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# THE REGIME OF AUTHENTICITY: TIMELESSNESS, GENDER, AND NATIONAL HISTORY IN MODERN CHINA<sup>1</sup>

PRASENJIT DUARA

The Spartan song—“We are what you were, we will be what you are”—is, in its simplicity, the abridged hymn of every *patrie*.

—Ernest Renan, “What Is a Nation?”<sup>2</sup>

[W]hat I have tried to maintain for many years, is the effort to isolate some of the elements that might be useful for a history of truth. Not a history that would be concerned with what might be true in the fields of learning, but an analysis of the “games of truth,” the games of truth and error through which being is historically constituted as experience.

—Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*<sup>3</sup>

## ABSTRACT

While there is much writing on the nation as the subject of linear history, considerably less attention has been paid to the dimension of the nation as the always identifiable, unchanging subject of history. This unchanging subject is necessitated by the ascendancy of the conception of linear time in capitalism in which change is viewed not only as accelerating, but can no longer be framed by an ultimate source of meaning such as God. Ostensibly, linear history is the falling of events into the “river of time,” but national history also posits a continuous subject to gather these changes. Such a subject is recognizable only by the spiritual qualities of authenticity, purity, and sacrality. The nation-state and nationalists stake their claim to sovereign authority, in part, as custodians of this authenticity.

A range of figures, human and non-human, come to symbolize a regime of authenticity manipulable to some extent by nationalists and state-builders. This essay focuses on the instance of women in early twentieth-century China. Nationalists and cultural essentialists tended to depict women as embodying the eternal Chinese civilizational virtues of self-sacrifice and loyalty and to elevate them as national exemplars. The essay also examines cases of how women themselves may have perceived this role as exemplars and concludes that while there was considerable subversion in their enunciation of this role (to their advantage), there was sufficient reference to the prescriptive code of authenticity in their self-formation to sustain the regime of authenticity. The essay ends with some thoughts about the changing relationship between authenticity and intensifying globalization in the contemporary world.

1. I would like to thank Homi Bhabha, John Davidann, Joan Judge, Claudio Lomnitz, Viren Murthy, Brian Porter, Shu-mei Shih, Aram Yengoyan, and especially Haiyan Lee for their help.

2. Ernest Renan, “What Is a Nation?” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (London, 1990), 19.

3. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, volume 2, *The Use of Pleasure* (New York, 1985), 6-7.

The nation is the guardian of an unchanging truth it believes itself to embody. This self-conception of the nation's timelessness has been little understood in the scholarship of nationalism that has, at least since Benedict Anderson, better understood the nation as the agent or subject of linear history.<sup>4</sup> I want here to probe the relationship between the concepts of time and timelessness in national histories through what I call the "regime of authenticity." In the second part of the essay, I study the effects of this regime by focusing on the example of women as embodiments of authenticity in twentieth-century China.

### I. NATION AND HISTORY

The modern territorial nation and linear history have an intimate relationship. Indeed, one might say that they co-produce each other as the principal mode of belonging in the twentieth century. Individuals learn to identify with nation-states that have supposedly evolved over a long history to reach the self-conscious unity of the two and are thus poised to acquire mastery over the future. The linear history of modern nation-states projects a territorial entity (the nation) backwards in time as its subject (or actor or agent) which evolves or progresses to the present and future. In projecting the presently constituted or claimed territorial nation—the "geo-body" in Thongchai Winnichakul's apt neologism<sup>5</sup>—into the past, national histories seek to appropriate for the present nation-state the peoples, cultures, and territories which actually had scant relations with the old empires. The Chinese Republic (1912–1949) was no exception, claiming sovereignty over peoples in lands where the modern notion of sovereignty was irrelevant to the historical relationship between the Chinese imperial center and these local polities.<sup>6</sup>

To be sure, even within national history there is much contesting the nature of the national people. Whether one constitutes the people according to theories of the primordality of race, or language, or culture, or even class or religion, produces a significantly different profile of the nation and the geo-body (compare for instance early Kuomintang [KMT] maps with Chinese Communist Party [CCP] maps). But each of these contesting narratives makes its claim in the same linear historical mode. In the late Qing (1644–1911), revolutionary nationalists depicted the evolving nation in terms of the history of the awakening of a race in its opposition to other races. The constitutional reformers sought to create a wider nation by invoking the evolution of a common culture from the seeds of Confucianism and thus to incorporate the Manchus and other minorities, whereas the National Essence school emphasized recovering the originary unity of the linguistic community. In these narratives, the nation as a pre-existing unity, like

4. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991).

5. Thongchai Winnichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu, 1994).

6. Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago, 1995), chapter 1.

a species, is shown to have evolved since ancient times, overcome strife and obstacles—whether in the form of barbarism or superstition—in the middle period, and to be poised in its self-awareness to gain mastery in the competition among nations. Even the Chinese Communist Party, which sought to repudiate all older narratives of community as bogus and to establish the sovereignty of the working classes or “the people,” strove to depict the consciousness of the working masses in the same historical mode.

Why did this mode become so necessary for representing the nation from at least the end of the nineteenth century? There are several convergent reasons. Central among these is that the nation-state staked its sovereignty on the notion of the oneness of the territorial state and a self-conscious people (awakened to their primal unity). As Hegel strove to demonstrate, self-consciousness emerged only in societies with states that recorded and recognized their progress in history.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it was only territorial nations with historical self-consciousness which, in the world of competitive capitalist imperialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, claimed rights in the international system of sovereign states. Such nation-states claimed the freedom, even right, to destroy non-nations such as tribal polities and empires. This is how we can understand Hegel’s belief that the British defeat of China was not only inevitable, but necessary.<sup>8</sup> This observation also alerts us to another factor necessitating the historical mode for nation-states: its linear directionality made it future-oriented and performative. It was only through the evolution of self-consciousness that the nation would be *positioned* to move competitively into modernity. In other words, this mode of history is necessary for the nation-state because it is performative: its conception of the past enables it to propel the nation into a desired future direction.

But history is not only about linear evolution; it is also about timelessness.<sup>9</sup> To be recognizable as the *subject* of history, the core of the nation has to be unaffected by the passage of time. This core often refers to the unity of a people and

7. Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, transl. J. Sibree (New York, 1956), 2.

8. One might say that it is this three-way relationship between a people, a territory, and a history that distinguishes contemporary nationalism from other types of identitarian movements which preceded nationalism. Historically, communities, and not necessarily religious ones, have often had a strong sense of Self versus Other and had developed hard boundaries in relation to outsiders (Duara, *Rescuing History*, chapter 2). What these movements lacked was not self-consciousness or identity per se (contra Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Roger Rouse, “Questions of Identity: Personhood and Collectivity in Transnational Migration to the United States,” *Critique of Anthropology* 15 [1995], 351-380, and others), but the historical claim arising from the idea of a sovereign people within a delimited territory. Thus, Brian Porter has advised me that European nationalisms before the late nineteenth century—such as the Polish one—often identified the nation with a spirit, of, say, “freedom,” and not with a territorially bounded people. This appears to resemble Hegel’s spirit which manifests itself over a variety of spaces and times, but, of course, Hegel’s teleology assures its ultimate realization in the space-time of Prussia. Is this final moment in Hegel the point at which the relationship between spirit and space-time gets reversed? When does the geo-body begin to limit the scope of spirit of a people and become its only legitimate vehicle?

9. The unchanging subject is not timeless in the strict sense of being outside of time, but rather in the sense of being unaffected by time.

its territory. In the nation's evolution historical vicissitudes exist during which a people may be driven out of its territory or enslaved, or become separated and lose consciousness of its original unity. But the historical destiny of the nation lies in the fulfillment or restoration of this unity and sovereignty of a people. National history is fully teleological in that its ends are to be found in its beginnings.

Yet even the evidentiary pyrotechnics of nationalist history is inadequate to sustain the irony of "unity within change." This should come as no surprise given that historically, people did not think in terms of their unity for future nationalisms nor in terms of territorial sovereignty. Thus the unchanging unity of the nation over time, its timelessness, has to be marked by signs of its authenticity. The authenticity of this originary unity is demonstrated and guaranteed by the values of the pure, the honorable, the good, and the spiritual which the nation supposedly embodies. Their immateriality renders them insusceptible to historical corrosion.

Ernest Renan, who confronted the problem of the nation's history as early as 1882, decisively rejected the idea of a materialistic determination of a nation whether by language, race, or geography. He stressed the role of "human will" in its formation. "Man is everything in the formation of this sacred thing which is called a people. Nothing [purely] material suffices for it."<sup>10</sup> What he calls the soul or the spiritual principle of the nation is none other than the

will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. Man, Gentlemen, does not improvise. The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice and devotion . . . The Spartan song—"We are what you were, we will be what you are"—is, in its simplicity, the abridged hymn of every *patrie*.<sup>11</sup>

It is significant that the spiritual principle enabling this continuity is the *will* to live together in the present, the will which mandates the necessary forgetting of the mixed and bloody origins of nations.<sup>12</sup> Here it is none other than human will—the will of the present projected unchanged into the past and future—that constitutes the *telos* of national history.

## II. THE APORIAS OF TIME AND THE ORDER OF AUTHENTICITY

The split or *aporia* in linear history (especially, but not only, of the nation) between evolution and progressive mastery of the future on the one hand, and the unchanging essence of the past on the other, is a problem that is structurally distinctive to it. Linear history embodies a notion of time where all is flux; but it also locates an unchanging core at the heart of change. Many analysts of nationalism have observed this split in the time of the nation, but since few have viewed it as

10. Renan, "What is a Nation?," 18.

11. *Ibid.*, 19.

12. *Ibid.*, 11, 15.

a problem rooted in the phenomenology of linear time, they have a partial understanding of it.

Thus, for instance, Partha Chatterjee has discussed it as a dual tendency among nation-states particularly in the colonial world: the forward march to modernity expresses the aspiration to join the ranks of global capitalist nations, and the emphasis on distinctive traditions reflects a desire to defy this order.<sup>13</sup> He has also shown how Indian nationalists developed the notion of a realm of inner sovereignty incorporating the core traditions of the nation. Within this inner realm Indian nationalists were unchallengeable, unlike their situation in the public realm of political and economic nationalism where they faced unequal competition with their British colonial masters.<sup>14</sup> Chatterjee, however, does not seek to provide an explanation of how and why this aporia emerged.

Joseph Levenson, who made a similar distinction between history and value among Chinese nationalists, did provide an explanation which is psychologically particularistic.<sup>15</sup> Levenson's interpretation of the modern construction of "eternal tradition" in China was that it was psychologically comforting to modern Chinese intellectuals who needed to assert the particularity of Chinese history in the face of the overwhelming superiority of scientific civilization and values. While this may have been true for some intellectuals at some times and places, the reconstruction of tradition had other meanings and functions not reducible to salving the inferiority complex of Chinese intellectuals. All nations and societies that see themselves as subjects progressing or evolving through linear time need to constitute an "unchanging core" in order to recognize themselves in their ever-changing circumstances. Hence the role of sacred national symbols or core values in Britain or France or America as embodied in royalty, the constitution, or, simply, in tradition.

Modern linear history is distinguished from traditional histories principally in that the meaning that the latter almost always seek in history refers to an earlier, presumed existent ideal or to a transcendent time of god. Traditional historiography mostly has a cyclical structure whereby time will reproduce, return to, or approximate a "known certainty." Linear history often dispenses with god and replaces it with the model of a unified actor—the subject, the nation—moving forward in time conquering uncharted territories.

The historical transition from the transcendent time of god to the secular, linear history of modern society is the subject of a masterly treatment by J. G. A. Pocock in *The Machiavellian Moment*.<sup>16</sup> Simply put, the "Machiavellian moment" refers to the relationship of virtue to history. Both Christian and Re-

13. Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (London, 1986).

14. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, 1993).

15. Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1965).

16. J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975).

naissance humanist conceptions of time saw true meaning in the divine or rational virtue that they thought existed outside time, in distinction to the secular or temporal time of history. These conceptions were unable to develop a theory of history, or what Pocock calls historicism: natural law was rational, unchanging, and true; history was irrational, fickle, and corrupting. The “Machiavellian moment” consists in deferring the inevitable collapse or corruption of virtue in mundane time by fostering as much civic virtue as possible. In Puritan America, this deferral of corruption was sustained by various strategies, such as imperialism and the spread of yeoman property ownership, which promised to extend civic virtue. However, the Puritan extension of timeless grace into this temporal world moved some way toward developing a genuine secular history through the search for the kingdom of god on earth—the city on the hill. But although it transmutes into a proto-modern history, Pocock argues that right through the nineteenth century, this old-world preoccupation with virtue as a sacred, rational, and timeless value persisted in America, and the vision of history as dynamic and creative in its “linear capacity to bring about incessant qualitative transformations of human life” found it difficult to appear.<sup>17</sup>

Pocock provides a historical perspective from which to understand the transformation of the relationship between the timeless as virtuous or sacred and the temporal as ultimately corrosive, even though I do not concur with his rather panglossian vision of linear history. Certainly the Chinese conception of the dynastic cycle embeds something very like the Machiavellian moment in the cycle of virtue and corruption; indeed, the Tongzhi Restoration (1861) has been interpreted precisely as an effort to extend the regime of virtue in the face of impending collapse. Pocock leaves us without much help, however, with regard to the question of what happens to timeless virtue when linear histories become hegemonic in the era of capitalism and nation-states. As we have seen, the meaning of history is not wholly or simply the “incessant qualitative transformations of human life”; the unchanging may not have the dominant role it once played in traditional histories, but it has not disappeared.<sup>18</sup> Let me explain why.

Born amid the loss of a known, if hard to attain, certainty, linear history emerges within a linear, pre-existing conception of time into which it can be seen to fall or unfold.<sup>19</sup> It cannot, therefore, rid itself of the anxieties of a linear con-

17. *Ibid.*, 551.

18. Johannes Fabian sees much greater continuity between modern linear time and sacred time. In linear time, Judeo-Christian time is secularized, generalized, and universalized, but it is the message that is transformed, not the elements of its code. The code consists of faith in a “covenant between Divinity and one people, trust in divine providence as it unfolds in a history of salvation centered on one Savior. . . . They stress the specificity of Time, its realization in a given cultural ecology. . . .” (Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* [New York, 1983], 2). Fabian is concerned with anthropology’s concept of time which, having absorbed the Judeo-Christian conception, remains a knowledge that is superior to and different from the time of the savage (*ibid.*, 10, 26-27). Here timelessness is displaced from the self and becomes a property of the savage; secular time becomes “a means to occupy space, a title conferring on its holders the right to ‘save’ the expanse of the world for history” (*ibid.*, 146).

19. Moishe Postone has usefully clarified the differences between capitalist and precapitalist conceptions of time as the difference between time as an independent variable in capitalism and a dependent variable in the latter. As an independent variable, capitalist time is conceived as pre-existing and

ception of time. According to Paul Ricoeur, the concept of linear time posits a series of nows, of unrelated instants. The anxiety—the sorrow for the fleeting past, the dread of the future (*distentio* in St. Augustine, inauthenticity in Heidegger)—associated with this linear representation of time cannot be fully overcome by the phenomenological philosophy of time nor by narratives of continuity. The aporias of time—the disjuncture between the past and the present as well as the incommensurability between time as flux and time as eternal—persist.<sup>20</sup> Linear history has to develop an artifice which allows historians to narrate over the succession of “nows,” to negotiate or conceal this aporia. This artifice is none other than the *subject* of history—the nation, race, or class. The subject enables history to be the living essence of the past, but also simultaneously to be free from the hold of the past: that which evolves is that which remains even as it changes.<sup>21</sup> Thus the subject is a figure which is necessary for linear history both from a phenomenological and a political point of view.

We have seen that the unchanging essence of the past is often endowed with a special aura of sanctity, purity, and authenticity at the heart of the modern discourse of progressive change (a discourse that is entirely synchronous with the quickening pace of change—the transformative drive—of global capitalism). It is possible to think of the aporia of linear history as demarcating two regimes—those of capitalism and of (national or transnational) authenticity—which institute two poles of authority. Linear, measurable time is necessary for capitalism where time is money, but the corrosive effects of capitalism (where all that is solid melts into air) is also made visible by this very conception of time. It is not simply the disruption caused by rapid material change that necessitates the production of an abiding truth. Ultimately the dominant temporal conception exposes this change as having no goal or meaning—as being a mere “series of nows”—and necessitates a continuous subject of history to shore up certitudes. This shows itself particularly in the importance of claims to national sovereignty.

The opposition between authenticity and capitalism is an old one and I need to outline the specificity of my argument. The tradition of modern writing on “authenticity” tends to locate it as the positive (both ethically and ontologically),

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an abstract measure of events and processes (such as labor) whereas the “concrete” time of precapitalist societies is dependent upon and shaped by events. The former is linear in direction, whereas the latter is characterized less by direction than by its dependent status (Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory* [Cambridge, Eng., 1993], 200-201).

20. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago, 1988), III, 138-141; (Chicago, 1984), I, 1-30. Jacques Derrida has called the elusive “now” which is always either being-past or being-future, the “intemporal kernel of time, the nonmodifiable nucleus of temporal modification, the inalterable form of temporalization.” There is an imperative to see the “now” as being-present, as being unaffected by time and Derrida observes that the now, the present, beings, substance, and essence, are all linked in meaning to the form of the present participle. (Jacques Derrida, “Ousia and Gramme: Note on a Note from Being and Time,” in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, transl. Alan Bass [Chicago, 1992], 40).

21. Note that because the historical subject cannot fully overcome the aporias of time, it is an aporetic subject, embodying progressive change on the one hand, and timelessness—of concern to us here—on the other.



if fleeting or evanescent, term in the opposition between the self and the market or modernity. Alessandro Ferrara argues that it derives from Rousseau's notion of authenticity as "man in the state of nature." The tradition develops through the thought of Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and in such contemporary thinkers as Daniel Bell and Christopher Lasch, who deplore the corrosion of authenticity and the reduction of self to pure exteriority.<sup>22</sup> Notably this tradition focuses on authenticity of the self or personhood. Ferrara also identifies an assumption of authenticity in the thought of social thinkers like Marx or Durkheim, whether it is located in the concept of the worker or the "species being" or in ideas of community or "gemeinschaft." Here the role of such concepts as Marx's "alienation," Weber's "rationalization," or Durkheim's "anomie" seem to indicate that authenticity is under constant threat of erasure. Most of all, for all of these thinkers, the loss of authenticity spells the destruction of social identity.<sup>23</sup>

The authenticity I want to explore refers neither to an ontological category nor primarily to selfhood. Authenticity in my formulation refers primarily to an order or regime which invokes various representations of authoritative inviolability. A regime of authenticity derives its authority from "being good for all times," which is tantamount to being beyond the reach of time. My understanding of authenticity differs fundamentally from the modern conception which depicts authenticity as an attribute of some endangered *being*; on my view, authenticity refers to a regime of power that repeatedly constitutes itself as the locus of authority—akin to Foucault's "games of truth." The hegemony of linear time accompanying the transforming drive of capitalism necessitates the repeated constitution of an unchanging subject of history—a regime which stands outside time—precisely because this very combination of capital and linear time erodes it and simultaneously exposes the spectacle of this erosion.

So far I have deliberately spoken of the regime of authenticity without human actors—as if it had an automaticity. I do believe that the predominance of linear time internalized by those in nation-states necessitated the production of the timeless authentic subject. The fundamental aporia of linear time is expressed in the nation-state's need to reconcile the demands of an unchanging unity of nationhood with a changing modern future. But this need is recognized by particular agents most interested in constituting and policing the regime of authenticity, namely, representatives of the national community (such as nationalist intellectuals) or the state. These agents do not simply balance or police the boundaries between the regimes of authenticity and the market, although they do both; rather, they underwrite a complex relationship between the two orders. To be sure, there is no shortage of instances where authenticity is mobilized to oppose capitalism and modernity, as fundamentalist and nativist movements the world over (whether it be the Taliban or Showa Restorationists) have shown. However, the regime of authenticity authorizes a range of representational prac-

22. Alessandro Ferrara, *Modernity and Authenticity: A Study of the Social and Ethical Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Albany, 1993), 30, 148-150.

23. *Ibid.*, 47-50, 86-90.

tices which are in constant traffic with the practices of the capitalist order, a traffic which produces an elaborate economy of authorization and delegitimation, and which the nation-state would like to control.

### III. NATION-STATE, AUTHENTICITY, AND GENDER

The question of the nation's historical unity is, of course, inseparable from the problem of its contemporary diversity. The idea of a collective actor or subject—the self-conscious, sovereign nation-people—that a national history ultimately presupposes is actually always being challenged whether through counterhistories or through political opposition by different ethnicities, races, classes, or other expressions of difference. The demand of the nation-state that we exist first and foremost as national subjects turns out to be a demand that is mostly hortatory. The nation-state exhorts its citizens to “ask not what the nation can do for you, but what you can do for the nation.” In reminding us that we exist first and foremost for the nation, representatives of the nation-state strive every day to *produce* the idea that the nation is prior to its citizens. The regime of authenticity contributes significantly to this production through representations that depict the priority of the nation. Because they picture the nation as inviolable, these representations are able to preempt challenges to the nation.

The subject of history is identified with that which is authentic and pure and with associated notions of honor, morality, and spirituality. It is the order of the sacred within the secular, the essence of the past in the present. Perhaps the best known signifier that incarnates the authenticity of the primordial nation is the national flag; there is perhaps no other symbol whose desecration incites such strong feelings of dishonor. In China, some of the more familiar representational practices that sustain the order of authenticity include the movement in politics and culture to identify essences and search for roots. Some of these include the early twentieth-century search for “national essence” associated with Zhang Taiyan, the National Culture of Hu Shi, the New Life essentialism in KMT, the folkloric or people's culture movement among communists and non-communists, the “native place” or “search for roots” literature in more recent times, and what Rey Chow has called “primitive passions” in contemporary Chinese cinema.<sup>24</sup>

What kinds of beings or objects are selected to represent the authentic? To be sure, the authentic tends to be differently represented by different powers (whether it be the nation-state or nationalist intellectuals or militarists) and at different moments in time (depending, say, upon whether the women's movement has flowered or whether the aboriginal has been domesticated by state-making).

24. Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York, 1995), 21-23. There is a growing literature about nostalgia in modern nationalism embodied in the genre of “homeland” literature, which is related to, but differs from, my analysis. See for instance Marilyn Ivy's lucid and representative Freudian analysis of the “discourses of the vanishing” in modern Japan (Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* [Chicago, 1995]). Simply put, the logic of nostalgia follows that of the fetish and is an effort to make whole by a substitute representation of the lost object, even as the representation signifies

But in general there appear to be two desiderata for the role: that the representation produce deep affect, and that it be denied agency in the public realm. While the requirement that agency be denied should point to objects and institutions, such as the American Constitution or the memorialization of martyrs, a living embodiment of authenticity appears to be able to move people more. Thus it is that woman, the child, the rustic, the aboriginal, and royalty often embody the purported authenticity of the nation. Each has been associated with deep, although different, symbolic affects in various historical cultures, including women's ability to connote motherhood or virginity; innocence and naturalness suggested by children and the primitive; the rootedness invoked by peasants; and timelessness located in royalty. Of course the problem with living embodiments as opposed to inert objects is that the "real life" agency of the former might challenge the representation of their timelessness, as well as that their lives will change in time and so too what emotions they can evoke.

To be sure, such a problem also arises with representative objects such as a constitution, a monument, or a flag. Here it is their changing meaning or interpretation that must be discounted, as can be seen in the effort to restore the original intent of the U.S. Constitution. The historicity of certain social practices or traditions like annual festivals can be obscured by their pace of change which is not synchronous with change in other spheres. But the most powerful embodiments, the human ones, are also the most ephemeral, since their risk of not living up to the unchanging ideal in time is considerable. These symbolic figures must be encased or contained within representational and, often, physical or spatial apparatuses that conceal their lived reality: the home, the reservation, or the castle. Even so, when, for instance, the women's movement seeks to blur the line between the domestic and the public, the embodiment of authenticity must be found in someone other than women.

In the remainder of this article I will focus on the representation of woman—in body and spirit—as a very significant site upon which regimes and elites in China responsible for charting the destiny of the nation have sought to locate the unchanging essence and moral purity of that nation. I want to show how and why women became this privileged site in China, and to probe a few instances of how the female representation of the authenticity of the nation may have affected the subjectivity of women and shaped the social understanding of gender roles.

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that the lack perdures. Note that unless there is a recognition of actual loss, one cannot have nostalgia. The attitude that underpins authenticity in my understanding is not necessarily one of nostalgia or mourning, but a range of feelings about the possible erosion of the true. They include fear, militancy, heightened devotion, discipline, self-abnegation, dutifulness, and vigilance. Moreover, loss is not only existential but may be experienced as dishonor, desecralization, and defilement (by commodification or sexualization). To the extent that the objects of nostalgia are essentialized as the truth of the nation—as for instance with the "native place"—the logic of nostalgia described by Ivy and others presents a particular mode within the regime of authenticity.

Recent studies of gender histories in the West (and especially in Latin America<sup>25</sup>) have shown how women and their bodies, systematically excluded from the public sphere during much of the modern period,<sup>26</sup> have served as a crucial medium for the inscription and naturalization of national power. “Explored, mapped, conquered, and raped, the female body and its metaphorical extension, the home, become the symbols of honor, loyalty, and purity, to be guarded by men.”<sup>27</sup> In Japan, the historical model of the self-sacrificing and frugal samurai woman became generalized as the model of feminine virtue in the Meiji era for the entire nation.<sup>28</sup> However, by the 1920s, the Modern Girl, active in the public sphere of work and politics, came to threaten “the patriarchal family and its ideological support, the deferring woman who was presented in state ideology as the ‘Good Wife and Wise Mother.’”<sup>29</sup> According to Miriam Silverberg, she became the symbol of all that was non-Japanese and modern in contrast to the Meiji image of the woman who served as “‘the repository of the past,’ standing for tradition when men were encouraged to change their way of politics and culture in all ways.”<sup>30</sup> The Modern Girl of the 1920s became the target of conservatives appalled by rapid change all around them, but she became so only because she, no less than the Meiji woman, occupied a special place within the regime of authenticity, a place she was beginning defiantly to transgress.

In China, the representation of woman as the essence of national virtue was dramatized most clearly during wartime when the imagery of the raped woman came to represent the defiled purity of the invaded nation. Wartime literature was so full of this motif that the woman writer Xiao Hong even sought to subvert it by having her protagonist be raped by a Chinese man in the midst of the anti-Japanese resistance (1931–1945).<sup>31</sup> Moreover, as work on wartime popular culture reveals, the resistance, no matter how modernist in ideology, tended to revert to traditional dramatic motifs of the fallen, heroic, or sacrificed heroine to represent the invaded nation. But the motif is by no means restricted to wartime.<sup>32</sup>

25. Anna Maria Alonso, “Gender, Power and Historical Memory: Discourses of *Serrano* Resistance,” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan Scott (New York, 1992); Jennifer Schirmer, “The Claiming of Space and the Body Politic within National-Security States: The Plaza de Mayo Madres and the Greenham Common Women,” in *Remapping Memory: The Politics of Timespace*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin (Minneapolis, 1994), 185-220.

26. Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1988).

27. Schirmer, “The Claiming of Space,” 196.

28. Sharon H. Nolte and Sally Ann Hastings, “The Meiji State’s Policy Toward Women, 1890–1910,” in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley, 1991), 171-172.

29. Miriam Silverberg, “The Modern Girl as Militant,” in *Recreating Japanese Women*, ed. Bernstein, 263.

30. *Ibid.*, 264. My essay is also a response to a question that has followed me since childhood, namely, why did modern Indian women wear the saree, while men dressed in Western clothes.

31. Lydia Liu, “The Female Body and Nationalist Discourse: *The Field of Life and Death* Revisited,” in *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, ed. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (Minneapolis, 1995).

32. Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937–1945* (Berkeley, 1994); Poshok Fu, *Passivity, Resistance and Collaboration: Intellectual Choices in Occupied Shanghai, 1937–1945* (Stanford, 1993).

## IV. NATIONALIST PATRIARCHY

Early nationalists and reformers in the first decades of twentieth-century China were committed to the liberation of women. But they were also committed to a vision of abiding national virtue which they tended to locate in women more often than in men. The principal reason for this was that most of these nationalists and reformers emerged from the habitus of the gentry and inherited the patriarchal traditions of this society and its ideals of womanly virtue. Contemporary research on late imperial China shows the pervasiveness of the rhetoric of female virtue and sacrifice, exemplified most particularly in the cult of chaste widows and virtuous wives.<sup>33</sup> This patriarchal legacy was evident and sustained in the heightened concern with preserving female virtues during the early twentieth century when the increasing integration of China into global capitalism produced rapid change in gender relations among urban families. “Virtuous and chaste girls’ schools” (*zhennü yixue; baonü yixueyuan*) sprouted everywhere in this period, and the journals about women, such as the *Fünü Zazhi* of the early 1920s, were filled with anxious essays about the problem of gender mixing.<sup>34</sup> Female virtue became a metonym for Chinese civilizational truths.

This legacy can also be seen in the efforts of nationalists to improve the status of women under the higher goal of national strengthening. Abolition of foot-binding, women’s education, and the need for prenatal care became major issues in the reform movement of the late nineteenth century led by Kang Youwei and his colleagues, because, as Kazuko Ono writes, these issues became “linked to the nation’s survival or demise, its strength or weakness, through the education of children.”<sup>35</sup> While there were some notable efforts by women writers themselves to dissociate women’s liberation from the national cause,<sup>36</sup> throughout most of the twentieth century the legitimacy of the former continued to remain dependent on the latter. Like many other early twentieth-century patriarchal nationalisms, women were to be liberated for and by the nation; they were to embody the nation, not to be active agents shaping it.

Even as this nationalism was authenticated, or rather, authenticized by appropriating certain ideals of womanly virtue from historical patriarchy, this rhetoric was simultaneously infused with values from the progressive discourses of modern nationalism. Women were to participate as modern citizens in the public

33. See Katherine Carlitz, “Desire, Danger, and the Body: Stories of Women’s Virtue in Late Ming China,” in *Engendering China: Women, Culture and the State*, ed. Christina Gilmartin et al. (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), 101-124; Susan Mann, “Widows in the Kinship, Class and Community Structures of Qing Dynasty China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 46 (1987), 37-56; Mark Elvin, “Female Virtue and the State in China,” *Past and Present* 104 (1984), 111-152.

34. See for example, Yan Shi, “Nannü tongxue yu lian’ai shang de zhidao” [Co-education and guidance on amorous relationships], *Fünü zazhi* 9, no. 10 (1923); Wang Zhuomin, “Lun wuguo daxue shang buyi nannü tongxiao” [On the inappropriateness of co-education in our universities], *Fünü zazhi* 4, no. 5 (1918).

35. Kazuko Ono, *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850–1950*, ed. and transl. Joshua Fogel (Stanford, 1989), 27.

36. See *Jindai Zhongguo nüquan yundong shiliao 1842–1911* [Documents on feminist movements in modern China, 1842–1911], ed. Li Younging and Zhang Yufa, 2 vols. (Taipei, 1975), 463-467.

sphere of the nation, but they were also expected to personify the essence of the national tradition. I use the expression “nationalist patriarchy” to specify this depiction of woman as the “soul of tradition-within-modernity.”<sup>37</sup> Nationalist patriarchy is dominated by the tension between the desire to modernize (the lives of women as well) and to conserve the truth of their regime in the bodies of women.

Consider a lecture by the leading KMT nationalist Wang Jingwei in a girls’ school in 1924 which addresses the contemporary discussion of feminine purity and civilizational truth as much as questions of social reform. Wang observes that the conflict between the old and the new in society can be seen as the clash between the school, which is the nucleus of the new thought, and the family, which preserves the old ways. He urges that in order for China to progress in this competitive world of nation-states, it is important for students to take control over society and reform its evil customs. He recognizes that it is easy for them to succumb to the control of the family and be assimilated into traditional social roles, but he implores them not to take this path. He suggests that it is particularly important for girls’ schools to nourish a spirit of social reform among their students since in their present state they stand as obstacles to national progress.<sup>38</sup>

Having framed his talk within the evolutionary discourse of modernity, Wang’s second theme is about the importance of choosing the right kind of education. He suggests that although Chinese tradition includes a lot that is bad, it has one strength: the cultivation of a long tradition of self-sacrifice (*xisheng*) among females, whether in their natal home where they willingly sacrificed their happiness for the sake of their parents, or for the sake of their husbands after marriage, or for the sake of their sons in old age. Doubtless, the old society often used this blind self-sacrifice to bury women’s freedom. But women should know that the responsibility of the individual is heavy and should not be exploited (*liyong*) by society. If they sacrifice themselves out of true conviction (*zhengzhende qinggan*), then such conduct is proper, and, indeed, highly admirable. This spirit of self-sacrifice actually forms the indispensable basis of all morality—Confucian, Buddhist, and Christian.

Chinese women are rich in the spirit of self-sacrifice. If we can properly direct this spirit towards . . . [the collectivity] and use it, then we can on the one hand, perhaps preserve a little of the essence [jingsui] of the teachings of several thousand years, and on the other, still plant the roots of modern liberatory thought. In seeking education for girls I hope we can uphold our mission to inherit the past to enlighten posterity [chengxian qihou].<sup>39</sup>

37. The expression “nationalist patriarchy” is taken from Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*.

38. Wang Jingwei, “Duiyu nüjiede ganxiang” [Reflections on women’s world] in *Funiu zazhi* 10, no. 1 (1924), 106-107.

39. *Ibid.*, 108. The notion of self-sacrifice, of course, pervades this entire topic and deserves more discussion. Several scholars (Renan; Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* [Chicago, 1995], 216-218; John D. Kelly, “Diaspora and World War, Blood and Nation in Fiji and Hawai’i,” *Public Culture* 7 [1995], 489) have argued that self-sacrifice is critical to establishing the claim to nationhood. Martyrdom is the root sacrificial form that sanctions and sanctifies rights for the wronged. Historically, the sacrifice of the pure and authentic often redeemed the desire for wealth, lust, and power (Richard Von Glahn, “The

The Chinese woman for Wang is not only a modern citizen but also the locus of unchanging authenticity. Nationalist patriarchy demands a self-sacrificing woman as the symbol of national essence.

Note, however, the different representational strategies for containing or framing woman's authenticity in Chinese and Indian nationalist patriarchies. In India, according to Chatterjee, the realm of inner sovereignty constructed by the nationalists became located in the home, and woman became idealized as the bearer of the most sacred values of this inner space. Thus, from our point of view, Indian national patriarchy evolved a spatial representation which contained women's authenticity within the domestic space so that its corrosion in real life could not be scrutinized in the public sphere. In contrast, the authenticity of woman in Wang's patriarchal model does not use a spatial strategy, but rather depends upon historical representations. Thus, while twentieth-century women were not necessarily discouraged from involvement in the public sphere, nationalist patriarchy in China sought to mobilize the weight of these historical representations to discipline women's bodies within the public sphere as figures of self-sacrifice. We shall see this in several examples below.

The tension within nationalist patriarchy inherent in the notion of woman as the soul of tradition-within-modernity is most visible in conservative Chinese nationalism, but it was also present, albeit more subtly, among other nationalists in China. The May 4th representation of the radically anti-Confucian, indeed, anti-familial, nationalist woman, would on first glance appear to repudiate "nationalist patriarchy." Indeed, these two conflicting representations of women yielded a great deal of violence in the 1920s and 1930s—especially after the split between the KMT and CCP in 1927—when thousands of "modern" women were killed by the KMT forces because they were accused of "free love," or sometimes simply because they had bobbed hair, unbound feet, or a local reputation for opposing familial authority.<sup>40</sup> While they were surely killed because they were marked by these signs as communist (whether or not they were), the causal logic worked in both directions. Communism itself was illegitimate significantly because such women and their behavior despoiled the innermost purity of Chinese culture.

One might thus expect the inheritors of the radical tradition of the May the Fourth movement, the Chinese Communist Party, to have dispensed with this traditional image of the self-sacrificing woman, especially given their commitment to progressive work among women. Yet they too found the figure of woman to be a most amenable site to locate a communist or nationalist essence in the march towards progress. While the communists were opposed to capitalism, their conception of progress necessarily entailed a "continuous revolution" in society.

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Enchantment of Wealth: The God Wutong in the Social History of Jiangnan," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 51 [1991]). The same mechanism may perhaps be at work in the national martyr, but the sacrificial action here also produces the authentic.

40. Norma Diamond, "Women under Kuomintang Rule: Variations on the Feminine Mystique," *Modern China* 1 (1975), 6-7.

Even more, as extreme proponents of linear history, they ironically risked producing still greater anxiety by exposing the spectacle of erosion that more moderate versions concealed. Thus despite the communist will to repudiate the entire past, to forge ahead and master the future, they still needed to identify an abiding communist-nationalist essence and anchor it within the individual self. The feminist Meng Yue argues that in PRC literature before 1980, the triumph of class struggle was secured through the figure of the de-sexed, un-bodied woman—the figure of purity. Ideally, both men and women gained their sense of the authentic communist self (the self which realizes the abiding, if latent, collectivism and selflessness of the propertyless) through the model of the self-denying, sacrificing, sexless woman. Meng writes, “On the one hand, the state’s political discourse translated itself through women into the private context of desire, love, marriage, divorce and familial relations, and on the other, it turned woman into an agent politicizing desire, love, and family relations by delimiting and repressing sexuality, self and all private emotions.”<sup>41</sup>

Meng Yue’s analysis is not directly concerned with the problem of timeless authenticity, but we can see that not only did the woman she describes enshrine all that was pure and true in communist discourse, she also symbolized that unchanging core—the stillness of the true—whereby communism could recognize itself in the march of change. Thus Meng Yue’s study shows that the project of authenticity cannot be equated with tradition, nor is its advocacy limited only to conservatives. It is a problem of societies living under the hegemony of linear time. The tendency for women to play this role in socialist China as much as in the early nationalist patriarchies has, I believe, to do with the abiding power of historical discourses of women (subterranean in the communist case), and second, with the absence of any political agency among women as gendered beings.<sup>42</sup> In both societies, it is their passivity, their being spoken for, that represents the political meaning of their gender.

#### V. THE SOCIAL LIFE OF EMBODIED AUTHENTICITY

How is woman as a figure of authenticity received in society? While a comprehensive response to this question is impossible in this essay, I select three cases to suggest how the question might be more meaningfully specified according to differences by gender and social circumstances. Further, where this figure does affect real women, these cases suggest how the tension between citizenship and authenticity, so important in nationalist patriarchy, is played out in their lives.

Lu Xun’s story “Soap” (1924) uses fiction to present a dense social and psychological analysis of the figure of woman as the soul of “tradition within moder-

41. Meng Yue, “Female Images and National Myth,” in *Gender Politics in Modern China*, ed. Tani E. Barlow (Durham, N. C., 1993), 118.

42. See Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, “From Gender Erasure to Gender Difference: State Feminism, Consumer Sexuality, and a Feminist Public Sphere in China,” forthcoming in *Spaces of Their Own: Women’s Public Sphere in Transnational China*, ed. Mayfair Yang (University of Minnesota Press, 1998).



nity,” and especially, of the different meanings this figure might have had for men and women in Republican China. In the story Simin has bought a cake of foreign, scented soap for his wife. His wife is pleased but also embarrassed by the coded message for her to make herself cleaner and more alluring. When Simin had wanted to open the soap packaging at the store to check its quality, he was taunted by some schoolgirls with bobbed hair by a foreign word he does not understand (it turns out to be “old fool”). Highly agitated, he now orders his school-going son to check its meaning and begins to rave and rant about the moral havoc that the new schools are wreaking on China, especially the schools for girls. He says,

Just think it is already in very poor taste the way women wander up and down the streets, and now they want to cut their hair as well. Nothing disgusts me as much as these short-haired schoolgirls. What I say is: There is some excuse for soldiers and bandits, but these girls are the ones who turn everything upside down. They ought to be very severely dealt with indeed. . . .<sup>43</sup>

Simin then goes on to contrast this behavior with that of a filial beggar girl of eighteen or nineteen begging outside a store who turned over all the money she received to her blind grandmother. The crowds that gathered to watch the two not only did not give much money, but made jeering remarks about how she would not be bad at all if one scrubbed her up with two cakes of soap. Simin sees this as evidence of the catastrophic decline of morality in modern China. Later at dinner, when Simin’s wife can no longer take Simin’s irritability, she hints that he secretly harbors sexual longing for the beggar girl which he tries to cover up by exalting her filial and self-sacrificing conduct. In utter frustration, she exclaims, “If you buy her another cake and give her a good scrubbing, then worship her, the whole world will be at peace.”<sup>44</sup> Later, she adds, “We women are much better than you men. If you men are not cursing eighteen or nineteen-year-old girl students, you are praising eighteen or nineteen-year-old girl beggars: such dirty minds you have. . . .”<sup>45</sup>

At this moment, Simin is rescued from this tirade by the arrival of some friends who have come to remind him about the urgent need to publicize the title of the essay and poetry contest for their Moral Reform Literary Society (*Yifeng Wenshe*). The title of the essay had already been drafted as “To beg the President to issue an order for the promotion of the Confucian classics and the worship of the mother of Mencius, in order to revive this moribund world and preserve our national character.” Thinking about the beggar woman, Simin suggests that the poem should be titled the “Filial Daughter” to eulogize her and criticize society. In the following exchange one of his friends laughs uproariously upon hearing the jeering comments about giving her a good scrubbing. Simin is acutely pained

43. Lu Xun, “Feizao” [Soap] in *Lu Xun Quanji* (*Lu Xun Quanji chubanshe*, n.p., 1924), II, 193. English translation in *Selected Stories of Lu Hsun*, transl. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (New York, 1960), 167.

44. *Ibid.*, (1924), 199; *Ibid.*, (1960), 171.

45. *Ibid.*, (1924), 200; *Ibid.*, (1960), 171.

by his friend's laughter, because as Lu Xun hints, it suggests to him the truth of his wife's words that he has repressed.

Lu Xun sets up the duality between Chinese and foreign, East and West, old and new as the basic framework of the story. The foreign and new—schoolgirls, bobbed-hair, modern education, English words, the heavy sound of leather shoes worn by Simin's son—are an intrusive and disruptive presence for Simin. Lu focuses our attention on the power of a new (if mere) *commodity*, soap, to disturb his protagonist by its capacity to arouse desire, and throw his world out of kilter. It is clear that what Simin finds most disturbing is the unmooring of gender and sexual norms by the changes he sees around him. He responds not only with vituperative rhetoric against the need for girls to go to school (thus keeping them within the domestic sphere), but by valorizing the conduct of the pure and filial beggar-woman. For Simin she represents everything that is eternal and pure in Chinese tradition and he wants the poetry contest to immortalize her purity. This effort to restore the moral authenticity of the nation via the beggar-woman thus has to exalt her poverty (filial even in desperate need) and de-sexualize her as the object of men's (especially his) desire.

As Carolyn Brown has pointed out, the one person in *Soap* who is able to see through this trope of woman is none other than the only woman unrepresented by the male characters—Simin's wife. Brown writes, "with the character Mrs. Simin, he (Lu) empowers a semi-traditional woman with speech and the capacity to 're-read the male text,' making her the locus of his own value."<sup>46</sup> Thus, with characteristic irony, Lu Xun suggests a robust skepticism towards the project of authenticity among those like Mrs. Simin who could well have been objectified by this project. The reader will not miss the final irony of Mrs. Simin being given voice by Lu Xun, the man.

My second instance is of a woman, a nationalist, writing in 1903 about the future of Chinese women. Calling herself only a "certain southern woman," this nationalist accepts all the historical pieties and clichés about women. She declares that three special qualities of Chinese women will allow them to surpass the women of Europe and America. Women have the heart of steadfastness (*jianzhi xin*), the heart of benevolence (*cai xin*), but also the heart of vengefulness (*baofu xin*). As in Wang's speech above, she recounts the constancy with which women give their love as filial daughters and chaste wives despite the severe restraints of a patriarchal ideology. If only women were enlightened about the value of the nation, they could transfer this steadfast love and undying loyalty to the nation. Similarly, if with their heart of benevolence and compassion, women could achieve education and participate equally in public affairs, then the nation would certainly have equality, public harmony, and love of the race, which China so utterly lacks. Finally, the label of women as vengeful is turned to national advantage. Although it is said that a woman's heart is most poisonous,

46. Carolyn T. Brown, "Woman as Trope: Gender and Power in Lu Xun's 'Soap,'" in *Gender Politics in Modern China*, ed. Barlow, 77. I would like to acknowledge my debt to Carolyn Brown's reading of "Soap" which inspired my own analysis.

the southern woman regards it as women's exceptional virtue (*te meixing*). The Chinese people lack a sense of hatred for, and can even collaborate with, their conquerors. But once women can learn about the brutality of the alien Manchus, their thirst for revenge will strengthen their hatred and cause them to devise plans to oppose them.<sup>47</sup>

On a first reading the text does all that we have suggested above. Nationalist patriarchy appears to have succeeded not only in instilling or preserving historical patriarchy's stereotypes of essential female values in the self-representation of this woman, but also to have elicited her desire to contribute these timeless qualities to the national cause. However, a closer reading reveals that the southern woman is engaging in a strategic rereading of nationalism in order to empower women. Each of the categories she discusses has been a means of subjecting women, not only in the sense of subordinating them, but also by giving them the only categories to think their subjectivity. But nationalism's progressive side gives her a new context in which to re-value these categories. By investing them with unexpected power, both constructive and destructive, she not only seeks to empower women, but potentially gives them far greater agency in the nation-building project than men who are neither steadfast, compassionate, public-minded, nor patriotic. Second, running through the text is the plea that these conditions can only be achieved if women receive education. The southern woman recognizes that this is an age of opportunity for women which must not be missed. There are even enlightened men who advocate the education of women. "Although they may not truly mean what they say, yet our generation can seize their words (*jie bi koutouchan zhi li*), and implement our agenda."<sup>48</sup> The tension between citizenship and authenticity in the southern woman's narrative yields a covert agency that seeks to undermine the dependency of women by using the language of timeless authenticity.

My third instance comes from a group of women in Manchukuo. The Japanese-sponsored regime of Manchukuo in northeast China (1932–1945) was perhaps the East Asian regime most committed to conserving "tradition within modernity." While the Manchukuo regime advocated one of the most comprehensive modernization programs in Asia outside of Japan, it sought its legitimation in the "spiritual civilization" of East Asia. In this context, the regime supported and promoted a large number of Chinese societies and organizations which had emerged in the early part of the twentieth century committed to the conservation of Eastern and Chinese civilizational traditions in the modernizing process. Through them, the regime promoted the representation of the new family: pure, selfless, and committed to the moral regeneration of the world. As we might expect, women became the principal vehicles of the new morality. Repositories of all that was good and timeless in East Asian traditions, women's

47. Chu'n'an nüzi [A certain southern woman], "Zhongguo nüzide qiantu" [The future of Chinese women], in *Jindai Zhongguo nüquan yundong shiliao 1842–1911*, ed. Li Youning and Zhang Yufa [1903] (Taipei, 1975), 394–395.

48. *Ibid.*, 395.

bodies and minds became the site for a discourse of self-sacrifice, righteousness, and moral regeneration.<sup>49</sup>

Oral histories of Chinese women from the mid-1930s are available for one such society, the Morality Society (*Daodehui*), which was founded in 1918 and continues its activities to this day in Taiwan. This was a modern, Confucian philanthropic society also engaged in the moral education of the public. It employed a large number of women lecturers mostly from middle-class backgrounds who frequently joined the society because they could not find meaning in their mundane lives. Many had experienced considerable suffering as second wives or concubines or in unhappy marriages. The personal narratives of these women reveal the ways in which their lives and behavior enunciated their expected role as moral paragons sacrificing themselves in order to serve their families and the nation.<sup>50</sup> Much like the “southern woman,” while interpreting their behavior as consonant with the pedagogy of virtue and self-sacrifice, they frequently deployed this pedagogy to grant themselves some agency. This operation typically involved their detaching the self from one kind of pedagogical value but continuing to derive meaning from the constitutive representation by emphasizing another of its values. Thus Grandmother Cai confesses her unfilial behavior as a youth when she defied the wishes of the elders and went off to study. Now she has devoted herself to vegetarianism, spiritual discipline, and the education of her children and grandchildren. She thus finesses filiality, not only with the new, superior card of universal education, but also with the end-play of devotion to spiritual virtues.<sup>51</sup> Mrs. Sun cites the words of a leader, “In devoting herself, the woman must not weary the husband; rather she should be able to help the husband obtain virtue.” She thus insists that it is appropriate for her to set up a business and become financially independent in order to perform her familial duties to her sick husband and impoverished brother.<sup>52</sup>

Mrs. Chen reports,

I was once sent to Beijing to lecture on morality, but my husband followed me and insisted that I return home. Why is it that men can bully women so? I asked the teacher if I should return. He replied, “You may return. What do you have to fear? All you have to know is whether or not you have the will.” I returned. In Tianjin I was asked whether I returned of my own will. I nearly wept. I had resolved to return because I remembered that I could not violate my parents’ command (*ming*). The next time I left, I went away for four years. And so I am what I am today. The important thing is to know your own will (*zhi*). It is how and why people make up their minds that is important, not the decision itself.<sup>53</sup>

49. Prasenjit Duara, “Of Authenticity and Woman: Personal Narratives of Middle-class Women in China,” forthcoming in *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond, 1900–1950*, ed. Wenhsin Yeh (University of California Press, 1999).

50. These narratives are taken from the Oral Records of Morality Seminars of the Third Manzhouguo Morality Society (hereafter ORMS) held in 1936 in Xinjing (Changchun). Participants in the seminar made presentations about how their lives were guided by the appropriate morality organized around five categories drawn from the classical Confucian tradition.

51. ORMS 137.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*, 181–182

Mrs. Chen performs two speech acts which make her narrative both moving and complex. She appeals to moral service itself as a higher form of self-sacrifice transcending family and filiality, and subtly reinterprets the Confucian notion of resolve/will or *zhi*. *Lizhi* (to establish resolve) had been part of a set of injunctions often used to constrain the behavior of women. By reinterpreting it, Mrs. Chen could not only supersede filiality and family, she was able to be true to her subjectivity inscribed by the Morality Society while recovering some agency as an enunciating subject.

I have presented these three instances to probe the ways in which the patriarchal representation of woman as the embodiment of eternal truths had social effects. The figure of woman was so embodied not for some arbitrary reason but because in the early twentieth century the impact of capitalist and urbanizing forces and their accompanying temporal conception threatened the Confucian image of the family and gender roles as the bedrock of society and culture. Lu Xun perceived the social basis of this representation with characteristic clarity. Although “Soap” is fictional, its descriptive component is consistent with Lu’s understanding of the subject as a social phenomenon. In his 1918 essay, “My Views on Chastity,”<sup>54</sup> Lu identifies and indicts modern gentry patriarchs, including Kang Youwei (the leader of the 1898 reform movement who became President of the Morality Society in the 1920s), who employed the language of traditional essences ultimately to exploit women. To be sure, as a radical thinker, Lu’s critique does not necessarily represent the wider views of woman as embodied authenticity. The self-understandings of the southern woman and the women of the Morality Society as models of embodied authenticity show that, while the two types of women were widely separated in time and political ideology, in both cases women sought to deploy the tensions between citizenship and authenticity to their advantage. The women of the Morality Society sought to express some agency within the constraints of an organization, a regime, and, most of all, a faith to which they subscribed. As for the case of the “southern woman,” I turn to it in the conclusion to reveal how the events of her life may help us grasp her text in its world.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This essay has explored two dimensions of the regime of authenticity: its constitution in relation to linear time, capitalism, and the nation-state system, and the role of gendered authenticity in society and in women’s subjectivity. How the notion of authentic female virtue was internalized is, of course, directly relevant to the role and even efficacy of the timeless in containing the spectacle of corrosion wrought by linear, capitalist time. To what extent did individual Chinese develop their sense of identity from, or in relation to, this essentialized image of the authentic Chinese?

54. Lu Xun, “Wozhi jielieguan” [My views on chastity], in *Fen, Lu Xun Quanjì* [1918] (Taipei, 1989), I, 101-113.

From Lu Xun's point of view, there would appear to be a healthy skepticism among people about these representations. Certainly, the three cases suggest that even when the subject appears to be interpellated by these representations, they are often enunciated differently by different social groups—women, men, the radical, and the religious—and can sometimes even subvert the pedagogy. But the accounts of the women also reveal that the self is formed *with reference* to the codes of authenticity. In Mrs. Chen's case we saw how she produced agency in the very act of reproducing the ideal of the self-sacrificing woman. With the southern woman, the self emerges from a traffic between this prescriptive code and the ideals of the Enlightenment. Indeed these codes may have been so much a part of her self that they also caused her much anguish.

The southern woman turns out to be Chen Xiefen, founder of the first woman's journal *Nüxuebao* and the daughter of Chen Fan, the publisher of the radical journal *Subao* in Tokyo in the early 1900s. While in Japan, her father promised her as a concubine to a Macao merchant. A storm of protest raised by progressive and famous revolutionary women like Qiu Jin succeeded, in the end, in calling off the union.<sup>55</sup> But in the midst of this protest Xiefen had consented, saying, "I cannot but obey my father" (*shichu fuming, bude bucong*). We have seen how she was able subtly to subvert the rhetoric of women's timeless qualities by invoking its power, but perhaps this invocation also revealed the power of this language—which continued to call for her self-sacrifice—over her. A women's movement subordinated to state nationalism meant that women would continue, even in the PRC, to embody the authentic virtue of self-sacrifice.<sup>56</sup> Self-sacrifice as the abiding truth of communist nationalism was needed by the state not only to demand such sacrifice from others, but to contain the spectacle of corrosion which would, *in time*, erode the founding reason of its power.

Thus, no matter how the popular appropriation of the images of authenticity may support, inflect, subvert, or parody this nationalism, for ruling regimes the representations remain of the most solemn significance. Regimes stake their legitimacy in important part on their role as custodians of the authenticity of the "body cultural"; and as the context of linear time exposes its corrosion, they repeatedly have to reconstitute it. The apparent inviolability that pervades and issues from these images of authenticity is a unique and potent source of authority that regimes hope to monopolize in the face of opposition within. But of course, this source of authority can also be turned against the state, as for instance in the case of fundamentalisms in Iran, in the American militia movements, or in the Cultural Revolution. These are instances in which a referential traffic between the regime's ideals of authenticity and their popular appropriations actually sustains the regime of authenticity. Just as often, nation-states require the inviolability to counter the critique of its institutions and policies

55. Lü Meiyi and Zheng Yongfu, *Zhongguo Funü Yundong, 1840–1921* [The Chinese Women's Movement, 1840–1921] (Zhengzhou, 1990), 210–213; see also Charlotte L. Beahan, "Feminism and Nationalism in the Chinese Women's Press, 1902–1911" *Modern China* 1 (1975), 389, 394.

56. See Yang, "From Gender Erasure to Gender Difference," for the PRC's "state feminism."

made by other nation-states or emerging from the dominant ideology (capitalist modernity) of the system of nation-states as a whole. An example is the argument made in the PRC today that resorts to the authority of socialist authenticity in the face of criticism of its human rights record (“we believe that feeding our people is more important than the rights of a few”). Consider also the example of Lee Kuan-yew or Mahathir Mohammed who, like the Japanese champions of the unique Asiatic culture of an earlier period, contest the right of Western nations to impose the standards of democracy precisely by resorting to the inviolability and superiority of a Confucian or Islamic essence as the foundation of their societies.

As we look outward from the last decade of the twentieth century, at a time of accelerating globalization and the transformation of customary notions of sovereignty, there appears to be an increasing commodification of the symbols of authenticity. This would appear to breach the demarcation of the two spheres of the market and authenticity, and in some cases it is possible that such a commodification, as with the British royalty, has already eroded its symbolic capacity to represent the identifiable core of an evolving nation. But we also see a paradoxical development in which the discourse of cultural authenticity intensifies with the commodification of its symbols. Thus in China today, when the tornado of global capitalism has whipped up an unprecedented pace of change, we are also witnessing a wave of nationalism not seen in a long time. The nationalist rhetoric resorts to arguments about national inviolability based upon old and new images of authenticity. More novel is the relationship between authenticity and the market. Nowadays in Beijing, popular theme restaurants known as the *yiku fandian* or Recalling “Eat Bitterness” Restaurants have appeared. Many of those youth who were sent down to the rural areas to serve the people during the Cultural Revolution now spend lavishly to relive the experience and eat the unappetizing food of those days. For many, this is not merely nostalgia, but a reaching back to the most important experience of “redness” or communist authenticity that they ever had, one which testifies to communism as a continuing source of this nation’s regime of authenticity. What this commodified authenticity means for the new nationalism, for subject formation, and for women, may be well worth exploring.

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