularly committed to supporting gender and ethnic equality in Chinese Studies and welcome submissions from PhD students and early career researchers. Until issue 9.1(2019) we published under the name *Journal of the British Association for Chinese Studies*.

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Editors' Introduction

The launch of issue 9.2 is an important moment for our journal. We are now using a custom-made Open Journal Systems publishing platform, and we are marking this next stage of our development with a change of name. We are now the *British Journal of Chinese Studies*. We continue to be fully open access and free of charge; all articles undergo stringent double-blind peer review, and we provide additional editorial support for early career researchers. All previous issues have been uploaded to the new platform.

When the then *Journal of the British Association for Chinese Studies* (JBACS) was launched in 2011, the open access agenda was just starting to rear its head, mostly in the context of the UK's research assessment exercise, now referred to as REF (Research Excellence Framework). The open access agenda has since gained momentum and become politicised in the context of the "triple dip" effect, which sees commercial publishers profiting from free academic labour. Our journal is part of an initiative to find new and fairer models of open access publishing in Asian studies. To this effect, Gerda Wielander took part in a roundtable discussion at the AAS 2019 in Denver, and will be part of a workshop on open access publishing at the London School of Economics on September 9, 2019. We are firmly committed to continuing to provide a gold star open access service.

When JBACS was launched, its aim was to provide a "service to the community." This begs the question, who is our community? Whom are we serving, and hence, who are our potential authors and readers? We continue to be affiliated with the British Association for Chinese Studies, yet what exactly constitutes Chinese studies is increasingly difficult to define. This is the combined effect of the decline of language studies in the UK, and the resulting dispersal of academics into "discipline based" administrative units, as though languages itself were not a discipline. This has led to the breaking up of co-

located clusters of researchers working on China (broadly defined, both spatially and temporally), which the creation of mostly virtual China studies centres has only partially been able to address. Yet it is also a reflection of the increasing reluctance of individuals to identify as Chinese studies scholars. They may find it more politic to identify as political scientists or scholars of linguistics in a HE landscape which marginalises language studies.

The *British Journal of Chinese Studies* is committed to promoting Chinese studies as a distinct discipline, where Chinese studies is defined as the in-depth engagement with Chinese language sources in the study of China, broadly defined. More specifically, we understand Chinese studies as the study of Chinese language(s) and their associated cultures and societies, from, simultaneously, the inside and the outside. The interaction of insider and outsider perspectives is central to Chinese studies, encapsulating a heightened awareness both of our "embodied" immersion in Chinese language(s) and cultures, and of our linguistic, cultural and/or geographical mooring in the UK.[1]

Gender and ethnic equality in Chinese studies is of particular concern to our journal. This not only informs the way we put our issues together, but we also specifically invite, and welcome, papers on this topic. January 2019 saw a special issue on Chinese women and academia, and we would like to continue to publish articles on this as an on-going thread.

The fact is that open access publishing does come with a cost. While academics can provide the articles, the peer review, and the editorial work, we are not also web-developers. There is no getting away from money, its limited availability, and the choices that need to be made, but also the danger of creating new dependencies and, potentially, the exploitation of skilled labour. One clearly articulated concern in open access debates in the UK is that it may lead to the final demise of what are now marginal subjects.

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[1] This definition is adapted from Professor Neil Kenny's working definition of modern languages as a discipline. See http://projects.alc.manchester.ac.uk/cross-language-dynamics/british-academy-plenary-round-table-does-modern-languages-have-a-disciplinary-identity/ (accessed 24.07.2019).

The *British Journal of Chinese Studies* hence not only serves a community, but also needs the support of the community. We need your support as authors, peer reviewers, and compilers of special issues; we need your recommendations to young academics, and your vocal support of the open access agenda which may require moving out of the prison of indexing, citations, and rankings—an agenda pushed by commercial publishers and managerial universities which many of us find difficult to escape, often against available evidence.

Having completed the move to the new publishing platform, our next push will be to further increase the number of submissions we receive, and to commission special issues which not only reflect our editorial mission, but also make the most of the creative opportunities online publishing allows. In future issues, we hope to incorporate interactive content, sound files, and videos. As editors, we are keen to discuss any ideas, however preliminary, with you.

Our authors in this issue range from established academics to rising stars, including the winner of the BACS Early Career Researcher Prize 2018, Dr Ros Holmes. As always, it has been an absolute pleasure to see these excellent articles through from submission to publication.

Gerda Wielander and Heather Inwood

The following amendment was added on 25 May 2022.

Following evidence of significant breaches of academic conduct, we the editors have decided to retract the following article on 25 May 2022:

Ros Holmes, "Bad Citizens and Symbolic Subjects: Wang Jin, Zhou Tiehai, and the Art of (In)civility," *British Journal of Chinese Studies* 9, no.2 (July 2019): 113-146.

For a full explanation please refer to the relevant Editors' Introduction on the journal website.

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A Small Business of Sexual Enlightenment: Zhang Jingsheng's "Beauty Bookshop", Shanghai 1927-1929

Leon Rocha
University of Lincoln

Abstract

This paper addresses the history and historiography of sexual knowledge during the May Fourth New Culture Movement (ca. 1910s-1930s) in China. Chinese intellectuals engaged in an ambitious project to build a "New Culture", translating and appropriating a wide range of foreign ideas including European and American works on sexology, reproduction, and eugenics. I focus on "Dr Sex", Zhang Jingsheng (1888-1970), well-known for his 1926 publication Sex Histories. *Zhang wanted to introduce the scientific study of sex to China and to overthrow what he regarded as repressive Chinese traditions. Between 1927 and 1929, Zhang operated the "Beauty Bookshop" in Fuzhou Road, Shanghai's "cultural street", to disseminate his writings and translations. He also published a short-lived journal called* New Culture, *which carried articles on politics, aesthetics, and most interestingly, readers' inquiries on sexual and reproductive practices. The case study on Zhang Jingsheng's "small business of sexual enlightenment"—to adapt a term from Leo Ou-fan Lee (in turn borrowed from Robert Darnton)—sheds light on local entrepreneurial and commercial dynamics in the publishing field of 1920s Shanghai that were crucial to the distribution of knowledge. It also offers an opportunity to see how China's urban, bourgeois, educated readers engaged with modern medico-scientific knowledge.*

Keywords*: Zhang Jingsheng (1888-1970), sexology, entrepreneurship, bookshops, readers' letters, Shanghai.*

Introduction: The Dissemination and Consumption of Sexual Knowledge

> [W]hen [the Beauty Bookshop] first opened, business was booming. All our publications were sold out right away. Now you're going to ask what was so valuable about these books

> and why they seemed utterly irresistible. Were they similar to *Sex Histories*? Were they new-style pornographic texts? No, they weren't. What we published were […] books by [Havelock] Ellis on all kinds of sex difficulties […] Our little bookshop was located at what was called "Fourth Avenue"; this was the bookshop district (Zhang Jingsheng, 2008: 161-162).

In the late 1920s, Chinese intellectual Zhang Jingsheng 張競生 (1888-1970) established the Beauty Bookshop (*Mei de shudian* 美的書店) in Fuzhou Road, Shanghai's "cultural street" (Wang Yaohua, 2006; Reed, 2004: 203-256). Zhang was Professor of Philosophy at Peking University from 1921 until he relocated to Shanghai in 1926 (Rocha, 2015; Rocha, 2010; Zhang Peizhong, 2008; Jiang Xiaoyuan, 2006; Peng, 1999; Leary, 1994). He set up the Beauty Bookshop with his associates; his mission was to disseminate Zhang's own writings on sex education as well as translations of foreign sexological texts, in order to bring about a "sexual revolution" (*xing geming* 性革命). Zhang Jingsheng also published a monthly in-house journal entitled *New Culture* (*Xin Wenhua* 新文化); it carried articles on politics, art, philosophy, and notably, readers' inquiries on sexual morality and practices—a significant selling point at the time. The Beauty Bookshop and *New Culture* both proved to be small-scale and short-lived: the former survived for around two years (1927-1929) and the latter ran for only six issues.

From the perspective of intellectual history, Zhang's bookshop and journal could be situated in the context of the May Fourth New Culture Movement, generally said to begin in the mid-1910s and to have ended around the 1930s (Mitter, 2005; Chen Pingyuan, 2001; Doleželová-Velingerová and Král, 2001; Chow et. al., 2008). To save the Chinese nation from the forces of imperialism and colonialism, many Chinese thinkers embarked on an audacious attempt to build a "New Culture" to replace Confucianism, "feudal morality", and old values which they believed had impeded China's modernisation. To that end these intellectuals, positioning themselves as agents of enlightenment, translated, borrowed, and distributed a tremendous range of new knowledge from Europe, America, and Japan (Liu 1995). Typical of this "May Fourth" generation, Zhang believed that, to increase China's national strength, the

quality of its population had to be improved. To accomplish that, Chinese women had to be emancipated from traditional family structures, sexual relations had to be fundamentally reconfigured, and reproduction had to be regulated through the implementation of birth control, eugenics and racial science (Sakamoto, 2004; Chung, 2010; Chung, 2002). Zhang's Beauty Bookshop and *New Culture* belonged to the countless number of projects at that moment when intellectuals thought the circulation of new ideas would bring about permanent social transformation. Political changes in the 1930s—the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and then the full-scale Second Sino-Japanese War—pulled intellectuals away from utopian thinking into militant politicisation and violent revolution.

I argue that the Beauty Bookshop and *New Culture* offer an invaluable opportunity to rethink frequently neglected issues concerning the dissemination and consumption of medico-scientific knowledge on sex and reproduction. Thanks to Anglophone scholarship on Chinese sexuality from the last twenty years or so, we have a thorough understanding of how Chinese intellectuals refashioned Western ideas to serve political ends, and how Chinese conceptualisations of sex accommodated or clashed with sexological knowledge arriving from afar (e.g. Dikötter, 1995; Chung, 2002; Sang, 2003; Barlow, 2004; Kang, 2009). This body of scholarship globalises the histories of sexuality and medicine—scrutinising networks of communication between adjacent as well as distant locations; the migration of people and expertise; the translation of texts and the movement of technologies.

Some scholars, such as Howard Chiang, have argued that the heated and often interminable debates on sexuality among groups of elite Chinese men (and some Chinese women) signalled a discursive shift in China—towards what Michel Foucault called *scientia sexualis*—that was radically discontinuous with the Chinese past (Chiang, 2010a; Chiang, 2010b). The prioritisation of the discursive and the global dimensions can, however, elide important questions concerning local conditions, as if ideas sublimated into a stratosphere of modernity or became implanted into a deep cultural unconscious. Instead of operating at that level, I am interested in asking the following questions: How was sex knowledge disseminated and promoted in China? What commercial dynamics and market forces drove the distribution of

publications about reproduction and sexuality? Why did some theories become fashionable for a brief period of time, and then disappear? What did the readership of these publications actually make of these modern ideas?

I use the case of Zhang Jingsheng's business venture to explore the publishing field and intellectual habitus in republican Shanghai, and to answer the questions above. The bookshop and journal also enable historians to peer into the mentalities of urban, educated, "self-aware youths" (*zhishi qingnian* 知識青年) in China—Zhang's primary audience—and how they interacted and interfaced with talk on free love, contraception, "perversions", and sex difficulties. They were trying to fathom what it meant to be modern, enlightened, and emancipated individuals. In what follows, I first introduce Zhang's life and work, concentrating on his metamorphosis from university academic to cultural entrepreneur in the late 1920s. The story is tied to the exodus of intellectuals from war and terror in Northern China, and the ascendance of Shanghai as China's cultural capital. In Part II, I turn to the Beauty Bookshop's operation, and argue that the demise of Zhang's business was related to commercial factors—a failure to build a competitive business. Part III pays closer attention the "Questions and Answers" section in *New Culture*; we can see how readers responded to Zhang's writings and to the Beauty Bookshop's products, and I argue that the "small business of sexual enlightenment" was just as responsible for generating the anxieties keenly felt by the emergent middle-class readership.

The paper's title, "A Small Business of Sexual Enlightenment", is an invocation of Leo Lee's *Shanghai Modern*. Lee argues that Shanghai's commercial ventures in publishing were "comparable to the eighteenth-century French 'Business of Enlightenment' [described] by Robert Darnton, in which the ideas of the *philosophes* were popularised and vigorously disseminated by a network of printers and booksellers" (Lee, 1999: 47; Darnton, 1968). In examining Shanghai's "Business of Enlightenment", previous scholarship focused on big players such as the Commercial Press (*Shangwu yinshuguan* 商務印書館), China Books (*Zhonghua shuju* 中華書局) and World Books (*Shijie shuju* 世界書局)—collectively known as the "Three Legs of the Tripod" (*sanzu dingli* 三足鼎立) (Lee, 1999: 43-81; Reed, 2004: 203-256). The "Three Legs of the Tripod" dominated the Fuzhou Road cultural

scene, and indeed China's publishing industry. Together they had by far the largest capital and turnover compared to any other bookshop or publisher in the 1920s and 1930s. Their publications had the highest circulation numbers and reached an extremely wide readership, including the Chinese diaspora (Reed, 2004: 210-211).

However, the "Three Legs of the Tripod" were ultimately exceptional in the Chinese publishing field in terms of their business structure and their ability to maintain (sometimes cosy) relationships with politicians and state institutions—and exceptional too in the very existence of archival materials for them. In the Republican era, Fuzhou Road was littered with hundreds of smaller bookshops, many of which failed within years or even months. Unlike the "Three Legs of the Tripod", most small businesses, like Zhang Jingsheng's Beauty Bookshop, left behind no traces in the Shanghai Municipal Archives. In this regard, the Beauty Bookshop was a very *typical* bookshop and, through Zhang's memoirs, *New Culture* and other materials—problematic these sources may be—there was a sufficient trail of historical sources.

For most other smaller bookshops, historians could generally say very little about them; it would be extremely challenging to ascertain even basic information, for instance their years of operation or what they sold. Many Chinese intellectuals at first worked for one of the major publishers, became frustrated with the big companies' business acumen and political conservatism, and subsequently set up their own bookshops that afforded them greater creative control, at the expense of financial stability (Hockx, 1999b: 74). Therefore, it is crucial to study those smaller businesses of enlightenment for a more rounded understanding of Shanghai's marketplace of ideas.

In this regard, the paper is animated by Michel Hockx's work, which grounds the traffic of ideas in republican China on Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theorisation of social, cultural, and symbolic capital (Hockx, 2003a; Hockx, 1999b; Denton and Hockx, 2008); the paper also speaks to investigations of cultural entrepreneurship in China (Rea & Volland, 2015). Whereas previous scholarship has tended to explain Zhang Jingsheng's failure and subsequent marginalisation on the basis of the absurdity of his theories about sex and

reproduction, I argue that it is better to contextualise and nuance Zhang's case as a failure to safeguard the viability of his "small business of enlightenment", and to sustain a vital outlet for his views.

I. From the Ivory Towers to the Cultural Street

Zhang Jingsheng was born in 1888 in Raoping, Guangdong. He attended the Whampoa Military Primary School where he received a Western-style technical education and acquired proficiency in French, and later studied at the Imperial Capital University in Beijing. Like many of his contemporaries, Zhang developed a keen interest in sexology, eugenics, Social Darwinism, and racial science. In 1912, Zhang travelled to France through a Kuomintang scholarship, and enrolled at the University of Paris and then the University of Lyon (Lai, 2009). At Lyon, Zhang completed a doctoral dissertation on Rousseau's pedagogical philosophy; he would later produce Chinese translations of Rousseau's *Confessions* and *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*. In 1920, he returned to China and was then appointed professor at Peking University. In 1924 and 1925, he published two texts, entitled *An Aesthetic Outlook of Life* (*Mei de renshengguan* 美的人生觀) and *The Method of Organisation of an Aesthetic Society* (*Mei de shehui zuzhifa* 美的社會組織法). These two texts established his reputation as a radical and somewhat eccentric thinker, who wanted to build a Chinese utopia based on aesthetic education, free love, and sexual liberation (Zhang, 2009; Lee, 2006; Lee, 2007: 140-185; Rocha, 2017).

In 1926, Zhang embarked on the project that would bring him overnight notoriety—*Sex Histories* (*Xingshi* 性史) (Leary, 1993; Peng, 1999; Lee, 2007: 186-219; Larson, 2009: 54-59). *Sex Histories* contained seven sexually explicit autobiographical confessions that Zhang solicited through an advertisement in a newspaper supplement. At the end of each confession, Zhang appended his sexological commentaries and claimed he was emulating British sexologist Havelock Ellis's *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897-1928). Zhang presented *Sex Histories* as a matter-of-fact, self-help manual that would instruct Chinese individuals about sexual hygiene and modern science. He prescribed his "correct path of sex" that would "heighten the intimacy between men and

women, achieve a fulfilling marriage" and produce "physically strong and vivacious children" (Zhang, 2009: 155).

His theorisation of this "correct path of sex", which only permitted heterosexual penile-vaginal penetration, revolved around the concept of the "Third Kind of Water" (*disanzhong shui* 第三種水) (Zhang, 2006: 80-84; Zhang, 1927b). He suggested that a woman's genitals could secrete three kinds of fluids: from the labia ("First Kind"), the clitoris ("Second Kind"), and the Bartholin's glands ("Third Kind"). He believed that, in an ideal intercourse with lengthy foreplay and penetration, a woman could release all three kinds of fluids. All sexual secretions had to be absorbed for their health benefits: a woman had to absorb a man's semen and a man had to absorb all three kinds of fluids from a woman. Moreover, Zhang suggested that it was a man's duty to train his stamina so that he could penetrate a woman for a lengthy period of time; he had to delay ejaculation so that it could coincide exactly with a woman's orgasm. A child conceived at the moment when a couple reached simultaneous orgasm, with the ovum and sperm "enlivened" by the "Third Kind of Water", would be physically stronger and more intelligent. Therefore, Zhang claimed that his "correct path of sex" also fulfilled a eugenic objective, inspired by Marie Stopes's *Married Love* (1918). As I have argued elsewhere, as "bizarre and 'pseudoscientific'" as Zhang's theory might sound, it could nevertheless be situated "in the context of [the] global genealogy and traffic of ideas" as a number of European and American sex manuals carried similar ideas on the eugenic function of simultaneous orgasms and vaginal fluids (Rocha, 2015: 163-164).

Zhang's contemporaries were broadly hostile to *Sex Histories*, arguing that it was at best nonsensical and at worst "smut-peddling" (*huiyin* 誨淫) (Leary, 1993; Larson, 2009: 54-59). Pirated copies, fake sequels, and parodies of *Sex Histories* rapidly appeared. Bans were put in place by some regional authorities, and schools allegedly searched their dormitories and confiscated *Sex Histories* from students (Zhang, 1927; Zhang, 2008: 157-158). Zhang abandoned plans to publish further volumes of *Sex Histories*, and in December 1926, left Beijing for Shanghai. It is unclear whether Peking University sacked him. In his memoirs, Zhang explained that Peking University's faculty could apply for sabbatical after four to five years of service, and his original plan was

to travel for one year (Zhang, 2008: 161). However, the political turmoil that unfolded in 1926 and 1927—the March 18 Massacre and Zhang Zuolin's occupation of Beijing—meant that Beijing was no longer safe for intellectuals (Zhang, 2008: 103-104; Schwarcz, 1986: 156-158; Strand, 1998: 193-194; Lin, 2005: 59).

Chinese academics were also not receiving regular pay. Funding for the universities came from the Boxer Indemnity Fund, but the fund's distribution was "conducted by a committee that suffered from serious administrative problems and possible embezzlement" (Lin, 2005: 45). In 1926, Peking University faculty probably received thirty to forty percent of their monthly salary. Zhang and his colleagues faced two options. They could seek employment at other institutions in Southern China, or they could try to build alternative careers as freelance writers, publishers, journalists, editors, or translators. Like many of his friends and adversaries, Zhang stepped out of the proverbial ivory tower into a marketplace of competing bookshops, magazines, and journals.

By the late 1920s, Shanghai had become home to most well-known Chinese intellectuals and revolutionaries. Its well-developed cultural industry provided intellectuals with a regular income, and the "legislative blankness" and the multiple occupation zones meant that censorship was disorganised and ineffectual (Kohama, 2000: 55; Hockx, 1998). Migrants were greeted with a city in which Western technology was ubiquitous, and where material comforts and spaces of interaction were abundant, from coffee-houses to foreign-language bookstores, from dancehalls to newspaper offices. The critical mass of thinkers in Shanghai, embracing divergent politics and possessing different expertise, led to an upsurge of intellectual production and a concomitant battle for positions in which Zhang vigorously participated (Xu, 2007).

II. The Beauty Bookshop and a Small Business of Sexual Enlightenment

Arriving in Shanghai in December 1926, Zhang flirted with the idea of working for the Commercial Press. However, like many Chinese intellectuals, he was

dismayed with the big businesses' restraints on scholarly freedom and editorial autonomy (Zhang, 2008: 166; Hockx, 1999b: 70-74). The Commercial Press adopted a conservative approach, not just to content but also genre; it was most famous for its reference works, general guidebooks, and abridged translations. Zhang thought the Commercial Press's products were often stitched together with little regard for the unity of the work or the quality of individual contributions (Zhang, 2008: 166). Moreover, he was displeased with the organisation of labour at the Commercial Press, where editors and translators were paid a fixed fee per Chinese character, and often received neither royalties nor attribution (Zhang, 2008: 180).

Zhang therefore decided to set up his own bookshop on Fuzhou Road in the International Settlement. He took advantage of this arrangement knowing that, if he landed in trouble, the International Settlement Police had no jurisdiction in the French Concession and therefore could not arrest him at his residence there (Zhang, 2008: 24-28; Martin, 1996: 31-32; Wakeman, 1995: 60-77). Fuzhou Road was located behind the international banks and the government institutions at the Bund, and several blocks away from Nanjing Road, the commercial hub and shopping centre of Shanghai (Cochran, 1999). Fuzhou Road took shape in the 1880s as a collection of offices for China's major publishers and newspapers. By the early twentieth century, these were joined by retail outlets, antique bookshops, trade associations, stationers and art suppliers, printers and instrument makers, translators' bureaus, and calligraphers' studios. By the 1920s, there were hundreds of large and small businesses crammed within the road's mile-long stretch and its side-streets. It became home to the headquarters and flagship stores of most "cultural brands" in China. There was also a clear east-west divide on Fuzhou Road—a gradient of respectability. On the east and towards the Bund, there were financial firms and elite institutions, and as one moved further west and away from the river, the density of entertainment establishments dramatically increased (Hu, 2001: 3-7).

Zhang's Beauty Bookshop was located at 510 Fuzhou Road, towards the seedier end of the "cultural street" and away from reputable bookshops like the "Three Legs of the Tripod". It opened in May 1927 with a capitalisation of about 2,000 dollars, which was typical for establishing a small bookstore in

Shanghai at that time (Zhang, 2008: 24-25, 161; cf. Liang, 2002: 338 on New Crescent Bookstore). This covered the printing and distribution of publications, as well as rent, fees for contributors and translators, and salaries for shop-front employees. Even though Zhang's name appeared prominently in Beauty Bookshop's products, a certain Xie Yunru 謝蘊如 was in fact listed as the major shareholder and general manager. Zhang himself was nominally the chief editor, deputised by the photographer and translator Peng Zhaoliang 彭兆良 (1901-1967), who would go on to edit *Ling Long* 玲瓏 magazine from 1935 to 1937 (Zhang, 2008: 27; Cheung, 2015). This arrangement provided Zhang with a degree of protection: when the Beauty Bookshop was in trouble with the International Settlement Police on obscenity charges, Zhang could not be held accountable as he was nominally not in charge of its operations.

The Beauty Bookshop was closely associated with a "New Culture Society" (*Xin wenhua she* 新文化社), consisting of around five or six disciples of Zhang Jingsheng. This "New Culture Society" was what Michel Hockx would call a "habitual society" (Hockx 2003a: 90)—a collective behind the release of a publication, in this case *New Culture*, the in-house journal of the Beauty Bookshop. A number of pieces in *New Culture* were signed by the New Culture Society, including a call for new members of the society (*Xin wenhua she*, 1927b: first page). This announcement began with a reiteration of Zhang's basic aims: promoting sex education and aesthetic philosophy. The New Culture Society was to provide a forum for like-minded individuals to improve themselves; Zhang wished to import the French salon culture into China. Future plans included setting up New Culture Society branches in major cities. In Hockx's terminology, Zhang was aiming to transform what began as a "habitual society" into an organisation with greater public visibility. It was also a marketing strategy—an attempt to expand the Beauty Bookshop's readership beyond Shanghai—but there was no evidence that the plan had much traction.

Zhang operated within a wider network of allies, as illustrated in *New Culture*'s inaugural issue (December 1926). The lead article, on women's inheritance rights, was followed by endorsements from well-known intellectuals and politicians such as Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868-1940), Wu Zhihui 吳稚暉 (1865-1953), and Zhang Ji 張繼 (1882-1945) (*Xin wenhua she*,

1927a: 1-21). The section concluded with a collection of signatures which exhibited *New Culture*'s credentials and allegiances; they functioned similarly to the "inscriptions" (*tizi* 題字) commonly found in Chinese books (Yen, 2005: 17-25; Rocha, 2010: 243-245). Wu Zhihui, Cai Yuanpei and Zhang Ji had all been involved in the organisation of the work-study programs for Chinese students in France. Wu and Zhang Ji both belonged to the Kuomintang's left-anarchist faction (Dirlik, 1991: 260).

From the list of signatories, a politically aware reader would surmise that *New Culture* and the Beauty Bookshop were situated in the left-anarchist, utopian socialist portion of China's political spectrum. *New Culture* positioned itself against the warlords in Northern China and the foreign powers, against Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang Right or intellectuals inspired by Anglo-American liberalism, and against Marxist-Leninism and the Chinese Communist Party. Zhang's venture, then, was not associated with the powerful political forces in 1920s China. *New Culture* did not adopt an irreverent, apolitical, or commercial approach to stay out of trouble either. In other words, Zhang lacked the kind of political support that might allow *New Culture* and the Beauty Bookshop to flourish.

The Beauty Bookshop produced three kinds of books: (i) the "Little Series on Sex Education" (*xingyu xiao congshu* 性慾小叢書); (ii) "General Literature" (*putong wenxue* 普通文學); and (iii) the "Romantic Literature Series" (*langmanpai wenxue congshu* 浪漫派文學叢書) (Zhang, 2008: 162). The "Little Series on Sex Education" consisted of abridged translations of Havelock Ellis's *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*—between 10,000 and 20,000 Chinese characters—and cost 20 cents. The front covers of the "Little Series on Sex Education" were nude paintings, designed to pique a customer's curiosity (*Mei de shudian*, 1927). The books listed under "General Literature" included Zhang's *An Aesthetic Outlook of Life* and *The Method of Organisation of an Aesthetic Society*, alongside other translated texts (*Mei de shudian*, 1927). Zhang's intention was to expand this series by adding another 200 works of radical politics and philosophy, science and technology guidebooks to rival collections sold by the Commercial Press and China Books (Zhang, 2008: 166). The third set of Beauty Bookshop's publications, the "Romantic Literature

series", were translations of Rousseau, Dumas, Hugo and other foreign authors.

The Beauty Bookshop closed in 1929. In his memoirs, Zhang cited two factors for the bookshop's demise: troubles with the police, and with gangsters. The Beauty Bookshop was prosecuted "seven or eight times" for its "obscene publications" (*yinshu* 淫書) by the Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP) in the International Settlement (Zhang, 2008: 24). The general manager, Xie Yunru, and the deputy editor, Peng Zhaoliang, took turns representing the bookshop in the Shanghai Provisional Court.

In one scenario, the SMP claimed that one of Zhang's articles in *New Culture* was pornographic. The article attacked the Chinese custom of proving a bride's virginity by displaying the bride and groom's blood-stained bedsheets in the family's courtyard on the morning after the wedding (Zhang, 1927a; Zhang, 2008: 163-164). In another case, the abridged translations of sexological texts sold by the Beauty Bookshop were deemed to be obscene (Zhang, 2008: 25). Zhang recalled that the Chinese judge often ruled against the bookshop, ordered fines between 100 and 400 dollars, and confiscated the offending publications. Zhang claimed he was frequently summoned by the SMP for "informal negotiations" (Zhang, 2008: 163). The SMP said they would allow the Beauty Bookshop to continue to operate if it removed the word "sex" (*xing* 性) from its "Little Series on Sex Education", if the nude paintings on the books' front covers were replaced with something plainer, and if Zhang delivered a monthly 1,000-dollar "handling fee" (*shouxu fei* 手續費)—euphemism for a bribe—to the SMP. When Zhang refused to comply, the Shanghai Post Office stopped mailing items for the Beauty Bookshop—a setback for Zhang's business as he could not process mail orders and subscriptions (Zhang, 2008: 164).

He also blamed the harassment of the Beauty Bookshop's employees by "Jiangsu gangsters" from Shanghai's "publishing industry union" (Zhang, 2008: 162). Since Zhang and his associates were mostly from Guangdong, and refused to pay "protection fees", Zhang claimed he received numerous threats of vandalism and violence. He also believed the SMP repeatedly raided his

bookshop because the SMP colluded with the "Jiangsu gangsters" (Zhang, 2008: 163).

Here, we need to exercise scepticism regarding Zhang's one-sided explanation of the Beauty Bookshop's failure. I would argue there was a more fundamental reason—Zhang's business practices. Looking at the Beauty Bookshop's offerings, textbooks were conspicuously absent. I argue this absence meant that Zhang's enterprise was ultimately unsustainable. Simply put: textbooks underwrote Shanghai's publishing market; all presses and bookshops were absolutely dependent on the educational trade. The Commercial Press's "unquestioned commercial dominance" was predicated on "its monopoly of its textbook market, a monopoly established in 1904 with the publication of a ten-volume curriculum stipulated for use in new-style public schools" (Jones, 2011: 119). Between 1921 and 1937, the "spectacular growth of [the Commercial Press] was a direct result of steadily increasing primary school enrolments, for only textbooks could consistently reach such a large, regulated readership" (Jones, 2011: 119). In a similar vein, Christopher Reed points out that the "staple commodity" in Shanghai's Business of Enlightenment was the textbook, the foundation upon which the "Three Legs of the Tripod" rested (Reed, 2004: 211-212).

The Enlightenment Bookshop (*Kaiming shudian* 開明書店) on 268 Fuzhou Road is a very useful contrast to the Beauty Bookshop (Wang, 1999: 84-115; Chow, 2009). Managed by Zhang Xichen 章錫琛 (1889-1969), the Enlightenment Bookshop opened in August of 1926 as a small outlet for intellectuals frustrated by the big presses' attitude towards revolutionary writings. Zhang Xichen was formerly employed by the Commercial Press as the editor-in-chief of *Ladies' Journal* (*Fünu zazhi* 婦女雜誌). Under his stewardship, *Ladies' Journal* focused on feminism and women's movements. Deemed too radical by his employers, Zhang Xichen was removed as editor. Disgruntled with the treatment, he opened the Enlightenment Bookshop just a short distance from the Commercial Press. One of the Enlightenment Bookshop's flagship journals was *New Woman* (*Xin nüxing* 新女性), which became a rival to *Ladies' Journal*, the content of which had become more conservative—housekeeping tips and recipes—after Zhang Xichen's departure. In May of 1927, Zhang Jingsheng opened the Beauty Bookshop on 510 Fuzhou

Road, and directly competed against Zhang Xichen. Zhang Xichen was incensed by readers who complained that *New Woman* was dull compared to Zhang Jingsheng's publications, and was unsettled by the constant stream of people who turned up at the Enlightenment Bookshop and asked him if he had Zhang Jingsheng's *Sex Histories* in stock (Rocha, 2010: 140-141).

In the long term, Enlightenment won this commercial battle—while Beauty closed in 1929, Zhang Xichen built a viable business that survived well into the 1950s. The foundation of the Enlightenment Bookshop's enduring success was laid in the late 1920s, when it maintained an extensive list of educational publications. The circulation and profitability of textbooks vastly outstripped literary and revolutionary writings—several hundred thousand copies versus a thousand copies. Zhang Xichen ventured into the textbook market to ensure Enlightenment's survival (Jones, 2011: 120). Effectively, textbook sales subsidised Enlightenment's production of radical philosophy and experimental literature. This was an instance whereby an "avant-garde" intellectual bookshop became commercially institutionalised; it played by the rules of the Shanghai publishing market to safeguard its buoyancy and growth.

In Hockx's (1999a: 4-9) theorisation, success in the literary field involved the balance between the "principle of autonomy" (elitist values, ideological purity, "high" culture for a small audience) and the "principle of heteronomy" (financial profit, sensitivity towards market trends, "popular" culture for a wider readership). The principle of autonomy was not necessarily at odds with the principle of heteronomy; in fact the principle of heteronomy *enabled* the intellectuals' continual dissemination of ideas by supplying economic capital (i.e. money!) (Hockx, 2003b: 220-239; Bourdieu, 1992: 214-280). Yet the principle of autonomy was crucial to the intellectuals' self-fashioning as disinterested truth-seekers with a social mission. The principle of autonomy thus conferred legitimacy and distinguished intellectuals' literary output from "entertaining", cultural products. For the Fuzhou Road intellectuals, a delicate balance had to be attained between the two principles. Unlike the Enlightenment Bookshop, the Beauty Bookshop did not appear to have any clear plans to diversify its catalogue, so Zhang Jingsheng's small business missed out on a vital demographic of customers—schoolchildren, parents, teachers—that might have made it profitable in the long term. The Beauty

Bookshop struggled until early 1929, and became another casualty on Shanghai's "cultural street". Zhang's influence on the intellectual scene was on the wane, and by the late-1930s he was largely forgotten.

How does the fate of Beauty Bookshop illuminate wider issues surrounding the historiography of sexual knowledge in China? Many historical studies have been concerned with the question of reception—namely, how medico-scientific knowledge from Europe and America travelled to faraway places like China and Japan, and how theories and ideas were translated, repackaged, and deployed by non-Western intellectuals. In *Obsession*, Wenqing Kang demonstrates that Western sexological understandings of male same-sex relations gained a foothold in China in the first half of the twentieth century. He analyses debates among Chinese intellectuals in journals and newspapers, showing that the motivations of those who introduced and appropriated "homosexuality" were tied to the issue of colonial modernity (Kang, 2009: 41-60). Similarly, Tze-lan Deborah Sang's *The Emerging Lesbian* investigates republican Chinese translations of Western sexological texts (by Magnus Hirschfield, Havelock Ellis, Richard von Krafft-Ebing and others), and examines the "diverse significations of the new taxonomy *same-sex love* in the popular discourse represented by the urban print media" (Sang, 2003: 126; emphasis in original). Sang argues that it was "above all the incorporation of female same-sex relations that distinguished the new discursive domain from the late-imperial discursive domain, marking it as modern" (Sang, 2003: 126). Kang and Sang give us deep histories of the formation of sexual identities in China, and how they overlapped and diverged from Western modes of being.

However, these accounts do not tell us about the issues of dissemination and consumption of knowledge—the Chinese intellectuals who wrote the books and sold them in their bookshops. I argue that these commercial dynamics—the survival or collapse of these "businesses of enlightenment"—are crucial if we want to understand why some theories persisted in the public sphere, while some intellectuals like Zhang Jingsheng could vanish after a brief period of popularity. In *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, Lee brands Zhang an "extremist" with a "vitalistic exaltation of sex" and an "unprecedented radicalism" (Lee, 1973: 270). According to Lee, Zhang carried some of the "seminal ideas" of celebrated Chinese intellectuals—Liang

Qichao's 梁啟超 (1873-1929) concept of "New Citizens", Lin Shu's 林紓(1852-1924) translations of Social Darwinism and racial science, Xu Zhimo's 徐志摩 (1897-1931) dream of "Dionysian madness"— to an "extreme frontier that borders on the absurd" (Lee, 1973: 271-272). Lee argues that other intellectuals were more successful because their ideas were less "extremist" and less "heretical" than Zhang's (Lee, 1973: 272). Here, Lee follows a surprisingly simplistic line of argumentation: that historians can simply appeal to the merit of an intellectual's ideas to explain their staying power, and an intellectual's staying power in turn shows the merit of their ideas. This section, however, has shown that Zhang's failure was one of entrepreneurship as much as anything else. By failing to make the Beauty Bookshop a sustainable business, Zhang did not secure a platform to broadcast his views. This is an aspect of intellectual life that histories of knowledge would do well to account for.

III. *New Culture* and Consumers' Sexual Anxieties

How did Zhang Jingsheng's readers respond to the Beauty Bookshop's products? It is difficult to offer concrete answers to this question, because the customers who set foot in the Beauty Bookshop tended not to write very much of it, thus leaving behind no archival documents that we could consult. Nonetheless, we could catch an indirect glimpse of the lived experiences of some of China's educated urbanites, specifically their confrontations with modern sexuality, by revisiting Zhang's journal *New Culture*. *New Culture* was another project that ended abruptly; only six issues were released between December 1926 and October 1927. Anecdotally, *New Culture*'s monthly print run was over 20,000 copies, without taking into account pirated and unauthorised editions (Chen, 1991: 73). While *New Culture* did not seem wildly popular, it did appear to have a solid following.

Of particular interest is the section entitled "Sex Education Communications" (*xingyu tongxun* 性慾通訊). Here, Zhang presents himself as a sexological expert responding to readers' inquiries on their intimate lives. "Sex Education Communications" appeared in all issues of *New Culture*—a total of 35 letters—with the exception of the fifth issue (July 1927) in which it was announced that

the section had been deleted because of "censorship from the authorities" (Zhang et. al., 1927e: no pagination). In the sixth and final issue, Zhang mentioned that he received so many letters of encouragement that he ultimately decided to defy the Shanghai Municipal Police and restore "Sex Education Communications" (Zhang et. al., 1927f: 1). If we take Zhang's word for it, then, the correspondence section was well-received by his audience. Such sexually explicit advice columns were rare in the late 1920s when *New Culture* was in publication, though by the 1930s there were other journals that published such columns (Cheung, 2015).

The general tone of the letters was panicky. These were young people who were overwhelmed with the conflicting advice in numerous sex manuals, and became deeply preoccupied with issues such as: the shape and dimensions of their genitals; sexual attraction towards strangers or their classmates (of the opposite sex as well as the same sex); their virginity or painful intercourse; the safety of birth-control products sold in Shanghai's pharmacies; vaginal discharge or leucorrhoea; masturbation and pornography. For example, in the second issue, "Youquan", a student attending Xiamen University, wondered if the continual use of condoms was harmful to the body. Youquan had been married to a fellow student for a year, and they had never had intercourse without condoms. If Youquan's wife became pregnant, then they would both have to abandon their studies. Youquan also wanted to know if using condoms had been diminishing sexual pleasure. Finally, he said that he could not help but ejaculate after five minutes of penetration if he and his wife had sex in the missionary position, but they experimented with the "lotus position" and he could last for twenty minutes before climaxing (Zhang et. al., 1927b: 104-106). Another reader, "Lin Dong", explained that he had a long foreskin, and intercourse was sometimes extremely painful because it could not retract past the glans. He wanted to have a circumcision to correct the problem, but worried that the procedure might lead to heightened sensitivity and premature ejaculation. Zhang promised Youquan that the prolonged use of condoms would not have any adverse effects, and strongly supported Lin Dong's course of action (Zhang et. al., 1927b: 106-107).

Yet another concerned reader, "CC", had a whole list of questions concerning the signs of a woman's sexual arousal. Zhang replied that, when a

woman was aroused and ready for penetrative sex, her clitoris would become firm and enlarged while her labia would become redder from the increased blood flow. Zhang also suggested that having sex during pregnancy would be unproblematic provided that one proceeded gently, but a woman who was a month or two away from giving birth ought to abstain from sex (Zhang et. al., 1927b: 110-112). “Mingming” wanted to know if kissing was hygienic when a woman was having her period; Zhang pithily wrote that menstrual fluids were not unhygienic, and were entirely unrelated to the oral cavity anyway (Zhang et. al., 1927b: 112) In the final issue of *New Culture*, Zhang recommended that reader “HOC” place a pillow underneath his wife’s hips to make the missionary position more pleasurable, and to experiment with having sex while standing (Zhang et. al., 1927f: 5-6).

The letters were almost all written by men, but there were isolated female voices. From *New Culture*’s second issue was Mrs. He Zhifen, who asked Zhang how she could put some of his ideals into practice. Zhang had previously advised that a man ought to wait until a woman was thoroughly aroused—as evidenced by the release of lubricating fluids from the vagina—before penetration. Mrs. He was worried that impatient men like her husband would be unable to follow this advice, or might become humiliated or bored. In response, Zhang published the excerpt of an article by a Ms. Shuya (pseudonym). Shuya defined any intercourse in which a woman was not sexually aroused as rape, and argued that this kind of sexual assault could be eliminated through the dissemination of correct sexual knowledge (Zhang et. al., 1927b: 100-104). In the final issue, Mrs. Qingyun wrote to Zhang seeking advice on marital aids and medication:

> Whenever I’ve sex with [my husband], just when I’m about to enjoy a wonderful sensation, he’s regrettably already ejaculated and considers it a job well done. But I really don’t feel satisfied! Sometimes my eyes convey to him a deep longing, and even when he wants to have another go, “his thing” [*ta de* 他的] ultimately can’t become erect. It doesn’t matter how much I fiddle with it, it’s just useless after ejaculation. Is this why I’m not getting pregnant? Please don’t be miserly with your advice. Please guide me and tell

> me the scientific, artistic, and artificial methods such that [my husband] can delay his ejaculation! Then I'll feel really lucky indeed! I wanted to tell my husband to buy a few bottles of "Yohimbe" [*Yuxiangbin* 育亨賓] to try. Maybe this could help with his weakness? […] I wanted to instruct my husband to go to a pharmacy and get hold of a vaginal warmer. So before sex, we can use it first so that "my thing" [*wo de* 我的] is heated and aroused […]maybe this can help us achieve simultaneous orgasm? (Zhang et. al., 1927f: 2-3. Quotation marks in original)

Zhang responded that, while the use of a vaginal warmer—a pre-heatable dildo—was suitable, he was adamantly "against all medications that purportedly stimulate sexual desire". This was because these aphrodisiacs and medications were "like opium: once [one became] addicted, [one] could not do without" (Zhang et. al., 1927f: 3).

"Wanhua", who was soon to be married, had never had sex before. He wanted to know if Vaseline was a safe form of lubrication. Wanhua wrote that he was "extremely confused, terrified, and had no idea how to confront these issues". He heard that "many people made a total mess of everything when they had sex for the first time", and he was fearful that he would "utterly embarrass [him]self". Wanhua demanded from Zhang "an essay like an 'instruction speech'" so he could memorise it as "golden laws and precious rules" (*jinke yulü* 金科玉律) (Zhang et. al., 1927b: 112-113). Another correspondent, "Zhuozai", was disturbed by premature ejaculation, and by the sensitivity of his penis, which sometimes bled after intercourse. In fact, Zhuozai contemplated suicide "several times" (Zhang et. al., 1927d: 77-78).

Zhang's responses were always sympathetic, reassuring his readers that their problems were much smaller than they imagined. On many occasions Zhang replied with deadpan humour. For instance, he praised the rear-entry position as particularly pleasurable. Reader "Kuansheng" wrote: "According to Chinese customs, intercourse mostly happens under covers. This is because, during intercourse, [one] cannot be exposed to 'wind' [*feng* 風]. If [one] were exposed to 'wind', then [one] would contract a cold-damage illness […] The

[rear-entry] sexual position cannot be accomplished under covers. Is this not very dangerous?" Zhang simply wrote: "Please get a heater installed or do it during the summer" (Zhang et. al., 1927c: 71). Even when Zhang could offer no direct solution to a reader's concerns, his tone was compassionate. "Zhizhong" and his wife were desperate as various birth control methods had failed. Zhizhong's wife tried using cervical caps, but found them scary to use. The couple then tried a contraceptive medication which caused vaginal inflammation. They also tried condoms—which broke regularly—and then a soluble spermicide (W.J. Rendell's "Wife's Friend" pessaries). The spermicide seemed to work for a while but then their fourth child was conceived. Zhang admitted that current contraceptive techniques were unreliable, and offered supportive words to Zhizhong (Zhang et. al., 1927f: 6-7).

The correspondents' writing styles, and the snippets of information that they revealed, allow us to speculate about their social background. They were relatively privileged urban youth, recently married or engaged, likely to have received at least a secondary education, and had enough income to purchase self-help manuals. The letters suggest that they felt inundated by the sheer amount of information available on sex. They seemed happy to experiment for the sake of happiness and fulfilment in their relationships. They believed that sex was a fundamental part of human nature, and that they had to ensure they were behaving in a "correct" fashion. Zhang thus cast himself as the authoritative yet gentle teacher, soothing his troubled readers. In the fourth issue of *New Culture*, Mr. Zhou's letter encapsulates this sentiment and explains Zhang's appeal:

> Because I feel so inadequate and agonised about my lack of sexual knowledge, I love reading all sorts of books […] Many [sex manuals] seem really superficial, barely scratching the surface […] Sir, you adopt an attitude of authentic research and you are unafraid of the attacks from so-called "righteous gentlemen" in our society. This spirit is something I salute (Zhang et. al., 1927d: 74-75).

Similarly, "Shifen" and his wife were impressed with *New Culture* and the Beauty Bookshop because they "improved [their] sex life": "the love between

us as husband and wife moved with the times”, and “even our bodies feel stronger”. Following Zhang, Shifen and his wife would “listen to each other’s opinions” in order to “eliminate men’s thousand-year oppression of women”. The couple declared the “abolishment of all unequal treaties”, and “established a contract based on the mutual respect of each other’s sovereignty” (Zhang et. al., 1927a: 51). Shifen’s letter brilliantly—and humorously—appropriated the political buzzwords of the 1920s, drawing parallels between China’s relationship with the Western powers and the unequal relations between the sexes. Semi-colonial oppression was analogised to patriarchal oppression, and national sovereignty was tied to individual autonomy. But Shifen’s letter was exceptional; no other correspondent framed sex in terms of national or racial survival. This was, after all, the overarching aim of Zhang’s sexological project and his small business of sexual enlightenment: ensuring Chinese couples had “good sex”, which in Zhang’s eugenic vision would lead to better offspring and a better China.

Wen-hsin Yeh and Rana Mitter have analysed the readers’ letters published in *Life* (*Shenghuo*), another popular magazine from the 1920s edited by Zou Taofen (1895-1944) (Yeh, 1992; Yeh, 2008: 101-128; Mitter, 2005). Mitter argues that the “still-developing boundaries of the new environments for work and leisure which the emergence of capitalist, imperialist modernity had brought to China were not yet clear”, and that “one window we have in which [Chinese people] tried to puzzle out the way that they should behave in the transition between the old and new worlds is the lively ‘Readers’ Mailbox’ section of *Life*” (Mitter, 2005: 80). One of the problems with using anonymous or pseudonymous readers’ letters as a primary source is, of course, the possibility that the letters have been selected, redacted, rewritten, or even forged by a journal’s editor to advance a particular political agenda (Dobson, 2009; Gudelunas, 2008).

A detailed textual analysis of the letters in *New Culture* is beyond the scope of this article. However, based on the variation of language used in the letters, I do not believe we can dismiss all of them as Zhang Jingsheng’s fabrications; the letters offer a rare if imperfect look into the mentalities of educated urbanites in China. The letters in *Life*, like those in *New Culture*, were also full of feelings of anxiety. As Mitter points out, “the anxiety of the *producers* of the

New Culture was not the same as the anxiety of its *consumers*" (Mitter, 2005: 88, emphasis in original). Whereas the May Fourth generation of Chinese intellectuals—including Zhang Jingsheng—were worried about the fate of China, the young people who consumed the intellectuals' output were more concerned about "finding ways to take up new opportunities in work and love", and struggled "in trying to deal with a changing and unpredictable new world" (Mitter, 2005: 89).

This is the other side of the "Business of Enlightenment". It is a chiasmatic situation in which the intellectuals' agenda and their target audiences' priorities did not align. The average readers of a magazine like *Life* or *New Culture* wanted a point of anchorage in a sea of uncertainty. The consumers of the bookshops on Fuzhou Road might have wanted to be "enlightened" with new theories of aesthetic education or population control, but they were equally eager, if not *more* eager, to find quick answers to their personal difficulties or seek affirmation that their experiences were "normal". Intellectuals positioned themselves as missionaries of modernity and expected their readers to heed and learn, while the latter were often more invested in knowing modern alternatives to the missionary position. Reader "Nanxi" complained to Zhang:

> I got married in April last year. I still haven't discovered the Third Kind of Water that you've spoken of […] Maybe this is because I'm not very healthy, or I'm not having intercourse correctly, or maybe [my wife] has an illness because she always has cramps when she has her period? Sometimes there's a menses-like discharge flowing out [during sex]; is this leucorrhoea? As for my prowess, I can last around forty-five minutes at most. Sometimes my penis goes soft half-way, and I can continue after a brief rest, or I'll have to stop altogether. Sometimes I can't become erect before intercourse; is this because of impotence? But during last year's summer holidays, there were several days in which I was having sex every night, and there was no problem with my erection? (Zhang et. al., 1927c: 66-68).

In a similar vein, reader "Zhijun" commented that Zhang's requirement to penetrate a woman for around thirty minutes was just too demanding for the average man, who might barely be able to last for seven to eight minutes (Zhang et. al., 1927c: 73-74). Another reader, "Caojun", felt "very confident" with his sexual techniques, and he could easily last for an hour before ejaculation. Caojun's wife would orgasm and release the "Third Kind of Water" every time, but Caojun nevertheless complained because his wife kept finding excuses to avoid sex, which became an exhausting ordeal (Zhang et. al., 1927d: 76). Since Zhang prescribed an ideal intercourse, he established a yardstick against which readers had to measure their own performances, and actually *added* to the feeling of alienation and inadequacy that he sought to remove through *New Culture* and the Beauty Bookshop's publications.

From the producers of knowledge, I have shifted our attention towards the question of readership. I do this as a way of moving beyond the abstract ways in which scholars have characterised the impact of Western sexology on China, by tethering the story of the Beauty Bookshop onto the experiences—however filtered or selective—of educated urbanites who read *New Culture*. For Howard Chiang, Zhang's theorisations of sexuality were evidence of the inauguration of an overarching "epistemic modernity" in early twentieth-century China: the empirical methodology, the use of scientific categories, and so on (Chiang, 2010a: 636). But I ask: what did this modernity actually *feel* like to people who were immersed in it? Once we start paying closer attention to the processes of dissemination and consumption, we find that these educated readers were not framing their intimate lives in terms of "enlightenment", "science", "race" or "nation". Instead, they experienced modernity as a constant bombardment of information, as chronic trepidation, and as acute insecurity over what constituted acceptable or "normal" behaviours.

Conclusion

I argue that an enriched historical account of sexological knowledge should encompass the following: (i) the construction of knowledge in local contexts (which often involves drawing from sources from other parts of the world); (ii) the material movement of knowledge around the world, its appropriation by intellectuals to advance particular kinds of politics, and the long-range

networks enabling such circulation; *and as I have argued in this paper using the case of Zhang Jingsheng*, (iii) the specific consumption of such knowledge, subject to market conditions and local dynamics, by audiences who understand and practise these ideas in ways that may diverge from the intentions of the producers and distributors.

I argue that Zhang Jingsheng's "small business of enlightenment" was very typical of the intellectuals' bookshops that opened in Shanghai's "cultural street" in the late 1920s—contrasting with big companies like the Commercial Press. Reading Zhang Jingsheng's memoirs against the histories of other bookshops, I suggest that Zhang's "Beauty Bookshop" never managed to transition into a sustainable business with a diversified range of cultural products. The failure of Zhang's bookshop deprived him of a vital channel to continue disseminating his radical visions of sex. I also show that Zhang's "small business of enlightenment" was at once a "small business of anxiety". The letters in *New Culture* showcase a readership that did not necessarily speak in terms of the "national salvation" that Zhang wanted to achieve through a sexual revolution—but mostly just wanted reassurance and tranquillity. It is ironic that Zhang's theories, and his notions of sexual performance, perpetuated—and arguably profited from—the cycle of anxieties that Zhang claimed he could alleviate. These are the nuances that historians can draw out if we step back from the mutation and reception of ideas, and investigate the entrepreneurial dimension of knowledge.

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Leon Rocha is Senior Lecturer in Chinese History and Society at the School of History and Heritage, University of Lincoln.

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Confessions of a Dance Hostess: Social Dancing in Shanghai and Self-Portrayals of Hostess-Writers, 1930-1949

Amanda Zhang
University of Oxford

Abstract

This paper adds to the existing scholarship on republican Shanghai and the study of social dancing, and dance hostesses, during that period. The key to this revision is the examination of the self-portrayals of hostess-writers throughout the 1930s and up to 1949. Hostess-writers documented their lives and careers as dance hostesses by writing about and publishing topics that ranged from politics to aspirations and personal tragedies. These writings were produced against a tumultuous political backdrop of war and nation-building, a period when social dancing blossomed in China as a popular entertainment option for people of different social classes. This paper considers the agency of dance hostesses before and after the Sino-Japanese War. It argues that they actively sought to mediate their existence through the power of narration that best suited their personal and financial interests.

Keywords: *dance hostesses, social dancing, Shanghai, self-portrayals.*

Introduction: The Articulation of Self in the Writing of Hostess-Writers

On the evening of June 24, 1938, a sickly woman named Wang Qinzhen (王琴珍 b. 1925) returned home after a long night out at the Paramount Ballroom (*Bailemen wuting* 百樂門舞廳), where she was one of the most popular dance hostesses. Upon arrival, her face was as pale as snow. When questioned by her concerned mother, she uttered nothing but vaguely pointed at her throat. She was sent to hospital, and this failed suicide attempt was only one of several known (*Wufeng*, 1938a: 1). Despite her seemingly fragile emotional state as demonstrated by her attempts to end her life, Wang's writings showed strength, patriotism and independence, as well as the determination and resilience to

fight on, whatever fate threw at her. She wrote frequently and her ability to write fluent prose earned her the title of "Best Writer in the World of Dance" (*wuguo diyi zhi bi* 舞國第一支筆) (*Shidai*, 1939: 41-42). Her writings reveal an emancipated female personality and exert a powerful textual presence that helped build her reputation and fame within and outside the walls of the Paramount. However, she was not the only hostess-writer in republican Shanghai; some others also wrote columns documenting their careers and lives.

The social dancing scene with its dance hostesses was an important feature of republican Shanghai. In a comprehensive guidebook of Shanghai published in 1934, the phenomenon of dance halls and social dancing was described as a new but popularised form of entertainment originating from the West (Shen, 1934: 151-153). Another guidebook derided dance halls as "kilns that melted gold" and as responsible for the moral decay of many young people (Wang, 1947: 186). Narratives of the dance hostesses noted their modern clothing, beauty, liberal attitudes and their frequent encounters with romance (*Wufeng*, 1938i: 10). Dance hostesses such as Wang Qinzheng also took every opportunity to present themselves as both personality and consumer item. Part and parcel of this self-commodification process involved documenting their lives and careers as professional dance hostesses by writing about and publishing topics that ranged from politics and nationalism to hopes and personal misfortunes. These writings were created against a tumultuous political backdrop of war and nation-building, a period when social dancing blossomed in China as a popular entertainment option for people of different social classes.

This paper considers the agency of dance hostesses during the republican period through a study of the self-portrayals of hostess-writers. It argues that dance hostesses actively sought to mediate their existence through the power of narration that best suited their personal and financial interests. While they were not always in control, they were not totally trapped in a hostile and unstable political climate, unable to control or change at least some aspects of their fate.

Several scholars have examined the history of social dancing and dance hostesses in Shanghai. Specifically, Ma Jun's 馬軍 pioneering and comprehensive work on these topics illustrates the rise and decline of social

dancing, and how it was eventually banned after the Sino-Japanese War. Ma argues that dance hostesses were not proactive political actors, even though the issue of social dancing and dance hostesses became a political matter. Ma describes these women as "ordinary folks" (*xiao baixing* 小百姓). In his book, he illustrates how many women were forced by various circumstances to take to the streets in 1948, and that many of them were just ordinary women trying to get on with their lives until they were caught up in politics (Ma, 2005: 187). Andrew David Field furthers Ma's work by arguing that dance hostesses were considerably affected by the political situation in republican Shanghai, particularly when Confucian conservatism eventually prevailed and gave way to the anti-dance movement. As such, Field also sees dance hostesses as relatively passive in that their security and fate were to a large extent dependent on discourses and political realities beyond their control, even though Field notes that dance hostesses, such as Wang Qinzhen, wrote articles for journals about social dancing (Field, 2010: 184, 261).

If, however, we investigate the writings of these of hostess-writers, we discover how they were, at least on some occasions, willing participants in politics and actively strived for change. They tried to advance their interests by portraying themselves to their advantage, and responding to other narratives written by concerned social and political agents (*Dazhong*, 1944: 49-57). In other words, dance hostesses were not completely passive, but contributed to shaping their image in times of war, and political and social turmoil.

Regarding dance halls and social dancing in China, both Ma Jun and Andrew David Field have described how social dancing was a relatively new phenomenon in republican Shanghai. Dancing in China had its roots in the early dynasties as a form of art, ceremonial ritual and entertainment. Social dancing, however, an activity which involved intimate physical interaction between men and women, was brought to China by Westerners and remained an exclusively Western and elitist activity that continued throughout the 1920s (Ma, 2005: 1-2). Both Ma and Field have also written about how the Black Cat Cabaret was established by Chinese investors in December 1927, and thus became the first dance hall in Shanghai to employ its own group of dance hostesses (Ma, 2005: 2; *Shenbao*, 1927: 1). Within a year, there were more than 33 dance halls in business, including the Majestic Hotel (Ma, 2005: 2).

Both Ma and Field's works also illustrates how the demographics of dance hostesses changed. While they were primarily Russian and Jewish refugees in the early years of social dancing, Chinese women later constituted the majority of dance hostesses in Shanghai, particularly after social dancing became a regular activity for Chinese consumers. In January 1941, while a few dance halls such as the Casanova and Jose Bar had exclusively Russian dance hostesses, most dance halls in the French Concession had a combination of Russian, Jewish and Chinese dance hostesses (Ma, 2005: 11; Field, 2013: 21). There were even dance halls such as the Charleston and Ladybird, which had only Chinese dance hostesses (*Shanghai Municipal Archives* (hereafter *SMA*), U38-1-2060). These statistics altered greatly a few years later. In 1946, out of 1,622 dance hostesses surveyed, only 36 were Russian, while 9 were Italian and 3 Korean. The remainder were Chinese women from Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Guangdong, with an occasional few from locations such as Shandong and Hubei (*SMA*, Y3-1-58-151).

As social dancing became a common popular pastime in Shanghai, professional dance hostesses became a well-known group of people, with the more famous and popular of them considered to be semi-celebrities with their own followings. It is difficult to attribute these dance hostesses to a particular social or political class. Their profession required them to be elegantly dressed in clothes of the latest fashion, and to behave like glamorous, liberated, modern women. Indeed, they were largely admired for these outward qualities. While some of them appeared to live extravagant lifestyles, frequenting luxury hotels and restaurants and wearing expensive silk dresses and furs, many others lived in poverty and struggled to put food on the table for their families and themselves. They were also from a range of backgrounds. While some of them were from rural areas and farming communities in China, others had been city dwellers since birth (*SMA*, Y3-1-58-151). Thus, while the appearance of glamour was only part of their outward appearance, behind this lay familial burdens and responsibilities that were shared by most ordinary working women in republican China.

As demonstrated by scholars such as Ma and Field, besides the money dance hostesses sent to their families, the largest item of monthly expenditure for an average dance hostess was clothing, which is indicative of their efforts to keep

up their outwardly glamorous appearance (*SMA*, D2-0-2748-8). Dance hostesses, however, were not generally known for their academic excellence or ability to compose beautiful prose and poetry. Most did not receive a good education, if any at all. Although there were the occasional few who were publicly celebrated for their university education and background, most dance hostesses were illiterate or had received only primary school-level education (*SMA*, Y3-1-58-151; Q141-5-41; Q137-7-33). Despite this, some of those who were literate, wrote and published in newspapers and periodicals as a way of increasing their personal or collective publicity.

Furthermore, although some men in China had assumed a female voice to write as women, it can be assumed here that these hostess-writers were women. This is because some of them, such as Wang Qinzhen and Li Li 李麗, were well-known dance hostesses who had a relatively strong media presence. They gave interviews in periodicals and newspapers quite frequently. Moreover, the ways in which members of the public and editors of periodicals responded to these self-portrayals also support the view that these hostess-writers were female.

Since this paper primarily investigates dance hostesses, it is also in conversation with existing scholarship about the modern woman in republican China. This is because dance hostesses were seen as modern women, and the dance hall was a site of modernity and a necessary backdrop for the emergence of the modern Chinese woman (Lee, 1999: 23-29). The modern woman was a symbol of Chinese modernity during the republican period, and several scholars have examined her as an archetype of the Chinese woman by looking at the discourse about them. Leo Lee suggests that the modern women portrayed in the fictional works of republican writers such as Mu Shiying 穆時英 (1912-1940) takes a dominant role over men, and although they are objects of male erotic desires, these women also have the ability to return the male gaze indignantly (Lee, 1999: 28). Louse Edwards argues that the discourse about the policing of the modern woman during the republican period consisted of synecdochal discussions about the governance of the Chinese (Edwards, 2000: 115). Madeline Yue Dong examined the discourse about modern women in republican magazines and newspapers, and argues that the modern woman was feared because her attractiveness, and the inability of men to resist her,

destabilised existing gender relations in China and brought changes to the patrilineal family order (Dong, 2008: 217). Similarly, Sara E. Stevens argues that the modern girl and the new woman were two new paradigms evident in republican China, that embodied both the hopes and fears attendant on modernity (Stevens, 2003: 82-103).

These arguments are all relevant here, as this paper also looks at narratives and discourses on the modern Chinese woman. It, however, furthers existing work on this archetype by focusing on the self-representations of modern women who were from a lower-class background. Specifically, this paper looks at how these modern women chose to represent themselves instead of how they were represented by other men and women, and thus offers new insights concerning the agency of the modern woman in republican China. They were not completely oppressed or totally emancipated, but as this paper shows, their condition was somewhere in-between.

A Vision of Glamour and Victimhood: Self-Portrayals by Hostess-Writers before the Sino-Japanese War

Dance hostesses who were literate wrote about themselves and their lives when they could. These narratives were beneficial on two levels: for the individual, they resulted in fame and reputation; collectively, they increased group recognition and social status. These individual and collective benefits were intertwined and mutually dependent. Thus, dance hostesses portrayed themselves as liberal, desirable women, but also occasionally as pitiful victims of circumstance, as a way to garner sympathy from the public. Hostess-writers sought to write because throughout their careers, one of the main problems they faced was a lack of public recognition. Furthermore, earning a living was of the utmost importance to this group of working women, particularly in the 1930s and 1940s. Dance hostesses in Shanghai, many of whom were refugees from neighbouring suburbs and rural areas, lived with the constant fear of losing their job and only source of income owing to a public backlash against social dancing. Not only could such a backlash deter people from seeking entertainment and hiring dance hostesses in dance halls, but also trigger a government ban on the operations of commercial dance halls. Thus, there was

a need for dance hostesses to promote themselves, and the entertainment services they physically provided, whenever possible. All such services, from table-sitting to social dancing, were hirable (Shen, 1934: 139-141). In other words, the patron of a dance hall had to pay for the time and services provided by a dance hostess. She had to package and promote herself as a commodity that was capable of gaining the attention and approval of potential patrons and customers, and enticing them to purchase her services (*Wode huabao*, 1939: 5).

Embracing Life as a Dance Hostess

In many cases, dance hostesses portrayed themselves as liberal and modern women available for hire through public means of promotion. In light of differing public opinion regarding social dancing and the role of dance hostesses, hostess-writers had to promote themselves in an effective way that gained admiration and even support. This was particularly the case during the pre-war period, when many of these hostess-writers embraced their lifestyle as dance hostesses. Working as one appeared to be a better way of life compared to other options for some women.

Dance hostess Wang Lingyi 汪伶儀 didn’t want to be married into a good family because of the fear of being “locked up” at home . Wang claimed that any woman with a bit of spirit in her would not be able to endure such oppression, and did not apologise for being a dance hostess. In any case, there were many women of higher social status who suffered much more than she did. This was because she felt that men and women did not have equal power in China. Wang was open about how she attracted and retained customers. She wrote in a magazine that she always told her customers she was eighteen. This was because they preferred this age to anyone older. She subsequently went on to say that her age depended partly on the customer. But this, argued Wang, was not because she was the plaything of men or subordinate to them. She wrote that if she said she was eighteen, then she was eighteen, and that age was entirely constructed by her (*Shiritan*, 1934: 14). As such, Wang presented herself as a strong, confident and liberal woman, qualities attributed to the “modern woman” who was much admired by the public during pre-war Shanghai.

Hostess-writers demonstrated in their writings that these women valued freedom of choice and wished to exert control over their lives, all of which were qualities that suggest they were "modern women" and made them more desirable as a consumable item or service. Dance hostess Yin Zhu 隱竺 was explicit in her attitude towards her job and men in another column. She wrote about one of her patrons, describing him as a laughable old man who came by with two tickets to a movie screening. She then took the tickets from him, ripped them into shreds and made it apparent that she clearly did not think much of him, calling him an idiot. But Yin wrote that she had to accommodate him and his wishes from time to time, because he was well off and she needed the money. She admitted that she lost her temper occasionally, which might seem inappropriate, but suggested that being slightly cranky at times demonstrated how precious she was (*Funüjie*, 1941: 19-20). In this case, Yin seemed fully engaged in her job and clearly understood ways in which to maximise her interests, despite the fact that she might not have willingly become a dance hostess in the first place.

Softening One to Her Cause

In certain cases, however, dance hostesses portrayed themselves as pitiful victims of life and circumstances. In return, this helped them earn sympathy and attract attention from the public. This was particularly the case when general narratives about social dancing were sometimes tainted by accusations of immorality and excessive splendour. Hostess-writer, Hu Manli 胡曼麗, documented how she became a dance hostess. She wrote that she was only a teenager when she began and, at first, had to work for eight hours every evening and danced so much that the muscles in her legs increased significantly in size. She claimed that it was difficult for her to earn much of an income, because she had to share half of what she earned every day with the dance hall. To maintain her glamorous appearance, she also had to buy expensive clothes and shoes which ate up a significant part of her income. Furthermore, she had to give most of what was left of her income to her family. For Hu, life was difficult as a dance hostess (*Diansheng*, 1935: 18).

Hu's description of her job and lifestyle is similar to the stories of other dance hostesses, and these writings all emphasise the inadequacy of income. They demonstrate that the reality behind the perceived glamour and beauty was often poverty. One wrote that there was a misconception as to how much a dance hostess earned; people thought that such women enjoyed a good income (1935: 35). Most started their dancing career at a young age because of their family's lack of money. One was only 14 when she started. She was the eldest daughter, with three younger sisters and one younger brother. With high inflation in Shanghai, everything became too expensive and unaffordable for her and her family, particularly after her father lost his job. Her mother eventually found someone who helped her get into dancing school. Even though it was the only way out for her, dancing every evening was difficult. She said that just writing about her life at the dance hall made her feel immense pain and sadness (*Diansheng*, 1936: 30).

A similar, somewhat tragic story is echoed in the writings of Yang Qing 楊菁. Yang was only 16 when she met her future husband, and they married against the wishes of Yang's parents. Yang thought that she would have a sweet and happy life after marriage, but she was mistaken since her husband spent most of his time gambling, drinking, dancing and seducing girls while Yang stayed at home. Despite having wealthy parents and loving sisters, Yang couldn't return to her family home. She eventually divorced her husband and became a dance hostess as she had no income and no employable skills. Resentful about the life she had lived and about being a "plaything", she decided to take revenge on men in general. Now, she was able to use her experiences and what she had learnt in dance halls to control men. Yang admitted that her newfound purpose was to trifle with men (*Funü shijie*, 1943: 28-29).

Writing about motherhood and the sacrifices they had to make for their children was another way in which hostess-writers acquired sympathy. Zhang Meili 張美莉 described how she was a hardworking and responsible mother, forced by situations and unforeseen circumstances to become a dance hostess. Originally a teacher in Tianjin, Zhang came to Shanghai to pursue a similar career in teaching. After a few odd teaching and administrative jobs here and there, she married a man whom she later realised was a severe opium-addict. She claimed that while she immediately regretted her choice of husband, she was

already pregnant and thus had to save her marriage by giving up all her savings to help her him quit his opium addiction. He, however, continued taking opium, frequenting brothels, and was even at times physically abusive. Eventually, Zhang left home with her two young children and finalised a divorce, but her former husband refused to pay alimony. Thus, she claimed that it was out of desperation and the need to take care of her children that she became a dance hostess (*Yule*, 1935: 465).

Besides narratives about how these women were forced into social dancing by tragic life circumstances, hostess-writers also wrote about the poor treatment they received from the men they met in dance halls. One wrote about how she was raped by her client, a young man who looked respectable, wore suits and appeared to be from an upper-class background. He showered her with affection, and spent a lot of money buying champagne and paying to dance and sit with her. This hostess-writer was initially smitten. She described how she was flattered by the amount of time he spent with her and the attention he gave her. She thought of herself as a mere dance hostess, but was pleasantly surprised that someone from an upper-class background would even notice her. Eventually, this hostess-writer was invited to go to a hotel room with him after work. Although she stated that she was very hesitant and sceptical, she nonetheless complied because he was her main client. After losing her virginity to this man, she wrote that she cried for days, saddened by what had happened to her, as well as realising that she was not treated as a human being, but was merely a plaything of men (*Xiaojie*, 1937: 14).

Occasionally, hostess-writers also wrote about their anxieties, especially those related to their careers as dance hostesses, which perpetuated the notion that they were pitiful victims. Hostess-writer Li Li wrote that social dancing was her lifeline, and that she could not reject a client’s advances because it was her duty and responsibility to entertain him. Moreover, she felt very uncertain about what her life would be like in 10 years’ time, and contemplated that it would be very sad if she was still a dance hostess by then. She stated that she was afraid that she might be laughed at and called out for having been a bad financial planner when she was younger, or for being too materialistic, thus deserving her life as a lowly dance hostess. According to her writings, thoughts about abandoning her money-oriented lifestyle went through her mind, but

then again, she also realised that she could not abandon her career. Li argued that this was because people were materialistic, and that she lived in an acquisitive society, and thus had to fit in (*Rensheng xunkan*, 1935b: 14).

Furthermore, self-perpetuating narratives about the tragic lives of these women were successful in gaining the sympathy of some members of the public. Upon hearing the heart-rending story of one dance hostess who was first forced into the profession after her husband died, and then was brutally raped by one of her clients, one commentator argued that being a taxi dancer was not a lowly profession. He suggested that one should be sympathetic to those who had to make ends meet by doing such a job (*Yingwu xinwen*, 1935: 7). Another journalist also wrote about his encounter with one who told him about her poor upbringing, and how she was forced to seek a job as a dance hostess in order to make ends meet and earn money for her family. After their meeting, the journalist felt heavy-hearted, and argued in his column that he couldn't possibly be the only one who felt sympathetic towards these women (*Tianwentai*, 1936: 3). Consequently, a similar response from people who have read the self-portrayals of these hostess-writers can be inferred.

Amid mixed perceptions of dance hostesses and social dancing in general, it was in the interests of the hostess-writers to portray themselves in a way that attracted attention and sympathy, as well as admiration and support from the public. These women sometimes depicted themselves as desirable because of their liberal qualities, their new-found power and their ability to exercise freedom of choice. In certain cases, however, hostess-writers also portrayed themselves as victims of abuse and as hardworking mothers and daughters who were coerced by unfortunate circumstances into a career in social dancing.

Narrating Wartime Pleasures: Hostess-Writers as Patriotic Women

In light of the public backlash against social dancing and dance hostesses in particular, hostess-writers presented themselves as enlightened and patriotic women, willing and ready to make wartime contributions for their country. This was considered more appropriate and acceptable during wartime China, in contrast to the pre-war portrayals of glamour and sexual liberation. Such

patriotic self-portrayals were also necessary for financial reasons. Living in wartime China meant earning a living was an even more pressing issue for many women, and dance hostesses struggled to improve their reputations by narrating their careers and identities in ways which could co-exist with rising nationalistic sentiments in wartime China (*Wufeng*, 1938d: 5-6).

War officially broke out between Japan and China in 1937. While parts of Shanghai and other parts of China were under fire, it was business as usual for the dance halls in Shanghai (*Shenbao*, 1938b: 10). A significant number of female refugees became dance hostesses while men spent money and leisure time in these venues (*Wuying*, 1938b: 9-10). Excessive hedonism and entertainment during wartime, however, seemed highly inappropriate and calls to cease the operations of the dance halls surfaced (*Shenbao*, 1943: 3). Moreover, dance halls did not discriminate against their guests so long as they were able to afford the goods and services offered. Hence, dance halls were visited by a range of guests, from Japanese military men to the usual groups of Western expatriates and Chinese patrons (*Shenbao*, 1938a: 2). Social dancing, dance halls and dance hostesses were increasingly disapproved of in view of China's wartime situation, particularly when frugality became an important determinant of patriotism. Thus, dance hostesses portrayed themselves as enlightened and patriotic women, who were willing and ready to make sacrifices for their country as a way to retain public support and to promote themselves.

"The Best Writer in the World of Dance"

One of the most prominent and well-known writers who successfully portrayed herself as a patriot and an ambitious hard worker was Wang Qinzhen, who was mentioned briefly at the very beginning of this paper. Wang was most active in writing during the years of 1938-39 (*Shidai*, 1939: 41-42). She depicted herself as both a keen student and a victim of war, who was forced to go into the social dancing business but worked her way up despite various hardships. Life as a dance hostess was not easy; Wang notes that she was much happier when she was younger, and that her early years as a dance hostess were miserable (*Wufeng*, 1938h: 22). Regardless, she claimed that she wanted to conquer life as she was still young, to make the most of what she had, and to help those in

need (1938i: 10). As she claimed to have suffered the slings and arrows of misfortune, she said that she understood the suffering of mankind. Thus, her sympathy and understanding towards those who had suffered a similar fate motivated her to help others (1938c: 5).

Wang portrayed herself as a keen writer, even suggesting that one way to help others was through writing. This improved her image as education and literacy were considered to be traits of the modern woman. Despite her full-time job as a dance hostess, however, she claimed that she continued her studies in women's vocational schools whenever possible. It was in these training schools that she learnt and improved her writing skills (*Wusheng*, 1938a: 7-8). She actively encouraged others to continue their pursuit of knowledge while working as dance hostesses, just like her. Wang's attitude towards life changed after coming across the phrase "where there is a will, there is a way" in a book, and it was then that she decided to study. While she didn't think that she was showing off, she thought that she was merely trying to prove that if one tries, and is willing to think, it would not be difficult to understand something. She then encouraged fellow dance hostesses to follow her example. Wang also proposed forming a study group of dance hostesses, where they could all discuss things they did not understand together, and "let those who despise us know that dance hostesses are also human beings, intelligent enough to examine academic issues" (*Wufeng*, 1938f: 28). Together, she further claimed, dance hostesses could continue their work to make ends meet while furthering their education for the sake of learning (1938f: 28). Such self-portrayals of herself as a keen student, and as someone who encouraged others, contributed to her increasing publicity.

While Wang enjoyed immense success in her dancing career and was an acclaimed writer of articles and prose, her private life was marred by a series of personal problems and failed relationships. Her first known and documented suicide attempt occurred in 1936, when she was still employed by the mid-tier Black Cat Cabaret. Her suicide attempts were briefly described in some gossip columns; they were allegedly caused by the death of her fiancé, a patron of hers, while she was working at the Liberty Dance Hall (*Xiaoyao wuchang* 逍遙舞場). Consumed by grief, it was claimed in tabloid papers that Wang attempted suicide multiple times by drinking poison. Soon after that, she went back to her

career as a dance hostess (*Tanxing nülang*, 1936: 13-14). In 1938, she attempted suicide again, for reasons unknown to the public (*Wufeng*, 1938a: 1).

Wang never openly mentioned these suicide attempts in her writings. Perhaps she was ashamed of them, and considered attempts to end her life to be signs of weakness that were inconsistent with her public persona. In her writings, she often adopted a relatively optimistic and uplifting outlook on life, and portrayed herself as strong and independent. One of her central themes was how the oppressed should stand up on their own to fight back. In a short column entitled "We are Humans" (*Women shi ren a* 我們是人啊), Wang called upon her colleagues in the dancing industry to fight for the right to be regarded as human. She said that "life can be tough and oppressive. Nonetheless, one must continue to work hard"—and that working hard was the only way in which dance hostesses like her could deal with those who despised them (*Wufeng*, 1938e: 23). Seemingly bitter about her life at the dance hall, Wang claimed that she was sent into a "butcher's field" (*tuchang* 屠場), a meat market that was fuelled by plenty of whisky and jazz (*Wuying*, 1938a: 11).

She wrote in another column that she had only one thought on her mind when she was dancing: that she must live on in order to fight her butchers, and make them repay the bloody debt of her youth (*Wuying*, 1938c: 25). She wrote that the key to being mentally strong and resilient was confidence. She believed that she would not come by opportunities unless she was confident, determined and hardworking (*Zhongguo yitan huabao*, 1939: 3). In many ways, these writings, portraying Wang as strong, determined and resilient to cruel public forces, helped her to gain social recognition, and increased her market value as a desirable dance hostess. Creating a heroic public image was also good publicity for her.

Wang's depiction of her own patriotism helped her public image. Specifically, she was vocal about the ongoing Sino-Japanese war, and about the behaviour of some during a national crisis. She noted that she, and many other hostesses, were regular newspaper readers and that they were all familiar with the conditions of the refugees (*Wufeng*, 1938b: 2-3). To see people laughing gaily and dancing happily infuriated her, as she thought of her countrymen who were using weapons and shedding blood in defence of freedom. She claimed that as

she danced, her face burned feverishly due to her foolish clients and colleagues. Then she thought about herself; she was doing the same thing, and she felt that she would be forever condemned to this kind of lifestyle (*Wuying*, 1938c: 25).

One way to remedy this was to contribute to the war effort. To do so, Wang became one of the main organisers of The Dance Hostesses' Entertainment Congress (*Wunüjie youyi dahui* 舞女界遊藝大會)—an association that provided funds for those affected by the war between China and Japan (*Dianxing*, 1938: 7). She campaigned for refugee relief on many occasions, and arranged a fundraising theatre production, playing the role of one of the lead characters, which she promoted in her writings (*Wufeng*, 1938g: 3). Commenting on this organisation, Wang thought that while they didn't have a lot of power as dance hostesses to help refugees, they had plenty of spirit, and contributions, however small, always helped (*Wusheng*, 1938b: 28). Showing that she was conscious of how social dancing might be inappropriate during wartime China, and presenting herself as actively trying to improve the conditions of those adversely affected by the war, helped improve her image as a patriotic dance hostess. Moreover, these kinds of patriotic self-portrayals helped members of the public to understand that social dancing was not inherently unpatriotic, and that dance hostesses could also be part of the war of resistance.

Wang was successful in her endeavours to portray herself as patriotic, despite the public backlash against social dancing as inappropriate during wartime. Many applauded her attitude towards life—her determination, desire for independence, patriotism, and hunger for knowledge. Such a portrayal of strength and determination earned her the reputation of being an "enlightened popular dance hostess" (*juexing de hongwuxing* 覺醒的紅舞星) (*Wufeng*, 1938g: 3-4). Patrons of dance halls and commentators have written articles praising Wang as an outstanding talent, an unusual woman and a role model for every woman in the country (1938g: 3-4; *Yingwu xinwen*, 1937: 11).

While it was generally agreed that Wang did not have the best of looks, the focus of praise, however, was often on her patriotism and determined character (*Wusheng*, 1938a, 7-8). Commentators argued that Wang became popular because of her inner beauty, not because of her looks or other superficial qualities. One commented that noble and respectable patrons enjoyed being

with her because of her gentle and fluent style of conversation, as well as her healthy appearance and respectable attire. This commentator further claimed that having met hundreds of dance hostesses, he found Wang to be the most resolute and determined, and that he had never met someone so eager to learn. Such curiosity, he claimed, would lead her to a good and bright future (*Wufeng*, 1938d: 5-6). One commentator even praised her for spending her free time at a tutorial college (*Yingwu xinwen*, 1937: 11). In other words, Wang's attempts at increasing good publicity for herself were well-received by others.

Furthermore, Wang was conscious of the benefits of good publicity and the importance of writing self-portrayals as a means to promote and enhance one's reputation. Feedback was not always positive for her, and she occasionally received some criticism of her writings. One critic accused her of superficiality, implying that she was attention-seeking, and derided her efforts to organise the Dance Hostesses' Entertainment Congress as a mere attempt at self-promotion. Wang replied defiantly by arguing that dance hostesses were just as capable of defending the country, and that women like her had never dreamt of being accused of attention-seeking or self-promotion. Yet she later admitted that perhaps she, and her fellow dance hostesses, had intended to promote themselves. Even so, Wang thought that it was only within the usual limits of how people behave with regard to business strategies and plans. Moreover, she didn't think their "attention-seeking" adversely affected or injured anyone. She further claimed that publicity deserved to be credited to whoever wrote good prose, implying that she had deserved all the attention and publicity she received (*Wusheng*, 1938b: 28).

Besides Wang Qinzhen, other dance hostesses also wrote about their patriotic endeavours during the war. Dance hostess Li Li wrote about how she supported the war effort by starting an event entitled "dancing to save the country" (*tiaowu jiuguo* 跳舞救國). In this event, patrons would dance with dance hostesses and donate, while dance hostesses would also donate the money they earned to the war effort. She wrote about how women like her could not fight on the battlefield, but could raise funds or make donations, and that she too donated one day's earnings. Li claimed that this was because she could not let her country down, as she was only able to earn an income because

of dance halls, and dance halls only existed because of her country (*Rensheng xunkan*, 1935a: 23).

Patriotism and treachery became the central themes of narratives about social dancing, dance halls and dance hostesses. This changing environment affected how hostess-writers portrayed themselves. Women such as Wang Qinzhen and Li Li thus presented themselves as determined and patriotic, as a means of mediating their existence in a changing environment that was becoming increasingly hostile to social dancing, and to dance hostesses in particular.

Social Dancing Ban: The Reinforcement of Nationalist Rule and Struggles for Control

As the possibility of a complete ban on social dancing loomed on the horizon, dance hostesses no longer considered themselves to be glamourous or even stern patriots. Instead, they depicted themselves as desperate and pitiful economic victims. After the Sino-Japanese War, a civil war broke out between the Communists and Nationalists, as China sought to deal with issues such as displaced families, refugees and hyperinflation which featured prominently in the everyday lives of ordinary people. The Nationalist government struggled for control as they faced pressing threats from the Communists who were active in bases within Nationalist-controlled areas via underground operations. To do so, the Nationalist government attempted to steer public debate and promote a frugal lifestyle for Chinese citizens as a way of gaining greater social control. The dance hostesses, meanwhile, continued to promote themselves in a way that was favourable to them.

Fateful Beauties

The continuing debate about whether social dancing was inappropriate during a time of national crisis changed abruptly from a relatively minor matter to a prominent legal and political argument after the Sino-Japanese War. As Ma Jun and Andrew Field illustrate in their research, this political and legal debate was

triggered by a petition, from members of the People's Political Council, calling for dance halls to be banned in 1947 (Ma, 2005: 25-29). Political Council member Zhang Zhijiang (張之江 1882-1969) from Hebei headed a 46-person petition requesting that the government ban dance halls in 1946, in order to improve the moral character of society (Ma, 2005: 25-29). The petition argued that social dancing corrupted people's virtue, the fundamental quality needed to serve and defend one's country. Hence, dance halls and social dancing were posing a threat to the post-war situation, when people's livelihoods, and the stability of the country, were still uncertain. Fearing that the petition might be rejected, a revised version, which requested local governments to take discretionary measures instead of enforcing a total ban, was eventually put forward and passed (Ma, 2005: 27-28).

Dance hostesses continued to write to gain sympathy during this period. One hostess-writer, named Yao Ju 姚菊 wrote about how she was approached by a man who asked her to go to bed with him during work. She claimed that he smiled at her first, and she looked back at him flirtatiously. They began talking, and after a short while she claimed that his hand was all over her body. Yao felt embarrassed and pushed his hand away. He then proceeded to ask her to go to a hotel room with her. When she declined to do so, he was angered and left after hurling abuses at her. Yao wrote that she was very saddened by this encounter, and ended the entry by questioning why dance hostesses were getting this kind of treatment, whereby they were treated as though they were worthless (*Haitian*, 1947: 2).

Similarly, another dance hostess, Wu Rongrong 吳蓉蓉, also portrayed herself as a reluctant yet defiant plaything of men, and a hard worker. She claimed that dance hostesses only joined the profession in the first place because of economic reasons, and many patrons knowingly took advantage of dance hostesses for their own selfish reasons. In her newspaper column, Wu described how she encountered hypocritical men. One patron in particular appeared to be from an upper-class background, as he wore nice clothing and was well-behaved. Yet he asked her to become his mistress and offered to pay her for sexual services. Wu claimed that she was angered and appalled by his gestures. She wrote that she said to his face that he probably got his money for nothing, while she earned every penny from hard work and sweat. As such, Wu

claimed that she was more honourable than he was. She further wrote that although she had little education, and lacked exposure and experience in society, she was a hard worker who was willing to put in the effort for financial returns. She concluded that if she had other opportunities, she would be more than happy to leave the dance hostess life (*Wenfan zhoubao*, 1946: 5).

More importantly, the idea that the dance hall ban might cause problems for the economy, and might have huge financial repercussions on individuals in the social dancing industry, was picked up by dance hostesses. Specifically, hostess-writers emphasised the need for them to survive and make financial contributions to their families. Dance hostess Hong Lian 泓蓮 wrote that she was extremely shaken when she first received news of the potential ban. She claimed that she immediately thought about the issue of survival, which would become the biggest problem. In her column, Hong had agreed that dance halls had now become degenerate places for young men and women, and that those who frequented them had often abandoned their careers and studies. She argued that a sudden ban on dance halls would adversely affect the lives of dance hostesses, as most of them did not possess any useful skills for re-employment. Moreover, despite yearning to improve as human beings, Hong claimed to have felt that no-one had given them any help or opportunity to advance themselves (*Funü*, 1947: 23).

Dance hostesses wrote letters to editors of newspapers and magazines, asking for sympathy and help, claiming that they too wanted a better life by quitting their jobs, but reality often determined that they remain employed as dance hostesses. A group of them wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper saying that they were just a group of weak and vulnerable women who were sacrificing their youth and dignity—owing to the harshness of reality—to become the playthings of men. Moreover, the uncertainty of the future of social dancing and dance halls in Shanghai had made their lives and jobs even more difficult, resulting in them being further exploited by the owners of dance halls. These women explained that at least half of their total income was given to the owners of dance halls, or paid as tax, and the remainder was not enough to keep their families alive. Although the women wanted to leave their jobs as dance hostesses, they found it very difficult to secure alternative employment because society would not support insecure women like them (*Minsheng*, 1948: 18-19).

The dilemma as to whether a dance hostess should quit social dancing is evident in other self-portrayals. Shanghai dance hostess, Zhang Kezhen 張克禎, wrote that while she thought the ban on social dancing might be a good opportunity for her to finally give up her career as a dance hostess, she also would find it very difficult to go back to her uncle's place in Changshu 常熟. The original plan had been to quit social dancing and keep house for her uncle, who sold his artwork for a living. Yet, when she had recently returned to Changshu, she had found her uncle so poor that he could no longer afford to buy drawing materials. Nor could he, wrote Zhang, find a stable job as a primary school teacher. Although she really wanted to quit social dancing, she found herself trapped in her career as a dance hostess because it could at least pay the bills (*Xiandai funü*, 1945: 18). When a potential national ban on dance halls was announced, there was increasing competition for attention and approval from patrons amongst dance hostesses. Their narratives, which emphasised their economic vulnerability, contributed to the overall public debate about the ban, and helped them attract public support and sympathy.

Dance hostesses used the best means at their disposal to remain employed, portraying themselves as vulnerable women. In their research, both Ma and Field discuss, in detail, how thousands of dance hostesses participated in a mass protest that unexpectedly turned into a violent riot on January 31, 1948 (Ma, 2005, 116 - 152; *Shenbao*, 1948a: 4). Unfortunately, this unforeseen event turned the public against the dance hostesses, who soon became associated with violence and destruction.

Despite this, dance hostesses continued to narrate their misfortunes even after the 1948 dance hostess riot. Some claimed that they were innocent, and attempts were made by hostess-writers to further narrate themselves as victims and weak women who were caught up in politics despite their daily struggle just to get by. A hostess-writer, named Wang 王, sought help and vented her frustration by writing to the editor of a periodical, detailing what happened to her on the day of the riot. Wang started her letter by saying that she was the most pitiful worker (*zui kelian de zhiyezhe* 最可憐的職業者). She said that she was a refugee who was severely affected by the war, and only became a dance hostess to support her family. Her father had been missing for some years owing to the war, while her mother was very old, and her brother was too young to

work. Wang claimed that she went to the protest for the sake of her future, but she was only a weak woman and was wrongfully arrested by the police for being a rioter. Although she claimed that she was later released without charges, she was injured in the process, and her mother was so worried that she also became ill. Wang claimed that her family relied on the income she earned from pleasing men and making them happy, and that the ban on social dancing would have severe consequences for her and her family. She desperately wanted her voice to be heard through the publication of her letter, and wrote that it represented the little bit of hope she still had within her. By publicising the alleged injustice through her writings, Wang depicted herself as a victim, and a reluctant participant in a protest that she had no choice but to attend (*Lianhe huabao*, 1948: 1).

In light of other incidents of violent unrest, as well as protests and strikes that occurred during the same period, it was not difficult for the authorities in Shanghai and Nanjing to accuse the Communist Party of instigating this particular riot (*Shenbao*, 1948b: 4). Now dance hostesses were not only seen as morally corrupt due to their alleged decadent and extravagant behaviour, but also as unpatriotic, owing to their presumed association with the Communists, their use of violence, and their disregard for law and order. Perhaps unexpectedly, however, the government gave in to the demands of the dance hostesses, and dance halls remained open until the end of Nationalist rule in mainland China.

Conclusion: Narrating the Commercial Self

Narratives written by and about these hostess-writers add to the complex, yet rich and diverse picture of social dancing and dance hostesses during the republican period. Because of the harsh economic realities which plagued Shanghai during the 1930s and 1940s, dance hostesses had the individual and collective need to survive, and an underlying desire to gain acceptance from society. These women found themselves having to comply with the realities of being a dance hostess; they were available for hire and had to dance in close proximity to their patrons. As a result, they had to represent themselves in

certain ways in order to attract and retain attention, as well as entice existing and future patrons to hire them.

The ways in which they described themselves changed accordingly, and they actively tried to improve their image. An investigation into the self-portrayals of hostess-writers presents them as a group of women who were more complex and proactive than was previously thought. Before the Sino-Japanese war, the women generally portrayed themselves as either desirable, consumable commodities, gaining the attention of potential customers, or as pitiful victims who deserved the public's support and sympathy. During the war, hostess-writers viewed themselves as patriotic and enlightened women, whose existence did not preclude growing nationalistic sentiments. After the war, dance hostesses went on to describe themselves as economically vulnerable women in order to gain public sympathy and remain employed. As such, these hostesses demonstrated some degree of agency in their actions, and their self-portrayals suggest that they actively attempted to mediate their existence through writing in ways that worked in their favour.

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Amanda Zhang is a PhD student in the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Oxford.

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Aestheticism versus Utilitarianism: The Reception of the "Tragic" in 1930s Chinese Literary Discourse

Tian GU
Nankai University

Abstract

This study examines the construction of the Chinese literary discourse on tragedy in the 1930s, when the intertwining connections between literature and politics left a noticeable influence on the Chinese understanding of the concept. It approaches the subject from three angles: first, it reviews both theoretical discussions of the concept of tragedy and the literary practice of the tragic, exploring possible factors that have either promoted or prevented the application of theory to practice. Second, it traces the changing relationship between pragmatic and aesthetic perspectives during the formation of the Chinese intellectual discourse on tragedy, analysing its relevance to the inextricable link between literature and politics in the 1930s. Thirdly, it investigates the differences between the Chinese perception of tragedy and its foreign origins, presenting the constant interplay among several cultural, social, and political elements that affected the establishment of the 1930s Chinese tragic tradition. In doing so, this study demonstrates the particular features of the Chinese perception of the tragic in the 1930s, as well as the decisive role that socio-political factors played in manipulating the intellectual practices at the time.

Keywords: *the tragic, the 1930s Chinese literary field, theory and practice, aesthetics, pragmatic, utilitarian, literary realist.*

The Chinese appropriation of the term "tragedy" (*beiju*) dates back to the beginning of the 20th century, when a pronounced influx of Western theories and concepts began to satisfy the appetite of a new generation of Chinese intellectuals, helping them to redefine their literary tradition in the wider context of world literature. Modern Chinese literary discourse on tragedy takes its shape from a pressing cultural and social crisis besetting the Chinese at the

turn of the 20th century. The political imperative brought about by a series of military and diplomatic defeats against Western forces urged modern Chinese intellectuals to reflect upon the backwardness of Chinese culture and social institutions. As a result, literature has since then stood at the forefront of the campaign for an overall cultural and social revolution, and shouldered the compelling obligation to eradicate the "chronic disease" produced by old traditions that lasted for more than two thousand years, in order to "establish for Chinese politics a foundation for reformation at the artistic and literary level" (Hu, 1922: 4). Therefore, in the modern Chinese notion of tragedy, it is of primary importance to mirror social realities to the greatest extent possible so that people can identify themselves in them. This pragmatic standpoint attempts to shorten the distance between literature and reality, so that the former functions more as an ideological weapon to enlighten the people.

Modern Chinese intellectuals interpret the concept of tragedy from two main perspectives: one is in the theatrical domain, where tragedy functions as a dramatic form closely related to the emergence of a new genre in Chinese literature, namely, the spoken drama (*huaju*). The other is in the aesthetic domain, where tragedy (or more specifically, *the tragic*) operates as a literary or philosophical idea and offers possibilities for a cross-genre development of this notion in non-dramatic literature. This dual-focus approach is paralleled by the intertwining relationship between literature and politics, which was a complicated, yet lingering problem besetting scholarly debates on tragedy in republican China. Modern intellectuals distinguished themselves by their different understandings of the inextricable link between these two; "the function of literature in the social process, and the way in which it best fulfils this function" (Eberstein, 1989: 7), thus became common questions for those attempting to either assess or reinterpret a given literary phenomenon at a certain period of time.

This study focuses on the interplay between different critical trends during the formation of modern Chinese literary discourse on tragedy between 1928 and 1937, which is usually known and referred to as "literature of the thirties" (*sanshi niandai wenxue*) (see for example Lee, 1986: 421; Zhu, 2007:

120). The political concern over tragedy's role in social progress at the time makes it impossible to totally strip the Chinese perception of tragedy from the obvious pragmatic implications. Therefore, by examining theories, writings and critical views produced during this period, this study explores possible factors that have either promoted or prevented the application of theory to practice, as well as whether, and how, the long-standing problem produced by the intrinsic connection between literature and politics has left a noticeable influence on the Chinese understanding of the tragic.

Theoretical Discussion: The Function of Tragedy

The Chinese conceptualisation of tragedy in the 1930s was marked by the substantial and clear references to European theories and works. Scholars devoted themselves to translation and interpretation, particularly concerning the Aristotelian concepts of tragedy, such as *mofang* (imitation), *lianmin he kongbu* (pity and fear), *yanzhong* (seriousness), *dongzuo* (action), *guoshi* (tragic flaw), and *xuanxie* (purgation). Their discussions highlighted the artistic nature of tragedy, concern with tragedy's means of expression (through "imitation"), emotional effects (as "pity and fear"), and theme (of something serious and profound in man's spiritual world). Based on the primary understanding of Aristotle's definition of tragedy, scholars went further to debate the function of tragedy, from the perspective of both the aesthetic approach and the pragmatic approach, each with their own distinctive and different interpretations.

The Aesthetic Perspective

Discussions of the function of tragedy initially went hand-in-hand with the interpretation of the Aristotelian term "purgation" (*xuanxie*), which was at first perceived as an emotional effect of tragedy. Liang Shiqiu referred to *xuanxie* as

the essence of an artistic task,[1] and therefore explained Aristotle's definition as "containing both ethical and artistic elements" (Liang, 1928: 101) in terms of its emphasis upon tragedy's capability to "amuse the audience with a necessary cause of moral judgement" (*lunli de caipan*) (Liang, 1928: 102). In other words, Liang held that the usefulness of tragedy lay not merely in the emotions it aroused among the audience, but more importantly, in the process of cleansing when those emotions were stimulated, released, and finally healed through watching tragedies: "tragedy […] extricates people from heavy emotional burdens, making them more conscious and strong-minded" (Liang, 1927: 103).

Xiong Foxi provided three different meanings for *xuanxie*:[2] medically, it was a psychological or physical treatment; religiously, it was an emotional relief; and morally, it was a cultivated sense of justice. He suggested understanding this word as the "purgation of passions" (Xiong, 1933: 58),[3] which was based on his observation of the emotional experience of watching tragedies: "there are times when we shed tears upon seeing tragedies with extremely miserable plots; however, our hearts are filled not with pain but instead with a sense of unspeakable joy—why is that?" (Xiong, 1933: 57). This question pointed to the core matter of tragedy's emotional function from the reader-response perspective, and received different answers from contemporary scholars.

Zong Baihua referred to the emotional release offered by tragedy as its "beauty" (*mei*),[4] because people could "feel a sense of comfort and relief

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[1] Liang Shiqiu (1903-1987): essayist, literary theorist, translator; known for his advocacy of New Humanism under the influence of Irving Babbitt, as well as his contribution to the development of theories of literary criticism with regard to the May Fourth and New Culture literary tendencies.

[2] Xiong Foxi (1900-1965): playwright, educator, and practitioner of modern Chinese drama; well-acknowledged for his fundamental contribution to the development of spoken drama (*huaju*) in modern Chinese literature through rural drama experiments and volumes of theoretical discussions.

[3] He used these English words.

[4] Zong Baihua (1897-1986): philosopher, aesthetician; active participant in New Culture Movement. Received systematic training in philosophy in Germany; expert in Chinese aesthetics of experience (*tiyan meixue*).

besides the miserable experience" (Zong, 1926-28: 531-532). He further explained how the miserable and joyful experience worked on the audience: the former related to the sympathy people showed towards the tragic hero who was suffering from a setback—"the more frustration he is confronted with, the more grief it will stimulate among the audience due to the greatness they find in him"; the latter was aroused by witnessing the tragic hero's choice of death to free himself from spiritual or physical tortures. As Zong explained, "tragedy of this kind is capable of presenting life's complexity and hardships; it easily attracts people, with its focus upon the internal facets of human existence" (Zong, 1926-28: 533-534). Therefore, to Zong, the function of tragedy lay mostly in its offering of the "opportunity to rediscover life's in-depth conflicts in ordinary daily experience", because "the true essence of human existence is the everlasting struggle for the realisation of a value beyond life; it may bring destruction to life during this process, but at the same time, an emotional release as delight and nirvana" (Zong, 1934: 67).

Li Anzhai gave an unusual explanation of why tragedy seemed appealing to people.[5] He explained this appeal as a "sadistic" mentality (upon seeing others' misfortunes), or a "masochistic" mentality (the empathy and co-experiences of the painful sufferings of others), or the "distance of safety" (from real mental or physical suffering). He also explained the "unusual beauty" in certain fine tragedies: "[it is] a mentality of perfection [*yuanman xinli*] to harmonise all those emotional conflicts that are not easy to reconcile—a process through which a new 'unity' [*zheng*] and 'wholeness' [*quan*] is created" (Li, 1934: 87-88). To Li, the function of tragedy was the cultivation of an ideal life style which was neither self-indulgent (f*angren*) nor self-oppressive (*yizhi*):

> The benefit of watching tragedies is that one can share with the tragic heroes the same experience without the need to have actually undergone those tragic events; [by doing this people can] build up an attitude of following the categorical

[5] Li Anzhai (1900-1985): sociologist, anthropologist, ethnologist; specialised in the study of Tibetan tribe culture.

> imperative[6] of one's conscience that is motivated by one's own inner desires, rather than being subjected to the external constraints (Li, 1934: 94).

Zhu Guangqian regarded this emotional experience as a "tragic pleasure":[7] "The pain in Tragedy is felt and expressed, and as it is felt and expressed, its pent-up energy is discharged and relieved. The relief of this pent-up energy means not only the removal of high tension, but also the awakening of a feeling of vitality. So it gives rise to pleasure" (Zhu, 1987: 163-164). Zhu examined tragedy's function from the perspective of the spiritual uplift of mankind, which was "denied to him in the actual world of compromise and mediocrity" (Zhu, 1987: 88): "Tragedy, in a word, transports us from the actual world of ordinary experiences to an ideal world of great actions and strong passions, and thus cures us of the nausea of sordidness and mediocrity which our daily routine constantly produces in us" (Zhu, 1987: 188).

Qian Zhongshu based his elaboration of tragedy's emotional effects upon the critique of traditional Chinese dramas.[8] He compared "Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and Dryden's *All for Love*" with "Pei Jen-fu's *Rain in the Oil Trees* [*Wutong yu*] and Hung Shen's *The Palace of Everlasting Life* [*Changsheng dian*]" (Qian, 1935: 38) (yet without explaining why he chose them).[9] To him, these two Chinese dramas were not tragedies, because they were unable to uplift the audience to any higher level of emotional experience beyond sympathy—"the tragic characters […] are not great enough to keep us

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[6] He used the English words here.

[7] Zhu Guangqian (1897-1986): aesthetician, literary theorist and critic, translator; one of the pioneering forerunners for the foundation of aesthetic studies in 20th-century China. Most celebrated for his series of aesthetic monographs as well as his translated works of Plato, Goethe, Hegel and Croce.

[8] Qian Zhongshu (1910-1998): writer, literary scholar, famous for his broad knowledge of both Chinese and Western literary traditions; well-established in the field of cross-cultural literary creativity and studies.

[9] *Rain in the Oil Trees* (*Wutong yu*) is a four-act play written by Bai Pu (1226-1306) in the Yuan dynasty; *The Palace of Everlasting Life* (*Changsheng dian*) is a 50-scene play written by Hong Sheng (1645-1704) in the early Qing dynasty. Both of these plays tell the tragic love story of Princess Yang Yuhuan and the Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty.

at a sufficient psychical distance from them" (Qian, 1935: 38-39). Here, Qian shared the same opinion with Zhu Guangqian in suggesting that tragedy be "'distanced' and 'filtered' through the medium of art" (Zhu, 1987: 39), as "[m]oral sympathy often destroys distance and so spoils the effect of tragedy" (Zhu, 1987: 58). In this regard, Qian referred to the two well-celebrated Chinese tragedies—*Zhaoshi guer* (*The Orphan of Zhao*) and *Dou E yuan* (*The Injustice to Dou E*)—as examples. According to Qian, the emotional effects of these two plays were largely weakened by either the "characteristic poetic justice in the last act [of *Dou E yuan*]", or the unequal strength between the "competing forces" that led to the self-division of the protagonist Cheng Ying in *Zhaoshi guer* (Qian, 1935: 41-43). Consequently, Chinese dramas of this kind, as Qian claimed, needed to be separated from "real tragedies", because they failed to provide the audience "with the calm born of spent passions, or what Spinoza calls *acquiescentia*, with the workings of an immanent destiny" (Qian, 1935: 38).

The Pragmatic Perspective

The above discussions concentrated on the emotional function of tragedy; they explored the role certain sentiments played in helping the audience with either the transformation of daily ordinariness through artistic activities, or the cultivation of a positive attitude to life. In the meantime, another perspective prevailing during this time highlighted tragedy's function for the enlightenment of society. Ouyang Yuqian promoted a dramatic art presenting faithfully daily life and social reality: "theatre mirrors and is determined by society" (Ouyang, 1929: 2).[10] According to Ouyang, theatre reflected society in a way that helped to reconstruct and reradiate the true image of the world during the process of representation, and thus enabled people to know life and themselves better by providing new driving forces for their development—"this is the true mission for theatre" (Ouyang, 1929: 4). Therefore, he advocated "a new kind of drama

[10] Ouyang Yuqian (1889-1962): playwright, Peking opera actor and film director. He devoted much of his career to the discussion and practice of theatrical creativity, and was considered one of the founders of modern Chinese spoken drama (*huaju*).

[tragedy] that did not satisfy itself solely with recreation" (Ouyang, 1929: 5), since "the old dramatic form is no longer capable of conveying the feelings and thoughts of modern people" (Ouyang, 1929: 32-33).

Xiong Foxi directed his interpretation of tragedy's function to the Chinese literary and social realities in the 1930s. Tragedy, he claimed, was the most solemn artistic form of poetry, because it could stimulate people's consciousness of respect and sympathy: "We cannot help feeling empathetic towards those tragic heroes when watching Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Ibsen's *Ghosts*; we are more likely to experience a sense of awe out of pity when seeing Yue Fei being stabbed in the back in return for his loyalty to the country" (Xiong, 1933: 70-71).[11] However, emotions of this kind were lacking in China, which was at that time "a country where a pestilential atmosphere of coldness and gloominess prevails": "Look at the present China! Where exactly are sympathy and respect?" (Xiong, 1933: 71). Consequently, Xiong regarded tragedy as primarily a wake-up call for the nation: "We should brook no delay in raising and promoting the art of tragedy, if we want a silver lining and the drop of a sympathetic tear to be found in China" (Xiong, 1933: 71).

Zhang Min also saw tragedy as the reflection of social reality; he elaborated this point by discussing the relationship between the writer and his works.[12] In his opinion, the origin of tragedy lay in various kinds of "tragic realities" (*beiju de xianshi*), from the very beginning of primitive society to the civilised societies of today (Zhang, 1936: 2); hence, "tragedy was not a mere creation of the playwright's subjective will, but a reflection of the emotions and lives of those living in the actual scenes of tragic realties" (Zhang, 1936: 3). To Zhang, drama needed to interact with the audience and to stimulate certain emotions among them in order to achieve its dramatic effects: "The solemnity

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[11] Yue Fei (1103-1142): a Chinese military general and national folk hero in Southern Song dynasty. Famous for his bravery in the war between the Southern Song and Jin tribes. Despite great contributions to the defence of his country, Yue Fei was framed and put to death by the Southern Song government.

[12] Zhang Min (1906-1975): theorist and educator of dramaturgy, director; one of the founders of the Left League campaign.

[*yansu xing*] in tragedy's theme produces a serious attitude, which is one of the most important features distinguishing tragedy from other dramatic forms. Sympathy [*tongqing xing*] is also one of the emotions stimulated by tragedy; in fact, it can be found in tragedies of all ages, with its contents varying according to the changing times" (Zhang, 1936: 11-12). Based on this point of view, Zhang emphasised the playwrights' responsibility to ensure that the emotions and thoughts they were trying to convey had certain universal meanings, because "the more profound sympathy a tragedy is able to stimulate, the higher its value and the better its effects" (Zhang, 1936: 17).

The Shared Focus

As stated above, two different perspectives remained visible in the Chinese interpretation of the function of tragedy in the 1930s, as there existed both an aesthetic interest in tragedy's sublimation or idealisation of daily experience through artistic expressions (promoted by Zhu Guangqian, Zong Baihua, and Li Anzhai), and a pragmatic concern over tragedy's faithful presentation of social reality (advocated by Ouyang Yuqian, Xiong Foxi, and Zhang Min). However, these two perspectives were not exclusively confined to any particular groups of scholars; to be exact, it was not unusual for some "social realists" to also recognise certain aesthetic or philosophical features in the art of tragedy.

For example, Ouyang Yuqian, although not directly quoting Aristotle, acknowledged that "[t]he emotional experience of watching a tragedy involved both pity [*lianmin*] and fear [*kongju*]": "the former is the sympathy for the miserable circumstances the protagonist encounters, the latter is the empathy for the same situation falling upon the audience themselves. These emotions are extremely noble as it produces all the peace and comfort in the world" (Ouyang, 1929: 35). Apart from insisting on the faithful presentation of social reality, Ouyang also considered the capability to "purify the spirit" (*shi jingshen jinghua*) as one aspect of tragedy's function, hence the writer's role in artistic creativity: "The rich compassion provides an artist with both his title and the value of his works, which lies in the profound emotions he is able to evoke"

(Ouyang, 1929: 35).

Xiong Foxi shared a similar perspective. He held that "[w]e would easily sympathise with the characters in past great Western tragedies, whose good intentions were repaid by evil results; we would also easily be afraid of encountering the same miseries, especially when this empathy extends to the entire human race" (Xiong, 1933: 60). But Xiong tried to associate this emotional effect with some traditional Chinese ideas of morality: he perceived tragedy "from a moral perspective" (*daode de yanguang*), considering it to be functioning in a way which could cultivate a sense of justice (*zhengyi*) and conscience (*liangxin*) in the audience through a method called "like cures like" (*yi du gong du*): "the more the conscience is being cultivated, the stronger and healthier these emotions could be; the sense of justice would also be reinforced during this process" (Xiong, 1933: 60-61).

This may suggest a different view to that found in some existing Chinese scholarship, which divides intellectuals who discussed the concept of tragedy in the 1930s according to their membership in literary (but in fact largely political) groups or societies—the left-wing camp and the liberal camp[13]—and thus based these two camps' interpretations of the concept of tragedy on an anticipated bifurcation between literary utilitarianism and literary aestheticism (see for example Xie, 2014: 204-218; Zhu, 2007: 120-141; Qian, Wen & Wu, 1998: 191-214; Fan & Zhu, 1993: 561-620). According to this classification, scholars such as Ouyang Yuqian, Hong Shen, Ma Yanxiang, Xiong Foxi, and Zhang Min were the leftists and ought to possess a clear political intention in their literary propositions, while Liang Shiqiu, Zong Baihua, and Li Anzhai were the liberalists and should therefore keep a relatively neutral standpoint regarding the politicisation of literature. However, the above examination shows that the viewpoints between these two camps, at least in the reading of

[13] An organisation of leftist writers founded in Shanghai on March 1930; also known as the Left League (Zuolian). The major purpose was to promote proletarian art and socialist literature to support the ideological rivalry of the Communists against the Nationalist government. Used to be the largest literary group in the 1930s, with its active engagement in a series of running debates; it was disbanded in 1936.

the tragic, were not so sharply contrasted: the shared focus on the aesthetic features of tragedy, between the so-called "leftist school" and "liberal school", stands as an example. In this respect, certain "shared literary values cut across the membership lines of literary groups" (Denton & Hockx, 2008: 8) in the theoretical construction of the concept of tragedy at this time.

To sum up, modern Chinese scholars in the 1930s understood the function of tragedy mainly from two angles: the aesthetic perspective, concerned with the relationship between tragedy and emotional release, and the pragmatic perspective, concentrated on the relationship between tragedy and social reality. These two perspectives overlapped when acknowledging the emotional effects of tragedy and its spiritual benefit to the audience. This situation offered more space for the growth of a non-utilitarian perspective, either exploring the aesthetic attributes of tragedy or investigating the typical Chinese cultural mentality. However, taking into consideration the rising political concern over the role literature played in social transformation at this time, the question of whether and how these theoretical discussions actually influenced contemporary indigenous literary creativity awaits further examination.

Literary Practice: The Debate Between Aesthetics and Literary Realism

Modern Chinese theatre reached maturity (Nobel, 2003: 446) in the 1930s with the publication of Cao Yu's tragedies, which, inspired by Euro-American tragic traditions, were a "popular success" (Goldman & Lee, 2002: 239) both at this time and in the following decades. Cao Yu is generally regarded as one of the most successful modern Chinese playwrights.[14] Interpretations of his tragedies vary across time and literary trends; aesthetic and political perspectives alternate and compete with each other. This section examines the

[14] Cao Yu (1910-1996): penname of Wan Jiabao. One of the most important playwrights in modern Chinese literature; the forerunner of Chinese spoken drama (*huaju*). Major plays include *Leiyu* (*Thunderstorm*, 1934), *Richu* (*Sunrise*, 1936), *Yuanye* (*The Wilderness*, 1937), and *Beijing ren* (*Peking Man*, 1940).

critical debates over Cao Yu's most famous tragedy, *Leiyu* (*Thunderstorm*, 1934), for a concrete demonstration of how the playwright's efforts to "transplant the European stage" (McDougall & Louie, 1997: 28) of the tragic to China were interpreted and accepted by his audience in the 1930s. The contention between aesthetic purposes and political concerns in assessing the play signified, to a large extent, a contemporary critical trend which saw the conflation of debates on aestheticism and realism, and thus served as an example of the actual impact of this conflation on the interpretation of the tragic in the 1930s Chinese literary field.

Leiyu and its Foreign Inspiration

Having a high status in modern Chinese literature, *Leiyu* is referred to as "the most famous dramatic work of the pre-war period and possibly the most performed play in the modern Chinese theatre" (McDougall & Louie, 1997: 177).[15] It was finished in 1933 and first published in 1934, and was followed shortly thereafter by several stage performances in both China and Japan, eliciting positive responses (for details, see Zhang, 2003: 42-57; McDougall & Louie, 1997: 177). The dramatic structure develops around a series of chaotic events, presenting the disintegration of a patriarchal family triggered by incestuous passion, moral degradation, ferocious revenge, and predestined retribution. The capitalist and coalmine owner, Zhou Puyuan, drove away the servant maid, Shiping, whom he formerly seduced, so that he could marry a young girl from another wealthy family. Some thirty years later, the eldest son of the Zhou family, Zhou Ping, had secret sexual relationships with both his stepmother, Fanyi, and the servant girl, Sifeng, not knowing that the latter, who was pregnant with his child, was, in fact, his half-sister. On the other hand, Zhou Puyuan was in fierce confrontation with a group of workers from his coalmine, and his unrevealed second son with Shiping, Lu Dahai, was the

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[15] A four-act play depicting the sudden exposure of the unrevealed secrets and sins in a big feudal family, and the destruction of the family members, who were victims of uncontrolled passion, oppression, revenge, and incestuous love. First published in *Wenxue jikan* (*Literary quarterly*) 1, no.3 (1934): 161-244.

leader of the strike action. In order to dissuade the youngest son, Zhou Chong, from having affection for Sifeng, Fanyi called the girl's mother, Shiping, to the Zhou house to take her daughter away; subsequently, the complex relationships among these characters were gradually revealed, leading them to their respective tragic ends.

Cao Yu's critics associated *Leiyu* with various foreign models. Li Jianwu pointed out two implicit European inspirations—Euripides's *Hippolytus* (428 BC) and Racine's *Phèdre* (1667)—as borrowings for the incestuous story between stepmother and stepson, together with the psychological description of the female character, Fanyi, as a woman driven by a strong desire for revenge (Li, 1936: 120-122).[16] Tian Han referred to *Leiyu* as "a mixture of several famous dramas",[17] such as "Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* [429 BC], Ibsen's *Ghosts* [1881], and Galsworthy's *Strife* [1909]" (Tian, 2000: 287).[18] Other critics like Ouyang Yuqian, Guo Moruo,[19] and Zhou Yang,[20] all regarded *Leiyu* as a tragedy of fate (*mingyun beiju*), which bore great similarity to the ancient Greek tragedies (see Tian & Hu, 1991: 706, 760, 828).

[16] Li Jianwu (1906-1982): writer, dramatist, and literary critic; member of The Literary Association (Wenxue yanjiu hui), leader of the drama movement in Shanghai during the Anti-Japanese War; known for his distinctive use of romanticism in the expression of the characters' inner activities.

[17] Tian Han (1898-1968): playwright, poet, literary critic and activist, pioneering figure in modern Chinese theatre, one of the founders of The Creation Society (Chuangzao she) and League of Left-Wing Writers (Zuoyi zuojia lianmeng); major works include *Kafei dian zhi yiye* (*A Night in a Café*, 1922), *Huohu zhiye* (*The Night the Tiger was Caught*, 1924), and *Nangui* (*Return to the South*, 1929).

[18] Tian Han, "Baofengyu zhong de Nanjing yitan yipie" ("A Glance at the Art Circle of Nanjing in the Storm"), first published in *Xinmin bao rikan* (*Journal of Xinmin Newspaper*), June 9, 10, 12, 14, 29 (1936), reprinted in *Tian Han quanji, di shiwu juan, wenlun* (Complete *works of Tian Han, vol. 15, Literary Criticism*) (Shijiazhuang: Huashan wenyi chubanshe, 2000), 282-96.

[19] Guo Moruo (1892-1978): poet, historian, archaeologist, one of the leading writers in 20th Chinese literature; especially well-known for his contribution to modern and contemporary Chinese academic traditions. His well-established works were collections of poems such as *Nüshen* (*Goddess*, 1921), *Xingkong* (*Star Skies,* 1923), and historical plays such as *Quyuan* (1942), and *Hufu* (*The Tiger Tally*, 1942).

[20] Zhou Yang (1908-1989): literary theorist and activist, translator; one of the leaders of the League of Left-Wing Writers (Zuoyi zuojia lianmeng); advocate of Marxist theories and the Soviet literary realist approach.

However, the playwright himself hesitated to acknowledge this connection. Shortly after the publication of *Leiyu*, Cao Yu clearly rejected the idea of relating this play to any particular foreign work or author: "To be honest, this [the idea that I am a follower of Ibsen and that certain parts of the play are inspired by Euripides's *Hippolytus* or Racine's *Phèdre*] has more or less surprised me. […] I have tried my best but still do not reckon there is any intentional imitation of any author in this play" (Cao, 1996b: 5).[21] On the other hand, Cao had admitted his indebtedness to ancient Greek plays before this declaration: "Someone claims that there is an influence from Ibsen in this play [*Leiyu*], but I would rather say there is an influence from ancient Greek plays" (Cao, 1935: 35). He further explained this influence in a later article by referring to the use of the Prologue and Epilogue to "function more or less as a Greek chorus in leading the audience into a wider sea of emotions and thoughts" (Cao, 1996b: 14). These somewhat self-contradictory statements showed Cao's ambiguous attitude toward the foreign influences he received, the motivation of which gave room to some speculation.

A Tragedy of Fate, a Social Tragedy, or Something Else?

Regarding Cao Yu's reluctance to acknowledge his foreign inspiration, Joseph Lau suggests that it may be because he mistakenly confused "the question of influence with imitation"—the latter of which "he was ashamed [of]" (Lau, 1970: 8). According to Wang Lieyao, the well-internalised incorporation of foreign influences in Cao's literary practices makes it "relatively hard to trace and orient any single foreign writer in his artistry" (Wang, 2002: 361); hence to simply associate him with any individual writer is largely one-sided. Another option this study would like to suggest is that Cao Yu wanted to stress his disagreement with certain contemporary interpretations in the reading of his play, as a further look at those comments *Leiyu* received in the 1930s shows that there were significant differences between the critics' reviews and the playwright's own intentions.

[21] Cao Yu, "*Leiyu* xu" (The preface to *Thunderstorm*), first published in 1936. It was reprinted in Tian and Liu (1996: 5-15).

One of the prevailing opinions in the 1930s was that *Leiyu* was a tragedy of fate, which resulted in a mixed reception from critics. Li Jianwu considered the concept of fate (*mingyun guannian*) “the most powerful, invisible yet penetrating force” (Liu, 1936: 116-17) in *Leiyu*. He differentiated it from that of the ancient Greek tragedies, in that the concept of fate in this play was presented not as retribution from the heavens but as an impulse for revenge—first in Zhou Fanyi and then in Lu Dahai—which served as “the hidden impetus to the plot development” (Liu, 1936: 118). In view of this difference, Li held that the mainspring of *Leiyu* was not certain mysterious, unpredictable forces which operated outside human society, but “a complexity of personal relations and psychologies” that led the characters to their mental and physical destruction. Li thought this was a successful achievement for the playwright (Liu, 1936: 118).

In contrast, other scholars criticised this expression of the concept of fate and therefore questioned *Leiyu*’s value. According to Guo Moruo, what Cao attempted to write was “a Greek-style tragedy of fate”; this “old-fashioned perception of the tragic” no longer fitted into modern times when “people have already become masters of their own fortunes” (Guo, 1936: 45). As a result, Guo found the entire play to be “shrouded by a dense atmosphere of old moral values and hence lacking in initiative”, and attributed this weakness to “the playwright’s lack of awareness” of the present situation (Guo, 1936: 45). Tian Han also criticised the play for simply basing the series of tragic events on “irresistible fate” (*bu kekang de mingyun*). He proposed lending the play a more “critical” perspective—to “revise this anachronistic tragedy of fate [*yunming beiju*] into a social tragedy [*shehui beiju*]” in order to “be responsible towards the audience” (Tian, 2000: 288), because “the young generation which has been toughened by the May Fourth Movement” would rather “fight bravely against those evil makers” than “submit to the cruelty of ‘fate’” (Tian, 2000: 287).

Such criticism became even stronger when *Richu* (*Sunrise*, 1936) appeared with its relatively more explicit thematic concern with the darkness

of society.[22] It was thus placed, by critics, in sharp contrast with *Leiyu*: Ouyang Yuqian regarded *Richu* as one step forward from *Leiyu*, because the latter "is embedded too much with a tragic sense of fate" (Ouyang, 1991: 706);[23] Zhou Yang termed the concept of fate in *Leiyu* as "fatalism" (*suming lun*), which "greatly reduce[d] the ideological significance of this play" and therefore was "extremely harmful to the general audience, whose simple minds would easily be affected by a notion of predestination and kinship enmity" (Zhou, 1937: 1316). It is noticeable that the above criticism more or less labelled the concept of fate in *Leiyu* as a spiritual heir to the ancient Greek tragedies, which they regarded as outdated and inappropriate for the social circumstances at the time. (Even Li Jianwu, who thought highly of this play, rejected the idea of providence or heavenly punishment.) This may, to some extent, explain the playwright's reluctance to admit his foreign influences, as Cao Yu used to be "frightened" by those criticisms which brought him feelings of "inferiority" and "incompetence" (Cao, 1996b: 6).

As a matter of fact, Cao Yu's own understanding of *Leiyu*'s theme and philosophical implications was totally different. In his view, what *Leiyu* conveyed was neither "an idea of karma" (*yinguo*) nor "heavenly retribution" (*baoying*), but a sense of "cosmic cruelty" (*tiandi jian de canren*) that was best represented by the sudden deaths of Sifeng and Zhou Chong, who did nothing to deserve such treatment (Cao, 1996b: 7). Here, Cao admitted the existence of a certain force behind such "cruelty" and "cold-bloodedness", but did not equate it with the Hebrew perception of God, the Greek dramatic notion of fate, or the modern concept of the "law of nature" (*ziran de faze*) (Cao, 1996b: 7). Rather, he depicted this "complex and yet primitive sentiment" as, vaguely, "an inexplicable mystery" (*moming qimiao de shenmi*) (Cao, 1935: 35) that was "too overwhelming and complicated to be either properly named or described

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[22] A four-act play written by Cao Yu in 1936, presenting the extravagance and decadence of metropolitan life; first published in *Wenji yuekan* (*Literary quarterly*) 1-4 (1936).

[23] Ouyang Yuqian, "*Richu* de yanchu" (The staging of *Sunrise*), first published in *Richu shouci yanchu tekan* (Special issue for the debut of *Sunrise*), 1937, reprinted in Tian and Hu (1991: 705-706).

of its true features" (Cao, 1996b: 7);[24] "this inexplicable mystery finally cost an innocent girl [Sifeng] her life. Couldn't this primitive psychology sometimes excite the heart and soul of civilised mankind and lead him towards an awareness of the deeper and more fathomless mystery in nature?" (Cao, 1935: 35). In this respect, Zhu Guangqian's comments provided another explanation of this thematic concern, that it "generally gives us the impression that there is in the universe a power which is neither controllable by human will, nor intelligible to human understanding, and that this power is blind to the distinction of right and wrong and it crushes the virtuous as well as the wicked" (Zhu, 1987: 245).

However, Cao Yu's contemporary critics did not accept this viewpoint. Rather than examine its largely abstract philosophical ideas,[25] scholars in the 1930s were more interested in exploring the realist elements in *Leiyu* that related to heated social issues such as personal freedom, class struggle, and social transformation. Shortly after *Leiyu*'s publication, comments were made on the pragmatic aspect of the play, considering it a condemnation of the capitalist social system: "it is an exposure of a Chinese capitalist family with a penetrating analysis that goes deep into their sins, covered by wealth" (Bai, 1935a); "the obscene and evil ugliness of the capitalist family is ruthlessly revealed through the presentation of their complicated love affairs; the fierce thunderstorm in the summer's night is indicative of the crumbling of this class" (Bai, 1935b: 39). Other reviews added an anti-feudal significance to the play's characters: first, Fanyi, who as a female victim of feudalist morality (Zhang, 1939), revealed with her death the cold-bloodness and the crisis of the feudalist system (Zhou, 1937); then, Lu Dahai, who, by confronting Zhou Puyuan, signified the rise of the much oppressed working-class (Liu, 1936) in contrast to the decay of the feudalist forces.[26] According to these criticisms,

[24] English translation taken from Lau (1970: 13).

[25] Zhang Geng once described his reading experience of *Leiyu* as "unempathetic" and "alienated", and that it made him unable to identify with the author's world. See Zhang (1936: 60).

[26] As a matter of fact, the characterisation of Lu Dahai was more often used as a negative example to show *Leiyu*'s weakness, because some reviews held that the portrayal of him only as a part of a complex kin relationship, rather than a representative of social conflicts, was

Leiyu as a social tragedy needed to make the best use of its subject matter in exploring "the confrontation between two social forces" rather than "the entanglement among kinship" in order to evoke "the predestined collapse of an out-dated feudalism" (Zhou, 1937: 1317).

This perspective was in line with the pragmatic view promoted by Ouyang Yuqian, Xiong Foxi, and Zhang Min in theoretical discussions about the function of tragedy as a means of social enlightenment and critique. The impact of this viewpoint is long-term, as the historical background of the play remains one important part of the analysis in later research: scholars refer to *Leiyu* as "the tragedy of the old marriage system, the feudal family structure, the oppression of the lower classes, the corruption of urban capitalists, and the frustrations of young intellectuals" (Lee, 1986: 465), which were "the most sensitive issues involved in the May Fourth Movement" (Lau, 1970: 7). To them, this was one of the reasons for its popularity among the Chinese in the 1930s, when the audiences "[were] themselves trapped in an ongoing historical thunderstorm" (Wang, 2010: 507; see also Lau, 1970: 6; Nobel, 2003: 447).

This interpretation was, again, in sharp contrast to Cao Yu's purpose of writing. Two years after the publication of *Leiyu*, Cao referred to those literary realist readings and criticisms as being "far beyond my own understanding of this play" (Cao, 1996a: 23),[27] because it was not his intention "to correct, criticize, or satirize anything" (Cao, 1996b: 7):[28] "What I wrote was a poem—a narrative poem that, […] in spite of its involvement with something real and practical (such as the strike), was by no means a social problem play" (Cao, 1935: 34). On the contrary, he insisted on the thematic concern over human beings' vain struggle under the dominance of a mysterious external force: "I portrayed the universe [*yuzhou*] in *Leiyu* as a cruel well [*canku de jing*] in which

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"gloomy" and thus "a complete failure". See the comments in Tian (2000: 287-288) and Zhou (1937: 1317).

[27] Cao Yu, "*Leiyu* ri yiben xu" (Preface to the Japanese translation of Thunderstorm), first published in the Japanese version of *Leiyu* by Sairen Press in 1936, translated and reprinted in Tian and Liu (1996: 22-24).

[28] English translation taken from Lau (1970: 6).

a person—no matter how hard he cried out in pain—could simply find no way to escape once falling into this dark hole" (Cao, 1996b: 8). Here, Cao valued the aesthetic distance between the audience and his play; he suggested taking *Leiyu* as "a myth" or "a story" (Cao, 1935: 34) in order to better appreciate the "poetic sentiment" (*shiyang de qinghuai*) (Cao, 1996b: 14). To him, "the plot develops in a way too horrible to be emotionally accepted in its secret, unknowable implications" (Cao, 1996b: 14); therefore, the Prologue and Epilogue served as a "veil of emotional distance so as to mitigate the intensity of the emotional and rational shock" (Cao, 1996b: 14).[29] Yet this proposal was nevertheless ignored: both the Prologue and Epilogue were deleted from the script after the first few stage performances both out of consideration of the play's length, and their "irrelevance" to the theme (See Cao, 2000: 384; Wang, 1994: 244-245). Zhou Yang also suggested not deliberately creating a so-called "emotional distance" between the audience and the play, because it would be better to "just let the audience be frightened and shocked by the sinfulness revealed before them, and cry out without control for the coming of a thunderstorm that shakes everything!" (Zhou, 1937: 1317).

Behind the Disputes

According to later scholars, the controversy over *Leiyu*'s theme revealed a paradox regarding the acceptance of this play in the 1930s Chinese literary field, as audiences were engaged in reading and appreciating *Leiyu* with both "an unprecedented enthusiasm" and "an overwhelming tendency of misinterpretation" (Qian, Wen & Wu, 1998: 421). In fact, this problem emerged almost immediately after *Leiyu* was put on stage in 1935. The comments of the editors of *Zawen* (*Essay*) provided an example, as they noticed a big gap between the audience's reaction and the playwright's intention when the play was performed in Tokyo: "According to the actual effect of the performance, what the audience have sensed from the play is a good exposure of the reality and sarcasm of the declining class—this is far

[29] Ibid.

from the author's motive as stated below" (The Editors, 1935: 34). Some scholars consider this difference in interpretation as a "discrepancy between the author's subjective intention and his works' objective effect", and see it as rather "common" (Yue, 2015: 215) because "the separation between the author's spiritual world and the audience's horizon of expectation" leads to a divergence in the focus of literary interpretation (Wang, 1994: 244).

Yet, this study would like to suggest that this "paradox" revealed the opposition between the aesthetic and realist discourses in the reading of the tragic in the 1930s. As can be seen from the above analysis, it is clear that Cao Yu's original concern was more with the aesthetic features of the play; but a literary realist viewpoint concentrating on *Leiyu*'s intimate relationship with prevailing social issues was remarkably influential and somewhat triumphed in the field of literary criticism. It not only determined to a great extent the play's popularity, but also, in return, changed Cao's attitude. To Cao, the criticism of the "self-contradiction between his worldview and his artistic approach" (Zhang, 1936: 65) was so pervasive that it made him gradually become less resolute in negating the implication of social criticism in *Leiyu*: "Quite possibly, when I came close to finishing the play, it might be that I was seized by a sudden passion so overwhelming that I could not but seek to release it in vilifying the Chinese family system and society" (Cao, 1996b: 7).[30] This was perhaps in order to not be side-lined in literary circles.[31]

In summary, the literary realist viewpoint prevailed in the evaluation and acceptance of *Leiyu* in the 1930s. It obviously differed from the situation in contemporary theoretical discussions, where the pragmatic concern with

[30] English translation taken from Lau (1970: 6).

[31] Cao Yu completely converted to a standpoint of social criticism in the 1950s, and confessed his "backwardness" in *Leiyu* regarding the concept of fatalism. He revised the play, deleted the Prologue and Epilogue, and made Lu Dahai more distinctly a representative of the working class with strong political awareness. See the detailed discussion in Liao (1963: 81-99), and and Cao Yu's own accounts of his changing standpoint in Cao Yu, "Wo dui jinhou chuangzuo de chubu renshi" (Preliminary thoughts on how to proceed with my writing in the future), first published in *Wenyi bao* (*Newspaper on literature and art*) 3(1) (1950) and reprinted in Tian and Liu (1996: 44-48).

tragedy's socio-political function was less dominant in its relation to the aesthetic interpretation of the concept of tragedy. This has to be understood in the context of the reception of the tragic, and the Chinese literary and social circumstances of the 1930s, when, as summarised by later scholars, the emphasis on "the social function of literature and arts" (Tong, 1997: 2) required "a criticism and exposure" of social problems in literary creativity (Ge, 2014: 283). The literariness and artistry of *Leiyu* was easily ignored, and gave way to a rather secular and pragmatic interpretation.

Conclusion

This study has examined the construction of the Chinese literary discourse on tragedy in the 1930s, the characteristics of which can be summarised as follows.

First, the aesthetic and pragmatic readings of the tragic remained visible in both theory and practice. In theoretical discussions, the two perspectives focused on either the emotional or societal function of tragedy, and shared the same attitude to acknowledging certain aesthetic features of it. In literary practice, these two perspectives competed with each other for an authoritative interpretation of Cao Yu's tragic idea. The latter prevailed in literary criticism, and thus largely determined the reception of *Leiyu* among its contemporary audiences.

Second, regarding the formation of a modern Chinese tragic tradition in the 1930s, theory was not totally applied to practice, as the pragmatic perspective did not seem to offer any space for the aesthetic perspective in the contemporary reading of *Leiyu*. In other words, despite the coexistence of literary utilitarianism and literary aestheticism in theoretical discussions, the majority of critical reviews were concerned with the literary realist aspects of works written during this period, and therefore read them with regard to their social implications and significance regardless of the writers' political inclinations. The reception of *Leiyu* was indicative of this trend, where the

pursuit of aestheticism had eventually been interpreted from, and included in, the political realist concern.

Third, the Chinese reception of the tragic in the 1930s was not a simple issue of literary appropriation, but was largely determined by the interplay between several cultural, social and political elements which served as a direct response to socio-political transformation at the time. As a result, the 1930s Chinese tragic tradition is distinctive, and has certain secular, pragmatic features: rather than emphasising the ultimate existence of an omnipotent power beyond human control, it concentrated on revealing earthly matters resulting from certain prevailing social and political problems. This literary orientation connected the tragic with reality, rather than with mysterious, unpredictable forces that distanced tragedy from the audience's daily lived experiences. In this respect, Cao Yu's *Leiyu* has inherited features from the Greek perception of fate, but has received sharp criticism from the contemporary intelligentsia; this case serves as an example of the rejection of this Greek perception in the 1930s Chinese literary discourse.

As stated above, the Chinese appropriation of the tragic in the 1930s was permeated by an intricate and changing relationship between aesthetics and literary realism. This set the tone for modern Chinese understandings of tragedy, making it a unique literary appropriation and reflection of the Chinese experience of social and political transformation in the modern period. Rather than formulate a definition of tragedy, scholars at this time were more interested in exploring its function; in other words, they asked what the use of tragedy was, rather than what it actually is. Therefore, the idea of the tragic in 1930s Chinese literature was in the first place not an aesthetic approach, providing the audience with pity and fear to purify their minds and souls, but a tool that transferred sympathetic feelings of grief and indignation into a practical concern with current socio-political affairs, and into a desire to make a change. The 1930s Chinese reception of the tragic, in this case, served as one telling example of the intertwining relationship between literature and politics that besieged modern Chinese literary discourse at the time.

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Tian GU is a Lecturer in Literary and Cultural Studies in the College of Foreign Languages at Nankai University.

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The Ideological Function of "Positive Energy" Discourse: A *People's Daily* Analysis

Francesca Triggs

Abstract

Following its emergence as a popular social byword, in 2012 the term "positive energy" was adopted into frequent usage in Chinese political discourse. Previous studies have analysed the term's usage in a social context alongside a growing interest in positive psychology, resulting in a portrayal of its main function as that of spreading hope and optimism in the face of challenges. This study now seeks to understand the ideological function the term has served in the political sphere, arguing for a deeper understanding of positive energy discourse within a Gramscian framework of political consensus-building, aimed at reinforcing CCP hegemony. This is shown through an exploratory analysis of People's Daily Online *articles inspired by framing and content-analysis theory, which considers the thematic components, sub-frame problems and actors of the term since the beginning of Xi Jinping's time in power. The results of this analysis reveal four key trends. These are a focus on challenges which undermine Party dominance; an emphasis on ideas of social responsibility, and communality of interest between the state and the people; a promotion of moral action a grassroots level; and the advocation of state authority over the Internet. The results demonstrate how positive energy discourse has encouraged a popular consensus around CCP hegemony, creating a Gramscian "common sense" due to its grassroots origins, association with an increasingly popular positive psychology movement, and in-built connotations of happiness.*

Keywords*: positive energy, consensus-building, Gramsci, hegemony,* People's Daily*, framing theory.*

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Introduction

In August of 2012 the term "positive energy" (*zhengnengliang* 正能量), began to appear in the headlines of China's political mouthpiece, the *People's Daily*. This followed its spread as a cultural keyword at the grassroots level; it was rated as the most popular catchphrase of the year by leading linguistics magazine *Yaowen jiaozi* 咬文嚼字 (Shi, 2013). While its aspirational nature has since been used by the government to spread hope in the face of challenges and suffering (Sun, 2013), alternative sources describe its adoption by the state as a mechanism of control against negativity and dissent (Bandurski, 2014). These varying interpretations begin to paint the picture of an apparently simple term, coined by the people, which has gone on to serve a more complex political agenda.

The origins of the term "positive energy" can be traced back to the field of quantum physics, where it was used in descriptions of the world as a battleground between positive and negative energy (Yang, 2016). It was later adopted by British psychologist Richard Wiseman, whose self-help book *Rip It Up* (2012) was published in Chinese with the term as its title. Wiseman refers to concepts of competing energy forces outlined by physicists, but in this case, in relation to the human body, describes how modifying one's behaviour can also improve levels of happiness. This places the emergence of positive energy at the grassroots level, in line with a growing interest in positive psychology, which has been central to its rising popularity (Hird, 2016; Wielander, 2017). According to China's main online encyclopaedia, "positive energy" is now understood as a "healthy and optimistic, positive and progressive power and emotion, the positive behaviour of social life" (*Baidu baike*, n.d.).[1]

However, the focus of this paper is not the meaning of the term itself, but rather the ideological function it has served in Chinese official media. In line with Williams's (1985) understanding of a "cultural keyword", the term "positive energy" constitutes an area of social discussion, significant not so much for its actual meaning but rather how it has accrued power and effect as an ideological

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[1] Original text: "正能量"指的是一种健康乐观、积极向上的动力和情感，是社会生活中积极向上的行为."

tool. The term's popularity at the grassroots level coincided with the start of Xi Jinping's leadership, when it was adopted from popular culture into Chinese Communist Party (CCP) political rhetoric. Though use of the term had been widespread on the Internet even before this point, very little has been written in academic literature about the relevance of this emergence, and less still on the function it has served in political discourse.

Looking at its initial appearance in popular culture, Du's (2014) work examines how the emergence of the grassroots "positive energy" movement during the run-up to the 2012 Olympics called attention to the exemplary behaviour of ordinary people, rather than glorifying the elite medal-winners. Du interprets this initial "positive energy" movement as a new form of non-political patriotism, providing an understanding of the term in popular culture strongly resembling positive psychology and its belief in the progressive power of positive thoughts and actions. These grassroots origins are key to the ideological function the term played after its appropriation into the political sphere, a function which remains largely unexplored in academic literature until now.

The only discussion of the appearance of "positive energy" in political discourse can be found in Hird's (2016; 2018) work on the use of the term in public service advertising, in an analysis which looks at happiness in the context of the formation of China's capitalist society. Forming a basis for his argument is Yang's (2013) work on the Chinese state's "psychologisation" mode of governance, which is argued to use positive psychology to encourage optimism and positivity amongst the people in the face of socio-economic problems. Hird builds on the idea that such happiness, and the emphasis on the individual typical of neo-liberal psychology, has been promoted by the government in part as a way of placing responsibility for social problems on the individual, turning public dissatisfaction away from the government. He develops Yang's ideas by offering a critical analysis of the appearance of "positive energy" in public service advertising, looking at how it has helped form subjectivities across China's different socio-economic stratas, leading to what Illouz describes as "new hierarchies of emotional well-being" (2007:73). Hird suggests that the discursive function of positive energy in this context differs from ideas of positive thinking in the West, in its emphasis on morally responsible behaviour,

as opposed to inward emotional insight, noting how state campaigns have linked the term with "citizenship values such as patriotism" (2018: 114).

While Hird's (2018) work marks the first step away from understanding "positive energy" as merely a cultural byword, offering an insight into its new political function, his study focuses mainly on public service campaigns. The current study complements his work by offering an alternative angle through which to understand positive energy discourse by looking at the term's appearance in official media, in particular the CCP's primary online political mouthpiece, the *People's Daily Online*. The current study differs largely in its main argument, which is that key to the ideological function of positive energy discourse is the fostering of a popular consensus, with the ultimate aim not only of shifting responsibility from the government to the individual for social problems, nor of merely encouraging the right behaviour among the people, but more importantly of consolidating state hegemony.[2] Hird's work is helpful, however, in providing a basis from which to understand how the term "positive energy" is suited to play this consensus-building role, key elements of which are its call for individual participation, association with an increasingly popular positive psychology movement, and in-built connotations of happiness (2018).

Providing an exploratory understanding of the ideological function of positive energy discourse in the *People's Daily Online*, this article argues that the ideological significance of positive energy discourse lies in how it addresses challenges to CCP authority by encouraging consensus through ideas of social responsibility and commonality of interest, active popular participation, and the importance of state control. This idea of consensus differs from Yang's collective "fake happiness" (2013), acting rather to support CCP authority as a response to the threat of the competing structures of belief which accompanied marketisation. In developing this argument, this article touches on how these trends have been supported by the term's initial emergence as a grassroots movement drawing attention to individual moral models (Du, 2014), as well as its association with positive psychology and happiness (Hird, 2016; 2018).

[2] In this study, the word "consensus" is used to describe a general agreement among the population.

The above arguments are reached through a content analysis of articles in the *People's Daily Online*, inspired by concepts from framing and agenda-setting theory. Although limited in its application of these methodological theories, the study provides at least an exploratory understanding of positive energy discourse. In so doing, it complements recent sociological and political analysis of the current trajectory of China's ideological propaganda campaigns, and fills a gap in the understanding of the political usage and significance of positive energy discourse.

The article will first outline theoretical considerations, followed by the methodological approaches used to analyse positive energy discourse in the *People's Daily Online*. It will then highlight key results of the data analysis, providing some initial explanations for empirically observed trends exhibited in extracts of *People's Daily Online* articles, and conclude with suggestions for future research.

Theoretical Considerations

Central to this study is Gramsci's (1999) authoritative work on consensus-building ideology, which provides a framework within which to analyse how the function of positive energy discourse has contributed to a wider ideological campaign in support of Party hegemony. The understanding of ideology in this article is that of a set of doctrines crafted by a ruling political group which serve "to establish and sustain relations of domination" (Thompson, 1990: 56). Hegemony is discussed in line with the Gramscian understanding of the accepted dominance of the ruling elite over society. This is achieved through a process of "consensus armoured by coercion" (Gramsci, 1992: 263), the consensus element arising from the acceptance of an ideology as "common sense" by the people (Gramsci, 1999: 625). Compared with "good sense" which resembles coherent philosophy, Gramsci's idea of "common sense" "enters the consciousness of the masses as part of their confounded and fragmentary" understanding (Rupert, 1995: 30). It is this "common sense" nature of positive energy discourse which has allowed it to build consensus among the people, in what this article shows to be support for CCP hegemony.

The Gramscian framework has inspired a field of literature which looks at its application in contemporary Chinese politics. Just prior to completion of this research, Gow (2017) published an article of particular interest which used this same framework to analyse the emergence of Xi Jinping's "Core Socialist Values" (*shehuizhuyi hexin jiazhiguan* 社会主义核心价值观), identifying the latter as falling under a broader umbrella of consensus-building ideology epitomised by the "Chinese Dream" (*Zhongguo meng* 中国梦) discourse. Gow describes how the "parameters of consensus are initially determined by the state vision" with Gramscian hegemony primarily relying "on the negotiation of consent and active participation by citizens through civil society institutions, which includes […] media outlets" (Gow, 2017: 94). This understanding of the importance of citizen participation and the media for attaining popular consent is key to positive energy discourse, as discussed in the research analysis of this article. This in turn complements Li's work (2015), which applies Gramscian theory in its analysis of how the Chinese Dream has been used to achieve social hegemony when confronted with the effects of marketisation. While this suggests that positive energy discourse may play a similar role to that of the Core Socialist Values and the Chinese Dream, a comparison of these is beyond the scope of this article due to space limitations. It should also be noted that, unlike these official CCP slogans, "positive energy" originated at the grassroots level and was only adopted into political usage subsequently. For present purposes, the use of Gramscian theory in these analyses serves to illustrate its application to modern day Chinese politics, providing a framework through which to understand state efforts to consolidate its ruling authority.

The development of consensus-building ideology must be understood in the context of challenges to Party hegemony, a comprehensive overview of which is provided in academic literature. Zhang (2011) discusses how hegemony-endorsing ideology has been threatened by the liberalisation of the media, resulting in mass access to information and alternate beliefs which undermine CCP authority. This issue is further outlined in Mahoney's (2014) work, which describes competing "metanarratives", or overarching structures of belief, which have emerged as a challenge to Party dominance during the course of marketisation. At the time of its adoption in 2012, the threat of instability caused by such challenges would have been heightened by the upheaval surrounding Xi Jinping's transition to power. Within the context of

these challenges, this article will explore how acceptance of government control over the media, and the strengthening of state approved ideology, are key functions of "positive energy" discourse. As well as threatening state control over popular ideology, the sociological changes resulting from China's move towards a market society also act to weaken CCP authority. Kleinman notes that emerging middle-class interests "represent a set of quests for meaning in everyday life among ordinary Chinese" which could radically alter Chinese society, describing a growing pressure on the state to cater to individual needs as well as those of the collective (2010: 1075). Yan's (2011) work further highlights a trend towards individualisation at the expense of the collective, resulting in what Lam (2015) describes as a de-stabilising "morality deficit" in Chinese society which has further compounded a breakdown in social trust. Positive energy discourse can be seen as contributing to a narrative that seeks to address the metanarrative of marketisation, and the ensuing unhappiness among Chinese people.

Positive energy discourse has been identified as playing a key role in the Chinese happiness narrative (Hird, 2018), which is relevant when one considers the relationship between happiness and social control outlined in academic literature. The element of emotional control implicit in the development of positive energy discourse adds another dimension to its role as a consensus-building ideology. Wielander (2016a; 2016b; 2017) explores how the concept of positive psychology resonates with Chinese notions of self-cultivation in working to achieve a "correct" mindset, describing ideas of a state-imposed "normative happiness" (2016a), while Ahmed's (2010) work provides a perception of happiness as something which demands universal consensus while simultaneously lending itself to outside definition by dominant social powers. Correct behaviour is promoted within established understandings of the desirability of happiness and positivity which, combined with the grassroot origins of the term "positive energy", and associations with an increasingly popular positive psychology movement, creates a Gramscian "common sense", acting as a powerful consensus-building tool.

Methodology

The primary objective of this research is the identification of the main ideological function of positive energy discourse in the *People's Daily Online*. The *People's Daily Online* was chosen as the sole primary research source first for its significance as a media source. The *People's Daily* is widely viewed as the mouthpiece of the CCP (Wu, 1994), and has been analysed as such in many previous studies (Duckett & Langer, 2013; Li & Hovy, 2014; Xue, 2012; Zhao, 2014). It can be assumed that articles published through this source are representative of the wider political function of positive energy discourse. The second reason was practical. The *People's Daily Online* is easily accessible from outside China using the Dow Jones Factiva database, which allows for easy analysis of publications.

In order to gain an understanding of the main ideological function of positive energy discourse, a content analysis of a select group of articles was conducted. The design of this analysis was inspired by concepts from agenda-setting theory and framing theory, which are well suited to analysis of media forms and the way in which key ideas are conveyed through them, whether it be through themes, words or descriptions of events. While agenda-setting theory looks mainly at how salient a given issue is in the media, framing theory goes one step further to focus on the way in which said issue is presented (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). The concept of framing has been applied to many areas of research, including some which focus on the *People's Daily*, demonstrating the importance of this source as a means to understand the official position on events.[3] To date, no framing analysis of positive energy in official discourse has been conducted.

The application of framing theory to this research lies in the premise that a typical frame selects a salient issue and develops this through the communication of a problem, its cause, a moral judgment and a solution (Entman, 2007). In this study, it is assumed that the frames identified have been deliberately "embedded" in political discourse in order to impose a certain

[3] See Xue (2012) for a comparative content analysis of the coverage of social emergencies in the *People's Daily* and Sina Weibo, and Duckett and Langer (2013) for an analysis of the media narrative on health care reform.

opinion or ideology on the audience (Kinder & Sanders, 1990: 74). Therefore, an analysis of the components of frames, or "sub-frame" elements (Matthes & Kohring, 2008), should help to form an overall understanding of the main ideological function of positive energy discourse. In taking this approach, this project echoes similar studies which have applied framing theory to a study of ideology. Bondes and Heep (2013) apply a framing approach in their analysis of how the state persuades the public that they are working for the common good in order to consolidate their ruling legitimacy, which Mahoney builds on in his assessment of the Chinese Dream narrative as a "framing discourse" (2014: 30). Framing theory plays a central role in determining the components of positive energy discourse, and how these come together to play an ideological function in the political media.

Using framing theory, several sub-research questions were identified to guide the data collection process. These include:

SQ1: What is the main thematic focus of positive energy discourse?

SQ2: What issues does positive energy discourse try to address?

SQ3: Which members of society does positive energy discourse relate to?

The first step of the data collection process involved identifying the target article group, consisting of Chinese language *People's Daily* publications from 2012, when the term was officially adopted into political discourse, to the end of 2016. The selection of articles for analysis was conditional on the appearance of the term "positive energy" in the title. The first reason for this was the practical need to narrow down the field of inquiry from the 9,842 articles which featured the term in the main article. The second was based on the premise that, due to its prominent placement in the article, a headline has the greatest influence on the initial association between concepts for the reader, rendering it "the most powerful framing device of the syntactical structure" (Pan & Kosicki, 1993: 59). Further analysis found 186 articles to be duplicates, and a further six to relate to "clean" energy rather than the term as understood in this study, leaving 540 articles for analysis.

The second element, and central primary research contribution, was the content analysis of all 540 articles. The unit of analysis selected was the entire article, although the primary emphasis was the context of the appearance of the term "positive energy". With regard to SQ1, it was assumed that each article had a central theme which could be classified under one of several categories of frame (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). For this project, a "theme" is understood as "an idea that connects different semantic elements of a story […] into a coherent whole" (Pan & Kosicki, 1993: 59). This contrasts with the idea of a central "topic". For example, if an article discussed how a particular book, in which a woman dedicated her life to serving the community, transmitted positive energy to society, while discussion of the book itself would be the topic of the article, the main theme would be "serving the community". When no clear overall theme was manifest, or when two or more separate themes were salient, that which dealt most directly with positive energy was considered. In addition, key sub-theme components were recorded to enable a more detailed qualitative analysis of trends within the frames. Finally, coding for the sub-frame elements, "problems" and "main actors", sought to answer SQ2 and SQ3 respectively. Only problems which were explicitly stated in the article were recorded. Due to space limitations, only one main "actor" was recognised in each article, and these were simplified to include only the key players in society. These included the "Government", the "People", the "Media" and "Enterprises".[4] These classifications allowed for a more focused interpretation of the appearance of "positive energy" in each frame.

It is important to state that this research was not able to carry out a content analysis to its fullest possible outcomes. In particular, the fact that all coding was carried out by the author alone leaves room for subjective interpretation as well as individual error due to a language barrier. This project must therefore be seen mainly as an exploratory analysis of positive energy discourse in a political context.

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[4] The names of these "actors" will be capitalised throughout the rest of the study. Reference to "Government", therefore, indicates the category of actor identified in the context of the framing analysis, while "government" is used is discussion to refer more generally to the Chinese government.

Results

1. Frames

SQ1: What is the main focus of positive energy discourse?

One of the central contributions of this project is the provision of frames through which to analyse positive energy discourse in the *People's Daily*. Following a thematic content analysis of all 540 articles, the main themes were grouped into 10 frames (table 1).

Frame	**Code**	**Main Theme**
Morality	CatM	Morality and exemplary behaviour, particularly at the grassroots level.
Reform	CatR	Reform, both within government and generally.
International Relations	CatIR	Positive energy in China's relationships with other countries and regions, and role in the world economy.
Media Management	CatIM	Importance of spreading positive energy on the Internet and other forms of media, and advocating the use of control mechanisms.
Other	CatO	Themes which did not appear to be linked to any larger frame.
Development and Innovation	CatDI	Social and technological development and innovation, and the importance of entrepreneurship.
Entertainment	CatE	Positive energy as something which brings feelings of warmth and happiness.
Nationalism and Chinese Dream	CatNCD	Nationalism, patriotism and the Chinese Dream.
Tradition and Culture	CatTC	Traditional Chinese culture.
Hardship and Perseverance	CatHP	Stories of individuals experiencing hardship and challenges, and yet finding ways to be happy.

Table 1. Frames identified by theme.

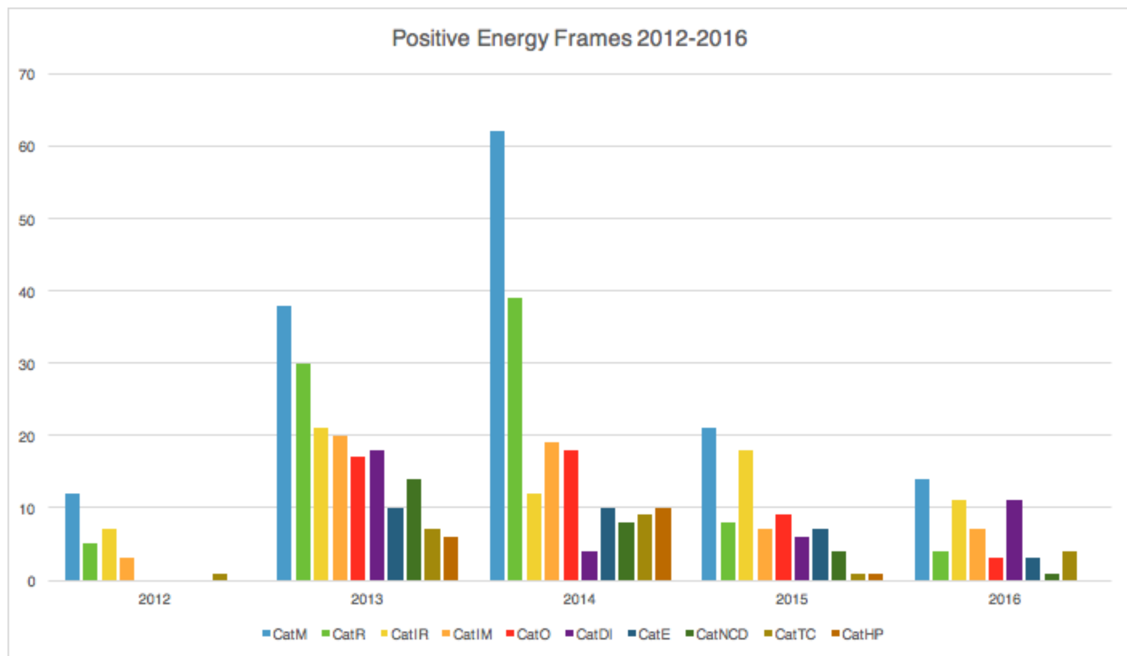

Figure 1. Frequency of appearance of each frame (2012-2016).

These results show positive energy discourse in the *People's Daily Online* to be a multidimensional construct. An analysis of the data shows that use of the term developed to become more complex in 2013 and 2014, during which time the two dominant frames were those of "Morality" and "Reform" (*figure 1*). The "International Relations" and "Media Management" frames are the third most commonly appearing in 2013 and 2014 respectively. Overall, these frames are the four which dominate the period under study, providing an initial understanding of the use of positive energy discourse in the political sphere. While it can therefore be said that the emphasis on morality seen in the term's emergence at the grassroots level seems to reappear following its adoption as a political tool (Du, 2014; Hird, 2018), the same cannot be said for ideas of the term as related to positive thinking to combat popular unhappiness and social challenges (Hird, 2016; Wielander, 2016a; 2016b; 2017), which would have presumably resulted in the higher prevalence of CatHP. We are therefore looking at an alternative understanding of the term's more recent function in political discourse.

Of the four most frequently appearing frames, Morality, Reform and Media Management all focus on domestic affairs within China. Moreover, the analysis of sub-theme components developing on the role of positive energy in the articles revealed key overlapping trends across these three frames. This pattern is significant, providing a clear indication of a central function uniting the three dominant "domestic" frames. For this reason, and due to space limitations, this article will focus only on these three frames.

Problems

SQ2: What issues does positive energy discourse try to address?

The three main frames selected as the focus of this project were also those which most commonly featured sub-theme "problems", appearing within the main identified theme of the relevant articles. These findings provide a clear indication of the role of positive energy discourse as a solution to problems, which in turn brings into question the nature of the issues it addresses. While only the fourth most frequently appearing frame overall, the Media Management frame was that which saw the highest appearance of such "problems", seemingly giving weight to Zhang's (2011) work on the threat posed to state hegemony by the liberalisation of the media, resulting in a direct ideological response to a new competing "metanarrative" (Mahoney, 2014). These issues will be examined in the next section, which brings together these quantitatively measured trends with a deeper qualitative analysis of the articles.

Actors

SQ3: Which members of society does positive energy discourse relate to?

Each of the main frames had a clear association with a particular "actor". In the Morality frame, the main actors detected were predominantly the "People", whereas in the Reform frame these were largely the "Government". Articles with these frame-actor combinations were given particular consideration in identifying key trends in positive energy discourse. The main actors in the Media

Management frame are evenly split between the Government and the "Media".[5] While the Media appears as a key actor in this frame, these articles almost exclusively focus on the importance of maintaining the Internet as a source of positive energy. While featuring the same "problems" and clearly highlighting the importance of positive energy on the Internet, Media actor articles lacked substance in comparison with those with a Government actor, and did not seem to play an equally important ideological role. Therefore, the following sections will focus on Media Management frame articles with a Government actor. Therefore, in response to SQ3, this project will consider that the key focus of positive energy discourse relates predominantly to the People and Government actors, serving to reaffirm the relationship between the two.

The Ideological Function of Positive Energy Discourse

The results of the analysis paint an interesting picture of positive energy discourse in the *People's Daily*, indicating that its principle domestic focus can be understood through three main frames, namely "Morality", "Reform" and "Media Management". As discussed, the most prominent frame-actor combinations are those of Morality-People, Reform-Government and Media Management-Government. A qualitative consideration of both sub-theme components and sub-frame "problems" highlights trends within and between each of these frames. Collectively, and in response to the main research question, these elements combine to create an understanding of the main function of positive energy discourse as a consensus-building ideology, broken down into several key points:

Argument 1: Positive energy discourse addresses problems which challenge CCP authority.

Argument 2: The spread of positive energy is portrayed as a social responsibility and in the common interest.

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[5] Here, it is important to raise a key limitation of the research design, which allowed for only one main actor for the sake of simplicity. In many articles, secondary actors also played a key role. While in this frame the Media and the Government are the main agents of positive energy, the People were often mentioned as important supporters of this initiative.

Argument 3: Popular moral action at the grassroots level is shown to be a key source of positive energy.

Argument 4: The government justifies its control of the media through its ability to spread positive energy.

These points lead the structure of this section, illustrated though reference to extracts from example articles referred to by the number allocated to them at the time of data collection.

Challenges to CCP Authority

Argument 1: Positive energy discourse addresses problems which challenge CCP authority.

Across all three main frames, positive energy discourse was largely directed at issues which challenge CCP hegemony, often related to changing social and moral systems following marketisation and the development of the media. While only occasionally stated as such, these issues can be understood as a source of "negative energy" to which positive energy provides a solution. This trend can be shown with reference to articles from each main frame.[6]

In the Morality frame, positive energy discourse primarily targets moral loss among the common people. This challenges CCP hegemony by threatening social stability and deeply altering a collective-based social structure conducive to authoritarian rule. In article 20, these problems are attributed to "profound changes in China's economic system […] and the profound changes in ideological concepts", which have resulted in "complex and fickle characteristics […] in popular morality" (*People's Daily*, 2012a). The severity of such developments is demonstrated through reference to the death of Little Yueyue, as well as multiple food safety incidents, quoting Wen Jiaobao in lamenting the

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[6] Relevant extracts of articles have been translated by the author, while the numbers used to refer to individual articles relates to their chronological placement in the body of articles analysed.

severity of China's "integrity deficit and moral decline" (*People's Daily*, 2012a).[7] The spread of "moral positive energy" can be seen to provide a solution in response to this (*People's Daily*, 2012a). This is seen again in article 232, in which positive energy promotes "the advance of society" to fight the ills of marketisation, which brought in its wake the loss of a moral "bottom line" as well as the development of "the worship of money, hedonism, and extreme individualism" (*People's Daily*, 2013e). This is echoed in article 353, which questions "the moral conscience and value recognition of the people of this era" (*People's Daily*, 2014b). The idea of a moral loss echoes what Lam has termed China's "morality deficit", which has led to a breakup in social relations and cost the nation "RMB 585 billion a year" (2015: 280), undermining the stability which is seen as key to the legitimacy of CCP authority (Fewsmith, 2016; Sandby-Thomas, 2011). Yan provides a related analysis of changing moral structures, describing a movement "away from an authoritarian, collective ethics of responsibilities" towards individualism (2011: 40).

Similarly, a lack of moral integrity in government appears as a key problem in the Reform frame, calling for the spread of "anti-corruption positive energy" in response. The problem of corruption, and the resulting discontent among the people, is another clear example of a threat to the authority of the state, referred to as a matter of "life and death" for the Party (*People's Daily*, 2014c). Article 207 states that among the "most pressing concerns of the people" are the loss of morality, extravagance and waste, and the need to improve official work style (*People's Daily*, 2013c). The development of positive energy is presented as a solution to this discontent, as officials are told to "inspire positive energy in alleviating negative mindsets" (*People's Daily*, 2013c). In line with this, article 520 emphasises the need for "sustained release of anti-corruption positive energy", focusing in particular on the "construction of honest culture" (*People's Daily*, 2014e). This is further supported by article 254 which describes issues relating to corruption in officials as "detested by the masses" (*People's Daily*, 2013f). The issue of morality loss within the Party itself, manifested through widespread corruption and resulting in popular discontent, is a significant threat to CCP authority (Lam, 2015; Mahoney, 2014).

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[7] Two year old "Little Yueyue" 小悦悦 was hit by a van on October 13, 2011. As she lay dying in the street, many people walked by but failed to help her. The event led to a wide-spread questioning of morality in China.

Finally, the same pattern can be seen in Media Management frame articles, which focus on challenges accompanying the development of the media. Positive energy is portrayed as a force against "negativity" and disunity on the Internet. This is seen in article 212, which describes how "in the clamour of mass voices of the mass media era, the ideological sphere is flooded with noise" (*People's Daily*, 2013d). As a solution, readers are called to "spread positive energy amid the clamour of mass voices" (*People's Daily*, 2013d). Similarly, article 698 points to economic incentives as causing the contamination of the "Internet's cultural environment" (*People's Daily*, 2016b), encouraging the spread of "maximum levels of positive energy" in guiding reform efforts (*People's Daily*, 2016b). This is supported by article 346, which cites "false information" among the problems caused by the growth of Internet use (*People's Daily*, 2014a). The development of the media poses a clear threat to the dynamics of control in China, providing a means through which to challenge the Party's monopoly over information (Mahoney, 2014; Saich, 2011).

These examples illustrate that, across all the three main frames, the spread of positive energy is portrayed as a solution to a moral loss both amongst the common people and in government, resulting from marketisation and the development of the media. These challenge CCP authority by proposing a competing "metanarrative", creating an ideological conflict which positive energy discourse seeks to address (Mahoney, 2014; Li, 2015).

Social Responsibility and Common Interest

Argument 2: The spread of positive energy is portrayed as a social responsibility and in the common interest.

A qualitative analysis of sub-theme components highlighted how, across all three frames, the spread of positive energy was represented as both a universal duty and in the common interest. Positive energy discourse portrays the resolution of problems as a social responsibility, encouraging consensus around the need for general reform. It thereby extends responsibility for anti-corruption efforts and the cultivation of a moral culture to the common people as well as

government, going some way to neutralise the challenge of popular dissatisfaction.

The Reform frame is the most significant in this regard. One of the main features was that, while the Government was the main actor in leading the "positive energy of reform", the sub-theme components of most articles positioned reform itself as a wider social responsibility. A clear example of this can be seen in article 520, which states that "in promoting the construction of honest culture, we must not only make the Party leadership officials the focus, but we should also turn towards all members of society and cover all of society" (*People's Daily*, 2014e). Similarly, article 354 describes "anti-corruption" as a "social responsibility" (*People's Daily*, 2014c). This is supported by article 65 which, in turn, calls people to "take up responsibility, everyone contribute positive energy" (*People's Daily*, 2013a). This trend creates a consensus around the idea of a group reform effort, and positive feelings towards the government in leading this endeavour.

The Reform frame also shows that the government's responsibility to spread positive energy is closely aligned with the interests of the people. One common representation of this is through the "mass line" campaign, which is described in article 65 as a "great channel through which we can contribute positive energy" (*People's Daily*, 2013a), while article 207 requires officials to "pay attention to the compilation of points of mass focus and develop positive energy" (*People's Daily*, 2013c).[8] Key to the function of positive energy discourse here is the creation of a positive perception of government as working to serve the people, with officials told to "amass consensus in responding to society's main points of concern" and "inspire positive energy in alleviating negative mindsets" (*People's Daily*, 2013c). Article 354 also closely aligns the anti-corruption campaign, which can be seen to spread positive energy, with the need to satisfy the expectations of the masses (*People's Daily*, 2014c). This outlining of a commonality of interest supports the creation of consensus within society.

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[8] The "mass line" campaign is an education programme enforcing "correct" behaviour. For further reading, see Thornton (2011); this research considers how the mass line movement has been used to encourage consensus, indicating a continuation of Leninist ideology under post-Mao leadership. Lam (2015) also provides an interesting overview of this.

A similar trend is seen in the Media Management frame. Here, the primary goal of positive energy is the creation of a "clean" network environment. Article 346 states that "as long as the government, operators, and Internet users […] unite and work together", everyone will have "a safe and clean network environment" (*People's Daily*, 2014a). Similarly, article 212 describes the need for society to form a consensus in "safeguarding the health of cyberspace" (*People's Daily*, 2013d). This is supported by article 675, which calls to "uphold an attitude of responsibility towards society and the people" in controlling the online environment (*People's Daily*, 2016a), adding that "cyberspace is the common spiritual home of millions of people" and "in order to create a clean and positive atmosphere the government, online businesses and each one of us Internet users needs to fulfil their responsibilities" (*People's Daily*, 2016a). In this frame, positive energy discourse aims to build a strong feeling of shared interest in the safeguarding of the Internet.

Finally, clear examples of this function can be seen in the Morality frame, in which positive energy is understood as a positive mindset which can be passed on to others, entailing a responsibility for each individual to do their part in cultivating this mindset for the good of society. In article 102, we see that positive energy is spread through a "virtuous circle [which] relies on the effort of every individual" (*People's Daily*, 2013b). This is echoed in article 20, which states that **"**whether it be officials or the common people, irrespective of which industry they work in, everyone should […] fully display moral positive energy in order to promote social harmony" (*People's Daily*, 2012a). Article 43 also shows that positive energy at the grassroots level has become "an important complement to government forces" (*People's Daily*, 2012b).

These examples demonstrate how positive energy discourse mitigates threats to the dominant authority of government by framing moral reform as a common responsibility, while commonality of interest in turn is an effective tool in the creation of consensus (Bondes & Heep, 2013). It is appropriate to consider how the concept of positive energy as something which encourages positive emotions, and which is associated with happiness, is conducive to promoting social consensus and responsibility (Hird, 2016; Wielander, 2016a). One significant parallel between academic descriptions of happiness, and positive energy discourse, is the understanding of something which is both self-

reinforcing and transmissible to others (Ahmed, 2010). By virtue of the fact that their own behaviour will have a direct impact on that of people around them, individuals have a greater responsibility to spread positive energy, while the term's association with positive thinking and happiness also makes it desirable. This suggests that "positive energy" itself is inherently suited to the state consensus-building agenda, which was likely a reason behind its adoption from popular usage.

Active Popular Participation

Argument 3: Popular moral action at the grassroots level is shown to be a key source of positive energy.

While the first two points describe trends across all three main frames, dominant characteristics of individual frames also highlight how positive energy discourse has contributed ideologically to social consensus. In particular, one primary feature of the most frequently appearing Morality frame is that it draws attention to the actions of individual moral models.

In this frame, positive energy is transferred through the moral acts of individuals towards society. Examples of this can be seen in article 232, in which a series of "most beautiful" stories contribute positive energy in response to a perceived moral loss (*People's Daily*, 2013e).[9] This is seen again in article 546, which is an example of a monthly "Positive Energy News Inventory" (*People's Daily*, 2015). This features accounts of individuals performing good deeds such as queuing to donate blood after an accident, a young boy collecting scraps to pay a sick father's medical bill, and even a man losing his life in an effort to save another (*People's Daily*, 2015). Well-known moral models such as Lei Feng are also used as examples, for instance in article 102 (*People's Daily*, 2013b).[10]

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[9] For an example of such a compilation of stories displaying examples of good moral models, see: "Good People 365" (*haoren 365* 好人 *365*) http://www.wenming.cn/sbhr_pd/hr365/.

[10] While details of Lei Feng's 雷锋 (1940-1962) life are disputed, he is thought to have been a soldier in the People's Liberation Army under Mao. He was posthumously portrayed as a symbol of model conduct in CCP propaganda campaigns, encouraging selfless behaviour and devotion to the Party.

This frame's emphasis on the active participation of moral individuals in civil society, as opposed to an outlining of ethical theory alone, demonstrates a powerful form of consensus based on an understanding of actions as a result of "collective will" (Gramsci, 1999: 688). This is further enhanced by the fact that this frame echoes the emphasis on individuals of the grassroots positive energy movement, harnessing the support this acquired and reinforcing its appeal to the people (Du, 2014). As discussed above, it is perceived that marketisation undermined China's traditional moral and social structures, challenging Party authority through a competing "metanarrative" which proposed prioritisation of the individual and economic benefit over the good of the collective. The nature of the Morality frame directly targets the threat of new developments, calling attention to traditional Confucian values, and figures such as Lei Feng who was also used as a model of good socialist morality under Mao (Wielander, 2016a). The emphasis on collective values, for example filial piety and self-sacrifice for the community, is significant in two ways. The first is that, as something which is deeply familiar to Chinese people and a characteristic element of traditional culture, this discourse is likely to achieve strong popular resonance, and therefore achieve the Gramscian concept of "common-sense" status among the populace (Rupert, 1995). Secondly, this emphasis on moral behaviour and tradition can be understood as another strategy for social control. The outlining and promotion of model behaviour creates new "norms", while the traditional nature of these contributes to a resistance against the competing influences of modernity (Bakken, 2000).

Government Control

Argument 4: The government justifies its control of the media through its ability to spread positive energy.

As with the Morality frame, the Media Management frame articles also conveyed a clear message, appearing to support the role of the government in controlling the Internet. This builds on the trend of positive energy as something which serves the common interest in working against "negativity". The portrayal of government authority as an important source of positive energy creates consensus around the need for control, overriding the importance of popular

freedom of speech and access to information. Article 212 describes the role of positive energy as strongly related to control, achieved by the "purification of the network environment" by public security organs (*People's Daily*, 2013d). Article 698 similarly states that in order to achieve "maximum levels of positive energy […] government departments should strengthen supervision of online culture" (*People's Daily*, 2016b). It expresses the need to "construct a strict social supervision network […] [and] to help Internet users improve their moral cultivation" (*People's Daily*, 2016b), while article 675 highlights a need to "strengthen the governance of cyberspace according to law" (*People's Daily*, 2016a). Finally, article 346 associates the spread of positive energy with Internet supervision, and "stringent measures to curb bad behaviour and language on the Internet", issuing the reminder that "freedom of speech has boundaries" (*People's Daily*, 2014a).

The clear advocacy of government control in these articles further suggests that positive energy discourse supports Gramscian concepts of hegemony, which identify force and coercion as necessary complements to consensus (Gramsci, 1999). By highlighting the important role of government management in solving social problems, positive energy discourse fosters popular consensus towards CCP authority, building on the notion, covered in previous sections, that issues such as an unhealthy Internet environment are part of a wider loss of morality, the resolution of which is in the common interest of both citizens and government alike. While the importance of rule of law and government control did appear to some extent in the Morality and Reform frames, this presence was not as central as in the Media Management frames. In the Reform frame in particular, government involvement is to be assumed and therefore does not require a significant mention in the analysis of ideological discourse.

Conclusion

International and domestic media alike have had their say in a discussion surrounding one of the most popular Chinese catchphrases of the last few years, revealing an application as wide in scope as the term is aspirational in nature. This exploratory research project has sought to identify the ideological function

which positive energy discourse has served in the political sphere, and in so doing, to fill a gap in the understanding of the term in academic literature.

Previous theories relating to the term's significance rested on understandings of a "fake happiness" (Yang, 2013), exploring a state-led positive energy discourse which encouraged morally responsible behaviour and positive mindsets in order to overlook destabilising social problems (Hird, 2016; 2018). The findings of this project develop on this work, seeking to provide a broader understanding of the significance of the term's use in political media. To this end, a framing analysis conducted on *People's Daily Online* articles sought to establish the thematic focus of positive energy discourse, the issues it addressed, and which members of society it related to. Trends revealed by the data include a focus on societal and moral issues accompanying marketisation and undermining Party dominance, the reinforcing of a common duty to resolve such problems in unison with the state, a promotion of active moral behaviour, and support for state control of the Internet. While reaffirming previous studies' discussion of the innate connection between positive energy and moral action at the grassroots level, this study departs from existing literature in key respects. In particular, it is argued that, rather than encouraging a cheerful overlooking of destabilising social problems, positive energy discourse has in fact promoted the active resolution of challenges through collaboration between the people and the state. The results of this analysis thus outline how positive energy discourse has encouraged a popular consensus around CCP hegemony in response to a competing "metanarrative" of marketisation, which in turn feeds back into literature on the power of happiness, and in particular the positive psychology movement, in fostering popular support (Ahmed, 2010; Weilander, 2016a).

This article raises interesting topics for future research. The first of these is the extent to which positive energy discourse as framed by the government was successfully naturalised in the minds of the people.[11] Such a study would have to look at whether the popular understanding of the term has evolved from the initial non-politicised byword used around the time of the 2012 London Olympics (Du, 2014), to approximate the governmental interpretation

[11] See the work of Entman (1989) and Graber (1988) for further reading on the process through which ideas are naturalised. This provides an insight into the theory of public opinion formation through media framing.

discussed in this article. As previously highlighted, it would also be interesting to see how positive energy discourse complements the Core Socialist Values and Chinese Dream campaigns, among others, in support of CCP hegemony. Finally, while this project excludes an insight into the frequently appearing International Relations frame due to space limitations, further research into this area might highlight whether the consensus-building element of positive energy discourse extends beyond domestic boundaries.[12]

While much study remains to be done on the role of the term in Chinese politics and society, what the current project has made apparent is that the power of positive energy discourse, stemming from the term's grassroots origins, associations with an increasingly popular positive psychology movement and in-built connotations of happiness, has been harnessed and channelled in the *People's Daily*, serving a complex ideological function at a time of political and social change. Crucially, the discourse aimed to leave readers with a perception of state hegemony as nothing less than "common sense".

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Francesca Triggs holds an MA (Hons) Chinese Studies from the University of Edinburgh and is currently pursuing postgraduate legal studies.

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Bad Citizens and Symbolic Subjects:
Wang Jin, Zhou Tiehai, and the Art of (In)Civility

Ros Holmes
The University of Manchester

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Abstract

RETRACTED

This article illuminates the relationship between contemporary art and visual representations of civility in postsocialist China. Focusing on a close visual analysis of two works of art: Wang Jin's Ice-96 Central Plain *(1996) and Zhou Tiehai's* Fake Cover *(1996), it examines how artists sought to reject the binary terms with which civility is commonly constructed: between model and shameful forms of deportment, good and bad, spiritual and material, civil and uncivil. Directly challenging the social and political role of civility as it is shaped, imagined and "imaged" in China, it explores how civility plays a pivotal role in making and unmaking citizens and argues that these artists offer a redefinition of civility not as a "discourse of lack" but as a surplus quality, an embodied excess, something which could be performed, parodied or publicly cast off. It therefore stands as an argument for considering the vexed and contested parameters of civility as artists sought to navigate the fraught terrain between ideology and market reforms, consumer citizenship and the exigencies of globalisation.*

Keywords*: China, contemporary art, civility, citizenship, globalisation, public conduct, visibility.*

On January 28, 1996, a crowd began to gather at the heart of Erqi Square in downtown Zhengzhou. Braving sub-zero temperatures, they arrived cocooned in hats and scarves, down jackets and padded coats. The mood was one of jubilant expectation, heightened by the promise of a commercial spectacle whose much anticipated unveiling had been insistently announced in a flurry of flyers and promotional banners, monopolising the city's billboards and airwaves, its television screens and newspaper columns in the preceding weeks. Just beyond the crowd lay their avowed destination: the glittering facades of the newly rebuilt Tianran Department Store. Yet obstructing their entry to this

consumer paradise lay an unexpected impediment: a two-metre-high, thirty-metre-long wall of ice.

Positioned above the expectant shoppers gathered below, a photographer took a covert shot of this initial moment of encounter, capturing the crowd's somewhat bemused reaction to this unforeseen obstacle. The photographer, Jiang Jian, had been stationed there by the artist Wang Jin (b. 1962), who, working with a team of assistants under the cover of night, had erected this impenetrable line along the periphery of the plaza immediately outside the store's main entrance, shielding the installation process from public view with the help of a strategically placed billboard. Over the course of three days, Jiang would proceed to take a startling series of documentary photographs that would chart the history of Wang's wall and the crowd's interaction with it, culminating in the protracted and public nature of its destruction. These photographs would come to mark *Ice-96, Central Plain* as one of the most original works to emerge from the hyperactive and increasingly commercialized art world of 1990s China, yet one that, as I argue in the course of this article, has not received the academic attention it deserves. For while scholarship, both within China and beyond its borders, has predominantly focused on the work's engagement with China's burgeoning consumer culture and its time-based and transient nature (Zhang, 1996; Song, 1997; Gao, 1998; Wu 2004; Cheng, 2007), these approaches have critically overlooked what I regard as its most salient and innovative contribution to contemporary art, namely its overt engagement with, and contestation of, the trope of civility.

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Civility (*wenming*) is a complex and multi-headed discourse in China, one that entered the country through a "complex global loop" involving transcultural exchange with Japan and Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century (Duara, 2001; Liu, 2011). Following the founding of the PRC, its semantic currency experienced various fluctuations in a narrative that reflects the turbulent history of China's twentieth century, but it experienced a major renewal following Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms. Under Deng's leadership, the two intertwined concepts of *wuzhi wenming* (material civilisation) and *jingshen wenming* (spiritual civilisation) were revived as central components of his programme of "opening and reform". No longer was *wenhua* (culture) the primary arena for struggle and change; civility effectively paved the way for both

a rejection of Maoist ideology and, coupled with spiritual civilisation's stabilising counter-effect over the material sphere, a legitimate embrace of the market. The return of civility in postsocialist China therefore signified not just a "return of the repressed", or to employ an art historical discourse, a "return of the real", but perhaps we could also view the "strange temporality" that Hal Foster talks about as a conscious decision by Chinese reformers of the 1980s to "turn to past paradigms to open up present possibilities" (Foster, 1996: xi).

If the recuperation of civility enabled Deng to push forward with his economic reforms by replacing class struggle with a new, cooperative, and harmonious model which reinforced a positive relationship between material and cultural progress, as the CCP divorced itself economically from Communist practice (Dynon, 2008), not all of Deng's leadership was as sanguine as him about the impact of this burgeoning consumer-oriented culture. Viewed as having a detrimental effect upon the moral fibre of China's urban citizens, the rise of "spiritual civilisation" was also promoted as a means of resisting the erosive influence of "bourgeois ideology", and combating what was perceived as a growing national crisis of faith (Ding, 1994). While Deng revitalized the concept, it was his successor Jiang Zemin who ensured that the promotion of civility reached a new level of coordination and institutionalization, directing "provincial, district and danwei-level Spiritual Civilization Offices to transmit the civilization discourse produced by theorists onto streets and into neighbourhoods and work places across China through the coordination of massive multi-layered promotional campaigns" (Dynon, 2008: 96).

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Visual depictions of civility subsequently became ubiquitous throughout the country's panoply of street-level banners, posters and promotional media signs, with government produced propaganda mirroring commercial advertising in its depiction of new apartment blocks, shining public spaces and depictions of comfortable, affluent lifestyles that in many ways helped to visually construct an image of a more affluent, "civilised" nation that corresponded with new consumer identities. With media outlets keen to be seen to be supporting the civilization drive, "news reports throughout the late 1990s described many activities and good deeds performed by Party organizations, military personnel, model citizens, residential districts and work units as examples of the grass-roots adoption of socialist spiritual civilization" (Dynon, 2008: 98). By the 1990s,

Jiang had even broadened the concept into a campaign to re-establish a national ethics based around hygiene, morality, legal consciousness, decorum, manners, and discipline. As such, the government's promulgations on civility included visual information that not only encompassed behavioural standards but also prescribed order to the unlegislated minutiae of citizens' daily lives. Not only did these visual representations make the message of civility voluble, even pervasive, within a rapidly growing and changing market-driven advertising industry, but these mutually reinforcing promotional mechanisms served to afford civility new visual and lexical legitimacy.

In 1996, the year of Wang's installation, the promotion of civility under the new guise of "spiritual civilisation" had returned as an ideological offensive more vigorously than at any point since its inception in 1979. The 1996 *Zhongguo nianjian* (*China Yearbook*) summarised the Party's rhetoric for that year, placing particular emphasis on the promotion of "spiritual civilisation": "In the building of modernisation, we cannot seize only material civilisation without seizing spiritual civilisation, and we cannot sacrifice spiritual civilisation in exchange for momentary economic development" (*Zhongguo nianjian*, 1996: 88). Yet despite this prominence in political and cultural discourse, research on the relationship between artworks produced in the 1990s, and narratives of contested civility are, however, completely absent. Offering a re-positioning, as well as a re-visioning, of the role of civility in contemporary art, this article explores the cultural implications of this complex discourse by focusing on a close visual analysis not just of Wang Jin's *Ice-96 Central Plain* (1996), but also a photographic series produced by Zhou Tiehai (b. 1966) in the same year, in which the artist parodies the trope of the model citizen, confronting the idealised and embodied nature of civility and its basis as a prerequisite for citizenship.

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If civics is the study of the rights and responsibilities of citizens, reflecting the shared etymological root between civil (from the Latin for "resident of a city" or "townsperson") and citizenship, *civis* has always been associated with the courteous manners of citizens as opposed to soldiers. Similarly in Chinese, as Wang Gungwu has aptly pointed out, civility (*wenming*) derives from *wen* which provides an important footnote in conveying what has perhaps always been considered the key to being civilised in China, "namely the acquisition of

language, literacy and the non-military aspects of government and education" (Wang, 1991: 146). But as the artworks examined in this article demonstrate, at times, the diversity of citizens, and their often unpredictable behaviour, also connotes a political threat: that *civis* may destabilize the polis and that the *wen* (the literary, artistic and cultural aspects of society) can sometimes rub up frictively against the pellucid promise of a bright and "civilised" future, muddying any attempts at clarity and offering a more occluded and at times equivocal frame through which to view these interactions.

Foregrounding how artists not only slyly subverted, but at the same time brazenly opposed the CCP's desire to police the boundaries of morality and its attendant physical, mental and behavioural qualities, my analysis therefore not only illuminates the relationship between contemporary art and public visual representations of civility, but more crucially, sets out an important agenda for understanding civility: proper attention to the impact of the visual. Rejecting the binary terms with which civility is commonly constructed—between model and shameful forms of deportment, between appropriate behaviour and unseemly conduct, civil and uncivil, good and bad—this article directly challenges the social and political role of civility as it is constructed, imagined and "imaged" in postsocialist China, illustrating how by implication, citizenship, a concept partially forged as a consequence of these polarized assumptions, is similarly ensnared within this limited framework.

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This article therefore fills an important gap in the existing literature by providing an evaluation not just of how civility has been visualised, but also an examination of how the concept has been critiqued and resisted *through* the visual. For if the artists discussed in this article sometimes disagree with the government over how the intertwined concepts of civility and citizenship come to be defined, the works they produced also question the assumption that proper conduct is the foundation for model citizenship. By countering the dominant approach which has focused on the differentiating discourse of civility, with a focus on those who are civilised and those who are "civility's others", and examining the points at which civility mediates subject and object, exclusion and inclusion, the dominant and the subaltern (Bakken, 2000; Friedman, 2004; Nyíri, 2006), this article will explore the cultural implications of this complex mediation and delineate how it has become imbricated with other pressing

concerns: urbanisation, globalisation, the overt commercialisation of Chinese society and a government relentlessly concerned with image and ideal citizenship.

Combining interviews with Wang Jin, and translations of Chinese artistic texts with a close visual analysis of the works under discussion, the article stands as an argument for considering the multifarious forms that civility takes and for moving beyond the contours of existing scholarship to reveal its manifold effects in shaping citizenship. My analysis therefore not only finds focus in the intertwined concepts of civility and citizenship, but crucially argues that the courteous foundation of citizenship is not as certain as the polarized terms of debates on civility would suggest; as many of the artworks discussed here illustrate, civility can frequently be dislodged from its ideological apex and incivility can, at times, paradoxically serve as a basis for citizenship.

Walls of Ice and Civilities of Surveillance

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The expectant crowd who assembled on that cold January morning in Erqi Square, Zhengzhou, had gathered to mark the reopening of the aforementioned Tianran Shangsha, (Tianran Department Store), destroyed a year earlier in a conflagration that heralded a dramatic climax to the "Zhengzhou trade wars" that raged throughout the 1990s.[1] Wang Jin even wryly alluded to this event when he encased photographs of fire fighters dousing the store's erstwhile predecessor to the outer façade of his icy barrier. The store's competitors were the six shopping centres that encircled the square, whose giant neon signs, glittering glass facades and imposing architecture both staged and framed the confines of this commercial arena. As they vied for visibility, the battle to be crowned as Zhengzhou's ultimate consumer mecca had resulted in a hyperbolic

[1] The term *Zhengzhou shangzhan* (Zhengzhou trade wars) first came to prominence due to a regular half hour television segment of the business news which was first broadcast on CCTV from December 1991. The programme commented on the fierce competition between the six department stores (Yaxiya shangcheng, Zhengzhou baihuo dalou, Zijingshan baihuo dalou, Shangcheng dasha, Shangye dasha and Hualian shangsha) in the square. The ensuing price wars that escalated between them meant that their combined sales for the 1991 financial year reached one billion yuan, resulting in five of the six shopping centres entering the national top ranks for the retail industry. For more information on the trade wars, see Sina (2005).

war of words and images played out on giant billboards and glossy handbills throughout the city, as well as increasingly theatrical publicity stunts devised to entice Zhengzhou's burgeoning consumers. Ironically, Wang Jin's wall of ice was originally intended as one such event, erected after Wang was commissioned by the Department Store to create a spectacle on a scale befitting their commercial rejuvenation.[2]

But instead of the customary commercial banners and promotional paraphernalia, the assembled onlookers were confronted with the unexpected sight of Wang's frozen installation. Beyond the wall's improbable building material, another facet of its construction elicited significant interest. Composed of over six hundred individual blocks of ice, the wall's outward appearance was deceptive, and its gelid surfaces belied a deeper artifice, for encased within each brick, Wang had chosen to suspend over a thousand sought-after commercial goods. These ranged in size and value from cosmetics to cell phones, watches and gold rings to cameras, television sets and even air conditioners, whose entangled piping protruded incongruously beyond the rough-hewn contours of the wall's façade (fig. 1). The majority of these consumer items had been provided by the department store itself, although Wang informed me in an interview that he had also contributed popular consumer items purchased from the smaller shops that lined the streets between the six retail behemoths.

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[2] The Department Store first contacted Chen Daliang, who subsequently got in touch with the art researcher Xue Encun, who was familiar with Wang's previous work and approached him in Beijing with the commission. Wang worked with fellow artists Guo Jinghan and Jiang Bo in the realization of the project. Information supplied by Wang Jin, interview with the author, Beijing, 24th July, 2012.

Figure 1: Wang Jin*, Bing-96 Zhongyuan* (Ice-96, Central Plain), 1996, Gelatin Silver Print, 77.2 by 114.9 cm. Copyright artist Wang Jin. Photo courtesy Pékin Fine Arts.

Wang apparently travelled to Zhengzhou twice before finalising his proposal,[3] with *Ice 96* being hastily approved by the store's management team, eager to entice new consumers through their doors. With the consumer goods selected and assembled, Wang oversaw their transportation to an industrial icehouse, where each was suspended in a steel mould filled with water and left to freeze for twenty-four to thirty-six hours. During the crystallization process, air pockets and other impurities were gradually removed from each block with varying degrees of success, ensuring that some of Wang's ice bricks were rendered translucent while others remained tantalisingly opaque. With a staggered production process that required over a week to complete, the six hundred blocks that formed Wang's wall were stacked vertically on wooden pallets within the warehouse, ready to be assembled on site.

Despite the unusual nature of Wang's installation, other aspects of the store's commercial reopening were rather more prosaic: a city official had been invited to cut the ribbon; dancers, musicians and folk performers were hired to enhance the festive atmosphere, while firecrackers, drums and gongs resounded as the crowd of jubilant spectators descended on the square (Cheng, 2013: 303). Security guards hired by the department store initially instructed onlookers not to get too close to Wang's wall, and formed a small cordon encircling its periphery. With the crowd's ranks swelling rapidly to over one thousand people, however, their numbers quickly overwhelmed the guards, who relinquished their duties with phlegmatic resignation. The photograph shot by Wang's assistant Jiang Jian captures the crowd's initial reaction to these events and to the petrified goods visible within the wall of ice; fingers point and heads tilt, torsos incline and knees flex, as the assembled onlookers lean in to survey the frozen vitrines in front of them. Some press their faces against the ice in disbelief while others exchange quizzical expressions with their fellow spectators as they jostle for space on the concrete paving slabs that fan outward from the store's entrance (fig. 1).

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[3] Various proposals for the opening were discussed before Wang settled on "Ice 96". These included hiring a helicopter to strew flowers and footballs on the gathered crowd, as well as a spectacular firework display. These were ultimately dismissed as either too extravagant or too dangerous. Information supplied by Wang Jin, interview with the author, Beijing, 24th July, 2012.

As a substance whose materiality is intertwined with ephemerality, it was inevitable that Wang's construction would undergo changes in its physical state, indeed the outer surface of this icy installation was expected to respond to daily fluctuations in temperature by sporadically thawing and freezing, presenting both occluded and vitreous views of the goods encased within. Given Zhengzhou's sub-zero temperatures in January 1996, Wang Jin anticipated that his wall would retain its structural integrity and solidity for a week to a fortnight, but while the wall was expected to slowly distribute its wares in a time-sensitive and sustained release of both product and promotion, the actions of the crowd who congregated outside the store made any such plans redundant. Whereas the majority of existing literature on this artwork has described the almost immediate destruction of the wall by the assembled spectators (Song, 1997: 102; Zhang, 1996: 64; Gao, 1998: 67; Cheng, 2007: 153; Wu, 2004: 159), Wang Jin informed me in an interview that this so-called "spontaneous irruption" was in fact a far more protracted affair, one that did not culminate in the destruction of the wall until a full three days after the opening.

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In a series of black and white photographs shot covertly by Jiang, we see the initial salvoes of this action unfold: a woman stabs at the wall with a rock while behind her the camera captures the spectral presence of a man's motion-blurred hand caught mid-blow, the exertion of his efforts accentuated by the strained grimace on his face. In another, a member of the crowd attired in what appears to be the silk garments of a folk dancer smiles as he drives a ceremonial spear into the ice, while two female spectators behind him survey his efforts appreciatively. In the background, two figures crouch on top of the wall in order to gain a better angle from which to pitch their assault. The mood of these photographs is almost gleeful, capturing not just the eclectic range of implements used to dismantle and effectively destroy Wang's icy installation, but also the unbridled joy derived from these destructive acts, and the carnivalesque atmosphere of this collective action. In Jiang's photographs, the handful of security guards tasked by the shopping centre with controlling the crowd point impotently at the ongoing demolition, unable or unwilling to intercede in the crowd's restive desire to liberate these coveted possessions from their icy alcoves (fig. 2).

Figure 2: Wang Jin*, Bing-96 Zhongyuan* (Ice-96, Central Plain), 1996, 7 Gelatin Silver Prints, Each image 77.2 by 114.9 cm. Copyright artist Wang Jin. Photos courtesy Pékin Fine Arts.

As Meiling Cheng notes, it was ironically and ultimately this irruption of audience participation, unforeseen by the artist, that became, in retrospect, a determining factor in the socio-historical significance of the work (Cheng, 2007: 153). But while the assembled crowd did foreshorten the duration of the installation, the true nature of their participation demands further scrutiny. Over two decades after the work was realised, why does the narrative of the wall's immediate destruction persist? What is it about this received version of events that makes it so compelling? In most interpretations of the work, the crowd's actions are read as a direct signifier of the kind of economism and pragmatism of the post-Deng era, in which Wang's wall of ice serves as an appropriate coda to the self-generating follies of the participants' journeys into urban and consumer modernity. As Cheng comments, "their concurrent privatized actions transformed a solemn allegory against mercantile seduction into a combustible show of China's accelerated market economy" (Cheng, 2007: 153). Wu Hung has similarly commented that "the ice wall in *Ice. 96 Central China* was a catalyst that dematerialized itself through an ensuing performance it visually provoked" (Wu, 2004: 159). Like Cheng, Wu has focused on the allure of those commodities suspended in Wang's semi-clear ice "chest" that tempted the spectators to "perform en masse, the capitalist machinery of desire", in which these "accidental co-performers" were united in their respective quests to convert "what they saw as 'images' into material things, able to be possessed and carried away" (Wu, 2004: 159).

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I would argue that there is nothing combustible or spontaneous about the deferred actions of the crowd, who did not finish "dismantling" the ice until a full three days after the opening. Yet this temporal delay, and its impact on the interpretation of this work, has been critically overlooked: what prevented the crowd from instantly sating their consumer appetites? What mitigating factors engendered their destructive procrastination? While Wang's *Ice 96 Central Plain* is indeed a time-based artwork, I would argue that far from being transient, it stands as a testament to the endurance of civility as an ordering construct, and its persistence in governing public conduct. Seen from this perspective, it is possible to see Wang's work, and the audience's direct engagement with it, as more than the uncontrolled manifestation of material desires, in which contemporary China is reduced to "an amalgam of appetites and afflictions" (Chen, 2007: 5). As economic class and status distinctions

became more pronounced after two decades of economic reform and "open door" policies, Wang's work stands witness to how the urban landscape in the 1990s underscored the importance of self-regulation within the public sphere, and how the crowd's deferred actions were precipitated by latent fears over impugning their civility and, by extension, their citizenship.

While the site specificity of Wang's work has not been given the analytical attention it deserves, it provides a crucial contextual framework to these arguments. Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan province, is situated amidst China's north central plains. Bordering the Yangtze River, its population of roughly eight million inhabitants categorizes it as one of many "second tier" cities whose ranks have swollen significantly since the onset of the economic reforms.[4] While the city has benefited from financial and economic stimulus packages in the last ten years, at the time of Wang's work in 1996, Zhengzhou was still largely viewed as a provincial backwater, a city whose geographic location on the periphery of both political and economic power ensured that it was better known as one of the country's most pivotal railroad junctions—a place of transit rather than a final destination. While this status may hint at how one's proximity to China's power centre, Beijing, opens or closes the apertures through which information (and capital) flows, its status as a commercial and cultural hinterland was also enhanced by Henan's reputation as one of China's most populated provinces as well as its most underdeveloped—its landlocked, predominantly agricultural economy instead determining its role as one of the country's largest exporters of migrant workers to other provinces (Li, 2012). Natives of Henan frequently complain that they are the subjects of national discrimination, in which they are construed as the backward, rural and uncivilised "other" against which urban elites in cities like Beijing and Shanghai distinguish themselves (Ma, 2002; *China Daily*, 2005).

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The central government's visible emphasis on the promotion of spiritual civilization within the urban landscape of 1990s Zhengzhou was therefore directed at a population perceived as "ill prepared for an era which is simultaneously more progressive and more economically demanding" (Friedman, 2004: 697). If the subjective orientation of the spiritual civilization

[4] Information and statistics on Zhengzhou's population are available via the Henan government website, available at http://www.hnjsw-gov.cn (accessed 25/3/2018).

campaigns of 1990s China promoted a mode of being that had to be internalized through the didactic power of the state, and displayed visibly through practice and speech (Friedman, 2004: 702), then the collective actions of the crowd who deconstructed Wang's wall show the failure of the moral imperative embedded at the core of spiritual civilization discourse. For instead of ridding the uncivilised bodies of Zhengzhou consumers of their bad manners and backward habits, in the process creating obedient, disciplined and compliant citizens who were automatically deemed to be of "higher quality" (*gao suzhi*), the sustained demolition of Wang's wall shows how the performative aspects of civility could often be publicly discarded under the pressure of the state's promotion of market-oriented economic growth.

At the time of Wang's work, Henan's vast untapped consumer market made it the "ground zero" of the trading wars that were set to sweep through central China. Most interpretations have therefore read Wang's 1996 artistic intervention staged at the heart of its commercial epicentre as a microcosm of the changes provoked by this consumer revolution. But the site of this transformation becomes even more ironic given that Erqi Guangchang (Erqi Square), the commercial mecca where Wang's work was staged, was originally designed as a memorial site to China's revolutionary history. Built to commemorate the 1923 railway workers' strike which was violently suppressed on February 7 by the local warlord Wu Peifu (1874-1939) (Williams, 2010; Saich, 1991), the fourteen-story pagoda situated at the centre of the square was built in 1971 to house a museum dedicated not just to the strike but also the city's early communist credentials (Chang, 1987). Over the years, however, Erqi square has gradually transformed from a site of revolutionary history into the city's premier destination for leisure consumption. Glimpsed in the periphery of some of the documentary shots of Wang's work, the pagoda stands as a spectral reminder of this layered history.

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In Wang's work, this quasi-commercial/public square is therefore not just an inert space, but a critical site for the performance of civility and citizenship. Within this context, it is important to remember that public squares are strategic sites within China for the display and enactment of a wide variety of activities designed to promote and reinforce the importance of civility (Boutonnet, 2011; Hoffman, 2006). From organised dancing troupes to

prominent visual displays and public service advertisements (PSAs) educating the public on appropriate public conduct, they serve as an arena for the types of "model" behaviour which the government espouses as part of its rhetoric in constructing "civilised" citizens (Lewis, 2002). As Pow Choon-Piew notes, "the territorialisation of social relations in public squares and other civic spaces is undergirded by a moral order that frames spaces according to an aestheticized world view and civilised values that emphasise the safety, order and citizenship aspects of the wenming discourse" (Pow, 2009: 112). They thus showcase and effectively stage civility for communal consumption by advising citizens, directly and indirectly, to comport themselves civilly, that is, to exercise continued judgement and vigilance in both their behaviour and those of others.

Wang's staging of this event in this politically and socially loaded space therefore also calls into question the authenticity of the government's decree in constructing "spiritual civilisation", as the actions of the audience are instead shown to represent a subversive force which not only spatially, but also spiritually, transgresses the boundaries between social discipline and a particular kind of performative civility. For beneath the spectre of the uncivilized appetites and desires so prominently showcased in Wang's work, there lurks a thinly disguised emphasis on the ways in which such practices constitute not only a rejection of the socially productive effects of self-restraint, but also of the civilizing process, with its emphasis on the coordination of the body's cultural management. Seen from this perspective, Wang's work draws out these palpable distinctions between civility and incivility, between the seemingly savage appetites and behaviour of the crowd and the need to comport the body in accordance with an etiquette of consumer citizenship. He thus illustrates that the spaces of civility are just as important to consider as the bodies engaged in performances of civility's manifold gestures.

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As the conceptual instigator of the work, Wang Jin remained a backstage figure during the wall's three-day demolition, and although he might have predicted how the crowd would react to his site-specific installation, he was certainly powerless to intervene in its deconstruction. Given the covert nature of the extant documentary photographs, the majority of the Zhengzhou inhabitants caught by Jiang's camera were probably wholly unaware that they were unwitting participants in a piece of performance art. However, as Meiling

Cheng notes, if the artist was unable to direct how his live audience would interact with his installation, he did have some influence over how his ephemeral artwork was read going forward (Cheng, 2013: 305). In a statement issued in 2000, Wang asserted that the original goal of the project "was to cool down and purify the public with ice, with reason" (Wang, 2000: 136), a post-mortem pronouncement that appeared to eerily echo official government promulgations on the creation of a more "spiritual civilisation" in its calling for a cooling and coagulation of material desires.

If Wang's art historical addendum sought to imbue the piece with socio-political significance, like so many works of performance and installation art that emerged from the restive reality of 1990s China, the nature of its contemporary mode of transmission, dissemination and display is also of critical relevance. In the absence of the extant work, it is Jiang Jian's frozen stills which instantiate Wang's wall, and which not only secured its iconic status, but which continue to ensure its viability as an object of art history inquiry. Condensing the jagged textures of *Ice 96* into a flat surface and crystalizing the three day duration of the piece in these printed images, Jiang's photographs turn the uncivilized actions of the crowd into a permanent object of spectatorship, and serve to transmute the performance of the crowd far beyond the "evanescent primary act" (Park, 2016). They thus serve as a stark reminder of André Malraux's famous dictum that "art history has been the history of that which can be photographed" (Malraux, 1949: 32). For if Wang originally proclaimed that the work represented an attempt to dismantle the authority invested in these commercial objects, over two decades after the event, it is ironically these photographs' transmutation into limited edition, large format works of post-produced "performance photography", and their insertion into transnational circuits of exhibition and display, that has ultimately transformed the work from a limited site-specific installation responding primarily to local and national concerns into a commodified, aesthetic spectacle of international contemplation and collection.

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We could therefore read Wang's work as an investigation and reflection on the consumer revolution of the 1990s whilst simultaneously serving as a document of the changing social norms governing civility and consumer citizenship from the post-reform period to the present day. In *Ice 96 Central*

Plain, a department store may be a public space for consumption which in some sense could "replace" the politicised square, but the mall also exists as a source for the creation of the private sphere (Venturi, 1977; Wang, 2001). In this regard, the covert nature of Jiang Jian's documentary photographs is also worth accentuating. Would the crowd have reacted in a similarly candid and gleeful fashion had they been aware their actions were being recorded? If the rhetoric of civility is designed to guard against public lapses in propriety, then an allusion could also be drawn to the panoptical gaze of the State, which, wary of any transgressive acts that could threaten its stability, polices the boundaries of morality and reinforces the self-regulatory impulses of the crowd. Wang's wall, however, not only screened off the store's facade and the goods contained within it, but also partially screened off the crowd's actions from public view, thereby challenging the norms of legibility and offering the possibility of confounding the state's biopolitical desire to disclose the body's truths. Through its repudiation of this civility of surveillance, one which frequently finds expression through techniques of behavioural vigilance and identity management, Wang's work confounded the state's macro-level concern with imposing boundaries, by paradoxically employing his own boundary to put those less intelligible bodies beyond state scrutiny.

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In this work, civility is most conspicuous in its absence, as we are confronted with the spectacle of the very uncivilised behaviour that the government (and urban elites) try to repress. Whereas urban civility has often been held up as a positive moral virtue that helps to ease social tensions and facilitates social interactions in a democratic and pluralistic society (Pow, 2009), the simmering uncouth and uncivil underside to public culture highlighted in the behaviour of those who deconstructed Wang's wall reveals the rippling undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the promised "better life" that the economic reforms were meant to deliver. In Wang's work, the civility of conspicuous consumerism is thus subtended by the incivility of the wall's breach. Instead of projecting colourful images of consumerist plenty, the monochrome and muted palate of Jiang's black and white photographs also seem to annul and contradict the joy the audience hopes to find in their blind pursuit of material objects.

While the audience's promethean efforts to acquire the objects of their desires form the main structuring locus of the performance, Wang Jin also

crucially deprives us of the afterimage of his spectator's consumerist fulfilment, leaving us to ponder the reaction to their acquisition of these fetishized objects. They thus provide a strange ellipsis that both negates, undermines and questions the entire process of capital accumulation, foreshortening and framing these actions as a moment of delayed violence that curiously undercuts the system that has created them. Wang Jin's wall could therefore be considered as a paradoxical landscape boundary fraught with internal contradictions and tensions that disrupts and unsettles the boundaries between the civilised desire to consume and the uncivilised process of attainment, between "inside" and "outside", "us" and "them", provincial and urban(e), "civilised" and uncivilised. By problematising the binary logic of spiritual and material civilisation, and further destabilizing the false dichotomy between civil and *uncivilised* behaviour, consumerism and culture, Wang illustrates how the processes constituting these social relationships are in fact complex and intertwined.

If semantically, the Chinese term *xingwei* encompasses both the idea of "daily conduct" in its quotidian sense, and that of "action" in all its socio-political potential (Wong, 2012), then the new "behaviour" demonstrated by the crowd who forcibly deconstructed Wang's wall could be approvingly recognized as "individual *xingwei*", as a reflection of broader social change, increased citizens' awareness and the desire to exercise their consumer rights. As "performance art" in mainland China is similarly referred to as *xingwei yishu*, Wang's performance piece ironically underscores the impotence of the official sphere and its aggrandizement of ideal roles and behaviours, while simultaneously pointing out the performativity that conditions it.

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By contesting and redefining civility, Wang's artwork revealed how the "disorderly" and "uncivilised" behaviour enacted by those who destroyed the wall does not render them morally and socially incongruous with the bright new capitalist future of postsocialist China promised within the gleaming walls of the adjacent department store. Rather it is their incivility, their emphasis on sating their individual desires, and their disregard for collective self-regulation, that paradoxically serves to signify them as the type of subjects capable of fulfilling the imperative of get rich quick individualism. For if the Chinese party-state's emphasis on the rhetoric of civility in the 1990s signalled the creation of a new

regime within a socialist market economy, and restructured the incentives and permissible limits of consumer and citizen action (Wang, 2001: 92), then Wang aptly demonstrates how new consumer and citizen *xingwei,* or “behaviours”, became visible, diverse and contestable.

Civility and the Politics of Visibility

In a work produced in the same year as Wang Jin’s wall of ice, the artist Zhou Tiehai probed this aspect of civility further. Zhou Tiehai’s 1996 work *Jia fengmian* (*Fake Cover*) features a self-portrait of Zhou in an ersatz mock-up of the front cover of *Newsweek* magazine (fig. 3). In the image, Zhou is portrayed as a well-groomed, besuited businessman, photographed against a reproduction of his own work. The main cover line at the foot of this pseudo-publication is worthy of analysis, as Zhou has sub-headed his edition with the words: *tai wuzhi, tai jingshen* (too materialistic, too spiritualised). The English translation which Zhou has given the work perhaps does not adequately capture the semantic nuances of this construct; by placing the adverb *tai* in front of both *wuzhi* and *jingshen*, Zhou imbues them with a deliberately droll emphasis that might be more accurately translated as “*really* materialistic, *really* spiritualised”.

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Fake Cover was the first in a series of works featuring Zhou on the front cover of an array of international news media and art publications, including the *New York Times*, *Der Spiegl*, *Frieze*, *Flash Art* and *ArtNews* (fig. 4). Zhou created these simulacra as a means of interrogating the structures and power relations at play in the artworld of the 1990s, when “Chinese” contemporary art underwent an unprecedented surge in demand in the global artistic arena (Huot, 2000; Andrews & Shen, 2012). This era of accelerated development was undoubtedly galvanized both by the country’s burgeoning economy and by the new geographies of access opened up by the exigencies of globalization, in which art from previously “marginalised” countries was suddenly thrust into the tectonic undertow of international biennials, museums, and auction houses.

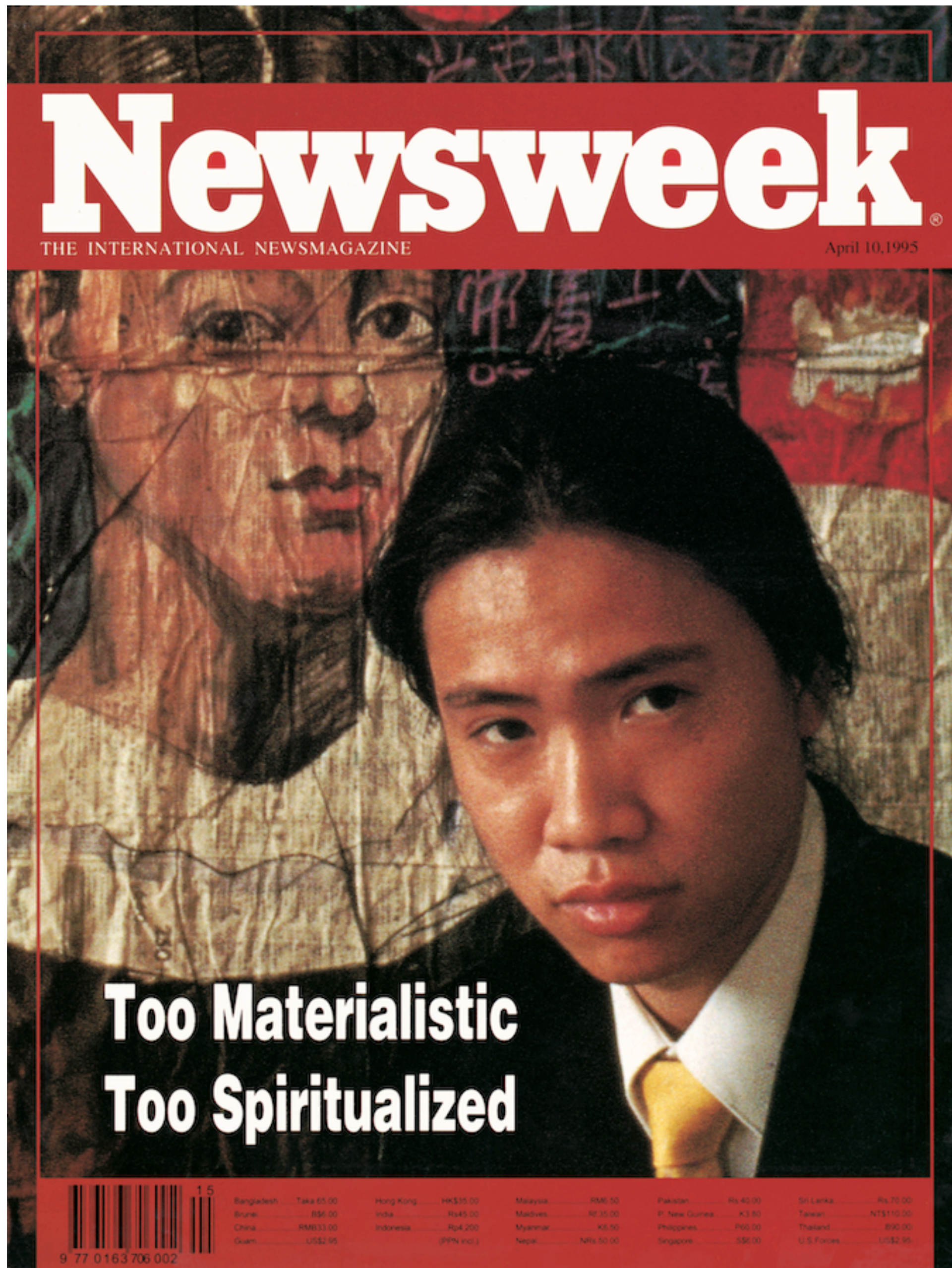

Figure 3: Zhou Tiehai, *Jia fengmian* (Fake Cover), 1996, Print, 26.9 x 20.5 cm. Image courtesy of Zhou Tiehai and the ShanghART gallery.

Disillusioned with navigating the nebulous array of relations between gallery owners, museum curators, art writers, critics and other artists, Zhou's magazine covers were designed as a critique of the path to artistic notoriety and recognition. Satirising the hierarchical systems of influence and power which condition and control the international art world, we could read Zhou's ironic covers as presenting a threat to the gatekeepers of the canon, the predominantly foreign curators and collectors who have so long determined which artists and works gain visibility while others are relegated to obscurity. They simultaneously lampooned the Western enthusiasm for "new" Chinese art, evident in many of these publications' sensationalized reports on the art scene of the 1990s, which was invariably presented "as a post-cold war political phenomenon in a Communist Country" (Wu, 2014: 130), betraying a deep-seated and somewhat entrenched ignorance of the social and artistic realities of the time.

These counterfeit covers, as the curator Pi Li noted, "created a false image of Chinese contemporary art as causing a constant sensation on the international stage. […] Left unspoken was the fact that Chinese contemporary art had neither entered into Chinese society, nor been debated seriously in the Western art world" (Pi, 2003: 47). In 1993, the writer Andrew Solomon came to China to write about Chinese contemporary art for the *New York Times Magazine*; he acted, so Zhou Tiehai decided, "like Columbus discovering a new continent" (Zhou, cited in Smith, 2016), prompting the artist to create another work in which he satirised Solomon for his imperious attitude.[5] Thus while many artists and critics were bemoaning the hegemonic power of Western cultural practices in China, Zhou addressed these asymmetries of visibility through his art in a hyperbolic gesture that both parodied and made explicit the artist's critical complicity with these forces of globalised consumption.

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As Zhou commented, "As a Chinese artist, you have to be on the cover of the West for people to know you" (Zhou, 1998). Zhou's appropriation and manipulation of these renowned publications thus coldly deconstructs the aura of Western contemporary art as an industry sustained, like any commercial

[5] The work was entitled "There Came a Mr. Solomon to China" (1994), and featured Solomon arriving on a gondola steered by Marco Polo himself, surrounded by other trappings of Western culture he had ostensibly carried "East".

venture, by a systemic consensus created between curators, institutions, the market and the media. This irreverent reworking of canonical publications instead documented and exposed the obsession with the process of vying for visibility on the horizons of the foreign media, and highlighted the chasm between the alleged advancements ushered in by the economic reforms and the often "uncivilised" means used to achieve international recognition. In this sense, we might regard Zhou's covers as a struggle for what Rey Chow has termed "post-colonial visibilities" (Chow, 2012); to seize control of the media frame is to compete for "the right to own and manage the visual field, to fabricate the appropriate images and distribute the appropriate stories" (Chow, 2012: 161). By placing himself squarely (and repeatedly) in the picture frame, Zhou demonstrates how his cosmopolitan civility and transnational media appeal afforded him a heightened degree of agency in a "political economy of representation and performance" (Chow, 2012).

If the nationalism of Jiang Zemin's concept of spiritual civilization in the 1990s was not only a product of domestic politics, but also an emerging popular self-confidence centred on China's growing world status—a status reinforced by the country's accession to the WTO and Beijing's successful bid to host the 2008 Olympics—then Zhou's ersatz photoshopped parody also visually articulated an erosion of Western cultural hegemony. In a pose that is studiously off-centre but exquisitely self-conscious and supercilious, looking up from his would-be absorption in the serious business of being a global art star, with a diffident expression that does not return the viewer's gaze, in *Fake Cover* Zhou primarily advertises himself (fig. 3). While the exaggerated bold red typeface of the publication's title dwarfs the characters in the background of the work, the smaller type at the foot of the image advertises the publication's international distribution channels by listing its price in a variety of foreign currencies, ensuring that the image drips with a cross-cultural affection that underscores the artist's international appeal.

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Figure 4: Zhou Tiehai, *Jia Fengmian* (Fake Cover), Prints, Offset Print, Paper, 1995 – 1997. Images courtesy of Zhou Tiehai and the ShanghART gallery.

More than just some fanciful photoshopping, the artist’s *Fake Covers* are confusingly real; a satire not just of the fetishisation of the Chinese artist by Western print media, they also embody a Warholian questioning of his own position and subjectivity within the mechanisms of that artworld. The hybrid civility of Zhou’s *Fake Cover* thus becomes a manifestation not of powerlessness, but of newly acquired power. Zhou’s initial *Fake Cover* is dated April 10, 1995, and the distinction between the real and the copy is further obscured by Zhou’s decision to sell his *Fake Covers* at the same price as the original publications. Ironically (or perhaps intentionally), it was Zhou’s meta-critical appropriation of

these modes of display that first assured him coverage in the self-same publications that he had originally critiqued.

But why "too materialistic, too spiritualised", which appeared not just on Zhou's first *Fake Cover*, but was also the title of his first solo exhibition, organized by the curator Hans van Dijk (as the New Amsterdam Art Consultancy) and held at the gallery of the Central Academy of Fine Arts (then known as Cifa Gallery) in 1996?[6] We could read Zhou's reference to these terms as an instantiation not just of the drive for economic modernisation prioritised by the onus on material civilisation, but also one in which the body of the artist is also reified as the apotheosis of the spiritually civilised subject. Cast as a besuited businessman whose imagined artistic fame and wealth has ensured his appearance on the cover of one of the world's most renowned publications, Zhou exemplifies a modern socialist morality—one robust enough to handle the challenges of the socialist market economy.

As a Chinese artist entering into the international arena, he also embodies the two sides of the discursive coin outlined by the material/spiritual binary: the need to be both globalised and patriotic, adept at navigating an increasingly multicultural artworld, yet also a representative of "the positive repackaging of China's cultural traditions." Indeed, it is his position as a paragon of the spiritually civilised and highly cultured citizen that allows him to enter these international networks of display and circulation, in which he casts himself as the literal "cover boy" for these societal changes. In this work, the possibilities of art in a society quite clearly "on the move" becomes the central issue, characterised first and foremost by its materialistic needs. In his caricatured critique of the capitalist yuppie, Zhou thus both deconstructs and debunks his own status and identity as an emergent player on this global stage, becoming a contiguous exemplar not only of material advancement, but also its spiritually civilised corollary.

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[6] The exhibition opened on the April 26, 1996 and ran until May 8, 1996. A selection of photographs from the original exhibition has been archived by the Asia Art Archive (AAA), and can be viewed online at https://cdn.aaa.org.hk/_source/digital_collection/fedora_extracted/39852.pdf (accessed 16.04.2018).

As a Shanghai-based artist who first exhibited this work in the gallery of one of Beijing's most famous art academies, the work also probes the complex links between aspiration and hierarchies of civility in operation at the close of China's long twentieth century, revealing the disparities in wealth distribution, segregation and stratification that have accompanied China's process of urbanization. For if Wang Jin's ice wall and Zhou's *Fake Cover* series complicate and unsettle the convergence between aspiration and civility, between bourgeois presentations of the urban(e) self and instrumental representations of the provincial/rural other, they also demonstrate how civility is deployed as a technique for both grooming and inculcating consumer-conscious "cosmopolitan" citizens, and for rehabilitating and chastising improper ones.

As Ann Anagnost has demonstrated, official media frequently portray the civilised citizen as a productive person who then, in turn, shares the fruit of his or her economic accumulation, so furthering the goals of spiritual civilisation (Anagnost, 1997). Zhou's fictitious casting of himself, not just as a modern subject endowed with qualities compatible with the principles of the market economy (including competitiveness and adaptability to the requirements of a neoliberal economy), but as an internationally renowned artist who has successfully conquered not just the foreign artworld but also its media, ensures that his ranking on the hierarchy of material and spiritual civility is exponentially high—a surplus reflected in his ironic self-referential captioning as "too materialistic, too spiritualised". His creative reworking and appropriation of civility's rhetoric thus also serves to highlight how this drive for both economic and spiritual advancement impacted the Chinese artworld of the 1990s, instigating a flurry of artistic experimentation that attempted to grapple with the thorny issue of China's position within a globalised artworld eager for politicised art from one of the world's most powerful emerging economies (Dai, 1996; Lu, 2001; Wu, 2001).

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In Zhou's *Fake Cover* series, civility is therefore more than just a state imposed, top-down rhetoric, whose primary goal is frequently to create a productive and organized citizenry. In his ascension of the hierarchy of civility, Zhou's status as a successful Chinese artist in the rapidly globalising contemporary art world has afforded him a stage upon which he can enact his civility. Through this restructuring and deterritorialisation of geographical (and

cultural) space, he thus becomes a truly global "citizen of the world". In his *Fake Covers*, the transcultural mobility and civility of the artist is exploited and parodied to maximum effect, reflecting more than just a society and government relentlessly concerned with image and ideal citizenship. In Zhou's hands, civility is converted into a device for exploring the ways in which China has not only come to be represented by the West, but also for measuring and critiquing the accuracy of those representations, and ultimately for an ironic reflection and rebuttal of their validity.

Conclusion

The two artworks examined in this article demonstrate how the power of cultural representation in the 1990s was often directly related to, and woven out of, the fabric of civility, making it central to the ways in which we understand and conceptualise the art of this period. If Wang Jin's installation visualised civility as a force of self-actualisation, linking the term to the growth of a consumer citizenry that is unafraid to exercise new consumer rights and behaviours, then Zhou Tiehai's parody of the Chinese artist vying for visibility on the glittering shores of the international art world serves as the ultimate embodiment of the awakened, civilised citizen, one who is perfectly at home in a post-socialist era dominated, above all, by the logic of global commodification.

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By creating artworks that both counter-balanced and mordantly satirised the prevailing ethos of get-rich quick vulgarity, and instead advocated an irreverent approach to the social realities of postsocialist China, these artists sought to extend a wry artistic gesture of resistance against the multifarious forces of commodification and government-sanctioned mercantile aggression. If the government, as outlined in the *China Yearbook* of 1996, attempted to commit the country to the solemn and burdensome task of civility, then Wang offered a carnivalesque rebuttal of the feasibility of such a civilizing mission. The increasingly "uncivilised" array of activities that Wang Jin's audience engaged in to acquire the goods embedded within his wall directly contradicted the moral imperatives called for in the building of "spiritual civilisation": namely the emphasis on manners, upright morality, a correct political stance and correct "lifestyle choices" (Wang, 2002). In their blind pursuit of material civility, their

level of spiritual civility was thus inversely drained. Exposing how the "exemplary behaviour" usually on display in public squares is as fragile and porous as the ice encasing his fetishistic display of luxury goods, Wang accentuated how the veneer of civility can be easily eroded, highlighting how the "spiritual" aspects of civility endorsed by the government instead became sublimated within a wider discourse that privileged material advancement over upholding spiritually "civilising" norms.

Zhou Tiehai similarly challenged these socio-political terms by aesthetic means, exploring the analogies between the seemingly mutually exclusive systems of the art world and that of the political terrain and rampant consumerism of Chinese society in the mid-1990s. In his *Fake Cover* series, Zhou presents this as an equivocal discourse that is ironically embraced by the artist as an affirmative mode of self-identification—a double-edged means of generating cultural and social capital through an exploitative "system of signification" that emphasises and exploits civility's attendant rights of political representation and social recognition.

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Wang Jin's *Ice-96 Central Plain*, and Zhou Tiehai's *Fake Cover*, thus point to a reconsideration of the easy accessibility of civility promised by capital acquisition. They instead question and problematise the idea that happiness and increased civility can be fulfilled by the relentless acquisition of consumer goods (or status). If their works forcefully stage the contradictions, ironies, and uneven cultural formations between the local and the global, and the native and the foreign, then they also expose how the struggle to acquire either luxury goods, or international fame, could similarly be read as national allegories of the pursuit of material and spiritual civility emphasized so prominently in the political and social rhetoric of the time. As I have argued throughout the article, these works instead reveal a moment when the parameters of civility and citizenship were vexed and contested, as artists sought to navigate the fraught terrain between ideology and market reforms, consumer citizenship, and the exigencies of globalization.

Exposing the complex links between civility and citizenship, these works of art therefore form more than just a simple critique of the reform era national agenda of modernisation, with its emphasis on the material acceleration of

society epitomised by the glib catchphrase “to get rich is glorious”,[7] with the added expectation that “it doesn’t matter if some areas get rich first.” Reflecting a society in which civility becomes more and more a matter of fast consumption and outward displays of wealth, they provide amusing yet acute reflections on the collusion of state and capital, culture and commodity, commitment and cynicism, that rested at the core of civility’s spiritual/material divide at the close of China’s long twentieth century. More than extending a poignant, if somewhat subdued artistic gesture of resistance against the multifarious forces of commodification, they alternatively question and expose the process of development in both the economic and moral spheres represented by the two civilities, questioning what it means for China to have achieved its developmental ends without losing its spirit in the process.

If civility has previously been framed as a discourse of lack, and its adoption and visualisation essential as a strategy to transcend China’s subaltern position in the global community (Anagnost, 1997), the rapid and vertiginous transformations that began in the early 1990s meant that in Wang and Zhou’s works, it spoke to the aspirations and desires of a modern, globalising and consumer-conscious society. In these artist’s visualisations, civility therefore becomes a surplus quality, an embodied excess, something which could be performed, parodied or publicly cast off. These works therefore offer not a rejection but rather a redefinition of civility, exposing how it triangulates the “bad” crowd, the “good” consumer and the “successful” Chinese artist within a constantly contested continuum of citizenship and self-cultivation.

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The pursuit of civility in contemporary China ultimately still remains as much of a prickly issue today as it was in the 1990s, or indeed at the beginning of the twentieth century, in part because it cuts at the heart of how “progress”, “development” and “tolerance” continue to be defined in China. In the decades following both Wang and Zhou’s work, civility has continued to accrue new aesthetic, market, consumer, cultural, and nationalist values, to the extent that “there is almost nothing which cannot be done in a ‘civilized’ or ‘uncivilized’ way” (Brownell, 1995: 172). From anti-spitting campaigns to the arrest of feminist

[7] Ironically, although this phrase is often attributed to Deng Xiaoping, it does not appear in any of his official writings. The phrase may have been popularised as a result of Western news coverage and books such as Orville Schell’s (1984) *To Get Rich is Glorious: China in the Eighties*.

activists and the forced detention and "re-education" of thousands of Uighurs, many read the renewed calls for civility under Xi Jinping's leadership not as an exhortation to virtue, a minimal conformity to norms of respectful behaviour and decorum, nor as a way to reconcile the tension between diversity and disagreement, but as a covert demand for conformity that delegitimizes dissent while reinforcing the status quo.

The exclusionary essence that lies at the heart of civility, its emblematic power to silence, deflect and exclude anyone uncivil enough to question it, points to a complex system of interactions designed to transform a number of external and internal features not just of the individual, or of Chinese society or culture at large, but in some cases, of the nation itself. As China's national identity has become increasingly bound up with its rapid integration into a transnational economy in the reorganization of capitalism that has been characterized as "the age of flexible accumulation", we must acknowledge that "the complexity of wenming discourse cannot fully be understood as a process internal to national borders; its sites of production are also global" (Anagnost, 1997: 76). Civility is therefore something which continues to ignite highly charged debates about the role of the state "in an increasingly globalised but not always entirely civilised world" (Golley, 2013: 91).

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If the evolving and overlapping valences of civility have become difficult to disentangle, it is also this ambiguity and imprecision which has ensured its survival within the socio-political and cultural landscape of contemporary China, providing artists with the means to both question and critique its continued deployment in the visual sphere. Highlighting how civility can be deployed as an asset or a tool, a mechanism or even a technology for the purposes of political, artistic and cultural re-positioning, the performative parodies that Zhou and Wang stage illustrate how civility frames and shapes the meanings of citizenship, in the process articulating and agitating both the visual parameters of civility and the overlapping and competing civilities of the visual.

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Ros Holmes is Presidential Academic Fellow in the History of Chinese Art in the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures at the University of Manchester.

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