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“Expressions of the Life that is within Us”
Epistolary Practice of American Women in Republican China

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Doctor of Philosophy

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By

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M.A., Beijing Foreign Studies University, 2000
B.A., Beijing University of Science and Technology, 1997

Advisor: Catherine Ross Nickerson, PhD.
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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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Abstract

“Expressions of the Life that is within Us” Epistolary Practice of American Women in Republican China

By Haipeng Zhou

Reciprocal exchanges, interactions that influence a person's life and development, are the focus of my dissertation on a group of progressive American women. Among them are Ida Pruitt, Helen Snow, and Maud Russell, who stayed in China in the 1920s and 1930s, engaging in various progressive activities as social worker, YWCA secretary and independent journalist respectively. Letter writing and reading was an indispensable part of their life in China. It served as a vital link between their diverse Chinese experience and American homeland, it set up a free stage for these letter writers to create and perform various selves, it served as a key factor to define the letter writers' sense of community, and it provided a unique lens to see a transnational history with emphasis on gender and race.

The purpose of this project is to unravel the significance of the discursive epistolary practice of these women. It examines through epistolary representations the internal and external standards in evaluating women's new and traditional roles in this historical period. More specifically, my dissertation will focus on four key themes: progressive American women's community in China, their self-representation of changing personas and selves in reaction to various external values, the influence of their letter writing on the perception of China in the US, and the impact of their epistolary practice on international feminist practices and cross-cultural understanding.

To explore these themes, I investigate the foreign community in China and its epistolary culture in general, as well as conduct specific case studies. I argue that the letters of the progressive women reveal unique transnational as well as local social networks established through their professional, domestic and social activities. The epistolary legacies left by these middle-class American women open new windows to see the past from an enlightening perspective. They demonstrate that individuals' experience can break through ideological barriers and influence imbalance among big territorial powers. Through analysis of their letters, this project asserts these progressive women's own voices in history, and sets new angles in assessing their work and impacts.

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Like the women characters in my dissertation whose life and development were greatly influenced by interactions with the people around them, I am also deeply indebted to many people who have guided and helped me through the research and writing of this project. My dissertation committee – co-advisors Kate Nickerson and Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, and committee member Rong Cai – have all given me vital support throughout the years of my graduate study in their distinct ways. Without their advice and encouragement the completion of this project would not have been possible. Early in my graduate years when I discussed with Dr. Nickerson my research interest in intercultural encounters seen through American women’s experience in China, she brought into my attention the collections at the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women. I did my first archival trip afterward and found the trove of letters. In a sense, this project started to really grow after that enlightening discussion with Dr. Nickerson. I cannot remember how many “writer’s block” moments I had in this project since I had so many. But I do remember each of the crunch times when Dr. Wallace-Sanders dragged me out of my dark hole of writer’s block and self-abasement, showed me new light and sent me to the right direction in writing. Dr. Rong Cai’s expertise in Chinese studies was also essential for my project. I could always rely on her wise advice to build a comparative perspective between the American women characters and Chinese women of the same period. I am really grateful and fortunate to have these remarkable and caring professors on my committee, and thank them from the bottom of my heart for their time, mentorship and trust.

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Words can never express my gratitude to my family: my mother and father, Niu Huiying and Zhou Jun, my brother, Zhou Haibo and sister-in-law, Liu Ying, and my nephew Zhou Yuetong. Finally, this dissertation is in memory of my grandma, who taught me what I could not have learned from written words. This project was originated when I tried to understand the time period of her youth.

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Introduction

We live very much to ourselves, the foreigners did. It was a very weird thing, when you think back. We lived above – and when I say above I don't mean necessarily in money or anything like that – but we lived on a different plane from the Chinese. We lived always as foreigners. Maybe there was no other way to live in China.

– Caroline Schulz Service, 1976¹

Caroline Service, wife of an American diplomat, John Stewart Service, described her life in China in the 1930s as living in an isolated glass bubble. She socialized mostly only with her own compatriots, sometimes with friends from other Western countries such as Germany, France and the Britain. Her children went to foreign schools where Chinese children were not admitted. She was interested in China not because of its people, but because of its history and exoticism. In fact, she knew nothing about the Chinese except for her Chinese servants, whom she knew as either “boy” or “amah,” instead of someone with real names. Looking back at her China experience with four-decade hindsight, she wondered why she did not know more about those servants, and why she did not have Chinese friends back then. But she had never thought of these questions when she was living among the Chinese. “It was just the way foreigners lived.” She explained. Giving an extreme example of many foreigners’ feeling of superiority, she remembered what a foreign woman once said about the Chinese, “They’re so stupid. They can’t even speak English!” When Catherine Service reminded this woman that she did not speak Chinese either, this woman replied that it was not important, for Chinese was not a language for her to learn. Service noticed the blatant ignorance of this foreign

¹ Rosemary Levenson, Interview with Caroline Schulz Service, 1976, p.66. Collection of Caroline Service: State Department duty in China, the McCarthy era, and after, 1933-1977. Schlesinger Library, Cambridge, MA.

woman, but she did not ever question her identity with the foreign community in which such feeling of superiority prevailed. It was the way “everybody” lived, she reasoned. Although a few foreigners lived like the Chinese or saw more Chinese, they were considered outcasts. “You didn’t see them very much, and they were considered quite odd. Mostly they were single people, single men, let us say, or a few strange missionaries who really were interested in Chinese as people.” Service recalled.

Catherine Service’s description of the foreign community in China fits well into a system defined by imperialism and Orientalism. People’s mindsets in intercultural experience were dominated by these big ideologies, and their behaviors in return reflected clear patterns of the “isms.” People took their privileges for granted and no one thought of the power imbalance since everybody lived in this way.

But was it really the only way to live through one’s privileges? Was turning a blind eye to the “others” the only way to maintain an integral community of “ours”? Were there ways to enter the lives of others? How could intercultural encounters increase understanding among peoples instead of reinforce hostility and conflicts? Besides being confined to or influenced by ideologies, what are the active agents of the people? How could individuals’ experience break through ideological barriers and influence imbalance among big territorial powers? How will discovery of women’s praxis help redefine the paradigm of Sino-Western relations beyond “the big white male actors”? How would women’s activism in an international context affect their own identities in return? These general questions have been my driving forces to originate this dissertation project.

The urge to find alternative lives which refused to be dominated by ideological systems and which insisted a voice of their own in history, brought me to the experience of a particular group of American women whose life histories have yet been studied. They lived in China in the same time period as Catherine Service, but they created an alternative foreign community in which life was not just about one's own people. They saw more Chinese, made friends with the Chinese. Unlike common impressions, they were not only "single men," or "a few strange missionaries," but a diverse group. They were very sensitive to social and cultural currents, actively participated in intellectual exchanges and sought their own roles in improving human conditions.

My dissertation focuses on this group of progressive American women. One strong feature of this special group is broader social interest than those comfortably living in the glass bubble. For example, Maud Russell, a China YWCA secretary, always harbored a craving for intelligent conversations way beyond the topics that were confined to the domestic sphere. During John Dewey's 1920 visit in Changsha, Russell had a chance to have dinner with the Deweys and two others with keen intellectual interests. Russell was thrilled to find someone who shared her broader interests, "we ... did have one grand evening discussing; it was such a contrast to be with a group that did not discuss what 'my servant said'"! [*Russell's original underline*]² She was often frustrated by the narrow interest of some of her female compatriots. "They aren't interested in anything but children and servants and the minute you talk about ideas they [get] up and

² Maud Russell to folks, October 30, 1920. Maud Russell Papers, Box 1. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. (Materials from this collection appear as NYPL in other places of this chapter.)

say ‘it’s time to go home’!”³ Russell complained once in her letter. Ida Pruitt, a prominent social worker in China, also found it boring to socialize with those who were too absorbed into their own world. She confided with a friend in letter about an uncomfortable dinner with some orthodox missionaries, “I have no objection to their being more interested in mission details and in their children than in me, but I do not want to be around when they are for I have other interests...and my time is not too much.”⁴ Small talks and gossips could not satisfy this group’s intellectual curiosity.

Another feature of this group of women is exuberant creativity. With the keen interests in social issues, they strived to find their own ways to express themselves and input their own part into the common human knowledge. They were all engaged in creative writing, be it fiction, biographies, journalist reports, magazine essays or epistolary writing.

These women also exhibited vital sense of social responsibilities beyond home. They were activists fully engaged in improving international relations, and saw it their own work to introduce China to the American public. Each in their own ways, they tried to raise community and citizenship consciousness among women and participated in movements to establish a fairer global order and more proper gender relations.

Yet these women’s places in history have been virtually ignored. A systematic investigation of their community, instead of just the missionary sector or an individual, is still needed to paint a more comprehensive and critical picture of these women’s life histories and legacies. This project is such an academic engagement with this

³ Maud Russell to folks, November 17, 1923. Maud Russell Papers, Box 1, NYPL.

⁴ Ida Pruitt to John F. McIntosh, May 21, 1933, Papers of Ida Pruitt and Marjorie King, Schlesinger Library, Cambridge, MA.

transplanted communal culture through a comparative angle. This angle magnifies and complicates the “Americanness” of this community, thus expands the understanding of American middle class women’s culture in the 1920s and 1930s as a whole.

More Specific Themes

The purpose of my dissertation is to unravel the profound significance of the discursive epistolary practice of these women. It intends to discover a group of progressive American women’s experience in Republican China represented in their letters and examine through epistolary representations the internal and external standards in evaluating these women’s newly emerged and traditional roles in this transnational historical period. To be more specific, my dissertation will focus on four key themes: progressive American women’s community in China, their self-representation of changing personas and selves in reaction to various external values, the influence of these American women’s letter writing on perception of China in the US, and the impact of their epistolary practice on international feminist practices and cross-cultural understanding.

To explore the above themes, I will focus on three American women’s epistolary practice during their China years. They are: Helen Foster Snow (1907-1997), Ida Pruitt (1888-1985) and Maud Russell (1893-1989). They all stayed in China for a fairly long time, engaging in various progressive activities: Russell was an executive secretary of the China YWCA from 1919 to 1943; Pruitt was hired by Rockefeller Foundation as head of the Department of Social Services at Peking Union Medical College (1921-1938); Snow started her job in China at a finance corporation in 1931, and after a short period working

for the American Consulate in Shanghai, she remained as an independent journalist and activist during most of her ten years' stay.

All of them were prolific letter writers. Because of their special experience, their letters reveal unique and various transnational as well as local social networks established through their professional, domestic and social activities – from Chinese and American politician elites to family members, literary agents and editors across continents. As a result, their letters provide special venues to understand a transnational history in the 1920s and 1930s.

Why Letters

Wish you could have seen my desk – looked like a country post office!

— Maud Russell, letter to her family, 1918

Most of the time I spent on writing informational materials and long letters like this one. This kind of work made certain impact, but not to the degree as expected.

— Helen Foster Snow, letter to *People's Daily*, 1986

Reciprocal exchanges, interaction that influenced these women's life and development, are the focus of my dissertation. The need to example, interrogate, or create oneself within an exchange with others is central to the impulse of the epistolary project. Letter writing and reading was an indispensable part of their life in China, as the above two excerpts testified. Epistolary practice served as a vital linkage between these women's Chinese experience and their American homeland; it set up a free stage for these letter writers to create and perform various selves; it served as a key factor to define the letter writers' sense of community and thus provided a unique lens to see a transnational history with emphasis on gender and race.

Letters constituted an essential part in these women's life in China because of several factors. First of all, many letters were emotionally important for the writers and recipients. The most common themes in all letters were the happiness for receiving letters and the frustration for lack of letters.

Your letter of March 28th came in the day before yesterday and you can imagine how glad I am to hear from you again.⁵

Please do keep on writing and write as often as you can for we love your letters and we want dreadfully to hear from you as often as we can...⁶

I wonder why Carrie has never answered my letter...? But then I guess she is busy and full of other things! I guess she knows how little letters or the lack of them bother me!⁷

A shared sense of joy for receiving letters and constant expectancy, as shown above, was imbued between the lines.

The importance of letters for these women were demonstrated in the large amount of time spent in writing and reading letters. For example, returning for a several-day trip, Maud Russell found a desk piled up so high with mail that it "looked like a country post office." For another woman, Helen Foster Snow, spending two hours in the evening on a letter was a usual thing in her routine.

The letters were important also because they recorded details of their China experience. Especially for those written to their intimate loved ones, minute details of their daily life and thoughts not only maintained the sense of connection between each other, but also became a source for self reflection and personal growth. As Maud Russell explained to her partner in the U.S., "I do not write so much of detail to any one else – it's partly a selfish reason that gives you these details, as I keep a carbon copy and that

⁵ Maud Russell to Barlett, June 1, 1918. Maud Russell Papers, Box 1, NYPL.

⁶ Margaret Cook Thomson to Nancy Thomson, December 7, 1937. Margaret Cook Thomson Papers, Folder 30. Schlesinger Library, Cambridge, MA.

⁷ Maud Russell to folks, October 22, 1922. Maud Russell Papers, Box 1, NYPL.

gives me my running record!”⁸ Ida Pruitt also wrote long letters to her lover while they were apart. As a long relationship concluded, her ex-lover asked what he should do about her letters. She replied,

I would like my letters. They contains a lot of materials that I would like to keep. They are practically a diary... I am trying to make myself write the events of the day as I used to you but find it more difficult when not addressed to a concrete person.⁹

Due to the nature of intimate reciprocal exchange of letters, they provided an effective venue of self expressions for these women, which no other forms of writing could match. They wrote in letters to tell about themselves, from very personal feelings to what was happening within the community – social activities, public lectures by visitors, big events, social issues and crisis. The fact that these women kept their letters and eventually saved them in archives indicates that they all realize the significance of their epistolary writing for our communal knowledge.

In addition, letters were important for some of these women because of the potential for public effect and social activism. Helen Foster Snow, for example, spent much time writing long letters and expected them to make great social impact by spreading her messages and by provoking people into action. Maud Russell also used letters to inform her family and friends and the American students of her YWCA constituency of China’s situations and requested their supports for or participation in her China work.

Despite the significance of letters to this group of women and as a treasure trove for political and cultural history, they have been rarely studied as important texts.

⁸ Maud Russell to Mary Bentley, July 11, 1932. Maud Russell Papers, Box 3, NYPL.

⁹ Ida Pruitt to John F. McIntosh, September 6, 1933. Papers of Ida Pruitt and Marjorie King, Schlesinger Library.

Regarding an area of investigation of this project, representations of China, Chinese women and American women, for example, the existent literature is dominated by the representations on media, in literature or other popular culture. The influence of personal letters on representations of women in public culture has been completely ignored. My research has discovered American women consciously and strategically used their own letters to “correct” or balance media views on China as well as themselves. The first-person narrative, the on-the-scene tone, and the close ties between the sender(s) and the receiver(s), demonstrated letters’ great power over people’s opinions. Sometimes their letters were also published in newspaper. At a time when the press was censored, and when news reporting about China was often garbled in the U.S. due to either language barriers or turbulent situations, personal letters were sometimes seen as more reliable news sources, especially at local places where these women were originally from. Therefore, this project will open new ground for studies on representations.

My research will also enrich epistolary studies. The case studies tackle with hotly debated issues of this area such as epistolary subjectivity, fluidity of epistolary identities, and public influence of private letters. Moreover, it emphasizes the border-crossing features of letters, with special emphasis on the transpacific location. This new political-geographical focus will shed new light on the burgeoning research in letters across borders.

The Progressive Era of the U.S. and the Republican Era of China

The Progressive Era of the U.S. and the Republican China shared several major agenda, such as women’s suffrage, modernization, educational reform and democracy

movements. The intersection of China and the US in the 1920s and the following decade hence is a perfect site for an investigation in intercultural encounters and international feminist practice. The progressive American women went to China with an American feminist heritage of the 1910s and 1920s, and confronted the height of New Women movement in Republican China during the 1920s and 1930s. The intercultural experience positioned them into consciously comparative perspectives. Consequently their epistolary writings served to bridge international feminist practice across continents, racial and national lines. The study of their letters will enhance our understanding of cross-cultural gender politics, female agency, and international feminist practices.

International feminist studies, dominated by the language of Western feminism, reflect abundant research in the influence of “progressive” Western feminism on non-Western, “more traditional” and patriarchal countries. Current response to this domination has been either a reinforcement – in the case of American Studies and Religious studies – of Western influence on Chinese women’s feminist practice, or a denial – in the case of China Studies – of Western influence at all: many scholars of Chinese feminism like Joan Judge and Tani Barrow argue that Chinese women movement in “modern” China originated from Japanese influence, Chinese women’s own initiatives and Chinese-constructed fictive Western figures, while actual Western influence was so weak as to be ignorable.

This project, through American women’s experience with both Western and Chinese women in China, reveals that unlike either the above two sides, the international feminist practice has never been just one-directional; instead, it always involves

multilateral interaction and exchange among women from different backgrounds, and all sides eventually influence each other.

Furthermore, the insights into the eventful 1920s and 30s China and the U.S. can help us better understand current China-US relations. Coming out of the start of opening at the turn of the century, the 1920s and 30s China went through a cosmopolitan transformation in big cities like Shanghai and Beijing, where the subjects of this study resided. Similarly, the current China, after the early 80s opening up and reform, reaches another peak of close interaction and constant exchange with the Western world. The daily experience of the American women in two decades, therefore, act as constructive referential cases to many current issues in the cultural relations of the two countries. The project intends to go beyond the framework of empire struggle and big policies, so as to disclose the meaning of international relations to individuals' everyday life and to the popular culture.

Literature Review

This project builds on three relevant areas – intercultural exchange between China and the West, epistolary studies and international feminist studies.

Intercultural exchange between China and the West

While there is a comprehensive literature of intercultural experience between China and the West, existing literature either highlights the effect of dominant ideologies such as imperialism, Orientalism, nationalism and colonialism and theories of empire,¹⁰

¹⁰ James Louis Hevia, *English Lessons: the Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-century China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Lydia He Liu, *The Clash of Empires: the Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Sheng-mei Ma, *The Deathly Embrace:*

or is constructed with a gender bias focusing on influential male politicians or elites.¹¹ For example, Michael Hunt's paradigm of the intercultural experience includes three US constituents in China – politicians, missionaries and businessmen – all male Americans. The long list of “Western advisors” in Jonathan Spence's canonical writing also consists of white men only.

The above scholarship lays solid foundation to understand China and the West encounter from a macro level, especially regarding to the ideologies and policies which greatly influenced international relations. On the other hand, however, it also tends to magnify the cultural and ideological barriers and ignore people's agency. After all, the abstract ideologies always need people's concrete experiences to substantiate them.

Therefore, some recent scholarly work has drawn more attention to people's active role among the interactions of big ideologies. Karen Leong exemplifies this trend with her work on Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, and Mayling Soong and the transformation of American Orientalism.¹² Acknowledging the power of mainstream Orientalism and nationalism, Leung investigates these individuals' agency in the process of their own flexible identity constructions in relation to China and the U.S. She also argues that the international mobility also positions these individuals “in betweenness,”

Orientalism and Asian American Identity (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Susan Schoenbauer Thurin, *Victorian Travelers and the Opening of China, 1842-1907* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999); Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹¹ Mary Brown Bullock, *An American Transplant: The Rockefeller Foundation and Peking Union Medical College* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Warren I Cohen, *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations*. 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Michael H. Hunt, *The Making of a Special Relationship: the United States and China to 1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Jerry Israel, *Progressivism and the Open Door: America and China, 1905-1921* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971); Jonathan D. Spence, *To change China: Western Advisers in China, 1620-1960* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980).

¹² Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

which allowed them to escape immediate limitations. Consequently, the individuals played a significant role in changing the ideologies to some extent, and in bridging national differences. Leung's work is especially enlightening for my project in her emphasis on the interaction between individual agency and ideologies.

Besides the insights into individual agency, Leong's work also contributes to the scholarly conversation which endeavors to balance historical research by studying women's experience. Nonetheless, the three women in her study are all elite celebrities' intercultural experience within the U.S. Ordinary middle-class American women's experience in China is beyond the scope of her book.

Bridging this gap, another group of scholars in this field who are important to the framework of my project are those who study less well known American women in China and their communities. Jane Hunter pioneers this group. In her widely cited work *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn of the Century China* (1984), Hunter critically depicts the life details of American women missionaries at the interaction of Chinese and American cultures, thus sees into a much neglected middle-class American women culture in comparison to Chinese women culture in early twenty century.¹³ Unlike the celebrities in Leong's book, the ordinary American women missionaries seemed to have less leverage to negotiate their positions in society; yet they still enjoyed a "cultural interface" where the women could escape familial hierarchies (255).

¹³ Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

The past two decades since Hunter's groundbreaking publication has only produced a little more studies which fill the research gap of ordinary American women's experience in China. A majority of the studies produce biographies of individual women, such as Agnes Smedley,¹⁴ Grace Divine,¹⁵ Ruth Harkness¹⁶ and the three subjects of this study.¹⁷ These biographies all offer precious insights into American women experience in Republican China.

On the other hand, although imbued with critical analysis of the cultural, social and historical contexts, as well as their protagonists' experience, these biographies still often confront the limits of the genre. For one thing, they tend to emphasize the exceptionality of their protagonists; for another, they often appear as paeans to the individual women. To better understand the American women community, and to theorize their experience, more critical and comparative work is yet to be done.

In line with Hunter's work, a few other scholars also takes biographical approach, but aims at a more rigorous integration of the women's experience and the sociocultural contexts, so as to generalize the communal, national and even transnational history

¹⁴ Janice R. MacKinnon and Stephen R. MacKinnon, *Agnes Smedley: the Life and Times of an American Radical* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Ruth Price, *The Lives of Agnes Smedley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Eleanor Cooper and William Liu, *Grace: An American Woman in China, 1934-1974* (New York: Soho Press, 2003).

¹⁶ Vicki Croke, *The Lady and the Panda: The True Adventures of the First American Explorer to Bring Back China's Most Exotic Animal*. 1st ed.(New York: Random House, 2005).

¹⁷ Karen Garner, *Precious Fire: Maud Russell and the Chinese Revolution* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); Marjorie King, *China's American Daughter: Ida Pruitt (1888-1985)* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2006); Kelly Ann Long, *Helen Foster Snow: An American Woman in Revolutionary China* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2006).

revealed in these individuals' experience. However, their works are mostly unpublished doctoral dissertations, which only concentrate on missionary women.¹⁸

The small number of studies and the unbalanced focus fail to give enough credit due to the rich and diverse experience of American women in Republican China. My own study will only be a small step further in comparison to the great legacies of those women.

Epistolary studies

A well established subject, studies of female letter writing have a long history. At least since the eighteenth century, the letter as a genre has gained consistent scholarly attention.¹⁹ In literary history, a tradition from that century sees the epistolary form as “preeminently the favored mode of moral instruction for women.”²⁰ Upholding this notion, letter novel reached its height at the same period.²¹ It stereotypes female epistolary skill and female social conduct, as epitomized by Samuel Richardson’s epistolary novels *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748), and Mary Wortley Montagu’s *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763). Similarly, most epistolary critics in the ensuing 200 years have seen letter writing as a natural skill of women, equating “letters and love, women’s writing and writing of the heart.”²² As a result, while epistolarity lack no

¹⁸ Janet Rice McCoy, “Through the missionary’s lens: One Woman’s Rhetorical Strategies to Promote China” (PhD diss., Bowling Green State University, 2004); Mary Jo Waelchli, “Abundant Life: Matilda Thurston, Wu Yifang and Ginling College, 1915-1951” (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2002); Hsiuyun Wang, “Stranger Bodies: Women, Gender, and Missionary Medicine in China, 1870s-1930s” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003).

¹⁹ Rebecca Earle, *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-writers, 1600-1945* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1999); Amanda Gilroy and W. M. Verhoeven, *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

²⁰ Gilroy and Verhoeven, *Epistolary Histories*, 2.

²¹ Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989).

²² Gilroy and Verhoeven, *Epistolary Histories*, 3.

scholarly attention, it tends to be treated either as marginal to canonical literature, or transparent factual documents whose only value is instrument to prove “historical truth.”

The critical discourse, however, reached a turning point in the 1980s, with the appearance of several groundbreaking works. Literary Critics Terry Eagleton and Terry Castle both discover the disruptive power of letters in the 18th-century letter novel.²³ Janet Altman even more considerably broadened the field with her structuralist analysis of epistolary fiction up to the 20th century; in addition, she opened new ground for epistolary studies by directing attention to the cultural and social aspects of correspondence history.²⁴ As a result, a series of books has joined this new trend of “meticulous cultural historicization” in epistolary studies.²⁵

In the late 80s and 90s, however, the definite majority of epistolary scholarship still concentrated on fictional letters, as self-evident in the book titles: *Discourse of Desire: Gender, Desire, and Epistolary Fictions* (Kauffman 1986), *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature* (Goldsmith 1989), *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics, and the Fiction of Letters* (Favret 1993). Other works of this category includes Kaffman’s another book *Special Delivery* (1992), and Barbara Maria Zaczek’s unpublished dissertation, *The Letter – A Female Territory under Male Auspices?* (1992). Therefore, the major trend in epistorarity in the 80s and 90s focused on the letter writing in epistolary fiction, especially those of the 17th- and 18th-century Britain and France.

²³ Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality, and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982); Terry Castle, *Clarissa’s Ciphers: Meaning and Disruption in Richardson’s Clarissa* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982).

²⁴ Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982).

²⁵ Gilroy and Verhoeven, *Epistolary Histories*, 10.

The new century sees another new development in epistolary studies. With the exception of *Addressing Epistolary Subjects* and *Correspondence and American literature, 1770-1865*,²⁶ most of the recent works on epistolarity examines real, non-fictional letters instead of those within literature. With even more emphasis on the cultural-history readings of epistolary texts, current scholars seek past individual and communal experiences from letters, disrupt such traditional binaries as of public/private, literary/real, self/other.

These new approaches define exciting theoretical and methodological framework for my study of the epistolary practice of American women in China. At the same time, nonetheless, they also leave untouched areas for me to tackle with. First of all, canonical figures' letters take much of the conversation, as shown in Suzanne B. Spring's work on Emily Dickinson, William Merrill Decker's book on Ralph Waldo Emerson, Emily Dickson and Henry Adams.²⁷ Furthermore, when the focus is on ordinary people and their communities, the research almost all still centers on either Europe or the U.S.; examples include three dissertations on Letter Writing, Gender, and Class in American in the second half of the 18th century, on two women's correspondences and diaries on the West frontier and on Women's Correspondence in Early Modern Italy respectively,²⁸ an

²⁶ Martina Sigrid Anderson, "Addressing Epistolary Subjects" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2000); Elizabeth Hewitt, *Correspondence and American Literature, 1770-1865* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²⁷ Suzanne B. Spring, *Forming Letters: Mount Holyoke, Emily Dickinson, and Nineteenth-century Epistolary Compositions* (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2005); William Merrill Decker, *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America before Telecommunications* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

²⁸ Konstantin Dierks, "Letter Writing, Gender, and Class in America, 1750-1800" (PhD diss., Brown University, 1999); Genevieve J. Long, "Laboring in the Desert: The Letters and Diaries of Narcissa Prentiss Whitman and Ida Hunt Udall" (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 2002); Anne Hankinson, "Women's Correspondence in Early Modern Italy Discourses of Power, Conflict and Love" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 2004).

edited volume on women's letter across Europe and a book on the culture of epistolarity in early modern England.²⁹

With letters special ability of border-crossing, and the large amount of such letters kept in various archives, lack of epistolary studies in transnational contexts is indeed unjustified. The only two published book-volume work on letter's role in border crossing, *Letters across Borders* and *Authors of Their Lives*, are merely transatlantic.³⁰ The transpacific contexts remains the most ignored. My study on the epistolary practice of American women in China will draw more attention to this significant yet still ignored area.

International feminist studies

Though still developing and open to contentious debate, theories of international feminist studies are significant to my research in constructing conceptual framework and methodological design. In contrast to the lack of attention to border crossing in epistolary studies, border crossing in feminist scholarship abounds, especially since the 1980s surge of academic engagement with feminism by Third World Women and US women of color. As a result, international feminism has become a very vibrant area – not only has it produced profound and constructive theories and approaches, but also more and more scholars endeavor to link feminist theoretical analysis into social praxes, such as Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Sandra

²⁹ Jane Couchman and Ann Crabb, eds., *Women's Letters across Europe, 1400-1700: Form and Persuasion* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005); Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005).

³⁰ Bruce S. Elliott, David A. Gerber, and Suzanne M. Sinke, eds., *Letters across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants*. 1st ed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); David A. Gerber, *Authors of Their Lives: The Personal Correspondence of British Immigrants to North America in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

Harding and Uma Narayan, Mrinalini Sinha, Donna Guy and Angela Woollacott, Marguerite Waller and Sylvia Marcos and tens of dozens of others whose cross-cultural works are included in edited volumes of the above authors.³¹

Among these feminist scholars, two are most influential to my approaches: Cherríe Moraga's "theory in the flesh" guides me in theorizing my research subjects' individual experience, and in connecting the particular with the general; Chandra Talpade Mohanty sets an example of geographically and historically specific scholarships in cross-cultural research.³²

Although Moraga's "theory in the flesh" preceded the bloom of international feminism, her influence is still prevalent across different branches of feminisms, including the latter. Her theory holds that "the physical realities of our lives – our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings – all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity" (21). It is an epistemic approach to knowledge which sees women's experiences and interpretation of these experiences as vital to knowledge production.

³¹ Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, eds., *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding, eds., *Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial, and Feminist World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Mrinalini Sinha, Donna J. Guy and Angela Woollacott, eds., *Feminisms and Internationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); Marguerite R. Waller and Sylvia Marcos, eds., *Dialogue and Difference: Feminisms Challenge Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

³² Cherríe Moraga, "Entering the Lives of Others: Theory in the Flesh," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa (Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press, 2002), 19-60; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

This framework disturbs “the conventional view that sees the letter as private, nonpolitical, and trivial – in part because of its association with women.”³³ Within this framework, my project is able to investigate letters as an important carrier of women’s experience, a critical intersection of the particular and the general, a significant site of knowledge and history.

While Moraga’s theory provides an empowering framework, it has also certain loopholes. As more recent scholars like Jane Scott points out, taking experience as the origin of knowledge fixes identities as immutable and self-evident. In Scott’s words, “Talking about experience in these ways leads us to take the existence of individuals for granted (experience is something people have) rather than to ask how conceptions of selves (of subjects and their identities) are produced.”³⁴

To refine this framework regarding to the above loophole, I will take Scott’s approach of seeing experience and identities as historicized and interactive. Associating this theory to epistolary, my research will explore how letters “disrupts the notion of the coherent subject and her uncomplicated relationship to her own experience.”³⁵ It foregrounds “the movement of identities” in epistolary practice,³⁶ analyzes how the self/sender and the other/receiver together create new meanings of each others’ experience, and add up each other’s actual experience.

While the above feminist scholars help me establish a framework for analyzing epistolary practice as a site of knowledge on flexible and multiple identities and mediated

³³ Anderson, “Addressing Epistolary Subjects,” 9.

³⁴ Joan W. Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Summer):782.

³⁵ Anderson, “Addressing Epistolary Subjects,” 17.

³⁶ Anderson, “Addressing Epistolary Subjects,” 18.

experience, Chandra Talpade Mohanty provides a feminist framework for cross-cultural studies. She alerts us against the essentialist use of the terms such as “Third World women” and “First World women.” In her canonized 1986 essay “Under Western Eyes,” Mohanty shows how Western feminist representation of women in the Third World have produced “universal images of the Third World women” as victims and dependents, in contrast to Western feminists’ self-representation as “secular and liberated.”³⁷ The representations reflect Eurocentrism and “Western developmentalist discourses of modernity, especially through the lens of the racial, sexual, and class-based assumptions of Western feminist scholarship” (10). The result of this kind of scholarship is that one says “too little and too much at the same time” (25). To overcome such obstacle of coalition in cross-cultural feminism, Mohanty cautions against gender essentialism, and suggests geographically and historically specific scholarships.

Mohanty’s approach is especially relevant to my own cross-cultural studies of white women’s experiences in Republican China. First of all, her caution against gender essentialism pushes my study to include both men and women subjects, and see both as agents in order to construct a feminist critical research design. Similarly, my study will pay attention to both white women and Chinese women’s different race, class, gender, sexuality, nation(ality), and culture, among other factors, instead of being trapped in the First/Third world or East/West dichotomy of “us”/ “other.” Finally, Mohanty’s comparative methodology give guidance to tackle with the different sites of my research, crossing the lines within/across/between China and America, while keeping vigilant to the historical and geographical differences as well as interconnections.

³⁷ Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders*, 42. (All the page numbers in this paragraph are from this same book.)

Methodology

My primary data comes from archives. Voluminous records are left behind by many women from the American community in China. In particular, the main three American women subjects of the project, Russell, Pruitt and Snow all kept especially extensive collections of their letters to and from them, the majority of which were typewritten – an invaluable advantage for research due to their perceptibility and readability.

Besides letters, diaries, notes, photos, short stories, memoirs and other kinds of manuscripts from the above archives, I have also collect relevant newspaper and journal accounts, court records of the exterritorial community, state archives, pamphlets, advertisements, biographies, and published writings of American women of the decades in question.

My approach to the analysis of these letters is interdisciplinary. I do not treat the letters either as a marginal form of literary work or as limpid factual historical documents as many previous studies did. Instead, I explore the complexity of the women's epistolary narratives, seeing them as a combination of literary work, historical documents and cultural artifacts. Acknowledging the impossibility of a complete restoration of the intertextuality of the letters with their original time and place of composition, this approach examines the "constructed" experience in letters, unravels the "distorted" epistolary representations, so as to discover the cultural and social assumptions of the letter writers on the history they went through.

Besides offering critical textual and historical analysis of the letters, I will also compare these women's letters with their published works and with popular views of the media in general. By matching up different sources to uncover disparity, I focus on "the clash of representations," because the clash reflects the struggle of power, ideologies and conflicts of the society in which the documents were originally produced.

I also explore other epistolary nonverbal factors: how the changes in recipients and communication venues impact the formation and exchange of ideas in the letters; how elements such as different formats and styles implicate social status and gender politics. As Sally L. Kitch puts it, "the study of texts must involve the study of writers and the impact of gender constructs upon their lives and work, as well as the work itself. Similarly, the study of abstractions – theories, historical trends – must entail an analysis of their manifestations in the lives of individuals and specific groups."³⁸

In addition, following international feminist approaches, vigorous self-reflection of my own position as the researcher in relation to my subjects of study, and in relation to the geopolitical location of my study is also essential to the methodology.

Chapters and Contents

The dissertation investigates an American women writers' community in China and three women's epistolary representations of their life histories in four chapters. Chapter 1, "The Voices Heard and Unheard: Pearl Buck and Others Who Wrote About China," examines the different voices among American women writers in China. Pearl Buck's fame and success in writing China for the American public set a role model and

³⁸ Sally L. Kitch, *This Strange Society of Women: Reading the Letters and Lives of the Woman's Commonwealth* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993), 3.

inspired competition among American women writers in China. The most common subject of their writing turned out to be Chinese women. The chapter interrogates reasons of this obsession, and deconstructs a variety of “real Chinese women” in this group of writing. By comparing the prominent literary voice of Pearl Buck with other less known ones, this chapter also intends to bring a change of perspectives in evaluating women’s literary work, and set the tone for re-examining evaluation standards of women’s other professional work in the following chapters.

Chapter 2, “More than ‘White Women’s Burden’: Ida Pruitt’s Narratives of Help in Medical Social Work,” compares various assessment of Ida Pruitt’s medical social work in a transnational context – by male authorities of her organization and several other groups such as female peer social workers. Ida Pruitt’s letters and experience tells a unique story of American women in response to the public expectations of her helping role as a social worker in China. Her letters functioned as an intimate and relatively safe space to reflect and negotiate the different selves within her, where she eventually learned to resolve the conflicts between external pressure on her helping role and her own internal creative desires.

Chapter 3, “In Pursuit of Joan of Arc: Helen Foster Snow’s China Years,” examines a woman who did not have external organizational pressure in assessing her work, but was still haunted by imagined public expectations of her professional and domestic roles. Obsessed with achieving a mythical female success of “Joan of Arc,” the ultimate external recognition for her work, Snow had strategically used letters to impact people and history. However, as she looked back, she assessed that the impact of her

letters were disappointing. This chapter evaluates Snow's letters with further hindsight, and discovers their real influence.

Chapter 4, "Values in Creative Experience: Maud Russell's Work in the YWCA of Inland China," analyzes Russell's ever evolving approaches in tackling ideological conflicts in intercultural contexts, and in creating her own values for her experience instead of depending on external recognition. As Maud Russell wrote in one of her letters to her family, "to be alive, and in China, during these years is no small responsibility," her actual experience as well as her epistolary construction of her experience in China was thoroughly intertwined with China's historical currents. She happened to be at the right place at the right moment, witnessing most of the important events in China at the exact places where it took place during the two decades. Therefore, her letters not only recorded her personal growth, but also transformation of the country where she resided.

All the main figures, as well as many other American women in the foreign community in Republican China, knew each other and got in and out of each other's life at different points, since this community was both "small" and "big" – small because the frequent socials in the community, and so everyone knew everyone; big because of the mobility their status provided them in China, and the large range of network they established both within foreign community and among Chinese.

With these women's sojourn at different cities in China at different stages of their life, their letters give fresh lens into the city life of these foreigners in Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Wuhan and Changsha. The epistolary legacies left by these ordinary yet special middle-class American women open new windows for us to see the past from an

enlightening perspective. Much as Maud Russell stressed the significance of “our expression of the life that is within us” in life experience, this project asserts these progressive women’s own voices in history and sets new angles in assessing their work and impacts.

Chapter 1

The Voices Heard and Unheard Pearl Buck and Others Who Wrote About China

She [Pearl Buck] was a major figure, I think, in my life or else, through my mother's life, in my fantasy life. Because she was the person, as I think back, who did what my mother might have wanted to do but didn't.

— James C Thomson, Jr.³⁹

James Thomson's mother, Margaret Cook Thomson was a next-door neighbor to Pearl Buck in Nanking, China, when Buck was writing *The Good Earth*. It was in the 1920s. Both Buck and Thomson felt bored, according to the family story of the Thomsons; so both of them started to do some writing and acted as reader for each other. After writing several very short stories, Buck absorbed herself in a longer project. Some weeks or months later, Buck showed Thomson, her first reader, the manuscript of *The Good Earth*. According to James Thomson, his mother was overwhelmed by Buck's work with admiration and jealousy – the latter his mother would never admit. On the word of an older daughter, however, her mother did not read the novel until Pearl Buck had been turned down by many publishers.⁴⁰ John Day had just accepted it, but asked Buck to pare it down. Buck then gave the manuscript to Thomson, who was thrilled by it, and insisted that nothing should be cut. Eventually, the novel was published in its entirety.

³⁹ James C. Thomson, Jr, interview by Jane M. Rabb, November 26, 1977, Transcript of Oral Histories, 1978-1985, Schlesinger Library, Cambridge, MA.

⁴⁰ Nancy Thomson Waller, interview by Jane M. Rabb, June 6, 1982, Transcript of Oral Histories, 1978-1985, Schlesinger Library, Cambridge, MA.

Whether the son or the daughter gave more accurate account, they presented a common view of the American women's community in Nanking: Pearl Buck was not alone in her intellectual and literate endeavor; other women were reading and writing as well. As the daughter of the Thomsons' put it, her mother and Pearl buck were in "a community that, in general, had very strong women... many had gone to excellent colleges – Bryn Mawr and Wellesley and Smith, etc."⁴¹

While Pearl Buck and Margaret Thomson were very good friends intellectually, Buck's books became best sellers in the 1930s, and still remain in the cannon till the present, but Thomson's work was never published, and her elaborately written letters now silently lie in the boxes at the Schlesinger Library, rarely visited (the majority of which were even unread by her children). Pearl Buck was the "fantasy self" of many American women in China – they wrote about China, they persistently sought publishers for their works and dreamed to become as successful as Buck; most of them eventually became like Margaret Thomson, with their papers scattered at various archives around their home country. In the 1940s, most of them traveled across seas again and returned to their home country with cases and cases of their writings and documents – either because of the civil war in China, or because of the end of the Republican era and the beginning of a Communist government in China after the war. Most of them have passed away; the writings and documents they took all the trouble to bring back from China were moved to archives or were lost.

While I read these writings on yellowed paper in the archives, I am often not only been touched, but also feel the urgency of strong voices to be heard. I hear them, and

⁴¹ Ibid.

want more people to hear them, so as to share not only the inspirations from their special experiences, but also the politics and history hidden in the yet unheard voices.

This chapter is an effort to combine the voices heard and unheard. It first examines why writers of the American women's community in China tended to pay special attention to Chinese women, and to speak for them to the American public through their writing; it also explores the different voices American women writers employed for their Chinese women characters, and the perpetual debates among these writers regarding the "real Chinese women" and their "authentic voices." After a general review of works by these writers, this chapter turns to two specific examples, the first written by the most known of this community Pearl Buck's first novel *East Wind, West Wind*,⁴² the second by a representative among the less known, Ida Pruitt's *A Daughter of Han: The Autobiography of A Chinese Working Woman*. By combining the heard and the less heard voices of American writers and their respective Chinese characters, I wish to deconstruct the "real Chinese woman," as well as reveal the complicated relationship between the constructed Chinese women figures and their American women writers.

Women's Writing for Women?

While no other American women of Pearl Buck's time who wrote about China reached accomplished as much as Buck, they left a rich repertoire of works on China and Chinese subjects. Two interesting contrasts exist between their public and their private voices. First, while they wrote various aspects of their China experiences in their letters,

⁴² After all, the daughter of Margaret Cook Thomson may have given a more accurate account of how her mother read Buck's *The Good Earth*, because Buck had worked on a long enterprise of the novel *East wind, West wind*, but the son James Thomson thought *The Good Earth* was Buck's first large project.

when they consciously wrote for a public audience, their topic tended to focus on narrower aspects of China, especially on Chinese women. For example, the above discussed Buck's friend, Margaret Thomson's only piece of writing which is left in public record, is her MA thesis at Columbia University on "adult religious education for a group of educated Chinese women." A non-inclusive list of books on Chinese women reveal this tendency in the three decades of the century: *The Education of Women in China* (1911) by Margaret Ernestine Burton, *Ji Yung, A Beautiful Gem: Letters from a Chinese School Girl* (1912) by Janie H. Watkins, *Chinese Womanhood* (1913) by Lucinda Pearl Boggs, *My Lady of the Chinese Courtyard* (1914) by Elizabeth Cooper, *A String of Chinese Pearls: Ten Tales of Chinese Girls Ancient and Modern* (1924) by Welthy Honsinger Fisher, *Portrait of A Chinese Lady and Certain of Her Contemporaries* (1930) by Dorothea Soothill Hosie, *Chinese Toiling Women: How They Are Helping the Chinese Soviets* (1931) by M. O. Bulle, *Hot-Hearted: Some Women Builders of the Chinese Church* (1934) by Florence Isabel Lodrington, *Chinese Women: Yesterday and Today* (1937) by Florence Ayscough and *Embroidered Gauze: Portraits of Famous Chinese Ladies* (1938) by Eloise Talcott Hibbert. Although the limit of words and space for publications may be a factor that determined these women writers' narrower choices of topics, the highly concentrated focus on Chinese women by this group of American women writers in China during this period challenges such an easy explanation. What other factors may have caused this phenomenon?

The other contrast between these women's publications and their letters relates to the above question. While their letters often bristle with eloquence and character, their literary creative writing about China sometimes reads tedious. What were the factors in

the discourse of China-writing that constrained the creative talent of these women writers who demonstrated exquisite skills in letter writing?

One influence on these American women writers' choice of Chinese women as their subjects was the missionary tradition of "Women's work for women." During the nineteenth century, a series of unequal treaties between China and European countries gave missionaries more and more access to inland China. Women "were thought to be especially suited to carry out the western colonizing nations' humanitarian mission overseas" because of their gendered "civilizing" role in society, and were aggressively recruited for foreign fields such as China from their home countries.⁴³ By 1890s, 60 per cent of American missionaries in China were women, who worked on Chinese women and girls. As a result of the ministry of women to women, the 1880s and 1890s saw "a new level of reporting of Chinese society, particularly through extensive missionary publishing activities."⁴⁴ Among these publications, a tradition of missionaries writing "memoirs" of the natives was established.

One distinctive example from this tradition is Adele M. Fielde's book *Pagoda Shadows: Studies from Life in China* (1884). The book is an introduction of Chinese social customs and everyday life. It includes the author's description of her own observations in China, stories she heard from others, and autobiographies of Chinese women. Despite the variety of genres and aspects of Chinese life included in this volume, a male missionary, Joseph Cook, commending Adele Fielde's work to the public in the

⁴³ Karen Garner, *Precious Fire: Maud Russell and the Chinese Revolution* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 4.

⁴⁴ Ian Welch, "Women's Work for Women: Women Missionaries in 19th Century China." Paper presented to the Eighth Women in Asia Conference 2005, Sydney.

Introduction, pitched the book as purely autobiographies of “Chinese women.” His comment on the book is sharply telling of the gendered division of labor between male and female missionaries:

I had read much of Chinese history and statistics; I had examined the best sources of information as to the Chinese religious and social life; I had studied such translations of the Chinese classics as had come in my way: but I found that the simple, vivid autobiographies, written by Miss Fielde from the actual diction of Chinese women, brought me nearer to a clear view of Chinese wants than anything else I had used as a guide.⁴⁵

In such a short passage, Cook established himself as an authority figure – an expert of Chinese history, with “the best sources of information” on Chinese religion and society, who also studied Chinese classics. With the “expertise” in all the fields about China, he confidently asserted that the “simple,” vivid autobiographies of Chinese women by Fielde gave the clearest view of “Chinese thinking.” An undertone of the high praise of “Miss Fielde’s” work indicates ranked categories of subjects of study: Cook the male missionary examined the “grand” fields of history, religious studies and classics, while Fielde the female missionary simply recorded the Chinese women’s words. Moreover, according to Cook, despite the various aspects of Chinese life as he listed as his fields of study, the most “authentic” narratives of China should be those by Chinese women. The hierarchy of knowledge hence was reinforced in Cook’s narrative, with he himself doing comprehensive and complicated studies, Fielde the female missionary writing “simple” autobiographies, and Chinese women keeping their “authentic” voices. In turn, this hierarchy of knowledge also contributed to the hierarchy within the missionary community.

⁴⁵ Joseph Cook, “Introduction” in *Pagoda Shadows: Studies from Life in China* by Adele M Fielde (Boston: W. G. Corthell, 1884), x.

Cook continued to suggest that similar endeavors as that of Felde's should be done in other parts of the world: "A sheaf of a hundred autobiographies from the heart of China, another such sheaf from Japan, another from India, another from Africa, another from the isles of the sea, would show that the sky is the roof of but one family." (xi) His following passages clearly assumed that this family was a Christian one that occupied "every land." With a poetic rhetoric, Cook expanded his authority to the whole world, thus exposing his Western-centric attitude, trying to understand and conquer the "strange people" [Cook's words] of other parts of the world.

In a similar rhetoric, Cook also depicted the West/East binary as masculine/feminine for according to him, one could get to know the East best through their women:

I saw a few billows of its [China] life so close at hand as to be able to look into them, and, through them, into the depths beneath them. The multitudinous sea of those billows – two or three hundred millions of them breaking constantly on the shores of time and eternity – became to me thereafter a new vision, and uttered to me a new voice. I have not lost the vision. I have not ceased to hear the voice. (x)

The poetic analogies between billows and Chinese women create a myth of the latter. In this myth, Chinese women had repetitive patterns of life and were locked in history – unchanged in "time and eternity." Underneath the literary language, Cook's logic goes that "a few billows of Chinese life" – a few Chinese women's autobiography – reflected the depths of China; then these "few billows" stealthily turned into the "multitudinous sea of those billows" – two or three hundred millions of Chinese women could be understood through "the few" whose autobiographies were included in the book. Once Cook read the few three-to-five-page autobiographies, he could already acquire "a new vision" and heard "a new voice" of millions of Chinese women. Cook's strong first person claims

both at the beginning and the end of the passage are telling of the relationship between the “new” vision and voice and “I” the male missionary: they merged into the one vision and voice of the missionary discourse.

Fielde’s stories and autobiographies following Cook’s Introduction reveal similar patterns. Fielde never gave a specific time period. Instead, she used phrases such as “once upon a time,” (12) “some hundreds years ago” (102). The Chinese customs were oppressive to women, and the first-person narrators of the autobiographies first talked about their sufferings, but eventually were pacified, and their problems were solved through their conversion to God.

Fielde’s book exemplifies the 19th-century missionary publications on Chinese women; Field herself was one of the white American women who participated in “constructing American Orientalism in the period between the 1870s and 1940s,” as Mari Yoshihara has thoroughly analyzed in her book *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism*. In consuming and producing Asian things and ideas, and in writing Asian women in particular, American white women played a role in “a dominant ideology,” and gained “authority and agency which were denied to them in other realms of sociopolitical life.” (6) Thus, the construction of the Chinese women subjects in their writing provided the missionary writers with power of making new meaning of their subjects’ and their own identities, and of affecting the mainstream opinions on their subjects.

Writing the “Real Chinese Women”

The American women writers who wrote about China during the 1910s and the

1940s on one hand, inherited the missionary's traditions of "Women's work for women;" on the other hand, they also had new reasons for choosing Chinese women as their subjects in writing, and have new views on them. Since the 1910s, a new generation of young American women went out to China. They were different from many of missionary women or wives of missionaries of previous decades. Some of them followed the models of the American professional women in the 1920s; some remained in the missionary sector, but with higher qualifications for their jobs – YWCA in the 1910s, for instance, required an MA degree for a woman to go to a foreign field. Some went out with their men to China, like the older pattern, but women's liberation was nothing new any more to them. They all went to China with an American feminist heritage of the 1910s and 1920s, and encountered the height of New Women movement in Republican China during the 1920s and 1930s. The changes of women's status in both countries allowed them to position themselves consciously from comparative perspectives, and pay special attention to the heated debates of "woman question" in Republican China. The switch of attention to wider aspects of women's life, instead of just the missionaries' purpose of converting the natives, gave women writers more leverage in employing their creative talent in a wider range. However, most of them needed to try really hard to go beyond the "women's writing for women" pattern. For example, in the 1930s, after the American journalist Edgar Snow came out with his best seller *Red Star Over China* (1937) based on his interviews with the then rarely known Chinese Communist Party, his wife Helen Snow tried to write her own scoop story. A large part of her book *Inside Red China* (1939) focused on the Chinese women in the Communist Party, but her book never reached such a big audience as her husband's.

Most of the American women writers' books on Chinese women in these decades focus on the tremendous changes women went through as China transformed from the "old" tradition to a "modern" nation. Most Chinese women who entered these books were depicted as oppressed by an oppressive patriarchic system, but with the new feminist wave in China, and with influences from the West, they observed and experienced tremendous changes, and overcame the difficulties of adjusting to new ways of life. Overall, these books meet the wishes of American writers to incorporate Chinese women into the "modern" western feminist discourse, and cut them from the "old" and "oppressive" Chinese tradition.

Despite such similar patterns, the specific portrayals of Chinese women by these writers still vary in a wide range: from the patrician to working class women, from old lady to young women students, from the right-wing nationalists to the left-wing communists. Among this group of writers, controversial debates on their common subjects often arise: who depicted the "real" Chinese women? The path of a long-living book, *My Lady of the Chinese Courtyard* vividly records this kind of debates which last even till our present time.

In the original edition which was published in 1914, the author Elizabeth Cooper started her preface with such a scene:

A WRITER on things Chinese was asked why one found so little writing upon the subject of the women of China. He stopped, looked puzzled for a moment, then said, "The women of China! One never hears about them. I believe no one ever thinks about them, except perhaps that they are the mothers of the Chinese men!"

Such is the usual attitude taken in regard to the woman of the flowery Republic... Less is known about Chinese women than about any other women of Oriental lands. (ix)

In depicting Chinese women as "never heard of" – despite the fact of thriving female

writing in Qing China,⁴⁶ Cooper followed the missionary discourse that mystified the concept of Chinese women. Similar to Adele Felde who asked a male missionary to write the Introduction of her book, Cooper used a male figure to start her preface – “a writer on things Chinese,” who “never hears about” Chinese women. Cooper reinforces the “women’s writing for women” restrictions in this way, but she also manipulates the rule for her own advantage: male writers ignored the important gender, and so she as a female writer opens a new window to see China. Cooper keeps on building her authority to the “less known” subjects in the Preface as follows:

Books about China deal mainly with the lower-class Chinese, as it is chiefly with that class that the average visitor or missionary comes into contact. The tourists see only the coolie woman bearing burdens in the street, trotting along with a couple of heavy baskets swung from her shoulders, or they stop to stare at the neatly dressed mothers sitting on their low stools in the narrow alleyways, patching clothing or fondling their children. They see and hear the boat-women, the women who have the most freedom of any in all China, as they weave their sampans in and out of the crowded traffic on the canals. These same tourists visit the teahouses and see the gaily dressed “sing-song” girls, or catch a glimpse of a gaudily painted face, as a lady is hurried along in her sedan-chair, carried on the shoulders of her chanting bearers. But the *real Chinese woman*, with her hopes, her fears, her romances, her children, and her religion, is still undiscovered. [*italics mine*]

I hope that this book, based on letters shown me many years after they were written, will give a faint idea of the life of a Chinese lady. (x)

Despite the lists of Chinese women given in the beginning, from the coolie women, to the ordinary mothers, to the boat-women, to the sing-song girls and ladies in their sedan-chair, no one on the list, according to Cooper, qualified for the “real Chinese woman,” which she would present in her book. Her authority over her subjects was established at the cost of exclusion of all the above mentioned Chinese women as “the real.”

Her “real Chinese woman” turned out to be Kwei-li, a wife of a very high official.

⁴⁶ See Susan Mann, *Precious Record: Women in China’s Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, eds., *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

The book was composed of the letters of this Chinese lady: the first section were letters to her husband at the end of the nineteenth century, telling of her domestic life with the big family while her husband was away; and the second section were letters written a quarter of a century later, to her mother-in-law, when she was with her husband who was stationed in a port city away from home, depicting the drastic social changes women went through in cities.

In contrast to the assertiveness of Cooper regarding the concept of “real Chinese women,” she was pretty ambivalent about the authorship of the book and the letters. Except for the title page of the book which shows that it is “by Elizabeth Cook,” and the “author’s Note” section which also tells of Cooper the author’s acknowledgement of using other’s translations of Chinese poems in the letters, other parts of the book gives the reader an illusion that the letters were really written by Kwei-li, instead of by Cooper. Cooper herself reinforces this illusion by providing clear and detailed biographical information on Kwei-li including her father’s family, even a real name of her childhood tutor.

Cooper is also ambiguous about the time of Kwei-li’s life. In the first preface before the first series of Kwei-li’s letters, Cooper simply informs the reader that the letters were shown to her many years after they were written – it is not known exactly how many years though. In the second preface of the book, before the second series of letters, Cooper says that “these letters were written by Kwei-li twenty-five years after those written to her husband when she was a young girl of eighteen. They are, therefore, the letters of the present-day Chinese woman of the old school.” (99) If we take the “present day” as 1914 when the book was first published, the approximate time when

these letters were written seems to be calculatable, though specific time of each letter is still unknown, because none of the letters includes the date written. However, a sharp contradiction still exists since at the beginning of the book, Cooper claims that it was based on letters shown to her “many years after they were written,” which indicates that the second series of letters were not written at the “present-day.”

The mystical “real Chinese woman” figure is even more reinforced by Cooper in her comparisons between the “Eastern woman” and the “Western woman,” and between the Chinese woman of the old school and the new generation. In the first comparison, Cooper depicts Kwei-li as

like every Eastern woman, clings with almost desperate tenacity to the traditions and customs of her race. Indeed, however the youth of Oriental countries may be changing, their mothers always exhibit that characteristic of womanhood, conservatism, which is to them the safeguard of their homes. Unlike the Western woman, accustomed to a broader horizon, the woman of China, secluded for generations within their narrow courtyards. (99)

This statement puts the “real Chinese woman” as the representative of “every Eastern woman,” with the essence of womanhood – conservatism. By contrast, the “Western woman” has much broader world, and enjoys more freedom. In the comparison between the old China which Kwei-li stands for and the new China, Cooper predicts that

new China will be Westernized in every department of her being. No friend of China hopes for such sudden changes, however... There is a charm about old China that only those who have lived there can understand, and there is a charm about these dainty ladies... Let Europe, let American, let the West come to China, but let the day be far distant when we shall find no longer in the women’s courtyard such mothers as Kwei-li. (101)

The Orientalist discourse of Cooper in this prophecy is clear – she supports the cultural colonization of China without reservation. But more significantly, she gains utmost authority of the “real Chinese woman” figure in this prophecy. When the “real Chinese

woman” disappeared in the real world, people can only find it in her book. This figure could only be preserved in her writing.

While the charm of the old China and of the “real Chinese women” is debatable, this book has its definite “charm” in America, for seventy-six years after its original publication, it was published again in 1990, under another title, with an even more exquisite book design. In addition, it involved the New York Times best selling author Eileen Goudge. Goudge recommended the book to a publisher who “was looking for a book about life in China.” Not a writer in the field of Chinese Studies – Goudge’s all other books are either junior romance or adult fiction, Goudge took the project of adapting the book to contemporary taste, and as the book newly published, became the co-author of this new version, the other author being Kwei-li. The ambivalent, but probably real author of the letters, Elizabeth Cooper receded behind the screen: except that on the title page, small characters reveal that the book was adapted from Cooper’s work, the most eye-catching are the names of Kwei-li, the purported author of the letters, and Eileen Goudge, who did the adaptation. Accordingly, Cooper’s preface which claims her authority over her subjects was also taken out. Furthermore, despite the assertive original title which Cooper gave to her book, “My Lady of the Chinese Courtyard,” the possessive pronoun was completely abandoned together with this title. Instead, the book was re-titled “Golden Lilies.” Goudge explained the logic of this new title: the golden lilies are “a reminder of Kwei-li’s bound feet, a symbol of old China’s women.” As a contemporary Chinese woman reader, I find it shocking that after a hundred years, Eileen Goudge still follows the discourse of those women missionaries in China at the end of the nineteenth century, who used Chinese women’s bound feet as a primary agenda in their

missionary work, and pitched this agenda to their American audience not only for the sake of Chinese women, but also for fund-raising purpose of the church.

And similar to Joseph Cook, the male missionary who wrote the Introduction for Adele Fielde's book *Pagoda Shadows*, Goudge claims that she and her group of co-workers on this project were impressed by a particular voice and vision: they are "inspired by the poetry of Kwei-li's voice, and the unique view she provides of a vanished China." (vii) Consequently, Goudge hopes the reader "you will feel, . . . that Kwei-li has indeed found a permanent place in our minds and hearts." (xvii) Like Cooper, the former owner of Kwei-li's voice, Goudge also intends to preserve this "Chinese woman" figure in her book.

This adapted book became a controversy in Eileen Goudge's career, and later she apparently tries to take this title off from her own book list – all her current websites exclude it. Shortly after the publication of *Golden Lilies*, a China hand, Jean Fritz wrote a sour book review on *The Washington Post*, titled "Chronicle of Faded China; One Lady's Letters: History or Fiction?" Fritz questioned Goudge's authority over the Chinese woman figure, and the authorship and authenticity of the letters. In addition, she criticized the original author, Elizabeth Cooper together with Goudge:

Cooper wrote many books of fiction, including three others on women – in Japan, Egypt, India. It is a pity, however, that she cast this one in the form of letters. Her own Western candor and didacticism continually get in her way. As for Goudge, a best-selling author in her own right, she would have done well to ask more questions.⁴⁷

To justify her sharp criticism, Fritz ends her review by saying "the reviewer, who was brought up in China, has written three books about it, including "Homesick," the story of

⁴⁷ Jean Fritz, "Chronicle of Faded China; One Lady's Letters: History or Fiction?" *The Washington Post*, December 25, 1990, p.B3.

her childhood.” It is interesting to notice that while no one would question the epistolary format of a fiction such as *Pamela* or *Clarissa*, the format becomes problematic only when the letters were purportedly written by a Chinese woman, and the matter of “authenticity” suddenly became salient. It is also interesting to note that among the American women writers who write about China, the long-lasting debates on the issues of authenticity and “real” Chinese women still linger at our present time.

After the delineation of this special group of American women writers, I now turn to two particular works of them, so as to more closely examine the “Chinese women” they constructed, and the relationship between the constructed Chinese women and the American women who wrote them. The first piece of work is by the most prominent writer this group Pearl Buck, the second one by a less known author Ida Pruitt.

The Voices Heard

Pearl Buck was sharply conscious of the impact of Western feminism on the Chinese during that time. This consciousness stemmed from her childhood experiences in China, and her experiences during the 1920s and 1930s as an American female author living within the country. Buck’s studies at Randolph-Macon Women’s College from 1910 to 1914 nurtured within her an “embryonic feminism,” providing “a glimpse of a more equitable and humane vision” of gender relations than what she had learned from her missionary parents in China.⁴⁸ In the 1920s, Buck’s first writings recorded the changes in women’s lives after Western feminism reached China. These writings include

⁴⁸ According to Buck’s biographer, Peter Conn, Pearl Buck acquired “embryonic feminism” at Randolph-Macon because this women’s college provided “a glimpse of a more equitable and humane vision” of gender relations, in contrast to what she had learned from her missionary parents in China. Her father had tended to discount women “because of their sex.” See Peter J. Conn, *Pearl S. Buck: A Cultural Biography*. (New York Cambridge University Press, 1996), 50-51.

“In China, Too,” a short essay published in the 1923 *Atlantic Monthly*, as well as “A Chinese Woman Speaks,” which appeared in the 1926 *Asia Magazine*. This short story served as the basis for her eventual first book *East Wind, West Wind*, published in 1930. During the 1920s, however, Buck still held “rather conservative views.” For example, her essay “In China, Too” presents Buck “as a middle-aged, stiff-necked supporter of the status quo, uncomfortable with the new Chinese woman and her demands.” Over the next decade, however, her attitudes became more supportive of “rebellious women.”⁴⁹

Pearl Buck is best known for her second novel, *The Good Earth* (1931), which brought her both the Pulitzer Prize and the Nobel Prize for Literature. Her first novel, *East Wind, West Wind*, has been largely ignored up to now. This novel, however, is one of the most valuable in feminist history because Buck extensively records the ways in which Western feminism was transferred into a Chinese context. The novel shows how Chinese male intellectuals translate Western feminist ideas for Chinese women; at the same time, it translates for Western readers the impact of feminism on Chinese women. Through this “double translation,”⁵⁰ Pearl Buck acts as a bridge between the East and the West, much as her fictional character of Kwei-lan attempts to bridge Chinese traditions with Western feminism.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Buck’s point of view in this essay is not completely static, though. Although she mainly speaks with a conservative voice, she also revises her tone at the end of the essay; “predicting the future course of her opinions . . . she abruptly allies herself with China’s rebellious women,” and foreseeing them to take over a new era. See, Conn, *Pearl S. Buck*, 75–76.

⁵⁰ I borrow this phrase from Ascham (1570), who invented the grammar-translation exercise that requires students to translate vernacular language into Latin and then put it back into vernacular language again.

⁵¹ Literary critics, Kang Liao and Xiongya Gao, Buck’s biographer Peter Conn and former President Nixon, among others, all call Buck a bridge between civilizations of the East and West. See Liao (1997, x), Gao, (2000, 9), Conn, (1996, 376).

This section will discuss issues of Pearl Buck's double translation of Western feminism into a cross-cultural context through *East Wind, West Wind*. It will explore how the novel problematizes Western feminism in a Chinese context, and how the novel criticizes the misunderstanding of Western feminism by Chinese male intellectuals. In addition, while acknowledging Buck's feminist concerns regarding the liberation of Chinese women and the representation of feminist ideals within her text,⁵² I argue that she voices to a few women at the cost of other women's silence. I argue that feminism is a complicated process that can never be translated through a single voice. My purpose is to highlight the challenges of being bridges, and to call more attention to cultural differences and historical contexts in feminist practice so that the bridging function of feminism can be more effective across cultures.

Feminism Void in the 1930's Reading of *East Wind, West Wind*

Although the novel was first published in 1930, a large portion originally appeared in 1926 an American magazine, *Asia*, as the short story "A Chinese Woman Speaks." As Buck's biographer Peter Conn comments, "The title itself is an act of defiant feminist affirmation, encapsulating Pearl Buck's pioneering desire to give voice to the voiceless women of China."⁵³ In the endnote for this statement, Conn compares this work with other Asian fiction published by Westerners before 1930, all of which either have men as

⁵² Although Buck never claims to be a feminist, the penetration of feminist ideas is clearly elaborated in several of her biographies as well as all her writings that take women as the protagonists, and women's emancipation as her major concern. Moreover, her whole life experience of fighting for independence and freedom is a feminist manifestation itself. In addition, as Kang Liao notices, "her two essays on the theme of 'America's Medieval Woman' and 'America's Gunpowder Women' that were published as early as 1938 and 1939" (1997, 5) pioneered the feminist movement in the US far in advance.

⁵³ In the endnote for this statement, Conn (1996, 83) also compares this work with other Asian fiction published by Westerners up to the time of its publication. While other novels either have men as their protagonists or cast Asian women into stereotypical figure (blindly obedient and without their own identities), Buck chooses a female point of view and gives her female protagonist a specific character.

their protagonists, or cast Asian women as stereotypical figures who are blindly obedient, lacking their own identities. Conn names as examples such works as André Malraux's (1926) *Temptation of the West*, and John Luther Long's (1898) "Madame Butterfly" (later adapted to become Puccini's famous opera). Other popular Asian images in American culture during the early twentieth century include Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu, who epitomizes the "yellow peril," and the slightly different female version, the Dragon Lady role of 1920s Hollywood and the 1930s comic series *Terry and the Pirates*. Unlike those stereotypical and one-dimensional characters, Buck's female protagonist has an independent, resonant voice—a breakthrough for Chinese female characters. Over seventy years later after the initial publication of Kwei-lan's story, the most famous Asian American writer Maxine Hong Kingston named Pearl Buck as her early model when she was searching for "her own voice" in literature.⁵⁴ Therefore, this novel is an illuminating feminist document in the history of Western efforts to represent Chinese women.

However, the publication process of the book and its reception by critics illustrate a patriarchal domination. First, the title was changed to *East Wind, West Wind*. "A Chinese Woman Speaks" became the subtitle of Part I, printed in a tiny font and almost unnoticeable among several other empty pages in the front of the book. Then, not surprisingly, most critics failed to regard the novel as a feminist text. Instead, they saw it as a book about China, the country. For example, shortly after its publication, Isidore Schneider wrote in his review that the thesis of the novel was "the clash between modern

⁵⁴ Conn, *Pearl S. Buck*, 83.

and traditional China;”⁵⁵ the reviewer identified as “E.G.” affirmed that the novel provided “the surest key that has been given the West for the understanding of the East;”⁵⁶ and Nathaniel Peffer maintained that Buck “tells more of contemporary China than a year of newspaper headlines or a shelf of volumes by political minded experts.”⁵⁷ While these critics were fascinated by the information on China in the novel, they failed to recognize Buck’s concern for Chinese women in particular.

The lack of attention paid by Western readers to the feminist themes in the novel corresponds with the state of the feminist movement in the United States during the 1930s. After a period of feminist activism and enlightenment during the 1920s, enthusiasm for it faded with the onset of the Great Depression. High unemployment rates reinforced support for the traditional notion that women should stay at home instead of “stealing” men’s jobs.⁵⁸ In contrast, China during the same period witnessed a surge of feminist movements. While Pearl Buck took keen notice of the feminist fervor in China, her contemporary American readers failed to recognize her message since it did not resonate within their own contexts.

Although two recent critics, Xiongya Gao and Peter Conn, acknowledge the female point of view of the book, they see it either as a celebration of Chinese women who are able to resolve the conflict of the two cultures by adjusting a new way of life, or as a discussion of the relation of gender and family structure, thus ultimately focusing on the

⁵⁵ Isidore Schneider, “Review of *East Wind, West Wind*, by Pearl buck.” *New Public* 21(May 1930): 24.

⁵⁶ E.G., “Review of *East Wind, West Wind*, by Pearl Buck.” *Pacific Affairs*(1930), 506.

⁵⁷ Nathaniel Peffer, “Review of *East Wind, West Wind*, by Pearl Buck.” *New York Herald Tribune Books*, May 6. 1930.

⁵⁸ Mickey Moran, “1930s, America -- Feminist Void? The Status of the Equal Rights Movement during the Great Depression.” *The Student Historical Journal* 20, (1988)
<http://www.loyno.edu/~history/journal/1988-9/moran.htm>.

issue of social organization.⁵⁹ I focus instead on the feminist narrative of this novel. Using the novel as a historical document of the development of feminism in general, I take Gao and Conn's argument a step further. On the surface, the novel celebrates the liberation of women from patriarchal oppression; however, the translation of feminist ideas in the novel for the protagonist (Kwei-lan) by the Westernized husband, and Buck's translation of the Chinese female subjects for her Western audience through this novel both problematize Western feminism in a cross-cultural context.

Silencing in the Name of Feminist Freedom

Kwei-lan has been raised under the traditional model of "a perfect wife." To her surprise and frustration, she realizes that her Western-educated husband does not find her silent obedience and bound feet attractive. To gain her husband's love, she abandons her traditional values and embraces the "feminist" views that her husband brings home from the West.

This plot portrays what really happened in the early part of the twentieth century in China, when many Chinese intellectuals, most of them males, were consciously introducing and advocating Western feminism and other Western concepts. Many male intellectuals started to see the status of women as a reflection of a nation's power,⁶⁰ and therefore they introduced the history and theories of the Western feminist movement to

⁵⁹ Gao Xiongya. *Pearl S. Buck's Chinese Women Characters* (London: Associated University Presses, 2000); Peter J. Conn, *Pearl S. Buck: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁶⁰ Tao Jie, Introduction to *Holding up Half the Sky*, xxiv; for primary writings by Chinese male intellectuals during that period, see Lan and Fong (1999). Examples of such writings from that book include "The Way of Confucius and Modern Life" (1916) by Chen Duxie, "Emancipating Women by Reorganizing the Family" (1919) by Zhang Weici, and "Freedom of Marriage and Democracy" (1920) by Lu Qiuxin.

China.⁶¹ For example, the renowned professor Zhang Weici wrote in 1919 on women's emancipation, mentioning, "Today we have already concluded that women's narrow-mindedness is a big obstruction of social evolution, and that women's 'individualism' is an obstruction to collective life."⁶² Apparently, his concern about women's emancipation came behind "more important" social issues. The avant-garde editor of the popular review *The New Youth*, Chen Duxiu, attacked the Confucian teaching of women's subordination as feudal and outdated doctrine, and advocated new gender relations following Western models in his 1916 essay "The Way of Confucius and Modern Life."⁶³ Among those wide-circulated essays, women's status was discussed not as an independent issue, but rather as an indicator of the degree to which Chinese society was modernized. Therefore, it is questionable to what extent the ideas of gender equality and women's emancipation really reached women as a group. Kwei-lan's story is not one of liberation, but rather one of the painful process that young, traditional Chinese women had to go through during that time. The following examples from the novel illustrate this.

On her wedding night, when Kwei-lan and her husband see each other for the first time, Kwei-lan is put into an astonishingly foreign situation. Her husband says:

You have been forced into this marriage as much as I have... Yet now that we are alone we may create our life according to our own desires. For myself, I wish to follow the new ways. I wish to regard you in all things as my equal. I shall never force you to do anything. You are not my possession – my chattel.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Lu Meiyi, "The Awakening of Chinese Women and Women's Movement in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Holding up Half the Sky*, 56.

⁶² Quoted in Hua R. Lan and Vanessa L. Fong, *Women in Republican China: A Sourcebook* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 25.

⁶³ Quoted in Lan and Fong, 5-8.

⁶⁴ Pearl Buck, *East Wind, West Wind*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1932), 31. (All the following quotes from this book are from this same version.)

Kwei-lan is too amazed to understand the meaning of her husband's words. Instead, she asks herself a series of questions:

I equal to him? But why? Was I not his wife? If he did not tell me what to do, then who would? Was he not my master by law? No one had forced me to marry him – what else could I do if I did not marry? And how could I marry except as my parents arranged it? Whom could I marry if not the man whom I had been betrothed all my life? (31)

Bearing all these questions in mind, the only sentence left ringing in her ears is “you have been forced into this as much as I have,” which she infers to mean that her husband does not find her desirable at all. As a result, she feels only anguish and pain.

Despite the husband's professed ideals of gender equality between himself and his wife, the words with which he floods Kwei-lan is incomprehensible to her; he speaks in a language completely foreign to her life experience so far. He declares that they should create their life according to their own desires; however, he does not give Kwei-lan an opportunity to articulate her own desires. When she is too intimidated by the situation to speak, he assumes her desires are in keeping with his own. He actually forces his own desires onto Kwei-lan.

The following tense scene foreshadows and symbolizes Kwei-lan's understanding of her husband's translation of gender equality and the entire process of her change from the traditional self to a “new” woman:

“Listen to me – I do not ask you to speak. But I beg you this small token. If you are willing to try the new path with me, bend your head a little lower.”
He watched me closely; I could feel his hand pressing down steadily. What did he mean? Why could not things proceed in the expected way? ...Oh, then my sorrow began – this heaviness that never leaves me by day or night! I knew not what to do. And in my despair and ignorance I bent my head.

“I am grateful,” he said, rising to his feet and removing his hand. “Rest quietly in this chamber....” He turned swiftly and went away. (32)

This scene shows that neither one really understands the other. Kwei-lan is left in miserable confusion. At the same time, her husband claims that he knows what Kwei-lan means by the “small token,” and he believes that she also completely understands the meaning of his words. However, the silent, “small token” from Kwei-lan indicates only the suffocating pressure from his hands, and that the translation of his new ideas makes no sense to her. The only way left for Kwei-lan to speak is by playing the Chinese harp, but her husband again fails to truly hear her, silencing her by saying “I will buy you a piano some day and you can learn to play Western music too” (47). Under the impression of liberating Kwei-lan from patriarchal Chinese traditions, her husband only forces her into another form of subjugation. He refuses to see Kwei-lan, and denies her beauty, making her invisible and nameless in her own home.

To gain her husband’s recognition, Kwei-lan finally agrees to unbind her feet, though it is not an easy decision. Kwei-lan has tried all other means to attract her husband, but fails to do so as long as she refuses to unbind her feet: “There was only one way for women. ‘You must please your husband’” (70). With this in mind, Kwei-lan decides to yield to her husband’s will.

She suffers from the unbinding as much as the binding itself. She first has to silently bear psychological pain. As her husband unwinds the inner cloth on her feet, he exclaims about the misery of her childhood, which was “all for nothing.” “The tears came into my eyes at his words. He was making useless all the sacrifice, and even demanding a new sacrifice!” (72). Right after the psychological blow, physical pain follows:

When my feet had been soaked and bound again more loosely, intolerable suffering set in... There were times in the day when I tore at the bandages to unfasten them and bind them more tightly to ease me; and then the thought of my husband and that he would know at night made me replace them with trembling hands. The only slight respite I could get was to sit on my feet and rock back and forth. (72–73)

To comfort Kwei-lan, her husband tells her that they endure the pain together.

“‘Try to think that it is not only for us but for others, too—a protest against an old and wicked thing.’ ‘No,’ I sobbed. ‘I do it only for you—to be a modern woman for you!’”(73). From then on the husband starts to listen to Kwei-lan. But the hidden message for her in this painful process is that in order to be heard, she must entirely renounce her past and adopt her husband’s Western ways. Kwei-lan is still seen by her husband as an object; he cares only about changes in her body, not about changes in her mind. Kwei-lan’s body, and her feet in particular, is a focus of the struggle between different ruling powers: The traditional Chinese patriarchy and an imperial patriarchy with the pseudo name of “Western feminism.”

Kwei-lan is not alone in her suffering of being objectified as a site of power struggle among nations and different ideologies. Yu-Fang Cho’s analysis of another Chinese woman figure, Mulberry/Peach from Hualing Nieh’s novel, also discloses similar phenomena.⁶⁵ In Mulberry/Peach’s decades of involuntary flight across China, Taiwan, and the United States due to social unrest and wars in Asia, her body is mapped as “a site where competing Japanese imperialist, Chinese patriarchal, Chinese nationalist, and U.S. imperialist powers are staged through the depiction of gender, class, sexual, and racial relations among the characters in the rest of the novel”(169). For instance, Mulberry/Peach’s diary records Japanese soldiers’ violence against Chinese women’s

⁶⁵ Cho Yu-Fang, “Rewriting Exile, Remapping Empire, Re-membering Home.” *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 5 (1) (2004):157-200. (Page numbers in this paragraph refer to this journal article.)

bodies in World War II and the Chinese male nationalists' response, which constructed "the Chinese woman's body as a symbol of national territory" (170). However, Mulberry/Peach not only is subjected to Japanese and other imperial powers but also suffers sexual assault from her fellow Chinese men. In the diary entry of the same day, Mulberry/Peach also writes about a Chinese refugee student who attacked female passengers on a boat. Although the refugee student represents a new generation of modern Chinese men, his "sexual assault on Chinese women reveals continuities rather than differences between Chinese societies in the past and at the present of narrative time: Despite their dissimilar degrees of 'modernization,' in both societies women are subjected to sexual exploitation, manipulation, and violence, although perhaps at different scales and in different forms" (171). Furthermore, the refugee student's assault on Chinese women parodies the modern Chinese nationalist discourse, in which "the woman's body is posited as the symbol of the nation to be protected from the penetration of imperial powers," (172), but is neglected when the attackers of the woman's body are Chinese men. Similarly, Kwei-lan's husband forces her to unbind her feet as a protest against the wickedness of old traditions. Ironically, Kwei-lan protests that she does so only for him—it has nothing to do with the nation or even herself.

After unbinding her feet, Kwei-lan is seemingly content with her life, finding true love with her husband, and finally understanding the meaning of freedom and equality. However, she never fully gains consciousness of her selfhood. Her last words, at the very end of the novel, illustrate once again her dependence and subjugation to her husband's will: "He will not allow me to cling to anything because it is old. He keeps my face set to the future . . . I know that my husband is right, always right!" (244). Therefore, instead of

a process of subject formation, Kwei-lan, via the Western feminist discourse that is forced on her by her husband, only experiences a lateral transformation, from one kind of subjugation to another.

Silencing the Other in the name of feminist freedom also occurs in other relationships in the novel. Those who received Western education silence Kwei-lan by using a foreign language. When Mrs. Liu, a graduate of a big Western college for women, visits Kwei-lan and her husband, foreign words fly back and forth between Mrs. Liu and Kwei-lan's husband so that Kwei-lan understands nothing and is left out of the conversation, "listening with drooping head" (68). As Kwei-lan's brother and his American wife arrive at Kwei-lan's home, they and Kwei-lan's husband again speak only English, which makes Kwei-lan feel that she and her son were the Other in the group: "I and my son, we are the only Chinese among us...I and my son, we do not understand them" (151). Through these two instances, Buck shows how Western education allowed Chinese women to talk to men but prevented them from talking to one another. She also implicitly criticizes what she labels as the "foreign Chinese" – Chinese who have been abroad and who intend to build a "foreign culture" within China. Through Kwei-lan's experiences, Buck demonstrates the weakness of those foreign Chinese, who completely negate the traditional Chinese past and uncritically emulate Western values and power. She attacks the elitist arrogance of those who present themselves as "agents of force and

harbingers of progress,”⁶⁶ but who are blind to the feeling and needs of common Chinese people.⁶⁷

After having internalized her husband’s version of feminism, Kwei-lan, in her turn, also silences her mother in the name of freedom of love, in which her mother has lost faith because of her lifelong suffering under a patriarchal polygamous system. In Part 2 of the novel, conflicts arise when Kwei-lan’s brother returns from the United States with his American wife, for Kwei-lan’s mother still insists on the brother’s previously arranged marriage. When Kwei-lan’s brother asks for her help in the name of love, she starts to speak to her mother in the same patronizing tone that her husband used with her on her wedding night. In response, Kwei-lan’s mother utters one of the strongest attacks against women’s oppression by men: “Men!... Their inner thoughts are always coiled like snakes about the living body of some woman!” (123). Through this statement, Kwei-lan’s mother, for once in her life, shows her daughter the bitterness and suffering that are “bowels of fire” within her. However, because Kwei-lan can only think with a mind subjugated to her husband’s, she can never really speak back to her mother to reach mutual understanding. Focusing merely on her brother’s love and happiness, Kwei-lan “cannot hear [her] mother speak” anymore, and she “does not remember [her] mother’s sadness” (143). This time, it is the mother who understands nothing and who refuses to speak further (144-45). Kwei-lan, along with all the other people in the novel, shuts her mother off and leaves her in loneliness and, in her abandonment, to her death.

⁶⁶ Qian Suoqiao. 2005. “Pearl Buck/赛珍珠 as Cosmopolitan Critic.” *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal* 3 (2):153-172.

⁶⁷ In three other essays – two essays with the same title, “The New Patriotism,” and a third one entitled “China and the Foreign Chinese” – Buck even more explicitly and vehemently attacks those “foreign Chinese.”

In the same way, Kwei-lan silences her father's concubines. In her narrative, they are "at heart ignorant women, always quarrelling and mortally jealous," never able to utter any meaningful words (17). For example, when the third concubine, La-may, attempts suicide in response to the father's intent to take another concubine, Kwei-lan does not recognize it as an act of protest. This is the most rebellious act in the novel, yet Kwei-lan does not interpret it as such. Kwei-lan assumes that La-may's silence after being saved from death stems from "losing a great deal of face by being unsuccessful in her attempt" (53). Only Kwei-lan's mother really understands La-may and sends her away from the shackle of the family after her attempt to end her life. However, Kwei-lan's mother is not able to articulate the real meaning of what has happened. Kwei-lan interprets what her mother does for La-may as rooted in her mother's pity for the concubine, and thinks the matter "mere small house-hold gossip and [had] no place in the conversations I held with my mother" (53).

Acknowledging only her husband's version of Western feminism, Kwei-lan recognizes neither the rebellious significance of her mother's remarks, nor the protest against patriarchy that La-may's attempt at suicide represents. Kwei-lan's idea of feminism has been taken from the literal meaning of her husband's words, and is entirely a response to her husband's initial rejection of her as a "traditional" woman. She completely denounces her past self, and passes as a "new woman," but in doing so, she is unable to recognize her own oppression by the patriarchy of the modern. In particular, she is unable to connect her oppression with the oppression of her mother and of La-may. When the two women are powerless under both "the traditional" system and "the modern" system, they use death and silence as the last resorts to deal with the oppression and

maintain their dignity. But because Kwei-lan misunderstands the true meaning of women's emancipation, their feminist protests and the meaning of their silence are not communicated to Kwei-lan.

Another group of women who are silenced are the servants. Kwei-lan represents aristocratic women, who see the servants only as inferior slaves, lacking individual identities. Only one elderly servant, Wang Da Ma, is depicted as a figure with character, and she appears as a happy and content person who is always eager to serve the aristocrats. Taking class privilege for granted, Kwei-lan is blind to the constant drudgery that Wang Da Ma has to endure. Kwei-lan assumes that Wang Da Ma enjoys her service to the family. On one occasion, Kwei-lan even laughs at Wang Da Ma's calmness and self-possession, thinking these two qualities as unnatural for a servant. Much as Kwei-lan is ignorant of the parallels between the oppression she has experienced in her marriage and the suffering endured by her mother and La-may, she also is unable to recognize the oppression suffered by Wang Da Ma and other poor and uneducated women.

Kwei-lan is certainly not alone in her inability to recognize the realities of class differences. Christine Stansell gives other examples in her book on women's life in early nineteenth-century New York, *City of Women*.⁶⁸ Stansell notices how the ladies who enjoyed the efflorescence of bourgeois life blamed working women for subverting "notions of domesticity and propriety" (xiii). While enjoying the leisure provided by the workingwomen's labor, the ladies appointed themselves as "examples of virtue," but in complete blindness to the fact that working women "bore the brunt of [the] oppressions" of bourgeois life (xii). The characters of Kwei-lan and the ladies in Stansell's study are

⁶⁸ Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

both examples of Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's (2002) argument that "within the women's movement, the connections among women of different backgrounds... have been fragile, at best."⁶⁹ The internalization of racism, sexism and classism has caused "the object of oppression [to be] not only someone outside of [one's] skin, but the someone inside [ones' own] skin."⁷⁰

Translating the Voice of the Other

The above oppressive relations all demonstrate how women can silence other women. As Spivak puts it, "The relationship between woman and silence can be plotted by women themselves; race and class difference are subsumed under that charge."⁷¹ Buck's novel juxtaposes various power relations between men and women and also among women, thus showing how the act of silencing is conducted in the name of feminism in China.

This novel also demonstrates some of Pearl Buck's own misinterpretation of Western feminism and her mistranslation of Chinese women's voices. Buck wrote this novel when she was in China, where she grew up with an idealized imagination of "good America." Decades later, she recalled that she regarded Americans as very different from the other foreigners in China; she believed that while other Western people of Europe had committed evil in Asia, Americans had only done good in Asian countries.⁷² Moreover, immediately before Buck started to write this novel, another incident reinforced her

⁶⁹ Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. (Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press, 2002), 28.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Gayatri Chokravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 287.

⁷² Pearl S. Buck, *My Several Worlds: A Personal Record* (New York: John Day, 1954).

idealization of her “homeland” America.⁷³ In May 1927, Pearl Buck experienced first-hand the Chinese revolts against foreigners, in what was known as the Nanjing Incident. The Nanjing Incident started with riots against the foreign soldiers who occupied the city, but the violence soon spread against foreigners in general. The hostility of some Chinese toward her and other foreigners made her “more than ever conscious of America and being American.”⁷⁴ Buck’s views of the United States eventually became less favorable, after her return to the United States several years later. However, the novel does reflect her idealization of “good America” at that earlier stage of her life in China.

In the novel, Buck takes a position as, first of all, an American, and then a special American who understands both the traditional Chinese and the modern Americans. Hence she begins the novel with Kwei-lan’s following words:

These things I may tell you, My Sister, I could not speak thus even to one of my own people, for she could not understand the far countries where my husband lived for twelve years. Neither could I talk freely to one of the alien women who do not know my people and the manner of life we have had since the time of the ancient empire. But you? You have lived among us all your years. Although you belong to those other lands where my husband studies her Western books, you will understand. I speak the truth. I have named you My Sister. I will tell you everything. (3)

Through Kwei-lan’s acknowledgment of Buck’s understanding of both the East and the West, Buck asserts her authority to interpret Kwei-lan’s views for Western readers. Moreover, Buck implies that Western readers find Chineseness incomprehensible, and that the Chinese people cannot understand the West. However,

⁷³ Although Buck once claimed that she regarded America as her motherland, and China as her fatherland, and that she was a “bi-nationalist,” it happened only later in 1933, when she had finished the novel and when she had become famous for her second novel *The Good Earth*. See her 1933 essay, “The New Patriotism.”

⁷⁴ Cornelia Spencer, *The Exile’s Daughter: A Biography of Pearl S. Buck* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1944), 46.

Buck does not explicitly acknowledge her privileged position as an American in 1920s China, which was under the protection of a Western army.

The tone of the writing is occasionally quite condescending. For example, Buck exists as Kwei-lan's omnipresent audience, addressed as "My Sister" by Kwei-lan in almost every chapter throughout the book. Kwei-lan considers her "sister's" opinions as important as those of her husband's, and seems to speak only if her audience (Buck herself) finds what she says of interest. Buck is regarded as a more knowledgeable woman throughout the book, and is beseeched for wise advice by Kwei-lan. For example, at one point, Kwei-lan laments "O My Sister, had you been here you might have taught me what to do!" (68). In a sense, Buck as the audience takes a role that is similar to that of Kwei-lan's husband. Kwei-lan enjoys "feminist" freedom only because she follows her husband's will, and she is also able to speak her mind only because Buck allows her to do so. Shortly after Kwei-lan tells the first part of her story, she consciously asks her audience, "You weary not, My Sister? I will proceed, then!" (50).

Buck's depiction of Western feminism and the West are highly romanticized in this novel, likely reflecting her desire to return to her "homeland" after the Nanjing Incident.⁷⁵ Western women are depicted as equal to men, enjoying complete control of their own body freedom in the United States. Women in the United States are "free as the sun and the wind are free" (132). Using Kwei-lan's voice, Buck depicts Kwei-lan's American sister-in-law, Mary, as a representative of American women and their freedom:

Certainly she is not like our women. Every moment of her body is free and unrestrained and full of a rapid grace... This foreign one has no fear of anything in her... She accepts as her right the interest of men. She makes

⁷⁵ Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

no effort to win their glances. She seems to say, “This is I. I am as you see me. I do not care to be otherwise.” (155)

However, women in the United States are still fighting for their rights and freedom in the patriarchal society even in the twenty-first century, not to mention the 1920s when the novel was written.

During the 1920s and the 1930s, women in the United States gained voting rights, but encountered significant discrimination in employment. Most jobs available for women were manual or clerical, and women’s pay was much lower than that of men.⁷⁶ Black women, in particular, remained the most exploited and alienated workers due to racism, classism, and sexism.⁷⁷ This time period also witnessed a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan, with many lynchings of blacks. Racial segregation remained unchallenged until three decades later.⁷⁸ The novel’s description of American women as free misrepresents the reality in the United States, and reflects Buck’s misconception of feminism. Only through blindness to racism, sexism, and classism in the United States is Buck able to contextualize an idealized version of U.S. feminism in China.⁷⁹

The transnational feminism comes at the cost of the rights of many of the oppressed “other,” the underclass of both the United States and China. In this sense, Buck falls into the “necessary misrecognitions” of diasporic discourse. Residing in Nanking at that time, she neglected different forms of oppression in the United States in her portrayal

⁷⁶ Mary Frances Berry, *Why ERA failed: Politics, Women's Rights, and the Amending Process of the Constitution, Everywoman* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

⁷⁷ Mark D Matthews, "'Our Women and What they Think': Amy Jacques Garvey and the Negro World." *Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research* 10 (8) (1979):2-18

⁷⁸ Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black/white Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

⁷⁹ Once Buck returned to the US, she was able to recognize the racial inequality, and started to fight against American racism and classism. See Qian (2005).

of Mary as the quintessential American women, and of the United States as the modern model of China.⁸⁰

Furthermore, as if to emphasize the equality between the American wife and her Chinese husband, Buck even feminizes the husband's physical appearance. Comparing Mary's hands with those of her husband, Kwei-lan says that the husband's are "the woman's hands" (150). Mary's feet are depicted as "longer by two inches than [Kwei-lan's brother's] feet," and she is also taller than Kwei-lan's brother (149). By adopting a common stereotype in portrayals of Chinese by Westerners, that is, by feminizing the Chinese man, Buck gives her female American character Mary a masculine power over the Chinese "other." At a time when white women cannot achieve a status equal to that of men in the United States, Mary obtains equality with men in China. The hidden message in Mary's achievement in China, however, reinforces the Western perception of the Chinese as an inferior "other."

Buck's position during this time period corresponds to the position of the character Mary's position within the novel. At the beginning of the 1930s, the American literary world was dominated by male writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and John Steinbeck. Despite the few women authors who won celebrity status and commercial success, "male critical contempt for women's writing in general" only increased during this time period.⁸¹ Buck was one of the better know women writers

⁸⁰ Similar to Pearl Buck's misrecognitions in her experience in China, the African American diaspora in Paris attacked American racism but was blind to French colonial exploitation during the New Negro movement. Brent Hayes Edwards discusses the "necessary misrecognitions" of the latter in his 2003 book, *The Practice of Diaspora*. The term "necessary misrecognitions" was originally coined by Kenneth W. Warren in "Appeals for (Mis)recognition: Theorizing the Diaspora" (1993), 404-405.

⁸¹ Elaine Showalter, *A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx* (New York: Knopf, 2009), 331. For a thorough delineation of the standing of women writers in the 1930s

of the period, but her work functioned as carriers of “otherness.” The character of Mary could enjoy complete equality only relative to an “inferior other” outside the United States. The author Buck could obtain literary attention equal to that enjoyed by male authors only by writing about the other for her American readers. Her authorship was accepted in the United States in part because she exercised in her work her authority only over a Chinese other.⁸²

Buck’s misconception of feminism is also illustrated by her sole focus on Kwei-lan’s experiences within the home. Buck omits more significant roles that Kwei-lan could have been able to play in broader social and historical contexts. From 1926 when Buck’s short essay “A Chinese Woman Speaks” was published, until 1930 when this novel was completed, various women movements took place in China. Women in the Nationalist movement demanded “constitutional provisions for equal rights and wider educational and professional opportunities for all classes of Chinese women.”⁸³ Women’s unions were established, and Communist women leaders practiced political activism. Middle-class women also went out of their homes and started to work in professions such as banking and secretarial work. During this period, the Young Women’s Christian Association in China offered an arena in which, Chinese women and American women could work together to achieve internationalism. These aspects of Chinese society are missing from the novel. Much as Pearl Buck ignored the reality of social events in America, describing Mary’s unlimited freedom as representative of American women,

United States, including their predicament and battles to tell their stories, see, “The Great Depression” in Elaine Showalter’s book.

⁸² On authorship and authority, see Tova Rosen, “On Tongues Being Bound and Letting Loose: Women in Medieval Hebrew Literature.” *Prooftexts* 8(1) (1988): 67–87 (1988).

⁸³ Garner, *Precious Fire*, 80.

she confines the character Kwei-lan to her role at home, and identifies changes within the family as the only kind of social change experienced.

Buck's role in this novel is a reminder of the importance of "self-consciousness that has to accompany criticism of others if that criticism is to avoid scapegoating."⁸⁴ Buck fails to question her cosmopolitan position, and her privilege over Kwei-lan and other characters within the novel. She prioritizes only gender conflicts and cultural clashes, and by doing so, she obscures class conflicts, colonialism, and imperialism.

A Frail Bridge

Despite the ways in which the novel falls short, Pearl Buck is still ahead of her time by raising race as a universal issue in our world, giving an ever voiceless Chinese woman a voice in the West, and trying to avoid a stereotypical depiction of China. Buck's novel also embodies a hope in human union beyond race, as symbolized by the half-American and half-Chinese son who is born in the end. This is the one occasion in which the novel presents the way Chinese women should express themselves in the era of change, when Mrs. Liu speaks to Kwei-lan about rearing their children: "Learn the good that you can of the foreign people and reject the unsuitable" (95). Moreover, if Pearl Buck identified herself with Kwei-lan as a frail bridge when she wrote this novel, Buck herself became stronger as time went by. She became committed to civil rights, racial equality, and pluralism after she returned to the United States in the 1930s.⁸⁵ Long before

⁸⁴ Mary Childers and Bell Hooks. "A Conversation about Race and Class" in *Conflicts in feminism*, edited by M. Hirsch and E. F. Keller (New York: Routledge, 1990), 60-81.

⁸⁵ Stephen Spencer, "The Discourse of Whiteness: Chinese-American History, Pearl S. Buck, and *The Good Earth*." *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture* 1(1) (2002). http://www.americanpopularculture.com/journal/articles/spring_2002/spencer.htm (Accessed April 20, 2009)

publication of Betty Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique*, Buck had attacked the low motivation of "over-privileged" middle-class women to become involved in social issues.⁸⁶

The weakness of the novel *East Wind, West Wind* in the 1920s does not signify that bridging genders, cultures, and people should be avoided. What the novel does illustrate is the difficulty and risk inherent to attempts to build bridges. The gaps between human beings are still wide, and more people are needed for the process of bridge building. I wish in this paper to stress that feminist bridges, cultural bridges, or other bridges tend to be frail because of such large gaps of historical and cultural differences, and because we are always at the center of many different forces. In Buck's case, even though she may not have an imperialist view per se, the systems around her exert their forces and change both her and her protagonist's original voices. As Rosario Morales suggests in her essay "We're All in the Same Boat," (Moraga and Anzaldúa 2002, 97) we are all in constant power struggles and we breathe in racism and sexism "like dust in the street"⁸⁷ Therefore in our effort of bridge-building, we need constantly examine and critically reflect upon our own positions.

In the translation of the voiceless so that they can be heard, there will always be *Decalage*, "gap," "discrepancy," "time-lag," or "interval" that refuse translation into another language or context;⁸⁸ and because articulations struggle for the delivery of

⁸⁶ Nora Stirling, *Pearl Buck: A Woman in Conflict* (Piscataway, NJ: New Century Publishers, Inc., 1983), 333.

⁸⁷ Rosario Morales, "We're All in the Same Boat" in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by C. Moraga and G. Anzaldúa (Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press, 2002), 98.

⁸⁸ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 13.

competing ideologies. Keeping these in mind, we can start to keep bridging the gaps in the world, as Kwei-lan puts it when she describes the struggles in her own life:

...I cannot forget [my mother] and that she is alone. Yet I cannot forget either my brother and that one whom he loves. I am torn hither and thither like a frail plum tree in a wind too passionate for its resistance (147) ... I'm like a frail bridge, spanning the infinity between past and present (146)

The Voices Unheard

Like Pearl Buck, Ida Pruitt was also a bridge between the Chinese and US culture. However, she was more like Buck's friend, Margaret Thompson, who wrote about China but only reached a smaller audience. As Pruitt's biographer Marjorie King puts it, "Ida was a friend of famous people, not famous herself."⁸⁹ As a "mishkid," who was born and grew up in China, Ida Pruitt was friends with other famous Americans who share similar experiences, such as owner of the *Life Magazine* Henry Luce, and Pearl Buck. From 1921 to 1938, she was head of the Social Service Department of the Rockefeller-funded Peking Union Medical College, and worked with famous doctors who greatly influenced the establishment of Chinese modern medical education. In the 1930s, she lived in the same Chinese compound with the Fairbanks, familiarizing them with Chinese culture and helping John King Fairbank with his academic research, who later became the most influential scholar of Chinese Studies in the 1960s and 1970s. She was also a close friend with the then-famous American journalist Edgar Snow. Like her famous friends such as Buck, Fairbank and Snow, Pruitt was also a prolific writer. Fortunately, besides the heavy 74 boxes of papers in her archive, she also has several publications, which can powerfully challenge the dominant voices of her famous friends.

⁸⁹ Marjorie King, *China's American Daughter: Ida Pruitt (1888-1985)* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press., 2006), x.

One of her books, *A Daughter of Han: The Autobiography of A Chinese Working Woman*, presents significantly different voices and views of Chinese women and their gradual discovery of the feminist self, compared with Buck's *East Wind, West Wind*. Although the book was not published until 1945, Pruitt wrote its manuscript in the late 1920s, almost at the same time as Buck did that first novel of hers. Also like Buck, Pruitt used a first-person narrative to give voice to an otherwise silent Chinese woman. Despite these similarities, the two Chinese women figure differ drastically.

Little Tiger's Long Way to Independence

Unlike Buck's Kwei-lan's timid and uncertain voice in the beginning, the protagonist of Pruitt's book, Old Madam Ning started her story in an assertive manner.

My father called me Little Tiger and I was my mother's youngest child... I had a strong disposition.⁹⁰

I have had a full life. I have seen wonderful sights. I have seen the sea floating with dead bodies like gold fish in a pond when bread is thrown to them. I have seen the great of this world and have eaten food that was prepared for them. I have suffered bitterly. I have suffered hunger and I have suffered the sight of my children sold. All have I had in a superlative degree. (2)

If the suffering mentioned reminds the reader of the victimization discourse by Western mainstream in describing Chinese women, yet this woman's tone and language indicate NOT JUST victimization: her point is that she has had "a full life," and that she has survived and prospered despite the suffering; like a little tiger, she is a strong and resilient character.

Like Kwei-lan, Old Madam Ning's marriage was disappointing in the beginning. Kwei-lan's husband found her unattractive because of her old-fashioned upbringing;

⁹⁰ Ida Pruitt, *A Daughter of Han: Autobiography of a Chinese Working Woman* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), 11. (All the quotes of this book are from this version.)

Ning was even more miserable because her husband had another woman living in the same house, a cousin's wife whose husband had gone many years. "We slept on the same K'ang, the four of us [the other woman had borne a son to her husband]. I was such a child that I told her I was glad she was there for I was frightened." (39) While Kwei-lan gained her questionable subjectivity through her husband's teaching of "Western feminism," Ning took a long journey of her self discovery through her own suffering and struggle. Unlike the educated, eloquent husband of Kwei-lan, Ning's husband was a voiceless opium smoker who was never dependable. It was first Ning's own anger which pushed her to make the first step.

In order to buy opium, Ning's husband sold everything they possessed. After he sold her last beloved thing, a pair of hairpins her mother had given her at her marriage, she was so angry that she and her daughter left her husband for the first time.

It was the first time I had walked from my husband's home to my mother's. Respectable women did not walk in the streets of P'englai. We rode on horses and squares of black cloth covered our faces. But I was angry... His relatives stood in their gateways and watched us pass. His uncle, the old man whose wife I had nursed and mourned, followed me down the street begging me to return. The tears ran down his face, he was so sorry for me. But I was angry and my anger was great. (47)

Ning's anger drives her to ignore the "respectable women's honor code." Her behavior also caused another disruptive scene against the masculine honor. The uncle cried and begged her to stay, but she denied him because her anger was too great.

While Kwei-lan talked about her marriage problem with both her mother and Buck the Western sister, Ning had no one to ask for advice. She could only keep asking herself "how could I know what to do?" Her upbringing told her that "A woman could not go out of the court": "We women know nothing but to comb our hair and bind our

feet and wait at home for our men.... so when I was hungry I waited at home for my husband to bring me food. My husband sold everything we had.” (55) She learned her lesson from the sharp contrast between what she was taught and what she experienced in her marriage. To feed herself and the family, she said to herself, “I will go into the fields and glean.” (56) Finally, when there was nothing left to glean, she started to beg. “It was no light thing for a woman to go out of her home. That is why I put up with my old opium sot so long. But now I could not live in my house and had to come out.” (62) Step by step, from the harsh reality of her marriage, Ning learned her own hard-core lesson.

When her husband tried to sell one of her daughter behind her back, she completely came out to claim her rights. She found the man who helped her husband sell her child, but the man would not let her go with him into the residence which hid her daughter. Her reaction was: “‘A residence! If you, a man, can go, surely I, a woman can do so. If it was a bachelor’s lair I still would go in to find my child.’ I held onto him by the slack of his coat as we went down the narrow street to a gate. He knocked and still I held to him.” (69) The Ning here is definitely not the stereotypical timid Eastern woman; she aggressively fought with a man, and was not afraid.

Still, coming out completely from the old teaching about womanhood was not an easy thing for Ning, though her life experience kept her self questioning on those doctrines. While “The old people tell us that her husband is more important to a woman than her parents,” (70) Ning’s husband could do nothing but ask her to have a plan for them and find a way for them to eat. In spite of the uselessness of her husband, she stayed with him so as to keep a good name for her parents, until he tried to sell her child again, and succeeded this time. She decisively left her husband and became a real beggar. She

gave the sharpest irony of the “honorable womanhood” which she was taught in her description of her life as a beggar:

The life of the beggar is not the hardest one. There is freedom. Today perhaps there is not enough to eat, but tomorrow there will be more. There is no face to keep up... The sights of the city are free for the beggars. The temple fairs with their merrymaking crowds, the candy sticks with fluttering pennants ... are harvest time for the beggars. There is drama on the open-air stage. No lady can get as close to the stage as a beggar. The ladies have their dignity to maintain and must sit in a closet cart or on the edge of the throng in tea booths. No woman but a beggar woman could see the magistrate in his embroidered ceremonial robes to ride to the temples to offer sacrifice at the altars of the city in the times of festival. (72-3)

Through her comparison between her own experience as a “respectable” woman and as a beggar woman, Ning noticed the price of respectability which women had to pay in that patriarchal society: the price was as high as their freedom.

Since she was free from the usual constraint of home and “good name,” she finally completely “came out” from home, and became a working woman, a servant for Chinese officials and foreigners. Her sense of independence was ever salient. She worked hard, but saw herself as the mistress of her own time. She refused to be treated as a bond servant, and when she felt that she was not respected by her mistress, she simply quit her job. In this sense, her life-long struggle was a feminist one to fight for her own independence.

“Naughty Amah” Talked Back

“You are a very naughty amah. You do not need to come any more.”(216)
Never had she seen an amah that talked back to her as I did. (209)

As previously discussed in this chapter, among the ones silenced by Kwei-lan in Buck’s *East Wind West Wind* is Wang Da Ma the amah, who wet nursed Kwei-lan and

her brother, and served her brother's son. She is a comical figure whose story takes up less than three pages of the 244-page book. The few sentences which Kwei-lan quotes from Wang Da Ma's own words all the more indicates as if the Amah's life has no other significant purpose but serving Kwei-lan's patrician family. Wang Da Ma's inarticulateness in Kwei-lan's narrative and Buck's book also reveals how Chinese servants have been placed in history. While American women missionaries in China left a heritage in American culture, the servants whom they relied on for their everyday life rarely appeared in record except as the converted.

By contrast, Ida Pruitt through her book of the autobiography of Old Madam Ning, provides a rare text which reveals the female servants' point of view regarding cultural conflict with their American employers. Ning's narratives about her different experience of service at Chinese officials' and American missionaries' homes, and in particular, about her quarrels with American mistresses discloses conflicts in religion, race and class, and the ways they were dealt with by both sides. Therefore, Ning's story is a strong rebuttal to the missionary discourse of victimization and conversion as well as Chinese patricians' depiction of her and her likes as blindly loyal and happy servants. It also shows that the domestic sphere of American homes in China was a critical site of cultural borders between Chinese and American women of different classes. Through close and direct contact, these women of vastly different background interacted and influenced each other's views on themselves and the others.

Before Ning started to work for foreigner missionaries, she worked for five Chinese official families. While Kwei-lan's Wang Da Ma served three generations of the same family, Ning changed her employer several times to fight for respect and her own

rights. When her goal of making a living and being respected was met, Ning was an able, hard-working and professional employee. Once her daughter was bed-ridden with the smallpox and needed her full-time attention. She decided to quit her job, reasoning “I am hired to work. How can I stay here and nurse my child?” (74) Her mistress did not let her leave; instead she and her husband sought the best doctor, and the mistress herself tended Ning’s daughter. Another time the same master of the family made a fire for Ning’s room when she was too busy with work to care for her own warmth. Ning’s account did not give a pretext of how she impressed her employers with her good work, but their kindness to her was telling of how hard she worked. Her matter-of-fact narration of her work indicates the large amount of work she did: “The sewing for the two younger children was my work, and the cooking of the grain for ten or more people. The cook was responsible for the meat and vegetable dishes. The washing also I had to do. Also I washed for the servants so they would not dislike me.” (76) Ning showed no complaint of the amount of work she did, but when she was not duly respected, she refused to be submissive.

As a result, Ning got a reputation among her Chinese mistresses as “bad-tempered” and “stubborn.” She talked about a typical fight with her mistress:

What my mistress often said about me is true – I have a bad temper. I was there for four or five years and she was very good to me. I shall never forget her care of us when Mantze had the smallpox. But I have never been able to endure being scolded too many times. Once or twice I could stand, but not too many times. I have a stiff mouth, but I try to live according to what is reasonable. She was very angry one day and reviled me, and I reviled back.

I said, “You are a T’ ai-t’ ai, a lady, the mistress, I am a servant. Our capital cannot be compared.” This made her very angry. So I quarreled with her.

I said, “Let’s settle our accounts.” And I asked her if she had someone for my place, for I was going. (85)

Ning was sarcastic about the class difference between her mistress and her. She defied the unjust social status and disrespect toward her: although their “capital cannot be compared,” the rich could not bully her just because they had capital. The mistress later even resorted to a threat of using some male power: “I will send for your husband and talk to him and see if he can put any sense into you.” Ning simply answered “The bargain was made with me and not with him.” Ning eventually quitted serving this family because she could not bear the unreasonable scold in the mistress. When she said that she would never enter the gates of that family, she meant it.

In the years when she served the Chinese families, she insisted on fair treatment as an employee, but meanwhile showed respect to her employers, and demanded the same respect accordingly. However, because of her lower social status, the mistresses tend to neglect her demand, and quarrels often occurred on those occasions. In return, her interpersonal relations with her mistresses sometimes seemed to be quite defensive. One of her other mistresses, with whom she got along well, said to her as they made their farewells when the family were moving to another city: “You are a good woman. You work well and your heart is good. You have only one fault. You are too hot tempered. You cannot bear to hear any words against you. Are others not people also? You must learn to see also with their eyes and to control your tongue.” (110) Despite the class difference, this mistress talked to Ning in an equal term, which reflects a feminist sisterhood among the two women.

As Ning’s Chinese mistresses were different, she also depicted a variety of American mistresses whom she worked for. Her first foreign employer was Mrs. Burns, whom she chose to work for because she could stay at her own home at night while

working for Chinese official families required living on the same compound. Her daughter was growing up and she needed to teach her housework skills at her own home. With Mrs. Burns Ning fought for a just treatment. While she ate together with her Chinese mistresses at travel, Mrs. Burns asked her buy her own food, but letting the male servant and the cook eat with her. When her work kept her too busy to go to other places to buy food, she quarreled with this mistress. Bitter words were exchanged:

“Never since I came to China have I hated anyone so much as you.”

“Never since I went out to work have I had so bad a place.” (149-50)

Mrs. Burns defined a racial line in her derogation, saying Ning as the worst Chinese she ever met, but Ning defied it by expanding their relationship as merely employer and employee, accusing Mrs. Burns as creating the worst working place. Then when Mrs. Burns tried to establish her authority by talking of her intention: “I wanted to make of you a very useful woman. Ning denied it with another smart irony: “It is as you say. I have always been a person of no use.”

Despite Ning’s persistent struggle for her own rights in her relationship with Mrs. Burns, their domestic bickering reflects the unbalanced international relations in which voices of the poor were hard to reach ears of the rich. Ning was truly angry because of the above quarrel and the unjust treatment she received, and so told Mrs. Burns that when they got back from the trip, she was leaving. But Mrs. Burns did not think she meant it. Not until Ning found another job after their return and told Mrs. Burns again, she took in Ning’s words, “she wept and held my arm and begged me not to go.” (150) Ning stayed. But “uncommunication” went on after her stay. Later when the Boxer madness reached their city, Ning from her observation of the local situations, telling Mrs. Burns:

“There is no use to be afraid.”

She said: “there is use to be afraid,” and went on with her preparations [to flee]. (152)

It turned out that the Boxer did not create any riots in their city.

Another common problem between Ning and another type of her foreign employers lied in the different ways they saw their relationships. Talking of Mrs. Yardley, Ning remarked:

She was a good mistress in many ways but she did not know how to talk to us. When she spoke of us she used the word for bond servants.

I would say to her, “We are not bond servants, such as used to be in China and were bought with money. We are hired people. We are free to come and go.” But she always spoke of us as her bond servants. (210)

Mrs. Yardley’s response to Ning’s argument was that “never had she seen an amah that talked back to her as I [Ning] did.” (209) Similarly, Miss Mason who ran the missionary Home also had her particular way of seeing her Chinese servants. “She would pray to her god to forgive her sins and she called herself God’s bond servant. And as God forgave his bond servant, so she hoped she could forgive her bond servants.” (214) Whenever she was not happy about Ning, she said “You are a naughty amah.” (215, 216). Ning’s narration of her story with Miss Mason was again sarcastic. Not only did she criticize how Miss Mason manipulated an unequal and unjust relationship with her servants through religion, but also she disclosed Miss Mason’s pretentiousness in her belief.

However, Ning was not disrespectful of others’ religion, and she also talked about other types of American women who became her true friends. Mrs. Wilson, the former single niece of Mrs. Deemster, was one of those who were “always my friend(s).” (151) Ning remarked about Mrs. Wilson, “She was a good woman. But I could never believe in her religion, even when she begged me to. She would make me kneel with her and pray. I could not believe her religion. But I knew she was a good woman.” When she visited Mrs.

Wilson, she stayed at her place as guests. In addition, Mrs. Wilson also helped Ning to find a job at a lace factory run by an Englishwoman. Ning saw genuine kindness and friendship in Mrs. Wilson.

Link in the Great Chain

Like Kwei-lan, Old Madam Ning also confronted the changes among different generations of women of her time. While both she and her daughter had arranged marriage, her granddaughter was a “new woman” figure who refused to marry, but devoted herself to the cause of saving the country. Old Madam Ning disagreed with her granddaughter, but she accepted her granddaughter’s decision on her own life. She concludes:

Life must go on. The generations stretch back thousands of years to the great ancestor parents. They stretch for thousands of years into the future, generation upon generation. Seen in proportion of this great array, the individual is but a small thing. But on the other hand no individual can drop out. Each is a link in the great chain. No one can drop out without breaking the chain. A woman stands with one hand grasping the generations that have gone before and with the other the generations to come. It is her common destiny with all women. (239)

Kwei-lan saw herself as a frail bridge between the past and the present, Old Madame Ning saw herself as a link in the great chain between the past and the future. Despite their different approaches to life and to women’s problems, they both saw their “common destiny with all women,” and narrated unique feminist practices through their personal histories.

If the “frail bridge” image reflects how Pearl Buck sees Kwei-lan and herself between the East and the West, the past and the future, the “link in the great chain” image tells of Ida Pruitt’s ideas on the connections among more complex relationships of different cultures and generations. Instead of being merely two-sided, the link in the

chain connects from multi-directions, and the gaps among the sides are not as big as a river. This concept is revealed in several factors in Pruitt's book.

First of all, concerning the relationships between the American author and the Chinese narrator, unlike the condescending role Buck played in her sisterhood with Kwei-lan, Pruitt acted as an equal friend of Ning Lao T'ai-t'ai. While Pruitt let Ning speak in her book, she really hid behind the screen after a brief introduction to show the context of Ning's story and the clear relationship between this narrator and the author.

Ida Pruitt gave a clear timeline and context of how she and Ning got to know each other. Pruitt met Ning through her colleague, whose husband was Ning's son's employer. She sought knowledge from Ning on old customs of Chinese families such as marriage and death, and interviewed her for two years. In the process, they became friends. In explaining the reason why they became friends, Pruitt attributed to Ning's smile after she described her rough life experience. In addition, Pruitt also showed her admiration for Ning's "gift of humor and of seeing things as they are." (2) In an interview, Pruitt depicted Ning as having "the unselfconscious self-respect of a woman who had done all her life what she had had to do and have enjoyed life in spite of everything." This depiction and the presentation of the book was "a striking departure from missionary woman's writing about Chinese customs."⁹¹

Moreover, the narrative of the book give the narrator full control of the flow of her own story. The language is that of the working class colloquium and the structure of the story lines are fragmented as in coversation.

²² Marjorie King, *China's American Daughter: Ida Pruitt (1888-1985)*. (Hong Kong: the Chinese University Press, 2006), 105.

Secondly, while Pearl Buck identifies herself and American women with the single representative Mary in her book, and lauds American feminist progress in comparison to Chinese women's status, Ida Pruitt presents a variety of both Chinese and American women together with the advances and setbacks of both sides. Chinese women figures range from Old Madam Ning who accepted arranged marriage even though her husband was "an old opium sot," and from her daughter who stayed in another unsuccessful arranged marriage but later rebelled with her own extra-marital relations, to her granddaughter who was armed with new thoughts from her modern and oversea education and refused to marry in order to pursue her own career and cause. The variety of American women included wives of missionaries such as Mrs. Burns and Mrs. Deemster, Mrs. Yardley whose husband worked at the Custom House, a single female missionary Miss Mason who ran a Missionary Home, another single lady Mrs. Deemster's niece who had to no other way to make a living but to marry, and the author herself who appeared as a professional woman busy with her own work. These women, Chinese and American, were interlocked into the great chain. The connections and interactions left strong marks in the complex big pictures of cultural and generational networks, but above all, they were traces of the encounters of people who crossed regions and borders in their daily lives.

Chapter 2

More than “White Women’s Burden” Ida Pruitt’s Narratives of Help in Medical Social Work

Dear Miss Pruitt,

... I have heard that you are planning going home in the autumn and that there is a bare possibility of your coming down this way. If you do so would you consider stopping off with us to give us suggestions and advice? As you may have heard we are selecting, as carefully as we can, one hundred destitute women between the ages of 18 and 30 and we are hoping to open for them a simple industrial-homecraft school by means of which we hope to rehabilitate them... We would be glad if you would find it possible to come down this way to criticise us and help to improve us...

Any suggestions that you can give will be greatly appreciated.

Very sincerely yours,
Minnie Vautrin¹

This letter records a conversation about help giving between two American women of executive positions in China in 1938. Minnie Vautrin had been acting president of the most renowned women’s college in Republican China, Ginling College, and was dean of studies and chairperson of education when she wrote this letter. During the Japanese invasion of Nanking just months before, she was chair of the college’s Emergency Committee, opened the Ginling campus to women refugees and saved up to 10,000 lives from the Nanking Massacre. The refugees called her the “Goddess of Mercy,” one of the most beloved deities among Chinese. This letter, however, tells nothing about the crises and catastrophes Vautrin just weathered, nor the incredible accomplishments she achieved. By contrast, she humbly asked Ida Pruitt’s critique and advice on her effort to help the refugees to rebuild their home, telling Pruitt that she was learning hard all the

¹ Minnie Vautrin to Ida Pruitt, September 9, 1938. Ida Pruitt Papers, Schlesinger Library, Cambridge, MA.

possible ways of refugee relief and she needed help to improve her work. Between the lines are Vautrin's high respect and acknowledgement to Ida Pruitt for Pruitt's of pioneering social service and refugee relief work as Chief of Social Service Department at the Peking Union Medical College (PUMC).

At the time when Pruitt received Vautrin's letter, however, she was busy packing up because her contract with the PUMC was about to terminate after her twenty years of service. A new administrative committee of the PUMC, all male in preclinical sciences, who knew little about medical social service, decided that Pruitt's work could be replaced by other departments of the institution.

In regards to evaluation on Ida Pruitt's social work, Minnie Vautrin, the administrator of the girls' college was in sharp contrast to the male authority selected by the China Medical Board of the Rockefeller Foundation. As to Ida Pruitt herself, although at that time she had established a firm belief in her social work as helpful for China, for years she had kept questioning it as an effective method for China's social improvement. After she left the PUMC, she ran a Nutrition Camp of Refugees for the American Quakers in Shanghai. Doubting the usefulness of refugee camp for solving China's problems, she later joined another group of Westerners to help run the Industrial Cooperations. Pruitt seemed to be convinced that the Industrial Cooperation Movement was the most effective way she could help China, and worked for its fund raising in the United States for fourteen years until she retired in 1952. Minnie Vautrin also returned to the States in 1940 due to severe depression. Despite the high praise of her work by many people, she blamed herself for not giving enough help to the refugees, and committed suicide in 1941 with a sense of failure in her effort.

Why was the cause of “helping China” so important to these white women of administrative power? How was their work of help evaluated by different groups? How did different standards of evaluation affect their values and identities? How did they internally negotiate the different standards? Were they agents or victims of the big powers who laid down the rules and standards? This chapter examines those white women’s motives and actual work in helping China, and compares the relatively private narratives in letters with the public discourses of help in both American and Chinese media. The disparities and similarities of these narratives and discourses shed lights to some inner thoughts of these white women on their work in China, to the social expectations on these women and their work, and to the influence of these women on the complicated interactions between China and the United States. Since Ida Pruitt’s career represents such a comprehensive variety of approaches in helping China, I will focus on her professional development during the period when she was in China. Under the paradigm of network analysis, I treat Pruitt as an essential central figure because of her “multiplex system of relationships”² in the China-helping cause of Westerners in Peking in the 1930s and in New York in the 1940s. The web of Pruitt’s relationships and her letters implicate common practices, gender and racial tensions, and transformations of powers in the helping discourses.

An Opening Approach: Beyond Victim or Agent

Ho Nainai comes in to the study where I am working on accounts and says that the ice man has a request to make of me.

He wants me to get his cart away from the Japanese. They have taken it and put it in the police station at Yen yao hutung. ...[Ho Nainai’s words] “It was taken by the Chinese for the Japanese and has not been given to them yet. The

² Margret McFadden, *Golden cables of sympathy: the transatlantic sources of nineteenth-century Feminism*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 15.

ice man says that if you do not get the cart for him he will not be able to deliver ice to you tomorrow. He will get a motor car and take you to the place if you will go and say that the cart is yours that it must bring you ice and coal.”

Once before the cart had been taken and got out by the use of my card. Now the card is not enough. I must go myself. The police will not recognise ownship or partnership unless registered in the embassy.

“I’ll go.”

...At home the servants and their wives were all in the court to hear the news... I told them that I had [got the cart out] and they were to tell the ice man and the delivery man next door to be very cautious about the use of their carts for though I had now got this cart out twice I was doubtful of my ability to get it another time.

“Oh but he is such a poor man.” Said the cook. “this is his only way to get a living himself and his family.”

“It is not that I will not want to help. It’s my doubt of my power.” I replied.

The cook had a childlike faith in my power to get things done.³

The excerpt is from Ida Pruitt’s long diary on September 5, 1937. She was living in Peiping, which was just captured by Japan in July. The cart incident was caused by the Japanese army’s order to the Chinese police station in Peiping that one hundred carts were to be collected from the city. The cart of the ice man who delivered Pruitt ice and coal was among the ones taken (or rather, robbed) by the police to meet that order. To help the ice man get out his cart before it was sent to the Japanese, Pruitt went to the police station at Yen yao hutung with him, but was simply redirected to the headquarters because the Yen yao hutung division had no right to release the cart. When they arrived at the headquarters, they were simply informed that the person in charge was not in. After a long waiting and with Pruitt’s persistence, another officer finally showed up, only to tell Pruitt that they had to obey the Japanese order and could not release the cart. Pruitt presented her card (Chief of Social Service of the famous American hospital in Peiping), the police officer started to backed up, asking Pruitt which was the cart she wanted back.

³ Untitled essay, Ida Pruitt Papers, Box 28, Folder 724, Schlesinger Library.

The problem was solved after the police officer realized that the cart was a donkey cart, instead of the larger mule carts which were actually ordered by the Japanese. To the police officer's relief, he returned the donkey cart to Pruitt's ice man.

This seemingly trivial incident reflects crucial and subtle power structures at play in the semi-colonial China at that time. The American woman Ida Pruitt appeared infinitely powerful to her servants, but in her reality, she had to negotiate her power with much difficulty with the Chinese male authority, and she felt almost powerless had she confronted the Japanese army. Taking the extermination of her contract with the PUMC into consideration, her career was also at the mercy of the American male administrators. In this complicated web of powers, how could Pruitt's positions be defined? Was she an agent of American's imperialist expedition? Was she a victim of the Japanese imperialist invasion to China? Was she also a victim of the "cause" of patriarchic empires? Was she a "good" white who helped the poor Chinese? Was she an imperialist herself who took advantage of inequalities and exploit the colonized cheap labor? These questions haunt not only Ida Pruitt's China experience, but also many other white women who similarly intended to help China and Chinese people.

Although few scholarly work discusses the paradoxical nature of white women's aid experience in China, a substantial body of research prioritizes gender in relation to imperialism, nationalism and colonialism in general, which can be used as reference to investigate the above questions in the Chinese context. One group of arguments foregrounds the role of Western women and middle-class feminism as agents for imperialism. Antoinette Burton, for example, studies British feminists' collaboration in the ideological work of empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and

criticizes British women's racism and cultural superiority in the name of "emancipating" Indian women.⁴ Similar to Kipling's imperialist idea about the "white man's burden," British feminists assumed moral authority and acted as "the saviors of Indian women and the feminist watchdogs of empire"⁵ at the same time. Following and extending this line of arguments, more recent post-colonialist scholars apply such theory to the contemporary development workers phenomena in Africa and Asia. Barbara Heron analyses how discourses of whiteness and development are based on a racialized Other, and questions the "helping imperatives"⁶ of the Canadian female development workers in sub-Saharan Africa. She brilliantly challenges white women's assumptions in "developing countries" that African people are available for the white women to experience and that their experience will ameliorate other people's lives. Nancy Cook also discusses how Western development workers use the transnational experience and a racial other to establish their own identity and power, though the developing country in Cook's case is Pakistan.⁷

While this group of arguments provide satisfying analysis of intersectionality of gender, race and class in transnational power flows, and maintain cultural sensitivity regarding the Northern countries aid to the Third World, they over-emphasize Said's theory about the interaction between the West and the rest of the world, that is, "a basic

⁴ Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1864-1915* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

⁵ Burton, *Burdens of History*, 129.

⁶ Barbara Heron, *Desire for Development: Whiteness, Gender, and the Helping Imperative* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), 6.

⁷ Nancy Cook, *Gender, Identity, and Imperialism: Women Development Workers in Pakistan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

cultural opposition between Self and Other, colonizer and colonized.”⁸ Much as the homogenization of the Third World women and their stereotypes as “backward” and “traditional,”⁹ the white women from the metropolis to the colonized or developing countries are also homogenized in a way because they cannot escape from being agents of the big empires, even if their actual practice and experience are discursive.

Another group of arguments overcome such weakness by differentiating the white women into various types, breaking the binary of Self/Other and adding more nuanced variance in analysis. Instead of seeing white women solely as agents of the empire or as unconscious of such a role in their transnational experience, authors in *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* find “both complicity and resistance by Western women to the cultural values dominant during an imperialist era,” and “different levels of consciousness”¹⁰ in Western feminists. Kumari Jayawardena, in her book *The White Woman’s Other Burden*, divides Western women in south Asia during the British colonial rule into various types. Several types of white women brought Western education and values to the women of Asia; while others negated Western values and upheld Asian traditions and cultures in nationalist, or even socialist movements in Asia.¹¹ Although the distinctions among American women missionaries in China under Jane Hunter’s analysis are not as great as the ones in Jayawardena’s book, they still fall into

⁸ Himani Bannerji, Shahrzad Mojab, and Judith Whitehead, eds., *Of Property and Propriety: the Role of Gender and Class in Imperialism and Nationalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 5.

⁹ These criticisms of the early Western feminist ethnocentrism are led by post-colonial feminist critics such as Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Trinh T. Minh-Ha.

¹⁰ Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, eds. *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 5.

¹¹ Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman’s Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia During British Colonial Rule* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

different categories according to their work, marital status, and time period when they were in China.¹²

Distinguishing white women in the colonized countries into different groups complicates the images of Western women as well as their relations to the native people; however, due to the comprehensive range of white women discussed in the above work, they present large pictures and sketches of women figures at the expense of those women's detailed experience. A side effect is that they compromise at multi-layered theoretical analysis, ignore change of values and identities of individuals when they stayed in the colonies for a fairly long time.

The different perspectives of the above scholars have shaped my understanding in the experience of Ida Pruitt and her like in China. However, delving into Pruitt's complex world of letters, I also find theories of agents versus victims, and linguistic opposition of domination versus oppression is inadequate to analyze such complex experience as of Pruitt's. That is why I decide to take an opening approach in presenting this research in transnational aid. As Sally L. Kitch puts it, "I no longer believe in the concept of definitive scholarship because it suggests closure and constraint. Rather, I believe in scholarship as an opening and a freeing of information that can be seen from different perspectives at different times."¹³ Such an opening approach avoids pinning down Pruitt and other white women to a single subject position and oversimplifying their experience; instead, it acknowledges that those women "occupied 'multiple subject positions' which were structured by historical layers of gender inequality, class, and indigenous social

¹² Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

¹³ Sally L. Kitch, *This Strange Society of Women: Reading the Letters and Lives of the Woman's Commonwealth* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993), 6.

stratification systems, as well as colonialism.”¹⁴ Seeing them from their multiple positions is to avoid judging them as aggressors or victims in different social systems; rather, they are nexus through which powers passed in multiple directions. Such a framework allows me to visit their past with their fuller humanity instead of reducing them as signs of colonial culture and identity politics. Paying attention to the actual details of their experience allows me to perceive the materiality of the forces that drives the powers in their network, in addition to the clashes of ideologies and cultures.

The multiple-subject-position framework also follows scholars such as Himani Bannerji and Shahrzad Mojab’s challenge to scholarship which treats “the entire history of colonialism and nationalism as a symbolic opposition between the West and the Rest.”¹⁵ Such scholarship ignores the differences of national independent movements and the variances of empires of different period and place. As Pruitt’s diary at the beginning of this section records, hegemonic power came not only from the West during China’s semi-colonial period, but also from Japan’s expansion. In addition, in the long history of China alone, different forms of empire had already existed and evolved before the West and Japan came into the picture.

Therefore, the purpose of this approach is, instead of elaborating accomplishments or injustice done by some people and empires, to demonstrate how power can work for positive social transformation, but if abused, can be oppressive and destructive for many. The history reflected from Ida Pruitt’s experience alone, five decades of her career path, already shows that people and nations obtain and lose power, much as inevitable as life and death. It is how power is used that makes the difference in

¹⁴ Bannerji, Mojab and Whitehead, *Of Property and Propriety*, 12.

¹⁵ Bannerji, Mojab and Whitehead, *Of Property and Propriety*, 7.

life and history. This chapter aims to serve as a space to explore lessons about help and power which can be learned in Pruitt's case.

“I Don't Want to Be a Noble Soul”—Pruitt's Social Service Work

I don't want to be a noble soul. I don't care whether the Chinese learn to wash their bodies and blow their noses. I prefer them as they are. In other words what I am really interested in is their mental and emotional life and not their salvation either spiritually or bodily.¹⁶

Despite Ida Pruitt's unwillingness to be a “noble soul,” to many, she is safely qualified as one. Her entire career life centered on helping others, from a principle of a missionary girls' school, to the initiator of China's social work, to war relief organizer and fund raiser for China's emerging homecraft industries. Although she disclosed her secret reluctance to do social work in the above letter to her lover in 1933, she continued her medical social work in the PUMC for another five years, leaving that position only because her contract could no longer be renewed. The juxtaposition of what Pruitt wrote about medical social work in her intimate letters and what she really did for the work reveals not just her personal career choices or crisis, but also the struggle of different powers which tried to define an emerging new field in social sciences in China. The ups and downs in Ida Pruitt's career as Chief of Social Service Department of the PUMC mirror the evolvement of social work in China, and various influences which struggled to set the standards for the field.

¹⁶ Ida Pruitt to John F. McIntosh, February 3, 1933. Papers of Ida Pruitt and Marjorie King. Schlesinger Library.

Orthodox Missionary Mother and Rebellious Daughter

Ida Pruitt's reluctance to be a noble soul has much to do with her rebellion against her missionary upbringing and her orthodox missionary mother. Both her parents went to China in their youth to introduce "Christian civilization." Her mother, Anna Seward Pruitt, in particular, assumed her role as saving the "heathen" Chinese souls and improving their life. In order to set for the Chinese villagers an example of Christian household as well as to establish a "tasteful, civilized, cultivated home" for her children,¹⁷ Anna S. Pruitt obsessively maintained the Americanness of her home by using American food and furniture. Despite her pray that her children "might be kept from evil in China,"¹⁸ Ida Pruitt fell for the Chinese way of child rearing. As she puts it in her autobiography, her Chinese nurse who was with her and her brothers all day was almost as important as her parents in her childhood. Many of her thoughts and attitudes were from her Chinese nurse.¹⁹ In addition, her playmates and neighbors were entirely Chinese until another missionary family moved to the village when she was five. Consequently, Ida Pruitt's views of the Chinese and the Chinese ways conflicts her mother's; she sees the Chinese as they are, not as someone whose souls need to be saved. Her estrangement from the missionary women already started when she was a child, though she kept it secretly and resorted to reading books in order to escape the missionary women's "endless talk of babies and sickness and the goodness of God."²⁰

¹⁷ QTD in Marjorie King, *China's American Daughter: Ida Pruitt (1888-1985)* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2006), 9.

¹⁸ QTD in King, *China's American Daughter*, 12.

¹⁹ Ida Pruitt, *A China Childhood*. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1978.

²⁰ QTD, King, *China's American Daughter*, 18.

The Chinese nurse who shaped Pruitt's world views sets sharp contrast to the common image of the black mammy in the American context. The power relations between Ida Pruitt's mother and her Chinese nurse are different from those between the white women and their black mammies in the United States. White women, despite the gun boat protection in China, had limited cultural influence in China. Even though she controlled much of her daughter's ideas about the United States before Pruitt actually went to the States for higher education, she antagonized her daughter due to her different views on China. As a missionary child growing up around the Chinese, many other venues (her Chinese nurse, playmates and her own observations) had greater influence on her views of China.

Ida Pruitt's association with mission work would have ended earlier, had it not for her younger brother John's sudden death in 1912. Ida Pruitt was teaching at an orphanage in New York then, and she decided to go back to China to comfort her parents. She lived together with her parents in Chefoo for another five years, and taught at Wai Ling School for Girls, a missionary school. While the child Pruitt could hide from the missionary women by playing her child games or reading, the young Pruitt in charge of the missionary girls school had to confront the missionary culture upfront. While she enjoyed teaching, and learned a lot more about Chinese culture from the girls, the conservative environment also suffocated her.

On the one hand, Ida Pruitt had problems living with her mother, Anna Seward Pruitt. Being an orthodox missionary, the mother intended to lead her daughter into a missionary life much like the mother's own. Every summer the mother would invite a young man of missionary type to their home, hoping the young Ida Pruitt could fall in

love with the invited guest. Grudging against her mother for not appreciating who she was, and for treating her as “an appendage who must act in the ways to give [her mother] the most satisfaction,”²¹ Ida Pruitt could not care for any of the young man her mother brought to home. Eventually, the mother’s pet phrase to Ida Pruitt changed from “when you get married” to “if you get married,” and Pruitt remembered her mother’s often sad look at her. The pressure from her mother was like “the Old Man of the Sea – on [her] shoulders,”²² recurrently perturbed and depressed her.

On the other hand, Ida Pruitt found the work at the missionary boarding school for girls too confining for her vision due to its parochial culture. Most of the girls were daughters of teachers or servants of the missionaries, or merchant families who joined the church. Many of the parents put the girls at the school to keep them safely away from boys and also to raise their value in the marriage market. Ida Pruitt wondered the effectiveness of the school’s education to the girls themselves, as she recalled the experience years later:

At fifteen or sixteen or seventeen their parents came and took them away and married them to boys to whom they had been engaged for many years or many months. They settled down to cooking and sewing and child bearing, and forgot the few ideographs they had learned and the few ideas that had lodged in their minds.²³

The parents’ disrespect to the girls’ own subjectivity, and ignorance to alternative futures for their daughters, frustrated Pruitt.

It was not only the parents who failed to encourage the girls’ intellectual freedom and financial independence, but also the general administrative body of the school. The

²¹ Ida Pruitt, Draft F, Untitled, Book III, Chapter 13. Schlesinger Library.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ida Pruitt, Draft F, “The School.” Schlesinger Library.

stronghold of conservatism alienated Ida Pruitt. For example, the local missionary board decided that they had to guarantee a way of support for one of the girls in the top class because she was daughter of a widow, a mending amah of at the English Boys School. But their approaches were either to find a husband for her or to make her a Bible woman. Normally, a Bible woman was a mature indigenous woman who was hired by the missionary societies in Asian or African countries, who visited women in villagers and introduced Bible study.²⁴ The girl in the top class would have been too young to be a Bible woman, but the missionary board considered it an option anyway because they thought the girl was too “plain and stupid” for them to find a husband for her, especially since she did not have any dowry. Unable to change such a mindset of the local missionary society, Ida Pruitt wrote about her anger: “Wrathfully I wondered which was more insulted, matrimony or God.”²⁵

Therefore, even though Ida Pruitt enjoyed teaching the various subjects at the girls school, and the school developed well, at her sixth year there, she became restless and felt confined. At that time, as recognition to Pruitt’s work, the mission appointed her to a committee to work with people from other missions in order to plan standard curricula for mission schools. Such a promotion alarmed Pruitt at her deeper involvement in the mission. Taking the opportunity of her furlough, she left the position of the Principle at the school, and went to America in pursuit of a wider and more diverse world.

²⁴ Dana L. Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons, 2009), 139.

²⁵ Pruitt, Draft F, “The School.” Schlesinger Library.

A New Profession – Separation of Medical Social Work from Church Mission

Ida Pruitt was a social case worker at the Philadelphia Society for Organizing Charity when the Peking Union Medical College (PUMC) was trying to find someone from the United States to initiate the Medical Social Service Department in 1919.

Medical social service in the United States, though still a nascent profession, was making much breakthrough around that time.

Medical social workers had been viewed with skepticism at American hospitals at the turn of the century, but by 1918, the profession of hospital social service was getting fairly acknowledged. The American Association of Hospital Social Workers was organized in 1918; in the same year, at the American Hospital Association conference, A. R. Warner, President of the Hospital Association, delivered an address especially focusing on the role of social service in hospital, titled “Social Service and Hospital Efficiency.”²⁶ In 1919, the American Hospital Association conducted a national survey of hospital social work, and found 286 social service departments in hospitals in the United States and Canada.²⁷ Social service workers had become “one of the personnel necessary for the best type of medical care of patients” in teaching hospitals.²⁸

One reason of the acceptance of social work in hospitals was due to the effort of the “scientific charity” movement which started in the 1870s in the United States. Such a movement emerged with industrial changes and with increasing number of people in

²⁶ A. R. Warner, “Social Service and Hospital Efficiency,” *Proceedings, American Hospital Association* (1918), 171-174.

²⁷ Ida M. Cannon, *On the Social Frontier of Medicine: Pioneering in Medical Social Service* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 127-130.

²⁸ Walter W. Palmer, “Forward” in *The Social Component in Medical Care: A Study of One Hundred Cases from the Presbyterian Hospital in the City of New York*, eds. Janet Thornton and Marjorie Strauss Knauth (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937).

poverty and in need of relief. To more efficiently distribute capital, Charity Organization Societies were founded to administrate public relief. Instead of giving direct material relief, charity organizations used social workers to investigate individual cases to determine suitable aid, and directed the individuals for assistance to matching charity agencies. In other words, “scientific charity” involves “not only helping, but studying the poor.”²⁹ Not only did the “scientific charity” movement provided medical social service its basic professional skills, but also early social workers who became forerunners of hospital social service.

Another reason why hospitals started to embrace social service departments was that doctors gradually recognized the interdependence between hospital and community, and “the relation of cause and effect in the patient’s disease and his environment.”³⁰ Before such recognition, hospitals did not attempt much to reach out to community life. Hospitals had been feared by many, especially by recent immigrants. Negligence of patients for the sake of medical teaching on doctors’ side, or blindly using cheap nostrums because inability to afford hospital treatment on patients’ side, were common stories of those days. The second decade of the twentieth century saw a period of social awakening, and doctors and social works started to cooperate to find out a patient’s environment so as to achieve effective medical cure.

Fully aware of such development of social work in American hospitals, the administrators of the Rockefeller Foundation who were preparing the launch of the Peking Union Medical College agreed that to be a first-rate hospital, the PUMC was in

²⁹ Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (rev.) (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 69.

³⁰ Cannon, *On the Social Frontier of Medicine*, 23-24.

dire need of “a person with not only good training, but also at least a few years of actual experience in the administration of [a medical social service department].”³¹ Through Social Worker Exchange and Philadelphia Society for Organizing Charity, the PUMC eventually found Ida Pruitt for this position. With Pruitt’s training in Philadelphia as a social case worker, and her grasp of Chinese language, and her missionary background, Pruitt received unanimous approval as the right candidate. However, as the actual process of transferring medical social service work from the United States to China took place, controversies rose, including organization of medical social service department in the PUMC, assumptions about China’s needs for help, and evaluation of medical social work. In part, these controversies explain Ida Pruitt’s mixed feelings about being a noble soul, and about helping China establishing medical social work.

Even before Ida Pruitt was selected as the head social worker of the PUMC, a controversy started in Peking and spread to New York about whether to have a separate Social Service Department or to put social workers under the Religious and Social Service Department. Philip A. Swartz, then Director of Religious Work at the PUMC, insisted in combining social and religious work together under his department; while Roger S. Greene, Residency Director of China Medical Board that was in charge of the PUMC, thought Swartz failed to understand the great development of the profession of hospital social service. Greene held that in order to secure a well qualified American medical social worker who would be willing to come to China, the medical social worker should report directly to the hospital superintendent instead of under the leadership of Philip Swartz. Greene based his judgment on the standards of medical social service in

³¹ Roger Greene to Franklin C. McLean, December 4, 1919. CMB Inc. Papers, Box 142, Folder 1032. Rockefeller Archive Center, New York.

the United States, Swartz, on his understanding of social service in China. The disagreement between the two indicates disparity of social service field in the two countries.

In the United States, as social service spreads rapidly in hospitals in the first decades of the twentieth century, social workers started to claim a unique body of knowledge in social service as comparable to other sciences. In particular, Mary Richmond “established the basis of a new profession” for social work in her influential book *Social Diagnosis*.³² In this 1917 book, Richmond “basically applied a medical model to the clients’ social difficulties and to social evidence bearing upon them.”³³ To test her hypotheses, she gathered and evaluated much evidence, and drew on established disciplines such as law, history and logic. A forerunner of medical social service, Ida Cannon, described hospital social service as a significant part of medical science, and compared the development of social service field with the history of science in general.

Much as leaders of social service in the United States identified the profession with science, social workers in China, much less in number, were identified as missionaries. As Ida Pruitt recalled later, the only trained social workers in China, when she was appointed the first medical social worker, were the few secretaries in the YWCA, and their training was in the group work field instead of case workers needed in medical social service. Philip A. Swartz, Director of the Department of Religious and Social Work at the PUMC, defined the relationship between medical social work and religious work as united, and consider the former “an essential part” of religious work. “If without

³² Joanna C. Colcord and Ruth Z. S. Mann (eds.), *The Long View: Papers and Address by Mary E. Richmond* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1930), 427.

³³ Stuart A. Kirk and William James Reid, *Science and social work: a critical appraisal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 29.

religious training, morality is feeble and personality is subnormal, then theoretically, the social worker should be prepared to meet these needs.”³⁴ The medical social worker in the United States did not have to shoulder such an inherent religious purpose, Swartz reasoned, because unlike China, the United States had already had very strong Christian social service.

In a sense, Swartz’s definition of social work is almost the opposite of the American version. While in the United States, social work educations distanced themselves from religious work and defined social work as a study of “the development of personality” and “the interrelations of persons in the family group and in other groupings of the community,”³⁵ in China, according to Swartz, the religious worker and the social worker shared the same specialty, helping individuals to acquire “normal personality.” He claimed that the religious worker and the social worker had “a common purpose, a common training, a common method of work and common difficulties.”

Neither Roger Greene nor Philip Swartz could persuade each other, and they both wrote to the China Medical Board and the Rockefeller Foundation in New York for support. The debate on the organization of the medical social service in the PUMC carried on to New York. While the disagreement between Greene and Swartz in Peking reflects different understanding of the medical social service field between the US and China, the two sides of the debate in the US further reveal different approaches and

³⁴ Philip A. Swartz to Richard M. Pearce, “Memorandum Re: The Development of the Department of Religious and Social Work,” December 11, 1920. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

³⁵ Mary Antoinette Cannon, “Guiding Motives in Social Work,” in *New Directions in Social Work*, ed. Cora Kasius (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 16.

agenda of the Rockefeller Foundation and administrative standards as medical social service was transferred to China.

One of the most important agenda of the Rockefeller Foundation in China was to implement modern medical research and change China through secular philanthropy.³⁶ That was the reason why the Foundation created the China Medical Board, and decided to invest in the Peking Union Medical College and transform it into a first-class medical school. Some foundation officers adopted aggressive methods, striving for a high medical professional standard of the college, hoping the hospital and college could be operated independent from missionary influence. Roger Greene was the driving figure of this approach. Besides advocating the separation between the medical social service from the Department of Religious and Social Service, he also proposed to eliminate the church affiliation requirement for the PUMC staff in 1921, and eventually have the Trustees loosen such restrictions when selecting candidates for positions in the college in 1922.³⁷ In 1928, Greene even tried to discontinue the Department of Religious and Social Service so as to put the budget for that department to other clinical departments in the college. This time, Greene was curbed by more conservative Trustee members who were more sympathetic to Christian evangelism, and the existence Department of Religious and Social Service was secured.³⁸

³⁶ For detailed elaboration of the agenda and aims of Rockefeller Foundation in creating the China Medical Board and in establishing the PUMC, please see John S. Baick, "Cracks in the Foundation: Frederick T. Gates, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the China Medical Board," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 30(1) (2004): 59-89; Qiussha Ma, "The Rockefeller Foundation and Modern Medical Education in China, 1915-1951," Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 1995.

³⁷ Roger S. Greene to George E. Vincent, March 5, 1921; Henry S. Houghton to Roger S. Green, September 4, 1922. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

³⁸ Roger S. Greene to George E. Vincent, October 29, 1928; George E. Vincent to Roger S. Greene, June 19, 1929. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center. Greene's radical views toward Christian evangelism was one of the main reasons that caused his resignation from China Medical Board in 1935.

Fully aware of the great influence of Western missionaries in China, another group of the foundation officers took care not to antagonize the missionaries, but to integrate and transform the missionary cause into the causes of Western medicine and education. They took a moderate approach, hoping that in a delicate process, they could transform missionary policy and promote Western medicine in China. At least on surface, they supported the religious aspects of the work at medical school. The Rockefellers upheld this moderate approach. When the PUMC was taken over by the China Medical Board from the several Western missionary boards which originally sponsored the school, Rockefeller Sr. assured the missionary societies that the spiritual life would be essential to the college. Rockefeller Jr. repeated this stand of his father several times when the status of the Department of Religious and Social Work at the PUMC was in question or in crisis.³⁹

On this case of the division between medical social service and the religious work at the PUMC, Franklin C. McLean, member of the China Medical Board and director of the PUMC who was then in New York, belonged to the moderate group. He responded negatively to Roger Greene's appeal to separate medical social service from the Department of Religious and Social Service:

We have now several promising candidates for appointment and I feel that it is altogether likely that a candidate can be secured who will fit into the plans developed by Mr. Swartz. I still feel somewhat apprehensive of the impression which might be produced by entirely separating our social services work from the department of religious and social work. So far Miss Cannon agrees with me as to

³⁹ George E. Vincent to Roger Green, June 19, 1929; John Rockefeller Jr. to Roger Greene, August 16, 1933; John Rockefeller 3rd. to George E. Vincent, April 19, 1934. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

the desirability of combining the two departments and she does not feel that this step would cause us any difficulty in securing the right sort of person.⁴⁰

Why was McLean apprehensive of the impression produced by separating medical social service from the Department of Religious and Social Service? To some people, especially those in the missionary sector, the separation might have indicated that the Rockefeller Foundation and the PUMC intended to emphasize their work on medicine (represented by the medical social service) rather than religion (represented by the Department of Religious and Social Service). Therefore, the separation could be seen as the PUMC's belittlement of the religious mission in China. Such impression would contradict the Rockefellers' pledge on the spiritual life at the college, and arouse worrisome concerns from some missionaries.

McLean's opinion on the organization of medical social service at the PUMC seemed to have heavily influenced Ida Cannon, one of the authorities of the medical social service field in the United States, as McLean reported on Cannon's agreement with him in his above letter to Greene. Cannon was Chief of the Social Service Department at Massachusetts General Hospital, the first department of its kind in the US. McLean consulted her on both the organization of the medical social service and the medical social worker candidates for the PUMC. Although Cannon had her own department at the Massachusetts General Hospital, and although medical social service had been fairly established in the US in general at that time, Cannon assumed that the Chinese hospital

⁴⁰ Franklin C. McLean to Roger Greene, February 2, 1920. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

could have a different plan of organization for the medical social service, and that social service and religious work should be carried on by the same department there.⁴¹

As an expert of medical social service, Ida Cannon's opinions apparently weighed much in the Rockefeller Foundation's decision on the organization of medical social service in the PUMC. Even though Roger Greene won support from other most important Foundation officers, hospital social service was still put under Philip Swartz's department first. Greene's supporters on this case included Richard M. Pearce, Edwin R. Embree and Henry Houghton,⁴² whose views were often different and more conservative regarding the place of the Department of Religious and Social Service in the college. Ida Pruitt herself, the would-be head of hospital social service at the PUMC, preferred to report directly to the hospital superintendent, rather than to both the superintendent and Swartz. Nevertheless, due to Ida Cannon and McLean's insistence, Ida Pruitt was assigned to Swartz's department. Not until a couple of month after her arrival to her position in Peking, was she able to have her own department independent of the Department of Religious and Social Service.

Trained in the U.S., Evaluated Across Culture

Soon after Pruitt was selected to initiate hospital social service at the PUMC, she started a year's training with Ida Cannon. Another controversy arose on evaluation of Ida Pruitt's performance at work. Similar to the dispute on the organization of hospital social

⁴¹ Ida M. Cannon to Franklin C. McLean, February 3, 1920; Interview with Franklin C. McLean and Ida Cannon, February 18, 1920. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center. Cannon went back and forth on her opinion regarding the organization of the medical social service and the religious work at the PUMC, but eventually she decided that the social and religious work should be done at the same department at this hospital in Peking.

⁴² Henry Houghton to Franklin C. McLean, December 10, 1919; Richard M. Pearce to George E. Vincent, December 29, 1920; Edwin R. Embree to Richard M. Pearce, February 5, 1921. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

service in the college, the controversial views on Ida Pruitt's individual administrative ability reveal different powers trying to set standards for the new field of medical social service in China according to their assumptions about China's need for help. In other words, it reflects issues of knowledge transference in a transcultural context, especially in a colonial setting.

Ida Pruitt started her training in hospital social work with Ida Cannon in February, 1920. Three months later, Cannon expressed dissatisfaction of Pruitt's development to the Rockefeller Foundation officer Franklin McLean. In October, Cannon repeated her dissatisfaction again to McLean:

She seems to be trying hard to get what we are offering her, but now, after a great deal of thoughtful study of her personality and qualifications, supplemented by three head workers under whom she has had special experience, I question whether she has capacity for executive work. I am trying constantly to think of her in the terms of what it seems to me China needs, recognizing that she has a tremendous lot to bring to the work there in a knowledge of the language and the people and her deep feeling for the Chinese. I should like very much to discuss the whole question with somebody who knows China and who will know the possibilities of her work there.⁴³

Cannon acknowledged the importance of the knowledge of the language and the people for a medical social worker, but when judging the capacity of a social worker to be assigned to a foreign country, she prioritized the standards of the specific methods and skills required for hospital social work, as if knowledge of social work was objective and universal, thus transcending cultural difference. Even though she had almost no knowledge of China, she was confident in her assumption of things "China needs," and judging Pruitt's capacity according to her assumptions. Whether Cannon managed to find "somebody who knows China" to talk with is not recorded, but by February 1, 1921,

⁴³ Ida M. Cannon to Franklin C. McLean, October 21, 1920. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Cannon's assessment of Pruitt's fitness for the PUMC position only worsened. She shortened Pruitt's training period from fifteen months to a year, in the belief that Pruitt lack "fundamental things" which she and Massachusetts General Hospital could not help with. Consequently, she referred Pruitt to a psychiatrist, who seemed to be able to solve some Pruitt's problems, according to Cannon.⁴⁴ As to the assessment of her own training of Pruitt, Cannon's epistolary tone is full of resignation:

[Ida Pruitt] has been a very interesting problem to me. I only hope that we have been able to help her somewhat. I shall watch with deepest interest the development at the Peking Medical School. Miss Pruitt seems to understand that she is to be placed in charge of the Social Service Department over there. You know, of course, that I do not feel that she is fundamentally fitted for this. One cannot, however, after meeting Dr. Houghton, question his good judgment. I shall be deeply interested to see how they work it out together.⁴⁵

The Ida Pruitt in Cannon's letter seemed to be a hopeless trainee, for even assessing the most basic knowledge – Pruitt's understanding of her own position and responsibility at the PUMC – Cannon had to use "seems to understand."

According to Cannon's above letter, the reason why Ida Pruitt managed to keep her position despite her trainers' extremely pessimistic judgment of her potentials, was due to the Rockefeller Foundation officer Henry Houghton's belief in her. Cannon did not mention Houghton's specific good evaluation of Pruitt, but from Houghton's colleague, Richard M. Pearce's letter of the same period, most probably Houghton together with other Foundation officers believed that Pruitt qualified for the position because of "her training in China and knowledge of the people."⁴⁶ Weighing between the expertise in managing medical social service and the knowledge of China, the Foundation

⁴⁴ Ida M. Cannon to Edwin R. Embree, February 16, 1921. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

⁴⁵ Ida M. Cannon to Edwin R. Embree, February 1, 1921. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

⁴⁶ Letter from Richard M. Pearce, recipient unknown. March 7, 1921. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

officers put more emphasis on the latter. Therefore, Ida Pruitt obtained her position as the first hospital social worker in the PUMC because the Foundation officers turned deaf ear to Cannon, the authority of medical social service in the United States. Ironically, over fifteen years later, after Pruitt became the authority figure of social service in China, she eventually lost her position in the college, almost because of the same reason; the Foundation officers again belittled the expertise in medical social service, assuming that medical social work and public health nursing were interchangeable, and that Ida Pruitt's work could be taken over by Chief Nurse in the college. Such a *déjà vu* drama deserves an analysis of its own in later sections of this chapter, after Pruitt's earlier career path being fully investigated.

Ida Pruitt's training under Cannon in Boston and her demonstrated executive ability during the year remained a mystery if we only read Cannon's and the Rockefeller officers' letters in the Rockefeller Archives. From Cannon's side, Pruitt seems a very weak candidate for an executive position in social work; from the Rockefeller Foundation's side, Pruitt knows much about China (her social work skills unmentioned). What caused Cannon to discredit Pruitt's ability that much? And how was Pruitt's actual performance as a medical social worker? To find out Pruitt's actual experience as the trainee who was about to carry the knowledge of medical social service from the United States to China, her own archives have to be consulted. In contrast to the official and authoritative voices in the Rockefeller Archives, Pruitt's reflection of her training experience in Boston is mixed with self questioning and subversive ideas at the same time.

Pruitt acknowledges both the rich learning and her own difficulties in her summary of the year's training in the Massachusetts General Hospital:

That was a rich year of learning about hospitals, about social work and about people. It is never easy, however, for an older person who knows some of the material at least, to go through the training designed for younger less experienced people who have had no training, or only the theoretical approach in school. Much of what I was asked to do bored me. I had already done that kind of preliminary work in a related field. I was ready to cut through routine and get to the principles involved, but my supervisors had no way to know this and I did not tell them. In China the burden of thinking was on the teacher. The student movements of China had not yet started nor had I been in contact with modern Chinese thought of the day. I had been brought up in the old culture that had not yet made any change.⁴⁷

According to Pruitt, the training program presented two problems to her. First, it was designed to younger students, but she was already thirty-two in 1920, coming into the program with previous experience in general social work. This explains the impression Pruitt made to her supervisors including Cannon that she was not keenly interested in her work. Second, the program took no special attention to her cultural background which was different from “the usual pattern of American students.”⁴⁸ Unfamiliar with the city and the American pattern of lives, Pruitt often felt lost at work. To make things worse, she did not know how to communicate her confusion properly to her supervisors. In her own words, “I made a few tentative efforts at explorations but did not know how to ask the right questions of the right people. It did not occur to me to ask Miss Cannon or any of my supervisors. In their wisdom, was my sub-conscious thought, they gave me work that was best suited to my development.” Assuming the total authority and correctness of her teachers, Pruitt never talked back to her supervisors, or re-act to their questions which were used with the intent to stimulate Pruitt to discussion. Even when Pruitt felt most

⁴⁷ Untitled essay, Ida Pruitt Papers, Box 28, Folder 698, Schlesinger Library.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

miserable because she thought she was found faults unreasonably, she still kept silent and went to the washroom to cry. As a result, she appeared as a dump and hopeless student to her supervisors. This explains the reason why Pruitt was an unsolvable “problem” to Ida Cannon.

Pruitt did not blame her problems to others. She wrote about her gratefulness to Ida Cannon and another supervisor, Sara Evarts, who took extra care to help her, and found a good psychiatrist for her. She attributed her problems solely to her own background factors: one is her psychological immaturity, the other her Chinese upbringings, hence her unfamiliarity with American culture. Many studies in cultural psychoanalysis have proved that change of cultural values and social patterns, especially in immigrant experience, can be the cause of psychological and emotional conflicts.⁴⁹ Discussing the clinical issues of cross-cultural psychoanalysis in a North American setting, Alan Roland considers persons from Asia, the Middle East and Africa at one extreme of a continuum because they may confront tremendous emotional difficulties due to their radically different cultural origins. Therefore, Ida Pruitt’s analysis of her own psychological difficulties in adjusting to American culture is very reasonable, that growing up in East Asian culture prolonged her psychological childhood and adolescence, and that even more emotional turmoil arose when she tried to bridge the two cultural worlds of China and America in her own experience. Pruitt’s claims on such difficulties are resonated by other missionary children who grew up in China. Pearl Buck, for example, also wrote much about the “the drastic physical and emotional pressures on

⁴⁹ For example, Alan Roland, *Cultural Pluralism and Psychoanalysis: The Asian and North American Experience* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Ricardo C. Ainslie and Pratyusha Tummala-Narra, eds. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 14 (3) (September 2009) Special Issue: Immigration.

young people uprooted at a formative age” and “torn by conflicting cultures.”⁵⁰ Like Pruitt, Buck remembered her college years in America as predominately isolated and lonely, and most of her fellow students at the girls’ college as parochial, uninterested in outside world, not to mention the far away China where she was from.

However, in spite of Ida Pruitt’s apparent difficulties in adapting to America, I also wonder whether she dramatized the cultural difference between China and the US. By the time of Ida Pruitt’s training at the Massachusetts General Hospital, she had already had at least five years’ education in the United States – four years at Cox College in College Park, Atlanta, one year of graduate study at Columbia University Teacher’s College in New York – and about one year’s social work practice in Philadelphia. She could also have compared her college education in Atlanta with the more individualized training at Massachusetts General Hospital, or the village and smaller city life she had in Shangdong Province in China and in College Park in Atlanta’s suburb with the big city life in New York and Boston. Such comparisons would have been very revealing to explain the demanding cultural adjustment Pruitt went through in Boston. Although Pruitt acknowledged her own fault of not telling her supervisors’ that the design of the program did not fit her own background, she used the excuse of the influence of “the old culture that had not yet made any change”: because she was brought up in “the old culture” of China intact of modern thought, she assumed “the burden of thinking to the teacher.” By omitting her previous experience in the United States, and appearing as if she was completely oblivious of and uninfluenced by American culture, she missed valuable

⁵⁰ Hilary Spurling, *Pearl Buck in China: Journey to The Good Earth* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 77.

opportunities to transcend cultural essentialism, and to challenge the homogenized assessing standards in medical social work through her cross-cultural experience.

After Ida Pruitt started her work in Peking in April 1921, Ida Cannon tried to follow up with her evaluation of Pruitt's performance. She made inquiries to Rockefeller Foundation officers who visited Peking for the dedication ceremonies of the PUMC that year. Witnessing social and cultural conditions in Peking which were different from either New York or Boston, these officers' evaluation of Pruitt's work was much less arbitrary and more affirmative than that of Cannon's. Edwin Embree thought it impossible to "make any intelligent estimate" of Pruitt's work at this early and transitional period, but he affirmed Cannon of Pruitt's interest in the work. He also predicted that Pruitt would be accepted by both the hospital staff and the Chinese patients.⁵¹ George Vincent even went with Pruitt to make visits to patients while he was in Peking. He wrote to Cannon about the visits, the good impressions Pruitt achieved among Chinese patients, and the qualifications she possessed for her tasks. He seconded Embree that "it is not fair to express any judgment" when Pruitt's work was at early stages. Furthermore, he objectively observed that "it remains to be proved whether in the conditions which exist in Peking social service in anything like the American sense can be successfully introduced."⁵² As the PUMC focused on the program of the institution as a whole for the first couple of years after it was taken over by the Rockefeller Foundation, Ida Pruitt was left alone and given much freedom to start up medical social work.

⁵¹ Edwin R. Embree to Ida M. Cannon, November 30, 1921. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

⁵² George E. Vincent to Ida M. Cannon, December 6, 1921. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

On Ida Pruitt's own account, in contrast to her isolated and lonely days in Boston, she was happy and at home in Peking. Although she has similar experience like Ida Cannon when Cannon tried to start up hospital social work in Massachusetts General Hospital, in the sense that other hospital staff did not understand the function of social work in hospital, Pruitt did not suffer much of the skepticism which Cannon had gone through.⁵³ Since all the "best hospitals" in Boston and New York already had social service departments, the PUMC leaders assured the PUMC of the Social Service Departments. Because the PUMC leaders were "too busy" to make specific plans about social service, Pruitt simply "[took] over whatever a need presented, and [did] what [she] was to do."⁵⁴ Since most of the doctors at the PUMC at this early stage were Westerners who knew not much about Chinese society or the Chinese language, needs for Pruitt's help in facilitating the treatment of Chinese patients always existed.

Initial Evaluation by the PUMC Male Authorities

In 1923, close to the end of Pruitt's first term of appointment, Roger S. Greene, on behalf of the Trustees of the PUMC in New York, requested the hospital Committee in Peking to conduct a detailed written survey regarding the performance of the Social Service Department among all the clinical chiefs of the hospital, and submit a report based on the survey so as to define functions and organization of hospital social service. One reason of the special attention from the hospital administration to Pruitt's department was that Roger Greene assumed that Pruitt's contract was to expire after the two years' employment with the PUMC. The Administrative Council needed to evaluate her

⁵³ As to the skepticism Cannon went through as the beginning of her service at Massachusetts General Hospital, see Ida M. Cannon's book, *On the Social Frontier of Medicine: Pioneering in Medical Social Service* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952), 63-71.

⁵⁴ Pruitt, Lose Notes and Sketches, Parts 2 and 4. Box 44, Folder 1122, Schlesinger Library.

performance to decide whether to renew her contract. Actually, however, as Henry Houghton, director of the college pointed out in his letter to Greene, the Trustee's minutes mistakenly recorded an appointment of Ida Pruitt for a two-year term, while the appointment letter said that Pruitt was appointed for two terms (a four-year term and a second term of three years). Because the appointment letter was a contractual commitment, Ida Pruitt's position at the PUMC was secured till 1927.

The hospital-wide survey about Pruitt's department was carried out anyway due to another reason: the Administrative Council of the PUMC, aware of the new development of and new discussion on medical social service in the United States, wanted to apply concerned questions in the new discussion on medical social service in the US to the PUMC, and examine the efficiency of Pruitt's department according to the new development of hospital social service in the United States. Around this time in the States, an influential analysis of hospital social service departments in New York City was released. Two important questions were especially discussed in the analysis to consider factors which might endanger the efficiency of medical social service. One danger for the social service departments was to be considered by medical staff and hospital authorities as doing just "relief work" and giving out free medicine. To avoid this danger, Marguerite A. Wales of the Social Service Department at Stanford University Hospital, suggested in her 1923 published essay that the department only give emergency relief and refer long-term cases to outside relief agencies.⁵⁵ Another danger for the department was to spend too much time on financial investigation into patients' situations, and to become an attachment of hospital administration, hence losing the department's

⁵⁵ Marguerite A. Wales, "Medical Social Service in the Hospital," *California State Journal of Medicine* 21 (5) (May 1923): 209-211.

own identity. The social service section of the associated out-patient clinics of New York recommended that financial investigation should be only a “temporary function” of the social service department, if such a function could not be totally avoided.⁵⁶

In the survey carried out in the PUMC in 1923, besides the organization of the staff of the medical social service department and their performance, the chiefs of clinics and the hospital committee were also asked to evaluate whether the above two dangers existed in the PUMC which might put the need for such a department into question.

Despite minor defects, Pruitt’s department was seen as very valuable to all clinical departments except for the eye department. G. W. Van Gorder, Chief of the Orthopaedic Department described Pruitt’s Social Service Department as “a tremendous help to the Orthopaedic branch of Surgery.”⁵⁷ The Social Service Department helped Van Gorder’s department arrange accommodations for out-of-town patients who were too poor to afford to stay at an inn, provide employment opportunities for patients who went through arm and leg amputation, find aid for the payment of surgical apparatus for poor patients from outside charity sources. Connecting to outside charity organizations and using outside sources, Pruitt’s department helped the hospital avoid financial loss which might have caused by providing such services free of charge. Another important help which Pruitt’s department provided to the Orthopaedic Department was to follow up hospital cases. It was the only means the Orthopaedic Department had to know the end results of their work on patients whose convalescence needed a long period of time. In Van Gorder’s own words in the same letter,

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ G. W. Van Gorder to T. D. Sloan, March 24, 1923. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Without such aid it would be impossible to make the Orthodaedic Department really efficient and I consider that all of this work is absolutely indispensable to the success of the Orthopaedic Department. The Social Service Department of this hospital has done extremely good work for me and I have no criticisms to make of its endeavors except favorably.

Similarly, John Hammond, Head of the Pediatrics Department expressed high appreciation of the Social Service Department. He deemed “it would be difficult to run a pediatrics clinic without social service work of a high standard in close cooperation,” and even claimed that other clinical departments needed social service work as much as the pediatrics clinic.⁵⁸ Head of the Obstetric and Gynecological Department, J. P. Maxwell acknowledged that the Social Service helped them “considerably” in some of the perplexing cases, especially with illicit pregnancies, and with tracking down lost patients. The Department of Otolaryngology also emphasized the aid of the Social Service in following up cases. They added that in doing so, the Social Service also helped to “obtain valuable material for teaching purposes” and to make the record of Otolaryngology more updated.⁵⁹ Another important function of the Social Service, according to the Department of Otolaryngology, was to “humanize the entire service [of the hospital] and make the patient feel that the institution is interested in their welfare.” In other words, the Social Service Department exhibited the good will of the hospital, and saved the hospital from being seen as a cold-blooded institution which was interested in merely the physical welfare and patients’ records for teaching purposes. Seconding all the above points in which the Medical Social Service assisted clinical departments, Andrew Woods of the Neurological Department added that the Social Service also helped to interpret between the clinician and the patient, especially to explain the meaning of the clinician to the

⁵⁸ John Hammond to T. D. Sloan, March 22, 1923. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

⁵⁹ J. P. Maxwell to T. D. Sloan, March 8, 1923; H. R. Slack to T. D. Sloan, March 6, 1923. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

patients, and to get the background information in neurotic and mental cases for the clinician. Woods recognized such service as “a feat often impossible to the clinician on account of the language difficulty, but particularly on account of the amount of time required.”⁶⁰ On a whole, Woods reported that the Social Service Department had “proven distinctly helpful to the neurological work. With normal development it [would] become indispensable.”

Even in the report from the Eye Department, the only one that saw no need for the Social Service Department, H. J. Howard, Head of that department rendered that the unsuccessfulness of the social service for the Eye Department was not caused by the “sphere of social service pure and simple,” but because of the great difficulties in searching for old cases for return. Howard thought such difficulties could only solved by either a good police officer or a good detective.

Based on the almost unanimous recognition of social service work at the hospital, both Dwight Sloan, the hospital superintendent and Henry Houghton resolutely affirmed the Trustees of importance of the Social Service Department for the PUMC. Sloan thought that medical social service was “not only a desirable but a very essential factor in the hospital organization” and “a distinct asset” because the department created a favorable impression to the patients and secured their cooperation, and because it increased the efficiency of the clinics.⁶¹ Henry Houghton, Director of the College, having observed the conduct of the medical social service work first hand, stated such work was “of great importance to the hospital and scarcely less to the professional and scientific

⁶⁰ Andrew Woods to T. D. Sloan, March 7, 1923. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

⁶¹ T. D. Sloan, “Medical Social Service at the Peking Union Medical College,” April 5, 1923. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

work of the clinical departments.”⁶² As to Ida Pruitt’s own work, both Sloan and Houghton expressed their appreciation of Ida Pruitt’s leadership in the department, despite minor weakness in case recording and executive ability, thinking her excellent command of Mandarin and ability to get on with the Chinese people “an immense asset.”⁶³ Sloan also saw Pruitt as “persona grata with the Chinese,” winning trust from the Chinese for the hospital.

Concerning the worries which were going on in the United States about medical social work doing general social service or administrative work, which endangered the independent identity of medical social service and put the necessity of such a department at a hospital into question, most of the people surveyed at the PUMC thought such worries irreverent to the PUMC situation. Sloan stated that it was not fair to compare medical social service in the United States and China because the charitable organizations in the two countries were too different. As Ida Pruitt explained in her own report about the department, although the department drew assistance from many Chinese resources and charitable organizations, the department did not turn over the control of cases to the charitable organizations so as to guarantee the efficiency of the patients’ treatment.⁶⁴

Due to the common affirmation of the performance of Social Service Department from all sides at the PUMC, the hospital committee recommended to the Trustees to increase the staff and funding of Pruitt’s department. However, the Trustees in New York seemed not to be in tune with the hospital committee in Peking regarding Pruitt’s work. In contrast to the pages of high praise from clinical chiefs and administrators at the

⁶² H. S. Houghton to R. S. Greene, April 5, 1923. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

⁶³ T. D. Sloan to H. S. Houghton, April 4, 1923. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

⁶⁴ Ida Pruitt to T. D. Sloan, March 20, 1923. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

PUMC, Roger Greene, on behalf of the Trustees in New York, replied to Henry Houghton two months after the survey, “Some of us are inclined to question whether we ought not to look forward to terminating our connection with Miss Pruitt on the expiration of her present appointment since there is grave question whether she is qualified to develop the work in an original and constructive manner.”⁶⁵ Apparently, the judgment of Pruitt’s professional conduct by some of the Trustees was based not on opinions of the people who worked together with her in Peking, but some presumptions probably still drawn from her training in the US two years ago.

Even though some of the Trustees of the PUMC turned a deaf ear to the voices from the clinics and remained arbitrarily judgmental to Ida Pruitt’s executive ability in social service work, the 1923 evaluation of Pruitt’s work was relatively democratic in that the PUMC administrative authorities collected feedback from all clinic departments with which Pruitt and her department cooperated, and such feedback was kept in complete written record. Even though some Chiefs in clinics were overly confident and comfortable in offering their judgment about the “right” directions for future development of medical social service (despite the fact that they did not have any experience in such a field either in China or the United States), they all acknowledged the great contribution of medical social work to their departments. Pruitt’s career survived through that evaluation, and she managed to expand her staff afterward. However, as her first four-year term of service was completed in 1925, and during the discussion of renewing her contract with the PUMC, another round of assessment of her work followed,

⁶⁵ Roger S. Green to Henry S. Houghton, June 23, 1923. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

this time only by the managing authorities (without consulting the clinics), and she encountered more severe threat in her career.

Opinions from Ida Pruitt's Female Colleagues

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Ida Pruitt remembered her first years at the PUMC as happy. At the end of her first term of service, she was optimistically planning her one-year furlough in the US and considering adding new blood to her department after the furlough. Things went well as she had thought in the beginning. On November 4, 1925, the hospital committee passed their recommendation to reappoint Pruitt for a second term of three years. This recommendation, however, pushed Harriet Barchet, the secretary of Director of the PUMC to write a letter of strong disagreement to the secretary of China Medical Board in New York, Margery K. Eggleston. Things started to changed dramatically for Pruitt due to this letter. Barchet explained to Eggleston that Pruitt's reappointment was not rightly justified. According to her, the medical superintendent (J. Heng Liu) could not get along with Pruitt, and did not approve of her methods or organization or point of view. In addition, many other people complained about Pruitt to her:

Some time ago Ruth [Superintendent of Nursing School] said to me she was deeply troubled about Ida – her personal point of view was so warped, her religious life was so nearly nil, and her speech so bitter, Ruth shook her head and sighed. Since then several have spoken to me about this woman – her seeming to go out of her way to annoy people; her inability to get results which ought to follow in of themselves; her deplorable lack of business tidiness; her really shocking statements of personal belief and aims. I see so little of her that personally we have had no jars the last two years; but that does not interfere with reverberations reaching me of jars with others. Mrs. S. T. Wang – deeply interested in medical social service as she is, and trained in certain lines of similar endeavor – was glad to be able to say she was promised for teaching and hence would not be free to help, even with advice, in Miss Pruitt's difficulties. Mrs. Read grows hot whenever her name (IP's) is mentioned. Worse yet, I cannot learn

anything cheerful from the Chinese with whom she works. Her growing ungovernable temper, her unreasonableness, her distressing dilatoriness, all come in for a share of scornful comment. ...One of the faculty spoke of her as a distinct menace to the good name of our institution, in almost every line of conduct. This is too sweeping, but still there is much truth in it.⁶⁶

Barchet claimed that Ida Pruitt was reappointed only because the hospital could not find someone else suitable to replace her yet, and because one or two of the hospital committee members were Pruitt's personal friends.

Margery Eggleston was deeply disturbed by Barchet's letter, and reported the situation to Henry S. Houghton who was in Toronto then. They agreed that they should ask the PUMC administrators in Peking to reevaluate the reappointment of Ida Pruitt. Pruitt's reappointment was reconsidered in Peking accordingly, and the term of her reappointment was reduced from three years to two years. The hospital committee acknowledged to Eggleston that they were aware of problems in Pruitt's management and her personal contention with some other colleagues, especially with her assistant Isabel Ingram and the medical superintendent J. Heng Liu, but they were not ready for drastic change in Social Service Department yet, due to lack of suitable candidate and thorough understanding to the field of hospital social service. Although no other people wrote similarly bitter words as Barchet did about Pruitt's work anymore, Pruitt's position at the PUMC was put into serious question in the next year while she was in furlough.

How did Ida Pruitt change from "the persona grata" to all in 1923 to "a distinct menace to the good name" of the PUMC? Or did such a change really take place? A careful examination of the difference between the group of people who assessed Pruitt's work in 1923 and that in 1925 tells stories hidden behind the letters. In 1923, chiefs of

⁶⁶ Harriet Barchet to M. K. Eggleston, November 13, 1925. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

clinics evaluated Ida Pruitt and the Social Service Department in view of the department's help to their clinical work; in 1925, Harriet Barchet stood for women colleagues at the PUMC in view of Pruitt's standpoint on women's role in a helping profession. If the 1923 survey on medical social service in the PUMC exhibited the male physician's opinions on a new emerging field for women's profession (therefore those men were less critical since Pruitt's role was to help them without menacing their secure positions at the hospital), the 1925 dispute on Pruitt's work revealed contradictory views on women's helping role and on womanhood in general. Pruitt's female colleagues' comments on her work were so much bitterer most probably because Pruitt's role posed menace to the security of their ideals on middleclass womanhood.

Ironically, the Ida Pruitt whose "point of view was so warped" and whose "speech so bitter" in Barchet's letter did not utter equally bitter words like those of Barchet's in any written record. However, a piece of Pruitt's matter-of-fact writing indicates a glimpse from her side why she antagonized some women who may be the Mrs. Wang and Mrs. Read in Barchet's letter. In an unpublished chapter about her social service work, Pruitt wrote about poverty in Peking and her and others' ways of dealing with it in social work:

We [the Social Service Department] saw misery and poverty hidden away in the back hutongs and courtyards, some of which came to the clinics. But we did not waste any time or pity on those who had adjusted well enough to the culture of their day to be making a fair living. They should, of course, be dealt with, but it was no social cure to take one off the street, though that also had sometimes to be done. The cause must be dealt with. Some westerner was, however, forever coming into the social service to talk about the babies the beggar women carried in their arms.

A delegation of wives of our doctors came in one day and sat in a small semi-circle around me. "We have come for your help," they said, "we want to establish an orphanage and gather the babies from off the streets."

I shocked the delegation by saying, "They (the beggar women) would only get other babies to carry around if you were able to persuade them to give up the

ones they are now carrying. And why take the babies, anyway, away from their mothers or foster mothers?"

"They are starving, poor women, and it is so bad for the babies to be on the streets."

"No woman who can run after a speeding rickshaw as fast as they can is starving," I replied. "And the babies are dirty but their cheeks are plump and red." I did not say what I felt that the babies brought up in the sunshine and gayety of a Peking street and given enough to eat, and I was sure those had, were really quite well off.⁶⁷

Dialogues as quoted above must be some samples of Pruitt's "shocking statements of personal belief and aims" which was severely deplored in Barchet's letter. Pruitt might have avoided such shocking moments for the wives of the doctors if she had patiently explained Peking's situation to them in a milder way. However, as Pruitt explains above, some westerners was "forever" going to see her with one single focus on the beggar women and their babies in streets, which had worn her patience away. When Pruitt tried to explain to these wives about places where they could use their love and compassion more effectively, such as "poor families who cannot support all the children they have," or "children out of wedlock" who could not be taken home because the mother would become a social outcast in Peking society, the committee of women replied:

"Then we will rent a little compound and get the little beds and soon we'll have the babies in the clean white rooms. How nice they will look in a row with their little clean faces and their little clean pinafores."

My heart sank. But part of the work of social service is to explain society and its needs to those who want to help. "Children are much happier and do better in private homes. We could set up a society and raise the money to board out the children in private homes."

This was not so thrilling. There were many objections. Those homes were not hygienic. Chinese would not take care of other people's children. They never had heard of boarding homes for children.⁶⁸

Pruitt's methods of helping dependent babies, to board them in private homes and eventually give parentless babies in adoption to suitable families were not her invention.

⁶⁷ Ida Pruitt, unpublished manuscript re: PUMC, social work, n.d. Ida Pruitt Papers, Schlesinger Library.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Social work in the United States of the same period supported similar approach. As Ida Cannon puts it regarding institutional vs. home care for children, it was “the firm belief of all of us [hospital social workers at Massachusetts General Hospital] that the next best place for a child after his own home is a well-selected foster home.”⁶⁹ However, Pruitt’s approach became especially problematic when the location was in China, since those western and westernized wives of doctors had great suspicion of Chinese standard of hygiene and prejudice on Chinese mothers’ attitude toward other people’s children. Such views reflected a condescending attitude toward Chinese motherhood. In their opinions, an orphanage organized by themselves would be do much more good to the parentless children than putting them into Chinese foster homes – homes maintained by the shoemaker’s wife, the carpenter’s wife and wives of soldiers. While those wives of the doctors felt confident about their love and compassion to the babies, they doubted Chinese foster mothers’ love, who actually took care of the babies day to day, and “disliked parting from [the babies] when the inevitable time came that they returned to their own homes or were adopted.”⁷⁰ In contrast to the foster mothers who took the babies into their real daily life, the wives of doctors imagined the babies as happy and healthy at the “clean” orphanage where one single nanny was paid to take care of a dozen babies.

Ida Pruitt could not have persuaded the overly confident wives of the doctors had it not for the authority of an American child specialist, Dr. L. Emmett Holt, who was visiting the PUMC during Pruitt’s dispute with the wives. He supported Pruitt and advised the wives to participate in building the Home Finding Society in 1924. The

⁶⁹ Cannon, *On the Social Frontier of Medicine*, p. 112.

⁷⁰ Ida Pruitt, unpublished manuscript re: PUMC, social work. Schlesinger Library.

Society was constituted of a board of Americans and Chinese women and a Chinese social worker. According to Pruitt, she picked this social worker for this society because although this social worker married well, to a successful dentist, she was brought up in a rural village and therefore could talk with foster mothers about things to pay attention to about the babies.

This incident reflects common conflicts in Ida Pruitt's social work caused by class, racial and cultural differences. Having been brought up in rural China, like the Chinese social worker she picked for the Home Finding Society, Pruitt understood and even felt identified with Chinese tradition, hence she held much less prejudice against Chinese ways of raising children than other westerners. Although she was well-off with her foreign salary in China, she had gone through poverty while she was a trainee social worker in Boston, when she had to wash the only dress she possessed every evening after work. Therefore she respected and understood the struggle of poor families she worked with in Peking, but appeared impatient and angry with the westerners who were too complacent of their "superiority."

Another incident which happened much earlier in Pruitt's life helps explain why it was hard for Pruitt to hide her rage toward people like the above wives, and why she incurred antagonism from them. She wrote about an outburst of her indignation towards an American young man when she was principal of the Girls' School in Chefoo. The young man taught in Tientsin, and was visiting Pruitt's family in Chefoo for the summer. Pruitt had dislike him because of his pretentiousness: bragging his knowledge of "pure art" to her 15-year-old impressionable brother, the only person who would listen to him; carrying a poetry book when they went to the hills for picnic. "It's forever falling out of

his pocket. It never came out in another way. He never reads it. He sees nothing of the poetry of the temples and hills and the people around him. He says he loves the Chinese. He does not even see them.”⁷¹ One day Pruitt was sitting on the porch of the house when the young man rushed toward the well in the courtyard to help one of Pruitt’s girl students who was carrying a small pail of water with ease.

He ran down the path and seized the handle of the pail. She hang on for she wanted the water and she had no idea of what he was trying to do unless it was to take the water for his own use. He spoke no Chinese and she no English. Her face turned red. Her shoulders curved with embarrassment.

There was a smugness of his conscious gallantry, as he came back to the porch, that made me more angry [*sic*] than I already was. I would not have spoken to him if it were not that I must protect the girls in the school from annoyance and possible gossip. I wondered as he came back up the path, that there could be people who saw only the narrow pattern of their own way of life and were unwilling or unable to grant there were any others.

“Don’t do that. She can carry it perfectly well.”

“Isn’t she as good as we are?”

“Of course. But that is not the point. You embarrass her. She is perfectly capable of carrying that small pail of water. There’s no need to help. If it had been really heavy there would have been some point to what you did and she would have understood. She’s an unmarried girl and young. According to the ways she has been brought up you, as a young man, should have ignored her existence.”

“I didn’t know you have an evil mind.

What could one do with so stupid a fool?

“Leave the girls alone and think what you will of me.”⁷²

Ida Pruitt was angry with the young man because he was ignorant of the local customs and refused to observe and learn – since he even did not see the Chinese, according to Pruitt’s observation of him. Having no sense of propriety, the young man violated a common taboo when he tried to grab the pail from the unmarried young girl; unsurprisingly he failed to notice the girl’s embarrassment since he was absorbed in the good feeling that he was a hero-like figure eager to “help the weak.” Had Ida Pruitt had more tolerance towards such a sense of superiority and explained the custom to the young

⁷¹ Ida Pruitt, Draft F, Untitled. Schlesinger Library.

⁷² Ibid.

man in detail, she might have avoided being seen as someone “with an evil mind” by him. However, her indignation was too strong, and the young man must have left Chefoo with the impression that Ida Pruitt’s “personal point of view was so warped... and her speech so bitter,” like how Harriet Barchet and the wives of the doctors at the PUMC considered of her due to many similar situations when Pruitt was impatient with those people’s sense of “help giving” and “power possessing,” and when those people “saw only the narrow pattern of their own way of life” and refused to grant other people’s ways of living.

As Ida Pruitt had opened up the field of medical social service in the PUMC, the influence of her department at the hospital increased; consequently, the department became a place “where the contacts with numerous departments and with all sorts of individuals are constant and produce friction very easily.”⁷³ Apparently, Ida Pruitt was able to handle the various contacts at her work and fairly successfully avoid much friction, as the 1923 survey on Ida Pruitt’s work and her department among chiefs of clinical departments reveals. As medical social service started to take ground, it attracted more middle class women to participate the work, but the side effect was arising disputes among those women trying to define this field by themselves. Therefore, the 1925 disputes regarding Pruitt’s approaches to helping the Chinese among her female colleagues reflects a middle class women’s perceptions to this female profession and its implications on womanhood and motherhood.

⁷³ Henry H. Houghton, Memorandum of conference with J. Heng Liu, Ida Pruitt and Henry H. Houghton, October 29, 1924. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center. The conference of the three was to discuss candidates for assistant to Pruitt, a position left vacant by the former assistant, Mabel Galt’s marriage. Houghton described medical social service in the above quote in this context: one of the candidates, Miss Simpson was favored by J. Heng Liu, but Houghton deemed her unfit for the position because he found she had difficulty in getting along with her colleagues at another organization, and he doubted if Miss Simpson could be a person with a stable disposition, which was essential for medical social service work at the PUMC.

Male Authorities' Second Thoughts

Ida Pruitt's female colleagues consequently had the PUMC male administrators reconsider the renewal of Pruitt's contract with the school. During her furlough year (1926-27) in the US, the PUMC seriously discussed replacing Pruitt with someone else. The officers in China Medical Board in the New York office, especially Henry Houghton and Margery Eggleston urged the PUMC administrators in Peking to investigate the issue, and to find a replacement. The hospital superintendent, J. Heng Liu and heads of clinical departments who serve on the hospital committee, however, insisted in reappointing Pruitt for two more years. Even though Liu personally did not get along well with Pruitt, he insisted that he was not ready to make any other recommendation because he did not have enough understanding of the new development in medical social service field in the US yet to form a fair estimate of Pruitt's work at the PUMC. He would rather wait for another year until he would go to the States and carefully study the field there before he could make confident recommendation to the reorganization of the Social Service Department at the PUMC.

Although Liu and the hospital committee recognized the shortcomings of Pruitt's "indefinite methods of work" and "difficulty in getting along with other people,"⁷⁴ they emphasized more on her training and experience in medical social work which no other available candidate possessed. They also pointed out that Pruitt's problems in getting

⁷⁴ Margery K. Eggleston to Harriet Barchet, December 14, 1925. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center. Ida Pruitt's biographer, Marjorie King analyzes that Pruitt's administrative ability was criticized because she took a mediator and family matriarch role in her departmental management, instead of a professional administrator. Deeply identified with the strong matriarch figure within traditional Chinese family, Pruitt's grandmother/mother-in-law style of management of her department sometimes was at odds with the Western-educated, urban social workers who preferred the American pattern of relationships between professional colleagues. See Marjorie King, "Chief of Social Service, Departmental Dowager, and a Dangerous Woman," in *China's American Daughter: Ida Pruitt (1888-1985)* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2006), 65-81.

along with others seemed to lie mainly in getting along with Liu and the assistant at Pruitt's department, Isabel Ingram.⁷⁵ The administration in Peking disagree with those in New York in choosing a visiting social worker from the States to replace Pruitt during Ingram's furlough year – thinking the mastery of Chinese language and understanding of the local society indispensable to the position; they also felt uncertain with the New York's suggestion of putting Ingram to the chief position, considering her still lack of professional training and experience in social service. As Liu argued, he needed to observe how Ingram could perform alone without Pruitt's supervision during Pruitt's furlough to decide whether she would be suitable for the job.

The different standards in selecting social service staff between Peking and New York administrations of the PUMC revealed different perceptions of medical social work among them. Hospital administrators in Peking worked closely with Ida Pruitt and the Social Service Department on daily basis, thus understanding the importance of the professional standards of social work which Pruitt tried to set up in her department. The foundation officers in New York, on the contrary, assumed social service could be done by any women with a college education of any discipline. They did not realize the importance of professional training in this field, or the value of deep understanding of the Chinese society in the work. That was the reason they were so easily convinced of Pruitt's "fatal shortcomings" by the report of bickering between Pruitt and the volunteer helpers among wives of doctors.

Isabel Ingram, the assistant of Pruitt who was suggested to replace Ida Pruitt after some practice and training by the administration in New York, maintained a high profile

⁷⁵ W. S. Carter to Margery K. Eggleston, January 21, 1926. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

in the foreign community. She had been the tutor of Wan Rong, empress and wife of the last emperor of China, and appeared in Western news as the American who educated the empress, same as the English tutors of the last emperor, Reginald Fleming and Reginald Johnston. A 1924 report in *Time*, for example, described the emperor and empress acquiring English names and educated by their tutors about Western ways and democracy.⁷⁶ The image of the attractive American tutor teaching Chinese empress must have been a comforting one to American news readers, boosting their complacency with the idea that Americans were teaching Chinese, even the empress, about the modern and Western ways.

Such an idea, however, is exactly what Pruitt had been angry about long since her years in the missionary community in China. She identified with the Chinese heritage and hated to change them according to Western ideas. While there must be personality issues that make the two – Pruitt and Ingram in conflict, different ideas regarding to changes in China must have also been one of the reasons why they did not get along well.

On the other hand, the foundation officer's eventual hesitation in choosing Ingram as the chief social worker for the hospital also reflects the predicament of women professionals' career choices and married life at that period. In Henry Houghton's words, Ingram was "young and a person of more than ordinary pulchritude and charm so that [their] chances of finding in her a permanent worker seem small."⁷⁷ Similarly, another

⁷⁶ "China: Henry the Democrat," *Time*, May 12, 1924. Similar mentions of Isabel Ingram appeared in a *New York Times* article "Empress to Leave Manchukuo Home" (November 21, 1934), 13; and a *Life* article "Pu Yi" by Ben Bruce Blakeney (July 16, 1945), 79.

⁷⁷ Henry S. Houghton to Margery K. Eggleston, December 11, 1925. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

candidate, Chen Kechun, was considered capable, but again she was thought to be “too good looking to last long as a single woman” and maintain her work at the hospital.⁷⁸

Lack of other suitable and qualified candidates, the PUMC authorities’ affirmation of Pruitt’s knowledge about China and professional training, and their insistence on more careful consideration of the development of medical social work, all contributed to reappointment of Pruitt for two years (the usual contract term being four years). In addition, Janet Thornton, Director of Social Service at the Presbyterian Hospital in New York, where Pruitt received further training during her 1926-27 furlough, also provided positive feedback on Pruitt’s work to the foundation officials, praising Pruitt’s “sincere enthusiasm for the work,” impressive knowledge of social work, “kindness toward patients,” and easily getting along with other people.⁷⁹ Although Thornton agreed that Pruitt had shortcomings in organization, and deemed her work not brilliant (but sound and reliable), she thought Pruitt’s special qualification for service in China and her hard working could compensate it and make her valuable for the PUMC.

Ida Pruitt Defining Her New Field

After four years of trial period (1927-1931), in which Ida Pruitt had to renew her contract with the PUMC biannually, her position as head social worker became secure again. Not only did her contract last the normal four years again starting from 1931, but also her designation changed from “Medical Social Service Worker” to “Chief of

⁷⁸ Henry S. Houghton interview with J. Heng Liu, September 16, 1926. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

⁷⁹ Janet Thornton to Margery K. Eggleston, January 31, 1927; Margery K. Eggleston to Henry S. Houghton, March 16, 1927. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Hospital Social Service.”⁸⁰ Neither the Rockefeller Archives nor Ida Pruitt’s own writing revealed the minute reasons why such change in the judgment of Pruitt’s work took place during that trial period. The only clues are, first, Isabel Ingram, the one with whom the PUMC had considered to replace Pruitt, left the hospital in early 1927; second, two official reports of the medical social service work written by Pruitt in 1928 and 1930 respectively, in which Pruitt explains medical social service work. The different styles of writing between the two reports reveal changes in Pruitt’s views concerning the meaning, significance and methods of her work. The first report in 1928 was unpublished and seemed to have only circulated among the hospital administrators; it was followed by another two-year trial. The second report was published by the PUMC Press and therefore must have satisfied the school authorities, resulting in a normal four-year contract for Pruitt.

In the 1928 report, Pruitt mainly recalled the first two years of service and explained why medical social work could function at the PUMC. In particular, she focused on the two questions which the department tackled at the initiative stage: “Would the Chinese allow the workers into their homes?” and “Were there enough outside resources to allow the department to do its ordinary work?”⁸¹ They found no difficulties getting into Chinese homes, but demanding tasks in cooperating with Chinese outside resources. Working independently with patients, the Social Service Department did follow up work, brought in diagnostic information for the doctors, and tried to persuade and plan for the patients to coordinate with the doctor, and to re-organize homes to suit

⁸⁰ Ida Pruitt to Roger S. Greene, May 21, 1931; S. T. Wang to Ida Pruitt, May 4, 1931. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

⁸¹ Ida Pruitt, “Medical Social Service at the Peking Union Medical College,” unpublished essay written in 1928. CMB Inc. Collection, Rockefeller Archive Center.

the changed need of a sick person. It also maintained a convalescent hostel for men and another for women and children, which did the interim work no other agencies did in Peking. When cooperating with outside agencies, such as orphanages, homes for the old and crippled, poor houses and schools for the blind and the deaf, the department still kept control of each case because other agencies did not take case work approach.

After a summary of the major functions of the hospital social service, Pruitt divided the cases into four categories: cases with no need of outside resources; cases cared for by wholly social serve which would normally be aided by other agencies; cases referred to other agencies; and cases the department had to drop. Detailed examples of each category were given and accounted for the main body of the report. For instance, the case of Li Liu Shi was under the first category. Li Liu Shi was referred by the Neurology Department for home investigation in order to determine the diagnosis, since the physical examination found no causes for her trouble. The social worker interviewed the patient, her husband and the other wife at home and found out the story of the family. Li Liu Shi was a widow when she was asked by her current husband for marriage, who claimed to be a single man. Two years after their marriage, however, the other wife from the country appeared and entitled herself as the first wife, ordered the patient around at home. Funds were tight for the family and bickering was constant. Being ambitious and strong-minded, Li Liu Shi got into her troubled condition and had to see the doctor at the PUMC. The doctor was able to make his diagnosis, and the Social Service Department helped the patient, the more intelligent wife to get a job outside home, and persuaded the other woman to do the housework.

Ida Pruitt went great length to describe each patient's situations involved in case work, but did not elaborate on the specific methods or importance of social work per se for the hospital. Her report reads more like the life stories of the patients rather than a summary of the work of her department. In evaluating her case records, she used merely one sentence, quoting a visitor's words, "Your records read just like the ones I was used to at home [in the States]." ⁸² Such an angle of focus in her writing does not answer the questions of her major audience, the hospital administrators who were more interested in how the department functioned for the hospital.

In comparison, her 1930 report was more technical, explaining much more thoroughly the knowledge of the medical social service field, its methods and division of specific labor within the department. The patients became statistical numbers in tables or numbered case abstracts, with their names and details of their situation eliminated. Such impersonal writing style makes the report look more professional, though against Pruitt's fondness of the personal and humane touch in her work.

Introducing the field of medical social work, Pruitt tried to convince her reader that hospital social serve deals more than the poor or merely giving out money. Taking a strategy similar to early social workers in the United States, Pruitt claimed that the social service aimed the same as the doctors in learning the causes of all disability and removing those causes. In her effort to emphasize the significance of her field, she stressed that "in social service the collection of social facts and the weighing of them are very important preliminaries to any action, and the studying of causes and the relieving of

⁸² Ibid.

distress must both be done as in any other branches of medicine.”⁸³ Similarly, when describing the case work method of medical social service, Pruitt positioned the patients as subject of study for the social workers: “Each patient is studied separately, from the personal, family and community points of view.”

Regarding the development of the medical social service in the PUMC, Pruitt divided it into three stages (while the 1928 report mentioned only the first stage). The first stage was to prove that hospital social work could be done at the PUMC and even more needed and effective than in America because there were less other agencies in China. The second stage was to organize the department according to careful studies of each clinical department, to recruit workers and train them. After building a solid staff, the third stage was a closer affiliation between the social workers and the medical staff.

Pruitt must have been aware of the complaint from the hospital authorities on her previous unorganized method of recording, for she had a specific section on it in this report. She emphasized that “A new system of recording and apportioning the work was put into practice. All social information, problems found, and solutions of difficulties are entered in the medical history and bound with medical and nursing notes on the patient’s condition.” The case records were attached towards the end of the report, each including sections of Diagnosis, Investigation, Findings, Problem, Service and Result in bullet format. Such format was very much similar to the ones adopted by social workers in the

⁸³ Ida Pruitt, *Two Years’ Report 1927-1929 of the Hospital Social Service Peiping Union Medical College*. Peiping, China: PUMC Press, 1930.

United States, as shown in Janet Thornton and Marjorie Strauss Knauth's 1937 textbook on medical social service.⁸⁴

Pruitt may also have heard about the criticisms (especially those from her Boston and New York trainers) about her work lacking “innovation” and “creativity,” and she wrote about new method of allocating social workers to different clinical departments and described it as one of the innovations of her department. It proved to be beneficial to both the doctors and the social workers, according to the report, for the fixed partners at work became accustomed to each other and the collaboration was more efficient. Pruitt elaborated each sub-branch of the hospital social service, ranging from pediatric service, cardiac service, Kala-Azar Service, Tuberculosis Service to special services, follow-up services and public health. In addition, she highlighted the teaching and research elements in her work.

Pruitt's 1930 report seems to be effective in demonstrating to the hospital authorities of her improved professional and executive abilities. After she received the external affirmation of her performance at work, however, these years of outside doubt seemed to have planted seeds in her heart. Although her position at the hospital finally became relatively stable and generally accepted, she herself started to internally question the methods of her own social service work, wondering whether such a profession was an effective approach to express her concerns to society and life, and whether it was what she really loved to do. Such a bout of self doubt in her career came together with a

⁸⁴ Janet Thornton and Marjorie Strauss Knauth, *The Social Component in Medical Care: A Study of One Hundred Cases from the Presbyterian Hospital in the City of New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937).

personal crisis in Pruitt's emotional life. That was the context when Pruitt wrote in a letter that she did not want to be a "noble soul."

**“Live as a Sane and Balanced Woman”
– Social Work and Other Expressions of Life**

I must live in this world as a woman of forty even if I have missed some of the intervening steps. And I must live as a sane and balanced woman. That is why I went to Dr. Taylor and that is what she is doing for me... I may have forty years yet to live and I can't live them in phantasy[sic] as I did the first years, not in your love as I did those beautiful four years in Peking. I must live them and I want to live them successfully. And success means so many different things to so many people. I am successful in my job, but not in love. So to myself I am a failure no matter what others may think. I must re-adjust my mind on that, and I cannot do it alone.⁸⁵

Ida Pruitt wrote this on the day before Christmas in 1932, and she just had her forty-fourth birthday the day before. Two days before this birthday, she started her first session with a psychiatrist Marianna Taylor in Boston because she was going through a personal crisis. Her lover of four years, John F. McIntosh, a Canadian doctor who worked at the Department of Medicine at the PUMC, returned to Montreal, and tried to dodge Pruitt's request of marriage. Such an escape only made Pruitt clingier to the relationship; she arranged a trip to Boston and New York to study new development of medical social service in the States, but in actuality she was waiting for McIntosh, who was in Montreal, to agree to marry her. It was a time of tribulation for Pruitt. Although she had a secure and well paid position at the PUMC, she became secretly resistant to the medical social work. She was afraid to return to Peking to be absorbed by the work, and wanted to focus her energy on writing about China. On top of her agitation caused by her change of professional interest, she was haunted by her sense of failure because she was unmarried.

⁸⁵ Ida Pruitt to John F. McIntosh, December 24, 1925. Papers of Ida Pruitt and Marjorie King, Schlesinger Library.

She was at a loss about the ways that expressed herself well; the only thing she was sure was that the right expression was not social work, and she was contemplating that maybe writing and marriage were the right expressions for her. She struggled so hard to be “a sane and balanced woman” that she was at the verge of insanity. The mental depression in return exhausted her physically.

Why do I write about the most depressing period in Pruitt’s life? Do I have the rights to disclose the deepest secrets in her love life? Perhaps she herself would not want people to know the Ida Pruitt who was at the lowest point as a woman, desperately and repetitively begging for marriage (fortunately it was a very short period in Pruitt’s 97-year-long life – the depression lasted about 4 months; while her life was filled with passionate mutual love even till her old age). Yet she kept all the letters between McIntosh and her intact. Before McIntosh got married with another woman, he asked Pruitt whether he should send her previous letters back to her. Pruitt replied that she would like her letters: “They contain a lot of materials that I would like to keep.”⁸⁶ Eventually, she leaves all the letters to the public in the archives at Schlesinger Library. Such a gesture of Pruitt’s indicates that she has long since been at peace with a perturbing past, as she wrote shortly after she returned to Peking from this stay in Boston, “[Dr. Taylor] has made it possible for me to come back to Peking and start my life here in a new way and in what I hope will be a satisfactory way. I am quite amazed to see how different things are to me. But you will see it in my letters, I hope.”⁸⁷ The letters of her depression period read definitely different from those after that period. The fact that

⁸⁶ John F. McIntosh to Ida Pruitt, July 19, 1933; Ida Pruitt to John F. McIntosh, September 6, 1933. Papers of Ida Pruitt and Marjorie King, Schlesinger Library.

⁸⁷ Ida Pruitt to John F. McIntosh, May 2, 1933. Papers of Ida Pruitt and Marjorie King, Schlesinger Library.

Pruitt overcomes her sense of failure and depression teaches meaningful lesson for many woman. The process reveals the *insanity* of the standard that makes modern women “sane and balanced,” sometimes at the expense of their real health and happiness.

Women Can Have Everything?

Ida Pruitt belongs to a generation of women who were bestowed with unprecedented freedom and opportunities. For example, in her writing about her first voting experience in 1920’s presidential election, she noticed that she enjoyed the new rights to vote in Boston despite her short stay there because “all women were to vote.”⁸⁸ A similar temporary stay would not have given a man such a right to vote there. While such historical victory for women was well recorded and celebrated in the history of feminism, a regression which happened at the same time was rarely considered together. The same year when American women gained the rights to vote, the Businessmen’s League, basically several big hotel owners in Atlantic City, came up with a plan to prolong the tourist season and make more money.⁸⁹ Consequently the next year, 1921 saw the first Miss America competition. The first winner of Miss America, Margaret Gorman, was crowned and wrapped in an American flag, and paraded around. The president of the American Federation of Labor, Samuel Gompers, commented on Gorman’s win and was quoted by the *New York Times*: “She represents the type of womanhood America needs – strong, red blooded, able to shoulder the responsibilities of

⁸⁸ Ida Pruitt, Unpublished writing on her study of social service with Ida Cannon. Box 28. Ida Pruitt Papers, Schlesinger Library.

⁸⁹ I appreciate the documentary film maker, Darryl Roberts, who notice the contrast between the women’s suffrage and the birth of the first Miss America in his film *America the Beautiful* (2007).

homemaking and motherhood. It is in her type that the hope of the country rests.”⁹⁰ The coincidence of the Women’s Suffrage and the Miss America pageant is symbolic of the predicament of modern women in a patriarchic system. Young women’s political and professional rights were acknowledged on the surface, but they were also told by the “king of workforce” that what they were really valued for was to uphold the burden of homemaking and motherhood.

Such an ironic parallel creates an illusion that women can have everything, and they can be a successful homemaker and accomplished career woman at the same time. Many women embrace such an idea. One of Ida Pruitt’s colleagues at the PUMC, Ye Gongshao, a professor of public health, for example, tried to prove the ideal of a successful modern woman with her own triumphant experience. After the graduation with a PhD in medicine in July 1935, she was assigned to the Public Health Division of the PUMC. She informed the director of the division, Yuan Yijin of her plan to get married in October. The director was very disappointed, and he tried to persuade Ye not to marry. Decades later when she became a renowned professor and government official in public health, she wrote about her early experience of fighting against her male director’s prejudice:

He told me that the PUMC would never send married female doctors abroad for further study because female doctors had to stay with their husbands. He also said that female doctors could not work anymore after giving birth to children. He gave me the examples of Yang Chongrui and Lin Qiaozhi, who was successful because they remained unmarried. As to Shen Jiying, although she was outstanding among the PUMC graduates, after she got married and had children, her work was severely affected and she left the PUMC soon after marriage. Yuan Yijin wanted to persuade me with these examples, but I did not change my mind.

⁹⁰ PBS Documentary, *Miss America: American Experience*, “People & Events: The First Miss America Beauty Pageant, 1921.” Accessed online May 18, 2010 at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/missamerica/peopleevents/e_first.html.

I married Dr. Huang Zhenxiang in October 1935 as planned, and continued to work at the Public Health Division till winter 1941 when the PUMC was forced to close due to the Pearl Harbor Incident. I gave birth to three children in 1936, 1938 and 1940 respectively. Except for using the regular one-month vacation of the PUMC, I did not ask for one more day off. I wanted to use my action to say that married women can continue to work as well, so as to eliminate their feudal view esteeming men above women. I won!⁹¹

I still remember the feeling of empowerment when I first read this part of Ye's essay. It used to tell me as a young feminist scholar of the twenty first century that we can have everything, for women like Ye Gongshao had made it decades before. Experience, more learning and research, however, has made me to come back to this essay and read it deeper between the lines. On the surface, it surely is a feminist manifestation that women should fight against the patriarchic institution which excludes married women from successful career. It integrates women's domestic and professional life in a victorious story of one professional woman. However, under the surface, this success story is set off by the "not-so-successful" stories of other women: be it the professionally successful Yang Chongrui and Lin Qiaozhi who had to remain single or the married Shen Jiying who had to eventually quit her job. Thus the "integrated woman" who has both a career and a family is pitted against other types of women who cannot have it all.

Ye Gongshao's story would have revealed more truth and taught us more lessons about women's life and roles if she had told us more background instead of merely the result that she was married as planned, that she had three children and that she had a remarkable career. We do not know how supportive her husband regarding child care, housework and her career. We do not know how much support she obtained from her

⁹¹ Ye Gongshao, "xiehe yixueyuan dui wo yisheng de yingxiang [The Lifelong Influence of the PUMC on me]" in *huashuo lao xiehe [The Old Peking Union Medical College]* (Beijing: Zhongguo Wenshi Chubanshe, 1987), 315.

family and social network, and we do not know how much hardship and how many hurdles she might have endured to have it all. One thing we can know is that her family and she were very well provided. Two doctors' salary at the 1930s and 40s PUMC could definitely allow them to hire domestic servants. In addition, Ye was born into a big wealthy feudal official's family (her father once being Governor of Jiangxi Province and her second big brother, Minister of Transportation). She did disclose at the beginning of this essay that she came from "a big feudal family," and mention her brother's officialdom, but it was to contextualize the difference between her, who rebelled against the patriarchic feudal system, and other women of her big family. As she puts it, "My goal then was to teach at a primary school after graduation so that I could be financially independent. I did not want to be like my sisters and sisters-in-law who completely depended on their husbands after marriage. I disliked the lifestyle of my mother and my sisters-in-law, who spent all their days at a mahjong table." Again, Ye's story of success is accomplished by the foils of her mother and sisters-in-law who subdue themselves to the old feudal system. Ye is definitely not alone in her sense of advancement and accomplishment. After all, are not there many contemporary people, feminists included, who claim how much progress we have made for women's rights in comparison with our mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers? But why do we have to depend on competitions with other women who choose different life styles to achieve a sense of success? Such is the mechanism of a men's institution: even when women break new grounds and gain new privileges, we tend to treat women at different grounds with competitiveness and superiority; we fight with each other to prove that "our" way (be it at home or at work or at both) is the "right" way for women's future. In a sense, such a

“competition of success” is not that different with the beauty contest of Miss America, for the ones on the top have to step on other women. As a result, such competitiveness among women helps to maintain or even add to men’s privileges.

bell hooks is among the few feminists who point out the harm which could be done by the illusion that women can have everything in this society. In an interview with African American film maker Camille Billops, hooks discuss the message Billops intends to convey through her documentary *Finding Christa*. Christa is Billops’s daughter who she gave up for adoption when the daughter was four. The mother did it in order to be able to pursue her own dream of art and adventure. The film shows the mother and the daughter of twenty years later when they met again and tried to reconcile. The following conversation shows Billiop and hooks’s comments on the audience’s different response to Billop and the foster mother Margaret:

CB: They see her [Margaret] as [the Madonna figure and a saint] because they see me as so bad – a monster really. These are primarily males that see me as clearly a bad person. Lots of people felt I could be redeemed if I would only repent.

bh: But you don’t. You refuse to judge yourself, and it is this absence of self-judgment that makes your commitment to pursuing your goal as a woman artist so threatening. This film challenged the notion that you can be *everything*, and this is what makes it subversive to feminism. Contemporary feminism has, in a sense, told a lie to women, all women, cross-race, cross-class. It has said, “You can have everything.” What you brought back into the picture with this documentary is that you cannot be a woman committed to your artistic development and have *everything*.

CB: No.

bh: Especially if you are poor.⁹²

Unlike Ida Pruitt or Ye Gongshao, who self judged themselves either as a “failure” or a “success” according to whether they could be a successful professional woman and

⁹² bell hooks. “Confession – Filming Family: An Interview with Camille Billops” in *Reel to Real: Race, Sex and Class in the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 188-189.

wife, Camille Billop shows no signs of self-judgment in *Finding Christa*. Neither does she portrayed the foster mom Margaret as a saint or a “success,” for together with scenes which exhibits Margaret’s motherly love and care to Christa, the film also includes moments of Margaret’s negligence to her own biological daughter. Despite Billop’s effort to present multiple perspectives and provide insights to women’s lives in a matter-of-fact manner, many audience, “primarily males,” still remain blind to her message and apply male-dominated mainstream standards to judge her and the other mother in the movie. In their eyes, Billop becomes a “monster” because she did not fulfill her motherly duties. The male-centered values to judge women are so deeply rooted in society that the refusal of self-judgment, that is, the refusal to internalize mainstream values has become one of the most difficult challenges to contemporary women. Although it is true that contemporary women have more freedom in career and financially, women are more bound up in men’s values, which now and then results in women’s self doubt and identity crisis.

Ida Pruitt’s Identity Crisis 1: Fulfilling Duties of a Wife

In Ida Pruitt’s case, one major cause of her identity crisis at the turn of 1932 was that she kept judging herself as a failure, thinking that she did not fulfill the generally expected “duty” of a wife. She had been with John F. McIntosh for the last four years, but at the end of 1932, their relationship reached an impasse. Normally when a relationship goes sour, both of the couple are somewhat responsible and many complicated factors inflict damage to a relationship; as to Pruitt and McIntosh, personality difference, age difference (Pruitt is nine years older than McIntosh) and other reasons unknown to outsiders are among the many reasons. However, during this difficult period when Pruitt

was alone in Boston waiting for McIntosh, she first blamed everything to herself – her inability to be a wife. For the moment, marriage seems to be the solution of all problems in her life. Letters after letters, she wrote to McIntosh about her understanding of the roles of a wife:

The function of a wife is to help the man maintain an emotional balance. I am so pleased at the way things are going for you. But naturally, a little sorry that my part is that of absence. Are you sure you don't want to come home at night and tell me all about it? ...

I am more and more impressed with the friendship function of marriage. Dr. and Mrs. Cannon each with her and his own work, discussing together, living together going separately. It is grand. ...I have a clearer conception of the job of wife than I ever did before. You have educated me.⁹³

In another letter a couple of days later, Pruitt declared her determination to take the wife role very seriously:

We have enough to live on and you have me pretty well trained. I now realize that being a wife is a profession just as much as teaching or social service and must be thought out and worked for, after marriage even more than before.⁹⁴

Besides the Mrs. Cannon mentioned in the above letter, Pruitt also tried to measure herself up with other women who appeared to her as happily married. Her letters show that her assumption of a wife's role then was to be a big "help" for the husband, to help his emotional wellbeing and to serve like what she did in her teaching and social service work. Apparently Pruitt thought over and over again about the requirements she should meet to be a wife. Not only did she give her man the entitlement to "educate" and "train" her, but also she judged herself from the standpoint of men, about her function as a woman and wife. Though it was not Pruitt's intention to show the limited career choices for women, she did compare the profession of a wife to teaching and social service – both

⁹³ Ida Pruitt to John F. McIntosh, December 8, 1932. Papers of Ida Pruitt and Marjorie King, Schlesinger Library.

⁹⁴ Ida Pruitt to John F. McIntosh, December 12, 1932. Papers of Ida Pruitt and Marjorie King, Schlesinger Library.

gendered professions for women, instead of other male dominated ones such as sciences or business management. By contrast, there seemed not to be any qualifications required by a husband's role, in Pruitt's thinking then. It seemed to her that a man could be a husband merely by "training" his wife. She made no judgment to McIntosh, but was extremely harsh to herself. When McIntosh blamed her for disturbing his peace by her letters, she even attributed this blame to herself: "Of course you cannot sacrifice your peace of mind to give me mine. What hurts is that I cannot give you peace of mind. That there is something so wrong with me that I fail in the most signal of [a] woman's capacities."⁹⁵ So heavy the burden of self-judgment that Pruitt refused to see that maybe the simple reason she could not be the wife of McIntosh was that they did not fit, instead of anything "wrong" with her or her capacities.

Pruitt's next couple of letters did contain outbursts which interrogated reasons from McIntosh's side. However, unlike the standards she used on herself, she did not question McIntosh's "qualifications" as a husband. Instead, she questioned his love to her. In this sense, she still questioned her abilities as a woman to be loved by men. In one letter she asked whether McIntosh was emotionally homosexual; in another, she suspected that McIntosh dodged her because of the unhappiness of his own family and because of his fear of marriage. However, right after these two letters, Pruitt again blamed herself for everything; she apologized, "Forgive me.... It is either my fault or my misfortune that I am not the suitable wife for you. Please forgive my outburst."⁹⁶ Such

⁹⁵ Ida Pruitt to John F. McIntosh, December 13, 1932. Papers of Ida Pruitt and Marjorie King, Schlesinger Library.

⁹⁶ Ida Pruitt to John F. McIntosh, December 19, 1932. Papers of Ida Pruitt and Marjorie King, Schlesinger Library.

atrocious self judgment, however, instead of keeping her “as a sane and balanced woman” as she was striving for, all the more pushed her away from love.

Ida Pruitt’s Identity Crisis 2: Defining the Value of Helping Others

Another reason of Ida Pruitt’s identity crisis was her hesitation to participate in the PUMC’s new plan for the development of social service work, and consequently, her doubt in social work as the right profession to express herself. Starting from early 1930s, John B. Grant, director of hygiene and public health, succeeded in persuading the PUMC administrators to put more emphasis on public health work. In particular, in 1932, following Grant’s ideas on rural education and reform movement, Chen Zhiqian and Yan Yangchu established a model rural health station in Ding Xian, a county west of Peking. The Ding Xian experiment intended to apply modern Western medicine, publish health and hygiene education to the situations of rural China. Quite different from the PUMC’s elite approach, this model was designed to improve medical conditions from bottom up. This experiment turned out to have improved rural health care and was a very meaningful help to China’s public health per se. Ida Pruitt had no doubt of the meaningfulness of such an effort. In a letter to McIntosh describing her visit to the Ding Xian health station, she described Yan Yangchu as a charming person and a prophet figure; she considered Chen Zhiqian as “one of the greatest men [she has] ever met personally.”⁹⁷

However, what Ida Pruitt had problem with was the PUMC administrators’ way of taking for granted the interchangeability between medical social service and public health nursing. In their assumption, both public health nursing and medical social service

⁹⁷ Ida Pruitt to John F. McIntosh, June 22, 1933. Papers of Ida Pruitt and Marjorie King, Schlesinger Library.

were “women’s work.” Therefore, when public health nurses were in need and could not be found elsewhere, they naturally turn to Pruitt’s Social Service Department for personnel to be engaged in the new endeavor. Pruitt had realized that after her 1932 Christmas vacation in the US, she was expected to devote herself to the new directions of medical social service at the PUMC; after all, to serve and to help had always been the focus of her profession. The problem was that she did not want to merely “help” or being a “noble soul,” if helping and being a noble soul means that she had to change the Chinese customs and habits, for her interest was then in elsewhere.

In a similar way as Pruitt once had escaped her work at the missionary girls school when the mission promoted her, she wanted to escape her social work duties when the PUMC intended to expand social service to the new field of public health. She disclosed to Marianna Taylor in her writing for Taylor’s psychoanalysis session:

I must go back to Peking. I am afraid that I will be very unhappy there. Committee meetings always bore me. I hate the elaboration of social service that will have to come as the next step. It will mean an absorption in the mechanism of co-operation and up-building. I left the teaching field when I saw that coming.⁹⁸

Many changes were happening in social service work in the United States at that time. That was one of the major reasons why Ida Pruitt had to think about the new elaboration of social service which she was supposed to do after her return to Peking. First of all, the social work in the US was heavily influenced by the 1930s depression. As a result, social work in the early 30s turned away from individual case work approaches and became more focused on social reform.⁹⁹ Although China was not hit directly by the depression, the new development of social service in the US spilled over there, as shown in the

⁹⁸ Ida Pruitt, “Intimate History for Psychoanalysis, to Dr. Taylor,” 1933. Schlesinger Library.

⁹⁹ Dan Huff, “Progress and Reform: the Cyborhistory of Social Work’s Formative Years,” Accessed on May 28, 2010. <http://www.boisestate.edu/socwork/dhuff/history/chapts/5-3.htm> .

spread of public health movement and the establishment of rural area health stations mentioned above. Moreover, working at the Rockefeller-funded PUMC, Pruitt had to follow the new trends of her field in the US; she was consequently expected from the PUMC authorities to adjust and develop her Social Service Department according to the newest trends in medical social service in the US. However, she was more interested in individual case work methods than the “uplifting” reform approach which did not allow as much personal connections. As she puts it, “Life is too short for it to be wasted in impersonal things always. That is why I like my babies and my staff and my old lady.”¹⁰⁰ “My babies” refer to her work with the Home Finding Society which was mentioned before in this chapter, through which she facilitated babies to be adopted to foster homes. Pruitt wrote many other times to McIntosh about her love for this type of work. For example, on another occasion during this period, she told McIntosh about her discussion with two other American social workers in Boston about child welfare in China, and concluded that “as you know that is one of my hobbies altogether.”¹⁰¹ “My old lady” refers to Ning Lao Taitai, the protagonist of the Pruitt’s book *A Daughter of Han* which has been analyzed in my last chapter. Pruitt was interviewing her during the period after she returned to Peking from Boston because she wanted to understand more about Chinese customs from Ning Lao Taitai and because she wanted to write about Chinese women. This is another hobby of Pruitt which will be discussed more in detail in the following section. Here I want to clarify that neither Pruitt and I intends to judge which approach – either the individual and more personal case work or the social reforming approach – is better and more effective. The point is that Pruitt’s personal interest lay

¹⁰⁰ Ida Pruitt to John F. McIntosh, June 11, 1933. Schlesinger Library.

¹⁰¹ Ida Pruitt to John F. McIntosh, January 1, 1933. Schlesinger Library.

more in the former, but she had to make adjustment and follow the trend of the latter due to peer pressure from the American social service field and the request of the PUMC authorities.

Secondly, a watershed event in Christian missions happened also during this time, which indirectly but to much extent, affected Pruitt's social service field. A Rockefeller-funded Commission of Appraisal re-examined the Protestant missions in Asia and published its report in November 1932, titled *Re-thinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry After One Hundred Years*. The report advocates treating missions in the modern world "as a matter of social service, and to take a sympathetic, even a syncretic approach to other world religions."¹⁰² Discussing the adjustment which missionaries should make to adapt to the rising nationalism in Asian regions and a more hostile attitude towards Western missionaries who tried to spread evangelicalism in Asian regions, Rufus Jones, a member of the Commission of Appraisal, insisted that missionaries should demonstrate the spirit of Christianity with their lives instead of merely words:

If you can go into a rural neighborhood and teach the mothers how to care for their babies, teach the children, boys and girls, how to play, and be one with them in it, if you can transform the quality of agriculture, if you can lift the economic level of the whole village and make yourself a part of the life of the village while you are doing it, and all that time be revealing the dynamic and central message of Christianity, you will probably get more permanent results than if you will hold a revival meeting of the emotional type and get just a few stirred, and then go off and leave them!¹⁰³

The report was issued with wide publicity and aroused controversial debates among missions at home and abroad. Among the many attention grabbing debates was the

¹⁰² Ruth Compton Brouwer, *Modern Women Modernizing Men: The Changing Missions of Three Professional Women in Asia and Africa, 1902-69* (Toronto: University of British Columbia Press, 2002), 29.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Stephen W. Angell, "Rufus Jones and the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry: How a Quaker Helped to Shape Modern Ecumenical Christianity." *Quaker Theology: A Progressive Journal and Forum for Discussion and Study* 2 (2), 2000, accessed on May 29, 2010 <http://www.quaker.org/quest/issue3-6.html>.

renowned outburst of Pearl Buck's high pitched attack towards the personnel of the missionary enterprise at a large gathering in New York. Buck then supported the modernists who composed this report, opposing the fundamentalists' approach of taking evangelicalism as the ultimate goal of the missions.

Such a splash of publicity of the report definitely affected Ida Pruitt as well, and caused her to rethink her own social service work and evaluate the Commission of Appraisal's ideas on the relations between social service and Christian missions. She discussed this with her friends in New York and wrote to McIntosh about the discussion: "I was thinking of the lack of dynamic force in the modern social service idea, which the Layman's commission advocates."¹⁰⁴ Pruitt did not elaborate the reasoning of her comment, but her reading of Sinclair Lewis's novel, *Ann Vickers* which was published during the same period gives some clues.

Lewis crafts a realistic and at times depressively dark depiction of problems in social work, especially settlement houses and prisons in the 1930s US. For example, the protagonist, Ann Vickers, despite the big success which her position as the head-resident of a settlement house brings to her (invited to address women's clubs, church forums, and girls' schools; awarded honorary M.A. degree by the University of Rochester; listed as one of "The Ten Most Useful Women in Rochester" by local newspaper), often questions herself the value of settlement work. She deems her settlement work as "too parochial," for it covers only a small neighborhood but leaves other neighborhoods which did not have their own settlements without the help in recreation, education, and emergency relief. Ann Vickers connects the settlement house with "the sour smell of charity"

¹⁰⁴ Ida Pruitt to John F. McIntosh, December 14, 1932. Schlesinger Library.

because the functions of charity work such as teaching the poor immigrants could have been done much better by professional teachers than the volunteers who tend to be a combination of “a wealth of ignorance and good intentions.”¹⁰⁵ Therefore, she thinks that the fundamental weakness of settlement houses and “charitable work” is that although “it brings together the well-to-do and the unfortunate,” it does so by reinforcing the power difference between them, and by turning *the essential rights* such as getting jobs and food and education into *charity*; and it allows the people who love authority to get the most of it by dealing with “the timid and unresisting poor.”¹⁰⁶

Ida Pruitt wrote to McIntosh about her unhappiness while reading this novel:

Sinclair Lewis always depresses me and this perhaps more than any. I am a realist but I do think that there is some icing on most of life or a raison or two at least somewhere. Perhaps however the reason I do not like it is that it strikes too near home... the book makes me wonder if all my campaigning for a school for social work and for better admitting office ... is really worth all the time and thought and energy I put into it.¹⁰⁷

Pruitt identified much with the protagonist Ann Vickers because they were of the same age; both had executive positions in social service, striving for ideals of serving the ones in need of help in society; yet both questioned themselves of the value of their help.

Hence Ann Vickers’s cynicism towards the modern organized charity explains why Pruitt considered the lack of dynamic force in modern social service.

Ida Pruitt’s Identity Crisis 3: Seeking her Own Expression in Work

Another important cause of Ida Pruitt’s identity crisis was the competition of her urge of creative writing with her duties in social service work. She complained to

¹⁰⁵ Sinclair Lewis, *Ann Vickers* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son Corporation, 1933), 236-37.

¹⁰⁶ Lewis, *Ann Vickers*, 265.

¹⁰⁷ Ida Pruitt to John F. McIntosh, June 11, 1933. Schlesinger Library.

McIntosh that due to the absorption in medical social service, she did not have time to “work on the other project in which [she was] more interested,”¹⁰⁸ that is, her writing about China. During the time when she had sessions with her psychiatrist in Boston, she often had dreams about building a house of her own, and she recognized such dreams as indicators of her desires and motives: “It seems from my dreams that I still do not want to go back to social work. That I want to build my house over in a new location with the sunshine on it, and on the ruins of an old one.” She reasoned that social work could make her a “noble soul,” but it was not her own choice and it constituted her duties; by contrast, writing novels was adventures for her, and a way of fully live her life. Searching for the right way of “expressing herself,” she seemed to be sure then that social service was not the expression of her desires, and she wanted to try to study and write about Chinese folk lore and faith. She decided that she would spend the next two years trying to train enough new social workers so that after that she could devote herself to her studies and writing. She declared, “I do not have to do my duty anymore. I have no duty. I have a life to live and I will live it fully and with an abundance... And by living, I will do more for myself and the world than by doing.”¹⁰⁹ Pruitt’s duties, in this context, was the social expectations of her to do the helping and servicing work involved in social service; while living fully was her ideal of creative freedom and adventure. Such a competition of different priorities is not Pruitt’s own imagination during a psychological crisis; it exists and other people notices her difficulties too. For example, Pruitt’s close friend, Dorothea Richards, before leaving China in 1931, wrote a farewell letter to her, saying:

There were so many things I wanted to urge on you before I left – for example to begin concentrating on writing a book that really express yourself. Far more than

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ida Pruitt to John F. McIntosh, February 16, 1933. Schlesinger Library.

a guide book – the story of a foreign child’s life in an interior station. You have the field now, and you must have something to fall back on if Mac fails you.”¹¹⁰

Dorothea must have noticed Pruitt’s struggle about the right ways to express herself – her struggle to maintain a “balance” among the competing relations between social work, writing and marriage in her life. And Dorothea saw it before Pruitt herself did with the help of psychoanalysis, that creative forces within Pruitt could help her really express herself.

The competition between urges of creativity and other obligations seems to be especially more difficult to deal with for contemporary women than men, due to different social expectations and biological features. In an interview with Marie-France Alderman, talking about the threat of patriarchy to female creativity, bell hooks comments that probably feminism was initially about how to “make room for self-determining, passionate women who will be able to just be.” She asks, “In what context within patriarchy do women create space where we can protect our genius?”¹¹¹ Ida Pruitt is one of the self-determining and passionate women, trying to find a voice for herself, and trying to find truths about herself by expressing herself in writing. In reality, she also had to meet demands from outside and inside which forced her to conform and not be her full self. Such a dilemma was especially severe during this time of crisis. After a trip from Ding Xian in 1933, where the model rural health station was set up, Pruitt caught a heavy cold. She wrote to McIntosh about the reason of her illness:

Ting Hsien [Ding Xian] showed me ways in which the work can be developed which will mean more work for me and I think that I wished I could not see them as I do not want to do the kind of work they show forth. But I do see them and

¹¹⁰ Dorothea Richards to Ida Pruitt, June 2, 1931. Schlesinger Library.

¹¹¹ bell hooks, “What’s Passion Got to Do with it? An Interview with Marie-France Alderman” in *Reel to Real*, 137.

think them necessary for China. So my kind sub-conscious took a hand in the matter and showed me how I could get out of it by ill health.

The conflict between her do-good work and her creative urge never completely disappear in her life. However, after over a month's session with her psychiatrist in Boston, Pruitt seemed to be more at peace with herself. She regained enough internal security to feel comfortable to go back to Peking without John F. McIntosh, and continue her social work, at the same time start her research for the next novel, which turned out to be the biography of Ning Lao Taitai, *A Daughter of Han*, a decade later.

Ida Pruitt attributed her recovery from her depression to psychotherapy, which helped her to psychologically grow up. She concluded that the "little girl" in her heart had caused her many fears in life and prevented her to become a mature woman who were ready for marriage and who were sane and balanced. She left the "little girl" behind and gradually grew into a "well adjusted, well integrated person,"¹¹² at least that was the impression she gave to people around her.

However, between the lines of the intimate letters Pruitt wrote to McIntosh, lies another layer of psychological growing in her. Her mediation about marriage, career and doing good to the world, her question about success and failure, and her rethinking about "competition" between being a noble soul and being a writer, all gave her certain freedom of independent critical thinking about the past values forced on her by her lover, her supervisors at work and her parents. From the process she learned to take more initiative in her own life, and she learned to rely less on mainstream values about marriage and career to fully express herself. Be it social work or writing, she eventually realized that they were just different means to reach her same goal – the goal was to

¹¹² Marianna Taylor to Ida Pruitt, February 27, 1934. Schlesinger Library.

remain passionate about life and experience it fully by being herself, at the same time help the world in her own way.

**“I Just Want to Make People Happy”
– Ida Pruitt’s Social Work Legacies**

For the next five years after this period, Ida Pruitt kept her social work at the PUMC, and tried to write at her spare time, and her ideas about social work, writing and love evolved to another level. To her lover from 1936-38, Jim Bertram who was also a writer, she wrote: “We are not writing for gratitude or recognition but for something which is greater than ourselves. I do not yet know how to name it.”¹¹³ Writing was still a means to express herself, but it meant more than self expression to her now. Talking about her love to Jim, she wrote, “personal emotions and emotions for the world are mixed.” Love and marriage was not merely an isolated standard to judge her own success, but connected with her love to the world; or to put it another way, her personal love constituted part of her love to the world. This was a period when she was busiest with social work – besides the hospital social service at the PUMC, she was also taking charge of the Relief Bureau in Peiping, working with thousands of war refugees in the city. But no longer did she complain about social work taking away her own time: “There is also the mental and spiritual satisfaction of knowing that I am doing something for the world in my own way... [and] there must be many approaches to the same world problems.”¹¹⁴ She stopped judging herself harshly according to the outside standards forced onto her, and she no longer assumed that there was only ONE right way to express herself. Much

¹¹³ Ida Pruitt to Jim Bertram, October 11, 1937. Schlesinger Library.

¹¹⁴ Ida Pruitt to Jim Bertram, February 12, 1938. Schlesinger Library.

as many approaches exist to the same world problems, she found multiple ways to express herself, be it love, writing or social service.

Ida Pruitt's service at the PUMC eventually was terminated in 1938. The official explanation from the PUMC was due to the stabilization program, which was meant to reduce budget on certain directions in the hospital by handing in the leading positions to the Chinese. Hospital social service was one of the first direction to reduce budget, followed by nursing. According to Pruitt's unpublished analysis of why the PUMC did not re-appoint her, however, the reasons were actually caused by other factors. Firstly, it was due to the PUMC administrators' misunderstanding of the field of social service and public health. After Henry Houghton took Roger Greene's place as the director of the China Medical Board, Houghton intended to hold back social service because Greene had always uphold it; Houghton himself had never seen the actual work done by social service first hand before he took charge of the PUMC. Another big influence in the PUMC authority, John Grant, tried to convince people that public health nurses should and could do all that social service did. Pruitt protested:

This view rests on a partial and superficial conception of social service. There is a slight common field as there is a slight common field between the work of surgeons and the internists, but one does not hear the suggestion that internists should do all of medicine. There seems however to be a feeling, I cannot call it thought, among some people that all of women's work can be done by one group of women.¹¹⁵

Pruitt acknowledged public service was a very important field that needed urgent attention, but she pointed out that "there are some things outside public health." She stressed medical social service as a field of its own, with its own special knowledge and training.

¹¹⁵ Ida Pruitt, Re: PUMC, unpublished manuscript. Box 30, Folder 738. Schlesinger Library.

Ida Pruitt was not alone in the frustration towards the PUMC male authority's ideas to merge social service and public health. Gertrude E. Hodgman, then Dean of the Nursing School at the PUMC, also suffered from this policy change. She was told by Houghton to "prepare to have her nurses to take over part of the work of social service." She complained to Pruitt that she did not have enough nurses first of all, and even if she did have enough nurses, she would rather have them do nursing work which they were good at instead of social work which they did not understand.

Secondly, the reason why Pruitt had to leave the PUMC was because her field, medical social service did not have a strong organization to look after the interests of medical social workers among the Rockefeller Foundations. While Hodgman was able to prevent the PUMC administration to lower the grade of nursing training with the support from American nursing organizations, and from the Laura Spellman Foundation, Pruitt could not find such support from either an organized medical social service body or from inside the Rockefeller Foundation.

Ida Pruitt did not blame everything to the PUMC male authority. She also pointed out that the illusion of "women's work can be done by one group of women" was also caused by some women. A few influential nursing leaders who were originally drawn into the profession because of the first world war and who were not temperamentally suited for nursing, instead of "getting out of nursing because they did not fit it they began to change nursing to fit them," and they tried to get social work into the nursing field.

One example happened at Yale University. One professor of nursing thought that public health nurses could do social work. Using her influential power, she succeeded in

getting social service out of Yale University Hospital. But several years later, social service had to be put back again. “It was an expensive experiment to build up a department, tear it down, and build it up again.”¹¹⁶ Pruitt commented.

Pruitt soon left the PUMC and did not write about her frustration about the reduced budget of medical social service any more. She was too busy to blame others or to be angry about the injustice done to medical social service. She was completely occupied with her other expressions of her life, other ways of helping others and doing her part for the world: war relief, research on war refugee, which was followed by fund raising for the China Industrial Cooperation. However, she has certainly branded the field of medical social service with her name.

The field of medical social service in China has suffered similarly like the department of social service at Yale University Hospital. Soon after Ida Pruitt left the PUMC, the Social Service Department was discontinued in 1941, partly due to Japanese invasion into Peiping and the move of the PUMC to other part of China. While the Social Service Department was re-established for a short period from 1948 to 1952, the size of the department was minimized to three staff members. Then in 1952, social service, together with many other social sciences ceased to exist in China because of political reasons (the Chinese Socialist government assumed such disciplines of social sciences came into existence because of the needs of capitalist societies, hence not suitable for China any longer). Since the 1980s, medical social service, together with other social sciences has been recovering again in China, and therefore, the name of Ida Pruitt has been reclaimed by this field. She has been exalted as the initiator of this field for China.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

However, it seems people's memory of her stays on the surface of the success she has achieved for medical social service in China, for war relief and for Industrial Cooperation. Nothing at all was mentioned about the great difficulties she went through to promote this field, or the "failure" she experienced, or the doubt about the above different fields she once had. An extreme example is the narrative of her work by one of her former Chinese colleagues at the Social Service Department, Zhang Zhongtang. In a memoir about social service work at the PUMC, published in the 1980s, he described Pruitt's departure from the PUMC as follows:

As the most prosperous time of the Social Service Department, Chief Ida Pruitt was recalled back to the United States. The entire staff of the department wrote petition to the PUMC administration so that Chief Pruitt could keep working in the department, but our petition was not granted.¹¹⁷

The central theme of Zhang's essay is how successful Ida Pruitt was at social service and how much the department achieved in helping the people. The problem of this narrative is that while it acknowledges what Pruitt has done, it does not do justice to what she has strived for and suffered with, and it does not disclose lessons we could have learned from the past "failures" or "successes."

As to Ida Pruitt herself, after the 1932-33 period of depression and self-judgment, she did not judge herself according to such mainstream values about marriage or success again. Time and time again she was still frustrated about institutional politics of organized charities, with which she worked, but she refused to judge her personal success merely according to their values. Jim Bertram once contrasted her calmness with the restlessness of another woman, Helen Foster Snow (focus of another chapter), and wrote:

¹¹⁷ Zhang Zhongtang, "shehui fuwubu ershi nian [Twenty Years of Social Service Department]" in *huashuo lao xiehe [The Old Peking Union Medical College]* (Beijing: Zhongguo Wenshi Chubanshe, 1987), 366.

“You, dear Ida, are one of the points of rest in an unstable world... I think you would have been calm and relaxed through the midst of shouting, whether in Peking or Washington.”¹¹⁸

Another woman mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, who discussed about helping Chinese war refugees with Ida Pruitt in 1938, Minnie Vautrin, also went through psychotherapy from 1940 to 1941 due to depression and a sense of utter failure in her mission in China. Unfortunately, her treatment was not as successful as Ida Pruitt’s, and she eventually turned on the gas in the apartment and stopped her life there.

Putting these women’s life choices together, in no way am I trying to judge whose life choices or expressions of themselves are right or wrong, but their life stories together tell their experience confronting various power struggles and the imbedded values, be it patriarchic or imperialist, or feminist or individualistic. This chapter has also been their experience of helping people and the conflicts they had in helping. All in all, it is also about ways of dealing with happiness and unhappiness. Therefore, Ida Pruitt and John Russell’s following conversation about Pruitt’s purpose in China helps conclude this chapter:

John Russell: Did you ever see yourself as taking part in a social movement? Or were you just wanting to be a teacher and desiring to help people? Or did you want to run home to America? What did you see about the way you wanted to live?

Ida Pruitt: I just wanted to make people happy. That was my ambition as a child... that just to make people happy. Because there was so much unhappiness around. I didn’t like it.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Jim Bertram to Ida Pruitt, August 14, 1970. Box 19, Folder 415. Schlesinger Library.

¹¹⁹ John Russell Interview of Ida Pruitt, n.d. Schlesinger Library.

Chapter 3

In Pursuit of Joan of Arc Helen Foster Snow's China Years

You have no idea how much we need your vision and way of getting things over to people. You come like a breath of new life to us. It will be grand when you get over here. They need the stirring up and getting out of ruts that you can do so very well, to them. I hope that it will be soon that you get to this part of the country. And I do want to see you as soon as possible.

– Ida Pruitt to Helen Foster Snow, January 30, 1941¹

Among many of Ida Pruitt's close friends when she was Chief of Social Service at Peking Medical Union College, was Helen Foster Snow. Their common years in Peking started a life-long genuine friendship as well as professional cooperation. In later years, they were both fully engaged in the cause of Chinese Industrial Cooperatives, and in the above letter, Ida Pruitt was discussing with Helen F Snow about its International Committee. Both of them write letters avidly, and also strive to be novel writers who can make as big a success as Pearl Buck. However, they have a sharp distinction in their letter writing practice. Letters provide Ida Pruitt with an intimate and relatively safe space to explore "in detail different dimensions of her self" in time of psychological and professional crisis,² but to Helen Foster Snow, letters act as a channel to communicate her intellectual aspirations and political activism, and as an initiator for actions. In time of personal crisis, unlike Pruitt, Snow either hides her self from letters, or to the other

¹ Ida Pruitt to Helen Foster Snow, January 30, 1941, Box 130, Folder 7, Helen Foster Snow Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

² This function of letter writing suits many other women writers too. For example, Margaret Fuller, a nineteenth-century writer, also examines different dimensions of her self through correspondence with close friends. See, Jeffery Steele, "Keys to 'the Labyrinth of My Own Being': Margaret Fuller's Epistolary Invention of the Self" in *Letters and Cultural Transformations in the United States, 1760-1860*. eds. Theresa Strouth Gaul and Sharon M. Harris (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009), 101.

extreme, glorifies a magnified self in letters. While Ida Pruitt, through intimate correspondence, found balance and refuge from her frustration about her professional “helping” endeavors, Helen Foster Snow saw letter writing as “do-goodness,” an obstruct for writing her “own work” – “the great American novel”. Why do letters function so differently in women’s exploration and construction of selfhood? Why does letter writing give Pruitt a sense of psychological security and by contrast, aggravate Snow’s suffering from insatiable desire for external recognition? A parallel analysis of Helen Foster Snow’s epistolary practice with that of Ida Pruitt shows the influence of patriarchic standards of “success” on women and teaches lessons about the importance of women’s independence of such standards to maintain healthy personal and professional identities.

Ida Pruitt confronted the “white woman’s burden of helping others” in her China experience. She encountered great difficulty in obtaining just recognition of her professional work in a male-dominated institution. In comparison, Helen Foster Snow tried more work opportunities. She had many opportunities in her early career and changed jobs constantly, until she settled as a free lancer. As a result, she did not have to endure the distressing judgments from different groups in an organization, like what Ida Pruitt did. However, lack of external evaluation or recognition of her work lead her into a constant and active pursuit of such a thing. She sought grander “success” and “glorification,” in other words, ultimate recognition by history as a “Joan of Arc” figure.

This chapter will analyze the causes of Helen Foster Snow’s desire for external recognition through a close reading of her letters. From the case of Snow, I intend to call attention to another trap which modern feminists may be easy to fall into: the lure of the

myth of Joan of Arc. It is important to be aware of this trap because, like the myth discussed in the last chapter, that “modern woman can have everything,” it gives women temporary empowerment and heroic illusions, but often at the expense of women’s long-term satisfaction and confidence. The “big cause of saving the masses” promises “big glorification” but way too often, in the end, leaves these women into forgotten corners of HIStory, and in Helen Foster Snow’s case, an insatiable state of seeking recognition. Even though Helen Foster Snow received considerable recognition at her old age, she still felt unrecognized and angry. In this chapter, by comparing Helen Snow’s letters of different phases in her life, especially regarding how she portrays persona in letters, I hope to give credit to the great causes in which Helen Foster Snow has engaged, and the great work which she has achieved, but at the same time, reveal the effect of the myth of the “Joan of Arc” on modern women like her; in particular, I want to disclose the obstacles which the external recognition like Joan of Arc can create for women to find satisfaction from work.

Teenage Dreams of “Joan of Arc”

How is my old “Joan of Arc”? Anyhow, do you remember that night you told me that you’d like to be a “Joan of Arc”? Do you?

– Dan to Helen Foster Snow, 1924³

Helen Foster Snow⁴ might have forgotten her teenage fantasy of Joan of Arc, for she never mentioned it in her later years’ writing or interviews, even though she talked a lot about her adolescent achievements or unfulfilled dreams. Had not Dan, her sweetheart

³ Dan to Helen Foster Snow, January 30, 1941, Box 10, Folder 1, Helen Foster Snow Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections. BYU.

⁴ In the following section of this chapter, Foster will be used as Helen Foster Snow’s last name to address her, since at this period, she had not met and married Edgar Snow, her future husband.

when she was fifteen, remembered her ambition of becoming such a heroine, and wrote it down in the above letter, the influence of the legend of Joan of Arc on Helen F Snow may have slipped into negligence. Foster had good reasons to forget her heroic fantasy. Since Dan left her for another city, she had been in a whirl pool of changes and excitement in Salt Lake City. She was elected vice-president of the student body and associate editor of the Year Book at the West High School at sixteen; then she started her college years at the University of Utah; she quitted college before graduation to work on various jobs in her early twenties, joining the generation of American youth of “Hedonism,”⁵ whose values were far from what Joan of Arc stands for. If Helen Foster had stayed in the U.S. for the rest of her life, she would have lived a life like her other middle-class girl friends. The need to be a Joan of Arc would have been irrelevant to such a life, and the transient teenage dream of Joan in the youngsters’ fancy love talk might have not been worth mentioning here. However, Foster’s China experience provided a different stage, and it rekindled her teenage dream and even fulfilled it to a great extent.

But first of all, why did the teenage Helen Foster want to identify with Joan of Arc? Born in 1907, Foster grew up with this icon. As Robin Blaetz puts it, in the United States, “The decade that began just before the First World War and ended with the events surrounding Joan’s canonization in the 1920 was filled with images of Joan of Arc.”⁶ The American Joans prevailed in the public eye, from novels to articles, songs, posters, from

⁵ In a letter of Helen Foster to her best high school friend, Sparkey (September 21, 1932), Foster recalls how the two girls used to discuss “Hedonism.” Helen Snow Papers, BYU.

⁶ Robin Blaetz, *Visions of the Maid: Joan of Arc in American Film and Culture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 47.

public sculptures to films and other commercial imagery.⁷ In particular, many of the Joan of Arc books of the era were for adolescent readers, to which Helen Foster belonged at that time. Although the main propaganda purpose of the prevalence of Joan of Arc at that time was to prepare America for the war, this mythical figure has always been moldable and open to multiple interpretations due to her “paradoxical association of femininity and warrior virtues, of naïve ignorance and intelligence, of the spirit of revolt or loyalty to an ideal.”⁸ Such a powerful exemplary figure must have fascinated the child and teenage Foster, and she must have absorbed the meaning of the Joan image for her own use.

One major appealing factor of Joan of Arc to Helen Foster was Joan’s great accomplishment. Foster aspired to be a success since a kid, always an A student and also striving for popularity. As she remembered, all her matriarchic guardians had high hope of her and set her up with big ambitions. Besides her mother, the teenage Foster also had her fraternal grandmother and aunt Tillie as her mentors. At senior high school, Foster moved from Cedar City to Salk Lake City to live with her grandmother and aunt Tillie so that she could get better and more secular education. Talking of all these women custodians in her life to her niece in later years, Helen Snow recalled, “They wanted me to make a big success of myself and they all claimed it. My mother claimed it, aunt Tillie for the Fosters and my grandmother claimed it for her ancestors who were the Damons and Moodys.”⁹ Whichever lady took credit for Helen Foster’s achievements, they all contributed to her ambition to be as a great success as Joan of Arc. An example reveals

⁷ For detailed delineation and analyses of representations of Joan of Arc in American culture in this period, see the above Blaetz’s book and Claude Grimal’s Appendix chapter, “The American Maid,” in John Flower’s book, *Joan of Arc: Icon of Modern Culture* (London: Helm Information, 2008), 248-267.

⁸ Grimal, “The American Maid,” 248.

⁹ Helen Foster Snow Recordings, interview with Helen Foster Snow’s niece, Sheril Bischoff, November 7, 1988. Cassette 15, Helen Foster Snow Papers, BYU.

how these ladies influenced Helen Foster's concept of success. At her old age, Foster still remembered a family story which aunt Tillie told her as a child. Aunt Tillie once met a fortune teller who told her that there would be a female member of the family who would become famous. In her youth, Aunt Tillie had always assumed that member to be herself. However, aunt Tillie was getting into her forties when Helen Foster moved to stay with Tillie and the aunt's mother in Salt Lake. Having had a divorce and having to care for her aged mother while teaching junior high school for her living, aunt Tillie had long ago given up her dream of fame; instead, she assumed that the famous girl from the family would actually be Helen Foster.

Besides success and fame, Joan of Arc evoked the young Helen Foster's fantasy of female heroism and leadership. From an obscure peasant girl, the French maid became a self-made woman warrior who led male soldiers. She braved the cruelty of war and restored order to the people. Her heroic act changed the course of history and saved the entire country. Such a magic story triggered, among the American public of this period, "philosophical thought on the subjects of exceptional destiny and the individual's role in history."¹⁰ As to the girl Helen Foster in particular, the Joan story sparked her imaginary girlhood identity as heroic and special. Growing up in the first two decades of the century, when more and more social roles became open to women, Foster received education which reinforced such aspirations.

Neither of the parents restricted Helen Foster's potentials to merely conform to traditional domestic femininity. The father, who graduated from Stanford University in science and the University of Chicago in law, was coach of the Girl's Basketball Team at

¹⁰ Grimal, "The American Maid," 248.

the same time when he studied law. He encouraged the daughter's sports zeal. Being the only child around – for her twin brothers were not born until she was almost five, Foster was the “baby athlete” at the school gymnasium.¹¹ The aggressiveness that grew with her athletic prowess was still salient on the teenage Helen Foster. At seventeen, she was a strong candidate for the Tennis Tournament at school, and seven years later, she still remembered the event and wrote to her friend, “... and how I lost the Tennis Tournament to some horrible girl Margaret...”¹² Helen Foster's mother also set an example of “sports-mindedness and physical fitness” for the daughter.¹³ In addition, the mother never hid her pride for the special talent of the daughter. She was proud of the daughter's extraordinary intelligence and self discipline. In the mother's autobiographic essay, the daughter at two already amazed even strangers with her good behaviors – being the only child on a three-day train trip who did not cry, and a neighbor had thought the two-year-old baby could read because the baby could say every Mother Goose rhymes perfectly from memory.¹⁴

The parents not only cultivated Helen Foster's talent and made her feel an exceptional child, but also reinforced certain qualities of Joan of Arc such as service and integrity through their own act as role models for the child. Despite the opposite personalities of the parents – incessantly talkative mother versus silent father, and pious Mormon mother who was very involved in church versus more secular father who never went to church, both parents had a strong sense of social responsibility to their

¹¹ Helen Foster Snow mentioned her athletic childhood both in a Recording of interview with her niece, Sheril Bischoff, November 7, 1988 and in genealogy work, “The Christopher Foster Family History, 1623-1953”, written in 1953, BYU.

¹² Helen Foster to Sparkey, September 21, 1932, BYU.

¹³ Kelly Ann Long, *Helen Foster Snow: An American Woman in Revolutionary China* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2006), 18.

¹⁴ Hannah Davis Foster, “Autobiography of Hannah Davis Foster.” Box 17, Folder 8, BYU.

community, and did their service to the community in their separate ways. The mother was an active leader in multiple groups of the city community, such as Women's Home Economic Club, Women's Civic Club, Parent-Teacher Council and Relief Society, and had also participated parades and convention in support of women's suffrage¹⁵; the father, as a lawyer, "constantly rendered service for needy clients without remuneration."¹⁶ Likewise, Helen Foster went out to be of service to others as a little student, tutoring boys who were weak in academic performance.¹⁷ In addition, both parents were acclaimed for their integrity. Helen Foster remembered her mother as "never told a lie,"¹⁸ and her father as always followed "truth ethnic."¹⁹ Hence both parents planted in Helen Foster's early youth a strong sense of justice, which influenced her later endeavors in writing and efforts to reveal "truth" about China to the public.

At school, Helen Foster was a teacher's pet as well as the "most popular" among students. She stood out in both academics and extracurricular activities. As she remembered, she was pushed to "take charge" in situations such as football matches, when the kids shouted for her to "go up on the stand... to prolong the session."²⁰ At high school, she was staff hostess of the ROTC, a military training program for students. She aimed to embody the old tradition of the ROTC; in her words, "we all set ourselves up to be models and examples for the rest of the school, and we all lived up to it too."²¹ At fifteen, she was selected as "the All-American Girl for a magazine cover," and her art

¹⁵ Hannah D. Foster Obituary in local newspaper (title unknown), October, 1952, BYU.

¹⁶ "Resolution of Respect in Honor of John M. Foster, in local newspaper (title unknown), n.d.

¹⁷ Long, *Helen Foster Snow*, 18.

¹⁸ Helen F Snow, "The Christopher Foster Family History, 1623-1953", written in 1953, BYU.

¹⁹ Long, *Helen Foster Snow*, 17.

²⁰ Helen Foster to Sparkey (September 21, 1932), BYU.

²¹ Helen Foster Snow, "Notes on Helen Foster from West High School Yearbooks, 1924, 1925, etc." Box 21, Folder 1, BYU.

teacher complimented her in front of the class that her face was “like a pink tea rose.”²² As Kelly Ann Long well observed, Helen Foster at her early age “constructed an identity based on the contrived notion that beautiful and intelligent women were rare,” and she saw herself as “an exemplar of American femininity.” The good effect of this imaginary teenage identity for Helen Foster was that she embraced an ambition that “she was destined to lead”²³ from an early age, and that she aimed to do good to others. The side effect, however, was that all the early external recognition and compliments fostered a “narcissistic streak” and craving for even more recognition so as to secure her constructed identity.

At her early teenage years, when neither of these effects had manifested saliently in Helen Foster’s real life, it did help nurture her idealistic dream of Joan of Arc. In her dream, much as Joan of Arc saved France, this “All-American girl,” with her special talent, stunning beauty, and strong sense of justice, might one day become a famous American hero and lead everyone to some kind of historic success and glorious victory.

Helen Foster might have only confided to her sweetheart Dan about her Joan of Arc dream at fifteen, but her lofty ambition must have been felt by others around her. Durrel, apparently another admirer of Foster at that time, or maybe as indicated in the following cartoon, a former fling lover, parodied her big ideal. In the cartoon by Durrel, Helen Foster was drawn as a big bird standing up above high, and chanting loudly even without looking downward at Durrel who was kneeling on the ground, “...Oh! you’r [*sic*] too small, I am looking for something larger, BAH!” On one hand, the cartoon is another proof of Helen Foster’s pursuit of great ideals like that of Joan of Arc; on the other hand,

²² Long, *Helen Foster Snow*, 19.

²³ Helen Foster Snow Papers, “Biographical History,” BYU.

it also reveals the girl's other fantasies which were emerging at the same time. Eventually, it turned out that the 1920s Salt Lake City was more suitable for the other dreams to grow.

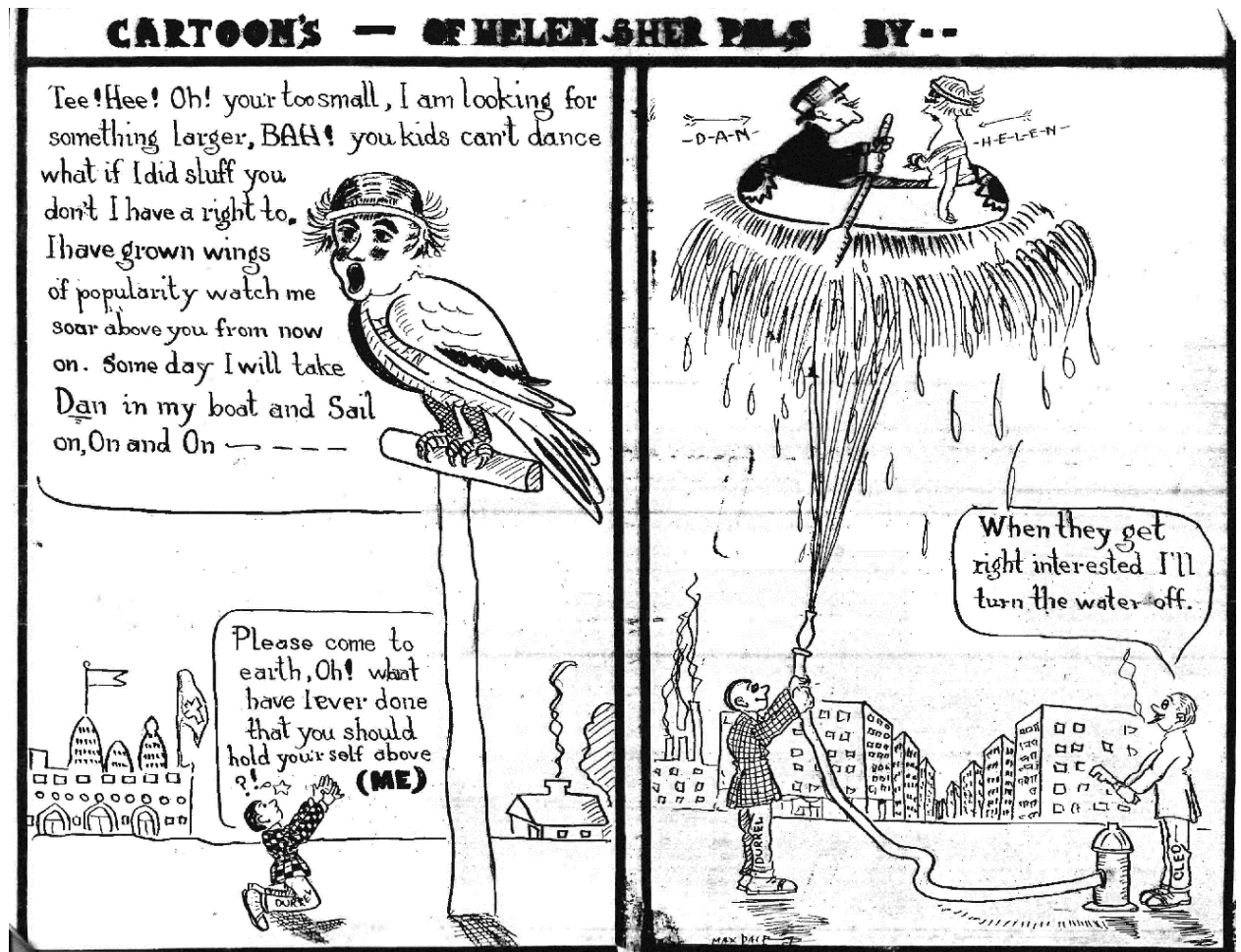


Figure 1 "Helen Foster and Her Pal," by Durrel around 1922, Helen Foster Snow Collections at Brigham Young University

The image of Joan of Arc which had been prevalent before and during the World War I lost its appeal afterward. For one reason, by the end of the war, "the discourse of the modern role of women in war had solidified in a way that made the active warrior Joan unusable."²⁴ Women's work in the war, such as nursing or couriering, was seen as behind the line, as helpers of male soldiers. For another reason, even during the war, women's anti-war groups had "rejected all warriors, including female ones." The poet

²⁴ Blaetz, *Visions of the Maid*, 73.

Amy Lowell seconded this stand by depicting war as a “social disease that was alien to femininity.”²⁵ Thirdly, as Blaetz concisely summarizes,

The extremity of Joan of Arc’s experience, which previously had been so attractive to what Lears calls this weightless era, had become too concrete. The war was over and the drive for self-fulfillment was now more easily placated through consumption as opposed to action.²⁶

As a result, the popularity of Joan of Arc was replaced by the flappers, the new women of the after-war decade who had bobbed hair, enjoyed free dress and free love, and who had opportunities to work on jobs formerly held by men.

Helen Foster’s experience in the 1920s perfectly reflects the shifts of values of that era. If the fifteen-year-old Foster still harbored her Joan of Arc dream dearly, she would soon join the flappers and seek fun in new “adventures” like jazz dance, first tastes of cigarettes and a series of dates. As shown in Durrel’s cartoon above, Helen Foster had her hair Dutch Cut, wore dress with bare shoulders (on the right side picture of the Cartoon), felt privileged to change her date at will, and strived for popularity and attention. As the Foster in bird form says, “I have grown wings /of popularity watch me /soar above you from now on.” Although the cartoon may be an exaggerated version of the teenage Helen Foster, it does tell that she was well on her way to become a true flapper girl of her time.

Helen Foster’s letters and writing also provide clues to her lifestyle of the “new woman” type in her late teenage and early twenties. In a letter written on her twenty-fifth birthday to her best friend of her teenage years, she recalls those days when they were together, and reveals her life after the boy Dan left:

²⁵ Quoted in Blaetz, *Visions of the Maid*, 74.

²⁶ Blaetz, *Visions of the Maid*, 75.

Do you remember the day Casey and I shocked Eddie's elderly Pa by sitting together on the same chair or something – how Casey's mother used to “rush” me... How rotten I was in typing and shorthand although I got A's in everything else... Zip Club Dances and Dean and Cal Herman... how we went up to the matinee dances at the U. and had a magnificent time. Remember the football captain Shy who rushed us? (... and, oh, yes, the Springville game and the dance after, that was great!) I wore Casey's ROTC officer's cap and was quite the sensation...

The short excerpt tells much about Helen Foster's behaviors that shocked the older generations. She went dancing excessively; her display of intimacy with boys exceeded the “lady's code” of older generations; she tried cross dressing by wearing a ROTC cap – the only reminiscent of Joan of Arc. But instead of a symbol of patriotism, the ROTC cap appeared to be her attention-grabbing prop. Moreover, Helen Foster apparently enjoyed such adventures, her letter filled with nostalgia for those bold and unworried days.

If the teenage Helen Foster in the above letter has become barely reminiscent of the image of Joan of Arc, she turned out to be the antithesis of the French maid and warrior at her early twenties. In her essay “Ante-War Generation,” written at the same period of the above letter but depicting the Helen Foster in her twenties instead of recalling her teenage past, Foster claims:

I belong to the post-war generation that is rapidly becoming ante – not anti. I was one of the flaming-bright-young-people of the fabulous twenties for whom those rows upon rows blooming in Flanders fields had turned to poppycock.... I don't like war. I don't like anything about it. I don't want a croix de guerre any more than I want to live in mud up the knees in a dug-out. I don't like flag waving. I don't even like parading up main street amid the plaudits of the multitude. As nearly as I can make out, I have no interest in the heroic. I am not even gallant enough to sign my name on an anti-war sheet of paper. It smacks too much of the early Christian. To avoid being the conscientious objector of the mother's clubs at home I would certainly brave the enemy shells. It would be less heroic. Yes, I would join the khaki lines in a new war..... In my formative days we sat wickedly around an illegal bottle of beer and wise-cracked in horrible puns about everything.²⁷

²⁷ Helen Foster Snow, “Ante-War Generation.” Box 22, Folder 13, BYU.

The poem “In Flanders Fields,” written by the Canadian Colonel John Macrae during World War I, had been extremely popular in the war era. It uses poppies growing in the graveyard of the dead soldiers to symbolize memory of those who died in the war, and to call for the youth to continue the idealistic cause of the war. To the post-war generation, however, the poppies merely provide another opportunity to make a pun, and turned out to be “poppycock.” Helen Foster and her peers found nothing in common with the previous generation. War was simply repugnant to them to the extent that even the so-called honor that came with it, such as a *croix de guerre*, reminded Foster of merely unpleasant experiences like living “in mud up to the knees in a dug-out.” Foster wanted nothing to do with war, even if it was heroism or a cause which is anti-war. If ever Foster was to join the army, it would not be for the idealistic cause of a war, but to avoid becoming a stay-at-home mom and the domestic duties that came with such a role.

Had Helen Foster completely abandoned her Joan of Arc dream? Why was it at one moment she was so proud to be associated with the ROTC, but merely several years later detested anything in connection with war? It is possible that when writing the above essay, Helen Foster had larger audience in mind than writing to her best friend, and thus the essay writing was more a performance. However, another important factor to consider is the changes, especially regarding identity explorations which she went through from adolescence to what Jeffrey Jensen Arnett terms “emerging adulthood.”²⁸ Although adolescence has been typically considered as the stage of identity formation, Arnett’s recent research has found that in industrialized societies, emerging adulthood, referring to the period from the late teens to the twenties, especially from 18 to 25, “offers the most

²⁸Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, “Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens Through the Twenties.” *American Psychologist*, 55(5) (May 2000): 469-480.

opportunity for identity explorations in the areas of love, work and worldviews.”²⁹ In trying out a variety of work possibilities, emerging adults investigate identity issues such as the kind of work that satisfies them and the kind of work they can do well. As to worldviews, they often explore a variety of worldviews and many start to challenge or eventually reject the worldviews which they harbor in childhood and adolescence. Helen Foster’s emerging adulthood went through exactly such process of identity explorations. However, I reserve to jump to the conclusion that Foster had rejected her Joan of Arc ideal for good. Rather, since neither the provincial area of Utah nor the post-war era of the United States provided a suitable setting for the Joan-of-Arc type of heroism, patriotism or social and political leadership, Foster’s Joan of Arc dream, or most of the elements of the dream, became dormant. Nevertheless, after she arrived in China, the different environment provided her a new stage to pursue greater success. In China, she found numerous opportunities to make history, and went full length to exhibit her superb capacity. She resumed her pursuit of the Joan of Arc dream, to be a young and powerful woman.

Emerging Adulthood: Exploring Different Professional Identities

Shanghai is a marvelous place for an enterprising young person with ideas. It is a total loss for many things, but anyone with the will to conquer should make history here, and I believe China and shanghai particularly are the new worlds to be had for the adventuring in the next few years.

– Helen Foster Snow to “far-away friends,” October 18, 1931

Magazine cover girl, vice president of student body, “attention center,” all the halo of Helen Foster’s adolescence made her seem really close to her Joan of Arc dream. However, the reality of her emerging adulthood pulled her away from that illusion. First

²⁹ Arnett, “Emerging Adulthood,” 473.

of all, at eighteen, graduating from high school, she came to painful realization of the limitations which came with being a girl. Having expected to follow his father's step and go to Stanford for college, she was informed by her mother that only rich families could afford to send girls to college. Her mother's words told the truth: at that time, Stanford accepted few females, and the Fosters were supporting four children and a nephew. However, to the young girl, instead of accepting the financial reality of her middle-class family, she interpreted that message "as indication that her parents valued her less than they did her brothers."³⁰ Eventually the parents supported Helen Foster's college education at University of Utah at \$25 a month, still a substantial amount at that time. On one hand, the young Foster felt guilty because she realized the financial burden her higher education incurred to her family; on the other hand, she could not overcome her sense of betrayal and disappointment.

Such mixed feelings put her into a kind of aloofness towards her own family. Unlike either Ida Pruitt, who despite her adolescent grudge against her mother, still kept regular mails with her parents, or Maud Russell, who detailed everything in her youthful life in China in her letters to her mother and family, Helen Foster rarely wrote to her parents or family members during her China years. In the voluminous collections of letters in her two major archives, not a single letter addressed to her immediate family members during her emerging adulthood or early adulthood was found. Her letters to her family become regular only after her return to the United States, more precisely, in the 1950s when she started to do research in genealogy. Again unlike Ida Pruitt, who wrote

³⁰ Long, *Helen Foster Snow*, 20.

personal essays about her confused feelings towards her family tradition, Helen Foster seldom write anything literary as an outlet to her mixed feelings about her family.

One of the few clues about her attitude towards her family is a letter to her from one of her younger brothers. After a long time when the family received no information about Helen Foster, Eric Foster, the brother, finally heard from his sister in 1939. In reply, he complained that he felt embarrassed not being able to answer inquiries about the sister from her old friends. He tried to persuade her to write to her parents:

... I don't know what I can say or do that might influence you, but, Helen, I wish you would PLEASE write dad and mother a letter. It would make them so happy. Neither of them would say much about you at home. I guess because they couldn't. I don't – I can't, believe you realize the heartache you have given them. I have seen mother go by herself and cry because she couldn't help it...

I think I can appreciate your attitude of ten years ago, having had a slight infection of the same complex myself. However if by this time you have not outgrown that juvenile notion, there is nothing more to be done. You have my sincere best wishes and perhaps, sympathy which I guess you will not appreciate at this time.

If the family (your family if you will) are happy at your measure of success, please understand it is sincere, not because they expect any material benefits. It goes deeper than that. Regardless of what a person may say or do, it is still a fact that "blood is thicker than water", and no exterior influence can alter that primary instinct that a parent has for its offspring. Dad and mother are fifty nine now. They have birthdays in October and November. Would you write them a line of greeting or something.³¹

Having lost contact with his sister for several years and grudging against her silence, the brother must have presumptuously assumed some of the reasons why she remained silent. For example, the idea that her parents would expect material gains from her success may never have come upon Helen Foster at all. However, the brother's letter does indicate some traumatic experience of the sister's emerging adulthood. The brother did not clarify what he meant by the attitude and complex which they both share ten years earlier in their

³¹ Eric Foster to Helen Foster Snow, September 25, 1939, BYU.

youth. Nonetheless, the immediate connection between the material gains and his mention of such a complex reminds the hurt which Helen Foster felt when she realized that her parents could not provide her to attend Stanford. Apparently, that incident had deeply influenced her beyond her formative years. As Kelly Ann Long points out, Helen Foster “transformed feelings of betrayal into a drive that manifested as combativeness and competitiveness, even as it fueled a life of adventure and noteworthy accomplishment.”³²

In addition, the brother’s letter reveals a pattern of Helen Foster’s letter writing which had established as early as her emerging adulthood. If she cannot control how she develops her selfhood in real life, she has good control of how she presents her selfhood in letter. Regarding the parts that hurt her perfect dreams and ideals, she simply leaves them out in letters. Furthermore, letter writing, and even literary writing, are never just private for her. She writes imagining sending out meaningful messages to others and expecting that her writing will eventually lead into certain effects, if not significant action in history. As a result, she simply leaves out in her letters the most private of her, things that she does not want others to associate with her self image. This pattern is such a key feature of her letter writing that I will come back to it again when discussing letters of other phases of her life.

Besides the disillusion regarding to Helen Foster’s education opportunities, a disappointing love affair in her early twenties also had a great effect on her dream of great success. Although she had many loves in this period, she felt “only about three

³² Long, *Helen Foster Snow*, 20.

intrigue [her] imagination.”³³ One of the three Great Loves was a leftist engineer. He “encouraged [her] dream of traveling the world and fueled her youthful idealism.”³⁴ Foster imagined them as becoming famous couples like John Reed and Louise Bryant, who traveled together across Europe and reported about the Russian Revolution. She had “hoped to marry her handsome radical and, therefore, to change the world.”³⁵ However, this great love did not last long, and the engineer chose to marry a daughter from a wealthy family instead. Helen Foster interpreted this emotional rejection as proof of the incompatibility of her Joan of Arc dream and marriage. She concluded that marriage would be an obstacle to “her own success unless she married a millionaire,” and she kept this idea all her life. As Kelly Ann Long summarizes this from her interview with Foster, “Only wealth could have liberated her from duties that she perceived as binding women to domestic rather than creative pursuits. She could not become a ‘great person’ while ‘washing dishes all day.’”³⁶ In this context, Foster’s idea of a “great person” specifically refers to one who achieves the kind of fame and success as great as that of Joan of Arc. Although always aiming high drives Helen Foster to achieve remarkable work, the narrow concept of a “great person” also incurs challenges and problems for her explorations of adult identities in later time.

Helen Foster’s assumption about the conflicting nature between female success and marriage reflects popular views on women’s role at her time. As Robin Blaetz’s study of the presence of the Joan of Arc image in American film and culture reveals, the American Joan of Arc was first created in response to the rapid social transformations of

³³ Helen Foster Snow to Sparkey, September 21, 1932, BYU.

³⁴ Long, *Helen Foster Snow*, 22.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Long, *Helen Foster Snow*, 23.

the modern era in the United States. The reality of the American West in the first two decades of the twentieth century produced independent and energetic women. They broke the “cult of true womanhood” in the traditional myths of American West, worked, played and fought side by side with men in the adventurous West. One of the earliest popular American Joan of Arc image was The Girl in David Belasco’s 1905 melodrama *The Girl of the Golden West*, who later also became a well-known opera persona of Puccini. All the popular representations of the new female freedom, however, were under the presumption that such freedom was restricted to single women. In Blaetz’s words,

Like Joan of Arc, The Girl is a child-woman...[her] aggressiveness was acceptable because it was tempered by childish spontaneity, good humor and innocence. The girl’s freedom ends, however, at the moment she falls in love and leaves the World for the Home. Since the independence of The Girl, like that of the Virgin Warrior, is unavailable to the sexualized, potentially maternal woman, melodrama ends with the wedding. Joan of Arc’s story is not unlike The Girl’s. Joan has obeyed her own voice and desire, revealing female strength and potential, but she pays her life when she refuses to go home.³⁷

Helen Foster had been like Joan of Arc and The Girl, who followed her own voice and desire in pursuit of her adolescent dreams, but in her emerging adulthood, as her dating became more serious and as she started to think of marriage, the mainstream image of women increased its influence on the young Foster. The failure of her love with the engineer all the more convinced her of the conflicts between marriage and her dream of great adventures and success. Consequently, as mentioned earlier, Helen Foster decided that she would not get married until she had travelled widely and written a great book.

During this period, therefore, Helen Foster took every opportunity to explore her professional identities, and her explorations in career are well recorded in her letters to friends – in contrast to the lack of epistolary exchanges with her family.

³⁷ Blaetz, *Visions of the Maid*, 30.

Salt Lake City

I ... don't understand at all how I wasted so much of my sweet young life in the uneventful land of Zion.

– Helen Foster Snow to friends in Salt Lake City, February 24, 1932³⁸

The first half of Helen Foster's emerging adulthood, in her own words, seems "uneventful" – so uneventful that the 10-page long letter to her high school friend Sparkey has only a fifth of one page to talk about her college and her jobs in Salt Lake, while the rest of the letter is devoted to her high school and her days in Shanghai. Nothing exciting is recorded during her two years of college. Then she started to work full time without finishing the degree.³⁹ Her first full-time job was at a judge's office, next the Intermountain Credit Men's Association, after which The Fox Film Corporation, and then the Power Company. Her positions were of the similar nature at this time – either secretary or stenographer, or office clerk. The only position that excited her was the one she held before she left for China, Assistant to the Secretary of the American Mining Congress. Her work was still secretarial at this position, but she had a very high salary compared with the average girl at that time, and she had access to all the mining typhoons in Utah because she was in charge of making appointments for them at the Mining Congress. She claimed that it was "the best position in the State of Utah" – for a young girl.

The gender restriction which Helen Foster added to the superlatively good job indicates two significant things about her sense of self during this period. First, her imagined image of personal success changed from the martyred Joan of Arc to a more

³⁸ Helen Foster to Stan, Jane, Ranch and others. February 24, 1932. Box 22, Folder 7, BYU.

³⁹ According to Kelly Ann Long, only about a third of college students graduated in the 1920s. See Long, *Helen Foster Snow*, 21.

materialized modern girl who could have high salary, proximity to male power (since such power did not belong to girls) and in her own words, “lots of fun.”⁴⁰ Second, her identity construction was fairly influenced by American mainstream portrayal of women’s roles. As Chapter 2 has discussed, the 1930s saw a weakened feminist agenda compared with the previous decade, due to both the Depression and the rise of commercialism. “The old upper-class model of femininity prevailed as women aspired to be intelligent, educated, and progressive, as well as to be beautiful, well-dressed, fun and unoccupied outside the home.”⁴¹ Helen Foster, despite her ambition in career, also aimed to marry well and stay at home after her success in work. She was aware of the limited professional opportunities for women at this era. In addition, her working experience in Salt Lake City proved the limitations: even though she kept moving upward in career with higher salary, she was confined to similar roles at the variety of positions. Therefore, Utah at this stage did not provide Helen Foster an appropriate context for her Joan of Arc ambition.

During this time, Helen Foster took the Foreign Service test, with the ambition to “go places and see things.”⁴² Her ultimate goal, after her experience abroad, was to write a great American Novel like what Edith Wharton and Hemingway did after their oversea years. She was already taking part-time courses in short story writing when she worked at the Mining Congress.

Her effort of securing a position in the consular service, however, taught her another lesson about women’s roles in American society. For two years, she tried to use

⁴⁰ Foster to Sparkey, p.3, BYU.

⁴¹ Blaetz, *Vision of the Maid*, 81.

⁴² Foster to Sparkey, p.4, BYU.

her connection with Utah Senator Reed Smoot and her father's Stanford alumni to get her a place in the consular service either in Paris, Rome, South America or Asia. The result was "a lot of correspondence and no action."⁴³ She finally realized that her "official eligibility" – passing the Foreign Service test – did not qualify her in actuality due to her gender. "No girls were ever allowed to go alone anywhere [as a clerk in a diplomatic service]."⁴⁴

Helen Foster did not keep waiting for opportunities from the public service sector. Instead, she contacted a friend in steam shipping business in Seattle, who helped her find a position as private secretary to the general manager of a firm of industrial bankers in Shanghai. It was still a secretarial job, but it allowed her to travel across the sea and see the world. She paid her own way to Shanghai so as not to be under contract with the firm. She was already prepared to explore more opportunities.

Shanghai

Sometimes it is like a fairy story, the things I do as compared with the old times in Salt Lake City.

– Helen Foster to Jane, June, 1932⁴⁵

Arriving in Shanghai in August 1931, Helen Foster felt she was transported to a fairy land. For one thing, with the currency exchange rate of 5 to 1, she found her purchasing power tremendously increased. "One must live like a millionaire here, as all white people do."⁴⁶ Foster told her friend at home. For another, under the protection of extraterritorial policy, Westerners enjoyed colonial privileges which were unknown to

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Helen Foster Snow interview with Sheril Biscoff, November, 1988. Box 163, Audio Cassette #8, BYU.

⁴⁵ Helen Foster to Jane, Box 22, Folder 7. BYU.

⁴⁶ Foster to Sparkey, September 21, 1932. P.8, BYU.

Foster before. Most importantly to young Helen Foster, she suddenly obtained access to career opportunities and power which were unavailable to her in Salt Lake City. She told her friend at home, “There are simply no end of opportunities in every line here if one is ‘interested’ but not much if you are merely a stenographer, a schoolteacher or such.”⁴⁷ Stenographer was one of her first positions in Salt Lake City, and many of her peers were still stenographers or schoolteachers at home, since those positions were most commonly available for American women at that time. In China, however, Helen Foster saw herself having risen above such a career path. She was interested in more challenging and adventurous jobs, and she plunged into her adventures and discovered a new self.

Cosmopolitan and Entrepreneurial

The first trait she acquired for her new identity in Shanghai was cosmopolitan. Her first job in Shanghai was at China Finance Corporation. Although it was an American firm of investment bankers, only three Americans, including Helen Foster were in the Shanghai office. In Foster’s own words,

There are, among the department heads, a nice Englishman, an Austrian, a German, two Portuguese, two Chinese and one Spaniard. The active company manager is some kind of Italian, I think. But they all speak five or six languages, and are very well educated, nice people. Isn’t this just too cosmopolitan? We get letters in every language and don’t even have to translate them – excepting the Russian and Chinese. The two Chinese ... are simply charming – both American educated, wear the newest Fifth Avenue fashions and drive to work in limousines with chauffers [*sic*], etc. There are fifty-two or three members of the staff in all, and most of them are Eurasians or Portuguese – some French and Italian, Chinese and Russians, etc.... I felt like a new born babe...And I drop into this from my dear old efficiency plus United States!⁴⁸

Before Helen Foster arrived in Shanghai, she had stayed in Utah most of her time. The provincial environment set such a big contrast with the cosmopolitan part of Shanghai

⁴⁷ Foster to Sparkey, September 21, 1932. P.7, BYU.

⁴⁸ Helen Foster’s letter, anonymous recipient(s), August 30, 1931. Box 22, Folder 4, BYU.

that the United States became her “dear old efficiency plus.” However, apparently the “new born” Foster still identified dearly with “America.” The Chinese department heads were charming because they both were “American educated” and showed taste of “Fifth Avenue Fashions.” If Helen Foster intended to be dissociated with the “old efficiency plus United States,” she only meant the provincial part of Utah. She felt a new born in a sense that she was born into a different type of American, a cosmopolitan American who represented the Fifth Avenue and the wealthy in limousines.

Helen Foster’s social life reaffirmed this new identity. Through her office work, she met a diverse group of clients who became her courtiers. She lavishly described the different approaches of some young men from various countries to her friends. A Frenchman persistently called her his “Americanine” and told her “Frenchmen love American women.”⁴⁹ A Hungarian said that Helen Foster was the first American girl he met and “declared his great devotion.” An Englishman pestered her for weeks for a date and called her “My Amerdican.”⁵⁰ She also went out with Americans, quite a few “cultured” Southerners and young men from other regions. Even dating Americans reaffirms her sense of cosmopolitan self, as she describes:

I went out with the best looking American type of fellow (observe my adjectives, now I’m so cosmopolitan) I’ve ever seen the other night....He tells me he likes to even sit and look at me because I’m the best all-around American gal he’s seen for so long.”⁵¹

Helen Foster appeared proud of her “all American gal” identity in Shanghai’s cosmopolitan community; however, she was not really excited about this kind of social life, and was not flattered to be sought by so many people. She claimed to her friends in

⁴⁹ Helen Foster to “far-away friends,” October 18, 1931. Box 22, Folder 7, BYU.

⁵⁰ Helen Foster’s letter, anonymous recipient(s), September 10, 1931. Box 22, Folder 4, BYU.

⁵¹ Ibid.

the same letter, “I feel myself simply subject to the commodity laws of supply and demand, a very boring feeling.”

Another reason this social life did not satisfy Helen Foster was the superficial interaction among people in the foreign community. As indicated from her letter, she was valued as “the American girl” by her courtiers, not for more specific qualities of her own. She suddenly became a token of this rare category of single American women upon her arrival in Shanghai’s foreign community. She herself was reacting in a similar approach. She did not take much effort to know her casual dates. Instead, she put them into convenient stereotypes, the French, the English and others. She generalized the entire community as “more or less commercialized – and have no thought of anything beyond their little circles of daily amusement.” Her views on the foreign community indicate the second character of her newly acquired identity. Besides feeling cosmopolitan, Helen Foster felt an urge to pursue something beyond commercialized values. In the pursuit of her creative work, she exhibited an independent and entrepreneurial self.

Helen Foster’s work at the China Finance Corporation was originally personal secretary for the General Manager. She was given much freedom at office. When she suggested to the general manager that the company did not have enough publicity, the manager asked her to work on it. So she became the advertising manager of the China Finance Corporation in addition to her other duties. As a result, instead of going out to socialize and date after work, Helen Foster spent much time writing and designing advertisements for her company and other clients in the evenings. Although she actually took advantage of the free advertisement mat services in the U.S., “stealing” the mat for

her own ads, she did exhibit much creativity and independent thinking in writing the copies and choosing the designs which fit her products and words.⁵²

The advertisements vividly reflect her active interpretation of womanhood and values at this period. For example, her series of ads for China Finance Corporation all features a super big figure high above urban or rural scenes. Although all other super figures appear definitely male, the gender of the first ad is ambiguous. As shown in Figure 2, this ad features a warrior riding on a horse. The small size of the picture makes the warrior appear gender mutual. The “BIG LEADER” in armor looks quite like Joan of Arc, except that she is entering a city of modern era in the ad, fighting in “the battle of modern business” (Helen Foster’s own words). If Helen Foster at the moment aspired to business and commercial success which is far different from her heroic teenage dream, she apparently still projected her ideals of female leadership and power into this ad, which Joan of Arc represents. The warrior in the ad therefore proves the continuity of Helen Foster’s pursuit of her Joan of Arc dream.

If “THE BIG LEADER” in the modern war of business seems a far stretch to resonate with a female warrior in Helen Foster’s advertisement for investment bankers in the early 1930s, she was more upfront to update the “modern” version of female beauty. In Figure 3, an advertisement for FIAT cars, Helen Foster associates beauty and strength in the body of a young woman. This ad, according to Judith Williamson’s analysis of the

⁵² What Helen Foster did with the ads was possible back then because Chinese advertising industry was only in its budding stage. In Foster’s own words, “Nobody here ever dreams of really advertising. They only print business cards. There is a wonderful fiend here for a free-lance copy writer.” In comparison, American advertising business was fairly developed. Being aware of the free ad mat services in the U.S., Helen Foster could use the mat from the U.S. for her clients in China, and having them believing that the graphic were her own designs. See her letter to “far-away friends” on October 18, 1931.

FOLLOW THE BIG LEADERS



... in your business

All over the world intelligent, far-seeing directors of large corporations are now realizing that the psychological moment is at hand to buy—to make wise additions and renewals, in equipment and in property, at the present low prices. They are, it is true, trimming a close margin on running expenses, BUT—they are putting out all they can for expansion.

It takes money to do this, extra money, more money perhaps than you have available for this purpose right now. With the aid of a China Finance Corporation loan, you can arrange it, however—easily and simply—without disturbing your working capital.

BE GUIDED by the example of these men in bigger business and take advantage of the moment to build up the potentialities of your business—looking to the future.

Consult

CHINA FINANCE CORPORATION

(Fed. Inc. U.S.A.)

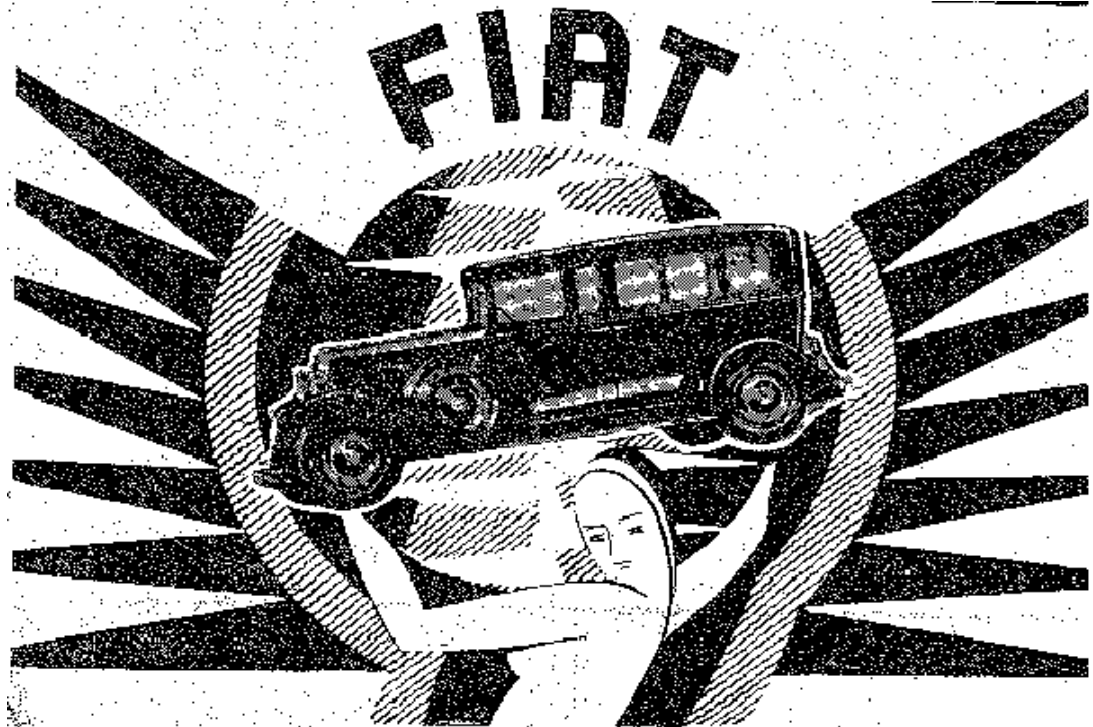
Investment Bankers

4 HANKOW ROAD

Post

9-19-31

Figure 2 Helen Foster's Ad Work (1)



BEAUTY AND STRENGTH IN EVERY LINE

WHAT YOU WANT
IN A MOTOR
CAR.

A smart appearance
Perfect mechanism
Luxurious appointments
Speed and power in action

You want a machine you will be proud to own, a machine that will be a real addition to the pleasure and comfort of your everyday life.

And—if you are a discriminating buyer, you will want other things. You will want UTILITY.

SO YOUR CAR
MUST ALSO
HAVE.

Durability in all parts
Simplicity in operation
Economy in mileage costs
Quick repair facilities

Also, it must be within a reasonable price range, with the convenience of instalment payments if desired.

The answer to your need is a FIAT when you buy a new motor car.

THE AUTO CASTLE

Showrooms:—920 Bubbling Well Road

Garage:—Rue Cardinal Mercier at Rue Lafayette

Figure 3 Helen Foster's Ad Work (2)

sign systems used in advertisements, falls into the category of ads which connect a person to a product.⁵³ Through color and shadow co-ordination, the FIAT car and the image of the young woman are linked. The black and larger shadow of the woman encircled her white body – the dark and white colors match the image of the car with a dark-colored shell, and a translucently white interior as seen through its windows. In addition, the outmost edge of the image, constructed by even larger shadow of the girl's body and a round shape surrounding the car, complete the connection between the girl and the car. In the center of the round circle, behind the car, are the same kind of slashes which draw the outmost circle, a further reminder to the viewer that the image of the woman stands for the FIAT car. The visible characters of this woman, as reinforced by the words – beauty and strength – are projected onto the car.

On one hand, Helen Foster's design caters to the mainstream consumerist culture. The intangible things such as beauty and strength, in the myth of this ad, become buyable and consumable through the concrete image of the woman. On the other hand, Helen Foster also challenges the image of woman in commercial culture by providing an alternative femininity. She is beautiful by being herself, not by wearing fancy clothes or makeup; she is powerful with extraordinary strength, raising a car with ease. Like the male super huge figures in her ads for the China Finance Corporation, this woman also appears proportionally much larger, and she has the situation under control. The fate of the car in her hands depends on her will. Her existence in this ad is not for "consuming" the car; on the contrary, the existence of the car is an evidence of her super power. In this sense, this woman figure can still fall into the Joan of Arc category.

⁵³ Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978).

Some other ads of Foster's, especially the ones for a beauty studio, also reflect her take of conservative views on femininity. On ad, for example, claims "BEAUTY is a woman's greatest asset!" On a whole, however, the advertising business provided her a field to experiment a variety of femininity, and to develop her independence and creativity.

Helen Foster, therefore, decided to engage in advertising business permanently in China. She quit her position at the China Finance three months after her arrival, and started her own advertisement firm. She explained to her friends:

I liked my position at the China Finance quite well, but I had to work very hard at something that was not constructive... I simply adore advertising, anyway, so I thought the thing to do was to go into the business and have my own time... Imagine having my own business – the good old spirit of the entrepreneur!⁵⁴

Compared with her former position as a personal secretary, Helen Foster found more freedom and creative energy in advertising. She could have chosen to do other work even right after she quit the China Finance. Managers of a couple of other companies inquired her interest in being an office secretary, but she preferred a position to do her own work, to have her "own time," instead of helping a male manager. Alternatively, she considered going into the Consulate, an ambition of hers back to the time when she was in Salt Lake City. However, compared with independent advertising, the official duties constrained her creative urge. According to the government regulation, she would not have been able to publish any writing except for her civil service. By contrast, working on her advertising business, she could not only engage in advertising and publicity work, but also write book reviews for a magazine, *China Weekly Review*, and ran a column in a

⁵⁴ Helen Foster to anonymous recipient(s), November 24, 1931. Box 25, Folder 13, BYU.

local magazine, *The Shanghai Spectator* – “neither of which are lucrative but lots of fun,” in Foster’s own words.⁵⁵

Another reason of her love for advertising, however, comes not from her concern for self-fulfillment, but for more recognition from others – a tendency she had shown from teenage years. Compared with secretarial work, advertising brought external accreditation for her sense of self. In the same letter to home as above, after telling the startup of her advertising firm, she wrote that she “was feeling quite rosy and thought [she] could write home of [her] achievement.” she enclosed some of her ads in the letter, claiming they were “famous,” and had won her “such respect in this land of the Orient.”⁵⁶ The paradox of Helen Foster’s explorations of her identity at the time – striving for independence but also for external recognition, is not uncommon for the youth of the emerging adulthood. However, the extraordinary extent of her craves for fame and recognition, foreshadows a pattern in her life of which she did not grow out eventually.

War and Re-awaking of Joan of Arc Dream

Helen Foster’s advertising career, however, turned out to be very short-lived due to the Shanghai War of 1932, which broke out late January. Her advertising business had to close down. But the news-worthy war re-kindled her teenage dream of being an international correspondent, an aspiration which is closer to her Joan of Arc ideal than entrepreneur success.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

When Foster was still a little child, she already read all the writing of Ida Tarbell, the well-known woman journalist in the early twentieth century. Even at old age, Helen Foster Snow recalled that Tarbell's book, *The Business of Being a Woman* (1912), has been one of the greatest influences on her. In this book, which Tarbell wrote after her great success in investigative news reporting on the Standard Oil and Rockefeller, she warned young women that they should not follow her steps. She insisted that women's real "business" was as a wife and mother. She emphasized the harm women would do to themselves if they sought a career in "masculine" fields. She claimed that such women were doomed to failure because it was against women's "nature." Even if some women succeeded in a man's world, she wrote,

Nature and Society must not permit her triumph to appear desirable to the young. ... They must be made to realize the essential barrenness of her triumph, its lack of savor and tang of life, the multitude of makeshifts she must practice to recompense her for the lack of the great adventure of natural living.⁵⁷

Paula Treckel pointedly analyzes the contrast between Tarbell's tremendous career success in a male-dominated profession and her objection of young women's pursuit of similar career paths. Having to fight hard all her way to accomplish what she did in a masculine world, Tarbell, despite her success, suffered great insecurity. "Ida felt she had to hide her insecurities and deficiencies from the men around her. But at the same time she distanced herself from other professional women who might have seen the truth beneath the mask she wore."⁵⁸ To the younger generation of women, she felt jealous because they took it for granted of the rights she had fought hard for and they threatened her "position as the exceptional woman."

⁵⁷ Quoted from Paula Treckel, "Ida Tarbell and 'The Business of Being a Woman,'" 1997. Accessed online Dec. 1, 2010 from <http://tarbell.alleggheny.edu/treckel3.html>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Helen Foster, taking Ida Tarbell as her role model, was indeed greatly affected by Tarbell's conflicting views on women's career choices and Tarbell's exceptional experiences. Foster explains this influence at her old age:

[Ida Tarbell] was the only famous and important American woman journalist. I have no idea of becoming a journalist because I thought it impossible. I knew that no good job would go to a woman and they weren't doing particularly good work. They were only given the "women's page," which was cooking and sewing and cosmetics and a few things like that, but they were not normally considered to be real journalists, except for Ida Tarbell.⁵⁹

On the one hand, Helen Foster as a young girl actually did aspire to become the Ida Tarbell of her own generation, and did try hard to achieve a professional success like that of Tarbell's. On the other hand, Foster psychologically took in Tarbell's view that Tarbell's success was an "exception" and that "women's nature" was to stay at home. In this sense, Foster inherited the career insecurity of Tarbell's generation, and it was a tough fight for Helen Foster in life.

In spite of Tarbell's warning, when the chance came, Helen Foster did try her career as a war correspondent. This professional experience also transformed her values, ideals and her sense of self.

An essay which Helen Foster wrote a month before the war serves as a good contrast to her outlook after the war. In this essay, "Thoughts of a Shanghai-American," Helen Foster identified with the city, and the middle-class mainstream values. She named Shanghai as "Paris, New York and London of the Orient," proud of its flourishing economy, triumphant trades and business, and cosmopolitanism. Discussing the tense

⁵⁹ Helen Foster Snow, Audio recording, "General Life, no script", Box 163, #6. Around March, 1984. Soon after Helen Foster arrived in Shanghai, she did get an offer as a woman's editor of a newspaper, but she declined it because she had "no interest in recipes, etc., for instance" – she explained to her friends in a letter on October 18, 1931.

situation with the anticipation of war between Japan and China, Foster worried about threat to the American and international business interests by the possible war, and the danger of disease which would be caused by the rush of Chinese refugees to the international sector of the city – she mentioned nothing about the misery of the refugees themselves. Concluding this essay, Foster confessed that “to an American five thousand miles away from home, it is a very comforting sight to see the Thirty-first Infantry come steaming into the harbor, to swell the ranks of ‘defense’ already here.”⁶⁰

Helen Foster’s thoughts, however, were tremendously transformed by the Shanghai War. The second day of the war, on January 29, 1932, she dropped some quick lines to Juanie, her best friend in Salt Lake City. Foster told her friend:

You have no idea what a terrible feeling war is. I feel all heavy inside, thinking of the suffering and trouble about. The Chinese are so depressed they don’t know what they’re doing. Our table boys dropped and spilled things today until it was funny.⁶¹

Living in the International Settlement, only a few blocks away from the fighting in the Chinese city, Foster could watch the fire and the bombing on the top of her apartment building with safety. In her words, “Every night from this height you could see the blazing inferno against the black sky close enough to be a seat at the opera and you could hear the Wagnerian crescendo of shells and bombs interspersed with machine-gun staccato.” She witnessed big fires burning “huts and buildings where half a million Chinese lived, chiefly factory workers, for this was the factory area.” She also saw the burning of the largest publishing house, and the library which included “priceless manuscripts even from the Sung dynasty a thousand years old.”⁶² Helen Foster’s

⁶⁰ Helen Foster, “Thoughts of a Shanghai-American.” December, 1931. Box 22, Folder 9, BYU.

⁶¹ Helen Foster to Juanita Crawford, January 29, 1932. Box 22, Folder 7, BYU.

⁶² Helen Foster Snow, “My Second War, Shanghai, 1932,” essay written in 1932. Box 22, Folder 4, BYU.

“comfortable” feeling of being protected under American army in Shanghai was gone. “It is a queer feeling,” She told Juanie.

She started to question the different war experience between herself and the Chinese in the factory area, and was shocked by the indifference of some of the foreigners to the suffering Chinese. Some British army officers who watched the fighting on the roof with Foster especially shook her identity with the cosmopolitan. One of them commented lightly, “Those Chinese must be scurrying out of there like rats ... It’s a good thing to get rid of those vermin-ridden houses and kill some of the plague and disease in the area.”⁶³ Foster was so angry with this British officer that she saw him the “plague.”

The war experience, witness of misery, death, destruction and indifference stimulated Helen Foster’s sense of justice and responsibility. She volunteered for canteen service in the first days of the war. She started to realize the British imperialist presence in Shanghai, and vehemently attacked imperialist behaviors. She hated the Japanese for invading China. As to what she termed as the “treaty-port Chinese,” white-collar Chinese who worked in foreign companies, her former colleagues who she had deemed “most fashionable and charming,” she criticized them for manipulating foreign powers for their own personal gain, instead of genuinely concerning the nation or the people. She wrote to a leftist friend in Salt Lake City,

I should love to see the great masses of China, that is China, come sweeping down to the coast and do away with the cocky little foreigners and their extra-territorial privileges, with the opium-smoking, tea-drinking scholars of Old China, that would be justice!⁶⁴

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Helen Foster to Ranch, August, 1932. Box 22, Folder 8, BYU.

Between the lines, Helen Foster indicated that her reaction to the violence and cruelty of the current war was to use violence to fight back. With the breakout of the war, in a sudden, Helen Foster found a stage for her Joan of Arc dream.

At the moment, the professional role Helen Foster chose to fulfill this dream was a war correspondent. This experience provided her opportunities for adventures in war and a vanguard role among career women. However, to secure this position, Foster also confronted a dilemma: she had to rely on men in power to carry on her work, and her activities of news reporting depended on the permission of those men. First of all, she had to obtain a press pass to enter the war zone, but a press pass had so far only been issued to male correspondent.

Foster's would-be husband, Edgar Snow, correspondent for the Consolidated Press, had already got a pass and walked right into the Japanese advance on the first night of the fight. Foster's curiosity and adventurous spirit was immediately triggered as she listened to Edgar Snow talking about his first-hand experience in the war. She asked Snow to get a press card for her, using his connection as a well established international correspondent in Shanghai; she intended to be "the only woman war correspondent." When Snow protested that "No woman would be allowed to do anything" in the war area,⁶⁵ Foster pleaded that she would not take risks but only wanted the credentials – in her heart she wanted the real experience as well, but she had to lie to meet the expectations of women of her class so as to get the press pass.

⁶⁵ Helen Foster Snow, *My China Years: A Memoir* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984), 51.

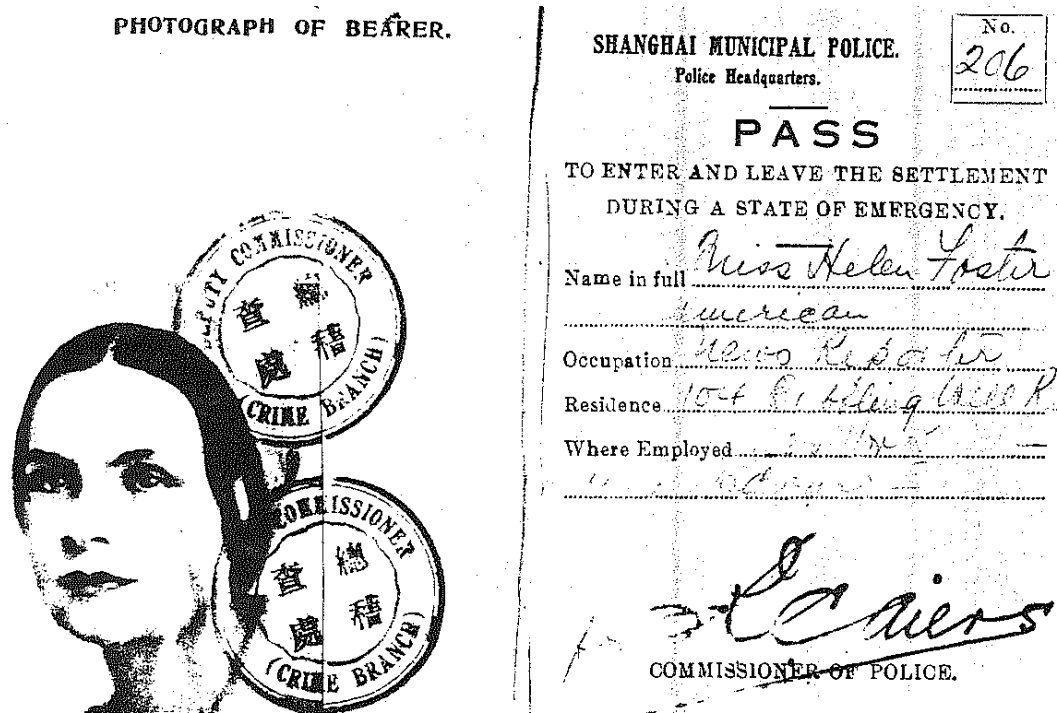


Figure 4 Helen Foster's Press Card During the Shanghai War

After Helen Foster got her press pass, she still had to rely on male helpers to get to the war zone. She asked for the help of Edgar Snow's assistant to drive her for an interview with the Chinese general (but they failed to reach the headquarter because of a bomb exploding in front of their truck), and she had an American lieutenant to drive her around in the war zone.

This is the difference between Helen Foster and another woman journalist of the same time, Agnes Smedley. While Foster tried to meet social expectations of her roles and to explore vanguard experience for women as the same time – therefore had to make compromises, Smedley resolutely disassociate herself with the white middle class and refused to constrain her professional activities by her gender. Her working class background gave her freedom to carry out news reports independently even in a war,

although her radical leftist views incurred census and stalking from secret services at the International Settlement in Shanghai.

How did Helen Foster's news reporting experience affect further development of her identity? As mentioned above, she dissociated herself from the cosmopolitan community, especially the "imperialists" represented by the abovementioned British officers. However, when she really entered the war zone and confronted the danger of war in real, she felt an affinity to the international army stationed at the Settlement and the port, for after all, she could be protected by them because she was a white woman. In an adventure to the Bund, she came face to face with the sentries. She described them in an admirable tone:

A handsome young Englishman was there in all his war togs. I swear I've never seen so many handsome young men of various nationalities in a year as in this one night. War does something to our women's potential liking for brass buttons and military bearing, I guess.⁶⁶

In particular, Foster became even more proud of her American heritage. One of her news reports, for example, was about an American Marine, whom she named "the hero of the first foreign engagement."⁶⁷ According to Foster, this marine, Howard H Hanvey, captured eight Japanese plainclothes singlehanded when he found those armed Japanese pursuing three or four Chinese on the road where he was on duty. Foster also wrote about this marine in her letter to her friends at home. Her letter indicates her identification with this marine hero. The marine became her "friend" in the letter, whose "crown of laurels sits but thornily upon his smooth, white brow."⁶⁸ In another letter to her friends at home several months ago before the war, Foster also used "smooth white brow"

⁶⁶ Helen Foster, War Diary on February 2nd, 1932. Box 22, Folder 10, BYU.

⁶⁷ Helen Foster to Stan, Jane, Ranch and others. February 24, 1932. Box 22, Folder 7, BYU.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

to describe herself. In the earlier letter, Foster made fun of one of her occasional dates, a Southerner who bowed to everyone. When this Southerner bowed, in Foster's words, "his chin occasionally collided with my smooth white brow."⁶⁹ This small coincidence discloses how Foster projected her self image onto the marine who obtained big publicity because of his heroic deed.

Much as Helen Foster's views on the heroic role of this American Marine who beat the invading Japanese for the Chinese, she envisioned a similar role to herself in relation to the Chinese. Although at times she praised Chinese soldiers' bravery in the war, more often than ever, she described the Chinese soldiers as children, and she imagined herself a protective role with these "children." In a diary about the war, she recorded her feelings about the Chinese soldiers:

I don't know what to think about the war. I could not feel more dreadful if it were Americans fighting, because I have learned to love the Chinese people very much, and it wouldn't be at all the same if the soldiers I have seen were full grown men, but they are all so pitifully young and cute looking.... I would never have this feeling for well-trained, well-equipped troops like they had during the world war. It is sort of slaughter here somehow – just sending human flesh against dynamite. You sort of want to tell them what to do – where to hide and how to handle their guns, etc. such good advice as I would give: One has a sort of maternal feeling.⁷⁰

Even though she did not experience the world war first hand, she seemed sure of the difference between the Chinese soldiers and those who were in WWI. Even though this was the first war Helen Foster had ever experienced, and the soldiers had at least had more military training than Foster, she comfortably assumed that she knew more about war than the young Chinese soldiers and "naturally" had a "maternal feeling."

⁶⁹ Helen Foster's letter, anonymous recipient(s), September 10, 1931. Box 22, Folder 4, BYU.

⁷⁰ Helen Foster, war diary, March 9, 1932. Box 22, Folder 2, BYU.

At this stage of Helen Foster's life, she behaved more like the white women whom Ida Pruitt criticized in her writing: the wives of the doctors at the PUMC who asked Pruitt to set up an orphanage for the babies of the Chinese women beggars on the street. Like those white women, Foster took her superiority of the Chinese soldiers for granted, and treated them as "her children." On the surface, Foster appeared eager to help and exhibited love to the Chinese people. However, such help was not based on the equality between the helper and the helped, and more often than ever, such help fails to be really helpful.

In her letters to Salt Lake City, Helen Foster also described for several times the "helpless" Chinese "children" soldiers, and China the country was seen as a child as well.

In one letter, she wrote about the situation in Shanghai as:

The feeling of racial prejudice and hatred is running rampant and is very depressing to me sometimes, but I'm not worrying about China. For some reason I have implicit faith that China will be here four thousand years from 1932 in practically the same condition as now. I simply adore the whole sprawling, spawning 400, 000, 000 of them for no good reason that I can see, and it seems to me that the whole world owes it to China to keep her happy just as if she were a big helpless child, which she is. Taking advantage of China is just taking candy from a baby, and it is the meanest nation in the world that would do it.⁷¹

With a sense of justice and compassion, Helen Foster notice the racial prejudice and hatred both in the international community in Shanghai and between the Chinese and the foreigners. However, her self-righteousness obstructed her to explore the issues deeper, and her judgment of the situation stayed not too far from those whom she deemed as prejudiced.

Such unconscious sense of self-righteousness is not uncommon across time and place. Like Helen Foster, Mellas, the protagonist of Karl Marlantes's novel *Matterhorn*,

⁷¹ Helen Foster to Mr. Sullivan, October 20, 1932. Box 22, Folder 7, BYU.

confronted blatant racial prejudice first time in his life in the Vietnam War. Coming from a working class white family, Mellas, the new lieutenant, intended to do justice to the black marines in his platoon. Using his administrative power, he transferred a blatantly racist white soldier to another army section, when two black soldiers talked with him and threatened to use violence against that white soldier. In a fight afterward, the entire platoon was trapped on top of a hill. Mellas was sharing a fighting hole with a black soldier, Jackson, and they might die any moment. The two people's conversation reveals much about race and about the harm of self-righteousness. Jackson told Mellas that both of them were racist.

“You can't grow up in America and not be a racist... Only there's one big difference between us two racists... Being racist helps you and it hurts me... There's another thing between us racists.... Some of us racists are prejudiced and some aren't. Now you, I'd say you are trying not to be prejudiced. Me too... We won't be free of racism until my black skin sends the same signals as Hawke's [another white officer] red mustache. The way it is now, you can't look at me without thinking something more, and me, I can't look back without the same attitude.”

Mellas was starting to understand... “You got me good.” Mellas said. He smiled. “So what do we do?”

He waited while Jackson thought a moment. “It's like the way you like China,” [China in the novel is the name of another black soldier.] Jackson said. “You have to stop that shit.”

“What's wrong with liking China?”

“Ain't nothing wrong with liking China. Everyone likes China.... What I mean is the *way* you like China. I mean he's your nigger.”⁷²

Jackson accused of Mellas's unprincipled favor to China even when China broke the army regulations and got himself in trouble, and he did not approve of the way China and his likes who “throw shit into whitey's face every chance they get,” and then go and tell white people like Mellas to get off their backs. According to Jackson, such kind of activities did not change the status quo of between the blacks and the whites.

⁷² Karl Marlantes, *Matterhorn: A Novel of the Vietnam War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2010), 431-32.

“Well, I’m nobody’s nigger,” Jackson went on. “I’m not some college students’ fucking nigger and I’m not some movie man’s fucking nigger. I’m going to be my own nigger.... we don’t need any special fucking help. We’re people. Just treat us like people. We’re no dumber than you and we’re no smarter.... We might even make some mistakes. We are people, Lieutenant, just like you.”⁷³

Jackson’s manifestation about the equality among people can well explain the problematic situation between Helen Foster and the Chinese soldiers which she reported about in newspapers and wrote about in letters. Like Mellas the lieutenant, Foster took it for granted that the Chinese soldiers’ needed her help and her help would do good to the soldiers. The underlying message, however, was the assumption of her natural superiority and power. This assumption obstructed Foster of any self-questioning, and thus she failed to see the problems of treating other people as unequals.

One of the important origins of Helen Foster’s sense of “natural superiority” came from the popularity of eugenics as a science during her coming-of-age years. Created by Francis Galton, eugenics became very popular both in Britain and the U.S. before the First World War. While the war diverted people’s attention from eugenics, Albert E. Wiggam, an American journalist, writer and Chautauqua lecturer led efforts to renew the public attention in the 1920s and 1930s. He lectured countrywide, and wrote three well read books on eugenics. The 1923 book, *The New Decalogue of Science*, in particular, was a best seller of the year. Wiggam “melded eugenic science with statesmanship, morality, and religion.”⁷⁴ Advocating eugenics with religious fever, Wiggam believed in inherited intelligence, inherited leadership and other characteristics of the “Noble Race.”

⁷³ Marlantes, *Matterhorn*, 432-33.

⁷⁴ Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 59.

In Helen Foster's Shanghai days, she was still very impressed by Wiggam's arguments. Incidentally, the eugenic ideas of heredity went well with her earlier education of the Mormon passion for genealogy. As mentioned earlier, when she was a child, both her mother and her aunt had insisted that she had inherited the intelligence or beauty of their respective family.

A letter from Edgar Snow – then still her boyfriend – to her revealed much of Wiggam's "apparent influence" on the young Foster. In order to dissuade Foster of Wiggam's one-sided pseudoscience, the boyfriend wrote a long letter of twenty one pages. Responding to Helen Foster's lament of a disappearing noble race, "the Russian bourgeoisie and nobility" with their "natural leadership," Snow reminded her that "a hundred classes of leaders had been overthrown in the past," and each of the leaders "achieved the position by force" instead of "natural leadership. In addition, he used India and China as "excellent examples of eugenics practices for centuries."⁷⁵ According to Snow, although the rigidly enforced system of caste in India ensured the continuity of pure "noble blood," many great Indian leaders and scientists came from the lower caste or the Sikhs who observed no caste lines. Likewise, the scholar-family tradition in china only allowed sons and daughters of similar family backgrounds to marry each other, but Snow did not think this system created a "Nobler Race." And the leaders of contemporary China, like Chiang Kai-shek, Sun Yat-sen and Lin Yu-tang were all from lower-class families.

When it came to the U.S., however, even Edgar Snow, with his relatively "balanced" views on race and class, believed in a kind of "natural superiority" of its

⁷⁵ Edgar Snow to Helen Foster, no date (1932). Box 22, Folder, 3, BYU.

people due to its democratic system and American idealism, although American society still needed much improvement in creating equal opportunities for children from all classes and reaching a higher evolution of human society. In his own words,

Also I have a faith, perhaps naïve, in the fundamental vigor, sanity, and aliveness of the American tradition, at least its finer ideals, and I should probably fight to defend them, whether from a horde of immigrant malcontents, or from the empiricisms of pseudo-scientific quacks, native or foreign, who prescribe for us without knowing us.

The young Helen Foster and Edgar Snow shared the belief in American ideals. While Snow attributed the superiority of these ideals to America's democratic tradition and adjustment to the environment to perpetuate "natural selection," Foster, before her discussion on this with Snow, believed it was due to the noble bourgeoisie race of her country. Under this logic, she inherited the natural leadership of her race, and therefore she was entitled to lead the Chinese in the Sino-Japanese war, and she could be the Joan of Arc among the Chinese "children soldiers."

Helen Foster's understanding of the Chinese and her self did not stop evolving here, however. Edgar Snow's letter was apparently more or less effective, for in Foster's later years, she no longer saw either China or the Chinese with a "maternal feeling." Even at that time, Snow had noticed Foster's strength of being able to "inquire deeply":

I know your sure sense of the broad movement and direction of humanity is ultimately an unerring guide for you, that some of the narrow interpretations you momentarily put upon phenomena cannot in the end satisfy.... I love the stalwart courage of your spirit, and the upbuilding flow of your life.

Helen Foster's war reporting turned out to be transformative for her identity and outlook. Despite some "momentarily narrow interpretations" of the situations, she did not comfortably sit in her relative safety in the international settlement, but went out to seek the truth about war. She also found this work very fulfilling, not only because of the

adventurous experience, but also because of the fame and recognition which came with the work. The latter reason indicates that she was still in the “prison” of seeking external recognition. She wrote to Sparkey, her teenage friend, that the newspapers put her news on front page, that news reporting made her “quite a famous correspondent,” and that she even got fan mail.⁷⁶ All these factors were exhilarating for Foster. However, merely a couple of weeks after her war reporting work set off, the American Consul General called her for an appointment as secretary in the consulate. Foster hated to leave her news work, but she saw the work at the Consulate another good opportunity, hence she hastily ended her short career as a war correspondent.

*Consular Service and the American Mascot*⁷⁷

Helen Foster’s reasoning of accepting this position at the Consulate was practical.

She wrote to her friend Sparkey:

I hated to give up my newspaper work, but we were expecting to evacuate any minute and it seemed like a good idea to get a government position so I could be transferred if we had to leave. We get a gold salary, too ... which is a young fortune here.⁷⁸

The “gold salary” Foster made at the Consulate, with the exchange rate of 5 to 1, was “almost as much as the Judge of the Chinese Supreme Court.”⁷⁹ Therefore, with the rise of income, she also gained a sense of rise in status. Although she was a young girl, she could already compare with a big male power like the Chinese judge, if not with those male Westerners in Shanghai.

⁷⁶ Helen Foster to Sparkey, September 21, 1932, BYU.

⁷⁷ In Foster’s memoir about her China years, she wrote that during her time working at the Consular Service, she “became a kind of American mascot.” See *My China Years*, 58.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Helen Foster to Eeeeemil, June 20, 1932; and Helen Foster to Jane, June, 1932. Box 22, Folder 7, BYU.

In addition to the gold salary, Helen Foster was also excited about the “important people” and significant events which her work involved. As secretary to the American Consul General, and social secretary to the Consul General’s wife, Foster claimed to have charge of all the “functions” of the Consulate. She organized the Fourth of July celebration for the American community in Shanghai, arranged the Memorial Day service and other events that made good publicity. Furthermore, she was in charge of seating dinner tables for diplomatic dignitaries and American military officials.

Helen Foster was very proud of the functions she played at this position. She not only wrote to all her friends at home about the good salary, but also about the social events she participated. Here is a typical excerpt:

Last week-end I went to an official reception at the Country Club given by the 31st Infantry, with three wonderful looking lieutenants – all gold braid and dazzling white. Afterward the Colonel (Colonel Gasser, a most beautiful man, the best looking commanding officer in Shanghai) invited us to dinner, and put me at his right in a friendly spirit.⁸⁰

The 31st Infantry was temporarily transferred from Manila to Shanghai due to the Shanghai War. Similar to her previous letter about the American soldier hero who captured eight Japanese, Foster described the military officials as her “friends,” an indication of her willing identification with those officers. She also told her Salt Lake City friends that the Colonel and his wife almost adopted her and called her “daughter of the regiment.”⁸¹

If being close to the military power is not enough to exalt her self image, she wrote further to her friends at home:

⁸⁰ Helen Foster to Jane, June, 1932. Box 22, Folder 7, BYU.

⁸¹ Helen Foster to the Nibleys, July, 1932. Box 22, BYU.

... the U.S.S. ROCHESTER has come to port with some really very nice ensigns and lieutenants abroad....The Captain is my good friend and invites me out to the boat for his teas and such. One day he turned the whole boat over to me to give a tea. It was wonderful, really, all the officers lined up in uniform and me the hostess. I had about twenty people.⁸²

If at the moment Helen Foster could not feel like a real Joan of Arc, this kind of social event at least gave her a similar illusion. Heading the table with twenty naval officers lined up beside her seemed not far from being a dazzling leader of the army. As her description of another social gathering indicates, “I had the Colonel on one side and my favorite Major on the other and it was great. I felt somewhat like a cross between the Empress of Asia and the head of Napoleon’s house.”⁸³

No wonder Helen Foster would tell several of her friends in Salt Lake City that her job was “one of the best positions a gal could get in the Far East.”⁸⁴ This claim, however, rings too close to the one she once said about her position at the American Mining Congress in Utah. Much as that one that was claimed as “the best position in the State of Utah” for a young girl, this one allowed her to work with male authorities. Access to the male authorities gave her a feeling of empowerment, but again that “empowerment” was superficial, and was controlled by the male authorities instead of being sustainable by Foster herself.

Helen Foster’s role at a tiffin gathering of the diplomatic circle exemplifies the ambiguity of this empowerment. Helen Foster sat among military officials and diplomats from China, Japan, France and Britain. She “decided to do what [she] could to improve

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Helen Foster to Jane, June, 1932. Box 22, Folder 7, BYU.

⁸⁴ Helen Foster to Eeeeemil, June 20, 1932. Box 22, Folder 7, BYU.

international peace relations” and “prevent an international war during the meal.”⁸⁵ It seems as if Foster is a modern Joan of Arc actively leading the peace-making decisions among the big powers of the world. Although she was definitely proud of her “leading” role among the dignitaries, as shown in her narrative to her friends at home, she was aware of the reasons why she was there, “I am going because I have blue eyes and a double chin, I guess.”⁸⁶ In another letter to her girl friend, she more explicitly explained that few women attended the tiffin, and she was the only non-committed present. That is to say, she was aware that she was present not because she was really making “powerful” decisions for the world, but because she was a young lady, in her own words, “a distinction,” different from the diplomats and military officials who was on the table to make real business. Accordingly, her method of “leading” among these men was “instructed” by her male boss, “to be ‘animated’ and make everybody happy,”⁸⁷ “to be ‘amusing’...bright and gay.”⁸⁸ The quotation marks she put on the instructions she received for her role – “animated” and “amusing” – stand out as big questions marks on the attitude towards professional women like Foster by those male “authorities” who gave her such instructions. Did they see her as their equals? Did they value her professional abilities and opinions, or did they include her merely as an entertaining or decorating element at the dinner table?

These troubling questions not only linger around Helen Foster’s experience at the Consular Service, but they also stayed common to the women of her time. Among the news clippings which Foster kept was a series of news on a dispute between some

⁸⁵ Foster to Jane, June, 1932.

⁸⁶ Foster to Eeeeemil, June 20, 1932.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Foster to Jane, June, 1932.

students of Yenching University and the mayor of Peking, Yuan Liang in 1934. The cause of the dispute was an invitation to 60 women students of the university to a garden party at the Summer Palace. A section of the men students protested against the mayor's intention of using the women students as ushers to his reception, and alleged "that the action of the mayor constituted a reflection on Chinese womanhood."⁸⁹ According to the news report, due to the men students' opposition, the 60 women students decided to decline the mayor's invitation. The mayor's pressmen, responding to the declination, declared the event a misunderstanding. He claimed that the mayor invited the women students in the same way as other guests – instead of as ushers. Because most of the people invited were foreigners, the pressman stated, "the mayor needed the assistance of the women students in receiving them because of their linguistic accomplishments. He was unable to see how this could be possibly interpreted as a reflection on women."⁹⁰

More agitation aroused after the garden party, as some women students did show up to the Mayor's party. Men students of the university claimed that "the mayor committed serious indignity" by asking women students to wait on guests, and that "their gentler school mates' had been shamefully exploited."⁹¹ The Mayor himself wrote to the school authorities explaining that his intention was to "offer the co-eds an opportunity to study the ways and manners of English-speaking guests."⁹² This excuse did not appease the men students. They still launched a movement against the mayor.

⁸⁹ *The Peiping Chronicle*, "Action of Mayor Rouses Students," May 6, 1934.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Dairen*, "Men Students Attack Mayor of Peking for Having Used Girls at Reception for Foreigners." May 9, 1934.

⁹² *Ibid.*

The reason that Helen Foster clipped this event may have been due to her consistent interest in student movements. However, this piece of news must have also touched a memory of her own past experience as a “woman guest” of the numerous parties among the Shanghai dignitaries when she worked at the Consular service over a year ago. She must have been reflecting on the role of her past self. In fact, even when she was still in Shanghai, complacent about her flashy social circle at work, she was already questioning the effect of her work to the growth of her identity. She confided to friends in letter that she didn’t know when she might be able to have time to do some of the things she wanted to do; she also complained privately that she was tired of the consular service and “simply dying to take time off to become famous.”⁹³ She wanted to go back to newspaper and magazine work, and she wanted to go to Peking, imagining it a place which was less “commercial,” where her creativity would not be constrained, and where she could concentrate to write her book.

Despite Helen Foster’s paradoxical feelings about her Shanghai days, she acknowledged the year in Shanghai had made her feel “all grown-up.”⁹⁴ Her short-lived but independent advertising company, the Shanghai War, and then later the hustle and bustle of social life among diplomats and other dignitaries all greatly transformed her. An excerpt from her diary of the Shanghai War exemplifies the glaring difference between her past experience in Utah and what she went through in Shanghai:

Tonight there is intermittent shooting, of what I am told are Vickers guns – heavier shot than a machine gun, but the same steady firing.

I have a letter from a girlfriend in a sorority house at home, telling me about how exciting life is there during Christmas what with fraternity parties and all the thrilling things that come with the holiday seasons.

⁹³ Foster to Eeeeemil, June 20, 1932; Foster to Sparkey, September 21, 1932, BYU.

⁹⁴ Helen Foster to Edna, October, 1932, BYU.

The curfew is in force and the streets are absolutely quiet.⁹⁵

Her past self in Salt Lake City had shared with her girlfriend in the sorority house similar understanding about what were “exciting” and “thrilling” about life. The juxtaposition of the reality in Shanghai, however, was a very far cry from such “excitement.” The year in Shanghai had pushed Foster to walk away from the kind of life her girlfriend had at home, after which she walked even further, from Shanghai’s international settlement to Peking’s Chinese and foreign intellectual circle in the 1930s.

Letters Styles of this Period

I am sending a very inadequate account of myself and pilgrimage, without even taking time to look it over. I hope to do much better later on.

– Helen Foster Snow to Aunt Betty and Dr. Houghton, September 2, 1931

Please tear this illiterate letter up as read, partly because it is illiterate and partly because it is one of those little pet hobbies of mine, as you may remember.

– Helen Foster to Sparkey, September 21, 1932

Most of Helen Foster’s letters kept of this period are her personal letters to friends at home, in her own words, “a very inadequate account of myself and pilgrimage.” Her distinct letter styles have already started to establish at that time. Often her letters are extremely long – her letter to Sparkey, for example, contains ten crowded pages. She wrote with a sense of urgency, always feeling lack of enough time to present her “busy self” to friends at the other side. Despite her “busy self,” she still spent much time and made much effort in writing letters. She typed “furiously” with an overflow of ideas “all

⁹⁵ Helen Foster, diary of February 2, 1932. Box 23, Folder 10, BYU.

mounting like a little of puppies for maternal consideration.”⁹⁶ Besides these common characteristics of her letters, several points stand out for the ones of this particular period.

First of all, she repeatedly requested her friends to destroy her letters after they read them. Why would she want her recipients to tear off her letters after she had spent so much time and energy on them? A double-edged reason is her high expectation of herself and her inadequate confidence both in herself at the moment and in letter as an effective messenger. A letter to an unknown recipient exemplifies her paradoxical feeling:

I took another trip a while ago, and am sending you an account of it if you would care to look it over. It's practically illiterate but you might like to read it. Please destroy these letters as read. I do not like to think of such things extant against me. I have had some fairly interesting experiences since I came, but I cannot write a thing for publication of course, on account of being pledged to secrecy in my position[at the consular service]...⁹⁷

On the one hand, she was not sure whether her letters carried her meaning and her own image interestingly to her reader; on the other hand, she expected to write about her experience in “real writing” as publications, instead of mere letters. She assumed the existence of the “illiterate” letters would be held against her future literary reputation, when she could express herself in more “competent” forms than letters. Another letter more explicitly explains her “pet hobby” of asking others to destroy her letter:

I have often thought that if only I could be sure the recipient would tear up my letters upon arrival, I'd enjoy very much writing them – but I do hate to have all my maiden fancies and bad grammar held out against me on paper.

Some lines down in this letter, she indicated her “maiden fancy” was to “accomplish something,” that is, writing a bestseller on China.

⁹⁶ Helen Foster to an anonymous Second Lieutenant, no exact date, but around 1930 when she was in Salt Lake City. Box 22, Folder 8, BYU.

⁹⁷ Helen Foster's letter, anonymous recipient(s), 1932. Box 22, Folder 8, BYU.

Why has Helen Foster kept the carbon copies of her letters intact while demanding her recipients to destroy the original ones? This relates to the second characteristic of her letters of this period. That is, her letters center on her and her experience. The foci of her letters would change to a broader scope as time passed by and as her identities matured, but at the time, they mainly recorded exploitations of her emerging identities. Her letters were important for her because they helped define her identities in relation to her audience. The audience provided different referential points for her to define her self images accordingly. As Charles Taylor puts it, “We define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us.”⁹⁸ Especially during this period when the young Helen Foster was exploring many possibilities in her identities, her epistolary self varies during interactions with different people. She explained the importance of letter writing for her to a friend as following:

Writing to you makes a very pleasant vehicle for my rather disconnected thoughts, and I had despaired of “essaying” it in the traditional form. I was only writing it for you, anyway; that is, you as an audience and me as the object of a boomerang.⁹⁹

In other words, letters functioned for Foster as a vehicle of self reflection. Although she wrote for her audience, she also wrote with the purpose to reciprocate, and therefore, “as the object of a boomerang,” she herself took the ultimate effect of her letters during this period.

However, her letter styles would soon change. With her move to Peking and with new experience, her letters started to open new worlds for her and her audience.

⁹⁸ Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition” in *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1994), 79.

⁹⁹ Helen Foster to an anonymous Second Lieutenant, around 1930, BYU.

Personal Discovery of China – Helen Foster Snow’s Peking and Yen’an Adventures

Now I’ve settled down to the discovery of China. (Everyone who comes out here somehow considers China his own personal discovery, you know.) So far I’ve only discovered that, like women and America, everything you say about it will sound true enough but won’t be. I have, however, seen enough of Europe at work in Asia to become very H. G. Wells. I almost want to take up the cudgels in the defense of “downtrodden humanity.” Every American female seems to feel that way somehow. There seems to be something in our educational system that does not prepare us for the facts of life out here among the “die-hards.” A die-hard, for your information, is a species of foreign business man resident in China who came with the white man’s burden in a peddler’s knapsack on his snow-white shoulders – came, saw, but has not yet conquered ...and won’t let the old cat of empire-building die.

– Helen Foster Snow to Mr. Winder, August 10, 1933

At the time when this letter was written, Helen Foster had already become Mrs. Snow. She married Edgar Snow and moved to Peking. Her series of exploitations in professional identities concluded with the marriage, and with her decision of being settled in the “writing” line. She planned that her first book should be a best-seller on Chinese history, philosophy and art combined with “brand new theories.”¹⁰⁰ However, she also realized her lack of qualification and acknowledged that she did not know enough about China. She worked hard to learn, having “from five to ten or fifteen books all open before [her] at the same time to check and examine.” She noticed that often none of the books agreed, though she did learned more after reading more. In a letter to a relative of her husband, she confided: “I have discovered one thing ... – studying another country is valuable not because you learn so much about that country but because you learn so much about your native place you thought was so simple.”¹⁰¹ This realization explains why she saw her experience in Peking as a “personal discovery” of China. This

¹⁰⁰ Helen F Snow to Dottie, March, 1934. Box 22, Folder 17, BYU.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

experience turned out to be central to the pursuit of her Joan of Arc dream, and she did eventually in a way “take up the cudgels in the defense of “downtrodden humanity.”

Becoming Very H.G. Wells

From being proud of her cosmopolitan circle of businessmen upon her arrival in Shanghai to wanting to use the cudgels against the “die-hards,” Helen Snow had come a long way. In her words, she had become “very H.G. Wells,” a radical leftist figure. What caused such a radical change in her?

First of all, even before she moved to Peking, Helen Snow’s year in Shanghai had already transformed her to the leftist side. Her own change corresponds with her comments on one of the characters of LaSelle Gilman’s book, *Shanghai Deadline*:

It is a logical fallacy to have Tony suddenly become a Communist sympathizer after travelling in the interior – Shanghai is the place to turn one’s stomach in such a direction. The interior trip should merely consolidate an impression already gained in Shanghai.¹⁰²

Both her epistolary and published writing recorded the reasons of such change in herself. A letter written during her Shanghai days delineates what she had witnessed on the streets: men, women, children and babies sleeping in the streets summer and winter; a dozen rickshaw men fighting for a customer “for twenty cents mex. (about 4 cents gold) for the privilege of running in the boiling sun or terrific winter gales of Shanghai”; Chinese coolies unrestrainedly kicked and beaten by Sikh policemen who were brought “by the British to squelch the lowly Chinese.”¹⁰³ Too much of the blatant injustice happening

¹⁰² Helen Snow to LaSelle Gilman, May 13, 1936. Box 22, Folder 19, BYU. Gilman sent Helen Snow the manuscript of this book and asked her suggestions for revision. Snow wrote a long 7-page letter of advice. *Shanghai Deadline* turned out to be a best seller in 1937 and were turned into a motion picture in 1938.

¹⁰³ Helen Foster to Ranch, August, 1932. Box 22, Folder 8, BYU.

every day angered her, and she found the crude reality of Shanghai proved Marxist theories on exploitation and imperialism.¹⁰⁴

In particular, she was deeply disturbed by the British imperialism in Shanghai, as already discussed above from her war experience. Before she left Shanghai, she wrote an article publicly attacking such a “British” attitude, and published it in the *China Weekly Review*, a newspaper edited by J. B. Powell, who had been fought “a personal war” against the British imperialism with Edgar Snow before Helen Foster joined them.¹⁰⁵ The trigger of this public “declaration of war on the British” was a 1932 novel by a British author, J Van Dyke, *Chinese Dust*. The novel described a small European community in Southern China, in which a missionary strangled a rickshaw man to death. The book describes the scene of the murder as follows: “Despite the sugary taint of the missionary, he had emerged at last with that true bee-and-beer savor of the Englishman about him. ‘Yellow swine,’ he had uttered, as he killed his man.... He had gone out like a Briton.”¹⁰⁶ Helen Snow was amazed by such blaring racism in a book published by a “supposedly reputable” press in London. She termed the attitude reflected in the novel as “the Sinophobic treaty-port ‘die-hard’ in China,” and claimed it moved her to deep contemplation on the subject of the die-hards. She criticized them for living “in a comfortable but hermetically sealed glass case” and living like tiny parasite which

¹⁰⁴ Helen Foster wrote about Shanghai’s status quo as a proof of Marxism in several unpublished essays too. See “Shanghai: A Study in Dialectical Materialism,” and “The Shanghailanders.” Box 22, Folder 4, BYU.

¹⁰⁵ Helen F Snow, “The Shanghai Mind,” recalling why she wrote the 1933 essay on the Shanghai Mind sometime in the 1980s. Box 23, Folder 5, BYU.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Nym Wales (Helen Foster Snow’s pen name), “Analyzing the ‘Shanghai Mind,’” *The China Weekly Review*, September 9, 1933, BYU.

“considers itself much more important to the world’s work than its host, and far superior.”¹⁰⁷

What distinguishes Helen Snow from others who witnessed the same blatant injustice in Shanghai but stayed in the “glass case” and refused to make any change, was her sense of justice and her “capability for being moved greatly,” as Edgar Snow puts it. While some “people forever sure of their own self-understanding are usually so bereft of feeling and sensitivity that they are incapable of having new responses to new stimuli,” Helen Snow constantly “recapitulate, evaluate, and readjust.”¹⁰⁸

In addition to her capacity to observe and react to new things, Helen Snow also received influence from her leftist friends in Shanghai, Edgar Snow and other friends whom she got to know through him, such as Soong Ching-ling and Agnes Smedley.

After Helen Snow and her husband moved to Peking, her social circle pushed her even more to the leftist side. Describing the experience of living in Peking for the first year there, she wrote, “... practically everyone of public interest finds his way here sooner or later for a few days. Then here is a little colony of American ‘intellectuals...’” These intellectuals included young artists, young delegates from the “Association of Learned Societies,” who studied Chinese culture and history, “several young women writing novels with a view to dispossessing Pearl Buck,” and some artists painting temple roofs.¹⁰⁹ In addition, according to Snow, established international scholars such as C. Walter Yong, Sven Hedin, Owen Lattimore lived in Peking permanently. Her description of a famous Chinese philosopher, Hu Shih, was revealing of the intellectual atmosphere

¹⁰⁷ Wales, “Analyzing the ‘Shanghai Mind.’”

¹⁰⁸ Edgar Snow to Helen Foster, no date (probably in 1932). Box 22, Folder 3, BYU.

¹⁰⁹ Helen Snow to Mr. Winder, August 10, 1933.Box 22, Folder 16, BYU.

in which she submerged herself. “Although he was a revolutionary not more than five years or so ago, he is now considered quite passeé by the new crop of intellectuals.”¹¹⁰

Unlike Helen Snow’s circle in Shanghai, which was a combination of diplomats, businessmen and journalists, she joined a “Peking club” of scholars, students, artists and of course, journalists.

The “new crop of intellectuals” included several artists whom Helen Snow befriended soon after her arrival in Peking, in particular, Wang Chun-chu (王钧初), Liang I-Chu (梁以俅) and Suhuo (徐火). It is not clear how she got to know them in the beginning. One possible reason was that Helen Snow went to see a woodcut exhibition at a middle school in Peking, and she was said to be the only foreigner who visited. This occasion may have made her known to the young artists. Another possible reason was that Lu Hsun (鲁迅), the famous left-wing writer, who knew both the artists and the Snows, may have suggested the young artists to visit the Snows. Either way, one young left-wing artist one day went to call the Snows at their house, and soon after that, three young artists became frequent visitors of Helen Snow between 1933 and 1935. Edgar Snow also liked the young artists, but it was mainly the wife who entertained these guests. According to the wife, the husband “could hardly endure the language barrier” – although the young artists could read English perfectly, they could not speak the language well. Usually, Edgar Snow “would escape after a few minutes and later ask [the wife] to report on what had been said.”¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Helen Snow, *My China Years*, 113.

Even before Helen Snow met these young artists, she had already shown a keen interest in Chinese new art. In October, 1932, when a well-known contemporary Chinese artist, Liu Hai-ssu (刘海粟) held an exhibition in Shanghai, Helen Snow saw it and also got to know Liu personally. They had several long talks on both the old Chinese style of painting and the new developments in Chinese art. However, she was not that impressed by Liu's work, as she commented, "His Western painting must have contained within itself the values of Chinese arts, yet here also one could not see any integration, not so well done, of course, as had already been done by Von Gogh and others in Europe. There was no originality at all in his Chinese work, though it was competent and charming, such as in *Wild Goose* and *Seeking for Prey*."¹¹² Helen Snow gave credit to Liu for his bravery of breaking Chinese taboos and becoming one of the firsts to use nude models for his art school, but she did not see much special artistic innovation, especially since his own painting was still divided into two Chinese/Western categories. This view of Helen Snow reflected that she had established her own habit of independent and unique way of thinking. At the time of the exhibition, Liu had become famous both in China and Europe: the mayor of Shanghai sponsored the exhibition, and Liu's painting, "Snow of Luxemburg" was purchased by the French government. But instead of blindly praising Liu's work, Helen Snow had her own critique based on her observation.

If Helen Snow was not deeply impressed by the "big shot," why did she adore the young new-comer left-wing artists instead? First of all, for her indignation against the imperialism and inhumanity she had witnessed in China, suddenly she found an outlet, and for her pursuit of Joan of Arc dream, she found a real cause. Later in the above letter

¹¹² Nym Wales, "Modern Painting in China," Notes on the Left-Wing Painters and Modern Art in China, no date, written between 1958 and 1961, p 54. Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, Stanford, CA.

to Mr. Winder, in which she vehemently attacked the vice of die-hards, she also introduced him her “little artist protegees” [*sic*]. Describing a private exhibition of these artists, Helen Snow told Winder, “They have a huge canvas on which is depicted the world struggle for democracy against dictatorship and imperialism. Also there were many woodcuts of empty rice-bowls, cloudy revolutionary-browed workers and peasants, in all very gory and quite forceful...”¹¹³ Helen Snow found these young artists of the 1930s different from Liu Hai-ssu’s generation. They were socially conscious and demanded a significance for their “art in the resolution of the pressing social problems of the day.”¹¹⁴ In addition, Helen Snow saw these artists as vanguard in Chinese art because they, for the first time in China, foregrounded human body in painting, in an attempt to “give value to the dignity of labor or to deplore the unnatural indignity suffered by those who toil.”¹¹⁵ What Helen Snow was most proud of these artists was that they originated “in the native soil,” and thus had developed “independently.” She saw in them “an idealism and a militant emotional feeling that can carry far.” Such spirits of independence, idealism and militant feeling for justice, all bore much similarity to the values she had acquired from her American education. Such characters, after all, are also the essence of the legend of Joan of Arc. Therefore, she thought she found someone Chinese who she could understand and with whom she could share her ideals in a way.

Another reason why Helen Snow adored these left-wing artists was their persistence and enthusiasm in their work in spite of heavy persecution from the authority. These artists’ jobs and lives were in danger because of the content of their painting. Even

¹¹³ Helen Snow to Mr. Winder, August 10, 1933, BYU.

¹¹⁴ Nym Wales, “China’s New Art,” *Asia*, July, 1935, 404-407.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

though they were non-Communist, their left-wing work was under heavy suppression by the KMD government, and once found by the police that they were the painter of such type of work, they would either be put into prison or even executed. Introducing these artists' work to a publisher in the U.S., Helen Snow wrote: "You cannot imagine what incredible courage it takes for these young Leftists to survive here – side by side with the most incredible cowardice and mercenariness."¹¹⁶ She went on with an example from Wang Chun-chu's experience to explain the terrible situation of these artists. Being a teacher of art at a college, Wang influenced a young artist to join the Left Art Movement. Then the young artist was put into prison for three years for painting a KMT flag in the mud. After coming out of the prison, the young artist became a manic depressive, and also had other nerve diseases that he could not work at all. Wang had to support this friend's family, which also included a wife and a baby. The wife was naturally unhappy about the situation and partially blamed it to Wang who influenced her husband. Wang hence worried that the wife might one day reported him to the police to earn some needed money – an informer for an authentic Leftist was well paid; such funds would have covered the entire family's expenses for a year. "These Leftists have absolutely no defense against this system except their own ingenuity." Helen Snow decried. She saw them as the most vulnerable because they were artists, poets and the like, purely intellectuals with mere loose organizations. "They were like sheep with the wolves turned suddenly upon them. It is horrible."

"Sheep under attack by wolves," this typical analogy for the weak and the minority under persecution must have triggered Helen Snow's deep memory of the

¹¹⁶ Helen Snow to Richard Walsh, September 30, 1935. Box 28. Hoover Institution Archives. All the quotes from this paragraph are from this letter.

tradition in which she rooted her idealism. The first traditional influence came from the LDS church. Born into a Mormon family in Utah, Helen Foster heard of the stories of Mormons being persecuted in her forefather's time. Although Helen Snow, in her childhood, had been confused by the opposing attitudes towards the LDS church between her parents – her mother being actively involved but her father staying detached, and although she broke with the LDS church as early as her early twenties, the pervasive influence she received from such a tradition during her formative years could not be just completely brushed away. After all, the legend of first president of the LDS church, Joseph Smith – who led the 1838 Mormon War in Missouri, was arrested afterward and later killed by a mob – bears similarities with the myth of Joan of Arc regarding the themes of rebellion, self sacrifice and leadership.

Furthermore, the spirit of pioneer life and independence was already imbued in the family story which Helen Snow's mother told her as a child. Hannah Davis Foster, the mother, experienced the Mormon style "exodus" when she was only two years old in 1893, though their "exodus," unlike the Mormon's travel in earlier decades, was voluntary. Hannah Foster's father, that is, Helen Snow's grandfather, decided to move to find a new place in Idaho. The family traveled in covered wagon, until they found a good farming land. They became one of the first four families who built the new village.¹¹⁷

Even Helen Snow's later years were reminiscent of the Mormon influence. Some current scholars with Mormon background claim that Helen Snow's idea of establishing the Chinese Industrial Cooperative may have been partially inspired by the United Orders Movement during Brigham Young's years – an ambitious attempt to build a utopian

¹¹⁷ Hannah Davis Foster, "Autobiography of Hannah Davis Foster," BYU.

society among the Mormons.¹¹⁸ In addition, during the cold-war era when Helen Snow's writing on China had little hope of publication, she changed her subjects to genealogy for two decades, a passion shared by many Mormons.

Besides the Mormon tradition, Helen Snow's sympathy with the Leftists may also have been influenced by her passion towards the Puritan tradition. During the same period when she worked on genealogy, she also finished a historic novel over 500 pages on Puritans who established the New England, *The Root and the Branch*, commemorating her Puritan ancestors who contributed to the founding of the Massachusetts Bay. She was openly proud of her Puritan ancestry, and reiterated identification with the early American Puritans throughout her life.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, she also associated the Puritan spirit with people she admired. For instance, she referred Rewi Alley, co-founder of the Chinese Industrial Cooperative, a Puritan even though he was from New Zealand: "Alley is a Puritan of the old pilgrim type that has always conquered new worlds and won disciples."¹²⁰ She also credited the Puritan tradition to the success of a famous woman journalist of her own time, Anna Louise Strong. She wrote about Strong as follows:

She was invented way back in the time of the Puritan revolution of the 17th century when telling the truth was part of the religion of her ancestors. Such generally American phenomena cannot be understood by anti-Puritans, such as the Byzantine pre-Reformation mind of some Soviet Russians.¹²¹

The context of Snow's above comments was the accusation of espionage towards Strong by the Soviet Union government, despite Strong's consistent enthusiasm in Communism.

¹¹⁸ Personal interview with John Hyper, July 2009, Provo, Utah. For the details of this movement, see Leonard J. Arrington, Feramorz Y. Fox and Dean L. May, *Building the City of God: Community and Cooperation Among the Mormons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co, 1976).

¹¹⁹ See, for example, Helen Foster Snow, Audio recording, "General Life, no script", Box 163, #6, BYU.

¹²⁰ Helen F Snow, "Rewi Alley: Building of New Human Lives," a speech by Snow introducing Rewi Alley when he visited the Philippines and talked about the Industrial Cooperative Movement to a group gathering. Box 28, Folder 10, BYU.

¹²¹ Helen F Snow, "Anna Louise Strong (1885-1970)." Box 70, Folder1, BYU.

Snow interpreted that Strong incurred such accusation from the Soviet Union because she refused to lie in her news report. She concluded that the Soviet Union could not understand Strong because Strong's integrity was a quintessential "American" character inherited from the Puritan forefathers. Likewise, Snow attributed the Puritan spirit as explanations to two other American women, Maud Russell and Talitha Gerlach, who devoted their lives "to the China problem."¹²² When she visited the Chinese Red Army for the first time in Yen-an in 1937, she even compared them with the American Puritans, both of which had austere lifestyle and strict moral codes. On the one hand, Helen Snow had strong capacity to observe, and was brave enough to challenge stereotypical prejudices by associating seemingly quite different groups; on the other hand, her approach of rooting her critical thinking and interpretation of her experience in "American characters" remained problematic. Nevertheless, she was certainly relatively perceptive about China's situation with the help of her mirroring American experience.

In addition to Helen Snow's capacity to observe and adapt to new things, the influence she received from her left-wing friends, and her SDL and Puritan heritage, another factor which make her "very H. G. Wells" was the new learning she acquired through more school work. In the school year of 1934-1935, Helen Snow studied at Yenching University, while Edgar Snow was teaching part-time a course in journalism there. Helen Snow took courses in Chinese economics, Confucianism and the family system, Communism and the history of Russian Revolution, Land and Labor, Chinese Esthetics, history of philosophy in the West and a course on Chinese philosophy in Tsinghua University by Fung Yu-lan (冯友兰). "This year of very heavy study and

¹²² Ibid.

research was highly productive for my mind, and I knew where I was on the China terrain.”¹²³ Helen Snow later recalled about this experience, referring to the deep thinking she had about Marxism and Fascism through her study and research. Besides new learning she acquired from Yenching and Tsinghua’s classes, she also got to know faculty members and students who shared similar interests, the liberal intellectuals in China.

At this period, she was horrified by what she termed as “sub-fascism” of the KMG’s policy towards both liberal and left-wing intellectuals. From her friends at school, she learned much about the “sub-fascism.” She wrote to her literary agent, “Last week twelve students were arrested at Tsing Hua University ... They were not Communists nor Leftists at all, anyway, but merely had a “Sit and Talk Club” about social problems.”¹²⁴ Helen Snow thought it ridiculous that the KMT government would consider even the liberal students and professors dangerous (even Fung Yu-lan, an entire liberal to Helen Snow, was arrested once in 1934 for lecturing on his experience in the Soviet Union). Therefore, her close contact with such intellectuals pushed her further towards becoming a H. G. Wells. In her own words, “My original interest in revolution in China was esthetic rather than political.” She found the left-wing artists, writers and students were the intellectual leaders, and personally more attractive to her than the others. The suppressing and also killing of “the aristocracy of China – its most advanced youth, those who were developing the human spirit,”¹²⁵ infuriated Snow and moved her to action in helping and joining the cause of these young people.

¹²³ Snow, *My China Years*, 136.

¹²⁴ Helen F Snow to Henriette Herz, March 20, 1935. Box 34. Hoover Institution Archives.

¹²⁵ Snow, *My China Years*, 117.

When Helen Snow asked Mr. Winter to help her “little artist protégés” in selling their books in 1933, she was still quite patronizing, but she changed her epistolary tones to a much more equal footing with the leftist artists later in 1934 and 35. When she asked the American publisher of *Asia* magazine to help publish Wang Chun-chu’s work and make his work known to the American public, she addressed Wang and others as her “artist-friends” and “colleagues.”¹²⁶ This change indicated Helen Snow’s identification with the young intellectuals of China. And she fully involved herself in the publicity work for the left-wing artists and writers.

Here are merely a few examples of her involvement in their publicity and creative work. She helped organized the first Chinese left-wing artists’ exhibition in Paris in 1934. Besides helping sell Wang Chun-chu’s painting to American magazines, to make his work known, she even wrote a long essay in English on Chinese art according to Wang’s talk, published it in *Asia* magazine with Wang Chun-chu as the author (Wang himself could not write in English then).¹²⁷ When a leftist magazine in the US, *China Today* mistakenly used Wang’s real name instead of penname with a painting, hence endanger Wang’s safety in Peking, Helen Snow helped Wang escape to Shanghai, writing letters to close friends in Shanghai so that Wang’s accommodation could be secured. She also acted as the main coordinator and letter writer among the Chinese writers and translators when she and Edgar Snow edited the book on modern Chinese literature in English, *Living China*. As if all the excitement and involvement was still not enough (when Helen Snow busied herself with discussions with and publicity for left-wing artists, Edgar Snow

¹²⁶ Helen Snow to Richard Walsh, letters on September 8, and September 30, 1935. Hoover Institution Archives.

¹²⁷ See Wang Chun-Chu, “The ‘Four Gentlemen’ of China,” *Asia*, December, 1935, 730-38.

had to “escape” from home to northeast China in order to finish a book), she also wrote letters for matters which appeared not to have that upfront emergency in her own personal life, which she nonetheless deemed essentially significant to justice in the world. To protest against press censorship in China, and in particular, an editorial in *The China Weekly Review* endorsing this policy of the KMD government and attacking the “liberal and radical press” like the *Nation* and the *New Republic* in America, Helen Snow wrote letters to editors of the latter magazines to show her support. She explained the news censorship situation to these editors:

I am anxious to have my little comments brought to your attention... “the news from China,” is the most garbled, superficial, and irresponsible from any country... at present there is absolute censorship and suppression of all newspapers and periodicals, and scarcely a Chinese will dare to speak frankly to any person on any subject except after a long acquaintance ... “Information” however is plentiful, free of charge and comes in a deluge – from official sources, and it is this spoon-fed pap that is rationed out to the public both here and abroad.¹²⁸

Another example of Helen Snow using letters as a way to seek more help for the leftist youth was a letter by her to Lin Yutang. After she read two essays by Lin which ridiculed the corrupted situation in China and called for a government ruled by law instead of “by Face, Fate and Favor,”¹²⁹ She applauded his writing and suggested earnestly in letter that he write more criticism on unjust policies of the government:

I would love to see you get going on this dreadful new revival of the pao chia system; this is the most fiendish intervention in the world to destroy any independence for the so-called “cowardice” and lack of responsibility among the Chinese, I think. Especially it ruins the spirit of youth, and of change. It may go far under the redoubtable Generalissimo’s back-to-Confucius program.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Helen Snow to Editors of the *Nation* and the *New Republic*, April 1, 1935. Box 22, Folder 17, BYU.

¹²⁹ Lin Yutang, “Some Hard Words about Confucius,” *Harper’s*, May, 1935. 717-726; “The Way Out for China,” *Asia*, October, 1935. 581-586.

¹³⁰ Helen Snow to Lin Yutang, July 10, 1935. Hoover Institution Archives.

The *Pao Chia* system (保甲制度) and the New Life Movement were two other things that Helen Snow considered as mostly damaging to the progressive spirit of the youth. According to Snow, it was “the most fiendish intervention in the world to destroy any independence” because after the government organized ten families into one *chia*, each family of the *chia* had to be responsible for other members, and an entire family might be punished for a word or an act of any member. Helen Snow thought this system was designed so that the youth would be under total control. She thought the back-to-Confucius program of the New Life Movement were also Fascist, for she saw it as a form of “cultural control” by the government. As she put it, “Confucianism, with its old tradition of a hierarchy of personal loyalties and blind obedience to elders and superiors is being desperately called in as an aid to dictatorship and pacification.”¹³¹ While Helen Snow focused on social issues such as Japanese invasion and reform for press freedom, which she deemed more urgent, she was frustrated that the government put full force on other superficial things in the New Life Movement, such as what the citizens should wear, putting women “back in their place in the social scheme,”¹³² compulsory military training at schools. She abhorred this program as means to enforce mass passivity.

Helen Snow’s high idealism seemed to collide with harsh reality at this time. When she suggested Lin Yutang writing an article attacking Chiang Kai-shek’s imitation of Mussolini in the New Life Movement, she fancied that Lin would become “an international hero in no time” if anything happened to Lin – most probably merely “a little ‘shushing’” in her imagination. However, as an American with much political security in China, she could not understand that, Lin, even though already a famous

¹³¹ Helen Snow, “Fascism in China,” unpublished essay, early 1935. Box 23, Folder 4, BYU.

¹³² Helen Snow, “Back to Confucius,” unpublished essay, early 1935. Box 30, Hoover Institution Archives.

writer, would still in great danger to lose freedom if he had published such an article.

Naturally, she did not receive a reply from Lin. Nor did her own articles attacking

Fascism in China find outlets in American magazines. She felt depressed about China's

situation in 1935, as she later recalled her feelings,

I felt suffocated, as if the air was dead, full of the carbon monoxide and methane gas of putrefying vegetation. Ed and I had each other, but we felt alien to the rest of humanity, at least to the part then dying in North China. We felt totally alone.¹³³

Her pursuit of idealism did not stop, however. Soon one of her poem was published in the US and a flame of hope returned to her.

“Old Peking” – Rebirth of Joan of Arc Dream

Peking is dead, is dead,
Shamelessly, openly dead,
with the death of warm things naked and unburied
on a new-lost battlefield, after the retreat, after the looting:
dead... where there should be voices in protest,
there is only a screaming silence;
where there should be life and action,
there is only unchallenging defeat, cold in limb and heart.

...

Peking is dead, is dead,
All the story-book words of the feudal, heroic era,
lie in paper-dust in unreal ancient tomes.
No horsemen gallop through the streets with banners flying,
to the defense of the Throne, of their wives and children.
These invaders do not want their wives, will not harm their children.
They want only a gentlemanly, honorable thing:
“Freedom to buy and sell... cotton from Hopei... an open market...
long, clear highways by rail, by caravan,
for transport in time of war, for a rich opium-traffic,
for wooden boxes of goods untaxed in transit...
and the firm crushing of the youth in the colleges,
no more May Fourth excitement... no more unkind words about Japan...
Let us be friends, friendly merchant and comprador,
why talk of master or slave?”

¹³³ Snow, *My China Years*, 154.

– Nym Wales, “Old Peking,” 1935¹³⁴

“Old Peking: An impression during her tranquil yielding to Japan” is Helen Snow’s publication which attracts relatively wide readership. It captures vividly of Peking’s political situation in 1935, expresses then suppressed feelings among many young Chinese who rendered voiceless by the government. To Helen Snow herself, it also marks a turning point in her literary and professional pursuit.

The 1935 started with Japanese military advancement in north China. Battles first broke out at the Chinese and Manchurian border, but the weak administrative order in north China was unable to resist Japanese encroachment. By early summer, Japanese army had reached Hebei, threatening to extend the War Zone to include Peiping-Tianjin. In June, the two sides signed the He-Umezu Agreement, with the Chinese government conceding as much as to remove all KMT organizations and central forces from Hebei. The governor of Hebei and the mayor of Tianjin were removed because they were deemed anti-Japanese. The provincial capital of Hebei was moved from Peiping to Baoding upon Japan’s request. Furthermore, the Chinese promised to crack down any anti-Japanese organizations. On June 10, the GMD government even issued a public declaration, the Good Mandate (敦睦邦交令):

The urgent duty of our nation is now to enforce honest and enlightened government and to affirm good faith and maintain peace in international affairs; friendly relations with our neighbors are most important for this. The central government has repeatedly stated that our people must treat friendly neighbors with good will, and that the people must use no speech or actions which are discriminatory or provocative of ill-feeling, and must not establish any organization which might harm relations between China and other powers. It is

¹³⁴ Nym Wales is Helen F Snow’s pen name. This poem was published in *Asia* magazine in December, 1935.

hoped that all will abide by this solemn declaration; any person infringing it will be severely dealt with.¹³⁵

The Chinese government not only yielded Peiping and other areas of North China, but also used excuses of “friendly relations with our neighbors.” Whether as a self-comforting effort or a wishful means to fool the people, this public declaration was issued in the hope that the public opinions could be controlled and anti-Japanese organizations would dissolve with this threaten.

Helen Snow was frustrated both by the concession of the government to Japan and the people’s “screaming silence” in reaction to the constrained atmosphere of the time. She wrote “Old Peking” as a satire of the weakness of the government. “... no more unkind words about Japan.... /Let us be friends... /Why talk master or slave?” She sharply indicated the imperialist approach of Japan and the unequal power positions between Japan and China as reflected in the Good Mandate. She also hoped her satire in the poem could change the stultifying situation and spur the Chinese people into protesting action. “...where there should be life and action, /there is only unchallenged defeat...” She thought the people, especially students, should have already been on the streets protesting or fighting back, as it was once depicted in story books from the past.

In particular, the yield of Peking might have triggered Helen Snow’s knowledge of the siege of Orleans. Peking should have likewise produced heroes, maybe another Joan of Arc in an epic defense war. She reminded people in the poem, “All the story-book words of the feudal, heroic era, /lie in paper-dust in unread ancient tomes. /No horsemen gallop through the streets with banners flying, /to the defense of the Throne...”

¹³⁵ Quoted in Marjorie Dryburgh, *North China and Japanese Expansion 1933-1937: Regional Power and the National Interest* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 39-40. For detailed situation of north China in 1935, please see Chapter One of this book.

The image of horsemen galloping “through the streets with banners flying” appeared many times before in the Chinese history, but it must have also appeared elsewhere in Snow’s mind, especially at this time, she constantly compared China’s situations to those of Europe. In any way, Helen Snow expected similar heroic reaction from the Chinese, and anticipated they make a history in which she would be proudly playing a part.

Helen Snow’s poem resonated among Chinese youth. Soon after it appeared in *Asia* magazine, it was translated into three Chinese versions (including one translated by Ping Hsin (冰心), an already famous woman writer and poet). The three translations were published in a Yenching University magazine, a Peking University magazine, and a literary magazine respectively. In addition, this poem was also included in the 1935 *Anthology of Magazine Verse and Yearbook of American Poetry*.

The good reception of this poem marks a change in direction for Helen Snow’s writing. She had planned to write a best-seller on Chinese history, art and philosophy, explaining the symbolism in Chinese culture upon her arrival in Peking in 1933. Her audience apparently was the general American public. However, her interest topics soon took another turn with her learning and research in Peking, her deep involvement with the left-wing intellectuals, and her gradual identification with Peking’s youth – even though a minor reason for the change of subject was that she found out another writer had already been writing a book with themes similar to her original plan. As one letter to Richard Walsh testifies this change in Snow:

It is a pleasure only to know that there is such a magazine as *Asia* ... the contributor doesn’t have to worry himself sick about creating interest in his subject which is the horrible drag in trying to write for an ordinary American magazine about China. I have always felt so discouraged about trying to write anything about China because I refuse to be a charlatan (which I think everyone is

who can write about the “golden, glamorous Orient” in the face of the tremendous and brutally present problems – unless he is so mystic with his head in the sand) and I feel that most people won’t want to read the grewsome [*sic*] facts that you can’t escape if you write with integrity, or at least that the editors think they won’t, except for purely political subjects.

I am so awfully glad that you’re getting away from the pretty-pretty stuff. I confess that I used to like it before I came to the Orient and discovered how subjective and faked nearly all of it is. Now I am actually revolted at the superficiality of any mind that can produce it, and moreover it is actually harmful and extremely misleading, giving an untrue picture of conditions and creating sympathies in the wrong direction. It is time the world knew that the “past” does not exist in the east... what I want to get my hands on is the real, vital nerve impulses that lead somewhere ahead. The past is chiefly valuable as contrast with the changes that are proceeding and growing out of opposition to it.¹³⁶

Helen Snow’s actual China experience pulled her away from general American editors’ taste for things imaginatively “China.” She found catering those editors substantially limited her writing. One editor for whom she once wrote during her Shanghai years, requested that her stories should be no more than 400 words, and listed the first interest of their readers as, “It seems to us – from this distance – that there should be many pictures of good-looking oriental girls who have done something unusual.”¹³⁷ Among others, this editor also included news photographs of scenes of war, riot, flood, famine or any other sensational event on his list of interest. In the end, he added, “A great deal of that kind of copy, however is not worth printing.” While Helen Snow had once tried in these directions to meet this editor’s request, by the time when she started to write for *Asia*, she had stopped such type of writing long time ago. Instead of trying to create interest in general American readers by coining “faked” “pretty-pretty” stuff or merely “sensational events” about China, Helen Snow by this time would rather write only for American readers who at least have some background knowledge in Asia. She only

¹³⁶ Helen Snow to Richard Walsh, September 30, 1935. Hoover Institution Archives.

¹³⁷ Jim Marshall to Helen Foster, December 30, 1931. Box 22, Folder 12, BYU. Marshall was an editor for *Western Features*, a newspaper in Seattle.

wanted to write about things that she had keen interest for the American audience who could understand her, and for Chinese people who stood for the “vital nerve impulses” of a progressive China.

In addition, she also wrote to stir up morale, to make change, and to spark flames, as her poem “Old Peking” did to some extent. She frankly acknowledged that her writing was not merely “information,” but also “propaganda.” “I was naturally an activist and had always been a student leader, from grade school to the University of Utah...”¹³⁸ At Yenching University in Peking, when China facing a crisis of losing the city to Japan, Helen Snow became a dedicated activist among Chinese students. She involved herself fully in a new type of Joan of Arc role.

Joan of Arc among Chinese Students

I have just a minute in which to drop you a line to tell you how perfectly thrilling and wonderful it is to be alive in Peking now! The student movement is going strong; it's really amazing. A spontaneous, serious and really revolutionary struggle. The students mean business, I think. Ch... has been grand. You never saw such a tired worn-out person in your life. He has been working day and night and simply did marvels in organizing the Y [Yenching] and Tsinghua students. I watched him conduct a meeting yesterday. The students clapped and shouted; he certainly knows how to rouse them. W... is also marvelous... And the little gal LM and anther gal... The buses are not running, and we are calling the kids up every five minutes giving and getting news. Today we organized a special interview with the gang for six newspapermen. They were quite dignified and very businesslike, and the newspapermen were delighted with them. [The newspapermen] are won over to the movement...

– Helen Snow to Anges Smedley, December 12, 1935¹³⁹

Helen Snow enjoyed a feeling of euphoria by being a special member of the student movement in December, 1935, which is known at the December 9th Student

¹³⁸ Snow, *My China Years*, 156.

¹³⁹ This letter is from Box 22, Folder 17, BYU.

Movement in Chinese history. As her above letter shows, she felt “perfectly thrilled and wonderful,” and she was very proud of the student leaders mentioned. She had to use abbreviations for these student leaders’ names to avoid censorship and protect their safety. Ch refers to Chang Chao-lin (张兆麟); W stands for Wang Ju-mei (王汝梅, who later changed his name to Huang hua/黄华); LM refers to Li Min (李愨). They were leaders of the student organization of Yenching University who frequently visited the Snows for news and for discussion about current situations. The original plan for a student demonstration to prevent establishment of an autonomous government for Japan in Peiping and for freedom of speech was thus invented at the Snows’ living room among this small circle. Helen Snow felt proud and responsible for these “kids” of her circle because she identified with them and their movement. At times, she felt she was the creator of this student movement. Through this movement against Chinese government’s “capitulation” to Japan and for the freedom of speech, she in a way fulfilled her heroic ideals.

Who originally organized this student movement, however, has become a controversy today. Helen Snow claims that the idea of the demonstration was originated by her, and the movement was organized by the students independently in the beginning, without any instructions from the Communist Party. But some Communist Party histories assert leadership of this movement by their undergrounds. One of the student leaders, Huang Hua, who later became the first ambassador from the People’s Republic of China to the United Nation, reveals that Song Chingling wrote a letter to the students to call for action but Helen Snow thinks it was her letter and articles which agitated the students into action. To Snow’s assertion that the students were passive and acquiescent to the

government's policy towards Japan till the December 9th Movement, Huang Hua responds that "Helen Snow was more innocent than the students, noting that an abundance of Leftist organizational activity occurred prior to...the students' first meeting with the Snows."¹⁴⁰ Li Min, another student leader, however, would stress, both privately and in public, the significant role Snow plays in the student movement, acknowledging "the inspiration and encouragement" from Helen Snow.¹⁴¹

As I am struggling with sources from all sides about the controversy of who exactly started this student movement, the origin of this movement seems to have become a myth. However, I also feel a second inner voice asking myself, why is this question "that important"? Why are all these people, including myself, be trapped with this question of who invented the idea of this movement and who led the movement? Without the thousands of students who ventured into the street eventually, who got soaked in the winter cold by the hose from the police (including Helen Snow herself), who endured police beating, and some of whom stayed in prison, or died there but already forgotten, there would be no such a movement at all. Considering those forgotten and those nameless who made the movement happen, are the debate among these names which still remain in history that important?

Therefore, this section, "Joan of Arc among Chinese Students," does not focus on the important role of "Joan of Arc" in the student movement, but on how the movement helped the Joan-of-Arc type of youth find passionate and meaningful selves among a common cause for justice, taking Helen Snow as an example. In particular, this

¹⁴⁰ Long, *Helen Foster Snow*, 59. For details about the controversy on the origin of this student movement, including some other contemporary scholar's opinions, please see Long's delineation on pages 55-60.

¹⁴¹ Li Min to Helen Snow, December 15, 1943. Box 43, Hoover Institution Archives.

movement stands out as a landmark, a climax in Snow's life because it was a perfect stage of her youthful ambitions.

First of all, Helen Snow found a voice of her own both in press and in letters among the students. Following the above poem which uttered the frustration upon submission and passiveness of the time in China, Snow wrote a series of news reports on the movement in the *Chine Weekly Review*, *Asia*, *China Today* and other publications on this movement and relevant issues. Her unique voice among the students has been recorded in numerous letters between her and the student leaders. A letter to Chang Chao-lin, then President of Yenching Student body, exhibits Helen Snow's commitment and initiative in the student movement:

I hope you will give a speech before [the students] and gave them the devil [*Snow's original underline*] for their inactivity and sleepiness. They're just like turnips exactly. Why be a vegetable?

It is a national disgrace – and it will go down in history as such – for the students even to be able to continue going to classes at such a critical time as this... At least you should declare a strike for a week and not act as if nothing were happening!

... You have a wonderful chance to make up some good slogans – if you should have a demonstration and a parade... And you could turn the old American Revolution phrases around like this: “Millions of Tribute but not one Cent for Defense” ...

...Also tell the students that they deserve the government they will tolerate... you cannot place the blame on the government. It is the fault of every single individual Chinese.¹⁴²

This letter carries a confident and passionate voice. It is as long as over twenty paragraphs filled with various ideas either on slogans or on strategies for starting a demonstration. Helen Snow imagines many scenarios of her suggested demonstration, ranging from students holding sarcastic cartoons of Chinese government kowtowing to

¹⁴² Helen Snow to Chang Chao-lin, no date, sometime in 1935 before December 9. Hoover Institution Archives.

foreign invaders, to them dressing in mourning clothes and carrying a coffin symbolizing “old China.” She sounds like an assertive director making a script for a historical moment, using many “you must,” “you should” and “you could.” The urgency and strong emotion under her tone indicates that she seriously consider this leading and provoking role in the student movement vital to her own identity and responsibility. Although her use of the American Revolution as an example for the Chinese students may suggests a deep-rooted view of the American exceptionalism, it also indicates her wish to connect the two countries’ history, both of which are close to her heart.

Helen Snow’s imagined leading role of both her and the students in the movement is heroic, but problematic. Her assumption of herself as a driving force in the student movement is questionable. She bases this assumption on her past experience as a student leader in Utah. But her contact and experience with students in Peiping are different from her student days in Utah (her Chinese language was also very limited). She generalizes Peiping’s students according to her understanding of the small gang of Yenching students whom she knew, and her comments about their reaction to the political situation sounds thus very judgmental. Furthermore, when discussing the students’ role in China, she seems elitist.

If you can talk, or read or write you can protest at least. The illiterate people can’t be expected to know what is happening, nor to do anything about it if they did – but at least the conscious part of the population should object.

If Helen Snow took herself and the students too seriously, she also judged the “illiterate people” with too much ease. When she tried to “teach” the students to act and claimed, “You know what is important is not the haystack but the spark that sets it afire,” she apparently forgot if there are no haystack, the spark cannot set up any fire.

Due to Snow's deep belief in her leading role among Peiping's students, she expected another American woman journalist, Agnes Smedley to take the same position among Shanghai's students. She had known Smedley since Shanghai days and they shared the same interest in students, and cooperated in work supporting left-wing intellectuals. During the December 9th Movement, they wrote to each other, exchanging news and soliciting any help they could get for the students. However, Helen Snow's assumption of her leading role got herself in a little trouble with Smedley. Later she realized that "Smedley took a real dislike to [her] for giving [Smedley] orders." Here is an example of Snow's orders to Smedley:

In Shanghai somebody must get...the schools to declare themselves along with this movement here, so you can get started and a chance to organize. You ought to send out a snaring squad to get them going.... You simply must spread the news of this movement through those newspapers and get them circulated among the students – and get your paper going quick.¹⁴³

Shanghai's students eventually did get going after a while, but not immediately as Helen Snow had requested; Smedley also did her best for this movement, but not exactly in the way Snow had directed. That Smedley did not take a "leading" role in the movement, may indirectly indicate that in reality, Helen Snow's actual role in the movement was a bit different from her assumption.

Despite Helen Snow's questionable position among the Chinese students, she did achieve much in the movement. Besides giving herself a voice in the press and among students, she also wrote many news reports and letters to have the students' voices heard. Her news reports at this period all centered on the students and their activities, following their parades, struggle against the police, public speeches in streets among crowds, and

¹⁴³ Helen Snow to Anges Smedley, December 12, 1935. Box 22, Folder 17, BYU.

trips to villages to spread their messages. She also reported about arrests and deaths of students, calling people's attention to those suffering in prison. Snow portrayed them as heroes and hopes for the country. In addition, Snow also paid special attention to a China's Joan of Arc in her reports.

Liu Tsui is now known as China's Joan of Arc during the December 9th Student Movement. News about her heroic deed was first reported by Edgar Snow and Helen Snow. During December 16th demonstration, the students who tried to parade to the city were blocked outside of Hsunchihmen gate. The students negotiated with the police and waited for hours in vain. Liu Tsui then rolled over under the gate and tried to open the gate from the other side for the students. She was arrested before succeeding, but eventually released.

Helen Snow's report on Liu Tsui was reminiscent of the figure of Joan of Arc:

... after waiting several hours in vain, the same pretty, diminutive Tsinghua girl-leader – at the head of the Tsinghua group which led the parade – stormed the big medieval gate all by herself personally by rolling under the open space of some two feet beneath and rattling the iron pin which holds the gate in an attempt to let her comrades through. Startled police immediately pounced upon her and began pummeling her...

Snow's writing in this report is dramatic and emotional. "pretty, diminutive... girl-leader... stormed the big medieval gate all by herself," the amazingly heroic behavior of this girl-leader was set off by "startled police" – who was also portrayed as "the riot squad" – brutally pouncing and pummeling the "tiny heroine."¹⁴⁴ Although Helen Snow wrote about Liu Tsui and used her pictures as illustrations several times in her reports,

¹⁴⁴ H.F.S., "Further Developments in the Peiping Student Movement," *The China Weekly Review*, December 28, 1935, p. 132. Helen Snow used "H.F.S." in this report in order not to be identified by the authorities in China. Both her own and her husband's journalist career in China would be in danger if she was identified as writing articles which sided with the students.

she always addressed Liu Tsui as “girl-leader” or “girl-student leader,” instead of using her name. One important reason may be due to Snow’s consideration for Liu Tsui’s safety at that time. A side-effect is that the nameless “girl-leader” acquires more mythical Joan of Arc flavor.

In addition to having the voices of herself and the students heard, Helen Snow also found a community of her own type among student leaders, and harvested life-long genuine friendship with them. Helen Snow walked with the students with almost all their demonstrations in the cold winter. She busies herself with translating handbills, typing them and sending them around to other journalists to let the students’ messages known. She and her husband also arranged interviews between student leaders and other foreign newsmen. To prevent Liu Tsui from being arrested again after she became known, the Snows hid Liu in their house for a week before Liu could escape from Peiping to Shanghai.

A short passage by Li Min, another girl-leader who kept regular correspondence with Helen Snow exemplifies the profound friendship between Helen Snow and these students. Talking about her experience in prison in 1947, Li wrote:

I never taught Marxism as I did not know it. Nevertheless, my husband and I were arrested on June 1st, 1947, in Chungking on the campus...on the charge of being Communists... I can tell you that I particularly remembered you when I went to jail. In the old Peiping days when the students were hurled against the police because they wanted to stop the civil war and fight Japan, you worried that I might get arrested and jailed in my heavy and clumsy coat. You gave me that warm, wool, short jacket for me to run away from the chasing police. I did not get caught in those demonstrations in Peking... During the arrest in Chungking I had that jacket with me. But I could not run with both arms tied together with a heavy rope... I will always remember you as my good friend to whom I owe so much since we knew each other fifteen years ago. Your image has been shining in my mind during all those years when life in China was a mere struggle for a living

and the fear of getting killed without ever being able to see a real democratic China was always threatening.”¹⁴⁵

The Helen Snow whom Li Min depicted above did not do any heroic and epochal deeds, nor was she a attention-grabbing public figure like the Joan of Arc she wished to be, but she gave true warmth and inspiration to a friend in need, and to her friend, no Joan of Arc could replace this Helen Snow.

Letter style

...yesterday six middle school (high school) students were executed in Taiyuanfu... so you see that life here is not unexciting at times if you have a taste for that sort of thing. I hope my letter answers what you wanted to know about Peking, but I fear I have not put in enough local color.

– Helen Snow to Eeeeemil, March 10,

1936

At this phase of Helen Snow’s life, she did not write much about her personal life to her friends at home any more. The above letter to an old friend from Salt Lake City days in 1936, therefore, serves a good comparison of her letter style with the period of her emerging adulthood. While she had stressed how much more exciting and glamorous her life in China was than that in Utah, by this time, she told Eeeeemil that life in China was not “entirely different from that elsewhere,” and that she had long ago “got tired of telling about it in letters.”¹⁴⁶ If some trace of her letter style from her Shanghai days still remained, it is that she still wrote about her social circle. But it was composed of journalists and writers, instead of diplomats or other dignitaries.

¹⁴⁵ Li Min, “Life Sketch,” 1950. Quoted in Nym Wales, *Notes on the Chinese Students Movement 1935-1936*, p. 4. Hoover Institution Archives.

¹⁴⁶ Helen Snow to Eeeeemil, March 10, 1936. Box 22, Folder 19, BYU.

Like most of Helen Snow's other letters of this period, she was never tired of writing about students' movement, and she also told Eeeemil about the students' unfortunate experience in prison, and the penalties they had to endure for their revolution. In her Shanghai days, she herself was the great charming persona in her letters to friends, but in her Peking days, she made place for the cause of the Chinese youth, and for her interest in art, literature and revolution. Accordingly, the main purpose of her letter writing changed from communicating information about her personal life to promoting her work with other intellectuals and students.

“Still A Small Potato” – But “My Story Could Make A Good Musical Comedy”

I had no wish to be a Christian martyr or any other kind, but... Someone had to act. I was the victim of history, which was squeezing out of me, like wine from new grapes... This wine was being handed out to the Chinese to intoxicate them with will and determination to act... Of all the people, I was a prime individualist, believing in the maximum development of individual, especially woman, who had not as yet often demonstrated this capacity. Yet by the end of 1935, I was socialized against my will. I was being destroyed as an individual, sacrificed for that great mass of people known as China. I actually lost my sense of self-preservation.

– Helen Snow, *My China Years*, 1984

The December 9th Student Movement subsided after a couple of months. Edgar Snow moved on to other endeavors which were more new worthy. Two years later, he became a world famous author with a news scoop about Chinese Communists and a hit book of Mao Zedong's biography, *Red Star Over China*. Helen Snow, however, after devoting so much energy and passion on the student movement, lingered her attention much longer on the students. Her news report on the students appeared on the *China Weekly Review* till the end of 1936. Then she worked a number of other things, like a magazine titled *Democracy*, an adventurous trip to Yen'an, Chinese Industrial

Cooperation Movement (INDUSCO), which she took almost as a life-long cause. Whichever endeavor she pursued, she committed it with the same dedication and identification as she did to the student movement.

She and her husband returned to the United States in the 1940s, soon after which their marriage broke up. She decided to be alone and stopped to be, in her own words, a “do-gooder” either to her husband or to others, including causes for the Chinese. So during the McCarthy era, she tried hard to write books and fulfill her ambition of writing a “great American novel.” She wrote many manuscripts and published several books – none became the “great American novel,” though. Starting from the 1960s, after a period of silence about her China past and her marriage, she became vocal again, at least in writing, concerning that period of her life, which seemed to come closest to her Joan of Arc dream. Her voice, however, kept being resentful from then on, and the content of her letters, unlike those written during the student movement or the INDUSCO movement, again centers more on her self.

Reflecting on her China years in the 1930s, she wrote around 1960:

My personality was changing – the impact of China was tremendous on me. I was intensely concerned with everything, great and small, that came up – but my husband had a different attitude... After I had done the legwork, he would make a report on it and write letters. He was easy-going and casual and did not take things so seriously as I did... But I was torn in a thousand directions at once, attempting ten times my capacities, and with no idea that there was any limit to one’s energies or abilities. I would be half dead from nervous and physical exhaustion, but my husband could not see any reason why I resented it.¹⁴⁷

Why did such change take place in Helen Snow? And why was she resentful? An important factor was that she felt she never received the recognition to her work as she should, which is partially true. For example, even though she did a large amount of work

¹⁴⁷ Helen Snow, “My trip to Peitaho, Manchuria and Korea, 1936.” Hoover Institution Archives.

for *Living China*, the book on modern Chinese literature, the public recognition went exclusively to Edgar Snow.¹⁴⁸ Even though she was the first to suggested the Chinese Industrial Movement, and was a major force to launch it, she had to hide behind publicity, claiming Rewi Alley was the originator so that people would take this movement seriously – in her memory, nobody including her husband would listen to her about this idea until she got Alley agree to participate this movement. Then decades past, Rewi Alley and Edgar Snow were seen as the initiators of the INDUSCO in Chinese official history. Even her husband did not understand her dedication and tried to persuade her not to work too much on causes like the INDUSCO (she was typing letters incessantly with tons of ideas on how to carry out INDUSCO projects):

Take a rest... Only damned fools like you and me will do this sort of thing indefinitely... I do not think it is ... decisive... it is not your fault if the total result is not all it should be. Or if it is, don't imagine that you alone made it possible.... You cannot save [the INDUSCO] nor China... You have already done more than anyone else to launch it. You cannot be China and make it a success, alone. Write your book. It will have far more influence than any number of letters, interviews and lectures.¹⁴⁹

Yet Helen Snow did not follow Edgar Snow's advice, and she did put most of her energy on letters, interviews and lectures, to promote the causes like the INDUSCO. As she put it, she was a natural activist. She did write books as well, but again, most of the books at the time were for her activist's causes and often read like propaganda.

The excerpt at the start of this section, lamenting her martyred life is a typical moment of Helen Snow's old age. Her moods switched between feeling self-important as an exemplar of American modern woman who made history in China, to feeling self-pity

¹⁴⁸ For the lack of recognition to Helen Snow's work for *Living China*, also see Robert M. Farnsworth, *From vagabond to journalist: Edgar Snow in Asia, 1928-1941* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996), 253.

¹⁴⁹ Edgar Snow to Helen Snow, June 15, 1939. Box 25, Folder 13, BYU.

as a woman who failed to fulfill her literary identity. She never reached the kind of calmness her good friend Ida Pruitt enjoyed in later years. Ida Pruitt was once restless and unhappy because she felt pressured to meet the expectations of her male bosses at work and boyfriend in personal life, which conflicted her own creative nature. Eventually she overcame their judgmental eyes and became free to be herself. Helen Snow, however, never really had to physically obey male supervisors, since she worked as independent journalist and write, and a housewife who did not have to worry about income. Yet she readily embraced many of the patriarchic values, while trying to be a feminist at the same time. A typical symbol of her state of mind is the Joan of Arc dream – she wanted to be a special woman who surpasses the patriarchic order, but at the same time, she depended on an affirmation of her achievements by the patriarchic order.

“Like many young literary hopefuls, I had begun as a versifier.”¹⁵⁰ Helen Snow wrote, looking back at her earlier life in Peking. Hence it seems appropriate to end this chapter with this verse, which suits her life well:

You're gorgeous, you old hag, and if I could
 give you just one gift ever
 for the rest of your life it would be this.
 Confidence.
 It would be the gift of confidence.
 Either that or a scented candle.

— David Nicholls, *One Day*

And plus, this chapter.

¹⁵⁰ Snow, *My China Years*, 154.

Chapter 4

Values in Creative Experience Maud Russell's Work in the YWCA of Inland China

I have shared these personal incidents with you that you may know that life in China these days is something more than merely academic consideration of international problems. Cutting across all our theoretical considerations of what we should do as Christians is always our relationship with individuals and how we as Christian friends should act in the face of circumstances in China. What shall we do? ... Are we cowards, when it comes to a show-down? This seems to be a question that is never answered, but we do want to keep moving in the right direction in our thinking and in our expression of the life that is within us.

— Maud Russell to Asilomar Division, May 26, 1927

All the women studied in my dissertation have their respective critical questions to be solved in their China years. Ida Pruitt, for a period, was troubled by the conflicts between her own values and those of her male-dominated institution – her longing for creative writing to express her own understanding of China versus her male supervisors' expectations for her to do public service according to their understanding of China's problems. Helen Foster Snow was also confused by the competition within herself as writer and as do-gooder, but her central question was how to obtain ultimate external recognition to validate the values of her work. As to Maud Russell, the subject of this chapter, her central challenge was to reconcile her beliefs with her experience. She arrived in China in 1917 with full-hearted beliefs in Christianity and internationalism, but for the next two decades, she had to keep adjusting her beliefs and values according to ever arising new and different experiences; she was pushed to reevaluate her "theoretical considerations" by "relationship with individuals" and with a turbulent situations. Through the eventful years, Russell continued to reconcile what she had known from

home with what she was learning in her adopted country, and to redefine the values of her staying in China. Russell shared a common issue with Pruitt and Snow, that is, the values of her work as a woman, but she was different from both the others in that she did not depend on the male others to validate her values, be it the authority of an institution (in Pruitt's case) or the mainstream public opinion (in Snow's case). Working in a non-governmental women's organization, the Young Women Christian Association, most time at provincial places where her established views clashed with the local tradition, she independently defined the values of her work through experience, and she challenged herself by constantly re-examine her stand and values according to the new experience. All the three women went through many inner struggles regarding their identity and the values of their work, and all resulted in personal growth. While Pruitt and Snow's immediate reaction to those inner struggles were either depression or insecurity, Russell, on the contrary, often conceived them as exciting opportunities of rich experience. Again and again, she appeared in letters as the happiest person because she was "lucky" to be in on challenging situations.

This chapter, therefore, discusses Maud Russell's feminist view of women's values and experience through several critical moments during her service as a YWCA secretary in inland China. Analyzing Russell's epistolary depiction of these moments when different ideologies clashed, and when her established values were challenged by China's arising political situation in the 1920s and early 1930s, I intend to unravel Maud Russell's identity growth and her evolving understanding to key concepts and phenomena of the period, including Christianity, nationalism, internationalism, women's movement, imperialism and communism.

Russell's approach to the above key concepts and her experience in China testifies Cherríe Moraga's "theory in the flesh." According to Moraga, "A theory of flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives – our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings – all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity."¹ It is an epistemic approach to knowledge originating from our bodies. To put it in other words, what Audre Lorde refers to the "deep place of knowledge,"² lies in our own experience and within ourselves – the love, the pain and the fear that take place within our bodies. A critical point of this theory is that our bodies are sites of social struggle, that "the object of oppression is not only someone outside of my skin, but the someone inside my skin."³ Another central point is that experience alone does not ensure to produce this theory; instead, it requires active interpretation of experience. As Emma Goldman clarifies:

It requires something more than personal experience to gain a philosophy or point of view from any specific event. It is the quality of our response to the event and our capacity to enter into the lives of others that help us to make their lives and experiences our own.⁴

Active interpretation of experience and capacity to "enter into the lives of others" are therefore what I emphasize in this chapter, which are vital to values in creative experience.

Maud Russell's experience as a foreign secretary of the YWCA in China provides a significant example for us to understand values in creative experience. In various crunch time such as war and student movements, confronting contradictions in her own

¹ Cherríe Moraga, "Entering the Lives of Others: Theory in the Flesh," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa (Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press, 2002), 21.

² Audre Lorde, "The Maser's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *This Bridge Called My Back*, 109.

³ Moraga, "La Güera," in *This Bridge Called My Back*, 28.

⁴ Quoted in Moraga, "La Güera," in *This Bridge Called My Back*, 24.

experience, Russell did not hide in her comfortable position; instead, she attempted to enter the lives of others, and searched deep within herself for a new philosophy of her own. She found bridges and community among her international colleagues – Chinese and other nationalities – in inland China; she also incorporated her American constituency, the Asilomar Division (Californian students in the YWCA) in her creative experience with her frequent long letters reporting her local work.

Therefore, a thorough examination of her letters concerning critical moments and ideological clashes is significant in that it reveals values of creative experience and of progressive women's contribution to the building of alternative international relations. Maud Russell's letters also demonstrates the importance of building of a set of alternative values that are healthier and more satisfactory to women's experience.

The Young Women's Christian Association in China

The YWCA of China is a movement of Chinese women seeking to find and to create better values and expressions of life for the women of China... The YWCA work in China is, for Western secretaries...a satisfying effort to discover and demonstrate the essential oneness of women in their needs, desires, ideals, and capacities; a fruitful international adventure.

– Julean Arnold, "Californians in China" August 13, 1930

The history and nature of the Young Women's Christian Association in China, at which Maud Russell worked during all her China decades, provide indispensable clues for her beliefs and personal development. The YWCA movement was originated in London in second half of the nineteenth century by Protestant women to cope with "unprecedented dislocations and social ills" caused by the Industrial Revolution⁵. Soon

⁵ Nancy Boyd, *Emissaries: The Overseas Work of The American YWCA 1895-1970* (New York: The Women's Press, 1986), 11.

after, the American YWCA began with the same dual commitment as the British – “personal piety and social service.” Two groups were the root forces which eventually merged to form the American YWCA in 1886. The first one, a group of New York City prayer circles focused on industrializing areas. Besides prayer classes, they offered boarding and occupational training services to working women. The second group emulated the Young Men’s Christian Association, with the aim of facilitating women’s entry into co-ed state universities which previously had been all-male. They were committed to spiritual improvement for the young women students, engaging them in activities such as Bible Study and Christian Convention. The British and American YWCAs amalgamated in 1894, and in 1898, a World’s YWCA was officially established, including branches in several other countries such as Norway, Sweden, Italy, Canada and India.⁶

The very next year, the Association was planning to begin work in China.⁷ In 1890, the first YWCA chapter in China was established at a missionary Girls’ School in Hangchow. Nine years later, a national committee was formed with both Chinese and Western members. The next two decades saw the YWCA centers sprouting in major Chinese cities including Shanghai, Nanking, Hangchow, Foochow, Canton, Hongkong, Changsha, Tientsin, Peking, Tsinanfu, Chengtu, Wuchang and Mukden.

Such a brief chronology of the YWCA’s entry into China, and its pledge to spiritual improvement and social service may apply to other women’s missionary

⁶ Alison R. Drucker, “The Role of the YWCA in the Development of the Chinese Women’s Movement, 1890-1927,” *The Social Service Review*, Vol. 53(3) (Sept., 1979): 421-440.

⁷ Mildred Hand, “The First National Convention of Women in China,” *the Young Women’s Christian Association in a Changing China* (Shanghai: The National Committee, Young Women’s Christian Assotiation, 1924), 67.

organizations, if the inception time moves a couple of decades earlier – the earliest women’s foreign missionary societies launched soon after the Civil War.⁸ What was the nature of the YWCA China that set it off from the women’s foreign mission movement? What features of this organization composed a more progressive environment, which encompassed Western secretaries like Maud Russell who drastically changed from a conservative missionary to a revolutionary radical over the years,⁹ as well as Chinese women who became leaders in Chinese governments – both Republican and People’s Republic? What aspects of the YWCA made it an important component of the Chinese women’s movement in the 1920s?

First of all, the organizational structure and the financial arrangement of the Association set it apart from the women’s foreign mission. The YWCA was independent of sectarian Christianity. With an aim to pursue “abundant life” for all the community, it prioritized broader social improvement over evangelism. Usually, the YWCA at local centers in China included not only Christians, but also non-Christian members; their boards could even be chaired by non-Christians. The according funding policy of the YWCA also sustained its independence. The World’s YWCA stipulated that funding was on national basis, and in China’s case, the World’s YWCA was not financially responsible for the running of the YWCA in China. Although the national committee of China partially depended on sources from the American YWCA (by the 1920s about half of the National funds came from the U.S.)¹⁰, and although American secretaries, who

⁸ Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-The-Century China*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 12.

⁹ Maud Russell was not the only American YWCA secretaries who took such a special path in her career. Talitha Gerlach, for another example in the YWCA in China, also changed from her originally more conservative view.

¹⁰ Boyd, *Emissaries*, 62.

constituted the greatest portion of foreign secretaries, received salaries from their local U.S. chapters, most YWCA city centers in China was able to be financially responsible for themselves. The local Chinese YWCAs therefore took entire initiative in fundraising for the business of their centers. Consequently, the World's YWCA had the authority to assign foreign secretaries to China according to local centers' request, and the local centers had the power to decide whether they would renew the foreign secretaries' position at their centers according to the secretaries' performance at the previous term.

A comparison with women's missionary societies can more clearly show the significance in such independence of the local Chinese YWCAs. The male-dominated church boards kept a tight rein on women's missionary societies, treating the women's boards merely as auxiliary to the general boards. Although the women contributed to "one-fourth to one-fifth of the total funds," they "had little control over the placement of their workers, which was handled by the church boards."¹¹ Some women's board resented such treatment. For example, the Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church demanded that the WFMS work with the general board in a "coordinate relation" rather than as a subordinate organization, and that it be financially independent. The general board reacted with forbidding the WFMS rights to collect "money in public meeting or [recruit] through the Sunday schools."¹² The tight control received by the women's missionary board set a contrast to the independence of the

¹¹ Boyd, *Emissaries*, 5.

¹² Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, 13; Mary Isham, *Various Adventures: A Record of Sixty and Six Years of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society, Methodist Episcopal* (Boston: WFMS, 1936), 17.

YWCA. The latter took full charge of its own membership, “free to set its own policies and carry them out in its own way apart from male opinion and male control.”¹³

Another feature which set the YWCA movement apart was its commitment to transferring its work and leadership to Chinese women. The World YWCA consistently held the policy to make the Association “as Chinese as possible.”¹⁴ As early as 1913, when the second General Secretary of the YWCA of China, Grace Coppock took the office, she had declared she accepted this appointment only with the precondition that a Chinese associate work with her. In 1920, Coppock identified Ding Shujing to eventually succeed her.¹⁵ In October 1923, eighty-five foreign secretaries and sixty-five Chinese secretaries were on the staff of the YWCA of China;¹⁶ in early 1930s, there was a slightly increase in the number of foreign secretaries; by October 1934, however, only twelve foreign secretaries remained.¹⁷ Occasionally, when disagreements arose between the Chinese leadership and Western secretaries, generally speaking, even the most experienced and powerful Western secretaries would give way to Chinese leadership – “a testimony to the quality of that leadership.”¹⁸

The transfer of authority to Chinese women may seem slow with a span of over two decades; however, comparing with other missionary societies and Sino-Western institutions, the YWCA did make unique and impressive progress. At the Peking Union Medical College, where Ida Pruitt worked, for example, although the Rockefeller

¹³ Boyd, *Emissaries*, 5.

¹⁴ Elizabeth A. Littell-Lamb, “Ding Shujing: The YWCA Pathway for China’s ‘New Women’” in *Salt and Light: Lives of Faith That Shaped Modern China*, ed. Carol Lee Hamrin with Stacey Bieler (Eugen, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), 85.

¹⁵ Boyd, *Emissaries*, p. 61; Littell-Lamb, “Ding Shujing,” 84.

¹⁶ Hand, “The First National Convention of Women in China,” 67.

¹⁷ Littell-Lamb, “Ding Shujing,” 94.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Foundation and China Medical Board (CMB, located in New York) also had a goal of eventual Sinonization of the institution, the leadership was controlled at New York in the Rockefeller Foundation and China Medical Board (CMB) until when the American side had to evacuate China at the beginning of the People's Republic era. On occasions of disagreements between New York and Peking, regarding funding allocations and placement of employees, New York always had the final say, since the funding of the institution was almost solely from the Foundation. Although the PUMC Trustees were composed of Chinese people, a report to New York by the CMB Resident Director in Peking in 1939 manifested the ineffective function of the Trustee in the organization: "They [the Trustees] were themselves not recognized as having important responsibilities of being in the Board for any purpose than to authorize periodic financial appeals to the CMB for funds."¹⁹ These examples of the PUMC do not mean that no change or improvement in transfer authority took place over the years; actually, the PUMC "might as well emerge as one of the more progressive institutions" among the missionary societies and Sino-Western institutions.²⁰ Nonetheless, the contrast between the PUMC and the YWCA does show the extent of progressiveness of the YWCA of China.

In addition to organizational independence and progressiveness, another aspect of the YWCA which made this movement feminist was its emphasis on women's leadership. "The YWCA secretary was not to be confused with the office worker," as Nancy Boyd clarifies.²¹ The YWCA secretaries had executive power, often taking charge of the field work of several provinces and dozens of schools, if they worked in city associations, or

¹⁹ Quoted from Mary Bullock, *An American transplant: the Rockefeller Foundation and Peking Union Medical College* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 73.

²⁰ Bullock, *An American transplant*, 75.

²¹ Boyd, *Emissaries*, 21.

even larger fields, if they served on the National headquarters. In comparison with mission schools, for example, the teachers worked in a safe and respected semiclosed environment which “replicated traditional Chinese society with a clear hierarchy, deference for age, and rules of female decorum.”²² But the YWCA secretaries followed professional code and bore responsibility more in line with “the most recent thinking in business science.” They had “a space of their own where they could experiment with new roles, learn modern approaches to social problems, and enter the public arena as women activists.”²³

Besides providing a progressive stage for the YWCA secretaries to experiment with new roles and activist initiatives, the YWCA of China played an important role in urban social reform for the first two decades of the twentieth century, especially for the benefit of women in general. With a variety of programs ranging from Mothers’ Clubs, Children’s clinics to industrial work and mass education, the YWCA gave “training and emotional support which female relatives and friends would have provided to former generations.”²⁴ It promoted new ideologies which improved women’s social position, and offered role models for young women in participating administrative and activist work. In the late 1920s, more radical and politically engaged women’s organizations in China took the YWCA’s prominent role in women’s movement. However, the YWCA continued its

²² Littell-Lamb, “Ding Shujing,” 83.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Drucker, “The Role of the YWCA in the Development of the Chinese Women’s Movement, 1890-1927,” 423.

work as an alternative reformative model, and their earlier leadership provided the late-comer organizations with experienced leaders.²⁵

One event epitomized the leading-edge role of the YWCA in women's movement in early 1920s' China. In October 1923, the first National Convention of Women in China was held in Shanghai and Hangchow. More than a hundred YWCA members and over seventy guests and visitors from a wide part of China attended the conference. This convention, according to a YWCA secretary, Mildred Hand, "was the first time that any large gathering of Chinese women [had] ever taken place, for any purpose."²⁶ From the shelter of conservative family, to a long-distance trip on a train coach surrounded by soldiers, the convention demonstrated the big steps of the women attendees. To testify the diversity of this convention, not only each speech was given both in Mandarin Chinese and English, but also interpreters of dialects were provided for participants from different regions of China.

However, the above creative aspects of the YWCA of China and its distinctions from the mission boards do not mean that the YWCA movement in China was completely separated from the missionary activities and organizations. Actually, their relationship was complex. For example, despite the YWCA's institutional independence, overlapping membership with the Churches in the field often existed.²⁷ The two also shared quite a few agenda in improving women's status. More importantly, both the YWCA and the mission boards in China trace back to a common history of colonialism

²⁵ For example, Soong Mei-Ling, who later became the first lady of the Republic, and led various women's movement of the regime, once worked as a YWCA secretary in Shanghai. However, her later political agenda were different from those of Maud Russell's – Russell was far more leftist. Deng Yingchao, These two figures nonetheless show the diversity of leadership which the YWCA encompassed.

²⁶ Hand, "The First National Convention of Women in China," 67.

²⁷ Boyd, *Emissaries*, 28.

and imperialism of the Euro-America expansion. In China, although Western Christians arrived as early as 1552,²⁸ it was not until the advent of European colonial powers did Christians, through unequal treaties, achieved more and more access to the country. Many missionaries saw the Opium War “as a providential measure,” and Christian faith as its justification: “military force was righteous when it was on the side of God.”²⁹ The nineteenth-century American saw a close relationship between the overseas evangelism, “the nation’s territorial expansion and mercantile adventurism.”³⁰ Then with the closing of American frontier in the 1890s, the US policy makers sought new frontiers beyond the American continent; the expanding American evangelical interest accompanied this economic and political ambition. By 1914, China became the largest receiving country of the US foreign mission force. The close connection between the Euro-American expansion and the expanding evangelical enterprise also resulted in one of Christian women’s earliest entries into the “public sphere” and a broader world, which would have been inaccessible to them in their home countries.

This historical context was essential for the YWCA’s expansion in Chinese cities in the 1910s. It was also the source of many of the contradictions in Maud Russell’s experience. The YWCA’s evolution in China, from evangelism, to liberal humanism and Christian socialism, reflected a variety of approaches for women’s movement, and

²⁸ Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之, *Xi xue dong jian yu wan Qing she hui* 西学东渐与晚清社会 [The Dissemination of Western learning and the late Qing society] (Shanghai 上海: Shanghai renmin chu ban she 上海人民出版社, 1994), 30.

²⁹ Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, 6.

³⁰ Lian Xi, *The Conversion of Missionaries: Liberalism in American Protestant Missions in China, 1907-1932*, (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 2. Before the 1890s, however, the relationship between American missionaries and their government was sometimes ambiguous. As Hunter explains in *The Gospel of Gentility*, on pages 6-9, domestic circumstances in the US and the prior considerations in foreign policies sometimes sacrificed missionaries’ demands. In addition, American politicians held different attitudes towards empire and overseas missionary presence.

produced a group of women leaders who sought to “find and to create better values and expressions of life for the women of China,” as Julean Arnold puts it in the quote at the beginning of this section. The YWCA was especially prominent in women’s movement of China from 1890-1927, as Alison R. Drucker has observed. It is also around this period that Maud Russell emerged as a key player of this movement.

The Comfortable American Girl “inside a Glass Bubble”

The patterns from Lelia came Sunday – I had just told the tailor a few days before to wait until I could see the new styles before making up my winter dress. I wish you would send me pattern books regularly.

– Maud Russell to Folks, October 1st, 1918

I wish you could see the way the Chinese look at that pink sweater. This morning I passed a group of coolie women and they looked me over, and one of them took ahold of it.

– Maud Russell to Folks, May 2nd, 1918

Maud Russell arrived in China in September 1917, a typical middle-class young American girl of her time. However, unlike the other all-American girl Helen Foster who arrived with a tourist attitude and a plan of short-term stay to experience China for her “great American novel,” Maud Russell went to China well prepared with knowledge about the country and a mission of bridging China with Christianity – a belief planted in her through her family and education. Born into an affluent middle class family in California, the child Russell established her perceptions of China through the Chinese immigrant labors who worked for her father’s construction business. As she grew and started to remember things, she witnessed from afar the development of a “Chinese village” five miles from her own home – Chinese “business people, laundry people, fruit

and vegetable people” lived in the compact community³¹. The family of the Russells would drive around the village for curiosity, though they never entered the village themselves. Actively involved in her district church as a teenager, Russell learned situations in China from returned missionaries and “vowed to become a missionary in China herself someday.”³² At university, Russell joined the YWCA, raising funds for its oversea endeavors in China and India. After graduation, she worked in the regional YWCA office in San Francisco, hearing more about foreign secretary’s work from her colleague who was previously posted abroad.

Through these experiences, Maud Russell constructed an image of China and an idealized idea of overseas YWCA work that were common among American female missionaries. She imagined an image of Chinese women being oppressed, miserable for lack of the blessings of Christianity; she assumed that the YWCA secretaries in China represented the “advanced” western women modernizing and westernizing indigenous women. Such a mindset was typical of Russell’s time. In Garner’s words, “in order for western women to enjoy social and economic power as professional social workers and missionaries, a degraded female ‘Other’ had to exist in the colonies.”³³ It reflected the “gendered process”³⁴ of an imperialist expansion. Unconscious of the underlying ideologies in her action, Russell arrived in China believing that she joined a noble and

³¹ Transcript of oral History Interview with Maud Russell, 1976, by Midwest China Study Resource Center. Box 56, Maud Russell papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. (NYPL stands for this library in the following sections of this chapter.)

³² Karen Garner, *Precious Fire: Maud Russell and the Chinese Revolution* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 5.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Kumari Yayawardena, *The White Woman’s Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia During British Colonial Rule*, (New York: Routledge, 1995).

significant international cause, and became “part of the YWCA’s Christian reconstruction project in China.”³⁵

Comfortable Glass Bubble

She spent the first year and a half in Nanking Language School to study Chinese. The majority of the students were American new missionaries of different Boards. Sometimes a few nurses attended this language school too. Occasionally a couple of missionaries from other Western countries came to it to learn the language as well. The classmates of the language school, and the American missionaries in Nanking formed Maud Russell’s circle in this period. During school time, she boarded with another girl at a married missionary couple’s home. They had lots of picnics, tiffins, receptions and dinner gatherings after study, but almost never with the Chinese. The Chinese they knew were their teachers, who worked for Westerners, but were rarely included in the Westerners’ socials.

At that time, Maud Russell was oblivious of this kind of insulation of her community, and she totally enjoyed herself. This is the state of what Catherine Service termed as “inside a glass bubble.” Talking of her years in Shanghai as wife of an American diplomat in China in the 1930s and 40s, Catherine Service describes this kind of “foreign life” as:

It was as though we were living in a glass bubble inside something else. And we were always inside our own glass bubble, all floating around, seeing each other, perhaps talking with each other, perhaps knowing one or two Chinese, but insulated.³⁶

³⁵ Garner, *Precious Fire*, 20.

³⁶ Rosemary Levenson, Interview with Caroline Schulz Service, 1976, p.66. Collection of Caroline Service: State Department duty in China, the McCarthy era, and after, 1933-1977. Schlesinger Library.

Catherine Service thinks this analogy could apply to the most majority of Westerners living in China. Eventually, Maud Russell would set herself apart from this majority, but her life at the Nanking Language School was still inside the glass bubble. She was comfortably a middle-class American girl, making effort to maintain her American life style in China.

Her weekly letters to family back in California were filled with social activities among her fellow compatriots. She also wrote with meticulous details about the fabric of her new clothes in China and repeatedly asked for pattern books to be sent to her from home, as shown in the first quote at the beginning of this section. Her letters also conveyed other things that reflected middle-class standards of good living. For example, in a letter on May 1918, she wrote to her family: “It’s mighty comfortable here – we have some luxuries such as running hot water and a bath tub, which practically very few houses here have...”³⁷ Nine days later, she wrote again,

I wore [my new hat] with my green silk summer suit to a concert and entertainment at Ginling College last Saturday...

And talk about ice cream – we have it at least twice a week and oftener this week. Today we had it for tea, along with some meal cookies that I like: Mrs. Hummel is a perfect peach about having the things we like, and having them as often as we want them.³⁸

Besides maintaining a “standard” good everyday life, upholding American middle-class womanhood by paying careful attention to the details of her clothes, Russell also enjoyed summer vacations at a “westerners only” mountain resort.

³⁷ Maud Russell to folks, May 11, 1918, Maud Russell Papers, box 1, NYPL.

³⁸ Maud Russell to folks, May 20, 1918, Maud Russell Papers, box 1, NYPL.

The Chinese Outside the Glass Bubble

Although she mentioned in a letter to her brother that Chinese were excluded from the resort, she did not question the phenomenon.³⁹ The Chinese in her experience at that time were much like other “exotic” things – objects of her camera which she could capture in pictures and send home, and she thought her folks could experience them almost like she did on the scene. In her letter descriptions, such as the second quote at the beginning of this section, the Chinese were merely a foil for her American-style sweater: “I wish you could see the way the Chinese look at that pink sweater.” Apparently, the way the Chinese coolies looked over Russell helped her feel good about herself and the sweater. At other times, the Chinese coolies appeared as numbers in her letters, numbers to demonstrate her good life in the summer resort:

Maybe you would be interested to know how much it costs us to live in a China summer resort. We pay \$400 rent for the season and last month board, which includes food, servants, laundry, in fact everything, came to about \$34.00. This includes servant’s travel too from Wuhoo and other places – we have four servants. Not so bad!⁴⁰

The servants were categorized together with food and laundry, as if they were utilities of these foreign girls’ boarding place.

Once the servants did appear as individuals in a letter, but were depicted as “ignorant” ones whom Russell learned to administer and teach. Telling her family about her experience organizing a YWCA summer conference there in June 1918, she thought she learned how to deal with servants:

Then the fun we had when we paid off the servants... Three of the coolies had been as cheerful as could be when doing the extra work... and so we gave them each 50 ¢ extra but one of the coolies had been stubborn so we gave him only 20 ¢

³⁹ Garner, *Precious Fire*, 27.

⁴⁰ Maud Russell to folks, August 9, 1918. Box 1, NYPL.

–he wanted more and handed that back so I put it in my money bag and let him wait. When we got through with all the others he was still there and Evelyn asked him what he wanted. Then we gave him 10 ¢, just to teach him that he should take a good thing when it is offered, but he handed that back, and went without any tip. I meant to give him something the next day but in the getting off missed him so the poor fellow really did have a good lesson.⁴¹

Russell’s dealing of the Chinese servants reflects what James Hevia terms as “the pedagogy of imperialism.”⁴² While Hevia shows how “imperial lessons” were taught among empires and to the public by using violence of arms, words and images, this incident demonstrates how similar lessons were carried out at interpersonal levels. Under the imperial mindset, Russell thought that she learned a lesson of how to control her “inferiors,” and at the same time taught them lessons on how to be good servants. Identified with “we foreigners,” she failed to recognize the resistance from the “other,” and misperceived the “effectiveness” of her lessons.

Potentials to Break Through the Glass Bubble

Comfortable as Maud Russell was with her identity as a “good American” who was in China to give help, she already exhibited characteristics which would help her eventually break through the glass bubble of foreign life: a strong sense of social responsibility in politics and an acute desire for new experience.

Strong Interest in Politics

Although she enjoyed “a full and happy year”⁴³ with her foreign community in Nanking, she longed for someone to “discuss and talk and react” political situations in China as well as the world. She complained to her folks:

⁴¹ Maud Russell to folks, July 6, 1918. Box 1, NYPL.

⁴² James Louis Hevia. *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁴³ Maud Russell to folks, August 21, 1918. Box 1, NYPL.

One of the disappointing things this year has been the lack of that – the Hummels [*the missionary couples with whom Russell boarded*] and the girls ... are not interested in talking things that are happening in the world. Mildred and I did our best to get them started at the table to discussing even Chinese politics, but in vain. The girls there hardly took enough interest to read the daily paper, while Mildred and I just raced through meals to get a chance at it.⁴⁴

Her strong interest in politics set her off from other women around. Unable to move her fellow compatriots from their self-absorption in their own glass bubble, Russell looked for her male Chinese teachers for the kind of intelligent conversations she craved for. At the end of the first year's language study, she was starting to be able to understand and even discuss politics and history of China. She took full advantage of this improvement in her language ability. She reported to her folks:

I had a mighty interesting hour with the teacher yesterday – he was telling me about the situation in Nanking when China was declared a republic in 1911 and who was who. I am quite fond of politics and it is a joy to be able to talk with the Chinese teachers on this subject. The other day I had the fun of telling him the terms of the Armistice – as many of them as I could remember. We surely have plenty of material for discussion these days, and isn't it thrilling to realize you can discuss it in Chinese!"⁴⁵

Russell's strong enthusiasm in politics jumped out of the letter. "mighty interesting," "quite fond of," "joy" and "fun" and "thrilling," all these words told her folks the excitement and inspirations she finally found in meaningful conversations with another. It was as if she found an oasis in a desert of indifference.

Russell's strong sense of social responsibility in politics was not only shown in her urge to talk about it with others, but also in her action. After she learned that the American Brewers Association was planning to move their entire business to China, she wrote home to request her folks to write to their congressmen to prevent the plan from happening. Russell thought such business conduct immoral apparently because she

⁴⁴ Maud Russell to folks, July 6, 1918. Box 1, NYPL.

⁴⁵ Maud Russell to folks, December 1, 1918. Box 1, NYPL.

supported the prohibition movement which was winning the cause at the moment in the US. She vehemently attacked the brewers' plans and asked her folks to also do anything they could to spread her message and publicize the issue so that the US government would take action to prohibit the brewers' business move in China.⁴⁶

Russell's political action against the brewer's plans reflected her deep belief in Christian socialist principles at that time. That is, by being "really Christian," one has to "renounce all selfish desires and hostile impulses, live a simple life emulating Christ, and express 'steadfast sympathy with all those who are oppressed.'"⁴⁷ In her action against the American brewers, she followed the principles and expressed her sympathy for the "oppressed China."

However, while Russell perceived the American Brewers Association as the oppressing force to the oppressed China and Chinese, she was unaware that the oppressing power also lay within herself. In the same letter, she depicted China as a "helpless country": "China, as things are at present, can't do a thing to prevent that awful business coming in; but perhaps our Government can [*original underline*] prevent her nationals from carrying a prohibited business to a helpless country." Depicting China as unable to do anything against the power of American business, Russell deprived "the oppressed" of their own agency, and she took for granted her own and her sympathetic American fellows' superiority.

What obstructed Maud Russell from seeing a fuller picture of this situation and her own position was blindness to the internalization of the oppressing power in her, and

⁴⁶ Maud Russell to folks, December 20, 1918. Box 1, NYPL.

⁴⁷ Garner, *Precious Fire*, 28.

an inability to have empathetic connection with the oppressed. At the time, she was at a similar stage of personal growth like that of Cherríe Moraga before Moraga achieved “a realist theory of identity.”⁴⁸ Born with her Chicana mother’s features but the fair skin of her Anglo father, Moraga was educated and taught to hide her Chicana heritage and pass into whiteness. Her mother intentionally denied Moraga’s Chicano identity because the mother wanted to protect the daughter from poverty and illiteracy which the mother experienced herself as a woman of color. She wanted the daughter to pass into the white-privileged system and enjoy the advantages that came with the fair skin. Although Moraga could pretend to be “the happy, upwardly mobile heterosexual,”⁴⁹ deep in heart she felt alienated but did not know the reason. It was not until she took the risk of accepting her homosexuality, and realized the oppression of emotional starvation inflicted on her by a heterosexist society, that she started to re-connect with her mother. She realized her internalization of the perceptions of the white middle-class women was also a form of oppression to her mother, the poor, uneducated and Chicano woman. From this realization, she learned to relate her oppression to those of others, and she learned to “enter the lives of the others.”

Maud Russell, in her comfortable middle-class American life in China at the time, still had a long way to go to reach such a realization and to enter the lives of a variety of Chinese whom she encountered. But she did already start a progressive process similar to that of the young Cherríe Moraga. For one thing, she had noticed the “inter-relatedness of all human activity”⁵⁰ and its effect on international politics; for another, she had a strong

⁴⁸ Paula M. L. Moya, “Postmodernism, ‘Realism,’ and the Politics of Identity: Cherríe Moraga and Chicana Feminism” in *Feminist Genealogies*, 150.

⁴⁹ Moraga, “La Güera,” in *This Bridge Called My Back*, 26.

⁵⁰ Garner, *Precious Fire*, 28.

desire for and alertness to new experience – the second characteristics which helped her to eventually break through from the glass bubble of the foreign life.

Acute Desire for New Experience

One of the new experiences Maud Russell had outside of her missionary community in Nanking was teaching English to a teacher from the Women's First Provincial Normal School, a governmental school. Most possibly Russell got to know this teacher, whose name was Edna Yang, through the YWCA, since Yang was a graduate of the YWCA Physical School in Shanghai. Russell went to Yang's school once, but had to change their weekly meeting place to the YWCA compound, because the principal of Yang's school told her not to bring Russell to their campus. "They are afraid of Christianity and evidently don't want me to get an entrance into the School."⁵¹ Russell was happy with the opportunity to get to know Edna Yang and also to have an access to a non-Christian school through Yang; she had thought that she was offering help and service by teaching Yang English. But surprisingly to her, the school principal's response to her good intention was hostility and fear. Although Russell did not do active interpretation of this new experience, her reaction was unique and creative in her own way: "It is an exciting game we Christians play out in the Orient." She commented this experience to her folks. Instead of reacting with complaint or derogative opinion of the principal's hostility to Christianity, she took the others' difference as challenging elements of "an exciting game" – she kept teaching Edna Yang at the YWCA, and started to learn the lives of the people who were different.

⁵¹ Maud Russell to folks, October 10, 1918. Box 1, NYPL.

After the language school, Maud Russell was assigned to an inland city, Changsha. But before she started to work there, she went to Peking to substitute another foreign secretary who had to take a sick leave. In this transitional two-month period from April to June 1919, Russell not only for the first time worked as a YWCA foreign secretary, but also had the chance to witness the May 4th Student Movement. Her openness to experience fully exhibited during her stay in Peking. “I’m getting the very best possible experience here in Peking.”⁵² She told her folks at home.

Russell’s openness to new experience was first reflected in her passion to her new work. One of the dominant themes in her Peking letters was her Association work. Her letters were filled with her enthusiasm in the new tasks. The following excerpt in particular epitomizes her genuine satisfaction in them:

Today has been quiet – at least there have been no outside activities. I’ve been working on books and taking on inventory of the Association property and doing other office jobs. It sure is fun being in a real Association – I’m learning heaps and loving it heap. I haven’t been so happy in China as I am up here, and that’s saying a lot, for I certainly have enjoyed myself in other places.⁵³

Besides office work, Russell’s new tasks at the YWCA included visiting schools which had connection with the association, both mission and government schools. Unlike the one mentioned in Russell’s Nanking letters, the government schools in Peking welcomed her, and she had chances to get to know the school faculty members as well as the children there. “It surely was fun watching those youngsters ... have just as good time as any girls at home would.”⁵⁴ She wrote to her folks about the children at a government school. Her ability to connect the Chinese girls with those in the U.S. indicated her willingness to break through the glass bubble isolated by race.

⁵² Maud Russell to folks, May 18, 1919. Box 1, NYPL.

⁵³ Maud Russell to folks, May 1, 1919. Box 1, NYPL.

⁵⁴ Maud Russell to folks, April 23, 1919. Box 1, NYPL.

Besides student work, Maud Russell also worked with upper-class married women, the t'ai tais, giving them educational class, "Better Babies" lectures and holding social activities among them.⁵⁵ Russell was excited with this type of work as well because she was opening new ground together with the t'ai tais. For example, she and her colleagues arranged parties to the married Association members (t'ai tais) and their husbands. It was "a rather daring departure in the way of social events"⁵⁶ because those Chinese men and women were not used to go out together. Such YWCA events were even criticized by some of the missions in the beginning, but it turned out to be "a great stunt," in Russell's words.

Russell expressed great excitement over her new responsibilities in another letter:

We have over three hundred and fifty members in the Peking Association, so it's a rather good sized show to be responsible for. But I sure am having one picnic. I feel almost as big as I used to when I'd be sent to the bank for four or five hundred dollars to pay the cutters and field men at our drier!⁵⁷

Comparing the new responsibilities at work to the trust she won from her parents in her youngster years, Russell indicated the personal growth she gained as a real YWCA secretary.

In addition to Russell's new work, she was also deeply concerned and excited about the May 4th student movement. Soon after her arrival in Peking, student

⁵⁵ Unlike the early stage of the YWCAs in the U.S. and Britain, which made strong entries both in industrial work and student work from the start, the YWCA of China had better connection to the middle- and upper-class circles of Chinese women. The Association targeted towards these groups of women's social needs, such as adapting new social activities with modernizing social changes, and learning Westernized baby caring methods. As to industrial work, although the YWCA of China also made effort at first in the 1900s and 1910s, due to the leave of the first general secretary who had been in charge of this type of work, and due to a lack of effective methods and hence ineffective results, the YWCA switched their attention to students and t'ai tais. Not until the 1920s, the industrial work was launched again and became another emphasis of the YWCA of China. See Li Yu-ning, "A Study of the Young Women's Christian Association of China: 1890-1930," *Chinese Studies in History* 10 (3) (Spring 1977): 73-88.

⁵⁶ Maud Russell to folks, May 9, 1919. Box 1, NYPL.

⁵⁷ Maud Russell to folks, June 22, 1919. Box 1, NYPL.

demonstrations broke out to protest against the resolution made at the First World War peace conference at Versailles that Shandong Province, the former German concession would be under Japan's control instead of being returned to China. The student protests targeted on the corrupted pro-Japanese central government, led by Duan Qirui and his clique known as the Anfu government, who secretly depended on Japan's military assistance to fight rival warlords in China. In addition to demonstrations, the students also organized boycotts of Japan. This movement lasted for six weeks, and became an unprecedented nation-wide anti-Japanese movement, arousing support from workers, business people and the press.⁵⁸

Like most of the Western missionaries in Peking, Maud Russell also supported the student movement and thought the students' request for a repeal of the Versailles Treaty regarding the Shandong question justified.⁵⁹ Russell's concern to the movement, however, went a further length than the average missionaries. She went out to the scene of the demonstrations, and walked with the parades to witness the real situation. "You ought to be living here now!"⁶⁰ She exclaimed in her letter to family, knowing her words were inadequate to show them the intense feeling among the students. She sent her family snap shots of the demonstrations, and subscribed for them newspapers which she thought gave a more objective report of China's politics. In addition, she also went out to social

⁵⁸ The causes and process of the May 4th Movement have been very well discussed in many books due to its significance in Chinese history. The following are just a few examples among the many where more details of the event can be found: Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960); Chen Xian Qing/陈贤庆, *Minguo Junfa Paixi/ 民国军阀派系* (Beijing: Tuanjie Chubanshe, 2008), 26; Richard Phillips, *China Since 1911* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 53-58; Garner, *Precious Fire*, 29-34.

⁵⁹ Peking Missionary Association passed a resolution around May 20, 1919 to be sent to their home governments, of America and Britain, expressing their support to the students' requests. Maud Russell's letter to her family on May 27, 1919 mentioned this resolution.

⁶⁰ Maud Russell to folks, May 27, 1919. Box 1, NYPL.

gatherings among the Chinese, listening to discussions about their movements and getting their perspectives. She wrote about her new experience at a Chinese tea party: “I was rather pleased with myself to think that I didn’t at all dread going, even alone.”⁶¹ She had the happy discovery outside of the isolated Western world.

Russell was optimistic about the outcome of this student movement, and about the international relations being rarified by this movement. As mentioned above, with her deep belief in Christian Socialism, she applied the Christian socialist principles not only to individuals, but also to international relations. She believed that Christian morality must also direct “the conduct of a nation’s public policy and international relations.”⁶² And she believed that President Wilson’s beautiful rhetoric about self-determination would be eventually implemented among nations.

Maud Russell left Peking for her summer at the end of June, with much hope and anticipation for her future work in Changsha. On her way from Peking to her summer resort Mokamshan (莫干山), she summarized what she newly learned about China since her arrival:

...I’m increasingly realizing that the Chinese were civilized thousands of years before we Americans were dreamed of. How they can even tolerate our up-start Europeans who think we have everything to teach them amazes me – but it shows how really civilized the Chinese are.⁶³

Although she naively simplified the international relations with “virtues of tolerance” and “civilization,” she did realize the problems of her previous condescending position as coming out to China and teaching Chinese women the “advanced” way. She continued in this letter to introduce her family what she newly learned about Chinese tea: “Wish you

⁶¹ Maud Russell to folks, May 9, 1919. Box 1, NYPL.

⁶² Garner, *Precious Fire*, 35.

⁶³ Maud Russell to folks, June 29, 1919. Box 1, NYPL.

were here sipping Chinese tea with me – only I don't drink it out of the spout as some of the coolies do! Great life out here!" At this stage, Russell had broken the glass bubble of race – she could drink tea like a Chinese and she could identify with them; however, she had not add in the concept of "class" yet – the Chinese with whom she drank tea were patricians, and she took care not to drink tea like a coolie. Nonetheless, Russell had left behind that "comfortable American girl," and she was no longer merely obsessed with up-to-date American style clothing, or totally absorbed in the glass bubble of foreign life.

A Safe Missionary in Chinese War of the Warlords

After having been on the inside of a local situation it has been real fun for me to read these clippings [from home] and try to imagine how folks at home would interpret them. I hope you haven't read into them any more danger than there actually was.

Foreigners in China have little to fear, for themselves, in such time. Our gunboats (shame on us!) stand in the river ready to protect us, and if things look really serious the consul orders citizens aboard... Of course this sense of security we have cannot be a selfish and personal thing and we do our best to use the safety we have as foreigners for the good of our Chinese friends. We feel with them the fright and terror that come when things are upset in the city and where we never tremble for ourselves we certainly do for them.

– Maud Russell to Californians, August 14, 1920

After a short visit to her family in California due to her father's death, Maud Russell arrived in Changsha around the Chinese New Year in 1920. Compared with the glass bubble of Nanking Language School, the YWCA of Changsha existed in a real Chinese environment, on the Zuo family compound. The Zuo family, offspring of a famous military leader and provincial governor in the Qing dynasty, inherited vast residential compound located in central area of Changsha City. Russell was overjoyed with her new residence, as she expressed in a letter to her family:

You who live in the West have no appreciation what it means to be living here in this Chinese compound – actually with the Chinese. It is something I have hoped for ever since coming to China but have yet to see any other foreigners who have the privilege; so you can guess how thrilled I am over it. It gives us such an entrée among the Chinese – and helps like everything in getting on to Chinese way and language.

Russell thought her chance of living with the Chinese a privilege among Westerners. Her interpretation of this experience is still Western-centered, for she merely saw her “privilege” among Westerners, but did not realize it was actually because of her “privilege” as a Westerner among the Chinese that allowed her entrée into the gentry men’s family compound.

The reason why the Zuo family had the YWCA secretaries living on their private compound was mainly because Westerners’ presence could give the place more protection from competing armies and looting from passing soldiers in an unstable warlord era. During the warlord period, from mid-1910s to mid-1920s in China, with frequent change of regime and a weak central government, nearly a dozen warlords dominated different regions, and “hundreds of petty commanders or mere bandits” took control of individual cities or remote areas.⁶⁴ Changsha, capital of Hunan Province, had always been fought for among the Northern and Southern warlords due to its vital location in Central China. As a result, it was one of the places which was most frequented by war in the era. As Maud Russell recalled, “once we had five or six governors within a few months in Changsha.”⁶⁵ To make it worse, most of the governors were power mongers who merely use the position to grab money and soldiers when they could. When a change of power took place, soldiers fled, looting and burning the city on the way.

⁶⁴ David Bonavia, *China’s Warlords* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1995), 2; see also Chen Xianqing/陈贤庆, *Minguo Junfa Paixi/民国军阀派系* (Beijing, Tuanjie Chubanshe, 2008).

⁶⁵ Maud Russell to Asilomar Division, November 16, 1926. Box 1, NYPL.

Russell indicated the meaningless change resulted from the wars in Changsha in another letter: “Peace has come in our city and for all the weeks of fighting and excitement we still have the same governor we started with!”⁶⁶ With almost constant turmoil, the foreign gunboat which protected the foreigners seemed to be a most consistent force at that time in Changsha. No wonder the Zuo family invited the YWCA to stay on their compound. If Russell had yet to realize her privilege among the Chinese guaranteed by the gunboats in Changsha riverfront, it became clear to her through her first war experience.

“Use Our Safety for the Good of Our Chinese Friends”

Merely four months after Russell’s arrival to Changsha, a war broke out between current governor Zhang Jingyao, a commander of the Northern troops, and a Hunan warlord, Zhao Hengti. As tension built up with the Southern troops getting closer to the city, Russell’s experience of the war started with a realization of Westerners’ relative security. She went out going shopping and doing her usual business, but noticed the Chinese were busy escaping with their belongings. Those who did not leave sought refuge in Westerner-occupied places. She reported her observation to her family:

This afternoon I went over to Yale hospital and what a sight it was – one steady stream of people suddenly “sick”, coming to live at the hospital until the trouble is over. The halls of the hospital were crowded with people – it surely is a busy place there days.⁶⁷

Yale hospital was a relatively safer place in war because Yale Missions in China was one of its founders, and American professors worked there. Russell’s narrative of people seeking refuge there appeared observatory and aloof. As her exclamation, “what a sight it was” indicated, so many people escaping and hiding at a place was new experience to her. She observed their physically moving in and out, but their worries and fears did not

⁶⁶ Maud Russell to Harriet Bromley, November 23, 1923. Box 1, NYPL.

⁶⁷ Maud Russell to folks, June 5, 1920. Box 1, NYPL.

touch her much. To the people trying to get a boarding place at the YWCA hostel, she used a similar tone.

Then war really came. Maud Russell and her colleague, Ruth Nathorst, a YWCA secretary from Sweden, took charge of several refugee camps opened by the Red Cross. They slept on a refugee camp for a week. Russell's war experience continued to be anthropologically observatory, and she appeared as a protector over the powerless and frightened Chinese refugees in her letters. Explaining to her family why she slept on the refugee camp, she wrote, "there hasn't seem to be any danger any of the nights but the Chinese seem to rest easier if there is a foreigner about the place."⁶⁸ In the same letter, she reported an explosion happened that day.

This morning at 3:35 we were woken by a terrible shock. It took me about five seconds to realize that there had been an explosion. Ruth and I have a room in the temple and the courts and rooms around were filled with people, and they were all talking by the time we were really awake. So I ... went out and asked them what had happened; of course they knew no more than we. They thought sure it was a cannon and that the Southerners were attacking the city.

I told them "No – the Northerners were blowing up their ammunition rather than leave it for the Southern troops" and that seemed to comfort them some.

Maud Russell's attitude towards the Chinese was somewhat similar to that of Helen Foster in the Shanghai war, in that they both assumed their expertise in dealing with war in comparison with the Chinese. Although it was Russell's first war, and apparently her reaction to the explosion was slower than the refugees – people had already been talking about the explosion when Russell got really awake – she had the confidence to rebuke the refugee's judgment about the source of the explosion right away.

⁶⁸ Maud Russell to folks, June 12, 1920. Box 1, NYPL.

Meanwhile fire started to burn into the sky. Russell and Nathorst asked people to take them to a higher spot to check out the reason of the burning. Although she had to depend on the people who knew the place to get to the high ground, her narrative had her and Nathorst as the only informers for the refugees:

We came back and reported to the scared people who were scattered all through the courts and told them that it was not near enough to be frightened...we just went back and forth among the people, from the tower to the front gate, trying to comfort the people and keep them from getting excited.⁶⁹

The refugees were described as “scared” and “excited,” while Russell and Nathorst as “comforting the people.” The contrast set Russell and Nathorst as “we” and the Chinese refugees as “them” in this letter, two different and incomparable groups. Russell did get somewhat scared after all, when the sounds of explosion and the burning became terrible, but she did not use that word on her; instead, it was “our hearts go fast.” And since she was still going back and forth and doing the reporting to “them,” the “we” were still the two distinct protectors of the others on the camp.

The war in Changsha subsided in the second half of June, in time for Maud Russell to go out of Changsha for summer vacation. Fighting was still going on at other places on her way. Boarding on a Japanese line, Russell watched a Japanese gunboat escorting her boat, protecting them from the fights which were going on. On the boat, she heard of the terrible suffering of the cities they passed: “there has been a lot of looting and killing.”⁷⁰ While on vacation, Russell paid close attention to the development of war situation in China, and she had a second thought of the war she went through in Changsha.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Maud Russell to folks, June 26, 1920. Box 1, NYPL.

Her second interpretation valued her first-hand war experience. The value she emphasized, however, seemed to be “experience for experience’s sake.” Vacationing on the mountain resort Kuling, she recalled to her family, “By this time you have gotten my letters telling of those strenuous days in Hunan and know that we foreigners were perfectly safe and busy through it all. I wouldn’t have missed it for anything!”⁷¹ With her sense of security, war provided an acute excitement for her experience. Although she was glad that she did not go to a sea resort near Peking as originally planned, it was only because she wanted to avoid further travel disruptions, not because she was afraid to get into the war between the Anlu and Chili warlords in Peking. “I wouldn’t at all mind ‘being in on’ some of the things that might happen!”⁷²

In a sense, Russell’s excitement over her war experience at the time was similar to her eagerness to a country trip. She explained the reason why she longed for such a trip: “Won’t it be some experience! – I’ve always wanted to take a country trip where I could see for myself what roughing it meant...”⁷³ She knew the trip would make her miss some welcome teas for new comers in Changsha, but she reasoned “this trip is worth any number of teas!”⁷⁴ Russell saw both the trip and the war as good chances to learn about new things, but she had not realized that the experiences are also chances to “enter into others’ lives,” and to relate herself with others. Instead, she experienced the new things, and then returned to her old life. On her way back to Changsha from the country trip, she had the third year anniversary of her arrival in China. Her remarks on the three years’ experience in China was, “when I think of how much of it I’ve seen as compared with

⁷¹ Maud Russell to folks, August 1, 1920. Box 1, NYPL.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Maud Russell to folks, August 28, 1920. Box 1, NYPL.

⁷⁴ Maud Russell to folks, September 11, 1920. Box 1, NYPL.

some of the others I count myself pretty fortunate. And now this trip of over three hundred miles... it's almost too good to be true."⁷⁵ Russell's courage and desire to experience the new and the rough is admirable. But her exploration of new experience was yet to go further beyond what she saw, and go deeper to what she thought and did.

For example, having witnessed gunboats escorting her travel in the war, Russell looked back at the war in Changsha and interpreted her experience with more thinking and questioning on her sense of security. However, at the time, her interpretation found no "oppressor" within herself, and she held a safe place close to "home," rather than ventured to a deep emphatic experience with her "Chinese friends." As indicated by the quote at the beginning of this section, in her letter to the California YWCAs on August 14, she tried to "imagine how folks at home would interpret" the news clippings about the Changsha situation which she just went through. It had not occurred to her to imagine how the Chinese in Changsha would interpret this situation.

Sharing the stand point of her folks at home, Russell again reassured herself that "foreigners in China have little to fear for themselves." However, the protection from their gunboats triggered questions in her interpretation. "Shame on us!" She felt it not right to have the gunboat, but somehow she did not connect the communal "shame" to her own identity: "Of course this sense of security we have cannot be a selfish and personal thing and we do our best to use the safety we have as foreigners for the good of our Chinese friends." By denying the privilege of security as a "selfish and personal thing," she was able to disassociate herself from the oppressing powers, and return to a safe place where she could be the condescending helper for her "Chinese friends."

⁷⁵ Maud Russell to folks, September 18, 1920. Box 1, NYPL.

However, Maud Russell's questioning of the gunboat policy did give her insights into a special group of her American compatriots, the navy soldiers. While Helen Foster, in the Shanghai war, identified with the American soldiers and saw them as heroes, Russell saw a very different picture of the soldiers' lives. Even as Changsha's war crisis was still not subsided, Russell did not think the soldiers on gunboats as heroes. Instead, she commented,

...the life of navy men out here is a mighty hard one, and the government does send out mere babes. It always riles me to see the big posters they stick up telling of all the wonderful advantages of joining the navy – a campaign of lies, that's all it is.⁷⁶

In contrast to Helen Foster's impression of the handsome and tall British and American soldiers in Shanghai, Russell noticed how young the American navy men were. Russell's observation of the extremely young navy men, to some extent, echoes Foster's description of the Chinese soldiers, also so young that they looked like mere children.⁷⁷

Russell's comments about the "mighty hard" lives of the American navy soldiers in Changsha came from her first-hand experience. Occasionally, the soldiers on the gunboat in Changsha riverfront came to visit Russell and other YWCA foreign secretaries. In a letter, Russell mentioned having a sailor visitor one evening:

...my evening went to entertaining him. Thanks be! He gets leave only every other night! They're a queer lot, these sailors – mostly boys with very little education, and they never know when to go home; tho' this particular boy has been pretty decent about leaving before ten! If you are the least bit kind or friendly to them they just come and live; and of course we don't like to be too cool, for life in a river port isn't much excitement for them.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Maud Russell to folks, June 20, 1920. Box 1, NYPL.

⁷⁷ One possible reason of the discrepancy between Maud Russell and Helen Foster's impressions of American navy soldiers in China may be because of the time difference – Russell wrote this in 1920, soon after WWI, while Foster commented on the soldiers in early 1930s. Still, such a big contrast between the two American women's impression on navy is worth exploring other reasons.

⁷⁸ Maud Russell to folks, June 18, 1922. Box 1, NYPL.

As an inland city, Changsha was unlike the cosmopolitan Shanghai, which at least provided the sailors with more forms of entertainment. Either in Changsha or Shanghai, nonetheless, Maud Russell noticed the hard lives of the navy men at that time, lonely and in need of friendly relations with people outside of the gunboat. Yet ironically, although the YWCA and YMCA had programs for the illiterate Chinese, the American boys with very little education in the navy somehow did not get into their agenda.

Student Work Began in Earnest

Despite almost continued political unrest in Changsha, the YWCA carried on their normal activities most of the time and developed their work in an impressive pace. Maud Russell took charge of the Student Department of the YWCA, and found her work inspirational and gratifying. To her Californian constituency, she reported, “I wish you could have some of the inspiration that has come for this new year of work; Changsha seems just about the most enticing place I could imagine just now – it is so brimful of opportunity!”⁷⁹ Her letter to her family revealed the same enthusiasm: “Work gets more interesting and thrilling every day, as I’m coming to know the students and the student situation here better.”⁸⁰

Russell’s optimism was well grounded. At the time of her arrival to Changsha, they merely have a hundred and twelve members (one third of Peking’s membership). But merely a year later, Russell was organizing student meetings with over 1400 attendees – while “200 others waited an hour for an overflow meeting.”⁸¹ In 1922, at a Health Week, they had meetings with talks and movies on public health, with turn-outs of

⁷⁹ Maud Russell to the Mills (Californians), October 18, 1920. Box 1, NYPL.

⁸⁰ Maud Russell to folks, December 9, 1920. Box 1, NYPL.

⁸¹ Maud Russell to Californians, October 18, 1921. Box 1, NYPL.

over five hundred people for each meeting. Not only the statistical numbers rose substantially, but also the specific programs of the YWCA were expanded. In Russell's first year in Changsha, she and her colleagues centered their work mainly on the elite women from the Zuo family and their friends, organizing mothers clubs and babies clinics. Soon after however, Russell and her colleagues started programs for a variety of women of other classes. A letter of 1922 summarized Russell's daily routine work as: "Classes – English, Chinese, arithmetic ... cooking and sewing ... Mother's Clubs, weekly Health clinic, Half Day School for Poor Children, Sunday meetings, members social meetings, Bible classes, calling, recreational groups, and student work."⁸²

In student work, Maud Russell succeeded in recruiting students from government schools into her English Club. She was overjoyed by the success. "You can guess how happy we were to have this great connection with splendid non-Christian students."⁸³ Russell held no bias against government school students although they were non-Christian. Instead, she went out to those students and tried to find common ground with them, considering them elements to enrich her own work. Her open attitude to non-Christian students set her apart from some other YWCA student secretaries who perceived those students as lacking proper guidance of the Christian God and need the help of the YWCA. For example, Ethel Cynthia Scribner, a YWCA student secretary in Wuchang, depicted a sharp contrast between mission school girls and government school ones. The former were often seen studying and chatting in a beautiful campus, while the latter lost and confused in a depleted environment. "The mission school girls are generally eager in spirit, with a face full of peace and happiness, occasionally radiant

⁸² Maud Russell to Californians, September 22, 1922. Box 1, NYPL.

⁸³ Maud Russell to folks, March 3, 1921. Box 1, NYPL.

with the light of an active faith, industrious, disciplined.”⁸⁴ In other words, the mission school girls had what the government school students lacked. After the comparison of the two groups in her writing, Scribner exclaimed, “One cannot help wishing that the government school girls might have the inspiration which the mission school girls have, that of living near teachers of genuine Christian character.” The non-Christian students in Scribner’s essay and in Russell’s letter actually were from the same region of Central China, of the same time period, but with different mindsets and approaches to the students, they saw two almost opposite pictures: Russell found them “splendid” and great connections for the YWCA, while Scribner found them hapless and challenging for her as a student secretary.

Despite the personal discrepancies of the secretaries’ opinions on non-Christian students, the YWCA student programs “always aimed to educate school girls about the problems of the urban poor.”⁸⁵ Maud Russell, in particular, not only increased her students’ awareness of the problems, but also tried to bring the privileged students and poor children together, in the hope that they would become activists to establish a fairer social order. Once she sent an essay by a student in her English class to her Californian constituency, to show them how thrilled she was to find her educational work could be so meaningful. The girl student wrote about schools for poor children, which the YWCA ran in Changsha. The student and her classmates often gave entertainments for raising funds for those schools.⁸⁶ In another letter, she shared touching moments at an event which

⁸⁴ Ethel Cynthia Scribner, “on the Student Field,” *The Young Women’s Christian Association in a Changing China*, 43.

⁸⁵ Emily Honig, “Christianity, Feminism, and Communism: The Life and Times of Deng Yuzhi,” in *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Daniel H. Bays (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 248.

⁸⁶ Maud Russell to Californians, March 29, 1920. Box 1, NYPL.

brought the two groups of students together. The YWCA Girl's Club organized a Christmas party for poor school children and their mothers. The poor children performed excellent program at the party. In Russell's lively words:

One eight year old youngster recited John 3.18 and all in the same breath ended up in Chinese fashion – “I've said it very badly”! another ten year old gave us a talk on Christmas and you would have thought she had been preaching all her life; afterward, when the party was almost over, she jumped up on the platform and said that as the representative of the school she wanted to thank the Girls' Club for the party – oh, it was laughable! We here just wish we could know the thing to do to bring out and to save all the possibilities there are in these bright youngsters who have so little chance in life.⁸⁷

The status quo of the privileged and the deprived did not change merely because of these activates, but all of the participants, including Russell, had left the events with more or less connections with the other, and seeds for change, though unseen at the moment, were planted.

Several factors helped the fast development of Maud Russell's student work. First of all, she had a Chinese student secretary to work with her. Russell herself emphasized the importance of having a Chinese colleague in the Student Department: “The best thing about student work in Changsha that I have to tell you is that we have a Chinese student secretary! ...But of course you can't even begin to appreciate what it means to me to have someone to work with, to think with, to do the talking, and to know the proper Chinese way of going about things.”⁸⁸ Secondly, Russell's language skills kept improving, and at the time she started to be able to read Chinese magazines. “One needs to be in order to keep up with Chinese current thinking, especially in student circles.”⁸⁹ Russell explained the importance of the improvement of her reading skills to her family. In

⁸⁷ Maud Russell to the Mills (Californians), January 8, 1921. Box 1, NYPL.

⁸⁸ Maud Russell to Californians, October 18, 1921. Box 1, NYPL.

⁸⁹ Maud Russell to folks, January 23, 1923. Box 1, NYPL.

addition, Russell's other international colleagues shared her concern for improving social welfare than evangelism. They all put the specific needs of the Chinese ahead of "modernizing" or "Westernizing" them. For example, Ingeborg Wikander, Russell's colleague from Sweden, stressed the significance of the cooperation between the Social Service Department of the YWCA with a local welfare organization, the Hunan Central Welfare Society. Esther Horjen from Norway reminded the Association of the urgency of preserving Chinese home arts and painting which were threatened by industrialization and imports.⁹⁰

Besides her focus on student work, Russell started to get involved in industrial work. Accordingly, the relations between Christianity and industry became a key issue in Russell's exploration of her Christian identity.

Christianity and Industry

The YWCA of China resolved to establish substantial industrial program around 1920. Shanghai, as the industrial center of China in the 1920s, was naturally the place where the YWCA launched its industrial work.⁹¹ Other city Associations followed Shanghai's lead, though their scope of industry work was not as comprehensive.

A six-week's stay in Shanghai in fall 1922 infused Maud Russell's enthusiasm in industrial work. Russell first attended the student conference which aimed to ask for student secretaries' cooperation with the Industrial Department. The student workers

⁹⁰ Ingeborg Wikander, "In Changsha"; Esther Horjen, "Homes, Customs, Art," both in *The Young Women's Christian Association in A Changing China* (1924), 50-53 and 24-26.

⁹¹ For more details on the YWCA of Shanghai's industrial work, see Nancy Boyd, *Emissaries: The Overseas Work of the American YWCA 1895-1970*, 131-138; Roger Boshier and Yan Huang, "The Untold Story of 'Foreign Devil' Adult Educators in Shanghai Silk Factories (1920-1949)," *Adult Education Quarterly*, Vol.57(4) (August 2007): 329-345.

resolved to give industrial department full assistance in carrying out industrial work. They decided to arouse students' awareness of the industrial problems in China. Then Russell stayed on to attend the industrial conference of the national YWCA. At the interval of the two conferences, Russell worked under chair of the Industrial Department in Shanghai, Agatha Harrison from England. Russell studied with Harrison, also went to visit factories and other city centers of the YWCA with Harrison. Russell was eager to get trained in industrial work, sharing the conviction with her colleagues in Shanghai that "the church could be the agent for fundamentally transforming the inhuman factory conditions in China."⁹² Expecting to have her share in this fundamental transformation of China's social order, she wrote to her family:

Can't you see me getting educated by the yard?!! Life certainly does get wider every day; there is so much more to know and do than we dream of. To be alive, and in China, during these years is no small responsibility. How thankful I am that my body is so strong!"⁹³

Rather than feeling depressed with the horrible industrial situations, Russell saw them as great opportunities for her to follow Christ's self-sacrifice and sympathy with the oppressed people. She expected to carry God's will to create a godlike egalitarian world in China.

Russell's Christian Socialist theology sustained her belief in the Church's decisive role in China's industrial work. At the industrial conference, the YWCA had a debate on whether the industrial committee of the YWCA should work under the church or as a separate fellowship group. Some thought although the church had a definite industrial stand, they "would stop with talking and do nothing more," based on the church's poor performance in other Western countries in the past. Maud Russell, however, sided with

⁹² Garner, *Precious Fire*, 48.

⁹³ Maud Russell to folks, November 11, 1922. Box 1, NYPL.

the others who believed that the YWCA industrial work should be organized under the Industrial Committee of the Church. She reasoned:

Of course, in other Western countries the Church has failed on this issue, and it has been necessary for outside groups to do the aggressive work on the problems that face humanity; but here in China the Church has the chance to be the group that shall work out a better industrial order: it's thrilling!⁹⁴

In Russell's opinion, since China was in the beginning of industrialism, the church could take the opportunity to take timely stand on economic terms and become "a real force for social building."⁹⁵ The conference eventually resolved to have the industrial work of the YWCA as part of the church.

After Russell went back to Changsha, she organized a series of meetings to discuss with colleagues and students about the relations between Christianity and industry. Although the YWCA of Changsha's engagement in industrial problems stayed mostly at the thinking stage at the time, she and her colleagues did go a great length in tackling poverty issues. They cooperated with the Chinese Benevolent Society, a local welfare organization, to relieve the beggars on Changsha's street. They had women beggars work on spinning and sewing, and men beggars working on construction and maintenance on their compound. Eventually these beggars were able to sustain themselves in the jobs either at the YWCA or in public service. Russell herself led the mass education program, "Common People's School." With the aim to eliminate illiteracy, the program offered classes spreading widely across the city, to young girls who otherwise have no chance for schooling.

⁹⁴ Maud Russell to folks, December 5, 1922. Box 1, NYPL.

⁹⁵ Maud Russell to Christmas Time, 1922. Box 1, NYPL.

The fast development and great appeal of the YWCA to young women of China in this period has multiple reasons. Firstly, at the initial stage of industrialization, the YWCA was the most influential women's organization to provide service for emergent urban women to tackle the change of women's new social roles. Secondly, they endeavored to improve women's social position and advocated for female autonomy and power. They worked to raise women's community and citizenship consciousness, both essential characters to be built in women at the time of social change. Thirdly, they were the few organizations that allowed Chinese women executive roles and trained them in leadership. Both the foreign and Chinese secretaries became role models and "distributed women's movement propaganda"⁹⁶ for younger women. Furthermore, during the warlords era, although both the nationalists and the communists were carrying on programs for women, their influence did not reach a cross-nation scale yet as that of the YWCA. This situation would change drastically after the formation of an alliance between the two parties during the 1923-1927 era.

The approaches of the YWCA work also had apparent limitations. For example, Maud Russell's comments on the Changsha YWCA's relief work with the beggars indicated some problems. She stated, "Not only, through this effort, have we been able to help this unfortunate class of people, but it brings us into a hearty relation with the local gentry who carry on extensive relief work in the city."⁹⁷ Similar to Russell's previous interpretation of her first war experience in Changsha, in which she related with the American recipients of her letter as the "we" and saw the Chinese as "them," this time she was satisfied with "a hearty relation with the local gentry," but as to the relation with

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Maud Russell to Pacific Coast Students, September 2, 1923. Box 1, NYPL.

the “unfortunate class of people,” her experience with them stopped as the helper. She did not push further to see what she would be able to learn from the others’ unfortunate experience.

Agatha Harrison’s approach to the industrial problems in Shanghai, in particular, epitomized the dilemma of the YWCA. Deeply disturbed and distressed by the miserable situation of Shanghai’s factory workers, Harrison dedicated her full effort to raise their living and working standard. Her and her YWCA colleagues’ work did improve the labor situation. For instance, a British owner, under Harrison’s persuasion, decided to raise the age of his hires to ten for boys and twelve for girls. However, Harrison had to repeatedly visit factory owners, often encountering hostility and indifference. Eventually the British owner suggested her to go for legislation. But her legislative proposal was voted down. An important reason was because the sympathetic Chinese members of the Shanghai Municipal Council did not attend the meeting as a protest to the May Thirtieth Incident, which happened to take place three days before the vote. On May 30, 1925, foreign police shot at student demonstrators who protested in front of the police station due to the death of a Chinese worker at a Japanese factory. With only the Western members left to vote, Harrison’s reform proposal was aborted.⁹⁸ Although this specific voting involved more complicated reasons, the result did tell the limitation of the YWCA’s approach to industrial program at the time. The imbalance of power could not be rectified by just involving the oppressor.

The May Thirtieth Movement following the above incident in Shanghai epitomized anti-imperialist and anti-Christian movements which rose to large scale

⁹⁸ Boyd, *Emissaries*, 136.

around 1925. Under this situation, the YWCA, despite its successful transform to Chinese leadership and actively recruitment of non-Christian membership – 95.3 percent Chinese and 51.2 percent non-Christian⁹⁹ – was still targeted by the anti-imperialist movement because of its Christian origin.

Maud Russell took a furlough in 1924. As she returned to China in 1925, she encountered the peak of anti-Christian movement, and her interpretation of her China experience hereinafter reached a new phase.

“My Spirit Longs for that True World”

During Russell’s furlough, however, she went through a painful breakup. This love, however, manifested her pursuit of adventurous experience and her boldness to challenge the part of mainstream external values which does not reflect her “true world.”

Russell and Anne Seesholtz, the National Student Secretary, was in love in China. They traveled together for vacations and conferences, and in between wrote passionate love letters. Most of these love letters, however, were destroyed by the executor of Russell’s estate. The few remaining letters show Russell as a devoted and passionate lover, but cannot definitely tell whether Russell and Seesholtz’s intimacy was Boston marriage, or the kind of same-sex love as understood today. Russell’s letter to her family, however, indicated that her relationship with Seeholz was more than Boston marriage.¹⁰⁰ She ardently wrote about the good time she and Seesholtz had together, and did not hide

⁹⁹ Drucker, “The Role of the YWCA in the Development of the Chinese Women’s Movement,” 433.

¹⁰⁰ Karen Garner, Russell’s biographer, Roger Boshier and Yan Huang, who did research in Russell, also think that Russell was an ardent lesbian.

her love to Seesholtz. This excerpt from a letter reporting her vacation with Seesholtz is a glimpse into her love life:

We are in our second week of joy – these days with Anne are really heaven for me – as much as I have dreamed all these months, and more. Every morning Anne reads, and the rest of the day gone leisurely. We walk and write and sleep, and have lovely evenings, sometimes out under the stars in the moonlight. It all seems too beautiful and happy to be true.¹⁰¹

Although Russell’s family were reluctant to accept her love of women – they had evaded seeing her first companion, another YWCA colleague of Russell – this time they accepted Anne Seesholtz.

However, during the furlough, when both Russell and Seesholtz came back to the U.S. and have to confront the social hostility to same-sex love,¹⁰² Seesholz decided to end their relationship. Russell persisted and hoped for a reunion with Seesholtz, but to no avail. One of the reasons for Seesholtz’s denial of their love was that someone “had called their love a ‘sin’ against the ‘world of spirit’ or against Christian morality.”¹⁰³ In her lonely emotionally abyss, Russell wrote this poem:

God deliver me from this hell
Wherein I dwell –
This deep and lonely hell wherein
I dwell with sin
Exile from the world of spirit –
Though so near it –
My spirit longs for that true world.¹⁰⁴

Russell returned to China after her furlough alone, without her companion. But her spirit continued her pursuit of the true world, and her love for women did not change despite the outside accusation of “sin.” Seesholz henceforce hid and suppressed her love for

¹⁰¹ Maud Russell to folks, June 23, 1923. Box 1, NYPL..

¹⁰² China was a refuge for same-sex love for quite a few Westerners at Russell’s time. See Roger Boshier and Yan Huang, “The Untold Story of ‘Foreign Devil’ Adult Educators in Shanghai Silk Factory,” 338.

¹⁰³ Garner, *Precious Fire*, 65.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Garner, *Precious Fire*, 65.

women. The only telling clue was Russell's photo which was displayed at a prominent place at her home for a lifetime, occasionally mentioned to others as her "best friend in China."¹⁰⁵

In this first three years of Maud Russell in the inland city Changsha, a lot happened to her. She had a series of warlord wars and witnessed the political unrest; she supervised lively and various YWCA student work in the city; she started to have Chinese as friends; she got to know about the working class, and thought deeply about the relations between Christianity and industry; and she travelled strenuously, often with soldiers and communion on the train –two thousand six hundred miles in 1921-1922, for example. All these provided the backdrop for the development of her identity. At the time she still held firmly her identity as a Christian and a missionary. While she started to question the gunboat policy, her approaches to China's problems tended to be still condescending, with exclamations like "poor old China" when she discussed the turmoil of the country. The "experience" of China Maud Russell pursued, at this time, tend to be anthropological, "to experience for experience sake" instead of really merging herself into the new environment. But meanwhile, she already showed her tendency of breaking the binds of mainstream values, doing what she independently thought as belonging to true to her own life philosophy.

Laughing Foreigner's Humbling and Creative Experience

War and its way are hell, and every day we live here in the midst of it, we hate it the more.

– Maud Russell to Asilomar, September 16, 1926

¹⁰⁵ Garner, *Precious Fire*, 66.

Of course you know I'm the happiest person on our China staff: to get back to Central China is bliss, and to be in Changsha is very heaven. Maybe you can appreciate what it meant to come back to a Chinese YWCA: to be met by Chinese friends and taken by them to rooms at the YWCA that they had prepared for me, and to belong to them and not to any group of foreign co-workers.

– Maud Russell to Sarah Lyon, March 29, 1928

When Maud Russell returned from furlough in August 1925, she returned to a China that was at the peak of nationalist, anti-imperialist and anti-Christian movement. Soon after the May Thirtieth Movement, the Nationalist Party launched its National Revolutionary Army into North Expedition, which would eventually end the warlord era, and establish a unified nationalist government in Nanking. The leftist Nationalist Party and the Communist Party cooperated in organizing labor unions and labor uprisings in cities. National anti-foreign and anti-Christian feelings were at height.

Maud Russell was stationed in Wuchang from 1925 to 1927, another inland city after her return to start a new YWCA center, and then back to Changsha again from 1928 to 1930. It turned out to be another turbulent period with war, revolution, labor violence, crackdown of communists, and wars between the nationalists and the communists. Wuchang and Changsha were both centers of revolution and war during this period. Russell found herself in the center of ideological clashes among Christianity, nationalism, communism, imperialism and internationalism. She tried to apply Christian principles of interpersonal relations to the political situations in an effort to resolve the upheavals, but only to find more challenges to Christianity from her student groups who rebutted her with the imbalance of international powers and imperialism which ran against Christian belief in human equality. Unlike some other Westerners who held tight to their psychologically “safe” place in China and was hence oblivious of the intensity of anti-

foreign feelings, Russell confronted the depth of the situation upfront. She pushed her own edge, and her approaches to experience in this period became more constructive and involved more self questioning. Together with the political revolution in China, Russell went through a revolution of her own mind.

The Conflicts between Nationalism and Christianity

To tackle the much questioning of the West in China which Russell confronted in work and in life, she and her YWCA foreign colleagues underwent deep thought on their “interpretation of Christ’s way of life”¹⁰⁶ and on their connection with Western gun-boat policy in China. Russell’s discussion and contemplation of extraterritoriality and Christianity resulted in a resolution to relinquish their privileges granted by extraterritoriality and gunboat policy. Russell and several other Western missionaries in Wuchang who were sympathetic to the nationalist anti-imperialist movement wrote a letter together to their consuls, declaring their resolution:

As missionaries of the Church of Christ in China we are becoming increasingly aware that in preaching a gospel of the triumph of love over force, of right over might, our cause is immeasurably weakened by our connection with rights and privileges gained and maintained through the use of foreign military force. We therefore desire to free ourselves from such rights and privileges and to this end we wish to express to our respective governments our desire as individuals to waive all the privileges of extraterritoriality.¹⁰⁷

They insisted that they should be governed by Chinese laws and should not take privileged protection by their own governments. Although this resolution demonstrated a spirit of true justice and a possibility to solve the conflict of Chinese nationalism and Christianity in theory, Russell’s later experience in time of crisis would put it in test, and

¹⁰⁶ Maud Russell to Asilomar, September 23, 1925. Box 1, NYPL.

¹⁰⁷ Maud Russell and others to the British and American consuls in Hankow, September 20, 1925. Box 1, NYPL.

demonstrate the practice of aforementioned “theory of the flesh” demands more challenging real experience than putting down a resolution on paper.

Russell not only tried to discard her comfortable and safe privileges as a foreigner, but also tried to be empathetic with students who were resistant to her YWCA work. In 1926, in order to overcome anti-Christian sentiments among Chinese students, Russell organized a student conference. At the conference, Russell encouraged the students to develop an “international outlook” and to acknowledge the progress western nations brought to China,¹⁰⁸ the students derogated foreign imperialism in return. Russell was frustrated by the nonreconciliation, but she tried to see the students’ perspectives, explaining to her Californian constituency about the Chinese students’ problems with nationalism and internationalism:

It is not an easy matter for Christian students to know how to express both their patriotism and internationalism – do try to realize that this is not a theoretical question to them: what *are* they to do when a local unit of the Patriotic Movement asks their school to join an anti-foreign parade? Could you stand being called a “slave of the foreigner”? but wouldn’t you want to express your feeling of national outrage after such affair as that of May 30th? What would you do – being both Chinese and Christian?¹⁰⁹ [*Russell’s underline*]

To further explain why being Chinese Christian was a difficult political choice, Russell used quotes from a letter of Mrs. Chen, a member of the National Student Committee of the YWCA. Like Russell, Chen also was very concerned with international relationship. She was deeply disturbed because she identified herself as a Christian, but she found Christian nations did not live up to the teaching of Christ. Instead of following Christ’s teaching of love one another and compassion for the weak, Christian nations used force, aggressiveness and oppressiveness to gain power and exploit. However, Chen refused to

¹⁰⁸ Garner, *Precious Fire*, 77.

¹⁰⁹ Maud Russell to Asilomar Division, August 16, 1926. Box 1, NYPL.

become slaves of ideology, and she refused to fall for either of the dichotomy of Christianity or nationalism, even though the pressure of public opinions forced her to choose her identity as either one or the other. She assertively claimed that she was both. Regarding the conflicts, she wrote, “There must be something which we can do even though we are only humble women. Each nation, one by one, by their names, I bring them before God for his blessings and for his protection...”¹¹⁰

In the deep soul-searching to find her own answer to the conflicts between Christianity and imperialism, Maud Russell once wondered whether she should do what some Chinese suggested, to go back to her own country to work on improving American government’s understanding of the Chinese revolution. But Russell hoped that by writing letters and reporting China’s situation regarding American foreign policy to her Asilomar constituency, she might be able to send her message to American government through her constituency. She herself still intended to stay in China to work on reconciliation, “to demonstrate that [she] can live, even in the midst of China as she is,” and “to really know what is going on in inner China and to know Chinese thinking ” so that she could convey accurate messages to her American constituency about China.¹¹¹

Russell stayed in China, and went through two other wars. She demonstrated her ability to enter into other’s lives as well as her limitations.

“Laughing Foreigner” in Humbling and Creative Experiences

The Nationalist Revolutionary Army (NRA) in the North Expedition reached Wuchang in September 1926. Wuchang was under the siege of war for forty days before

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Maud Russell to Asilomar, December 29, 1926. Box 1, NYPL.

¹¹¹ Maud Russell to Asilomar, Decmeber 29, 1926 and April 13, 1927. Boxes 1 and 2, NYPL.

the NRA defeated the Northern army. Unlike the previous war among the warlords which Russell experienced, this war was more serious, and the Western consuls urgently advised Westerners to leave Wuchang for Hankow, where a foreign concession was located. Russell gave a definite refusal to take a refuge in a foreign concession, and stayed with her Chinese colleagues and the refugees on their compound. However, this time the reason why Russell stayed was not because she felt safe and protected by foreign gunboats, but because she resisted belonging to the oppressing power. “Why should a foreigner’s life be dearer than a Chinese?”¹¹² She rebutted her Chinese colleague who urged her to leave – by leaving the Chinese behind, she thought she would be assuming her superiority.

In her letter report about this war, Russell no longer wrote about how she the foreigner protected the Chinese refugees. Instead, she focused on the suffering of the people: “The people – their lives and their property – are as nothing if they stand in the way of some thing the military want; this ruthless using of one’s fellow citizens is unbelievable.”¹¹³ And she experienced what the Chinese refugees felt about the war this time, as the first quote at the beginning of this section revealed, “War and its way are hell, and every day we live here in the midst of it, we hate it the more.” She had stood together in the suffering with her Chinese colleagues and the refugees, and she was one of the “we” which was not defined by race and nation, but by their common experience.

While Russell did not mention how she worked for the refugees in her letter, her Chinese colleague, Liu Tai Ching’s letter about this war experience revealed it:

¹¹² Liu Tai Ching , to Helen Thoburn, December 1927, in response to a request form Herietta Thomson in California for an expression from Chinese people about Maud Russell’s work in China. Box 2, NYPL.

¹¹³ Maud Russell to Orange YWCA and Alisomar, September 14, 1926. Box 1, NYPL.

About the forty days and nights of the siege we did nothing except comforting the refugees, about over a hundred women and children living at the back of the London Mission Hospital, ... The way Miss Russell acted was better than preaching the gospel...For forty days she lived with us Chinese, and there was not a bit showing the boundary of the two countries. In the evening she used to play with the children and tried to make everybody happy...when I was still in Shanghai she returned back to Wuchang to see where she could help. Nobody had the experience equal as she had.¹¹⁴

Liu also wrote that Russell's love of the Chinese people and her cheerfulness won her a nickname, the "laughing foreigner." Russell would not allow darkness to rule her world. "Most of the time when she heard somebody saying things discouraging about the fate of the future China, she at once made them to do their share toward China."¹¹⁵

In 1928, Maud Russell was transferred back to the YWCA of Changsha again. Compared with the eight years ago when she first arrived in Changsha, the YWCA center had undertaken impressive growth. It used to have only one Chinese secretary, but this time Russell was the foreigner minority. Russell considered the new model of the YWCA as an example of world friendliness. "As a matter of fact, our YWCA here with a Japanese chairman, and a staff of Chinese and Westerners is a pretty good proof that real internationalism is a possibility."¹¹⁶ She was overjoyed that she could participate in this growth and be at a place she had started to see as her own "home."¹¹⁷ "I'm the happiest person on our China staff: to go back to Central China is bliss, and to be in Changsha is very heaven."¹¹⁸

Russell was happy also because the great improvement in Changsha's social situation after the nationalist revolution. All the streets were paved and widened; auto

¹¹⁴ Liu Tai Ching , to Helen Thoburn, December 1927. Box 2, NYPL.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Maud Russell to Asilomar Division, March 29, 1928. Box 3, NYPL.

¹¹⁷ Maud Russell to Asilomar Division, February 11 , 1928, Box 3, NYPL.

¹¹⁸ Maud Russell to Sarah Lyon, March 29, 1928. Box 3, NYPL.

roads were built; and railroads were speeded up. Although poverty situation was still dire, the standard of living got improved in comparison. “All these improvements locally, provincially, and interprovincially, show us what China can do and does do when there is a spell of peace.”¹¹⁹ Russell thought the most significant thing that the government had done was to have the students as census takers. While the government had other reasons to have a census, Russell’s reason for applauding this act was that she noticed that the students were doing something “constructive and stimulating.” The students came back from the census taking “with thought-provoking impressions of the poverty and terrible economic conditions of the people of the city... a far better thing than to be having their heads filled with justifiable but useless and fruitless attitudes towards other nations.”¹²⁰

The students with whom Russell worked with still rebutted her discussion on peace movements with the gunboats staying on their riverfront. Russell tried to persuade them not to judge a country’s real attitude merely by what the government did, but also by “the thinking and desire” of its people.¹²¹ But she herself was not satisfied by this answer either. She kept asking herself and her Californian constituency about their own roles in the imbalance of international power, and reminded them that China’s situation was a test of their “Christian way of life.”

Another test soon arrived for Russell. The Communist army attacked Changsha in summer 1930, and Russell had to confront another hard choice of evacuation as a foreigner. The Communist and the Nationalist parties split in 1927. Although in the beginning, Maud Russell was glad that the Nationalist government took control of the

¹¹⁹ Maud Russell to Asilomar Division, January 18, 1929. Box 3, NYPL.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Maud Russell to Asilomar Division, November 25, 1929. Box 3, NYPL.

communist element because it seemed to have caused labor turmoil in the city which disrupted normal life, she did not agree with the nationalists approach and was worried about the killing of the communists. As she expressed her disapproval of the central government's policy in the following letter excerpt:

That the Communist element, working within the Party, has injured the Revolution is probably true. But that the Communist element had made a contribution to the Revolution is unquestionably true. The Communist idea has been a rallying point for Chinese youth... there began the slaughter of the Communists, the slaughter of thousands and thousands of China's most dedicated youth, an irreparable tragedy.¹²²

What was worse, Russell found that the Nanking government used "force instead of education" to keep the masses in control – the same old way which the militarist warlords had used against different opinions. In addition, Russell noticed the label "communists" was put on anyone who was disagreeable, and almost all who had this label were executed by the military. With a prophetic insight, Russell wrote about her observation: "There is considerable muttering among the people against the eagerness of the military to kill. The seeds of the next revolution are being sowed."¹²³

At the end of July 1930, the Red Army attacked Changsha. The U.S. consulate urged all Americans to board gunboats for evacuation to Shanghai. Maud Russell, due to her resistance to the gunboat policy, disobeyed such an order. She waited till the Chinese governor He Jian also ordered that all foreigners be evacuated. But she still insisted on boarding a Standard Oil launch instead of a gunboat. She squeezed herself on the launch among 72 Chinese employees of the Standard Oil and their family, which was meant for eight or ten, and she had to share other's food since she did not bring any in a hurry.

After a night's stay on the river, a British gunboat was setting off to Hankow, while this

¹²² Maud Russell to Asilomar Division, January 3, 1928. Box 3, NYPL.

¹²³ Maud Russell to Asilomar Division, February 11, 1928. Box 3, NYPL.

Standard Oil launch would stay at the river. Russell was asked to decide in a minute whether she would go with the gunboat. In a moment, Russell landed on the gunboat.

Russell had a mixed feeling about this experience on the gunboat, as she put it in letter:

And such a reception as I got from the forty odd foreigners – no taunting and so sarcasm, but utter friendliness. And we have all of us fallen in love with the officers of that ship – there wasn't a single thoughtful thing that could be done for human beings that they didn't do for us...I can tell you that there are some missionaries who also learned a lot about the sheer human bigness of these business and navy people. Perhaps the experience that came to us those eighteen hours on the gunboat more than compensates for having to let go principle? ... My heart is happy about what came through this experience, but my mind still somewhat despises me.¹²⁴

Russell repeated her description of this experience to her Asilomar constituency, added that “it was a humbling and creative experience.” Should Russell have stayed at the Standard Oil launch and suffered more? Was she despicable because she spoke loud of principles but broke them “when it comes to a time of show-down”? She kept asking herself these questions, but no easy answer for either her or us who could look at her experience with hindsight. Her letters describing this experience do give us some good salt for thought. For one thing, the business and navy people, privileged as they were in that situation, were no abstract concepts to be merely theoretically derogated; they were real people; human interactions and connections, not mere hostile oppositions could help to break the boundaries established by any kind of privileges. And finally, Maud Russell, like her fellow passengers on the gunboat, is also human.

¹²⁴ Maud Russell to Ting Shujing, July 31, 1931. Box 3, NYPL. Karen Garner finds a somewhat different story in Russell's friend, Louise Farnam's letter to home, which says that Farnam and Russell pleaded to transfer onto the British gunboat, but the captain was hostile to Russell and scolded Russell for being so late. See Garner, *Precious Fire*, 104. If Russell really omitted the hostility of the captain in her own letter, it may be because she intended to present this experience as what she saw “the vest in people,” as the YWCA journal reported about this experience according to Russell's account.

Reflection on the YWCA Work and Revolution

At the tenth anniversary of the Changsha YWCA in November 1929, Maud Russell reassessed the YWCA work in China. She wondered if the YWCA achieved too little in comparison with the vast social and political problems in China. She consoled herself that the very fact that the YWCA survived and expanded instead of all the upheavals was telling of its own significance for women of China. “this has been a period of mushroom growth for many organizations – many are started but few last.... perhaps just this holding steady through years of social and political change is a worthwhile contribution to make to the woman movement in China.”¹²⁵

Experience within Us: A Feminist Declaration

Perhaps a secretary in a foreign country, with no so-called “Christian society” to carry her or her work, may have the experience of being forced for the first time to generate a conviction as to the meaning of her work, its place in an alien society, and its relatedness to a satisfying philosophy of life.

There can be no question about the values a thoughtful secretary secures for herself by this experience of foreign service—no one of us but knows we have acquired far more than we ever even dreamed of giving. Meanwhile, as long as one can believe that the presence and work of aliens in “the land of their adoption” help to create, support and enhance the values that are greatest worth for all women, one can continue to remain

A Foreign Secretary.

– Maud Russell to Sarah Lyon, December 18, 1935

Russell’s adventurous experience and active interpretation continued for her later years. She kept searching for new approaches to achieve social justice, and to be creative in her experience. In the 1930s, her contemplation focused on her Christian identity and communism. Her experience of the war in Changsha in 1930 gave her opportunity for the first time to witness the communist movements, and she started to have new outlook

¹²⁵ Maud Russell to Asilomar, November 25, 1929. Box 3, NYPL.

toward it: “any work we do out here has to recognize the Communist protest and desires, and the more experience one has of their presence, the readier one is to be a part of life as it is in China.”¹²⁶ During her next furlough, she went to the Soviet Union and stayed there for several months, studying and working, trying to understand the new social phenomena there. Critical of the bureaucracy and new privileges she found there, she was very impressed with the tremendous social changes among the working class. With her ever optimistic outlook to new experience, she became an ardent communist sympathizer, and active supporter of the Chinese communist when she returned to China. Russell had been able to critically and creatively interpret her experience in China during her China years, and in her later years after her return to the U.S., she was able to maintain her independent and critical interpretation on the U.S. politics, but her interpretation of China’s politics started to be not as critical, sometimes she blindly supported the new Chinese Communist government. As she predicted earlier in the 1920s when contemplating whether she should return to the U.S. so as not to oblige the gunboat policy, she had to stay in China to fully understand her people’s thinking – looking it afar from the U.S., China became Russell’s “perfect” model for a new social order and humanity. Nonetheless, her deep experience during her China years has much to teach about feminist values of creative experience.

The great length Russell went through in her China years would be best summarized by her own words:

I went to China as a pacifist. I went to China as a Church member. China affected both of these positions. I stopped being a pacifist. And I stopped being a Church member, coming to dislike [organized] ‘Christianity,’ but considering myself a

¹²⁶ Maud Russell to Asilomar, August 30, 1930. Box 3, NYPL.

religious person – due both to my Christian heritage and to the new concepts China was giving me about human relationships.”¹²⁷

She started to see religion for women as relations women have to their environment, be it the people, the past, and the future, among other things. And she saw internationalism as an achievement instead of an attitude, a hard-earned one with much work and understanding to the complicated forces that create and determine international actions. Her unique views on these important issues provided a creative feminist approach to women’s experience and values. That is, an independent philosophy of life, a theory of the flesh which explore deep into one’s experience, which transcend beyond boundaries of race, class and gender.

Two of Maud Russell’s close friends’ accounts best tell the values of her experience. Talitha Gerlach, was introduced to China by one of Russell’s letter which reported about her war experience in Wuchang in 1926. Inspired by this letter, Gerlach came to China and became another YWCA secretary, working on student and labor departments. Deng Yuzhi, who was originally recruited by Russell into the YWCA, and later became chair of the Labor Department of YWCA of China, credited Russell as the greatest influence which triggered her interest in the working class. After about 60 years of friendship between the two women, Deng sent Russell a tape as a birthday gift, who lived in New York (sharing an apartment with Ida Pruitt). The following excerpt from the tape demonstrated how Russell inspired Deng’s independent thinking:

Maud taught me to read something about revolution. She helped me study English and asked me to study with her a book called *Dialectical Materialism*. [laughs] I had very poor English then and there were so many big words in that book. I had to use a dictionary all the time in order to find out the real meaning. Whatever

¹²⁷ Quoted in Garner, *Precious Fire*, 131-132.

little knowledge I had about socialism at that time was started by my contact with Maud, and her helping me read those famous books about social revolution.¹²⁸

Like Russell, Deng was also a woman who sticks to her own values, and had a “vision of politics that is her own.”¹²⁹ Deng, in return, also changed Russell’s life. As Emily Honig concisely stated, “it was the experience of living in China, and working with people such as Deng, that radicalized her thinking...”¹³⁰ Being humble and creative in her experience, giving inspirations to each other, discovering meaningful connections with her environment, and working for a better social order, these were the eternal values of Maud Russell’s experience, and expressions of the life within her.

¹²⁸ Quoted from Honig, “Christianity, Feminism, and Communism: The Life and Times of Deng Yuzhi,” 251.

¹²⁹ Honig, “Christianity, Feminism, and Communism,” 244.

¹³⁰ Honig, “Christianity, Feminism, and Communism,” 252.

Conclusion

Sometimes I feel a little like Jacob working for the chance to get back to China.

– Ida Pruitt to Rewi Alley, May 7, 1946

Ida Pruitt returned to the U.S. in autumn 1939. It became the watershed in her life between her China and U.S. years. She had planned to stay in the U.S. for a couple of months, quickly establish a promotion committee for the Chinese Industrial Cooperative (CIC, also known as Indusco) in New York, and then return to China as her New York responsibilities were transferred to the committee. However, it turned out to be a seven-year delay, and her return was only temporary, a short four-month stay. The CIC movement needed her to stay in the U.S. permanently instead.

The Chinese Industrial Cooperatives was initiated by Helen Snow, her husband and a New Zealander Rewi Alley in Shanghai at the end of 1937, soon after the breakout of the Sino-Japanese war. They aimed to re-build China's industry as a measure to resist Japanese invasion, and to provide refugees in free area with productive work. They defined this as the "people's movement for production,"¹ distinguishing it from the soup kitchen charity programs in that the CIC cultivated independence in the refugees. At small and mobile factories of this project, people organized and managed themselves. "Gung ho," transliterated from Chinese, meaning "work together," therefore became another name of the CIC movement, which eventually became a new word in American lexicon.

¹ Helen Foster Snow, *My China Years*, 304.

Ida Pruitt was still packing up in Peiping when the first committee for the CIC was found in Shanghai in April 1938. As a good friend of the Snows, she was aware of this movement at this time. Helen Snow asked Pruitt to be a leader for fund-raising campaigns in the U.S. However, after all the years as a social worker associated with the Rockefeller Foundation, and after working at a large refugee camp with American Quaker mission in Shanghai – neither satisfactory in her views as ways to solve the industrial or war refugee problems, Pruitt did not readily jump into this new movement which required her to work with American philanthropy again. Instead, she took a tour of the inside China with the Red Cross, helping to map out a plan to aid the free China area. On the way, she ran into Rewi Alley, who was inspecting CIC factories across the area. Alley's charismatic personality and eleven-year experience of industrial work finally convinced Pruitt to join the cause. More importantly, they shared similar values and ideals of creating a humane economy. In such an economy, cooperation would take the place of exploitation and labor abuse. As an aside, Pruitt might have been sexually attracted, but she soon found out that Alley fell for same-sex love. They became best friends of a life time, sending each other moral and spiritual support via letters, since one stayed in China, and the other the U.S.

After this meeting with Alley, Pruitt went to Shanghai and Hong Kong to establish an international committee and to promote publicity. As soon as this committee was in shape, Pruitt was ready for her trip to the U.S. to organize another committee.

However, at this time, the assessment of her work by the male authority of her former institution even followed her to the CIC committee. Edgar Snow sought out John B. Grant, a Rockefeller Foundation official in public health, for advice on the CIC

programs. Grant, who used to be Ida Pruitt's colleague at the PUMC, specifically picked out Ida Pruitt as an "incompetent" leader. Discussing whether the CIC could get support from the League of the Nations, Grant put forward that Ida Pruitt would be a disadvantage of the CIC's communication with the League. "The greatest lack in the whole scheme is the absence of an individual with general social economic background competent to talk intelligently to people of big affairs. I doubt whether Ida can do this."² Grant also explicitly reiterated that it was impossible for the Rockefeller Foundation to support the CIC, one of the major reasons being lack of competent leadership. He ended his comments as follows:

I admire her spirit and what she is doing. I would raise a query as to whether, even if she had made an inspection trip inside to obtain first-hand details, she possesses the requisite background to formulate appeals in a sufficiently concrete and concise manner to impress such "big-league" individuals in America...

While Grant stressed the affliction with and support from the Chinese government, the League of the Nations, and big philanthropist organizations like the Rockefeller Foundation, Ida Pruitt and her fellow activists at the CIC, especially Rewi Alley and Helen Snow, prioritized the independent and grass-root nature of the movement.

Actually one big issue of the operation for the CIC was how to avoid control from the Chinese government and big foundations so that they could maintain their freedom and allocate their funds independently. While the KMD government endorsed the CIC, they also tried to take control of the funds which the CIC committee had independently collected. For example, Madame Chiang Kai-shek originally had asked the fundraisers in the Philippines to send the money directly to her "for her own discretion," but Helen Snow rallied with the donors such as the important leaders of overseas Chinese in the

² John B. Grant to Edgar Snow, March 16, 1939. Helen Foster Snow Papers, Box 28, Folder 2, BYU.

Philippines to curb the first lady. Then Madame Chiang backed up but still asked for all the money to go to her “for her New Life Indusco work,”³ instead of to the CIC’s own international committee. Such kind of delicate negotiations with the government was an ongoing process throughout the CIC movement.

Due to its grass-root and independent nature, the CIC welcomed Ida Pruitt as a leader, who would never be swayed merely by the opinions of “people of big affairs,” but would stick to the principles to keep the CIC a people’s productive movement.

In response to opinions such as those of Grant, Ida Pruitt herself had grown out of the early years’ insecurity about her own values. Even a bit shot like John Grant could not interfere with her now. Instead of feeling depressed about lack of “big-league” people’s financial support, she simply worked harder to prove herself. She wrote to Rewi Alley about the slow start of her organizing work due to people’s suspicion in the beginning: “But I had to prove myself, rather than the cause. I suppose that is the way the world goes around and I should not feel bitter about it. That was why we wanted [Edgar Snow] to come in the first place because he was the one that had proved himself before the world and could therefore get going sooner.”⁴ Meeting with possible donors and organizers, interviewing with the media, giving public talks, lunch and dinner with others to advocate the cause, Ida Pruitt single-handedly managed the publicity and fund raising in the first couple of months. Every day was so full that sometimes she did not even have time to check the overwhelming amount of mail which should have been handled by an office and a committee.

³ Helen Snow to Ida Pruitt, December 14, 1939. Helen Foster Snow Papers, Box 29, Folder 2, BYU.

⁴ Ida Pruitt to Rewi Alley, January 29, 1940. Helen Foster Snow Papers, Box 29, Folder 3, BYU.

Her plan at this time was still to return to the CIC in China within months. Eager to find someone who could take over her New York committee, she was very happy to find Harry Price in early 1940. For a while, Pruitt thought Price was the right candidate. It was Harry Price who taught Helen Snow about cooperatives at an economic course in Yenching University around 1934. In 1940, He was in charge of a committee for embargo on trade of oil, scrap irons and cotton with Japan, so as to stop the material supply for Japan's military aggression. In Pruitt's opinion, the Price organization was one of the best of all the China Committees. Therefore, when Price showed great interest in taking over the CIC New York committee once his Embargo lobby would succeed, Pruitt was expectant of the committee transfer and of her return to China soon.

However, three or four months later, Ida Pruitt's letter to Rewi and others revealed that she could not trust Harry Price with her committee, the reason being Price's embrace of the values similar to those of the male authorities at the PUMC. At this time, Pruitt had obtained sharp insights to their problems. One problem in Price's case was his over admiration for people in high places, assuming those who had arrived high places as "ipso facto great people."⁵ As Pruitt put it in another way: "Harry ... has a way of taking the big boys too seriously, or rather to take the place they are sitting too seriously. They are important to get things done. But other sides are here also."⁶ Pruitt noticed this issue because for one thing, Harry Price would always side with Henry Luce, the publisher tycoon, about the running of the CIC; for another, he disbelieved Pruitt's stories about the corruption of some high officials in the Chinese government on the base that he used to be colleagues with some of them at Yenching University. Another problem in Price's

⁵ Ida Pruitt to Rewi Alley, December 11, 1940. Helen Foster Snow Papers, Box 29, Folder 3, BYU.

⁶ Ida Pruitt to Rewi Alley, June 8, 1940. Helen Foster Snow Papers, Box 29, Folder 3, BYU.

approach was to intend to manage all the aid for China into one big organization under his leadership. Ida Pruitt found this ambition problematic because her observation proved to her that the groups working to aid China had such dissimilar aims that it would take a long time to amalgamate all the organizations into one, but meanwhile the war could not wait such a long period of organizing without action.⁷

Seeing the danger of Harry Price's fundamentally conservative set of values for the CIC movement, Ida Pruitt decided to stay on in New York. Unlike the Pruitt eight years ago at the PUMC, who responded with conflicting values by hating her social service work and by wanting to leave the work behind, the Pruitt at the time was confident of her leadership and critical of those who seemed to be authoritative.

For the next twelve years, Ida Pruitt worked on the CIC in New York, until the office closed in 1952. Embracing an independent set of values did not mean that her work could be carried out smoothly thereafter. Actually the dozen years were filled with ups and downs, upsetting politics within the umbrella organization United China Relief, problems of the CIC internal administrations, frustration as well as happiness. But sticking to her own values did allow her to find the meaningful expressions of her life; she managed to do her part of the "construction" as the world went on "tearing itself to pieces"⁸ during the WWII.

Ida Pruitt's fund-raising campaign in the U.S. over the years added up to two million dollars for Chinese cooperatives. Looking back at it decades later, however, she did not think it important for China. Answering John Russell's interview question

⁷ Ida Pruitt to Walter B. Foley, June 7, 1940. Helen Foster Snow Papers, Box 29, Folder 3, BYU.

⁸ Ida Pruitt to Rewi Alley, May 6, 1940. Helen Foster Snow Papers, Box 29, Folder 3, BYU.

whether the Chinese government “hush-hushed” her contribution, she replied: “oh no, it just wasn’t important; everybody else was doing so much more than I was. Except it was part of my life, but ... in proportion, it wasn’t important in China.”⁹ When John Russell discussed her roles at the Social Service Department to the PUMC, addressing her as the “Jane Adams” of China, Pruitt again refused to accept her importance for China; instead, she said “I’m only one more person.” In Pruitt’s “humble and creative” experience, her work was important not because it made her an important person in history, but because it was part of her life, the part in which she gave, shouldered her responsibilities, expressed her vision for a better social order, and sustained her happiness.

Helen Foster Snow left China around the same time as Ida Pruitt did. Before arriving in the U.S. in 1941, Snow stayed in Baguio, the Philippines for two years while her husband did war reporting in China. With the same enthusiasm and dedication she had showed to the December 9th Student Movement, Helen Snow full-heartedly worked for the Chinese Industrial Cooperative movement. It was a period in her life in which she cared least about external recognition. Her long letters were imbued with ideas, strategies, analysis and updates about this cause. She reiterated again and again that Rewi Alley “must be given credit for creating the movement and starting the field work” with other Chinese technician staff,¹⁰ for Alley was the one to be trusted with honestly administrating the funds. She and Edgar Snow had to put personal savings to initiate the movement, but Helen Snow mentioned nothing about it in her letters. Instead, she was concerned that Ida Pruitt was living on her personal savings while working for the CIC

⁹ Ida Pruitt IP interview with John Russell. Ida Pruitt Papers. Schlesinger Library.

¹⁰ Helen Foster Snow’s letter to others in the CIC committee, n.d., Helen Foster Snow Papers, Box 29, Folder 3, BYU.

for the first year, and another Chinese staff whose salary was too low to maintain his entire family. Her work in the Philippines was impressive. In one year from 1938 to 1939, the group she led in the Philippines raised as much as \$600,000 Ch.

At the time, neither was Snow concerned about what the CIC could bring to her. Instead, she stressed what the CIC could do for China and the U.S. She saw this movement “a golden opportunity to help the people’s movement in China,”¹¹ a progressive channel for the Kuomintang government to move in more democratic and liberal direction. She hoped the CIC could reinforce the United Front and avoid the civil war in China. For the U.S. benefit from the movement, Snow predicted that a stronger industry in China might make it possible to avoid the impending war between the U.S. and Japan:

Actually it is worth ten battleships to American defense to build up Chinese independence and keep Japan from monopolizing the market and colonizing the country. ...if [the businessmen in the U.S.] don’t raise purchasing power in China by industry and reconstructing the Chinese village the “400,000,000 customers” are the myth they have always been and will continue to be, especially in so far as America is concerned.¹²

Like Ida Pruitt, Helen Foster also tried to call Americans’ attention to Asia when most people in the U.S. focused on the war in Europe. They both pointed out that the world was one and that the war in the two places was closely connected.

Helen Snow’s inspirational messages and her unreserved giving were between the lines in most letters during those days. Reading side by side these earlier letters and the ones she wrote decades later is saddening. It seemed that over the last two decades in her life, she was fighting an imagined war to obtain a position in history. She did not mind

¹¹ Helen Snow to Chen Han-sheng, December 26, 1940. Helen Foster Snow Papers, Box 29, Folder 3, BYU

¹² Helen Snow to Ida Pruitt, January 25, 1940. Helen Foster Snow Papers, Box 29, Folder 2, BYU.

that she had been “crippled and paralyzed” geographically by lack of money in the later years,¹³ but she did look for recognition from the public as well as from “high places” for her past work, for she assumed that such recognition meant a justified place for her in history, and hence a justified life.

As the China-U.S. relations started to normalize in 1972, Helen Snow started to reconnect with her old friends in China. Her letters at this time, however, often read like a retrogradation of her identity development, centering on her importance in the past events. The following epitomizes her hurt feeling of being unrecognized:

By far I figure what justifies my life was being the sparkplug of Dec. 9th and Indusco, but nobody else appreciate this now – they did a little from 1938 to 1949, not much. You and I are not given recognition.

....HUBERT WE FIGURED OUT THE ONLY FORMULA that would work in China – the magazine was DEAD RIGHT, Indusco was DEAD RIGHT, and before that, Dec. 9th was DEAD RIGHT. I always knew that from the first so I wasted nearly all my time working on these activities and never became a GREAT AUTHOR which was what I had always intended. All my books were ruined by worrying about Indusco.... Ed and Evans and Rewi are being deified. Only you and I are not appreciated as yet.¹⁴

Feeling unappreciated, Snow became over defensive and competitive, claiming her vision as the only way for the world’s problems. Knowing the significant role she had played in the historical events such as December 9th and the Indusco, she sadly negated that she had a full, meaningful and beautiful life – she saw her life as a tragic sacrifice merely because she was not given recognition by the people “in power” – much of their power exerted influence on her own identity because of her mindset.

Besides writing, another active way of Helen Snow to tackle the “unappreciateion” was by archiving. As early as 1958, she contacted the Hoover Institution Archives and deposited some important files of hers there. Later in the 1990s, because Hoover would

¹³ Helen Snow to Edgar Snow, December 22, 1971. Helen Foster Snow Papers, Box 130, Folder 2, BYU.

¹⁴ Helen Snow to Hubert Liang, sometime in 1972. Helen Foster Snow Papers, Box 130, Folder 16, BYU.

not take her files unrelated to China or files they deemed as “not significant” enough, such as her research in genealogy, Snow decided to find a second archive to store her files. Snow explained to the archivist at Hoover Institution, Elena Danielson about her reason to keep “more than the ONE SINGLE COPY IN EXISTENCE.” That is, she had “a special responsibility to have [her] files kept safely for the future.”¹⁵ In the hope for the future, she also wished that she could be properly recognized. This wish was revealed in multiple letters to her old friends, and also in the following candid monologue to her reader:

I realize that none of my books or mss. are commercial, but all are unique and valuable... I will leave a body of writing and research and thinking that should be put in one or two places and set in future by for another generation. You can begin with 83 years of experience, where I left off. I never even tried to reach my potential as I had to keep up my morale and self-confidence in my abilities – it would have been a mistake to try and fail, I thought. Yet I keenly feel how tragic it was that a person like me could not be in a more favorable situation. I think of Van Gogh’s “Sunflowers” selling for millions of dollars now, when he died of starvation and lack of a place to work or even to live.¹⁶

Helen Snow passed away in 1997. Perhaps it should be comforting to her that her papers were kept in two very good archives as she had wished, and whether she agreed with it or not, she did have a significant place in history, leaving the voluminous papers of hers for the future generations. Her 89 years of experience leaves us traces of interaction of big ideologies and “isms” within her, the progressive development of her identity while tackling the ideological conflicts first hand. The digression of her identity in her later years teaches us lessons about the interconnectedness of our own work to others and the world. When she foregrounded her own role in history but neglected this interconnectedness, she lost sight of some of the big picture of history.

¹⁵ Helen Snow to Elena S. Danielson, December 1, 1990. Helen Foster Snow Papers, Box 128, Folder 12, BYU.

¹⁶ Helen Snow, “The Two of Them,” may 1991. Nym Wales Papers, Box 49. Hoover Institution Archives,

As for Maud Russell, since she returned to China from her 1932 trip in the Soviet Union, she became a communist sympathizer and started to associate the Chinese YWCA with the approaches of the communist social revolution in China. In 1939, she made a trip to the communist Yan'an and hereafter turned into an avid communist supporter, "ready to demonstrate her loyalty to the party line."¹⁷ For one thing, she witnessed in Yan'an that everybody worked, studied and labored, "the highest men in the Party as well as all the students, men and women."¹⁸ She was very impressed by this human equality. For another, she was thrilled to notice women in the communist area was welcomed to "the public sphere of rural governance," and became the "most passionate" participants in communist social revolution.¹⁹ Comparing this with the KMD government's policy on women, which conservatively urged women to return to their domestic sphere, Russell believed the CCP stood for the future of China. An excerpt from a public talk demonstrates Russell's endorsement of communist ideals:

What we women (and men!) really want [is] – a society in which *all* will be treated as persons – as worthwhile persons; where no one will be treated as a thing; no exploitation; where all will participate in society; where all will have a chance to be creative.²⁰

She thought she finally found in Chinese communism the prescription for all the social problems, and a recipe for the "creative experience" she longed for everyone.

In 1943, Russell decided that she could act more effectively in the U.S. by more directly affecting the U.S. foreign policy towards China with her activism. Upon her return, she kept working with the American YWCA for a couple of more years, at the same time finished her M.A. in social work at Columbia University in 1944. In a course

¹⁷ Garner, *Precious Fire*, 173.

¹⁸ Maud Russell to folks, August 17, 1939. Maud Russell Papers, Box 3, NYPL.

¹⁹ Garner, *Precious Fire*, 172.

²⁰ Quoted in Gardner, *Precious Fire*, 180.

assignment which explained why she took the study of sociology, she declared that she had reached a point where she “desire to stress social action” in the American scene. She intended to continue to stress the YWCA educational method – “learn by doing”, “participate in meaningful activities” and “find and create values through your own experience” in her social work, and was interested in how women – “of all races and classes and religion – can participate in creating a more decent society and a more satisfying life for themselves.” Meanwhile, she also intended to find out from the course “whether or not international relationships and world-wide issues suggest any field of work for a social worker in an American city.”²¹

Whether through this course or not, Russell surely found her own role in the international relationships and world-wide issues. She accepted the offer as executive director of the Committee for a Democratic Far Eastern Policy (CDFEP), plunged into leftist political activities and lobbying for the Communist Party with a full-fledged enthusiasm.

However, it was doubtful whether Russell upheld the education methods she had benefited much during her China years, whether she continued to “learn by doing,” and “find and create values” through her own experience. With a deep belief that the Communist Party had the cure-all for everything, she did not use enough critical and creative interpretation of her own experience, but “became an ideologue.”²²

Much as the extremist rightists saw everything associated with communism as “evil,” Maud Russell assume anything about the Communist Party as “correct.” During

²¹ Maud Russell, “Why I am in this Course,” Spring Term 1944, Sociology 138. Maud Russell Papers, Box 4, NYPL.

²² Garner, *Precious Fire*, 189.

her China years, when her ideologies were challenged multiple times by new political situation, Russell had always discussed the issues with students and friends, trying to find common grounds among the different ideologies. But at the time, far away from China, she had to rely on old friends' letters for new development in China, which only reinforced the myth of the Communist Party in China. On the other hand, the U.S. cold-war foreign policy all the more pushed her to rally against anti-communism. As Karen Garner puts it, "Russell and her fellow CDFEP radicals, like the staunchest anticommunists, saw the world in black and white."²³

Russell had a long life, and hence followed closely the later political ups and downs in China. She supported the extremists in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, telling her American audience in a public address that "For the true left and true progressives this cultural revolution is the brightest ray on the future..."²⁴ She was disappointed in Deng Xiaoping's open policy afterward, criticizing China's "digression" from socialism. At the end of her life, she witnessed the 1989 protests in Tiananmen Square. She applauded this movement as revolutionary action of the people:

People can dare to face the authorities; people can organize; people can defy local bans; people can immobilize police and soldiers... [in] all this revolutionary potential is the memory and experience of the mass political rallies that created and characterized the People's Republic of China.²⁵

Russell thought that the protests demonstrated the Chinese people's unwillingness to "go back to the exploitive society of the past." However, perhaps if she had studied closer of others' experience in the China, she might have noticed that the "exploitive society" did not merely existed in the past. Preserving the spirit of the mass political rallies that

²³ Garner, *Precious Fire*, 202.

²⁴ Quoted in Garner, *Precious Fire*, 220.

²⁵ Quoted in Garner, *Precious Fire*, 231.

created the People's Republic of China, as well as creating new and more progressive democratic values of the new generations, both require an ongoing political activism and participation of the people.

Ida Pruitt, Helen Foster and Maud Russell's creative experience in China's warlord era, nationalist revolution, the split of a united front and emerging industrial situation from the 1919 to 1937 showed how women can influence international relations and history. Their experience also demonstrated how women's identity responded to political trends in their own ways. More importantly, their experience proved similarities and connections between personal and social developments. Like society, personal identity also evolves with progress as well as retrogresses. Therefore, rather than matching clear-cut and nice labels for the summary of their lives, these women's unique experience, each in their own way, gave expressions of their own, with their own creative values. The world today has obtained more understanding and justice across cultures and ideologies because of the people like them who dedicated their efforts for a better social order across nations. Their life histories and lessons also reveal that creative experience for more people, entering others' lives for more people have to be a constant process to make the world tomorrow a more meaningful and progressive future.

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