

## Shanghai Girls' American Dreams:

### *Ling Long* Magazine and Imagining American Depravity in the 1930s

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This article explores the way in which images of the United States of America [USA, America] featured in the 1930s Shanghai women's magazine *Ling Long*. I argue that in the first few years of the magazine's life, the USA became an important symbolic location for readers of the magazine as they grappled with their own pressing personal concerns in negotiations with families and communities about appropriate feminine behavior. Readers of the magazine found in the depiction of life in the USA answers to their anxieties about 'How much dancing is too much dancing?' and 'What are the limits to a decent girl's socializing in public?' In this period of rapid social and cultural change *Ling Long's* editors clearly felt women wanted guidance about appropriate behavioral limits for their modern city lifestyle in vibrant, cosmopolitan Shanghai. With the boundaries for behavior set in their mothers' and grandmothers' days no longer relevant, 'What was a girl to do?'

*Ling Long's* imaginings about the unbridled, limit-free lifestyles of Americans provided a vision of 'the extreme' to these readers. China's modern women could plot their behavior on the imagined trajectory stretching between American depravity (glamorous and oh-so-romantic) and the dull, prison of Confucian morality complete with its idealized segregation of 'good' women from public space altogether. On such a trajectory, a 'moderate' amount of dancing and socializing with men was readily quantified and only reasonable, surely! Within such a schema *Ling Long's* readers could think of themselves as 'good' while still having a bit of fun in the nightclubs and coffee shops. After all, consider the behavior of the depraved Americans!

INSERT COVER IMAGES 1& 2 NEAR HERE

[Caption: The search for a position between the woman-child of China and the steamy, doe-eyed American. Front and Back covers of *Ling Long* 1933, vol. 88. ]

While addressing readers' pressing personal concerns about negotiating life in the big city the magazine also marks a trend typical of the 1930s in which Chinese urbanites and political leaders are actively creating a place for China and Chinese culture in a modern, cosmopolitan world. Producers of cultural products and political structures sought to be both modern and Chinese.<sup>1</sup> This desire to

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of how 'modernity' was conceptualized at this time see Leo Ou-fan Lee *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge MASS: Harvard University Press, 1999). Urbanites at this time who desired a 'modern' China adopted a linear notion of time in which human society was placed on a trajectory that potentially could move to a glorious future with the old, ancient and traditional left behind in its wake. In this

find a uniquely Chinese path to modernity is manifest clearly in the 1930s and stands in contrast to powerful opinions of the 1910s and 1920s that called for unrestrained westernization.<sup>2</sup> Popular imaginings of the USA in the China of these first decades of the twentieth century provide a classic example of the contradictory and evolving operations of Occidentalism. The Occidentalism of the New Culture Movement (1915-1925) manifested itself in reformers' enthusiasm for the teachings of 'Mr Science and Mr Democracy' and their iconoclastic demolition of Confucianism as a moral, political and cultural force. But, by the 1930s ordinary people had a renewed pride in China—in part spurred by the Nationalist government's vision for a modern Chinese culture and nation made possible by their successful reunification of the country under one government in 1928. In this context, the USA as the one-time progressive 'Occidental model other' became a marker of 'progress too far'—an extreme that would not suit China.

Women and women's bodies were central to this creation of a 'modern' China for as Leo Lee reminds us 'the display of the female body [in China] had become part of a new public discourse related to modernity in everyday life'.<sup>3</sup> Katrina Gulliver's exploration of Shanghai's modernity summarizes the central, symbolic role of women in the forging of a *Chinese* modernity as one of aspiration: 'The Modern Woman was a Western concept to which other countries could aspire.'<sup>4</sup> But, Gulliver also shows that this 'catching up' was not a value-free process. Influential educator, Sophia Chen Zen, spoke of the broad, public anxiety that the processes of westernization were 'too much, too soon'.<sup>5</sup> The key problems on the ground for real women, then, became those of degree: how much was too much, how fast was too fast? Or more specifically, how much of a Chinese woman's body is viewed, in what position is that body placed and whose company does she share? Moderation, as marked against an American extreme helped establish those parameters.

At the level of popular culture, evidence of China's self-determined *modern* moderation could be asserted by presenting the USA as the 'land of the too-free

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movement the present was attributed a sense of particular urgency as individuals took part in the formation of the future.

<sup>2</sup> R. David Arkush and Leo Lee note this shift in their book of translations of Chinese views of America, *Land without Ghosts: Chinese Impressions of America from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). The book is structured chronologically with the section on the 1900s through to the end of the 1920s being called "Model America" and that of the 1930s and 1940s as "Flawed America". They explain this shift as "By the 1930s and 1940s, America was becoming increasingly familiar to literate and urban Chinese' and that 'with familiarity and deeper understanding came a somewhat sharper awareness of less attractive aspects of American society' (pp. 143, 144). Yet, I argue that images of the USA took on this different hue because Chinese readers and leaders needed to envisage a different type of America in order to forge a new type of China. To be useful to China's leaders and reformers in the 1930s the idea of America had to change from a model of modernity to a model of excess within which China could be posited as modern and moderate.

<sup>3</sup> Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, p. 74.

<sup>4</sup> Katrina Gulliver, 'Shanghai's Modernity in the Western Eye,' *East West Connections*, (January 2009): 131. In another article Gulliver discusses the anxiety many reformers felt about the changes for women in China.

<sup>5</sup> Katrina Gulliver, 'Sophia Chen Zen and Westernized Chinese Feminism,' *Journal of Chinese Overseas*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2008): 266.

and the home of the depraved'. Hollywood stories provided ample evidence of this excess as readers thrilled at the frank discussion of divorce, the open displays of sexual desire and the ample displays of flesh extruding from long languid glamorous dresses. As George Kao wrote in 1937 when describing the then-new New York phenomenon of 'striptease' to Chinese readers:

'It is a woman standing on a stage in front of an audience taking her clothes off piece by piece to the point considered by police regulations to be an offense against morals—except that, frankly, the morals in New York and most other American cities have already been damaged to the point that nothing more can be done to them!'<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, this vision of life in American cities is a partial view. Sophia Chen Zen warned North Americans of the erroneous impressions many Chinese had of the USA. In a lecture held in Winnipeg Chen Zen is quoted as saying, 'American moving pictures are doing harm in China, socially, for they draw a distorted picture of American life, and as social life in China is something new for which the older generations have no example, the young people take their models from the actors they see depicted in the screen.'<sup>7</sup> But this 'distorted' view fed a distinct demand in China—people needed and wanted to imagine a place of excess in order to create their own modern Chinese virtue.

### ***Ling Long's evolution***

Ling Long's Shanghai publishers, Sanhe Company, of Nanjing Road targeted the 'new women' of China and the sophisticates of Shanghai that had emerged from the schools and factories of urban China during the 1920s. This was a readership that definitely wanted to reaffirm its modern credentials and, thanks in equal measure to the foreign concessions and to rising Chinese nationalism, knew it was Chinese. The potential readers were educated women with disposable income and grand dreams of beauty, fame and a life of ease. Students in Shanghai's many women's colleges and the expanding white collar workers in the offices of the cities appear to be its main audience apart from young ladies of leisure supported by family wealth. *Ling Long* was not a journal devoted to rousing women into action on behalf of one or other political party, nor even on behalf of their sisters in rural China. Its goal was "to promote an exquisite life for women, and promote noble *entertainment* in society" (*zengjin 'funü' youmei shenghuo; tichang shehui gaoshang 'yule'*).<sup>8</sup> To reflect these twin aims the magazine could be read from both directions—the front-to-back section included articles on women's matters ('How to stop your husband from straying?') and the back-to-front section focused on cinema, music and celebrity ('After Janet Gaynor's divorce'; music scores for Irving Berlin's latest songs). It was lavishly

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<sup>6</sup> George Kao (Gao Keyi, Qiaozhi Gao) 'Burlesque,' in Arkush and Lee (eds), *Land Without Ghosts*: p. 166.

<sup>7</sup> Sophia Chen Zen in *The Winnipeg Free Press*, 4 October 1933, cited in Gulliver, 'Sophia Chen Zen and Westernized Chinese Feminism,' p. 266.

<sup>8</sup> 'Ben zazhi de mubiao,' *Ling Long*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1931): 13.

illustrated with photos or line drawings accompanying each article up to about 1935, after which time text dominated images.

Funding for the publication came from Mr Lin Zecang, a businessman heading the Sanhe group, and the editorial board comprised a number of different men and woman with Ms Chen Zhenling and Mr Lin Zemin featuring prominently.<sup>9</sup> While their names appear as authors of articles in the magazine, many of the contributors are from outside the editorial group and comprise largely of women—many asserting their educational status ('Student of Fudan University') to mark their authority and fashionability. The magazine retailed for 7 *fen* in Shanghai and a little more in other urban centers. Gao Yunxiang tells us that this was 'inexpensive' and its content shows us that its target audience stretched from laborers to professionals.<sup>10</sup> It was a pocket-sized 13cms in height and issues ranged between 30 and 80 pages in length. A weekly publication *Ling Long* appeared on the news-stands every Wednesday.

The magazine evolved over the course of its life most likely in response to political rather than economic pressures. In February 1934 Chiang Kai-shek and Song Mei-ling launched the "New Life Movement", a campaign aimed at improving the morals of the country and reversing its putative spiritual degeneration. Although it is often described as being a conservative movement, Arif Dirlik has demonstrated that in its conception the movement was 'not a traditional but a modern response to a modern problem'. Yet, on the ground the call to prevent moral degeneration gave credence to conservative forces seeking to reign in the 'modern women'—in whose company *Ling Long's* readers would have considered themselves a part.<sup>11</sup> Probably in response to the New Life Movement the journal adopted a far more conservative style from 1934, but this conservative trend would also be in response to the increasing application of Nationalist Government censorship rulings. Parks Coble argues that although the Nationalist Government had press censorship laws in place from 1930 the laws were only effectively enforced in 1934 'when the government established the Shanghai Censorship Commission directly under the Publicity Department of the Guomindang'.<sup>12</sup>

The increasing conservatism of the magazine in 1934 is clear when one considers that the photos of nude women that featured in 1932 were absent in

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<sup>9</sup> 'The Magazine,' <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/linglong/about.html> (accessed 5 May 2011). Columbia University's C.V. Starr's East Asian Library has digitized the magazine and made it publicly and freely available on line at the website above.

<sup>10</sup> Gao Yunxiang, 'Nationalist and Feminist Discourses on *Jianmei* (Robust Beauty) during China's "National Crisis" in the 1930s,' *Gender and History*, vol. 18, no. 3 (2006): 550.

<sup>11</sup> Arif Dirlik, 'The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counterrevolution,' *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 34, no. 4 (August 1975): 945. I have argued elsewhere that the Modern Woman faced critique not only from conservatives. Women radical activists also bemoaned the fact that the 'modern woman' risked losing her political edge as she became associated with a fashionable urban lifestyle rather than political campaigns to 'save the nation' or 'advance women's rights'. These critics alerted readers to the phenomenon of the 'traditional woman dressing in modern clothes'. See Louise Edwards, 'Policing the Modern Woman' *Modern China*, vol. 26.2 (April 2000): 115-47.

<sup>12</sup> Parks Coble, 'The anti-Japanese Movement in China: Zou Tao-fen and the National Salvation Association, 1931-1937,' *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 44. No. 2 (Feb, 1985), p. 296.

later years.<sup>13</sup> As the nudes disappeared, pictures of children and babies appear in increasing numbers alongside portraits of wholesome girls in parkland settings. Similarly, the sultry, steamy American starlets that dominated the back-to-front section at the start of the magazine's life in 1931 are few and far between by its end. The utility of the pictorial image of the American 'immoral extreme' in selling copy and titillating readers had to be tempered with the censorship regime that took upon itself the task of protecting the nation from spiritual degeneration.

INSERT FIGURES 3 & 4 NEAR HERE

The increasing aggression of Japan signaled the end of the magazine's existence. War was declared on 7 July 1937 and Shanghai experienced direct military attacks from 13 August 1937 through to the retreat of the Chinese troops at the end of November that same year. The magazine's last issue was published on 11 August 1937, only two days before Japanese troops invaded Shanghai. That issue's lack of 'final closing notice' alerting its readers to its end suggests that it was a sudden decision induced by trauma of war.

### **Glamour and Modesty: What to wear? How much flesh to show?**

The magazine established the moral schema for its anxious readers from its very first issue. Shanghai's modern girls would learn to judge 'how far was too far' with the imagined USA providing the marker of 'too far'. Clothing is a key marker of decency around the world and battles for female modesty are frequently fought over dress. *Ling Long* magazine presents a clear vision of the moderate (Chinese) and the extreme (American).

The quantity of skin exposed in the pictures shows us the transformation that occurred in the connection between skin and sexuality over the course of the magazine's life. During the first part of the decade the magazine's Chinese women rarely show any flesh and any naked arms were balanced by high collars. The covers of the first issue provide a significant pairing of the two cultures. The front-to-back cover shows a young Chinese woman holding her hand modestly across her breasts. The girl appears in a hybrid style clothing wearing a dress

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<sup>13</sup> Nudity is primarily associated with Europeans (rather than Americans) and in particular with the Germans. German women are frequently depicted as 'going about their daily business' nude. French nudes appear as artistic objects of the human form. Neither style is particularly 'sexy'—the clothed American woman occupies this position through the sensual manner in which the clothing is worn. The completely naked Germans or French emerge as curiosities. See the pictures of nude French models in *LL* vol. 2, no. 42 (1932): 1674 and of German women sunning themselves naked in *LL* vol. 2, no. 53 (1932): 120. One photo includes an American nude (no. 95 (1933): 664 and this is a very alluring nude compared to the German nudes. Chinese nudes rarely feature but two examples are: 'Woman Hero' no. 100 (1933): 974 and 'Soft Breast', no. 68 (1932): 841. The only exception I could find to the disappearance of nudity after 1934 was in the vol. 16, no. 283 (1937) (April 28<sup>th</sup>) where an article on the suffering experienced by female models showed a full back view of a naked non-Chinese woman. The article explains that models are subject to humiliations before they secure employment: such as being asked: 'Are you a virgin?', 'Do you have any illnesses?' as well as being examined naked for excessive wrinkles or scars (p. 1276).

that is nipped in at the waist, spreading out in European ball-gown fashion, yet the top sustains a high Tang collar that covers all of her neck and throat. The only flesh revealed are the young model's bare arms that stretch from her short-sleeved dress top.

This vision of feminine modesty stands in stark contrast if readers pick the magazine up to read from back-to-front. Inside the back cover Great Garbo sits crossed legged draped in luxurious black gown with a train stretching along the floor. The scooped neckline sets off her face that looks challenging at the viewer. Her covered arms are placed either side of her body in an assertion of the strength of her place on the frame. Not a trace of modesty or humility feature in Garbo's picture.

INSERT FIGURE HERE [Front Cover of vol. 1, no. 1, 1931]

INSERT FIGURE HERE [inside Front Cover of vol. 1, no. 1, 1931]

In general, the American movies stars appear with bare legs, craning necks, scooped necklines and backlines. The amount of flesh exposed is matched by the sensuous poses of the celebrities—interlinking naked skin and sex. And, in the contrast between American and Chinese women, readers are reassured about the modesty of Chinese women. The juxtaposition of the alluring American woman wearing clothes that hinted at sex beneath and the demure Chinese woman with her collared neck and covered arms is standard throughout the life of the journal.

A classic example of this mirroring of morality appears in Ling Long's second issue. Readers are treated to an article on Clara Bow, 'the IT girl' of 1931. The semi-glad Clara gazes directly at the readers with sultry bedroom eyes in a full-length picture captioned "She's so hot her clothes are off". The text accompanying the picture explains that Clara is not happy about being considered a hot girl because 'she knows that the hotness of the female sex can wreck all the world's grand enterprises' (p. 68). This warning about the dangers of beauty to social stability has deep resonances in Chinese history but rather shallower ones, I suspect, with American culture. In keeping with Ms Bow's knowledge of the Chinese audience's expectations she 'tells' readers that the labels of 'hot' and 'it' are hateful (*naohen*) and hard to take (*nanshou*) because they make it seem that she just 'comports herself like Japanese at under a volcano'. The disjuncture between text and image is compounded by the second picture in which she is sitting on a globe in her underwear 'enthusiastically (*re-hot*) looking out at the men of the world.

INSERT FIGURES HERE [no. 2, 1931, pp. 68-69]

The Chinese women depicted in this same issue include Ms Zhou Ming, sitting modestly covered to the elbows, wearing her white, spring outfit to benefit from the warming weather. The caption concludes with 'A girl's seclusion and quietude (*nüzi de youjing*).' On the opposite page readers are treated to a new style of irregular hemline in a dress modeled by Ms Li Jinrong. The fabric is of large floral designs and invokes a western style. Her arms are bare, but cross modestly in front of her crotch as she clasps her purse. Her legs are bare, but

placed together as the wall behind bears her weight and she gazes politely and rather expressionlessly at readers.<sup>14</sup>

INSERT FIGURES HERE [no. 2, 1931, pp. 42-43]

The cover of the same issue provides us with an even more stark contrast with Ms Bow's difficulties with her hot-ness and it-ness. The portrait of an uncertain Chinese beauty adorned in a high-necked, intricately collared diagonal Chinese style top greets readers. But, her modernity is marked by the permed hair cut in Hollywood style (cf back cover) and readers' appreciation of her status as a Hujiang University student.

INSERT FIGURES HERE [no. 2 front cover and back cover]

There is one important venue in which more Chinese flesh was exposed as the magazine evolved through the censorship regime—the swimming pool. At the beginning of Ling Long's life in March 1931, very little Chinese skin was revealed, but starting in the summer of 1932 women in bathing suits adorned an increasing number of issues. By the end of the journal's life Chinese swimmers appeared in almost every issue and sometimes with multiple pictures in a single issue. Gao Yunxiang explains this trend as part of Ling Long's engagement with the New Life Movement through its campaign to build the health and physical fitness of the nation's womenfolk—and establish the desire for a 'robust beauty' (*jianmei*) among Chinese women. The poses these swimming women strike are never languid or alluring—these are simply shots of girls at the pool-side keeping fit and aspiring to become the much-promoted 'healthy beauty'. The donning of a swimming cap appears to be the crucial garment in assuring readers/censors of the good purpose for revealing Chinese women's skin. Swimming caps signify China's moderation in matters of female modesty.

INSERT FIGURE HERE [Cover 1932, no. 61] Unnamed swimmer

INSERT FIGURE HERE [p. 742 1932, no. 66] First named swimmer

In contrast, American women wear swimming togs to look sexy. They never have swimming caps on and frequently appear to take to the water or pool in high-heel shoes even if the caption implies they are models of the healthy body. They are routinely modeling the latest fashion rather than covering the laps. The American swimsuit wearer is a sexualized form, whereas her Chinese counterpart maintains a putative modesty through the active sporting context in which she is framed. This framing does not mean she was not read in a titillating manner but in contrast to the American woman, the Chinese one clearly had higher purpose.

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<sup>14</sup> Francesca de Lago alerts us to the significance of bare legs and leg crossing as a marker of modernity in China of the 1930s. de Lago, 'Crossed Legs in 1930s Shanghai: How 'Modern' the Modern Woman?' *East Asian History* no. 19 (2000): 103-44. Readers of Ling Long in the 1930s would have perceived many of the bare legged cross-legged women featured as exhibiting particularly modern behavior.

INSERT FIGURE HERE 1933, issue 98, p. 841

### **What company should a girl keep?**

As China moved into the twentieth century, long held ideals about ‘good girls from good families’ remaining out of the public sphere and segregated from non-family men were dismantling. Men and women agents for change sought to find legitimate locations in which members of the opposite sex could be seen together without irreparably damaging the girl’s reputation. The advent of Girls’ Schools provided a legitimate reason for good girls to be seen in public and the eventual move to co-educational environments confirmed the idea that advancing one’s education in a modern environment was sufficient reason for deviating from old patterns. By the 1930s women from all walks of life were moving around Shanghai independent of men or female chaperones. The even sought leisure in dancehalls, movie theatres and coffee shops, but they needed to know how much public mingling with the opposite sex was too much. Again, America provided the extreme case within which Shanghai’s girls could come to recognize their own moderation and modern morality.

The first two issues of the journal set the stage with a two-part article by editor Lin Zemin. Titled ‘The Mirror for the Modern Girl’, the article explains that ‘99% of western girls are no longer virgins’ because although these countries claim to have attained culture and wealth they lack propriety (*lijiao*). Western girls have an extreme predilection for social intercourse (*ku shi she jiao*) and spend too much time in movie theatres and dance halls mixing with men. The article is accompanied by an inset article with a line drawing of a man and woman kissing on a park bench (her garters revealed) with the English words “Keep off the Grass” on a placard behind and a larger two-page spread of a line of more than 20 western women in togs at a beach lined up learning forward on one leg, with the other leg stretched to the sky captioned ‘Fragrant legs crazy dancing on the beach’.<sup>15</sup> The second part of Lin’s article reminds us that ‘the bulk of women have lost their virginity’ (*shi shen*—lit. lost their bodies) in these depraved countries and then provides us with the recent developments in the USA. Readers learn that the late Albert E. Pillsbury gave 20,000 pounds to four universities (Harvard, Yale, Columbia and Princeton) in order that they ‘prohibit women from going out’. Lin reports that although the four universities have yet to formally accept the money it shows that western thinkers are also contemplating the rights and wrongs of this objectionable custom (*e su*) and are aware of the dangers of women going out.<sup>16</sup> The article is accompanied by picture of Chinese school girls playing volleyball to a public audience.

This unambiguous message that ‘girls should not go out’ is complicated by the images. The first part shows that if you ‘go out’ you could end up dancing half-naked on beaches or be caught with disheveled clothing on a park bench. The

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<sup>15</sup> Lin Zenmin, ‘Modeng nüzi de mingjing,’ (part one) *Ling Long*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1931): 18.

<sup>16</sup> I can find no references to Albert Pillsbury’s will and a donation of this kind from a man who was supportive of women and African Americans seems rather odd. Lin Zenmin, ‘Modeng nüzi de mingjing,’ (part two) *Ling Long*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1931): 55.



second half show women's legitimate 'going out' for physical fitness. Both the 'crazy dancing' and the volleyball have men visible as the witnesses to the girls' going out. Complicating the message further, the editors include an article by Ms Bei La, a writer from a women's college, on a recent Charity Ball and how Madam Shi, having danced herself crazy (*kuang wu*) half the night rejected praise of her dancing skills saying that it was due to her "partner" "Mr W." (both words were written in English). Ms Tang and her niece Ms Chen from Ningbo also enjoyed the night although it appears they lost some expensive embroidered dance shoes as the party dispersed.<sup>17</sup>

Further into this same issue readers are presented with Liang Peiqin's article on 'My Boundaries'. She explains that the movement of girls from their households into society is definitely 'not a bad thing'. By moving in society girls can learn about the hypocrisy of men and protect themselves from falling prey to their trickery. She opines that girls only schooled in the old rules of feminine propriety were easy prey to men's tricks. The lives of the girls of yesteryear were "too dull and dry" (*kuzao*). But now we do have restraints, 'we cannot go too far, if we go too far then we will suffer censure; and if we are too inferior then people will laugh at us.' She noted that girls always have to act according to how we think will suit other people. But, as all the readers would have known, the reason that girls want to go out into society is because they want to make male friends (*nanyou*). But there are a number of hazards that girls should watch out for. Firstly the relationships must be equal and girls should not remain silent on the man's attitudes. For example, a girl must maintain a certain 'coldness of heart' and sharpness of eye' so that she can accurately assess the actions of the opposite number. 'Does he have ill intent or not?' If he does, then girls should immediately break off all contact with him. And, finally, Liang advises her readers, girls should be very careful not to 'fall in love at first sight' or think that 'all men are wonderful'.<sup>18</sup> To reinforce the validity of her advice about 'limits' Ms Liang includes a picture of herself in very modest Chinese attire with her head slanted shyly to one side and her hands protectively crossing her chest.

INSERT IMAGE OF MS LIANG PEIQIN NEAR HERE

And equally modest Ms Zheng Meixiu gives female readers advice on dancing. And, like Ms Liang only a few pages earlier contrasts women of today with those in the olden days. She contrast the women of China's past who did nothing but sit at home confined from the world and having no social intercourse or entertainment. Most people recognize that the fact that today's women can participate in such things has brought benefits not only to women, she states. But, when it comes to the question of dancing, people with some old values still argue that dancing diminishes or destroys feminine dignity. Ms Zheng then tells readers that just because some women dance in a manner that has no limits (*wu xianzhi*), or dance without any rules (*bu an guiju*) you can't blame all dancing inherently. 'I love dancing, but I make sure that my dancing joy (*wu xing*) must

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<sup>17</sup> Bei La, 'Cishan tiaowuhui de zhen wen,' *Ling Long*, vol. 1, no.1 (1931): 7.

<sup>18</sup> Liang Peiqin, 'Wo de jiaoji,' *Ling Long*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1931): 10-11.

not exceed my rules (*guiding*) so that I reap the benefits for my body and mind of the exercise derived therein.<sup>19</sup>

INSERT IMAGE OF MS ZHENG MEIXIU NEAR HERE

Other articles throughout the journal follow a similar pattern. The bad old days were too restrictive and did nobody any good, and now just because we are modern, it doesn't mean we don't have any limits. We have our rules, our guidelines, our limits and the old moralists should not worry. The radical content is frequently paired with a very modest picture of the author. And visions of America stand as evidence of a limit-less, rule-less and even guideline-less world.

Prepared with the knowledge that 99% of American girls had lost their virginity in vol. 1, no. 1, *Ling Long's* readers could proceed through subsequent years of reading observing just how America got to its current state of depravity. Kissing had to take a lot of the blame for the moral decay. Images of American movie stars hugging, kissing, or nearly kissing men feature frequently up to 1934. Ms Shi Baoqin, author of a book titled *A Girl's Lovelife* (*Nüzi lian'ai shenghuo*), tackled the matter of kissing directly in issue no. 3. She explains that while she understands many girls regard kissing 'as a shameless and seedy business which they would seek to distance themselves from, they are quite wrong.' In fact, our expert reminds the girls, kissing is an expression of a man's love for a woman and if she is kissed, that woman should kiss back. If a girl simply receives a kiss and 'pretends to act like a dullard, half resisting and half relenting' (*jia chi jia dai, ban tui ban jiu*) then it just shows that we women are no use.<sup>20</sup>

While reminding girls of their duty to be useful, the magazine throughout its entire publication never includes a picture of a Chinese woman kissing or being kissed; and rarely shows them embracing or being embraced.<sup>21</sup> China's women with limits appear either on their own or in pairs and groups with other women.

INSERT FIGURE NEAR HERE no. 50 (1932): 2064

INSERT FIGURE HERE, no. 77 (1932): 1250 Respectable women

INSERT FIGURE HERE, no. 83 (1933): 115 trio

But in 1933 readers are treated to dozens of happy American couples in romantic positions. For example, in issue 97 Sally Eiler and James Dunn sit embracing in an affectionate, rather than desirous pose. Marlene Dietrich and

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<sup>19</sup> Zheng Meixiu, 'Nüzi yu tiaowu,' *Ling Long*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1931): 15.

<sup>20</sup> Shi Baoqin, 'Wo duiyu jie wen biaooshi,' *Ling Long*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1931): 76-77.

<sup>21</sup> The first issue promised a more daring approach with a small photo of Chinese actress Hu Die and her then boyfriend and one-time fiancé, Lin Xuehuai—an actor who she had met on the site when making *Deserted Fan in Autumn* (Qiushan yuan, 1925). The pair were engaged to be married but the relationship broke off amidst much scandal and rumor. The picture of the couple shows her in high neck Chinese clothing with him standing behind, his hand on her shoulder protectively in a western suit. *Ling Long*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1931): 27. In 1933 readers are treated to some pictures of Chinese couples hugging in vol. 91 (p. 424) and these too are movie stars acting their romance. In contrast Americans are expert kissers. See the story about the actor who is a PhD in Kissing in no. 5 (1931): 1931 that includes the comment 'We should respect his experience.'

Oliver Brook feature in a close embrace in their promotion photo for *Shanghai Train* (check name) in issue no. 99. Helen Hayes and Randal Colman are locked in a desperate near kiss in the back to front cover of no. 100 of 1933 as are Cary Cooper and Tallulah Bankhead in the back to front cover of no. 101 in the same year. The kissing fest ceases after 1934.

INSERT FIGURE NEAR HERE no. 100 (1933): 1011

INSERT FIGURE NEAR HERE no. 101 (1933): 1075

### **Marriages and Divorces: American Style**

The consequences of the American enthusiasm for embracing is made clear to readers in the editorials that note their fragile or fluid relations with men appear. Throughout the magazine's life, readers are treated to tales of the romantic lives of American movie stars and then their inevitable divorces. The first issue, for example, includes a story titled "Janet Gaynor After Divorce" in an interview held in a San Francisco dancehall with Gaynor about her relationship problems (*ganqing wenti*) with her husband Jessie Lydell Peck. Jenny explains to readers that she is just a pitiful and weak woman who is trying to reduce the hassles in her life by swearing never to marry again and never to get close to anyone again. Jenny will just live on her own efforts from now on. A picture of the couple playfully embracing in happier times accompanied the article.<sup>22</sup> Later issues include discussion about Jenny's new romance.

The excess of freedom in choice leads to a revolving door of romance and separation in a world apparently devoid of moral concerns for either the woman or man and certainly no anxiety about preserving marriages on the part of American women. Where Chinese women are presented with a list of their responsibilities in preventing husbands from wandering. Ms Zhang Pinhui provides a 6-point list of wives responsibilities in ensuring husbands do not wander including: wearing beautiful clothing as a matter of course at home; recognizing that when a 'husband fears his wife' he is more likely to stray; be warm and affectionate when he comes home tired at the end of the day; manage the house smoothly and ensure the children are educated appropriately; only go out with your friends at times when he is also out; talk directly with him about any difficulties. These six points will ensure a happy family.<sup>23</sup> Handy hints about how to manage children or outlines of a typical list of household duties that women must undertake frequent the pages of *Ling Long*.<sup>24</sup> Yet, *Ling Long's* readers are not alerted to the fact that such lists advising women on how to make a happy home were also common in the USA at this time in equivalent popular magazines remains. This significant aspect of American culture would disturb the moral schema in which the USA is the imagined extreme of freedom and depravity.

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<sup>22</sup> Cheng Jingqiu, 'Lihun hou de Zhenni Gainuo,' *Ling Long*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1931): 33.

<sup>23</sup> Zhang Pinhui, 'Zhangfu waiyu,' *Ling Long*, vol. 1 no. 1 (1931): 4-5.

<sup>24</sup> See for example, Zhang Pinhui, 'Nüzi jiating zhi chouhua,' *Ling Long*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1931): 45-6. A modest picture of Ms Zhang accompanies this article.

Although by today's standards, the journal is creating a vision of a rather patriarchal family if we place these items into China of the 1930s, the ideas being propagated are quite revolutionary. The idea that a wife could prevent her husband from seeking pleasure outside marks a significant break from old ideals of a noble wife approving of and sometimes arranging concubines for her husband. The conjugal unit of husband and wife, as opposed to the large multi-generational family was gaining ground in urban China, with the new Civil Code's provisions on marriage of 1931 reflecting the new love-match ideal.<sup>25</sup> Ms Zhang's 6-point advice list to readers does not include 'getting on with his mother' or 'serving his parents'—both significant departures that readers would have noted as identifying the progressive and very modern models of marriage presented in the magazine. The preservation of new-style modern marriages was a good thing for China and it contrasted with the frivolous attitude American women adopted in relation to marriage.

Ms Yang Xiujian advises readers on ideal husbands and warns against choosing on the basis of money. She declares that although she herself is not married, she has observed many marriages and come to the considered opinion that marrying for money is a recipe for marital misery. Instead, she recommends choosing a husband who is 'equivalent to your position' (*yi ziji de diwei ze xiangdeng de zhangfu*).<sup>26</sup> Her detailed discussion of this nature of this 'position' explains that women should select men that have equivalent education, have similar ideas about personal conduct (*pinxing*), and equivalence in abilities, family finances (*jiadao*), temperament and age. The rationality of her recommendations for marital happiness is then confirmed in her final paragraph when she draws a comparison to an American survey. According to this survey 20% of American women chose husbands based on their health, 19% on their wealth and only 8% on their education and 6% on their personal conduct. What further evidence did a modern Shanghai girl need? Americans' flippant attitude to marriage is reflected in their flippant attitude to partner choice—wealth and good looks (if one construes 'health' with 'good looks') dominate the marriage market in the land of the 'too free'. The modern Shanghai girl, equipped with her own educational assets and armed with a sense of her own power of choice, ideas about her own personality type and individual preferences about personal conduct would be able to make a modern marriage, if she so chose, on her own terms.<sup>27</sup> In so doing she could avoid the twin traps of staying in a miserable marriage, as had her mother and grandmother, or swinging wildly from marriage to marriage, partner to partner, as Americans were prone to do.

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<sup>25</sup> Ling Long kept its readers abreast of their new legal rights in a special column on Legal Matters. See vol. 3, no. 89, p. 303-2 where women are taught about their rights in marriage and in inheritance.

<sup>26</sup> Yang Xiujian, 'Wo de zhangfu guan,' *Ling Long*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1931): 82-83.

<sup>27</sup> Avoiding marriage altogether was another common theme in Ling Long's annals. The reasons were clear: men were too fickle in their affections, marriage was likely to bring work and bother whereas a girl could study a bit longer or secure her independence and avoid marriage. See Yang Yizhu, 'Bu jia zhuyi,' *Ling Long*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1931): 12-13. Alternatively, Liang Peiqin recommended living apart from one's husband after marriage so that a woman's freedom could be maintained, and the couple could be able to respect each other's independence. Liang Peiqin, 'Xiwang nanzi fen ju,' *Ling Long*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1931): 86.

American's enthusiasm for divorce is a repeated feature of the magazine. For example, in 1933 readers are treated to one of the many 'only in America' stories that fill *Ling Long's* pages in which a woman divorces her husband after discovering his adultery. The husband had bought his wife a new dress that he proudly declared was 'one of a kind'. The proud wife was then perplexed one day when out shopping she finds another woman wearing the same dress. Confronting her husband she soon discovers that he had lent her dress to his lover. Suing for divorce was the American woman's solution.<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusion

*Ling Long* was a magazine that took its role in helping China's modern women understand how to manage their lives, manage their relationships and manage their fashion in a very serious manner. Recognition that the old methods of managing these aspects were no longer relevant, *Ling Long* provided a regular commentary on how to be modern and how to be Chinese. International comparison was fundamental in this project of creating a modern path for China and the nation that featured most prominently in all comparisons—explicit and implicit—was the USA. In 1933, readers were presented with a serialized survey of comparisons of women around the world. The list of ten countries covered started with the USA (no. 1) and ended with China (no. 10). There is no particular sense that the countries are ranked upon any criteria but the framing of the list by the USA and China suggests the weight of readers' interest lies with these two nations. The USA is regarded as having women that place particular emphasis on freedom and independence so they always love to go out in society rather than hiding at home. 'That's why America has the most professional and vocational women and has the most advanced women's rights.' French women are the most pure and naive, gentle and soft. English women are serious and hard working and follow the 'three obediences and four virtues' for family matters most seriously. Japanese women are the most oppressed and pathetic. Chinese women are divided into two categories: the hardworking and uneducated countrywomen and the educated urbanites who do nothing. The future for China lies in merging the best attributes of both these types, Zhu argues.<sup>29</sup>

Such explicit comparisons of nations is far less common than the implicit comparisons that are made in images and texts that establish the possibility of a moderate modernity for China's Shanghai girls. The USA and 'boring old China' provide the contrasting extremes within which *Ling Long's* readers could find a modern, and relatively virtuous, path through life. Without the imagined depravity and excessive freedom of the USA such a 'moderate' path would be revealed for the radical and revolutionary shift it was in actuality.

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<sup>28</sup> 'Yi xi yi tang lihun tiaojian,' *Ling Long*, vol. 3, no. 88 (1933): 373. A 1937 example of the view that Americans are flippant about marriage that literally is tagged with the phrase 'in America where there are so many strange things' tells of a woman who puts her husband up for sale. 'Chu mai zhangfu,' *Ling Long*, No. 283 (1937): 1223-4.

<sup>29</sup> Zhu Minwan, 'Shijie geguo nüxing de bijiao—shang,' *Ling Long*, vol. 3, no. 90 (1933): 340. The second part of the article appears in no. 93 (1933): 520-21.