Body, Subject & Power in China

Edited by

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Theorizing Woman: Funü, Guojia, Jiating (Chinese Woman, Chinese State, Chinese Family)

Tani E. Barlow

The generic woman, like its counterpart, the generic man, tends to efface difference within itself. . . . Woman as subject can only redefine while being defined by language.

Trinh, “Difference”

What narratives produce the signifiers of the subject for other traditions?

Spivak, “The Political Economy of Women”

The cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart.

Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals

The theorizing part of my argument revolves around points expressed in the three aphorisms above. First, in T. Min-ha Trinh’s words, “Woman as subject can only redefine while being defined by language.” Funü or “Chinese women,” the object of my genealogical attention, is a subject in Trinh’s sense; to this day the politics of funü involve “redefinition while being defined,” as I will illustrate. But though language situates and constitutes, it does so within the constraints of canon, text, and tradition. Gayatri Spivak’s “What narratives produce the signifiers of the subject for other traditions?” compels a situated, historical response. Finally, distilled in my assertions (that Chinese intellectuals’ appropriation of the imperialists’ sex binary in their struggle against patrilineally expressed difference opened the bodies of peasant women to the state’s restructuring) is a particular view of history: in Nietzsche’s motto, “The cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart” (Nietzsche 1969: 76; Minson 1985).

Attention to these three points allows me to argue here that hege-
monic funui/women, the principal female subject position available to women under Chinese socialism, took shape in "a system of purposes" that constitutes a genealogy. One kin-inflected category, funui/kinswomen, became the tradition against which cultural revolutionaries in the 1920s posed a colonial sign. Woman, that they called nixing. Political funui women, an element of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) nomenclature, contested "Westernized" nixing/Woman, redesignating it "bourgeois," and marked it off as normatively forbidden. The Revolution restituted funui/women inside guojia (state) and thus by synecdochic logic, inside jiating (family) under a Maoist inscription. Modern funui/women thus provided a staging ground, offering the sexed bodies of peasant women as a space of modernization.

That is to say, despite their common roots, contemporary official language marks a discontinuity in Chinese women's history. Funui/women actually belongs in a discursive constellation not with older female subjects, but with other modern state categories, like worker (gongren) and youth (qingnian) and proletariat (xuexianji). Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century funui/kinswomen and Maoist funui/women are linked tangentially. Only in relation to modern nixing/Woman did the old compound funui relinquish its previous connection to female kin and relocate itself as a state category representing all Chinese women rather than merely one's own kin. Since sex-identity politics first entered Chinese political discourse in the May Fourth movement of 1919 and the neologism nixing/Woman emerged as a trope of colonial realist literature, funui has been a statist (and under the CCP out of power, a protostatist or what I call "fugitive state") category, with all the prerogatives of a statist subjectivity. It was part of the "system of designations" that until the overthrow of Maoism "regulated[d] all important social relationships" (Billetter 1985:138). Indeed, more than any state category I can think of, funui/women and the government bureaucracy that enabled it, the Women's Federation, or Fulian, "construct[ed] the interests it represents" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:120). Over the course of nearly fifty years, the 1940s to the mid-1980s, Fulian has sustained funui and so ensured that gender inscription remained a province of the state.

This critique and the alternative genealogies that follow are rooted in a debt I owe to an earlier generation of innovative scholars: Marilyn B. Young, Phyllis Andors, Margery Wolf, Kay Anne Johnson, Wolfgang Kubin, and Charlotte Beahan. Their historiography assumed a relatively unified subject of global feminism; it predated, in other words, recent contests over gender theory and postcolonial criticism. Their research made my own thinkable. My debt to them is very great, and so is my gratitude.

Producing Virtuous Mothers and Good Wives

In late imperial Chinese discourses funui signified female family members. In his Jianzi yigui (Inherited guide for educating women), the eighteenth-century scholar Chen Hongmou neatly illustrated what I mean.

When fu [persons, sages, women of rank] are in the jia [lineage unit] they are ni [female, woman, daughter]; when they marry they are fu [wives], and when they bear children they are mu [mothers]. [If you start with] a xianmu [virtuous unmarried female], then you will end up with a xianfu [virtuous wife]; if you have virtuous wives, you will end up with xianmu [virtuous mothers]. With virtuous mothers there will be virtuous descendants. Civilizing [wanghua; literally, transforming through the influence of the monarchy] begins in the women's quarters. Everyone in the jia benefits from female chastity. That is why education for women is so important. (Chen, n.d., 1b-2a)

Chen's statement invites analysis because it demonstrates so well why later cultural radicals found colonialist categories worth borrowing and even, perhaps, why the Maoist state's recuperation of funui had nativist overtones.

The first point I want to raise involves categories. The citation presents a fu who marries a husband, has children, is "her" father's daughter (her in quotation marks because pronouns in Chinese are not inflected for gender). Chen says that the fu is a person of rank within the differential kinship sublineage group, jia. The point, however, is that the text's very specificity concerning fu forecloses a general category of "generic woman," a category that would incorporate fu (woman of rank), ni, fu (wife), funui (female kinfolk), xianmu, and all poor women of no rank. In other words, I could translate the passage as follows: "Before [women] are married they are ni/female/daughters, when they get married they are fu/wives, and when they give birth to children then they are mu/mothers."

But to do so would involve substantiating a category of woman, Trinh's "generic woman," that does not appear in the syntax of the sentence. A lot rests on this reading, because in contemporary standard Chinese ni (in its cognates nüe, niun, niuhi, etc.) is almost always translated as
“woman,” “female,” or “women.” Indeed, in Chen Hongmou’s own text there appear innumerable instances in which \( nü \) should indeed be translated as “woman”—usually instances in which \( nü \) appears in a pair with \( nan \), meaning “male,” “men,” or “man,” as part of a parallel or multiple homology of gender domains (Yanagisako 1987:109). Why the binary \( nan/nü \) is subordinated to other signs is not my concern here. It is pertinent, however, that the syntactical habit I have cited appears throughout Chen’s text. It is so prevalent that it forecloses transcendent framing of female persons as generic women.

“Inherited Guides” also does not support a transcendent agent called Woman. The subjects Chen’s passage addresses, primarily wives and daughters (\( fùnù \)), are “women,” of course. But they are women, as I will demonstrate momentarily, because they enact protocols specific to their subject positions. \( fùnù \) acts as a frame of differential \( jia \) relation, not as a transcendent category. In fact, there exists no moment in Chen’s text where “woman” operates as a framing category beyond \( jia \) or relationality. (That is why I am claiming that the \( fùnù \) whose referent is “the masses of Chinese women” has no late imperial antecedent). Another way to phrase this point is that Chen Hongmou assumes no foundational status for Woman. Rather than noting certain kin-specific situations, actions, and responsibilities as instances of “things that women do,” Chen explains that acting within the boundaries of ethical-practical kin relations makes a person recognizably female.

Thus differential kin linkages are for Chen the agent that positions people in relation to one another—what makes them who they are and therefore what genders them. Chen Hongmou did not have to provide his readers with charts of quotidian differential positions, since these had long been normalized into the primary categories of personal experience and common sense. Here I want to focus on that older, discursive system. A decade ago Elizabeth Cowie argued, against prevailing wisdom, that rather than theorizing women as women situated in the family we ought to grasp that it is “in the family—as the effect of kinship structures—that women as women are produced.” Cowie sought to understand “kinship” not as a system of exchange but as a production line for subjectivities. I quite agree. Part of my reason for invoking Cowie is to ratify the notion that kinship nomenclature is productive discourse that constructs by virtue of its effects. But just as significant was Cowie’s conclusion that “the sign ‘woman’ in exogamy is not exchanged but produced in the exchange of actual women” (Cowie 1978:61–62).

Cowie showed how the forces in anthropological discourse that produced Lévi-Strauss as a theorist of kinship had also appropriated adjacent theories about language, and had introjected these into sexist notions like the belief that Woman and Man consist of different, unequal substances. Her insight helps me argue that the exchange of actual women in patrilineal, patrilocal Chinese kinship produced not the sign “woman,” but a profusion of signs with one thing in common: though they all accommodated “real” women, none could be reduced to a preclusive category Woman. The process of exchange of women in the late imperial Han Chinese contexts was a social discourse for the production of persons. By its very syntax and inscription, it provided multiple subject positions and diverse, complex protocols of practice. But it did not produce Woman as a hegemonic sign.

Under these conditions, gendering in Chen Hongmou’s world proceeded as a cosmological activity whereby differential relations on the analogy of yin/yang established and positioned subjects normatively on the primary sites of the \( jia \), in constantly reinscribed taxonomies that included protocols of (gender and positionally appropriate) behavior. Chen Hongmou’s texts do not refer to women’s bodies. They do not designate as women those persons whose bodies exhibit specific markings, like bound feet or large breasts (Carter 1980). Other contemporary texts also seem relatively uninterested in conflating gender and body (McMahon, this volume). Particular cosmological ordering made engendering one of many activities that contributed to the coherence of human culture.

I want to reinforce one last point about gendering, and to do so I cite Judith Butler (1990:111):

Gender is not a culture as sex is to nature [nor is sex] prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts. . . . Simone de Beauvoir wrote in The Second Sex that “one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one.” The phrase is odd, even nonsensical, for how can one become a woman if one wasn’t a woman all along? And who is this “one” who does the becoming? Is there someone who becomes its gender at some point in time? How does one “become” a gender? What is the moment or mechanism of gender construction? And, perhaps most pertinently, when does this mechanism arrive on the cultural scene to transform the human subject into a gendered subject?

I use Butler’s point to suggest that as gender is to culture, so sex is to culture. Cultural codes and discursive traditions turn out genders, which have in common the fact that they possess different foundations. It be-
comes clear why I might argue that all formations of “woman,” not just *fünü* and *nüxing*, possess multiple, complex genealogies. Because the instability of gendering is historically so pronounced, it makes as little sense to confute women and bodies in old China as it would to do so in pre–Enlightenment Christianity (Castelli 1991). Indeed, historically bodies are as easily the ground of similarities between women and men as they are the first ground of their difference (Flax 1990:51). Since Chen Hongmou’s texts do not refer to women’s bodies or designate as women those whose bodies exhibit specific markings, and since other contemporary texts also tend not to confute gender with body, I have turned elsewhere for the apparatus of gendering.

When I name the processes of gendering in Chen Hongmou’s world social cosmology enacted primarily on the (never stable or fully bounded) site of the *jia*, I am rendering into my own language the point the late sixteenth-century physician Li Shichen made in his *Materia Medica*. “Normally *qian* and *kun* make fathers and mothers; but there are five kinds of non-males [*feimén*] who cannot become fathers and five kinds of non-females [*femü*] who cannot become mothers” (Furth 1988).* Qian and kun are the first and last hexagrams of the *Yijing*, or *Book of Change*, the foundational text of Confucian studies since the Song dynasty (Smith et al. 1990). *Qian* and *kun* refer to forces operating in *tianda*, the realm extrinsic to human culture, as well as the realm of *wen*, human social life.

The forces of yin and yang are many things: logical relationships (like up and down, in and out, husband and wife), practical forces, “designations for the polar aspects of effects,” and in a social sense, powers that inscribe hierarchy (i.e., yang subordinates yin because it encloses the lesser force into itself), but yin/yang is neither as totalistic nor as ontologically binary as the Western stereotype would have it (Porkert 1985:13). What Li Shichen says, then, is that the dynamic forces of yin/yang do “produce”—only not anatomical women and men, but father subject positions or hierarchical, relational, subjectivities named mother and father, husband and wife, brother and sister, and so on.

Li understood yin/mother and yang/father (or yin/wife and yang/husband, yin/junior brother and yang/senior brother and so on) as agencies by which cosmic order established itself.* “Father/mother” is a differential relation, structured on the analogy of yin/yang, possessing temporality that exceeds that of the bodies of the specific person answering to the name “father” or “mother” at any given moment. Yin/yang does not produce women and men. It produces mothers and fathers, wives and hus-

bands—capable, in turn, given fertile human material (aided by medical practitioners, if necessary) of (re)producing sons and daughters.

The anomaly confronting the physician, the problem that has forestalled cosmological production of “father” and “mother,” in the cases Li cites, is derived from a general instability of bodies in most Confucian discourse. Here the nonman and the nonwoman, whose defective bodies forestall reproduction, as well as the castrated, the impotent, the vaginally impenetrable, and bodies known to change from female to male and from male to female, all present to the physician surfaces that are neither stable nor automatically “gendered.” For Li Shichen’s and Chen Hongmou’s time, Simone de Beauvoir’s peculiar notion that “women are not women but become women” makes sense. Why? Because the surfaces onto which eighteenth-century Chinese subjectivities were inscribed (Li Shichen’s fecund organ system) were more flexible than the (gendering) subject positions that producing sons and daughters actually enabled women to occupy and possess.

The instance cited could be joined by myriad others. Gendering proceeded in late imperial China not at the level of one but in multiple discourses beyond my present scope—many, like I commentary, not directly addressing immediate persons, yet others appropriating “female” for subservive purposes. Its processes changed under different social and discursive conditions, and it produced bodily effects—the bound foot, for instance—marking the body as feminine. But at no time was gender ever “a property of bodies or something originally existent in human beings”; it was always “the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and social relations” through deployment of “complex political technolog[ies].”

What appear as “gender” are yin/yang differentiated positions: not two anatomical “sexes,” but a profusion of relational, bound, unequal dyads, each signifying difference and positioning difference and analogically. A *ni* is a daughter, unequally related to parents and parents-in-law. A *zu*, or filial son, is differentially unequal to mother and father, yin to their yang. A *fu* is a wife, tied in a secondary relation to her husband. A *mifu* is a wife who, grasping the powers visited upon the secondary yin term, masters through familiarity with protocol (Porkert 1985:22–23). Obviously (invoking Cowie’s point), subjects got produced within the *jia* (more properly *jia*-ist or familial discourses). Chen Hongmou’s definition of *ni*, *fu*, and *mifu* makes it clear that while (good) women in the *jia* did effect social relations outside the family, no position existed for female persons (or male persons, for that matter) outside the *jia*’s boundaries.
The jia* exists within the kin world of reciprocal inequality by virtue of her father’s high standing.  

Chen Hongmou sought to educate women in order to produce more xianwu or virtuous women and thereby to enhance the jia—that is all. Learning to act virtuously is coterminous with acting “like a woman” in Chen Hongmou’s view, and “acting like a woman” required maintaining difference. “[Just as] the yin and the yang are different natures [shuqing], so males and females [nan/mu] should act differently,” as Chen’s text puts it. In the view of Lu Jingxi, Chen Hongmou’s own authority, “there is a difference between the li [ritual] of men and women [nan/mu]. If you do not maintain the distinction, then you will cause gossip” (Chen, n.d., 15). Li—behaviors, rituals, or normative manners—were what, for the most part, protocol consisted of; they provided guidance for appropriate, proper, good, and efficacious self-presentation. Prescribed, normative behavior and gendered experience were inextricable (Chen, n.d., 9b). When the daughters act on the li of daughterhood, married women act on the li of wives, and so on, then the distinction between men and women is accomplished and gendering is effected.  

Lest the reader get the wrong impression, these protocols took virtually everything into consideration. “As a kinswoman [niu] you must establish yourself in life [lishen],” one reads, for instance. “If behavior don’t turn your head from side to side; if you wish to speak do so without moving your lips; if you wish to sit, do so without moving your knees, and if you stand do not wiggle your skirt. If you are happy do not giggle, if you are unhappy, do not yell aloud. Inside and outside [nei/wai] the jia women and men [nan/mu] should be separate” (Chen, n.d., 6b). Chen Hongmou cited reams of text from ancient times describing in minute detail the fishes (body etiquette) he felt would allow people in the present, through their physical actions, to resurrect the splendid world of the Confucian past.  

These texts produced “gender” relationally by linking good behavior to correct enactment of written protocols that inscribe kin difference. “The father-in-law [weng] and mother-in-law [aun] are the heads of the husband’s family,” a typical specimen reads. “You are their daughter-in-law when you marry your husband, so you must support them as you supported your own parents.” What that requires is service of a specific order enumerated in concrete detail: serve parents only when properly dressed, listen attentively while remaining in a standing posture, prepare their wash water and towels in the morning, pre-masticate their food, prepare their bedding, and avoid disorder, criticism, or neglecting their comfort.  

This is precisely what I am calling protocol. It is neither a mere code, nor a map, nor a “role.” It rests on a shifting foundation, the cosmic activity of yin/yang, yet it provides advice and counsel on achieving naturalized, normative, gendered relational subjects. Protocols instruct. They provide a continuity and reinforce subject positions by linking the archaic past in which these protocols were first established to contemporary texts. They stand as a bulwark of order against the undoing of gender distinction that Daoist practices threatened. A protocol models in a bare-bones narrative fashion.  

By the nineteenth century these protocols, or what Gary Hamilton calls “codification[s] of the roles of family members,” had become completely embedded in a wider system of abstract allegiances, “loyalty to [the monarchy’s] symbols and philosophic principles” (1984:417–18). I substitute “protocol” for Hamilton’s “role,” since the latter suggests an ontological status, but overall I think Hamilton is correct. His insight is particularly valuable in that it points to the power of narrativity. If kinship, or differential positionality, became metaphor (or strategy), if protocols stood for subjectivities that were rooted in the old textual heritage, then change required, among other things, strategic reinvention and retelling of protocol and stories (Lauretis 1984:106). Such indeed did occur, as I will argue shortly.

Producing Nixing/Woman

Under Western imperialism efforts began to retheorize the figures (jia*, niu, fami, mu, and so on) populating texts like Chen Hongmou’s. The Manchu dynasty’s long, slow implosion and the imperialists’ relentless penetration of the heartland via “treaty ports” transformed the political elite’s social configuration and powers. The “high center” of kingship, in Benedict Anderson’s beautiful phrase, receded, and sacral legitimacy was at its end (Anderson 1983:25). Whereas texts coded with meaning and associated with the monarchy had enabled Confucian officials to regulate the meaningful world, garranuan pressures dispersed the older stacked powers; they collapsed in 1908 when the Qing throne abolished the civil service examination system. Where once a Chen Hongmou could hegemonize Confucian textual production of gender, there emerged a modern, post-Confucian, professionalized intellectual who oversaw the transcription of foreign signs into the new domestic, urban, mass market, mecha-
nized print economy—an "intellectual" who signaled a shift from the widely diffused textuality of the old society to the scriptural economy of realist representation in a modern peripheralized world economy.

In the early twentieth century a new social formation arose calling itself zhishi jiezi, or intellectual class, later to become qiming xueshe (enlightened scholars), and finally, under the same forces that produced funsi women as a political category, zhishi fengzi, or Chinese intellectual under Maoist inscription (Certeau 1984). Zhishi fengzi were the educated element of the tiny, exceedingly significant new commercial bourgeoisie that monopolized the appropriation of Western ideas, forms, signs, and discourses (Bergere 1990). In their hands, peripheralization of signs proceeded as new missionary-educated and college-graduate professionals imported, translated, republished, and commented on texts in foreign languages (Barlow 1990). Historically this group constituted itself as a colonialized elite, meaning two things: that the imperialist semicolonization of China forced into existence "new intellectuals," and that these elements did not just passively import neologisms from Japan and the European West, but actively redrew the discursive boundaries of elite social existence. In this way the zhishi fengzi occupied (thence further valorizing) new, modernist social fields like shehui, or "society" (Woodside 1976:54). Situated inside the treaty ports in a crude material sense—the Palladian English banks, French boulevards, German beer, American TMCAs, and Japanese factories—neologisms like shehui acquired increasingly concrete referents. The powerful older terms guan (official), gong (public), and si (private) from Chen Hongmou's time increasingly gave ground. Once-robust conventions were reduced to something intellectuals of the 1920s would call "tradition" (chuantong) and would regard either with painful nostalgia or with contempt and fear.

A larger project would require far more comment on colonialist discourse among the treaty-port zhishi fengzi. Here let it suffice that the discourses of semicolonialism had an effect on older Chinese gendering practices at many levels. A rash of masculinist interest in the universal sign of woman had surfaced as early as the 1830s, when there occurred what Mary Rankin (1975) calls an efflorescence of "pro-feminine" male writing. Male reformers in the 1860s spoke admiringly of "enlightened" relations between women and men in Western countries. Anti-foot-binding and pro-female academy arguments held key positions in the late 1890s and first decade of the twentieth century, in the work of major male new-style intellectuals.

Indeed, masculinist recycling of niu initiated, according to the Charlotte Beahan (1975a), an unprecedented female journalism within the slackening Confucian discourses between 1890 and 1910. Calling themselves sisters (jiemei), female writers reversed the strategy Chen Hongmou had adopted when he argued for female literacy on the grounds that ethical women in families produced strong states. "Why isn't China strong?" one asked. "Because there are no persons of talent. Why are there no persons of talent? Because women do not prosper." Late Confucian women, as Beahan carefully points out, sought liberty on nationalist grounds. The sisters' publications contributed part of what emerged rapidly as a "myth of the nation" (Brennan 1990:44). That is to say, writers positioned themselves as citizens of the Chinese nation, as advocates of national emancipation from Western imperialism and Manchu occupation, and as constitutionally different from men of their own Han Chinese nationalist group. On those unimpeachable grounds they sought to mobilize China's "beloved but weak two hundred million women...the direct slaves of slaves" (Beahan 1975a:384).

The expression "slaves of slaves" as a term for Chinese women signified a change in the theorization of niu. "Slave" referred to Han Chinese males "enslaved" to the Manchu monarchy and thus signaled democratic patriotism. "Slaves of slaves" recategorize all Chinese women into a patriotic unity against the myriad imperialists seeking to "divide China up as though it were amelon," as people put it then. The kin-inflected category of funsi began the referential shift. Writers made Chinese niuren (female person) one specific instance of a universal category consisting of all women, and they did it under a patriotic inscription.

An example of the mechanics of the referential shift comes from Zhen Ziyang's Niusai xin duben (New study book for women), a collection of stories about virtuous women linked generically to narratives in the Chen Hongmou book I cited earlier. The older text celebrated "just mothers," "ethical stepmothers," and other situated kinswomen who had managed the jia sphere well, thereby benefiting, through their adept use of protocol in difficult circumstances, the space beyond their own jia—the gong or general world. Indeed, Chen Hongmou's use of narratives of contradiction applauded the discipline and far-sighted judgment required of "good" kinswomen. The modernist text, in contrast, provided not one but two sets of ethical narratives about good women, sets off from each other in two separate books (Zhen 1907). Book 1 retold stories familiar to readers even before Chen Hongmou's time, such as the story of Mencius's mother,
who sacrificed to provide her son an appropriate ethical environment, Yue Fei's wife Liang, who personally fought the Nužen barbarians on behalf of the Song dynasty, and Hua Mulan of the Liang dynasty, who masqueraded as a filial son and fought as her father's proxy for twelve years. It also included examples of women who had, in the hoary past, transgressed unfairly gendered boundaries or had been ignored in masculinist histories. Huang Zongjia, for instance, "was born a girl but did not want to be a woman/niuzi," so she masqueraded as a man and served as an official; Suo Maoyi taught the master calligrapher Wang Xizhi his calligraphic style; and so on.

Book 2 assembled a set of parallel stories about famous women of the West who matched or exceeded Hua Mulan's filial devotion because they served not father, husband, or patriline but the nation. "Sha Lanuo" or Charlotte Corday, according to this version of the story, studied at a nursery for six years and became engrossed in a particular book about national heroes (I cannot figure out who the author "Puluhua" might have been in a European language). The book's inspiration sent Sha Lanuo to Paris, where she surprised the tyrant Mala (Marat) while he was with his concubine. In prison for his murder, she sent her father a filial letter declaring that tyrannicide was not a crime, and she met her death with "Puluhua's" book clutched in her hands. Another narrative venerated Madame Roland, who studied "the Confucianism of her country" but preferred the example of the Greeks and Romans. After marrying Roland for his politics, she inspired her timid husband to resist Robespierre's "People's Party" (minhang). When Robespierre executed Madame Roland, her husband committed suicide and their servants, overcome, also petitioned for execution. Their requests were carried out! (Zhen 1907, 2:10:7b–9a).19

The juxtaposition of "Chinese" and "other" stories engendered meaning in two significant ways. First, obviously the reworked "Chinese" stories and the "Western" parallels jointly showed female heroes shifting their loyalties from husband or father to "nation," without directly requiring that they abandon the prior object. A certain "Frances" (Frances Willard, perhaps) appears to have been selected because, following her father's death, she remained unmarried and devoted herself to the improvement of North America through a renovation of the family, the nation, and finally the entire world. Nation rose up to peripheralize father, without necessarily precluding his importance (Zhen 1907, 13:10a–12a).

Second, the bilateral mutual exchange of "Western" signs and "Chinese" narrative had the effect of producing a category of universal womanhood. ("Chinese" narratives changed in a generic sense when the subjects of their interest became "Western" women.) When Zhen situated Chinese female heroes in the company of European women of the state like Joan of Arc, Charlotte Corday, and Madame Roland, the effect was to legitimate and universalize niuzi within a statist, universal (i.e., Europeanized) world history. Zhen sought to conjoin bourgeois state revolutions like the Glorious Revolution, the French and Italian revolutions, to the expected Chinese revolution (the Xinhai Revolution occurred a few years later, in 1911). Giving such remarkable prominence to Western women in their national revolutions, moreover, also granted universality to heroic female actions of whatever kind, at whatever time. Remarkably, the "Chinese" section of the text went so far as to legitimate Wu Zetian of the Tang dynasty, a woman previously reviled as a female usurper and defiler of her husband's throne. Before the 1920s, though, female heroes rested securely in the inherited binary division familiar from Confucian contexts of the filial hero and the just throne.

The term niuzi (literally, female sex) entered circulation during the 1920s when treaty-port intellectuals overthrew the literary language of the Confucian canon. Critics replaced the wen (culture) of the old world with wenxue (literature), inscribed in a hybrid literary language (part colloquial Chinese, part "European" syntax garnered from reading Western fiction in Chinese translation; Hutens 1984, 1988). Wenxue consisted of an appropriated realist representationalism, an insight that has produced a good deal of focus on the production of modernist subjectivities (Anderson 1990). The field of wenxue unfolded in the 1920s as a general terrain of combat for intellectuals. The May Fourth movement of 1919 established wenxue as primarily governed by realist referentiality: the second most significant major figure within that new textuality, after the "hyper-trophied self" (Hutens 1984) of the writer, of course, was the figure of niuxing. Niuxing was not a self-reference. It was not initially an "identity" for women at all. Like the recuperation of niuzi as a trope of nationalist universality in masculinist discourses, niuxing was a discursive sign and a subject position in the larger, masculinist frame of anti-Confucian discourse. When intellectuals overthrew the Confucian canon they sought the total transformation of "Chinese" culture. The same modernist revolution that invoked new, modern signs like society (shenhui), culture (wenhua), intellectuals (zhishi), individualism (geren zhuyi), and innumerable other modern Chinese neologisms gave niuxing or "Woman" wide discursive
powers. Nüxing played a particularly significant role in two separate textual streams, literary representation and the body of the writing known as Chinese feminism. Historically speaking, women writers did not predominate in either one.

"Historical languages constitute classes," as Talal Asad has argued, "they do not merely justify groups already in place according to universal economic structures" (1987:606). Nüxing coalesced into a category in Asad's sense when, as part of the project of social class formation, Chinese moderns disavowed their older literary language of power. After the May Fourth movement of 1919, Chinese writers wrote in a newly modernized, Westernized, semicolloquial language in which nüxing played the part of a subject of representation and an autonomous agent. Nüxing was one half of the Western, exclusionary, essentialized, male/female binary. Within the zhishifengzai as a class, the sign of the sex binary had enormous utility. Nüxing (and to a lesser extent its correlate namexing, male sex) was magnetic, attracting around its universal, sexological, scientific core a psychologized personal subject position that made it the fulcrum for upending Confucianism and all received categories. Chinese translations of European fiction and social theory also relocated agency in the individual at the level of sex opposition and sex attraction. In particular, colloquial fiction made sex the core of an oppositional personal identity and Woman a sexological category.10

The career of nüxing firmly established a foundational womanhood beyond kin categories. It did so on the ground of European humanism. That is, when it introduced the category "Woman" (nüxing), Chinese feminist writing also flooded texts with representations of women who were the "playthings of men," "parasites," "slaves," and so on—dependents of men or simply degraded to the point of nonexistence. Feminist texts accorded a foundational status to physiology and, using monolithic forms of Victorian ideology from nineteenth-century Europe, they grounded sexual identity in sexual physiology. Indeed, the most shocking of all Chinese feminism's arguments substituted sexual desire for reproductive service to jiao as the foundation of human identity. The secret attraction of European texts was their emphasis on what Foucault has called "sexuality" and has excavated as though it were any other historical artifact (Foucault 1979, Weeks 1986). Yet when the leading male feminist Yeh Shengtao spoke of women, even while he granted foundational status to male/female, it was often in terms of Chinese women's lack of personality or human essence. In other words, when Chinese translators invoked the sex binary of a Charles Darwin they valorized notions of female passivity, biological inferiority, intellectual inability, organic sexuality, and social absence through reference to the location of these "truths" in European social science and social theory. Thus Chinese men became nüxing Woman only when they became the other of man in the Victorian binary. Nüxing was foundational when she became nüxing's (man's) other.

Ching-ku Stephen Chan's recent exploration of nüxing in the literature of major male May Fourth realist writers makes this point at the level of the high literary text. When the zhishifengzai turned to European-style realism, Chan argues, "the classical mimetic function of realism" required that the writer represent himself through his own representations of the other, and the other of male realist choice was Woman. Nüxing was first and foremost a trope in the discourses of masculinist, Europeanist, Chinese realist fiction. As Chan puts it, "Textually speaking, where is she to be found?" Nüxing appears in a literal, representational sense, "but [always] as an innocent scapegoat, paying for the crimes that society has committed day after day, generation after generation." Semicolonial Woman made her appearance in a cruel equation that held that "the root of your [female] suffering is to be found in my [male writer's] inability to right the wrongs that society has done me" (Chan 1988:26–27).

Chan's point can also be made in a slightly different way. When the modernist female writer Ding Ling began producing texts in the late 1920s, she too had to struggle with the self/other oppositional dynamic coded into the sexual equation of Man/Woman. Ding Ling's texts sought to make Woman a subject position and they read like explications of modern Chinese woman's social psychology. Yet the texts Ding Ling produced during that period of her career invoke nüxing who must either die, commit suicide, or lose herself in a sexual excess, and mental disorder. No positivity, no universal woman independent of man could exist under the terms of the recoded Victorian sex binary. In the end Ding Ling, who continued to write, but not as a woman, simply abandoned psychological realism (Barlow 1982).

The social history of the trope nüxing requires more space than I am allotted here. Once it entered elite zhishifengzai discourses, nüxing the representation took on a life of its own. Her image appeared in popular movies and pulp fiction, in photographs and fashion magazines and strolled the schools, boulevards, and parks. These indigenous representations of
nāxing constructed a universal category Woman in the image of an object of consumption, to paraphrase Annette Kuhn, and nāxing eventually 'entered cultural and economic circulation on [its] own accord' (Kuhn 1985:19, cited in Hutcheon 1989:22). She ceased to be a "Western" sign and became instead a sign of Westernization. Nāxing was never a disfigured or unsuccessful replication of Victorian woman; she was always a recoding of modernist discourse on the sexual construction of gender, situated in a semicolonial context. Once recontextualized, the sign nāxing/Woman, had a career and politics of its own. In this respect Nietzsche's point that "the cause of the origin of a thing and its eventual utility, its actual employment and place in a system of purposes, lie worlds apart" is, historically speaking, literally correct (1969:66).

Producing Funü/Women

The sex-binary of Man/Woman and the sign nāxing/Woman never went uncontested. Carolyn Brown has vividly shown Lu Xun criticizing the formulation and arguing that the physical body of modern Chinese women "had become the repository of a meaning—the signified, that it did not rightfully bear" (1988:68). Social criticism from Chinese Communist Party theorist Xiang Jingyu, who employed funü/women as a figure in Marxist writing on women, contested the cultural world's pervasive irrationalization of nāxing (Leith 1973:50–51, 61). Xiang lost no time classifying nāxing as a product of bourgeois women's preoccupations, and her comments in the early 1920s set the tone for Communist theorizing for decades. Nonetheless, Xiang's early Communist funü had entered modern Chinese discourse the same way as sex-opposed nāxing had, through zhishifenzi appropriation. In the process of transmitting social theory, Communists retranslated out of the European revolutionary heritage a Woman they called funü to distinguish it from the febrile nāxing. The bourgeois social sciences, political rights theory, and nineteenth-century patriarchal theory that left-wing zhishifenzi found so valuable also shared elements of the sex essentialism manifest in contemporary realist fiction. But appropriators shaped their critique to emphasize social production, thus weighing historical and institutional teleology over organic, biogenetic time. Moreover, the funü/woman of early Chinese Marxist thought was always insufficient because the all-encompassing revolutionary equation, theory and praxis, held that she would come into her own only in the future when the proletariat gained the ascendancy. Unlike nāxing, Marxist funü was the product of revolutionary practice and existed in a future world, after the revolution.


Chinese Marxist discourses on funü clarify how thoroughly the history of women in China had become, by the early 1950s, a subsidiary of the history of the European working class. Du Zhunhui's 1949 Funü wenti jianghua (Lectures on the woman problem) exemplifies how, when Europe gets placed at the hegemonic center of "universal" theories of capital, Chinese history is inevitably reduced to being a subsidiary, local growth, possessing historical significance only as a semicolon of Europe, following a two-thousand-year dark night of "feudalism." Du's sophisticated historical critique insists that funü forms a social category (funühou). Still, the final chapters find her berating the Chinese women's movement for its failures, using as her measure the "universal" European women's movement (Du 1949).

State building supplanted bourgeois consolidation in both "white" and Communist camps as the Japanese advanced in the late 1930s. Socialist funü obviated nāxing once the Right allowed the discourses of national salvation (jiansuo) to become the special preserve of the Left. The reactionary Right rescinded its pallid remaining feminist-rights arguments and dissolved the women's movement into a "feminine mystique" (Diamond 1975; Croll 1978; Kruks, Rapp, and Young 1989). Socialist mobilization politics targeted funü as a tactical object and eventually made her a triangulating category mediating between modern state and modern Chinese family. But in the provinces during the late twenties and thirties
an increasingly Maoist CCP began grafting local practices onto its international Marxist teleology of women in the discourse of social production/reproduction.

§

"Keep in mind," said a 1932 activists' organizing manual for Party cadres doing women's work under the auspices of the Jiangxi Soviet, "what world revolutionary leader Lenin said [to the effect that] 'socialism cannot succeed without the participation of women.' At the same time we ought to keep in mind that the Liberation of Chinese women and the victory of Soviet state power are inseparable (my emphasis; JF 1932, 3.2.2: 53–54). The Communist Party's fugitive state project ("fugitive" in the sense that between 1930 and 1940 each state apparatus the CCP established decamped under pressure) made the funü of Chinese Marxism into a category of political praxis. In so doing it reversed and canceled the earlier relationship of theory and practice.

Not only did the "universal" woman of Euro-Marxism, an agent in the "universal" history of capital, relinquish her theoretical centrality to the women of practical village mobilizations, but Chinese Communist practices canceled out the existence of that older European woman so that she simply vanished. The peripheralized sign of woman realized its own independent local politics, to put it another way. Context revised text. The Jiangxi Soviet (1930–34) described funü as a political subject who was over fourteen years of age; had been emancipated from the tongyangzi (infant brides by purchase), prostitution, and female slave systems; had recourse from family violence; did not bear the bodily marks of "feudalism" (no earrings or foot-binding); called herself funü; and took part in liberating political praxis (JF 1932, 3.2.2: 21).

This subject existed within a structured sphere of politics beyond the rural calendar of field work and beyond village social relations. She labored according to schedule (JF 1931, 11, item 1–7: 38) and according to protective laws (JF 1931, 12: 231). A rudimentary bureaucracy concerned itself with her welfare (JF 1932, 2, 1: 46) and ensured her freedom of marriage. Political networks, such as the Working Women's Congress (JF 1932, 2.1: 43), operated to rationalize her political outlook (JF 1932, 1.2: 44–45). The symbolic center of this woman as a subject was undoubtedly the effort to propagandize "Women's Day." 38

Discourses of woman under the fugitive state had a proto–mass line function that allowed activists, the Party Central Committee, and local women to speak in different voices and that opened a large range of positions to local people.39 These subject positions included guifuj (young women), niáide de tongyangzi (oppressed wives by virtue of infant bride sale), da pinb luodong funü (the large suffering masses of laboring women), nongzun zhong di luodong funü (laboring women of the rural villages), and niáong nongfun (women workers and peasants). Even the heterogeneous funü of this period, however, was always a subject-effect of state discourses and a by-product of its legal, ideological, and organizational apparatus. It is just that before 1949 the mass line did not attempt political closure. Funü appeared in the form of a range of subject positions residing in the Soviet state, beyond the reach of family and feudalism. As one document put it, village women do not understand the agitation for liberation and need to have explained to them the link between victory in class struggle and the liberation of women. They must be taught that their self-interest is concerned to the state and not the family (JF 1932, 6: 20).

The ideological ideal was a healthy, semiliterate woman of eighteen to thirty-five who could "destroy her familial outlook and serve [the state even when called upon to make] government transfers" (JF 1933, 8.31: 104). She was expected to act out of self-interest (benren iley) for her personal rights (quanli), "representing" herself through grass-roots mass organizational work (JF 1933, 3.14: 87). The funü encountered in these texts appeared never to have understood what was meant by "women's self-interest" until propagandists explained the stakes in concrete detail. 40 The natural interests women theoretically possessed, in other words, had first to be inscribed via the actions of recruiting, educating, nurturing, and mobilizing. Funü's proper field was the organizational sphere of the party [dang di zuobian fanwei]," where she sustained herself in the political space of the CCP through election (zuobei), mobilization (dongzun), and various organization (zuobei) practices (JF 1933, 3.28: 89).

Maoism in the late thirties and forties constantly reformulated funü, always retaining the statist slant (Stranahan 1981, 1983). The formula that emerged in the early 1940s consequently involved a synecdochic process of exchange between two interpenetrating objects of political discourse, the state (guojia) and the family (jiating) (Lu Fu 1949). Rather than posit independent funü as an agent of politics outside the domestic closure, as the brief earlier experiments had done, later Soviet practices emphasized production of funü through political processes that retained women and men in a sphere of politicized domestic relations.

After 1943 the CCP turned to transformation of the family itself. By
1947 Maoist state policy had shifted—in contradistinction to Marxist theory and socialist practices elsewhere—toward a strategically reinvented family that appears in these texts as *jiating*. The homily of the Zhu Fusheng family conference, for instance, treated the history of domestic politics as a party historiographer might chronicle a Central Committee meeting. The women of the Zhu family, though oppressed, did not have the habit of democracy; they did not know how to speak, ask questions, or actually say a thing. After Zhu Fusheng explained democratic procedures to them, they collectively transformed themselves from an autocracy (*jaishang zhishiwei*) into a democratic family (*minzhu jiating*). In the subsequent months family members instituted political-democratic policies such as self-criticism (*zishan pipa*), domestic production of thread and cloth, and scheduled planning, all activities related to the kinds of domestic production the CCP was promoting at the time. The homily of the Zhu family shows very economically how the state’s political practices interpenetrated family relations, lodging *funü* through democratic rhetoric within a renovated statist *jiating* or nucleating family (Lu Fu 1949).

The recuperation required that the politicized new family reconstitute itself in the language of politics. Leading party officials promoted domestic political construction, as Zhou Enlai did, for instance, when he argued that women did not really need emancipation from family so much as men needed to take family responsibilities as seriously as women did. Not just mothers, but fathers too had a substantial political obligation to be the best parents possible (Zhou 1942). As Patricia Shanahan has argued, it was precisely this reorientation of woman policy that provided the stable base peasant women eagerly accepted; the resulting line both reflected peasant common sense and achieved revolutionary transformation through social production. The resulting collaboration of village women and the Central Committee was, I want to stress, neither “traditional” nor “Marxist” in a simple, universalist sense. It was syncretic and as modern as any other practical Marxism.

The newly minted Maoist family formation that rested on this interpenetration of state and family made the body of a woman a realm of the state at the same time as it opened the state to inflection by kin discourses and kin categories (Fulian, n.d., 7–11). The entry point was reproductive science. Woman-work *ganbu* (cadres; particularly nurses, who were known as “Nightingales” in honor of Florence Nightingale) brought to political activity the powerful new scientific knowledge of sanitation, physiology, and scientific midwifery. Texts drilled village women in productive physiology (“it’s just like your farm animals”) and dispensed information on bodily functions like the menstrual cycle and hygiene (don’t borrow pads, don’t drink cold water, stay away from dirty menstrual blood, which carries diseases, don’t have intercourse during your period, visit the doctor for irregularities, etc.) (Lu Fu 1949: 74–77). Scientific midwifery connected reproduction to politics (ibid., 78, 80).

The dawning of the golden era of Chinese Communist familialism in the 1950s found the modern Chinese *jiating* sandwiched between the pre-1949 peasant-inflected formation and idealized revolutionary images flooding in from the more advanced socialist USSR. By that time the *jiating* had become the modernized, bourgeois family of *zhisheng* idealization: mommy, daddy, and me. *Jiating* grounded social production in a context heavily marked with the traces of older cultural codes and ideological formations, just as the modern nation did. The modern socialist *jiating* and Maoist *funü* coexisted in unity—as concept metaphors of each other. This is how I interpret mobilizations like the 1957 campaign “Industrious and Frugal in Establishing the Nation, Industrious and Frugal in Managing the Family,” where state and family are virtually synonymous; what operated in one sphere translates directly into the other (Fulian 1958: 27). “The material and cultural life of our state’s [*guo*] masses of people has improved substantially in the past few years. But the lives of many families [*jiating*] are still not comfortable,” the text reads. To raise the *jiating*’s level the masses must “industriously develop our state’s industry and agriculture.” The work of housewives (*jiating* *shufu*) must exactly mirror the work going on outside the *jiating* in the *guo*. “Every housewife could be industrious and frugal in managing the family affairs, if she institutionalized a rational planning schedule... Industriousness and frugality in the family labor strengthens industriousness and frugality in the nation” (my emphasis; Fulian 1958: 2).

Women’s Federation and *Funü* as a State Category

William Parish and Martin Whyte once commented that after socialist Liberation in 1949 the Chinese state took no clear measures to transform family structure, and that Fulian, the state’s Women’s Federation, was an “amorphous” government bureaucracy, the only mass organization that people belonged to by virtue of physiology (Parish and Whyte 1978: 39). This does not explain the very real powers of the Women’s Federation. The importance of Fulian lay in its power to subordinate and dominate all inscriptions of womanhood in official discourse. It is not that Fulian ac-
tually represented the "interests" of women, but rather that one could not until recently be "represented" as a woman without the agency and mediation of Fulian. That fact is a measure of its success and its importance.\[8\]

In late 1948 the government commissioned its leading female officials, dignitaries, and luminaries in the liberated areas to plan the All-China Democratic Women's Association's (later simply Women's Association) first meeting as soon as Beijing fell.\[60\] With formal gravity the planning committees and standing committee began directing the installation of new bureaucratic frameworks charged with deciding national policy and convening the association's first representative congress (Fulian 1949: 5).

In these initiating moments Fulian consolidated its power as a national state organ for responsibly representing "new China's women." With mechanical deliberation the bylaws connect representation of "female masses" to the international socialist women's movement, through the accumulating processes of representation (Fulian 1949: 94–100). "What deserves most pride," one document read, "is that the representatives [daihuan] from the liberated areas are elected from the local area women's congresses. . . . We have been commissioned by the female masses. We must loyally represent their opinions" (Fulian 1949: 20–21). They added an important proviso: "Representation [daihuan] means representing the masses; [it does] not [mean] controlling [guan] the masses."

This bureaucratization and Fulian's transformation from actively producing funü to formally representing them in Beijing relied on the CCP's history of struggle. But it radiated a new sort of definitional power. Representative bodies like congresses and the Federation itself not only "represented the masses," they also consolidated and mediated internal differences (tuanjie zhezhong bing dui de funü), homogenizing political subjects into a representable mass, so to speak, through an elaborate machinery of political democracy. The inception of Fulian initiated for funü unprecedented participation in the rituals of state formation and promised the newly minted subjects bureaucratic powers: but only so long as it—Fulian, the government—retained the power to determine what, in fact, constituted a funü (Fulian 1949: 73–74).

Deng Yingchao, speaking to this issue, laid out the official view when he argued that women in the discourses of the state had achieved "political, economic, cultural and social elevation and elevation of herself in the family" (Fulian 1949: 28). Fulian's charge involved consolidating and expanding the political sphere carved out earlier under the fugitive state: a process, the document argued, that ensured equal status for women by transforming them from consumers into producers (Fulian 1949: 31). By its third congress Fulian spoke in even broader, less autonomous terms, the dialect of the state:

The All China Women's Federation is, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, an organization for the basic organization of every strata of laboring women. The All-China Women's Association has achieved enormous work success since the Second National Congress. In the new period of history the organization of the All-China Women's Federation wants to expand even greater energy in the task of better organizing all the country's women in the social reconstruction, so it must improve and strengthen its mass viewpoint and its mass line work methods. It must be concerned with and reflect the real interests and demands of women, and it must struggle energetically to end discrimination and the harming of women; [it must guide] the attitudes and activities of children; it must serve the masses of women with enormous energy at every turn, particularly in [child welfare] . . . so that Fulian and the mass of women have an even more intimate relationship (Fulian 1958: 3).

The founding of the Fulian, however, was not specific to women. The same ritual unfolded in the mass groups that "reflected and represented" youth, trade unions, and other politically delineated constituencies. The Fulian organization (and its replicas) took part in a reinscription of the national body, and thus it represented at a subordinated level the processes of state building commencing at levels superior to itself.

At the beginning of this chapter I argued that sex identity (the commonsense notion that what makes women female is their sex and more specifically the influence of their indisputably physiological sex organs on themselves) grounded on anatomical difference had not held a central place in Chinese constituting discourses before the early twentieth century. I concurred with Mark Elvin, who suggested that when the late imperial state rewarded virtue it was surprisingly blind to anatomical difference and rewarded people according to coded social, kin-anchored behaviors that I called protocols. A Confucian like Chen Hongmou wrote as a father-official and not as a CCP state bureaucrat like Cai Chang, whose job was to instruct, represent, and produce women as funü (Fulian 1988: 247–54). This suggests to me that although the old imperial state had actively intervened in social formations related to gender, it never saw fit to cast male/female in essentialist binary terms.
The socialist state did consolidate gender difference on the material ground of scientific physiology. Scientism has been part of modern Chinese reformist and revolutionary rhetoric since the May Fourth movement. Part of scientistic discourse, clearly reflected in Fulian documents, is the idea that people are in literal fact material because their organic reproductive capacity makes them like animals (Kwok 1965). Thus, gendering under Maoist inscription unfolded within the tradition of scientific socialism and its emphasis on reproduction. The fusion of peasant realism and socialist scientism gave rise to texts like “People and Wealth Flourish” (Ren yu cai weng) that “encourage the people of the liberated areas not merely to work hard to get enough to wear and eat, but also to have more children, which, once born, must be supported” (Yang 1943). Lyrically conflating “production” and “reproduction,” the state vowed to train midwives, investigate infant mortality, propagate scientific sanitation, oppose feudal superstition, and publish popular chapbooks on infant care, all predicated on popularizing a modern understanding of reproductive physiology and sanitary childbirth practices.39

Much work among women aimed at producing people who would collaborate in the state’s biopolitical agenda.40 Before the twentieth century, of course, birth and death had possessed no direct link to the throne, or state political economy. Life and death commenced in the spatial boundaries of jia and organized themselves around such matters as pollution, temporality, rupture, and consolidation (Ahern 1975). Although late imperial domestic and popular medical practices regarding menstruation, conception, parturition, suckling, and so on were historically sophisticated, they participated in the same neo-Confucian epistemic order that gendered people, and that meant reference to the state through dyadic obligation to father, husband, and monarch. The socialist state, on the other hand, popularized a direct linkage between state’s needs and modern obstetric practices. Study Guide for the New Woman very straightforwardly declared that “the twenty-seven lessons in this book, all told 30,000 words, are for the exclusive use of village women in their study [xuexi] and in [female] literacy classes and political lessons [which the CCP attempted to organize at the village level whenever possible]. It is very appropriate as a refresher for teachers and active elements [activists representing the CCP’s agenda at the village level] in studying self-discipline” (Lu Fu 1949:1). The book concluded each of its lessons (“The ritual [lijiao] etiquette of the feudal society is the source of women’s suffering,” “The inharmonious family causes great harm,” “Pay attention to menstrual sanitation”) with an attached series of study questions: “How does the old power of feudalism in your village oppress women? Do we still have feudal ways of thinking?” and “What is the source of family unhappiness? How can we make the family a happy place?”

This process of study (xuexi), or learning the correct mass line, transmitted the notion that physiology was the foundation of gender difference. It inscribed the difference between women and men in terms of scientific fact, and it understood the baseline of reproductive physiology to be the basis of social reproduction. Thus, as has been the case in modernist discourses elsewhere, the CCP’s statist made anatomical difference into the key factor in social life. It also assumed that male and female were essentially different organisms (What else do the “physiology of the human female” and the “physiology of the human male” do but inscribe difference on a surface of similarity?) and on that basis made reproductive biology and physiology its scientific foundation. But the inscription of gender difference at the level of reproductive physiology elided something very interesting. It made material reproduction the site of gender difference, but it did not reduce personality to physiological terms. That is to say, although biology may be destiny, it did not appear to directly determine gender-appropriate psychology. In Fulian writing particularly there is a tendency to attribute difference to physiology while curtailing attributions of difference at the level of personality. This latter, the realm of feeling and character, remained until recently bound to conventions of Maoism that emphasized social class, not sex anatomy or “gender.”

It is easier to see the statist construction of jiajiu under Maoism now that Maoism is a dead letter (Biller 1985). One of the most interesting parentheses closing the Maoist period has been the recurrence of writing about sexuality, subjectivity, romantic love, gender psychology, and feminism (niexing zhuyi) in fiction, cultural criticism, and social theory (Barlow 1994). The collapse of political jiajiu loosened a torrent of writing about niexing, who, under the present formulation, now endures new and compound indignities. Not just physiologically distinct but biologically inferior, post-Mao niexing exhibits “natural” emotions that clarify her essential endocrinal difference (Honig and Hershatter 1988). “Class” as a frame of personality has given way to sexual physiology as a frame of identity. Certainly the present barrage of niexing wenxue, or women’s literature, has rekindled the battle that in 1942 set Cai Chang and Ding Ling at odds over how to fill up the empty category of woman (Dai Jinhua & Meng Yue 1989).
The resurgence of a subversive nüxing helps clarify the contradictory formation of nüxing/funü from a final angle. Under the previous static protocol, funü allowed for the social production of woman in politics but disallowed any psychology of gender difference. The even older initial May Fourth literary inscription of nüxing made Woman the “other” of man but proved insufficiently stable to resist statis inscriptions of funü. The recuperation of nüxing’s heterosexual male/female binary does enable difference as femininity and does provide a position of great potential for resistance (Barlow 1994). Post-Mao nüxing, however, has rendered itself powerless in the face of clearly prejudicial “scientific” claims to female inferiority.

Given that funü offered a way of opening village women to statis operations and nüxing has provided an oppositional personal identity for urban educated classes, how Chinese intellectuals will process issues of sex identity and subjectivity in the next decade depends on many factors. Of course, although it was intellectuals who initially constructed the originary colonialist categories of modern Chinese gender politics, there is no guarantee that as a class they will continue to monopolize its potential. Whether writers and resisters relocate the contest in sexuality and gendered identity or whether the struggle shifts to other sites will decide the future of funü/nüxing. That is because at another level altogether these terms are simply the vocabulary of everyday life in the People’s Republic of China. As such they form a reservoir for usages, in Certeau’s sense, vastly different from the designs of those who appropriated them long ago or those who employ them now. As such they also offer prolific opportunity for contest. The “presence and circulation of a representation,” to echo Certeau, echoing Nietzsche, “tell us nothing about what is for its users” (Certeau 1984:xiii). Users, not makers, speakers, not historians will decide.

Notes
1. The same is true of guoqia (postmonarchy nation/state), which partakes of an older social formation, guo (empire), and jiating, meaning a contemporary domestic unit that formed in part as a reaction to jia (patriline). (Guoqia is translated as nation or state depending on context.) These powerful terms all show the marks of intense political struggle yet are obviously different from their predecessors.
2. See Anagnost 1989 for an example of the discursive powers of the state’s propaganda.

3. For what follows I am indebted to Joanna Handlin’s classic article, “Lu K’un’s New Audience: The Influence of Women’s Literacy on Sixteenth-Century Thought” (1975), particularly pp. 36–38, which concern Chen Hongmou.
4. It is a commonplace of Western studies of Chinese society that sacral relationships, specifically the “Three Bonds” (langang) and “Five Human Relations” (wulin), structure all human experience. That is why I claim later in this chapter that the social space signified by the neologism “society” (shenhui) was new and part of a general discourse of Chinese modernity. The semicolonial shenhui of neutral meeting places and autonomous individuals did not yet exist before the Unequal Treaty System erected European-style cities in China’s hinterlands. The texts and artifacts of the old society are the “signifiers of the subject” for the earlier tradition and can be read as such.
5. Situated men (nan/ren) that way too. For a good discussion of the tensions between personal morality and sacral kinship see Lau 1985. No subject dressed as female could take the civil service examination or serve the monarch in an official capacity, it is true. Yet, as Keith McMahon has found, a persistent literary tradition existed that toyed with the fantasy of the superior woman who, masquerading as a man, outshines her male relatives and competitors at their own game (McMahon, this volume). His work reinforces my point; it was not so much that “women” were categorically unequal to “men” (neither of these categories was cast as a stable, exclusionary bodily trap) or that women’s essence precluded service, since at least in theory female gendering practices allowed for transgender masquerade. Rather, subject positionality required people to execute different tasks inside which personal effort and adherence to service ideals differed greatly.
6. Both Judith Butler and Teresa de Lauretis point out that gender for post-Cartesian Western subjects originated on the privileged site of heterosexuality, itself a disciplinary discourse. Indeed, this insight has become a commonplace in much feminist theory. Women become women in the compass of masculine, heterosexual desire. My object in focusing on the jia as and considering it the privileged site under most Confucian discourses is to suggest (1) that heterosexuality, sexuality as an institution à la Foucault, and sexual identities in the European metaphysical sense have no particular historicity here, and (2) that the sexed body of “Western” gender processes does not obtain. An interesting but rather brief reference to the taxonomic range possible within the yin/yang dynamic in the feudal past is Wang 1989.
7. Many people have made the point that civilization (wén) serves as the basis of existence in a late Confucian episteme, but none so eloquently as Angela Zito (1989).
8. Furth translates funün and funü as “false” women and men. I overtly translate these terms slightly to convey my point about the literality of language. The foundational or categorical figure is mother/father, not woman/man.
9. See, in this volume, Judith Farquhar, John Hay, James Hevia, and Angela
Zito. Forthcoming work by Farquhar particularly emphasizes the nonfoundational elements of body discourses in Chinese medical practice.

10. Though as McMahon points out in this volume, even bound feet could be concealed! The bodily sign never fixed identity.

11. The first quotation is from Lauretis (1987: 3). The second is from Foucault, as cited in Lauretis (ibid.).

12. There is an important respect in which woman (daughters, mothers, etc.) and men (sons, fathers, etc.) are the same. All kinds of women and all kinds of men, depending on the specifics of birth order and generational relations, still strive to be people (ren) of benevolence (ren). Neither being a person nor acting out the cardinal virtue of ren is essentially gendered. In this, Confucian practice resembles similar arguments about the woman’s soul in forms of puritanism. It is rather that what is important is the execution of one’s given tasks as a mother, a father, a daughter, or a mother-in-law (and combinations of these behaviors, since ego exists in multiple relationships). Gender is accomplished not so much through female virtues per se as through the behaviors of persons in specific subject positions of kin relation. This sense is made explicit in Joseph Lau’s discussion of dai (public virtue), but Lau does discuss ren (benevolence). Tu Wei-ming provides an important discussion of ren in “The Creative Tension between Jen and Li” (Tu 1979), but Tu does not talk about women’s possessing ren (benevolence) as Lau does.

13. It is not clear to me whether establishing on oneself liuban as a mother was considered equivalent to the requirements exacted of male Confucianists: filial behavior, examination preparation, reading and writing inside the canon, and producing filial sons. The extension of liuban to well-behaved women is probably part and parcel of the eighteenth-century movement Susan Mann (1987) has written about in her discussion of widow suicide.

14. Protocols are similar to what Spivak calls “regulative psychobiographies” (1989: 227). I agree with Spivak, having reached a similar conclusion independently, that the history of women must rely on the excavation of the narratives that have effected our construction, though I regret her choice of the term “regulative psychobiographies,” since to me it conjures up memories of the “psychohistory” movement of the 1970s. For a moving instance of narrative’s effect on a working-class English girl’s subjectivity, see Steedman 1986.

The ancient times Chen refers to go back to the Zhou (twelfth to third century B.C.E.) period. Contemporary compilers selected texts from older books that expressed particularly well the point the compiler wished to make. Because Chen’s was a period of Han revival, interest in ritual and the codification of ritual was widespread.

15. The specific Confucian lineage I am analyzing equates “being a person” with realizing orderly relations between kin and establishing kin rhetoric as the metalanguage of social relations generally. Let Daoism stand as a counterexample, the exception that “proves” the rule. Daoist discourse makes the dissolution of this economy of inequality its objective. Roger Ames suggests that Daoism pivots around an ideal axis or “third” gender, that of the ruler whose person reconciles both male and female actions. For Ame’s Daoist the ideal Daoist person resides beyond the distinctions Chen Hongmou is drawing between relations with mother-in-law, relations with son, relations with husband, and so on. In not taking a position, the ideal Daoist person becomes androgynous. Objecting to distinctions, the Daoist refuses the marks that masculine or feminine behavior would inscribe onto the person. Physically, the Daoist sage must shrink his penis or stop her menstruation to achieve sageshood. They do not act within the protocols of gendered position and therefore are neither one “sex” nor the other (Ames 1981).

16. Hamilton’s point about codification is also useful in the sense that since “fictive” kinship [became] a metaphor for putting groups together and for determining hierarchies of all types” (1984: 417), then it is not so startling that essentialization of sex/gender in Marxist liberationist discourse in the twentieth century got fixed in hierarchical stone at the same moment it offered the “liberation of women from men.” My grateful thanks to Hamilton for his stimulating interventions during my graduate-school days.

For an excellent mammoth discussion of how retheorizing female subjectivity became so important in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Roxane Witke’s venerable and still unsurpassed narrative history (Witke 1970). Also see the work of Michel de Certeau (1984) on the scriptural economy and Marie-Claire Bergere (1990) for a sociological discussion of class formation in the interwar years.


18. The myth of Chinese homogeneity and the exclusion of Manchus, indigenous peoples, Mongols, Uighurs, and other Moslem subgroups, and so on was as much a part of Chinese nationalism as such exclusions and differentiations have been elsewhere. See Bennington (1990: 132). Bennington states what most of the contributors to Bhabha’s Nation and Narrative assume—and I along with them—that “the idea of the nation is inseparable from its narration.”

19. Mark Elvin argued that the hallmark of Chinese dynastic practice insofar as women are concerned was the throne’s decision to reward women for their acts of resistance to family. He cites a remarkable number of instances in which women killed their own sons. The transfer of the female hero’s attention from her father to the democratic West reinforced a statist strain in Han Chinese gender constructing practices therefore (Elvin 1984). Of course, women in the cases of chaste widow suicide that Elvin cites did not really act on behalf of the state. Although the throne might have arbitrated in a sense, the suicide’s object was never to protect the state qua state.

For a text showing that Westerners sacrifice to the state whereas Chinese are bound by the particularism of the Five Bonds—see Zhen (1907, vol. 2, chap. 12,
“Lu Zhi,” 9a. The notion that Westerners sacrificed to the state was widespread, as was another equivalence—female body mutilation—between foot-binding and corseting.

20. This is the thesis of my forthcoming book, in a chapter titled “Chinese Feminism” (Barlow, n.d.). Mei Sheng’s compendium and key articles (1929) allow the reader a marvelous overview of the debate over the Chinese woman question.

There exist extensive analyses of modern fiction for reference. The most productive critical commentary so far has come from Marsten Anderson, Ching ku Stephen Chan, Chen Yu-shih, Rey Chow, Theodore Huters, and Wendy Larson, critics who all take seriously the generativity of the texts they read. Major Chinese texts that reinscribed the oppositional construction of male/female are, Ba Jin’s (Family), Ding Ling’s “Shafei nu shi riji” (Miss Sophia’s diary), and the novels of Mao Dun. Male/female was not, it should be noted, an exclusive or hegemonic formation, even during the May Fourth era. Lu Xun and Ling Shihu appear to have found such reductionist terms for engendering untenable (Brown 1988; Chow 1988). See also Shen Zhixian 1936.

21. Social theory retains physiology as a sign of its materialism (Barlow, n.d.). And it never unpacked the inherent logical contradiction, of course. This is not at all surprising. The physiological anchor in our own essential notions of womanhood has coexisted quite happily with constructivist notions for decades (Burler 1990). This is particularly true in Chinese feminism, since the category itself was relatively novel and so the unpacking received even less attention.


23. Fulian (1949a). This collection has a slightly different composition.

24. My criticism of Du echoes the critiques that the Subaltern Studies group has leveled at the universal Marxisms (Charterjee 1986; Chakrabarty 1988).

25. Jiangxi Fulian, ed., Jiangxi suxu fumi yeding shiliu xuanqian (Selected materials for the Jiangxi Soviet women’s movement) is a compilation of documents that I will cite hereafter as JF. The accompanying dates, however, are the dates of the documents’ initial publication.

26. See JF (1932, 2:52) for the statement that “marriage is a relationship of two persons, male and female.”

27. This is a splendid document detailing instructions governing women’s organizations. It clarifies how women’s work should model itself on established forms, possess an established work plan, and fix a topic for each meeting (for instance, “opposing feudal bonds” or “enlisting men, comforting troops, doing mass work, becoming literate”).

28. See JF (1932, 2:53) and many subsequent documents. Women’s Day and propaganda for the marriage law are the two major work areas for gundu (cadres) undertaking women’s work. JF (1933, 2.7) uses it to demonstrate why Woman is connected to state and suggests that workers use magazines, newspa-

pers, and storytellers to spread the word. The effort is also reflected in regional document JF (1933, 2.10:77). The document paraphrased here offers the flavor of the propaganda language. “March 8 is nearly here. March 8 is International Women’s Day. It has the same significance as Labor Day and Youth Day. All over the world, laboring women demonstrate and march in parades on this day to oppose the oppression of capitalist landlords, the feudal restraints of the old society and old family. But our demand for thorough liberation as laboring women is undertaken under the leadership of the proletariat to overthrow the feudal restrictions of society and the old family. . . . If we look, what is life like for women in the Soviets who have already been liberated? They no longer have landlords, capitalists, destroying or oppressing them; they’ve already got independence and freedom. They’ve been liberated from deep family anxieties and live a happy life with a high degree of political culture” (JF 1933, 2:15): “Laboring women! Arm yourselves to protect the Soviet.” It is significant that the international demonstrations are conceived to precede those taking place in the local context, but the local instantiation of this universal process exceeds even those global demonstrations assumed to be unfolding simultaneously!

29. The provisional nature of the laws and the multiplicity of voices are clear in JF (1932, 6.20:60–65), which talks about the resistance to certain laws. Its self-critical tone is significant.

30. The document gives instructions on the mechanics of representation. For example, set a time for conference, locate the laboring women’s congress inside the system of other mass organizations, recruit according to certain forms, get ten to twenty women, establish a representative, elect a presidium and such capped by a party member, and so on. See p. 88 for good discussion of how representation works.

31. JF (1933, 6.25:95) suggests that quite strongly.

32. Szanabany are the best empirical studies available in English (1981, 1983). Her work supports that of Phyllis Andors (1975, 1983), arguing that given the material and cultural context the CCP’s policy on women’s affairs was remarkably fair and productive both in party terms and in the view of the woman policy effected.

33. Examples are the case histories and subject biographies in Fulian 1949c.

34. At least this is how I interpret the writing on love and family construction that the state issued in the 1950s (Dan Fu 1956; Li Di 1958). An example of the style of writing comes from Lo Fu: “In the Soviet Union the new family of socialism has become the organizational basis of society, the major reason for the strength of the society. The party, the government, youth organizations, and all the collective organizations of Soviet society that organize and teach mass work, all are aimed at strengthening without stop the Soviet family as the base. The basic utility of the Soviet family is the education of children [zidai] to become people active with communist consciousness. This is the most important responsibility of
the citizen who is a parent, the responsibility for raising children in the society. …

35. To my knowledge there is no institutional history of Fulian yet available.


36. These luminaries and dignitaries were, in descending order: Cai Chang, Deng Yingchao, Zhang Chingliu, Li Dechuan, Chen Shaoqi, Kang Keqing, Ding Ling, and Ho Xiangning (Fulian 1949b: 102–8). The only real surprise here is Ding Ling, who had been purged from her women’s work following the publication of her “Thoughts on March 8” essay in 1942.

37. Much public health writing took birth and female physiology as its starting point. Take for instance:

Lecture 22 “We Want to Study New Methods of Childbirth”
Giving birth and raising children [shenye yangnui] is a glorious event. Also, it is a great event in terms of the fate of the laboring mother and infant. But in the old society this greatness was not appreciated. Using ignorant midwives and allowing them to manage the birth has mortally wounded untold numbers of adults and children. In this lesson we want to study new methods, tell everybody about it, so they won’t be afraid and will help out others.

and

When the pregnant woman reaches term, prepare a place for her to deliver and implements such as … yarn, cloth, cotton, a towel … old cloth, clothing for the child and so on. … When the woman goes into labor have her pace up and down on the ground … pass and shit at her leisure … take a look at the cervical opening when it is as big as a silver ingot [etc. etc., in pedagogic detail]. (Lu Fu 1949: 78–80)


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