

Diary, Letters and Women Writers' Magazine Culture in Republican China

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1. Introduction

Quite a few women writers in Republican China including Bing Xin (1900-1999), Lu Yin (1899-1934), Su Xuelin (1897-), Feng Yuanjun (1900-1974), Shi Pingmei (1902-1928), Ling Shuhua (1900-1990), Lin Huiyin (1904-1955) and Zhang Ailing (1920-1995) showed an exclusive preference for the writing of short stories over other literary forms. The genre was commonly associated with less experienced young writers, including female writers. Yet, it was not only women writers who channelled most of their creative energy into the new modern

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genre. It is incontestable that Lu Xun (1881-1936) achieved recognition through his short stories. During the May Fourth Period, eminent writers such as Xu Dishan (1893-1941) and Yu Dafu (1896-1945) also devoted themselves to the creation of short stories. The short story came to usurp the novel in popularity during the pre-May Fourth era and the two decades that followed it.¹⁾ Various ideas circulated about the genre, which was in its formative stages. In this study, I shall examine the representative views of the short story in Republican China, and the distinctive aspects of the female elite writers' appropriation of the genre. In particular, based on my archival research of the magazines, I will approach the characteristics in relation to the magazine culture of the graduates of the National Beijing Women's Normal College (hereafter NBWNC), which produced a great number of famous women writers including Feng Yuanjun, Su Xuelin, Shi Pingmei and Lu Yin. Feng Yuanjun, short-story writer and scholar of classical literature, grew up in an educated family of officials in Henan province. Feng Youlan, one of the foremost scholars of philosophy in modern China is her elder brother. Feng Yuanjun began publishing short stories such as *Gejue* (Isolation) in *Chuangzao* (Creation Quarterly) from 1923 shortly after graduating from NBWNC. Su Xuelin came from a traditional extended family of low-level Qing officials in Anhui province. She entered NBWNC in 1919 at the same time as Lu Yin but left the college in 1921 and studied literature and

1) It reached a range of 20-30 collections annually during the years 1927-29; in the years 1935-37 the number fluctuated around 35-40 short story collections every year; and in the year 1947 over 40 short story collections were published. Zbigniew Slupski, Introduction, in *A Selective Guide to Chinese Literature 1900-1949 Vol II: The Short Story* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1988), p. 4.

art in a special programme for Chinese students at the Institut Franco-Chinois de Lyon. After returning from France in 1925, she published the short stories and essays that make up *Lutian* (Green Skies). Shi Pingmei, a native of Shanxi province, entered the Department of Physical Education at NBWNC in 1920. As an active member of political and social circles and lover of the revolutionary Gao Junyu, she voiced her opinions in frequent essays on women's rights, Marxism and social reform. Shi Pingmei was Lu Yin's closest friend, and their correspondence often appeared in journals such as *Fun zhoukan*. She co-edited *Fun zhoukan* with another NBWNC colleague, Lu Jingqing, and published a number of essays, poems and stories in the journal.²⁾ The college contributed a great deal to the emergence and development of modern Chinese women's literature and their magazine culture provides us with new insights into some significant characteristics of women's writings in modern China such as the frequent use of diary and letter.

Women's involvement with Republican magazines has been examined often in terms of feminist activities or commercialisation of the female body, and feminist magazines such as *Fun zazhi* and popular magazines such as *Linglong* attracted attention from scholars. Yet, women writers who attended elite universities such as the National Beijing Women's Normal College and Yanjing University showed distinctive ways of engaging in magazines. Using the term, the female elite, I intend to

2) Amy D. Dooling and Kristina M. Torgeson eds., *Writing Women in Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Liu Siqian, 'Nuola' yanshuo Zhongguo xiandai nzuojia xinlu jicheng (Nora's speaks Modern Chinese women writers' mental journey), (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1993); Su Xuelin, *Su Xuelin daibiaozuo* (Representative works of Su Xuelin), (ed. Zhongguo xiandai wenxueguan, Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1999).

explore the problematic of privilege in the public sphere and its distinction from the term, intellectual. Such a position in the print culture is closely related to their appropriation of the genre of the short story.

Strategically established and supported by the government, NBWNC was renowned nation-wide as an elite higher educational institution for women in Republican China.³⁾ The students are known to have received a high level of organised education. Notably, Li Dazhao (1888-1927) and Lu Xun both taught in the college and it produced a number of distinguished scholars and writers as well as educators. Teaching was one of the most promising jobs available for women at the time, thus normal colleges in general attracted quite a few outstanding female students. Furthermore, its location in the capital contributed to its attraction for distinguished female students from throughout the country. NBWNC, which was established and sponsored by the government, charged no tuition fees in principle.⁴⁾ The family

3) NBWNC was founded as the Capital Women's Normal School (Jingshi nzi shifan xuetaang) in July 1908 at the suggestion of a Royal secret inspector (yushi) Huang Ruiqi. As soon as the Republic was set up, its name was changed to the Beijing Normal Women's School (Beijing nzi shifan xuexiao). In line with the Ministry of Education's official promulgation of the establishment of the women's normal college (nzi gaodeng shifan xuexiao) on 12 March 1919, the government established the National Beijing Women's Normal College in April 1919. Guoli Beijing nzi shifan daxue gaile (Outline of National Beijing Women's Normal University), (Beijing: Guoli Beijing nzi shifan daxue, 1926); Lei Liangbo, Chen Yangfeng and Xiong Xianjun, Zhongguo nzi jiaoyu shi (History of education of Chinese women), (Wuhan: Wuhan chubanshe, 1993), pp. 329-32.

4) According to Wen-hsin Yeh, NBWNC did not charge tuition during the Republican Period: With the exception of normal colleges (National Beijing Normal University and National Beijing Women's Normal University), tuition was charged in all institutions of higher education during the Republican period. Wen-hsin Yeh, *The Alienated Academy: Culture and Politics in Republican China 1919-1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Centre, 1990), p. 196. However, in her autobiography, Lu Yin states that she had to earn the tuition

backgrounds of students at NBWNC were not socially as high as those of Yanjing Women's College. In general, while new women at Yanjing College were recognised primarily by for their beauty, NBWNC's new women were marked by their enthusiasm.⁵⁾ The well-known story of Li Chao's tragic death represents the severity of the conflicts that sometimes arose between zealous female students and their unwilling families.⁶⁾ It might be true to say that there were more barriers for women to become new women than for men to become new youth. NBWNC came to take an active part in social movements and quite often to be a centre of the socio-political struggles, including the incident of May 30th 1925.⁷⁾ The different characteristics between the

(xuefei) for entrance. In this instance, she may mean the boarding fee, or NBWNC may have charged tuition fees before it became the National Beijing Women's Normal University in 1924. In contrast, the tuition fee at Yanjing Women's College in 1924 was \$50 per year, including other fees it amounted to about \$160 per year. Supplementary Bulletin Regarding Course at Yenching Women's College 1924-1925, Bulletin no. 20 (1925): 6.

- 5) In the early 1930s, the numerical superiority of Yenching on three counts was widely recognized: its plethora of beautiful young women; the number of Western-style suits owned by its men; and the variety of social parties held on its campus. Wen-hsin Yeh, *The Alienated Academy*, p. 225, citing Beijing Chenbao ed., *Beiping daxue de zhuangkuang* (Conditions of universities in Beiping), (Beiping, 1929), p. 160.
- 6) Li Chao, a Beijing Normal Women's College student, unable to get financial and mental support from her wealthy family in Wuzhou, Guangxi province, died of tuberculosis in solitude in August 1919. She had been a student at Guangzhou Women's Public Normal School, but on hearing of the fame of NBWNC, went to Beijing and transferred to the college on her own initiative in the hope of receiving a better education. See Hu Shi, *Li Chao zhuan* (Biography of Li Chao), in *Wusi shiqi fun wenti wenxuan* (Selected writings on women problems in the May Fourth period), (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1981), pp. 209-20.
- 7) See Lu Jingxuan, *Beijing ngaoshi zai wusi yundong zhong* (Beijing Women's Normal College in the May Fourth movement), L Yunzhang, *Wusi yundong zhong de Beijing n xuesheng* (Female students of Beijing in May Fourth movement), in *Wusi yndong yu zhishi qingnian* (The May Fourth movement and young intellectuals), (ed. Chen Shaoting, Taipei: Huanyu chubanshe, 1973).

two representative women writers, Bing Xin, a graduate of Yanjing College, and Lu Yin may also be approached from the different college cultures. In mainland China, Bing Xin's literature was often characterised as the spirit of Spring (chunqi) while Lu Yin's was the spirit of Autumn (qiuqi).

This paper will examine the magazines in which the students or the graduates of NBWNC were deeply involved. This paper will explore how the magazines connected the female elite with the reading public; how the female elite compromised with the public gaze on the female body and the private life; and how the women's magazine culture interweaved the private with the public; and how the characteristics of their short stories can be understood in relation to such magazine culture. The women writers' short stories created a dialectical distance from both politics and art and inscribed female experiences and female sensibility within the framework of the genre. The public reception of their aesthetic experiments with the genre was inflected by their position in the print market and their magazine culture.

2. Various Views on The Short Story and the Gender/Genre Hierarchy

As Hu Shi himself declares, it was he who, for almost the first time in modern Chinese literary history, paid serious theoretical attention to the short story. Deploring the fact that most his contemporaries were vague about the new genre, Hu Shi presented a clear definition of the

short story. According to Hu, the short story is a mode of writing which, by means of the most economical literary devices, describes the most essential slices or aspects of facts.⁸⁾ He continues to expound on two superlatives, the most economical literary devices (*zui jingji de wenzue shouduan*) and the most essential part (*zui jingcai de bufen*). Hu remarks that in epigrammatic stories written using the most economical literary devices, words can neither be added nor eliminated. He argues that the short story writer must not abandon his aspiration to portray the whole body of reality, and that this goal only becomes possible when the author grasps the most essential part of reality. Hu Shi admits, however, that his definition of the short story is an idealistically perfect one, and I would argue that the short story is idealised from the standpoint of the novel in his terminology. Hu Shi charges the short story with the task of accomplishing what novels accomplish; in other words, he attempts to transform the genre into a compact version of the novel.

As Zbigniew Slupski points out, this tendency to view synecdochic characteristics as the main feature of the short story was prevalent among modern Chinese writers.

It [the short story] is the genre which in a concise, brief and symbolic way can talk about things which are complex, vast and far-reaching and would usually have to be discussed very extensively there is a fundamental difference between the novelists and the majority of modern short story writers, because the latter also aim at saying much, but with the help of comparatively few words.⁹⁾

8) Hu Shi, *Lun duanpian xiaoshuo* (On the short story), in *Xin qingnian* 4, no. 5 (May 1918): 463.

9) Zbigniew Slupski, *A Selective Guide to Chinese Literature 1900-1949 II: The*

In the West, too, quite a few critics of the short story equate novels with the whole and the short story with a fragment, and suggest that the latter should take the former as a model. Mary Pratt provides a useful articulation of this view: If the short story is not a 'full-length' narrative it cannot narrate a full-length life; it can narrate a fragment or excerpt of a life. And if from that fragment one can deduce things about the whole life, then the more novel-like, the more complete, the story is.¹⁰⁾

Certainly, then, the obsession with presenting the whole vision of life existed in the West as well as in China; but what is noteworthy in Hu Shi's article is the fact that his preoccupation with the whole is captured by the concept of the nation. Hu takes two examples of the short story that come close to his idealistic definition. These are *La dernière classe* (The Last Class) by Alphonse Daudet (1840-97) and *Le siège de Berlin* (The Siege of Berlin) by Guy de Maupassant (1850-93). Hu Shi contends that both stories are exemplary because they depict the French people's experiences of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 in a superb, laconic style. The two examples imply what Hu denotes by the whole and the most essential part. In Hu Shi's formulation, the whole limits itself within the national boundary and the most essential part is what evokes nationalist emotions.

In his article *Tan wo de duanpian xiaoshuo* (On My Short Stories), Ba Jin (1904-) also suggests that the short story is a genre which expresses deep import in a few words (*zishu shao yiyi shen*).¹¹⁾ Like

Short Story, p. 17.

10) Mary Louise Pratt, *The Short Story: The Long and the Short of It* in *The New Short Story Theories* (ed. Charles E. May, Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 99-100.

Hu Shi, Ba Jin associates deep import with the reality of the nation. In this article, he considers the short story primarily as an effective form for disclosing an oppressed people's miseries under imperialism and designates the short story writer as a spokesperson for the people.

If Hu Shi and Ba Jin expected the short story to be a compressed form of the novel, Lao She (1899-1966) ignored the short version in favour of the complete one. He confesses in a penitent tone that he wrote short stories simply for quick income and in accordance with the requests of journal editors. He did not take the genre seriously.¹²⁾

While male realist writers, whether they admit it or not, tend to approach the short story from the standpoint of the novel, the male modernist Shen Congwen posits that, from the perspective of avant-garde aestheticism, the short story is closer to poetry than to the novel. In his talk *Duanpian xiaoshuo* (The Short Story), Shen traces its genealogy from Chinese art and poetry rather than from the novel.¹³⁾

In creating a short story one must learn, to some extent, from the tradition of the past, and its language should be learned from language itself. Thus poetry must be placed first and novels placed last. In all art forms, the creator pours a kind of lyrical emotion into them, and the short story is no exception. If one attempts to learn from fiction (*xiaoshuo*) for the purposes of writing fiction (*xiaoshuo*), then one

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- 11) Ba Jin, *Tan wo de duanpian xiaoshuo* (On my short stories), in *Ba Jin wenji* vol. 14 (Collected works of Ba Jin), (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1962), p. 449.
- 12) Lao She, *Wo zenyang xie duanpian xiaoshuo* (How I wrote short stories), in *Lao She quanji* vol. 16 (Complete works of Lao She), (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1999), pp. 192-98.
- 13) Shen Congwen, *Duanpian xiaoshuo* (The short story), the transcript of his lecture at *Xinan lianda guowen xuehui* on 2nd May, 1941, in *Shen Congwen wenji* vol. 12 (The collected works of Shen Congwen) (eds. Shao Huaqing and Ling Yu, Hong Kong: Sanlian, 1984), pp. 113-27.

cannot gain much benefit. 14)

Shen Congwen highlights the lyrical language of the genre and applies the aesthetics of Chinese poetry and art to the short story, whilst distancing it from the novel. He presents an avant-garde paradox that the short story is promising because it has no bright future. Shen argues that since the genre is unprofitable, it frees itself from the fetters of commerce and politics and draw nearer to art. For Shen, art is located on the opposite side of commerce and politics. Shen encourages the short story writer to stand aloof from immediate reality just as traditional Chinese painters or poets did. The novel is inherently more susceptible to the vicissitudes of society so it cannot be an aesthetic model for the short story in Shen's view.¹⁵⁾

In fact, the short story has been seen as internally linked to modernism in the west because the two experiment with surfaceness and ephemerality of the modern period. Dominic Head, for instance, asserts that:

The rise of the modern short story in the 1880s and 1890s indicates that the written story enjoyed a period of significant development arguably the birth of a new kind of short story which was concurrent with the emergence of literary modernism. The short story encapsulates the essence of literary modernism, and has an enduring ability to capture the episodic nature of twentieth-century experience.¹⁶⁾

14) *Ibid.*, 126.

15) Cf. Short fiction does not reflect the 'human condition' as the novel does. It is not a sociological art form, and to approach it from a primarily sociological perspective is to distort and defy its inherent characteristics. See Walton Beacham, *Short Fiction: Toward a Definition*, in *Critical Survey of Short Fiction* (ed. Frank N. Magill, Essex: Bowker Publishing Company, 1981), p. 16.

16) Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

Lu Xun's view of the short story is distinctive from the two representative views of realists and modernists in China. He explored the subtle tensions between the novel and the lyric in his short stories. Marston Anderson, in his analysis of Lu Xun's short stories, suggests two contrasting characteristics of the realist short story. On the one hand, the short story is more fundamentally realistic than the novel since it is short enough to need no structuring in its presentation of a moment of existence. On the other hand, the short story is also akin to the lyric.¹⁷⁾ The presence of the author is more perceptible in the short story compared to the novel. In short, due to its brevity, the short story is at once more realistic and more artificial than the novel. Thus, the primary struggle in the short story is not waged between the protagonist and the fictional world, but between the feeling subject (author) and the resistant object (the world). As Anderson suggests, Lu Xun's short stories skilfully exhibit the unstable relationship that exists between the lyric and the novel, and the author and the world.

A few feminist critics of Chinese literature have explored the relationship between fiction and women. Lu Tonglin highlights the shared destiny of *xiaoshuo* (fiction, literally little talk) and women, who were often referred to as *xiaoren* (a narrow-minded person, literally little person). She argues that, due to the low status of both women and fiction in Chinese culture and society from the Ming dynasty to the present, the two entities have consistently been used by Chinese intellectuals to mark subversiveness and progressiveness.

Press, 1992), p. 1.

17) Marston Anderson, *The Morality of Form: Lu Xun and the Modern Chinese Short Story*, in *Lu Xun and His Legacy* (ed. Leo Ou-fan Lee, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 35.

Thus in modern China, both modern fiction and issues of gender have functioned as a mark of Westernised modernity.¹⁸⁾ Yue Mingbao articulates a rather critical view of the relationship between women and fiction in modern Chinese realist fiction. She demonstrates how early realist fiction hinged on the gendered structure of the male subject who set out to investigate the oppression of the object women.¹⁹⁾

In particular, women writers were often ridiculed for creating short forms of literature. It is fair to say that women writers initially welcomed the short story for its comparative ease of composition. In modern China women writers were rarely reckoned as the handlers of scientific knowledge or lengthy narratives. Instead they were often located on the opposite pole to scientific knowledge. The following piece from Chenbao fujian on 15th January 1924, Feifu yu (Words from the Bottom of the Heart), straightforwardly confirms that this was the implicit assumption amongst some male intellectuals:

A Mrs Bing Xin

A Mrs Lu Yin

Then, this Mrs, that Mrs, that Mrs, this Mrs. It compels people to think of mushrooms after rain.

Although Mrs Bing Xin has already reached the point that she cannot cut off Tang Jun or Lu Xun's influence, she has, after all, her own characteristics.

This Mrs, that Mrs, how about them?

New poetry, creation, creation, new poetry.

18) Lu Tonglin, *Misogyny, Cultural Nihilism & Oppositional Politics: Contemporary Chinese Experimental Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 11-12.

19) Yue Mingbao, *Gendering the Origins of Modern Chinese Fiction*, in *Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature and Society* (ed. Lu Tonglin, New York: State University of New York, 1993), pp. 47-65.

Why don't you study some mathematics?
Why don't you study some physics?
Is the world infinite or definite?
Is there a great power inside an atom or not?
Where does human beings' intellectuality come from? The brain?
Some gland?
Why don't you prove these kinds of things?
But just new poetry, new poetry, creation, creation.²⁰⁾

The piece sarcastically imitates the new style of poetry in order to show how easy it is to create a new poem. It also represents a male intellectual's irritation over the increasing number and popularity of women writers. It is true that short genres such as poetry and the short story were accessible to less experienced young writers, including female writers. Realist critics believed that the short story reflected the writers' inability to handle panorama of society and structured, full-length narratives.

More often than not, their use of the short story was seen as indicative of their literary inferiority a view with which they themselves sometimes concurred. However, the easy access also meant a relative freedom from the formal constraints of the novel and poetry. While male writers applied the aesthetics of the novel or poetry to the short story and sought to lift the genre to the level of the novel or poetry, women writers welcomed the short story for its freedom from the

20) This piece was originally written by a male author, Liu Shang and published in a newspaper in Tianjin. Reading the piece in the newspaper, the contributor Yin Hen thought that the question Liu Shang raised deserved wider public consideration, so he sent it to the editor of the *Chenbao fujian*. Liu Shang, Feifu yu (Words from the bottom of the heart), in Yin Hen's *Feifu yu*, in *Chenbao fujian* 15 January 1924. *Chenbao fujian* is the other title used instead of *Chenbao fukan* for this period. Tang Jun is one of Lu Xun's pennames.

stylistic or thematic constraints of other literary genres, such as the burden of dealing with the real or with refined language. In the short story, V.S. Prichett finds the collapse of standards, conventions and values, which has so bewildered the impersonal novelist.²¹⁾ Significantly, women writers did not shape the genre into the ideals of the novel or poetry. It is not only their subjective literary practice but also their position in the literary field which generated such characteristics. The interplay between avant-garde aesthetics and popular literature in which the female elite writers engage is embodied in the genre of the short story, in particular in the literary forms of diary and letters.

3. Diary and Letters and the Magazine Culture of the Alumni of the National Beijing Women's Normal College

Both in the west and China, women's preference for diary and letters has been discussed by many scholars. Lydia Liu and Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker, in their analyses of Ding Ling's *Shafei nshi de riji*, stress the point that through these subjective forms women writers were able to delve into female subjectivity.²²⁾ While acknowledging this point,

21) V.S. Prichett, *Short Stories*, in *Harper's Bazar LXXXVII* (July 1953): 31, 113, quoted in Frank N. Magill ed., *Critical Survey of Short Fiction* vol. 1, p. 87.

22) Lydia H. Liu, *Invention and Intervention: The Female Tradition in Modern Chinese Literature*, in *Gender Politics in Modern China: Writing and Feminism* (ed. Tani E. Barlow, Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 33-57; Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker, *Subjectivism and Literature*, in her *Ding Ling's Fiction: Ideology and Narrative in Modern Chinese Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 19-51.

Wendy Larson also suggests that the forms of diary and letters reflect the difficulty of linking women and literature, even for May Fourth female writers such as Lu Yin and Bing Xin: In order to be associated with a woman in a story or novel, writing must appear in mediated forms such as the diary or letter, rather than in a direct representation of the creative transcendence of fiction or poetry.²³⁾ For Larson, both the use of diary and letters and the representation of the sick female body register May Fourth women writers' difficulty in linking women and writing. Larson's view that diaries and letters constitute mediated literary forms may be susceptible to the criticism that she takes for granted the literary hierarchy which privileges fiction or poetry, characterising these as the highest forms for creativity, because this idea was forged in close connection with male dominance in the literary field.

I think that the modern Chinese women writers' preference for the letter and diary form can also be seen in relation to this print culture of friendship and secretive coterie. It also shows a particular way of appropriating the genre of the short story. The women writers from NBWNC started their magazine activities from their college period by editing and writing in the college magazine, *Wenyihuikan* (Periodical of Literature and Arts). The college magazine carried introductions to curriculum and particular lectures, and essays in various topics including social issues.²⁴⁾ The boarders at Honglou (Red Building,

23) Wendy Larson, *Women and Writing in Modern China*, p. 125.

24) For instance, Lu Yin's four articles appearing in *Wenyihuikan* under her real name of Huang Ying, were *Lijizhuyi yu litazhuyi* (Egoism and altruism, 2nd issue), *Jindai xiju de xin qingxiang* (The new tendency of the modern drama, 3rd issue), *Chen Jiaoxuan xiansheng jiangyan wenke jinxing fangzhen* (The guiding principles of the course at the Faculty of Humanities: Mr Chen Jiaoxuan's talk,

dormitory of NBWNC) continued the friendship forged in that dormitory, even after their graduation, and magazines were the pivot of their communal relationship. Some of the university students and graduates set up the Beijing Rose Society (Beijing qiangwei she) and published their own journal. The Beijing Rose Society was primarily led by Lu Jingqing (1907-93) who was still a student at the university, and by graduates such as Shi Pingmei and Xue Wen. Firstly, they began to publish their own weekly journal *Fun zhoukan* on 10 December 1924. Lu Xun's article *Guafu zhuyi* (Widowism) appears in the special issue of *Fun zhoukan* celebrating the first year of publication, which focused on the topic of the education of women. *Fun zhoukan* ceased publication in December 1925 after 50 issues were published. The opening article in the initial issue was written by Shi Pingmei. *Fun zhoukan* was printed with only five pages per issue in the form of a third supplement to *Jingbao* and included articles dealing with social issues related to women and literary works in short forms such as poems, prose and short stories.

The Beijing Rose Society resumed its activity of journal editing in April 1927. The society started to publish *Qiangwei zhoukan* (The Rose Weekly), which was the second supplement to *Shijie ribao*. The main authors included Binghua, Bowei, Dili, Pingsheng, Pingmei, Biqian, Dongmei, (Yu) Gengyu and Lu Yin. This journal, similar to *Fun zhoukan*, published articles that introduced feminist movements and

2nd issue) and Li Shizeng xiansheng jiangyan Faguo di nxue jie (Mr Li Shizeng's lecture on Female Academic Society in France, 4th issue). Chen Dingxiu's essays in the college periodical include *Tuoersitai zhi wenxue* (Tolstoy's literature) and *Duweiboshi jiangyan 'jiaoyuzhexue'* (Dr Dewey's lecture on 'Philosophy of Education').

short literary writings. The short leaflet-type journals led the editors and the authors to produce short forms of writings and such a supplement type may have represented the specially allocated corner for the women writers in the print market of Republican China.

The NBWNC students' literary activities including magazine editing can be understood from special textures of their friendship. Schools and colleges, in general, represented liberated spaces for female students in the otherwise rigidly defined patriarchal territory of Republican China. For many students at NBWNC, the gulf between the college campus and other social space was profound. For them, college may have symbolised a spiritual enclave from the patriarchal outer world.

In the two magazines of *Fun zhoukan* and *Qiangwei zhoukan*, the close relationship of the group of authors to each other is shown clearly, which were often letters to one another. Many writings which are not in the form of letters also share the emotional setting of friendship. The authors in the magazines exchanged letters with spiritual concerns and in literary style. The print culture of the female elite coterie was in some senses buttressed by the authors' view, which regards the letters as spiritual rather than as private. In particular, the correspondence between Shi Pingmei and Lu Yin shows that how they used mass printed journals as the sphere of private letter exchange. Among many of the private references, the following sentences in Shi Pingmei's letter epitomise their correspondence culture in the print media.

I have read your *To the Lonely Goose in the Far End of the Sky* (Ji tianya yi gu hong). You have succeeded. After reading it, I shed tears, and even wailed! It was a very gloomy, cloudy day, and I came across Yijun of the Women's Normal University (Nshida) at a dusty junction.

She let me know that your letter to me is in the recent issue of Xiaoshuo yuebao.²⁵⁾ (My translation)

This letter was published in Qiangwei. Compared with the abstract manner in Lu Yin's printed letters, Shi Pingmei's letters are more unequivocal.

Lu Yin was undoubtedly the most productive and famous writer among the graduates of NBWNC and was most deeply involved, as the editor and the author, in all the journals which the NBWNC alumni published. She is often mentioned as one of the female writers who made frequent use of diaries and letters in their writings. The literary form of the diary was found in many of her works such as *Lishi de riji*, *Fuqin* (Father), *Yi ge qingfu de riji* (Diary of a Mistress), *Shidai de xishengzhe* (The Victim of the Times) and *Gui yan* (Goose Returning). Most of her other works make use of letters, such as *Yi feng xin*, *Shengli yihou*, *Huoren de beiai*, and *Haibin guren*. Lu Yin is also famous for having published the love letters between herself and Li Weijian. Some stories such as *Manli* include both forms, diary and letters.

The literary genres, the imagery and atmosphere in her literature had a close resemblance to the writings in the journals that NBWNC alumni published. One of the distinctions of the journals was to present the authors' names in two characters often omitting surnames. For instance, Shi Pingmei's name always appeared as Pingmei and Lu Jingqing's name was Jingqing in *Fun zhoukan* and *Qiangwei zhoukan*. Of course, we can find similar examples in other journals where only

25) Shi Pingmei, *Ji haibin guren* (To the old friend at the seashore, 25 December 1925), in *Shi Pingmei sanwen xuanji*, p. 66.

given names were included. Such a phenomenon was not uncommon in modern and contemporary China for various reasons: many authors preferred not to reveal their names in the public sphere and a few anarchist journals such as *Fendou* (Struggle) used English abbreviations for authors' names in place of Chinese names as a gesture of objection to the family system. However it was rare to consistently print only given names throughout publications. I believe this highlights the informal and casual characteristics of the relationships among the authors and such a way of imagining the relationship between the author and the reader.

The blurring of the boundary between the inside and the outside of the fictional text is also noticeable. Lu Yin's intermingling of the fictional genre of the short story with her private letters suggests the inclination of her short stories to the genre of essay. Shi Pingmei often referred to Lu Yin as Lusha, the protagonist's name in Lu Yin's representative story, *Haibin guren*, or simply as *haibin guren*. In *Fun zhoukan*, Lu Yin also published a short essay entitled as *Haibin xiaoxi* (The News from the Seashore) under the penname of Lusha.

The literary writings in the two magazines show pure and sorrowful adolescent-like emotions and the common imagery of rain (*yu*), autumn (*qiu*), return (*gui*) and hero (*yingxiong*). The literary world of these women was primarily under the influence of traditional Chinese literature. In general, state-sponsored universities such as Beida, Shida (Beijing shifan daxue, Beijing Normal University) and NBWNC laid stress on and excelled in the teaching of Chinese literature and history. The curriculum of the Department of Chinese Literature at NBWNC which produced a great number of women writers aimed at the

teaching of traditional Chinese literature. Within traditional literature, the curriculum of the department focused heavily on composition and linguistics. Optional subjects for the third-year students in the department in 1921, for instance, were: selected exemplary writings (mofan wenxuan); selected academic writings (xueshu wenxuan); selected stylistic writings (yuti wenxuan); introduction to literature (wenxue gailun); grammar (wenfa); philology (wenzi xue); historical phonology (shengyun xue); literary history (wenxue shi); rhetoric (xiuci xue); and practices of Chinese composition (guowen lianxi).²⁶⁾ The women writers' short stories were shaped by the literary imageries from traditional Chinese lyrics.

What is noteworthy is the female friends' worshipping of masculine heroes. Their letters are full of the expressions tears, blood, heroes, and a person of playing with the world (youxi renjian) etc. For instance, when Shi Pingmei's letter says, Lu Yin! I have filled up myself with affectionate warm blood. I wish to soak the cold-blooded, unfeeling world in my warm blood, (1927) we can relate this imagery with Lu Yin's story *The Hero in the Pool of Blood*, which was included in Lu Yin's second collection of short stories, *Manli* in the following year.²⁷⁾ Her short story, *Xuepo zhong de yingxiong* (*The Hero in the Pool of Blood*) is an example of her decadent association of the hero with blood. The story is replete with all her favourite liquid metaphors of tears and blood combined with the lake or sea. It is based on a story

26) Guowenbu xueke kecheng yilan bing jiaoshou gaikuang (Outline of academic curriculum and the teaching staff of the Faculty of Chinese literature), in *Wenyihuikan* no. 3 (1921): pp. 6-7 (Appendix).

27) Lu Yin! Wo manzhu zhe yiqiang youqing de rexue, wo shi yuanyi ba lengkuwuqing de shijie, jin zai wo rexue zhong. Shi Pingmei, *Gei Lu Yin* (To Lu Yin, 23 January 1927), in Shi Pingmei *sanwen xuanji*, p. 52.

about the tragic death of a young student called Zhixuan, about which the narrator heard from his/her friend. The major part of the story depicts the narrator's imaginings about Zhixuan's inner consciousness and sentiments during his last few days. At the beginning of the story, we are told that Zhixuan had been axed by a contract murderer in a revenge attack. The main part of the story overflows with the description of his dire pain and agony; the illusions and thoughts of his dim, fading consciousness in the hospital; and his father's tears. Zhixuan is repeatedly depicted as sleeping in a pool of blood (shui zai xuepo zhong) and the traumatic imageries of the blood sea and tears inter-flow in the streams of his half-consciousness ebbing away towards death.

This characteristic of worshipping heroes can be traced back to their college period. The (future) notable women writers, Lu Yin, Wang Shiyong (the chairwoman of the Student Union), Chen Dingxiu, and Cheng Junying (both executives of the Literary Society at the college) formed an exclusive coterie of the Four Princes (si gongzi), the appellation from the Warring States Period. Their distinctive group behaviour, such as wearing the same clothes, and pretensions to the masculine heroes attracted their classmates' attention, and after the publication of Lu Yin's story *Haibin guren* (Old Friends at the Seashore), modelled after the Four Princes, they came to be famous not only among the students at the college but also to the public.

In the subjective forms of diary and letter, the imaginary position of the reader is that of an intimate, sympathetic female friend. This kind of writing culture is reminiscent of that of the male and female literati in pre-modern China. Yet the primary difference lies in the fact that

the letters of the women writers were published in newspapers and supplements to newspapers. The private relationship between the reader and the writer in the literary world of these women evokes the feeling of sisterhood, but on the other hand, it is accompanied by the commercialisation of the woman writer's privacy.

The following episodes show how the reading public was interested in women writers' private lives. In a letter sent to Lu Yin, Wang Lixi, (1901-39, the chief editor of *Shenzhou guoguangshe* and Lu Jingqing's husband) said [I] hope that you, living in half seclusion, will not keep a secret from the reader of our *Dushu zazhi* (Reading Magazine).²⁸ It shows demand for the publication of a woman writer's private life. When her love affair with Li Weijian, who was nine years her junior, was put under intense public attention, they chose to publish their love letters in *Tianjin Yishibao* from February of 1930, and *Shenzhou guoguangshe* republished them under the title of *Yun'ou qingshuji* (Love Letters of Yun and Ou) in February 1931 in a collection which included 68 letters between the two. The women writers' ultimate pursuit of spirituality ironically led right to the core of commercialism.

A more philosophical turn of the NBWNC alumni's journal activities is found in 1929. Yu Gengyu and Lu Yin co-edited the literary journal, *Huayan* and the main authors of the journal were Jingqing, Boxi, Junong and Dongmei, besides the two editors. Thus the group of authors to a great extent coincided with that of *Fun zhoukan* and *Qiangwei zhoukan*. *Huayan* was a monthly journal published on the 20th of every month starting on 20th January 1929. Interestingly, the

28) Letter from Wang Lixi to Lu Yin on 15 February 1931. Here in Yang Yufeng, Lu Yin ji Wang Lixi de yi feng yihan (A lost letter from Lu Yin to Wang Lixi), in *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yanjiu congkan* no. 4 (1993): 263.

so-called Literary Association group writer, Lu Yin, promoted what is known as the Creation Society's motto, art for art's sake in an essay in the journal.²⁹⁾ Huayan is a journal for philosophical issues and literary theories rather than for women's issues. This journal anticipates the alumni friends' future careers of professors and teachers in the field of literature.

4. Conclusion

I have tried to discuss modern Chinese women writers' preference for the genre of the short story and their particular way of appropriating the genre, that is, diary and letters in relation to the magazine culture of the NBWNC graduates. No doubt, this study is merely one way of interpreting the literary phenomenon but as NBWNC played a significant role in modern Chinese women's literature, their magazine activities can be seen as an important setting for it.

Diary and letters of the modern Chinese women writers can be seen as subjective, spiritual, private or commercial. For feminist critics, diary and letters were the literary means for women writers to explore female subjectivity; for the women writers from NBWNC, the forms express the friends' spiritual communication; for readers, the secretive forms satisfy the readers' curiosity for women writers' private lives; for

29) Lu Yin, *Wenxuejia de shiming* (The duty of a literary man), in *Huayan* 1, no. 1 (January 1929): 11. For the journal, see Jeelson Hong, *Paradoxical Individualism in Lu Yin's Writings* *중국현대문학* (Modern Chinese Literature) 67 (December 2013): 99-128.

editors, women writers' private narratives seemed commercially promising.

The female elite from 1920s' Beijing may have regarded the magazine as a public platform for private correspondence exchanges, or in their view, spiritual dialogues. Yet, the secretive use of the public sphere and the fusion of fictional characters with real people contributed to enhancing public interest in women writers' private lives. The spiritual and lyrical or what one may simply call girlishculture of the magazine, unexpectedly brought them to the heart of print capitalism.

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< Abstract >

The short story came to usurp the novel in popularity during the pre-May Fourth era and the two decades that followed it. Various ideas circulated about the genre, which was in its formative stages. In this study, I examine the representative views of the short story in Republican China, and the distinctive aspects of the female elite writers' appropriation of the genre. In particular, I approach the characteristics in relation to the magazine culture of the graduates of the National Beijing Women's Normal College (hereafter NBWNC), which produced a great number of famous women writers. Their magazine culture provides us with new insights into some significant characteristics of women's writings in modern China such as the frequent use of diary and letter. Diary and letters of the modern Chinese women writers can be seen as subjective, spiritual, private or commercial. For feminist critics, diary and letters were the literary means for women writers to explore female subjectivity: for the women writers from NBWNC, the forms express the friends' spiritual communication; for readers, the secretive forms satisfy the readers' curiosity for women writers' private lives; for editors, women writers' private narratives seemed commercially promising. The female elite from 1920s' Beijing may have regarded the magazine as a public platform for private correspondence exchanges, or in their view, spiritual dialogues. Yet, the secretive use of the public sphere and the fusion of fictional characters with real people contributed to enhancing public interest in women writers' private lives. The spiritual and lyrical what one may simply call girlish culture of the magazine, unexpectedly brought them to the heart of print capitalism.

Key words: Short Story, Diary, Letters, Female elite, Magazine, National
Beijing Women's Normal College, Public, Private

원고접수일	심사일정	1차수정	게재확정	출간
2014. 9. 16.	2014. 10. 20.	2014. 11 5.	2014. 11. 15.	2014. 11. 30.