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Dangerous Fiction and Obscene Images
Textual-Visual Interplay in the Banned Magazine
Meiyu and Lu Xun’s Role as Censor

ABSTRACT The magazine Meiyu (Eyebrow Talk, also translated as “Eyebrow Signals”) was China’s first literary magazine edited by a woman and targeted at a female audience. It was also the first modern magazine to pay extensive attention to nudity and to physical and romantic intimacy through at times carefully considered juxtapositions of texts and images. In addition, it was the first Chinese magazine to be banned on the basis of obscenity legislation introduced during the early Republic. The committee that banned Meiyu was led by Zhou Shuren (周樹人), who later became known as the author Lu Xun (魯迅), and his disparaging reminiscence about Meiyu caused the magazine to be all but forgotten for nearly a century. In this article, the authors use a wide variety of archival material to reconstruct the complex publishing history of the magazine, as well as the processes and cultural standards involved in its banning. This is followed by a close analysis of aspects of the contents of Meiyu, especially the interaction between texts and images in the representation of nudity, intimacy, and coupledom.

KEYWORDS magazine culture, women’s literature, obscenity, nudity, censorship

This article aims at understanding and interpreting the complex publishing history of a unique modern Chinese magazine. Meiyu (Eyebrow Talk, also translated as “Eyebrow Signals”) was launched in November 1914. Its editor was Gao Jianhua (高劍華) (1890–?), also known as Gao Qin (高琴) and most likely born around 1890.1 She was assisted by several other female editors, as well as by her husband, the popular author Xu Xiaotian (許嘯天) (1886–1946). Meiyu was the first of many journal and book publications on which Gao and Xu collaborated as a couple. The journal’s life span ended after the publication of the eighteenth monthly issue, in April 1916. Roughly half a year later, as issues of the journal were still circulating on the market, its sale was banned by order of the Ministry of Home Affairs (內務部) in Beijing. The banning request was drafted by a censorship committee called the Popular Education Research Association (通俗教育研究會) (Tongsu jiaoyu yanjiu hui). It charged Meiyu with moral transgression, calling it obscene and harmful to human dignity. The standards by which the
committee measured obscenity in fiction were formulated by its first chairperson, the Ministry of Education official Zhou Shuren 周樹人 (1881–1936), who would later become China's most famous modern writer, using the pseudonym Lu Xun 魯迅. Whereas Lu Xun's involvement in the banning of books and journals in the service of the government of Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 (1859–1916) is relatively well documented (if still not widely known), few scholars so far have tried to find out why Meiyu was considered so transgressive that it was in fact the only magazine banned during the life span of the censorship committee. This article can be read in part as a critique of five decades of Lu Xun scholarship, in which the canonical author's involvement with Meiyu has been mentioned and evaluated by many, but few have bothered to read the journal itself. Consequently, the act of censorship carried out in 1916, for which Lu Xun was at least partially responsible, has silenced this particular publication and its unique stylistic features for nearly a century.

Meiyu was reprinted in 2006, but with poor quality, and many of the images were blurred. A good-quality, fully browsable online edition has been available only since 2017 as part of the Shanghai Library database of Republican-era journals. Consequently, scholars in recent years have started to pay attention to some of its contents, yet there has so far been no comprehensive attempt to document the journal. Basic information, such as the correct date of its first publication, continues to be misreported. We therefore start this article with a general factual overview of the journal's publication history, paying special attention to some significant differences between the various print runs of individual issues, and how such differences can result in discrete interpretations of the journal's characteristics. This part of our analysis calls attention to methodological issues in the field of periodical studies, where the fact that the same issue of a journal can exist in different editions is often overlooked.

In the second part we describe how the censorship committee built its case against Meiyu, relying on the fortunate circumstance that the minutes of all meetings of the committee have been preserved, providing rare insight into the workings of censorship in the early Republic. In the third and final part, we return to the contents of Meiyu to analyze the kind of texts and images that would have been considered offensive. By using the censors' reports productively to enrich our evaluative reading of the journal's content, we point toward novel ways of contextualizing and interpreting cultural products. We emphasize the ways in which texts and images interact with each other in relation to three themes: nudity, romance, and coupledom. We show how Meiyu explored new territory in its treatment of gender, bodies, and intimacy; how it ventured beyond the boundaries of what was considered morally acceptable; and how it was pushed into near anonymity by the combined forces of state censorship and elite disapproval.
Publication History and Positioning

The first issue of Meiyu appeared on November 17, 1914, which was the first day of the tenth month according to the lunar calendar. Almost all existing descriptions of the journal incorrectly give October 1, 1914, as the date of first publication. The text of the manifesto in the first issue, discussed below, indicates it is very likely that the lunar calendar was used. Positive confirmation is provided by an advertisement announcing the arrival of the new journal that appeared in the Shenbao newspaper (see fig. 1). The advertisement states that the intended date of publication is *yinli shiyue chuyi* 陰曆十月初一, that is, the first day of the tenth month according to the traditional calendar (*yinli*), which converts to November 17. Similarly, the eighteenth and final issue of the journal was dated not March 1 but April 3, 1916.²

The significance of this excursion into lunar calendars becomes clear when one reads the manifesto printed on the inside cover of the first issue:

Spring is the season to catch butterflies by the flowers; summer is the season to enjoy a cool breeze by the threshold; autumn is the season to stand by the curtain and look at the moon; winter is the season to sit by the stove and sample tea. Wise are the sisters from well-to-do houses who, when they are off work, get their well-coiffed heads together to have some carefree fun. Yet when going on an outing and getting some fresh air, admiring the moon and discussing the snow, or just silently facing each other, one cannot be without a companion.

Our society, therefore, brings together many talented ladies to edit this magazine, overseen by Ms. Gao Jianhua, the wife of Mr. Xu Xiaotian. Elegant and refined, delicate and graceful, their writings might be playful and their stories absurd, yet they contain crafty critique and subtle satire. Their imperceptible influence lingers after the entertainment they provide; surely they are not without impact. Whenever the new moon shows its arch, this magazine will appear, hence the title *Eyebrow Talk*. It is a good companion, by the flowers or under the moon, for those of refined taste and poetic temperament. What say you, you poor wretches who are caged like birds? And what say you, you ambitious females cackling together? We hope that those with discerning views will instruct us, to our good, good fortune!

花前撲蜨宜於春；檻畔招涼宜於夏；依帷望月宜於秋；圍罏品茗宜於冬。璇閨姊妹以職業之暇，聚釵光鬟影能及時行樂者，亦解人也。然而箇箇納涼賞月話雪，寂寂相對，亦亦不可以無伴。本社乃集多數才媛，輯此雜誌，而以許嘯天君夫人高劍華女士主筆政，錦心綉口，句香意雅，雖曰遊戲文章、荒唐演述，然譎諫微諷，潛移默化於消閑之餘，亦未始無感化之功也。每當月子灣時，是本雜誌誕生之期，爰名之曰《眉語》，亦雅人韻士花前月下之良伴也。質之囚鸞笯鳳之可怜蟲，以謂何如？質諸鶯嗔燕咤之女志士，又以謂何如？尚祈明眼人有以教之，幸甚幸甚！³
The moon plays a crucial role in the text of the manifesto, not just as a stock image for pleasant enjoyment in the company of friends but also as an indirect explanation for the title of the journal itself: because it will be published each month on the day that the moon is like an arch (i.e., the new moon), it will be called Meiyu—because the arch of the moon is reminiscent of the arch of a lady’s eyebrow. Furthermore, the “language of the eyebrows” (or “eyebrow talk” as we translate it here) has the connotation of flirtatious or amorous expression, as in the well-known phrase meiyu muxiao 眉語目笑 (the eyebrows talk and the eyes smile). The aim of the manifesto seems clear: on the one hand, to draw attention to the large-scale active involvement of women in the production of the magazine and, on the other hand, to introduce an element of playful frivolity—though not without “crafty remonstrance.”

Although Meiyu was not the first Chinese periodical edited by a woman and targeting a female readership, it was definitely the first literary magazine to have these characteristics. The emphasis on the combination of women and literature is clear from the advertisement referred to above (fig. 1), which features...
the heading guixiu zhi shuobu yuekan 閨秀之說部月刊 (young ladies’ fiction monthly). In two later manifestos, printed on the inside cover of the second and third issues, the editor Gao Jianhua explicitly calls for more contributions by women, as well as photographs and images of women. The language employed in these texts is ambiguous in terms of the implied readership of the journal. Although Gao clearly directs her call for contributions toward women, at the same time she calls upon “cultured gentlemen” 風雅君子 (fengya junzi) not to miss the opportunity to view so many images of women. This is all the more salient since, as we shall see, many of the images in question were nudes and seminudes.

The presence of nude images and the various appeals to the male gaze are in part responsible for a long-held belief by the few scholars who have looked at Meiyu that it was not a women’s journal at all, that Gao Jianhua was a “front,” and that all contributions signed with women’s names were in fact written by men.5 There is, however, as Jin-Chu Huang has shown, substantial evidence of Meiyu publishing an unusually large amount of fiction by actual women.6 Moreover, as Huang argues, the fiction by women writing for Meiyu is often different from fiction written by men, especially in its portrayal of female characters, their romantic desires, and their ability to exercise some agency in pursuing their own life choices, albeit still confined by and ultimately subscribing to patriarchal values.7

Another impression of the journal, frequently found especially in Chinese-language scholarship, is that it lacked seriousness, was morally suspect, and ran counter to more progressive trends. The locus classicus for this disparaging evaluation is the following passage in a famous 1931 article by Lu Xun:

The monthly journal Meiyu […] appeared at a time when the Mandarin-Ducks-and-Butterflies style was flourishing. Although Meiyu was later banned, the power [of this style] did not wane at all. It was challenged only when New Youth started to become popular.

……月刊雜誌《眉語》出現的時候，是這鴛鴦蝴蝶式文學的極盛時期。後來《眉語》雖遭禁止，勢力卻並不消退，直到《新青年》盛行起來，這才受了打擊。8

The combination of the pejorative label “Mandarin-Ducks-and-Butterflies style,” the fact that Meiyu was banned, and the disproportional weight of Lu Xun’s opinion across several generations of PRC scholars has been sufficient to cast the journal in a morally negative light. Lu Xun scholars who became aware of his direct involvement in the banning of the journal have defended his actions by presenting them as a positive contribution to the “struggle” against this pernicious literary style and its perceived moral values.9 We go into more detail below about Lu Xun’s specific contribution to the literary censorship policy of the Yuan Shikai regime,
but first we look at another aspect of the journal’s publication history that has gone largely unnoticed so far: the existence of several different editions of its early issues.

**Plural Editions and Unblemished Bodies**

By tracking down sets of *Meiyu* in different libraries and databases, we have established that the first five issues of the journal exist in different versions. Although such plurality of editions is not uncommon for Republican-era magazines, the phenomenon has rarely been studied and has considerable methodological implications. The currently most widely available sets of *Meiyu* are the 2006 reprint, which is based on a holding in the Chongqing Library, and the online version in the Shanghai Library database of Republican-era journals. These two sets are not identical. Moreover, the Shanghai Library owns a second set that is different from the one that was digitized.

Famously, the first print run of the first issue of *Meiyu* carried a painting by the artist Zheng Mantuo 鄭曼陀 (1888–1961). The image (fig. 2) shows a young woman wrapped in semitransparent fabric. Her left breast is exposed and appears in the exact center of the picture. The characters for “*Meiyu*, volume 1, number 1” appear in striking red-color calligraphy on the left-hand side. The signature and seal of the artist appear in the bottom corner on the right-hand side. The table of contents of the issue provides the title for the cover image: “Qingbai nü’er shen” 清白女兒身 (An Unblemished Woman's Body). This is the version that was digitized by the Shanghai Library.

The second print run of the first issue, held in a spare set at the Shanghai Library, is identical to the first except for the color of the calligraphy on the cover, which now appears in white, presumably indicating a slightly cheaper method of printing (fig. 3). The third print run, held in the Peking University library, identifies itself as the “third edition” and is dated December 7, 1914 (jiayin 甲寅, 11th month, 7th day). Its cover is the same as that of the second edition. What marks the difference is that it carries an announcement on the back, encouraging companies, especially those selling women's products, to buy advertising space in the journal, claiming that the first issue has already sold five thousand copies. Although there is no way to verify the number, it is not unreasonable to assume that *Meiyu* was unusual enough compared to other journals on the market to sell well. Since the first edition came out, as mentioned, on November 17, this means that the issue went through two print runs, totaling five thousand copies, in a little less than three weeks.

It took a further four months before the first issue of *Meiyu* went into a fourth print run, dated April 8, 1915, and showing a completely different cover (fig. 4). The (unsigned) image now shows a young woman who is fully clothed, wearing a fashionable jacket with a high collar, tight shoulders, and a diagonally closing front. At the center of the image, the viewer’s attention is drawn to the fact that
FIGURES 2–4. Covers of the first (top left), second (bottom left), and fourth (above) print run of *Meiyu* 1, no. 1. Figures 2, 3, Shanghai Library; Figure 4, Stanford University Library.
she is biting on a corner of her handkerchief, which her left hand appears to be tugging down gently. In visual depictions of young women, the gesture of biting the handkerchief while staring into the distance typically represents a mixture of shyness and expectation, linked to budding romantic feelings or sensations. The title of the cover image remains unchanged: “Qingbai nü’er shen” 清白女兒身 (An Unblemished Woman’s Body). The connotations of the caption in relation to the image, however, have changed entirely. In the provocative cover of the first three print runs, the crucial term qingbai 清白 refers to the pure nakedness of the body, whereas in reference to the later cover, the term seems to describe the woman in all her innocence.

This process was repeated with the publication of the second and third issues, where initial covers showing more or less nude women were replaced in later print runs with images of women whose bodies were less exposed. With the fourth issue, an image of a fully clothed woman was later replaced by an image of a landscape. The fifth and sixth issues feature more images of women’s upper bodies wrapped in near-transparent sheets, and in one case (the sixth issue) a single breast exposed (figs. 5–12).

Much of the swapping of cover images took place in the spring months of 1915. It is likely no coincidence that this happened around the same time that the Ministry of Education in Beijing began to publicly criticize the publishing industry for its lack of moral standards. The March 1915 issue of Jiaoyu zazhi 教育雜誌 (English title: The Chinese Educational Review) reproduces a document issued by the ministry in January 1915, carrying the title “Quangao zhuzuo chuban jie yi zhuyi wenhua” 勸告著作出版界宜注意文化 (We Urge Writers and Publishers to Pay Attention to Culture). Although this lengthy critique coming from the authorities targets the publishing world as a whole, it specifically mentions “fiction magazines” that “offend public decency” and cover images that “expose . . . bodies.”

This must have caused the editors of Meiyu some unease. To the best of our knowledge, Meiyu was unique among contemporary magazines for featuring nudity on its cover. Despite the absence of direct archival evidence, it seems hardly a coincidence that the journal’s most provocative cover images were replaced in new print runs of earlier issues that were done after the authorities had issued this document. One outcome of these events is that the two most common editions of Meiyu available to scholars today (the 2006 reprint and the Shanghai Library digitization) produce a very different visual impact, likely leading to different conclusions about the transgressiveness, and the complexity, of Meiyu, especially in its early issues.

**Popular Education and Censorship**

It is important to note that the critique of modern publishing cited above originated from policy makers concerned about education. Education, especially of
those traditionally denied schooling, including many women, was on the minds of many early Republican intellectuals, activists, and officials. What was called “popular education” 通俗教育 (tongsu jiaoyu) was spreading rapidly around the country. To support such efforts, “popular libraries” 通俗图书馆 (tongsu tushuguan), offering free access to books, magazines, and newspapers, were established in many cities.12 This provided commercial opportunities for publishers of textbooks and other reading materials to support these educational efforts. What educators were concerned about was that publishers would put profit over pedagogy by catering too much to vulgar tastes.

On July 18, 1915, the Ministry of Education established an official body tasked to give guidance and direction to publishing activities aimed at lower-educated readers. Led by Ministry of Education officials and joined by representatives of the Beijing police and various Beijing institutes of higher education, this Popular Education Research Association devoted most of its time to inspecting popular reading materials circulating in the book markets in China, especially in Beijing. They divided themselves into three sections 股 (gu), respectively devoted to fiction 小说 (xiaoshuo), drama 戏曲 (xiqu), and speeches 演讲 (yanjiang). The choice of these vernacular genres reflects assumptions about what people with low literacy levels would read.

Zhou Shuren (i.e., the later Lu Xun) was appointed chairperson 主任 (zhuren) of the Fiction Section, serving in that capacity from September 1915 to January 1916. Throughout the rest of 1916 he attended meetings of the Fiction Section, wrote inspection reports about works of fiction, and took part in censorship discussions. Scholars in China have written positively about Lu Xun’s contribution to the censorship process, with some, as mentioned above, anachronistically praising him for starting the fight against what would later become known as the “Mandarin-Ducks-and-Butterflies style.” More recently, an attempt has also been made to link Lu Xun’s experience as a censor with the development of his literary sensibilities and his understanding of the kind of writer he wanted to become.13 Although these scholars all mention the banning of Meiyu, the journal does not seem to interest them.

In previous publications, we have written in general about the banning of Meiyu by the Popular Education Research Association.14 Here, we look in more detail at the working methods and inspection standards of the Fiction Section, as formulated by its inaugural chairperson. We also pay attention to some of the lengthy discussions between the section members, which led to Meiyu becoming the only fiction magazine to be banned during the entire life span of the association. The minutes of all meetings held by the three sections from 1915 to 1918, as well as lists of all books and magazines they inspected, and copies of official documents they issued, can be found in their four annual reports 報告書 (baogaoshu). Official documents also appeared, as they were issued, in Jiaoyu gongbao 教育公报.
FIGURES 5–12. Original and later covers of Meiyu 1, no. 2 (this page, top); 1, no. 3 (this page, bottom); 1, no. 4 (facing page, top); and covers of Meiyu 1, no. 5 (facing page, bottom left); and 1, no. 6 (facing page, bottom right). Figures 5, 7, 9, Beijing University Library; Figures 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, Shanghai Library.
(Education Gazette) and sometimes in *Jiaoyu zazhi*. The discussion below is based on these sources.

**Setting the Standards**

Within three months of their appointment, the members of the Fiction Section, under the leadership of Zhou Shuren, had agreed on the criteria by which they would assess all works of fiction that came their way. These criteria were first published in the December 1915 issue of *Jiaoyu zazhi*. At the outset, the criteria divide all fiction into eight categories based on their subject matter: education, politics, philosophy and religion, history and geography, the natural sciences, social affairs, fables and jokes, and “miscellaneous.” Within each category, works can receive one of three quality rankings: upper rank 上等 (*shangdeng*), middle rank 中等 (*zhongdeng*), or lower rank 下等 (*xiadeng*). The highest rank is reserved for fiction that not only is well written but also disseminates accurate knowledge and is of benefit to education. The middle rank, which most publications inspected by the group would end up in, is reserved for works that are lacking in literary excellence but still useful for educational purposes. This is an indication of the pedagogical priorities of the association: fiction is a tool, not an end in itself. The lowest ranking is described in language that points either to a lack of truth-value (bizarre, absurd, ridiculous) or a lack of morals (indecent, obscene, vulgar, harmful). This is the kind of language that would be applied to *Meiyu* throughout the group's discussions.

In a further note to the description of its inspection standards, the group wrote: “Upper-rank fiction we should try to promote; middle-rank work can be allowed; lower-rank works we should try to restrict or ban” 上等之小說，宜設法提倡；中等者，宜聽任；下等者，宜設法限制或禁止之. In practice, this led to the committee introducing two additional ranking categories: a top category called “upper-rank with prize” 上等給獎 (*shangdeng gei jiang*) and a bottom category called “lower-rank and to be banned” 下等禁止 (*xiadeng jinzhi*). The annual reports of the association contain long lists of all the books and magazines that were inspected and their respective ranking. As Paul J. Bailey has pointed out, a large number of banned book titles made reference to sex. To this we can add that many of these titles referred especially to sexual adventures by women and that, without exception, the censors were all men (see fig. 13).

The final sentence of the Fiction Section’s statement about inspection standards adds an additional element to our discussion: “The covers and illustrations of all categories of fiction must be inspected separately according to the above standards” 各種小說之封面及繡像插畫等，均宜參考照上列標準分別審核. This provision was clearly meant to capture those instances, referred to in the ministry’s critique of publishers cited above, where books with innocuous contents were marketed with provocative covers to boost sales.
After agreeing on its general standards, the Fiction Section spent additional effort recording its working methods 条例 (tiaoli) to be applied in the inspection of fiction magazines. The document outlining these methods acknowledges the fact that periodical publications are different from book publications and present unique problems to censors, such as how to deal with content that is only partially objectionable, how to deal with serialization, and whether or not to inspect issues of periodicals separately or as part of larger volumes or sets. Most important for our purposes here is the indication that inspections of magazines would pay special attention to the visual elements (covers and illustrations), as well as to the overall “editorial intention.”

On the basis of these standards, sixteen magazines were listed in the annual report for 1916. No prizes were given, but two journals were considered upper rank: *Xiaoshuo lin* 小說林 (Forest of Fiction), published in Shanghai, and *Xin xiaoshuo huibian* 新小說彙編 (Compilation of New Fiction), published in Yokohama. Well-known titles such as *Funü zazhi* 婦女雜誌 (English title: *The Ladies’ Journal*) and *Zhonghua xiaoshuo jie* 中華小說界 (English title: *The Chung Hwa Novel Magazine*) were considered middle rank. The inclusion of *Funü zazhi* and other women’s journals into the category of fiction magazines confirms the committee’s interest in inspecting titles related to women, even if these did not present themselves specifically as fiction magazines. Of the three magazines considered lower rank, *Meiyu* was the only one for which banning was recommended. Below we look more closely at the discussions that led to *Meiyu* being considered more seriously flawed than any of its contemporaries.
The Banning of *Meiyu*

The minutes of the meetings of the Fiction Section show that *Meiyu* was regularly discussed together with three other magazines considered problematic: *Youxi zazhi* 遊戲雜誌 (English title: *The Pastime*), *Xiangyan zazhi* 香艷雑誌 (Enticing Magazine), and *Huaji zazhi* 滑稽雑誌 (Comical Magazine). The minutes of the twenty-first meeting, which took place on July 5, 1916, mention that a majority of the group were in favor of banning *Youxi zazhi*, that one of its members had inspected *Xiangyan zazhi* and classed it lower rank, and that further inspection of both these journals, as well as of *Meiyu*, was ongoing. During the meeting the question was raised of whether a distinction should be made between banning journals that are entirely bad 惡劣 (elie) and those that have only some bad content. One member suggested that partial banning should be possible, while others held that, if the majority of the content is bad, the entire journal must be banned. Zhou Shuren is mentioned by name as agreeing with the latter position, that is, total banning of all issues of journals with bad content.

During the twenty-fourth meeting, on August 9, 1916, the group's attitude toward *Meiyu* becomes clearer: a proposal to ban it is unanimously accepted. Members disagree about the other three journals. Dai Kerang 戴克讓 (1874–?), who was to become chairperson of the group in 1917, stated that "these journals merely use a playful style to deliver playful substance" and added that, compared to *Meiyu*, they were not a priority; all present agreed. The group then set out to draft, on behalf of the Ministry of Education, a request to the Ministry of Home Affairs to ban the sale of *Meiyu*, dated September 7, 1916. The Ministry of Home Affairs agreed and issued a nationwide ban on the printing and sale of *Meiyu* on September 25, 1916. Both the official request and the official banning order appeared in the November 1916 issue of *Jiaoyu gongbao*. The banning order was also widely reprinted in provincial publications.

In its original request for a ban, the Ministry of Education stated that “harmful fiction” 不良小說 (buliang xiaoshuo) does great damage to social morals and needs to be controlled. It mentioned the special difficulties involved in inspecting magazines, as opposed to books, and cited the Popular Education Research Association’s report on *Meiyu*:

This association, in examining a magazine called *Meiyu*, has found that its language and topics seem specifically aimed at destroying moral barriers and harming social standards. Among all fiction magazines, its errors are the gravest. We have found that this magazine continues to be published; therefore measures must be taken for it to be banned. . . . Examination shows that the fiction and images carried by *Meiyu* are largely of an obscene nature and of ridiculous intention. They seem unaware of respect for human dignity. If this sort of fashion were to spread, it would do considerable harm to social morality.
Both the use of morally focused negative language and the attention to all aspects of the editorial intention of the journal (i.e., its fiction as well as its illustrations) reflect the norms and methods established by the Fiction Section under Lu Xun’s chairpersonship.

In the remainder of this article, we look in detail at examples of Meiyu’s “editorial principles” that fell afoul of the censors’ moral standards for magazine publishing. The censors themselves did not provide specific examples, other than to say that both the textual and the visual content of Meiyu were obscene and absurd. Our approach here is interpretive, trying to translate the censors’ summary opinion back into concrete instances of transgression. We pay special attention to aspects of the journal that demonstrate “editorial agency,” such as the arrangement of images and of texts and the connections forged between them. Examples include instances of intervisuality (images on the cover and on the inside pages referring to each other), intertextuality (themes or language used across different genres of writing), and what we call interplay or interaction between texts and images. The latter includes editorial decisions about what captions to add to which images, as well as examples of photographs and images inspiring the writing of stories or poems. We apply this method to trace the theme of nudity, as well as the related themes of romance and coupledom.

Nudity
In the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, displaying visual representations of unclothed human bodies in the popular press became a prominent global phenomenon. Images of unclothed bodies were circulated in many cities around the world, in part due to the affordable reproduction of photographs and paintings that came with the introduction of modern print culture. In each of these cities, the appearance of nudes first challenged conventional views but later came to be regarded as an icon of civilization, largely associated with debates on aesthetics, bourgeois lifestyle, and modernity.

In the mid-1910s, the depiction and description of unclothed bodies, whether for artistic, commercial, or other purposes, were emerging topics of debate in urban China as well, largely as a result of influences from Western culture and the impact of similar debates in Japan in the 1890s. The earliest Chinese artist to draw nude models is assumed to have been Li Shutong (1880–1942) in 1914. The earliest commercial advertisement image featuring a nude is considered to have been
painted by Zheng Mantuo in 1915. Both men are closely linked with the founding of Meiyu. Li wrote the price list for Gao Jianhua’s calligraphy, which was featured as an advertisement in the early issues of Meiyu. Zheng Mantuo, as mentioned above, provided the nude cover image for the first issue. The fame of Zheng’s cover image can be gauged from a 1917 spoof “legal complaint” published in the entertainment journal Yuxing 餘興 (Lingering Leisure), in which a “woman-in-the-picture” is described as bringing a lawsuit against Zheng Mantuo, demanding that he stop putting her naked body on the cover of fiction magazines, turning her “unblemished” (qingbai) beauty into an obscenity. The reference to Meiyu is clear, since no other fiction journals at the time had featured nudes painted by Zheng Mantuo, and the term unblemished directly refers to the title of Zheng’s cover.

Despite the emerging elite interest in nudes, these images were far from uncontroversial throughout the 1910s, especially in contexts where they might be shown to wider audiences, such as at exhibitions. The decision to feature nudity in Meiyu shows that the editors were aiming at more than just leisure or entertainment—they put (semi)nude images on the covers of five of the first six issues. In a later issue, they also placed an announcement asking readers to send in “famous paintings” 名畫 (minghua) on three different themes, fashion, love, and nudity, offering ten to fifty yuan in cash per picture. On the occasion of the magazine’s first anniversary, the editors offered to reward new subscribers with an “enticing and elegantly beautiful” large calendar poster, “two feet long and over one foot wide,” depicting a “naked beauty” 裸體美人 (luoti meiren). It is clear that editors considered the inclusion of female nudes a selling point for the journal.

Like other journals at the time, Meiyu opened each issue with several pages of images and photographs. In the first issue, Gao Jianhua included two photographs of Western women dressed in tight-fitting, semitransparent outfits that clearly showed their curves and created the impression of nudity. One photo carries the caption “A Consort Yu from the West (Taming a Horse),” and the other is called “A Concubine Yang from the West (after Bath)” (fig. 14). Based on the style of the pictures, props displayed, clothing, hairstyles, and photo studio seals, the images are readily recognizable as so-called French postcards (or erotic postcards). These were produced in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and were widely circulating around the world and avidly collected.

The caption of the first image refers to the famous Three Kingdoms-period story of Xiang Yu 項羽 and his beloved concubine, known as Consort Yu 虞姬 (Yu ji), later popularized as Bawang bie Ji 霸王別姬 (Farewell My Concubine) in different styles of performance, such as Peking Opera or, most recently, a 1993 film of the name. Although the caption itself has no erotic overtones, a visual analysis of the image yields a different result. In Western visual culture, and especially in the semantic system of the French postcards, horses typically represent masculinity.
Images of women juxtaposed with stallions have an obvious erotic connotation. In the second image, the reference to the famous concubine Yang Guifei 楊貴妃 (719–56) and the genre label “After Bath” 出浴 (chuyu) are clear indicators of erotic intent and extremely common themes linked to nude images at the time. Here, the interplay of images and captions further enhances the sexualization of the women’s bodies.

In later issues of *Meiyu* much more content relates to Yang Guifei coming from her bath. In issue 4, for instance, a selection of classical Chinese poems by Japanese writers called “A Hundred Odes to Women” contains a work by Takashina Shunpan 高階春帆 (1825–1905) inspired by a painting of a beautiful woman coming from her bath. The same issue also reproduces several passages from poems by the contemporary poet Fan Zengxiang 樊增祥 (1846–1931), including some lines from his “Yi yu” 憶浴 (Remembering the Bath). In the poetry section of issue 5, Gao Jianhua selected a poem called “Ode to the Bath” by the Tang poet Han Wo 韓偓 (844–923). The cover of issue 14 shows a woman in a loosely draped robe, with one breast exposed, with the caption “Looking over Her Shoulder at the Fragrant Water and Smiling” 回頭卻顧蘭湯笑 (Hui tou que gu lantang xiao). In addition to poems and image captions, some of the fiction in the journal also makes frequent reference to bathing scenes. When all these photographs, captions, poems, and stories are juxtaposed with the notion of the “unblemished” naked woman’s body, it is fair to say that the latter image becomes distinctly ambiguous.

**FIGURE 14.** Reproductions of French postcards in *Meiyu* 1, no. 1. Shanghai Library.
It appears that Gao Jianhua, both as editor and as author, reflected on this ambiguity and responded to it. After the first three issues, which all featured nude images, the fourth issue went in a different direction. None of the print runs of the fourth issue that we have seen feature a nude cover image, nor do they contain nudity on the inside pages. Instead, the issue opens with a story by Gao Jianhua herself, titled “The Words of the Naked Beauty” 裸體美人語 (Luoti meiren yu). In this story, Gao experiments with new connotations of nudity. As far as we know, this story is the first-ever literary work commenting on nudity written by a female author, heralding the emergence of a new treatment of (female) nudity in modern Chinese literature.

The story starts out with a lengthy description of a “remarkable beauty” 奇美人 (qi meiren) named Meixian 眉仙. As the daughter of a famous recluse, her home schooling has been impeccable. She is fond of the hermit lifestyle and roaming through nature. All those who see her are struck by her resemblance to “the Western statue of the Goddess of Liberty” 西洋雕刻之自由女神 (Xiyang diaoke zhi ziyou nüshen). In contrast, her cousin Xiajing 霞婧, who is just as beautiful, is much more skillful with makeup and jewelry. When Meixian’s father is on his deathbed, he tells his daughter that she is too “innocent” to live in the mundane world and instructs her to look after the house and to allow herself to be betrothed only to a man who is “handsome and lighthearted as well as a great scholar.” He adds a final warning: “Wealth will kill you.”

Meixian lives in solitude for a while but gradually starts to get bored, at which point her cousin, who has since married into an imperial prince’s household, comes to visit. Attracted by Xiajing’s wealth, Meixian becomes envious. Gradually her character changes, and she starts to long for luxury and riches. After Xiajing has returned to the palace, Meixian decides to visit her. She is excited by the luxurious palace life, with its dazzling splendor and excessive ceremony. One day, the imperial concubines go on an outing, and Meixian wanders away from the group, only to suddenly find herself in a mysterious, idyllic place, where she encounters a naked woman. The story ends with the following passage, in which Meixian recounts her dialogue with the naked beauty:

As I was pacing about, I noticed the face of a beautiful woman appearing among the blossoms. I quickly walked over and looked at her and found she was a naked beauty. Slender and beautiful she stood by the flowers, charming and naive. When I looked closer, I saw her skin was smooth and creamy, her hair draped down like silk, and she seemed completely unembarrassed by my presence. She stared at me with her gorgeous eyes and said: “You are a vulgar person. Get out of here.” I laughed and replied: “Look at you, stark naked. I can’t stand how vulgar you are.” When the naked beauty heard this, she sighed softly and said: “Makeup powder makes you dirty; clothes and jewelry are just
for ceremony. Of all the evil in the world, none is worse than adornment. Fake gentlemen adorn themselves with fake morality; wanton women adorn themselves with clothing. What is adorned loses its true nature, overemphasizing politeness, wallowing in mechanicalness, and never returning to what is real. I feel sad about common people being so sinister and deceitful; I can't avoid them quickly enough. I live here and preserve my natural brightness and purity, nurturing my simplicity and honesty, without recourse to any fancy words or pretty ornaments, yet the taste for beauty is strong in my mind, and nothing is more important than this.” When I heard what she said, I awakened to my mistake in having returned to mundane life. Thereupon I remained forever in the mountains, following the beauty, so as to restore my perfect purity.

正徘徊間，見叢花中隱隱露一美人之首。儂急趨視之，則一裸體之美人，玉立花前，憨容可掬，細察其膚，色如凝脂，披髮如垂絲，見人毫無羞澀態。彼乃以瑩瑩之目注儂曰，汝俗人也，速去此。儂笑對之曰，若汝者，一絲不掛，真俗不可耐矣。裸體美人聞之，微哂曰，脂粉污人，衣飾拘禮，世間萬惡，莫大於飾。偽君子以偽道德為飾，淫蕩兒以衣履為飾。飾則失其本性，重於客氣，而機械心盛，返真無日矣。吾悲世人之險詐欺飾也，吾避之惟恐不速。吾居此留吾天然之皎潔，養吾天性之渾樸，無取乎繁文華飾，而吾心神之美趣濃郁，當無上於此者矣。儂聞其語，儂乃大悟吾重入塵俗之非。隨終於山中，追隨美人，以還我完璞也。  

Gao’s decision to give her protagonist the name Meixian (眉仙, Eyebrow Fairy) can hardly have been accidental and must constitute an intertextual reference to Meiyu. As an innocent girl lost in decadent society, Meixian is moved by her meeting with the “naked beauty” and follows her in order to restore her own purity. Nudity is presented as a return to one’s true self and as the opposite of hypocrisy and wantonness. It is significant that Gao, as a female author, uses this story to undermine the male convention of playful ambiguity when writing about female nudity. Gao turns nudity into a metaphor for innocence and unblemishedness, communicating bodily awareness through a form of écriture féminine. Female nudity is presented as a signifier not for sexual seduction but for purity, simplicity, and honesty. In contrast, clothing and jewelry become tools to cover up depravity and to fake morality.

This logic encourages a reinterpretation of the publication of nude images in Meiyu and issues a powerful defense of the editorial intention in linking such images with captions such as “an unblemished woman’s body.” Gao Jianhua’s arrangement of images in Meiyu and her redefinition of nudity in “The Words of the Naked Beauty” constitute a unique intervention by a female editor into an ongoing cultural discourse about nudity, as well as a clear transgression of the male-dominated moral conventions of mainstream society. The images printed in the magazine
provided a visual foundation for Gao’s literary imagination, inspiring her to give nudity a new significance. Conversely, these images can serve as important footnotes to Gao’s story about the naked beauty. This is yet another example of the interplay of images and texts in *Meiyu*: cover images inspire stories, which in turn help redefine or reinterpret the images. Similar mechanisms can be seen at work in the magazine’s treatment of the themes of romance writing and coupledom.

**Romantic Couples**

*Meiyu* editor Gao Jianhua and her husband, Xu Xiaotian, were first cousins and childhood lovers. Throughout their joint journal editing career, starting with *Meiyu* in the mid-1910s and culminating in *Hong ye* 紅葉 (Red Leaves) in the 1930s, they always portrayed themselves as an extremely close and loving couple. Although Gao’s name appeared alone in the *Shenbao* advertisement for the first issue of *Meiyu* (see fig. 1), Gao and Xu appear together on a photograph inside the actual issue, while the journal manifesto refers to her as “the wife of Mr. Xu Xiaotian.” In the photograph, they seem comfortable in each other’s company, but other than his hand on her shoulder there is no sign of intimacy. In issue 2, another photograph of the couple appears, this time with Gao seated and Xu standing behind her, making no physical contact. These relatively restrained depictions contrast and interact with several outspoken descriptions of their passionate love for each other that can be found elsewhere in the journal, as well as with frequently appearing photographs of both Chinese and Western romantic couples. Some of these representations of coupledom may well have been perceived by the Ministry of Education censors as displays of “flirtatious men and women.”

In issue 4, for instance, Xu published ten so-called new love-letters 新情書 (*xin qingshu*), in which he ardently professes his love for Gao, as well as the hardship of spending time apart. In one of the letters Xu also refers to the fact that he and Gao were cousins and that already in childhood they “promised to grow old together” 訂白頭約 (*ding baitou yue*). This description connects nicely with a series of pictures in the same issue, showing two small children, a Western boy and girl, innocently playing together, to which the editor has added the caption: “Secretly Destined for Marriage” 姻緣暗卜圖 (*yinyuan anbu tu*).

Another example of a text describing marital intimacy is a story by the female author Liu Peiyu 柳佩瑜 published in issue 5. The narrator starts the story by suggesting that all manner of romantic activity takes place in the private quarters of the couple Gao and Xu. She then adopts the persona of Gao’s pet dog, Xuebi 雪婢 (Snowy Servant), and describes a highly intimate scene: Xu tiptoeing into the bedroom, finding his wife asleep, and secretly using his hand to measure the size of her feet. In both the written and visual tradition of Chinese erotica, fondling the feet has always been portrayed as a form of sexual arousal. This passage in the story should be considered particularly daring.
Above we mentioned French postcards as a frequent source for the circulation of nude images. Postcards also featured many different kinds of images, for instance, of couples kissing or otherwise displaying intimate behavior. These themes make up a considerable proportion of the postcard images reproduced in *Meiyu*. In issue 3, an image of a Western man and woman sitting together at a table, smoking and chatting, is given the caption “Treating Each Other with Respect” 相敬如賓 (*xiāngjìng rúbīn*); in issue 4, a heart-shaped photograph showing a Western couple holding hands and looking into each other’s eyes gets the title “Reliving Their Parting by the Flowers” 花前溯別 (*huā qián sù biē*); in issue 13, an arrangement of three pictures shows a variety of kissing and hugging couples. The caption reads “A Multitude of Love” 萬千歡愛圖 (*wànqīan huān’ài tu*), but a short poem appearing underneath, inspired by another one of Fan Zengxiang’s works, features erotic language hinting at sexual intercourse:

My body full of fragrance, soft and fair and warm  
Wrapped in my perfume he feels my lasting fondness  
Expertly I handle all my beau’s spots  
Just now collapsed in bliss I soon revive him once again

竟體芳蘭撲玉溫，  
薰人長感阿儂恩，  
最能操縱檀奴處，  
剛使消魂又返魂。  

Again, it is the interplay of texts and images, brought about by editorial decisions, that pushes the arrangement as a whole toward the limits of contemporary propriety.

The editors showed considerable inventiveness in their arrangement of the various intimate images. One method they used several times was to contrast photographs of Western couples with photographs of Chinese couples. For instance, beneath the above-mentioned image of the Western couple tightly holding hands and looking into each other’s eyes in issue 4, there is an image of a Chinese couple, also holding hands though maintaining considerably more physical distance. The same technique is used to arrange two photos of couples in issue 9. In both cases, the Chinese couples appear to be a man and a woman, but on closer inspection the woman turns out to be impersonated by a man. In the former image, the man playing the male role is clearly recognizable as Xu Xiaotian himself. As for the female impersonator in the picture, we were able to confirm that this is Lu Zimei 陸子美 (1893–1915), a famous actor in the New Drama 新劇 (*xinju*) genre (fig. 15). At the time the social status of New Drama actors was low and the frequent appearance, and intimate gestures, of New Drama actors in the
pages of *Meiyu* may well have been one of the sociocultural factors influencing the perception of indecency, although picturing actual Chinese women, rather than female impersonators, in such positions would likely have been considered even more offensive.  

As in the case of the theme of nudity, the images of intimate couples also inspired writing in several genres. Issue 5 includes a photograph with the caption “Laughing as She Throws Herself toward His Shoulders, Telling Him to Hold Her Tight” (笑撲郎肩教抱牢 *xiao pu lang jian jiao baolao*). In the picture we see a “woman” with a long braid, played by Lu Zimei, who is standing on a rock and seems to want to come down. Below “her,” Xu Xiaotian, dressed in a Western-style suit, is holding out his hands, as if to make sure that “she” can safely climb or jump down. In the picture they appear to look fondly at each other, with smiles on their faces, creating the impression of intimacy. Issue 7 includes a short poem that reads:

Exquisite are the rocks, piled up low and high  
Leisurely watching the wild geese, straining my tired eyes
Why is it that the young lass, who stands leaning in his direction
Laughs and throws herself toward his shoulders, telling him to hold her tight

壘石玲瓏低復高，
閒看飛雁倦眸勞，
小姑底事偎儂立，
笑撲郎肩教抱牢。37

Clearly this poetic description was inspired by the earlier photograph. And in issue 8 we find a short story by Zhang Qingzhen 張慶珍 that is also titled “Laughing as She Throws Herself toward His Shoulders, Telling Him to Hold Her Tight,” providing an even more imaginative backstory for the scene in the picture.

The interplay among images, poetry, and fiction is a conspicuous feature of the content of *Meiyu*. Further examples abound. In issue 7, an author called Ru Hua 汝華 published a poem in which each line referred to a different image in the front of issue 5; on the inside back cover of issue 6, Gao Jianhua announces that readers of the journal have been gifted with a set of romantic postcards 愛情明信片 (*aiqing mingxin pian*) under the title “Combing Her Hair behind the Crystal Curtain” 水晶簾下看梳頭 (*shuijinglian xia kan shutou*). The same issue includes a short story that carries the same title and opens by professing the inspiration the author received from viewing the postcards.

Images are sources of inspiration for contributors to *Meiyu*, while their works conversely enrich the content and meaning of the images. As a consequence of these frequent textual-visual interactions, *Meiyu* as a whole came to constitute a self-referential sign system that increasingly presented the themes of nudity, coupledom, and romantic expression. And it seems it was the force of this presentation that struck the censorial nerves of the Popular Education Research Association.

**Conclusion**

Although Gao Jianhua’s journal *Meiyu* published only eighteen monthly issues and was banned within two years of its launch, it played an important pioneering role in modern Chinese print culture, editorial culture, women’s culture, literary culture, visual culture, and body culture. The study of *Meiyu* also carries significance for our understanding of Chinese moral and educational standards during the early Republic and for our understanding of Lu Xun, who worked to impose those standards. *Meiyu* was the first and only magazine to be labeled harmful, obscene, and absurd, based on a comprehensive interpretation of its texts, covers, illustrations, captions, and editorial principles. As we have shown, it was the magazine’s thematic emphasis on textual and visual representations of female nudity and romantic interaction, combined with the gender of its main
editor and proclaimed readership, that most likely led to it being considered more harmful than any other journal of its time.

The appeal to a female readership was especially significant in this context, since female readers were also an important target of the campaign for popular education. The mere thought of Meiyu, with its libertine, audacious, and at times openly erotic content, being used for literacy education was unbearable to the censors, to the extent that they insisted on having its sale and distribution completely cut off. No other magazine was treated in this way.

Previous scholarship has wrongly conflated the suppression of Meiyu with the later criticism of the so-called Mandarin-Ducks-and-Butterflies style, for no reason other than that Lu Xun said so, in his misleading and duplicitous statement of 1931. In fact, Meiyu was not the kind of commercially oriented, culturally conservative publication that is usually targeted by the pejorative “Mandarin Ducks” label. Instead, it was every bit as opposed to Confucian morality as the later Lu Xun and his associates would be, but it expressed this opposition through an emphasis on public male-female interaction, as well as through presenting a blend of traditional and modern erotic culture, taken from textual and visual sources from both inside and outside China. Meiyu challenged the same moral taboos that the later May Fourth generation would challenge, but it also challenged that revolutionary generation in its prudishness, as well as in its unwillingness to connect traditional and modern cultural sources.

From the point of view of cultural studies, the case of Meiyu shows how important it is to look beyond labels and study journals in their entirety, paying attention to the interaction between their textual and visual content and how these were arranged. Such an approach encourages new ways of close reading that integrate texts and images, moving away from the conventional division of labor that has seen scholars of Republican-era literature look mainly at the texts, while scholars of Republican-era art look mainly at the covers and illustrations. Surprisingly, it is in the minutes of the meetings of the men who banned Meiyu that we find confirmation for this argument: even the censors were aware that when assessing a journal the entirety of its contents and its editorial intention should be taken into consideration, and the judgment on the journal as a whole was something different from individual judgments on any of its parts.

It has taken nearly a hundred years for Meiyu to regain critical attention. Lu Xun referred to it as the epitome of the Mandarin-Ducks-and-Butterflies style, yet that style has been the object of scholarly attention and reappraisal since at least the 1980s. Inspired mainly by general trends calling for more emphasis on popular culture, scholars both inside and outside China have by now written countless books and articles on the Mandarin-Ducks style, but still very little about Meiyu. Even those recent studies that have yielded important information about, and analyses of, fiction by women writing for Meiyu are nearly silent on
the journal's really very obvious libertine interests, such as the omnipresence of nudity. This indicates that at least some of the elite moral disapproval that led to its ban in 1916 is still affecting its suitability for study in 2019.

The historical and contemporary fate of Meiyu should alert us to the presence of a range of cultural material from the Republican period that continues to be unexplored and unstudied. Even though most political restrictions on Republican-era investigations have now been lifted, there are still moral restrictions, which are often not clearly pronounced and are implemented not by the political authorities but by the intellectual elite—or by both operating in tandem. As our study has shown, if these moral judgments are not challenged by detailed archival research and close, comprehensive reading, they can easily obscure the existence of richly diverse cultural tapestries that, though innocent by today's standards, remain tainted by the labels they were once given.

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Acknowledgments

Earlier versions of this article have been presented at various conferences and workshops over the last few years. Numerous librarians and scholars helped us acquire rare materials and offer constructive feedback. We especially thank Chen Jianhua, Grace Fong, Theodore Huters, Huang Guorong, Jin-Chu Huang, Joan Judge, Barbara Mittler, Wu Shengqing, and Zhu Junzhou. We are also grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions.

Notes

1 Gao Jianhua's date of death is unknown. According to personal correspondence with her husband's great-nephew, Xu Baowen 許寶文, she was still alive in 1965. For the assumption that Gao Jianhua was born around 1890, see Huang, “Lü Yunqing,” 226.

2 A recent article by Guo Haofan 郭浩帆 shows, based on advertisements in Shenbao, that by the time Meiyu published its final issue, it was nearly two months behind schedule. Guo's evidence suggests that the real publication date of the final issue was May 30, 1916. Guo, “Minchu xiaoshuo qikan Meiyu.”

3 Meiyu 1, no. 1 (November 1914): inside front cover.

4 The first Chinese periodical edited by a woman and aimed at women was Nü xuebao 女學報 (Chinese Girl's Progress), published from July to October 1898. See Qian, Politics, Poetics, and Gender in Late Qing China, 123–24. For general studies of Republican-era women's journals, see Judge, Republican Lens; and Hockx, Judge, and Mittler, Women and the Periodical Press.

5 See, e.g., Link, Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies, 171.
Huang, “Constituting the Female Subject.”

Ibid. For another comparison between male-authored and female-authored fiction in *Meiyu*, see Hockx, *Questions of Style*, 135–36.


This effect is strengthened by the fact that the 2006 reprint has blurred many of the nude images appearing on the inside pages of the journal. A good example of how this impacts on research is a recent article by Ma Qinqin 马勤勤, which argues, based on evidence taken from *Shenbao* advertisements, that *Meiyu* started drawing attention to nudity only later in its life span in an attempt to further increase sales. Ma is clearly not aware that the early issues of the journal in fact featured more nudity than the later ones. See Ma, “Zuowei shangye fuhaodeng nü zuozhe.”


Li, “Tongsu jiaoyu yanjuihui.”


*Tongsu jiaoyu yanjuihui di-e r ci baogaoshu*, section zhengcheng 章程 [Procedures], 3.

Bailey, *Reform the People*, 189.

*Tongsu jiaoyu yanjuihui di-e r ci baogaoshu*, section zhengcheng 章程 [Procedures], 3.

*Tongsu jiaoyu yanjuihui di-e r ci baogaoshu*, section wendu 文牘 [Documents], 17.

For a definition of the concept of editorial agency, see Sun, “Body Un/Dis-covered,” 15–17. For a specific example of editorial arrangement of nude images in the context of Republican-era publishing, see Sun, “Exotic Self?”

See, e.g., Dawkins, *Nude in French Art and Culture*; Nicholas, “Figure of a Nude Woman”; Picard, “To Popularize the Nude in Art”; Dijkstra, *Naked*; and Satô, *Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State*.

For the genealogy and semantic constitution of the concept of *luoti* 裸體 (unclothed bodies) in Republican China, see Sun, “Body Un/Dis-covered,” 30–107.


As Julia F. Andrews shows, various 1910s exhibitions showing nudes were met with social disapproval. Andrews, “Art and the Cosmopolitan Culture of 1920s Shanghai.”

For instance, the first-ever seminude advertisement image, painted by Zheng Mantuo, referred to above, was an image of Yang Guifei after her bath. See Laing, *Selling Happiness*, 118–19.

32 For the later development of the love-letter genre in modern Chinese literature, with yet another connection to Lu Xun, see McDougall, Love-Letters and Privacy in Modern China. See also Findeisen, “From Literature to Love.”

33 Liu, “Caizì jiaren xin you zhi,” 1. For a further example of textual-visual interaction, note that a photograph of Gao’s pet dog had already appeared in the first issue of Meiyu.

34 The closing lines of Fan Zengxiang’s “Yì xiàng” 念香 (Remembering the Fragrance) read: “Her body full of fragrance, the embroidered quilt is warm / By the perfume on his clothes he feels her lasting fondness / Expertly she handles all her beau’s spots / Just now collapsed in bliss she soon revives him once again” 竟體芳蘭繡被溫, 薰衣長感玉人恩, 最能操縱檀奴處, 剛使消魂又返魂. Fan, Fanshan xùjì, 26.20b. For Fan’s poetic and social activity during the early Republic, see Wu, Modern Archais, 185–88.

35 We identified Lu Zimei by comparing the picture in Meiyu with named pictures of him in Youxì zāzhǐ 遊戲雜誌 (English title: The Pastime). Meiyu also published pictures of female-female couples. For a discussion of this aspect of the magazine’s content, see Sang, Emerging Lesbian, 1–3.

36 Compare the uproar created as late as 1929 by the performance at various educational institutions of Lin Yutang’s 林語堂 (1895–1976) play Zì jiān Nánzǐ 子見南子 (Confucius Saw Nancy), which featured female actors appearing onstage with men. Again, the fact that these performances took place in educational settings was an important aspect in moralistic critics’ disapproval. Interestingly, in this case, Lu Xun actually sided not with the moralists but with the reformers. See Sohigian, “Confucius and the Lady in Question.”

37 The “young lass” 小姑 (xiāogū) and her man 郎 (láng) form a conventional representation of a romantic couple through reference to Mount Xiaogū 小孤山, which rises up in the Yangtze River near Anqīng 安慶, Anhui 安徽, and leans toward the Pengláng Rock 彭浪磯, which projects outward from the river shore. We are grateful to Xiaoshan Yang for help with translating this poem.

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