

A Taste of Class: Manuals for Becoming Woman

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Here beauty does not only refer to appearances. It extends to femininity itself. I forget who has said that the saddest thing to happen to a woman is when she forgets she is a woman.

—Zifu and Qizi, *Dream Women* (*Zaomeng nüren*)

This essay addresses the making of woman as postsocialist class-object, developing core notions of class-making and spiritual homelessness through an exploration of the forms of the feminine in the taste structures in contemporary urban China.¹ Our key observation is that beautification, sexual styling, and spiritual/cultural cultivation are consistently linked in narratives of “becoming-woman” in a newly successful genre of aspirational literature, which we call “manuals of elite civility.”

Titles in this genre include works on manners, education choices, modes of cultural consumption, business etiquette, travel and tourism, interior design, and what we might describe as the general articulation and dressing of the self for a new time. There is also interest in class as a political and performative category, and the books tend to include philosophical and literary musings to underline spiritual or cultural value in any and all aspirational and consumption-led activities. These books are differentiated from high-end magazines by their format, their literary/cultural approach, and the reputation of some authors and contributing essayists, as well as by production values that emphasize a coffee-table look and a semi-intellectual address and design. Several, and those are the subject of this discussion, focus on the performance of womanliness as an objective of the reading practice. This womanliness is modeled on the past but re-created in modern formations for a new era. Publications in the genre sell widely in bookshops and at international airports. They tend to be relatively expensive, high-quality publications, offering visual and textual advice on standards of civility, elegance, and taste in particular aspects of modern society.

The first image (fig. 1) is taken from Chen Ping, Chen Huifeng, and Li Ziyun's *Beautiful Images of Chinese Women: Beauties of Our Times*, a book that falls into the category of womanliness revisited.² As with all the other manuals, its address to the reader is didactic. Here, the authors take pains to describe, in an insert on the image itself, that this mode shot should be read as an early-twentieth-century example of Western-styled features (large eyes and dark lips, a deliberate move away from Chinese moon beauty). Ironically, the model strongly resembles—and may indeed be—the American-born actress Anna-May Wong (1905–61), a Chinese American, born in Los Angeles, who despite significant acting talent was required to build her career on looking “Oriental” and who therefore already embodies an anachronistic formation of Chineseness. However, rather than her (possible) history, it is her deployment by contemporary authors as a “type” to which women may return in seeking *nüxingmei*, feminine beauty, that is striking. Why do modern Chinese women need to be told about the fashionable switch to large eyes and dark lips in the 1920s and 1930s? Or, rather, why should this book and this particular image reemerge *now*? What is being sought in the memories of classy women from these magazines? And



Figure 1 *Nüxingmei*: “Anna Mae Wong,” or “Western-style eyes in 1928.” Li, Chen, and Ping, *Beautiful Images*, 64.

This image was sourced from an unattributed photograph (no photographer is named) of the woman depicted (also unnamed), from a contemporary collection of images and commentary. The picture exemplifies the version of womanliness described above but is also catachrestic in the very method of its reproduction—no attribution, and a temporal collapse between the date on the image and the superimposed box marking it as “twentieth century.”

why do the modern manuals need to caption and explain the image in the twenty-first century, whereas in the 1920s it was self-explanatory?

We argue here that the narratives of womanliness and becoming in these manuals may be understood in reference to *catachresis*, expounded and developed by Tani Barlow in her work on the category of “women” in Chinese feminism.³ Barlow’s emphasis is on the cumulative historical significance of what might otherwise be viewed as an analytic conundrum, or set of competing exemplars. That is, when considering the formation and use of categories such as *nüxing* (persons of female gender) and *funü* (women), where the term’s referent is theoretically and philosophically ambiguous, Barlow

argues, “I read then historically: I stress their heterogeneous contents as well as their centrality and instability. . . . I also demonstrate the roles these terms played in policy.” The wider and very useful ramification of the work is that “when reconsidered as historical catachresis, ubiquitous, descriptive, proper nouns become legible repositories of social experience.”⁴ Thus, Barlow’s work allows us to compete with macro-concepts, such as modernity and reform, by introducing contingencies as deliberative catachresis, which give social substance to temporal and spatial givens, as constitutive and cumulative categories on their own account. The intervention can also allow a shift from teleologies of advance to a horizontal account of change and continuity, “a radicalness [of theoretical perspective] that is often the only means of effecting change.”⁵ In this vein, we propose to understand our underlying term of analysis, *middle-class*, which has several contemporary Chinese translations but—crucially—no absolute referent, and middle-class *nüren* (feminine person) as historical catachresis. We will therefore both recognize the advantageous impossibility of “correct” usage of these terms, as Barlow has done in her work, and stress that it is their centrality, heterogeneous contents, and instability that allow us to see with more clarity what may be happening to women in contemporary China, and how these happenings may be seen as *change in historical context*. The second related point is that the cultural imaginary of the “new” feminine Chinese woman revealed in these manuals, as *made-to-be-looked-at* and emulative, betrays a fascination with class that responds to the modernization processes underpinning social distinction in Reform. Such fascination, while capitulating to the neoliberal utopian fantasies of a future China, the “will have been”⁶ of both class and gender, clings to tropes of “residual” cultural sentiments and structures of practice, thus reinscribing women with a sexual ontology (as in *nüxing*), as well as an evacuated, reformed historicity (as in the exit of *funü* and the reentry of *nüren*). The evacuation of history operates in the manuals of elite civility by the elision of deep context for those selective images, characterizations, and moments of nostalgic textuality that operate as the currency of the past for women to embody while disregarding a sense of history that connects to the present across decades of political contradiction and social change.

A History of Beauty

Becoming-woman (*zuo nüren*) in postsocialist China is, then, a class proposition. This is not to suggest that class is a given or even an actual formation, as the better works on middle-class phenomena in China have noted, class is a work in progress.⁷ The transformation from appropriate socialist members of the female gender (*funü, nütongzi*)⁸ to the quintessentially feminine person (*nüren*) is one part of a response to the need for appropriate class performance.⁹ What we see in these manuals is a palimpsest for class becoming in a society that has lost its prior ideological impetus but that nonetheless requires cohesion and investment in the discourse of wealth creation on which Reform was founded. The idea that class is as mutable as gender is crucial to the analysis of these manuals. In order to locate the loss of bearings that prompts the urge to re-form through class allegiance and status, we have turned to the Weimar period in twentieth-century Germany. Although this comparison is not exact, there are helpful notes of consonance. Particularly, in our readings of the German commentator of early-twentieth-century modernity, Siegfried Kracauer, we have noted that the idea of spiritual homelessness and class-becoming, which he ascribes to the white-collar workers of Weimar Germany¹⁰ — “in Berlin, a salaried type is emerging, standardized in the direction of the desired complexion”¹¹ — is redolent of the ideological homelessness of China’s salaried masses’ current aspirational relationship with class and social becoming. Homelessness for Chinese masses is in some cases actual, as we note elsewhere in reference to displaced land workers and forced internal migrations.¹² In this argument, however, it is more closely allied to ideological lack and spiritual uncertainty, which is part of the groping toward class boundaries and cohesion that we observe in the publications discussed here. Catachresis provides the conceptual bridge by which one can begin to understand how homelessness is answered by anachronistic and loosely articulated categories of being and becoming — in the realms of both gender and class.

The to-be-looked-at-ness — the visual staple of the manuals of elite civility — is a symptom of a homelessness that prompts a search for the self in a shared and sanctioned ontology of class. Interestingly, however, it is also a return to strategies of class creation from an earlier era. Tina Mai

Chen has shown how in the 1950s the visual aids to self-construction were borrowed from and patterned on Soviet film stars — “Soviet film provided visual imagery, language, and a comparative framework central to Chinese self-understanding”¹³ — while both Harriet Evans and Chen Xiaomei have argued for the role of political posters and the women who “starred” in them as emulative objects in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁴ Such comparative frameworks are extremely hard to locate for the salaried masses of today, when modern articulations of class cannot be simply or legitimately borrowed from either postsocialist (despite the transitory attractions of Russia’s new rich and the Natasha syndrome)¹⁵ or capitalist regimes, and yet are introduced and confused in the flow of visual data that global media and marketing make inescapable. Arguably, catachresis is an alternative streamlining strategy for those acting out the creation of status boundaries and style, as much as for those who attempt to understand the process in relation to a longer trajectory of modernization and social change.

The transformation of the idea of woman, from *funü* to *nüren*, is underway both discursively and through autodidactic or emulative social-cultural acts. These feminine acts coincide with other processes of social differentiation and reformation in Reform and post-Reform China, which are contingent on the (now Late) Reform era but are also couched in the catachrestic manipulation of former times and other places. The inclusion of Zhang Zhixin as a model (fig. 2) is a striking example. Zhang, a political activist, was executed in 1975. She has since been taken up as a heroine by offshore dissident groups and reinstated in contemporary history at home. But here, in this manual of civility, it is what she *looks* like that really counts. Neat, smiling, and in an intellectual but floral setting, Beijing University gardens, she is dressed in the “white” of urban class distinction that Tina Chen has noted,¹⁶ and refers to nothing so much as an idyll of appropriate female, intellectual class for her time. Zhang is appropriated by organized dissidence in the United States, and here by the idea of perfected revolutionary womanliness in white shirtsleeves, but the nature and meaning of her actual sacrifice and the contingencies and causes of her anger in the 1970s are not discussed or even considered relevant to contemporary consumption of her image. She is arguably as ahistorical in this presentation as are the “Yangzhou beauties” in another manual on women in Jiangnan:



Figure 2 Cultural Revolution heroine, Zhang Zhixin, in Beida gardens, 1952. Zhang died violently in 1975. Li, Chen, and Ping, *Beautiful Images*, 154. This image is also unattributed in the source book and is also an example of catachrestic elision. Portraits of Zhang from the year of her death show a very troubled and damaged woman, not a beauty across time at all.

Today's Yangzhou women are still delicate, refined, and tasteful. Their refinement is not confined in their care and ingenuity in the details of dressing, but also in their natural affinity with the traditional culture. They do not really like rock and rolls, but prefer Pipa and Flutes.¹⁷

These images and texts offer means of appropriating distinction and self-distinction through a class-based and gender-specific civility, but they do not involve the multiple referents of “Chinese women” in Reform or any other period, which would deliver a rather different image of becoming “women.” Rather, to become woman (*zuo nüren*) evokes the legitimacy of returning to a feminine essence free from Maoist ideological constraints, though to become woman is also part of the consolidation of the postsocial-

ist economy and consequent social differentiation.¹⁸ The intellectual, Zhang, is returned to high-class, feminine intellectualism, even in the process of noting, briefly, her martyrdom to intellectual values of free speech. One might say, then, that the remaking of *woman* is meaningful only in the context of the remaking of *class* in post-Reform China, though the actual story of class-making in which “Chinese women” are central players is often submerged. The aspirational pull and practice of *class*, on the other hand, is typographed and inscribed in taste structures and distinct elite feminine forms. Yangzhou women display their class by preferring a musical form that is not ostentatiously contemporary, but in so doing they lay claim to contemporary femininity, which must be both of its time and accessible, but nonetheless beyond time, and thus open to the nostalgic gaze of the male essayist. The multiple temporalities at work in these manuals thus combine to suggest a way of becoming woman and achieving class status in the immediate future. While these representations gesture to the various nostalgic elements of different pasts they nonetheless operate as a catachrestic accumulation of feminine traits and exemplars whose final qualities are in their desirable sensibilities and their looks.

The classification of woman is a process in which *funü* becomes increasingly subaltern and less ontologically sexual. Nowadays, indeed, the term often refers exclusively to working- and underclass women as a sociological group in which gender is not foregrounded. *Baomu*, the maid class, is arguably an offshoot of this reproletarianization of the classes that supports the idea and possibility of status. Meanwhile, *nüren* not only reiterates for a new period the circularity of essential femininity, which is then circumscribed by class performance, but also presupposes the possibilities and luxuries of choice in relatively affluent “lifestyles” that reflect “quality” civility and sentiments in the post-Reform society.

Manuals of Elite Civility: Beautiful Images

Beautiful Images of Chinese Women: Beauties of Our Times is both generically representative and atypical of the manuals of elite civility. Its contrary impulses to capitalize on the to-be-looked-at-ness of women as images of the present and to recover their alternative temporalities highlight both the

genre's promise and its dilemma. That said, it does not manage to outwit its own generic formulations and is finally a text that evacuates its own feminist intentions. The volume is first of all representative in its style of presentation and in its ambition to encapsulate a social phenomenon of modern womanhood through text and image; a comprehensive, nicely produced photographic memoir of Chinese women across the twentieth century. These women are captioned "Beauties of the Times," an example of the deployment of beauty as a transhistorical element of class authority to produce a catachresis — woman — which emphasizes a becoming, yet fixes that process in a time loop of nostalgia and aspiration. As we have suggested in our comparison between Zhang and the Yangzhou beauties, the women are read in the context of their publication, which is a China of becoming and collective self-invention: what does it mean to be "such a one" *now*, and how might one achieve that becoming? In *Beautiful Images*, women are placed alongside one another, privileging their womanly achievement over their temporal differences. Sisterhood is a fine thing, but here it is also an unfortunate renouncement of historical change and loss. When history is thereby returned to a different realm, perhaps masculine, "our times" are made always present and closed to critique. Without the benefit of historical comparison, for instance, how might one stage an argument that women in Reform China have both exceptional opportunity and the danger of being returned to essentialized irrelevance? The nature of both danger and opportunity are negotiated not so much by achievement as by class, family wealth, and the bequests of nature on a woman's form.

Nonetheless, the publication is also *atypical* because it is feminist and semi-academically intended, with an interest in representing women's history as a series of "alternative temporalities." Its "progressive" protofeminist layout and inscriptions are suggested by subtitles and the frontispiece and afterword. But again, its style is susceptible to its readership, and the book shares the trappings of its generic sisters, whereby the representation of historical and contemporary femininity in its compilation of images claims the capture and definition of its subject: the woman in time. In the introductory chapter, entitled "Who Defines the Beauty of the Times," the authors assert:

The transformation of the images of women is actually the capturing of history through images. Those both bodily and spiritually “real” people—women—who adorn themselves and change according to the times, are indeed “captives” of particular times and places. . . . Often “trends and fashion” are considered as something that happen among women themselves, but what really causes the clouds and rains, that is, makes women dedicated followers, is the absent “hand” of the times. Women cannot really decide their own images and the changes therewith. Behind their “independent” appearance and “cool” adornment, are the more forceful demands and imaginaries of their times.¹⁹

Although trying to establish the importance of women and their images in an attempt to write a different kind of history, the authors inadvertently define their subject as “captives” of the times. The impulse to feminist explication sadly falls back into an essentialist mode of historical exegesis, which is not after all so dissimilar from the book’s concern with “capturing” women’s image, as, apparently, they have been already captured by the contingencies of their own history. A similar move is made in Verity Wilson’s account of the Soong sisters’ sartorial politics, but there she allows that the women in question made political decisions around style and self-presentation in order to capture modernity rather than the other way around.²⁰ It is a preferable reading. *Beautiful Images* is, as a piece of editorialization, a catachrestic move in itself. The unrepresentable—the multiplicity of actual women—is represented by a visualized and narrated concept: the elite, civil, beautifully adorned woman. Yet, both overdetermined and underplayed by the text, and lacking the soft edges of change and flexibility, this woman is denied the benefits of catachresis. While these women are all supposedly of their time, options for the present are limited in the actual curation of the images to a hyperglamorization of the Republican era, or of an image of beauty circumscribed by commodity fetishism, or by star status in the film world (fig. 3). In this “feminist” text, woman is narrated and curated according to her timely iconic beauty and to categories of production, which are already historically imagined and are therefore didactic and dialectically looped. In this sense the book reevokes the ghostly tradition of the old “feudal” feminine genre of the martyrs of chastity, as well as the socialist-era legends



Figure 3 Portrait of Wang Danfeng *Beautiful Images*, 154. The actress Wang Danfeng (1924–) was a member of the National People’s Congress until 2003. Again, her life history is collapsed into the category of “actress” although she took on more political roles in the second part of her life. Efforts to contact her in relation to this article were unsuccessful. Her survival in comparison to Zhang’s (fig. 2) demise is an irony unnoted by the book’s editorial team.

of model women workers. In this book, as across the genre, there are worrisome echoes of past strategies for encompassing women’s attempts at escape, self-definition, or refusal.

This generic inheritance is more than an uncanny echo of the past; it typifies the gendered manuals of elite civility, which tend to propound a new typography and inscription of postsocialist femininity. This is perhaps as evident from the image curation’s omissions as from its inclusions. Those included are writers, actresses, political figures, or more often political wives (especially the Soong sisters), women who are simply “well-born,” model workers, sent-down youth in the flush of excitement, Mao’s girlies, and sportswomen. And indeed, many of these beauties have a name and historical significance. Zhang Zhixin, the martyr and heroine of the 1970s (fig. 2), is included, as we have seen, but her photograph is placed next to that of a film star, Wang Danfeng, known for playing glamorous Shanghai women

(fig. 3). Thus, a real martyrdom is visually collapsed, organized into a series of “exciting women,” some real and some nominated for their own fictional interpretations of history. The book creates a general confusion of the quasi-mythical, as in the model soldiers, workers, and young Red Guards, with the almost-regal, as in the images of the Soong sisters, but all are clearly associated with modes of being woman and being named as such over the past century. It is therefore in both the editorialization and the reading of the book that the catachresis “woman” is produced, if only as a strategy to accommodate the incompatibility of many of the women presented. Their temporality is somewhat returned through their position in history, but it is reevacuated in their depiction as instances of glamour or heroism.

Arguably, the book’s contribution to a visual history of political change, in a tradition of politically oriented art over the century, is both noteworthy and insubstantial, as historical discretion is sacrificed to the catachresis.²¹ *Beautiful Images* derives its diegesis from a recovered and contemporarily omnipresent culture of commodity forms. The idea of “alternative temporalities” reconstructed in the narrative line of the memoir, both pictorially and textually, is similar to the neoliberalist account of a Chinese modernity: development, interruption and recovery, and the necessary triumphalist ending of capitalist/commercial globalization. This narrative evacuates women’s actual input in the making of the conditions of class (entrepreneurialism, domestic migration, educational and professional accomplishment), their deliberate choice of “alternative” modes of lives (such as why and how they became revolutionaries), and the massive female disenfranchisement in the process of reclassification. Instead the book focuses on women as iconic markers of class emergence, taste bearers of social status, and performers of cultural and personal quality.

The becoming-woman is thereby reduced to a small tale of becoming-through-fashioning, or to-be-looked-at-ness. It is not who they are or what they do that classifies, but what they look like and what they stand for in regimes of femininity and beauty. In particular, the woman’s becoming turns on how she embodies *timely* glamour. In the concomitant remaking of the (bourgeois) modern woman (*modeng nüxing*), a short period of localized modernity is retroactively portrayed as the golden age of a Chinese bourgeoisie.²² This not only empties out the historical context of the *mod-*

eng nüxing but also undercuts the longer histories of Chinese modernity developing through the Ming and Qing, and its alternative modes of socialist experimentation.²³ The pictorial history of twentieth-century Chinese woman within the formula and typography of the manual thus represents rather less “alternative temporalities” than iconic markers of a distinct “class-modulated” taste. Its half-hearted tributes to the revolutionary and socialist women are elsewhere adamantly written out, and such images are resolutely re-placed through editorial standards of distinction and exclusion. A woman’s historical specificity matters only to the extent that it offers a pathway to traces of style, feminine behaviors, and youth. But the way in which her body might translate that history, through such traces, into a nostalgic and cumulative version of womanliness for the present and future matters very much indeed. This is very close to processes of class-making, in the sense that such categorization functions as organizing principles for contemporary political, social, and cultural life, while appropriating key elements of the past for the new versioning of the present and future.²⁴

Timely Becoming: Vogue Grandma

In making what we see as a necessary link between gender and class, and thus outlining the catachrestic resurfacing of “middle-class-ness” as a project of becoming-woman in postsocialist China, we can make use of Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of customary practice in the construction of social distinction.²⁵ As the socialist revolution, nearly sixty years ago, declared the end of the legitimacy of bourgeois class consciousness, so current class revival is marked by abrupt disruption. A quieter but still traumatic revolution, the Reform era, has not only eroded the existing homogeneous history of socialism and liberation but has also irreversibly transformed the familiar life-worlds for the multitude. Therefore, the seekers of both “new” class/taste and “new” femininity in contemporary China are hampered by an acute sense of “lack” of historical continuum. They require constitutive precursors in restructuring *proper* class feelings and sensibilities or *ideal* prototypes for emulative gender reformation. Thus, nostalgia and memoir writing mark the first stirrings of a gendered class yearning, underpinning a new phase in gendered myth-making and gendered historical constructs.

As we suggested in our opening remarks, “class” is a contested term in social and cultural theory. The idea of “middle class” is even more ambiguous, with its “multiple meanings and predictions about its fate,” as Maila Stivens, among others, has indicated.²⁶ Given its necessary imprecision, in placing and gendering the term we aim simply to trace the genealogy of something called “Chinese middle class” as it emerges as a catachrestic counterpoint to women in the contemporary Chinese social imaginary. The legitimated use of the term “Chinese middle class” is clearly traceable to the Sixteenth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, held in November 2002, which launched the blueprint for a future China in characteristically utopian though postsocialist-style “pragmatic” tenors. The keynote to this particular Party manifesto is the building up of a comprehensive “relatively affluent (*xiaokang*) society,” and the need to increase the national ratio of middle-income earners. Since then, as expressed in a well-worn socialist couplet successfully reused in postsocialist commercials, “middle class [alternately *zhongchangjieji* and *zhingchangjiechen*] has blossomed East-West of the Land and North-South of the River, like a spring breeze blown over night.” The idea became an instant media focus and a defining lodestone of public discourse. New residential buildings were constructed to target the “middle class” for “high-quality life”; interior design and the furniture industry marketed “middle-class” taste as their benchmark for high standards. Advertisers introduced “perfectly tasteful” lifestyles; car dealers readjusted their sales goals for the possible demand of the “middle class”; bars and nightclubs sprang up exclusively designed for the cultivation of unique middle-class taste; newspapers, magazines, and the Internet endlessly opened up “middle-class” topics and programs. All of a sudden, “wealth” and “relative affluence” became *the* topic of the new millennium.²⁷ As David Kelly has noted in his recent study of citizenization (a translated neologism for *gongminhua*), intellectuals have attached “a great deal of hope” to “the formation of middle-class (or, better, middle-status) citizenship.”²⁸ This may account for the enthusiastic subliterate espousal of the notion as well as for the strategies of citizenization and harmonization in sociopolitical developments Kelly describes.

This (extremely short) history of the concept of a Chinese middle class shows it to be a key term for a new “pragmatic” political imaginary, and a

focal point of convergence of different economic, social, and cultural interests. The term responds to the need to address, harness, and make good one of the main consequences of the economic reform — the fast-growing post-Reform social differentiation. In this sense it is not unlike the “new” middle classes of the recently affluent Asia, who are (or in the Chinese case *will be*) “the children of these hypertrophic states.”²⁹ Hence, the “Chinese middle class” is not a descriptive category, “reflecting” an emergent or existing social group. In its Party origin, its state-bureaucratic employment, and their attendant think-tank terminologies, as well as in popular commercial evocations, it remains a utopian vision, a desired social stratum, and an object of emulation. As one report puts it, in its contemporary Chinese transplantation, “middle class” becomes a word of temptation; it is associated with “all that is desirable and tasteful in life.”³⁰ It projects a dream at once political and economic, everyday and personal. This has been spelled out in clear sociopolitical terms by the leaders of state planning bureaus. The vice director of the State Bureau for Statistics, He Ken, states in the 2002 Beijing “Forum for Cutting-Edge Academic Discussions” that “middle class” should indicate “wealth,” “relative affluence,” and a “civilized” state. It should be a social stratum that will form the mainstay of the citizens of a future Chinese “*xiaokang*” society.³¹ As leading members of a “relatively affluent” future China, He further notes, the middle class should be not only economically well off, but also high in spiritual-cultural quality (*sixiangwenhua suzhi*). Thus the making of the middle class, as a foundational project for post-Reform affluent China, should not only depend on economic development but also involve large-scale “national education,” which will “cultivate” a middle class and spur on class initiatives as active creators and consumers of an “advanced” culture for a prosperous and “harmonious” society.³² Delineated as such, the matter of postsocialist class is emphatically a matter of contemporary taste in a state-oriented developmental context.

Unsurprisingly, feminist academic authors of the pictorial history of timely “beautiful images” are concerned with how such a history of beauty displaces a more violent and traumatic political history, also located in a class-managed period. The portrait of Zhang Zhixin (fig. 2) allows the reader to discover this antagonism between the times, nostalgia, and the brutalities of history, but only if she knows how to look for it and if she wants to find such an

irruption in her becoming.³³ Other titles in the genre are, however, happy to entirely abandon the notion that a history of beauty or indeed of taste needs to be “representative” of any imagined or “real” conditions of possibility. The assemblage and reproduction of memoirs become a matter of preferably pleasurable, often fantastic (albeit tasteful) presentist redressing.

The reversion to a classy past is a symptom of the need to ground both class and women, and — crucially — women’s bodies, in a preferred ahistorical time frame. Comically, the idea of the Grandma has been discovered as a path to a preferred and indefinite past. The Grandma is not a mother, and therefore is not an immediate dyadic reference to the self, but indicates the possibility of an embodied connection, which can be appropriated through a structured nostalgia for the catachrestic modeling of woman for the present. *Vogue Grandma (Shimao waipo)*³⁴ was first produced as a thematic TV documentary by a group of thriving twenty- and thirty-somethings for the Life and Fashion channel of the Shanghai Television Studio, then remade and published as a picture-memoir in collaboration with one of the most venerable Shanghai publishers — the United Press (Sanlian Shudian).³⁴ It seems indeed a happy encounter between the aspiring new members of the culture industry (along with the new aspirants to the middle class) and obliging “residual” icons of their object of desire — the Vogue Grandmas (and grandpas) who were once the bona fide insiders of a “tasteful” Chinese bourgeois life. To call for *grandmas* — that is, to emphatically bypass the revolutionary and socialist *mothers* — is to rush straight to the heart of the matter of class and taste. This is a search for precursors to feed the loop between nostalgia and aspiration. The Vogue Grandmas are the only possible carriers of a certifiable “Chinese” middle-class or bourgeois life for contemporary inheritors.

The narrator of the documentary/memoir, Zhou, is an avatar in the series and in the book of legendary Shanghai bourgeois life (fig. 4, cover photo). Zhou is a retired actress who became a leading player in the municipal spoken-drama theater in the last days of the Republican era and continued to work throughout the socialist period. The narrative emphasizes her modern urban professional background, thus indicating her status as a dyed-in-the-wool Shanghaier (*didao Shanghai ren*).³⁵ She lends the visual and textual



Figure 4 *Vogue Grandma* (*Shimao waipo*). The image reproduced here is from a collage on the cover of the book. Every effort has been made to contact the book's publishers and editor to discuss the images and models chosen, but with no response elicited.

presentation of the volume a definitive civil, elite, and elegant image and accent, looking and sounding the epitome of cultivation and taste. In her aspect, expression, and pose, she is very close to the Anna May Wong cover reproduced in figure 1.

Explicitly, however, *Vogue Grandma* is not in the business of reminiscence. The casting of Zhou as the narrator is actually *not* intended to evoke

her story of professional and social self-making as an illustration of women's part in Chinese "cosmopolitan" urban bourgeoisie formation. Zhou is shown to have class, but it is inherent and of her time. Her own self-making is less important than the signifiers she evokes of a woman *already made*. "Class" does not reside in her story as a historical agent; rather, it is borne in her image and in her voice. The book's preface, which is taken from her farewell remarks to the audience at the end of the TV program, repeats her confession that she does not know the actual history of development of Shanghai as a modern city. Unknowing but articulate and to-be-looked-at, she is indeed the catachresis *woman nüren*: made by the times and now to be remade by new times in a strangely self-conscious unknowing.

In the preamble, which is both the narrator's self-introduction and the opening statement of the essay-interview-picture memoir collection, the narrative voice tells us that Grandmas are the witnesses of history but that to be in vogue entails catching up with the trends and moving forward with the times.³⁶ The memoirs of the *Vogue* Grandmas are editorialized as fragments of those *on a journey* "in search of the fashionable life of the old Shanghai" (subtitle). But of course they are also implicated in another journey, that of the young editors and their readers who search for class origins predicated on contemporary requirements. Once the move is made to the fashionable life of old Shanghai, the boundaries of class and exemplary classy women come into sharp relief. The collection of textual and pictorial montages combined as an elegy "of things long past" acquires a distinct focus: a set of standard images and stories that showcase the legendary fashionable life of a cosmopolitan Shanghai in 1930s and 1940s. What distinguishes these images of Grandma nostalgia is that "they" were the genuine class articles and their stories represent inside information.³⁷ What makes their categorization catachrestic is that they are nonetheless part of a contemporary search for glamour, which resides in the past as object and the present as subject of the times. It is as though only the pre-Liberation experience is constitutive of their current becoming.

Vogue Grandma is made up of affectionately recalled, sentimentally narrated vignettes of authentication, the gender-specific details of a bygone urban bourgeois life: ladies' outfits, personal grooming, drawing-room scenes, dance parties, and stockbroking (for gentlemen only). Such details

are exhumed to articulate the reality of class.³⁸ The catachrestic impulse in the book links the essentialism inscribed on Grandmas and the nature of becoming and consumer choice allowed in the present. As with *Beautiful Images*, this is a bold move, and one which at least acknowledges that the relationship between change and the past is as much spatial as temporal. Problematically, however, it is a partial catachresis, one that ignores the absences of *nüren* in the Liberation period, and so plays into a class creation wherein the referent is deliberately rather than contingently excised. To be bourgeois then and now—to have class in the genuinely “modern” sense—is termed *ling fengqi zi xan* (to ride the trendy winds of the times).³⁹ This sleight of hand bypasses the unpleasant aspects of modern Chinese class-making, and previous class turmoil, and transfuses them with an aura that is not only the *stuff of nostalgia* but also a *vindication for aspiration*. The evacuation of history here, as in many such similar pictorial and textual removals, is to prepare the way for rewriting. The stage is readied for new fantasies and “realities,” new heartaches. In stories about old class, old men, and old women, there is an alternation. The Grandmas, who have previously been disparaged as politically incorrect residues, resurface as the perfect avant-garde avatars of transhistorical taste. They are evoked as the leaders of everyday class practice, the very incarnations of sensibility. And in this sense these women are upheld as embodied class examples, even though they do not, in their contemporary selves, possess class. Rather, they function as links between past and present for younger aspirants of class and for those who would profit from molding taste in the present.

Taste and Place

The spatial loop is a strategy of catachresis, but it is also a category of class-oriented curation of the self through taste. Class aspirants turn to their imagined or in some cases really “known” “cosmopolitan” Western peers to find authenticated structures of middle-class feelings and practice. They do so in part through the adoption and occupation of place imaginaries, most often conceived on a spatialized spectrum of Shanghai style and civility. Shanghai, in repetitive and tender recollection, has been recast as the cradle and display window of petit bourgeois sensibility (*xiaoziqingdiao*), which pertains not

only to class but always simultaneously to women. It is designated by many as the proper feminine version of middle-class taste. While it derives from the re-remembered Shanghai bourgeois life, it carries with it a transhistorical connotation — recommencing the finesse of the former but redressing it with contemporary moderation. Crucially, the transhistorical connotation shifts the backdrop of taste from the milieu of the semicolonial high bourgeoisie to that of the contemporaneously well-off (*xiaokang*).⁴⁰ Meanwhile, as Shanghai *nüren*, with their propensity for petit bourgeois feelings and lifestyles, are elevated as exemplars of proper middle-class womanhood, other places and competing evocations of tradition contend for a defining role in emerging postsocialist class/taste orthodoxy (*zhengtong*). In these acts of formative reiteration, place-writing and gender-writing converge, as they both seek to denote the history and location of beauty. They implicitly lay claim to a delayed authenticity as their proscriptions seek to lay the foundations for new class and gender taste structures. The manuals of elite civility here function as complementary typographies and reinscriptions of both the history and origins of the class-made beauties both of *our time* and *in place*.

The symbiosis of class, place, and gender in present-day China comes, in a sense, as no surprise. Three decades of “reform” have touched every aspect of contemporary Chinese life and dramatically reshaped all facets of the social fabric. Feminist critics as well as theorists of class have pointed out that gender and class are always intricately intersected in processes of historical and social transformation, and in the formation of personal and collective identifications.⁴¹ And the urbanization of public culture and consumption necessitates spatial models of (middle-)class becoming. Yet what might be called a taste for class is so pronounced in the ideal and practice of the making of a postsocialist Chinese “femininity” that we begin to suspect that acquiring class, being in place, and becoming woman are one and the same project. This can be argued from Skegg’s definition, through Bourdieu, of femininity as embodied cultural capital.⁴² One can further observe that the Chinese version of postsocialist feminine woman is predicated directly on distinction achieved through the acquisition of economic and cultural capital. This distinction (and even, as the passage below suggests, brand identification!) is of course the stuff and substance of the manuals we have been reading:

It is just as painter/writer/stylist/entrepreneur Chen Yifei has said: “Chengdu girls are very clever, very capable, they can endure hard life even better than men. Chengdu is also where my fashion brand sells best in the country. Chengdu girls are also very pretty. They eat so much chili but can still retain such good skin. . . . All in all, Chengdu beauties are a good brand. In this era of visual economy, their social, economical and cultural role becomes more and more important.” These are the Chengdu women, they are both quietly refined and enthusiastic, tender and open. They are the ID card of the city.⁴³

. . . And I must also give an anonymous quote from the Internet: “Only when one arrives in Sichuan, does one realize what the phrase “beauties gather like cloud” means! . . . It is just as everybody says: only when in Beijing does one understand that one is a small potato, and only when in Sichuan does one realize that one married too early!⁴⁴

Taste is not simply the taste of women who go out shopping, but a taste *for* particular kinds of women, which will determine how their attempts to present themselves will be viewed and appreciated, and *classed*. When Raymond Williams defines the term *taste* as a keyword for modern English aesthetics, he delineates its part in cultural historical change while emphasizing its timeliness: “the word became significant and difficult” first in the seventeenth century and then in the eighteenth, “when it was capitalized as a general quality” and associated with the need for “correction” (Shaftsbury) and “Rules . . . among the Polite World” (Addison) or simply “became equivalent to *discrimination* (Barry).”⁴⁵ So Williams charts the history of becoming of “taste”: how it comes to signify the artistic, cultural, and social standards of the “polite world,” a world that is also subsequently thought to belong to the ascending bourgeoisie. He also points out, most important, that it has been established as a set of “rules,” a matter of necessary, correctable, and cultivatable discriminations, predicated on gradual schooling and acquisition. The gendered “manuals of elite civility” that are mushrooming as part of the formation of taste structures in contemporary China are in every sense concerned with the setting up of rules and standards for the “polite” (as expressed in the hope for a harmonious society [*hexie shehui*] built on civilization [*wenming*] and quality [*suzhi*] in the population) post-

socialist class game. The key words in these publications are therefore the cultivation of discrimination, emulation, and distinction — those activities that mark high spiritual and cultural quality. These key words and ideas are envisaged through reiterative typography and inscription that evoke legacies of tradition and other life-worlds and structures of feeling that provoke a taste for class.

In short, these manuals cultivate discrimination and set up norms for taste. The illustrated essay-texts about Shanghai women have become so popular, as must-reads for emergent urban middle-class women, that they are now an established best-selling subgenre. The tastefulness of the place, Shanghai, is emphasized by the tastefulness and emulation of its women. Chen Naisan and He Zhaoya's *Shanghai Women (Shanghai nüren)* is a case in point.⁴⁶ He Zhaoya, a photographer, set out to look for women that live extraordinarily chic lives, deploying them as a standard for female excellence. She found them in Shanghai and in "refinement, sincerity, and charm."⁴⁷ Chen, who is a major writer of the genre and, indeed, a pillar of the considerable Shanghai nostalgia industry, writes: "For one to appreciate Shanghai history, one has to look at Shanghai women . . . as women are the embodiment of the spirit of a city."⁴⁸ In Chen's tribute, Shanghai women are not only the actors but tantamount to the very movement of history: "Shanghai women are always there, always like this, between the clashes of the historical landmass, between tradition and modernity, the East and the West, between restrictions and opening, between norms and the margins. They bear the burdens of history and the glories of modernity as they zig-zag, sidestep and saunter along . . . just like the Bund which carries with it the distilled essence of both the old and new Shanghai."⁴⁹

But for what acts are these women, the "essence of Shanghai," noted? Chen ruminates as if in an old Shanghai pop song: "Perhaps only Shanghai women could manage, in the years of the brimming red sea, inside the lapel of their jackets on which badges of the Great Leader are worn, to pin on a sprig of gardenia of lingering fragrance or magnolia."⁵⁰ Chen could hardly be accused of deliberately objectifying her subjects. Indeed, she portrays them as subjects, who are all heroines of petit bourgeois refinement defending taste and fashion at all costs and against all odds. In these writings, Shanghai women are vanguards of class and femininity.⁵¹ Nonetheless,

the acting out of class is again catachrestic. The women fashion themselves, but the mode of their fashioning is presented as an inevitability of place and time, in which they figure as exemplary ciphers. As with the beauties of our times, the Vogue Grandmas and of course those phenomenal workers of the 1960s posters, these women are not so much agents of class as emplaced exemplars of becoming-in-time.

Class aspirants and trendsetters of other places are neither as constrained nor as emplaced as the women of Shanghai, as no golden age of a suitably Chinese bourgeoisie is to be found elsewhere. This has not deterred anyone from finding the prototypes of their own version of classy women, as interested parties vie for leadership in the promising new middle-class formation beyond the archetypal metropolis and as metropolitan publishing houses vie for sales. Place-based narratives of differently located and differently tasteful womanhood abound, so much so that almost every locale in China offers a topography of its *nüren*.

Jiangnan Woman (*Jiangnan nüren*),⁵² quoted earlier in this discussion, draws on its location to the south of the Yangzi River to evoke a bygone Sino-centric civilization. It calls up a legendary history to claim class based on cultural orthodoxy:⁵³

Throughout the centuries, what enraptures and enchants the Chinese gentry scholars, and even caused a Northern Emperor to abandon his imperial duties in order to visit Jiangnan three times, besides the charming scene where “Spring water is as blue as the sky, lured by the sound of the rain one dozes in the painted boat,” are perhaps the Jiangnan women “as luminous as the moon by the wine counter, whose fair arms are coagulated snow . . .” [And] that elegant and appropriate linkage has never been broken in the heritage of Jiangnan women. They may not have read *The Appreciation of Poetry*, but know how to use the aura of subtlety.⁵⁴

The narrative of *Jiangnan nüren* is a sentimentalized pastiche of bits and pieces of well-known literary and popular cultural accounts of the South of the River — paraphrased and excerpted rewriting of classical novels, poetry, popular legends, contemporary newspaper columns, and media (including Internet) commentaries. It links contemporary yearnings for class and feminine essence with the lost age-old *shidafu* (landed gentry) culture, whose

residual presence is evoked in stock images such as *yanyu Jiangnan* (the misty landscape of Jiangnan) and *rushei nüren* (waterlike women), which, as kitsch and stereotype, foreground their historical resilience. The suggestion that one can recover a vintage class-based *shidafu* practice and sentiments, as an alternative but more authentically “Chinese” cultural legacy for postsocialist construction of middle class and femininity, is not incidental. In the bid for a successful “Farewell to Revolution,”⁵⁵ the ghost of *shidafu* legacies has been raked up both by the “elite” intellectual discourse and the commercial popular cultural nostalgia. It has also been appropriated as the historical/traditional underlining by the Party-State movement to improve national spiritual/cultural quality, accompanying the intensifying “reform.” Some have even suggested, in the recent contention for the history and present of a Chinese middle class, that the country gentry (*shiseng*, *shidafu*) class should be considered as the prototype and precursor of its modern Chinese version.⁵⁶ And, of course, the return to place is a deliberate counter to the spiritual homelessness that characterizes the construction of a new class system for a new society.

The history of Jiangnan is green. Water here is green, the rice is green. . . . In this green world, there are two things that are the most beautiful—the jade green porcelain and Jiangnan women. Jade-green porcelain and Jiangnan women are mysterious and complementary metaphors of each other. Jiangnan women are like jade-green porcelain; jade-green porcelain is like Jiangnan women. . . . Both jade-green porcelain and Jiangnan women are introverted, beautiful, and of the kind of beauty that does not easily fade. . . . They possess that classic beauty constructed in green and white, an innocent and trusting beauty, a fragile and breakable beauty, but also the most calm and confident beauty.⁵⁷

Thus, even though the Jiangnan competitors for the fable of postsocialist Chinese class taste and womanhood may feel outdone by the Shanghai culture industry in terms of industrial sophistication, or the very lack of any modern bourgeois legacy, they can and do claim a “time-honoured” and thus more genuinely “Chinese” class tradition buttressed by historical resources and exemplary practices, at least in terms of cultural orthodoxy (*wenhua zhengtong*). In these unabashed efforts at genteel/“petit bourgeois”

lyricism, Jiangnan *nüren* are figured as the “soul” and embodied “spirit” of the forever there, forever more civil and refined South of the River. Their substance is vindicated by the fantasies of generations of the “Chinese” intelligentsia. They become, along with the legendary history of Jiangnan, the less crass and more orthodox version of Chinese civility. It may be recalled that the Shanghai bourgeoisie, even in the golden age, were considered class upstarts, thus the allegedly longer tradition of Jiangnan women makes them more “natural” standards for class, taste, and femininity.

As an aside, however, we note that although books like this eulogize the refinement and civility of Jiangnan women as the peak of class and gender cultivation, they seem not to be aware of the Jiangnan *Guixiou* tradition, which is perhaps the most “authentic” place-based women’s elite cultural tradition.⁵⁸ Rather, the books exploit repetitively popular stereotypes and stock literary historical images, drawn exclusively by male authors in their rewriting, so that tasteful Jiangnan women are written again and again as “like water” or “misty rain.” Such nebulous personae simultaneously mask and demonstrate exemplary class and gender—their flowing performance harmonizes the sounds and fury of an often traumatic history.⁵⁹ This enhances the theme of elite, civil, and beautiful women as understated class examples either in the guise of residual *shidafu* splendor or the fashionable contemporary petit bourgeois accomplishment. Nostalgia for old class has not hindered the casting of these women as successful heroines in postsocialist commodity-formations, not least as elegant managers and standard-bearers of affluent lifestyles.⁶⁰ However, these stock reiterations of cultural clichés of gender and place also threaten to belie the function of these lyrical writings as gendered civility manuals. They read too much like catalogues for the gaze of male connoisseurs on sightseeing tours, not enough like blueprints for female cultivation and distinction.

This is true even though some books are in fact written and designed by women and even though not all cultural place-based stereotypes lend themselves to comfortable images of pliant femininity. *Sichuan Woman* (*Basu nüren*), for instance, is a similar tale with different local colors, as predictably clichéd as its Jiangnan sister. Here, though, the women are like “chilies” rather than “water”: “The young women of Chongqing are very much like the temperament of chilies: fiery red, blazing hot, overbearing but invit-

ing.”⁶¹ They are therefore more passionate, less understated than the women of Jiangnan and Shanghai, but—as we have seen in the case of Chengdu, the older, classier town in the heart of Three Kingdoms territory—still an excellent brand!

The natural beauty seen collectively on Chengdu girls is quite remarkable in the regional competition. There is little sunshine and the air and earth are moist in Chengdu, which means this place is more suitable for the *yin*—the feminine. Therefore Chengdu beauties are at an obvious advantage in terms of facial features, figure, and complexion. Also because of the aforementioned latitude influence, that kind of just-right tempo which is a combination of hot Sichuan and soft Jiangnan, which would be too much to apply to men, is most suited as representation of women. In it both the overcompliance of Jiangnan women and the over-hardihood of Northern women are moderated and combined, and this forms the basis of the unique tender-toughness of Chengdu girls.⁶²

New Dream, New Woman: A Class Proposition

The place, taste, and gender manuals are somewhat akin to touristic atlases, with women as the main attraction. At the other end of the spectrum are emulative manuals of gender and taste with a young readership and “cosmopolitan,” subcultural appeal. These offer trendier treatments of class, taste, and feminine becoming, and they begin where the historical and nostalgic narratives end. Social differentiation and distinction are here taken for granted as the grounds for contemporary female social, economic, and cultural aspiration. Images often take on a dreamlike, fantastical quality and are more directly predicated on contemporary transnational commodity forms.

Dream Woman (Zaomeng nüren) typographs the role for ambitious, imaginative young Chinese women as dreamers and dream-makers of different types and tastes.⁶³ The author requires of women a certain industriousness in their attention to self: “Dreams, after all, are always dreams. To make them into reality, one needs to make quite some effort. Of course, their realization cannot do without capitals. In other words, dreams can be made, but

their construction requires ‘materials.’”⁶⁴ The book then delineates the categories of this labor in terms of capital, both embodied and material. Clothes, creativity, and beauty are the key elements of female success, and femininity is a strategic weapon in one’s career. A sign of mature intelligence in a woman is the facility not just to recognize her charms and attractiveness, but also to deploy them to advantage. This reminds one of a rather tragic story in the *China Daily* on Women’s Day 2007. As a gift for the special day, a man in a provincial capital had paid a great deal of money for his wife to have plastic surgery — not, apparently, because he wanted her to change, but because she had realized that she could not hope to climb any farther up the promotions ladder in her workplace unless she became “better looking.” She was merely following a prescription, which the manuals would approve as a sign of maturity: “Appearances and femininity are absolutely the best capital for a woman, because this is a unconstrained, immaterial capital, whereas property is limited and only material. . . . So next, we have to talk about how as women, or — for the lucky ones — as beautiful women, should we make the best use of our ‘beauty’ capital.”⁶⁵

Women in *Dream Women* are united by a quintessential ability to dream and are divided into neotribes (*Xin xin renlei*), rather as Wang Jing has described in her work on subcultural urban youth.⁶⁶ Wang’s analysis of advertising and marketing strategies is an illuminating study of postsocialist China as a hyperbole of contemporary consumer society, but she concludes that neotribal fads such as the Bobo fever⁶⁷ “was indicative of one symptom,” that is, “a leap of faith in the separability of taste from ‘class’ (as in *jieji*).”⁶⁸ What Wang sees in the faddy merry-go-rounds of the post-Reform Chinese social imaginary is a disjunction between the market ploys, individual and collective desiring, and existing structures. But if one abandons the idea that class culture is necessarily something sociocultural corresponding to an already-formed base, then it is precisely in the desiring, the dreaming, and the productive forces that support such dreams that the parameters of class formation — including its taste structures — are forged. In this sense Bobo fevers and neotribes are not merely disjointed cultural frenzies that fail to correspond to a Chinese reality; rather, they are transplanted, transposed, and reinvented taste and identity structures in a frenzied game of

post-Reform social stratification. They are two of the many labels and markers, aspirational, performative, or displaced and evacuated, in the divisive process of becoming-woman and becoming-class.

Dream Woman as aspirational literature could then be understood within a theoretical paradigm of the catachresis. Its narrative, both textual and pictorial, is predictably evacuated: women are quintessentially differentiated from men as dreamers rather than ideal upholders; and in their reinscription, what they stand for becomes more important than who they are or what they do.⁶⁹ However, the typography of the new — the neocosmopolitan, subcultural tribal types (some are genuine Chinese new inventions, such as *xin yaoxing nüren*, or new enchantress) — makes the volume potent and invites emulation. It signals a postsocialist ease and acceptance of social stratification and cultural distinction. The overall mood is indulgent. It is as though the writers and expected readers have all adopted a contemporary version of capitalist (post)feminism: self-indulgence predicated on pursuit of capital gain. There is no longer any search for historical or mythical class and gender *zhengtong* (orthodoxy). One is simply vindicated by the acquisition of capital: once there, the choice is yours. The dreamscape for this neo-essential womanhood as water women, faded petit bourgeoisie, mixed-race Bobos, the emerging superwomen, and the new enchantresses, seems indeed the liberalist postsocialist market heaven — the phantasmagorical multiplicity of choice founded on worldwide affluence.⁷⁰ This invitation to feminine dream-making does not necessarily indicate oblivion to the social real, but most decidedly acquiesces to the exclusive games of globalism and elite cosmopolitanisms played out within a game of local class becoming and positioning. Beautiful, civil, and tastefully essential womanhood can be yours if you can afford it. *Zuo nüren* (becoming-woman), whether showcased in the fantasy of neotribal types or fondly remembered from the gentility of the Shanghai bourgeoisie, has become a class proposition.

The manuals of elite civility on bookshop shelves hint at the effort of becoming that characterizes contemporary Chinese identity. Place, gender, beauty, consumption, and memory are brought into relation with one another as they service the emergence of a self-identifying middle class. Becoming-woman and becoming-class may seem twee performative pro-

cesses in this coffee-table iteration, but the performance of gender and class is never ultimately a cozy story. The processes of becoming *nüren* rather than *funü* limit woman's subjective possibilities in the present era (although arguably the category *funü* has had its own problems in a different ideological field).⁷¹ The category *nüren* pimps history for its momentary passages of transhistorical style, making life narratives subordinate to a catachresis of the feminine that will undoubtedly conflict with the agency of women in reform as they go about the business of making money, and making class work for them in their everyday lives. And, of course, the market is itself an ambivalent master, complicated yet further under the encouraging gaze of the Party-State. While these books perform a perfected loop of timely nostalgia and aspiration, the boundaries of class and taste will remain contentious in practice, and the search for distinctive femininity, with its more unabashed dreams and longings, may well exceed the "safe cool."⁷²

Notes

This article is a publication from our jointly held ARC Discovery Grant "The Making of Middle-Class Taste: Reading, Tourism, and Educational Choices in Urban China." We are extremely grateful to the ARC and to the following people for their help in writing this article: the anonymous readers at *positions*, who gave detailed and inspiring comments and clearly gave generously of their time in so doing; our respondents in interviews in Chengdu that allowed to frame our ideas in context; and colleagues at the ASAA Women in Asia Conference, 2005.

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4. *Ibid.*, 1.
5. From Rey Chow's large and early contribution to this mode of analytic referral: *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 17.
6. Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, 2–3.
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8. Tina Mai Chen, "Female Icons, Feminist Iconography? Socialist Rhetoric and Women's Agency in 1950s China," *Gender and History* 15, no. 2 (2003): 268–95.
9. See Harriet Evans, "Past, Perfect, or Imperfect: Changing Images of the Ideal Wife," in *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*, ed. Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 335–60.
10. Stephanie H. Donald and Zheng Yi, "Richer Than Before: The Cultivation of Middle-Class Taste: Education Choices in Urban China," in *The New Rich: Future Rulers, Present Lives*, ed. David Goodman (London: Routledge, 2007), 71–82. See also Siegfried Kra-cauer, *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, trans. Quentin Hoare (London: Verso, 1998); a gloss is offered by David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin* (London: Polity Press, 1984), 162–64. Moreover, Tina Mai Chen's article on proletarian white is reminiscent of this train of thought: "Proletarian White and Working Bodies in Mao's China," *positions* 11, no. 2 (2003): 361–90.
11. Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses*, 39.
12. Stephanie H. Donald, "Richer Than Before (*Bi qian fu*): Salaried Class, Middle Class, Global Class: Spiritual Homelessness in Urban China" (paper presented at the conference "Politics of Strangers and Neighbours: Accounts of Grounded Cosmopolitanisms," Middlesex University Social Policy Research Centre, September 25, 2006).
13. Tina Mai Chen, "Internationalism and Cultural Experience: Soviet Films and Popular Chinese Understandings of the Future in the 1950s," *Cultural Critique* 58 (Fall 2004): 82–114, 83.
14. Xiaomei Chen, "Growing Up with Posters in the Maoist Era," in *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*, ed. Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 101–22.
15. For either end of the spectrum of Eurasian models of beauty: Donna M. Hughes, "The Natasha Trade: The Transnational Shadow Market of Trafficking in Women," www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/natasha.htm (accessed September 29, 2006); Emma Jinhua Tang, "Eurasian Hybridity in Chinese Utopian Visions: From 'One World' to 'A Society Based on Beauty' and Beyond," *positions* 14, no. 1 (2006): 131–63.
16. Chen, "Proletarian White and Working Bodies in Mao's China," 361–90.
17. Qi Qing and Li Haiyan, *Jiangnan Woman (Jiangnan nüren)* (Beijing: China Friendship Publishers, 2004), 39.
18. See Hooper and McLaren for accounts of the earlier post-Reform processes of regendering Chinese women. Beverley Hooper, "'Flower Vase and Housewife': Women and Consumerism in Post-Mao China," and Anne McLaren, "Chinese Cultural Revivalism: Changing Gender Constructions in the Yantze River Delta," both in *Gender and Power in Affluent Asia*, ed. Krishna Sen and Maila Stivens (London: Routledge, 1998), 167–94; 195–221.

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20. Verity Wilson, "Dressing for Leadership in China: Wives and Husbands in an Age of Revolutions (1911–1976)," *Gender and History* 14, no. 3 (2002): 608–28.
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22. See Li, Chen, and Cheng, *Beautiful Images*, 21–103, 187–205.
23. Wang Hui, "Questions and Answers on the Modern Question," in *The Hapless and Nameless Cultural Reality*, ed. Han Shaogong and Jiang Zidan (Kunming: Yunan People's Press, 2003), 1–21.
24. Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
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28. David Kelly, "Citizen Movements and China's Public Intellectuals in the Hu-Wen Era," *Pacific Affairs* 79, no. 2 (2006): 183–204; quote p. 203.
29. Stivens, "Theorising Gender, Power and Modernity in Affluent Asia," 13.
30. Chen and Yi, introduction to *An Investigative Report*, 1.
31. *Ibid.*, 2.
32. *Ibid.*, 29–30.
33. Li, Chen, and Cheng, *Beautiful Images*, 154, fig. 2.
34. Jiang Weimin, ed., *Vogue Grandma: In Search of the Fashionable Life of the Old Shanghai (Shimao waipo: Zuixun laoshanghai de shishang shenghuo)* (Shanghai: Sanlian, 2003).
35. *Ibid.*, 1.
36. *Ibid.*, 2–3.
37. *Ibid.*, 33–34.
38. *Ibid.*, 19, 36, 114–15, 330.
39. *Ibid.*, 2.
40. Chen Naisan and He Zhaoya, *Women of Shanghai (Shanghai nüren)* (Hangzhou: Jejiang Photographic Publishers, 2003).
41. Beverly Skeggs, *Formation of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage, 1997); Janeen Baxter and Mark Western, eds., *Reconfigurations of Class and Gender* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); Fiona Devine, Mike Savage, et al., *Rethinking Class: Culture, Identities and Lifestyles* (London: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2005).
42. Skeggs, *Formation of Class and Gender*, 10–11.

43. Dong Engcheng, *Sichuan Woman (Basu nüren)* (Beijing: China Friendship Publishing House, 2005), 6.
44. *Ibid.*, 190.
45. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 313.
46. Chen and He, epilogue to *Women of Shanghai*.
47. *Ibid.*, 2.
48. *Ibid.*, 1.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*, 9–10.
52. Qi and Li, *Jiangnan Woman*.
53. The cover illustration and table of contents provide an emphatic outline of this by previewing highlights of such a narrative.
54. Qi and Li, *Jiangnan Woman*, no. 16, 83.
55. This phrase is borrowed from the title of a controversial but popular book that represents the height of the Cultural Reflection movement in Reform China and argues that because “national salvation” has always stunted a Chinese Enlightenment, the foremost task for postsocialist China should be a final farewell to revolution. See Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu, *Gaobie geming (Farewell to Revolution)* (Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 1995).
56. See “Introduction: History and Present of Chinese Middle Class,” in *Survey of the Chinese Middle Class (Zhongguo zhongchanjiecheng diaocha)*, ed. Zhou Xiaohong (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2005), 2–3.
57. Qi and Li, *Jiangnan Woman*, 55.
58. See Tani Barlow, via Dorothy Ko, on class and gender in Jiangnan Guixiou culture as precursor of a Chinese elite female cultural tradition. Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, 28–30.
59. Qi and Li, *Jiangnan Woman*, 93–115.
60. *Ibid.*, 65–88.
61. Dong, *Sichuan Woman*, 20.
62. *Ibid.*, 5.
63. See Zifu and Qizi, *Dream Women (Zaomeng nüren)* (Shenzhen, China: Haitian Publishers, 2005).
64. *Ibid.*, 168.
65. *Ibid.*, 191–92.
66. Wang Jing, “Bourgeois Bohemians in China? Neo-Tribes and the Urban Imaginary,” *China Quarterly*, no. 183 (2005): 532–48.
67. Bobo fever refers to the rush to embrace high technology and m-technology. A full explanation is available in *ibid.*

68. Ibid., 545–48.
69. Zifu and Qizi, *Dream Women*, “Preface.”
70. Zifu and Qizi, *Dream Women*, “Table of Contents.”
71. Harriet Evans, *Women and Sexuality in China: Discourses of Female Sexuality and Gender since 1949* (London: Polity Press, 1997).
72. Wang, “Bourgeois Bohemians in China,” 545.

