The 'New Woman' Gender Roles and Urban Modernism in Interwar Berlin and Shanghai

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By Carol Schmid[1]

Abstract

During the interwar period, urban modernism was connected to opposing ideals of womanhood. On the one hand, women's participation in a culture of leisure, consumption and body consciousness created images of the New Women in Berlin and Shanghai during the 1920s and early 1930s. On the other hand, women in Weimar Berlin and Republican Shanghai were both desired and feared for their role in the significant changes in these two metropoles. This article analyzes the emergence of the *neue Frau* and *modeng xiaojie*. The growth of the cities, industrialization and changes in the work force provided new opportunities for many women's lives. However, in the interwar period, anxiety-ridden discourses about sexual disorder and moral decay became significant forces and shaped attitudes toward women's roles in urban society. The article examines the critics and conflicts generated by the modern women in the two societies and the conditions leading to the demise of the modern women era in China and Germany.

Key Words: New Woman, Gender Roles, Weimar Germany, Republican China, Berlin, Shanghai, Interwar

Figure 1

Credit: courtesy Mitali's Images   Credit: http://jazzuality.com/
on Film (no longer online)

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Background to the Status of Women in Interwar Berlin and Shanghai

During the interwar period, urban modernism was linked to contending ideals of womanhood. Women's participation in a culture of leisure, consumption and body consciousness created images of the New Women in Berlin and Shanghai during the 1920s and early 1930s. Weimar Berlin and Republican Shanghai were a laboratory for change in women's roles. While this modernist female persona was short-lived, modern women at least had a short appearance in the drama of interwar Germany and China. The struggle for a new identity and status for women revealed the anxieties associated with modernity in Berlin and Shanghai and a redefinition of national identity. Urban modernism in these two metropoles described a new sensibility and representations of gender roles including a new independent identity, fashion, access to the public sphere, education and jobs. The anonymity of the cities, a change in the work force and new possibilities in urban life produced a transformation in many women's lives.

Figure 2: Berlin, 1920s

Source: www.deutsches-architektur-forum.de

In Berlin, one important result of the Weimar government was a relaxing of previously accepted gender roles and sexual mores (Brice, 2006). In the 1920s, Berlin was the largest German city, and from the early 20th century it had the highest and most rapid increase of population (Flickinger, 2007). In 1920, the Greater Berlin Act united dozens of suburban towns, villages and estates into a greatly expanded city and established Berlin as a separate administrative region. Berlin had a population of around four million. In a short time period, Berlin expanded from a Grossstadt to a Weltstadt, from city to metropolis. There was also an influx of new inhabitants and increasing stratification among the population. In addition, Berlin,

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like most global cities, experienced growing anonymity and alienation in public and private spheres. In Germany, during the Weimar Republic, white collar employees became distinctly more like blue collar employees with respect to wages, job insecurity and white collar privileges (Kaelble, 1976:152).

At the same time, the expansion of technological advancements, industry and administrative services created a large number of urban workplaces. The new jobs of shop-girls, secretaries and stenographers that required fairly low skills and pay became identified as 'women's jobs.' These new jobs provided young women independent incomes and leisure. At least for those in the middle and some of the working class, the ability to spend money beyond necessities was available to a wider range of individuals. Many women and men were eager to climb socially and to spend money on new luxuries (Flickinger, 2007).

Figure 3: Shanghai, 1920s

Source: www.hslu.wordpress.com

Shanghai, in the interwar period, was also an urban city where tradition met modernity. In 1910 there were about 1 million residents in Shanghai. By 1920, the population almost

doubled to 1.6 million people (Boshier and Huang, 2007). During this time, Shanghai became an increasingly important economic, political and cultural center. By the end of the 19th century, Shanghai had become the most important treaty port in China. By 1930, its population was around 3 million (Lahmeyer, 2003). By the end of the 1930s, in terms of facilities and infrastructure, Shanghai was on a par with major cities, ranking as the world's fifth largest metropolis (Lee, 1999).

Portions of the city were administered under the jurisdiction of European powers. The western section of Shanghai was divided into two districts: the French Concession and the International Settlement. The French Concession was administered by a Consul-General appointed in Paris. The International Settlement was administered by a Municipal Council of 14 permanent foreign residents of the city. In the 1930s, almost 90,000 Europeans and Americans lived in Shanghai. Although Shanghai was a semi-colony it also reaped some benefits. Shanghai became one of the most prosperous metropolitan cities in Asia. The standard of living, including that of Chinese residents in the International Settlement, was the highest in Asia (Sergeant 1990). In 1925, there were slightly over 1,107,000 Chinese in the two foreign settlements (Tales of Old Shanghai–Census and Population, n.d.).

Although educated Chinese found an increasing standard of living, similar to Berlin, there were significant differences between rich and poor. The foreign-owned silk and cotton factories that largely employed women and girls operated under horrific conditions (Boshier and Huang, 2007). Several industrial surveys in Shanghai indicate that the majority of employees in cotton textile mills were female and child workers. They received no education, and their average wage levels were very low. One survey in a Shanghai cotton mill showed that only 20 percent of the male workers and three percent of the female workers could write their own names. Yan (2008) estimates that from 1924-1926, highly skilled workers earned about 12 times as much as unskilled workers.

Yet the literacy rate in Shanghai was among the highest in China (Yan, 2008). By 1936, the number of Chinese attending high school had grown to 627,246, 6 times that of 1912. Modern high schools, including women's high schools, allowed more individuals to gain an education.

In comparison with London, Paris, Vienna or Tokyo, both Berlin and Shanghai were late arrivals in terms of world cities. In the 1920s, although in different cultures, both perceived the loss of male cultural authority. This produced a backlash and anxieties regarding the role of women. Rowe (1995) observes that Berlin became a convenient target of friends and foes of the Weimar Republic. The problems were often framed in gender terms. In Shanghai, the new woman, according to Zhang (1999), was often considered a disruptive force in modern Chinese society. The New Woman came to symbolize both modernity and its endemic crisis.

Even though there are certainly major differences, the 'New Women', or *neue Frau* in Germany and *modeng xiaojie* in China, had many similarities. The emergence of the modern woman in the 1920s and 1930s was a worldwide phenomenon (Peiss, 2008). In Germany and China, with very different cultures, political institutions and economies, the new woman developed for a short period in history in similar ways. She became a symbol of female social freedom, fashion, and beauty but also of modernizing economy and societal political tensions. In both Berlin and Shanghai, the female became synonymous with the idea of modernity, although most discussions about the new woman were held by men.

The first section examines the emergence of the *neue Frau* and *modeng xiaojie*. The second section analyzes the changing position of women in Berlin and Shanghai, including the

myth and reality of women's lives. The third section examines the critics and conflicts generated by the modern woman in the two societies and the conditions leading to the demise of the modern women era in China and Germany.

The Birth of the New Woman in Germany and China

Already in 1919, the Weimar constitution, which was shaped by democratic principles, promised equality between the sexes. In terms of formal rights, this meant that women gained suffrage, which was granted to all German citizens over the age of twenty. The new constitution declared that men and women had fundamentally the same civil rights and duties and that all citizens, without distinction, were to be admitted to public office in accordance with the laws and according to their abilities (Van Zee, 2009). However, the new constitution retained a large body of imperial law, particularly relating to the illegality of abortion and the restricted rights of women in marriage and divorce (Rowe, 1995). The constitution mandated considerable gender equality, but tradition and civil and criminal laws continued to be patriarchal and to perpetuate inequality.

Many older ideas of *Kinder, Kirche, and Küche* persisted. In 1911, German sociologist Georg Simmel wrote that "the home remains the supreme cultural achievement of women" (1984:97). Marianne Weber, the wife of Max Weber and a feminist, wrote a critical response to Simmel's 1911 essay (Wobbe, 2004: 55). Her work emphasized changing power relationships and inequality in society. She observed that many women participated in the labor market for the first time, which led to shifting gender roles and challenges within the male-dominated family and institutions.

With technological modernization, old gender roles in Berlin changed significantly. Specifically, typewriters and adding machines reduced many aspects of office work to "the level of simple mechanical tasks, tasks that could be easily performed by low-paid semi-skilled female labor. A new class of white-collar workers or *Angestellten,* many of whom were women, emerged as a result of numerous low-skill clerical jobs" (King, 2009:2-3).

New images of women were portrayed in advertising, the film industry and magazines, emphasizing symbols of glamour and a carefree, independent lifestyle for women. In 1920s Berlin, these images created an elusive role model that many women strove to imitate. The advertising industry successfully encouraged many women to fashion their life based on these images. According to Peiss (2008), the Modern New Woman was a symbol of female social freedom, Western racial hierarchies, the universality of beauty and a modernizing economy. Fashion played an important role in defining the modern woman. It was a marker of economic status and beauty as well as the focus of the new female consumerism.

Similarly, during the 1920s and 1930s, Shanghai was home to a new type of cosmopolitanism. It witnessed the rise of a public sphere and mass media. In Shanghai, young women and men congregated around Western-style cinemas, dance halls and coffee shops (Stevens, 2003). If Chinese women had fewer rights than their German counterparts, in Shanghai Chinese women experienced at least some freedom in comparison to their rural sisters. Chinese, Japanese and foreigners in the concessions established silk and cotton factories that employed Chinese women and girls. While conditions in the mills were often poor, they allowed some women an independent income. By 1935, there were 3,421 factories and workshops employing more than 170,700 persons in Shanghai (Boshier and Yan, 2007). Shanghai had more than a quarter of a million white collar workers by the late 1930s (Wasserstrom, 2001).

As a result, women in China attempted to change their subservient status. The May 4th Movement, also referred to as the New Culture Movement, was brought about by demonstrations on the fourth of May 1919, when citizens and students in Beijing protested the decisions made by the post–Versailles Conference. The Peace Conference did not honor China's claims to present-day Shandong Province. The May 4th Movement was part nationalist and part social movement. The protest turned a cultural movement into a political movement. The New Culture Movement of the mid 1910s and 1920s was related to disillusionment with traditional Chinese culture following the failure of the Chinese Republic that was founded in 1912 (Tse-tung, 1960).

The social aspects of the May 4th Movement consisted of attempts to emancipate Chinese women. Bergere (2009:140) observed that "daughters, sisters, and wives of enlightened elites and radical intellectuals—called for the end to their domestic enslavement." Numerous feminist organizations and parties sprang up to challenge the position of the dominance of men. The May 4th Movement called for a new Chinese culture based on global and Western principles. These values included an end to the patriarchal family in favor of individual freedom and the liberation of women. The New Culture Movement advocated modern roles for women as an attack on traditional values (Na, 2005; New Culture Movement, n.d.). Many feminist issues were raised during the May 4th Movement. These issues included open socializing between men and women, co-education, women's economic independence, and abandonment of arranged marriage and one-sided chastity (Na, 2005).

Lu Xun's *Regret for the Past* and Ding Ling's *Miss Sophie's Diary* illustrate women's dilemmas. The New Culture Movement mobilized the elite in China to publish articles in literary and political magazines. Lu Xun's *Regret for the Past* was written in 1925. It tells the tragic love affair between Juansheng, a May Fourth 4th scholar, and Zijun, a young woman, and portrays their financial hardships and the psychological struggles they experience after they elope from conservative families in pursuit of individual freedom. The new woman can be found in Zijun in her own words: "I belong to myself…No one else has any rights over me" (Xun, 2009: 255). However, Lu Xun portrays the couple's struggles as futile and doomed to fail. Juanshen admits he no longer loves Zijun; she leaves him, and he later learns that she has died.

Among Chinese women writers of the 1920s, Ding Ling was among the first to express an awareness of gendered sexual inequality. *Miss Sophia's Diary* is the story of a young woman with tuberculosis who leaves home for the city. She struggles to find out who she is but ultimately ends up in disillusionment. She is an excellent example of the Chinese New Woman who explores the realm of moral virtue bestowed on women and challenges females' presumed disposition to be chaste. The diary gives a firsthand account of the modern struggle and crisis from a female point of view. Sophie is an erotic woman who is isolated from the world, both of her own accord and also because she feels she is not understood by her surroundings (Ding Ling).

Between 1920 and 1930, Shanghai culture was no longer entirely Chinese, but it was not Western either. The majority of traditional Chinese lived on the margins of the concessions. It was primarily the Chinese elite and those in the Shanghai concessions who experienced cross-cultural influences from traditional and foreign models. While Chinese Nationalist authorities criticized the luxury of the concessions and the modern woman, Shanghai entrepreneurs promoted Chinese goods in the name of patriotism. Therefore, consumerism was, for a short time, rehabilitated in order to strengthen the economy and therefore the Chinese nation. Bergere observes, whether they were able to acquire all the new items or simply window-shop, "modern women were the preeminent mediators between society and a world full of technical

innovations" (Bergere, 2009: 264). In Shanghai, although it was a very cosmopolitan city with members of different nationalities living side by side, little mixing actually occurred except at the elite levels in society (Bickers, 1998).

The Cinema in Berlin and Shanghai

In both cities in the interwar period, cinema became one of the most popular forms of amusement. Berlin in 1929 was home to 369 cinemas with 189,692 seats (Ross, 2006). Between 1920 and 1925, approximately 6 million Berliners regularly attended the cinema per year (this number is based on 134 cinemas for which data is available) (Flickinger, 2007). Films such as *Metropolis* and the *Der Blaue Engel* portrayed women in non-conventional roles. The varying approaches and imagery contained in the films provide a window on the changing perceptions of women in Weimar Germany (Zagula, 1991). Hansen argues that women were a high percentage of early audiences in Weimar and that they "presented a more fundamental threat to the dominant organization of public experience than the cinema's appeal to any particular class" (Hansen, 1983:173-174). However, the film industry was less concerned with women's conformity to traditional roles and more concerned with their roles as consumers (Hansen, 1983).

The cinema was also important in Shanghai. In 1935, Shanghai imported 350 films. Local companies produced 72 independent films (Bergere, 2009). The Shanghai cinema of the 1930s produced more female than male leads. The highly politically charged film industry produced films for the articulation of new roles for women, new urbanity, modernity and nationalism or cultural colonialism. The story of Ruan Lingyu, who committed suicide at the age of 25 in 1935, after completion of the film *The New Woman,* is a legend. The film and the roles she played became symbols of the modern woman in China, particularly in the metropolis of Shanghai (Hong, 2007: Lu, 1997). In *The New Woman*, Ruan played a writer who identified with women laborers but succumbed to the pressure of living and oppression by the old-fashioned society. By the time she realizes the danger, it is already too late in the movie, and she commits suicide. This could be an epitaph for Ruan's real life (Hong, 2007).

The Changing Position of Women in Berlin and Shanghai: Myths and Realities

Work outside the home made women more visible, but it did not substantially increase female employment in Germany. By 1925, 36 percent of all women were working, only slightly more than in 1907. In 1925, working women were young and single—two-thirds of all white collar workers were unmarried and under the age of 25. For most young working women impeded by a lack of education, their working lives lasted only a few years (Ankum, 1997b; Fechner, 2001). While, in economic terms, working women did not significantly change their status in terms of independence and equality in comparison to men, the emergence of a more public profile for women provided a sense of challenge to existing male-dominated hierarchies (Rowe, 1995).

The significance of this period of life in Berlin was that the intermediary stage of personal independence between adolescence and marriage and motherhood became socially acceptable in Weimar society (Ankum, 1997b). Many images of women in novels and magazines portrayed smart, fashionable women in Berlin who saw work merely as a means of supporting a consumer-centered lifestyle until they could find a successful husband (King, 2009).

Women's access to jobs and some education offered them a certain degree of independence. Many families were immigrants from other parts of China who left behind extended families. There was a predominance of nuclear families. In extended families, many women's fate depended on the personality of the mother-in-law (Levy, 1963). The urban family composition promoted some liberty from old gender roles. In many families, arranged marriages continued to be the rule. However, unlike arranged marriages in rural China, young couples in Shanghai were now consulted and had an opportunity to meet each other. The age of marriage also increased since parents were anxious to keep wages of the working daughter as long as possible (Bergere, 2009). Moreover, the availability of tea shops and cinema provided more freedom in the metropolis than in rural areas of China.

Edwards (2012:572) observes that "women and women's bodies were central to the creation of a modern China." In Shanghai in the working class suburbs, young women could only dream of swapping their trousers and jackets for a figure-hugging *qipao*. The *qipao* invoked modernity. The original *qipao* was wide and baggy and was a Qing court invention for courtly ladies. The modern *qipao,* first popularized in Shanghai in the 1920s, is a one piece, form-fitting dress that has a high slit on one or both sides. It was equally modern and traditionally Chinese with its imitation of an imperial fashion and was made famous by movie stars, socialites and upper class women (Finnane, 2007, chapter 6). The choice of fashion was a marker of modern women in 1930s China (Edwards, 2012).

The cult of physical appearance in both Berlin and Shanghai ushered in the reign of fashion and the cult of the body. This was reinforced in film, magazines and advertising. The sexualized image of women in Berlin (Rowe, 1995) and Shanghai (Petro, 1997) in the 1920s and early 1930s emerged in tandem with radical social changes in both societies. Weimar culture in Berlin took on an identity of sexual liberation. In Shanghai, the new woman flaunted her physical charms against tradition in the urban playground of the late 1920s (Laing, 2003).

Young, single and employed women constituted half of Berlin's white collar force in 1930 (Smith, 2008). Visual images of the *neue Frau* dominated print culture. Poiger (2008) observes that like elsewhere modern women raised hopes and fears about the forces of modernity. The *neue Frau* "in bobs, short, loose dresses, or sports outfits" became a pervasive social presence across classes in 1920s Germany. There was a clear association between consumerism and the New Woman.

Consumerism went hand in hand with westernization in Shanghai as well. This was far more than just an imitation of lifestyles and consumer tastes; Shanghai developed its own unique style. The cult of physical appearance was a criterion of modernity (Bergere, 2009:263). Fashion reigned, particularly in the middle classes. Woman's magazines and Hollywood films presented the latest trends. Fashionable Shanghai women wore a *qipao*. They also favored permed hair and high heels.

A dazzling nightlife further united Berlin and Shanghai. There were plentiful dance halls, nightclubs, bars and shady establishments, in many of which the amusements available were a prelude to prostitution. The increased presence of women on the streets and in nightlife, clubs and bars where they were previously excluded "meant it was difficult to tell the difference between women of different classes, and even between prostitutes and respectable women" (Sharp, 2004:119). In both societies, this blurring of roles disturbed the traditional ideal of women and motherhood.

Estimates of the number of prostitutes vary widely. In 1930, Dong (2000) estimates that one person in 580 was a prostitute in Berlin and one in 130 in Shanghai. In Berlin, estimates of

prostitutes ranged from a low of 500 to the often published figure of 120,000. This depends on the definition of prostitution. Although prostitution was technically unlawful, it was widely allowed in practice. Berlin had no established red-light district or legalized brothels. Prostitutes were prohibited from verbally soliciting customers or announcing their services in print (Gordon, 2006). Of course, this did not stop the practice, and as prostitutes were becoming more visible, they also became more threatening to middle-class morals. In Berlin, a whole lower-class industry grew up around prostitution in cafes, cabarets, beer halls and music halls (Lewis, 1997). In addition to prostitution, during the 1920s in Berlin, there was an increasing emergence of visible homosexuality. Individuals came from many parts of the world to enjoy freedom that they were denied in their home countries (Fechner, 2001).

There remained a decidedly double standard in the German metropolis. Keun's *The Artificial Silk Girl* (2002), which was originally published in Germany in 1932, describes the considerable disadvantages women suffered if they fell outside the social conventions of education and marriage and family. Suffrage and low-wage jobs did not do away with patriarchy, although women's roles were no longer exclusively ascribed. Women who displayed sexuality outside of marriage were still considered social deviants. Although she is first depicted as a New Woman, working in an office and sexually emancipated, Doris, the protagonist, is limited in her opportunities as a low-paid office worker.

Baudelaire (1964) had originally developed the French verb *flaneur* to indicate a person who walks in the city to experience it. Unlike the male stroller, the *femme flaneur* had to justify her presence, or she was assumed to be a street walker (Ankum, 1997a). Even in the relatively liberated age of 1920s-early 1930s Berlin, spaces for women were organized from a different perspective.

Until 1927, Germany had a system of state-regulated prostitution, under which only those prostitutes who submitted to regular health checks and numerous other restrictions on their personal freedom were tolerated by the police. In contrast, male clients of prostitutes were not subject to any controls. The decriminalization of prostitution in 1927 was related to important postwar gains in women's rights. Although these changes were welcomed by feminists, Social Democrats, and liberals—they also mobilized powerful conservative resistance in German society (Roos, 2010).

Prostitution also thrived in the Chinese metropolis. In Shanghai, there were at least 1,700 brothels in the international settlements between 1920 and 1925. Although the Municipal Council endeavored to close the establishments down, this move merely prompted them to go underground or move to the French concession. There, the authorities practiced a policy of tolerance combined with a measure of control. One estimate shows the number of brothels doubling between the 1920s and 1930s (Bergere, 2009). Wakeman (1995) estimated that, in the 1920s, one in three women in the French concession was a streetwalker.

The International Settlement's by-laws gave the Shanghai Municipal Council the right to license and regulate brothels. Similar legislation was missing in the Chinese-controlled parts of Shanghai. In 1928, Chiang Kai-shek banned all prostitution in the provinces of Anhui, Jiansu, and Zhejiang, which increased the number of prostitutes in Shanghai (Wakeman, 1995).

In both Berlin and Shanghai, there was a link between prostitution and the New Woman. The overt nature of prostitution and the changing status of women were contested in both Germany and China. According to some feminists, women were passive victims with no voice. Bridenthal (1994) stresses the role of women as victims in Weimar Germany within the job market. Recent scholarship has debated the idea that the prostitute was either a symbol of 'sexual

decadence' or a victim of socio-economic class position. Roos (2010) argues that prostitutes were active participants in the public debate over prostitution reform and exposed cracks in the patriarchal structures of urban society. Many regarded themselves as working women, particularly since the line between the New Woman and prostitutes was often blurred.

Women in the job market maintained women's jobs—they rarely replaced males. Despite the right to vote, German women held very little political power in the society. In the elections to the National Assembly in 1919, women won 41 out of 423 delegates—less than 10 percent. Although this raised hopes among the feminist movement, this success was never subsequently matched. Leading feminists from the Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine (BDF) were prominent among the women elected. The percentage of women slipped to 5.7 percent in 1924, and was 6.7 percent in 1928 (Harvey, 1995). The political parties had little sympathy for the emerging New Woman.

The fate of the New Woman in German politics and political discourse had a downward evolution with respect to gender equality. In women's first election as voters, all the major parties, including the Conservatives, assumed women were interested in gender equality. The Democrats hailed themselves as the 'party of women.' They attempted to construct a new female citizen. However, when females voted along the same class and religious lines as their male counterparts, the platforms of the major parties weakened. Ballots cast by women favored parties emphasizing religion and culture. This experience induced the Democrats and Socialists to alter their campaign and to stress women's motherly role in politics. By 1930, the Democrats all but abandoned equality. This left the emancipated New Woman without bourgeois defenders (Sneeringer, 2002).

Chinese women lacked suffrage. However, the Feminist Movement Association (FMA) demanded women's rights, particularly stressing the same educational and career opportunities for Chinese women as for men. It also made special efforts to include lower class women by demanding equal pay and protective legislation for female factory workers (Wang, 1999). The May 4th era (1915-1924) discussion on women's issues was embedded in a framework that valued 'modernity,' women's emancipation and female social activism (Wang, 1999; Gilmartin, 1999). The period 1924-27, in contrast, took a more institutionalized approach to the women's movement. Women's emancipation was closely intertwined with the course of the Nationalist Party (GMD) and the Communist Party and used the women's emancipation movement to mobilize women (Gilmartin, 1999). Gilmartin (1995:201) concludes that the "Chinese revolution of the mid-twenties encompassed the most comprehensive effort to alter gender relations and end women's subordination of all China's twentieth-century revolutions."

In the early 1930s, the right-wing backlash against liberal gender reforms like the 1927 prostitution law played a fateful role in the downfall of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Nazism. In Shanghai, the events culminating in the New Life Movement in 1935 played an important role in the backlash against the New Woman in Shanghai and China.

Critics and Conflicts Generated by the Modern Women in Berlin and Shanghai
In both the Weimar Republic and Republican China in the interwar period, anxiety-ridden discourses about sexual disorder and moral decay became potent political forces and shaped attitudes toward women's role in society. In Berlin and Shanghai, advocates of the changing status of women pointed to indicators of increased leisure and wealth, greater public

roles and moral decay. Women in newly independent roles, visible in the streets and in the workplaces, were often blamed for the ills of modernity.

In Berlin, three major discourses blamed women for the ills of urban society. Georg Simmel, a German sociologist who lived in Berlin immediately prior to the Weimar Republic, was one of the first to make a connection between fashion and modernity. He observed that modernity created favorable premises for the manifestation of imitative impulses (1997). Critics alluded to women as victims of commercial manipulation and 'slaves of fashion' (Poiger, 2008), The New Woman was portrayed in films, newspapers and cheap fiction as employed and spending her earnings on fashion and fun. According to Ganeva (2008), 25 percent of average earnings in Weimar Germany were spent on clothing.

The second discourse concerned sexuality, prostitution and promiscuity. Roos (2003: 85) argued that crisis in gender relations, particularly prostitution, brought about "fears about the loss of a stable sexual and moral order" and played a key role in Weimar democracy's fall. Female sexuality in the public sphere needed to be controlled if Berlin was to function in any sort of order (Rowe, 2003: 122). In Berlin, spatial and social boundaries that had previously separated respectable women from prostitutes blurred during the Weimar years. Greater numbers of women entered the workforce and, particularly single women, became a presence in the streets within the city, including popular entertainment milieus—cabarets, cinema and revues (Smith, 2008).

Sexually liberated women were also shown on the screen. Numerous artists and writers responded to Berlin's modernity by criticizing the city as alienating and female. In *Metropolis*, Lang constructed the woman as a technosexual other, epitomizing male fantasies of control over female sexuality and technological change (Fechner, 2001).

A third discourse revolved around the increased presence of women in the labor force and the drop in childbearing. Petro (2008: 109) observed there was fear in Germany that "modernization had incorporated women into public life and wage labor too quickly, with the result that women had become 'masculinized' or alienated from their bodies and resistant to childbearing." This was a topic of heated consideration. Reactionaries such as Hans Morek argued that the masculine fashions of women would inspire them to reject motherhood (Muller-Mattis, 2007).

Marriage and the family, the two previous pillars of society, seemed to be disintegrating in Berlin. The birthrate in Germany dropped from 2.7 per woman of childbearing age in 1914 to 11.5 births per 1000 in 1922 (Lewis, 1997: 210-211). A steep decline in the population occurred in Germany: those who married before 1905 averaged 4.7 children per family; those who married in 1925-1929, only two (Usborne, 2007). The abortion rate was also high, although estimates vary considerably (from half of all women in 1914 to exceeding live births in 1930) (Lewis, see Grossman, 1984 who debates these numbers as being unreliable).

Particularly negative views of the new status of women were shaped by eugenic visions. Worries about the *neue Frau* were linked to health of the nation. The presence of the New Woman was at the center of many debates about the proper role of women in the Weimar Republic. What makes Germany unique is how abruptly and completely the status of women was reversed. With the ascension of total male dominance in Nazi-Germany, the image of women was again exiled to the traditional position of *Kinder, Kuche, and Kirche* (Zagula, 1991).

During the Weimar Republic, ideas known as racial hygiene or eugenics informed population policy, public health education, and government funded research. Eugenics proponents argued that by keeping the unfit alive to reproduce and increase in number, modern

medicine and expensive welfare programs interfered with natural selection. Eugenics advocates in Weimar Germany included physicians, public health officials and academics in biomedical fields, on both the left and the right. A significant faction linked eugenics to race, favoring Nordics as 'eugenically advantaged,' and discussed racial mixing as a source of biological degeneration (Holocaust Museum, 2011). The low fertility rate and decline in the German birth rate since the 19th century were of particular concern. Berlin had the lowest birthrate of any capital city in Europe (The Abortion and Eugenics Policies of Germany, 2001).

The Nationalists and leftists, even though they were political rivals, both criticized the Modern Women in Chinese society. The Nationalist government regulated daily life as soon as it could take control of the cities. The government also attempted to purge intellectuals and silence the left. Women in "Westernized" fashions were banned from public spaces. In large cities, including Shanghai, organized "Brigades of Destroyers of the Modern" enforced new regulations by policing public spaces and arresting women in "strange clothes" (Dong, 2008).

The emasculation of women was also an issue in China. A year before the outbreak of the Revolution, a Chinese woman's newspaper, Beijing *nübao,* lamented that women were imitating men in everything—in their clothes, hats, shoes, hairstyles, spectacles and cigarette smoking (Li, 1981: 121-122).

The policing reached a peak in 1934 during the New Life Movement. "Inspired by German and Italian Fascism, this was an attempt to mobilize the masses during a time of national crisis by fostering in them qualities such as frugality, self-discipline, and a spirit of self-sacrifice" (Dong, 2008: 216). During the New Life Movement, consumerism was criticized as well as the New Woman's appearance, which was considered un-Chinese. Women were required to abide by a dress code that included the length of dress, jacket and skirt and to abandon modern fashions; however, these codes were rarely followed (Dong, 2008; Na, 2005).

Edwards (2000) argues that the preoccupation with morality and external manifestations of modernity, such as dress of the new woman, was related to attempts by some reformist intellectuals to regain their status. Over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, the modern woman emerged during the May 4th movement as a challenge to the 'traditional woman' and Confucian China.

Conservative opposition in China to the new woman coincided with intellectual concerns. Conservatives were worried that the modern woman was not sufficiently devoted to motherhood and domestic duties. The reformist, in contrast, feared for the new woman's moral state. They were concerned about her commercialization and the loss of their influence over government policies. By 1934, the modern woman faced criticism from both reformists and conservatives in China (Edwards, 2000).

Conclusion

Gender remains a crucial category for an understanding of interwar Berlin and Shanghai. Rapid development of the two cities reflected a tension between tradition and modernity. In both modern cities, the transformation of women became a focus for debates about the nation and modernization. The new woman was either a symbol of the emancipation of woman from male oppression or a symbol of the significant threat to the family, public order and national morality.

Discussions about "moral decline" assumed a distinctively negative tone in the Weimar Republic (Roos, 2010). The adverse debates coincided with significant changes in gender roles, military defeat and dramatic changes in the political system. Similarly, in Republican China

during the 1920s and 1930s, China reformist intellectuals in Shanghai engaged in a protracted discussion about the condition of the nation's women. The preoccupation with the moral and outward attributes of the modern woman by male intellectuals was, according to Edwards (2009), an attempt to police the modern woman. In both societies, anxiety-ridden discourses about sexual disorder and decay became potent political forces and shaped attitudes toward women's role in society.

In Germany and China, there was a link between female sexuality and changing gender roles and the troubles of the modern city. Social changes brought by urban modernism affected contemporary notions of gender and sexuality in the interwar period. The new woman was an object of male fear and desire. It is striking that that the two cities were discussed as being female on to whom contemporary anxieties could be projected.

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