

her own life so that other American citizens could seek happiness and become enlightened. Both men and women revered her as a beloved hero (*jing'ai yingxiong* 敬愛英雄), and she achieved what all aspiring Chinese heroines sought—a place in history. Her name, Lingxi wrote, the name of a hero (*renjie* 人傑), would be remembered forever.<sup>48</sup>

#### Conclusion

The *Subao* journalist who had introduced the *Ten World Heroines* claimed that the ten Western women's biographies in that compilation would serve as a "precious raft," which would gently ferry Chinese women through the often turbulent transitional period in which they lived (*nijie guodu zhi baofa* 女界過渡之寶筏).<sup>49</sup> Compilers of new-style textbooks and editors of women's journals sought to achieve a similar objective in introducing their audience to the life stories of foreign heroines like Joan of Arc and Lyon. Committed to providing Chinese women with more than basic literacy skills, these individuals used biographies of Western heroines to equip their readers with a new understanding of heroism, patriotism, and social commitment. This knowledge would aid their female compatriots in weathering the vicissitudes of their era of heightened cultural change. It would also encourage them to contribute boldly to China's future themselves.

Authors who were determined that their readers not be left behind by the waves of new knowledge and practice central to the turn-of-the-twentieth-century global experience were, nonetheless, also concerned that young women not be swept away by the tide. Yang implicitly condemned Joan of Arc's acts of gender inversion, for example, and Lingxi overwrote Lyon's choice of a single life with descriptions of her devoted social mothering. The "precious raft" of Western heroine's biographies would guide young Chinese women toward the global elsewhere that represented China's future hope. Values of gender propriety and social service enshrined in the two-millennia-long tradition of Chinese female biography would continue, nonetheless, to function as their cultural anchor.

<sup>48</sup> Lingxi, 70.

<sup>49</sup> "Shijie shi nijie yanyi." See note 26.

## CHAPTER SIX

### FEMALE ASSASSINS, CIVILIZATION, AND TECHNOLOGY IN LATE QING LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Jing Tsu

Growing interest in late Qing fiction in recent years has only begun to revise our conceptions of modern Chinese literature. Although historians and literary scholars in China and Japan have been studying this period for some time, its bewildering spectrum of genres and innovations seems to defy existing frameworks of literary historiography.<sup>1</sup> While Liu E 劉鶯 (1857–1909) and Wu Jianren 吳趸人 (1866–1910) have long been heralded as masters of the genre of "fiction of social critique" (*giansu xiaoshuo* 譴責小說), many late Qing popular fiction writers did not prefer to maintain an intellectually critical distance from the political scandals that palpably shaped the urban landscape. On the contrary, commercially minded writers, keenly aware of the marketability of sensationalism, were eager to tap into the salacious details of the quickly modernizing urban scene, transformed by new forms of knowledge through popularized Western science, technology, and perceptions of individualism.

The writing of late Qing literature was itself one of the many gestures and postulations of change during this pivotal moment of modern history and culture. A world in its own right, late nineteenth-century China was a nexus for old and new ideas, trafficking between fiction and second-rate writers and translators, and fostering a growing enthusiasm for Western science as a new source of not only pragmatic but also fantastical knowledge. It would be an exaggeration to say that this

<sup>1</sup> Tarumoto Teruo 樽本照雄, *Shinmatsu shōsetsu kandan* 清末小說閒談 (Informal discussions about late Qing fiction) (Kyōto: Hōritsu Bunkasha, 1983); Fan Boqun 范伯群, *Zhongguo jinxuandai tongshu wenxue shi* 中國近現代通俗文學史 (A literary history of early modern and modern Chinese vernacular fiction) (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000); Yuan Jin 袁進, *Zhongguo xiaoshuo de jindai bianqie* 中國小說的近代變革 (Transformations of the Chinese fiction in the early modern period) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1992); David Wang, *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1848–1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

worldview was empirical, scientific, and thus “modern” in nature, as the boundary between the scientific and the fantastic was often indistinct. It would be equally misleading to assess the fiction from this period according to the standards of great literature, if by “great” we mean canonical works still recognized today. It is, in fact, the oblivion of these once flourishing literary labors and cultural engagements in the modern canon that makes them all the more significant. More than fiction, they bring into relief a world that is unique in its emphasis on innovation rather than staying power, epistemic fissure instead of cohesion.

Examining this new constellation, this chapter analyzes the transposed knowledge of Western science, technology, and political nihilism, and their cultural relays through discussions of radicalism, female assassins, and heroism in early twentieth-century Chinese fiction. By looking at the different cultural and cross-cultural preoccupations that converged on sensationalizing the image of the female assassin, I am interested in how the different conceptions of radical political heroism, women as agents of violence and diplomacy, the possibilities of science, and the technologization of civilization gave new intelligibility to late Qing modernity. Admittedly, one of the difficulties of this task is that the late Qing cultural topography does not provide us with clear maps of genres. Operations of science, technology, gender, civilization, politics, and literature were interstitial, productive in their clashes rather than distinct voices. The complex production of late Qing culture, furthermore, mobilized a variety of sources. The abundance of biographies, journal articles, translated and untranslated Western fiction, Japanese science fiction, and political treatises on reform testified to the efforts of a diverse community of cultural agents working for profit, novelty, and ideology. This new proximity between the native and the foreign, science and literature, generated new epistemic grounds, forging surprising analogies between unobvious realms of cultural life and rearticulating scientism as a practical power and realizable fantasy.

Taking shape in this context, literary treatments of female heroism and assassination were much more than gimmicks for print sensationalism. The tolerance for and even fascination with violence committed by women in two novels published in 1904, *Miwa shi* 女媧石 (The Stone of Goddess Niwa) and *Niyou hua* 女獄花 (Female jail flower), boldly places these new women at the forefront of visionary scientific and political innovations. In their own ways, these two novels rationalize the moral ambiguity in the much flaunted but little explained notion of “civility” (*wenming* 文明), widely circulated as a topic of intellectual

debate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They also provide an important focus for engaging discussions on the division between violence and civilization, radicalism and conservatism, and tradition and modernity. Following closely on the heels of the first Chinese literary appearance of the female assassin, Sophia Perovskaya (1853–81), in *Dong ou nihaojie* 東歐女豪傑 (Heroines of Eastern Europe) in 1902–03, these two novels absorb this exotic figure into the specific imaginary of late Qing political and scientific culture. A glimpse into this larger context reveals the extensiveness and productive inconsistencies of this translation of the “world.” The emergence of this interest in and acceptance of political violence, when delivered with extravagant technology manipulated by beautiful women, reflects not only the shifting perceptions of gender but also the mixing of genres between literature, history, politics, and science in configuring a new cultural episteme.

### I. *Women's Fiction and the Heroism of Destruction*

Chinese intellectuals' and writers' preoccupation with China's transition from empire to nation around the turn of the twentieth century prompted an interest in revolutionary figures, or “heroes” (*haojie* 豪傑), particularly from the European and American contexts. Intellectuals greatly admired famous statesmen and generals such as George Washington (1732–99), Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821), and Otto von Bismarck (1815–98), to name a few, for their resolve to realize extraordinary political visions.<sup>2</sup> Russian nihilism prominently figured in this matrix as a more radical form of revolutionary inspiration. Popular fiction writers such as Zhou Shoujuan 周瘦鵑 (1894–1968) dabbled in translating nihilist fiction, while more committed translators such as Chen Jinghan 陳景漢 devoted their careers almost exclusively to the subject.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Chen Jianhua 陳建華, “Napoleon yu wan Qing 'xiaoshuo jie genying'” 拿破崙與晚清小說界革命 (Napoleon and “fiction revolution” in the late Qing), *Hanxue yanjiu* (Chinese studies) 23.2 (2005): 321–54. On the reception and transformation of George Washington as a figure of progressivism in China, see Pan Guangzhe 潘光哲, *Huashengdan zai Zhongguo: zhiqiao guofu* 華盛頓在中國：製作國父 (Washington in China: Producing the founding father) (Taibei: Sanmin, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> There were many translations of nihilist fiction of known, partially known, and unknown origins. They were published in mainly literary journals such as *Xiaoshuo shibao* 小說時報 (Fiction times); *Xiaoshuo xinbao* 小說新報 (New journal for fiction); *Xiaoshuo congbao* 小說叢報 (Fiction series journal); *Minyu bao* 民權報 (People's sight);

As historians of anarchism and socialism in Japan and China have noted, the ideology of destruction appealed to the desire for social change.<sup>4</sup> In the name of a kind of freedom not readily understood in the contemporary context of Western liberalism, anarchism and nihilism promised a utopian realization of society's potential through political apocalypse.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, not all of these preoccupations were in the service of bringing about large-scale epochal social and political transfor-

*Mǐnhu bao* 民呼報 (People's cry); *Yuyue xiaoshuo* 月月小說 (Fiction monthly); *Libaihu* 禮拜六 (Saturday); *Fubao* 復報 (Recovery); *Touxi zazhi* 遊戲雜誌 (Play magazine); *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小說月報 (Short story monthly); and *Mǐn bao* 民報 (People's news). I give in parentheses dates of the translations, when available, followed by brief remarks on their likely provenances. See, for instance, *Tanhuo meng* 夢花夢 (Dream of the Queen of the Night) (1914) [allegedly translated from the work of a Russian writer "Sana sikifu 薩那斯奇夫"]; *Ni xuandang* 女虛無黨 (Female nihilists) (1912), trans. Tianjin ludiao 天津路釣; *Xuandang* 虛無黨 (Nihilists), trans. Chen Jinghan 陳景漢; *Xuandang zhenxiang* 虛無黨真相 (Exposed on nihilists) [allegedly translated from the work of a German writer "Mohasun" 摩哈孫]; *Meiren shou* 美人手 (Beauty's hand) (1903–06) [allegedly based on a French novel]; *Xiaohun cao* 消魂草 (Soul perishing grass) [allegedly authored by a British writer "Maishi" 麥士]; *Ye gungui* 野薔薇 (1908), trans. Li Shicen, and retrans. Ba Jin (1909); *Xiaohun yu* 消魂雨 (Soul perishing rain) (1909), trans. Daohaizi 蹈海子; *Xuehua lei* 血花淚 (The teary history of blood-stained flowers) (1911), trans. Lu Guanchun 陸冠春; *Qihuan* 妻幻 (A wife's illusion) (1917), trans. Shewo 舍我; *Fanlian fuyuan* 翻天覆地 (Overturning heaven and redoubled rain) (1914), trans. Zhou Shouyuan 周瘦鹃; *Huangshi zhi xuandang* 皇室之虛無黨 (Imperial nihilists) (1906), trans. Da ai shi 大哀氏 [this was translated from the work of Japanese writer 金津園大郎]; *Ni xuandang ren* 女虛無黨人 (A member of the female nihilist party) (1914), trans. Zhou Shouyuan; *Sharen gongri* 殺人公司 (Assassination incorporated) (1908), trans. Chen Jinghan 陳景漢; *Xuandang* 虛無黨 (Nihilists) (1904), trans. Chen Jinghan; *Xuandang an* 虛無黨案 (A case of the nihilists) (1906); *Xuandang feiting* 虛無黨飛艇 (Nihilist flying ship) (1911), trans. Yang Xinyi 楊心一; *Xuandang fuchou ji* 虛無黨復讐記 (Revenge of the nihilists), trans. Yang Xinyi 楊心一 [from "Gewellian" 葛威廉, that is, William Tufnell le Queux]; *Xuandang niyi* 虛無黨密議 (The nihilists' secret summit) (1913) [allegedly translated from a story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle]; *Yifeng shu* 一封書 (A Letter) (1917).

<sup>4</sup> See Don Price, *Russia: The Roots of the Chinese Revolution* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1975); Arif Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Peter Zarrow, *Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); John Crump, *The Origins of Socialist Thought in Japan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983); Martin Bernal, *Early Chinese Revolutionaries: Radical Intellectuals in Shanghai and Chongqing, 1902–1911* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); Jiang Jun 蔣俊 and Li Xingzhi 李興芝, *Zhongguo jindai de wuzhengfu zhuyi shichao* 中國近代的無政府主義思潮 (The trend of anarchism in modern China) (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> See Steven G. Marks, *How Russia Shaped the Modern World: From Art to Anarchism, Ballot to Bolshevism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), esp. chap. 1; and Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Culture, 1861–1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

mations. The impassioned belief in destruction also harbored an idealized view of self-sacrifice. Expressing at heart an intense form of self-distinction, nihilism propagated a rather romanticist notion of destruction, glorifying the martyrdom of individual sacrifice. Dedicating themselves, often through death, to the cause of freedom, revolutionaries, anarchists, and nihilists shared a fervent desire for eternal recognition, leaving behind a prominent trail of pamphlets, suicide notes, and photographs. The well-known photograph of Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875–1907), dressed in a Western man's suit with a pipe in her mouth, remains an interesting commentary on radicalism as an antifeminine and anti-Chinese posture. Invocations of the famous last words of martyrs such as Chen Tianhua 陳天華 (1875–1905) and Zou Rong 鄒容 (1885–1905) predicated the possibility of liberation on the violence of racial nationalism and the assassination of Manchu officials.<sup>6</sup> Wu Yue 吳越 (1878–1905), who was responsible for the bombing attempt made on five Chinese emissaries, left behind what was originally a letter to his fiancée.<sup>7</sup> It was later expanded and published as the programmatic statement for political radicalism and assassinations entitled "An Epoch of Assassinations" (Ansha shidai 暗殺時代). Succinctly expressing the self-appointed task of political radicals, Wu claimed that China, lacking a coherent sense of collectivity, was not yet ready for a revolution, which required collective action. More urgently needed were the exemplary gestures of extremist martyrs whose selflessness would inspire larger social rebellions and sacrifice.

Indeed, political assassinations unleashed an era of subversive individualism, where exceptional acts carried greater value than life itself. Participating in the tumultuous period of dynastic decline and the founding of modern nationhood, the practice became increasingly notorious, especially after Shi Jianru 史堅如 (1879–1900) famously

<sup>6</sup> See Zou Rong 鄒容 "Gemingjun" 革命軍 (1903), in *Xinbai geming qian shiminjian shilun xuanyi* 辛亥革命前十年間時論選集 (Selected political essays published during the ten years prior to the 1911 revolution), eds. Zhang Nan 張村 and Wang Renzhi 王忍之, 5 vols. (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1960), 1:2:649–77, esp. p. 665. For an earlier call for assassinations, see Li Qun 李群, "Sharen pian" 殺人篇 (Essay on assassinations) (1901), in *Xinbai geming qian shiminjian shilun xuanyi*, 1:1:21–25.

<sup>7</sup> Wu Yue 吳越, "Ansha shidai" 暗殺時代 (An epoch for assassinations), in *Xinbai geming qian shiminjian shilun xuanyi*, 2:2:714–33. For a discussion of the differences between revolutionaries and anarchists, see Meng Diesheng 夢蝶生 (Ye Xiasheng 葉夏聲), "Wu zhengfu dang yu geming dang zhi shuoming" 無政府黨與革命黨之說明 (Clarifications on the difference between anarchists and revolutionaries), in *Xinbai geming qian shiminjian shilun xuanyi*, 2:2:490–97.

assassinated the Governor-General of Guangdong and Guangxi provinces, Deshou 德壽, in 1900. Beginning in 1903, reports on Russian revolutionaries and nihilism flooded the pages of radical and progressive journals such as *Dalu* 大陸 (Mainland), *Guomin ribao* 國民日報 (People's daily), *Hansheng* 漢聲 (Voice of the Han), *Subao* 蘇報 (Jiangsu journal), *Mingbao* 民報 (People's journal), *Jingzhong ribao* 警鐘日報 (Alarming bell news), *Zhejiang chao* 浙江潮 (Tide of Zhejiang), *Tongzhi shijie* 童子世界 (Juvenile world), and *Jiangsu* 江蘇.<sup>8</sup> After 1903, assassination became a more commonplace technique for eliminating political opposition, and targeted killings continued throughout the Republican period.

Translated from Russia, filtered through Japan, but reconceived in China as a new kind of modernist, individualist universalism, nihilism exceeded its original source of inspiration in its new frame of ambition. It took on distinct possibilities, increasingly coupled with other pressing concerns at the time. Constitutionalism, racial extinction, nationalism, and women's liberation simultaneously pointed to violence as a justifiable and even celebratory kind of destruction.

Tilting the discussion towards the reformist project of educating women, "women's fiction" (*nüzi xiaoshuo* 女子小說) incorporated assassinations and political violence into its own vision of radicalism. At the frontline of this imagined revolution, however, one does not find the male revolutionary carrying out assassinations in Tianjin or Beijing, as was abundantly reported in urban newspapers and journals. Capturing the writers' fancy, instead, was the image of stunningly beautiful female assassins traveling in enviable style in exotic Europe and America.<sup>9</sup> While

male radicals in real life risked physical damage and disfigurement in their trade, novels portrayed female assassins as multilingual socialites, equally adept at public speaking and planning ambush. Distinguished from other Western figures associated with political virtue (Madame Jean-Marie Roland, Florence Nightingale, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catherine the Great) who were revered by the Chinese around the turn of the twentieth century, the Russian female nihilist demonstrated a fierce resolve to carry out physical violence.<sup>10</sup>

Appearing between November 1902 and June 1903 in Liang Qichao's seminal journal *Xin xiaoshuo* 新小說 (New fiction), *Dong ou nü haojie* 東歐女豪傑 (Heroines of Eastern Europe) shared the forum for original new fiction along with other ominous titles such as Liang's *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* 新中國未來記 (The future of new China), *Hongshui huo* 洪水禍 (Disaster of the flood), and *Huitian qitan* 回天綺談 (Beautiful tales of changing the world).<sup>11</sup> By 1907, the figure of the woman nihilist assassin was frequently seen in late Qing fiction about women. As protagonists or key figures in individual chapters involving plots of political intrigue, they added a progressive appeal. Nihilists, not only Russian but also Chinese, became commonplace in translations and original Chinese creations alike. Apart from the biographical fiction about Qiu Jin such as *Liuyue shuang* 六月霜 (Frost in June), novels such as *Zhongguo xin nühao* 中國新女豪 (China's new heroines), *Nüzi quan* 女子權 (Women's rights), *Nü xuwu dang* 女虛無黨 (Female nihilists), and, later, *Mimi nüzi* 秘密女子 (Secret female agents) featured Chinese female assassins conducting top-secret political negotiations, establishing constitutionalism and

<sup>8</sup> Articles on Russian revolutionary and assassination activities in 1903 alone include "Eguo xuwu dang sanjie zhuan" 俄國虛無黨三傑傳 (Biographies of three Russian nihilist heroes), *Dalu* 3 (1903); "Eluosi de geming dang" 俄羅斯的革命黨 (Russian revolutionary alliance), *Tongzhi shijie* 33 (1903); "Shi E di yalishanda zhe zhuan" 弑俄帝亞歷山大普傳 (A biography of the assassin of Czar Alexander), *Dalu* 9 (1903); "Eguo geming dang nüjie Shaboluo ke zhuan" 俄國革命黨女傑沙勃羅克傳 (A biography of Russian revolutionary heroine Shaboluo ke), *Zhejiang chao* 7 (1903); "Ehuang yalishanda di er zhi sizhuang" 俄皇亞歷山大第二之死狀 (The circumstances surrounding the death of Czar Alexander II), *Guomin ribao* (1903); "Eguo xuwu dang zhi jiguan" 俄國虛無黨之機關 (The organization of Russian nihilists), *Hansheng* 6 (1903); "Lun Eluosi xuwu dang" 論俄羅斯虛無黨 (On Russian nihilists) (1903): 40-41; "Xuwu dang" 虛無黨 (Nihilists), *Subao* (19 June 1903); "Luxiya xuwu dang" 露西亞虛無黨 (Russian nihilists), *Jiangsu* 4 (1903).

<sup>9</sup> Other than Qiu Jin, there were Chinese female nihilists and radicals about whom we know very little but who were involved in heading assassination corps and bomb-making. Fang Junyong 方君瑛, Zeng Xing 曾醒, and Chen Bijun 陳璧君, for instance, organized an assassination corps for Tongmenghui 同盟會 (Revolutionary Alliance) in Japan in

1905. In 1906, Fang and Zeng, along with Cai Hui 蔡惠 and Tang Qunying 唐群英, were also involved in running a bomb-making facility in Yokohama. See below.

<sup>10</sup> For a set of important articles on women's literature, readership, and culture in the late Qing period, see *Nan Nü: Men, Women and Gender in China* 6.1 (2004).

<sup>11</sup> For an interesting discussion of this text in relation to *Flower in the Sea of Regret*, see Hu Ying, *Tales of Translation: Composing the New Woman in China, 1899-1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), chaps. 1 and 3. Also see Chen Pingyuan 陳平原, *Ershi shiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo shi* 二十世紀中國小說史 1897-1916 (History of twentieth-century Chinese fiction, 1897-1916), esp. chap. 7, collected in *Chen Pingyuan xiaoshuo shi lunji* 陳平原小說史論集 (Chen Pingyuan's collected works on the history of fiction), 3 vols. (Shijiazhuang shi: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1997), 2:794-833. *Hongshui huo* 洪水禍, a "historical novel" (*lishi xiaoshuo* 歷史小說) by Yuchenzi 雨塵子 (Dust from the Rain), is set in France, while *Huitian qitan* 回天綺談, a "political novel" (*zhengzhi xiaoshuo* 政治小說) by Yusezhai zhuren 玉瑟齋主人 (Master of Jade Zither Studio), is set in England. Both are collected in vol. 26 of *Zhongguo jinda xiaoshuo daxi* 中國近代小說大系 (A compendium of modern Chinese fiction), 80 vols. (Nanchangshi: Bahua Zhou wenyi chubanshe, 1991).

the founding of the Republic, and forming worldwide revolutionary alliances.<sup>12</sup>

The popular literary vocation of assassins mirrored a notable change in writers' conception of traditional character types of chivalry. Commenting on the unprecedented flavor of the modern assassin in his preface to his 1906 novel *Cike tan* 刺客談 (On assassins), Chen Jinghan remarked on the distinct break between the figures of the traditional *xiaoke* 俠客 (knight-errant) and the *yishi* 義士 (righteous man), on the one hand, and the new Russified Chinese assassin on the other.<sup>13</sup> Assassins embodied a new modern heroism, and the idea of the female nihilist assassin, in particular, was revolutionary, as Chinese fictional heroines assumed the postures of Sarah Aizenson and Perovskaya while embodying new political sensibilities according to a different set of moral criteria. These standards were otherwise less permissible in the traditional categories of valor and virtue. The Russian examples thus inaugurated a series of imaginative embellishments, incorporating biographical sources on notable Western women, such as Cleopatra, Joan of Arc, Nightingale, Roland, Beecher Stowe, as well as those on celebrated virtuous women from home. A distinctive feature Chen did not mention, however, was how, in fiction dealing with female assassins, the female assassin's adroitness at technological manipulations became a distinguishing mark of her role as the harbinger of a more scientific than moral civilization. She was not only a symbol of antithesis to tradition but also, and more interestingly, embodied the negotiated copresence of Western-technological and traditionalist-moral worlds.

The association between women revolutionaries and scientific knowledge and pragmatism was an important part of the theorization of political radicalism. It was first explicitly propounded in Jin Tianhe's 金天翻 (1874–1947) 1903 *Nijie zhong* 女界鐘 (Bell for women's world).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Zhongguo xin nihao* and *Nizi quan* are by the same author, Siqi zhai. For an interesting introduction to this little known writer, see Ellen Widmer's "Inflecting Gender: Zhan Kai/Siqi Zhai's 'New Novels' and Courtesan Sketches," *Nan Mi* 6.1 (2004): 136–68. See Siqi zhai, *Zhongguo xin nihao* (Shanghai: Jicheng tushu gongsi, 1907); *Nizi quan* (Shanghai: Zuoxin she, 1907); Tianjin Lugou 天津路鈞, *Ni xuxudang* (Shanghai: Youzheng shuju, 1916). *Nizi quan* is also collected in *Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo daxi*, vol. 64.

<sup>13</sup> "Xin Zhongguo zhi feiwu" 新中國之廢物 (The New Refuse of New China, Chen Jinghan's 陳景漢 penname), *Cike tan* 刺客談 (On assassins), in *Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo daxi*, vol. 58.

<sup>14</sup> Jin Tianhe, *Nijie zhong* (Shanghai: guji chubanshe, 2003). See also Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之, "Jin Tianhe yu Nijie zhong" 金天翻與《女界鐘》 (Jin Tianhe and *Nijie zhong*), *Shilun* 史林 3 (2003): 1–6; Hu Si 胡思 (Zhu Jianming 朱建明), "Nijie

The need for women's education and political participation, in fact, had already been voiced in the 1870s in the newspaper *Shenbao* 申報 (Shanghai newspaper).<sup>15</sup> Women writers Xue Shaohui 薛紹徽 (1866–1911) and Chen Xiefen 陳楨芬 (1883–1923) primarily focused on women's rights in their journals of the same title, *Mi xuebao* (Journal of women's learning), founded in 1898 and 1902, respectively.<sup>16</sup> *Nijie zhong*, however, gave a complete program for the newly politicized woman, epitomizing the "new citizen" as a rebuilt feminine figure. Jin

*zhong* 作她的 著者 真名 考 (A research on the real name of the author of *Nijie zhong*), *Dang an yu jianshe* (Archives and construction) 11 (2003): 25–26; Li Xiaojiang 李小江, "Shi zhege naren qiaoxiang le Zhongguo Nijie zhong", 是這個男人敲響了中國 "女界鐘" (It was this man who tolled the bell for Chinese women), *Dushu* 5 (2003): 68–74.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, "Lun nüxue" 論女學 (On education for women), *Shenbao* 1203 (30 March 1876); "Shu 'Lun nüxue' hou" 書論女學後 (Written after "Lun nüxue"), *Shenbao* (7 April 1876); "Zailun nüxue" 再論女學 (On education for women, a follow-up), *Shenbao* (11 April 1876). For a discussion of the author of the "Lun nüxue" (and "Zailun nüxue" should be written by the same author), see note 21 in Rudolf G. Wagner, "Women in Shenbaoguan Publications, 1872–1890," collected in this volume, pp. 227–56. Cf. Liang Qichao, "Lun nüxue," *Shenbao* 23 (12 April 1897): 1a–4a, and 25 (2 May 1897): 1a–2b. For articles that appeared around the same time as the novels I discuss, see, for example, Zhu Zhuang 竹莊, "Nüquan shuo" 女權說 (On women's rights), *Nizi shie* 5 (1904): 1–5; Zhang Zhujun 張竹君, "Nüzi xingxue baoxianhui xu" 女子興學保險會序 (Prologue to the Society for Ensuring the Rise in Women's Learning), *Zhongguo xin nüjie zazhi* 中國新女界雜誌 4 (1907): 1–5.

<sup>16</sup> Xue Shaohui is the first known woman translator of foreign fiction in the late Qing period. For a discussion of her life and others such as Chen Hongbi, see Guo Yanli 郭延禮, *Zhongguo jindai janyu wenxue gailun* 中國近代翻譯文學概論 (A brief study of modern Chinese translational literature) (Hankou: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1998), 168–69. For a chronology of her life and collection of her works, see *Xue Shaohui ji* 薛紹徽集 (Collection of Xue Shaohui), ed. Lin Yi 林怡 (Beijing: Fangzhi, 2003). For a detailed study of Xue Shaohui's fascinating life, see Nanxiu Qian, "Borrowing Foreign Mirrors and Candles to Illuminate Chinese Civilization: Xue Shaohui's moral vision in *The Biographies of Foreign Women*," *Nan Mi* 6.1 (2004): 60–101. For an account and useful list of female members of the Revolutionary Alliance (*Tongmenghui* 同盟會) and their activities in publishing and distribution, see Shen Zhi 沈智, "Xinhai geming shiqi de nü zhishi fenzi" 辛亥革命時期的女知識份子 (Female intellectuals during the 1911 revolutionary period), in *Xinhai geming yu jindai Zhongguo xingxue* 辛亥革命與近代中國 (The 1911 revolution and modern China), ed. Zhonghua shuju bianjibu 中華書局編輯部 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), 359–77. Also see Xie Chanfa 謝長法, "Qingmo de lun nüxuesheng jiqi huodong yu yingxiang" 清末的留日女學生及其活動與影響 (The activities and influence of women students studying in Japan in the late Qing period), *Jindai Zhongguo funu shi yanjiu* 近代婦女史研究 (Research on women in the modern period) 4 (1996): 63–79; Bao Jialin 鮑家麟, "Wanqing ji xinhai geming shiqi" 晚清及辛亥革命時期 (The period of the late Qing and the 1911 revolution), in *Jindai Zhongguo funu yundong shi* 近代中國婦女運動史 (A history of modern Chinese women movements), ed. Chen Saoping 陳二井 (Taipei shi: Jindai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1990), 53–156.

eagerly argued for the usefulness of science as a tool for radicalizing women. He enthusiastically cited, for instance, the study of Western craniometry to show that, given the comparable size of their brains to the opposite sex, women were no less intelligent than men. The problem of inequality consisted more in everyday practice: since women were more likely to come into contact with nuns, Daoists, and shamans in their idle time, Jin believed, they were more prone to be deceived by folk medicine, magic, and enchantments. Only science could provide the antidote to the widespread superstition that for him was at the root of women's inertia to learning.

Women's susceptibility to occultist beliefs was also evident in other aspects of their daily activities. Along with the abolition of footbinding and prearranged marriages, Jin proposed that women lighten their physical adornments and excessively complicated dress. Heavy hair dress impeded movement, not to mention the harm in wearing rouge, the lead content of which, Jin warns, could easily be absorbed into the skin and bloodstream. Coupling rudimentary physiology with progressive ideology, he encouraged women to become revolutionaries, educators, and entrepreneurs. With its impassioned language and focused expressions of grievance, *Bell for Women's World* left an important imprint on not only political but also fictional visions of women's liberation. Novels such as *Ziyu jiehun* 自由結婚 (Freedom in marriage), *Women's Rights*, and *Huang Xuyiu* 黃繡球, for example, replicated its extensive discussions of dress and choice of marriage.

A key concern in Jin's treatise, however, is that women's political participation, as a measure of China's progress toward modern civility, relied on a prerequisite willingness to resort to violence. The necessary struggle toward "civilization" was not without bloodshed, for one "in the end cannot reach out a begging hand to sages and rulers, but has to struggle for one's lost rights with one's own hands. Failing that, one would do better to sacrifice peace and embrace radicalism."<sup>17</sup> His sanctioning of individual initiative, however, did not replace the association of women with their traditional capacities in the popular imagination. Female radicalism was conceived of as more an extension than a replacement of women's familiar social roles. This new way of seeing a woman as an agent of political transformations and violence

<sup>17</sup> Jin Tianhe, *Niye zhong*, 48.

widened the spectrum of her visibility, blending in conservatism and radicalism along a new axis of possibility.

As though exemplifying this new recognition, the popular journal *Xiaoshuo shibao* 小說時報 (Fiction times) printed an illustration of women's newly perceived versatility as encompassing the traditional and modern, the virtuous and decadent.<sup>18</sup> The illustration, comprised of seven photographs, features a pair of delicate, feminine hands performing different traditional tasks. Building up to the climax, the illustration leads one's gaze to an eye-catching finish: a photograph of the hands holding a dagger. Evoked in a metonymy, the image of the radicalized modern woman as a pair of hands implies a continuum between her domestic and political capacities. This versatile image of the female assassin was in many ways unprecedented to her contemporary audience. Furthermore, her participation in a worldwide, international movement of liberation introduced a kind of cosmopolitan legitimacy, transcending national and cultural boundaries, especially when facilitated—in fiction—by balloon travel, electric horses, and underwater transportation. Out of a sense of inspiration defined less by Western novelty than self-renewal, Chinese heroines embraced their own splendor as inventors and assassins. The female revolutionary and assassin was thus constructed out of a composite image of the scientist, educator, athlete, talented woman (*cairu* 才女), and martyr, which collectively redefined sacrifice in light of nationalism.

This aura, of course, was a far cry from the risks of carrying out assassinations in real life. The only interaction an assassin had with royalty and officials was usually a fatal one. Acts of assassination, however glamorized in fiction, more often ended in aborted attempts, if not with the loss of a limb or eye, as was the case with Yang Dusheng 楊篤生 (1871–1911), who plotted to assassinate the Empress Dowager by blowing up the Summer Palace in Beijing. Real assassins were unambiguously on the other side of the law and never intersected it in any favorable way.

As though making up for this less-celebrated side of male reality, the fictional embodiment of women assassins fulfilled the lack and more. This type of women's fiction perhaps served as a positive example with which male readers could also identify. Noteworthy "women's fiction" from this period, in fact, was mostly written by men, for whom writing

<sup>18</sup> "Qianqian yuying" 纖纖玉影 (Slim jade shadow), *Xiaoshuo shibao* 15 (1912).

cross-gendered fiction specifically about women was a novel and possibly more lucrative endeavor. Women writers such as Xue Shaohui and Chen Hongbi 陳鴻璧, as far as we know, translated Western science fiction and treatises with an eye on their serious intellectual content.<sup>19</sup> While women's fiction about female assassins embellished the new connection between women and science, women writers were more interested in probing that novelty as a form of transposable, modern knowledge. In the fictional imaginary, radical revolutionaries often traveled clandestinely between secret meeting points in Tokyo and Paris, Yokohama and Tianjin. The female assassin was desired but respectfully pursued by her male comrades, whose less successful careers in no way overshadowed hers. Her high-risk life flaunted a kind of sophisticated, cosmopolitan glamour that spoke more to its desired utopian possibility than to the reality of its practice. The enviable risk women took by smuggling explosives through checkpoints revamped the familiar knight-errant image with the flair of modern espionage. They also commanded a kind of international profile rivaling and even exceeding that of real-life official emissaries and diplomats, as they often commingled intimately, with an ease possible only in fiction, with high officials and international royalties.

Bridging elitist and popular concerns, men and women, female assassins used their technological savvy to revitalize the idea of returning freedom to the common people. The coupling of romanticist self-dedication with selfless martyrdom for the nation provided an unusual catharsis for reconciling the desire for modern individualism and the imperative of nation-saving. Invariably multilingual, they were also the ultimate cultural diplomats, moving easily between languages and cultures, camouflage and impersonations.

As anarchists and women assassins appeared frequently in novels, translations of Western fiction on anarchism or dealing with anarchism also rose in number. The genre varied. What was translated as "detective fiction" (*zhentan xiaoshuo* 偵探小說), like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories, for instance, also carried significant anarchist plot twists. Those professing to be "nihilist fiction" (*xuwendang xiaoshuo* 虛無黨小說) did not have an exclusive claim on the topic. In the late Qing literary milieu of borrowings, translation-editing (*bianyi* 編譯), loose translations (*yanyi* 衍義), and other forms of half-inventive, half-faithful translations, one original

source goes a long way. British sensationalist writer William Tufnell le Queux's (1864-1927) *Strange Tales of a Nihilist* (1892), for example, generated at least five different works, separately serialized in *Mingbao* 民報 (People's newspaper), *Yuyue xiaoshuo* 月月小說 (Fiction monthly), and *Xiaoshuo shibao* between 1908 and 1909.<sup>20</sup> An English edition of le Queux praised his "startling and thrilling glimpses into the lives of underground Russian nihilists in London and the ever-threatening danger of the Russian Secret Police."<sup>21</sup> Translated into Chinese for the urban audience in Shanghai, Russian nihilists, ensconced in London, found an unexpectedly sympathetic readership. Works like "Xuwu dang qitan" 虛無黨奇談 (Wondrous tales of nihilists), "Nu zhentan" 女偵探 (Woman detective), "Baoliedan" 爆裂彈 (Explosive bomb), "E guo huangdi" 俄國皇帝 (The Russian emperor), and "E guo zhi zhentan shu" 俄國之偵探術 (Russian detective techniques) were taken from different le Queux stories and translated in different journals. A nonliterary example of cross-genre translation of anarchism is Kemuyama Sentarō's 煙山專太郎 *Kemuyama museifu shugi* 近世無政府主義 (Modern anarchism), a condensed history of Russian anarchism and nihilism, which, in its adapted Chinese translation by Jin Tianhe as *Freedom's Blood* (Ziyouxie 自由血), elicited very sympathetic responses from fiction writers and a great number of political radicals.<sup>22</sup>

## II. The Stone of Goddess Nüwa: Science and Female Chivalry

The initial attempts to sinicize the female assassin in the three years after the publication of *Heroines of Eastern Europe* demonstrated the degree of ingenuity required of this feat. A few writers tried to build the image of the radical, if not ascetic, woman revolutionary based on existing familiarity with traditional male hero (*taotian* 好漢) figures and virtuous daughters. The challenge of innovation consisted in superimposing inspired ideas about female assassins on this traditional screen. As agents of formidable destruction and barbarous violence, these new women were also great inventors who spearheaded unimaginable efforts

<sup>20</sup> William le Queux, *Strange Tales of a Nihilist* (New York: R.F. Fenno, 1892). See Price, 264n66.

<sup>21</sup> Le Queux, "Author's Note," iii.

<sup>22</sup> See Jin Yi 金一 (Jin Tianhe), *Ziyouxie* 自由血 (Shanghai: Jingjin shuju, 1904); Kemuyama Sentarō 煙山專太郎, *Kemuyama museifu shugi* 近世無政府主義 (Modern anarchism) (Tokyo: Meiji Bunkan, 1965).

<sup>19</sup> See note 16.

to elevate the standards of modern comfort and civilized living. The contrast between their capacity for annihilation and contribution to regeneration usually only heightened their dramatic appeal as a hybrid of traditionalism and technological modernity. A striking example of this experimental composite is the novel *Niwa shi* by the writer pen-named Haitian duxiao zi 海天獨嘯子 (The Lone Howler of the Sea and Heaven).<sup>23</sup>

No stranger to science fiction, Lone Howler was one of the first translators who introduced Japanese science and adventure novels into China in the early twentieth century. In his 1903 translator's preface to Japanese science fiction writer Oshikawa Shunro's 押川春浪 (1876-1914) *Kongzhong feiting* 空中飛艇 (Flying ship in the sky), he expresses his personal conviction in the importance of introducing fiction about science. Reiterating the view that fiction propagated science in a way that engaged the common reader, Lone Howler sees its additional benefit in fortifying people's minds from superstitions, a danger against which all civilizations must defend itself:

Women and young girls, taken in by talent-beauty fiction, wish only to emulate it. The worship of gods and belief in spirits is practically branded on their brains (*naoguang yinlao* 腦光烙印), calcified against any hope of breaking through [...] Today's civilization, however, is radiating through untold distances. The time is ripe for breaking open this web; it is a time for fiction's reform [...] As our citizens looked to each other, not knowing what to do, hopes of aspiration turn into shadow and froth in their minds (*naojin zhu yinpaopao* 腦筋之影泡). At such a time, one must judiciously choose the materials, revise one's strategy, and inject (*zhushe* 注射) them into the brain in order to restore its vibrancy with new knowledge.<sup>24</sup>

Lone Howler hopes for a complete renovation of the mind through fiction. But this is in a much more radical sense than the mere observation of Liang Qichao's 1902 programmatic statement. With the aid of science, the infusion of new knowledge takes on a specific form of transmission, targeting the brain as the appropriate site of surgical remedy. Elaborating on this kind of "scientific" reasoning, *The Stone of Goddess Niwa*, which Lone Howler began to compose just one year later,

describes this mental renovation as no less than a mind-altering operation. Unlike the scientifically designed program of women's reeducation that Jin Tianhe proposes, female assassins take the matter of science into their own hands. Taking the project of modern education a step further, the novel does not leave the implementation of science to the discretion of enlightened male intellectuals who get to decide what modern women need. In this vein, chapter ten features a climactic episode where the female protagonist assassin Jin Yaose wakes up to find herself on the operating table in a brain-washing clinic (*xinaguan* 洗腦院). She has been captured by members of an underground female revolutionary cell called White Cross Society.

Mistaking her for a spy sent from the "barbaric" government in power, the supervising doctor Chu Xiangyun 楚湘雲 (pun on the chivalric Shi Xiangyun 史湘雲 of Cao Xueqin's 曹雪芹 *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 [Dream of the Red Chamber]) removes her brain for examination while she is unconscious. To their surprise, her cerebrum is white and unblemished. They soon realize that Jin is the heroic female assassin they had long known by reputation. When she regains full consciousness, they welcome her and explain their stated mission of purpose. One of their central operations is the innovative, brain-purification regime.

Though flawless at birth, they explain, the brain can stray from its pristine state during the course of physical development under three kinds of corrupting influence. For those who grow up in poverty, their brains lie in waste due to the likely neglect of cerebral stimulation in a life engrossed in physical labor. In these cases, the nerves regress and their elastic tissues gradually atrophy, finally turning into fat. Those who live near water; on the other hand, because of the easy access to fish that provide essential nutrients for the brain, have particularly sensitive cerebra, as the sight of water also constantly replenishes their thoughts with the image of motion. Lastly, there are also those whose brains are of such clattering density that they have long lost any responsiveness and become impervious to the effects of desires and emotions.

To demonstrate this wide range, Chu shows Jin several atlases of the brain in its hundreds of variations. Some are dotted with black specks, while others resemble beehives. They can be further divided into solid masses and weaker ones that bear the literal imprints of objects. According to her analysis, impressions are left on the cerebral surface, depending on the different ways in which people exercise their imagination. Chinese officials, for example, slavishly pattern their thinking on the wishes of their superiors. What they pine for is a lucrative post.

<sup>23</sup> Haitian duxiao zi, *Niwa shi*, in *Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo daxi*, 25:439-536.

<sup>24</sup> Haitian duxiao zi, "Kongzhong feiting bianyan" 空中飛艇弁言 (Preface to the flying ship in the sky), in Chen and Xia, Xiaohong 夏曉虹, *Ershi shiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo lilun ziliao* 二十世紀中國小說理論資料 (Theoretical sources of twentieth-century Chinese fiction) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1997), 107.



Their cerebra, consequently, acquire a dark gray shade as a result of their habitual obsequiousness and take on the image of their superiors. Correspondingly, the vessels and nerves in their cerebra loop and crisscross aimlessly, incidentally, but aptly resembling a pile of gold coins. In a similar state of degeneration, unenlightened traditional scholars who only read Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130-1200) commentaries on the Confucian classics write eight-legged essays, copy standard scripts in their calligraphy, and have pools of ink cumulating in their heads, calcified like hard bricks. Their brains smell like manure and rot like mud. Covered with gray and black spots, they characteristically look like beehives. As for those who disingenuously cry for revolution and clamor for freedom, their brains are in actuality hollow as mists. They secretly dream of possessing many beautiful wives and concubines in the old ways of feudalism. On those cerebral surfaces, one could almost make out the contours of rouged lips.

To counter such degenerate thinking, the secret society's main mission is to cleanse as many brains as possible. For this purpose, Chu concocts a complex potion combining different chemical elements, using procedures of varying complexity. Those beclouded by title and fame, for instance, would have to be bleached by chlorine gas. Requiring a more complex procedure, those brains that have hardened from an excessive preoccupation with wealth must be first softened in chemical water being before irrigated with phosphate. As for brains imprinted with photo images of desired objects, a three-step measure is required: first, dissolve the impressions in sulfur, then, filter the remains with bone ashes, and, finally, put it back in the skull. When all else fails, the unsalvageable part of the cerebrum would simply have to be replaced with that of a cow.

Physically transformed, the brain is thus reengineered to fit the requirements of enlightened thinking. Such an elaborate narrative of scientific procedure, of course, did not spring from the writer's creative genius alone. The brain-washing episode took its inspiration from late nineteenth-century science journals such as John Fryer's *Science Compendium* (Gezhi huibian 格致彙編) and treatises on Western anatomy like the work of London Missionary Society's Benjamin Hobson in *A New Outline of Anatomy* (Quanti xinlun 全體新論) (1852). If Lone Howler thought that science could have an important place in Liang's vision for new fiction, he saw it not as a set of hypothetical theories but the very instrument for physically altering the mindset of modern female citizens.

The seemingly outlandish suggestions in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* lent "scientific" reasoning to the desire for new fiction and citizenry. The goal of rationalization was not so much to present an argument that is persuasive or credible. Rather, it was to familiarize oneself and one's readers with the incredible in order to imagine, to accept, and to take it for granted as common sense. The dividing line Lone Howler wanted to draw between superstition and new knowledge was not between intrinsically unscientific and scientific beliefs. There was in fact nothing obvious about what counted or did not count as science. But this indeterminacy was not an impediment to creative understanding. Instead, it provided ample room for the fiction writer to establish new correspondences between the possible and the impossible by appropriating and immediately repackaging "scientific" knowledge, as it was introduced in journals, newspapers, and even other fiction by fellow novelty-seeking writers. In this cultural landscape of variegated citational practice, *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* took its cue from nutritional science, assassination techniques, and electrical studies.

Significantly, new knowledge did not necessarily engender correspondingly new applications. Often, it was brought back to deal with the old preoccupations in a familiar locus of cultural anxiety. During an interlude to Jin's visit at another female revolutionary cell, Flower Blood Society, for example, we get a glimpse into how science served to extend the popular Daoist concern with "cultivating life" (*yangsheng* 養生) and increasing longevity. Qin Aiming 秦愛濃, the leader of the society, invites Jin to dine with her in a special room modestly set up with a table and two rubber recliners. Two tubes are attached to a machine on the one end and to two small, individual pacifiers on the other. Electric gold plates carrying food are fed into the machine on a conveyor belt. After much noise, a fine-tasting elixir, distilled from an array of exotic and delicate flavors, begins to flow from the tubes and into the mouths of the two women, who suckle avariciously on the pacifiers. Qin then explains to Jin that she invented this "scientific trifle" (*lexue xiaoxi* 科學小戲) upon discovering the principle of longevity. According to her calculations, if properly cared for, the human body could continue to function for up to four hundred years. Much of its extended quality depended on the level of prior nutritional intake and, equally importantly, the process of digestion, which must be carefully monitored by first removing any harmful sodium or sediments from foods that could block circulation. The discovery that undigested sediments entered directly into the blood stream proved the linkage between

aging and insufficient mastication. To remedy both problems, Qin extracts only the very essence of meats and vegetables before turning them into liquid form to be imbibed like the elixirs of immortality in Daoist literature.

The association between science and occultism in *The Stone of Goddess Nizua* deeply impressed one contemporary commentator, known to the reader as Sir Profligate the Crouching Tiger. Allegedly a close acquaintance of Lone Howler, he wrote the preface to the novel as well as the individual commentaries at the end of all sixteen chapters. In the first paragraph of his commentary to chapter ten, the word "marvelous" (*qi 奇*) appears no less than eighteen times.<sup>25</sup> He remarks on China's cultural preoccupation with longevity, which had never been more than an ill-defined, esoteric notion. The recent demonstration of a French scholar's abstinence from food, however, showed that one could remain vibrant without reliance on physical food intake. Nonetheless, Sir Profligate acknowledges, Madame Qin's liquefying device is certainly much more enjoyable without having to deprive one of the pleasures of taste.

In this way, *The Stone of Goddess Nizua* facilitates the everyday practice of science by making it accessible as short cuts that could facilitate the constant labor of self-care. But the necessity of nurture also raises a different issue. As though standing in for the lost mother, the feeding machine was suggestively attached to two pacifiers. In an implicit nostalgia for the womb, the two female assassins symbolically seal their common allegiance in the sharing of artificial maternal care. The catapult toward a futuristic world of sophisticated technology is thereby unexpectedly staged as a return to the primordial scene of bliss for the female assassin turned infant. The autonomous machine replaces the nurture of the mother in the world of female assassins and technology. In their dedication to a political cause, it is as though they must declare themselves to be first and foremost revolutionaries before they can recognize themselves as daughters. National filiation, it would seem, supersedes filial piety.

This commitment to revolution at the price of symbolic matricide, in fact, is the first moral choice Jin has to make at her first attempt at assassination. The novel begins with her return to China after three years of studying abroad. After laboriously winning the confidence of

the Empress, who kindly takes her under her wing, Jin wastes no time in planning her assassination. She first smuggles a pair of ivory tusks, which store a lethal amount of electricity to be released upon impact, into the inner palace. Just as she is about to stab the Empress in her sleep, however, the Empress opens her eyes. Jin hastily explains that she has brought the ivory tusks as a token of her gratitude. The Empress soon resumes her slumber, and Jin tries to carry out another attempt, as she has hidden explosives in her sleeves as well. Jin is poised to toss the explosives through the bed curtains in a suicide mission, but at that very moment, the Empress stirs again, this time less persuaded by her excuses. Frustrated by her own failed attempts, Jin reproaches herself, as though voicing the novel writer's own sigh, "If the Russian Nihilists can do it, why can't I?"<sup>26</sup>

Revealingly, when the technology of killing comes face to face with the act of killing the mother, the female assassin falters. The Empress's reprimanding eyes shake her resolve, now suddenly reduced to the guilt of an undisciplined daughter. She does not need to look to the Russian nihilist assassin as an example by which to measure her own lack of political courage. As a cold-hearted assassin willing to kill even her benefactor, she already proves her prior failure at embodying the ideal daughter. Her incompetence reflects not a fear of failure but, rather, the greater anxiety for success, which goes against the greater prohibition of matricide. Significantly, this initial cowering before the maternal figure is crucial in leading her on to the path of self-discovery. Only after she is forced to flee the maternal domain in order to escape persecution does she find her calling as a revolutionary. Instead of founding her political radicalism on killing the mother, in other words, Jin has first to be rejected and even threatened by the maternal figure in order to become a female assassin in her own right. Her allegiance to radicalism and new individualism is indebted to that initial separation from the mother, the first symbolic murder that wins her revolutionary freedom.

Interestingly, the denial of filial submission to the mother is expressed in the female assassin as a different capacity for nurture. As though nostalgia for the mother is possible only upon her death, the assassin subsequently assumes the role as an agent of care. Notwithstanding their reacing of technology as a replacement for lost maternal care, female assassins perform a different life-giving function by nurturing science in

<sup>25</sup> Haitian duxiao zi, *Nizua shi*, 475.

<sup>26</sup> Haitian duxiao zi, *Nizua shi*, 460.

turn, breathing life into inanimate objects. In this way, their femininity also expresses a desexualized generative capacity, released through the exercise of freedom and self-will. They invest in a kind of technology that correspondingly serves this new purpose of independence. Upon Jin's departure from the Heavenly Fragrance Compound, she is given an electric horse (*dianma* 電馬) as a parting gift. Chapter nine focuses on an extensive treatment of electrical science, following Jin's heroic feat of shooting down a balloon that she has mistaken for the colossal, mythical bird *peng* 鵬. While explaining to Jin the ingenuity of the gift, the leader of the Heavenly Fragrance Compound makes a distinction between the technology of electricity she reinvented and its Western genealogy:

I should tell you that this electric horse is something that neither the ancients knew nor the Westerners could ever invent. It is a response to the era of electricity in the twentieth century. Since the discovery of electromagnetic waves (*dianliang* 電浪) in the eighteenth century, people have recognized the power of electricity (*dianqi* 電氣). Though Yadang, Lin Desui, Leisi, Hengli, and others all have had, one after the other, their own contributions and inventions, the practical use of electricity has not yet been fully demonstrated. For instance, Tesina's (Nikola Tesla) use of Heshi's (Heinrich Hertz) electromagnetic waves to navigate ships is in truth only a toy for scholars. Its use in things like wireless telegram shows its enchanting force. But once put to practical test, it is intolerably clumsy and inadequate. This proves the shallow depth of recent knowledge. For instance, how ridiculous is it that trams (*dianche* 電車) would still require tracks or that telegrams need lines? Don't they know that the release of energy has its own spontaneous quality, depending entirely on how people use it?<sup>27</sup>

This exposition on electricity is less concerned with accuracy than novelty. Madame Qin's reasoning makes little distinction between electricity and electromagnetic waves, as everything that had anything to do with electricity—such as trams (*dianche* 電車), telegrams (*dianbao* 電報), and telephones (*dianhua* 電話)—featured “electric” *dian* as a prefix in the binome. The generalization, however, does not dampen the enthusiasm of Sir Profligate. Having found Madame Qin's explanations true to the source and backed with proof (*yongen youju* 有根有據), he is duly impressed. Her “pioneering thinking” (*dapi xinsi* 獨辟新思) insightfully grasps the fundamental principles of the universe. Excited at the

<sup>27</sup> Haitian duxiao zi, *Niwa shi*, 491.

implications, he asserts, “That my country is wealthy in its people's talent for innovations is a fact publicly recognized by the author, the readers, and the white people [...] Westerners say that in the coming century Chinese will bring the newest technology into the world. I, for one, believe it wholeheartedly.”<sup>28</sup>

This expressed euphoria does not just belie Sir Profligate's own personal enthusiasm. The conviction in the power of fiction to state truths about science was more widely felt as a new confidence. In this respect, he is the expression of a particularly interesting relationship to science in the text. On the one hand, he presumes to be able to judge the truth or falsity of its empiricism, as though already equipped with prior scientific knowledge. On the other hand, the commentator also marvels at the science described in the text, taking it as evidence for the latest innovation in technology. The text in turn, in other words, authorizes him. This marks a subtle corroboration, whereby science and fiction, commentator and text, acquire mutual legitimacy through a process of defamiliarization marked by surprise, marvel, and inspiration. The principles of science are held up to the requirements of proof and empiricism, while at the same time subjected to intuitive taste and judgment. The objective presence of science carries the subjective impressions of the commentator, but this recognition dawns on him only as exterior knowledge. As though displacing the secret hope for science as an universal truth, the representation of science in fiction expresses a kind of coveted self-affirmation, coming back as tested and proven objective reality.

*The Stone of Goddess Niwa* is one of the most outlandish fictional accounts of science from the late Qing period. It predates Wu Jianren's well-known *Xin shitou ji* 新石頭記 (New story of the stone) by just a few months. Similarly playing on the conventions of Cao Xueqin's *Dream of the Red Chamber*, it begins with a myth of creation, where a colorful boulder falls out of the sky after Goddess Niwa completes her task of mending the universe. Instead of being endowed with human sentience, however, creation becomes the object of not literary genius but empirical production. The novel's use of elaborate scientific explanations anticipates the narrative practice of documenting the technical provenance of sophisticated weaponry in the futuristic fiction *New Century* (Xin jiyuan 新紀元), which was published three years later in

<sup>28</sup> Haitian duxiao zi, *Niwa shi*, 495.

1908 and reprinted eight times by 1936. *The Stone of Goddess Niwa*, however, is not a simple tale of science fantasy, despite its meticulous cataloguing of all of the latest, real or imagined, Western technological innovations. The novel is, more importantly, in dialogue with the various issues concerning women's liberation, the promise of science, and ideas for social cleansing. Rather than fundamentally challenging traditional roles, the novel reenacts a more complex relation to its predecessors in traditional fantasy literature as well as Western science. It revels in reversing cultural stereotypes only to highlight the transgressibility of genres to which it too is subordinated.

Thus, certain inconsistencies in the text appear to question its own success in revamping the female image. Combining Russian nihilism with a Buddhist mission, Jin's task as a female assassin is, oddly, first and foremost to "redeem" (*pu du* 普度) those mired in corruption as though out of religious benevolence rather than political vengeance. Her ideology of assassination claims no singular object or enemy, as she seeks a liberation transcending even that of the political. This exaltedness of the ideal subsumes under the rubric of legitimacy all otherwise questionable behavior and narrative logic. The reader is expected to accept with equal plausibility her progressivism and her earlier, voluntary prostitution. One of her most daring escapes is accomplished with the assistance of a "former client," who oddly appears as a political comrade rather than paramour. Despite the strict codification explicitly imposed on the female revolutionaries, the practice of celibacy signifies a rather artificial renunciation. The figure of the female assassin plays on the legitimacy and illegitimacy of opposites, yet goes far beyond their restricted scopes of antithesis. She brings destruction for good, encourages lust for the sake of redemption, belittles her own sacrifice while desiring posthumous fame, and practices science in the service of superstition. As though at times finding it irresistible to allow the precarious distinction between good and evil to collapse, the narrative sometimes hints at the distinction's vulnerability, as Jin herself at one point becomes the pursued in a witch hunt for a local sorceress (*yao ni* 妖女), causing an identity crisis between the high-tech assassin and hypersexualized shaman. For a sobering moment, the aura of beautiful international secret agents disappears and is replaced by the general stigma of punished women.

Nonetheless, female assassins-cum-inventors infuse not only their deeds of destruction but also their projects of invention with the desire for freedom. But the freedom desired by nihilism and anarchism was

very far from being defined by concrete visions. What distinguished a politically seditious act from legitimate overthrow was as fraught a question as it was to choose between conservative and radical change. One observer commented in 1904 on the difference with remarkable economy: "when it's a few, it's assassination, when it's a majority, it's revolution."<sup>29</sup> The desire for revolution, in this way, translates into a will to upset the order of things, to turn meanings against each other, and to mark a passageway for words with opposing meanings. Even the most violent deeds, according to this great epistemic reevaluation, may well gain legitimacy in retrospect.

In this unresolved way, "freedom" (*ziyou* 自由) is a liberating notion but lacks a pragmatic plan of reconstruction. Seldom does one get a definition of what this state of freedom might look like after destruction. Early revolutionary writings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries incite the will for change rather than envision its political substance, and even within this passion for liberation, there is often an immediate counterimpulse. Liberation is defined in terms of new restraints, as female assassins must observe a strict regime of celibacy and renounce the sexual body along with motherhood. The return to traditional female virtues, while being politically subversive, seems to be the most difficult fantasy to realize. The female assassin's body is exclusively the focus of aptitude rather than birth and sexual desire. While the athleticism of the female assassin may shame her male counterparts, her sexuality is often muted under a restraint disguised as choice. How to portray the fine distinction between the ideologically committed assassin and the sexual, independently minded woman was admittedly a hard choice to make.

Indeed, writing fiction for women during this period had its share of difficulties. It was easier to defy the virtuous role and to take pleasure in subversive femininity than to manage woman's volatile role at the juncture of tradition and modernity. *The Stone of Goddess Niwa*, taking the easier route, indulges in the quick fix of a revenge fantasy as the return of oppressed femininity. The successful version of radicalism is hastily articulated as simply the female embodiment of male heroism. Jin Yaose's maid, Feng Kui 鳳葵, in this regard, is a perfect example. She is clearly intended to be a spitting female image of the brute-turned-monk Li Kui 李逵 from *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (Water margins).

<sup>29</sup> *Xinhai geming qian shiminjian*, *shimin zuangji*, 1.2:127.

Rebelling against the strict tenets of female revolutionary societies while displaying the unrefined directness and crass humor much enjoyed and condoned in the righteous world of brotherhood, Feng Kui is the instigator of drunken bouts that were entirely symmetrical to those of Li Kui. Not so subtly modeled after the incorrigible but righteous ruffian, Feng Kui even embodies his well-known attributes, being unattractive, dark skinned, and quick tempered.

### III. Female Jail Flower: *From Violence to Political Constructivism*

Though *The Stone of Goddess Nitava* radicalized the solution to the question of women's freedom, it also recognized its own limitations. A different novel about female radicalism appearing around the same time, *Female Jail Flower*, opted for another approach. Working earnestly with the given reality of inequality, it constructs a socially more realistic scenario for negotiating women's equality and freedom. In the 1904 edition of *Female Jail Flower*, the preface writer Yu Peilan 俞佩蘭 notes that although traditional Chinese novels are rich in genres such as the link-chapter (*zhanghui* 章回), romance (*chuangqi* 傳奇), and plucking rhymes (*tanci* 彈詞), those dealing with women's rights and education are far and few between.<sup>30</sup> "Fiction for women's world" (*nijie xiaoshuo* 女界小說) required a different set of demands on the woman writer. She needed to have the "talent of singing willow wisps, a pen that grows flowers, Buddhist compassion, and the methods of a hero (*haojie zhi shouduan* 豪傑之手段). Combining precarious talent, benevolence, and revolutionary will, the woman writer, much like her fictional character, also had to be a new composite. She had to display leadership in rebuilding civilization from the ruins of destruction."<sup>31</sup>

Beginning with a tribute paid to a great hero (*da haojie* 大豪傑)—"China's Columbus" (a likely reference to Jin Tianhe)—who advocated women's rights, *Female Jail Flower* traces the revolutionary path of the female assassin protagonist Sha Xuemei 沙雪梅. While appearing to glorify political assassinations and female political radicalism, the narrative, however, abruptly changes its tone in chapter ten (of twelve), where the leader of the women's revolution suddenly dies and is subsequently replaced by the less radical and ultimately more effective reformist and

educator Xu Pingquan 許平權 as the protagonist. The radical part of the novel, however, deserved to be examined first.

Sha Xuemei, prophesied to be a "woman devil who kills without blinking her eyes" (*sharen bu zhayan de nü mowang* 殺人不眨眼的女魔王), teaches martial arts by day and studies Herbert Spencer's (1820-1903) treatise on women's rights by night. She sets the tone for female radicalism when she kills her husband with a "black-tiger-stealing-the-heart punch" (*heihu touxin de quanou* 黑虎偷心的拳頭), after he violently attacked her during an argument. She concludes that, though the world has evolved, the institution of marriage failed to evolve with it, resulting in the totalitarian rule of men over women. As is characteristic of early, modern novels that first try their hand at articulating modern female political radicalism and progressivism, traditional male chivalry provides the obvious blueprint. One day, enraged by a similar logic of inequality which she witnessed in a tiger that deferred to lions but aggressed toward a nearby female panther, Sha pummeled the tiger with her bare hands in the heroic style of Wu Song 武松.

A total of six women join forces to start a women's revolution. They travel to Nagasaki, Tokyo, and Paris to pay homage to the birthplace of freedom. Political radicalism in the nihilist vein, however, proves unsustainable. Along with the seventy other female terrorists who fail, Sha commits suicide through self-immolation. In the absence of leadership, the women's revolution grinds to a halt, leaving the only alternative of taking up reform through education. The surviving members then found schools and focus on teaching medicine, history, geology, mathematics, and engineering to young women. Xu Pingquan and her husband, whose marriage was consecrated on the basis of mutual respect and free will, spearhead this new effort at civilized revolution.

*Female Jail Flower* chooses a provocative way of reconciling the problem of violence with political constructivism. Through the interchange between its two female protagonists, the narrative argues for the necessity of both chivalrous assassinations and moderate reforms. This is demonstrated in the dialogue between Sha and Xu at their first meeting in chapter eight. Sha proposes to form a clique with the mandate to kill all men and take over national power. Xu, on the other hand, expresses deep skepticism at the high cost of human lives. Her grounds for objection, however, are less genuinely pacifist than racially motivated.

She explains that revolution is easier to carry out on foreign soil where the difference in race, religion, and language makes it matter

<sup>30</sup> Wang Miaoru 王妙如, *Niyu hua* 女獄花, in *Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo daxi*, 64:701-60.

<sup>31</sup> Wang, 705.

less to inflict violence. Revolutions, however, would be much more difficult, because they are instigated toward members of one's own race. In response, Sha points out that men's physical abuse of women does not differ all that much from the mistreatment of foreign races. Similar to the recommendations made for the female assassin in *The Stone of Goddess Niwa*, Sha believes that women must sever their emotional attachments in order to assert a basic invulnerability. For Sha, however, this would be accomplished in accordance not with revolutionary imperative but emotional propensity. Endowed with a naturally "cold disposition" (*bingshuang xingzhi* 冰霜性質), women can more readily dispense with their passions and adapt to the absence of "love" (*qing* 情).<sup>32</sup> The discussion soon falls back on an analogy of racial disparities and their correspondence to the weak and the strong:

Xu: Look at the Indians, for instance, despite their valor, they cannot begin to express the bitterness of their enslavement by the British. Even though every day they speak of revolution, the hope for revolution and gaining independence does not lie with them.

Sha: India is an inferior race (*jianzhong* 賤種). Of course they can't break free. The brain quality of women, however, surpasses that of men. How can you take Indians as an analogy?

Xu: According to Western biologists, ants' brains are the most superior, followed by the avians, then humans. The reason that humans rather than ants oversee the world is because the physical structure of ants, like avians, is not complete. Women, similarly, have not been educated or physically unfettered, thus their attempts at revolution have yet to succeed.<sup>33</sup>

The analogy between women and the Indians links the project of women's liberation to the discourse on national salvation. Discussions on racial survival in the late Qing period utilized the framework of Social Darwinism as a way of reassigning superiority and inferiority.<sup>34</sup> Though at times looked upon sympathetically, Indians, along with the Persians, Poles, and Egyptians, were considered people of perished nations (*wangguo* 亡國) who served as negative examples for the Chinese.

<sup>32</sup> Wang, 741.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> See discussions in Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (London: Hurst, 1992); Rebecca E. Karl, *Slaving the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2002); and Jing Tsu, *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature: The Making of Modern Chinese Identity, 1895-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

This conclusion led to two different interpretations. One was that the Chinese could easily follow the footsteps of these enslaved races and nations, if the empire continued to disintegrate without making a viable transition to modern nationhood. The other was that China was still in some way better off than these inferior races, since it had not yet incurred a similar fate.<sup>35</sup> Racial hierarchy was both the mirror for seeing China's subordination and the frame for objectifying the lamentable fate of the presumably truly inferior races. The goal of revolution may have been to do away with one's own subordination. In rationalizing one's way out, however, it also reinvested in the terms of subordination and inferiorization. It is as though in order to understand what it would mean to be free, one had to draw on an example of greater unfreedom. Expressing two sides of the feminist debate, Sha and Xu nonetheless share the assumption that some races are intrinsically more inferior than others. The inequality between the Indians and British, for example, reflected less the problem of imperialism than the Indians' own weakness. The lack of agency was recuperated as a strangely articulated question of choice. The issue was not racial subordination itself but, rather, that some races allowed themselves to be enslaved, thereby contributing to their own miserable fate.

Drawn as an analogy to women's liberation, this logic has uncomfortable implications. The attempted comparison with the plight of the "inferior race" discloses the unevenness in the ground of comparison. Identification with the weak is admonitory, while that with the strong is aspiring in tone. Reintroducing the assumption of natural hierarchies of race and power into the discourse on women's liberation, Sha's view becomes entangled in the proliferating terms of subordination. Borrowed from other discourses as a case in point but, in the end, narrowing the vision of female radicalism to a subversion of inferiority, Sha's and Xu's analogy stops just short of reevaluating the larger framework of rivalry and uneven capital that continues to replicate and reinforce

<sup>35</sup> I discuss this elsewhere. See my *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature*, chaps. 2 and 3. This discourse on perished nations also extended to oppressed peoples in general, including, for example, the Jews and the Filipinos. See, for example, Xiamin 俠民, "Fetizbing waishi zixu" 浮羅濱外史 自序 (Preface to *An unofficial history to the Philippines*), in *Ershi shiji Zhongguo xiaoshuo litan ziliao* 二十世紀中國小說理論資料 1897-1916 (Theoretical materials of Chinese novels in the twentieth century, 1897-1916), eds. Chen and Xia (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1989), 145; and "Feilubin wangguo canzhuang jilue" 菲律賓亡國慘狀記略 (A record of the horrendous circumstance of the extinct nation Philippines), *Guanzhan* 1 (1904): 1-6. Cf. Karl, chap. 1.

these terms of subordination. Inferring from craniometry the root of women's atrophied intelligence, Xu further borrows from Jin's version of science to strengthen rather than to challenge the imperialist logic of racial and sexual inferiority. The two female revolutionaries seem to be arguing for the possession of the logic of subordination, as they deposit the specter of inferiority and unworthiness into the category of race, along with its naturalized undesirability.

#### IV. Concluding Remarks

Fiction about women assassins, in this way, is significant less for its subversion of social protocols than its demonstration of how those protocols were generated and reformulated. The sense of novelty expressed in late Qing fiction does not necessarily have much to do with experiencing the truly unknown. It emerged equally from the defamiliarization of old tropes rediscovered as new. Writers created a semblance of the "new" out of the "old," "civilization" from "barbarity," and female assassins from good wives and daughters in order to forge a range of credible possibilities that facilitated rather than fixed polarities. In this way, late Qing fiction was engaged in a process of creating epistemic beliefs. Rather than unreflectively favoring the hierarchy of modernity over tradition, it provided a discursive forum where they met as outlandish science fantasies or sensationalist political intrigues. In this regard, fiction about female assassins and inventors in particular was not exceptional to this larger discursive nexus. These novels participated in and, by virtue of their literary production, reinforced the trafficking of different orders of plausibility. To claim them as a distinct genre because they ostensibly dealt with women would be to miss the hidden differences within sameness.

Perhaps for this reason, the late Qing period witnessed an explosion of new genres, not only women's fiction (*nüzi xiaoshuo* 女子小說), nation-loving fiction (*aiguo xiaoshuo* 愛國小說), sentimental fiction (*yanqing xiaoshuo* 言情小說), nihilist fiction (*xuwendang xiaoshuo* 虛無黨小說), legal fiction (*falü xiaoshuo* 法律小說), and even women's nihilist fiction (*nüzi xuwendang xiaoshuo* 女子虛無黨小說) but also fiction of social critique, constitutionalism fiction (*lixian xiaoshuo* 立憲小說), utopian fiction (*wutoubang xiaoshuo* 烏托邦小說), idealist fiction (*lixiang xiaoshuo* 理想小說), detective fiction (*zhenjian xiaoshuo* 偵探小說), nation-saving fiction (*jiuguo*

*xiaoshuo* 救國小說), and science fiction (*kezue xiaoshuo* 科學小說).<sup>36</sup> Even though late Qing fiction reinvigorated the question of tradition versus modernity, its cultural openness to experimentation also exceeded the scope of that inquiry by fundamentally reconceptualizing how literature engaged its cultural context. Genres, as with gender, involved a process of distinctions and polarities, disguising commonality as difference and passing off differences as analogies of the same. Female assassins and inventors did not stand out as particularly outlandish figurations of radicalism or modernity but, in their novelty, extended this larger epistemic web of possibilities.

<sup>36</sup> While some—such as *zhengzhi xiaoshuo* 政治小說 (political fiction) and *lishi xiaoshuo* 歷史小說 (historical fiction)—are more common, others carry unusual specificity, including *xuejie xiaoshuo* 學界小說 (scholarly world fiction); *shiye xiaoshuo* 實業小說 (industrial fiction); *hangxing xiaoshuo* 航行小說 (navigation fiction); *yizue xiaoshuo* 醫學小說 (medical studies fiction); *minzu xiaoshuo* 民族小說 (racial fiction); *shengji xiaoshuo* 生計小說 (livelihood fiction); *shangye xiaoshuo* 商業小說 (commercialism fiction); *shangye xiaoshuo* 尚武小說 (militarism fiction); *shuxue xiaoshuo* 數學小說 (mathematics fiction); *lanca xiaoshuo* 漁業小說 (prosimitic narrative fiction); *yuyue xiaoshuo* 漁業小說 (fishing industry novel); *yanyu bingqi xiaoshuo* 研究兵器小說 (study of weaponry fiction); and *guanggao xiaoshuo* 廣告小說 (advertisement fiction).