

102. Forcey, Crossroads of Liberalism, 334 n.

103. Bruce Bliven to Leonard Knight Elmhirst, 4 October 1972, Bruce Bliven Papers, Special Collections, Cecil H. Green Library, Stanford University, Stanford, Calif. (hereafter Bliven Papers).


108. Young, Elmhirsts of Dartington, 93.

109. Dorothy Elmhirst to Bliven, 8 March 1952, Bliven Papers.

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**BRINGING THE “NEW WOMAN” TO THE MISSION SITE: LOUISE MANNING HODGKINS AND THE HEATHEN WOMAN’S FRIEND**

Cheryl M. Cassidy

In 1893, Miss Louise Manning Hodgkins became the editor of the *Heathen Woman’s Friend*, a monthly magazine published by the American Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The magazine was designed to inform Methodist auxiliary societies throughout the United States about female missionary endeavors. Like other American evangelical female missionary magazines, the *Heathen Woman’s Friend* hired its own managerial staff; conducted its own accounting and business affairs; wrote, edited, and distributed its own monthly magazine; and did so generally without any male supervision. In accepting the editorship of the *Heathen Woman’s Friend*, Hodgkins had no intention of emulating her predecessor, Mrs. Harriet Merrick Warren, whose twenty-five year leadership of the magazine reflected an evangelical ideology of duty and self-sacrifice, principles she promoted by dying in office. Hodgkins had other ideas about what a missionary magazine might be and what missionary women might achieve. Single, professional, and highly educated, Hodgkins responded to the increased professionalism of the missionary societies, and her leadership reflected the dramatic changes in gender ideology and publishing needs of the time. Under Hodgkins's professional hand, articles, illustrations and editorials continued the process of shaping a “new missionary” woman: one whose missionary life was not solely devoted to evangelical work but whose service at home or overseas combined spiritual endeavor with professional experience. Although the magazine continued to support and further a missiology of “woman’s work for heathen woman,” the *Heathen Woman’s Friend* extended traditional evangelical gender ideology to promote professional opportunities, especially for those in leadership positions in Methodist missionary societies.1

Louise Manning Hodgkins's role in the *Heathen Woman’s Friend* can best be understood in the context of the American women's for-
eign missionary movement and its expression in denominational mis-

sionary magazines. Evidence of the new professionalism of women and

the ideological changes that brought about the New Woman in the

later decades of the century were apparent years before Hodgkins was

appointed editor of the *Heathen Woman’s Friend*. The flexibility of

evangelical Christianity produced what Lenore Davidoff and Catherine

Hall suggest was a “negotiability” between domestic spheres and pub-

clic agency. Although Protestant ideology sanctified the home and glo-

rified the essentialist nature of women, evangelical gender ideology

encouraged women to undertake mission work as part of “woman’s work

for woman.” Western women were seen as the repositories of civ-

cilized culture and their presence in heathen societies—whether as

teachers, doctors or administrators—would not only elevate heathen

women and children to Western standards (and ultimately their cul-

tures), but would offer heathen women (some in seclusion) education

and Christian salvation. Thus, the elasticity of missionary work en-

couraged extended roles for women, allowing women to define them-

selves as agents within and beyond the domestic sphere.

Beginning long before the Civil War, American women were in-

volved in voluntary activities designed for and dedicated to promoting

woman’s special nature and providing avenues for “woman’s work for

woman.” Catharine Beecher, in her *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, ar-

gued in 1841 that “self-denying benevolence” was crucial to charity

work. In her advice to women readers to put aside small sums from

their household accounts for charity, Beecher contended that “in a

democracy like ours, where few are very rich . . . this collecting and
dispensing of small drops and rills is the mode best adapted to the

purposes of Nature, the dews and showers are to distil on parched and desert

lands.” For Beecher, women’s special nature required that they have

“no interest or concerns in civil and political affairs” but instead de-

vote themselves to “morals or manners” where women “have superior

influence.” Although women might have no direct interest in public

affairs, Beecher emphasized the role of education in promoting civi-

lization. A founder of several female seminaries, Beecher argued that

when educating a woman “the interests of the whole family are se-

cured” and that, in educating women, America would be “distin-

guished above all other nations, for well-educated females, and for the

influence they will exert on the general interests of society.” For

Beecher and others, such as Sarah Josepha Hale, the education of

women was crucial to the fabric of society.

The rise in middle-class literacy accompanied by a commensurate

rise in women’s colleges, seminaries, Bible schools, and normal

schools reflected an emphasis on educating young women for their

special roles in society. Mary Lyon, founder of Mount Holyoke Female

Seminary in 1837, connected Beecher’s concept of an essentialist na-

ture of American women with a missionary enterprise, stating that the

purpose of Mount Holyoke was “to cultivate the missionary spirit

among its pupils; the feeling that they should live for God, and do

something as teachers, or in such other ways as Providence may di-

rect.” Lyon’s views were echoed by Hale, editor of *Godey’s Lady’s

Book*, who used her magazine to promote female education and mar-

ried women’s property rights, and who was instrumental in sending

the first female missionary doctor overseas. As first president of the

Philadelphia Branch of the Woman’s Union Missionary Society, Hale

was deeply involved in medical missionary work, launching the Ladies’

Medical Society of Philadelphia in 1851. Despite Hale’s work in med-

cical mission, it was not until 1869 that the Women’s Foreign Mission-

ary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church (North) sent Dr. Clara

Swain to India.

Following the American Civil War, the women’s foreign missionary

movement in the nineteenth century was formally established to re-

spond to two pressing female concerns. First, by the late 1860s, a

large population of educated women had few opportunities for employ-

ment to use the expertise in managerial and war relief work gained

during the Civil War. Second, they saw a critical need for foreign evan-

gelists. Responding to married women missionaries who pleaded for

help from single women not bound by domestic concerns, American

women in evangelical denominations formed their own foreign mis-

sionary societies, designed to be separate from traditional patriarchal

church societies. Between 1869 and 1871, Methodist, Congregational,

Presbyterian and Baptist denominations created female foreign mis-

sionary societies, each with its own monthly magazine. Bible schools,

such as Chicago’s Moody Bible Institute, Mount Holyoke and Wellesley

Colleges, were founded to educate and train prospective missionary

girls. By 1915, over three million American women were members of at

least one missionary society.

To support the missionary crusade, each Protestant society cre-

ated regional boards as well as local auxiliary groups to fund, support,

and pray for the numerous young, single women who flocked to mis-

sionary service. In significant ways, the structure of these societies

was highly decentralized, unlike traditional Church societies. Auxil-

iaries reported to regional branches, and local societies were fully

responsible for holding meetings, gathering funds, supporting individual

missionaries and specific heathen converts, and funding hospitals and

schools overseas. The domestic framework supported a global mis-

sionary effort. As early as 1873, a contributor to the *Heathen Woman’s

Friend* explained that missionary work moved women beyond the do-

central sphere: “We must have something to talk about better than

cake-making or flounces.”

Each female missionary society had similar monthly magazines

filled with letters from missionary women overseas, inspirational sto-

ries, informative articles and study guides for auxiliaries at home, il-
Illustrations of foreign people and landscapes, and maps of missionary stations. Moreover, each magazine contained multiple pages of monthly auxiliary donations gathered from local groups in each state. Editorials framed the contents of each issue, often with particular themes related to missionary purpose or fundraising efforts. These editorials significantly connected the leadership of the societies with the local auxiliaries and the foreign workers, creating a collective consciousness of missionary purpose and formulating a distinctly feminine voice of missionary principles. According to Patricia Hill, missionary “journals offered a detailed picture of the movement” and, in many ways, monthly magazines “created a personal relationship between auxiliary members and the printed voice.”

As the largest of all the female American missionary societies, the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church (WFMS) reflected evangelical gender ideology of the time. Harriet Merrick Warren, as the first editor of the Heathen Woman’s Friend, from 1869 until her death in 1893, mirrored in her personal and professional life an essentialist model of evangelical womanhood (Figure 1). Dana Robert explains that Warren’s role as editor of the most widely read female missionary magazine published by the largest of the female missionary societies “set the tone for the entire woman’s missionary movement.” Warren’s public life included a variety of administrative, yet traditionally female roles: a trustee of the New England Conservatory, as well as an officer of the Indian Rights Association and of the American Maternal Association. Warren also was a member of several female societies and an acting member of various female boards. Yet, despite these public administrative roles, as Hill explains, Warren “was characteristic of the movement” in her role as “the housewife as editor.” Married to the president of Boston University, William Fairfield Warren, and the mother of four children, Warren was educated at a local seminary and informally trained through volunteer work in missionary groups and associations. It was in Warren’s living room that the constitution of the WFMS was created in 1869.

During Warren’s twenty-five year editorship, as a reflection of the burgeoning foreign missionary movement, the content of the Heathen Woman’s Friend broadened and its page numbers tripled. Beginning in 1869 with a brief eight pages, the Heathen Woman’s Friend grew to twenty-six pages by 1881, and by 1893, when Hodgkins took over, the magazine contained thirty-two pages of articles and budgetary information. While the content in its early editions (1869-1873) focused almost solely on India and China, by 1874, as the society began to increase the number of young, single missionary women overseas, the Heathen Woman’s Friend expanded its missionary coverage to Mexico, Japan, and various other Asian locales. A column for children, a post office column connecting those at home with girls overseas, study guides for auxiliaries, obituaries, and a ‘Personal Mention’ column that provided up-to-date news on missionary travel, sickness and death, were but a few of the additions to the magazine.

Arriving in American rural and small-town homes, the Heathen Woman’s Friend connected domestic concerns to a global enterprise. Far from usurping traditional domesticity, articles and editorials underscored how missionary work might enlarge domestic female lives while elevating heathen women’s lives. As an 1885 article in the Heathen Woman’s Friend claimed: “The house-mother’s position is the highest in the world and need not be the narrowest, and what makes this missionary work for heathen women so peculiarly adapted to our needs is, that it enlarges our lives in our own sphere. It does not call us from our homes to other fields of labor.” For those in stateside positions as regional or auxiliary leaders or even as members of a local missionary society in a small town, working in and for the foreign missionary society meant combining traditional gender ideology (“let every woman work at home”) with evangelical purpose which encouraged service beyond the home, carrying the seeds of civilization to non-Christians. Becoming an active member in a missionary society did not mean every woman was “call[ed] from . . . homes to other fields of labor”; indeed, work in mission meant “negotiating” between domestic

Figure 1. Harriet Merrick Warren
and public spheres. Missionary work encouraged women to define themselves less as repositories of culture—or sanctified symbols of motherhood—than as agents engaged in a global enterprise that might enlarge their own lives as well as their heathen sisters’ lives.

Those who did not go abroad could gain expertise in organizing and implementing missionary funding, or in writing or editing articles for the *Heathen Woman’s Friend*, and, of course, writing letters to girls overseas. Many married and single women worked tirelessly in auxiliary societies. For those who went abroad “to other fields of labor,” some, like Miss Mary Hastings, spent long fruitful careers as teachers, while others, like Miss Florence Nichols taught college in India or, like Dr. Clara Swain, founded hospitals. A few, like young Miss Maud E. Simons, died in service.

As founding member of the WFMS and editor for *Heathen Woman’s Friend* for twenty-five years, Harriet Merrick Warren promoted “the house-mother’s position . . . [as] the highest in the world.” Her editorials for the magazine, written in a maternal tone, as one Christian housewife/mother to another, reflected both the sanctification of motherhood, principle concerns of the missionary society, and the limits of the domestic sphere in which her readership was lodged. Warren’s use of common metaphors of domestic life, especially in the first decade of the magazine (1869–1879), reflected to a large extent the interests and experiences of her audience. In an early editorial from 1870, Warren compared the female mission to an evangelical leavening of souls: “Our Lord has honored and dignified and immortalized the bread-making process by likening it to His own divine work in the world, the universal leavening of humanity with truth and holiness. He has, in like manner honored and dignified woman by making her the human agent of the work. She is the one who is to take the leaven of His teaching and life, and mix and mingle it with measures of human society until the whole is leavened.” Warren’s use of a bread-making metaphor allowed a connection rather than a disruption between what readers knew and what the editor wished them to understand. Common to the reader-housewife, the bread-making metaphor evokes in the reader an alternative perspective to a simple housewifery task, situating the reader in a range of new perspectives that enlarged the domestic landscape. The ‘leavening’ of souls, not merely for salvific purposes, but for the leavening of society, is part of the larger evangelical purpose. The metaphor does not move beyond its syntactical boundaries, but instead reinforces already embedded images of self and the divine. As a trope, the bread-making metaphor reflects the combined utterances of the self, the self’s identity within culture and within a religious structure, as well as the utterances of traditional evangelical ideology to promote a symbolic understanding in the reader. Warren’s use of the bread-making metaphor reinforced not only the importance of women as “leavening” agents in a divinely sanctioned global enterprise, but also legitimized their roles as agents of culture both within and beyond the domestic sphere.

Later in the editorial, Warren conflated domestic tasks with evangelical endeavors. Directly addressing the reader, Warren reminded her of the bread making process: “On the cleared table stands the bowl heaped with snowy flour, the pitcher of milk, the cup of yeast. You stand before it curious, expectant, half reluctant. The clean hands begin the work by preparing in the center of the flour the place for the yeast . . . Nicely smoothed and rounded, you replace the dough in the bowl with a pat here and there, and, setting it away, await its rising.” Warren’s emphasis on the individual bread maker as “curious, expectant, half reluctant” moved the reader toward a spiritual rather than a domestic experience. Framed with a direct address to the reader (“you”), Warren’s description of an ordinary task, no doubt, encouraged the reader to connect spiritual tasks with common everyday duties. Reinforced in the passage is the notion that bread making as well as evangelizing requires patience and a “proofing” time period, a notion that women of the time would readily understand.

Often Warren’s editorials were tied to seasonal or agricultural events, as in her editorial for Easter 1873 in which she reminded readers of how women’s responsibility for the fall of man might be mitigated by missionary work. Where autumn issues carried themes of harvest, spring issues produced the trope of sowing the seeds of Christianity to reap souls and discussed blossoming trees as metaphors for the spread of Christian work. Just as she had in 1870, when she stated “Sowing, then, is the work of the month,” in one of her last editorials (February 1893), Warren used a farming metaphor for gathering financial crops from auxiliaries “to keep the Lord’s forces at work.” Warren’s final editorial in 1893, printed posthumously, reiterated her refrain of the duty and self-sacrifice that missionary women must embrace, and mirrored one of her first editorials for the *Heathen Woman’s Friend*. In 1870, Warren explained that the death of nine-year old Elma Scott in India was essential not only “to hasten the coming of Christ’s kingdom in the world” but also to the “sacrifice of the missionary mother.” In her last editorial (February 1893), Warren exhorted her readers to “behold the unexpected heroism of those about us” and to seek “large self-denial, courage and faith.”

Originally, none of the traditionally male denominational missionary Boards were enthusiastic about female missionary societies, though all agreed that sending single females would increase evangelical success. In 1869, during a discussion about whether or not women should be allowed to form a foreign missionary society, Dr. John Durbin, an officer of WFMS, described those called to serve as “Protestant nuns.” Durbin warned the WFMS “that no woman should aspire to serve in Christian missions . . . who cannot regard such serv-
ice as a sacrifice unto God, a whole burnt offering of body, soul, and spirit.”\(^3\) While few women, even at mid century, conceived of themselves as burnt offerings, the ideal of self-sacrifice was an integral part of the early rhetoric of the woman’s foreign mission movement.\(^3\) Isabel Hart, a frequent contributor to the *Heathen Woman’s Friend*, wrote in 1871 that Christ’s crucifixion “was the paradigm for Christian self-sacrifice” and that “Christianity is a religion of woman, for woman; . . . we accept as a glory . . . the salvation of others bound up in the sacrifice of the self.”\(^4\) However, for the editorial leadership of *Heathen Woman’s Friend* and for its regional leaders, the evangelical crusade was international in its mission and could not be predicated upon fragile “burnt offerings.” Self-sacrifice and “burnt offerings” were well and good, but meanwhile there were hospitals to staff in Beijing, schools to administer in Madras, funding to collect and allocate, missionary girls to train, and heathen women and children to evangelize.

Twenty-five years after Dr. Durbin’s concession to include single women as missionaries, the leadership of the *Heathen Woman’s Friend* had become a bulwark of professional and managerial competence. While not abandoning its emphasis on “woman’s work for woman,” by 1894, when Hodgkins became editor following Warren’s death, the *Heathen Woman’s Friend*, once “conceived as [an] intimate visitor[ ] to rural and small town American homes, was becoming a professional journal. Patricia Hill suggests that missionary magazines reflected the increased professionalism of the missionary societies and that this process was generative: as the leadership of denomination societies embraced the “science” of modern missions, they adopted the administrative techniques of male evangelical societies.\(^5\) Moreover, as the old, founding guard of the missionary society diminished through death and retirement, opportunities to hire college-educated professionals increased. Yet this process toward a more professionalized enterprise did not always proceed smoothly. Essentially a conservative entity, the missionary society at times belatedly reflected changes in gender ideology of the time, and, often, the professionalization of the society was met with some resistance.\(^6\)

The appointment of Hodgkins was indicative of missionary society’s response to changes in gender ideology in the larger society. Not only did Hodgkins have no formal or informal training in missionary work, but also her background was more that of the “New Woman” than the “housewife as editor” of the past. Born in 1846, Hodgkins was educated at Lawrence University in Wisconsin, joining Wellesley College as an English Professor in 1877 (Figure 2).\(^7\) As a single, professional woman, Hodgkins taught a variety of English literature courses, and eventually edited books on Matthew Arnold (Sohrab and Rustum, 1890), John Milton (*Milton’s Lyrics*, 1893), Daniel Webster (*First Bunker-Hill Oration*, 1889), and produced *A Guide to the Study of Nineteenth-Century Authors* (1890) that was used in English literature classes at Wellesley. During her twelve years at Wellesley, Hodgkins took over leadership of the Shakespeare Society from Wellesley founder Henry Fowle Durant, offering Wellesley girls opportunities to produce an entire Shakespeare play, even taking on the male roles.\(^8\)

Hodgkins’s appointment to the editorship of the *Heathen Woman’s Friend* reflected a sea change in the journal. Dropping the sentimental, maternal tone of Warren’s editorials, Hodgkins’s editorials were uniformly pragmatic: dismissing the “burnt offerings” of the past and admonishing and rallying the readership of the present to grasp the opportunities of missionary work. Where Warren used traditional metaphors of motherhood and household responsibilities to instruct her readership in dutiful activities, Hodgkins offered practical suggestions for work and rarely mentioned evangelical notions. This new approach to missionary work was evident in Hodgkins’s first editorial in January 1894. Rather than focusing on evangelical ideology, especially in its emphasis on elevating heathen women and children, Hodgkins looked instead at the financial solvency of the WFMS, noting that the society had raised more than double the funding of its parent society. Abandoning an ideology of self-sacrifice, Hodgkins went on to explain that missionary societies “opened a new avenue for the energies of woman; it made her whole world larger and her individual
world of less account.” Although Hodgkins reminded readers that the WFMS existed for the “amelioration of the condition of their less-favored sisters,” the tenor of the article focused on the burgeoning intellectual and professional opportunities for women in mission. Hodgkins concluded her editorial with quotes from various philanthropists, repeatedly urging her readers to “Try it!,” though readers may have had some difficulty determining what the pronoun “it” referred to. Given the breadth of topics in her editorial—from the society’s financial matters to professional opportunities and finally to a discussion of early missionary women—Hodgkins’s use of an ambiguous pronoun compelled readers to formulate meaning beyond the topical elements of her editorial. Rather than Hodgkins defining “it,” readers formulated the referent(s) for “it” which might include all or some of Hodgkins’s topical points, and might indeed include those aspects of missionary life that readers brought to the text. Interestingly, Hodgkins included six exclamation points in a three-column editorial, perhaps hoping to accentuate her topics.

This emphasis on a non-traditional approach to missionary work was apparent in subsequent editorials. Hodgkins’s second editorial in February 1894 used a metaphor of electricity to “make the connection” between old ways of “conducting” (no puns intended by me but possibly by Hodgkins) missionary business and the new ways of involvement in missionary activities. Admonishing readers to avoid leaving the missionary magazine “unread on our tables,” Hodgkins explained that “electricity is the order of the day; and in spiritual things in the history of the Christian Church, the day has always been one of electrical possibilities.” In using electricity as a metaphor for modernity, Hodgkins abandoned Warren’s metaphors of home and hearth to embrace science and professionalism. Hodgkins’s conflation of missionary work and science created an alternative perspective on the missiology of woman’s work for heathen women. Rather than disrupt or subvert evangelical ideology, Hodgkins extended the professional, even public, aspect of missionary service.

During Hodgkins’s twelve years as editor, the organizational framework of the Heathen Woman’s Friend began to alter, relying less on the ideology of home and motherhood (and the theology of self-sacrifice) and moving to a more public domain of trained professionalism. If we examine the progressive use of photographic illustrations in the magazine, we can retrieve evidence of this shift. Between 1889, when the magazine first arrived in homes, and 1872, production costs prevented any illustrations. Through the 1870s, generally one or two engravings were printed each year until the 1880s, when printing technology improved and engravings could be produced cheaply. During the 1880s, frontispiece engravings of foreign city scenes or landscapes introduced each monthly issue underneath the magazine’s title, producing a sort of travelogue for the reader with illustrations of elephants, Asian temples, market scenes and festivals in exotic locales.

If we compare photographs and illustrations from earlier years to the decade after Louise Manning Hodgkins became editor, an increase in publication of photographs is apparent. Increasingly, photographs depicting missionary buildings appeared to underscore the new “professional” look of the Heathen Woman’s Friend. Generally, each monthly issue printed one or two photographs or illustrations, although some issues might have none while others might have two or three smaller photographs or engravings. I have omitted data from 1893, the year Warren died, during which her daughter, Mary Warren Ayars, took over the editorship for six months. The magazine appeared to stem from the confusion following Warren’s death, and only a very few illustrations were printed. As the chart and summary data indicate, from the late 1880s through the next dozen years, the number of engravings declined while photographs of missionary facilities, missionaries and converts increased. Where in the early 1880s, the magazine relied on engravings for its illustrations, as the century ended, the magazine moved almost completely to photographs, with the exception of religious illustrations which continued to be engravings. Between January 1889 and 1892, only twelve illustrations of missionary buildings were printed. However, during Hodgkins’s first four years, from 1894 through 1897, thirty-five photographs of missionary facilities were printed, nearly one photograph or engraving every month. Between 1897 and 1900, sixty-six photographs of missionary buildings were printed.

A similar progression occurred in missionary photographs. Not until Hodgkins became editor did the Heathen Woman’s Friend publish any photograph or engraving of a solitary female missionary. However, between 1896 and 1900, the magazine produced seventy photographs of women in missionary service. Although many illustrations from the 1880s and early 1890s of converted women and children contained missionary women, especially as teachers and doctors, no single portrait was published of a woman. In important ways, earlier illustrations of converts and missionaries became composite representations of missionary purpose, underscoring the success of the evangelical endeavor. When photographs of missionary women did appear in 1894, the magazine appeared to emphasize the professional aspect of missionary work, and photographs of converts often appeared without their attendant missionaries. Consider, for example, the frontispiece photograph from the May 1894 issue of the Heathen Woman’s Friend (Figure 3). In this photograph, published five months after Hodgkins became editor, five young Mexican graduates are featured in Western clothing with their names written beneath the portrait. The accompanying article, “A First Commencement,” written by Mary De F. Loyd and Harriet L. Ayres, emphasized the girls’ conversions and
## Harriet Merrick Warren (editor 1869–1893)

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## Louise Manning Hodgkins (editor 1894–1904)

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<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Summary Data

1869 through 1872 no illustrations were printed.

- 1872 = 3 (all engravings)
- 1881 = 5 (all engravings)
- 1882 = 8 (all engravings)
- 1883 = 12 (all engravings)
- 1884 = 8 (all engravings)
- 1885 = 8 (all engravings)
- 1888 = 12 (all engravings)
- 1889 = 23 (all engravings)
- 1890 = 14 (all engravings)
- 1891 = 13 (2 photographs & 11 engravings)
- 1892 = 12 (4 photographs & 8 engravings)
- 1894 = 25 (17 photographs and 8 engravings)
- 1895 = 22 (16 photographs and 6 engravings)
- 1896 = 15 (14 photographs and 1 engraving)
- 1897 = 34 (26 photographs and 8 engravings)
- 1898 = 26 (22 photographs and 4 engravings)
- 1899 = 60 (54 photographs & 6 engravings)
- 1900 = 43 (41 photographs & 2 engravings)
- 1901 = 66 (63 photographs & 3 engravings)
- 1902 = 59 (54 photographs & 5 engravings)
- 1903 = 52 (48 photographs & 4 engravings)
- 1904 = 77 (75 photographs & 2 engravings)

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**Figure 3. Missionary converts**
academic achievements, focusing on their sweetness and purity. The authors described the commencement ceremony with descriptions of “pond lilies, whose large, pure white petals gleamed in the lamplight like snow,” no doubt equating the local flora with the purity of the graduating girls. The combination of Mexican girls in Western dress with an article describing their school commencement emphasized the similarities between the converted and their teachers, arguing not only for the common traits that link all women, but encouraging readers to acknowledge that years spent in a western school have erased cultural differences and elevated the students to western standards.43

Looking at the chart, there appears to be a progression in the Heathen Woman’s Friend from a rather complex presentation of exotic locales and peoples to the more focused use of female missionary portraits and missionary facilities. While I think the technological advances inherent in publishing and printing industries in the 1890s allowed for more emphasis on photographs in missionary magazines, technology does not completely explain the movement from city and landscapes to missionary women and facilities, though portraits of converted women and children increased also. I suggest that missionary magazines increased photographs of missionaries and buildings to promote an emphasis on professional careers rather than on pious femininity. In important ways, the editorial leadership of missionary magazines like the Heathen Woman’s Friend abandoned traditional evangelical gender ideology to identify with patriarchal culture represented by professional, public careers. As American women in mission relinquished traditional identities and adopted more public representations, they began to negotiate new gender ideologies.

The magazine’s movement from illustrations of cityscapes and landscapes to a greater emphasis on missionary facilities can be seen in the twenty-fifth anniversary issue of the Heathen Woman’s Friend which occurred seven months after Hodgkins took over the editorship. Printed in July 1894, the magazine included as frontispiece a photograph of the society’s Boston offices and a photograph of “Miss Walden’s Private Office” (Figures 4 and 5). I find it peculiar that in a popular magazine directed toward evangelizing heathens, and in a twentieth-fifth anniversary issue no less, the magazine published no photographs or illustrations of heathen or converted women and children. Instead, readers were presented with photographs of business offices. In the frontispiece, as well as in a photograph of “Miss Walden’s Private Office” on the following page, readers were offered images of a modern-day office: bookcases, large, official desks, and office chairs depicted a business-like atmosphere. Neither photograph included people, leaving readers with images of ungendered efficiency, especially as there are no feminine touches. Patricia Hill suggests that the emphasis on furniture without people diminishes any
gender specificity of the environment, allowing the reader to assume a professionalism of purpose and content. As Hill explains, the photographs become a metaphor for the mission itself: less oriented toward a missiology of woman’s work for woman and more focused on a professional enterprise. Both photographs disrupt readers’ conceptual frameworks in that the images present readers with unexpected alternative views. By foregrounding business offices without working women, Hodgkins and the staff of the Heathen Woman’s Friend could reshape the ideology of evangelical mission, promoting images of a leadership (and a movement) that relied less on evangelical gender ideology and more on the professional requirements of a global organization. Curiously, the inclusion of a photograph of Miss Walden’s “Private Office” in the anniversary issue assumed that the readership was familiar with the publishing agent’s name and thus would be interested in what her office looked like. Moreover, including a photograph of a private office disturbed the boundaries between separate spheres, no doubt extending, at least for some readers, the private (or domestic) sphere into a public space and doing so in a way that reinforced the breadth of the missionary enterprise and reflected the progression of women’s professionalism.
sumed an atmosphere of Western education with desks in rows, an alphabet chart and world map at the front of the classroom, and a teacher’s desk complete with books and writing equipment. The accompanying article, “The Sea From the Shore,” locates the room in a school in “Buenos Ayres,” but does not reveal who teaches or learns in it. The title of the photograph, “The Large School Room on a Festal Day,” appears curiously vague as does the article’s title “From Sea to Shore.” The author, Eleanor Le Huray, does suggest that readers “reverse” the saying that we “let others see us as we see ourselves” to “from the shore look across the sea.” However, Le Huray does not explain which shore or which sea or even specifically what she intends by this reversal. In this way, the title of the article combines with the photograph and its caption to become emblematic of the missionary enterprise, emphasizing for readers the collective thrust of the foreign mission crusade that remained uniform across various climates and cultures. Photographs of buildings, such as the half-page illustration of the Foochow Hospital as the frontispiece in the November, 1894 issue or the Girls' High School of the WFMS in Rangoon, Burma (October 1896) appeared regularly and often without an attendant article to underscore the commitment of the missionary enterprise.

Along with photographs and illustrations of denomination buildings at home and abroad, under Louise Manning Hodgkins, the magazine began to feature photographs and articles about missionary women. Only three months after she became editor, Hodgkins chose a frontispiece entitled “Our Founders and First Missionaries.” The full-page frontispiece depicted four women, Mrs. E. W. Parker and Mrs. William Butler, two of the founders of the Methodist Board of Foreign Missions, and Miss Isabella Thoburn and Miss Clara A. Swain, M.D., two of the first single women missionaries sent out from the society (Figure 7). The four photographs frame Mrs. Butler’s introductory article, “The Origin of the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church,” which outlines a brief history of the society’s origins twenty-five years earlier. Beneath Mrs. Parker’s photograph is printed 1869, the founding year of the missionary society, while under Mrs. Butler’s photograph is printed the current year of 1894, as if to underscore the twenty-five year span of the society. The photographs of Thoburn, the first single woman who made missionary work a profession, and Swain, a licensed medical doctor, depict younger, more energetic women than the founding members of the society. As with the portraits of Warren and Hodgkins, the photographs published in the March, 1894 issue depict women whose demeanor are both strong and feminine. None of the women displayed look at the camera, but they all have serious expressions and are dressed formally. The flowers that twine behind the four photographs underscore the essential nature of the women, conflating their professional and feminine abilities in the missionary enterprise.
Directly adjacent to the photograph is a full-page advertisement for the Women's College of Baltimore and its liberal arts courses and scientific training (Figure 8). The illustration has three captions identifying the college as connected with the First Methodist Church and distinguishing two of the buildings. Beneath the captions is text describing the college's liberal arts tradition with distinctly female arts such as “Voice Training” and “Excellent facilities for Art and Music.” Readers are assured that those attending the College of Baltimore will lodge in “three homes, planned with strict regard to cheerfulness, comfort, and health, and conducted upon the principles of a Christian family.” Framing both advertisement and photograph is Louise Manning Hodgkins’s editorial entitled, “Forward!” which reviewed “our noble army of workers at home and missionaries abroad,” whose efforts needed to be directed toward “the thousands untaught, the millions unfed.” Rather than focusing on an exhortation of evangelical piety and ideology, Hodgkins reminds her readership that “we will remember the things that are behind only so far as they give courage and inspiration to achieve the things which are before.” Of the “things” to be achieved, Hodgkins emphasizes schools and hospitals in need of better facilities and equipment. Readers might well interpret that the “things that are behind” and give “courage and inspiration” to the present missionaries may be the old guard represented by Parker and Butler, while the “things which are before” are represented by the College of Baltimore and young, professional, single women like Thoburn and Swain.

The emphasis on the business of missionary work led the magazine’s board in 1895 to consider changing the magazine’s name from the *Heathen Woman’s Friend* to the *Woman’s Missionary Friend*. Hodgkins argued forcefully that the term “heathen” was objectionable to missionaries and to their “sisters” in foreign lands. In December of 1895, Hodgkins wrote to her readers that changing the title of the magazine should be “commend[ed] for two reasons: first, because it retains the popular part of our former name, and further, for its naturalness. Who does not use frequently the phrase ‘a missionary friend of mine?’ Let us hope that the old magazine with the new-old name may prove a ‘missionary friend’ to a thousand new subscribers in the coming year.” Although many on the Board opposed the name change and wanted to retain “the name that expresses so much and which is freighted with such sacred associations,” Hodgkins and her colleagues carried the vote. The next month, the *Heathen Woman’s Friend* became the *Woman’s Missionary Friend*. What is interesting about this title change is that the new title, the *Woman’s Missionary Friend*, is semantically vague: who is the “woman” in the title and who is the “friend”? While the missionary thrust of the magazine remained constant, the recipients of that action and the agents involved became nebulous. Hodgkins’s remarks that the magazine “may prove a ‘missionary
friend’ to ‘new subscribers’” appeared to shift the magazine’s emphasis from evangelizing “heathen” women to a focus on Christian women. Yet, interestingly, the frontispiece for the christening issue of the Woman’s Missionary Friend was a full-page photograph of “The New Girls’ School in Pachuca, Mexico,” underscoring the substantial nature of the WFMS’s commitment to the education of heathen women. Innocuous as it may at first appear, the change in the magazine’s title was part of the evolution of an alternative gender ideology. Conflict between Victorian gender ideology of home, religiosity, and spirituality and the insistence to service beyond the domestic sphere was ameliorated within the missionary context. Women in mission could move beyond established notions of domesticity to pursue roles that transformed traditional gender ideology, and could become “New Women”: educated, often single, but with professional careers in medicine, academics, and business. The “New Woman” at the missionary site combined the traditional with the innovative, and did so generally without the debasement of the self. The juxtaposition of photographs of old and new guard appeared with some regularity throughout the 1890s and into the early 20th century. In 1896, shortly after the title change, the magazine published a photograph of Mrs. Mary Clarke Nind, president of the Western branch of the WFMS, flanked by three young single missionary women. Miss Eva M. Foster, Miss Emma E. Ferris, and Miss Sophia Blackmore (Figure 9). Nind, an older woman, is depicted in sharp contrast to the young, vibrant faces of the missionary girls. Something of a hero to young Christian women, Mary Clarke Nind’s letters from the West, her presence in annual WFMS conventions, and her travels to Asia served to accentuate a life lived in fullness. As with the illustration of the four missionary women published in 1894 with the two elder women adjacent to the “new missionary” women, younger readers viewing the photograph of Nind encircled by three young missionary women no doubt felt a kinship to the younger women, and in some cases, may have been inspired to emulate their examples. Readers may also have been struck with how Miss Ferris looks directly into the readers’ eyes. Her strong, symmetrical face with its light eyes and earnest expression is remarkable in a magazine that featured women looking everywhere but at the camera. Ferris’ article under the photograph, “A Welcome Visitor,” related Nind’s visit to Ferris’ mission in China. No mention is made of the other two young women, though readers could look up their names in the column “Post-Office Address of Missionaries in Active Service” which were printed every three months, and find that both young women were posted to Singapore.

Although the Heathen Woman’s Friend paid homage to its founding members and to its older, more experienced missionaries, the magazine directed much of its efforts to younger readers. After 1893, new feature articles began to appear that emphasized preparatory training...
for work in mission and biographical sketches of young women in missionary work at home and abroad emphasized professional careers. Prominent features, such as “How I Became Interested in Missions,” a selection of first-hand accounts from college girls training to be missionaries, and “The Quarterly,” an insert outlining current news from various branches, gave readers opportunities to engage in religious study, learn news from auxiliaries, and read about careers in missions. A monthly series entitled “College Girls in Mission” outlined the backgrounds and prospective careers of girls from various female missionary colleges. Setting the tone for the series, Hodgkins wrote the initial article that featured college girls from the Woman’s College of Baltimore and included photographs of four young women. Generally running three to four pages, subsequent articles highlighted girls from different universities, including Ohio Wesleyan, Boston, DePauw and Northwestern. Hodgkins’s editorials, such as “If I Were You (To girls)” published in the June 1903 issue, encouraged American girls to become students and travelers, and, as they embraced intellectual study, gain knowledge of the world. Although Hodgkins’s influence was most visible in her editorials and in a new emphasis on professional photographs, her editorial hand was also apparent in the magazine’s publication of obituaries. Under former editor, Harriet Merrick Warren, obituaries were placed prominently in each monthly issue, underscoring for readers in concrete ways the dangers in as well as the sacrifice needed for mission work. After Hodgkins became editor, she and the board argued that the publication of obituaries of stateside and overseas missionaries needed to be minimized to some extent. During a business meeting in May 1895, the Publication Committee of the Heathen Woman’s Friend resolved that publication restrictions confined obituary notices to “one line, giving name, date, Auxiliary and Branch.” No longer would each issue contain black-bordered full or half-page eulogies to lives spent in missionary pursuits. Thereafter, obituaries were usually placed in the Personal Mention Column and often included in the midst of news of marriages, poor or better health, and movement to and from missionary stations. Later in the decade, many obituaries were posted in a brief “Entered into Life” column (on the last page, near reports of receipts from various branches). As the society perceived itself as a more professional organization, the notion of self-sacrifice and duty—the traditional content of obituaries—became less necessary to extol, and obituaries became subsumed into the larger professional organization. However, some exceptions were made, especially for those in leadership positions. The December 1902 issue contained a two-column obituary of Mrs. Philippine Jacoby-Achard, a prominent stateside missionary. Featured with a large portrait photograph, the obituary outlined the “joys and sorrows of a pioneer Methodist missionary, getting her full share of work with her family of twelve children.” Given the list of hardships and illnesses listed in the obituary, Jacoby-Achard’s early death appeared more due to her “sorrows” than her “joys.” Often, unexpected deaths of young missionary girls abroad warranted an extended obituary, as in the case of Miss Maud E. Simons, whose death in a riverboat accident in Yokohama in 1898 produced two extended articles and a photograph. Simons’s obituary recounted the many professional achievements in her young life: she not only “organized the art department” (Nagasaki), and was “the treasurer of Southern Japan,” but was also instrumental in supervising the rebuilding of facilities destroyed by fire and earthquake. Rather than focus on piety and self-sacrifice, as so many obituaries had done in past decades, the adjacent article focused on Simons’s managerial competence and extolled her intelligence and competence.

The changes Hodgkins initiated as the editor of the Heathen Woman’s Friend reflected the changes in the missionary movement as well as in the culture of the time. Hodgkins’ presence at the helm of the Heathen Woman’s Friend reflected and responded to the needs of a professional organization. Patricia Hill suggests that the leadership of the Heathen Woman’s Friend reflected a public compromise with Victorian gender ideology: on one hand, the magazine retained the rhetoric of domesticity—especially in its continued focus on converting heathens—yet on the other the magazine extended the limits of the domestic sphere in its focus on the trappings of professional lives. The editorial leadership of the Heathen Woman’s Friend, as with other missionary magazines, abandoned aspects of pious femininity and moved to embrace professional, public careers. Yet, in discarding traditional female identities and adopting public representations more commonly thought of as male, women risked defining themselves inside patriarchal discourse and culture. For young women of the late nineteenth century, relinquishing pious femininity within (or outside) the domestic sphere did not necessarily constitute autonomy but often merely substituted one boundary for another, and risked the slippery slope of being defined by that which they could neither fully embrace (the public male world) nor fully enter. Of course, as Barbara Welter suggests, few missionary women discerned that the differences between themselves and the recipients of their evangelizing might be in their “degrees of bondage,” and that any elevating done to heathen women had reciprocal value for the Christian woman. Yet, in important ways, the magazine signaled the movement to substitute circumstance for nature in the character of women. This exchange from a collective identity characterized by gender ideology to a more professional identity beyond the private sphere, bound not by aspects of domesticity but by public, professional needs and achievements, created a distinction between what a woman was and what a woman did or could do.

On March 13 1905, Theodore Roosevelt began his speech before the National Congress of Mothers by warning “[i]n our modern industrial civilization there are many and grave dangers to counterbalance the splendors and the triumphs.” One such “grave danger,” he pointed out, was the emergence of women “who deliberately forego” “the supreme blessing of [having] children.” The existence of such women “in American life,” he continued, was “made unpleasantly evident by the statistics as to the dwindling families” as a result of women not marrying and not bearing children. With a palpable level of apprehension in his words, Roosevelt asserted that “[t]he existence of women of this type” was an ominous sign that Anglo-Saxons had become “a race that practiced race suicide.”

Roosevelt singled out college-educated New Women, many of whom were from women’s colleges in the Northeast, as the main perpetrators of this “race suicide.” During the early part of the twentieth century, these women and their Alma Maters became targets of rebuke because more than half of their graduates remained single. The rationale behind this castigation was clear: although many came from Protestant middle-class backgrounds and were thus seen as being the ‘prime stock’ of the Anglo-Saxon race, they were not fulfilling their duty to reproduce. This led to the fear that, if such conditions persisted, America would soon be dominated by immigrants from southern and eastern Europe who would not at all be bashful about reproducing. The ultimate result, as some feared, was an America in which Anglo-Saxons would one day became a minority.

Such views, espoused by Roosevelt and other like-minded figures, were
also linked to ideas of civilization driven by the ideology of Social Darwinism prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. Popularized versions of Social Darwinism basically sought to utilize ideas of biological evolution in terms of “survival of the fittest” and, more precisely, competition not only within human societies between individuals and races, but as well among nation-states and civilizations themselves. Those who embraced some of the tenets of Social Darwinism thought American civilization might indeed lose the struggle against other civilizations in the world if, as a consequence of social or racial degeneration, the Anglo-Saxon race lost in its struggle with newer immigrants inside the U.S. In this respect, the emergence of the New Woman from within the old-stock of white Americans was a bleak signal that pointed to the eventual degeneration of the Anglo-Saxon race in America. As a result of this growing disquiet about the future of America during the late nineteenth century, controversy arose among white male Americans over the legitimacy of the New Woman.

At the time, the majority of white middle-class Americans thought that the domestic sphere – as a timeless reservoir of purity and moral standard – was the proper place for women. This view was also supported by popular evolutionary theories which saw distinctive demarcation between sexes, most notably in the form of separate spheres, as proof of a higher stage of civilization America had already reached. According to such views, moreover, women’s bodies came to be seen as vessels for preserving and enhancing the capacity of the race. As static ahistorical subjects, women were thus kept institutionally and symbolically outside a public sphere which was experiencing rapid transformation from the forces of modernity. Under such circumstances, some college-educated women saw a way around this exclusion by inserting themselves in the historical development of American civilization as active and significant participants in the vanguard of the modern world. While shunning their reproductive duty, these women began, in Julia Kristeva’s words, an effort “to gain a place in linear time.” According to Kristeva, however, such attempts were often quite problematic because they were grounded on a vision of masculine time of “project, teleology, linear, and prospective unfolding,” rather than on that of cyclical and repetitive “women’s time” rooted in the reproduction process. Yet, in the period when this “women’s time” was the main discursive means for designating women as something which stood outside modern time, their active participation in ‘masculine’ discourses of linear historical progress seems to have been the most promising way to escape the domestic sphere. Such endeavors were, moreover, pushed forward not through their parting with ‘female’ networks or institutions, but instead by utilizing what was at hand, such as making use of the very same male-centered discourse of civilization that had designated them detrimental to the future of the Anglo-Saxon race and American civilization itself. By appropriating and turning the tables on the logic within this discourse, American New Women attempted to construct a new subject position and thereby establish themselves as emancipatory agents of progress in the modern era.

During the early part of the twentieth century, to this end, quite a few women took up missionary careers in education and ventured to China, which became the largest foreign field for American Protestant Missions. These women established educational institutions designed to transform Chinese women into modern independent women, like themselves, through the higher and professional education they sought to provide. Before sailing to China, most of these women assumed it was a virgin land waiting to be impressed and shaped. Yet, the reality proved to be quite different from their initial expectations. The term “New Woman,” or xin nüxing, already existed in China and, moreover, had different connotations than their own version. Although American women became living role models for many Chinese students, they eventually ended up realizing that Chinese women did not exactly follow the path which they had blazed. This was to become a problem for American New Women because the path they offered to their Chinese sisters was basically ignored by them. As a result, they could not justify their own claims to be at the forefront of progress for women in the modern world. If they could not prove they represented the best
future’ image of women in the modern world, they might not be able to establish legitimacy for their enterprises in China and for their self-appointed role as ‘preachers’ of American civilization.

American women were, however, not the only ones who were troubled by Chinese women’s ‘deviation’ from the ‘proper’ archetype of the “New Woman.” Chinese male intellectuals, who as in the case of their counterparts in America were involved in creating the subject position of the “New Women” under the influence of the ideas of evolutionary theories, were perturbed by the act of ‘reinscription’ by Chinese women. As will be shown, encounters between American and Chinese sides brought to surface differences in how American women, Chinese women, and Chinese men entertained different views on the subjectivity of New Women and ideas about the appropriate model for Chinese women. This article examines how the construction of the subjectivity of New Woman by American women, Chinese women, and Chinese men intersected, in varying ways, with influential ideologies of the period such as social Darwinism, nationalism and (anti) imperialism. By discussing encounters between these groups, it will also show how the foundational myth of the ‘universality’ of American womanhood, as well as larger ideologies which helped ground this myth, came into question just as the decolonization movement reached the shores of China and pushed forward the national revolution movement in the mid 1920s. In so doing, this paper sheds light on the paradoxes and complexities in power relations associated with gender concerns under the project of imperialism.

**The New Woman, Evolutionary Theory, and the Civilizing Mission**

The rise of evolutionary theory in America during the latter half of the nineteenth century prompted a spate of narratives in response to new developments among white middle-class women. Edward Clarke’s Sex in Education (1873) was one of the earliest works in this genre. It claimed that education is harmful to a woman’s health because it diverts energy from her reproductive organs to her brain. Owing to the lower birth rate among the newly emerging class of college-educated women, furthermore, admonitions of this kind about the destructive effects of education on woman’s reproductive capacity were also voiced by male intellectuals. As new trends among American women were raising fears about the degeneration of the Anglo-Saxon race, male intellectuals began to mobilize evolutionary theory to justify and support their claims as to the danger posed by college-educated women who were now encroaching on the public sphere in daily life.

One example of these alarmist narratives utilizing evolutionary theory was the 1898 article “Evolution and the New Woman,” appearing in Literary Digest. Summarizing a certain lecture given by Harvard trained zoologist Alpheus Hyatt Verrill, the article asserted that “the modern efforts to make woman more and more like man may have an important, and probably a harmful, effect on the progress of the human race” because “[p]rogress hitherto has been associated with divergence of the sexes, and …. to foster tendencies [which might help create similarities between men and women] is to help on a movement of retrogression.” According to this view, the emergence of the New Woman, who dared to blur the boundaries between male and female spheres, was an especially ominous sign for the evolution of “highly civilized people” and their societies. Although the article also pointed out “the dangers of feminization” for men, these were seen as not “so important or threatening as those that lie in the possible future of the women.”

The burden of “retrogression” had thus been squarely placed on the New Woman’s shoulders alone. The New Woman was now clearly identified as the ringleader of a trend leading the Anglo-Saxon race towards its own degeneration.

Upset by such views, women such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a prominent feminist writer, defended the New Woman in her Woman and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution (1898). According to Gilman, “[m]uch effort is wasted in showing that women will become ‘unsexed’ and ‘masculine’ by assuming…human duties [which had been allocated
only to men]” and “the endeavor of women to perform … masculine economic functions marks a decadent civilization.” She instead argued that “[i]f it could be shown that the women of to-day were growing beards, …. were developing bass voices, or that in their new activities they were manifesting the destructive energy, the brutal combative instinct, or the intense sex-vanity of the male, then there would be cause for alarm.” Gilman declared, in contrast, that it seemed “[w]omen are growing honester [sic], braver, stronger, more healthful and skilful and able and free, more human in all ways.”10

In both the arguments of Gilman and those who supported the New Woman, the term “human” came to signify a more gender neutral or gender mutual character and was thus an important key word. This notion of “human” character signified the higher virtues of human beings that could transcend the limitations of sex. The New Woman, although transgressing traditional female boundaries, was nevertheless still a woman – an advanced sort of woman who had in fact acquired more “human” elements. Gilman claimed that “the ‗new woman‘ will be no less female than the ‗old‘ woman, though she has more functions, can do more things, is a more highly specialized organism, has more intelligence.”11 This suggests that the notion of “human” being invoked was a liberal conception based upon an abstract paradigm that advocated male norms as ‘universal,’ transcending space and time. In truth, however, this New Woman with “human” characteristics espoused by Gilman and others was not merely an abstract universal subject. The New Woman, for them, was also a living entity that could actually assist in the evolution of the Anglo-Saxon race in America, since her capacity as a human being had moved forward in both space and time.

Backed up with the counterargument advocated by women like Gilman – that the New Woman was proof of the advancement of the Anglo-Saxon race, rather than its retrogression – more college-educated women attempted to extricate themselves from social and gender confinement by becoming agents of liberation in the modern world. Many chose to enter areas like settlement houses that sought to assist in the Americanization of immigrants. Such a place, in the words of Wellesley College professor Katharine Coman, served as “a colony planed in a strange land by immigrants …. [which] has become a potent force in civilizing of the great city wilderness where it was planted.”12 Their backgrounds as white middle-class Protestant women, an attribute which had led to their being castigated as ‘saboteurs’ of American civilization, now enabled them to assume the position of bearers and purveyors to transmit the traits of American civilization to those (i.e. immigrants) seeking its blessings. Based upon this new identity and role – a stretched version of “mother of the race” – college-educated women could, in effect, clear their names by uplifting ‘less civilized’ people from foreign lands. The same logic extended, moreover, to American women seeking to bequeath the fruits of civilization to those in far-flung places who would never have the chance to set foot on American soil. As ‘preachers’ or ‘gospellers’ of American civilization, they took up missionary careers and set sail for mission fields in ‘less advanced’ countries.

The enthusiasm behind this idea was borne out by the fact that the interdenominational women’s foreign missionary movement became the largest women’s movement in North America during the early twentieth century, with more than three million women on its roster of approximately forty denominational women’s foreign missionary boards.13 Lucy Waterbury Peabody, one of the prime movers of this interdenominational movement, claimed in 1898 that “[t]he new woman in missions is imperatively needed.” The reason for Peabody’s and other like-minded leaders’ insistence in bringing “the new woman” into mission fields lay in their conviction that women were obligated to “help…other nations” raise their level of civilization because they were themselves benefactors of this higher civilization.14 Many of these “new women” missionaries were assigned to the field of education and China had become, by the turn of the century, the premier destination of those college-educated women. One such figure, Alice Seymour Browne, a graduate of Mount Holyoke, reported in 1911 from China that “[w]herever foreign influence has been felt, …. the change in the
feminine horizon and ideal is one of its most noticeable effects.” The emancipation of women in China was now confirmed to be on course as a result of the efforts of women like Browne. Yet, Browne’s observation also alerts us to another critical issue: she saw in China a cause and effect relationship between the progress of women’s liberation and “the impact of the new world civilization upon the old.” 15 As Browne indicated, not only were their activities a part of “foreign influence,” but the very success of their work in China depended to a great extent on how much “foreign influence” they could actually bring to bear. Yet, the work of American “new women” missionaries was also very much part of larger events and developments unfolding in China, a China upon which a number of imperial powers had designs.

**American Imperialism, Social Darwinism, and Women’s Education in China**

From the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing at the conclusion of the Opium War (1839–1842), through a series of unequal treaties claiming to enhance ‘peace, friendship, and commerce,’ foreign powers such as Great Britain, France, the United States, Russia, Germany, and eventually Japan developed a system to expand their rights and interests in China. As a major member of this imperialist consortium, the United States, by the end of nineteenth century, had invested $20 million in China and approximately 3,500 Americans were living in its port cities and concessions.16 During the early twentieth century, the United States tried to further increase its influence over China through the “Open Door Policy” of providing equal trading opportunities for all nations.17 American interest in China was, however, not limited to the commercial arena. As Paul Reinsch, political scientist and U.S. minister to China (1913–19), noted in 1915 “our past relations with China …. and the activities of our people have been religious, cultural and educational in a far greater measure than they have been commercial.”18 For America, which had just declared the end to its continental frontier – or as Fredrick Jackson put it, the “meeting point between savagery and civilization” and “the line of most rapid and effective Americanization” – Asia, and more specifically China, was fast becoming a kind of new frontier.19 During this period many Americans saw U.S. involvement in China as something benign when compared to that of Europe or Japan; American involvement was thought to be rooted in benevolent elements of Americanization and was thus seen as something different from imperial exploitation. As veteran missionary in China W. A. P. Martin argued, “America is [a] neighbor to China,” and while “others may wound and rob, we do neither.”20 This idea of exceptionalism, separating America from other imperial powers, was also reinforced through efforts to expand educational activities. For example, a consular official in Nanjing wrote in 1901 to William Woodville Rockhill, who was to later become U.S. Minister to China (1905–9), that it was the domain of education by “filling the chinese [sic] mind with American ideas,” which could be “the most lasting influence [sic] for America.”21 From the outset of the twentieth century education became one of the major fields of America’s engagement in China.

This tendency to emphasize education, especially among those involved in U.S. policy toward China, did not just come from a spirit of generosity. Americans believed that much was at stake. Roosevelt explained the logic behind the necessity for expanding educational operations in China by declaring:

*Now* is the time for the West to implant its ideals in the Orient, in such fashion as to minimize the chance of a dreadful future clash between two radically different and hostile civilizations; if we wait until to-morrow, we may find that we have waited too long.22

In the eyes of people like Roosevelt, who were concerned about the growing Japanese influence in China, America’s new frontier was the front line in the struggle to ‘Americanize’ the world through imperial power. This meant that only the Americanization of China could make it truly civilized and thus a nation that had earned the trust and respect of the United States.
The concrete task of expanding the new frontier and at the same time diffusing conflict was largely entrusted to missionaries. Through the influence of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, which singled out China as “the last citadel still holding out against Christ,” many university graduates began missionary careers in education from the late nineteenth century. This new generation of missionaries focused on higher and professional education and began creating education enterprises in China. One male missionary who had graduated from Yale University in 1903 asserted that if they are able to “win [over] the leaders” of China, they will be able to effectively “win the Empire.” In the aftermath of the 1911 Revolution, which ended China’s long dynastic history, The President of China Society of America boasted that just “as the French Revolution was inspired by America’s success, so China’s revolution was brought about and won by America’s education.”

American Women missionaries shared this view and it was very much central to their work while in China. Although in comparison to their male counterparts they used a less masculine tone to describe their own work, they nevertheless shared the same hierarchical view of civilization, locating America in a far more advanced position than China. Based upon this perspective, American missionaries assumed the role of ‘givers’ to their Chinese sisters. For instance, just after the 1911 Revolution, Grace Coppock, general secretary of the YWCA in China, stated that “[w]ith this awakening has come a keen desire for what the women of the West have to give them,” “because now that the empire has become a republic we can expect more remarkable advances.” Jennie Field Bashford, the first president of the Association for Collegiate Alumnae who went to China with her husband James B. Bashford, the Methodist Episcopal bishop of China, affirmed this view in 1908 by arguing that “[s]cores of American college women, engaged in mission work in China, are doing much to give wise direction …. for the uplift of women.” She also noted:

During the last three years it has been my privilege to witness China’s rapid advance in the education of women. The officials and gentry are everywhere awakening to its importance, and the eagerness of girls for Western learning, even the highest, is fast becoming American in its intensity.

Bashford took notice of the groundswell of interest among Chinese male intellectuals, reformers, and revolutionaries to promote the education of women. One significant factor behind this surge of interest in female education was the growing influence of Social Darwinism in China.

Since the late nineteenth century, ideas of civilization that included popular versions of Social Darwinism were gaining currency in China. With the popularization of Social Darwinism, the notion of competition in evolutionary theory spread rapidly. Yet, the most significant impact which Social Darwinism had on China was the idea of the fundamental precariousness of the future: the future would diverge from the past and present and was, therefore, seen as something wildly unpredictable. Such uncertainty was both disquieting and hopeful for countries like China, which had an acute and undiluted fear of impending doom owing to the growing encroachment of the imperial powers. This sense of ambivalence about the future was, as Gail Hershatter points out, amplified further by “the very incompleteness of China’s colonization.” The situation could get worse anytime, but with purposeful effort to thwart colonial enterprises it could also be ameliorated.

With China’s crushing defeat in the Sino-Japanese war (1894–5), the strengthening of the Chinese race and nation became a particularly urgent issue. It was at this juncture that many intellectuals and reformers began to regard women as the wasted half of the Chinese population and to have actually impeded China’s development into a modern nation state. Transforming women into productive citizens was thus seen as a pressing need and the Enlightenment of women became a matter of the survival of the Chinese race and its civilization. Discussing the physical strength of women, prominent reformer and scholar Kang Youwei (1858–1927) wrote in 1898:
I observed Europeans and Americans to be well-built and sturdy, because their mothers do not bind their feet, and as a result have strong offspring. In the period of military expansion and competition among nations, keeping weak offspring is quite dangerous.

Like male intellectuals in the United States, Kang saw a close relationship between women’s reproductive capacity and the survival of the race. From this perspective, he came out against foot-binding and instead advocated the importance of improving women’s physical health. For Chinese intellectuals like Kang, however, reproductive capacity was not the only problem facing Chinese women. Kang and others also maintained that the mental capacity of Chinese women had to be improved as well. To this end, he and others championed women’s access to education. Liang Qichao (1873–1929), a renowned intellectual and reformer wrote:

Through promoting equality between men and women, America has flourished; through spreading women’s education, Japan has become strong; to create a prosperous nation and intelligent people, we must begin with this [women’s education].

Male intellectuals like Liang thus ardently advocated the importance of female education and, unlike their American counterparts, did not consider education to be something detrimental to women’s reproductive capacity. Education was now instead seen as one of the basic rights of citizens in the modern nation state, even though the specific contents of education for men and women could still be different. Likewise, some Chinese intellectuals construed the idea of equality between men and women, in terms of social evolution, as an element to help make China a strong, modern nation-state.

Young J. Allen, a veteran American missionary in China who took notice of these developments and the growing impact of evolutionary concepts on notions of race, nation and civilization, claimed in 1907 that “the relative position which the woman occupies in any country is an index to the civilization which that country enjoys, and this test applied to the Orient reveals [that there are] many stages yet to be achieved.”

In this sense, then, the condition of women was now seen to be a barometer of the level of civilization within a given country. Based on this perceived causal link between the status of women and the level of civilization, China’s designation in civilizational terms was lower than those of the imperial powers which had been casting covetous eyes on its territory, an assessment gloomy enough to compel many Chinese intellectuals and reformers to begin thinking about ways to improve the lot of women.

This kind of evolutionist logic carried over well into 1910s and 1920s in China. For instance, in 1920 Mao Dun, one of the leading male writers and social commentators of the period, wrote:

I dare say that the purpose of our advocating women’s Emancipation is for the sake of social evolution. Because we consider social evolution a fundamental concept, we are trying to raise the level of personhood and general ability of women to that of men... by first abolishing all kinds of bondage over women.”

For male intellectuals like Mao Dun, social evolution was a key basis for their support of Chinese feminism. As a historian Wang Zheng points out, in China during the early part of the twentieth century “feminism … was considered part of the universal truth and an indicator of a higher stage of civilization” because its adoption was seen as a “crucial strategy for China to accelerate the speed of evolution in its race against the West.” Owing to this positive appraisal of feminism as a tool for civilization and enlightenment, the emancipation of women was embraced from the outset by a number of male intellectuals and revolutionaries. To be certain, this idea of social evolution was not the only principle supporting women’s liberation, but it had been firmly planted onto Chinese soil in the early twentieth-century and thus helped...
shape the characteristics of women’s issues in China as it became part of
the overall drive toward modernization. In these respects, the New
Woman and feminism were not simply a ‘women’s issue,’ but were also
an urgent matter of ‘national salvation.’ As a result, the New Woman
and feminism were conceived as positions that could incorporate a
variety of political modernities from various sources into China in order
to make her strong amidst the harsh environment of world competition.

In the years following the 1911 Revolution, which put an end to China’s
long dynastic history, earlier concerns over women’s issues were
reformulated into a discourse of emancipation and subjectivity for the
‘liberated’ woman. The New Culture Movement, inaugurated with the
publication of New Youth (Xin qingnian) in 1915, played a significant
role in helping bring this about. As in the case of male positions on
women’s issues during the late Qing period, the New Culture Movement
and its discourses on women emerged out of a sense of anxiety among
intellectuals over the future of their country. During the late 1910s
through the mid 1920s, these intellectuals came to seek cultural
solutions in order to revitalize China and transform her into a modern
culture. Although the emancipation of the New Woman was a
popular topic for male Culturalists because of doubts about their own
subjectivity and China’s own precarious situation, a number of young
Chinese women also entered the debate. These women sought to become
living examples of the New Woman for the purpose of liberating
themselves and serving as historical agents of change in China. For
instance, a young female student named Zhang Ruoming argued that
even though there are “people who advocate women’s emancipation” as
an ideal, “these people have not presented any concrete solutions.”
Zhang held, in contrast, that “women’s emancipation has to be initiated
by women themselves, and women should not wait for other people to
emancipate them.”

Another example of this New Woman, physical
education instructor Lu Lihua, recalled that “in my youth, we thought of
ourselves as new women who dared to rush forward and break old
conventions.”

The May Fourth era, which began in the late 1910s, witnessed both this
sense of an active desire for emancipation and the ‘nationalization’ of
liberation ideas. Women like Lu, who considered herself a prime
example of the New Woman, began to put the objectives of the May
Fourth New Culture movement into concrete practice. Lu and other
like-minded women understood the goal of the movement to be nothing
less than the “overthrow [of] the old feudal system and [the]
transform[ation of] old ideas into new and progressive ideas.” Ideas of
individualism and humanism associated with the equality between sexes
were, however, mixed with other elements like national salvation. Zhu
Su’e, a student of law, described the impact of historical change upon
her own life by acknowledging that she originally “wanted to pursue
nüquan (woman’s rights) for myself” but, as the nation came to face
a crisis, she instead “became involved with national salvation.”
Ultimately, Zhu realized that “the two could not be separated. Nüquan
and patriotic national salvation merged into one movement.” The May
Fourth Movement was in fact an important catalyst to these
developments because it helped flush out and integrate the goals of
women’s liberation and national salvation. The movement began when a
demonstration broke out in Peking on May 4, 1919. It quickly spread to
other parts of China. Both male and female students rose up to protest
the terms of the treaty concluded in Versailles after W.W.I, especially
the clause consenting to Japan’s Twenty One Demands over China in
1915. These events were important because they brought home the fact
that Chinese women could make history happen. They were now part of
the historical changes already underway in China. With this sense of
engagement and purpose, some women began to directly work for public
change in ways that helped them create a greater sense of historical
agency for themselves.

Just as emancipation for some young Chinese women began to intersect
with issues of national salvation as a result of the May Fourth
Movement, during this period both the identities of Chinese men and
women were being transformed. Women like Deng Chunlan, who in
1919 demanded Peking University lift its ban on women, insisted that “it
is true that patriotic movements are important, but the women’s movements (promoted) by women are even more important.”41 In their effort to bring about women’s liberation in Chinese society, young Chinese women targeted the patriarchal family system, something they saw as central to shaking up the old feudal way of life. At root, they found the “old-fashioned idea of marriage” to be the nucleus of a feudal family system that had for ages functioned as a definitive “drawback to the progress of women.”42 During the May Fourth period, the patriarchal family system was also the chief concern of many New Culture male intellectuals. Like their female counterparts, they thought that they too were fettered by the patriarchal order. In order to become independent human beings, they felt that it necessary to be unshackled from this bondage by becoming ardent advocates of family reform. As historian Susan Glosser points out, in the May Fourth period “the redefinition of manhood” among male intellectuals who had anxiety over their subjectivity “occupied the primary, if implicit, focus of...family reform.”43 They championed ‘modern’ forms of marriage and the nuclear family, which they saw as the antithesis of arranged marriages and the feudal family system. In the eyes of some young Chinese women, however, even companionate marriage seemed to be an obstacle to the achievement of their goals. It was thus not a drastic leap for young Chinese women to decide to stay celibate. Women like Zhang Ruoming, in this vein, declared that “in view of China’s current situation, the best thing for women intending to be at the vanguard of ‘women’s emancipation’ is to stay single.” She also asserted that although “‘marriage’ is an issue for ‘women’s emancipation,’” it is “not the ultimate one.” As she saw it, the “more crucial issue for ‘women’s emancipation’ is obtaining education and achieving economic independence.”44

For those who sought to become self-sufficient independent New Women, it was education, rather than marriage, which was of paramount importance. In 1919, T.C. Chu observed that women in China were still “under the influence of some bad old ideas and customs.” Yet, she also claimed that “[i]f Chinese girls have the same educational advantages as those prevalent in the West, they will be as capable and useful to the world as their European and American sisters.”45 It was also at this time that the number of young Chinese women enrolled in educational institutions American women established in China showed a significant increase. While the reasons for their interest in these schools varied, their appeal was understandable because government universities took only a handful of women at the time. As we have seen, it was male intellectuals who launched the discourse of xin nüxing and helped it to circulate. Yet, it was Chinese women themselves who imparted life into this ‘invention’ of male intellectuals, so that it was not a mere trope but rather a living example of women as historical agents of change. It was, moreover, these Chinese women who would come into contact with their counterparts from America.

Encounters between Two Kinds of New Women

By the mid 1910s, American women opened three women’s colleges, three women’s medical schools, and two collegiate nursing schools in China.46 Many Chinese students who came to American women’s institutions had already graduated high-school several years earlier and the average age of freshman in the first class at Ginling College, for instance, was twenty-three years old. Wu Yifang, who entered Ginling at age twenty-four, recalled that most of the students “had teaching experience, and came to college with a serious purpose of securing further training.”47 These students came to the American women’s institutions in the hope that they could obtain higher and more advanced knowledge, something that fit the expectations of their American teachers, many of who had come to China after W.W.I with MA., MD., and Ph.D. degrees. Without a doubt, the academic knowledge these new teachers brought with them provided a nice stimulus to Chinese xin nüxing students. Yet, this was not the only thing belonging to American women which helped to inspire their new students and reaffirm their role as teachers. They also became living role models for their students. As Carol Chen notes, “[o]ur choice of profession was influenced by the personal examples of our teachers.”48
They also admired their American teachers’ self-sufficiency and commitment to celibacy. Deng Yuzhi, who became an active industrial worker in the Shanghai YWCA during the 1930s, recalled many students felt admiration for their teachers’ way of “living independently.” As she pointed out:

They earned their own salary and …. were not married. [Yet] no one thought it was odd that they were single. People respected them because they could earn their own living. …. People wanted to be independent, and so did I.49

Deng’s thoughts confirm what has already been pointed out, namely, that there was among young Chinese women a growing tendency to stay single. This could be seen, for instance, among members of the first graduating class at Ginling College, who all pledged to each other that they would never marry. Xu Yizhen, one of these pledge members, recalled that “I loved to be alone. It was in general, the attitude of modern woman of our time. We called it singleness of purpose.”50 These xin nüxing students also desired that their teachers, as role models, likewise remain celibate. In an article entitled “The Ginling New Faculty,” one student even noted that “the earnest hope of the students is that the new faculty will forever belong to Ginling and their title will ever be ‘Miss.’”51

This view on the part of the students reflected certain difficulties they faced at the time. Some students were, in fact, not successful in breaking off engagements arranged by their parents. For those unable to break the bonds of an arranged marriage, it was particularly important to have role models so that they could continue to encourage themselves to pursue the goals they had originally set. In reality, however, American teachers acted as more than mere role models and became formidable defenders of Chinese women’s aspirations toward celibacy. This was possible because of their own living example they conveyed to Chinese women longing to remain single and to extricate themselves from the shackles of the feudal family system. From the viewpoint of the American women, conversely, this also appeared to be a clear sign that their students were on the path to becoming modern independent New Women like themselves. Grace T. Seton, a suffragist and a writer, observed while visiting China in the early 1920s that “[i]n recent years there has been an ever-increasing chorus of women avowing to live single” and maintained that “[i]t is a sign of their progress in thought and in ideals of life.”52 This view on celibacy was indeed common among American women teachers in China. Some of them went so far as to help their students escape from being forced into arranged marriages.53

There were other obstacles often impeding the transition to New Women in China during this period. These included the stern views of their male counterparts, who saw the new trend of celibacy among young women as problematic because it had become popular among well-educated women, just the pool of women who were to be their prospective brides.54 One such concerned voice was that of Zhang Weici, a young faculty member of Peking University. Zhang asserted that “in my opinion, women’s main task is to restructure their families using both artistic and scientific methods,” rather than to emulate men in public sphere. For Zhang, then, merely “imitating men will not solve their problems.”55 Likewise, male university students, many of whom expressed their support for modern marriage, were oftentimes not as enthusiastic as their female counterparts about their becoming independent women. Some male students thus complained that the female students at the institutions of American women “were….too scholarly, too much interest[ed] in study,” and not much interested in marriage.56 In response to such charges, one American teacher replied “[i]f a small number of women should choose not to marry in order to serve their day and generation as teachers, or nurses, or physicians, or social workers, no great danger to society would result.”57

It is true that American teachers showed great sympathy toward the predicament of their students caused by the patriarchal family system. They supported wholeheartedly their desire to become independent
women. At the same time they were, however, also weary of the eagerness shown by their students toward the project of national salvation. For American teachers, pursuing economic independence and shunning marriage were familiar issues because they stood out as distinct characteristics of New Women in America. They were, in other words, things that had already been achieved by many American women. As a result, there was not much danger that Chinese women, if successful, might disturb the relationship between American teachers as forerunners and Chinese students as followers. Participation by Chinese women in efforts to bring about national salvation was, however, something different. This was because many of the American women, especially those who came to China after the W.W.I, supported the idea of internationalism, something they saw as linked to nationalism by the idea of America as an ‘exceptional’ country at the forefront of modern progress in the world. American women thus saw their own nationalism as something healthy because it was democratic, rational, and relativistic in character. In comparison to their own principled nationalism, however, nationalism in ‘less advanced’ countries – which was on the rise in the colonized world – appeared as something far less rational, and even somewhat violent and fanatic. From this perspective, American teachers had to first figure out what national salvation entailed for their students and why it meant so much to them. Gradually, they did come to understand their students’ enthusiasm toward the project of national salvation as a significant component to their becoming New Women and even showed sympathy toward their efforts. They came to perceive their students’ involvement in national salvation as a sign of Chinese women’s evolution toward a more advanced stage of womanhood.

Yet, American teachers were still a bit perturbed by their students’ keen interest in and devotion to the idea of national salvation. In fact, for many it still remained a source of uncertainty. Elsie Clark, a graduate of Goucher College and a faculty member of Hwa Nan College, epitomizes such a feeling shared by many of her colleagues in China.

[I]t was amazing to hear the young [Chinese women]….., saying that women should help their country as much as men did, …. that they should take an interest in things outside their home, that they should have greater opportunity to develop all their different sorts of power, that they should lead a larger life, and most of all, again and again, that they should help their country.58

For Clark, a suffragist herself, it was undoubtedly quite an exciting experience to find a strong desire among young Chinese women to be independent and involved in the movements of their day. Yet, this intense desire on the part of Clark and her colleagues was not focused on the issue of national salvation as much as it was Chinese women’s efforts to shake off the yoke of imperialism and feudalism.

The New Woman and Imperialism in the National Revolution

The rise of the decolonization movement after W.W.I significantly changed the circumstances surrounding the enterprises of American women in China. During the 1920s, Lenin’s theses on the national and colonial question spread quickly throughout the colonial world and attracted many nationalists in colonized countries seeking to establish formal nation states through campaigns for ‘national independence.’ In China, Lenin’s thesis was appealing to those disillusioned by the stance toward China by Western powers at the Versailles Peace Conference after W.W.I., which denied China’s request to protect its sovereignty. In 1921, as a result, interest in achieving ‘national independence’ and proving China’s anti-imperialist credentials to the Marxist Third International in Moscow led to the creation of the Chinese Communist Party. The Party set its sights upon breaking up the feudal ruling class of warlords and ameliorating the adverse effects of foreign imperialism in China. These kinds of concerns were, moreover, to become important issues beyond those left alone, as the drive toward national revolution in China during the 1920s gained steam. Anti-imperialism, class struggle, and nationalism became the three basic and interrelated ideas supporting national revolution in China during this period. As part of this vision, the mobilization of the Chinese public was seen as necessary to the
creation of “mass power” (qunli) by the Chinese race (minzu) and to the realization of revolution.59

It was the May Thirtieth Incident of 1925 that ignited this revolutionary spark and helped unite many local forms of resistance into a national revolutionary movement. The incident began with gunshots fired by Sikh policemen, who were under British control, into a crowd of Chinese protesting the shooting death of a Chinese worker by Japanese guards. This use of violence on May 30th, which resulted in the death of thirteen Chinese workers and students, galvanized patriotic and revolutionary fever already brewing in China. Shortly after this incident, demonstrations took place all around China against foreign powers. Many of these were concentrated in port cities. Here, “mass power” (qunli) was recognized as the chief ingredient that could help to bring about a revolution. In this way, the incident marked the beginning of a National Revolution which eventually helped bring Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist Party (GMD) into national power in 1927. This was in many respects a process that would have a major impact on the lives and the projects of American women in China.

Quite naturally, American women kept a close watch on these unprecedented developments. For example, Frances King of the Shanghai Christian Medical College for Women noted that “[t]he Chinese as one body rose in indignation over the affair. …. Everything points to the fact that there is a strong nationalistic feeling in China and she will no …. longer be the ‘goat’ of every nation that cares to exploit her.”60 Likewise, Mary Dingman, a YWCA worker, also reported that “[t]he shooting of May 30 crystallized public opinion. …. [A] nationalistic movement [that] has been arising …. rapidly accelerated in recent years due to increasing contact with the West and growing resentment against the power of the West in China as manifested by ‘the unequal treaties.’” Based on such observations, she declared that “[t]he day of the foreigner as the lord of creation in China is [now] over.”61

Although many American women recognized this rising tide of nationalism and anti-imperialism in China, they still did not closely associate America and their own enterprises in China with any kind of imperialism. In their view, imperialism was still something that, like feudalism, had not taken hold in America, although it had in Europe and Japan. They similarly refused to see the projects they were running as enterprises of exploitation because they were staunch advocates of the Wilsonian ideal of national self-determination, something that was very much oriented toward national independence. The urgent task for these women was thus to clear the good name of their educational work, now being demonized as a “cultural invasion of China.”62 For instance, Margaret Bailey Speer, a graduate of Bryn Mawr and a faculty member of Yenching Women’s College, urged her peers in China to convey to the public that “our work is not in any way an agent of imperialism or an attempt to substitute Western religious superstitions for Chinese superstitions.”63 Speer believed that it was in fact “the girls [who were] consistently taking a more sane and sensible stand than the boys.”64 By a “sane and sensible stand,” Speer meant the general tendency among female students to rarely become involved in defiant action toward their teachers or toward the schools. In a similar vein, Elsie Riek at Hwa Nan College reported that “[a]ll of our trouble has come from various outside student organizations …. [and] the college girls were absolutely loyal to us.”65 Such loyalty did not, however, mean that Chinese female students were unsympathetic to the cause of national revolution altogether. On the contrary, they were quite concerned about the issue of national salvation and were actually a party to the swell of nationalistic sentiment of the day, as were many of their male counterparts.

Nevertheless, there were different standpoints and objectives between them and their male counterparts regarding participation in China’s revolutionary movement. One significant element behind such differences may be found in the characteristics of nationalism itself. As Anne McClintock points out, nationalism is “radically constitutive of people’s identities through social contests that are frequently violent and always gendered.”66 In a period of growing nationalism under the rising momentum toward national revolution, the identity of male Chinese was
seen as having been emasculated by foreign imperial powers and, as a result, images and discourses of Chinese masculinity began to take on an intentionally aggressive tone. Yet, this process of identity formation did not take place independently of existing gender relations. Although many male intellectuals, revolutionaries, and students championed equality between men and women, oftentimes such claims were made in the context of national salvation. Thus, equality in gender relations was often related to the concept of modern society and to the promise of a new social structure to break down China’s conventional family system that, in their view, had prevented it from shaking off feudalism. Their advocacy of the women’s enlightenment was also grounded on the same logic of national salvation. Consequently, enlightening women meant transforming them into productive citizens for the purpose of strengthening China to set it free from the yoke of imperialism. These issues were all lumped under the category of “women’s problems” and the burden of solving these was, accordingly, cast upon the shoulders of women themselves. No matter how enlightened women became and emulated men they were, however, still considered ‘imperfect’ men and thus the hierarchy between men and women was retained. It was also true that many maintained traditional or conservative gender relations within their own private lives.67 Thus, in spite of their public stance defending gender equality, many Chinese men still required women to remain under their direct control. This would help ease their sense of inferiority provoked by the encroaching imperial powers and also help them to create masculine identities attuned to ‘saving’ their country and their women.

Under such circumstances, American women teachers became problematic figures. This was primarily owing to the fact that they had been earnest supporters of young Chinese women’s efforts to free themselves from the feudal family system as well as from conservative gender relations which their male counterparts still wished to retain. At times, they even sought liberation from marriage itself. In the eyes of young Chinese men, to no surprise, this kind of independence among women was not something desirable. Such discrepancies in expectations toward young Chinese women between American women and young Chinese men led, furthermore, to a state of antagonism. For young Chinese men, the basis of American women’s enterprises came to be seen as an unhealthy and dangerous trend taking hold among young Chinese women. From this position, therefore, the redemption of Chinese women from such improper ‘outside’ influences became an important part of their revolutionary movement.

Matilda Thurston, President of Ginling College, was one notable American woman who found herself in this tug-of-war with young Chinese males. Thurston and others were aware that there was a shift taking place in the power relations between American women like themselves and Chinese men interested in reshaping Chinese women. This shift occurred in tandem with the rise of anti-imperialist nationalism and caused Thurston and her peers much grief, especially since it involved issues of gender. At Ginling College, Thurston observed that although there were “some outside influences ... [aimed at] stirring up a spirit of criticism,” as was also the case in other institutions the majority of the students remained unruffled. According to Thurston, this was clear proof that “girls are more civilized than boys.” Yet, such ‘civilized’ behavior among Ginling students actually confirmed the suspicions of male Chinese students at nearby institutions like Nanjing University that Ginling’s students were indentured to their American teachers. For those intent upon seeing things this way, Ginling students were “conscientious about college requirements [even] when they conflicted with patriotic holidays.” They were, as well, too “foreignized and [thus] not trained to make good wives.”68

At that time, there was a general tendency among male university students to seek out educated women for wives. For such young men, the quality of their wives was essential to their self identity as modern enlightened men with an independent personhood. This preference for an ‘equal-match’ marriage in terms of educational level was rooted in their aspiration to acquire a new identity as Chinese men no longer shackled by feudalism and able to serve and to save China.69 These
kinds of ideas did help drive and support young male students’ criticisms of their female counterparts at Ginling. Of course, even though Ginling girls were perfect marriage candidates for them, their own sights seemed to be directed toward things other than marriage. In the eyes of male students, conversely, Ginling students did not appear to be keenly involved in pressing political issues that related to the strengthening of the nation. Male eyes of suspicion also set upon college figures and authorities like Thurston, moreover, because they saw her and others like her as having forced Chinese female students into a kind of servitude to them. In response to male students’ criticism, Thurston expressed her own understanding of the situation as follows:

The boys resent the girls’ independence and refusal to fall in behind them in their student activities, political and otherwise. They think the girls are under the dominion of their foreign teachers, and give them no credit for having opinions of their own on social and political questions.70

In Thurston’s view, male students’ attitudes toward Ginling students were chauvinistic and were oblivious to the reality that Chinese female students had as much subjectivity and agency as they had. It was, nevertheless, equally true that as head of the school, Thurston possessed an attitude toward her students that was essentially maternalistic, something that became yet another source of antagonism between American women like Thurston and young Chinese males.

As mentioned earlier it was during this period that young Chinese males also attempted, as earnestly as their female counterparts, to unshackle themselves from dictatorial forms of patriarchal rule that had decided almost everything in their lives, including their marriage partners. For such Chinese men the feudal family system was not only an impediment to China’s progress, but also the chief obstacle for its citizens to becoming modern individuals. Consequently, emancipation from patriarchal rule became crucial to developing a new kind of independent personhood among Chinese men. For this purpose, removing the (male) head from his vaunted place as family paragon become a key priority. Yi Jiayue, a student at Peking University and a co-founder of the Family Research Society, encapsulated the logical necessity of such a dethronement in the following way:

Although many aspects of the family need reform, the very first that must be eliminated is that disgusting thing – the family head. Because no matter what aspect we are discussing, the family head always represents power, class, and [is thus] an impediment to social progress.71

As this suggests, for young Chinese men the family head was virtually the same as an outmoded despot who brought with him many harmful things without any real benefits. From here, it was not a huge leap for such men to connect their ‘white elephant’ to American women like Thurston. This is because, in their view, women like Thurston were also tyrannical figures who used their own authority to keep young Chinese women in bondage. To make matters worse, American women were seen not simply as feudal masters, but also as imperial aggressors, regardless of their sex. Within the rise of Chinese anti-imperialist nationalism, ultimately, these two categories of feudalism and imperialism became linked and helped form the impregnable ground upon which to debunk the illegitimacy of the American women’s enterprises, eventually shaking them to their very foundations.

Yet, Chinese male students were not the only problem for educational institutions created by American women. During and after national revolution, more and more female students came to have serious concerns about the lives of the underprivileged. As a result, the idea of “mass power” (qunli) and “awakening of masses” continued to spread among young Chinese women as a key requirement for social change. This interest swelled among female students at educational institutions run by American women as they came to show a deeper interest in the impoverished Chinese population, especially in the countryside.72 For instance, one student at Yenching asked the college for permission to
live in a local village. The reason she gave was that she “had no right to live in all the comforts which the College afforded the students [including herself] when the common people all about had so little.” In addition, she claimed that she wanted “to share the life of the villagers” so as to prepare herself to work among them and understand the problems they were facing.73 The enterprise of women was, however, not designed to train students for improving the lives of “the masses.” Their conscious goal was to create New Women like themselves – urban middle-class professional women. Against this backdrop, Leila Hinckley acknowledged that one “serious problem is the ever increasing number of students who are turning to communism” precisely because “[we seem] to be doing nothing about [the problems facing China]. Many, [who were] ready to give their lives to help the cause of the oppressed and downtrodden, turned to communism.”74 Under these conditions, it is no wonder that the kind of activities being carried out by American women’s institutions came under criticism. As one Chinese staff member at theYWCA national conference implored, they must now “stop being a middle class organization!”75 Naturally, this was not an opinion limited to this one voice but was also shared by her Chinese colleagues.

Although in America women like Raymond Robins, then chairperson of the international committee on Oriental Relations of the Women’s Trade Union League, asserted that “the opportunity” was at hand “to do for China what Lafayette did for America,” for American women in China this refrain no longer had any real resonance.76 Even the most glorious parts of the history of American nationalism that led to the establishment of the United States seemed to be anything but a good example for China to follow. In fact, many American women, especially those who had established institutions and had assumed administrative responsibilities, were now beginning to realize that this kind of ‘opportunity’ to edify and tutor China was no longer possible. This came to represent little more than a pipe dream as the authority of school administrators began to wane. Matilda Thurston, president of Ginling College, commented, “I feel that …. I have been powerless.” What she had once called “poor China” was now, ironically, exercising its influence over the enterprise to which Thurston had been devoting all her energies for many years. Resigning herself to this situation, Thurston proclaimed “[f]or us it was the end of the world – of our world.”77

**Conclusion**

Contrary to their own expectations, American New Women in China found that their own form of womanhood, which they had held to be the most advanced, could not be emulated by Chinese women and was thus not as ‘universal’ as they originally believed. It is thus somewhat ironic that although there did exist concrete differences between American and Chinese women, both held subordinate positions in their own societies and sought to challenge gender norms so as to move beyond the domestic sphere and create a new subject position as historical agents of change by appropriating and reenacting dominant male discourses. For American women, this entailed their self-transformation from saboteurs of American civilization to prophetic witnesses for it. For Chinese women this meant yoking off the designation of social parasites depleting China’s strength and taking on the role of citizens who could make contributions to the country. In the end, both American and Chinese women did manage to forge new kinds of subjectivity even though they began this journey from subordinate positions within their own societies. Once in China, however, American women came to assume a dominant position along with their male counterparts, owing to their country’s existence as one of the imperial powers. By utilizing their identity as middle-class white Protestant women, American women were clearly able to derive a new subject position as gospeters of American civilization, and their new womanhood was thus associated with dominant ideologies in America. As a result, they were castigated as imperialists by young Chinese men, even though they were convinced that America was, contrary to the Old World, exempt from both feudalism and imperialism. For American women, many of whom subscribed to Wilsonian internationalism, America was not imperialistic but rather a beacon of democracy to the world. In this sense, they
envisioned their own womanhood as standing at the vanguard of modern women and as a force for the liberation for women in many parts of the world. Nevertheless, in China they discovered that history was not to unfold as they had expected. By the mid 1920s, China began to move in alternative directions and in ways that synthesized both indigenous and exogenous ideas about gender, the nation and modernity.

The difficulties New Women faced were, however, not limited to American women only. There were differences between Chinese men and women over how to interpret the phenomenon of the New Woman. For a good number of Chinese women the objective was independence and remaining single was an attractive option given the social conditions existing in China. For their male counterparts who felt emasculated by the imperial powers and were attempting to create new identity to be able to serve and save China, it became important to have wives who were enlightened women. In this way, they could claim that they were themselves having transformed into more independent identities. Such expectations led to American women being indicted by young male Chinese as feudal masters and imperialist aggressors. Most importantly of all, this situation also sheds light upon the complex nature of power relations between dominant/dominated when gender is taken into account. It also reveals some of the complex ways in which power relations were gendered and, in the bigger picture, how the New Woman may be reconsidered as a transnational phenomenon entangled in historical, social and political events that went beyond national borders. Both the dominant and dominated were able to maneuver within the politics of temporality to their own specific ways in order to achieve their own objectives. Within this arena, gender relations were being contested and came to intersect with other power relations in intricate ways.

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Footnotes

2. The “New Woman” first emerged as a social issue on both sides of the Atlantic in the end of the nineteenth century and soon spread to various parts of the world. Because the “New Woman” became a transnational phenomenon, the qualities of the “New Woman” varied in different countries and regions. Owing much to this diversity, moreover, the term the “New Woman” has been used rather inconsistently among scholars. In this article, I define it as a movement of women who attempted to insert themselves in modern historical progress and become emancipatory agents by engaging in reform and/or revolutionary activities aiming at liberating societies and people from “the old” during the period from the late nineteenth century through the 1920s.

3. For instance, the marriage rate of alumnae at Mount Holyoke, Vassar, Radcliffe, Bryn Mawr, Wellesley at the turn of the century are the following: Mount Holyoke 52.0% (classes of 1894–1903), 52.0% (1904–13); Vassar 56.5% (1892–1901), 60.6% (1902–11); Radcliffe 51.3% (1891–1900), 51.1% (1901–10); Bryn Mawr 47% (1894–1903), 44% (1904–08); Wellesley 52% (1893–1903), 68.3% (1900–09). Barbara Miller Solomon, In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), p.120.

4. According to Gail Bederman, by the end of the nineteenth century, the notion of civilization came to consists of three variants: “race, gender and millennial assumptions about human evolutionary progress.” Civilization signified not simply ‘the West’ or ‘industrial society’ but a stage of human racial development evolving from savagery through barbarism to advanced civilization. In this racialized notion of civilization, gender relations were the important index to access the evolutionary level of each race. Gail Bederman, Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p.25.

5. About the impact of Social Darwinism in America, see Richard Hofstadter, Social Darwinism in American Thought (1944, rev. ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Carl N.
Degler, In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Robert C. Bannister, Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in American Social Thought (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988). As Bannister argues, Hofstadter may have overstated the influence of Darwinism on social thinkers in the U.S. Yet, it was also true that ideas of social Darwinism could be found within the dominant discourse at the time and were mobilized by various social groups to justify their counterarguments against white male dominance. Such protean characteristics of the ideas of Social Darwinism become clearer when viewed from a transnational perspective, as this article attempts to do.


7. It is estimated that the average interwar total number of American missionaries in China was between 3000 and 4000. Of these missionaries, one third were single women, one third were married women (missionary wives), and one third were men. James C. Jr. Thomson, While China Faced West: American Reformers in Nationalist China, 1928–1937, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969, p.36.


18. Paul Reinsch to Wallace Buttrick, Dec. 1, 1915, box 1, series 1, RG4, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Rockefeller Archives Center, Tarrytown, NY.


23. This phrase was expressed at the 1894 convention of the Student Volunteer Movement. Michael H. Hunt, The Making of a Special Relationship, p.163. The

24. J. Lawrence Thurston to Beach, June 8, 1903, quoted in Jerry Israel, Progressivism and the Open Door, p.19.


32. Young J. Allen, Woman: In All Ages and in All Countries (1907), 4: vii, quoted in Hu Ying, Tales of Translation, p.2.


35. The New Culture movement was promoted by Chinese intellectuals who were disillusioned by the 1911 Revolution’s failure to establish a strong modern nation-state. These intellectuals turned to a cultural solution to strengthen China and attempted to rejuvenate Chinese culture by replacing some of China’s ‘traditional’ customs with ‘modern’ western philosophy, literature, and culture.


42. T.C. Chu, “The Emancipation of Chinese Women,” Chinese Recorder 50, (October

44. Zhang Ruoming, “‘Jixianfeng’ de nüzi,” p.54.


46. Ginling College (Nanjing, 1915); Yenching Women’s College (Peking, 1920. It started as North China Women’s College which began to offer college level courses from 1905); Hwa Nan College (Fozhou, 1909, Full college course was adopted in 1907); The North China Union Medical College for Women (Peking, 1908); The Hackett Medical College for Women (Guangzhou, 1900); The Shanghai Christian Medical College for Women (Shanghai, 1924. It was established by uniting Mary Black Hospital in Suzhou and Margaret Williamson Hospital); Yale-in-China School of Nursing (Changsha, 1910); Peking Union Medical School (1920, Beijing. It was established by the China Medical Board, the Rockefeller Foundation’s organization in China).


50. Y.T. Zee (Xiu Yizhen) to Mary Lou, March 10, 1974, folder 3, box 145, RG8, China Record Project, Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library.


53. When Deng Yuzhi was sophomore at Ginling, her husband’s side relatives and their lawyer came Nanjing to ask her to quit the school and marry, faculty members of Ginling arranged her to escape in Shanghai. Emily Honig, “Christianity, Feminism, and Communism,” p.129


56. Mrs. Lawrence Thurston and Ruth M. Chester, Ginling College, p.71.


58. Elsie Clark to Family, Oct. 15, 1916, folder 26, box 4, Elsie Clark Papers, RG142, Elsie Clark Papers, Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library.


60. Frances King to Father and Mother, June 8, 1925, folder entitled “Corres.1923–1927,” box 175, RG8, China Record Project, Special Collection, Yale Divinity School Library.


64. Margaret B. Speer to Family, June 21, 1927, in Margaret Bailey Speer, Like Good Steel, p.66.

65. Elsie Riek to Edona, June 28, 1927, folder 4, box 163, RG8, China Record Project, Special Collection, Yale Divinity School Library.


70. Matilda Thurston, “Ginling and University of Nanking,” September 8, 1928, folder 2845, box 143, RG 11, Special Collections, Yale Divinity Library.


72. Margaret Speer to Family, July 5, 1936, Margaret Bailey Speer, Like Good Steel, p.186.


