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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages and Literatures

Chinese Literature

HOW NEW IS NEW?

REREADING THE NEW WOMEN IN GOLD DUST DYNASTY (*JIN FEN SHIJI*)

by

Yu Zhou

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For the Mississippi River

Who is the modern Chinese “new woman (*xin nüxing* 新女性)?” How new is she in comparison to the traditional Chinese woman? Is she just as “new” as the well-educated but not yet self-reliant women in mainstream May Fourth literature such as *Sophia*, Zeng Shusheng and Lusha?¹ To study the “new woman” in the early twentieth-century China only referring to one certain type of literature would trivialize a complex phenomenon. Although the “new woman” seems to be a leftist term in China, there have been a variety of “new women” characters in the 1920s and 1930s.

In the recently published autobiographic fiction *Little Reunion* (*Xiao tuanyuan* 小团圆) by Eileen Chang 张爱玲 (1920-1995),² the heroine mentions a story that exemplifies how new women survive and thrive in the tumultuous modern Beijing: “Jolly 九莉 sits on the floor while reading *Gold Dust Dynasty*, very happily”(Chang 128).³ Like her fictional self Jolly, Eileen Chang enjoyed reading the novel too, because she thought the author Zhang Henshui 张恨水 created characters whose desires always

1 Sophia 莎菲 in *Miss Sophia's Diary* (*Shafei nüshi de riji* 莎菲女士的日记, 1927) by Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904-1986), Zeng Shusheng 曾树生 in *Cold Nights* (*Han ye* 寒夜, 1947) by Ba Jin 巴金 (1904-2005), or Lusha 露沙 in *Friends on the Sea Shore* (*Haibin guren* 海滨故人, 1925) by Lu Yin 庐隐 (1898-1934)

2 Eileen Chang (spelled as Ailing Zhang in this edition), *Xiao tuanyuan* (Beijing: Shiyue wenyi, 2009).

3 Zhang Henshui 张恨水(1895-1967), *Gold Dust Dynasty* “*Jin fen shijia*” 金粉世家 (1927-1932) (Xi'an: Shanxi shifan daxue, 2007).

embodied the desires of the masses (Wen 75).⁴ Then what are the desires of the women characters in *Gold Dust Dynasty* that Jolly and Eileen Chang happily identified with? -- To become the “new woman.”

May Fourth literature provides a series of tragic new women defeated by traditional forces, in order to justify the assumption what modern China needs is a “new woman” and that this “new woman” would exist as a distinctive character amidst a rapid changing society in which various proposed cultural and value systems were competing with each other. *Gold Dust Dynasty* clearly reflects a more complicated relationship between the “new” thoughts and the “old” realities especially with regards to women’s lives.⁵ The practical needs of living in still somewhat traditional society and the desire to be new converge in the cooperative cultural explorations for new education, love marriage, and financial independence. The ideal of becoming the “new woman” never dies from any social ills or personal traumas.

My thesis, thus, is less a critical approach to the oppressive traditional ideologies and is more concerned about the ways in which Chinese women had been redefined. I will reread *Gold Dust Dynasty*, Zhang Henshui’s bestseller which was better known among women readers in the 1920s and 1930s and thus was left out of the leftist canons in today’s history of modern Chinese literature. Contrary to what Zhang’s novel depicts of women’s lives, the leftist canon tend to portray how woman characters assimilate new

⁴ Eileen Chang published her comments on Zhang Henshui’s works in several different essays. For more information, see Wen Fengqiao, *Xiandaixing shiye zhong de zhang henshui xiaoshuo* (Qingdao: Zhongguo haiyang, 2005): 75-76.

⁵ Jin Feng has systematically studied the “new woman” images in May Fourth literature in her *The New Woman in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Fiction* (West Lafayette: Purdue University, 2004). The “new woman” characters analyzed in this work all confronted serious crises and hardly achieved the independent lives they wanted.

concepts in a new social milieu while at the same time were able to transform traditional ideas. By analyzing the women characters, I seek to uncover the manners in which these characters understand the old value as the basis for their new potentialities. This will enable me to discover the multidimensional aspect of the building of the Chinese “new woman.”

Following in the footsteps of *Fin-de-Siecle Splendor* by David Der-wei Wang, I wish to move beyond the thoughts of a group of high-minded intellectuals searching for the Westernized formula to save China.⁶ Mainstream May Fourth intellectuals criticized late Qing writers as tradition-forward literatus. Wang’s analyses, however, reveal that late Qing writers used exposé novels as a means to rework tradition and pursue modernity. According to his memoirs, Zhang Henshui was highly influenced by the late Qing writer Li Hanqiu 李涵秋 (1873 - 1923) and therefore maintained a twin concern with modern concepts and traditional cultures while probing their interconnections. He prefigured the paths for Chinese “new woman” both self-directing and influenced by the West. In his view, modern concepts not merely referred to Western ideas introduced by May Fourth intellectuals but also could be new ideas within China.

In his essay “To Restore Cultural Pride” (*Huifu wenhua zizunxin* 恢复文化自尊心), Zhang Henshui argued that the May Fourth movement gave a violent shake to

⁶ David Der-wei Wang, *Fin-de-Siecle Splendor* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

Chinese people's cultural pride.⁷ Zhang Henshui believed traditional Chinese civilization was superior to Western civilizations in terms of its long history; he even considered Confucius as the representative of core Chinese values, and therefore, most of Confucian works should be maintained as valuable inheritance. His suggestion of modernization, then, was to reform the tradition in a less radical way and to accept the modern in a more critical way.

Based on his thoughts above, the ideal new women in *Gold Dust Dynasty* are portrayed as two types. One type are the traditional women who actively modernize themselves; the other are the Westernized women who also appreciate traditional cultures. Neither entirely traditional nor Westernized women characters can succeed in the novel, because they cannot cope with the complicated changes in the early twentieth century China.

Shaping the “New Woman”

I do not attempt to undervalue the significance of the modern idea of the “new woman” spelled out by Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873 - 1929) and his followers. After all, the definition of the “new woman” in *Gold Dust Dynasty* was partially developed from it. Before Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962) translated the American term “new woman” into Chinese, Chinese intellectuals led by Liang Qichao 梁启超 paid more attention on

⁷ Published on February 9th, 1942 in *New Citizens (Xinmin bao 新民报)* in Chongqing. For more information about this essay, see Fengqiao Wen, *Xiandaixing shiye zhong de zhanghenshui xiaoshuo* (Qingdao: Zhongguo haiyang, 2005), 222.

the critiques of the traditional Chinese women than the construction of the new alternatives. References were widely made to “the secluded old-styled women” and “the sick old-styled women.” For example, as Hu Ying analyzed in her introduction to *Tales of Translation*, Liang Qichao harshly challenged the aesthetics of the “old-styled talented woman” in his *General Discussion of Reform (Bianfa tongyi 变法通义)* (1896). The image of the “old-styled talented woman” toying with ditties on the wind and the moon, the flowers and the grass, spring sorrow and sad departures was claimed to be too closely associated with the decadent high culture and therefore could not be used as a model for the building of a modern nation (Hu 7).⁸

Unlike modern American women who defined the meaning of the American “new woman” by themselves, Republican Chinese women were basically followers of the “new woman” translated from the West by Hu Shi. Hu Shi basically followed Liang Qichao’s idea that traditional culture enveloped individuals’ minds, and when he wanted to define the “new woman,” he explored ways to cut the past off of her. Without any critical evaluation, Hu Shi borrowed the American definition for a “new woman”—modern dressed, highly educated, financially independent, and politically active. This definition was soon widely utilized and circulated in the print culture.⁹ The imported womanhood of the “new woman” received few challenges among May Fourth intellectuals before it

⁸ Hu Ying’s study focuses on the composition of Modern Chinese women in the Late Qing period. Since the term “new woman” was introduced to the Chinese audience as late as in 1918, the study actually shows how the trope of the preoccupied composition of the “new woman.” For more information, see Hu Ying, *Tales of Translation: Composing the New Woman in China 1899-1918* (Stanford: Stanford University, 2000).

⁹ For more information, see Hu Shi, “Meiguo de xin nüxing,” *Meizhou pinglun*, December, 1919, and Kristine Harris, “The New Woman Incident: Cinema, Scandal, and Spectacle in 1935 Shanghai,” in Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, ed., *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1997).

had been accepted as a way out for Chinese women.¹⁰

The American definition to some degree suited the moment in the 1910s and 1920s China when the upsurge of women's enthusiasm for modern education was stifled by the repression of their traditional social roles. In Hu Shi's biography of Li Chao 李超, a girl student who was determined to become a scholar but died of poverty and sickness without any support from her family because of her refusal of the arranged marriage, he posed four tough questions drawn upon the American "new woman" model as the tentative perspectives to discuss the future for all Chinese women: (1) how should Chinese women respond to the traditional parental figures in their families, (2) what does modern education mean to Chinese women, (3) could Chinese women have the equal right to inherit property, and (4) could Chinese women choose not to have children?¹¹ From 1919 through the 1920s, Hu Shi published a great number of essays on these four questions, all reaffirming the basic dichotomy—a new revolution of Chinese women overthrowing old values.

In 1922, Liang Qichao's new elaboration of the new woman was still vague and inchoate. He believed that in order to acquire equal rights with men women have to become self-conscious and self-reliant.¹² Meanwhile, *New Youth* magazine (*Xin qingnian*

¹⁰ Hu Shi had introduced American womanhood earlier in 1917, which also had been accepted as references for Chinese women. For more information, see Hu Shi, "Meiguo de furen," *Xin qingnian* 5.3 (1917).

¹¹ For more information, see Hu Shi, "Li Chao zhuan," collected in *Zhonghua funü lianhehui funü yundong lishi yanjiushi* ed., *Zhongguo jindai funü shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo funü, 1989).

¹² Liang Qichao first introduced feminism in Late Qing in the hopes of enhancing women's education in China. In the 1920s, he stressed women's self-consciousness and self-determination. For further study, see "Renquan yu nüquan," 人权与女权 published on *Chenbao fukan* on Nov. 16, 1922.

新青年) introduced Marxist Feminism and stated that economic inequality was the fundamental cause of women's oppression. Chinese communists wanted to unite women to fight against exploitation. They originated the political analyses of gender inequality, advocated public education, hygienic revolution, birth control, and even children's rights. Women's self-determination to achieve financial independence became a formula for the "new woman" first in leftist reading materials and then in commercial newspapers and magazines.¹³ Not only the high-minded intellectuals but whole society began to search the way out for oppressed women of all classes.

Although the influence of Liang Qichao, Hushi and contributors of *New Youth* on modern Chinese culture can hardly be exaggerated, to cut off the past was not the only approach to define the "new woman." If we broaden the focus to include the diverse cultural origins from which the Chinese "new woman" evolved, there had been other solutions, for example, to respect the past and develop new ideas of the tradition. During the introduction of the idea of "new woman," the masses unavoidably understood the new concept based upon their knowledge about traditional Chinese women. After all, the "new woman" made more sense in the Republican era when she was explained in conjunction with the traditional woman.

Despite the sentiments of anti-modernity evoked by her name, the "traditional woman" in Republican China did not refer to someone old, static, or outdated. Rather, traditional women's characters were still being employed nationwide by modern writers and directors. In the year 1927 alone, when *Gold Dust Dynasty* was being serialized of

¹³ For more information and illustrations about the "new woman" in commercial press, see Bryna Goodman, "The New Woman Commits Suicide: The Press, Cultural Memory and the New Republic," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 64. 1 (2005): 67-101.

approximately 500 characters per day, traditional masterpieces including *West Chamber Romance* (*Xi xiang ji* 西厢记), *Dream of Red Mansions* (*Honglou meng* 红楼梦), *Romance of Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo zhi* 三国志), and *Journey to the West* (*Xi you ji* 西游记) all had been adapted into films.¹⁴ Besides, *Consort Yang* 杨贵妃, a film made from the legend about the controversial talented beauty Consort Yang (719 - 756) was also in the limelight. The adaptation of the traditional characters on screen could be seen as a process that mixed concepts, models, and practices from both old and new cultures, and reconstitutes the traditional characters as resources of splendors to be appreciated by viewers from different cultural backgrounds.

Gold Dust Dynasty was produced and promoted in a similar process. Republican readers talked about it as a modern *Dream of Red Mansions*. As recorded by Xu Wenying in 1941,

We have read parodies of *Dream of the Red Mansion* like *Garden Full of Flowers* (*Hui fang yuan* 汇芳苑), *Dream of the Green Mansion* (*Qinglou meng* 青楼梦), etc, but we should happily say that our Republican *Dream of Red Mansions*, *Gold Dust Dynasty*, is a lot more mature than its precursors (in terms of characterization). *Gold Dust Dynasty* has a Jin 金 family like the Jia 贾 family, a Leng Qingqiu 冷清秋 like a modernized

¹⁴ The films that adapted from the traditional novels in 1927 were performed in the styles of traditional dramas.

Lin Daiyu 林黛玉, a Jin Yanxi 金燕西 like a Jia Baoyu 贾宝玉 dressed in a Western suit (Zhang and Wei 308).

Xu's positive comments on *Gold Dust Dynasty* suggested that Republican readers understood this novel based on their knowledge about the traditional canon. In their reading, the corrupt Republican bureaucracy, the collision between traditional and modern values, and the sufferings of innocent people were interlocked with their most familiar love story, *Dream of Red Mansions*. The half-familiar half-exotic women characters were modernized by being associated with a fashionable image of their time, the "new women" going to school and parties in their short skirts. To the Republican readers, they appeared still enticingly traditional but already modern (Zhang Ji 122-125).¹⁵

From 1927 to the 1930s, few novels could compete with *Gold Dust Dynasty* in terms of popularity.¹⁶ The fiction was first published in daily installments in the newspaper Zhang Henshui edited, *World Daily* (*Shijie ribao* 世界日报). Based in Beijing, one of the media centers of modern China, *World Daily* circulated nationwide with a positive reputation among middle class urban residents. However, the appeal of *Gold Dust Dynasty* was not confined to the middle class. It also involved a large audience from celebrities to ordinary citizens with minimal literacy. Earnings from the sale of the first collected *Gold Dust Dynasty* in 1933 could support the establishment of

¹⁵ For more information about Zhang Henshui's readership, see Zhang Ji, *Wo suo zhidao de Zhang Henshui* (Beijing: Jincheng, 2007).

¹⁶ Perhaps the only bestseller selling better than *Gold Dust Dynasty* in the 1930s was another of Zhang Henshui's novels, *Fate in Tears and Laughter* (*Tixiaoyinyuan* 啼笑因缘, 1930).

Nanjingers Daily (*Nanjingren bao* 南京人报) mainly underwritten by Zhang Henshui.¹⁷

Gold Dust Dynasty tells an intriguing and realistic story for understanding the challenging changes of life in urban China and the possible ways to confront them. The main story covers a period of only two years in the early 1920s in 112 chapters; it portrays the decline of the Jin family, a family with a glorious history over five generations but bankrupted in a few months. The setting is the Upper East Side Beijing, a historically wealthier residential area. In the interlude, a journalist-like storyteller informs the audience that he will tell a tragedy about a poet, calligrapher, and single mother. As an educated working mother who seems to be a successful new woman of her time, however, Qingqiu regrets her too modern path for developing too much publicity outside home. Then the storyteller traces back to years ago and starts the story with Jin Yanxi, the youngest son of President Jin lusting after the student-poet Leng Qingqiu. Jin Yanxi buys the quadrangle next door to Qingqiu's home and frequently takes her out to modern high-class social events such as balls and concerts. Born in a traditional middle class family, Qingqiu is impressed by Jin Yanxi's generosity and takes it as the true love she has seen in Hollywood movies. Qingqiu marries Jin Yanxi and moves to his family immediately after she finds herself pregnant. In the Jin family, Qingqiu witnesses the newest inventions and innovations of her time as well as the degeneration of the bureaucratic class, all of which reaffirms her determination to become a financially independent woman. As Qingqiu realizes her husband is, in fact, nothing more than a playboy who can never give up his dissipated relationships with

¹⁷ For more information, see Zhang Wu ed. *Zhang Henshui zishu* (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin, 2006).

numerous girlfriends, she escapes from the Jin family and lives on her own with her newborn child. Meanwhile, President Jin unexpectedly dies from a stroke. Since none of his sons has a successful career, the whole family soon loses its privileges and is divided into seven nuclear families. Jin Yanxi immigrates to Germany with his inheritance. Qingqiu makes a living as a calligrapher and teacher in the upper west side Beijing to keep away from the sphere of influence of the Jin family. Her well-educated sisters-in-law also manage to make a living after the collapse of the family. Most of these “new women” achieve occupations, respectability, and dignity disconnected from their men.

The fate of Qingqiu and her interactions with the Jin family are the most coherent thread of the narration. Republican readers could easily identify Qingqiu and her sisters-in-law with the first generation of Chinese girl students striving for financial independence through their pioneer paths full of uncertainties (Zhang Wu 54).¹⁸ They are as beautiful and talented as women in *Dream of Red Mansions*, but far more confused. They learn traditional values from their families but Western values from the schools. They believe in monogamy but their husbands have concubines or mistresses. They advocate female independence but their marriages turn out to be cages locking them in the domestic sphere. The division of the Jin family functions as good fortune for them. To the audience, the bitter-sweet ending is more of an inspiring adventure than the tragedy suggested at the beginning of the novel.

However awkward their lives are, over all, the “new woman” characters in *Gold Dust Dynasty* are more optimistic than the “new woman” characters in May Fourth

¹⁸ Republican readers tended to associate the characters in the Jin family to the girls from one of the prestigious families in Beijing. They wrote to Zhang Henshui to ask which family he was writing. Zhang Henshui answered that he was writing all of them. For more information, see Zhang Wu, *Wo de fuqin zhang henshui* (Beijing: Tuanjie, 2006).

literature. Through the contradicting values Qingqiu and her sisters-in-law deal with everyday, one could learn not only the hardship of achieving independence but also the benefits to becoming a modern individual. Qingqiu's longing for true love, financial independence, and an autonomous identity were often associated with practical needs for family, money, and the respect from society. Her traditional natal family supports her new education, her love marriage, and her ordinary career life as a single mother both for financial reasons and for catching up with the present trend. This might have created a sense of commonality among the common Republican women readers, and enabled them to recognize their complicated living conditions blessed with modernity.

Perry Link's pioneering study, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies*, is a search of Republican popular fiction that provides cultural support for a disoriented readership in times of confusion.¹⁹ *Gold Dust Dynasty* conveys a large number of explorations and messages functioning as experiments in the mode of fiction to test the cost of and return from being a "new woman." These messages confirm the anxieties about the pressure to succeed in new social roles for modern Chinese women. Rather than depicting the largely traditional environments in Republican Beijing, the fiction invokes a markedly modern upper middle class, modern, Westernized urban space. Such a revision of Beijing counters more discussions about what traditional values to maintain and what new values to accept. On the one hand, the tradition becomes a refuge from the anxieties of the new social demands of modern culture; on the other hand, the new ideas function

¹⁹ Perry Link views Zhang Henshui as a "Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies" writer, which is problematic. Yet his studies on "Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies" writers offers an insightful perspective to reread the popular writers neglected by Communist Chinese scholars. For more information, see Perry Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities* (Berkeley: University of California, 1981).

as remedies to the old culture threatening by the foreign invaders.²⁰

Instead of calling for any “ism,” Zhang Henshui simply wrote this readable story as a reference for his women readers who wanted to know how a “new woman” could survive in Republican China. If there was a disconnect between what May Fourth intellectuals advocated in the lectures and what real people did in real life, Zhang Henshui built the bridge between them. Generally, Zhang Henshui adhered to the feminist premise of the “new woman” promoted by May Fourth intellectuals, but he was more concerned about the practical problems women confront. His admirations for May Fourth intellectuals and his observations of society merge in his modern journalist point of view. Frequently interacting with real “new woman” journalists, writers and readers, Zhang Henshui developed a more optimistic attitude toward the reality and future for the “new woman.” In comparison with May Fourth intellectuals like Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936) who was uncertain about the future of “the new woman” in his famous lecture “What Happens after Nora Leaves Home” (“Nala zouhou zenme yang,” 1923) and his fiction *Regret for the Past* (*Shang shi* 伤逝, 1925), Zhang Henshui strongly believed that women could achieve the independence they wanted.²¹ The pursuits for independence could be identified in dozens of women characters with various backgrounds in *Gold Dust Dynasty*, most of whom manage to depend on themselves after leaving the Jin family, just like the actual 1920s Chinese “new women” teachers, journalists and all other professional women.

²⁰ Japan invaded Northeast China in 1931. The latter half of *Gold Dust Dynasty* was written during the war.

²¹ For more information about Lu Xun’s attitude toward the “new woman,” see *The New Woman in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature*, 40-59.

Unlike Lu Xun who considered ordinary Chinese people as ignorant and unenlightened, Zhang Henshui saw the masses as innocent individuals and never presume himself any more insightful than the less educated. In Zhang Henshui's view, there were no readers too traditional to be enlightened, nor was there privileged modernity outside the reach of the masses. He developed this compassion for the masses due to his tortuous personal life path. Born in a clan of literati-bureaucrats and martial arts practitioners in Guangxin, Jiangxi province, Zhang Henshui was thereby cultured in both Confucian values and martial arts skills.²² His father made him learn more of the Confucian classics because he thought martial arts would not be useful in the age of modern firearms. Well-known as a smart child in Guangxin, Zhang Henshui's childhood was happy and prosperous. His father promised to send him to England so he also learned English in his teens to prepare for that day. But unfortunately, his father died early and Zhang Henshui was sent to Zangmeng Farm School (*Zhangmeng kenzhi xuexiao* 藏蒙垦殖学校) where the tuition was affordable for his widowed mother. Not interested in farming at all, Zhang Henshui was addicted to popular fiction and wandered from place to place in his early twenties. He had worked as an actor, salesman and pharmacist, struggling at the foot of the social ladder. In 1919, he found a job as an editor in *Waijiang Daily* (*Waijiang Ribao* 皖江日报) based in Wuhu, Anhui province. Encouraged by May Fourth Movement in 1919, Zhang Henshui left Anhui for Beijing. He applied to Beijing University but did not take the entry examination because his younger brothers and sisters also needed money for education. Although later Zhang Henshui succeeded in

²² For more information, see *Zhang henshui zishu*, 1-140.

making a career in journalism and creative writing after years of hard work, he always saw himself as a marginal figure and maintained his aspiration to membership in the new May Fourth class in his memoirs.

Contrary to Zhang Henshui's admiration for them, most May Fourth intellectuals, most of these May Fourth intellectuals labeled Zhang Henshui as a writer of "Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies School" (*Yuanyang hudai pai* 鸳鸯蝴蝶派) whose works reinforced outdated moral values and writing styles.²³ In fact, the stylized love conventional in "Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies" fiction was reformed in Zhang Henshui's works, and new territories of social realities entail modern concepts, including sexuality, hygiene, the nuclear family, and the new identities of Republican era young Chinese.²⁴ Zhang Henshui had been charting what leftist critics have termed "the modernization of Chinese literature." Insofar as the Butterfly label typically flagged a backward-looking sentiment, it would be misleading if applied to Zhang Henshui, whose concerns were modernizing the tradition rather than strengthening back to the tradition.²⁵ A group of leftist intellectuals led by Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896-1981) made Zhang Henshui notorious in the leftist-dominant cultural circles. The only mainstream writer who publicly admitted his admiration to Zhang Henshui was Lao She 老舍 (1899-1966). Lao

²³ For more information about the whole collection of leftist critiques on Zhang Henshui as a "mandarin ducks and butterflies" writer, see Wei Shaochang 魏绍昌 ed. *Yuanyang hudie pai yanjiu ziliao* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi, 1962).

²⁴ John Berninghausen and Ted Hutters generalized the love routine in Butterfly fiction as "boy meets girl, boy and girl fall in love, boy and girl are separated by cruel fate, boy and girl die of broken heart." For more information, see their "Introductory Essay," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 8.1 (1976): 2.

²⁵ For the whole collection of leftist critiques on Butterfly Fiction, see *Yuanyang hudie pai yanjiu ziliao*.

She thought Zhang Henshui was the only current writer known by every woman and child in Republican China and a popular writer of moral integrity during the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945).²⁶ Given the fact that Lao She also experienced mistreatments from the mid-1950s until his death, Zhang Henshui was basically helpless in the leftist-dominated literary world. Throughout his life, Zhang Henshui barely received any positive comments from the cultural circle he wanted to join in. As a result, Zhang Henshui developed his worldview mainly based upon the knowledge he learned by himself from the modern reading materials and in his working experiences in interviewing real people, and reporting and editing real events.

Outside the May Fourth cultural circle, Zhang Henshui wrote fictional new women basically in the way journalists wrote people, and provided inspiration to millions of readers in the process. His earlier bestseller *Unofficial History of Beijing* (*Chunming waishi* 春明外史 1924 - 1929) made him a celebrity who could befriend with both ordinary readers throughout China and extraordinary readers like Zhang Xueliang 张学良 (1901-2001). Before writing *Gold Dust Dynasty*, Zhang Henshui had communicated with numerous real independent women including girl students, actresses and prostitutes as a journalist. The strategy Zhang Henshui often used was to present people in a way that journalists hunted for inspiration. Rarely did he look at an individual woman with any ideological marks of being “new” but he sought to understand how “new” a “new woman” was in comparison to her mother, her older sisters, and her former self. In *Gold*

²⁶ For more information about Lao She's thoughts on Zhang Henshui, see Lao She, “Yidiandian renshi,” published on *Xin minbao* on May 16, 1944. Also collected in *Yuanyang hudie pai yanjiu ziliao*.

Dust Dynasty, “new woman” characters are diverse, reflecting the transformations in the Chinese womanhood from different angles in different degrees.

Understanding the “New Woman”

The method I choose to analyze “new woman” characters is that of medical anthropology, a subfield in anthropology that has been applied by Charlotte Furth to study traditional Chinese womanhood both in texts and historical facts in *A Flourishing Yin*.²⁷ Medical anthropology integrates knowledge in medicine, history, archeology, and linguistics to study people (Brown 10-19).²⁸ Since “new woman” characters are set in a social context in which modern medicine is restructuring the traditional understanding of women’s bodies and minds, the methodology in medical anthropology is useful to explain the changes of “new woman” characters’ self-perceptions and social roles. The traditional mysterious guidelines on issues governing women’s menstruation, pregnancy, and post-partum period are replaced by modern hygienic views that emancipate women to step out their imagined inferiorities rooted in their wombs. Under the influences from the West and the churns of internal political turmoil, the “new woman” characters are encouraged to shed their traditional subordinate roles and emerge as a new and more forceful entity to make useful contributions to society and win security and freedom for themselves in the process.

The significance of medical anthropology to my thesis also lies in its holistic

²⁷ Charlotte Furth, *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China’s Medical History, 960-1665* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998).

²⁸ Peter J. Brown, *Understanding and Applying Medical Anthropology* (Mountain View: Mayfield, 1998).

prospective that accords with Zhang Henshui's journalist-editor-writer point of view of observing and writing people. In the framework of medical anthropology, Zhang Henshui's "new woman" characters are both popular predecessors of and influences on traditional womanhood. Inspired by medical anthropology's theories of how culture shapes the body and the mind of a person, I shall then examine transformations in the meaning and usage of the concept "new" that have been used to "new woman" characters living in a still somewhat traditional cultural context.

In doing so, I follow in the footsteps of Margaret Lock rather than Michel Foucault. Foucault focused on how modern clinics emerged through and within the history of medical knowledge.²⁹ This stance opened up a horizon of inquiry into the bodies and minds of people in different cultures comparatively. Foucault tended to divide discursive regimes in the knowledge of sickness and healing to different temporal and geographic fields in his pioneer work *The Birth of the Clinic* that traced the history of Western medicine. I want to escape this tendency in my study, because Republican China had a different history of developing and assimilating knowledge in medicine as culture. Traditional herbal medicine had not been replaced by biomedicine in China in the way it happened in the West. Both traditional and Western approaches to understanding people coexisted in the Republican clinics, and they all worked to explain and solve actual symptoms.³⁰

In contrast, Lock emphasized the complex tensions within a particular place in which people understand themselves and others in plural cultural systems coexisting

²⁹ For more information, see Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973).

³⁰ For more information, see Paul U. Unschuld, *Medicine in China: A History of Ideas* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985).

without necessarily fight against each other. In Lock's view, this understanding makes up a complex site of tensions characterized not only by discontinuities or struggles but also by continuities and interactions. Based on her field studies in Kyoto, Japan in the 1970s, Lock developed a dimension to investigate the changes of one's social roles in his or her different roles in sickness, health, trauma and recovery. As she concluded in *East Asian Medicine in Urban Japan*, Kyoto people changed the ways they understood their social roles through a cultural system that mixed traditional Japanese beliefs, Chinese cultural knowledge and Western biomedicine; their sick and traumatic conditions as well as the cultural ambiguity, contradiction, crisis and paradox caused by the sicknesses and traumas led to permanent transformations of people's understandings of themselves and others.

Later in the 1980s, Lock worked with Nancy Scheper-Hughes to reconsider the body as three bodies: the individual body, the social body, and the body politic. The individual body is the body understood in the phenomenological sense, the social body refers to the "representational uses of the body as a natural symbol with which to think about nature, society, and culture" and the body politic refers to the "regulation, surveillance, and control of bodies in reproduction and sexuality, in work and in leisure, in sickness and other forms of deviance and human difference" (Brown, 209).³¹ The three-body theory questions the body-mind dualism and explains how people change both their bodies and minds in culture-defined living paths.³² Here mainly apply theories of

³¹ Theories of the social body and body politic were not first developed by Scheper-Hughes and Lock. They first integrated all three ways to study the body at the same time.

³² The natural/supernatural, real/unreal dichotomy that influenced on the understanding people as body/mind dualism in the works of Rene Descartes (1596-1650) formulated the ideas of the precursors of contemporary biomedical conceptions. Scheper-Hughes and

social roles in the plural medical-cultural system, three bodies, and the changes of social roles in health, sickness and traumas.

The medical-cultural knowledge that shapes the social roles of “new woman” characters is cosmopolitan medicine, which chooses the best of traditional Chinese medical-cultural knowledge and Western medical knowledge. Traditional medical culture helps women distinguish the contrasts and differences in male and female physical features and social duties. Western medicine inspires women to recognize the similarities, and provides them more effective treatments to their sicknesses. Affluent “new woman” characters turn to Western medical knowledge and hygienic personal items to acquire curvaceous body shapes, glowing complexion and radiant personality.

The social bodies of “new woman” characters refer not only to the changes of the physical images of women but also how these new images had been used as a metaphorical means of justifying particular modern values and modern arrangements. The relationships between the individual bodies of “new woman” characters and their social bodies are about power and control. Usually, the higher a “new woman” character’s class is, the closer her individual body is to the social body. *Gold Dust Dynasty* is more body-conscious than *Dream of Red Mansions* in the sense that the “new woman” has an imagined perfect body image for which to diet and work out. The politically correct body for the “new woman” is the lean, strong, sexy and physically fit (need illustration) form through which the modern cultural values of autonomy, toughness, subjectivity, youth, and self-control are manifest.

The sicknesses of “new women” characters are not thought to be accidental but

Lock believed this dualism was merely one approach to understand of the body, there were other ways to view bodies as mindful bodies in non-Western civilizations.

attributed to their failures to attain modern standards. “New woman” characters often question traditional social roles in sicknesses and traumas. When they find their weak bodies do not look as beautiful as the “new woman” images in posters, they experience intense conflicts between autonomy and dependence, expression and repression, activity and passivity. The healthy social body appears more modern than that of the bound-feet “old-styled woman,” but is not necessarily bias-free. This “new” value is first popular among a dominant class, the wealthy Jin family, and then diffuses to the lower classes as a superior set of beliefs and behaviors. As the healthy social body of the “new woman” becomes a measure, women characters are taught to sustain their best health conditions to prove their abilities to succeed in modern society and leave behind all their dependent, repressive emotions in the past sicknesses and traumas. In doing so, they are drawn to the task of explaining their current social roles and who they ought to become. I will analyze this process in the following sections.

“New Woman” Characters and Their Social Roles

To begin I want to clarify terms that seem to be used interchangeably in *Gold Dust Dynasty*. “The new people” (*xin renwu* 新人物) is reserved for the modern young Chinese. “The new woman” is used to designate a female who consciously modernizes herself. “The new people” are young, freshly graduated from or still studying at school, whereas “the new woman” can be someone older and/or illiterate. Both Yanxi, Qingqiu and their classmates are called “the new people” throughout the novel, Qingqiu and her older sisters-in-law are called “the new women,” but her older sisters-in-law and illiterate

servants are never called “the new people.” The personhood of “the new people” seems to have already been conceived by society’s understandings regarding how a modern individual should be represented. For example, the Jin family forgives Yanxi and Qingqiu’s sexual relationship before marriage because this behavior is thought to be what “the new people” have to experience. The traditional way to have sex only after being married will not fit their social identity. By contrast, “the new woman” is primarily supposed to possess some degree of autonomy. For example, when the barely educated servant Xiaolian 小怜 escapes from the Jin family and marries her high class lover, other characters believe she turns out to be a “new woman” like her female masters.

The “new” used in both terms implies two different standards of being new. One is the ideal modern life path imagined and promoted by the modern media, as illustrated by the high-class young figures in the Jin family; the other is the practical way to improve one’s living conditions, as illustrated by Qingqiu, Xiaolian and other women characters who do not have privileged family backgrounds. Both standards work to shape the characters of “new women” characters, but the latter is decisive. Yanxi once oscillates between these two standards in his fantasy: “If I want a girl friend, of course I should date modern party queens. But if I want a wife to manage the household, active but unaffected women like Leng Qingqiu are better choices”(Zhang Henshui 24). Although Yanxi has never been a loyal husband to Qingqiu, he always thinks Qingqiu is superior to his girl friends in terms of her self-esteem and self-discipline.

As one of the most representative “new people,” Yanxi is not as monogamous as his “new woman” wife. Interestingly enough, there are no “new men” in the fiction. Yanxi’s father, brothers and brothers-in-law all have “new women” wives and traditional

concubines or lovers at the same time. On the one hand, Western ideas model the “new people’s” vision of modern love marriage; on the other hand, the “new people” find it difficult to refuse the lure of the traditional delicate beauties singing on stage or smiling at brothels. They advocate “female independence” for their “new woman” wives not merely to liberate them but also to maintain more personal spaces for themselves. They are afraid that if their wives have nothing to do for themselves they will check their husbands’ schedules to prevent any extra marital affairs from happening.

To strive for “independence” is the most evident feature of “new women” characters in the fiction. By “independence,” in the Jin family, it refers to “leaving the extended family and depending on oneself financially, and spiritually” (Zhang Henshui 299). To become an independent individual, a “new woman” needs to be capable of thinking out her own future and earning her own living (Zhang Henshui 511). This female subjectivity is built upon earlier ideas that systematized the notion of modern women. Joan Judge has studied the relationship between female subjectivity and modernity both in Republican China and in comparison with America. According to Judge, the word “new” from which Chinese intellectuals derived diverse applications as the “new woman,” the “new nation” and many other phrases reflected the fact that China confronted many new questions simultaneously and passively (Judge 766)³³. Unlike the America “new woman” who claimed for her rights in a nation that had already embraced

³³ Joan Judge, “Talent, Virtue, and the Nation: Chinese Nationalisms and Female Subjectivities in the Early Twentieth Century,” *The American Historical Review* 106. 3 (2001): 765-803.

the concept of modernity for almost a century, the Chinese “new woman” was encouraged by her new nation to ask for her rights.

The “new” in the “new woman” in *Gold Dust Dynasty* basically accorded with the New Cultural advocates mentioned in the introduction. However, the uses of feminist theories to change women characters’ minds were scarce. Rather, “new woman” characters are strengthened or transformed from who they were in the sufferings of the traditional ways of thinking or living. The male “new people,” in contrast, often mention feminist advocates in their conversations with their wives and concubines. Although the pursuits of the new values may be a genuine desire to win freedom, gain employment and achieve social recognition, they appear less powerful than women’s pursuit of independence.

Choices between the traditional and new paths around education, profession, marriage, and child-care characterize a “new woman” or a member of “new people.” “New people” characters follow the paths prepared by their parents. “New woman” characters dare to decide what to learn, how to make a living, whom to marry and how to deal with children. They may appear inferior to male “new people” at the beginning of the novel. But as the story develops, educated “new woman” wives from upper-middle classes become the representatives of the typical “new woman” and their social roles are thought to embody Chinese modernity along with a newer view of women as self-reliant women and working mothers. The women from lower class also achieve self-reliance but their lives appear as a combination of the tradition and the modern. Their different life patterns mirror different thoughts of the time. The relatively gradual development of women’s social roles was brought to an abrupt halt by defeat at the Opium Wars from the

middle of the 19th century. The “new woman” mother’s image was consciously fostered during the late Qing era at the end of the 19th century, and was modeled after Liang Qichao’s idea of “mother of citizens” borrowed from the West (Judge 4-5). In the next few decades among mainstream intellectuals, women’s social roles appeared superficially to be an all-out embrace of Western values.³⁴ These ideas were congenial at that time since traditional Chinese values were thought to be responsible for the crushing defeat and crippling poverty. In this historical context, the intellectual image of the “new woman” had been one of a borrowed womb, a means to produce stronger offspring to save China. In *Gold Dust Dynasty*, high class women characters are aware of this trend; however, lower class women characters never consider their roles as producers of a new generation.

Clearly, “new woman” characters receive modern education as male “new people” at schools. But it is not enough. They also learn the time-honored four arts of zither, chess, calligraphy, and painting. Some learn modern arts such as dramatics and social dancing as well. Overall, they are more knowledgeable than their male peers. As

³⁴ Judge argued that “mothers of citizens” was a notion reminiscent of the postrevolutionary French and American ideal of republican motherhood. She pointed out that the core of the ideal of republican motherhood was the notion articulated by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1792: “If children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism, their mother must be a patriot,” Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988), 129. On the meaning of republican motherhood in France, see Landes, 129-38; Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: Calif., 1992), 122-23. For the United States, see Anna Davin, “Imperialism and Motherhood,” *History Workshop* 5 (Spring 1978): 9-65. On the notion of “mothers of citizens” in China, see Joan Judge, “Citizens or Mothers of Citizens? Gender and the Meaning of Modern Chinese Citizenship,” in Elizabeth Perry and Merle Goldman, eds., *Changing Meanings of Citizenship in Modern China* (Cambridge: Mass., forthcoming).

a result, they may find it boring to talk to their husbands or brothers, and when it comes to decision-making, they won't let male family members decide anything for them.

Over the thirty years prior to the time of *Gold Dust Dynasty*, that vision was transformed from children-centered into mother-centered. The novel stresses modern motherhood as one of the motives to pursue financial independence. "New woman" characters are granted a certain degree of autonomy first at home and then in the workplace, largely in order to fulfill their duties first as supporters for themselves and then as educators for their children. The creation of new social roles with associated rights and duties has been mentioned throughout the fiction, and in the end the autonomy associated with these roles has become so marked that some "new woman" characters regard their husbands as useless "new people."

"New woman" characters are largely satisfied with their roles as new students and new mothers, but as not new wives. A Western-styled white wedding does not guarantee a happy ending, nor a lifetime marriage which was the only socially accepted marriage in pre-modern China. "New people" have the options to divorce and remarry now. The negative aspects in unstable but still polygamous marriage are strongly countered by a belief in the importance of monogamous love relationship, especially during the period of pregnancy and nurturing children. It is also clear that, even in a "new" context with modern convenience, being a new wife is disappointing, largely because of the traditional desires of their husbands. Unlike the traditional styled concubines and mistresses of their husbands, "new woman" characters never practice unquestioning submission and obedience to their husbands. They believe, different from their predecessors in feudal times, patience, endurance, even-temperedness, and compliance do not contribute to their

new identities. They pride themselves on living for the sake of independence, rather than marrying into the most distinguished family as the wealthiest wives in Beijing. This tendency is not Zhang Henshui's self-projection but the actual trend in northern urban China. Beijing changed its leaders so often during the late Qing and early Republican era that people did not trust political powers as they did during peaceful times. Not only the "new woman" but whole society wanted to add self values to protect themselves.

"New woman" characters are also portrayed as the generation without an obvious role as moneymaker after they leave school. They do not have tasks as conveyor of a cultural tradition because the tradition is under reconstruction. Once they get married, they may see themselves useless to society and experience problems of isolation. The rising uncertainty of their financial fortunes are reflected in their health. The lack of a clear social role as moneymaker, basic to the maintenance of the individual identity as a "new woman," is the major contributory factor to their physical sicknesses. Here I prefer the word "sickness" to "disease" and "illness" because from a medical perspective, "sickness" refers to the socialization of "disease" and "illness" (Janzen 4-6).³⁵ The sufferings of "new woman" characters are subjective, recognized as the social factors that cause their discomforts, therefore "sickness" better suits in their conditions.

Ambiguities associated with their social role as moneymakers are layered one upon another: intelligence, independence, and self-discipline are still valued as before; but being female masters in a wealthy family requires very little of these modern values. The young wives in the Jin family become bored and lonely, but seeking employment outside the home is unnecessary. Frequently, these contradictions push them into

³⁵ John M. Janzen, *The Social Fabric of Health: An Introduction to Medical Anthropology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002).

uncomfortable positions that encourage them to worry about not only the wellbeing of themselves but also the wellbeing of all women at large.

Drawing upon the general issues above, I will then discuss the social roles of six related “new woman” characters as the “new” daughters, “new” students, “new” wives and “new” moneymakers.

Qingqiu and the Wu Sisters 乌家姐妹: Rebellious Daughters, Good Students, Peripheral Moneymakers

Qingqiu resembles Lin Daiyu in beauty and talent, but not in tragic fate. Her fate is “based upon several real women’s lives in Zhang Henshui’s large circle of acquaintances” (Zhang Wu 29-30). Qingqiu grows up at a historically prestigious alley not far way from the Jin family. Her father dies when she is a child, but her widowed mother Mrs. Leng and her brother generously spend their limited inheritance for her education in the hopes of training her into a financially independent professional woman. Mrs. Leng does not prevent Qingqiu from dating Yanxi. When she knows Qingqiu will drop out to marry Yanxi due to her pregnancy, Mrs. Leng feels sorry for her daughter but does not complain about it. With or without marriage, Qingqiu has Mrs. Leng’s support. Mrs. Leng also helps Qingqiu foster her son after she returns to her natal family. Although Qingqiu departs from the life path Mrs. Leng carefully designed for her again and again, Qingqiu and Mrs. Leng never fight against each other. Even when they have opposite opinions on something, they talk instead of argue. Mrs. Leng thinks that “Qingqiu is born in a modern world” and therefore both she and Qingqiu should let go of

the traditional spiritual burdens and “fully enjoy the experiences of modern living” (Zhang Henshui 103).

Mrs. Leng forgives Qingqiu primarily because she is proud of Qingqiu’s talents in poetry and calligraphy. Although Qingqiu is just a high school student, she is already more educated than over 99% of real Chinese women in the 1920s. In 1929, among a population of 400,000,000, educated women with at least an elementary school diploma were fewer than 2,000,000.³⁶ Most Chinese women did not have any chance to go to school.³⁷ If Qingqiu had been written as a college student, she could only represent the one in a hundred thousands “new women.”³⁸ But portrayed as a high school student, Qingqiu could be imagined as a girl student next door by urban readers in early Republican China. Qingqiu and her classmates’ regretful early marriages also mirror the fact that marriage always entailed the end of education for Republican women. Women magazines such as *Women Magazine* (*Funü zazhi* 妇女杂志) and *Female Youth* (*Nü qingnian* 女青年) all have criticized the negative influences of marriage for women.³⁹ Culturally, women had to leave schools or the workplace for the homes of their husbands. Meanwhile, under the name of “equal rights, divided finances,” their new love marriage did not secure but threaten their financial status.

³⁶ Meng Ru, “Zhongguo zhi funü wenmang,” *Dongfang* 31. 1 (1934): 1.

³⁷ Wo Tian, “Jinri zhongguo nüzi de san de san shi,” *Nü qingnian* 9. 2 (1930): 2.

³⁸ For the statistics of educated women estimated by contemporaries, see Yu Qingtang, “Sannian lai zhi zhongguo nüzi jiaoyu,” *Jiangsu jiaoyu*, 4.1-2, (1935).

³⁹ For more information, see Suwen Luo, *Nüxing yu jindai zhongguo shehui*, Shanghai: Shanghai renmin, 1996.

No laws protected married women's employment in Republican China. Qingqiu is lucky in the sense that she can support her mother, her son and herself. Her profession as a creative calligrapher does not seem new, but working like a new professional woman in the modern workplace she may "earn less money than an average prostitute" (Su 544).⁴⁰ In a conversation between Su Qing 苏青 (1914-1982) and Eileen Chang, they both argued that "being employed does not necessarily result in financial independence," because "most current professional women cannot support themselves" (Su and Zhang 564-576).⁴¹ Shen Cijiu 沈慈九, the-editor-in-chief of *Women's Lives* (*Funü shenghuo* 妇女生活) in the 1930s, admitted that she depended on her family inheritance rather than her own earnings to sustain her decent life (Yi 1).⁴² In 1930, *Takungpao* (*Da gong bao* 大公报) did a survey of women in their professional lives. They found that women were involved in various professions including teachers, doctors, witches, clerks, business owners and so on. The supply of fresh female graduates exceeded the demand of the depressed economy. Even if women found the jobs they wanted, their salaries were inadequate to meet their living expenses.⁴³

Compared to the significance and difficulties of financial independence illustrated with Qingqiu's story, motherhood appears less important. Reproduction is constructed as a matter of consumption of modern hygienic items and services. Qingqiu learns from her

⁴⁰ Su Qing, *Su qing sanwen jingbian* (Hangzhou: Zhejiangwenyi, 1995).

⁴¹ Su Qing, "Su qing yu zhang ailing duitan ji," *Su qing sanwen jingbian*, 564-576.

⁴² Yi Fan, "Nala zuotan," *Funü shenghuo* 2 (1933):3.

⁴³ For more information, see "Jinshi zhiye funü de shenghuo," serialized in *Da gong bao* from February to May, 1930.

pregnant sisters-in-law to buy modern instructions for childbirth before or during their pregnancies, see foreign or foreign-educated doctors, take special diets and make appointments with midwives and nurses two months before the expected dates of childbirth. Everything relevant to reproduction is routinized to ensure the “hygienic” process of pregnancy and childbirth. Unlike traditional women, Qingqiu no longer sees reproduction as the most important feature of filial piety. Sometimes she even considers her child as obstacle to her future happiness because it is harder to divorce her unfaithful husband and to have a career with the child. Her child is basically the result of their premarital sex initiated by Yanxi. Qingqiu has thought about abortion during her pregnancy but has not done it because Yanxi promises to marry her. In terms of the power to negotiate conjugal sexual decision-making, Qingqiu is just as “old-styled” as traditional women. Qingqiu never thinks of using her sexuality to attract man or to make extra money either. Even when she sells her calligraphy in the crowded bazaar, she intentionally dresses like a middle-aged woman in an unattractive style.⁴⁴ Underlying her new options of Western knowledge, love marriage, and being a single working mother, the traditional morals, knowledge and skills survive. This phenomenon is pervasive among the “new woman” wives in the novel, but women characters who choose not to marry have more powers in sex.

In comparison to Qingqiu, women characters who choose to be totally modern do not mind making a living as modern social butterflies. The Wu sisters, two of Jin Yanxi’s scandalous girlfriends who never “downgrade” themselves to appreciate

⁴⁴ Qingqiu has her son when she is 18. When the narrator meets her in the market her son is around 8 year old, which means that Leng is about 26 at that time. However, the narrator identifies her style of dressing as a middle-aged woman.

anything traditional, choose to “date” high-class men to maintain a high standard material life. They are educated, fluent in English and well mannered, but they are more famous for their social skills in dealing with the opposite sex. Unlike Wei Ming 韦明 in the leftist movie *The New Woman* (*Xin nüxing* 新女性 1934) who is uncomfortably preyed upon by men, the Wu sisters are proud of their sex appeals and willing to present their bodies boldly to the public to be looked at and admired.⁴⁵

However controversial the Wu sisters’ reputations sound, they are still considered to be the “most fashionable” and the “most modern new women” by Yanxi and his friends. Their middle class father keeps silent about their untraditional behavior. In their aesthetics of the “new woman,” what a woman chooses to do is much less important than how courageously she makes the decision. The social roles of women moneymakers are so unclear that people do not know how to judge the ways how women choose to make money. “New people” characters and their families are enchanted by the notion of the “new woman” because in its having nothing to do with any familiar traditional femininity. Few characters ever criticize the Wu sisters. Although Yanxi thinks the Wu sisters are too dangerous to marry, he still enjoys hanging out with them as if catching up with the latest fashion. In comparison to Qingqiu who is written as a “new woman” grown up from within the tradition, the Wu sisters are composed as “new woman” characters bending to challenge the tradition from outside.

Bilingual social butterflies like the Wu sisters may invoke as many questions on women’s social roles as the adorable talented courtesan-actresses in traditional fiction,

⁴⁵ For more information about the film, see Kristine Harris, “The New Woman Incident: Cinema, Scandal, and Spectacle in 1935 Shanghai.”

and perhaps the most evident question is why educated women sell their bodies rather than their knowledge and skills like their male contemporaries do. If over ten years of modern education prepares male characters for professional tracks, it is still not clear enough for “new woman” characters to figure out to where their modern education will carry them. Even if Qingqiu holds a job when she needs money, she still feels guilty for not making better use of what she has learned. Compared to Qingqiu, social butterflies like the Wu sisters at least feel good about themselves. They exchange intimacy not only for money but also for maintaining their social reputation as the most modern girls in Beijing. If they did not become social butterflies, they would either get married or work in exploitative jobs, if not more than, prostitution in terms of wages.

The bare skins and bold laughter of the Wu sisters at bars and clubs may be read as an unfinished map to represent the beginning social relations of the “new woman.” “New woman” characters can sell their company because they are appreciated by “new people” as living models, but not as real people who also have tears and excreta. “New people” husbands betray their “new woman” wives after seeing their bodies too often. From a male sexual partner point of view, “new” wives are biologically traditional except for their natural feet. The image of “new woman” appears much more charming in her social body in public than in her individual body at home preoccupied with the social functions inherited from ancient traditional women.

Bai Xiuzhu 白秀珠: Single Girl, Powerful Heiress

Bai Xiuzhu represents some of the highest Republican expectations for a “new woman.” Stylishly dressed in her imported car, heading confidently ahead, Xiuzhu seems like a potent symbol of a new age of freedom and fortune for women. Born in a high-class family as distinguished as the Jin family, Xiuzhu dates Yanxi for years and always considers herself to be Yanxi’s future wife until she receives the wedding invitation from the Jin family. She cannot secure her relationship with Yanxi even she studies at the best school in Beijing as well as foreign college and continues to learn piano and many other modern elegant skills.

Why does Yanxi not love Xiuzhu? One reason is that Xiuzhu is superior to him in knowledge, manner, finance, and almost all other aspects. Xiuzhu unconsciously scares Yanxi away. She is one of the few modern Chinese ladies with a foreign education, the heiress of one of the wealthiest families in Beijing, and the “new woman” celebrity who helps her senator brother socialize other high level officials. Unlike Yanxi who spends most of his time with girls, Xiuzhu is still concerned about and working for the futures of herself and her family. Work has a meaning for her beyond what a salary can bring: it justifies her existence as a modern individual and links her to the wider world of respect and achievement.

Another factor that annoys Yanxi is her strong character. Unlike Qingqiu who barely complains about Yanxi’s dissolute social life, Xiuzhu dares to directly ask Yanxi to stay away from other girls. When Yanxi dates Xiuzhu before encountering Qingqiu, Yanxi often feels Xiuzhu intrudes upon his world with her thoughts about monogamy. Yanxi’s premarital betrayal in some sense saves Xiuzhu from being betrayed in marriage. After Yanxi and Qingqiu are separated, Xiuzhu does not desperately try to get back to

him but waits to see whether Yanxi has changed his character. Xiuzhu basically does not care about marriage as much as her older relatives and friends. Unlike those women characters who consider marriage as a gauge of success, Xiuzhu barely sees Yanxi's betrayal as a loss. She is markedly more concerned about her own fame as the measure of gains.

The increased visibility and assertiveness of Xiuzhu in public, in her brother's office and city streets, in parties and organizations with a charitable purpose, all makes her seem less and less in tune with the traditional womanhood centered with marriage. Perhaps the only conventional cultural feature recognizable in Xiuzhu's character is that of forgiveness. In the two distinct relationships with Yanxi before and after his marriage, Xiuzhu has been cheated several times. But she never dates any men other than Yanxi. However irritated she is, Xiuzhu accepts Yanxi again and again. His polygamous traditional thoughts continue to live through the forgiveness of Xiuzhu. In the years of being single and waiting for Yanxi to divorce Qingqiu, Xiuzhu unconsciously carries on some of the ideas she denies. In the last chapter, Yanxi and Xiuzhu break up another time, and once again, it is initiated by Yanxi.

For Xiuzhu, a "new woman" wife is the most difficult social role to play because she senses her marriage to men in her social circle will unavoidably be disturbed by extramarital affairs. Especially when the decline of the Jin family makes Yanxi a mismatch, Xiuzhu is even less likely to trade her prestigious family name for a playboy. Although the "new woman" is not supposed to marry for economic security but to marry for real intimacy and companionship, the latter will not necessarily guarantee a happy marriage for her either. There are rarely any happy marriages among her friends and

family. “New people” cheat on their “new woman” wives now and then, just like Chinese men did to Chinese women in the past thousands of years. Moreover, the modern attitudes toward love and sexual pleasure encourage them to pursue extramarital sex with less sense of guilt, if there ever had have been any. For “new woman” characters cultured in monogamy at schools, their betrayed married lives are more unbearable than that for traditional characters.

If Qingqiu and the Wu sisters mirror the majority of middle class women who basically follow the trends of the “new,” Xiuzhu represents the women leaders of this trend. Qian Nanxiu argued that Chinese women were not merely followers of the reforms in their social roles, waiting to be liberated by others. Rather, “they were active organizers and sophisticated thinkers, holding a very different attitude toward tradition than most male reformers” (Qian 401).⁴⁶ Although the idea of “new woman” was initiated by male intellectuals, there had been modern women calling for women’s rights from the end of the 19th century. Women journalists had written dozens of essays to encourage women to study of science, medicine, art, and literature. They also reported on Shanghai women workers’ living conditions and other women’s issues in social reality rather than in theories (Qian 416).

Legends said that both Xiuzhu and Qingqiu’s stories are developed upon the real life of Lü Bicheng 吕碧城 (1884-1943), the most famous women *ci*-poet in the 1920s Beijing, who never got married but still led an admirable life.⁴⁷ Losing her father at the

⁴⁶ Nanxiu Qian, “Revitalizing the Xianyuan (Worthy Ladies) Tradition: Women in the 1898 Reforms,” *Modern China* 29. 4 (2003): 399-454.

⁴⁷ Zhang Henshui never admitted who the archetypes of women in *Gold Dust Dynasty* were. For more information about readers’ guesses, see *Zhang henshui zishu*. For more

age of 12, Lü Bicheng lived with her widowed mother and her mother's brother in Beijing. Famous for her poetry, she became both the first female journalist for *Takungpao* and the first female principal for Beiyang Women's School. Lü Bicheng also had studied at Columbia University and traveled around the world. With the identifiable strong "new woman" figure in the social context, it is little surprise to read that "new woman" characters like Xiuzhu and the fled Qingqiu can achieve independent lives.

Wanxiang 晚香 and Ōko 櫻子: Courtesan Mistress and Foreign Concubine

When Jin Feng analyzed the "new women" characters in Yu Dafu 郁达夫's works, she argued that Yu Dafu provided invaluable insights into the construction of the "new woman" through prostitutes, proletarians, and Japanese women characters he composed (Feng 60). *Gold Dust Dynasty* also portrays peripheral characters such as prostitutes and foreigners. Wanxiang and Ōko are two of them.

Wanxiang meets Yanxi's first brother Fengju 凤举 at her brothel when she is fifteen. Fengju buys her out as a mistress and hides her at a luxurious apartment. The domesticated life makes Wanxiang feel inferior to her former self as a courtesan, so she secretly leaves the apartment with all the money Fengju gives her to pursue her own future. The Japanese lady Ōko is a maid of Yanxi's fourth sister Daozhi 道之 during the

information about Lü Bicheng, see Shengqing Wu, "Old Learning and the Refeminization of Modern Space in the Lyric Poetry of Lü Bicheng," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 16. 2 (2004):1-75.

years Daozhi stays in Japan. Daozhi's husband Liu Shouhua 刘守华 falls in love with Ōko and honestly tells Daozhi that his love for Ōko is stronger than his love for Daozhi. With permission from Daozhi, Shouhua marries Ōko as his concubine. When Daozhi takes Shouhua and Ōko back to the Jin family, Ōko appears cautious in attitude and careful in actions, which makes Daozhi suspect that her "motives for being a concubine of a Chinese official during war time are not innocent" (Zhang Henshui 511). However, Ōko maintains her loyalty after the dissolution of the family until the end of the novel.

Compared to girl student characters, Wanxiang and Ōko represent subservient women outside the discipline of modern education.⁴⁸ Educated women do not find them comrades. Rather, Wanxiang and Ōko are seen as women living to fulfill men's desires. Even if "new woman" wives may forgive them through compassion, their sexualities still trap them in illegal and insecure relationships, which proves the significance of modern education. Without the weapon of knowledge, women characters are harder to understand the meaning of becoming self-reliant and what the right ways to achieve so are. Ōko's story also reveals that in the construction of the "new woman," foreign ideas are not the key to cultivate the self-supporting, self-consciously liberated new womanhood. If not financially independent, a foreign woman cannot be counted as a "new woman" either.

Three Bodies of the "New Woman"

Discussions of "new woman" characters in the last section present a variety of

⁴⁸ According to the new Penal Law of Republican China, Polygamy was banned in China in 1935. During the years (1926-1932) the novel was serialized, mistresses and concubines were still very common among wealthy families.

social belongings of “the new woman.” These seemingly distinct individuals share one social body: all of them appear physically stronger than the traditional women characters in *Dream of Red Mansions* they parallel. Main women characters in *Dream of Red Mansions* tend to fall victim to some mysterious or chronic sickness; some of them miserably die from incurable malady. In *Gold Dust Dynasty*, by contrast, “new woman” characters usually stay healthy, and even if they catch a cold or pneumonia they can recover from it in a short time. This healthy collective image of “new woman” is mainly supported by global medical knowledge such as modern reproductive theories and anatomy. The new knowledge of the body and mind opens up thoughts of femininity that were previously shrouded in mystery.

Like most young Chinese women in the 1920s and 1930s, the physical features for “new woman” characters are predestined before they are born in terms of foot sizes. Thanks to the Natural Feet movement from the 1870s to 1910s primarily led by foreign missionaries, “new woman” characters already have natural feet.⁴⁹ Those who have bound feet are associated with concubinage, arranged marriages, illiteracy, seclusion, and female submission to male authority. They are considered to be unhealthy, out-of-date, and therefore, unwanted.

Many of the dramatic changes in “new women” characters’ lives can be summed up less controversially and more beneficially under the name of health. Literally and metaphorically, to be healthier sounds progressive yet safe to the characters in the novel and to its Republican readers. For example, Qingqiu hesitates to attend the fund raising

⁴⁹ For more information about the changes in people’s attitudes toward the aesthetics and practices of feet binding, see Joyce Jennings Walstedt, “Reform of Women's Roles and Family Structures in the Recent History of China,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 40. 2 (1978): 379-392.

activity held by her sisters-in-law to support women's rights movements, but she is willing to join her sisters-in-law' and mother-in-law's discussions on such topics as modern healthy recipes. In order to be as healthy as they are, Qingqiu carefully learns what to eat, what to wear and how to play.

Healthy "new woman" characters are dressed in "hygienic" Western-styled clothes that allow women to expose their bodies in outdoor activities. The skin textures, body contours and healthy looks of "new woman" characters are portrayed with knee-high skirts and round-toe flats designed for natural-foot women. Traditional dresses along with the domestic lifestyle are considered to be "unhygienic." However, "new woman" characters do not always expose their arms, legs, and décolleté areas for their health. For example, Yanxi's third sister-in-law Yufen 玉芬 wears a Chinese-styled undershirt underneath her semi-translucent silk dress to cover her bust and décolleté area, her husband Pengzhen 鹏振 asks her not to wear it by saying, "to bind your breast like that will do harm to your respiratory system. Could a liberated woman possibly prefer her elegantly conservative style to her respiratory system?" When Yufen sticks to wear her undershirt, Pengzhen argues,

"In nature, most males are more beautiful than females, only men are less beautiful than women. Why? In the animal world, both males and females have the abilities to survive. When male animals want female animals to do the reproductive work, they have to look beautiful to please female animals.... But in human society, men can work; we can live independently. Women cannot; they basically depend on us. In order to

depend on men, they have to look beautiful to please us....” (Zhang Henshui, 75)

Pengzhen’s judgmental argument reveals that the trend to dress in modern style is not modern in a feminist sense. “Healthism” here can still be used to justify men’s control of women. What is healthy or unhealthy are limitless in the medicalization of everyday life, and “new woman” characters do not necessarily live in a healthier environment.

The healthy lifestyle of the “new woman” characters is evident not merely in their Westernized dresses but also in their consumption of Westernized commodities. The rhetoric of the healthy and vigorous “new woman” is reinforced by the advertisements of modern lifestyles. Western sportswear, underwear, perfume and other personal items are described as health promoters. The pharmaceutical and hygienic products foster the upper class value: to be a “new woman” one needs to use a variety of commodities to maintain her healthy skin, hair and contour.

During this promotion of the healthy image of the “new woman,” there is a growing gap between women who have access to Westernized apparel and accessories and women who do not. Although it seems that “new woman” characters do not necessarily need a distinct family background, in fact all of them are urbanized women familiar with the commercial images promoting the idea of how a “new woman” should look. “Urbanized women” do not refer to ordinary women in 1920s and 1930s Beijing. During that time, Beijing was much smaller than the flourishing Shanghai in terms of the urbanized proportion and the population of urbanized people. In 1928 as Kuomintang defeated the Beiyang Army, the capital of China was changed to Nanjing, traditionally occupied by the Kuomintang. From 1928 to 1937, the urbanization of Beijing suffered a

severe reverse. For instance, the Beijing Stock Exchange that opened in 1918 almost completely bankrupted by 1928 (Wu 636).⁵⁰ Most Beijing residents in the late 1920s and 1930s could not afford the healthy lifestyle of the “new woman” backup by expensive modern commodities. As a result, the luxuries promoting modern lifestyles were both written and read as illustrations of the exploitative nature of the Beiyang bureaucrat class that caused the decline of Beijing.

Even within the wealthy Jin family, the wonders of modern commodities are also accompanied with high pressures to afford and practice them. Qingqiu, concubines of President Jin, and the servants and cooks coming from lower classes markedly wear less modern clothing. Like other superrich families in Beijing, the mansions and gardens of the Jin family are both tokens of the modern lifestyle and hierarchal system. However new the family claims itself to be, it is still an extended family functioning with invisible old rules. People from lower classes never play Mahjong with people from richer backgrounds like they would with their friends. Besides class, age also implies privilege. Older family members supervise the younger members’ thoughts and behavior in health and sickness, and demand reports of symptoms from them. Servants and cooks are also taught principles of hygiene, which are often associated with food. For example, excess sugar and monosodium glutamate are required to be avoided in the dishes, whereas fresh vegetables are proclaimed as healthy desserts. Family members who prefer sweets to vegetable will be thought as less elegant people.

The relationships between individual bodies and the social body take on special meaning for us to reconsider the idea of health and the modernity it stands for. Ivan Illich

⁵⁰ Tingxie Wu, *Beijingshizhi gao 3* (Beijing: Beijing yanshan, 1998).

first used the expression “medicalization” of life to reveal a process in which the medical community attempts to create a market for its services by redefining certain values, behaviors, and problems as sicknesses and sufferings. During the process of “medicalization,” women pursue their social bodies rather than maintain their individual bodies, and therefore, they may lose their rights of control and autonomy over their own lives to some degree. This tendency is reinforced by their eagerness to be or to catch up with the modern. The so-called hygienic modernity, therefore, had a dual function of liberating women’s qualities of lives, while at the same time producing new repressions.

The “medicalization” of life seems to be a response on the two standards of being “new:” to follow a particular life path illustrated by the “new people,” and, to strive for one’s ideals as illustrated by the “new woman.” “New woman” characters opt to have their lives monitored by modern hygienic knowledge and techniques, which makes them still oppressed by the new standard of being good women. Because of changes in living arrangements, “new woman” characters are unconsciously forced into structural positions where they cannot participate properly as self-directed, self-supportive individuals. The dilemma of being healthy is stimulated to a large degree by the fiction’s attempt to question the May Fourth idea that “new” is “better.” Along with the distances between the multiple individual bodies and the only one social body, we can remap relations between the “new woman,” the tradition, and the modern.

Sickness, Trauma, and New Identity

The new social roles for “new woman” characters and their collective social body

suggest what they do, but these are not enough to reveal who they are and how new they can become. Since fictional characters do not possess real identities, in *Gold Dust Dynasty*, women's willpower, positive attitude, and endurance are primarily portrayed through health, sicknesses, and traumas. In their sufferings and pains, "new woman" characters focus more upon personality defects.

The unclear social role as moneymaker can trigger a sickness at any time on the body of a "new woman" in the Jin family. To protect the prominent family name, young wives have to commit to the ideal of respectable domesticity. None of them actually work in the public sector, although they step out to enjoy a tea or a movie now and then. In order to make money in a mostly domesticated life, Yufen secretly works from home to manage a fund she runs. Most other young wives except for Qingqiu also have invested in some businesses. These married but ambitious women have a sense that if they do not have enough money, they cannot change their status as "toys" of their men. Some of them deposit or spend the money they earn for themselves. Others make a great effort to organize, petition and fund-raise to give young girls more learning and working opportunities than they have had.

"New woman" investors consider the stocks and bonds they secretly hold as important as their lives. They feel not merely depressed but seriously sick when they lose money or do not have the chance to work, no matter how rich their husbands are. Even though the external factors that cause their sickness may be different germs, viruses or parasites, the internal factor is mostly the sense of loss in financial security or career life. When Yufen is informed that her husband is having an affair, she just says a few unhappy words; when she is informed that her stocks lost all value, she vomits blood. To cover

the fact that she has invested in a bankrupted company, Yufen calmly asks her servant to clean up the blood and hide her sickness from every other person in the family. In Yufan's mind, the loss of financial investment is failure that seems less disgraceful than her husband's betrayal. Since her husband Pengzhen has a scandalous girlfriend at the same time, Yufen thinks, "it is better to make others believe I vomited blood because of Pengzhen's affair" (Zhang Henshui 370).

Metaphorically, to be sick means to have something wrong with oneself in a way regarded as abnormal when compared to a suitably chosen reference, to experience both an unpleasant sense of disruption between the body and the self, and a threat to one's integrated personhood; to undergo an alteration of one's social roles and relationships (Hahn 13-39)⁵¹. In Yufen's case, her sickness reflects her sense of failure when compared to other successful male investors. The loss of the money is seen by her as losing the backup of her independence and her desire to change her living and working environments. Other "new woman" sickness episodes similarly represent this essence of sickness as unwanted conditions. Peifang 佩芳, the formal wife of the oldest son Fengju, gets abdominal pain when she is upset over her husband overspending their money; Qingqiu gets a fever once she feels trapped in the domestic life depending on Yanxi.

The sickness experiences of "new woman" characters are often associated with reversed expectations, scrambled realities and all kinds of ambiguous messages. These "new woman" characters reverse back to wearing traditional long robes, eating traditional food and staying in traditional chambers because their experienced servants tell them that

⁵¹ Robert A. Hahn, *Sickness and Healing: An Anthropological Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University, 1996).

these traditional behaviors are suitable for their weak bodies. The “new woman” in sicknesses turns again to be traditional, which means, metaphorically, the traditional woman symbolizes sickness. This metaphor makes both the sick role and the “traditional woman” role more horrifying, and drives “new woman” characters to determine to get well as soon as possible. Even before they completely recover from their sicknesses, they get dressed as normal and prepare to rejoin society.

The “new woman” characters’ senses of rights and obligations shift from the modern perspective to the traditional perspective during the beginnings of the sicknesses and shift back with the endings of the sicknesses. For instance, Qingqiu appears like a traditional delicate talented beauty walking in the backyard under the moon, overwhelmed by excessive sentiments of self-pity. During her sickness, she chants classic poetry like Lin Daiyu. After chanting a few poems, Qingqiu feels her misery is eternal in the history of Chinese women. Then the novel writes her pain in the way traditional talented beauties feel sad about themselves:

“Seeing the full moon rising over the sky, Qingqiu finds the moonlight pure and beautiful. She thinks, ‘the moon cannot be as beautiful tomorrow night as it is tonight. New or full, the moon is always the moon; but people looking at them are different.... Why I cannot happily appreciate the moon but feel sad, wasting my time in sorrow and regrets? I should not do this. Oh, I followed my dead father’s footsteps, turning my talents in poetry into distress.’ As she thinks of her father, Qingqiu bursts into years under the moon” (Zhang Henshui 464).

In rooting the fiction in the understanding of *Dream of Red Mansions*, this description of the traditional feminine sentiments imitates the famous “Lin Daiyu Buries Flowers,” seen in which Lin Daiyu chants:

“How long can a beautiful flower be fresh and fair?
In a single day wind can whirl it to its end.
Fallen, the brightest blooms are hard to find;
With aching heart their grave-digger comes now.
Alone, her hoe in hand, her secret tears
Falling like drops of blood on each bare bough....” (Cao and Gao 539).

The similarity in content and style between the portrayals of Qingqiu in her minor sickness and Lin Daiyu in her chronic incurable sickness suggest the dangers of traditional sentiments. Qingqiu soon gets a high fever and falls into a coma. As she comes around after treatment, she realizes that to be a “new woman,” she has to reformulate her sentimental self, maintain the useful traditional knowledge, and skills but discard the useless pessimistic emotions along with it.

Later when Qingqiu has almost fully recovered, she questions herself and ascribes the inherent cause of her sickness as well as her unhappy marriage to her dependent life.

She thinks:

“Even if I do not want to be an independent woman for myself, I should be an independent woman for all ordinary women. Even if I leave the Jin family, I will not starve to death.... I cannot be as sick as this. I can hold for a while by myself. But my newborn baby cannot digest problematic milk.... I have been studying at school for ten years, learning both new

and traditional knowledge, but I sell my body to exchange for this humiliating marriage. What was my education really for? Damn me,” (Zhang Henshui, 479-481).

The denial of her former self then entails a more confident Qingqiu who believes in her ability to survive without Yanxi. A few days later, Qingqiu realizes her plan to flee from the Jin family and starts her life with a sense of new self.

The narratives of healing involve conscious or semiconscious self-alterations of personhood. Here healing is used in a general sense to mean both the sufferer-defined resolution of the sickness experience, and the medically defined transformation of the disorder (Janzen 176). Women transforming to “newer women” through the process of healing is a dominant mode of the construction of “new woman” characters in the fiction. There is a cumulative effect of healing or improving in the recovery of “new woman” characters. They sense both the uncertainty of achieving financial independence and the desire to leave the domestic life of sicknesses. Their self-reflections not only lend coherence to a condition of suffering, but it begins a psychological process in which both the sickness and the fear of failures are healed. As Susan Sontag has pointed out, the metaphors of sicknesses provide culture imagery that redefines the sicknesses.⁵² “New woman” characters redefine their sicknesses caused by the “non-newness” preoccupied or intruded in their bodies. The “punitive fantasies” that Sontag analyzed from the metaphor of breast cancer can also be put to analyze the nonfatal sicknesses of “new woman” characters. They are so afraid of being punished by not being new enough in their sicknesses that they make more efforts to be “newer” after their recovery. Usually,

⁵² Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1978).

when their bodies are restored, their beliefs in the rhetoric of the “new woman” are strengthened too.

The transformation of a sickness experience into trauma brings other dimensions for thinking about “new woman” characters. The underlying idea of trauma is an extension of much older conceptions, rooted in folk psychology, “concerning the power of experiences to cause intense emotions and pains” (Young 246).⁵³ President Jin’s death from stroke turns into a trauma for every woman in the family. Although President Jin also has concubines and many other traditional problems, he is absolutely the most capable man in the family. His sudden death shocks everyone. Each “new woman” character’s social role as carefree daughter-in-law in the Jin family is now in question, requiring them to make long-term adjustments in the ways they deal with daily life. The incident immediately scars the minds of President Jin’s wife and two concubines, resulting in psychological paralyses that overwhelm their identities. These three relatively older women choose different futures. The formal wife disbands the extended family and converts to Buddhism; one concubine swallows opium to commit suicide but fails; the other concubine flees from the family with a huge collection of jewelry she steals. All of them serve as foils to the “new woman” characters after trauma who transform themselves to becoming the real financially independent women.

“New woman” characters are sad and silent in the first week after losing their father-in-law. A few weeks later, they move into their post-trauma living conditions with a stronger sense of control over their finances, although their husbands betray them more often during this chaotic time period. Qingqiu asks Yanxi to spend less money each day

⁵³ Allan Young, “Suffering and the Origins of Traumatic Memory,” *Daedalus* 125. 1 (1996): 245-260.

to maintain an ordinary but happy life. In the hopes of persuading Yanxi to do so, she says: “I don’t think happiness refers to luxurious social life, the greatest happiness lies in one’s spirit. If you can finish a difficult thing smoothly, that is a kind of happiness too.” However, Yanxi is not yet aware of this point and continues his idle life. Peifang asks Fengju to sign a contract with her to make sure she controls the income and expenses. Huichang 慧厂, the wife of the second son Hesun 鹤荪, shows Hesun his defaults in the accounts she manages and forces him to stop overspending. Yufen wants to play tricks to receive more inheritance, but she does not have a chance since all other women characters see through her tricks.

Overall, unlike the sons of President Jin who spend more time dawdling at theaters and clubs to allay their sorrows, their “new woman” wives actively make plans for the future. When the formal wife of President Jin divides the family into seven nuclear families to finish her distribution of the family wealth, she believes her daughters-in-law can well manage their finances and comments,

“Peifang has the right sense of managing a family. If she becomes a mother-in-law in the future, she will do a better job than us.... Huichang can help her husband to make a good life. She always admires the Westernized nuclear family, so she must already have thoughts about their future.... Yufen can keep her husband from overspending, but she should manage their finances in an appropriate degree. Nowadays, people learn from each other’s experiences and all get smarter. Some smart people think others are fools; but sometimes the smart can be fooled too....”

(Zhang Henshui 530).

The “new woman” daughters-in-law have prepared for this day. What they look forward to the new era away from the mansions of the Jin family is a more independent womanhood that makes its decisive imprint on a future with more freedom.

The strong will and confidence to achieve independence is essential to the understanding of the transformation of “new woman” characters in their posttraumatic era. Increasing belief in themselves has developed a resistance to sorrow. Learning to cope with tight budgets is one thing, but quite another is the entirely new way to manage their nuclear families. In contrast to the days in the prestigious extended family, new lives with only their husbands and/or children are both exciting and challenging. If there had not been so many sicknesses and troubles, “new woman” characters may appear like Zi Jun 子君 in *Regret for the Past*, leaving the family, turning compulsively away from her domestic life, and regretfully returning to another domestic life at her maiden home. But with so many pains and difficulties undergone in the past, “new woman” characters in *Gold Dust Dynasty* seem to enter their new womanhood more successfully. They distill the same message from the life experiences of themselves and their peers: self-reliance provides the best insurance in an unpredictable modern era.

Tentative Conclusion For Future Studies

Qian Mu 钱穆 (1895-1990) summed up a symposium on the relation between *yin* 阴 and *yang* 阳 by noting that “yin moves adaptively, not passively; yin has its own

subjectivity just like yang” (Qian 16-17).⁵⁴ “New woman” characters in *Gold Dust Dynasty*, in terms of the ways in which they grow up from traditional girls, can be accommodated to Qian Mu’s idea of *yin*. In rereading women in *Gold Dust Dynasty* as both adaptive and subjective characters, I seek to remove the May Fourth view of “new” as superior or improved. Selectively limiting my references to those intellectuals who had endeavored to situate the “new woman” in the 1920s and 1930s China, I retain a scope of comparisons between traditional women, “new people,” and “new woman,” characters in *Gold Dust Dynasty* and their counterparts in reality. I do not refer to the unwarranted leftist critiques of Zhang Henshui and his works as reactionary forces. This allows me to make the following observations in the construction of “new woman.”

First, traditional knowledge and skills, Western thoughts and techniques, and the practices of being or becoming “new” are intrinsically interrelated in *Gold Dust Dynasty*. Traditional knowledge and skills are not undervalued as an empty, unconscious past. Rather, they live through “new woman” characters and perpetuate their stories. By and large, Western ideas and techniques are appreciated, but they are not seen as a perfect solution for everyone. Being or becoming a “new woman” does not mean a heroic myth but an active pursuit or maintenance of her financial independence.

Second, “new woman” characters are shaped in new social roles as autonomous daughters, wives, and mothers. The traditional virtues of being subservient to fathers, husbands, and sons no longer exist in the living experiences of “new woman” characters. In comparison to their “new people” husbands who are set in their modern life paths by their families, “new woman” characters choose their own paths. Even if they prostitute

⁵⁴ Qian Mu, *Hushang xiansi lu* (Beijing: Sanlian, 2001).

themselves as social butterflies, they do it on their own initiative, not forced by others. The attainable goal of financial independence granted by modern education works as a cushion against ill treatment from their husbands. “New woman” characters can leave the family if they find it not compatible with their personal goals.

Third, beyond the diverse individual bodies of “new woman” characters, there is a common social body as the healthy, fit, and modern-looking woman. The print culture that facilitates the textual transmission of modern concepts help established this “medicalization” of the “new woman.” Although women unavoidably lose their individuality to fit into the politically correct body to some extent, they are by no means always passive vessels with respect to the constraints of hegemonic, undisputed cultural norms. Even in their sicknesses and traumas, “new woman” characters have the self-healing power to transform themselves into stronger persons.

Overall, “new woman” characters in *Gold Dust Dynasty* suggest a growing female confidence. They represent the effort to work through crises in Chinese women’s identities by healing the conflicts between traditional and Western cultures and encouraging other women to explore their own possibilities. As I re-imagine the construction of the “new woman” in the 1920s and 1930s Chinese literary history, I attempt to position Zhang Henshui and other modern popular writers as therapists who prescribed novels as medicine for the masses. In our arguably depression era, women characters in *Gold Dust Dynasty* remind us of how important it is to remain confident while in the forge of hard and bitter struggle.

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