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978-1-108-41975-8 — Women and the Periodical Press in China's Long Twentieth Century

Edited by Michel Hockx, Joan Judge, Barbara Mittler

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Women and the Periodical Press in China's Long Twentieth Century

In this major new collection, an international team of scholars examine the relationship between the Chinese women's periodical press and global modernity in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The essays in this illustrated volume probe the ramifications for women of two monumental developments in this period: the intensification of China's encounters with foreign powers and a media transformation comparable in its impact to the current Internet age. The book offers a distinctive methodology for studying the periodical press, which is supported by the development of two bilingual databases of early Chinese periodicals. Throughout the study, essays on China are punctuated by transdisciplinary reflections from scholars working on periodicals outside of the Chinese context, encouraging readers to rethink common stereotypes about lived womanhood in modern China and to reconsider the nature of Chinese modernity in a global context.

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Women and the Periodical Press in China's Long Twentieth Century

A Space of Their Own?

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For Harriet Evans
An inspiration to all of us

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Victorian Woman's Magazines: An Anthology (2001), with Kay Boardman; *The Women's Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and Women's Magazines* (1991), with Ros Ballaster, Liz Frazer, and Sandra Hebron; and numerous journal articles, chapters in books, and edited or co-edited volumes. She was an Associate Editor of the *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* (2009) and is Senior Advisor to the Boards of the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals and ESPrit (the European Society for Periodical Research). She is an Honorary Research Fellow in the School of Arts and Media at the University of Salford, Manchester, having retired from the English Department at Manchester Metropolitan University.

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Dangerous Tunes: The Politics of Chinese Music in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the People's Republic of China since 1949 (1997); *A Newspaper for China? Power, Identity and Change in China's News-Media, 1872–1912* (2004); and *A Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture* (2012), which won the Fairbank Prize 2013. She is also the editor of *Asian Punches: A Transcultural Affair* (with Hans Harder, 2013). Currently, she is finishing another book-length study on women's magazines and a joint book with historian Thomas Maissen on the Renaissance and China.

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Acknowledgements

This volume has been a long time in the making. It is the product of a conference entitled “Gender and Transcultural Production: Chinese Women’s Journals in their Global Context, 1900–2000,” which was held at SOAS University of London in May 2011. We are extremely grateful to the American Council of Learned Societies, which awarded us a conference grant under its “Comparative Perspectives on Chinese Culture and Society” program, and to the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange, which funds the program. In addition to funding the conference, the ACLS/CCK grant also provided a generous publishing subvention that has greatly facilitated the publication process and enabled us to include all of the images we wanted to appear in the volume. We must also acknowledge the many other agencies and institutions that helped subsidize various aspects of the London conference: the SOAS Centre of Chinese Studies, the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies, HCTS (Asia and Europe in a Global Context) at Heidelberg University.

The conference, which included 24 participants from six countries, would have been a logistical nightmare without the support of Alicia Filipowich at the York Center for Asian Research, York University, Toronto. Alicia managed flight details and reimbursements with unfailing efficiency and good nature. We also want to thank Jane Savory and her team at SOAS, who provided invaluable local assistance.

The London meeting was not merely a standalone conference on the Chinese women’s periodical press. It was also the culmination of a three-year international collaborative project on “Gender and Cultural Production: A New Approach to Chinese Women’s Journals in the Early 20th Century,” funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the German Alexander von Humboldt-Foundation’s Transcoop Programme. The conference was an opportunity for the six members of the project who attended (Michel Hockx, Joan Judge, Barbara Mittler, Grace Fong, Liying Sun, and Doris Sung) to share their research and to further refine the project’s methodology for reading the periodical press. It was also the occasion for the launch of the digital component of the project, the database “Chinese Women’s

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Magazines in the Late Qing and Early Republican Period” (womag.uni-hd.de), and its follow-up, the “Early Chinese Periodicals Online Database” (ecpo.uni-hd.de). We owe a tremendous debt of thanks to our digital team, who constantly refined the database’s functionality, uploaded data, and organized metadata. We are immensely grateful to our database technician, Matthias Arnold of the Heidelberg Research Architecture (HRA), Heidelberg University, and to our two former database program managers, Liying Sun and Doris Sung, both contributors to the volume, who have now moved on to exciting new stages in their professional careers.

The transition from vibrant conference to coherent volume would not have been possible without the support of Cambridge University Press. Lucy Rhymer showed enthusiasm for the project from the moment we presented her with the idea, and she continued to offer thoughtful support as we navigated the publication process. We also want to thank the various members of the Cambridge team: Melissa Shivers, Ian McIver, Laura Blake, Anamika Singh, Shubhangi Tripathi, and our conscientious copy editor, William H. Stoddard. We also owe deep thanks to the two readers for the press. We greatly benefitted from their detailed and insightful suggestions and criticism of the original manuscript. Their input has strengthened the final volume in innumerable ways. Last but not least, we want to thank Ms Wai-hing Tse of the SOAS Library for assisting us in getting a high-quality image for the book cover.

We owe a huge intellectual debt to those who participated in the conference as discussants but who are not represented in the volume. They include Jan Bardsley, Parnal Chirmuley, Natascha Gentz, Andrea Janku, and Francesca Orsini. We have special thanks for Jennifer Scanlon, who launched the conference with her illuminating keynote lecture, “Ephemeral, Material, Instrumental: Meditations on Women’s Magazines.”

Our final round of thanks is for the contributors to the volume. These include our “outside experts,” who were willing to grapple with the particularities of the Chinese case, and our “China experts,” who were willing to think hard about the methodological challenges and transcultural dimensions of the Chinese women’s periodical press. Each of them has endured multiple rounds of revisions and long periods of wondering if their essays were ever going to make it into print. The volume would never have come together without their fine work, energy, and commitment to the project.

Note on Sources

Two databases provide online access to digital copies of many of the journals discussed in various chapters in this volume. Their search and browsing features offer researchers access to indices of articles, illustrations, advertisements, key terms, and personages appearing in these journals.

Chinese Women's Magazines in the Late Qing and Early Republic (WoMag: womag.uni-hd.de)

This database of the Heidelberg Research Architecture (HRA) is a key component of a collaborative project first funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the German Humboldt Foundation, and further expanded with additional funding from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation. It is a joint project, conducted by researchers at York University, Toronto; Academia Sinica, Taiwan; and the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies. The focus is on four seminal women's or gendered journals – a key genre of the new media – published between 1904 and 1937: *Nüzi shijie* (Women's world, 1904–07), *Funü shibao* (The women's Eastern times, 1911–17), *Funü zazhi* – *The Ladies' Journal* (1915–31), and *Linglong* – *Linloon Magazine* (1931–37).

The database facilitates research on these periodicals. It highlights the journals' pictorial material, including materials normally excised in reprinted or digitized editions, such as advertisements. It provides online access to digital copies of the journals from cover to cover, and its search and browsing features offer researchers access to indices of articles, illustrations, advertisements, key terms, and personages. It therefore mobilizes and interrelates various bodies of data (e.g., visual and textual) within the same tableau, enabling its users to create horizontal and vertical narratives and interconnections between them. The database is ultimately not simply another electronic archive, but can serve as the basis for new forms of historical research. It is of interest to scholars of cultural history and of Chinese cultural, print, literary, women's, and art history.

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Early Chinese Periodicals Online (ECPO: ecpo.uni-hd.de)

ECPO was originally created by the Heidelberg Digital Humanities Unit, the Heidelberg Research Architecture (HRA), in collaboration with Taiwan's Academia Sinica. It joins together several important digital collections of the early Chinese press and makes them available to scholarly communities around the world.

Developed jointly by many of the authors of the book, this database is distinguished from all other existing databases of Chinese periodicals in that it not only provides image scans, but also preserves materials often excluded in reprint, microfilm, or digital (even full text) editions, such as advertising inserts and illustrations. In addition, it incorporates a sophisticated body of metadata in both English and Chinese, including keywords and biographical information on editors, authors, and individuals represented in illustrations and advertisements. By framing the journals with this body of metadata, ECPO enables researchers to establish interconnections between, for example, specific individuals, topics, or illustrations over the entire run of a particular periodical or across different periodicals. These capabilities open new horizons in Chinese studies. Using ECPO, the researcher is able to nuance, challenge, and potentially refute existing narratives of historical and cultural change.

Illustrations

High-resolution color versions of the illustrations in this book are available at <https://doi.org/10.25354/2017.06.1>

Most images contained in this book can also be found in the two databases introduced above, WoMag and ECPO.

Online Resources

All online resources cited in this volume are permanently available through the Digital Archive for Chinese Studies (http://www.zo.uni-heidelberg.de/boa/digital_resources/dachs/). We have created a repository for this volume.

Conventions

In discussions of Chinese periodicals, the first mention gives the pinyin transliteration of the title, followed by the English translation: for example, *Nüzi shijie* (Women's world). Subsequent mentions use the English translation: for example, *Women's World*.

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If publishers gave a journal an English name we use that name as our translation. At the first mention, we give both the Chinese and English titles. Subsequent mentions will give the English title: for example, *Funii zazhi* – *The Ladies' Journal*; *Linglong* – *Linloon Magazine*.

Preface: The Role of Gender in Defining the “Women’s Magazine”

Margaret Beetham

“Women’s magazines? Old women’s magazines? Are there any?” People’s responses when I answer a question about what I am studying often betray surprise and more or less politely concealed contempt at the idea of scholarly attention to a form so ephemeral, so marginal. They never ask, “What are women’s magazines?” or “How do you study them?” There is a common-sense view that we already know the answers to these questions and could all recognize a women’s magazine at ten paces and, as for reading it, nothing could be easier. As I and all the authors in this volume have discovered, such “common sense” fractures under critical scrutiny. We have to answer the implicit question “Why study women’s magazines?” – a form that until recently was below the horizon of the academic gaze. However, even more basically and surprisingly for my hypothetical questioner, we have to define the object of our study. What is a women’s magazine? What is it that the writers in this volume see as the object of their study, a study mostly of the recent past of China, a country not normally associated with this particular print genre?

Historians have often turned to periodicals of various kinds, including magazines, for facts about, or contemporary views of, a particular period; literary critics have extracted poetry or fiction; art historians have looked for visual material. However, the magazine is a slippery kind of form, not single-authored but multivocal, heterogeneous in terms of genre, and with a particular relationship to time that complicates periodization. It juxtaposes different kinds of writing or textual and visual representations, it mixes voices, and, because it comes out at regular intervals over a period of time, it resists closure – even as it presents each number as self-contained. If we ignore these formal qualities and try to treat the magazine simply as a repository of facts, or of literary gems from the past, we miss the particular qualities that the form can bring to our historical understanding. All the characteristics of the magazine listed above open up the complexities of the past as no single-authored or single-genre work can, but these characteristics also present methodological problems. They challenge our modes of reading. Of course, I and others engaged in this field would argue that it is precisely this complexity that makes the magazine such a potentially wonderful resource for historians of all kinds – literary, cultural, and social.

And this is abundantly demonstrated in the range and variety of scholarship represented in this volume.

What happens when we add gender to this already rich mix? Katherine Shevelow, among others, argues that the rise of the magazine in the anglophone world at the end of the seventeenth century was inextricably bound up with gender, as it was with class.¹ Scholars of the nineteenth-century press, particularly Brake and Fraser *et al.*, though coming at periodical study from different perspectives, argue cogently that periodical forms, such as the magazine, are intrinsically gendered, though the way gender works in and through them is not stable.² However, the “women’s magazine,” as we now understand the term, makes the role of gender central and explicit. This is what distinguishes it.

The “women’s magazine” has its roots in the late eighteenth century/early nineteenth century, and by the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century had become an important part of the magazine press globally, as the chapters in this volume attest. However, as I have suggested, despite a common-sense understanding of what we mean by the term, it is not easy to define for scholarly research. *The Ladies’ Magazine*, which was launched in England in 1770 and lasted through mergers and title variations until 1847, may be seen as the earliest example of the form, and it defined itself as a magazine written exclusively “by ladies.” However, even a rapid reading shows that this claim is hard to sustain. For one thing, most of the contributors were anonymous or used pseudonyms, a practice that continued and continues to make it difficult for scholars to know the gender of a magazine. Later women’s magazines have almost always employed men as well as women writers, and some of the most famous nineteenth-century English journals, such as *The English-woman’s Domestic Magazine* (1852–1877) and *Woman’s World* (*Lady’s World* 1886–1887, then *Woman’s World* –1890) were openly edited by men (Samuel Beeton and Oscar Wilde, respectively) or edited by men who concealed their gender under female pseudonyms, as did the future novelist Arnold Bennett when he edited *Woman* (1890–1912) in the 1890s. Of course, some women’s magazines that were explicitly concerned with women’s rights did make a point of employing women at all levels of the processes of production, from writing articles through to the print room (see, for example, Emily Faithful’s *The Victoria Magazine*, 1863–1880), but generally the gender purity of production is uncertain, ambiguous, and shifting. This is in part because of the nature of the magazine as a polyvocal, multiauthored work.

¹ Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture*. See also Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer, and Hebron, *Women’s Worlds*, 43 ff.

² Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges*. Fraser, Green, and Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*.

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Recent scholarship, including some in this volume, situates particular magazines within communities of writers, editors and artists, which further complicates the importance of gender as a defining concept of the women's magazine. In terms of production the magazine is more like a film than a novel; that is – even with a powerful editor or “auteur” director – it is the product of a team.³ And beyond the immediate editorial team may well lie other networks of fellow writers, fellow artists, and – of course – readers who bring their own gendered and classed identities to bear.

Turning to readership, then, can we define the “women's magazine” in terms of an exclusively female readership? We can usually find out who the target readership of a magazine is or was, though even that may be unclear. However, I think we can safely say that women's magazines can be defined as aiming to be read by women and usually to be read by a particular group of women defined by social status, education, political persuasion and so on, as well as by gender. This is crucial. Discovering who in point of fact read, or even reads, any kind of published work is extraordinarily difficult. Proving who were the actual readers of magazines is particularly so. Contemporary media research shows that substantial numbers of men read magazines designated for women. Historically, we may look to extraneous information from diaries, letters or other such sources, but these are hard to find. Where there is correspondence or advice columns in the magazines themselves, we can look to see what proportion of those who wrote in to the magazine defined themselves as men, though all the cautions about anonymity and pseudonyms apply.⁴ The methodological challenges are great indeed.

There is a further aspect of readership that both complicates and enriches our research, and that is the way the magazine characteristically seeks to blur the line between readers and writers, rhetorically inviting the reader into the circle of the magazine's community or even inviting actual readers to become writers. This is a function of the way the magazine comes out over time and therefore, in common with other forms of serial, has the potential not only to enter the life of the individual reader in a time-extended way but also to create real or “imagined” communities of readers who are linked through the publication.⁵ To sum up, we can define the women's magazine as having a target readership that is exclusively female, but we cannot prove that its readership is exclusively defined by gender – in fact, evidence suggests the contrary.

Where does this leave us? We may either decide at this point to go and find an easier research topic or, like the writers of this volume, press on to develop

³ See Leary, *The Punch Brotherhood*, for a detailed examination of this in relation to *Punch*.

⁴ For an extended discussion of these problems see Beetham, *In Search of the Historical Reader*.

⁵ The concept of the “imagined community” in relation to periodical readers was coined by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, and has been widely used, and perhaps abused, in periodical studies.

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a more nuanced methodology. Such a methodology must, I suggest, take the foregrounding of gender in the woman's magazine as a starting rather than a finishing point. In identifying women as its target readers, the women's magazine presents these imagined readers with material appropriate to what Judith Butler has called the "performance" of femininity.⁶ Whether it concentrates on domestic matters, on the upbringing of children, on fashion or on family, it is defining an "appropriate" gender role for its readers.

If, as argued above, the magazine is always already gendered, then the presence of women's magazines in a print culture where there is no equivalent flagging up of the masculine as a writing or reading position shows that "woman" here represents the "other" to a norm, assumed to be masculine. The binary of gender means that address to femininity always involves, whether articulated or not, an equivalent masculine norm. Women's magazines, therefore, not only delineate a particular cultural and historic femininity but by implication, by omission, or sometimes by direct admonition can also reveal much about the masculinity that is the cultural norm against which "woman" is defined.

Of course, some of the magazines, including some of those studied here, deliberately sought to challenge accepted definitions of appropriate femininity by offering new models. In particular, the very act of allowing, or even encouraging, women to appear in print might itself be a challenge to traditional concepts of a valued femininity as confined to the private or the domestic. The ambiguous nature of the magazine as a print space that is simultaneously public and yet private is important here. For, as the magazines discussed in this volume show, the unsettling of gender definitions is one of the marks of modernity, like the appearance of print media. The women's magazine, with its interactive and multivocal form, emerged globally in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century as a site in which shifting gender roles could be debated, enacted, or denounced.

There are other methodological problems that the study of women's magazines in a historical context raises. These range from the practical difficulties of finding and delimiting the historical sources to wider questions of what critical and theoretical models are useful for the study. Material problems in relation to historical women's magazines are Janus-faced, often presenting us simultaneously with lack and overabundance. Because magazines are of their moment, ephemeral, they were not always preserved as were more valued literary objects, or, if kept, they were often in partial and fragmented form. Even digital resources, which open up so much for us, cannot completely solve this. They may, however, contribute to the converse problem, which is that, where we can find runs from the past – either material or digital – even a single magazine can provide a daunting quantity of material over the course of just a few

⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, is the work where she first developed this theory.

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years. In seeking to draw on appropriate reading strategies for these texts, we may turn to draw on different theoretical models from elsewhere, including those of philosophers and social theorists, such as Bourdieu and Foucault, or we may look to a Bakhtinian model.⁷

However, whatever the other problems we encounter in our study of the women's magazine, we need, I suggest, to keep the role of gender central, along with the qualities of the magazine. Whatever the body of material to be studied, whatever theoretical models we draw on to develop our research and reading methods, we need to address the complexity of the "women's magazine" in relation to both terms, to genre and gender and to the dynamic between them.⁸ The chapters in this volume show some of the ways in which that task can fruitfully be carried out.

⁷ See Liddle, *The Dynamics of Genre*. See also the discussion in *Victorian Periodical Review*, 44:3 (2011), 291–300.

⁸ See Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?* 1–14 and passim; see also Gough-Yates, *Understanding Women's Magazines*, 6–25 for an overview.

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