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Journal of Women's History, Volume 32, Number 1, Spring 2020, pp. 85-110
(Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2020.0008>



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“A WORLD OF CONCUBINES”:

Fissures in the Category of “Woman” in Republican China

Bryna Goodman

This article examines critiques of concubinage in the early Chinese Republic and their fruition in the anticoncubinage movement of the 1920s and 1930s. In contrast to Japan, concubines remained a public preoccupation long after China’s legal embrace of monogamy. After examining the question of concubinage in missionary and Chinese Christian endeavors and egalitarian reconceptualizations of society, the article turns to concubine abolition movements. The class prejudices of female activists fractured their conceptualization of the modern category of “woman” and created exclusionary ideas of female personhood. These fractures suggest the enduring imprint of the hierarchic principles of polygyny on ostensibly egalitarian formations of identity.

The formation of a Chinese republic in 1912 called the elite prerogative of polygyny (male family head with a wife and one or more concubines) into question.¹ Historians attribute the shifting optics of concubinage in the Republican era to the global hegemony of Western norms of marriage and Western legal models, a situation that might be likened to Japan’s Meiji era legal reforms. To gain European recognition of the modernity of Japanese law and overturn unequal treaties, the Meiji government determined that “civilization” disallowed polygynous domestic arrangements. Japan’s erasure of concubines from household registries in 1882 and legal embrace of monogamy in 1898 articulated monogamy as a new modern value. If Japan was to appear civilized, concubines could not legally be considered wives.² Motivated to regain legal sovereignty, Chinese jurors revised the Qing legal code on the basis of Western and Japanese models in the modernizing reforms that characterized its last decade of rule. After the collapse of the dynasty, the revised legal code became the basis for the interim criminal code of the Republic. The new Chinese law institutionalized an imported understanding of monogamy that defined marriage as “one-husband-one-wife” and did not sanction concubinage.³ The Republican law no longer considered concubines approximations of wives, as they had been in late Qing legal practice. By eliminating explicit references to concubines in the legal code until the mid-1930s, lawmakers avoided explicitly stipulating prohibition, thereby tolerating concubinage in practice. These female household members nonetheless lost their legal identity and became in various respects legally invisible.⁴

Despite China's legal embrace of monogamy in 1912, concubinage endured in practice and as a social issue. In Japan, despite the absence of measures to force abolition or sanction men who took concubines (and despite lawmakers' refusal, similarly, to actually prohibit concubinage), the already small number of concubines declined by the turn of the century, even in elite peerage households.⁵ Recognizing the persistence of concubinage in Republican China, the important but limited historical scholarship on polygamy has emphasized its progressive legal curtailment under the Guomindang (or Nationalist Party, which categorized it as adultery in the 1930s) and the Communist Party (which categorized it as bigamy), suggesting the gradual elimination of concubinage.⁶

Western and Chinese observers in the early Republic highlighted concubines' omnipresence. Zhu Caizhen, the editor of a 1922 collection of concubine-abolition writings, dramatized the dynamism of concubinage a decade into the Republic:

People are infected by an epidemic: concubine-taking madness. Taking concubines has been popularized. During the Qing dynasty, those with "three wives and four concubines" were mostly big merchants or high officials. Taking concubines was limited to an [elite]. Not so in the Republic. There are innovations in form. The germ of the concubine has been disseminated in popular society. . . . Look! Small merchants [and industrialists] take concubines; principals and teachers . . . take concubines; [university] students take concubines; doctors, lawyers, and painters take concubines; miserable poor scholars who [win a lottery] immediately take concubines. Most distressingly, legislators who preach Marxism also take concubines. Graduates from women's normal colleges enter warlord families as concubines. Hasn't this become a world of concubines? Alas! I have not heard that people in our country have popularized the right to vote . . . But the evil of taking concubines has been . . . distributed equally.⁷

This article takes up the question of concubinage in early Republican China through the lens of intellectual and social mobilization against the practice. Concubinage served as a refractory lens for measuring not simply gender equality, but also the performance of the state and the state of democracy in the Republic. Writing in the context of a concubine abolition movement that arose in the New Culture era, Zhu lamented the democratization of concubines as a perversion of the ideals of the Republic. The print traces of this little-studied social movement (that crested in the early 1920s and again in the 1930s debates over the Guomindang adultery law) illuminate the afterlife of polygyny in the era of legal monogamy and enable excavation of the imprint of the concubine on the new category of "woman" in the Republic.

Historians looking at concubinage in Republican China have primarily considered the shift from the extended to the nuclear family, the legal reforms, and the suffrage movement. Discussion of family reform has focused on the agency of lawmakers and New Culture elites, rather than the social dynamics of contradiction found within the concubine abolition movement itself.⁸ Materials from this movement bear out the literary scholar Keith McMahon's suspicion that the egalitarian visions of society that emerged at the twilight of the Qing monarchy were "inextricably bound" to a past cultural ideal of polygamy.⁹ In the Republican era, the concubine served not simply as a figure of old society but also as an example of "innovations in form" and as a force for the production of new hierarchies of liberation and exclusion. As both an idea and practice, concubinage was protean and dynamic, even generative.

It is instructive to begin with missionaries and other Westerners in China because of their role in the dissemination of ideas about Western-modeled marriage. Missionary observations also suggest the distinctiveness of Chinese preoccupations with the issue. Western diagnoses of the "sexual pathologies" of Chinese families, although influential, did not define Chinese preoccupations.

From the early Jesuits onwards, missionary insistence on monogamy clashed with elite family practice. In the late imperial period, missionaries required male converts to divest themselves of concubines, a requirement that missionaries could strategically present as a variant of long-standing Chinese ethical concerns about sexual indulgence, male distraction, and respectable daughters' vulnerability.¹⁰ Colonialism bolstered Western networks and ideas in China. By the early twentieth century, missionary schools, Western feminists, and Christian Chinese feminists all strove to propagate monogamy.

The missionary creation of Christian Sociology aimed to "Christianize Chinese sexual relations." In a parallel development, secular sociologists diagnosed Chinese "social pathologies" and advocated for family reform.¹¹ These ideas informed the Christian internationalist work of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in China in the 1920s, which provided a platform for Chinese activists. Shanghai's Chinese YWCA worked to recruit and "unite [Chinese women] for advancement . . . and service to God and country," goals that included the abolition of prostitution and concubinage.¹²

Missionaries, and the Protestant community more broadly, were less troubled by concubinage than prostitution. At times concubines appeared as mere impediments to conversion. Presbyterian missionaries, for example, celebrated in 1917 "that in answer to their [prayers]" they had brought about the conversion of an elite Shanghai family that opposed Christianity, although this transformation "had involved the difficult [decision] to put

away a favourite concubine."¹³ Protestant institutions' inconsistent commitment to eliminating concubinage—in contrast with their intense focus on prostitution—is observable in the Door of Hope, established by missionaries and local charities in various cities for the rescue of prostitutes. Women departed from the Door of Hope only "through marriage or concubinage." According to the regulations of the Beijing institution (1921): "When a man wishes to marry one of the women in the Door of Hope, he must first go to the photograph room. . . . The inspector will bring to the waiting room the woman whose picture has been chosen and the two parties will be given an opportunity to talk over the question of marriage. If both parties are satisfied, the man must write . . . his name, native place, address, business, whether or not he is married, and whether or not he has a concubine, and state whether or not the woman from the Door of Hope is to be taken as a wife or concubine."¹⁴ Once the man made a financial contribution to the institution, the wedding could proceed. Despite ambivalence over this procedural commodification of women, the missionary James Wiley praised the rescue functions of the institution.¹⁵

Turn-of-the-century missionaries did not consider concubines agents in their domestic arrangements and therefore did not bar concubines from conversion.¹⁶ By the early 1920s, Western female missionaries recognized the social activism of wealthy concubines and noted that concubines were "liberal in their support of charitable enterprises."¹⁷ Interest in mobilizing concubines' charitable energies led to innovative approaches among the Western women who guided Chinese YWCA policies. Emmavil Luce, for example, sought out "younger and more spirited" "secondary wives" and discouraged first wives from membership because they dampened concubines' spirits.¹⁸ Grace Seton described "secondary wives" as "some of the sweetest, most attractive women" she had met, and she applauded their contributions (including Marshal Zhang Zuolin's fifth concubine, a rights activist at Beijing Normal College for Women).¹⁹

In contrast, Chinese activists were more troubled by concubinage than prostitution. Western missionaries observed that Chinese "restlessness" about concubines grew in the first decade of the Republic. One missionary account quoted, as an example, a male Chinese reformer who, in 1916, presented concubines as Chinese men's greatest weakness: "[When] they get money, their first thought is to marry a concubine. The more money they have, the more concubines they will marry. The Chinese can do business as well as others, but they are so engaged with this system of concubinage that they are always satisfied with a little because they want all the time they can have with their concubines."²⁰ Missionaries also attested to the emergence of new voices in the burgeoning Chinese press, observing by the 1920s that the "new woman," "articulate for the first time in Chinese history," was

“raising her voice” to protest concubinage.²¹ Moreover, Chinese “public opinion against concubinage” appeared “more powerful than opposition to prostitution.”²² A Protestant-led campaign to abolish prostitution in Shanghai’s International Settlement (1915–1925) failed because “Shanghai’s Chinese residents were indifferent to a debate that hardly resonated within their own culture.”²³ Western suffragists found Chinese suffragists uniquely obsessed with concubinage, in contrast to their relative indifference toward prostitution. Seton, for instance, reported in the early 1920s that the concubine question “aroused the greatest passion.”²⁴

From the twilight of the Qing dynasty, Chinese reformers connected concubinage to China’s global reputation, as they contemplated China’s place in an international order of nations. On the eve of the revolution, the influential journal *Eastern Miscellany* published one of the first sustained modern critiques of concubinage, written by the reform-minded editor Du Yaquan. Du began with an East-West comparison that recognized European global hegemony, noting that Western society championed monogamy and viewed women’s rights as an index of civilization. Eastern societies, in contrast, lacked “awareness of women’s personhood (*ren’ge*),” tolerated the “despicable” habit of polygamy out of concern for male descendants, and “considered women as objects that could be owned.” Du affirmed the principle of equality between men and women as an immutable truth. If concubinage was not abolished, he remarked, flourishing a Western Orientalist figure of Eastern barbarism, talking about gender equality was “as ridiculous as talking to Genghis Kahn about constitutionalism and republican governance.”²⁵ Du’s key concern was not so much gender inequality as inequality between nations and the need to improve China’s image as viewed by Europeans. Civilization and enlightened rule required monogamy. “Eastern peoples who consider our societies civilized and refuse to be consigned to inferior positions” should reform their families, he argued. Concubinage, the anachronistic fruit of atavistic appetites, “humiliated society and stained [Chinese] civilization.”²⁶

Du’s critique of concubinage drew on nineteenth-century civilizational comparisons as well as an older Chinese moral restraint that viewed excessive sexual appetite as harmful to the body, the family, and ultimately the state. He wrote that “extravagant and lustful” Chinese officials indulged in “barbaric freedoms,” weakening society with the “poison of concubinage” and threatening China’s survival. Unwilling to suggest that China was uniquely prone to concubinage, he added that concubines made China’s political arena resemble “a congregation of Mormons.” Although he invoked gender equality, Du argued for balance between the sexes because inequality created instability: “Unmarried men may be seen everywhere, while other men have multiple women to satisfy their lust.” Du found the

destabilizing political effects of inequalities *between men* (the dangers of "bare-sticks," or socially disruptive poor men who were "unanchored to families" and thereby threatened the normative order) particularly concerning.²⁷ In contrast, his imported concern for women's rights was too superficial to steer his eclectic argument away from a reflexive traditional misogyny: "[If we] peruse the 4000-year history of our country. . . . we can invariably attribute calamities related to the court, eunuchs, and imperial in-laws to concubinage. Even wars and chaos, in the last analysis, are female-originated disasters."²⁸

Some of Du's comments were old-fashioned and hyperbolic, but his argument drew force from the urgency of China's modern predicament. In the context of contemporary debate over legal reform, Du advocated applying the crime of adultery to deter men from acquiring concubines. But he considered legal reform insufficient to resolve what he portrayed as a matter of elite male morality. To avert national catastrophe, he urged enlightened reformers to model citizenship by regulating their appetites and taking no concubines. Female agency—and concubine personhood—remained outside this picture, even if Du's manifesto was informed by the abstraction of gender equality and its stamp of global approval. The imperative to rid China of concubines, as articulated by the politically moderate Du, was repeated with increasing force by activists who heralded a new republic. For reformers and revolutionaries, there was little place, ideologically, for concubines.

As a feature of women's activism, the division between wives and concubines gained prominence in Chinese discussion. Concubinage was an emotional issue in the women's schools that emerged at the turn of the century. In 1908, a Guangdong Women's Normal School student committed suicide in protest of her husband's acquisition of a concubine. Feminists publicized her act as "a sacrifice for the cause of monogamy."²⁹ Amid a broader critique of gender inequality that was associated with China's weakness, female revolutionaries from elite backgrounds denounced concubinage for violating women's human rights and degrading women's status. Among them, with the help of the flamboyant Qiu Jin, Chen Xiefen escaped her father's plan to dispose of her as a concubine. Contemporary male reformers were more measured on the topic. Kang Youwei (who was vocal in opposition to foot binding) and Liang Qichao had concubines themselves.³⁰ There were no male martyrs to the cause.

In the revolution, elite Chinese women, who were enmeshed in networks of global feminism, enacted their political agency on the national stage. In February 1912, as the Nanjing provisional government deliberated on the provisional constitution, three Japan-returned female veterans of the revolutionary Tongmenghui established a Shenzhou Women's Suffrage Al-

liance to advocate for equal rights, popular education, family reform, and the prohibition of concubinage. Thousands of suffragists mobilized across China in 1912. Their leaders lamented to the visiting international suffrage campaigner Carrie Chapman Catt that the President of the Republic, Yuan Shikai, had nine concubines.³¹

As is well-known, this first wave of Chinese feminist activism failed to force affirmation of women's equality in the March 1912 Provisional Constitution. The new Republic was nonetheless understood to require gender equality and family reconfiguration that modeled in microcosm the formation of a citizenry and a new democratic culture. Viewed simultaneously as icons of oppression and markers of male decadence, concubines appeared antithetical to the new equality of citizens.³² The Republic's legal embrace of monogamy expressed this recognition.³³ Nonetheless, as Du had feared, social engineering through law alone was insufficient to remedy the societal problem.

A year into the Republic, Yuan Shikai crushed parliamentary democracy and suppressed revolutionary feminist radicalism. New women's journals, nonetheless, grew in number and importance. In the conservative political climate, the more visible of these journals avoided controversy while creating a venue for the writing of elite women, among them Chinese Christian advocates of monogamy.³⁴ The nationally distributed *Women's Eastern Times* (*Funü shibao*, 1911–1917), edited by the prominent writer Bao Tianxiao, framed the new social category of woman in a commercial package that was larded with photos of elegant women in familial roles or as fashionable brides, aesthetic images that marketed well. Although most articles were written by men, Bao assiduously solicited material from female writers, some of whom used the public venue to vent strong feelings.³⁵ One such writer was Jin Yuanzhen, whose thoughts on concubinage, like those of Du Yaquan, were addressed to male readers. As a woman, Jin deployed distinctive rhetoric: "In our country, within families at the highest level of society, there lurks an extremely venomous beast. [Its] fearsome capacity to destroy family happiness exceeds the power of international law to exterminate it. More dreadful than a poisonous dumdum bullet . . . this fearsome animal is harboured by three or four families among ten. . . . What is this dangerous beast? Our Chinese dictionary names it 'concubine.' . . . The so-called concubine is the illicit spouse in an illegal, irregular conjugal union."³⁶ Jin identified with wifely concerns and emphasized that only a monogamous husband-wife union could ensure marital happiness. A destroyer of the modern family, the deplorable low-class concubine contaminated the household with immorality that endangered "mutual love and safety between husband and wife" and immiserated "virtuous and kind" wives.³⁷

In the first years of the Republic, new public associations joined Christian communities and older critics in evincing disgust at the persistence of concubinage.³⁸ In this liminal period of shifting social norms, public intercourse with foreigners also motivated a number of officials and diplomats to take on young, educated concubines who fulfilled public functions that older, more conservative wives found challenging. Concubines who took on public roles (and new opportunities) in this transitional era quickly encountered stigmatization. Revelations of the presence of concubines in diplomatic encounters or public affairs were swiftly followed by social outrage.³⁹ Even as powerful men maintained polygynous households, newspaper columns brimmed with critiques of concubinage as an obstacle to promoting gender equality. This era was a tipping point in newspaper editors' perceptions of the public acceptability of concubinage. After the early 1920s, positive public portrayals of concubinage became more difficult, even if concubines remained.⁴⁰

A decade into the Republic, those who declared concubinage "the shame of the Chinese nation" gained the rhetorical edge.⁴¹ Concubinage had no future: "at the beginning of the Republican era, people's minds embarked on a new path. All social matters, large and small, followed in the footsteps of the Euro-American powers. People believed in the system of monogamy and the trend of taking concubines was gradually eliminated."⁴² Concubinage thus appeared as an anachronism, one that might be compared to other lingering social ills (for example, gambling or opium use). Writers viewed concubine ownership as characteristic of powerful and wealthy men in the *old* society or as characteristic of corrupt characters whose decadence weakened the new Republic: "Officials and politicians, tyrannical landlords and dishonest businessmen, thieves and bandits: once they get hold of money, they acquire the following ostentations: 1) opium, 2) concubines, and 3) Western-style houses [to] manifest their wealth and status."⁴³ Like Zhu Caizhen, other observers noted that the possession of concubines was not limited to the types of men described in this quotation. In July of 1921, the tabloid newspaper *Crystal* compared the owners of major Shanghai newspapers in terms of the accouterments that positioned them on a spectrum of wealth and style. The men's tastes differed in respect to clothing and cars. But all of them, the author reported, possessed concubines.⁴⁴

This tidbit of social gossip focused on concubine-possession by *new* characters: men who held formative positions in the print media that framed the culture of republican citizenship. The vast majority of men could not afford concubines; poor men could not afford even wives. But for those with sufficient income, the polygamous male maintained a powerful grip on the urban imagination. Popular literature presented Shanghai as a playground for male desire. Shanghai guidebooks, relatively immune to New Culture

political correction, capitalized on perceived connections between the city and financial, sexual, and culinary appetites. Such books served up ample information, for practical and vicarious consumption, on how to acquire concubines. They took for granted that men travelled to the city in search of concubines, given the rich pickings in Shanghai's brothels and performance venues.⁴⁵ The entertainment press, which printed some critiques of concubinage, also offered a space in which such critiques were answered, in turn, by arguments against the tyrannical imposition of the new "single-wife-ism," a foreign import.⁴⁶

In the social and ideological flux of the Republic—as domestic arrangements grew in diversity, sometimes to the disadvantage of wives—a new wave of strident critiques of concubinage arose.⁴⁷ These critiques were authored by overlapping actors: women's rights and suffrage groups and legal and family reform activists. Their publications, meetings, and activities comprised what was known as an anticoncubinage movement (*fei qie yundong*). This was the context for Zhu Caizhen's impassioned volume, *Abolish Concubinage*.⁴⁸

In contrast to the gentle mockery of *Crystal* gossip, the rhetoric of the concubine abolition movement was shrill and humorless. Associations that advocated for female participation in government were significant actors in, and authors of, this movement.⁴⁹ Their leaders were educated professional women. In successful campaigns to gain suffrage rights in provincial constitutions between 1919 and 1923, they aimed at a broader social following. Known for rhetorical sharpness and guerilla tactics, anticoncubinage activists called on female comrades to investigate legislators' personal lives, demanding the expulsion of those with concubines. Comrades who met resistance were advised by their leaders to block concubine-possessing legislators from entering their meeting places.⁵⁰

This little-studied anticoncubinage movement spoke for women, pitted men against men, women against men, and women against other women. Some activists dismissed the possibility of working with legislators' "illiterate and ignorant" wives, whom they deemed too stupid to comprehend gender equality.⁵¹ Scornful of hypocritical men and disparaging of their wives, these female activists penned scathing criticisms of actual concubines.

This movement illuminates particular Chinese tensions of class and agency within the modern identities of woman and feminist as they emerged. In her study of Chinese women's political struggles, the historian Louise Edwards suggests that after legislators failed to give women the vote, suffrage activists supplemented their claims to the universal identity of citizenship with new concerns informed by the particular identity of gender.⁵² The language of the anticoncubinage movement, however, suggests that gender-based identity remained aspirational, riven by tensions

that emerged among women. Amid these tensions, the hierarchic principles of polygamy and concubinage shaped claims to universal rights that were grounded in ideas of gender identity and equality.

At the same time, various critiques of concubinage that appeared in print media exceeded the scope of “women’s issues” and intermingled with revolutionary critiques of traditional culture and capitalism. The lens of concubinage tinted analysis of the Chinese past and the struggle for democracy. A declaration written by female activist Gui Shi in 1922 typifies the political resonance of family reform and the entwinement of gendered, revolutionary, and class identities: “There is a thrilling proclamation in the *Communist Manifesto*: ‘The history of hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle.’ [I] say, ‘The history of hitherto existing families is the history of struggle between wives and concubines.’ . . . This statement summarizes the miserable reality of wife-concubine wars, family tragedies, and strong eating weak.” Gui urged concubines to stir themselves: “Women who are concubines, quickly wake up!” Her manifesto—rhetorically addressed to concubines—chided them in accordance with popular caricatures of extravagance and inattention to personhood: “can a car or diamond make up for your loss of integrity (*ren’ge*)?”⁵³ As a female activist, Gui articulated categorical gulfs between women.

The New Woman—a globally circulating fantasy—was defined, and defined herself, in contrast to other women’s fundamental inferiority.⁵⁴ The problem was not simply that the attainment of New Womanhood eluded the reach of the majority. In China, aggressive New Culture denunciation of habits and people who emblemized the old decadent culture heightened the rejection of older-style women and the exclusionary character of the New Woman.⁵⁵ Newspapers caricatured the long fingernails, bound feet, stooped posture, and clothing of old-style women in graphic cartoons that contrasted their demeanor with the natural feet, clipped nails, and upright carriage of purposeful new women.⁵⁶ Beyond these physical features, in the dawning of the categorical identities of citizen and woman in China—categories based ostensibly on claims to democratic inclusion—exclusionary mechanisms emphasized independence as a qualification for citizenship, with added attention to virtue in the case of women.

New Culture era discussions of women’s ability to achieve independent personhood (*duli ren’ge*), a defining, if elusive, mark of the New Woman, grounded these exclusionary tendencies. The New Culture architects, Chen Duxiu and Cai Yuanpei, identified personhood as a gender-neutral quality of the new citizen. Personhood combined independent thinking, self-reliance, and individual moral integrity. Suffrage activists declared that only women with independent vocations—doctors, teachers, secretaries, and entrepreneurs—achieved true personhood. Dependent women,

considered parasites on society, focused instead on jewelry and fashion, money and frivolity.⁵⁷ Numerous commentators, feminists among them, identified concubines—who were often former prostitutes, servant girls, and performers—as degenerate personifications of unhealthy habits. As one commentator put it, “Their personhood is inevitably flawed.”⁵⁸ These judgments enacted a pervasive class bias. Working-class women might be valorized by left-wing writers, but those writers rarely described the same women as possessing personhood. Their illiteracy and bodily labor implicitly disqualified them.⁵⁹

In 1919, the Chinese journalist Hollington Tong announced, “Chinese Women Declare War on Concubines,” a development that he heralded as “one unmistakable sign of the moral awakening of the four hundred million Chinese people.” He acclaimed the Tianjin Women’s Patriotic Association for firing “the first shot,” announcing “that concubines are not eligible for membership.”⁶⁰ Tong continued: “[The association] is prepared to lose the support of thousands upon thousands of concubines who as a rule are wealthy and liberal in donating to charitable purposes. This brave attitude of China’s modern women has been commended and indicates that a relentless warfare is to be waged by a large group of educated Chinese women against their unfortunate sisters in the near future.”⁶¹ Disinclined to reflect on the paradoxical exclusion of concubines from “women” in his pronouncement (beyond the label “unfortunate sisters”), Tong applauded the “sound reasoning power of modern Chinese women and their readiness to speak their minds frankly.”⁶²

The membership criteria of Shanghai and Guangzhou associations, which excluded concubines on the grounds of insufficient independence and moral inadequacy, similarly evinced the exclusionary character of ostensibly egalitarian formations of female personhood. The Shanghai Women’s Association refused membership to “anyone bound in concubinage.”⁶³ The Guangzhou Women’s Federation emphasized moral reputation: “The Women’s Federation is an organization of women of quality, and must maintain a high quality of personhood. If people’s bodies have been possessed as concubines, they should not join the association, or they should be deprived of the right to vote or be elected.”⁶⁴ The fullest exposition of these exclusions was offered by the Women’s Patriotic Association of Tianjin, as presented by the publicist Min-ch’ien Tyau, who, like Hollington Tong, admired the women’s courageous determination. Tyau explained:

Why not take in concubines, who are also Chinese women and are nonetheless patriotic? We have been asked to answer this question. . . . [1] Our object in organizing . . . is to reform the family, reform society, and abolish any social system that is detrimental

to Chinese women. Those concubines who desire to join us will probably fail to understand [and] would be offended should we [discuss] the abolition of concubinage. Such a disagreement [will hinder] the progress of the association. [2] Such being our principle, we cannot admit the right of concubines to exist as part of the society and consequently cannot allow them to become members; otherwise our task of uprooting the evil will be increased tenfold. However, we are not looking down upon them or considering them not as our equals. On the contrary, we are devising means for their salvation from their present deplorable state. [3] If we take in as our members any concubines at all, the good name of the association will surely be compromised. [4] 99 of 100 women are not free. . . . Our parents will dislike our association with degraded women. These are the four reasons we exclude concubines from the association.⁶⁵

At the first national convention of the Chinese YWCA (1923), the influential Chinese wives who predominated at the meeting similarly "took a stand against concubinage."⁶⁶ Disregarding the organization's avowed mission to unite Chinese women, they barred concubines from membership.

Western observers periodically rebuked Chinese activists for discriminating against concubines, despite their espousal of universal female emancipation.⁶⁷ Seton was among the foreign observers who were puzzled by what she called "the social black eye" given to concubines by the women's associations. Her account reveals a social reality that blurred the clear lines drawn by Chinese feminist activists. Chinese wives' exclusion of concubines, she wrote, "has caused much discussion in Chinese society and has involved unpleasant consequences, as many of the concubines are personal friends, even relatives, of the members." Seton also highlighted the financial cost: associations "would forego the support of thousands and thousands of concubines who as a rule are wealthy and generous."⁶⁸ Seton's uncritical repetition of Hollington Tong's hyperbole notwithstanding, her comment highlights the presence of socially progressive concubines in elite families and the collaborative relationships that characterized some households, observations that fed her bafflement at the developing extremity of wife-concubine divisions.

The class prejudices of social activists, and the growing tensions of unstable Republican-era domestic arrangements, worked to increasingly thrust women who bore the moral stain of concubinage outside the salvational community of the nation. Once only the sexual agency of husbands and wives was legitimate in law, concubines could be denied social visibility among the Republican citizenry. In the intermittent elections of the Republic, those (elite male) individuals who comprised the electorate enacted the

emblematic exercise of representative democracy. Female activists chafed at their exclusion from the suffrage rights of citizens but claimed these rights for themselves as members of an elite. They did not extend their indignation over gender discrimination to consider voting rights for concubines.

The publications of the anticoncubinage movement illuminate divisions among women within the framework of reconceptualized domestic relations, distinctions that facilitated a caricature of concubines in terms of their agency and culpability. The (male) Zhu Caizhen argued that concubines acceded to their positions reluctantly, and that concubinage was fundamentally the fault of men: "What innocent woman with precious personhood would want to be a concubine? Who would want to be a man's plaything, despised and trampled upon by other women? . . . Concubines are not guilty. They did not aspire to be concubines. Men [bought, forced, or deceived them]. Some morally degraded women . . . are willing to be concubines as a reluctant choice. Unable to be wives, they accept a lower position as concubines. I can confidently state that no woman would wish to be a concubine."⁶⁹ Zhu sympathetically exculpated concubines as a group, but even he did not imagine all of them to be clean. Nor could he understand a woman's decision to become a concubine as other than suicidal.

Female writers were less willing to entertain concubines' innocence, and often held concubines complicit in their ignominy: "When a woman is willing to degrade her personhood and humiliate herself to become a concubine-toy, she is motivated by nothing but obscene desire for wasteful extravagance."⁷⁰ Such caricatures of concubines proliferated in the essays of activists who sought to liberate women. Female activists' denigration of concubines—and their own self-exaltation—is evident in an example of concubine-abolition verse:

The free woman and the concubine:
One stands in the lofty clouds,
One tumbles into the fiery pit.⁷¹

This poem did not aspire to elegance. Instead it offered an unequivocal assertion of the categorical difference between self-actualized Chinese female activists and benighted concubines.

Some anticoncubinage activists urged greater sympathy, although they insisted on concubines' moral depravity: "In regard to degenerate women who are seduced and become men's concubines, instead of making light of their personhood, we should call out their sympathetic feeling, enabling them to become revolutionary pioneers."⁷² Despite the socialist inspiration evident in some of this commentary, even left-wing female activists' views of concubines frequently exhibited class prejudice. Concubines might be reformed, but only within class constraints: "Pitiful women who become

concubines, try to think objectively! . . . Please determine your future, your fate, immediately! . . . Do you know how to reel silk? Better to be a female silk factory worker than a toy of men. Can you sew? Better to be a seamstress than to sink into the trap . . . Ambitious concubines, awakened concubines. Hurry! Hurry! Arise! Arise!"⁷³ At best, concubines might attain the status of worker:

A concubine who gains liberation
And a worker who wins victory
Stand together at the same level.⁷⁴

Such concubine-abolition writings of the early 1920s suggested the relatively spontaneous activism of the May Fourth era, eager embrace of industrial progress and republican ideals (in the face of a failed republic), and rhetorical faith in a process of individual social awakening through social mobilization and print.

The tone of anticoncubinage writings in the 1930s conveys the frustrations of female party members, as Guomintang legislators—even after the solidification of the Nanjing government—failed to make good on earlier revolutionary commitments to gender equality. An account of the abolition movement, published by the veteran activist Jin Shiyin in 1931, castigated Guomintang lawmakers who failed to make concubinage illegal. Her targeting of the Guomintang, and male lawmakers in particular, did nothing to increase her sympathy for concubines. In a context of diminished socialist sympathy but fervent nationalism, Jin expressed particular disgust at the spectacle of concubinage twenty years into the Republic: "Powdered and decorated, concubines fawn upon their masters and vie for favors. More harmful than plague . . . concubinage still parasitizes the young Chinese nation. . . . Concubinage flourishes in fact . . . the shame of the party-state. The Guomintang's aim is to build a free and equal nation based on gender equality. On the basis of domestic equality we may proceed to achieve equality in the international arena. If we cannot achieve equality [among citizens], how may we achieve equality among nations?"⁷⁵ Jin's lurid portrait of concubines is more striking in this description than her criticism of the inadequacy of the law and lawmakers' *de facto* toleration of concubinage.

To remedy the situation Jin emphasized that only female party members had the ability and will to transform society. Jin described the situation, after two decades in the trenches: "Now we have a program for abolishing concubinage, but who shall carry it out? Society? It is numb, apathetic, and unconcerned . . . Men? Drunk with unfettered pleasures and reactionary, they have no time. Concubines themselves? They are clueless . . . Must it then be us comrades in the women's movement who love the party and the nation?"⁷⁶ Jin's contempt for male weakness submitted, nonetheless, to the

discipline of a male-dominated party in which women's duty lay in proving themselves to be superior activists who corrected but did not displace male leadership. Anticoncubinage literature in both the 1920s and 1930s blamed men for devaluing and oppressing women, for purchasing them "like piglets" to satisfy their lust, or for fulfilling an unenlightened desire for male offspring.⁷⁷ Female activists in the 1930s vociferously targeted the hypocrisy of male legislators who sheltered men's traditional sexual privilege by avoiding the equal application of criminal sanctions for adultery to men who kept concubines.⁷⁸ One observes, even so, a tendency to exculpate the men who, in activists' descriptions, were in thrall to their concubines' more powerful whims. Female activists' solidarity with their male partners along class lines frequently trumped their concern for gender identity or recognition of concubines' humanity. The trope of controlling, materialistic, mahjong-playing, shrewish, and duplicitous concubines and the weak men who could not manage them is familiar in early twentieth century fiction. What is striking is that the rhetorical skewering of concubines and their men appear in non-fiction essays written by female activists and in texts that are not so easily distinguished from male-authored literary fantasies.⁷⁹

Fragments of actual "concubine voices," gleaned from Republican-era materials, shed light on the shrill flatness of the feminist caricatures. Real-life concubines exercised their behavioral options. Newspaper advertisements document the rising prices men paid for educated concubines, suggesting that market factors could trump social stigma, at least in terms of family calculations.⁸⁰ Concubines did not speak out *qua* concubines because there were no concubine organizations (or basis for an organization as concubines) and because of the pejorative character of the label. In this sense we may understand the reputed generosity of concubines in elite households. Their charitable acts purchased a degree of social respectability and a connection to public life beyond the family. Individual "concubine voices" express concern for social respectability and opportunity at a time of heightened stigma and defensive use of the new language of equality and rights. In 1913, for example, administrators fired Yao Wenyu, an educated female staff member in the Hubei Women's School of Law and Politics, for tarnishing the school's reputation after she became a concubine. Unwilling to accept this insult, she publicly challenged the school's president, Li Qimin, claiming a legitimate status, not as a concubine, but as a properly married woman. She questioned why the school scorned her for violating monogamy when men who possessed concubines could hold public office. Her protest was notable both for her claim of equality and her castigation of male hypocrisy. "Why should a concubine be looked down upon as 'degraded' despite the fact that she married [with appropriate ritual]?" she asked.⁸¹ Although Yao failed to regain her position, Shanghai newspapers reprinted her challenge to

gender inequality. Her outrage and assertion of parity with a wife suggests the flux of the first years of the Republic, before the hardening of modern categorical distinctions between wife and concubine.

The language of divorce announcements in the 1920s indicates that concubines found it rhetorically strategic, in contrast, to lament their loss of personhood in order to claim the right to break free of a humiliating bond. An example is Huang Feinong, the abandoned concubine of Guangxi military leader Lu Rongting. Huang declared her independence in a paid newspaper announcement that framed her decision in terms of her aspiration for gender equality and a virtuous life to redeem her lost personhood: "Feinong is unlucky. In my youth my family was economically oppressed and sold me as a servant to Lu Rongting, who took me as his eighth concubine. Lu moved to Beijing and Shanghai in 1920 and left [me] in Wuming, where I suffered the oppression of the other concubines, living an inhuman life for eight years. . . . In this time of women's liberation, in the interest of casting off the bitterness of [this] life to claim integrity and personhood, Feinong breaks off relations with Lu Rongting to reclaim her freedom."⁸² Such newspaper traces of "concubine voices" reveal how, in particular contexts, individual women navigated the shifting legal, organizational, and rhetorical possibilities of their time. Concubines' voices nonetheless were excluded from articulations of the concubine abolition movement.

Concubine abolition activists of the 1920s and 1930s lamented that they were not gaining traction over the practice of concubinage, despite their efforts and the ubiquity of radical critiques in the media. Zhu Caizhen was not alone in suggesting that concubinage had increased in the Republic.⁸³ The American sociologist Sidney Gamble, a longtime researcher in Beijing, suggested that concubinage had become more prevalent: "80 per cent of the officials have secondary wives and the taking of concubines has become a fad in Peking. . . . Taking secondary wives is also spreading among the lower class. A foreigner's cook was even found to be supporting three wives."⁸⁴ Although precise demographic information is lacking, recent studies attest to the robust market in female bodies during this time period.⁸⁵ Other changes in society created new variations in the domestic arrangements of concubinage; urban concubines, for instance, enjoyed separate apartments and autonomy from wives' supervision, which threatened wives' control over the household money. The media luridly reported sensational cases of concubines mistreating wives.⁸⁶

The shifting domestic arrangements of educated elites contributed to new polygynous formations. Educated women were susceptible to new-style entanglements like cohabiting with men who had already married. Contemporary observers of these arrangements noted resemblances to the old concubine system. Since "free love" arrangements lacked clear termi-

nology, Zhu Caizhen coined the concept “new-style concubine”: “Relations between men and women are in a state of extreme instability. On the one hand, people vigorously advocate freedom in love . . . On the other, people with freedom in divorce cannot leave spouses. People choosing free marriage cannot marry. . . . Because the old custom of male superiority has not been abolished, there are regretful consequences, with many new-style concubines. Old-style concubines have not yet been abolished. How can we stand to add new-style concubines?”⁸⁷

Individuals in these relationships would not have accepted Zhu’s label. Zhu’s concept of a “new-style concubine” was oxymoronic because of the ideological gulfs embedded in the categories of New Woman and concubine. For new women, being likened to a concubine was the most shameful of insults, as one journalist commented in 1922, so compromising of social integrity (*shehui ren’ge*) that suicide was not an unreasonable response.⁸⁸

The complexities of new domesticities exposed the chimera of sexual equality. New women were caught between the universal ideal of equality and the particular (unequal) experiences of women in a still-polygynous society.⁸⁹ Male partners often accepted parentally-arranged marriages at a young age. Although desirous of sexual liberation, these men found it less socially disruptive to remain married than to reject their parents and divorce their wives. Many left legal wives with their parents and improvised domestic arrangements elsewhere. It is unsurprising that cultural radicals, including communists in this era, “retained some traditional expectations of gender roles.”⁹⁰ Numerous proponents of gender equality led contradictory lives. Chen Duxiu engaged in affairs and visited prostitutes, whereas Lu Xun and Guo Moruo took lovers without divorcing their legal wives. Such new-style affairs were facilitated by the freedoms of urban life and the experimentalism of cultural iconoclasts. Women’s growing employment outside of the home—and the eroticism of sexually integrated public spaces of work and leisure—also made free love encounters possible.⁹¹

The decades-long relationship of Liu Qingyang and Zhang Shenfu, begun in 1920, exemplifies the protean imprint of concubinage on individuals who aimed to radically reconfigure heterosexual relations. A fiercely independent young woman at age sixteen, Liu joined Sun Yatsen’s Revolutionary Alliance. In 1914 she opened a girls’ school, joining the Association for Women’s Rights in 1915. At twenty-one, rejecting a parentally-arranged marriage, she chaired the Tianjin Women’s Patriotic Association (noted for its exclusion of concubines).⁹² Liu adhered for a time to the egalitarian gender politics of the Enlightenment Society, using a number instead of a name to break with the tainted patriarchal family.⁹³

In 1920, Liu met the married Marxist professor Zhang Shenfu en route to France.⁹⁴ They lived together after their return to China in 1923. Both were

active in left-wing circles and Liu entrusted their son to Zhang's legal wife. In 1924, Liu edited the Tianjin *Women's Daily*. She never reflected explicitly on her own situation, although she criticized unequal expectations for women in revolutionary circles.⁹⁵ Zhang reminisced about Liu in a revealing late-life interview that exposed how the anima of concubinage haunted their domestic arrangements. As Zhang told their story: "[Liu] did pretty much what I told her to. She joined the Communist Party upon my recommendation . . . When we came home from Europe she lived with my family, even though I had another wife at the time. She was more of a concubine at first [though] we were above such notions."⁹⁶ Zhang had been a propagandist for the new sexual morality and what he called the "art of sex." He likened romantic love to bondage and berated women for their failure to liberate themselves, writing: "Why can't you take care of yourselves? . . . why do you let yourselves be trampled on?"⁹⁷ Throughout his career he was troubled by what he called women's tragic desire for monogamy and "habits of dependency."⁹⁸ Despite his disdain for old ideas, Zhang's retrospective comment exposes the polygynous subtext of his thinking. His frank admission appeared in hindsight, after Liu's death, and was expressed by an old man who still prided himself on his polygynous domesticity, which he recoded as modern emancipation. Liu was no concubine, but Zhang somehow blurred the distinctions.

In contrast with the Westerners who sought to reform them, Chinese were intimately familiar with the attractions of polygyny for men in the new era, even as they wrote against its power. Male writers of all stripes could afford greater sympathy for the sexualized concubine than female writers, whose moral virtue (and claims to power, affection, and household authority) was at stake.⁹⁹ Following the abstract logic of the modern idea of "woman" and universal claims of women's liberation, and looking in from the outside, one might have anticipated gender solidarity. But Republican-era female activists—grasping for elite status themselves in the name of gender equality—adopted a mechanism of class exclusion to expel concubines (in the name of personhood). Displacing their anger about inequality from men of their own class, they targeted concubines who threatened what properly belonged to them. Concubine abolition was, after all, "in their own interests as wives."¹⁰⁰

Arguments for the abolition of concubinage were, in certain respects, distinct from parallel discussions of the need to eliminate footbinding and prostitution. The condemnation of footbinding as backward developed from nineteenth-century discomfort with the foreign gaze and missionaries' criticism of Chinese social practice. After the new concept of "natural feet" destabilized the aesthetics of tiny feet, bound feet lingered in Chinese society because of the materiality of female bodies: bones that had been

broken could not be reshaped into natural feet.¹⁰¹ New women might pity or look down upon those with bound feet. There was, however, less cause to revile their character. Once reformers had denaturalized bound feet by vigorous promotion of the idea of “natural feet,” bound feet had a lingering physical presence in older and rural women but presented little threat. Concubines (and their shifting legal definition and social circumstances), in contrast, threatened both wives’ social status and the family reform that modeled democratic citizenship. Concubines’ ongoing presence in Chinese society was due to the market in women, the allure of polygyny for male status, and the reluctance of powerful men to curb their own privilege. In contrast, prostitution (a manifestation of the market in bodies and “profoundly rooted in Chinese social practice”) was a universal practice, not central to ideas of Chinese backwardness or identity. The foreign-led effort to abolish prostitution in Shanghai’s International Settlement in the early Republican era thus remained “an artificial experience,” a short-lived and superficial imposition on a society that did not accept its logic.¹⁰²

In the greater heat of Chinese writings about concubinage, different people seized the liberatory rhetoric of egalitarianism in accordance with their particular interests, unsurprisingly oblivious, or willfully blind, to the exclusionary character of their actions or the way that inequality might be masked by a language of equal rights, choice, and self-determination. It is in this regard, and in its enduring attraction for men—despite the legal deterrents of the twentieth century—that we may trace the modern afterlife of Chinese polygyny, as it left its traces on new egalitarian visions of society.¹⁰³

NOTES

My thanks to Janet Theiss, Hiroko Sakamoto, and Barbara Molony for suggestions, and to the Oregon Humanities Center for support.

¹Sumptuary laws initially restricted concubines to men by rank, but this restriction eroded by late imperial times. See Beverly Bossler, *Courtesans, Concubines, and the Cult of Female Fidelity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); and Katherine Bernhardt, *Women and Property in China, 960–1949* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

²Harald Fuess, *Divorce in Japan: Family, Gender, and the State, 1600–2000* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 55–56. The recognition of the hegemony of Western monogamy or devaluation of polygamy is common in studies on the nationalization of modern marriage. See Hanan Kholoussy, “The Nationalization of Marriage in Monarchical Egypt,” in *Re-Envisioning Egypt, 1919–1952*, ed. Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy Johnson, and Barak Salmoni (Cairo and New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 317–342.

³Bernhardt, *Women and Property in China*, 161.

⁴Bernhardt, *Women and Property in China*, 161, 178, and 181; and Lisa Tran, "The ABCs of Monogamy in Republican China: Adultery, Bigamy, and Conjugal Fidelity," *Twentieth Century China* 36, no. 2 (July 2011): 99–118.

⁵Marnie S. Anderson, "Critiquing Concubinage: Sumiya Koume and Changing Gender Roles in Modern Japan," *Japanese Studies* 37, no. 3 (November 2017): 311–319, 317.

⁶Yu Hualin, *Nüxing de "chong su": Minguo chengshi funü hunyin wenti yanjiu* [Remodeling women: research on women and the marriage question in Republican cities] (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2009); and Lisa Tran, *Concubines in Court: Marriage and Monogamy in Twentieth-Century China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015). Neither scholar considers the contrasting speed of the reduction of Japanese concubines or the distinctiveness of the Chinese case.

⁷Zhu Caizhen, ed., *Fei qie hao* [Abolish Concubinage] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang shuju, 1922), 1.

⁸Susan Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915–1953* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Louise Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy: Women's Suffrage in China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008); and Tran, *Concubines in Court*.

⁹Keith McMahon, *Polygamy and Sublime Passion: Sexuality in China on the Verge of Modernity* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 127.

¹⁰Gail King, "Christian Women of China in the Seventeenth Century," in *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women*, ed. Jessie Lutz (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2010), 70–71; and Joanna Walley-Cohen, *The Sextants of Beijing: Global Currents in Chinese History* (New York: Norton, 1999), 78–79.

¹¹James Wiley, "Christianizing Chinese Sex Relations: The Fight for Monogamy in China" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1929); and Herbert Lamson, *Social Pathology in China* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1934).

¹²Karen Garner, *Precious Fire: Maud Russell and the Chinese Revolution* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 24.

¹³Presbyterian Church in the USA, *Reports of the Missionary and Benevolent Boards and Committees* (Philadelphia, PA: Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the USA, 1917), 93. Emphasis on elite conversion (and missionary social conservatism) diminished missionaries' concern for the human rights of the concubine.

¹⁴Sidney D. Gamble and John Steward Burgess, *Peking: A Social Survey* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1921), 485. The Guangzhou branch of the Door of Hope was exceptional in that it opposed concubinage.

¹⁵Wiley, "Christianizing Chinese Sex Relations," 133.

¹⁶King, "Christian Women of China," 71. In 1907 Methodists considered admitting concubines as converts because they were not considered "free agents."

"The Question of Secondary Wives," in *China Centenary Missionary Conference Records* (Shanghai: Methodist Publishing House, 1907), 567–568.

¹⁷"Chinese Women Combat Concubinage," *Missionary Review of the World* XLIII, no. 1 (January 1920): 737. By the 1920s Protestant missionaries were 60 percent female. See Alison Drucker, "The YWCA in the Chinese Women's Movement," *Social Science Review* 53, no. 3 (September 1979): 425.

¹⁸Nancy Boyd, *Emissaries: The Overseas Work of the American YWCA, 1895–1970* (New York: The Women's Press, 1986), 42–43. Boyd highlights the wife of Zuo Zongtang's fifth son who played a role in engineering the YWCA's respectability in Changsha. On the YWCA's dependence on elite wives, see Xia Shi, "Reconfiguring Traditions: Gender, Philanthropy, and Public Life in Early Twentieth Century China" (PhD diss., University of California Irvine, 2013).

¹⁹Grace Thompson Seton, *Chinese Lanterns* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1924), 193, 225, and 230.

²⁰Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., *Reports of the Missionary*, 53.

²¹Wiley, "Christianizing Chinese Sex Relations," 119.

²²Wiley, "Christianizing Chinese Sex Relations," 141.

²³Christian Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai: A Social History, 1849–1949*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 310.

²⁴Nicola Spakowski and Cecelia Milwertz, eds., *Women and Gender in Chinese Studies* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006), 7; Elisabeth Croll, *Wise Daughters from Foreign Lands: European Women Writers in China* (London: Pandora, 1989), 126–128.

²⁵Du Yaquan, "Lun xuqie" [On keeping concubines], *Dongfang zazhi* 8, no. 4 (1911): 15.

²⁶Du, "Lun xuqie," 15.

²⁷Du, "Lun xuqie," 17, 19.

²⁸Du, "Lun xuqie," 16.

²⁹Paul Bailey, *Gender and Education in China: Gender Discourses and Women's Schooling in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 219–268.

³⁰Liang Qichao briefly participated in the World Monogamy Association. See Yuxin Ma, *Women Journalists and Feminism in China, 1898–1937* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2010), 71; and Cheng Yu, "Qing zhi minguo de xuqie xisu yu shehui bianqian" [Concubine possession and social change from Qing to Republic] (PhD diss., Fudan University, 2005), 208–211.

³¹Headquartered in Nanjing, with provincial branches, the society claimed several hundred members. See Ma, *Women Journalists*, 110–111; and David Strand, *An Unfinished Republic: Leading by Word and Deed in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 122–133.

³²Revolutionary anarchists criticized marriage itself as the dark core of inequality. In 1912, Cai Yuanpei, Wu Zhihui, and Li Shizeng established the Society to Advance Virtue, which advocated the abolition of marriage and private property. See Arif Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 88; 99.

³³Bernhardt, *Women and Property in China*, 161.

³⁴Daniel Bays, *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 197.

³⁵Given limited female literacy, 90 percent of the readership was likely male. See Perry Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 250. Bao emphasized that national salvation required the partnership of women, as “flowers of our brilliant citizenry.” Female-authored content approached 20 to 30 percent. See Joan Judge, *Republican Lens: Gender, Visuality, and Experience in the Early Chinese* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 4-8; 8.

³⁶Jin Yuanzhen, “Pohuai jiating xingfu zhi weixian dongwu: ming hu qie” [Dangerous animal that threatens domestic happiness], *Funü shibao* 18, no. 18 (May 1916): 7-8.

³⁷Jin Yuanzhen, “Pohuai,” 8-9.

³⁸Cai Yuanpei’s Society to Advance Virtue, organized 1918, reprised his earlier anarchist morality. Members abjured concubines, gambling, and brothels. See Vera Schwarcz, *Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 49; Wang Shijie, “Da Yang Xi xiansheng lun fei qie ‘Zhongguo feiqie yu falü’” [“Response to Yang Xi’s discussion in ‘Chinese Concubine Abolition and Law’”], *Yusi* 109 (1926): 27.

³⁹Critics denounced Zhou Ziqi’s travel to Washington with his concubine as a national shame. Cheng Yu, “Qing zhi minguo de xuqie xisu yu shehui bianqian,” 194-197. Li Yuanhong’s capable concubine Li Benwei took on a “public wife” role and was active in the Women’s School of Law and Politics in Hubei. Li’s first wife, however, was appointed nominal President of the school, not Benwei. Although Benwei was protected by Li Yuanhong, another concubine was fired from the school in 1913 because she was seen as a stain on the school’s reputation. See Xia Shi, “Just Like a ‘Modern Wife’? Concubines on the Public Stage in Early Republican China,” *Social History* 43, no. 2 (2018): 222-224.

⁴⁰Before the 1920s, illustrated ads that appeared in the Beijing newspaper *Chenbao* conveyed the idea of success by showing a family head with multiple wives and children. Within a few years, however, advertisements depicted monogamous couples and smaller families. See Yu Hualin, *Nüxing*, 322-323.

⁴¹Jin Shiyin, “Ershi nian fuyun zhi yi da gongzuo: fei qie” [“20-year task of women’s movement: abolishing concubines”], *Funü gongming* 41 (1931): 11.

⁴²Lin Meijing, “Yeque zhilu” [“Concubine-smelting furnace”], in *Fei qie hao* [Abolish Concubinage], ed. Zhu Caizhen (Hangzhou: Zhejiang shuju, 1922), 33.

⁴³Jin Shiyong, "Ershi nian," 9.

⁴⁴"Shanghai baojie sida jingang zhi bijiao" ["Four pillars of Shanghai newspaper world compared"], *Jingbao*, July 6, 1921.

⁴⁵*Shanghai youlan zhinan* [Shanghai touring guide] (Shanghai: Zhonghua tushu jicheng bianjisuo, 1923), 77–79; and Yun Shi, ed., *Funü zhi baimian guan* [Hundred views of women] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi bianyi she, 1927).

⁴⁶Runje Shaw (Shao Zuiweng), "Fandui du qi zhuyi" ["Oppose single wife-ism"], *Xin shijie*, December 2, 3 and 6, 1917.

⁴⁷Cheng Yu, in "Qing zhi minguo," describes concubines in wealthy Republican-era households, especially in cities and in the south. Husbands often established financially autonomous urban apartments for their concubines, removing concubines from their wives' strict control. Wives lost the legally-protected right to treat concubines as inferior (including through physical punishment). Republican newspapers reported the mistreatment of wives by concubines (178–196). Yu Hualin highlights the lure of concubine ownership, despite circulating critiques. See Yu Hualin, *Nüxing*, 312; 334.

⁴⁸Zhu Caizhen, ed., *Fei qie hao* [Abolish Concubinage] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang shuju, 1922).

⁴⁹Tan Sheying, ed., *Zhongguo funü yundong tongshi* [History of the Chinese women's movement] (Nanjing: Funü gongmingshe, 1936). This work contains notices of women's groups that advocated concubine abolition. See also, "Women Organize Against Concubines," *Far Eastern Republic* 1, no. 2 (November 1919): 26.

⁵⁰"You shi yi mu feiqie yundong" [Another concubine abolition movement], *Xinwenbao* (Shanghai), August 30, 1921. Grace Seton noted that five hundred women petitioned for the bigamy prosecution of men who took concubines. See Seton, *Chinese Lanterns*, 225, 230; and Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*, 25, 28.

⁵¹"You shi yi mu," *Xinwenbao* (Shanghai), August 30, 1921.

⁵²Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*, 28.

⁵³Guishi, "Qie zhi zijue" ["Concubine self-determination"], in *Fei qie hao* ed. Zhu Caizhen (Hangzhou: Zhejiang shuju, 1922), 25.

⁵⁴Alys Weinbaum et. al., eds., *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

⁵⁵Bryna Goodman, "The New Woman Commits Suicide: The Press, Cultural Memory, and the New Republic," *Journal of Asian Studies* 64, no. 1 (February 2005): 67–101.

⁵⁶The Shanghai newspaper *Crystal* published an extensive cartoon series in June 1919, "Chinese Women Past and Present," that depicts such contrasts. *Jingbao*, March 21, 24, 27, and 30, 1919; and April 2, 6, and 9, 1919.

⁵⁷Tiesheng, "Wo de nüzi canzheng guan" ["My views on women's suffrage"], *Shangbao* (Shanghai), April 7, 1921; Bryna Goodman, "The Vocational Woman," *Gender in Motion: Divisions of Labor and Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China*, Bryna Goodman and Wendy Larson, ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 265. Wives' parasitism could be mitigated by virtuous modern child-rearing.

⁵⁸Mei Lu, "Fei qie tan" ["Abolish concubinage"], *Rensheng zazhi* 3 (1924): 14.

⁵⁹Goodman, "The Vocational Woman," 271.

⁶⁰Hollington Tong, "Chinese Women Declare War on the Concubines," *Millard's Review of the Far East* (Shanghai), ed. Thomas Franklin Millard, August 30, 1919, 531–533.

⁶¹Hollington Tong, "Chinese Women Declare War," 531–533.

⁶²Hollington Tong, "Chinese Women Declare War," 531–533.

⁶³Ke Jiu, "Wo zhen ti zhe xie zi kexi" ["I find these words unfortunate"], *Juewu* (Shanghai), June 13, 1921; "Tianjin nüjie aiguo hui jujue rufuren ruhui zhi liyoushu" ["Reasons for Tianjin Women's Patriotic Association's refusal of concubine membership"], *Chenbao* (Beijing), August 15, 1919.

⁶⁴"Yue nüjie zhi paiqie huiyi" ["Guangdong women's meeting excludes concubines"], *Minguo ribao* (Shanghai), January 31, 1920. The Women's Suffrage Association banned the unchaste and those in "non-upright" occupations. See Tan Sheying, *Zhongguo funü yundongshi*, 53. Edwards highlights the defeat of one exclusionary provision, but others remained. See, Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy*, 114–116.

⁶⁵Min-ch'ien Tyau, *China Awakened* (New York: McMillan, 1922), 61–62. She draws on material in Hollington Tong's "Chinese Women Declare War."

⁶⁶Garner, *Precious Fire*, 24.

⁶⁷Gerve Baronti, "Chinese Women and the Concubine," *North China Daily News*, March 17, 1920.

⁶⁸Seton, *Chinese Lanterns*, 225.

⁶⁹Zhu Caizhen, "Qie zhi miedu shuo" ["How to eliminate concubines"], in *Fei qie hao* ed. Zhu Caizhen (Hangzhou: Zhejiang shuju, 1922), 1, 8.

⁷⁰Mei Lu, "Fei qie tan," 14.

⁷¹Gui Shi, "Za shi" ["Miscellaneous poems"], in *Fei qie hao* ed. Zhu Caizhen (Hangzhou: Zhejiang shuju, 1922), 6.

⁷²Qiu Ying, "Qie shi zurao renlei jinhua de zhang'ai wu" ["Concubines are obstructions to human progress"], in *Fei qie hao* ed. Zhu Caizhen (Hangzhou: Zhejiang shuju, 1922), 33.

⁷³Gui Shi, "Qie zhi zijue," 26–28.

⁷⁴Gui Shi, "Za shi," 7.

⁷⁵Jin Shiyin, "Ershi nian," 6; 12.

⁷⁶Jin Shiyin, "Ershi nian," 14.

⁷⁷Gui Shi, "Qie zhi zijue," 27.

⁷⁸Lisa Tran, "Sex and Equality in Republican China: The Debate over the Adultery Law," *Modern China* 35, no. 2 (March 2009): 191–223.

⁷⁹Mei Lu, in "Fei qie tan," 14. Mei Lu likens concubines to a cosmic force, with dragon-like powers capable of slowly destroying their masters. See also Zhu Hongda, "Qie" ["Concubine"] in *Fei qie hao* ed. Zhu Caizhen (Hangzhou: Zhejiang shuju, 1922), 3; Mao Dun, *Midnight* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1957), 210–213; Lao She, *Cat Country*, trans. William Lyell (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1970), 133–143; Yan Duhe, "Feiqie" ["Abolish concubines"], *Xinwenbao* (Shanghai), serialized, September 1921.

⁸⁰"Xian ping er," *Dagongbao* (Tianjin), July 30, 1909; and Yu Hualin, *Nüxing*, 309.

⁸¹"E sheng nüjie xin choushi" ["New scandals in women's circle in Hubei Province"], *Shenbao* (Shanghai), January 16, 1913, cited in Xia Shi, "Just Like a Modern Wife."

⁸²Yu Hualin, *Nüxing*, 323.

⁸³See also Lin Meijing, "Ye qie zhilu," 33; Qiu Tian, "Qie de bi hai he ruhe feiqie" ["The harms of concubinage and the means of abolition"], in *Fei qie hao* ed. Zhu Caizhen (Hangzhou: Zhejiang shuju, 1922), 15.

⁸⁴Sidney Gamble, *Peking: A Social Survey* (Beijing: George Doran Company, 1921), 259–260.

⁸⁵Cheng Yu, "Qing zhi"; Johanna S. Ransmeier, *Sold People: Traffickers and Family Life in North China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

⁸⁶Cheng Yu, "Qing zhi," 194–197.

⁸⁷Zhu, *Fei qie hao*, preface.

⁸⁸Huang Qinghua, *Xin Shenbao* (Shanghai), September 18, 1922.

⁸⁹Bryna Goodman, "Words of Blood and Tears: Petty Urbanites Write Emotion," *Nan Nü: Men, Women, and Gender in China* 11, no. 2 (2009): 270–301.

⁹⁰Christina Gilmartin, *Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 110–111.

⁹¹Goodman, "The Vocational Woman." Sun Yat-sen and Jiang Jieshi simply took on new wives without divorcing earlier ones.

⁹²Vera Schwarcz, *Time for Telling Truth is Running Out: Conversations with Zhang Shenfu* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 60–85.

⁹³Jie Tao, Bijun Zheng, and Shirley Mow, eds., *Holding Up Half the Sky, Chinese Women Past, Present, and Future*, (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2004) 66.

⁹⁴Lily Xiao Hong Lee and A. D. Stefanowska, eds., *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women*, v. 2: The Twentieth Century, 1912–2000 (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 358.

⁹⁵Schwarcz, *Time for Telling Truth*, 80–81.

⁹⁶Schwarcz, *Time for Telling Truth*, 76; Gilmartin, *Engendering the Chinese Revolution*, 111.

⁹⁷Cited in Schwarcz, *Time for Telling Truth*, 60.

⁹⁸Schwarcz, *Time for Telling Truth*, 88.

⁹⁹Republican law diminished the wife's authority to punish concubines and redefined a concubine's legal relationship with her children (who no longer belonged to the first wife). A trend toward separate urban residences for concubines diminished a wife's economic control over the household. See Cheng Yu, "Qing zhi," 178–196; Yu Hualin, *Nüxing*, 312; 334.

¹⁰⁰Elisabeth Croll, *Wise Daughters from Foreign Land*.

¹⁰¹Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

¹⁰²Henriot, *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai*, 310–311.

¹⁰³McMahon, *Polygamy and Sublime Passion*, 127.