Envisioning the Flying Woman: Technology, Space, and Body in China's Print Culture (1911-1937)

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Abstract:

Aviation, which had drastically changed human movement and perception, epitomized the state of the art among all the new technologies developed at the turn of the twentieth century. The discursive Flying Woman in China's mass market-oriented print culture between 1911 and 1937 participated in shaping a new knowledge paradigm, contemporary gender norms, and the collective aspiration to technological modernity in face of constant national crises. This essay delineates the trajectory of how the Flying Woman evolved from the spectacle, which incorporated the male fantasy combining eroticism and new knowledge of science and technology, to the aviatrix of China, whose technological competence, cosmopolitan experience, and patriotism commanded spectatorship, in the vernacular context of the print culture. Examining various ways of "seeing" the Flying Woman, this essay foregrounds the synergy of genres and media to imagine, visualize, and refashion the idea and ideal of femininity and modernity in relation to technology.

Keywords: aviation, modernity, visuality, gender, technological gentility

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Among all the new technologies developed at the turn of the twentieth century, aviation, especially that of the airplane, epitomized the state of the art that had drastically expanded the prospects of human movement and perception. Its rapid development, portrayed in texts and visuals of print culture all over the world, created a sense of accelerated modernization. China's mass market-oriented print culture in the early twentieth century, itself the product of new printing technologies, provided texts and visuals (e.g. drawings and photos) that enabled its

readers to read about and see new images and novel things. It thus manifests what Miriam B. Hansen terms "vernacular modernism" which encompasses "cultural practices that both *articulated* and *mediated* the experience of modernity." The word "vernacular" combines "the dimension of the quotidian" with "connotations of discourse, idiom, and dialect, with circulation, promiscuity and translatability" (60, emphasis added).

This essay examines the Flying Woman, or the pairing of woman and aviation, in China's booming print culture during the turbulent years between 1911 and 1937. The source materials include an array of texts and visuals, such as news reports, (non-)fictional stories, interviews, travelogues, illustrations and photos. Straddling between fictional and historical, foreign and Chinese, textual narration and visual depiction, the Flying Woman is a discursive icon portraying and producing ideas and ideals of technological modernity and how women should be part of it. More specifically, I analyze a gallery of the Flying Woman to delineate the trajectory of how she evolved from the spectacle – images (of courtesan) incorporating the male fantasy that combined eroticism with new knowledge – to the aviatrix of China commanding spectatorship for her technological competence, cosmopolitan experience, and not the least, patriotism. China's print media, with their "cross-fertilization of a variety of genres and styles" and "cross-platform saturation of affective immediacy" (Pickowicz et al. 10-11), had actively contributed to the complicated processes of valorizing modern science and technology as new knowledge essential to realizing a unified modern nation-state and reshaping social (especially gender) norms and Chinese society.

The iconography of the Flying Woman in China's flourishing print culture overlaps in many ways that of the equally discursive Modern Girl, who appeared around the world between WWI and WWII (Weinbaum et al.). Their visibility in public space and visuality as icons rendered them translatable and consumable and therefore gave rise to disputes over femininity and modernity, especially in terms of women's emancipation. Like the Modern Girl, the Flying Woman is also characterized by "global-straddling multidirectional citation practices," in which "iconography, commodities, and ideas" travelled and were reworked to be locally deployed (Weinbaum et al. 10). The deeds of foreign flying women were cited and commented upon in China's print culture to promote women's education in modern science and technology, but Chinese flying women's invariable endorsement of nationalism was a local response to constant national crises. Most different from the Modern Girl who upset social and gender norms, the Flying Woman's relationship to patriarchal social order is highly ambivalent.

Chinese courtesans in the early twentieth century survived and thrived through their clients' consumption of their visibility (public appearance) and visuality (photos, drawings, advertisement, etc.). Their images as the Flying Woman in photos or drawings catered to their client's fantasy of new knowledge and their desire to boast cultural sophistication. Meanwhile male intellectuals and cultural entrepreneurs translated and published stories of foreign flying women. The media coverage of the American aviatrix Katherine Stinson (1891-1977), who flew to Japan and China in 1916 and early 1917, brought to Chinese spectators and readers a real-life Western Flying Woman, who embodied a new genteel femininity featuring technological knowledge, courage, and global horizon. In China's crisis decade of the 1930s – which started with the Mukden Incident in 1931, the Shanghai Incident in 1932, and continued into the outbreak of a total war with Japan in 1937, aviatrixes Lin Pengxia 林鵬俠 (Lin Peng-Hsieh, 1904-1979) and Li Xiaqing 李霞卿 (Lee Ya-ching, 1912-1998) came back to China, bringing with them technological trainings of aviation to save the nation. Both aviatrixes travelled extensively to investigate China's borderlands and their transportation infrastructures. Despite their shared patriotism and technological competence, Lin and Li exemplified different ideas of genteel femininity – with different implications of imagining technological modernity. This essay concludes with a brief discussion of the film *The Women Pilots* (*Nü feixingyuan* 女飛行員, 1966) to open up further discussions on the issues of technology, gender, and social ideals in China.

Visualizing Technological Gentility

In the early 1910s modern science and technology were still curiosities and novelties for most Chinese. As I argue elsewhere, they were not only seen as instruments to save the nation and strengthen its (military) power, but also served as literary resources to feed the reader's appetite for modern fantasy and as a new indicator of their cultural sophistication and cosmopolitanism (Kunze). The cover of one 1911 issue of the *Fiction Eastern Times* (*Xiaoshuo shibao* 小说时报) featured a woman high up in the air:

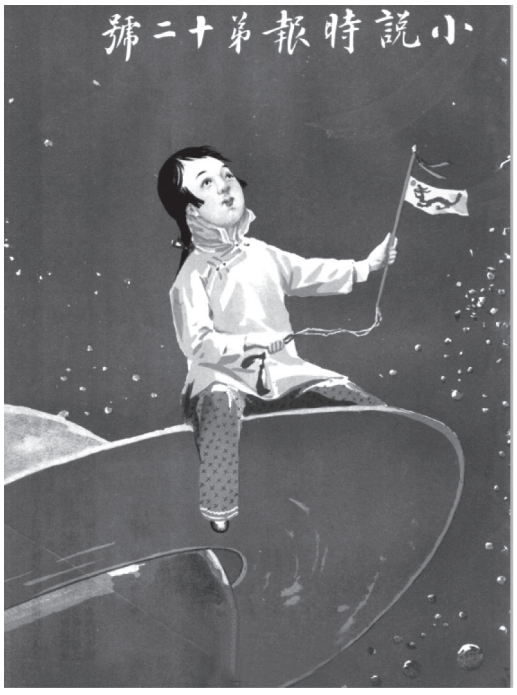

Fig. 1. Cover image (Artist unknown). *Xiaoshuo shibao*, 1911, no.12.[1]

Against the dark background, which appears to be outer space with meteorites, a woman with bound feet in bright-colored clothes sits on the rings of Saturn, waving a yellow national flag of the Qing government which carries a dragon and a flaming pearl. Her hairstyle and attire – high-collared vermillion blouse and green flowered pants – suggest that the image might be modelled on contemporary courtesans.[2] This sexualized female figure is positioned in a location conceivable only with the knowledge of modern astronomy while the national flag indicates the new awareness of the nation-state.

The first image of Chinese aviatrix may be the one depicted in the 1913 collection *Brand New Illustrated One Hundred Beauties* (*Xinxin baimeitu* 新新百美圖) by commercial artist Shen Bochen 沈泊塵 (1889-1920). While the drawing shows a stylish woman flying a plane, the accompanying text situates this audacious modern woman within the classical poetic world of beauties, birds, clouds, and

1 All the visual sources (photos and drawings) in this paper were downloaded from the following databases: 晚清期刊，民国时期期刊全文数据库 and大成老旧刊全文数据库, which the author accessed through CrossAsia, a research portal hosted by Berlin State Library.

2 This image has a similar appearance to that of the courtesans on the next pages of the magazine. It was customary to print copper-palate photos – of beauties (Chinese or foreign), landscapes, and news – in the first pages of magazines in the early twentieth century. Many of the Chinese beauties were courtesans. For the "increasingly blurred parameters of female visibility and respectability" in early Republican China. see Joan Judge 2013.

flowers.[3] In her study of Republican ladies' portraits, Joan Judge (2013) brings together woman and airplane through a reading of two groups of photographs, which appeared in, respectively, the *Women's Eastern Times* (*Funü shibao* 婦女時報) (1916) and the courtesan album *New Photographs of Graces* (*Xin jinghong ying* 新驚鴻影) (1914). Like the *Fiction Eastern Times*, both were published and distributed by the Youzheng Book Company (*Youzheng shuju* 有正書局), whose owner Di Baoxian 狄葆賢 (1872-1941) also possessed the Minying Photography Studio (*Minying zhaoxiangguan* 民影照相館). Equipped with the latest reproductive technologies ranging from photolithography and photogravure to collotype printing, the Youzheng Book Company was able to produce a large quantity of photographs with high quality. The *Women's Eastern Times*, China's first commercial women's magazine that shared the same male editors with the *Fiction Eastern Times*, published in 1916 a group of montaged photographs titled "China's aviatrix Miss. Zhang Xiahun (*Zhongguo zhi nü feixingjia Zhang Xiahun nüshi* 中國之女飛行家张侠魂女士)," who made a brave passenger flight when attending an airshow at the Nanyuan Aviation School in Beijing and got hurt in a minor accident there. These montaged photos visualize China's aspirations to aviation technology and a new womanhood embracing dangers and nationalist discourse through her "incursion into global and masculine space" (165). The courtesans in the *New Photographs of Graces*, on the other hand, posed passively in mock airships that were props of the photo studio. Whereas the photos of Zhang Xiahun (1895-1938), a twenty-year-old woman from a good family, record "a singular moment" of "a particular woman," Judge argues, the photos of her courtesan others present "repeatable moments with interchangeable women and identical props" (167). By juxtaposing these two groups of photos produced by the same publisher at a short interval of two years, Judge demonstrates "aviation's multifaceted appeal in the early twentieth century" and the "social distinctions" marked in these images of women (167). Both groups of photos render the female body visible by moving it into public space, but their different visual presentations of the female body in relation to space and aviation technology reveal the print media's biased use of photography technology to treat the linking issues of technological modernity (symbolized by the airplane), social class, and gender.

Given that socialization with courtesans remained an aspect of gentlemanly life in early twentieth-century China, the images of courtesans in the photos and on the cover of the *Fiction Eastern Times* attest to a historical moment, when the

3 For the drawing and an analysis of it, see Louise Edwards, *Citizens of Beauty: Drawing Democratic Dreams in Republican China* (University of Washington Press, 2020), 168-170.

new knowledge of modern science and technology intersected with male literati's "old" cultural life. In both cases the courtesans bear the gaze and projection of fantasy on the part of their (male) patrons/readers, who expected to be entertained and pleased by their new images. Despite the difference between the expressionless (historical) courtesans in the photos and the (imagined) enthusiastic girl riding the rings of Saturn, the photos and the drawing all celebrate the new knowledge of the nature and the technology of aviation. I propose the term "technological gentility" to tease out the relationships between new knowledge, social hierarchy, and gender norms visualized in these sources. As a centuries-old notion, "gentility" calls attention to "deeper veins of norms and belonging" in social and cultural lives and their "continuation and endurance" (Starr and Berg 6) in Chinese society. The notion "technological gentility" intends to describe the reconfiguration of gentility in a new context, in which technological literacy and competence replaced classical studies and literary accomplishments as the major cultural capital to gain social prestige and define genteel femininity and masculinity.[4] Meanwhile the political ideology of patriotism (of the nation-state) had obtained a strong moral dimension and become a new form of moral righteousness of gentility. Focusing on the process of change, this notion is used here also to reveal a continuity between China's long meritocratic tradition and the technocratic mentality of Republican China and its dream of realizing a developmental state (Kirby). My discussion of gendering technological gentility, furthermore, foregrounds technology, social class, and woman's emancipation as linking issues in this changing process.

"Technological gentility" was articulated and mediated in China's print culture, which offered both texts expounding "useful" modern science and technology and visuals substantiating – sometimes undermining or contradicting – them with images of objects, human bodies, and landscapes. Its extensive use of visual materials belonged to "a global trend of a rapidly expanding scopic desire, abundantly evident from the fascination with and proliferation of panoramas, museums, world expositions, train tours, posters, pictorials, theater, vaudeville, photography, X-ray, and silent cinema" (Pickowicz et al. 11). Christian Henriot and

4 This does not mean classical studies and literature have disappeared from Chinese social life in the twentieth century. Wu Shengqing cogently shows in her *Photo Poetics: Chinese Lyricism and Modern Media Culture* (Columbia University Press, 2020) that literati's classical literary practices productively interacted with the new technology of photography. Masculine gender norms in early twentieth-century China were also remade through the promotion of martial values and military skills, see Nicolas Schillinger, *The Body and Military Masculinity in Late Qing and Early Republican China: The Art of Governing Soldiers* (Lexington, 2016).

Wen-hsin Yeh acknowledge the function of images to introduce "new perceptions and new social figures" (xx), but caution that "[i]mages never tell obvious stories despite – or perhaps because of – their immediacy" (xxiv). As I show below, framing and compositional strategies, (manipulation of) visual conventions, and not the least, the readers/spectators' expectations and affective needs, all contribute to how visuals are shaped, interpreted, and experienced. The iconography of the Flying Woman from 1911 to 1937 demonstrates constant negotiations among the spectacle, the spectacular, and the spectator, in which the technology of photography did not just put forward evidence based on its visual verisimilitude but also envisioned the ideal genteel woman and the future of technological modernity for China.

Translating the Flying Woman

In 1911 the *Women's Eastern Times* published stories of foreign flying women. In a short essay introducing British and French aviatrixes, (Zhou) Shoujuan［周］瘦鵑 (1895-1968), one of the most prolific English-to-Chinese translators, novelists, and editors in Republican China, praised these aviatrixes for their courage, flying skills, and handling of dangers with aplomb. Like his colleague Bao Tianxiao 包天笑 (1876-1973), whose 1908 short science-fiction story (*kexue xiaoshuo* 科學小說) "The Aerial Warfare of the Future (*Kongzhong zhanzheng weilaiji* 空中戰爭未來記)" claimed that "the twentieth-century world is a world of aviation" (Xiao),[5] Zhou stated in this text that the twentieth century would be a century of aviation (Shoujuan). It is difficult to identify the original names of the aviatrixes mentioned in this essay, but one illustration was a photo of Élise L. Deroche (1882-1919) and the other possibly showed Therese Peltier (1872-1926).

Zhou's translation of a "Diary of Aviation (*Feixing riji* 飞行日记)," authored by a certain American lady Mrs. Julia Thomas (*Meiguo choulihen tuomaisi furen* 美國仇麗痕托麥司夫人), appeared later in 1911. Containing two entries, it offers a first-person narrative of a woman's experience high up in the air. The narrator told in the first entry about her unforgettable passenger flight in the balloon in 1908 with her husband Dr. Thomas, who ran an aviation business. They travelled from home

5 A genre from Japan, *mirai-ki* 未來記 was a "literary device for refiguring the past" in the sixth and seventh century, whose "Meiji variant" overlapped with the political novel and "attempted to extrapolate past experience and present understanding into accounts of future realities." See Kyoko Kurita. "Meiji Japan's Y23 Crisis and the Discovery of the Future: Suehiro Tetchō's *Nijūsan-nen mirai-ki*." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 60, no. 1 (June 2000), pp.5-43, esp. 6-7. Liang Qichao's 1902 *The Future of New China* is perhaps the best known Chinese version of the Meiji variant.

(location unspecified) to New York City in one day. The second entry described how she parted, with difficulty, from her nine-year-old boy who was going to fly to Portland with his father (Wumen). The genre of the diary allows Mrs. Thomas to describe her experience and perspective as firsthand. She had an incredible bird-view of landscapes, felt like an ascending immortal (*dengxian* 登仙) (perhaps a free translation), and savored the physics phenomenon that thinner air conveys sound more slowly than on the earth. Upon arriving in New York City, she observed from above that the national defense facilities around New York Bay were weak. Mrs. Thomas also noted many spectators when the balloon took off, upon arrival, and on the way: the fact that she saw men on the ground taking off their hats shows that the Flying Woman won admiration and respect from those (men) who could not (afford to) fly.

The speed of the new means of transport, as Wolfgang Shivelbusch tells us about the case of the railway, led to "a shrinking of space" (33) while increasing "geographical connections" (53). In this story, aviation as a means of civil transport allowed its passenger to gain sensory experience of even faster speed and, more importantly, as new technology it offered its passengers the opportunity to do things impossible on the ground, such as testing scientific theory and commanding a vantage point of "seeing" from above. Mrs. Thomas' narrative of her unusual experiences of speed and new horizon also maps the geographical space of the nation (from New York City to Portland). Appearing in the same year (1911) as the courtesan cover image discussed above and in a magazine produced by the same publisher, this translated text foregrounds Mrs. Thomas as an active, female "seeing" subject, even though her narration of flying is contextualized in a patriarchal society – her flight was financed by her husband and she saw it her duty to raise the adventurous offspring with love and stoicism.

When Katherine Stinson arrived in Shanghai and performed airshows to tens of thousands of spectators in early 1917, the American aviatrix and her images in the print media fleshed out the inspiring and aspired foreign Flying Woman. Well-known for her acrobatic flight stunts, Stinson was the first American woman who flew to the Far East. Fan clubs developed all over Japan to honor the "Air Queen." She held airshows in Shanghai and Beijing. Up to 40,000 people reportedly watched her aerial stunts in Jiangwan, part of today's Shanghai (Keffeler, Bailey). The portrayals of Stinson and her airshows in China's print media formed an intertextual and multi-genre network: her life story and speech were told and retold; her performances were described in local news and illustrated with photos, extolled in verses of classical form, and interwoven into fictional narratives by Chinese authors. All these show Chinese spectators' various experiences of "seeing" Stinson

the Flying Woman and, via print media, they also expanded the spectatorship and their affective responses from those on site to a much broader readership. Stinson as a contemporary figure who operated her machine to fly across oceans and continents, furthermore, stimulated China's imagination of its own aviatrix.

In an unfinished story *The Future of Chinese Women* (*Zhongguo nüzi weilaiji* 中國女子未來記, 1916-1917), possibly inspired by Liang Qichao's 梁啟超 (1873-1929) equally unfinished *The Future of New China* (*Xin Zhongguo weilaiji* 新中國未來記, 1902), Stinson is mentioned as a real-life role model for woman, who masters the newest of new learning – aviation. The protagonist of this story Wu Shaohuai 吳少懷 appears to be an ideal genteel woman in 1910s China, who, under the auspices of her father, studied "new learning" and foreign languages (English and French) with missionary teachers and developed a strong sense of responsibility as a modern citizen. In order to promote the independence of young women from poor families, she founded a school providing them with modern education. Wu the fictional character refers to the historical figure Stinson as "an American lady flying her airplane to Shanghai last year:"

> Once she arrived in China, the whole country marveled at her. Tens of thousands of people rushed to watch her airshows, willing to pay much for the tickets. Even those from Suzhou and Changzhou travelled to Shanghai for no other purposes than to see her fly (Yi 89).[6]

Stinson inserted in this fictional narrative, and Mrs. Thomas like her, are translated modern women for their Chinese contemporaries.

From the passage cited above we may also fathom the amazement and excitement aroused by Stinson's airshows. One spectator, for example, wrote a poem in the form of regulated verse to commemorate his/her viewing experience among "tens of thousands of people," "all looking up" at Stinson "flying freely up and down like a goddess." The narrator expressed the fascination with her flying ability by comparing her to the immortal with esoteric knowledge: "Now that she possesses the techniques of accessing the heavens, she must know what happens up there" (Lu). This author carried on the social tradition of Chinese literati to write a poem to record a memorable event and have it circulated (published). Now that the content of this poem dealt with the latest modern technology, which went well beyond his/her understanding, the author had no other way but to resort to Chinese

6 All the translations of source materials are mine unless otherwise indicated.

mythology to boast his/her firsthand encounter with aviation and aviatrix. Female poet Zhang Mojun 張默君 (1884-1965) was apparently also one of the spectators on the ground and she also published a poem in 1917 on the event in the *Women's Eastern Times*. As the elder sister of Zhang Xiahun mentioned in last section, Joan Judge (2015) notes, Zhang Mojun briefly mentioned her younger sister's story of flying in her poem. This literary practice, in Judge's view, "implicitly draws global parity between Stinson's stunts as a pilot on a world stage with Xiahun's aborted passenger flight" (215).

Photos of Stinson not only visualize her as the personification of the state-of-the-art technology and social respectability, but also convey vividly the enthusiasm of her spectators. *Pastime* (*Yuxing* 餘興), a magazine distributed by the Youzheng Book Company, printed photos of Stinson and her airshows in consecutively two issues in 1917. They show the aviatrix smiling in front of her machine; the images of the airplane taking off, doing stunts in the air, and landing; and not the least, a large crowd of spectators on the spot.[7] Remarkably in two photos Stinson posed with the Defense Commissioner of Shanghai Lu Yongxiang 盧永祥 (1867-1933) and his entourage.[8] In one of them (Fig. 2), Lu sat in the passenger seat of Stinson's plane.

Fig. 2. Shanghai military official Lu Yongxiang posed with Stinson in her plane. *Yuxing* 1917, no.26.

7 "Photos of American Aviatrix Miss Stinson's Airshows 美国飛行家史天孫女士試演飛機之寫真," *Yuxing* 餘興1917, no. 25 and no 26, pages not indicated. Baily cites photos from the *Eastern Miscellany* 東方雜誌 (254), some overlap those in *Yuxing*. Photographers' names were given in neither of the magazines.

8 "Photos of Defense Commissioner Lu and Miss Stinson Sitting in the Same Plane 盧護軍使與史女士同乘飛機之攝影," *Yuxing* 餘興1917, no. 26, no page numbers indicated.

The photo positions the highest military official of Shanghai in the center, whose status of dignitary is further emphasized by his men standing outside the machine, three in civil clothes (traditional robes) and three in military uniform. While the aviatrix leaned naturally forward in her airplane, Lu sat stiffly and passively, ironically reminiscent of those courtesans in mock airships. Despite his awkward position, Lu smiled slightly, appearing proud of trying Stinson's machine personally, even though it stood on the ground. In this photo Stinson was placed side by side with Chinese male elites (military and civil). Her gender was addressed – as the feminine "Miss S(tinson)" in the captions – but not stressed. Her androgynous look in aviator's hat and flying togs and perhaps also her foreignness (otherness) all tone down the fact that this was young woman who grasped the state-of-the-art technology and who could boast her extraordinary mobility across oceans and continents. Her plane, on the other hand, is positioned diagonally across the photo and claims a much conspicuous existence. Consequently, this photo bespeaks less interest in the Flying Woman than in the airplane as the epitome of industrial civilization and aviation as military technology.

Female spectators and women's magazines, in contrast, made sense of the aviatrix in terms of gender and technology. The *Ladies' Journal* (*Funü zazhi* 婦女雜誌) , a magazine published by the Commercial Press (*Shangwu yinshuguan* 商務印書館) targeting female readers from middle- and upper-class families and promoting a new womanhood with literacy of modern science for efficient home management, cited Stinson's speech in Shanghai to argue for the compatibility of woman with aviation and even her superiority to men as the pilot. Women, including her sister, could fly and do stunts in the air, Stinson was reported to have said, and that if men, like women, did not damage their brain- and willpower by indulging in smoking and drinking, they would become equally wonderful aviators (Jizhe).

In 1918 the *Ladies' Journal* published a science-fiction story titled "China's Aviatrix (*Zhongguo zhi nü feixingjia* 中國之女飛行家)" (Xie), one year after Stinson's visit. It tells a story about a fictional Chinese aviatrix Su Yufen 蘇毓芬, who spent three years learning flying in London and came back to China to do airshows in order to inspire her countrymen to learn modern technology. She worried about China and was critical of Chinese men, whose self-claimed newness lay only in superficial consumption behaviors such as driving a car or eating Western food (2). In one performance Yufen's plane crashed in a storm. She landed on a wild island, which she found belonged to China, and survived with her knowledge till her compatriots, who came to mine the phosphate reserve on the

island, saved her.

Supported by her open-minded father, a rich Hong Kong businessman, Su Yufen the imagined Chinese aviatrix studied abroad while developed patriotism so she would put her skills into use for China. "Miss Su's flying skills," the spectators of her airshows in the story claimed, "is far better than Stinson, the currently best known aviatrix" (3). With detailed description of how Su operated her biplane, how she made fire by grounding her mirror to collect sunlight, and how she made sure to eat enough vegetables to keep herself healthy, this story brings together two kinds of survival through science and technology: Yufen's bodily survival on the island with her knowledge about nature and China's national survival with modern technology (e.g. aviation) and science, as demonstrated by Yufen the aviatrix.

The illustration of Yufen (Fig. 3) in the magazine, however, fails to visualize the qualities of a new genteel woman depicted in the story:

Fig. 3. Illustration of the story "China's Aviatrix." *Funü zazhi* 1918, no.1. Illustrator unknown.

Following the compositional conventions to portray "women of [poetic] talent (*cainü* 才女)", this illustration presents Yufen as a frail and sentimental genteel woman: her discreet female body is accentuated by the neat dress and combed-up hair; her poetic sorrow is pictured through her lone position in a melancholy landscape of the cliff over the ocean and the familiar symbol of wild geese in the distance. The fact that the illustrator had to turn to earlier visual conventions of the genteel woman to depict the fictional aviatrix, who should be physically and mentally strong enough to

survive a plane crash on an uninhabited island, exemplifies the epistemological and social changes at the time, when the illustrator failed to envision China's aviatrix and portray the qualities of gendered technological gentility she embodies.

Gendering Technological Gentility

In reality, Chinese aviatrixes emerged in the 1920s. They received attention from China's print media in the 1930s, together with their counterparts in the U.S., Britain, France, and Soviet Union, among them Amelia M. Earhart (1897-1937), Amy Johnson (1903-1941), Maryse Hilsz (1903-1946), Polina D. Osipenko (1907-1939), Dorothy Hester (1910-1991), and Lindbergh's wife Anne Morrow Lindbergh (1906-2001). In addition to Lin Pengxia and Li Xiaqing discussed below, sketches, interviews, and photos portrayed Chinese aviatrixes, such as Zhu Mufei 朱慕菲 (1897-1932), Zhang Ruifen 張瑞芬 (Katherine Sui Fun Cheung, 1904-2003), Wang Guifen/Canzhi 王桂芬/ 王璨芝 (1900-1967), Zhang Qianying 張倩英 (Hélène Tsang, 1910-2005), Li Yueying 李月英 (1912-1944), etc. Like the fictional characters Wu Shaohuai and Su Yufen, most of these aviatrixes came from prestigious families of high social and economic status, which enabled them to learn flying in Europe and North America. Both Lin Pengxia and Li Xiaqing came from wealthy merchant families originating in the southern provinces of, respectively, Fujian and Guangdong; Zhu Mufei's father served as the head of the Aviation Bureau under Sun Yat-sen's government in 1919; Wang Guifen was the daughter of Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875-1907), the revolutionary woman martyr; Zhang Qianying's father was a high Kuomintang (KMT) official in Zhejiang province.

The institutionalization of aviation in China started in the 1920s. The Canton Aviation Bureau was set up in February 1922 and the Guangdong Military Aviation School in September 1924 (O'Keefe 136). During the Nanjing Decade (1928-1937), the Nationalist government built airports and developed civil aviation "through official joint ventures with Pan American and Lufthansa" (Kirby 148). In 1923 Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), then the head of the military government in Guangzhou, and his wife Song Qingling (1893-1981) hosted the inaugural flight ceremony of the biplane designed and built by Sen Yat Young 楊仙逸 (1891-1923). To show her confidence in China's aviation technology, Madame Sun requested to fly as a passenger in the biplane, which was consequently named after her Christian name *Rosamond I.* The prominent couple was photographed in front of the plane and Sun calligraphed "aviation saves the nation (*hangkong jiuguo* 航空救國)" to commemorate the occasion (Chang). It is not known whether this was the first time that Sun pronounced the dictum or whether he was the person who coined it. In any

case this extensively quoted dictum has been attributed to Sun to spell out the eager expectation that aviation would build and defend a unified China.

Amy O'Keefe shows that male aviators were made media celebrities around the period of 1928 and 1933, whose flights symbolically mapped a unified China and whose appearances in, for example, the illustrated magazine *The Young Companion* 良友, embodied the hopes of China's potentials and competitive power in the world (136). Zhang Huichang's 張惠長 (1899-1980) publicity flight through twelve provinces from Guangzhou to Nanjing in 1928 was a "symbolic unification of a territory fraught with schisms" (144, also see Chang); while Sun Tonggang's 孫桐崗 (1908-1991) daredevil flight from Germany, where he was trained as a pilot and received his license, to Nanjing during June-July 1933 in an airplane bearing the dictum of "aviation saves the nation" attracted young people's interest in aviation when China was facing the real threats posed by Japan (151). For spectators and readers, these larger-than-life heroes epitomized the ideal of technological gentility, especially its norms of masculinity, by sporting their militarized male body intimately displayed with their machines.[9] They brought back to China "the most powerful technology and training that the West offered" and endorsed an "able, patriotic modernity" (O'Keefe 136-137).

Like their male counterparts, Chinese aviatrixes were also seen as the embodiment of new gender norms gesturing towards technological modernity. Their media coverage (not limited to the *Young Companion*) came slightly later – around 1932 to 1937, which was right in the time of national crises. These historical flying women, as the cases of Lin Pengxia and Li Xiaqing show, were often cited as examples in the debates over women's emancipation in relation to the nation's pursuit of (technological) modernity. The discussion of the modern woman, whether in the ideal of the enlightened, patriotic New Woman or the image of the troublesome Modern Girl, had entered mass print culture since the late Qing dynasty. It was in the New Life Movement (*Xin shenghuo yundong* 新生活運動, hereafter the NLM), a cultural movement initiated by Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) and his wife Song Meiling (1898-2003), that state power intervened to control the idea of the modern woman. Implemented in 1934 and evoking Confucian and

9 For Chinse reformist intellectuals' advocacy of the militarized male body in the Military Citizen Movement 軍國民運動 in the early twentieth century, see Huang, Jinlin 黃金麟, *History, Body, and Nation: Shaping the Body in Modern China (1895-1937)* 歷史、身體、國家：近代中國的身體形成 (1895-1937). Beijing: Xinxing chubanshe, 2006, pages 46-57, and Schillinger (2016).

Christian values of self-cultivation and corrective living,[10] the NLM was "a post-May Fourth phenomenon" reacting to "the cultural and social revolutions of the twenties," with the emphasis on controlling individualism and political factionalism (e.g. communism) (Dirlik 962, 979). Its strong technocratic tendency manifests itself in the attempt to transpose the goals of industrial management and engineering – rationality, efficiency, and labor productivity – onto the Chinese everyday life and individual body so as to develop China with "maximal efficiency by concentrating power in the hands of experts and ensuring that people performed their proper social functions" (Clinton 138). Nevertheless mass print culture participated actively in shaping social and gender norms, as shown in the case of Shanghai-based woman's magazine *Elegance* (*Linglong* 玲瓏) and its urban female readers, who resisted and negotiated with Nationalist conservatives' control of the female body (Yen). Hsiao-pei Yen notes that the controversies point at two distinct connotations of modernity: for *Elegance* and its readers, "modernity signified individualism and emancipation from traditional confinement"; while for the NLM activists, "modernity entailed technological improvement and institutional innovations that fostered national strength" (182).

Aviatrixes and their media (self-) representations in the 1930s were associated with both women's emancipation and national modernization. As technological elites they were perceived as the role model of the modern woman. Yet as the cases of Lin Pengxia and Li Xiaqing show, they exemplify very different ideas of gender norms and brought with them arguments which blurred the boundaries – instead of marking out the distinctions – between individualism and national modernization, resistance against and consolidation of patriarchal social order.

Lin Pengxia

Born to a wealthy family with Christian background and educated in Shanghai and Tianjin, Lin Pengxia then studied political economy at Columbia University and learned flying in England (Tai 58). Between November 24, 1932 and May 25, 1933 she carried out a self-financed six-month solo travel to the Northwest of China, covering the provinces of Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, and Suiyuan 綏遠 (areas including today's Inner Mongolia). She contributed her travel accounts to an array of magazines and newspapers – the above-mentioned *Elegance*, *Ladies' Monthly* (*Nüzi yuekan* 女子月刊), *Borderland* (*Bianjiang* 邊

10 According to Elmer T. Clark, Chiang and his wife sought "the aid of the Christian missionaries of all denominations" at the beginning of the New Life Movement. See Clark, *The Chiangs of China*. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c. 1943 (war edition), 90.

疆), *Aviation* (*Feibao* 飛報), *Taya-Pictorial News* (*Daya huabao* 大亞畫報), etc. – before publishing them into a nearly 300-page travelogue *Journey to the Northwest* 西北行 in 1936.

At the end of 1934 Lin Pengxia was selected by the *Young Companion* as one of the ten "ideal women (*biaozhun nüxing* 標準女性)" for her "adventurous spirit (*maoxian jingshen* 冒險精神)." Notably, except for her and swimmer Yang Xiuqiong 楊秀瓊 (1919-82, for her sportiveness), most of the "ideal women" represented fairly "traditional" genteel qualities such as social and economic prestige, filial piety, wifely virtue, literary talent, and artistic talents (partly relocated in the 1930s as dance and film).[11] Given the reputation of the *Young Companion* to have "reflected and generated the changing perceptions of gender roles, social norms, cultural boundaries and traditional femininity" (Lei 113), Lin's selection into the "ideal women" shows that her courage displayed in the adventurous trip was acknowledged as a quality of genteel femininity. This "adventurous spirit," as Lin made it clear throughout her book, was not for individual gratification, but rather served the meaningful purposes of developing the borderland for the nation.

Lin Pengxia's travelogue situates her trip against the backdrop of national crises. Upon the outbreak of the Shanghai Incident in 1932, her mother asked her to leave Singapore, where she was tending the family business, to go back to China to provide service on the battlefield. Too late for the war in Shanghai, which ended in truce in May, Lin followed her mother's suggestion to investigate the Northwest. The purposes were to collect firsthand information and to practice the Christian tenet of universal love (3). In other words, Lin made the trip to practice filial duty and patriotic duty at once. Her travel responded to the intellectual and official discourse on Opening Up the Northwest in the 1930s. Jeremy Tai argues that this discourse not just betrayed "territorial anxiety" but also showed a reorientation intertwined with "a pursuit of a command economy and the articulation of Chinese fascism" by conceptualizing the Northwest "as a locus of early Chinese empires" and the "long-forsaken ancestral homeland" of the Chinese (18-20). Lin hoped that her travelogue could appeal to overseas Chinese and persuade them into working with the Nationalist government to develop the Northwest ("Preface One" 3). She specifically disclaimed any individual reasons involved in her trip by stating that her ancestral land (*zuguo* 祖國) was her lover (22). Her travelogue with the first-person narrative provides abundant information on the natural and historical landscapes

11 No Author. "Ideal Women 標準女性." *Young Companion* 良友畫報 99 (1934): 22.

and resources, local transportation infrastructure, and ethnical groups and societies. She took nearly one thousand photos on her way ("Preface 2", 4). They were used as evidence and documents to record what she saw in the Northwest and to present herself – as an educated and patriotic traveler, observer, and commentator who strongly promoted women's education and emancipation. Li's travel and travelogue reiterate China's territorial sovereignty and bring in Muslim, Tibetan, Mongolian, and overseas Chinese into the Chinese nation.

Lin Pengxia kept her flying skills low-key in her travelogue. With her friends' caution of "not carrying out the investigation in the style of a flying tourist" (4), she chose to travel with local transportation means – long-distance bus, car, donkey-drawn cart, raft, etc. – to get into close contact with common people. In an interview with the magazine *Woman's Voice* (*Nüsheng* 女聲) in 1933, Lin explained that the work of developing the Northwest, especially women's education there, was much more important than showing off her flying skills (Bi 12). Nevertheless, her aviatrix identity stood out in all the reports on her travel and in her social interactions with local elites and government contacts. She was reported to have delivered speeches on her way, propagating the significance of aviation for civil transportation and national defense.[12] As a matter of fact, Lin's deliberation to travel with pre-modern means of transport precisely brings into relief her well-known competence with the most advanced technology at the time and thereby reinforces her media image as an enlightened woman of knowledge who, as her friend in the Commercial Press Huang Jingwan 黃警頑 (1894-1979) acclaimed, "was not afraid of cold, hardship, and dangers."

Lin Pengxia seemed to care little about her appearance. When the journalist from *Woman's Voice* met her, she "almost failed to recognize her [Lin] as a woman," because "she was in the flying togs and a pair of heavy leather boots" and "her face was swarthy and reddish" (Bi 11). Lin often travelled in men's clothes, sometimes mistaken by villagers for a man (62, 214, 232). Her book contains a portrait of her sitting in a chair, wearing men's suit and tie. If her cross-dressing in travel was for the purposes of safety and convenience, then the self-conscious pose in this portrait seems to indicate a moment of performance – with equivocal implications: does the cross-dressing, which downplays her female body, assert a wish of gender equality, or does it actually confirm the authority of patriarchal social order by concealing her female gender? *Woman's Voice* published two photos of Lin Pengixa: one shows her on horseback (Fig. 4) and the other climbing a tree. While the reader can hardly

12 No Author. "Aviatrix Lin Pengxia Gave a Speech on Aviation 女飛行家林鵬俠演講航空." *The Ladies' Monthly* 女子月刊1.1 (1933): 102-105.

tell whether the small figure on the tree is male or female, from the hairstyle and small stature one may make out that the person on horseback may be a woman.

Fig. 4. "Lin Pengxia on horseback." *Nüsheng* 1933, vol. 1, no. 19.

Against the backdrop of upturned eaves of an ancient-style architecture and a man in military uniform on horseback, Lin looks like a woman warrior of pre-modern time waiting to depart for a battle. Again, this photo captures a moment of performance, in which she acts out "crisis femininity." Louise Edwards uses this term to describe the unusual feminine qualities that (fictional and historical) women warriors in dynastic China demonstrated when "exceptional events provide space for a temporary release from the norms of womanly behaviour (passivity, gentleness and frailty) as they lead armies, wage war and defend cities" (10). The (possibility of) gender parity shown in such crisis femininity, however, is temporary and contained. First, crisis femininity is premised on exceptions – women with exceptional abilities ("remarkable courage and martial skill") and exceptional situations (crisis). Then their energy and capabilities are controlled and channeled to serve their husbands and fathers, that is, the patriarchal social order (10-11). Like women warriors, Lin possessed the exceptional abilities (among them aviation technology as a military skill) and carried out a feat (the adventurous

travel) during the exceptional situation of national crisis. Her embodiment of crisis femininity is visualized in this photo through the quality of militarization, which is closely associated with discipline and service of the nation. More specifically Lin the female technological elite confirmed patriotism as a new disciplining force to contain women's disruptive desires or social transgression possibly unleashed in the modern society, especially by means of consumption.

Lin Pengxia was introduced by *Woman's Voice* as a modern woman who is exactly NOT the consumption-oriented urban Modern Girl: despite the facts that she had studied abroad and had a rich father, "she neither likes dancing, beautiful clothes nor does she need a lover" (Bi 10). Instead Lin's de-sexualized body was cited as an example to promote a "useful (*youyong* 有用)" feminine beauty. An author attacked the women who wasted their time on such "trivial" things as trying to make themselves sexually attractive with "eyebrows like thin crescents," "blood-red lips," "fine clothes," and "meaningless socializations:"

> In a socialist country like the Soviet Union, beauty has a new definition: "The useful (*youyong*) is the beautiful." Measured by this standard, no beautiful women can be found among those keen on painting their eyebrows and lips. Only those like Miss Lin Pengxia, who are fearless in face of long distance and cold and willing to risk herself to serve our society, are the real Chinese beauties! (Hua)

Citing Lin's extraordinary physical mobility and courage to serve Chinese society as the desirable qualities of femininity, this essay chastises the Modern Girl's infatuation with makeup, fine clothes, and socialization as worthless frivolity. In her travelogue, Lin Pengxia herself criticized the Modern Girl, whom she called *"inland modern women (neidi modeng funü* 内地摩登婦女)" or "contemporary women (*shixia nüzi* 時下女子)," for pursuing wrong freedom and emancipation (21). Like the NLM activists, Lin apparently believed that urban consumption corrupted both women and the Chinese culture. She reprimanded the vanity and hedonistic indulgence of "contemporary women," who received modern education yet had no sense of responsibility for the society: "[They] do not seek independence by using their skills and knowledge; all they did was to consume and burden men. They were indeed the origin of social disorder" (236).

She then projected her own Confucian and Christian values, such as filial duty, service, stoicism, and a simple lifestyle onto borderland women. Her praise of the borderland Other, notably, displays her strong disapproval of women's

social transgression of the patriarchal social order: whereas women should receive education to achieve their economic independence, they nevertheless should stay in their "proper" place within the social hierarchy, help maintain the social order, and serve higher purposes of the nation and the society. While she lamented the general lack of education as well as opium addiction and bound feet of women in the Northwest (59), Lin acclaimed the "simplicity and stoicism" of educated women from good families there, with whom those "inland modern women" could not compare (20). Contrasting a poor woman serving her mother-in-law the best food she could get with "educated men" in big cities who spent days accompanying their modern wives in and out of cinema and dancing hall, Lin praised the former for following proper social order and practicing the principle of filial piety (46). She saw in Muslim women the virtue of good housekeeping: cleanliness, order, cooking, sewing, supporting her husband and raising her children (113) and in Mongolian and Tibetan women the strong body, thriftiness and bravery (133). Presenting these "female" virtues of borderland women either as readily useful for or as liable to being channeled into the discourse of nationalism, Lin used them to integrate the Northwest into the China nation geographically, economically, culturally, and ethnically. With her self-consciously elitist prescription of the "correct' way to women's emancipation, which should have nothing to do with "selfish" indulgence in pleasure or personal good look, Lin actively joined in endorsing the patriarchal control of the female body.

Li Xiaqing

The daughter of a wealthy businessman and a former movie star, Li Xiaqing learned flying in foreign countries and, like Lin Pengxia, she came back to serve the nation and traveled to borderlands in the 1930s. Different from the austere Lin, though, Li wore "eyebrows like thin crescents," painted her lips "blood-red," varnished her fingernails and toenails, and danced and socialized often in her form-accentuating *qipao*. Nor did she refrain from sporting her flying skills on public occasions. Admired for her stunning feminine beauty, fashion, and wealth as well as unusual flying skills and knowledge, Li maintained a relationship to mass media that operated on the logic of celebrity culture. While media attention helped to boost her reputation, they also turned her into an object of mass consumption and interpreted her technological gentility in terms of privileged access to modern consumer goods, all these tended to sensationalize and trivialize her engagement with China's aviation.

Li Xiaqing built up her celebrity status as a teenage movie star with the name

Li Dandan. After marrying a man from a prestigious family at the age of seventeen, she withdrew from the movie world,[13] but her private life and flying trainings had been well documented in newspapers and magazines. She enrolled for flying lessons at Geneva's Cointrin-École d'Aviation in October 1933 and obtained her private pilot's license in August 1934.[14] She was accepted by the Boeing School of Aeronautics in Oakland, California in January 1935 and graduated as the first woman from the school, receiving her diploma while granted a U.S. private pilot's license (Gully 139-144). Her long-distance flight with her fellow students from Oakland to Chicago in 1935 was reported in the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Weekly* (*Waibu zhoukan* 外部週刊) and the literary magazine *Saturday* (*Libai liu* 禮拜六), both using the same photo of her in flying togs and high heels posing in front of the Ford Trimotor.[15] Li Xiaqing returned to China shortly before the Chinese New Year of 1936. She was welcomed by women's magazines for raising women's interest in and willingness to work for China's aviation development,[16] but the tone of local entertainment newspapers, such as *Lih Bao* (*Li bao* 立報) in Shanghai, was ambivalent: she was introduced as a former movie star that had transformed into Miss Li Xiaqing "now known for her courage in the world of aviation" (B).

Li Xiaqing helped launch the China Flying Club (*Zhongguo feixingshe* 中國飛行社) in March 1936 and served as its instructor. In February 1937 she flew with the Euroasia Aviation Corporation (*Ouya hangkong gongsi* 歐亞航空公司) to inspect China's civil air routes and aviation facilities, covering Nanjing, Luoyang, Chengdu, Xi'an, Kunming, Zhengzhou, Taiyuan, Beiping.[17] According to Patti Gully, whose book on China's aviatrixes contains a biography of Li, she was permitted by the Captain Walther Lutz to "take the controls of the big 16-seater Junkers JU/52" that was "equipped with state-of-the-art technology" because she had logged some time on a tri-motor aircraft at the Boeing School (154). In March and April 1937 she spent six weeks flying as a volunteer transport pilot to inspect the Southwest for the government-owned Southwestern Aviation Corporation (*Xinan hangkong gongsi* 西

13 Li married Zheng Baifeng 鄭白峯, a graduate from the Sorbonne, member of China's Foreign Service, and the nephew of Dr. Zheng Yuxiu 鄭毓秀 (Tsceng Yu-hsiu, 1891-1959), China's first woman lawyer and judge. See Gully, 126-136.

14 No Author. "China's Miss Li Xiaqing Obtained Pilot's License in Switzerland 我國李霞卿女士在瑞獲飛行員執照." *Aviation* 飛報227 (1934): 17.

15 *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Weekly* 67 (1935), illustration, no page number; *Saturday* 596 (1935), illustration, no page number.

16 No Author."Chinese Aviatrix Li Xiaqing Arrived in Shanghai 中國女飛行家李霞卿抵滬." *Women's Monthly* 婦女月報2.3 (1936): 30.

17 No Author. "Interview with Li Xiaqing Who Travelled through the Country 航行全國女飛行家李霞卿訪問記." *Social Welfare Daily* 益世報, 12 Feb. 1937: 4.

南航空公司) (154-55). Thus Li actively contributed to developing aviation in China by performing airshows, training pilots, and strengthening China's air sovereignty. The fact that she, in contrast to Lin Pengxia, travelled purely by air over China (both as passenger and as aviatrix) suggests her self-awareness of her status as a technological elite.

Li Xiaqing was presented as an exemplar of the career woman in the *Young Companion*, who symbolized, in the magazine's own English translation, the "modern womanhood."[18] Li Xiaqing herself also wished to be viewed as a patriotic aviatrix with courage and technological competence. She turned the news of her divorce in 1936, which appeared even in KMT's official newspaper *Central Daily News*,[19] into a promotion of her career by claiming her resolve to devote herself to China's aviation (Gully 145-48). In her 1937 interview with *Elegance*, she explained that her inspection tour was to help the Southwestern Aviation Corporation to evaluate the possibilities of expanding civil airlines. In particular, she called attention to the dangers she risked (snow, fog, mountain ridges) in the two inspection tours and her plan of writing a book entitled *The Romance of Airways in China* (never published) to report her inspection results and introduce current aviation developments in foreign countries. Seeing Li vexed by the question evoking her past as a movie star, the *Elegance* journalist concluded: "She seems to want to forget her former career [as a film star]; forget it, so that she can start anew as a strong woman of our time" (1903).[20]

In a 1937 photo published in the NLM-affinitive magazine *Healthy Home* (*Jiankang jiating* 健康家庭), Li Xiaqing was practicing calligraphy writing the dictum "aviation saves the nation." This photo, however, was printed side by side with another one showing her partying and drinking cocktail with a group of well-dressed young people.[21] While the latter photo, as the English caption "At a party" aptly indicates, visualizes the upper class glamorous lifestyle of consumption, the Chinese caption "Relatives and friends get together happily" shifts the focus to the values of family and friendship. These photos and their captions exemplify the vacillation of Li's celebrity media image between a patriotic, engaged technological elite and a consumption-oriented Modern Girl.

18 "New Women 新女性." *Young Companion* 良友1936, no.120, illustration, no page number.

19 No Author. "Aviatrix Li Xaiqing and Zheng Baifeng Divorced 女飛行家李霞卿與鄭白峯離婚." *Central Daily News* 中央日報, 17 March 1936: 3.

20 No Author. "Interview with the Aviatrix Li Xiaqing 女飛行家李霞卿訪問記." *Elegance* 玲瓏 7.24 (1937): 1908-1903.

21 He Hanzhang 何漢章 (photographer). "Private Life of Aviatrix Miss Li Xiaqing 女飛行家李霞卿女士之私生活." *Healthy Family* 健康家庭 3 (1937): 16.

The report of *Lih Bao* upon her arrival in 1936 started with a detailed description of the "magnificent living room" and Miss Li in her light blue *qipao* and brown high heels. In this interview Li talked about her experience of learning flying, revealing that each teaching hour at the Boeing School of Aeronautics cost 16 to 48 dollars, which were exorbitant prices for the newspaper's average readers (B). Other interviews opened similarly with the journalist's gaze at Li's body and her meeting room, which effectively locate Li's aviatrix career in the popular imagination of a consumption-based technological modernity. Her meeting room, the reader of *Social Welfare Daily* (*Yishi bao* 益世報) was told in 1937, was decorated with a yellow wooden aircraft propeller hung on the light green wall and two silver aircraft models standing on the piano. The first thing the journalist from *Elegance* noticed was Li's hair "rolled up in a half curve, the latest style of 1937."[22] In 1937, the illustrated magazine *New Life* (*Xingsheng huabao* 新生畫報) and the above-mentioned *Healthy Home*, both promoting the NLM agendas, published photos of Li Xiaqing, with similar titles in English: "The Private Life of Miss Li

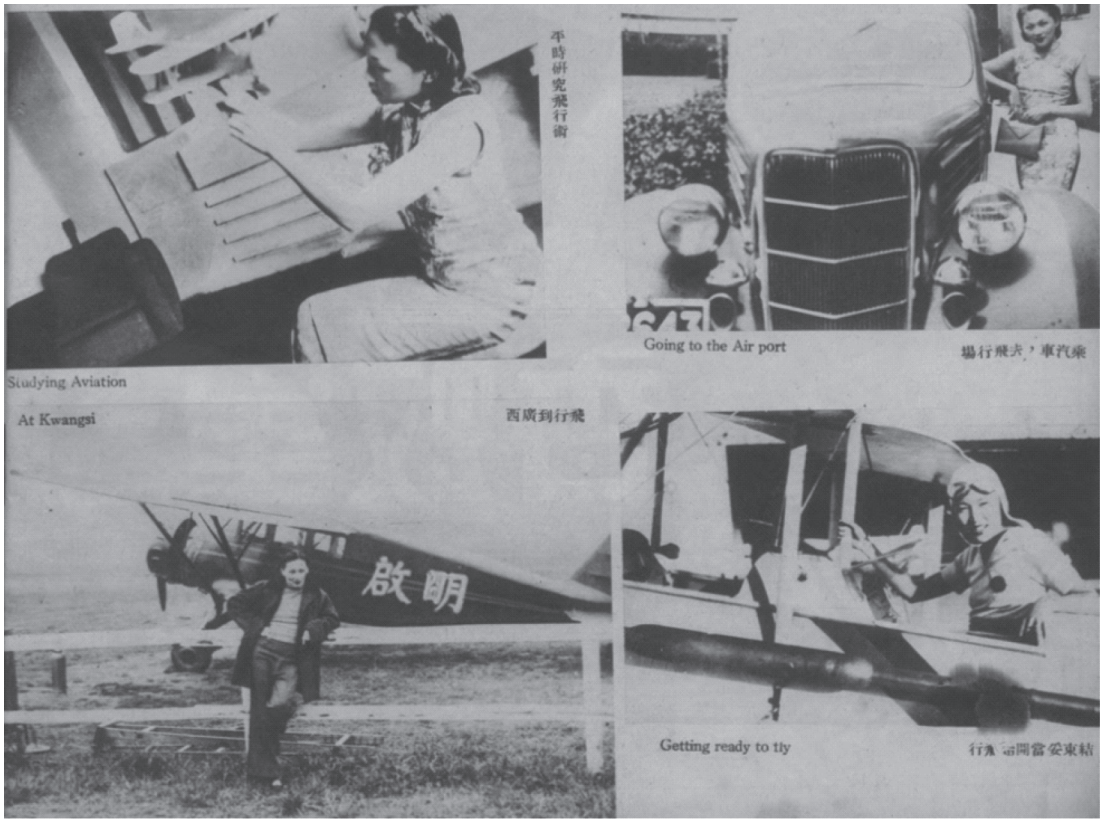

Fig. 5. "Private Life of Miss Li Hsia Ching." *Jiankang jiating* 1937, no. 3

22 *Elegance* 7.24 (1937); *Social Welfare Daily*, 12 Feb.1937. Quoted translation by Gully, 155.

Hsia Ching/Lee Yia-ching." The sixteen photos in *Healthy Home* and eight on the two-page spread in *New Life* visualize Li as an embodiment of genteel femininity who was versed in both "classical" and new genteel activities: she read (aviation journals), wrote (diary and calligraphy), appreciated the beauty of flowers in her garden; and she also kept her body fit by playing tennis and riding horses (sportiveness); and most important of all, she lived a life surrounded by the latest technological products: the typewriter, the camera, the radio (for weathercast); the car (to drive to the airport); and the aircraft.[23]

The captions of the four photos (Fig. 5) in *Healthy Home* intend to present Li Xiaqing's life as one centering upon aviation: she was studying the airplane model at home and standing in the garden ready to drive to the airport; she was sitting in her machine before departure and pausing in Guangxi during her flight. Yet one of them – the photo of Li in *qipao* holding her handbag next to a car – speaks a quite different message of technological modernity from her patriotic commitment to aviation. The disproportionately large car, which squeezes the aviatrix to the upper right corner of the frame, catches the reader's attention – and less possibly as a vehicle carrying Li to the airport than as an enviable foreign consumer good and a symbol of modern lifestyle made possible by the new technology of automobile.

The ambiguous relationship between Li's career, modern technology, patriotism, and her sexualized body in public (both male and female) gaze facilitated tabloids' gossip and rumors about her, which referred to her past as a movie star to mobilize both social and gender prejudices against her. On October 24, 1936 Li performed flying stunts on the fiftieth birthday celebration of Chiang Kai-shek, when aircrafts bought through a national fund-raising campaign were christened and, according to Gully, "one hundred and fifty thousand souls made their way to the celebration" (151). *The North China Herald*, the most influential English-language newspaper, reported the event as a sign of "the increasing air-mindedness of China and the growing spirit of national solidarity." It noted the spectators' liking of Li's performance and praised her for promoting woman's role in advancing China's aviation:

> Miss Lee Ya-ching's part in the day's ceremonies was, of course, greatly to the taste of the crowd. Women have played so admirable a role in developing aviation in other countries that China is right in welcoming this

23 He Hanzhang, "Private Life of Aviatrix Miss Li Xiaqing," *Healthy Home* 3 (1937): 14-15; Zhang Wenjie 張文傑 (photographer). "Aviatrix Li Xiaqing 女飛行家李霞卿," *New Life* 新生畫報 1 (1937), no page number.

young lady's vindication of her sex's ability in the air.[24]

This report's enthusiasm resonates with Chinese spectators' amazement at Stinson's airshows only two decades ago. And it stood in stark contrast to the sensational rumors emerging around November 1936 in Chinese tabloids that Li was an inferior pilot, whose show was actually performed by a male pilot hidden in her airplane. Some said that all Li could do was to bring the aircraft into the air and flying stunts had to be done by other male pilots (Shenme). Some reports emphasized on her "sudden transformation" from a movie star into an aviatrix and circulated "the unverified information (*chuanshuo* 傳說)" that she could not operate the aircraft at all (Yunü). Yet others defended Li by pointing out that gender prejudice worked against her repeatedly in her application for positions as flight instructor or as pilot (Changgan, Haoshi). Gully also notes that Li "had struggled with government red tape at every turn" before her performance in October 1936 (152), but she does not specify what happened.

Li Xiaqing left China for the U.S. towards the end of 1938 and would spend the next years carrying out her goodwill tours in North America, South America, and Central America, raising funds for civil relief in China. Her last reappearance in China's print media was in 1939, when her was dubbed "China's Amelia Earhart" and, interestingly, her charity efforts were placed side by side with the news of her joining the Paramount film *Disputed Passage* (1939), performing the role of a Chinese aviatrix.[25]

In Lieu of Conclusion

The examination of the Flying Women as a discursive icon in China's print culture has traced the epistemological, ideological, and social transformations between 1911 and 1937 in response to constant national crises. Embodying the rise of (gendered) technological gentility, the iconography of the Flying Women articulated China's aspirations to technological modernity at individual, collective, and institutional levels and participated in the debates over women's emancipation. The technology of photography as part of vernacular modernism not only offered historical evidence of but also visualized ideas and ideals of the modern woman as translatable and consumable. The case study of Lin Pengxia and Li Xiaqing in the

24 No Author. "Shanghai Notes: China's Air Effort." *The North-China Herald*, 28 Oct. 1936:136.

25 No Author. "Chinese Aviatrix in the USA: Three Positions of Li Xiaqing 中國女飛行家在美國：李霞卿的三種姿態." *Young Companion* 149 (1939): 40.

1930s in particular shows how the interplay among national crises, imaginations of technological modernity, mass print culture, as well as women's social class and physical (but hardly social) mobility shaped and complicated the iconography of China's aviatrix and, essentially, the debates over women's role in modern China.

Socialist China made institutional efforts to improve women's education as part of the CCP's (Chinese Communist Party) programs of women's emancipation and social hierarchy flattening. Such "Chinese socialist feminism," developed from "urban liberal and Marxist feminist discourses of the May Fourth Cultural Movement (1915-25)," stressed "the central role of women workers and peasants" (Wang 596). These institutionalized practices effectively integrated women from worker's and peasant's backgrounds into labor force, while at the same time made their social mobility possible. Women "working with heavy machinery had particular saliency" in the visual culture of early Socialist China (Chen 270); posters of female parachuters depicted empowered, bodily strong women as part of Socialist China's military modernization.[26] *The Women Pilots* (dir. Cheng Yin 成蔭, Dong Kena 董克娜), produced shortly before the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, offered another vernacular form (film) to visualize aviation technology, social class, and gender.

A group of young women from various family backgrounds (peasant, revolutionary martyr, teacher, etc.) were trained as female pilots for China's new air force. Through the character Qiaomei, the film dramatized the transformation of a peasant girl into a pilot, whose stoicism, patriotism, and hard work helped her overcome low education level, physical weakness (vertigo), and low self-esteem to become the first woman of the team to fly solo. Technological knowledge remained central in China's modernization project, including the Socialist Era, and those who could access and possess aviation knowledge would enjoy high social esteem. On the other hand, by placing the girls in the army, the film put the female body and its movement in the quintessential context of discipline and control. It therefore conflated, or forced, the rural young woman's personal aspiration to social mobility into the national aspiration to military modernization. The continuities and changes in the relationship between women's technological literacy, femininity, and social respectability and mobility across 1949 deserve a separate discussion.

26 See posters of women parachuters from 1955 to 1984 here: https://chineseposters.net/themes/women-parachuters. The transformation of their image from the calendar girl in the early 1950s and a more muscular and belligerent version in the 1960s is noted by the website.

Acknowledgement: I thank Nathaniel Isaacson, Marc A. Matten, and the anonymous reviewer for their valuable comments.

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