

Transnational Socialist Imaginary and the Proletarian Woman in China

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Abstract: In her article "Transnational Socialist Imaginary and the Proletarian Woman in China" Anup Grewal discusses 1930s Shanghai and representations of the proletarian woman in relation to the intellectual New Woman and the fashionable Modern Girl. Grewal considers the concept of the proletarian woman in socialist culture first within the context of a local and global field of contending modernist visions of femininity, class, and the city. Next, Grewal analyses how the figure of the Chinese proletarian woman activates a socialist transnationality through shared formal and narrative innovations of translational leftist literature and cinema. Through her analysis, Grewal suggests how the 1930s Chinese transnational socialist imaginary presents a moment of global modernity based on simultaneity and affinity through political solidarity.

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Transnational Socialist Imaginary and the Proletarian Woman in China

Chinese leftist woman writer Ling Ding's two-part novella *一九三零年春上海* (*Shanghai, Spring 1930*) formulates the convergence of two notable phenomena animating transnational socialist cultural politics of the 1930s. First, there is the emerging prominence of images of the proletarian woman in a wide array of journalistic, literary, and visual media (i.e., posters and film). Second, there is the emergence of experiments into the art and literature of the "masses" by leftist avant-garde artists who argued changing realities were engendering new arenas of social experience and working-class subjectivities that the arts needed to find ways of representing.

The two stories of *Shanghai, Spring 1930* center on young, urban Chinese intellectuals confronting the difficult dilemmas of romantic love, literary creation, and political commitment, as well as the contradictions between the cosmopolitan bourgeois pleasures of the modern city and its harsher economic and political realities. Shanghai is narrated through a movement between worlds engrossed in domestic or leisure and commercial spaces to student-worker meetings and mass demonstrations. These different spatial associations are connected to the question of the meaning of modern femininity. While the two main women characters of the stories embody the typical characteristics of the most iconic figures of modern femininity — the New Woman and the Modern Girl — in the second story we encounter a fleeting image of the proletarian woman as an alternative to both. She appears for the first time during her busy working hours as a tram conductress (142). In her second appearance she is clasping the hand of her lover in the midst of a tense mass demonstration (169). In both instances, she is narrated as a possible embodiment of revolutionary womanhood: working-class, politically conscious, and modern. This characterization is signaled not only through her socially productive labor, forthrightness, and presence in a gender-mixed and political crowd, but also by her public display of romance. Yet, the image is tentative in a narrative that is centrally about the political transformation of intellectual women and men in the city. The proletarian woman remains in the realm of the possible that the intellectual, struggling to find himself/herself in a new social reality of political and class consciousness, is still discovering. The contrast between the tram conductress's "clear understanding of politics," and the intellectual's wavering and contradictory desires suggests that it is not the intellectuals who will lead but the ones who have much to learn (142). The intellectual here might very well include Ding Ling herself, searching for new narratives of both the modern city and modern womanhood.

Shanghai, Spring 1930 has often been read as a key text marking Ding's shift from focusing on the sexual-romantic desires and psychology of the educated urban New Woman and Modern Girl to a more typically degendered and masculinized leftist aesthetic (see e.g., Dooling; Larson; Stevens; Tang; see also Feng). I take the image of the proletarian woman in *Shanghai, Spring 1930* as an entry point for a discussion of the leftist imaginary of modernity, class, and femininity in the wider cultural context of 1930s Shanghai, a city which was itself a contested symbol of Chinese modernity. I focus on the shifting, class-inflected spatial and political associations of femininity and the city within which the proletarian woman, particularly the Shanghai woman factory worker (上海女工) — whose growing population and increasing visibility elicited much discussion from a range of modernist perspectives — emerged as both a downtrodden figure of capitalist modernity and a revolutionary harbinger of socialist modernity. Indeed, like her more elite counterparts, the New Woman and the Modern Girl, the figure of the proletarian woman reveals not only the stakes in a contest over how China would manifest "modernity," including the shape it would take as a polity, but also the type of femininity that would be its most authentic embodiment (see Edwards; Duara; Gerth; Stevens). Within this contestation, leftist images of the proletarian woman as the embodiment of a future-oriented socialist modernity share certain characteristics with both the New Woman and the Modern Girl imagery, while at the same time being markedly different from them.

While re-reading Chinese leftist representations of proletarian femininity within different "imaginative geographies" of 1930s Shanghai, we can also ask what other such geographies this figure reveals (see Karl 1097; Palat 61). As studies of the Chinese New Woman and Modern Girl have

shown, these figures take us beyond national or nationalist oriented histories to reveal complex global dynamics and structures in which the Chinese experience is located (see Weinbaum, Thomas, Ramamurthy, Poiger, Dong, Barlow). Rather than taking the "global" as a simple way to bypass the national — such that the former is read as a "realm of autonomous free flow" while the latter is the "space of containment" (Bao 135) — the transnationality of figures of modern femininity suggests how the local, the national, and the global are produced in particular ways through the imagery and embodiment of femininity. In other words, we can ask how these figures, even in their sometimes entangled interactions, themselves articulate specific configurations and conditions of "globality" or "locality" without predetermining the content, form, or provenance of either.

If a transnational figure of early and mid-twentieth-century femininity such as the Modern Girl underscores patterns of globality based upon the ideologies and practices of liberalized capitalist modernization and consumption, how else were the transnational, the global, as well as the local and the national produced in this period? How did different ideas and practices of transnationality contend and interact with each other? Through the 1930s figure of the proletarian woman, I consider the activation of a socialist transnationality. While the specific dynamics, including shifting hierarchies, of this particular transnationality become more visible in the polarized geopolitics of the 1950s and 1960s, we can identify emerging practices and relationships in the more dispersed global leftist movements of the 1930s (for the 1950s, see Chen; Volland). We can consider not only the connections between Chinese leftist images of proletarian femininity and similar imagery in the Soviet Union, the U.S, Europe, and other parts of East Asia, but also those between both the media and the formal/narrative innovations of different leftist proletarian arts movement in the 1930s in which this imagery appeared. Through the media and texts of these movements, we discover socialist transnationality as an imaginative geography based upon political solidarity, a shared vision of the future of the modern political community, and the social role of aesthetic practices. The conditions of this transnationality in China reveal a moment of "global" engagement and participation in the "modern" based on a sense of simultaneity and affinity rather than on the belated transportation and localization of "Western" signs and practices. In what follows then, I take a closer look at the multiple provenances conditioning the making of the proletarian woman as a transnational figure of modern femininity in the cultural sphere of 1930s Shanghai.

Shanghai of the 1930s was not only a "world class" Westernized metropolis, but also both the site of concentrated industrial power and the center of a new working-class culture and political militancy (see Tang 99). In the complex interactions of its different realities and the imaginations they evoked, Shanghai became central to the question over which class would be the historical agent of modernity. And, if we can say, following Zhen Zhang, that the struggle between contending spatial and ideological narratives of modernity in this period was most emblematically "waged over the fate of the modern girl and the meaning of urban modernity" (xxxii), then the question of class cannot be divorced from the question of femininity. Madeleine Yue Dong has shown that as women of all classes, including young women arriving fresh from the countryside to work in factories in the poor industrial districts, began to appear on the city streets dressed as "modern metropolitan girls" (i.e., 都市摩登女郎), cultural elites tried to differentiate themselves from other classes to "defend their privilege to be modern" (195, 201). Magazines such as the stylish 1930s *妇人画报* (Women's Pictorial) warned that modern status, in terms of style and even practices such as free love, should be left to the "modern misses" (i.e., 摩登小姐) and would-be wives of wealthy homes who had the necessary cultural and economic capital to maintain a cultivated and "high-class" modernity (202, 204-06). Conversely, campaigns of the mid-1930s nationalist New Life movement targeted middle and upper class women of the cities as "taste makers" who could set the standards of a distinctly Chinese modern femininity (Gerth 299). Here, too, anxieties over maintaining class differences in relation to the status of modernity appeared in stories like one in *申報* (Shanghai News) in 1934 that has the daughter of a wealthy home complaining against her father's attempts to have her use only China-made products: the daughter argues that "only workers do so" (Gerth 301).

The cultural left's turn to the image of the proletarian woman was part and parcel of this contest over the meanings of femininity, class, and the modern city. Leftist imagery relocated the modernity of the city to factories, docks, slums and workers' evening schools (see Zhang 262). Proletarian

modern femininity was differentiated similarly from allegedly illusory and repressive capitalist bourgeois codes of femininity by privileging laboring bodies and political over sexualized imagery. We can see such a recalibration in Fu Yin's 1930 poem "写给一个新时代的姑娘" ("To a New Era Girl"), where the bourgeois Modern Girl dissolves into the revolutionary proletarian modern girl through overlapping imagery and a sharp spatial/political shift. While the characters in Ding's *Shanghai, Spring 1930* undergo a transformation of consciousness as they move from domestic and commercial spaces toward working-class and political spaces, Yin's poem relies on performative unmasking and an attention to the physical: The poem opens with the narrator gazing at a picture of a refined Modern Girl whom "the poets of a decade ago" had compared to a rose (unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). The poet asks how she could have thought raising the heels of her shoes, crimping and perming her hair, slapping on make-up, and slipping on white gloves was enough? By the third stanza, the echoes of a self-assured young woman walking down a city avenue with her heels clicking suddenly transform into a new image, that of the girl who is "graceful as a tree," walking with a "straight waist" in a brisk stride that carries her not into a department store or a dance club, but to a mass meeting where she speaks up without a trace of shyness. The illusory "New Era Girl" disappears completely when this new figure is revealed to be a woman worker. The delicate hands in white gloves and extravagant excess of cosmetics become hands "worn rough and dark from labor" and cheeks "sallow from being buffeted by life's ups and downs." The final stanza celebrates the working-class girl as a "warrior of the new era," placing her in a new set of modern social and personal relations — both a figure of gender equality, a "comrade" who we can "clasp hands with," and a figure of romantic desire, whom we can "embrace."

The attention to movement and body language in the poem is noteworthy, especially the style of walking evoked by the high-heeled shoes of the first image, and conversely, the flat leather shoes imagined for the New Era Girl's brisk stride. Since the early twentieth century, "modern" clothing was believed to be inaugurating a new body language, upending enduring class and gender distinctions. For example, early twentieth-century Chinese literati associated modern western dress with the elongation of legs and faster movement, making one "look like a laborer" (Harris, Robert 177). Women's shorter, simpler dresses and hair, as well as the abandonment of bound feet, was particularly seen as aiding an expansion of women's bodily movement and visibility in the public sphere (see Pruitt 89; Xie 70-71). High heeled shoes caused much controversy with some cultural commentators viewing them as symbols of sexually liberated modern femininity, while others saw them as a throw-back to the days of women's limited physical mobility, especially harmful to the ideal of the productive working woman (see Edwards 42). In Yin's poem the real New Era girl is a combination of the liberated gestures of modern femininity and practical working-class modernity.

If Ding's and Yin's texts only hint at how working-class modernity arises from both the experience of proletarianization and the new revolutionary forms of collectivity and activity created in capitalist industrial society, this dual presentation becomes more explicit in several contemporary literary reportage sketches of women factory workers in Shanghai. Literary reportage gained international prominence in the 1930s as a genre of socially engaged proletarian arts adopted by leftwing and revolutionary writers' leagues in the Soviet Union, Germany, Japan, the US-American John Reed Clubs, and others. The novelty of reportage was its turn to newspapers, photography and film as models for a new mass literature that incorporated "on the spot" (纪事) recording of real life and imagistic and sensory-oriented depictions aiming to capture the everyday voices, experiences, and spaces of the working classes (see Zhou 64). The turn to this journalistic-photographic idiom points to leftist artists' interest in the potential of mass media in collectivizing cultural production and creating new forms of representation for, of, and by the masses. In a 1937 series on women workers in different Shanghai industries, the writer Hong Ji not only reveals the proletarian femininity in its exploited conditions and revolutionary becoming, but also suggests the potentials of mass media for this modern femininity. One piece, about her visit to a night school for women factory workers run by the radical YWCA Labor Board, starts with her gazing out of the tramway to see a distant mass of seemingly exhausted and hunched over bodies that the machines have "sucked out" the "labor power" from (715). The imagery quickly switches, however, to one in which the women factory workers appear as very different types of subjects, not denying their conditions of labor but exposing their grasp of a new language of critical

social analysis about the capitalist system that underpins their situations. We see the women workers reading newspapers, performing their own plays and making speeches about the power of creating a women's labor movement (718-22).

In other texts of her series, Ji focuses on the experience and spaces of labor, with the narrator interacting with women as they work and talk about their lives. Indeed, the "participating" (参与) writer who is involved in the reality she depicts and who helps to build a new set of social relations between previously alienated subjects is a central practice of reportage. The persona of the "raging reporter" in Czech German writer Egon Erwin Kisch's work and the "operative writer" of Soviet artist Sergei Tretiakov (later elaborated upon by Walter Benjamin) in the late 1920s also evoke this practice (see Benjamin; Fore; Segel). Genres like reportage and other practices of the Chinese League of Leftwing Writers and its sister associations illustrate how these organizations were connected historically to their counterparts around the world both through similar aesthetic styles and imagery and through a model of "cultural intervention" through the arts — a model that continued to inform Chinese socialist cultural institutions of the People's Republic after 1949 (see Laughlin 83-84). But is historical simultaneity of styles, imagery, and practices the only way to understand transnationality? How did these organizations themselves view their participation in a transnational leftist cultural movement or even a socialist community? How did they make and perform a transnational socialist imaginary?

Perusing the many publications of the Shanghai-based Chinese League of Leftwing Writers, such as the magazine *拓荒者* (Pioneer) in which Yin's poem appeared, one notices an acute awareness of being connected to and actively participating in a transnational leftist cultural sphere that included Europe, the Soviet Union, the U.S., Japan, and Korea. The pages of League journals are filled with translations of creative works, debates, and concepts for the practice of proletarian literature, as well as features on different leftist artists, movements, and publications around the world. These appear in conjunction and side by side with works by Chinese writers and the Chinese leftwing league's own debates and meetings. We can also find calls for solidarity around movements against imperialism and fascism or campaigns for the release of detained leftists. These are written in different languages and with the names of major figures of the international left supporting different causes, including those in China, displayed prominently. Thus, apart from the types of aesthetic practices and activities they published and promoted, we also see how these journals viewed themselves as participating in a transnational socialist community through their display of leftist internationalism based on a shared political vision and solidarity. How do such activations of a transnational socialist imaginary interact with representations of proletarian femininity in Chinese leftist texts of the 1930s?

The issue of *Pioneer* in which Yin's poem appeared also featured images of Soviet women. The most prominent one is right after the table of contents, showing a young working woman in front of a Soviet flag, dressed in a thick but shapely belted coat and jaunty cap, and gazing out of the picture with a relaxed posture, hands on hips, and smiling. The caption is simply *新女性* (New Woman). How is the imagination of Chinese proletarian femininity in Yin's poem linked with that of the Soviet Union as a center of socialist modernity? Is the Soviet imagery itself an imposition of Soviet state ideology over women? What does the publication of images of Soviet socialist femininity in a Chinese leftwing magazine of the 1930s signify in terms of the relationships that underpin a transnational socialist imaginary? These questions are complex not least because expressions and images of proletarian femininity in the Soviet Union are themselves polyvalent, revealing in their style and content contending political and aesthetic concerns. These images might not align neatly with domestic realities or with the imagination of the Soviet Union abroad. Anne Gorusch, for example, points to contentions over young women factory workers' love of fashion and dance in late 1920s Moscow. While cultural critics worried about the Westernization and bourgeoisification of these members of the vanguard proletariat, for the women themselves fashion and dancing signaled the modernity and up-to-dateness of the revolutionary urban capital (Gorusch 177, 183, 185). In terms of Soviet artistic representations of proletarian femininity, Victoria Bonnell traces the changing imagery of the *колхозница* (collective farm woman) from 1929 to 1934. While in 1929 this figure took on the distinct characteristics of the revolutionary urban woman worker — trim youthfulness, short hair, a red kerchief tied at the back, and engagement in labor — by 1934, as collectivization ended, a softer,

more contemplative, maternal imagery took over (Bonnell 86, 101). Such modifications, Bonnell argues, resulted not only from state policy, but also from changing theories of aesthetic representation debated in cultural circles of the time, including typicality, documentary photomontage, and different viewing practices of urban and rural audiences.

The interaction between evolving political, social, and aesthetic concerns embedded in the imagery of the Soviet new woman suggests a complexity to the question of Soviet ideology and its exportation. It may be more useful to attend to the meanings produced for the image of the Soviet new woman in the space of international leftist magazines, such as the magazine *Pioneer*, and in the framework of socialist transnationality activated by organizations such as the Chinese League of Leftwing Writers. We might read the display of the Soviet new woman in *Pioneer* as indicating an ideal representation of socialist femininity, as recognition of the Soviet Union's inspiration for Chinese leftists or as a symbol of solidarity in other ways. In the end, however, while we can certainly complicate our understanding of images of proletarian femininity in leftist or communist party affiliated media, did they have a larger currency outside of this partisan sphere? How did they interact and comingle with competing definitions of modern femininity in the cultural arena at large? How did they interact with other imaginations of the transnational?

While *Pioneer* was a short-lived literary magazine with limited circulation, the contributors, discussions, and imagery it displayed were widely accessible in print and visual media of the period. One important arena for this wider dissemination was women's magazines such as *妇女生活* (Women's Life), which published Ji's reportage series. There was a remarkable increase in women's magazines and in the number of women editors in the 1930s. Such magazines, with their competing agendas, "evolved into a vital civil force which shaped public opinion" (Ma, Yuxin 260). A significant number either explicitly or implicitly engaged progressive leftist-feminist viewpoints providing the language of class analysis and new imagery of women's public economic and political spheres of action. Some magazines, such as *Women's Life*, replaced commodity advertising with announcements of new publications, cultural organizations, and political activities. Contributors participated in the same practices of cultural activism and public service that informed the formal leftwing leagues, including being teachers at factory night schools, to reach women beyond their main intellectual readerships. Even non-partisan, mainstream women's magazines presented wide-ranging discussions of Shanghai women factory workers, international working-class women's movements, and their meanings for modern femininity. One 1932 article in *妇女杂志* (Women's Magazine) for example, suggested replacing Henrik Ibsen's *Nora* with the working-class women characters from Bolshevik feminist Alexandra Kollontai's stories as new models of modern liberated femininity (Dooling 70; on the importance of Ibsen's work in Chinese literature and theater, see, e.g., Guo <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss2/21>>).

The wider cultural incorporation of a transnational socialist imaginary is also apparent in left-inflected cultural spheres outside of China and the Soviet Union, whose productions in turn entered Chinese cultural space. Paula Rabinowitz notes, for example, that typical proletarian heroines from Soviet arts were popular in 1930s US-American popular culture because they "had something in common with the spunky young women who populated Hollywood musicals and screwball comedies during the 1930s" (51). Films such as *Gold Diggers of 1933*, which display this plucky, working-class femininity, were also popular with Shanghai audiences. As Rabinowitz points out, "the connection between proletarian ideals and popular culture was not lost on the Left," with many screenwriters and directors themselves being communist party members or "fellow travelers" (51). Indeed, the practices of transnational leftist cinema are a compelling scene from which to grasp the intervention of the proletarian woman into the broad cultural imagination of modern femininity. In China, the popular 1934 film *新女性* (New Woman) by director Chusheng Cai (蔡楚生) is particularly illustrative. *New Woman* was part of a series of box-office-record-breaking films scripted and directed by artists associated with the Shanghai League of Leftwing Dramatists and, later, the larger Association of Chinese Film Culture founded in 1933. The films brought political, national, and class-conscious themes onto the silver screen by uniquely blending Hollywood melodramatic romance narratives and continuity-editing style with techniques like montage and extra-diegetic documentary insertions from radical Soviet cinema, while also incorporating the style and stories of the Chinese May Fourth critical

realist literary tradition in innovative ways (see, e.g., Guo <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss2/21>>; Ma, Ning; Pang). As Zhang observes, "far from being an isolated radical movement within the predominantly commercial Shanghai film industry, the left-wing cinema emerged and thrived in a moment in Chinese and international film history when multiple ideological and aesthetic inclinations co-existed and commingled as much as they collided" (247).

One major aesthetic operative within the versatile 1930s Shanghai cinema was that of the international proletarian arts movements. While radical leftists called for a "puluo-jinou" (proletarian "kino" or "cinema") directly evoking the work of Soviet filmmakers like Dziga Vertov, the wider sphere of Shanghai filmmakers, critics, and magazines was equally enthusiastic about the possibilities of Soviet, Japanese and other radical international film movements (see Pang 41; Zhang 247-48). Shanghai filmmakers were quick to incorporate montage and other formal political techniques of transnational proletarian cinema, but the nationalist regime heavily censored any overt depictions of class consciousness, communism, or revolution. This censorship regime thus becomes another important factor in the narrative and visual language of 1930s Shanghai progressive films (see Harris, Kristine 277-303).

Cai's film *New Woman* illustrates the interaction of 1930s Shanghai cinema's diverse political-cultural conditions and the narrative-visual presentation of female characters as contrasting embodiments of different ideal modernities (see Hansen 15; Zhang 244-97; Pang 113-37). *New Woman* follows the story of Ming Wei, a music teacher and aspiring woman writer who is driven to suicide by the patriarchal, sensation-seeking capitalist society of Shanghai. Wei's character and story contrasts with that of her neighbor, Aying Li, a teacher and organizer at a school for women factory workers who is portrayed as a different type of "new woman." In the end Li and the mass of women factory workers with whom she is associated reveal to Wei that it will be through collective solidarity between women of all classes that their social liberation will be achieved. The different paths of gendered liberation and the type of "modernity" each character embodies are not only apparent in these different narratives, but also in the careful shots of comportment, dress, objects, musical associations, and the city spaces the characters occupy. *New Woman* fueled and fed into a wide-ranging and passionate cultural debate in magazines of different political persuasions over who was the "real" new woman not only of the film, but of China (see Harris, Kristine 288-90). Li was a provocative contender although she is not the main character of the film. How did Li's composition and characterization compel audiences to rethink the terms of modern gendered liberation? How is she a figure of proletarian femininity, rather than a figure that represents class over femininity?

Audiences may have identified with Wei because of her narrative privileging and the star power of the actress Lingyu Ruan who plays her (Hansen 16). Li, however, disrupts this easy identification and emerges at key moments in the film as a compelling alternative for and to Wei. The import of Li cannot be dismissed: she is not a radical, alien "other" to Wei, but a sympathetic friend and this relationship lends to the power of her provocation. In one suggestive scene, Li's shadow suddenly looms large over the small and forlorn figure of Wei: rather than being menaced by this shadow, Wei recognizes it and turns toward her approaching friend. Other scenes with Li imply that the revolutionary figure of proletarian femininity is appearing in the streets, in the factories, the night schools, and other spaces of the working classes. The insertion of documentary images and reference to elements such as newspapers also signals realities beyond the film which viewers may be compelled to consider. Finally, the composition of many shots of Li against bare or stark backdrops or as part of montage sequences depicting collectivities in political or industrial activity are suggestive and privilege her in ways different than Wei, even if the implications of their militancy cannot be represented directly under the political conditions of the time. In the end, suggestions of revolutionary proletarian femininity and of solidarity between women through the figure of Li come together. As Wei, now dying, desperately cries "I want to live," the screen splits to reveal Li and a group of women factory workers marching through pieces of scattered newspapers sensationalizing her death. Here, the film seems rather ambivalent toward modern mass media as it preys upon modern women like Wei. Yet, the use of newspapers, documentary images, and direct references to the camera at key moments intended to

activate the audiences' consciousness suggests its revolutionary potential, as proposed more directly by leftist reportage literature.

Li's dress and physical appearance are also significant, providing an instance of "multidirectional citation" that includes different modern social realities and different modernist aesthetic practices (Weinbaum, Thomas, Ramamurthy, Poiger, Dong, Barlow 4). On the one hand, Li is an index of a Shanghai woman factory worker. She and the other women workers in the film all wear plain dresses, flat leather shoes, and sport various lengths of bob, evoking an ensemble called the "female student look" that was often adopted by Shanghai's actual women factory workers to signify their urban and modern identities (see Honig 70; Perry 59). The actual popularity of this look in turn suggests the ways in which Shanghai's working-class women's own experience and self-fashioning engaged with different aspects of Shanghai culture at large through cinema, drama, magazines, pulp fiction, and schools. On the other hand, the stylized and selective elements of Li's image reveal her to be an imaginative intervention within a politically provocative leftist film projecting a socialist vision. Li's style belies the diversity of styles and forms of adornment that Shanghai's women factory workers may have displayed and draws upon a particular aesthetics of transnational avant-garde leftist art. But there is more to Li's composite style and its intervention into the meanings of modern femininity than just reality versus Marxist aesthetics. Her short hair, for example, makes her a modern city girl, but it is differentiated symbolically from the sleek and attractive salon bob of the bourgeois modern girl by being cut rather roughly. Her haircut, as well as her style of walking, is rendered purposeful rather than alluring to the male gaze. While Yin's poem evoked movement, Li takes the modern working-class woman's embodiment of a revolutionary modernity even further to suggest the possibility of a complete transformation of a gendered order and a regime of body language that keeps women weak and men strong. Li is physically strong as evinced by the physical fight she has with Dr. Wang to protect Wei. Her strength serves to further differentiate her proletarian body from the domestic, delicate upper-class woman who needs a man to protect her. Simultaneously, it evokes the athletic body culture attached to both Modern Girl imagery and to national rejuvenation narratives promoting exercise for female citizens (see Hong). Li's image is meant to illuminate the working-class woman as the most modern of women. Although some leftist commentators of the time criticized Li's image for being too abstract, underprivileged, and minor, her provocative and active construction may have been compelling to audiences at large (see Harris, Kristine 290; Zhang 64-65).

Through a careful reading of figures such as Li, we may get a sense of the emerging prominence of the proletarian woman as a figure of modern urban femininity in the late-republican Chinese cultural imaginary. If, rather than seeing such images through the thesis of repression, we look at them through constructions of modern femininity where both terms were being worked out by different political and cultural intermediaries, then we get a much fuller and more complex picture of what the image of the proletarian woman entailed. In the cultural sphere at large we may see how the political and social realities of the time gave rise to new forms of class consciousness that interacted with debates about modernity and femininity. In the leftist cultural field, the Shanghai woman factory worker appears as a romanticized figure, a blurry symbol of possible new subjectivities, and a politically radical image. These representations were central to projects aimed at finding new visual and literary languages to represent the working classes as the harbingers of a revolutionary socialist modernity. This search included questions of how to represent the working classes in terms of content but also of form. Were aesthetic forms linked to actual classes? If so, could "bourgeois" cultural forms like the novel and the short story, or even commercial film, ever really open up to a depiction of the proletariat? On the other hand, would modernist avant-garde representational strategies be understood by the common masses, urban and rural audiences? How could artists write about the proletariat if they had no experience of their lives?

In conclusion, the figure of the proletarian woman as a symbol of revolutionary socialist modernity in 1930s leftist arts provides a way to look at a transnational socialist imaginary that both interacted with and contested other narratives of modernity and aesthetic modernism. Through this figure we may grasp the particular concepts and relationships which underpin this transnational socialist imaginary and the vision of a socialist modernity. These include the focus on classed subjectivities and on the international proletariat as the harbinger of modernity in its most advanced form. It also

includes relationships of political allegiance, friendship and common struggle against fascism, imperialism and capitalist exploitation. While Moscow is already emerging as a "site of recognition" for the meaning of socialist modernity (Chen 51), it is still but one center in a larger transnational community in the struggle for socialism towards which China's leftwing organizations have a sense of simultaneity and affinity. Studying representations of socialist femininity such as the 1930s proletarian woman in the context of their complex production, circulation, and the meanings they themselves call forth, we can understand them as figures of multiple provenances embedded in different formations of imagined community and solidarity: creative, national, and global included.

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