

2 Theorizing “Women”

Gender [is] . . . the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. JUDITH BUTLER, *Gender Trouble*

This chapter examines terms for women and their rules of play.¹ It introduces what are for the most part catachreses, or generic terms for women and woman in specific theoretical languages in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. The historical catachreses under scrutiny here are also subject forms. In the “prose of the world,” as Harootunian writes, these subject forms are inextricable from the discourses that “open up a space for tenants to occupy,” change, or alter as conditions are altered. Consequently, one thing historical catachreses encode is information about how, “in the act of appropriation, the subject is constituted by the matter of the discourse.”² These historical catachreses are sometimes neologisms, but they are always conceptual statements and signifiers of a historical reality that is not a transition.

Between the eighteenth- and the early twentieth-century cultural revolutions, the dominant, formulaic historical catachresis in mainstream Confucian regulative gender theory projects was funü. Funü signified the collectivity of kinswomen in the semiotics of Confucian family doctrine. Confucian family philosophy was a specialized style of theoretical writing about being a person in the patriline, and the patriline in all Confucian thought was held to be the literal foundation of the central government. In the “semifeudal, semicolonial” 1920s, when self-avowedly post-Confucian cultural revolutionaries started rewriting the past as a dead “tradition,” intellectuals, creative writers, and social activists invented the word nüxing in the rhetoric of global sex and eugenics theory. Chapter 3 is devoted to analyzing this nüxing catachresis and its implications during the era, which I am calling colonial modernity.

Early in the twentieth century the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took

over responsibility for the organized women's movement. Internal Party debates over what to call the subject women in revolutionary praxis actually continued for decades. An alternative, massified, politicized subject known in CCP diction as *funü* eventually superseded both the Confucian protocols of *funü* and the eroticized subject *nüxing*. In Maoist rhetoric, *funü* referred to a national subject that stood for the collectivity of all politically normative or decent women. Under the Maoist state's centralizing discourses, *funü* got resituated, first within the *guojia* (state) and then, secondarily, through the magic of revolutionary social praxis and ideological metonymy, in the modern *jiating* (family). In other words, Maoism reversed the older convention of woman within and man outside. It imagined a national woman, *funü*, intertwined directly in state processes over the period of social revolution and socialist modernization who, because of her achievements as a state subject, would modernize family practices.

Chinese states, like most states, had always regulated gendered norms.³ But when Maoist thinking increasingly linked the catachreses of *guojia* (nation or state, depending on context), *jiating* (family), *nanxing* (modern man), and *nüxing* (all of these being both neologisms and new social formations), it empowered a modern rhetoric, a system of modern norms. Maoist *funü* existed as one element of a larger discursive constellation, with other modernist, universalist state categories, catachreses like "worker" (*gongren*), "youth" (*qingtian*), and "proletarian" (*wuchanjieji*). *Funü*, that is, formed a part of the "system of designations by . . . which," from the late 1930s until the Deng Xiaoping era of the 1980s, Party "political authorities regulate[d] all important social relationships."⁴ (The centrality of this Maoist system is discussed in chapters 4 and 5 of this book.) *Nüxing*, by contrast, was reclassified in Maoist state theory to mean the reverse of normativity for women, at least in theoretical and political terms. No longer a universal term signifying women, *nüxing* meant a femininity that was "Westernized," "bourgeois," individualist, erotic. Until, that is, the post-Mao era of reform and market socialism, which saw the resurgence of feminist concern with the priorities of sexual difference and a return to theoretical acceptability of this older subject.⁵ (Chapters 6 and 7 are devoted to this shift.)

A remarkable feature of Chinese feminist thinking is its persistence in the face of discontinuity and disruption. In the ruptures and discontinuous accumulation that returned the question of women's emancipation to the national agenda decade after decade lie the traces of enlightened optimism, diminished over the century but never fully defeated. Theoretical Chinese refined and sharpened its analytic vocabulary over the course of these violent ruptures. Perhaps the effect of revolutionary conditions on mass communication and literary expression, mechanisms for recasting gen-

dered personhood, are particularly visible in theoretical Chinese. In any case, a working assumption in the discussion that follows is that these historically complex catachreses of women—*funü*, *nüxing*, *nüren*, *nüzi*—make it possible historically to evaluate the richly contingent, composite, or humanly made quality of regulatory concepts and categories. People thought in these terms, just as people contest, invent, accept, and refine them to this day.⁶

The Subject Women Historically

Recall the question Paul Rouzer posed about the problem of writing a history of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century elite Chinese women. “How does one define ‘woman,’ ” he asked, “let alone ‘woman writer,’ in the seventeenth century?”⁷ Mid-Qing hypergamy, lineage retrenchment and family ritualism, commercial networks and niche marketing to female consumers, commercialization of media, female seclusion and footbinding, as well as the efflorescence of elite female literacy are all preconditions for grasping eighteenth- and nineteenth-century styles of womanhood. But, as Dorothy Ko’s social history suggests, gender cannot be “read off” these data except through singular subject forms. Explaining the sexes historically would involve opening into scrutiny gendering processes and gendered subjectivities and treating them as “historically singular form[s] of experience.”⁸ A way that historians deal at this level of specificity is to read rhetoric naïvely. The guiding assumption is that key words or terms express something about the behaviors, expectations, and enabling constraints that they are describing.

Mou Zhengyun’s genealogy of the key term *funü* is a good example. The study shows the centrality of *funü* in the Qing period and links it to *funü*’s ubiquity in the Maoist era.⁹ Mou, a classicist and Sinologist, tracked key signifiers of female subjects in the canonical works (*Shisan jing*) and dynastic histories or official post-mortems produced after the fall of a prime regime. Using this textual and intertextual resource, Mou establishes that in the period after the mid-seventeenth-century dynastic transition and before the era of state disintegration in the warlord era, 1913–1927, the key word *funü* surfaces in canonical texts more frequently than any other collective noun signifying women. Mou is particularly concerned with how key terms were defined in classical dictionaries and in the official histories. This helps to explain how specific eras may have understood key terms and allows Mou to track changes in definition, implication, and regularity of use. Her point is that between roughly 1750 and 1920, and only those years, the compound word *funü* arose to become the overwhelmingly preferred collective noun referring to female persons.

The transitional decades between Ming and Qing eras saw a meaningful shift in nomenclature. The two kinship terms *nü* (unmarried woman) and *fu* (married woman), previously separate nouns, were combined into a single word, *funü*, and were glossed as the collectivity of all women in the patrilineal family. Previously, particularly in archaic dictionaries, the word *nü* and its compounds, such as *nüzi*, *nü er* (girl child), and *nüren* (female person), meant unmarried girls, and *fu* and its compounds (*furen*, etc.) meant married women. However, although classic texts all use slightly different vocabulary and rhetorical strategies, none except the *Liji* ritual text (dated to the Zhou dynasty, circa tenth through third centuries B.C.E.), included the designation “*funü*,” until, that is, the late imperial Confucian renaissance. In the High Qing and early modern eras a newly coined word, *funü*, had the novel, specialized meaning “women of the patriline.” It would appear from Mou’s detailed analysis that it was precisely these elements of analytic rhetoric that became, in Butler’s terms, the “apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves [were] established” in late Qing governmentability.

The historical event of linking married and unmarried female kin into the single collective noun *funü* was, in other words, a relatively recent development. Also, consistent with the work of Rowe, Elman, Chow, and Zito, who all discuss the surge in concern with ritual order in this era, the late imperial use of the term *funü* specifically defined *fu* in terms of ritual service to the husband and his family. Thus, Mou cites the Qing-era Kang Xi dictionary that the “already married is spoken of as *fu*, not yet given in betrothal is spoken of as *nü*. Parents and child, although she is married, still refer to her as *nü* [daughter].” Even more bluntly, “the already married *nü* [daughter, girl] is spoken of as *fu*. *Fu* means service [*fu zhi yan fu ye*], service to the husband.”¹⁰ Most of the evidence for this consolidation of terms, Mou notes, appears in the histories, where gradually the term *funü* overtook the two previously dominant common collective nouns in circulation for describing people gendered as female, *furen* and *nüzi*. By the end of the dynastic era, *funü* had become the most commonly used term for women in the Confucian theoretical language.¹¹

Mou argues convincingly that marriage itself is the distinction or marking place between *nü* and *fu* because marriage is what makes a *fu* out of a *nü*. What also seems clear from her evidence is that in this unfolding of the historical term *funü*, there is no term present before the twentieth century that might indicate women as a group outside the family (i.e., another gloss on *nüxing*). Eventually, I will show that *nüxing* has as complex a genealogy in modernist sex theory as the terms *nü*, *nüzi*, *nüren*, *nüdi*, *fu*, *furen*, and so on in the Confucian canon that Mou sets out for analysis. Noting the absence in Confucian theoretical languages of a third term

grounding all female kin is only the first step. These terms are, in a nominalist sense, signs of social experience.

Chen Hongmou, mentioned earlier in relation to the work of his biographer, historian William Rowe, was a celebrated government official in the 1740s, 1750s, and 1760s. In the course of his spectacular career, Chen showed particular interest in popular education and took the position that women best served the family and the civilizing process when they were literate. He expressed these views in one long chapter of a much longer work in which he selected and reproduced selections from earlier philosophic texts and appended to them his personal evaluations and comments. Chen's selected pedagogic texts concentrated on names and norms; he drew extensively on writing that established gender normativity by defining and naming things. Although, as Rowe pointed out, Chen took liberal positions, there are several ways that his preoccupations were not personal or idiosyncratic. The texts Chen cited were very familiar to educated readers and many were parables or posed ethical norms through old stories. The positions Chen took on female literacy and behavior in general were in response to the larger, unparalleled debates over womanhood that Susan Mann calls the eighteenth-century *querelle des femmes*. Chen's contribution to the dispute is explicitly normative and definitional. How elite women behaved in relation to these norms surely differed, but even the most refined *guixiu* could not have been unaware of them and to some degree acted in relation to their normative powers.

In the chapter of his *Wu zhong yi gui* (Five posthumous regulations) titled *Jiao nü yi gui* (Posthumous regulations on educating women), Chen spelled out what, in theory and practice, he means by women. The fact that he defined his terms as succinctly and bluntly as he does suggests perhaps that his interlocutors may not have shared his views. However, as is clear in the descriptions and instructions Chen attached to the text, he was very interested in how people behaved and what they should be called. He was preoccupied with the “very apparatus of production,” which is the way “the sexes themselves are established.” Below is Chen’s core definition of woman:

When *fu* [persons, sages, women of rank] are in the *jia* [procreative sublineage unit] they are *nü* (young girls, daughters); when they marry they are *fu* [wives, married] and when they bear children they are *mu* [mothers]. [If you start with] a *xiannü* [a virtuous unmarried daughter/girl], then you will end up with a *xianfu* [virtuous wife]; if you have virtuous wives, you will end up with *xianmu* [virtuous mothers]. Virtuous mothers ensure virtuous descendants. Civilizing [literally, *wang-hua*, or transforming through the influence of the monarch] begins in

the women's quarters [guimen]. Everyone in the jia benefits from the chaste woman zhennü. That is why educating women is so important.¹²

The first point about this definition is that it effectively forecloses the general, social category “all women.” The citation presents a *fu*, who is either a *fu*, when she is married into a patriline, or a *mu* after she has children. Before her marriage, s/he (Chinese pronouns did not distinguish) was a *nü*, or a daughter in a patriline. Chen says that the *fu* is a person of rank who takes shape, is defined, because of differential positioning inside the patrilineal sublineage or procreative family, the *jia*. Quite simply, location says it all. Because the *funü* (Chen does not employ the term here but he does at other points in the *Wu zhong yi gui*) or generic women in the citation include *fu*, *nü*, *fu*, and *xiannü*, I could render the passage into English as follows: “Before [women] are married [they] are *nü/female/daughters*; when [they] get married they are *fu* or wives; and when [they] give birth to children, [they] are *mu* or mothers.” As soon as I render it this way, I have substantiated a category, Women, that does not appear in the syntax of the sentence. The persons whom Chen’s comment addresses and consequently substantiates are primarily wives and daughters, or *funü*. They are women, of course. But, as I will argue, they are gendered by virtue of the protocols specific to their subject positions and not necessarily or even in the first case by reference to the physiological ground they may or may not share with people outside the kinship group.

Funü is a collective noun shaped in relation to differential *jia* positions, whereas *Women* or *Woman* is a transcendental signifier. Chen defines what *fu* and *nü* mean primarily within the *jia*, because what defines and anchors *funü* is the ritual life of the family. Like the writers and editors in the theoretical tradition that Mou discusses in her survey, Chen does not assume a foundational status for *Woman* outside the relations of patrilineal kinship. This has practical, theoretical implications for the way the gendered person is defined. Rather than framing kin-specific situations as examples of “things women do,” Chen is far more likely to explain that acting within specified ethical-practical boundaries produces a recognizable person. His overall argument in this edited and annotated collection of aphorisms, historical examples, poems, and family maxims is precisely that kinswomen should be educated not because they are *educable*, but because civilizing kinswomen raises the general cultural level of the family line and, through the family line, the nation itself.¹³

Funü, or “patrilineally related kinswomen,” in Chen’s family theory, is the context for highly complex subject positions like *xianmu* (virtuous mother); but *funü* is the lowest common denominator for female subjects.¹⁴ The question is: How did Chen’s writing situate human beings in

kin and normative relations like *xianmu* and make them stick? Recall Elizabeth Cowie's early suggestion that rather than presuming that women are prediscursively "situated in the family," it is more accurate analytically to argue that it is "in the family—as the effect of kinship structures—that women as women are produced."¹⁵ Cowie sought to understand kinship not as a system of exchange but as a production line that situated people in social or learned relations. Understood in this way, it is more obvious why abandoning the anachronisms of woman and women is useful to historians. Women may have suffered under the strict performance requirements of their stations in Chen's system, but they suffered as contemporaries of Chen and not as my contemporaries. Also, if the category of *funü* is an instance of gendering in a world where principles of rank and degree of relation to the patriline predominated, and if the evidence supports my interpretation, Chen's theory becomes more than a reflection of social reality. It is the coproducer, the signifier of historical or *real* signifieds. Cowie's willingness to consider the singularity of Victorian sex theory helps suggest that the exchange of actual women in patrilineal, patrilocal Chinese kin fields produced not the sign woman, but a profusion of signs with one thing in common. They are "real" women, but not in a contemporary "prediscursive" sense.

Yin/yang logic rather than the logic of strict opposition (male/female, either/or) characterizes gender theory in Chen's world, just as yin/yang logic can be found underscoring religious, social, governance policy, and judicial theory. Chen used the Han Confucian Dong Zhongshu to reiterate his own views on positional inequality: "There is nothing that does not have a correlate, and in each correlation there is the Yin and Yang. Thus the relationships between sovereign and subject, father and son, and husband and wife are all derived from the principles of the Yin and Yang. The sovereign is Yang, the subject is Yin; the father is Yang, the son is Yin; the husband is Yang, the wife is Yin. [These are the three cords (*gang*), the foundation of civilization.]"¹⁶ Putting this point negatively, Chen's texts do not refer to women's bodies nor to their body parts, nor to universal emotional qualities they all possess as proof of their social existence. Rather, his text argues that disciplined *funü*, stacked in hierarchical relations organized on the basis of yin/yang logic (e.g., *funü* inside the *jia*, men outside it; *funü*'s job is filial caretaking, service to parents, moral instruction of children, and personal normative practice) guarantee the coherence of human culture.¹⁷

Calling these processes social-cosmological activities enacted on the never stable or fully boundaried primary site of the *jia* renders into contemporary analytic language the point late sixteenth-century physician Li Shichen made in his *Materia Medica*. "Normally," he wrote, "qian and kun make

fathers and mothers; but there are five kinds of nonmales [feinan] who cannot become fathers and five kinds of nonfemale [feinü] who cannot become mothers.”¹⁸ Qian and kun are the first and last hexagrams of the I Jing or Book of Changes, which since the Song dynasty has been a foundational text of hegemonic Confucian studies. In the Book of Changes, qian and kun are forces operating in tiandi, the realms extrinsic to human culture, and in the realm of wen, or human social life. They are the paradigmatic forces of yin and yang. Yin and yang are many things: logical relationships (qian and kun, inside and outside, husband and wife), practical forces, and “designations for the polar aspects of effects,” and so, in a social sense, powers inscribing hierarchy.¹⁹ What Li is saying about these medical anomalies is that the dynamic forces of yin/yang do not “produce” women and men (themselves subject positions within yet another discourse) so much as the required civil projects of motherhood and fatherhood, husband and wife, brother and sister, and so on.

The anomaly Li reported had to do with the general instability of bodies in most Confucian discourse. The immediate cases of the nonman and the nonwoman, whose defective bodies forestall production, as well as cases of the castrated, impotent, or vaginally impenetrable and bodies known to change from female to male and from male to female, all present to the physician unstable surfaces that resist customary “gendering.” In Li Shichen and Chen Hongmou’s time, Simone de Beauvoir’s peculiar notion that “women are not born Women but become Women” makes a lot of sense, since the surface onto which eighteenth-century Chinese subjectivities were inscribed (i.e., Li’s fecund body) was more flexible than the (gendering) subject positions that producing sons and daughters enabled women to occupy and possess.²⁰

What appear in Chen’s texts are not the “sexes” as they are normally understood now, but a profusion of relational, bound, unequal dyads, each signifying difference and positioning difference analogically. A nü is a daughter, unequally related to parents and parents-in-law. A xiaozi (filial son) is differentially unequal to mother and father, yin to their yang. A fu is a wife, tied in a secondary or service relation to her husband. A xianfu is a wife who, grasping the powers accorded yin, masters her domain through her familiarity with the sort of protocols introduced below. Obviously (invoking Cowie’s point), subjects got produced within the jia. Chen’s definitions of nü, fu 4, and mu further suggest that although (good) women in the jia did have social relationships outside their immediate family, there was no legitimate or decent position for defining female persons (or male persons, for that matter) outside of the jia.²¹

Chen advocated education for women so that mothers could produce

better filial sons and virtuous daughters, which would enhance the jia and solidify the Throne and foundations of civilization. In Chen's cosmology, female literacy meant moral philosophy, of course, and not poetics. For Chen, literacy, or learning to behave virtuously, and acting womanly were a single continuous arc in which acting normatively was the same as acting "as a woman."

The most important task for "acting as a woman" was the maintenance of difference. "Just as the yin and the yang are different qualities, so males and females should act differently," as Chen's text puts it. Citing Lu Jingxi, Chen underscored Lu's commonplace view that "there is a difference between the rituals of men and women. If you do not maintain the distinction, then you will cause gossip."²² These protocols or gendering behaviors consisted of ritual or elite forms of courtesy. Behaviors, scripted physical motions, manners, and norms shaped what was decent, appropriate, proper, good behavior for each person. Intersubjective norms and gendered experience were inextricable. In the rigorous cadence of these kinds of text—when the daughters act on the protocols of daughterhood and married women act on the ritual expectations of wives, and so on—the distinction between men and women is accomplished and gendering is effected.

Funü itself was internally differentiated, and the educated funü learned how to retain a sense of appropriate distance in ambiguous situations and in conditions where ethical judgments were complex. According to one of Chen's moral stories, the state of Qi attacked Lu during the Warring States era. The Qi general encountered a woman attempting to flee with two young boys. At a certain point, the woman abandoned one child, who told the soldiers that the woman was his mother. When they finally captured her, the woman explained why she had left her own son behind to save her brother's son: in the relation of *gong* and *si*, the ethical extremes of selfishness and altruism, it would have been selfish under the circumstances to save her own child at his cousin's expense. The Qi general returned home and told his monarch that Lu was impregnable because even ordinary women behaved in a morally correct or righteous manner. The monarch of Lu, on the other hand, rewarded the woman with some gold and the title *yigujie*, or righteous elder paternal aunt, for he credited her with saving Lu from Qi.

Actually, Chen disagreed with the Lu monarch's actions. His commentary pointed to the fact that though she was indeed her brother's sister, the *yigujie* was also a wife to her husband and a mother to her husband's son. The *yigujie*, Chen insisted, had actually misunderstood the point of the distinction of *gong/si*. She could sacrifice her husband's child only under

two conditions: if her husband had other sons (or could impregnate her, thereby replacing the dead one) and if her brother had died leaving only this son. Furthermore, the monarch of Lu himself undervalued the competing claims of sororal and marital protocol. The narrative assumed that one child must be abandoned. But, reasoned Chen, the better solution would have involved the death of the *yigujie* herself. Yes, the specific protocols of *funü* (i.e., “sister” and “wife”) led in competing directions. Rather than fail either, however, the *yigujie* should have begged the Qi general to save both boys. This would inevitably have caused Qi to execute her, but what a righteous death it would have been! The parable and Chen’s effort to reread it hints at its own complexity: not only were subject positionalities difficult to stabilize (it was difficult to “do” them correctly), but a person often found herself subject to simultaneous claims from multiple protocols.²³ Nonetheless, the example suggests how *funü* is the subject in this narrative and the importance of kin difference in normative performances.

Archaic ritual texts reproduced in Chen’s textbook spelled out in detail how to behave decently: As a kinswoman [*nüzi*] you must establish yourself in life, for instance. Do not turn your head from side to side; if you wish to speak, do it without moving your lips; if you wish to sit, do it without moving your knees, and if you stand, do not wiggle your skirt. If you are happy, do not giggle, if you are unhappy, do not yell aloud. Inside and outside [the *jia*] kinswomen and kinsmen should be separate. These injunctions are *lishu*, or body etiquette, and Chen cited reams of text from ancient times listing them in minute detail. The protocols of *funü* are not mysterious or malignant. They seem mundane, practical, disciplinary physical movements and frequently personify behaviors, as Chen did when he reproduced the protocol of female host-guest relations using the historical example of Song Shanggong. Host-guest relations should be governed by a principle of purposefulness: walk gracefully in the company of your hostess; arrange your hands just so; accept tea; do not remain for a meal unless pressed, then only touch food to your lips; decline everything; keep your neck bent and head low; stay home whenever possible.²⁴

The true mark of the educated *funü*, though, was not her discipline per se or her ability to master body etiquette (*lishu*), *lijiao* (social etiquette), and *guiju* (conventional behaviors), but rather her ability to devote herself through these codified behaviors to the service of her husband’s family. Regulations for serving the parents appeared in canonical Han dynasty (second century B.C.E. to second century C.E.) texts, the *Liji* and the *Zhouli*, where they gave descriptive, elaborately detailed instructions. All *funü* shared some general behavioral norms, but they did so from specified locations in the family, and tied to each of those locations were precise

service obligations. Chen included two parables that illustrate this point very well. The first involved Lu, wife of Zhang Daizhi, who was passionately attached to her nü daughters. She taught them about everyday life in great detail using the falu [law] concerning victuals and drink, well-executed food, handling meat and fish. Her yunü [youngest daughter] was married to Lu Yinggong. One day Lu went to see her daughter and felt unhappy when she saw that pots and pans were littered all over the room. She told her daughter's mother-in-law [jiaguo furen?] that she should not let the younger generation prepare its own food. Private preparations of victuals and drink ruin the jiafa [family law] [as they allow selfish privacy, to say nothing of bad housekeeping]. How strict the mother was!²⁵

This story distinguished between commendable emotional attachments and the disciplined behavioral protocols that the lijiao dictated. It is fine for a mother to indulge her beloved daughter, Chen noted. But “correct” or theorized family relations are not based on indulgences. The daughter’s primary obligations were to the physical well-being of her husband’s parents. The cult of self-abnegating daughters-in-law was, in fact, a testament to the expectation of service. According to the lijiao, the civilized person, a gongmu (exemplary mother), for example, should enforce the differences that must ritually separate her from her daughter once her daughter marries and becomes someone else’s daughter-in-law. At that point, according to the regulations of the lineage, the daughter is subject to service obligation regulating the lives of her husband’s funü.²⁶

Civility or “correct” behavior rationalizes and scripts relations of difference among funü in the jia. Difference, or bie, has to be maintained among funü, particularly people who are as intimately connected as mothers and daughters. The protocols are, in other words, systems of regulating difference that set people in mutual, unequal relations and inscribe each in terms of correct behaviors. For instance, the general protocol governing gusao (sisters-in-law) in Chen’s text followed a relation that specified a shugu zhi nü xiongdi zhi qi (relation of daughter of one’s husband’s younger brother’s wife and one). A certain Ouyang married into the Liao family and had just produced a baby girl when her husband’s parents died, leaving a girl called Runniang. Ouyang raised the two girls together but egregiously favored Runniang, her own child’s aunt. When Ouyang’s daughter asked why, the mother said, You are my daughter and Runniang is your aunt, the daughter of your grandparents. Besides, you have a mother and she does not. How could I treat you both equally?²⁷ Here, the bie (difference) is generational. Generation trumped the mother-child bond, just as the tension of public and private had trumped surname solidarity in the eyes of the monarch of Lu (though not in Chen’s eyes) in the earlier example. Differ-

ence expresses itself and is adjudicated situationally. In the process, the discourses of difference blanket the field of play.

Chen's instructions rationalized joint subjects like mother-daughter, aunt-nephew. He also included positive descriptions. He cites, for instance, the *Nü lunyu* (women's analects), which states declaratively what protocols are required and how to enact them: The *aweng/agu* (father-and mother-in-law) are the heads of the husband's family. You are their daughter-in-law when you marry. So you must serve them as you did your own parents. When you serve *aweng* your appearance must be tidy. When *agu* sits, you must stand. You get your order from her and then you leave. Get up early and open the door, but be quiet and do not wake people up. Set out parents-in-law's towels and their soap and warm water, and then serve them. Retreat when they are finished. Their rice should be soft and meat overdone, because they are old and their teeth are tender. In the evening or late night put them into bed and leave the room. Do this every day. If others know that you do this they will say that you are a good and kind daughter-in-law.

It appears that in Chen's writing, protocols effect gender relationally because they link good behavior and correct performance of the written texts or recipes which have the primary task of situating and distinguishing kinship differences and service obligations inside the family. Performativity or norms materialized in performance, as Butler has suggested, situate the sexes through tactile differences of many kinds. In this case, the differences include age, rank, birth order, marital status, and thus gender. These protocols were neither mere codes or maps nor merely roles. They instructed people in the way advice literature does and they provided continuously reinforced personalities because they linked the theoretical traditions and contemporary behavioral norms. Protocols formed a bulwark of order against the undoing of difference and positioned subjects in social narrative.

If gender simply means the cultural clothing that women put on over their bodies, then Chinese women were only latent historical subjects or "invisible" historically. But if gender is the processes of the materialization of differences, including the difference of sex, then this *Jiao nü yi gui* shows women, or more accurately, *funü*, to be very much present in the historical record. Here the subject women is not the point. Chen did not have to provide his readers with fully enumerated charts of the differential positions through which the gendering of the sexes, the positing of sex difference, took place. By the eighteenth century the discourse on kin difference had been normalized into the foundational category of broadly shared experience.

Producing Woman (Nüxing)

Imperialism forced into crisis the texts and the world of gendering protocols that Chen Hongmou and those like him had so strenuously attempted to stabilize and reproduce. The Manchu dynasty's long, slow implosion and the imperialists' relentless penetration of the heartland through the treaty port system transformed the political elites' social configuration and powers. Where previously the monarchy and bureaucracy had enabled Confucian officials to regulate the meaningful world, social upheaval dispersed these older powers. The old political order buckled in 1905, when the Qing throne abolished the civil service examination system. Eager to replace the old-style elites and their intellectual commitments, a modern, post-Confucian, professionalized intellectual emerged who oversaw the appropriation of foreign signs into the new, domestic, urban mass media.

In the early twentieth century a new social formation arose calling itself *zhishi jieji* (intellectual class), later *qimíng xuezhe* (enlightened scholars), and finally (under the same forces that produced political *funü* or women as a political category), *zhishifenzi*, or Chinese intellectual under Maoist inscription. *Zhishi jieji* were the educated offshoot of the tiny, very significant new commercial bourgeoisie, who monopolized the appropriation of “Western” ideas, forms, signs, and discourses. In their hands, peripheralization of signs proceeded as new missionary-educated and college-graduated professionals translated, republished, circulated, and commented on texts in foreign languages. Historically, this group constituted itself as a colonialized elite. By that I mean two things. First, the colonial modernization of China forced into existence “new intellectuals”; these elements did not just “import” neologisms from Japan and the European West, but redrew the discursive boundaries of elite social existence. In this way, *zhishifenzi* occupied (and further valorized) the new, modernist, social field of *shehui*, or “society.” Situated inside the treaty ports in a crude material sense—the palladian English banks and French boulevards, the German beer, American YMCA, and Japanese factories—words like *shehui* acquired concrete referents. *Shehui*, a conceptual term, had, in other words, a visual, material, topographic referent in the new urban spaces of Chinese colonial cities. The powerful older theories and words from Chen Hongmou’s time increasingly gave up their eroding referential ground. Once robust conventions were gradually reduced into something intellectuals of the 1920s would call “tradition” and regarded with either nostalgia, contempt, or fear.²⁸

The rising importance of semicolonial urbanity or colonial modernity had a growing effect on conventional gendering practices. A rash of masculinist interest in the universal sign of woman had surfaced as early as the 1830s, when there occurred an efflorescence of what Mary Rankin calls “profeminine” male writing. The convention of men writing sympathetically about the needs of women was not new or remarkable; there were precedents in the various *querelles des femmes* of the eighteenth century. But by the 1860s male reformers were speaking admiringly of “enlightened” relations between women and men in Western countries. Already advocacy of antifootbinding and modern female schooling was part of progressive arguments that the male, new style intellectuals forwarded by the late 1890s and the first decade of the twentieth century.²⁹ Masculinist interest in *nü* initiated, according to Charlotte Beahan, an unprecedented surge in female-authored journalism discourses between 1890 and 1910 inside the slackening old world.³⁰ Calling themselves “sisters” or *jiemei*, these female writers reversed the strategy Chen adopted when he argued for female literacy on the grounds that ethical women in families produce strong states. “Why isn’t China strong?” one woman writer asked. “Because there are no persons of talent. Why are there no persons of talent? Because women do not prosper.”³¹ Late Qing women sought liberty on “nationalist” grounds. The sisters’ publications contributed to what rapidly emerged as “myths of the nation.”³² That is, writers positioned themselves as citizens of the Chinese nation, as advocates of national emancipation from Western imperialism and Manchu occupation, and as different from men of their own Han Chinese nationalist group. On those unimpeachable grounds they sought to mobilize China’s “beloved but weak two hundred million women . . . the direct slaves of slaves.”³³

The expression “slaves of slaves” as a term for Chinese women signified a noteworthy change in the theorization of *nü*. “Slave” referred to male Han Chinese “enslaved” to the Manchu monarchy and thus signaled democratic patriotism. Women, as the slaves of slaves, reached into domestic units to recategorize all Chinese women in a patriotic unity against the myriad imperialists seeking to “divide China up as though it were a melon,” as people put it then. The kin-inflected category of *funü* began a slow, fitful referential shift. In place of kin-inflected *funü*, some writers began to offer Chinese *nüren* (female person) as one specific instance of a universal category consisting of all women, and they did so under a patriotic inscription. An example of the mechanics of the referential shift comes from Zhen Ziyang’s *Nüzi xin duben* (New study book for women), a 1907 collection of stories about virtuous women linked generically to narratives in the Chen Hongmou mode discussed above. The older texts celebrated

“just mothers,” “ethical stepmothers,” and other situated kinswomen who managed the *jia* sphere well, thereby effecting, through their adept use of protocol under difficult circumstances, the space beyond their own *jia*, that is, the *gong* or general world. The modern text, in contrast, provided not one but two sets of ethical narratives about good women, set off from each other in two separate books.³⁴

Book 1 retold stories familiar to readers in Chen Hongmou’s time. These included the ancient story of Mencius’s mother, who sacrificed herself constantly to provide her son an appropriate ethical environment; Yue Fei’s wife, Liang, who personally fought the Nuzhen barbarians on behalf of the Song dynasty; and Hua Mulan of the Liang dynasty, who masqueraded as a filial son and fought as her father’s proxy for twelve years. It also included examples of women who, in the hoary past, had transgressed unfairly gendered boundaries or had been unjustly ignored in masculinist histories. Huang Zongjia, for instance, was born a girl but did not want to be a woman (*nüzi*), so she masqueraded as a man and served as an official; Suo Maoyi allegedly taught the master calligrapher Wang Xizi his calligraphy style; and there were others.

Book 2 assembled a set of parallel stories about famous women of the West who matched or exceeded Hua Mulan’s filial devotion because they served not father, husband, or patriline but the nation. Individual female heroes did not just contribute to the nation through their service to husband and in-laws, as the parables in Chen’s compendium established. They served the nation directly. Charlotte Corday, or “Sha Latuo,” according to the Chinese version of her story, studied at a nunnery for six years and became engrossed in a particular book by Girondist Charles Barbaroux about national heroes. The book’s inspiration sent Sha Latuo to Paris, where she surprised the tyrant Mala (Marat) while he was with his concubine. In prison for his murder, Sha Latuo sent her father a filial letter declaring that tyrannicide was not a crime, and met her death with Puluhua (i.e., Barbaroux’s book clutched in her hands). Another narrative venerated Madame Roland, who studied “the Confucianism of her country” but preferred the example of the Greeks and Romans. After marrying Roland for his politics, she inspired her timid husband to resist Robespierre. When Robespierre executed Madame Roland, her husband committed suicide and their servants, overcome, also petitioned for execution; their requests were carried out.³⁵

The juxtaposition of “Chinese” and “other” stories engendered meaning in two significant ways. First, obviously, the reworked “Chinese” stories and the “Western” parallels jointly showed female heroes shifting their loyalties from husband or father to nation, without directly requiring that

they abandon the prior object. A certain Frances (Frances Willard, perhaps) appears to have been selected because, following her father's death, she remained unmarried and devoted herself to the improvement of North America through a renovation of the family, the nation, and finally the entire world. Nation rose up to peripheralize Father, though never precluding his importance at the personal level.³⁶ Second, the bilateral mutual exchange of Western signs and Chinese narrative had the effect of producing a category of universal womanhood. Chinese narratives changed in a generic sense, that is, when the subjects of their interest became Western women. When Zhen located Chinese female heroes in the company of European women of the state like Joan of Arc, Charlotte Corday, and Madame Roland, the effect was to legitimate and universalize *nüzi* within a statist, universal (i.e., Europeanized) world history. Zhen sought to conjoin bourgeois state revolts like the Glorious Revolution and the French and Italian Revolutions, to the expected Chinese Revolution (the Xinhai Revolution occurred a decade later, in 1911). Giving such remarkable prominence to Western women in their national revolutions, moreover, granted universality to heroic female actions of whatever kind, at whatever time. Remarkably, the Chinese section of the text went so far as to legitimate Wu Zetian of the Tang dynasty, previously reviled as a female usurper and defiler of her husband's throne. Changes in pro-feminine discourses thus conditioned the form that *nüxing* eventually took.

Before the 1920s, however, female heroes continued to rest securely in the inherited binarism familiar from Confucian contexts of hero and the Throne. The term *nüxing* (literally, female sex) erupted into circulation during the 1920s, when treaty port intellectuals overthrew the literary language of the Confucius canon. Critics replaced the *wen*, or culture of the old world, with *wenxue*, or literature, inscribed in a hybrid (part colloquial Chinese, part European syntax that developed as people began reading Western fiction in Chinese translation) literary language. *Wenxue* rested on realist representationalism, and thus supported the production of modernist subjectivities. The field of *wenxue* unfolded in the 1920s as a general terrain of combat for intellectuals. The May Fourth movement of 1919 established *wenxue* as a field of realist referentiality: the second most significant major figure of that new textuality, after the “hypertrophied self”³⁷ of the writer himself, was *nüxing*.

Women by and large did not employ the term *nüxing*, or perhaps more accurately, there is no evidence that women developed this term to describe themselves. Like the recuperation of *nü* as a trope or symbol of nationalist universality in masculinist discourse that Rankin noted, *nüxing* constituted a discursive sign and a subject position in the larger frames of anti-Confucian discourse. When intellectuals overthrew the Confucius canon

they sought the total transformation of “Chinese culture.” The same modernist, semiotic revolution that invoked the new signs of society (*shehui*), culture (*wenhua*), intellectuals (*zhishifenzi*), individualism (*geren zhuyi*), and innumerable other new Chinese words gave *nüxing* or Woman wide and expanding discursive powers. *Nüxing* played a particularly significant role in two separate textual streams: literary representation and the body of writing known as Chinese feminism. Historically, women writers did not predominate in either one.

“Historical languages constitute classes,” Talal Asad observed some time ago; “they do not merely justify groups already in place according to universal economic structures.”³⁸ So *nüxing* coalesced as a category when, as part of the project of social class formation, Chinese moderns disavowed the older literary language of power. After the May Fourth movement (ca. 1919–1937), Chinese writers wrote in a newly modernized, Westernized, semicolonial language in which *nüxing* played the part of a subject of representation and an autonomous agent. *Nüxing* took shape as one half of the European, exclusionary, male/female binary. Within the *zhishifenzi* as a class, this explicit sex binary had a lot of uses. *Nüxing* (like *nanxing*, or male sex) became a magnet. Its universal, sexological, scientific core gave life to a psychologized personal identity. But *nüxing* was also a fulcrum for upending Confucianism and the older forms of social theory, with all its received categories. Chinese translations of European fiction, criticism, science, and social theory placed explicit attention on theories about sex opposition and sex attraction. In particular, colloquial fiction established sex as the core of an oppositional personal or individual identity and woman as a sexological category.³⁹

In other words, the career of *nüxing* firmly established a foundational womanhood beyond kin categories. It did so on the ground of European humanism and scientific sex theory. That is, when it introduced the category of woman as a universal category of *nüxing*, Chinese feminist writing flooded texts with representations of women as the “playthings of men,” “parasites,” “slaves,” as dependents of men or simply as degraded to the point of nonexistence. Feminist texts accorded a foundational status to physiology and, in the name of nineteenth-century Victorian gender theory, they grounded sexual identity in sexual physiology. Probably the most alarming of all of progressive Chinese feminism’s arguments substituted sexual desire and sexual selection for reproductive service to the *jia* and made them the foundations of human identity.

The secret attraction of European texts was their emphasis on what Foucault termed “sexuality,” a “singular historical experience” and a traceable regulative discourse: a historical artifact. When leading male Chinese feminists used the category women as a universal, biological fact and

granted foundational status to the Victorian anthropological binary of male/female, it was often in terms of Chinese women's lack of personality or human essence. (I examine this question in detail in chapter 3 because it is one of the distinguishing factors in the national traditions of Chinese feminism.) In other words, when Chinese translators invoked the sex binary of a Charles Darwin or a Havelock Ellis, they valorized debates about female passivity, biological inferiority, intellectual inability, sexuality, and social absence through reference to the location of these "truths" in European social scientism and social theory. Thus, Chinese women became *nüxing* only when they became the other of Man in the colonial modernist Victorian binary. Woman was foundational only insofar as she constituted a negation of man, his other.

Ching-kiu Stephen Chan's exploration of *nüxing* in the literature of major male May Fourth realist writers makes this point at the level of literary texts. When the intellectual class, or *zhishifenzi*, turned to European-style realism, Chan argues, "the classical mimetic function of realism" required that the writer represent himself through his own representations of the Other, and the Other of male realist choice was woman. *Nüxing* was first and foremost a trope in the discourses of masculinist Western-inspired realist fiction. As Chan puts it, "Textually speaking," *nüxing* appeared in realist texts, "but as an innocent scapegoat, paying for the crimes that society has committed." Indeed, woman appeared within a cruel equation: "The root of your [female] suffering is to be found in my [male writer's] inability to right the wrongs that society has done me."⁴⁰

Chan's point can also be made in a different way. When the modernist female writer Ding Ling began producing texts in the late 1920s, she too had to struggle with the self/other dynamic coded into the man/woman sex binary. Ding Ling's texts, as I develop fully in a later chapter, sought to take woman as a subject position and social psychology. Yet the work she produced during that period of her career invokes a *nüxing* who either must die, commit suicide, or lose herself in sexual excess and mental disorder. A universal woman independent of man had to be forged outside the terms of the simple evolutionary sex binary. In the end, Ding Ling, who continued to write but not as a eugenic woman, abandoned psychological realism.

The social history of *nüxing* is complex: I develop an intellectual history of its efflorescence in the 1930s. However, as it entered elite *zhishifenzi* discourses, *nüxing* as a representation took on a life of its own. Her image appeared in popular movies, in pulp fiction, in photographs and fashions, schools and parks. These representations of *nüxing* reinforced a universal category of woman emerging in the new consumer society. Accordingly, *nüxing* rapidly ceased to be a Western sign and became a sign of modernity

in bourgeois New China. Once it was situated centrally in this new political economy and culture, the sign of nüxing took on a career and a politics of its own.⁴¹

Reproducing Funü

The sex binary man/woman and the sign woman or nüxing never went uncontested. Carolyn Brown has vividly shown Lu Xun criticizing the initial formulation and arguing that the physical body of modern Chinese women “had become the repository of a meaning, the signified, that it did not rightfully bear.”⁴² Social critique from CCP theorist Xiang Jingyu contested what she saw to be a thoroughgoing irrationalization of Chinese new women, nüxing. In her extrapolations from international Marxism she forwarded funü as an alternative name for women as a collectivity.⁴³ Xiang lost no time classifying nüxing as a product of bourgeois preoccupations, and her comments in the early 1920s set the tone of communist theorizing for decades. Regardless, Xiang’s early communist funü reentered modern theory the same way sexed nüxing had, in zhishifenzi recoding, usage, and rearticulation of social theory. In the process of transmission, communists, socialists, and social scientists systematically used the Confucianized, late imperial, collective compound funü to stand for women in social theory. The bourgeois social sciences, political rights theory, and the nineteenth-century patriarchal theory that left-wing intellectuals found so valuable also shared elements of the sex essentialism manifest in realist fiction. But enlightened social theorists shaped their critique to emphasize social production, and consequently weighted historical and institutional teleology over organic, biogenetic organicism. So, unlike nüxing, Marxist funü found its referential framework in revolutionary practice and in the historical woman that future world-historical teleology would produce.

The Chinese translation of Bebel’s *Women and Socialism* is a foundational example of funü used this way. Its chiliastic tone and the systematic use of funü as the figure par excellence of general social revolution relied on a conjuncture of woman and society that attracted Chinese Marxists from the start. Later CCP theory would include Engel’s “Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State,” Lenin’s “Soviet Political Power and Women’s Status,” “International Women’s Day,” and “On the Freedom to Love,” and Stalin’s “International Women’s Day.”⁴⁴ The catachresis of nüxing testified to the sex binary’s importance in what became a tidal wave of theoretical work and translation. The communist funü rested on other theoretical truths. It situated its subject of women in social production as much as in family reproduction. Women in Chinese Marxism took shape within an encompassing theoretical framework of Euro-Marxist modes of produc-

tion, historical teleology, stage theory, the state/society and sub/superstructure binarisms, and, of course, the discourse's universal, international referentiality.⁴⁵

State building supplanted bourgeois consolidation in both the “white,” Guomindang or Nationalist Party as well as the communist camps, as the Japanese troops advanced in the late 1930s, occupying Manchuria and treaty ports and eventually extending their military hold into vast parts of the country. Socialist *funü* obviated *nüxing* once the right wing allowed the discourses of national salvation to become the special province of the left. The reactionary right rescinded its pallid remaining feminist rights arguments and dissolved the women’s movement into a “feminine mystique.” Socialist, Communist Party mobilization politics targeted *funü* strategically as a tactical object and eventually found methods of pulling women into the anti-Japanese struggle and social revolution by recreating *funü* as a third element or triangulating category mediating between the modern state and the modern Chinese family. But in the provinces during the late 1920s and 1930s an increasingly Maoist CCP grafted elements appropriated from local categories to its international Marxist teleology of women in social production/reproduction. The Communist Party’s fugitive state projects (fugitive in the sense that during these years, the CCP abandoned territory under military pressure from the Japanese Imperial Army and the Nationalist troops and eventually undertook the Long March to Yan’an in the late 1930s) made the *funü* of Chinese Marxism into a category of political praxis.

In doing so, the universal female proletarian prominent in Bebel and other European Marxist writing relinquished theoretical centrality. In place of this figure, Chinese theoretical practice installed the village women engaged in various kinds of mobilization. Chinese communist liberation practices canceled out that older European subject of woman. To put it another way, the peripheralized sign of woman realized an independent local politics. The Jiangxi Soviet (1930–1934), for instance, identified woman as a political subject who met the following criteria: she was over fourteen years of age; had been emancipated from the fetters of *tongyangxi* (child marriage), prostitution, and female slave systems; had recourse from family violence; her physical body did not bear the marks of “feudalism” (no earrings or footbinding); and she named herself as a *funü* in liberating political praxis. This subject existed inside a structured sphere of politics beyond the rural calendar of fieldwork and beyond village social relations. She labored according to schedule and according to protective laws.⁴⁶ A rudimentary bureaucracy concerned itself with her welfare and ensured her freedom of marriage. Political networks, such as the Working Women’s

Congress, operated to rationalize her political outlook. The symbolic center of this woman as a subject was undoubtedly the effort to propagandize Women's Day.⁴⁷

The discourse of Woman under the fugitive state had a proto-mass-line role that allowed activists and Party Central Committee and rural women to speak in different voices and that opened a wide range of positions to local people.⁴⁸ These included *qingfu* (young women), *ludai de tongyangxi* (wives oppressed because they had been sold as infant brides), *dapinku laodongfunü* (great suffering women laborers), *nongcun zhong di laodongfunü* (the laboring women of the rural villages), and *nügong nongfu* (women workers and peasants). Even the heterogeneous *funü* of this period, however, was always already a subject-effect of state discourses and a by-product of its legal, ideological, and organizational apparatus. It is just that before 1949 the "line" did not attempt political closure. *Funü* consequently appeared to take a range of subject positions inside the Soviet state, beyond the reach of family and feudalism. For a Marxist feminist like Ding Ling, this was the arena for experiments in liberation. As one document put it, village women do not understand the agitation for liberation and need to have explained to them the link between victory in class struggle and the liberation of women. They must be taught that their self-interest is connected to the state, not the family.⁴⁹

Thus, the ideological ideal was a healthy, semiliterate woman of eighteen to thirty-five years old who could "destroy her familist outlook and serve [the state even when called on to make] government transfers." She was expected to act out of self-interest (*benshen liyi*) for personal rights (*quanli*), "representing" herself through grassroots mass organizational work.⁵⁰ The *funü* encountered in these texts appeared never to have understood what was meant by "women's self-interest" until propagandists explained the stakes in concrete detail.⁵¹ The natural interests women theoretically possessed, in other words, had first to be inscribed via the actions of recruiting, educating, nurturing, and mobilizing. *Funü*'s proper field was "the organizational sphere of the Party" (*dang di zuzhi fanwei*), where she sustained herself in the political space of the CCP through election (*xuanju*), mobilization (*dongyuan*), and various organizational (*zuzhi*) practices.⁵² Maoism in the late 1930s and 1940s constantly reformulated *funü*, always retaining the statist slant.⁵³ The formula that emerged in the early 1940s consequently involved a synecdochic process of exchange between two interpenetrated objects of political discourse: the state (*guojia*) and the family (*jiating*). Rather than posit independent *funü* as an agent of politics outside domestic closure, as the brief earlier experiments had done, the late Soviets' and Yan'an-style praxis emphasized production of *funü*.

through political processes that retained women and men in a sphere of politicized domestic relations.

After 1943 the CCP's party line turned to the transformation of the family itself. By 1947 Maoist state policy had shifted—in contradistinction to Marxist theory and socialist practices elsewhere—toward a reinvented family, which appears in these texts as *jiating*. The homily of the Zhu Fusheng family conference, for instance, treats the “history” of domestic politics as a Party historiographer might chronicle a Central Committee meeting. Published in 1949, this instructive story plays a role in structuring new citizens similar to what Chen Hongmou’s text may have intended to play among educated female kinswomen. The women of the Zhu family, though oppressed, did not have the “habit of democracy, and did not know how to speak, ask questions, or actually say a thing.” After Zhu Fusheng explained democratic procedure to them, they collectively transformed themselves from an autocracy (*jiazhang zhuanzhi*) into a “democratic family” (*minzhu jiating*). In subsequent months, family members instituted political democratic policies such as self-criticism (*ziwo piping*), domestic production of thread and cloth, and planning, all domestic production activities the CCP promoted at the time. The homily of the Zhu family nicely exhibits how statist political practices interpenetrated family relations, lodging *funü* through democratic rhetoric in a renovated statist *jiating* or nucleating family.⁵⁴

The rhetorical recuperation of women into family required a politicized new family reconstituted in the language of politics. Leading Party officials promoted domestic political construction, as Zhou Enlai did, for instance, when he argued that women did not need emancipation from family, that what really needed to happen was for men to begin to take family responsibilities as seriously as women did.⁵⁵ Patricia Stranahan has argued that it was precisely this reorientation of woman policy that provided the stable base peasant women eagerly accepted; the resulting line both reflected “peasant realism” and achieved revolutionary transformation through social production.⁵⁶ The resulting collaboration of village women and Central Committee was, I want to stress, neither traditional nor universally Marxist. It was syncretic and as “modern” as any alternative.⁵⁷

The Maoist interpenetration of state and family made the body of women a field of the state, at the same time that it opened the state to inflection by kin categories.⁵⁸ The entry point was reproductive science. Woman-work *ganbu* (cadres), armed with medical knowledge, brought to political activity the power/knowledge of sanitation, physiology, and scientific midwifery. Texts drilling village women in reproductive physiology (“It’s just like your farm animals”) dispensed information on bodily functions like the men-

strual cycle and hygiene (don't borrow pads, don't drink cold water, stay away from the dirty menstrual blood that carries disease, don't have intercourse during your period, visit the doctor for irregularities, etc.). Scientific midwifery connected family reproduction to state politics.⁵⁹

The dawning of the golden era of Chinese communist familism in the 1950s found the modern Chinese jiating sandwiched between a pre-1949 peasant-inflected formation and idealized revolutionary images flooding in from the more advanced socialist USSR. By that time the ideological norm or politically ideal jiating had become the nineteenth-century Europeanized family idealized by the zhishifenzi: mommy, daddy, and me.⁶⁰ So jiating grounded social production in a context heavily marked with traces of older formations, just as the nation did. The modern socialist jiating and Maoist guojia coexisted in synecdochic unity, as concept-metaphors of each other. That, at least, is how I interpret mobilizations like the 1957 campaign "Industrious and Frugal in Establishing the Nation, Industrious and Frugal in Managing the Family," where state and family are virtually synonymous; what operates in one sphere translates directly into the other. "The material and cultural life of our state's [guo] masses of people has improved substantially in the last few years. But the lives of many jiating are still not comfortable," the text reads. To raise the jiating's level the masses must "industriously develop our state's industry and agriculture." The work of housewives (jiating zhufu) must mirror the work going on outside the jiating, in the guojia. "Every housewife could be industrious and frugal in managing the family affairs if she institutionalizes a rational planning schedule. . . . Industriousness and frugality in the family labor strengthens industriousness and frugality in the nation."⁶¹

The Women's Federation and Funü as a State Category

William Parish and Martin Whyte once commented that after Liberation in 1949, the Chinese state took no clear measures to transform family structure, and that Fulian, the state's Women's Federation, was an "amorphous" government bureaucracy, the only mass organization that people belonged to by virtue of physiology.⁶² This does not explain the very real powers of the Women's Federation. The importance of Fulian lay in its power to subordinate and dominate all inscriptions of womanhood in official discourse. It is not that Fulian actually represented the "interests" of women, but that one could not until recently be "represented" as a woman without the agency and mediation of Fulian. That fact is a measure of its success and its importance.⁶³

In late 1948 the government commissioned its leading female officials,

dignitaries, and luminaries in the Liberated Areas with the task of planning the All-China Democratic Women's Association's (later, simply Women's Association) first meeting as soon as Beijing fell.⁶⁴ With formal gravity the Planning Committees and Standing Committee began directing the installation of new bureaucratic frameworks charged with deciding national policy and convening the association's first representative congress. In these initiating moments Fulian consolidated its power as a national state organ for responsibly representing "new China's women." With mechanical deliberation the bylaws connect representation of "female masses" to the international socialist women's movement through the accumulating processes of representation. "What is most deserving of pride," one document read, "is that the representatives [daibiao] from the liberated areas are all picked by election from the local area women's congresses. . . . We have been commissioned by the female masses. We must loyally represent their opinions." And the proviso: "Representation [daibiao] means representing the masses, [it does] not [mean] controlling [guan] the masses."⁶⁵

This bureaucratization and Fulian's transformation from active production of funü to formally representing them in Beijing relied on past struggle. But it emanated from a new sort of definitional power. Representative bodies like congresses and the Federation itself did "represent the masses," but they also consolidated and mediated internal differences (*tuanjiele gezhong butong de funü*), homogenizing, so to speak, through political democracy. The inception of Fulian initiated for funü unprecedented participation in the rituals of state formation and promised bureaucratic power, but only so long as Fulian, the government, retained the power to determine what, in fact, constituted a funü.⁶⁶

Speaking to this issue, Deng Yingchao laid out the official view when she argued that in the discourses of the state, woman had achieved "political, economic, cultural, and social elevation and elevation of herself in the family." Fulian's charge involved consolidating and expanding the political sphere carved out earlier under the fugitive state: a process, the document argued, that ensured equal status for women because it transformed them from consumers into producers.⁶⁷ By its third congress Fulian spoke in even broader, less autonomous terms, the gray, ponderous language of the state:

The All-China Women's Federation is, under the leadership of the Chinese Community Party, an organization for the basic organization of every strata of laboring women. [It] has achieved enormous work success since the second National Congress. . . . [But now it] must improve and strengthen its mass viewpoint and its mass-line work methods . . . be concerned with and reflect the real interests and

demands of women, struggle energetically against discrimination and harming of women [etc.] . . . so that Fulian and the mass of women have an even more intimate relationship.⁶⁸

The founding of Fulian, however, was not specific to women.⁶⁹ The same ritual unfolded in the mass groups that “reflected and represented” youth, trade unions, and other politically delineated constituencies. The Fulian organization (and its replicants) took part in a reinscription of the nation itself, and thus it represented at a subordinated level the processes of state building commencing at levels superior to itself. The socialist state consolidated gender difference on the material grounds of scientific physiology. Part of this scientism, clearly reflected in Fulian documents, is the notion that people are in literal fact material because their organic reproductive capacity makes them like animals.⁷⁰ Thus, under Maoist inscription, gendering located itself as a process of reproductive differentiation within “scientific socialism.” The fusion of peasant realism and socialist scientism gave rise to texts like “People and Wealth Flourish” (“Ren yu cai wang”), which “encourage the people of the liberated areas not merely to work hard to get enough to wear and eat, but also to have more children, who, once they are born, must be supported [*yanghuo*].” Lyrically conflating “production” and “reproduction,” the state policy vowed to train midwives, investigate infant mortality, propagandize for scientific sanitation, oppose feudal superstition, and publish popular chapbooks on infant care, all predicated on popularizing a modern understanding of reproductive physiology and sanitary childbirth practices.

Much work among women aimed at producing people who would collaborate in the biopolitical agenda of the state. Before the twentieth century, birth and death had possessed no direct link to the Throne or to state political economy. Life and death commenced in the spatial boundaries of the jia or sect and took form as matters of pollution, rupture, and reconciliation.⁷¹ Although late imperial domestic and popular medical practices regarding menstruation, conception, parturition, suckling, and so on had been extremely sophisticated, they operated in the same neo-Confucian epistemic order as other gendering discourses. The socialist state, on the other hand, made clear the direct linkage of state practice and modern obstetric medicine in the process of popularizing the discourse of hygiene. The 1949 *Study Guide for the New Woman* straightforwardly declaimed that “the 27 lessons in this book . . . are for the exclusive use of village women in their study, literacy classes, and political lessons [which the CCP attempted to organize at the village level whenever possible]. It is appropriate as a refresher for teachers and active elements [representing the CCP’s agenda at the village level] studying self-discipline.” The book concluded

each of its lessons (see “The *lijiao* [ritual etiquette] of the feudal society is the source of women’s suffering,” for instance) with an attached series of study questions, such as “How does the old power of the village oppress women?” Study, which meant learning the correct answer transmitted physiology as the foundation of gender difference. The textbooks inscribed sex physiological differences through their discussions of scientific facts and presented reproductive physiology as the foundation for the production of male and female. Thus, as has proved the case elsewhere, statist rhetoric inserted anatomical difference into a discourse on life and death. It assumed a binary base (the “physiology of the human female” versus the “physiology of the human male”) for the reproductive biology that the science of physiology established or foundationalized. But the inscription of gender difference at the level of reproductive physiology elided something very interesting. It adamantly positioned material (re)production as the site of difference, but it did not theorize personality in physiological terms. Fulian writing has a tendency to inscribe difference at the level of physiology while curtailing attribution of difference at the level of personality. This latter, the realm of feeling and identity, until recently remained bound to conventions identified under Maoism in terms of social class, not sex or “gender.”

It is easier to see the statist construction of *funü* under Maoism in the wake of post-Mao social critique. The post-Mao or Deng Xiaoping economic reforms aimed to transform or reform the relationship of the citizens to the means of production, systems of commodity distribution and consumption, and popular cultural and social life. After 1987, when it became clear that these changes in the economy and civil administration of the country would not be reversed, the forces unleashed a globally significant Great Transformation of the political economy, rewriting the national landscape and the relation of the nation in the reregionalizing, neoliberal international state system. This pathway is intensifying now as China accedes to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and as neoliberalism in the state’s policymaking bureaucracies takes the dominant position. Major changes led to the end of the commune system, rollbacks in social welfare and social redistribution schemes, the rise of the new monied elites, and the government’s support of domestic markets, where particularly urban populations are pressed to take up responsibility for compulsory commodity and leisure consumption. Since 1985 in literary and social science theory, questions of women’s social and sexual subjectivity have become explosive.⁷² The post-Mao state’s efforts to reestablish mass organizations like Fulian brought on an overt conflict between the national subject *funü* and an increasingly sexualized, consumer-oriented, retheorized *nüxing*. The resurgence of the eroticized *nüxing* helps clarify the contradictory

formation of nüxing and funü from a final angle. Under the previous statist protocol, funü allowed for the social production of woman in politics but disallowed any psychology of gender difference. The even older, initial May Fourth literary inscription of nüxing made woman the other of man, but proved insufficiently stable to resist statist inscriptions of funü. The recuperation of nüxing's heterosexist male/female binary does open up difference as "femininity," and thus it does provide the potential for feminist resistance. (This point will be developed more systematically in chapters 6 and 7.)

This sketches out the prevailing conditions of theoretical innovation in the late imperial period, the colonial modern period, and the periods of social revolution, socialist modernization, and the post-Mao reform economy. The next chapter describes in detail the rich and intricate arguments that put into play Chinese progressive feminism and its sexed, physiological understanding of the modern Chinese women, nüxing. Chapters 4 through 7 follow specific individuals and cohorts of thinkers who worked in the moments mentioned here in schematic form. In each case the question of women in Chinese feminist thinking describes a novel subject which is also a catachresis. I have read each to highlight the historical tense of the future anterior, which examines not what women are but what they will have been.