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Thinking of Western Influence: Elite Chinese Women's Response from 1880s to 1920s

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project to my wonderful parents,
Lai Yu-Chang and Wang Chin-Hsiu.

To my grandma, Lai Shuang, and my aunt, Lai Mei-Hui.

I would not be here without their unwavering support and unconditional love.

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Table of Contents

Introduction……..1
Chapter 1: Historical Background……..……..6
Chapter 2: Bound Feet and Western Dress ……...…16
Chapter 3: He Yin Zhen and the Question of Women's Liberation……...33
Conclusion…….47
Bibliography……...51

Introduction

Western modernization theory suggests the transformation of "traditional" and "pre-modern" societies into a "modern" framework, characterized by industrial and social advancements.[1] The view of "modern" is oriented from a Euro-American view. In *Passing of Traditional Society*, Daniel Lerner divided countries into three categories: the traditional, the transitional, and the modern. [2] In discussion of modernization theory, Lerner offers several steps for a society to transition from traditional to modern. The first step consists of population migration from rural to urban. Once the population grows in the city, urbanization demands an increase in schools, media, markets for free trade, and other modernized institutions. In the ideal process of modernization, literacy, and media consumption will grow, as economic and political participation will further grow when the population becomes literate. [3] For Lerner, the prerequisite for a society to be considered modern is the ability to join economic and political forces. The transition to a modern society indicates a nation that is built upon democracy and free-market with a general level of participation among citizens.

The transition from traditional to modern thus introduces new social dynamics, such as the increased participation of women in the workforce and the necessity of educating females to enhance their contributions to societal production. Through industrialization, women move from

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[1] SHAH, H. (2011). Introduction: The Rise of Modernization Theory. In *The Production of Modernization: Daniel Lerner, Mass Media, and The Passing of Traditional Society* (pp. 1–30). Temple University Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bt7b7. "Post war modernization theory posited a model of societal transformation made possible by embracing Western manufacturing technology, political structures, values, and systems of mass communication."

[2] Lerner, D. (1968). *The passing of traditional society: Modernizing the Middle East*. Free Press. 76–85, Lerner refers to modernization as the "West," namely Europe and the US.

[3] Ibid

traditional households to the industrial world, leading to the introduction of education, workers' rights, and political rights for females. These rights reshape women's roles both politically and culturally.

Following the modernization transition at the end of the 18th century, Western influences spread globally, reaching the East, notably China and Korea between the 1880s and 1920s when students from China and Korea returned to their homeland after studying abroad in the West. The clash between Western values and deeply ingrained Confucian principles in China and Korea sent shockwaves through local communities. Thus, the elite appropriation of Western customs and norms, commonly called Westernization in later elite productions, interacts with local communities. Debates took place amongst the intelligentsia who had the chance to traverse between China Europe and the US. This paper explores how the collision of Western values with traditional Chinese norms influenced the identity of elite women during this period. As the first beneficiaries of overseas educational opportunities, elite women in China and Korea spearheaded discussions on female labor, education, and marital rights within their urban intelligentsia. However, even within this group of elite women, there are conflicting responses to the adaptation of Western values. Their exposure to Western ideals and divergent concepts sometimes clashed with traditional beliefs. Among the elite class in China and Korea, women from traditional backgrounds questioned the influx of foreign values. This paper contrasts these value systems by examining local feminists' distinct approaches to female education, political rights, and employment. How did these so-called "modern" values challenge local communities with vastly different perspectives on these issues? How did elite Chinese women react to these changes, and did local communities adapt to or resist these new values? By analyzing literary works written by

women of the era, I aim to delve deeper into the interplay between Western and Eastern contexts and values, exploring how different groups of elite women responded to these transformative shifts.

The following analysis will be focused on the works of elite Chinese women during their encounter with Western modernization theory. In the first chapter, I will provide a historical overview of China spanning before and after the 1880s, including the Confucian texts that influenced traditional teaching. The 19th century marked the introduction of Westernization in China and coincided with the decline of the Qing dynasty. Subsequently, I will delve into the first novel, a memoir penned by Chang Yu-i, the founder and president of the Shanghai Women Savings Bank. Through examining Yu-i's memoir, I will explore the intersection of local community values with the influx of Western ideas. Ultimately, her work will enhance our understanding of how elite Chinese society responded to the introduction of Western modernity to China, as well as the ensuing clashes between Western modernity and Chinese societal norms.

In the third chapter, I will explore the work of He Yin Zhen, a Chinese anarchist feminist who offers suggestions on how China should adapt to Western values. He Yin Zhen focuses primarily on women's liberation from both household chores and within the labor force. Her works, “On the Question of Women’s Liberation” and “On the Question of Women’s Labor,” provide valuable insights into the perspectives of radical feminism in Chinese society at the time. He Yin Zhen critiques Confucian society, arguing that the unequal distribution of wealth leads to inequality among ordinary women. Her criticisms shed light on how some Chinese elite women, influenced by foreign theories such as Marxism, socialism, and anarchism, envisioned the nation's development. Additionally, I will examine how the introduction of foreign theories, such

as Western modernization theory, posed risks to local communities during the nation's transformation.

The Use of Literature

I discuss these questions through the analysis of the literary production of elite Chinese women from 1880-1900s. The memoir and essays analyzed here offer insights into the individual struggles faced by some elite women navigating the clashes between Western and traditional values. When examining the work of Yu-i, the reader will be guided through an era where traditional and Western clashes with each other. We will see the dilemma raised in Yu-i's marriage with a Western-educated Chinese man. We will also witness the transformation Yu-i experiences from a traditional household to Germany, where she eventually receives higher education. Through her work, we access Yu-i's internal world and thoughts as she navigates her interactions with foreign values. The memoir also functions as a dialogue reflecting Yu-i's inner self, providing insight into how traditional Chinese elite women view the introduction of Western values.

In addition to Yu-i's memoir, I will examine critical works by He Yin Zhen. These critiques often present critical arguments against local customs, followed by proposals for reforming traditional practices. Given the lack of a centralized government in the era I am examining, these proposals did not fully integrate into the government's agenda. Nevertheless, they remain significant as they reflect how elite visions for the country's transformation took place at the time, particularly concerning women's liberation in labor and family roles. Using a Western model in critical writing, He Yin Zhen launched an attack on how Confucian values had

limited women's role in society and how patriarchy succeeded in imposing their desires on women. She is primarily concerned with adapting Western models into Chinese society without fully understanding how society functions.

At the same time, I find the adaptation process of Western values and ideology in China to be a phenomenon that occurs around the world. The introduction of a set of values different from the local values can also be seen in other countries in the Global South including Turkey. Perin E. Gürel's concept of selective Westernization in Turkey, which entails adapting to some Western values while preserving local values, demonstrates that similar transformative dynamics took place across the world in response to Western cultural expansion, producing different results depending on the unique circumstances of each context. One feature to note is such cultural expansion rarely penetrated local communities. The discussion of Westernization both socially and culturally remains a topic within the elite groups. Through their work, I will examine the challenges and problems generated by imposing Western-based values on non-Western communities. My project will focus on the discussion among a group of elite Chinese women on Westernization in China, rather than discussing the process of China's modernization as a whole.

Elite women from traditional households question the motives behind Westernization and offer their interpretations of the ongoing changes. My analysis will delve into the debates among Chinese elite women regarding women's employment, educational rights, and political empowerment. Through this examination, I aim to address the perspectives of elite Chinese women on the process of Westernization and its impact on their society as they understand it.

Chapter 1: Historical Background

Confucianism Text in Relations with China and Korea

To understand how Western values clash with traditional values in China and Korea, one must first understand the role of Confucian values in these communities. In ancient China, Confucian values played a pivotal role in shaping societal norms and structures. Rooted in the teachings of Confucius (551-479 BC) during the Zhou Dynasty (c. 1046 BC – 256 BC), these values emphasized a clear social order where individuals had predefined roles. Confucius, in the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), articulated the importance of maintaining a distinct hierarchy within society, with each individual—be it the king, man, father, or son—playing a specific role. These roles, however, place women outside of the social hierarchy. This philosophy underscored the significance of a well-defined social order, where individuals adhered to their designated positions. Particularly for women, Confucius outlined strict guidelines in the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), describing a woman's obedience to fathers when young, submission to husbands after marriage, and deference to sons if widowed. These entrenched social beliefs persisted throughout Chinese history, influencing societal dynamics for centuries.

The transmission of Confucian values extended beyond China to the Korean peninsula. During the early Chosŏn period around 1392 BC, Confucianism became the predominant political and ethical system in Korea. Korean scholars, influenced by Chinese Confucianism, integrated Confucian principles into the fabric of Korean society. Confucian values, similar to their impact in China, established a rigid social hierarchy and delineated strict roles for individuals. This societal structure became deeply ingrained in Korean culture, impacting

everything from familial relationships to political governance. The infusion of Confucianism into the Korean ethos created a rigid social order, with the values persisting well into the 1880s. Like Chinese women, Korean women under Confucian rule receive limited education. They were treated as domestic subjects rather than an individual. Since Chosŏn Korea[4] also adopted the social hierarchy structure, women were placed below men. Whether it is marriage rights or education rights, Chosŏn Korean women did not enjoy freedom as their male members did. In his essay, Michael J. Pettid describes Confucian ethics' impact on China and Korea as "Confucianism advocates a strong patriarchal order and this was repeatedly highlighted by writers in both China and Korea over the centuries not only in exegeses of the Confucian canon, but also in educational works that highlighted behaviors supporting hierarchical relations between the sexes and the reinforcement of the patriarchal system." [5] He further emphasizes the strict rule of The Three Bonds [6], a Confucian belief that rules the households and the country.

Nonetheless, Confucianism's enduring influence in both China and Korea had profound implications for education and literacy. In China, the emphasis on classical education and the absence of a unified spoken language contributed to widespread illiteracy, particularly among women. The societal expectation that women's primary role was to manage households and raise families reinforced the gendered nature of education. Thus, although higher-class women did have access to education, their training was completely different from their male family

[4] Chosŏn Korea was a Korean dynasty that lasted from 1392 to 1910.
[5] Pettid, M. (2011). Confucian Educational Works for Upper Status Women in Chosŏn Korea (pp. 49–70). essay, State University of New York Press.
[6] Pettid describes The Three Bond (三綱) as "the basic relationships that operated at all levels of society, from the home to the governing of the country. These idealized relationships, specifically the bond of loyalty between subject and ruler, filial piety of children to parents, and distinction between husband and wife, were understood as fundamental requirements for the creation of an orderly home and country. These ethics became pervasive by late Chosŏn and spread to every level of society."

members. According to the *Liji*, women and men were obligated to separate themselves from age seven. Separate books were provided to men and women. Men were required to study *Sishu*, the Confucian canon to become Confucian scholars and government officials. While women were required to study *Nü Sishu*, *The Four Women Books*, a book that emphasizes women's rule under Confucian ethics to become obedient daughters, good wives, and caring mothers.

Similar texts were seen in Chosŏn Korean literature. The use of Chinese texts as a basis was widely observed in Chinese-Korean texts for women. For instance, *Nü Sishu* was translated into its Korean version, *Yŏsasŏ ŏnhae*, under the royal edict in 1736. [7] Like the original *Nü Sishu*, *Yŏsasŏ ŏnhae* explicate a woman's role by man in the Confucian universe. The book talks about "the very quality that made a woman female, that is *yin*, also made her inherently inferior and subservient to males. How she could fulfill her role was to conduct herself by the Confucian regulations that established the primacy of males throughout society." [8] Confucian ethics continued its influence on women's education throughout China and Korea until the 1880s.

In Korea, certain texts were published for Chosŏn women. Private texts reflect on practical contents and are exclusively for upper-class women.[9] There were three main categories: women's life in childhood, women's life after marriage, and women's life as a daughter. These books, namely, *Uam kyenyŏsŏ* (Admonishments for Women by Uam)[10], *Kyubŏm* (Rules for the Women's Quarters) [11], and *Sasojŏl* (Elementary matters of etiquette for scholar families)[12]

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[7] Yŏngjo sillok , 42: 22a (1736-08-27).
[8] Pettid, M. (2011). Confucian Educational Works for Upper Status Women in Chosŏn Korea (pp. 49–70). essay, State University of New York Press.
[9] Ibid
[10] 尤菴戒女書, written by Song Siyŏl (1607– 1689) for his eldest daughter before her marriage
[11] 閨範, written by Lady Yun of Haep'yŏng
[12] 士小節, compiled by Yi Tŏkmu in 1775. These books are often written by male scholars on how to instruct one's daughters.

formed upper Chosŏn women's life. Pettid highlights the influence of Confucian texts on women. He points out these books often emphasize behaving honorably at all times, regardless of the husband's attitude, serving one's parents, reverence to one's ancestors, discussing "proper women virtue" from Confucian values, and the idea of a daughter needing to act correctly in marriage or otherwise reflecting badly upon her natal home.[13] Chosŏn government advocated for these books during their ruling period. Upper-class women, although enjoying the luxury of society, were formed to obey rules under Confucian ethics. With the rooted gender division in the social and educational sphere, this historical background sets the stage for the clash between traditional Confucian values and Western modernity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In China, the movements led by elite intellectuals sought to move women from domestic roles to active participation in society. Rooted in Confucian principles, Chinese society traditionally adhered to a strict social order, where individuals played predefined roles. Confucius emphasized the importance of maintaining this order, prescribing specific roles for women, echoing through Chinese society for centuries. When Korean scholars encountered Chinese Confucian values during the early Chosŏn period (1392 BC), Confucianism became the dominant political system in Korea. The intrusion of Western values into these Confucian-driven societies was a profound shock. China and Korea, having only recently opened their doors to the West, struggled with low industrialization and literacy rates. Education, especially for women, was a luxury, and the language divide in China added another layer of complexity. In China, with its fragmented language system and classical Chinese education accessible only to the elite, most of the population, especially women, remained illiterate. In Korea, the introduction of Chinese

[13] Pettid, M. (2011). Confucian Educational Works for Upper Status Women in Chosŏn Korea (pp. 49–70). essay, State University of New York Press.

texts during the Chosŏn period reinforced Confucian teaching within the Korean peninsula. Confucian values become the traditional values promoted by the government. Women in both countries received limited education in Confucian classics designed specifically for women and followed certain Confucian ideals such as filial piety and female chastity. Traditional values confined women to domestic roles, rendering them insufficiently educated and skilled for the emerging industrial world. The collision of Western modernization theory with traditional values challenged these norms, particularly in terms of women's education and employment. [14] The societal tension between modernity and tradition is vividly captured in literary works of the time.

[14] Pettid, M. (2011). Confucian Educational Works for Upper Status Women in Chosŏn Korea (pp. 49–70). essay, State University of New York Press.

Western Modernization Theory

The emergence of modernization theory in the 19th and early 20th centuries represented a paradigm shift in Western societies, particularly in Euro-American countries. This theory, predicated on the belief in the linear progression of societies from traditional to modern, sought to explain and guide the transformation of nations. The adoption of modernization theory brought about substantial societal changes. Industrialization, technological advancements, and shifts in cultural and social norms mark the era of modernization theory. It asserts that economic development and technological progress were integral to societal advancement. [15] The rapid industrialization in the UK not only propelled it into a position of global economic dominance but also brought about profound changes in social structures. Urbanization, the rise of the working class, the demand for women to be trained into workers, and advancements in education and healthcare were key components of the modernization process. As the UK modernized, there was a concurrent evolution in political structures, with the expansion of democratic ideals and the gradual enfranchisement of previously marginalized groups, such as women.

The impact of modernization theory extended beyond economic and technological realms and influenced cultural and intellectual spheres in the UK, the US, China, and Korea. The emphasis on rationality, individualism, and secularism reflected the broader transformations occurring in these societies. Education became a focal point, with an increasing emphasis on scientific inquiry, critical thinking, and the dissemination of knowledge to broader segments of the population. Many Chinese students and Korean students who studied abroad in the UK and the US aspire to back foreign knowledge to their homeland. These students include Xu Zhimo,

[15] Lerner, D. (1968). *The passing of traditional society: Modernizing the Middle East*. Free Press.

the famous Chinese poet and author, Lin Huiyin, the first female architect in China, and Kim Jeom-dong, the first Korean woman who studied Western medicine. The establishment of the Barbour Scholarships for Oriental Women in 1917 encouraged the late Qing Empire in China to send women abroad for higher education. With the knowledge gained overseas, scholars returned to China with Western mindsets. As Western nations embraced modernization theory as a method to reach Asia, the interactions with non-Western societies during the 1880s to 1900s laid the groundwork for a clash of values between local and foreign.

While Chinese and Korean intellectuals adopted Western values during modernization, the clashes between traditional and so-called "modern" values impacted local communities. This project addresses internal conflicts within local communities and their interactions with Western values. It is worth recognizing that this clash is not limited to the East and the West, but is a universal phenomenon between any local community outside of the Western context. Within this project, I will examine arguments made by Western-educated intellects from local communities. The means to provide these arguments is to present the conflicts local communities face when they interact with a foreign value. As Perin E. Gürel mentioned in her work, whichever value is borrowed from an outside community will create a chain of consequences. [16] This idea of modernization, assumes the idea of the West being equalized to "modern," and presents a complex relationship between traditional communities that already have a set of values. I will also examine what Gürel called "selective Westernization" [17] in her case study in Turkey and the

[16] Gürel, P. E. (2017). INTRODUCTION: Good West, Bad West, Wild West. In *The Limits of Westernization: A Cultural History of America in Turkey* (pp. 1–16). Columbia University Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/gure18202.4, pg, 4

[17] Selective Westernization, through Gürel's example of Turkey and the US, is a methodology Turkey's intellects adopted to "alternate conceptions of modernity, and folk culture hybridized with American cultural exports, operated as resources for both popular anti-Americanisms and resistance." Pg. 3.
to state-led westernization.

US.[18] Which is the strategic use of modernization theory by the US and Europe to other non-White and non-Christian states creates a dramatic impact on regions around the world. Gürel accounts for this interaction in the introduction of her work. She quotes, "In the late nineteenth century, U.S. intellectuals and policymakers began figuring America as the world's model, guide, and arbiter of modernity." [19] The idea of a "model" presents the problematic features of Western modernity. The assumption that the West was better and industrialized and the communities outside of the West were wild, barbaric, and needed to be transformed into a modernized state creates a hierarchy within the interaction. To counter such a model, Turkey's intellects turned to selective Westernization, with the lens at "deeming Westernization both necessary and potentially corrupting." [20] The hybrid feature of selective Westernization comes with the local and U.S. elites "attempting to figure people into civilizational templates that clash with the complexity of culture." [21] In this project, I am attempting to look into how the Chinese culture from the 1880s to the 1900s adapts to the foreign values introduced during a transformation period.

[18] Ibid, pg. 4
[19] Ibid, pg. 7
[20] Ibid, pg. 3
[21] Ibid, pg. 3

Implications of Modernization Theory on Women

The pivotal focus of the project looks at women's role in modernization, education, employment, and political rights. Throughout Western history, women were deprived of the opportunities that men had. When modernization happened in the UK and the US, lifting women's status became a big issue. While women were encouraged to attend schools and get employed, they faced obstacles in social norms and domestic obligations.

Similarly, in East Asia, Chinese and Korean women were traditionally viewed as inferior to men and incapable of doing higher-skill jobs. Confucian values, deeply ingrained in societal structures, reinforced gender roles that confined women to domestic duties. Modernization posed a unique challenge to these traditional norms. In China, with the influx of Western values, the call for women's education and participation in the workforce clashed with entrenched beliefs about women's roles. The introduction of modern ideas challenged the age-old perception that women were solely responsible for family matters. In Korea, the clash between Confucian values and the rising tide of modernity created a similar tension. While the New Women's Movement[22] in Korea advocated for dress freedom, education rights, and marriage equality, traditional Confucian values resisted these changes, perpetuating the notion that women's primary role was within the domestic sphere. As the clash between traditional values and modernization intensified, women in both Western and East Asian societies found themselves at the intersection of progress and entrenched norms. In the West, despite advancements in education and employment, societal expectations and stereotypes continued to hinder women's progress. In East Asia, the tension between Confucian ideals and the call for modernization created a complex

[22] The New Women's movement is a movement that begins in Korea in the 1920s, where educated Korean women protested against Confucian patriarchal society.

landscape for women seeking to break free from traditional roles. The juxtaposition of these regions highlights the universal challenges women faced during this period. This interplay between Western modernization and Eastern traditional values laid the foundation for the intricate dynamics that unfolded in the realms of gender, education, and employment during this transformative period.

Chapter 2: *Bound Feet and Western Dress*

Footbinding and its Social and Economic Implications

The oral memoir of Yu-i, *Bound Feet and Western Dress,* illustrates the life of a traditional Chinese elite woman during the 1880s. Yu-i's family, the renowned Chang family that had produced numerous scholars and politicians educated overseas, wanted to bind Yu-i's feet when she was young. Yu-i resisted due to the pain, but her mother and maid insisted on binding her feet so she could be eligible in the marriage market. On the third day, Yu-i's brother overheard his sister's screams and announced that he would support Yu-i's life if she couldn't get married. This decision allows her to escape the fate of footbinding. However, for many other elite women raised in traditional households, their lives were different from Yu-i's.

The question of footbinding intertwines with the transformation era of what marriage and life looked like for elite women in China in the 1800s. In her book *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding*, Dorothy Ko delineates two distinct groups of women in China from the 1880s to the 1900s. To underscore the conflicts between women with bound feet and those opposing footbinding, Ko provides insights into the differences between these two groups. The first voice comprises prominent Chinese feminists, often characterized as modern and educated. These women typically received Christian education before pursuing further studies in Western countries. They also advocate for anti-footbinding as it limits women's freedom to work and move freely. Ko notes that as the anti-bound-feet movement gained popularity, seen as crucial for the nation to align with Western standards, the first voice and its advocates "were contained by, and were speaking in the terms of, the immense history of the

nation." [23] On the other hand, the second voice belongs to the women with bound feet, whose voices may not be immediately discernible to us. To capture the essence of these two voices, Ko asserts, "Two kinds of translation are necessary before these 'miniaturized' or 'contained' histories are brought to light. The first involves translating from the silent presence of the footbound woman's body to her concealed inner world. The second involves translating from the silent presence to others writing, quoting her utterances." [24] These voices are important in this essay as they both experienced the modernization of China between the 1880s to 1920s. In this chapter, I will examine how Yu-i, a woman who belongs to the second voice, experiences the changes happening in her country. Throughout her life, Yu-i interacted with different Chinese women, some were Western-educated feminists, and some were traditionally educated as her. The project is interested in examining how these two voices interact in an era where the definition of feminism is being shaped by Western modernization theory.

To understand how the two voices interact when Western modernization theory is introduced to China, we first have to examine footbinding as a social practice. The tradition of bound feet was long viewed by the West as restrictive and backward in China from the 1800s to the 1900s. However, in China, footbinding aligns with a woman's marriage eligibility and social standing. As Dorothy Ko describes, footbinding existed among elite women who aspired to marry into a higher class. The "marrying-up theory" consists of two ideas: first, only servants have big feet, and second, matchmakers inquire about the size of women's feet. These ideas closely align with elite families binding their daughters' feet, as bound feet became a ticket to a brighter future for the bride and her family, symbolizing "good destiny and social prestige." [25]

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[23] Ibid, pg. 13
[24] Ibid, 12.
[25] Ko, D. (2007). *Cinderella's sisters: A revisionist history of footbinding*. University of California Press, pg. 3.

The act of footbinding also relates to the labor force. Anthropologists Hill Gates and Laurel Bossen explain that footbinding, "which made woman appear to be *wasted*, allowed the patriarchs to mask the value of female labor." [26] Both scholars explored the domestic labor force in Fujian and Sichuan, where bound feet women performed domestic work. Soon after heavy labor replaced domestic labor, women's feet in these provinces were unbounded. Gates and Bossen argue that anti-footbinding becomes an act of economic calculation.

Despite the theory provided, footbinding explains a process in which the body becomes a machine. Whether footbinding serves the purpose of marriage or the economy, elite women's bodies transformed into a tradeoff for a life within the house, taking away the choice of marriage and economic freedom. This tradeoff further impacted women's mentality beyond the physical damage done. Ko describes the controversy between *tianzu*, natural feet, and "liberated feet," unbound feet. When footbinding women received the government order to unbind their feet, some chose to hide from government inspections and bind their feet again. Ko explains the situation as "unlike the cutting of men's queues, footbinding is an irrevocable bodily process once the bones are bent and new muscular habits formed." Although many anti-footbinding activists called for an end to footbinding, they ignored the fact that "liberated feet" were harder to walk on and more deformed than bound feet. [27] That being said, bound feet not only served a physical function but transformed women's thinking between the 1880s and 1920s when the anti-bound feet movement in China became popular.

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[26] Ibid, pg. 2.
[27] Ko, D. (2007). *Cinderella's sisters: A revisionist history of footbinding*. University of California Press, 11.

Early Life of Yu-i

In the story of Yu-i, the case becomes more complicated. Raised in a traditional household, Yu-i's older sisters' feet were bound. However, when it came to Su Yi's time in the late 1880s, her brothers had returned to the country from studying abroad, and along with them were the first group of female Chinese students coming back. These students brought in changes in education and women's employment rights. Ko noted renowned feminists and modern women like Qiu Jin (1975-1907) denounced footbinding as a backward culture that restricted women's freedom. Naturally, unlike those women who had their food-bound, modern women wrote about themselves as "romantic heroes in quest of personal and national salvation. They expressed pathos to political activism, self-realization, and sexual yearnings. They speak the language of individual freedom and self-determination." [28] Thus, when Yu-i's brothers witnessed how their younger sister screamed in pain to get her feet bound, they interfered with her footbinding process. Yu-i's feet were not bound for the rest of her life. However, the mentality to have women footbound in exchange for a better marriage existed throughout her teenage years until she married the famous poet and author Xu Zhimo, who disliked Yu-i due to her mentality as a traditional Chinese woman. Although Yu-i never had her feet bound, her life before she went abroad for Xu Zhimo had been much like a woman with bound feet. Her unbounded feet provide mobility for her to move freely outside the household. Her exposure to Western education and witnessing how girls drop out of school to get married further determined her to mandate her own life. The memoir of Yu-i serves as a testimony of women coming from the second voice. This chapter aims to explore the social and political implications of *Bound Feet and Western*

[28] Ibid, pg. 13.

Dress. Through Yu-i's story as a young girl raised in a traditional Chinese household, I will examine how she transforms both mentally and physically in her first marriage with Xu Zhimo as a woman. Yu-i's story captures the voice of elite women who had not received similar opportunities as modern, literate women. Her experiences further reinforce the liberation of women's freedom comes not only from the liberation of bound feet but further support from the social level and political support.

The discussion of Yu-i's life dissolves into three parts in the memoir: childhood, marriage, and employment. In the first part of the story, Su Yi describes her family background and the education she receives from her family.[29] She accounts her childhood memories to her niece, also the author of the memoir who was born and raised in the US, about the values Su Yi was brought up in:

> In China, a woman is nothing. When she is born, she must obey her father. When she is married, she must obey her husband. And when she is widowed, she must obey her son. A woman is nothing, you see. This is the first lesson I want to give you so that you will understand. When a boy was born to the house, the servant saved his umbilical cord in a jar under Mama's bed. When a girl was born, the servants buried her umbilical cord outside the house. A girl left her father's house as soon as she came of age, and there was no need to save the umbilical cord of a guest. [30]

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[29] Chang, P.-M. N. (2011). *Bound Feet and Western Dress*. Transworld Digital. Pg. 5. Yu-i, full name Chang Yu-i, comes from the Chang family of Jiading. Peng-Mei describes the the Chang family as the following: [They] were usually mentioned in connection with the May Fourth era, a period from about 1919 to 1926 that witness tremendous upheaval of traditional Confucian culture as Western ideals pushed to the fore. Peng-Mei Natasha Chang's great-uncles, Yu-i's two brother Chang Chia-sen and Chang Chia-ao, had been cited for their respective accomplishments in government and banking.

[30] Chang, P.-M. N. (2011). *Bound Feet and Western Dress*. Transworld Digital. Pg. 6.

Yu-i recalls families' separate treatment of boys and girls. These values would impact her life and her marriage with her first husband, Xu Zhimao. In the household, girls would not be accounted as children of the house, only the sons counted. Traditional families believe only sons would carry forth the family name, while daughters would marry and take on the duties of their husbands' families, Yu-i noted. [31] The core teaching comes from the idea of filial piety, what Yu-i recalls as "very formal" even when she is in front of her father. These teachings shaped Yu-i's life. She recalls, "It is unfilial to try to commit suicide. I tell you this now so you will understand why later when my life was very sad, I could not kill myself." [32] She was forbidden by filial piety to commit suicide, make decisions without informing her parents, and disrespect her family and elders. [33] Yu-i obeys the teachings she was brought up in. However, when it comes to the marriage decision, it becomes the first time Yu-i "breaks the rule of [her] past."[34] She later divorced without telling her parents, a decision herselt is amazed by. This teaching ultimately relates to bound feet and marriage choice, which are two turning points in Yu-i's life. Yu-i recalls her first memory of bound feet according to the Chinese myth of the two sisters on the Moon:

> It was the custom when I was little for a woman to have tiny, tiny feet. Westerners call them bound feet, but we call them something so much prettier in China: new moon or lotus petals, after the Tang Dynasty concubine who started the tradition.

[31] Ibid, pg. 6
[32] Ibid, pg, 9
[33] Ibid, pg. 9-10.
[34] Ibid, pg, 10

> How small, how beautiful, then, the bound foot… Imagine how your palm as the sole and your fingers as the toes. See how fingers in your palm make a loose fist in the shape of a new moon? That is the bound foot — you end up walking on your heels and the knuckles of your toes — and if it is perfectly formed, you can slide three fingers into the niche between the toes and the heels. [35]

Yu-i's earliest memory of bound feet as a tradition originates from a myth. She was taught that the two beautiful sisters who lived on the Moon related to the shape of bound feet. Her imagination of bound feet as beautiful objects was directly informed by the aestheticization of bound feet circulating during the time. Yu-i at three years old describes bound feet as "new moon" or "lotus petals," both beautiful imagery that connotes purity. Her imagination originates from a myth her mother and Amah told her. Even more, her amah assured her that "if [Yu-i] was good she would grow up to be like [my] mother, pale and beautiful like one of the sisters on the moon." [36] Yu-i's mother, an elite woman who married into an elite family, also had her feet bound since childhood. These outside influences also shaped what younger Yu-i believes to be "right." Before a girl's feet get bound, she is already exposed to an environment that encourages her to believe in the aesthetics of bound feet. The combination of mythology to become a beautiful woman like the Moon sisters and to be loved like the Emperor's concubine influences women's choice to get their feet bound. The concubine's story also signals only small feet of women will be praised and loved by men. The concubine was known for her physical beauty of small feet that could dance on the lotus. Yu-i describes her physical beauty as her "graceful

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[35] Ibid, pg. 20
[36] Ibid

dance steps were like the new moon flitting among the clouds in the reflection of a lotus pond."[37] Again, we see the metaphor of the new moon and lotus. These objects appear white and shiny often related to pureness. As a response to the concubine's lotus feet, the Emperor was so impressed that he constructed for her a pond of metal and jewels. His impression further encouraged other women to "wrap their feet and bend their arches in the crescent shape of the new moon." [38] This story shows how bound feet were favored at the time when Yu-i was born. It is a symbol of physical beauty and guarantees to be loved and married to powerful men like the Emperor. Yu-i's ideal of bound feet soon crashed when her mother and Amah bound her feet for her to be eligible for marriage. The background of Yu-i's family constructed her early life values, which later contradict her first husband, Xu Zhimao, educational background.

[37] Ibid
[38] Ibid

Marriage and the "First Divorce" in China

Yu-i was known for several reasons. First, she was the first wife of Xu Zhimo [39], the renowned Chinese scholar who graduated from Columbia University in 1919 and furthered his studies at Cambridge in 1921. Xu's educational background made him the early trend of Chinese scholars who received education abroad. He is known for his activism to reshape Chinese poetry under Western influences. Xu leads several literary movements during the 1900s, including the organization of *Xinyue* ("Crescent Moon"), a literary monthly featuring liberal ideas and Western literature. [40] Xu and other Chinese scholars, including Yu-i's two brothers who went abroad for college, are considered the leaders of the May Fourth Movement,[41] an intellectual movement led by Chinese elites to modernize the country through education and anti-traditional values.

In Yu-i's first marriage with Xu, we observed how modern and traditional marriage concepts interact with each other. Both individuals have their own opinions on what marriage looks like. Yu-i's marriage with Xu, an arranged marriage between the two families, was seen as a duty for Yu-i but backward by Xu. Xu wanted an "educated woman," as Yu-i quoted later in her biography. Xu's idea of marriage presents the Western model of marriage at the time, which includes mutual understanding and the freedom to pick who they want to marry. Yu-i embodies the traditional marriage value that does not start from love or knowing each other.

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[39] Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, March 14). Xu Zhimo. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Xu-Zhimo, Xu Zhimo was a Chinese poet who strove to loosen Chinese poetry from its traditional forms and to reshape it under the influences of Western poetry and the vernacular Chinese language. The foreign literature to which Xu had been exposed shaped his own poetry and helped establish him as a leader in the modern Chinese poetry movement.

[40] Ibid

[41] Ibid

Yu-i describes her marriage setup as:

> "At that time in China, we married whoever our parents chose for us. This was another sign of our filial piety, perhaps one of the most extreme: in a complete sign of obedience, proper young men and women became betrothed to each other at their parents' wishes and met each other only on their wedding days. The *Liji*, the Book of Rites, said: Marriage is to make a union between two persons of different families, the object of which is to serve, on the one hand, the ancestors in the temple, and to perpetuate, on the other hand, the coming generation." [42]

For Yu-i, marriage comes from the agreement of two families without meeting her future husband prior. She follows the traditional guide of *Liji* and trusts her Fourth brother, the person given the right to pick her husband, to arrange a suitable marriage for her. For Xu, marriage comes with the concept of free marriage, when two people pick each other after understanding. Yu-i disagrees with Xu's concept of marriage. She later points out that free marriage meant to her to take "too long to learn everything about the person first until it becomes impossible to separate the good points and the bad points." [43] From the description, we know that Yu-i and Xu have very different conceptions of marriage. Although they both obeyed their family's will to get married, they had different approaches to their marriage. After their wedding, Yu-i chose to stay obedient to family roles and take care of her in-laws as how she was taught. While Xu decided to

[42] Chang, P.-M. N. (2011). *Bound Feet and Western Dress*. Transworld Digital. Pg. 68.
[43] Ibid

leave the family soon after Yu-i gave birth to their first son. We also see the unequal stance of the modern and traditional individuals here. For Xu, there is always an option to be abroad to study for other degrees and go to work at other places. However, for Yu-i, a woman who had never left her country or the household, her in-laws' house became the only place she could be. Her world is limited to the household if she isn't allowed to pursue higher education or Xu decides to bring her along to the UK. There is still a fundamental difference in what modern and traditional individuals get to choose in their lives, such as opportunities to go beyond the households and to receive education.

Another point that made Yu-i and Xu's marriage unsuccessful was Xu's urge to have a modern educated partner. For Xu, marriage should be based on romance and intellectual abilities. Xu examines women based on whether or not they received a "modern education," or Western education, at the time. Unlike other elite Chinese women raised in Westernized households and had received substantial education throughout their lives, Yu-i did not receive further education before she married Xu. Thus, when Xu saw her photo during the match-making process, Xu "turned down the corner of his mouth and said with distaste, 'Country Bumpkin.'" [44] Xu's reaction to Yu-i turns out to be a surprise. Yu-i was taught since childhood that bound feet would make a woman marriageable. Although she did not have her feet bound, the lack of Western education made her unqualified Xu's opinion. The interaction between modern and traditional values is seen through the difference in what makes women eligible for marriage. In traditional households, the eligibility used to be bound feet and obedience to serve the household. However, in modern marriage Xu expects, the criteria to come with whether or not the person received a

[44] Ibid, pg. 67

Western education. We see a shift in what makes women eligible to marry in the modern concept. For women coming from traditional households and having fewer opportunities to receive Western education, marrying into a modern household becomes harder as modern household operates in a different concept from traditional households. If women were to marry traditional households, like Yu-i's first sister, they continue their lives in a separate concept the nation is moving towards.

When it comes to education, it also comes with the question of whether or not traditional families are willing to send their daughters to receive Westernized education or not. Xu was personally Yu-i's brother's friend. All of Yu-i's brothers received education from Japan or other Western countries, then they returned to China to work as government officials or in the private industry. Yu-i brothers and Xu belong to the "modern, Westernized elites" China wanted at the time. However, for Yu-i and the daughters of Chang's family, education was hard to obtain because her father was "forward-looking for his sons but did not have enough morning to worry about the cost of his daughter's education." [45] She also points out that if it was not for her family having become poor, maybe her father would have been more generous about getting Yu-i a tutor or letting her study at the best schools like the woman her husband later loved. From Yu-i's quote, we see how resources were not located for women in traditional households. Some women received an education and went abroad, but there are still elite women who were raised through traditional values and did not receive equal opportunities in education.

Unsurprisingly, Yu-i and Xu's marriage ended with a divorce. Although divorce, as Yu-i quotes earlier, was seen as unfilial in traditional households, Yu-i agreed with divorcing Xu when

[45] Ibid, pg. 55

he brought another woman into their lives. For Yu-i, who was born and raised to be filial and take care of her in-laws, the word "divorce" comes with struggle and high pressure from society. She points out that in the past when a man divorces a woman, there must be a reason coming from the *Qi Chu* [46], the Seven Outs, for a wife. When Yu-i received a notice from Xu that he wanted a divorce and he had found his love, Lin Huiyin, a Western-educated Chinese woman who was a scholar and architect during the May Fourth Movement. Yu-i responded To Xu's request for divorce with confusion. For her, divorce comes with pressure from society. She was concerned that people might think that she had treated Xu's parents poorly, had not accepted Xu's girlfriend, or maybe even had an affair with Mr. Guo. For Yu-i, her concerns are rooted in the education she received from her family. [47] She followed everything her family taught her to do: stay filial, obey her in-laws, bear children, and take care of the household. Yet, in return to her is divorce, an outcome she cannot imagine. A few months after Xu departed Cambridge without notifying her, Yu-i received the notice from Xu during her time in France. She was four months pregnant and had been living with a Chinese couple in the countryside of France. When Yu-i agreed with Xu's divorce, Xu was pleased and quotes, "You see, this is so necessary. China must get rid of the old ways." [48] However, Yu-i, who knows the truth of the "first modern divorce in China" is initiated by Xu's urge to marry Lin Huiyin after the divorce, quotes:

[46] Ibid, pg. 131. The Seven Outs include if she disobey to his parents, could not hear him sons, committed adultery, acted jealous and unwilling to take in a concubine, repulsively sick, taked too much, committee theft. Men were allowed to divorce their wives in whicever reason, but the vise-versa was not allowed.
[47] Ibid, pg 152.
[48] Ibid, pg.144.

> All because Hsü Chih-mo [Xu Zhimao] was in a rush to get Lin Huiyin, he did not allow me time to get permission from my own parents. I had been raised to be filial, and now I would have to break the union that my parents had willed for me even without even asking for their permission. [49]

The divorce with Xu becomes the first action Yu-i takes in her whole life that is against her teaching. She breaks the union her parents seek for her and agrees to the divorce, an action that would be considered a punishment to women from traditional backgrounds. Although her brothers assured her that divorce was only an agreement between a man and a woman at the time, the action still left ruins to Yu-i on how people back home might gossip about her. Yu-i was quite right about the gossip. The Chang family and Xu are both famous families back in China. When Xu carried out the "first divorce in China," people responded with confusion and excitement to the modern convention. Afraid of how people might gossip about her, Yu-i decides to stay in Europe, instead of going back to China, until her second child is born.

The realization of her situation leads Yu-i to make changes during her stay in France. Alone and pregnant in a country she had never been to before, she begin to think of her husband's quote about her being not modern and old-fashioned. When Yu-i saw Xu's friend Miss Ming who has a pair of bound feet but a Western-styled outfit, she told Xu "Bound feet and Western dress do not go together," Xu responded with a raised voice and said that is why he wanted a divorce. In Xu's mind, although Yu-i never had her feet bounded, she might as well have her feet bounded. For Xu, Yu-i is old-fashioned by the mindset, not just the physical

[49] Ibid, pg. 143

restriction bound feet. Xu thinks of Yu-i as a daughter-in-law who fits the Xu family but not his wife. [50] Yu-i observed herself during her time in France. She then gives out a conclusion, which marks the transition of her life:

> Hsü Chih-mo [Xu Zhimao] had compared the two of us [Yu-i and Xu] to Bound Feet and Western dress, which initially confused me, because I did not have bound feet. But during the months in the French countryside I realized, in many ways, I had acted as if I did. In Xiashi [51], I never dared deviate from my in-law's expectations of me. I never questioned old Chinese customs and traditions. I had grown up in an educated, forward-looking family who sent their sons abroad to study. Yet I had been bound by the thinking of the past. I would have to find courage in my thoughts and my actions. I was the first woman in my family not to have bound feet, and I had to use this gift to its fullest advantage.[52]

Yu-i's realization comes with the eagerness to change. After the divorce, she decides to take the opportunity she has abroad. She realized bound feet were not only a physical restriction but also a mental restriction that had stopped her from wanting more, such as education and travel opportunities. With her feet unbound, she is allowed to travel to more places and move more easily. Thus, when Yu-i received the opportunity to study further in Berlin, she took the opportunity to become a teacher. In her next four years in Berlin, she embarks on an education journey that she longed for since childhood. After receiving her bachelor's degree in Berlin, she returned to China and started a clothing business. Her life dramatically changes after Berlin.

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[50] Ibid, pg. 122
[51] Xiashi is where Xu Zhimao's family house resides.
[52] Ibid, pg. 156

For Yu-i, she distinguishes her life as “before Germany” and “after Germany.” [53] She quotes, “Before Germany, I was afraid of everything, after Germany, I am afraid of nothing.” [54] Yu-i’s courage eventually led her to found the first women’s bank in China, the Shanghai Women Saving Bank, a bank founded by women for women. She helps non-upper-class women save their money through their earnings. She understands how hard women’s lives become once they get married and stop working, so her bank operates solely based on savings and allows women to have some earnings that are free from their husbands’ accounts. Yu-i also understands how upper-class women work in China. She lets upper-class women store jewelry outside of their husbands’ accounts. Yu-i becomes a businesswoman upon her return. Yu-i’s life begins with the restrictive resources distributed to her. Her life has been within Chang or Xu’s households. Her life-changing moment comes when she decides to break through some of the traditional teachings that have restricted her. She wants to be “modern,” to receive a Western education so she can have similar opportunities like Lin Huiyin or Xu Zhimao. At the same time, she still holds on to the traditional values such as taking care of her family members even after the divorce. She maintained a mutual friendship with Xu. Her previous in-laws made her the adopted sister of Xu's family. Yu-i’s change originates from her first breakthrough in the traditional role. She makes her decision to stay in Germany after the divorce, a change she never had before as an obedient daughter, sister, and wife. Even when her previous in-laws wrote to her to come back to China, she did not change her mind to pursue education. Yu-i’s life is a combination of traditional and Western. She interacts with both values and decides what she wants to keep in her

[53] Ibid, pg.146
[54] Ibid

life. Close to "selective Westernization" Perin Gürel mentioned in her book, individuals like Yu-i require resources to decide what they want to keep through traditional household teachings.[55]

In Yu-i's story, we see her resilience towards the new changes happening in her life. In addition to the family structure's change, Yu-i experienced the foreign values introduced to her marriage life and education choice. These changes contradict the traditional values she was raised. She selectively chooses the values she wishes to obtain through Western education, at the same time, keeping her traditional upbringing in the ways of treating family. Her experience shows that Western influence does not have to be a complete assimilation, but a selective process of what to keep and not. With a sustained understanding of how women raised in traditional households experience the changes happening around them, I will turn to how anarchist feminists view the adaptation of Western values to China.

[55] Gürel, P. (2017). Introduction: Good West, Bad West, Wild West. In *The Limits of Westernization: A Cultural History of America in Turkey* (pp. 1-16). New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/gure18202-002. Selective Westernization, the term quotes in the introduction paragraph, comes from the context of Turkish elites deciding what to keep from American values and modernization theory in relations with Turkey's community values. The analogy offers here responds to the process of a Western-educated individual like Yu-i decides what to keep from her abroad experience when she returns to her home country.

Chapter 3: He Yin Zhen and the Question of Women's Liberation

Chinese Feminists From 1880s to 1920s

In the chapter, I turn to the analysis of elite women activists in China from the 1880s to the 1920s. Unlike Yu-i, who was raised in a traditional household, some Chinese women received formal education while growing up in China and eventually pursued further studies abroad, akin to Xu Zhimao, Yu-i's first husband. These women, whom Yu-i describes as progressive and forward-looking in her memoir, were instilled with different values than Yu-i. Upon their return to China after higher education, they advocated for comprehensive reforms to China's antiquated systems. They introduced Western ideologies, with a particular focus on advocating for women's rights and gender equality in areas such as employment, marriage, and social standing. Among these scholars, He Yin Zhen stands out as a prominent example of anarchist feminists during this period. He Yin Zhen challenged the traditional Confucian principles that had governed China for millennia. She questioned women's roles in traditional households as merely serving men's interests and advocated for a new societal structure where men and women would enjoy equal rights. She supported her arguments by analyzing Confucian texts and contemporary social phenomena, proposing solutions for women's liberation and labor rights. This chapter will explore the perspectives of feminists of the time regarding the necessary reforms for society.

The change for elite women to receive Western education roots from the beginning of the late Qing dynasty.[56] China was forced to open up its self-sufficient market during the Opium

[56] Liu, L. H., Karl, R. E., & Ko, D. (2013). *The Birth of Chinese feminism: Essential texts in transnational theory*. Columbia University Press. Pg. 28. The authors described this period of China (1860s-1911) as suffused by political, economic, cultural, and military crisis. Late Qing dynasty experienced foreign forces that forced the self-sufficient

Wars, and foreign commodities from Britain, France, Prussia, and the US flooded the local markets. Chinese producers and suppliers who used to sustain through local markets now have to compete with foreign commodities made through industries, producing cheaper and higher quantities of goods. These changes, along with the missionaries that had entered China with gunboats, brought in new forms of commerce and foreign relations that demanded the country enter a Euro-American-dominated market. Although the missionaries did not convert many, they established schools with Western education. [57] The authors of *The Birth of Chinese Feminism* describe this change as "creating ideological and social fissures through their translation efforts and promotion of different sociocultural values." [58]

Due to the changes happening in the late Qing dynasty, educated Chinese who had gone abroad then returned to serve in the dynasty's bureaucracy as officials, began to rethink the country's future and how they could solve the catastrophe the empire faced in past decades. [59] Some factors involved in remaking the nation include initiating new industrial manufactures, a translation bureau, the establishment of schools and institutes for new forms of knowledge (Westernized mostly), and going abroad to study the ways of the dominating countries such as Britain, France, Germany, and the US. The urgency to reform, what Karl and others describe as "in the space of less than a generation, the old ways of the integrated Chinese sociocultural and

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economy to open up to commodities from Britain, France, Prussia, and the US. Although China had remained trades with these countries in the past, it now is forced to trade under the global dominated by Euro-America, including commodities from industrialized countries. The introduction of foreign goods hurt local markets and their producers. Internal conflicts and external factors, such as missionaries entering the country with gunboats, create ideological and social fissures so different from the sociocultural values China has.

[57] Ibid, pg. 28

[58] Ibid, pg. 28

[59] Ibid, pg. 29

political-economic system could not and will not last," accumulated when China's navy was defeated in the first Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895). [60]

Losing to its once weaker neighbors brought humiliation to China. Since then, a wave of educated elites, both men and women, have been trained to bring the dominant power's knowledge back to China. In the early 1890s, China experienced a dynastic reform that allowed more flexibility in political, social, cultural, commercial, and military development. The first reform period in 1989, led by the young Guangxu Emperor, was soon suppressed by his mother, the Emperor Dowager Cixi. Educated elites, the reformists of this period, are exiled to Japan, Hong Kong, and the US. It will take another 20 years for their return to topple the Empire and replace it with the Republic form of government.[61] During these 20 years, China experienced its first wave of feminist movements led by elites. This is the period referred to as the "modern China." [62]

[60] Ibid, pg. 29
[61] Ibid, pg. 29, although the emperor is supposed to be the leader of the dynasty, the court is actually controlled by his mother, the Empress Dowager Cixi and her faction of conservatives.
[62] Ibid, pg. 30.

"On the Question of Women's Liberation"

In this chapter, I will examine the work of He Yin Zhen and her proposal on labor reform and women's rights. Chinese women who had studied abroad and returned to China advocated for women's rights and freedom. In Dorothy Ko's essay, these women would fall under the first voice. [63] Their call for reform was proposed to the nation as a new hope. Upon their return to China after studying abroad in the US, UK, Germany, or Japan, they would join the country's reformation movement in education, democracy, and women's rights. Born in 1884, He Yin Zhen was a leading figure in feminism in the late Qing Empire. She joined the exiled Chinese revolutionaries in Japan in 1907 and formed the Society for the Restoration of Women's Rights. The journal she founded, *Tianyi*, Natural Justice, became the most influential medium for radical ideas such as feminism, socialism, and Marxism at the time.[64]

He Yin Zhen is keenly interested in women's liberation and labor issues. In her works, "On the Question of Women's Liberation" and "On the Question of Women's Labor," she explores women's rights through a comparative analysis of China and Euro-American countries. She identifies similarities between the two societies while also highlighting the unique construction of Chinese society. He Yin Zhen puts forward several proposals for reconstructing society and provides insight into the meaning of women's liberation.

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[63] Ko, D. (2007). *Cinderella's sisters: A revisionist history of footbinding*. University of California Press, 11. Ko separates Chinese elite women into two voices. The first voice belongs to the elite women who had been educated in Western style and proposed to reform the country through Western modernization theory. These women's voices echoes to the country, as Ko mentioned in her novel. The second voice, as discussed in the previous chapter, belongs to those who did not receive Western education and are raised in traditional households. Yu-i, prior to her education trip in Germany, would fall under the second voice. The feminists discuss here will belong to the first voice.

[64] Liu, L. H., Karl, R. E., & Ko, D. (2013). *The Birth of Chinese feminism: Essential texts in transnational theory*. Columbia University Press. Pg. 51.

In her first piece, “On the Liberation of Women’s Liberation,” she quotes:

> To liberate women means letting women enjoy equal rights and sharing the fruits of all freedom. If we decided to follow the model of the current European and American systems, we would get our freedom in name but not in substance and also would have equal rights in name only. A sham equality deprived of true freedom is not equality at all.

For He, women's liberation in China does not come from copying the Euro-American model. If one wants to liberate women, by providing equal rights as men and sharing all fruits of freedom, then they should understand the roots of unequal rights in society. He Yin Zhen’s ideology is similar to the approach Turkish elites took during Westernization or so-called Western modernization. In Perin E. Gürel’s book, *The Limits of Westernization: A Cultural History of America in Turkey*, Gürel explains how Turkish elites, nationalists upon their education in the West, return to Turkey to establish a Western-modernization system that incorporates Turkish values. The establishment of such a system requires delicate work, such as choosing what parts of Western modernization should be installed and what parts of local values should be preserved. Incorporating Western and local values into a new system, the “selective Westernization” method Gürel quotes in her book, transcends into the Republic of Turkey from an imagined community. Similarly, when He Yin Zhen examines the case of Chinese women's liberation, she imagines a

community that would have incorporated Western feminist values and gives her analysis.[65] He Yin Zhen explains that if Chinese society adopted Western values directly, there are a few reasons why it wouldn't be successful.

Firstly, the foundation of the women's liberation movement in China primarily stems from the admiration for power and authority in European, American, and Japanese cultures, predominantly driven by men. Since these countries are viewed as more civilized nations of the modern world that all grant their women some degree of freedom, Chinese men might think "transplanting this system into the lives of their daughters and wives, by prohibiting the practice of footbinding, and by enrolling them in schools to receive basic education, they will be applauded by the world." [66] Since the root is not all altruistic, He Yin Zhen believes that eventually women will not be liberated.

Secondly, He Yin Zhen questions if the motivation to send women to school, or at least the lowest degree of education including craftsmanship or skills, is for women to alleviate men's burden on households. In traditional Chinese families that are large, leaving the women with basic skills that can feed the elderly and youth means the men can travel and roam in distant places and choose not to concern themselves with the management of the household.[67] We see a similar cause in Yu-i's example. Soon after she settled down with her marriage in Xu Zhimao's family house, Xu left her in the household and went abroad to study. Later when Yu-i is pregnant with her second son, Xu leaves them in the household in Britain after seeing her capable of living

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[65] The phrase "Western modernization" comes from the ideology of the West, namely Euro-American countries, to view what is modern and not. The idea of "modernization" imposes the dominant figure of Euro-America as industralized and civilized, while the rest of the world to be the opposite. Because the phrase is a Euro-American centralized term, adding it roots "Western" seem more appropriate in this sense. I will explain how local communities cannot simply adapt to the Euro-America system due to the uniqueness of each community.
[66] Yin Zhen, H. (1907). In *On the Question of Women's Liberation*. Essay, pg. 60.
[67] Ibid, pg. 61

alone. He Yin Zhen quotes such action as the "pursuit of self-interest" [68] of men in the name of women's liberation. The benefits men can gain through liberating women outweigh the traditional values that give limited freedom to women. If the motivations for women's liberation come from such a cause, then the movement won't be successful if men are the ones who make the rules.

Finally, He Yin Zhen criticizes the form of family in Chinese society. She quotes Chinese men who view family as their personal property, yet when it comes to family responsibilities such as running the household and raising the children, they leave the work to women. If liberation were to happen, then the traditional quotes on "family education as the backbone of all educational effort" would be transformed into women's work. If education is introduced to women, this quote will separate women from the "civilized" and the "barbaric" through their educational level. He Yin Zhen states that this quote is saying that "barbaric women are inferior to civilized women to run the household or to educate children." [69] Such separation, ultimately, will hurt women as a group and force them to separate through the education they receive. Similarly, we see how Yu-i, a traditional woman who did not receive a Western education, was looked down upon by her Western-educated husband. She was viewed as backward, even though she does not have her feet bound, Xu views her as she did. Furthermore, as educated women are still bound to stay in the household to educate their children, the goal of women's liberation diminishes if the freedom women receive is limited to men's rule.

He Yin Zhen is concerned with these issues and proposes a solution to them. She states, "The cause of women's rights must be won through women's efforts. It must not be granted by

[68] Ibid, pg. 61
[69] Ibid, pg. 61

men." [70] If women allow men to control the rightful role given to women, then women will always be the ones who receive freedom from men. Men will become the ones that women look above, like what happened in the past. Therefore, only when women liberate themselves and push for their rights can there be freedom for women. He Yin Zhen warns her audience that if women "continued to be instrumentalized and remain men's appendages, we would be liberated name only and our rights could never really be our own." [71] The problem of a men-controlled society is rooted in unequal power distribution. If in the modernized world, men are still the ones who hand freedom to women, the power dynamic will remain the same. Thus, He Yin Zhen states that Chinese women cannot remain in a passive role and expect men to liberate them. The most direct answer is for women to raise their voices and advocate for freedom. To provide an example, He Yin Zhen uses a comparison between Finland and China. He Yi Zhen noticed how Finnish women are the ones who step up and form their organizations among all Euro-American countries. She points out that in 1884, Finnish women established the Finnish Women's Association to mobilize women's political participation. The movement, although struggled with violence, remained until 1907. When He Yin Zhen wrote this essay, Finland had nineteen women elected to the Parliament, which was "unprecedented in the world" as He Yin Zhen quotes. [72] For He Yin Zhen, the Finnish women's rights movement is a success that can inspire Chinese women to form their organizations and advocate for their rights.

He Yin Zhen noticed the unequal distribution of wealth and education resources that allowed elites to have more opportunities to access knowledge. She further advocated for equal rights among both elite and common women. She questions whether women's rights should be

[70] Ibid, pg. 63
[71] Ibid, pg. 63
[72] Ibid, pg. 64

concentrated in the hands of a few rich ladies. She concludes, “A minority of women holding power is hardly sufficient to save the majority of women.”[73] Although Finland was successful in electing nineteenth women into the parliament, these powerful women did little to bring benefits to the general population. Therefore, He Yin Zhen explains that women's liberation cannot end at this cause. To further advance women’s benefits, both elite and working-class women should enjoy the same rights. Political rights become the main issue He Yin Zhen is concerned with. She believes that without universal suffrage among elite and working-class men and women, the first step for equal rights will not be achieved. In He Yin Zhen’s definition, equal rights cannot be achieved in haste. To achieve equal rights among men and women is to break through the system of centuries where men rule the society. He Yin Zhen advocates, for modern women not to wrest with women, but to compel men to renounce their privileges and power and humble themselves [men]. [74] He Yin Zhen continues to propose ways in which Chinese women can find liberation. She firmly believes that equality is among elite and working-class women. Even among scholars of the time, He Yin Zhen's beliefs were considered too progressive. Nevertheless, her work laid the foundation for liberating women from the constraints of the old society. She elucidates the interplay between local values and their divergence from Western values. He Yin Zhen meticulously distinguishes between Chinese and Western societal norms, emphasizing their disparities and advocating for reforms tailored to Chinese society. Through examining the root causes of gender inequality in China, she calls for substantial reform. To provide further explanation of He Yin Zhen’s belief, I will examine her second piece, “On the Question of Women’s Labor.”

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[73] Ibid, pg. 66
[74] Ibid, pg. 70

"On the Question of Women's Labor"

In He Yin Zhen's essay "On the Question of Women's Labor," she addresses the root of Chinese women's labor. Influenced by Marxist and socialist ideas, He Yin Zhen compares Chinese society with the West.[75] When observing the differences, He Yin Zhen realizes that income inequality contributes the most to why Chinese women enter concubinage and prostitution. While some Chinese women work within the household, doing jobs like silk weavers, maids, or family carers, some women enter concubinage society to sustain their lives.[76] She states that concubinage is a problem of livelihood. The problem comes from the inequality between the rich and the poor. Families sell their daughters to rich families to secure food and living.

Before He Yin Zhen, labor focus had been on industrialization and how factory women's condition is. In He Yin Zhen's focus, the problem of factory women lacking rights is similar to concubinage and prostitutes. She draws an analogy between the three situations women experience in the Chinese labor market. She further compares China's concubinage system with Euro-American countries. She quotes, "In Euro-American countries, the concubine system does not exist. There is freedom of marriage and divorce." [77] He Yin Zhen redirects our focus from elite Chinese women to the commoners who lacked opportunities. As the country sought to modernize, it was crucial to tackle the struggles of the majority who were still dealing with poverty. Only by examining income inequality and women's experiences in these circumstances, can we fully understand how feminists viewed China's reform during the era. For He Yin Zhen,

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[75] When the author mentions Marxist and Socialist ideas, the goal for this project remains with the discussion of Western modernization theory. It is not to undermine that Chinese scholars at the time are not influence by other foreign ideologies.

[76] Yin Zhen, H. (1907). In *On the Question of Women Labor*. Essay, pg. 77

[77] Ibid, pg. 86

liberating women comes with liberating both wealthy and poor women. She noticed that Chinese society oppresses poor women through the labor market. These women, due to a lack of economic opportunities, turn to concubinage and prostitution to sustain their lives. He Yin Zhen quotes the "practice of concubines is most widespread in China." [78] By noticing how women's labor market had been focused on concubinage, prostitution, or domestic work, He Yin Zhen proposes the question of women's labor in China comes from the unequal distribution of wealth and family structure. Lower-income women sell their lives to wealthy men, who often own many women at a time, in exchange for bread and living necessities. He Yin Zhen is aware of this social phenomenon. She compares the concept of marriage between China, Euro-American countries, and Japan. She calls out the different attitudes towards prostitution in New York and China. In places like New York City, where prostitution thrived at the time, newspapers often discussed the topic as "poverty leading to the bitterness of prostitution," yet, in China, newspapers often tell about the affairs of famous prostitutes and call them insulting names. [79] The different attitudes toward prostitution and labor for lower-income women to engage for a living, are rooted in the question of livelihood. He Yin Zhen provides an explanation for concubinage and prostitution in China:

> In contemporary Euro-America, many believe that prostitution is detrimental to social customs and advocate its abolishment. At the same time, they attack the concubine systems of both China and Turkey. Knowledgeable people in China also want to substitute monogamy for concubinage. Surely, it is not a bad thing to do away with the

[78] Ibid, pg. 82
[79] Ibid, pg. 83-85

> systems of prostitution and concubinage. However, the proliferation of prostitutes and concubines is not a question of customs; it is a problem of livelihood. As long as there is income inequality between rich and poor, neither prostitution nor concubinage can disappear quickly. Even if one were suddenly to pronounce them dissolved, perhaps the names would be gone, but the reality would persist.

He Yin Zhen begins by addressing the prevailing attitudes in Euro-American countries. These countries hold a belief that prostitution is harmful to societal norms and should be abolished. They criticized the concubine systems in China and Turkey. Yet, they ignore the fact that such practice is a choice forced onto poor women to sell their lives to wealthy men. The wealth gap between the poor and the wealthy and men and women exists in these societies. The gaze of Euro-American countries reflects on the imposition of Western moral standards on non-Western societies. He Yin Zhen emphasizes how Chinese society differs from others. To truly abolish concubinage and prostitution, one has to acknowledge that the issue is a question of livelihood. If the country is to abolish such a system, it has to provide an economy where women labor can work equally as their male counterparts. Or else, as He Yin Zhen warns, the practice of concubinage and prostitution will only be gone by names but not their practices. He Yin Zhen's analysis also provides critics of Chinese society that had long viewed prostitution and concubinage as solely a social custom. She argues that these practices are deeply intertwined with economic factors, specifically income inequality. Last but not least, when rethinking how society should reform itself into a gender-equal economy, He Yin Zhen highlights the intersections of gender, economics, and cultural norms in understanding the persistence of

practices like prostitution and concubinage. She challenges simple moral judgments and calls for a deeper examination of the structural inequalities that continue these practices.

For scholars like He Yin Zhen, reforming society necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the local community's intricacies. Simple adjustments based on imported models, such as the Western modernization model, are only possible with a deep comprehension of the underlying issues. By emphasizing the importance of the roots that caused this social phenomenon, she urges scholars and policymakers to approach the complex connection of cultural, economic, and social factors when transforming local communities into a Western-modernized model. Only through such understanding can meaningful and sustainable societal reforms be achieved. Notably, He Yin Zhen stands out as one of the few voices to recognize the condition of poor women within society. Her recognition amplifies the awareness of the majority’s conditions that elites ignore in their argument. In a society where opportunities are concentrated among the elites, non-elites undergo separate experiences within the framework of Western modernization theory. He Yin Zhen's writings acknowledge the experiences of both the wealthy and the poor, the elites and the non-elites. Her emphasis on the condition of the non-elites remains pioneering for her time. Her work also serves as a reminder that when a nation seeks to adopt foreign theories, it must do so with care and ensure a comprehensive understanding of its local communities.

In her pursuit to liberate women both socially and economically, He Yin Zhen engages in dialogue with Chinese traditions. She often questions these practices and delves into the reasonings behind certain practices. When proposing solutions to integrate Western ideas into Chinese society, she regards the considerations for introducing foreign concepts to a distinct

community. Additionally, she reminds her readers to be cautious against the superficial adoption of Western ideas, emphasizing the importance of understanding the unique cores of local communities that operate differently from the West. Through these arguments, He Yin Zhen ultimately desires that society consider her advice when contemplating the liberation of women from traditional roles. The importance of He Yin Zhen's work lies in how Chinese elite women diverse their opinions on Western influence. We see a different response from He Yin Zhen than Yu-i. Through different focus and analysis of the issue, He Yin Zhen provides insight into anarchist feminists' thoughts of Chinese society under Western influence.

Conclusion

I examined in this project Chinese elite women's responses to the introduction of Western values in China by focusing on the work of two prominent women writers of their generation. Their statements reveal a segment into some aspects of what elite women believe should be considered when foreign values are introduced into a community. While the changes brought about by Westernization might be seen as inevitable, these women's work gives us insight into the various aspects within the elite group that push against this presumed inevitable. Through the lens of their work, we can examine what forms of thinking, adaptation, and refusal of such changes have prompted elite segments of Chinese society at the turn of the century. One of these elites, Chang Yu-i, describes her life before going abroad to Germany and the changes she made while living in a foreign land with different values. In Yu-i's story, I observed how women raised in traditional households responded to changes happening in family structure and economic freedom. Yu-i's ultimate choice to follow her husband to the UK, as examined in chapter two, demonstrates the persistence of her earlier inclination to obey her family's will. However, while abroad, Yu-i was exposed to Chinese intellectuals with different educational backgrounds from hers. Her encounters with women like Ms. Chang, a bound feet woman with Western education, demonstrate to her the unlimited opportunities she can obtain with education. The bound feet depicted in this novel metaphorically correspond to physical constraints and psychological barriers ingrained within women's mindsets. Without dismantling the traditional norms associated with bound feet, a limitation set for women to physically free themselves and think of their lives as their own, embracing new values remains unattainable. Her final decision to pursue

education herself to become a teacher in Germany change her life. With the experience of living alone in a foreign land, Yu-i gained the confidence and courage to make her decisions in life.

For Yu-i, embracing Western values is more about selection than complete assimilation. She selectively chooses the customs that suit her rather than completely adapting to foreign cultures. Her marriage with Xu Zimao, which entailed a bond between a traditional Chinese woman and a Western-educated Chinese man, highlights the tensions between different value systems. While Yu-i represents the values taught by traditional China, Xu represents the new era where Western values are introduced. The tensions within their marriage demonstrate the turmoil created in local communities when Western values clashed with local values. Yu-i's life before Germany was confined to the household. However, by willingly taking certain but not all Western values while retaining her traditional upbringing, she liberates herself from these confines. Her selective approach to foreign values in this way reveals the limitations of foreign values' appeal to her in this context. She adopts certain aspects of the value system—pursuing higher education, engaging in entrepreneurship, and asserting her independence in decision-making—while still adhering to her original values. Upon her return to China, for example, she still took care of Xu's parents even after their divorce, maintained the family's large household, and continued to show respect for the elderly. Even though Yu-i had gained foreign values abroad that are different from her original teaching, she still values the concepts learned since her childhood. Her independence gained through her abroad experience does not contradict her following some of the Confucian values, i.e. respecting elders. She still views her traditional upbringing as important for her. Thus, Yu-i shows us the choice that is made by selectively choosing the values she wants to keep in

both cultures. She demonstrates the possibility of learning a new culture with the aim of keeping parts of the old one.

The other primary texts I examined as part of this project are He Yin Zhen's essays, "On the Liberation of Women" and "On the Liberation of Women's Labor." Unlike Yu-i's memoir, which centers on private life, He Yin Zhen's essay focuses on Chinese society, particularly its public sphere. She delves deeper into the question of women's liberation within China. She pinpoints the roots of Chinese patriarchy and how it affects women's liberation. While acknowledging the efforts of women's unions in Western states, she also highlights the challenges of imposing Western models onto Chinese society without a thorough understanding. As an anarchist feminist, He Yin Zhen examines common women's labor rights and economic freedom. She looks at concubinage and prostitution in China as both social and economic phenomena. She advocates for a comprehensive examination of these issues before attempting to implement superficial solutions that fail to address their underlying roots. He Yin Zhen's essay provides us with a different lens compared to Yu-i's position to assess how anarchist feminists within the elite Chinese women group that I focus on here understand women's liberation. Using the examples of Euro-American countries and the Finnish women's union, He Yin Zhen draws a comparative analysis between China and other countries. She mentions that women's liberation is a universal issue in patriarchal societies, not simply a Chinese problem. With her observations, she provides her readers with advice she believes would be useful for Chinese society, including sharing rights with all women, not just the elites. He Yin Zhen's work offers a different insight from Yu-i's. While Yu-i selectively chooses the values to adapt to her private life, He Yin Zhen

looks at the bigger picture of the Chinese public. He Yin Zhen emphasizes on complete surveillance of the local community before adapting to a foreign model.

Ultimately, this project explored the historical experiences of elite Chinese women from the 1880s to the 1920s. Through the two examples, I delved into how Chinese women viewed Western values at the time. I examined how these women perceived the cultural expansion of the West into their local communities. While some embraced certain changes, as we have seen in Yu-i, others questioned the rationale behind such expansion and highlighted the necessary process of examining the local community's value before any adaptation happens. Nevertheless, their perspectives provide valuable insights into the debates these interactions generated at the time and the challenges they posed to elite women of the era. Beyond China, other regions across the globe also grappled with the repercussions of Western expansion.

As we examine the two elite women's work, we are reminded that the elite group does not represent the whole society. Being the ones who are exposed to foreign ideals first, they have a completely different experience from the rest of the society. We recognize how Western values have influenced cultures and communities worldwide, we are left with several questions: how can a community survive with its values after Westernization happens? How do the majority experience the introduction of foreign values other than the elites?

Most importantly, in thinking of how the community shows resilience to foreign values, how do we understand the challenges posed by Westernization?

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