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Alternative Marriage Practices of Wartime Urban China in Discourse and Practice (1937-1949)

Charlotte Cotter

EAST 480: One-Term Senior Essay

Advisor: Professor Peter Perdue

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I. Introduction[1]

In the summer of 1937, Japan launched its full-scale invasion of China, beginning what would be an eight-year-long conflict that ended with the surrender of the Japanese in 1944. The end of the war with the Japanese did not deliver the era of peace much awaited by the Chinese citizens. No sooner had the Japanese surrendered than China barreled headfirst into civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists. The Chinese Civil War resulted in the Communists' ultimate victory and the October 1, 1949 founding of the People's Republic of China, an event that often overshadows the wartime period in the popular imagination.

Yet, the wartime period is at the heart of China's twentieth century. It was a transitional period characterized by extreme levels of instability, uncertainty, and chaos. While Western academics have produced a significant body of work on China's experience in WWII,[2] historians are only recently turning to the social impact of the war on individual lives, especially those of women. In *The Chinese People at War: Human Suffering and Social Transformation*, Diana Lary poignantly illustrates the enormity of suffering that Chinese individuals endured during the war and the severity of the population displacement that upended China's very social fabric.[3] Zhao Ma draws from municipal criminal case records to survey everyday survival tactics of

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[1] This paper owes a great debt to Professor Peter Perdue, who was fundamental in shaping the argument and structure of the essay. The author also wishes to recognize Mark Baker, who gave very crucial suggestions.

[2] For general English scholarship on China's War of Resistance against Japan, see Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937-1945* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing, 2013); James C. Hsiung and Steven I. Levine, eds., *China's Bitter Victory: War with Japan, 1937-45* (Abington: Routledge, 1992)*;* Lloyd E. Eastman, *Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution, 1937-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984)*.* To date, the bulk of the research focuses on politics, collaboration, economics, literature written by elites, state building in GMD areas, developments at CCP bases, and military history of the period.

[3] Diana Lary, *The Chinese People at War: Human Suffering and Social Transformation, 1937-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

lower-class women in wartime Beijing.[4] Danke Li has undertaken a pioneering study of the lives of individual women in the wartime capital of Chongqing, relying on personally conducted oral histories to illuminate the more hidden aspects of daily wartime life.[5] However, no English studies to date have attempted to illuminate the social lives of women in occupied urban areas of the Lower Yangtze.[6] Following in the footsteps of Lary, Li, and Ma, my paper draws attention to the more mundane side of wartime experience often neglected in favor of macro masculine-focused political and military histories or the dramatic, sensational, and violent aspects of war. My study demonstrates that, as in other areas of China, citizens within China's occupied areas experienced both agency and constraints that wove together into nuanced, varied choices, falling somewhere in the grey area in between. Through the lens of alternative marriage practices, my paper sheds light on routine life caught in the crossroads of massive social upheaval and political turmoil. In the rough strokes that can be derived from limited historical sources, it sketches urban alternative marriage practices in the lower Yangtze during China's wartime period, primarily through the example of occupied Shanghai. How did the uncertainties and disruptions of war and

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[4] Zhao Ma, *Runaway Wives, Urban Crimes, and Survival Tactics in Wartime Beijing, 1937*-1949 (Cambridge: Harvard East Asia Monographs, 2015).

[5] Danke Li, *Echoes of Chongqing: Women in Wartime China* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

[6] In the Chinese language journal *Jindai zhongguo funüshi* 近代中國婦女史, Lü Fangshang has written a piece on marriage in wartime China based primarily on newspaper announcements. Her article also identifies "remarriage" (*chonghun* 重婚) and "co-habitation"(*tongju* 同居) as the two main trends in wartime marriage practice. However, her focus is solely on the wartime capital of Chongqing and does not extend to the occupied areas. In addition, she frames the rise of these practices through the term "*weizuzhi*" 偽組織 [False Organizations], arguing that like the "puppet government," they were fraudulent, problematic products of wartime that brought tragedy and conflict. My work tends to emphasize the ways in which wartime conditions empowered citizens to adopt alternative marriage practices, while, of course, also recognizing that it is also true that wartime conditions coerced citizens into participating in alternative marriage practices. While many of our findings are similar, Lü also does not delve too much into contemporary discourse.

occupation affect marriage practices among urban couples? How was that reflected in the contemporaneous public discourse on marriage and relationships?

Marriage had already been shifting significantly since the turn of the century. Going into the wartime years, the most prevalent ideal of marriage was set by the Republican Civil code (1929-1930) and championed monogamous male-female love-marriages.[7] Yet, in practice, women and men rebelled against this idea and created their own definitions of modern marriage based on convenience and economic considerations. In some cases, it was rather that they were forced by social and economic realities to adapt their definitions of the modern marriage. Under the chaos and violence of war, the widespread social dislocation, harsh socio-economic realities, and the extreme pressures of daily survival, alternative marriage practices flourished and garnered mainstream attention. There were two main themes that intensified in respect to marriage practices during this time period: one, a rise in "co-habitation" and "co-habitation" announcements; and two, the proliferation of "war wives" and "war husbands," in which wartime population displacement resulted in the separation of a couple and one or both sides took another partner Although both were illegal and tested the boundaries of social norms, public discourse offered couples a certain degree of flexibility in light of the extreme conditions of wartime life, given the tacit understanding that these practices would end with the war. Thus, the wartime period was crucial in creating space for the urban middle-class to publically engage with, even if only temporarily, alternative definitions of "the modern marriage."

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[7] Lisa Tran, *Concubines in Court: Marriage and Monogamy in Twentieth-Century China* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

II.   Historical Background

A. China's War of Resistance Against Japan (1937-1945)

In the summer of 1937, the Marco-Polo Bridge incident in Beijing sparked Japan's full-scale invasion of China, beginning what China calls their War of Resistance against the Japanese (hereafter referred to as the War of Resistance). By November 1937, the last of the beleaguered Chinese troops had withdrawn from Shanghai, surrendering the eastern coastal urban metropolis to the invading Japanese troops. After three months of bitter fighting left tens of thousands of casualties, entire portions of the city razed to the ground, and hundreds of thousands without homes, full-scale warfare shifted into a regime of foreign occupation.[8] A mass exodus of Shanghai residents fled inland with the retreating Guomindang (hereafter, GMD) army to escape the advance of the Japanese troops.[9]

Invasion proved an incredibly dangerous time for Chinese women. Both sexes, of course, were vulnerable to physical harm by aerial attack, bombardment, and fire. At the same time, the Japanese assault on the Chinese was gendered; in her survey of women's journals in the early war period, Susan Glosser found that sexual violence against women was especially commonplace during the invasion period.[10] Whereas men were shot or conscripted for labor, women were raped or forced into prostitution.[11]

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[8] Christian Henriot and Wen-Hsin Yeh, "Introduction," in *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun: Shanghai Under Japanese Occupation,* eds. Christian Henriot and Wen-Hsin Yeh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.

[9] Danke Li, *Echoes of Chongqing: Women in Wartime China* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 35.

[10] Susan Glosser, "Women's Culture of Resistance," in Christian Henriot and Wen-Hsin Yeh, ed., *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun: Shanghai under Japanese Occupation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 310.

[11] Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 22.

B. Japanese Occupation of Shanghai

In Shanghai, the Japanese occupation is conventionally split into two periods: the *gudao* 'solitary islet' period from 1937-1941 and the period of full Japanese occupation from 1941 to the Japanese surrender in 1945.[12] Because the foreign settlements (the International Settlement and the French Concession) self-proclaimed neutrality during the conflict, they were spared Japanese military occupation for the first four years of the war. From 1937-1941, Japanese occupation was limited to the former walled Chinese city and the suburbs surrounding the foreign concessions, making the foreign settlements somewhat like an 'isolated island' of independent sovereignty. This gave rise to the name of the period – *Gudao* 孤島, or 'solitary islet.'[13] However, on the morning of August 8, 1941, Japanese forces commenced a full-military occupation of the International Settlement and the French Concession, which would continue until the Japanese surrendered in 1945.[14] Despite being called the International Settlement, by this time, the majority of the residents of Shanghai's foreign settlements were Chinese.[15]

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[12] Wen-Hsin Yeh, "Prologue: Shanghai Besieged, 1937-1945," in *Wartime Shanghai*, ed. Wen-hsin Yeh (London: Routledge, 1998), 1-17.

[13] The International Settlement included the financial center of the Bund, the famous shops of Nanjing Road, and the residential areas and shopping areas in the French Concession. Parks M. Coble, "Chinese Capitalists in Wartime Shanghai, 1937-1945: A Case Study of the Rong Family Enterprises," in *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun: Shanghai under Japanese* Occupation, eds. Christian Henriot and Wen-Hsin Yeh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 46. The Chinese part of the city was made up of the 320 square miles comprising the Shanghai Special Municipality, which included the regions of Jiangwan, Zhabei, Nanshi, Yangshupu, and Pudong as well as its hinterland. Poshek Fu, *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration: Intellectual Choices in Occupied Shanghai, 1937-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), xii-xiii.

[14] Nicole Huang, *Women, War, Domesticity: Shanghai Literature and Popular Culture of the 1940s* (Boston: Brill Publishers,2005), 4.

[15] Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2004), 28.

As mentioned before, the Japanese invasion precipitated a mass inland migration of people away from occupied areas in the Lower Yangtze. People who fled were generally wealthier and many were higher level GMD government officials, who had reason to believe that their ties to the Nationalist government would cause them to suffer under Japanese occupation.[16] Yet, those who lacked the resources to flee or decided against abandoning Shanghai stayed behind and made do with the circumstances they found themselves in.[17] It is important to note the distinction between invasion and occupation. As Brook succinctly states, "Invasion is one thing, occupation another. An invasion mobilizes massive force to drive a military opponent into defeat; an occupation means turning attention from soldiers to civilians and establishing institutions through which the conquered territories can be administered."[18] While the brutal physical assault and rape of women discussed in conjunction with the invasion certainly continued into the occupation period, the "re-building" nature of the occupation to some extent tempered conditions of total anarchy.

Many Chinese citizens in occupied areas wrestled with practical choices between collaboration or resistance in order to survive. Average middle-class urban dwellers, however, were not a part of the elite political or intellectual activities of government building.[19] Rather, the priority was on securing food to eat, clothes to wear, and a house to live in.[20] The practical

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[16] David P. Barrett, "Introduction: Occupied China and the Limits of Accommodation," in *Chinese Collaboration with Japan 1932-1945: The Limits of Accommodation,* eds. David P. Barrett and Larry Shyu (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 10.

[17] Brook, *Collaboration*, 240.

[18] Brook, *Collaboration*, 33-34.

[19] Lo Jiu-jung, "Survival as Justification of Collaboration, 1937-1945," in *Chinese Collaboration with Japan 1932-1945: The Limits of Accommodation,* eds. David P. Barrett and Larry Shyu, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 117.

[20] In fact, staying out of politics could have been a survival strategy in and of itself, given the threat to one's life that participating in contemporary politics incurred. See Frederick Wakeman

challenges of daily survival, however, proved more and more of a challenge. During the wartime period, civilians in Shanghai faced rampant inflation, astronomically high prices for goods and materials, resource scarcity, and severe shortages of food, as well as changes to their environment such as military blockades, sandbags, and barred windows. According to Christian Henriot in "Rice, Power and People: The Politics of Food Supply in Wartime Shanghai (1937-1945)," the two main causes of concern for Shanghai's authorities and population were price increases and food shortages.[21] More specifically, by the end of the war, inflation was skyrocketing. Food supplies deteriorated, and legal and black market prices alike soared as the Japanese took control of Central China's resources.[22] Citing Christian Henriot's work, the price of rice in *yuan* for ten *dan* (around 180 kgs.) was 12.20 in 1937, doubling in 1939 for a price of 23.72, and tripling for a price of 63.27 in 1940.[23] In 1943 and 1944, because of the hyperinflation that struck Shanghai after the change in currency under Wang Jingwei, prices soared to 1416.60 and 11155.50 respectively. In this situation, Poshek Fu writes that even the fortunate people who were employed could not maintain minimum subsistence in the majority of cases.[24]

C. Lack of "Post-War Period" – China's Civil War (1945-1949)

Following the defeat of Japan in the summer of 1945, the Nationalist government returned from their wartime capital of Chongqing to try to reclaim their power. The Chinese people were in high spirits over their victory, looking forward to a new era of peace, stability,

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Jr., *The Shanghai Badlands: Wartime Terrorism and Urban Crime, 1937-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[21] Christian Henriot, "Rice, Power and People: The Politics of Food Supply in Wartime Shanghai (1937-1945)," *Twentieth-Century China* 36, no. 1 (November 2000): 68-69.

[22] Fu, *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration*, 47.

[23] Christian Henriot, "Rice, Power and People: The Politics of Food Supply in Wartime Shanghai (1937-1945)," *Twentieth-Century China* 36, no. 1 (November 2000): 46.

[24] Fu, *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration*, 47.

and prosperity.[25] But immediately after the Japanese surrendered, the Nationalists and the

Communists became mired in civil war. To the bitter disappointment of the Chinese people, the

end of the war with the Japanese failed to stem political unrest, inflation, and military struggle,

rather heralding an extended period of instability and uncertainty. In an essay on Chinese society

during the 1940s, Joseph W. Esherick sees the Civil War as an extension of historical trends of

the War of Resistance, calling the war-torn years of 1937-1949 "the long decade."[26] He notes

that there were certain basic socio-economic changes that arose during the war, continued

through the civil war, and laid the foundation for the society that was to be created after 1949.

For one, runaway inflation was still rampant in the post-war years, continuing to bankrupt the

middle class, shrink salaries, and destroy any remaining savings.[27] Esherick noted that the

shifting Shanghai wholesale price index vividly reflected the crisis. If the wholesale price index

of September 1945 is taken as 100, the index increased to 1475 one year later, and to 12,534 in

September 1947. After the Gold Yuan reforms of 1948, it spiraled completely out of control until

it stood in August of 1948 at 1,368,049.[28] Food continued to be scarce and expensive, giving rise

to protests and rice riots.[29] Additionally, extravagant political corruption continued to flourish,

and bribery and monetary favors permeated all levels, as officials newly rich from confiscated

Japanese property enjoyed themselves in dance halls while the majority of the people were living

in poverty.[30] Marriage adaptations, such as co-habitation and "war husbands" and "war wives,"

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[25] Joseph W. Esherick, "War and Revolution: Chinese Society during the 1940s," *Twentieth Century China* 27.1 (2001): 2.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Esherick, "War and Revolution," 7.
[29] Esherick, "War and Revolution," 8.
[30] Esherick, "War and Revolution," 7.

that had developed during the War of Resistance against the Japanese bled into the era of the Chinese Civil War.

In October 1949, with the military victory of the People's Liberation Army, the Chinese Communist Party declared the founding of the People's Republic of China. Esherick writes that while, in many ways, the result of the civil war was the replacement of the old bankrupt social order with the Communists' revolutionary alternative, at the same time, there were important continuities between the old order and the new.[31] Indeed, it is crucial to remember that the social upheaval, chaos, and violence of the wartime years fundamentally reshaped Chinese society and many of these changes laid the foundation for the society that characterized the early period of Communist rule.

III.   Source Limitations

Because of the informal and potentially controversial nature of alternative marriage practices as well as the limitations caused by a tumultuous period in Chinese history that was fraught with conflict, often dangerous political undercurrents, and well-founded fears of reprisal, very few contemporaneous records exist to illuminate informal marriage practices during the War of Resistance and its aftermath. We must rely on limited newspaper records, popular periodicals, and fictional accounts to track and reflect these more elusive yet important social practices.

A. Official Records

In speaking about informal practices that were not sanctioned, and, indeed, in some cases actively discouraged by the state, it is not surprising that there are few official records left behind. While there would be court records marking disputes over potentially illegal marriage practices, other than that, we would not expect government records of informal marriage

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[31] Esherick, "War and Revolution," 9.

practices.[32] This is especially true because we are looking at a period of wartime and upheaval in

which the government would not have seen collecting statistics on marriage as a major priority.

In fact, the Chinese-run puppet administrations propped up by the Japanese were primarily

interested in collecting census data in order to allocate rice rations. For this reason, information

was collected only by household, meaning a total of everyone who was living under the same

roof, rather than by relationship of those living within the household.[33] Since so many people

were crowded into a given house at this time, the administration apparently thought it would be

pointless to try to sort people into biological families.[34]

B. Personal Records / Memoirs

The lack of official data on informal marriage practices prompts us to turn to personal

accounts, memoirs, or diaries detailing wartime experiences. However, the political climate

immediately following the war proved largely inhospitable to the retention and expression of

personal memory. As Poshek Fu so eloquently writes: "In postwar China, moral choices during

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[32] Courts were widely used to settle civil disputes in the Republican Era. Kathryn Bernhardt in "Women and the Law: Divorce in the Republican Period," argues that because practices of codified civil law and local magisterial adjudication of civil disputes from the Qing dynasty laid the foundation for modern western legal institutions, China was more hospitable to the Western legal practices of Republican civil code than one might have thought. Furthermore, in *Intolerable Cruelty: Marriage, Law, and Society in Early Twentieth-Century China*, Margaret Kuo demonstrates that in the 1930s and 1940s, women were able to navigate the courts to improve their individual marriage situations. A further avenue of research on marriage in occupied areas would be the records of civil divorce, bigamy and adultery suits. Most of these archives are in the Second Historical Archives in Nanjing and the Shanghai Municipal Archives, which I did not access. It would be interesting to see whether wartime affected citizens' use of the courts and whether court records suggest the same marriage trends described herein. Kathryn Bernhardt, "Women and the Law: Divorce in the Republican Period," in *Civil Law in Qing and Republican China*, ed. Kathryn Bernhardt and Philip C. C. Huang (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 187-214; Margaret Kuo, *Intolerable Cruelty: Marriage, Law, and Society in Early Twentieth-Century China* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 14.

[33] Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights*, 219.

[34] Ibid.

the Japanese Occupation were telescoped into clear-cut, idealized polarities: the prevalent

perception was of a Manichean world in which, heroes versus villains, selfless resisters fought

shameless collaborators."[35] Those who had resisted were hailed as heroes while anyone who had

stayed under Japanese occupation was vulnerable to being labeled a *hanjian* 漢奸, a term

meaning a traitor to the Chinese people. Besides largely silencing anyone who might have

spoken out about their wartime experiences, this political climate also most likely prompted the

destruction of many records from that period, since being in possession of these sorts of

documents would have made people vulnerable to political attacks. For example, with the 1945

Japanese surrender, the returning GMD government held publicized trials for political

collaborators who had worked with the Japanese.[36] Under the earlier years of the Chinese

Communist Party, having lived under the Japanese occupation continued to be a major liability;

those who had supported the Guomindang were silenced by the anti-rightest campaigns.[37] The

dawn of the Cultural Revolution in the mid-sixties halted virtually all publishing about the war.[38]

Only with the reform and opening up in the 1980s did the so-called "new remembering" of the

war surface, but by then many who would have been old enough to recall the war with any sort

of detail had already passed away.[39]

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[35] Poshek Fu, "Preface," in *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration: Intellectual Choices in Occupied Shanghai, 1937-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), xiv.
[36] See, for instance, the trial of Chen Bijun in Charles Musgrove. Additional discussion of post-war trials can be found in David P. Barrett, and Larry Shyu, eds. *Chinese Collaboration with Japan 1932-1945: The Limits of Accommodation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Mark Eykholt, "Aggression, Victimization, and Chinese Historiography of the Nanjing Massacre," in *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography,* ed. by Joshua A. Fogel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 11-89.
[37] Parks M. Coble, "The Legacy of China's Wartime Reporting, 1937-1945," *Modern China* 36, no. 4 (2010): 448, JStor.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.

C. Newspaper articles, periodicals, and fictional accounts

Mostly, I will be relying on newspaper articles, periodicals, and fictional accounts created during the wartime period. Read together, these sources paint a compelling, if fragmentary, picture of alternative marriage practices during the period. But, we do have to be mindful of some limitations of this approach. First, in drawing from newspaper articles published during the war, we have to keep the possibility in mind that they did not necessarily reflect average practice. The news is often drawn to exceptional tales of conflict, so there is a very good chance it does not necessarily reflect average practice. Second, during Japan's total occupation of Shanghai, although there were a number of women's, home, and family magazines published, discussion directly addressing hardships of daily survival under occupation was few and far between. As Glosser notes in her chapter "Women's Culture of Resistance: An Ordinary Response to Extraordinary Circumstances," women's journals at the time were filled with romantic ideals on women and the family which largely ignored the material, economic, and social hardships women were facing during this time. In other words, Glosser concludes "these journals tell us a lot about what women should have been doing about their families and their marriage, but very little about what they actually did."[40]

Of course, there were articles during this short window of time that indirectly acknowledged material shortages and soaring prices as a backdrop for lighter topics, for instance one article advising women to make cloth shoes due to shortages in leather.[41] However, during the total occupation of Shanghai, women's articles never comprehensively addressed the daily

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[40] Susan Glosser, "Women's Culture of Resistance: An Ordinary Response to Extraordinary Circumstances," in *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun: Shanghai Under Japanese Occupation,* eds. Christian Henriot and Wen-Hsin Yeh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 323.

[41] Nü sheng bianjibu 女聲編輯部 [Women's Voices Editorial Board], "Buxie yundong" 布鞋運動 [The Cloth Shoe Movement], *Nü sheng* 女聲 3 (1942): 10.

hardships of living and the choices resulting from these hardships, nor did it assign responsibility to the occupation administration or the Japanese invasion. First, after Japan's full invasion of Shanghai in 1941, the Japanese took over the newspapers printed in the international concessions and issued guidelines and restrictions on acceptable content.[42] The Japanese prohibited any kind of anti-Japanese content or sentiment from being published and carried out a system of harsh censorship. Accordingly, magazines steered away from drawing any connection between the conditions of war and occupation having any negative effect on marriage practices. Second, the aversion of women's journals to contentious issues was part of a larger wartime Shanghai culture that valued escapism and leisure over serious discussion. Without a doubt, Shanghai had been a city of leisure, escape, and entertainment before the war, but during the war, the cinema and entertainment sectors became an even more integral part of daily life.[43] The popularity of entertainment and leisure, including journals with romantic visions of the family, reflects the desire of a war-weary public to find escape from constant wartime hardship and suffering.

Fictional accounts created during the wartime period present the glaring problem that they were self-identifying as "fiction," perhaps one of the ultimate reasons for historical skepticism. However, when newspaper articles and periodicals can corroborate that similar

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[42] Even during the period of partial occupation, freedom of expression was severely limited, and resisters were "in constant danger of discovery and reprisal from both the Japanese army and the foreign area authorities." See Poshek Fu, *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration: Intellectual Choices in Occupied Shanghai, 1937-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 31. After Japan extended its military occupation to the foreign areas of Shanghai, the Japanese closed down all foreign newspapers and universally enforced press censorship and political surveillance. See Fu, *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration,* 56.

[43] Poshek Fu writes, "As a filmmaker remembered, all kinds of restaurants and night clubs were full every night despite extended hours. As in wartime London or Paris, it seemed that the Shanghai public flocked to the darkened theaters where they could find a refuge from the frustrations and uncertainties of everyday life." Poshek Fu, "Projecting ambivalence: Chinese cinema in semi-occupied Shanghai, 1937-1941," in *Wartime Shanghai*, ed. by Wen-Hsin Yeh (London: Routledge, 1998), 88.

trends actually occurred during the war, the fictional accounts may help to set the scene and context. Furthermore, many fictional accounts were seen by contemporaries as semi-ethnographies, so although each individual fact may not be true, we can begin to get a sense of general patterns of relationships and the contemporary dialogue and norms with which these works were in conversation. And of course, labeling work as "fiction," even if it were true, would be a way to avoid the strictures and dangers of open political commentary.

As Timothy Brook in *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* aptly notes, "How women were affected by occupation, rather than invasion, is more difficult to sketch."[44] Nevertheless, as Zhao Ma quotes Peter Andreas with respect to Andreas's work on smuggling in the history of the United States, it is better to sketch as best as we can with "admittedly imperfect and incomplete evidence rather than throw one's hands up in the air and pretend the world of smuggling doesn't exist because it cannot be precisely measured."[45] In this case, relying on admittedly fragmentary evidence is the only way to bring this otherwise important hidden history to light.

IV.   Shifting Trends in Marriage

By the late 1930s and 1940s, China's twentieth century marriage discourse had already undergone several major shifts. As early as the late nineteenth century, male intellectual elites had already been planting the seeds that would become China's modern female liberation movement. In 1883, Kang Youwei criticized the "backward" practice of footbinding as emblematic of the kind of traditional oppressive values that were holding China back from being

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[44] Brook, *Collaboration*, 24.
[45] Zhao Ma, *Runaway Wives, Urban Crimes, and Survival Tactics in Wartime Beijing, 1937-1949* (Cambridge: Harvard East Asia Monographs, 2015), 31.

a strong, global power.[46] His student Liang Qichao called for advancements for women in three categories: productivity, education, and the cultivation of a strong and healthy body.[47] Discussion continued during the May Fourth Movement, when the "woman question" came to occupy a central space in debates on how best to modernize China. In place of arranged marriage and patriarchal control, the May Fourth Movement promoted free-choice and companionate marriage.[48] It also encouraged women to step outside the domestic space and find spiritual and economic independence. A major focal point for this model came from Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House,* which had tremendous impact on the May Fourth cultural and intellectual scene.[49] Nora, the play's female protagonist who leaves her husband for her own life, became an icon for free-will as well as an inspiration for stepping outside the traditional confines of family and slamming the door shut against assigned roles. She was not, however, without detractors. In his famous 1923 speech at Beijing Women's Normal College entitled "What Happens to Nora," Lu Xun argued that because the reality was that Nora had no money, running away would have brought her nothing but a tragic end, and furthermore, the only way for women to achieve independence was through economic means.[50] As we will see, this shift towards prioritizing socio-economic factors became very prevalent during China's tumultuous wartime years.

When the GMD under Chiang Kai-shek established their new capital of Nanjing in 1928, the "woman question" became a useful tool for nationalist state building. The GMD's New Life Movement was a social movement aimed at creating a modernized, nationalistic, and civilized

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[46] Susan Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State: 1915-1953* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 6.
[47] Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State*, 7.
[48] Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State*, 1.
[49] Ying-Ying Chien, "Feminism and China's New 'Nora': Ibsen, Hu Shi, and Lu Xun," *the Comparatist* vol. 19 (1995): 97, JStor, stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/44366898.
[50] Chien, "Feminism and China's New 'Nora,'" 106.

China through re-appropriating what New Life leaders saw as Confucian morals.[51] As part of the

New Life Movement, the GMD championed the return of women to the domestic sphere,

encouraging them to support their husbands and educate their children in search of a stronger

state and society.[52] Continuing through the 1930s, marriage reform remained an important

platform for the GMD to reshape society in a Western vision of modernity. The passage of the

1929-1930 Civil Code was their landmark achievement in marriage reform.[53] In her work on

marriage in Republican China, Margaret Kuo writes that the new civil code both "reflected the

utilitarian concerns of state building" and also rearranged marriage and family relationships

"according to principles associated with liberal modernity like equality, monogamy, and

individual rights and duties."[54] Whereas before, marriages were arranged contracts between

families that had little to do with the desires of the two getting married, the Republican Chinese

state trumpeted the romantic ideal of love-marriages and free choice.[55]

As for discourse during the early wartime period, Susan Glosser argues that periodicals

published in the International Settlement before the full Japanese take-over of Shanghai did not

so much encourage women to engage in direct political activism, as they encouraged women in

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[51] Sun Xiaoping, "New Life: State Mobilization and Women's Place in Nationalist China, 1934-1949" (PhD diss., University of California Santa Cruz, 2008), 59.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Margaret Kuo, *Intolerable Cruelty: Marriage, Law, and Society in Early Twentieth-Century China* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 3.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Whether or not these ideals were accurately articulated in the law as well as whether they had success in practice are different questions entirely, but it is important to remember that regardless of GMD success, these ideals nevertheless played a key role in shaping public discourse and social norms. See Ono Kazuoko who argues that the GMD marriage law failed to sufficiently acknowledge the rights of women as individuals. Ono Kazuoko, *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution*, trans. Kathryn Bernhardt et al., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 153.

the war to do their traditional jobs but to do them better.[56] She characterizes the ideal wife within public discourse of that time as "the frugal housekeeper who kept her family healthy and contributed her small bit to the war effort."[57] This seemed to largely echo the GMD affirmation that a stronger domestic sphere would make a stronger populace, which in turn would create a stronger nation.

Yet, as it always does, reality differed significantly from the ideal. In both pre-war and wartime China, traditions embedded in culture persisted and new marriage practices challenged the ideal of the "modern."[58] On the one hand, these challenges demonstrated that women lacked agency; for instance, economic realities of continued female dependency on men and the need to support oneself forced women to marry out of monetary considerations. On the other hand, women were not complete victims either – Margaret Kuo in *Intolerable Cruelty* illustrated how women used the civil code and the courts system to negotiate greater agency in their marriages.[59] In this sense, a version of participation in the following alternative marriage practices can hardly be seen as new to wartime life. However, the chaos of war, the widespread social dislocation, and the extreme pressures of daily survival greatly exacerbated these trends and forced them into the mainstream. In addition, because of the extraordinary circumstances of war, these alternative definitions of the "modern marriage" were largely tolerated in public discourse and media. In

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[56] Susan Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915 – 1953* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 322.

[57] Susan Glosser, "Women's Culture of Resistance," 322

[58] For instance, in *Concubines in Court: Marriage and Monogamy in Twentieth-Century China,* Lisa Tran details the GMD's continued struggle to regulate practices of concubinage. The GMD wrestled with how to continue to protect the vestigial groups of concubines while still keeping concubinage illegal and upholding ideals of monogamy. See Lisa Tran, *Concubines in Court: Marriage and Monogamy in Twentieth-Century China* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

[59] Kuo, *Intolerable Cruelty: Marriage, Law, and Society in Early Twentieth Century* China, 14.

this sense, the war provided greater space for urban citizens to live alternative definitions of the modern marriage.

A. Cohabitation (*tongju* 同居) and Group Marriage (*jituan hunyin* 集團婚姻)

Co-habitation refers to the practice of a man and a woman moving in together without undergoing a formal ceremony or completing legal registration. For many couples, foregoing a traditional ceremony was a practical and modern solution to an antiquated problem. Traditional Chinese wedding ceremonies were customarily lavish affairs with payments of large dowries and elaborate, expensive ceremonies. In *Runaway Wives, Urban Crimes and Survival Tactics in Wartime Beijing, 1937-1949,* Zhao Ma writes that three major expenses made the wedding a very costly event: cash payments to matchmakers, gifts to the bride's family, and the wedding ceremony itself. [60] In 1933, sociologist Sidney Gamble reported that for wedding ceremonies in Beijing, "the wedding expenses ranged from 1.5-9 times the average monthly income" and that it was common for families to "go into debt to secure the necessary funds."[61] In fact, expenses were so high that they had attracted the criticism of contemporary researchers and reformers.[62] Of course, high costs of marriage had always deterred those with less resources. However, with the exorbitant price inflation and scarcity of resources during the wartime period, more people than normal would have been deterred by cost considerations.

A1. Group Marriage (jituan hunyin 集團婚姻)

The government offered an official solution to this problem in the form of "group marriages." "Group marriage" was not a phenomenon unique to the wartime period; articles as

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[60] Zhao, *Runaway Wives*, 193.

[61] Zhao, *Runaway Wives,* 194. Citing Sidney D. Gamble, *How Families live in Peiping: a study of the income and expenditure of 283 Chinese families receiving from $8 - $550 silver per month* (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1933), 198-202.

[62] Ibid.

early as 1934 promoted "group marriages" as a positive advancement in marriage practices.[63]

Neither were "group marriages" a phenomenon unique to occupied Shanghai. Rather, because

price inflation due to the increasing scarcity of materials was endemic to the entire nation,

"group marriages" were promoted across GMD urban controlled areas. One December 17th, 1934

article published in Hankou, a city in central China, ties the rise in "group marriages" to the

exorbitant cost of marriage ceremonies.[64] It cites the average cost of recent marriage ceremonies

in Wuhan as being around 1,000 yuan. For those on the wealthier side, the cost of marriage could

rise to even around 3,500 yuan.[65] In the face of such high costs, the government introduced

"group marriages" both as a cost-saving option and as a way to boost nationalism and loyalty to

the state.

"Group marriages" were less expensive precisely because they were held by the local

civil administration. On December 25th, 1947, an article from the Shanghai periodical

Shehuibanyuekan documented a step-by-step "group marriage" procedure. It showed that "group

marriage" preparation required not much more than applying for certificates, paying a small fee

of twenty-yuan to the appropriate bureaus, and signing official documents.[66] The ceremony itself

was quite bureaucratic, featuring customary bowing to the GMD flag, the delivery of speeches,

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[63] Jing, Yuan 井原, "Jituan hunli de shidaixing" 集團婚禮的時代性 [The Timeliness of Group Marriages], *Shehuibanyuekan* 社會半月刊 1, no.8 (1934): 26-27.
For this and subsequent Chinese sources, translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
[64]"Jituan jiehun" 集團結婚 [Group Marriages], *Meizhou pinglun* 每週評論 Issue 149 (1934): 2-3.
[65] "Jituan jiehun" 集團結婚 [Group Marriages], 3.
[66] "Shanghai xinshenghuo jituan jiehun banfa caoan" 上海市新生活集團結婚辦法草案 [Draft of Shanghai New Life Group Marriage Procedures]. *Shehuibanyuekan* 社會半月刊 1, no. 8 (1934): 3-4.

and the issuance of standardized marriage certificates.[67] The GMD held "group marriage" ceremonies at set dates of significance throughout the year with municipal officials in attendance; the article consulted announced that the "group marriages" would be held at the government's Hall of the People on the first day of the first month of the Chinese Lunar Calendar (*yuandan* 元旦), Confucius's birthday, National Day, and the premier's birthday and would be witnessed by the mayor and the Social Bureau.[68] Not only did "group marriages" offer an official way to face the problem of expensive ceremonies while discouraging illegal alternatives, but they also offered the GMD a platform to espouse modern values and foster nationalism.

A2. Co-habitation (tongju 同居)

Just because the state offered an option in line with its own values did not guarantee that citizens would adhere in practice. In practice, urban people also adopted co-habitation as an informal alternative to "group marriages." Co-habitation (*tongju* 同居 , also called *pindu guanxi* 姘度關係 or *pinju guanxi* 姘居關係) refers to the practice of a man and a woman moving in together with the intention of a long term relationship but without an official marriage ceremony or the necessary documents from the state. The war years boosted the practice of co-habitation and allowed it to gain greater traction and public attention. Co-habitation was not a new phenomenon to the war years; the first co-habitation announcement in *Shenbao* appeared in June

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[67] "Xinshenghuo jituan jiehun yishi caoan" 新生活集團結婚儀式草案 [Draft of New Life Group Marriage Ceremony], *Shehuibanyuekan* 社會半月刊 1, no. 8 (1934): 4.

[68] "Xinshenghuo jituan jiehun yishi caoan" 新生活集團結婚儀式草案 [Draft of New Life Group Marriage Ceremony], 4.

of 1927. [69] However, the number of co-habitation announcements in *Shenbao* spiked in the years during and directly following the war. For instance, in *Shenbao* there were eighteen announcements regarding co-habitation in 1941, with eleven of them being announcements of newly formed co-habitation relationships (see table below). [70] In 1947, the number spiked again to thirteen. The dramatic increase of the number of co-habitation announcements from 1939 onwards suggests one of two things: either the war years saw an increase in co-habitation practice, or it became more acceptable to publish these sorts of announcements during the wartime years. Most likely, it was a combination of liberalizing public discourse and an increase in the actual practice itself, although it is impossible to know for sure. Of course, the newspaper announcements merely reflect those that were published, so given that we would expect some people to be clandestine about their co-habitation arrangements, it is possible that co-habitation was more widespread than was documented in the newspapers.

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[69] *Shenbao* was a foreign-owned newspaper founded in 1872 by English publisher Ernest Major and published in Shanghai. For its 1872-1949 run, it was the most successful Chinese language newspaper of its time.

[70] "Regarding co-habitation" means they were either announcing or dissolving co-habitation relationships.

Table 1 Announcements Related to Co-habitation found in *Shenbao*

Year	TOTAL Number of Announcements related to Co-habitation in Shenbao	Number of Announcements dissolving co-habitation in Shenbao	Number of announcements for new co-habitation in Shenbao
1927	1	1	0
1929	2	0	2
1931	2	2	0
1932	1	1	0
1933	2	2	0
1934	3	1	2
1935	1	0	1
1936	4	3	1
1937	4	4	0
1938[71]	0	0	0
1939	11	6	5
1940	14	8	6
1941	18	7	11
1942	8	6	2
1943	13	10	3
1944	7	6	1
1945	3	2	1
1946	4	2	2
1947	13	12	1
1948	11	9	2
1949	1	0	1

*NOTE: duplicate announcements were discounted. An announcement was deemed a duplicate if it included the same name and action as a previous announcement.

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[71] The *Quanguo baokan suoyin* 全國報刊索引 [National Index to Chinese Newspapers & Periodicals] database is missing *Shenbao* issues from December 15th, 1937 until October 10th, 1938. See Shanghai kexue jishu qingbao yanjiusuo 上海科學技術情報研究所, *Quanguo baokan suoyin* 全國報刊索引 [National Index to Chinese Newspapers & Periodicals], Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu qingbao yanjiusuo, 2006, http://www.cnbksy.cn.

The reason for such widespread co-habitation, like "group marriage," is linked to economic concerns, but is also inextricably bound to conditions of social chaos and population displacement. An August 12th, 1944 article in a Yongan, Fujian GMD newspaper which announced that the Internal Affairs Bureau (*neizhengbu* 內政部) had outlawed co-habitation announcements in newspapers as legitimate marriage arrangements also closely linked the rise of co-habitation to the economic hardships of the individuals involved.[72] If one is looking for an economical way to get married, the article duly suggests the idea of "group marriages." Yet, an October 1st, 1947 article entitled "Discussing the place of Co-habiting within Marriage Laws" from a Hangzhou based magazine ties co-habiting to "transitional periods" (*shiju biandong* 時局 變動), complex human affairs, and economic downturn.[73]

Although both were cost saving measures, unlike the state-held "group marriages, publishing a co-habitation announcement in the paper did not constitute a legal union. Yet, the practice of co-habitation gained enough traction to warrant multiple articles condemning its existence as well as local administrative attempts to stem the flow. A February 1st, 1945 article from neighboring Fujian province criticized the publishing of co-habitation announcements with the open support of a lawyer.[74] In some ways, this article attacked the lawyer permitting the

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[72] "Jinzhi nannü tongju" 禁止男女同居 [Prohibiting Men and Women from Co-habiting], *Lianhe zhoubao* 聯合週報, August 12, 1944.

[73] Chang Xiangshen 常相申. "Lun hunyinfazhong zhi tongju guanxi" 論婚姻法中之同居關係 [Discussing Co-habitation in the context of Marriage Law], *Shengliu* 胜流 6, no. 7 (1947): 450.

[74] "Fenglingchishu jinge nannü tongju pinqing lüshi gongkai dengbao qishi zhi efeng bing pubian tichang jituanjiehun" 奉令饬属禁革男女同居聘请律师公开登报启事之恶风并普遍 倡办集团结婚 [Respectfully commanding a prohibition of the harmful trend of men and women hiring a lawyer to publically announce their co-habitation and promoting universalizing group marriages], *Shengxing tongxun* 省行通訊 6, no. 31 (1945): 112.

Articles of this type appeared in many urban areas, for example, in Chongqing: "Nannü tongju ji tuoli guanxi zhi guanggao ying qiangkou" 男女同居及脫離關係之廣告啓事應槍口

practice just as much as, if not more than, the individuals actually partaking in the illegal practice of co-habitation. Another August 8th, 1944 article from the GMD wartime capital of Chongqing lightly reprimanded those who were "freely moving in together" (*ziyou tongju* 自由同居) and publishing announcements without a legal marriage ceremony.[75]

Yet, the wording of these announcements indicate that couples involved in the practice saw the establishing of co-habitation as akin to legal marriage and the dissolution of co-habitation as akin to legal divorce. A co-habitation announcement in *Shenbao* from January 5th, 1941 stated "The above parties involved jointly announce that Xu Yingren and Jian Yuanmei, because of mutual compatibility (*qingtou yihe* 情投意合), have resolved… that from this day forward the two are mutually willing to enter a binding commitment of co-habitation. Besides signing a contract of co-habitation, they have also published this announcement in the newspaper in order to spread the news about the commitment described previously."[76] The set phrase of "mutual compatibility and willingness" (*qingtou yihe* 情投意合) was frequently invoked in newspaper engagement announcements of legal marriages.[77] However, it was also common for engagement announcements to report that the marriage was conducted with the agreement of

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[Announcements of co-habitation and dissolving of co-habitation must be stopped] issue 12 (1944): 12.

[75] "Nannü tongju ji tuoli guanxi zhi guanggao ying qiangkou" 男女同居及脫離關係之廣告啓事應槍口 [Announcements of co-habitation and dissolving of co-habitation must be stopped], *xinjian yuebao* 新檢月報 issue 12 (1944): 12.

[76] "Xu Yingren Jian Yuanmei shengming tongju qishi" 徐應仁儉緣梅生命同居啟事 [Announcing the Co-habitation of Xu Yingren and Jian Yuanmei], *Shenbao* 申報, 1 January 1941.

[77] For an example of the phrase "mutual compatibility and willingness" in engagement announcements, see "Si Tuzuyin Huang Lingbao dinghunqishi" 司徒祖蔭黃玲寶訂婚啟事 [Engagement Announcement for Si Tuzuyin and Huang Lingbao], *Shenbao* 申報, 15 July 1941, 2.

both heads of family (*shuangfang jiazhang tongyi* 雙方家長同意).[78] In that sense, perhaps co-

habitation may also have offered a more convenient modern marriage arrangement that did not

require the consent of the families. Similarly, an announcement of the dissolution of cohabitation

in *Shenbao* from July 6th, 1944 announced that Ma Yangxiang and Wang Cuiyun were dissolving

their co-habitation relationship because of "mutual incompatibility (*yijianbuhe* 意見不合).[79]

Like the set phrase from the creation of co-habitation announcements mirrored announcements

of marriage, the phrase "mutual incompatibility" (*yijianbuhe* 意見不合) was a set phrase often

used for divorce announcements.[80]

Furthermore, in these co-habitation announcements, lawyers were often present to stand

witness to the upcoming plan. The November 3rd, 1940 announcement reads: "A notice in which

lawyer, Mr. Qu Shizhen, attests to the co-habitation of Lü Zi'an and Wang Suhua. According to

the above parties involved, the two of us have found each other mutually compatible. We wish to

grow old together, and we desire to become living partners. Besides having the previously

mentioned lawyer present as a witness, we have also asked a representative to publish the

announcement above in this newspaper as evidence of our union."[81] In other words, couples who

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[78] For an example, see "Dong Fushi and Cheng Ruoquan dinghun qishi" 董復始程若荃訂婚啓事 [Engagement Announcement for Dong Fushi and Cheng Ruoquan], *Shenbao* 申報, 18 July 1937, 6.

[79] "Zhou Yongding Lüshi zhengming Ma Yangxiang Wang Cuiyun tuoli tongjuguanxi qishi" 周永定律師證明馬錫祥 王翠雲 脫離同居關係啓事 [Lawyer Zhou Yongding verifies that Ma Yangxiang and Wang Cuiyun dissolve their co-habitation announcement], *Shenbao* 申報, 7 July 1944, 2.

[80] See, for instance, "He Baozhenjun Huang Ya'enüshi xieyi lihun qishi" 何寶珍君黃雅娥女士協議離婚啟事 [Divorce Agreement for Mr. He Baojun and Ms. Huang Ya'e], *Shenbao* 申報, 15 September 1939, 6.

[81] "Qu Shizhen lüshi zhengming Lü Zian Wang Suhua tongju qishi" 瞿世基 律師證明 呂子安 王素華 同居啟事 [Lawyer Qu Shizhen verifies that Lü Zian and Wang Suhua are co-habiting], *Shenbao* 申報, 3 November 1940, 12.

put these sorts of announcements in the newspaper did not see co-habitation as challenging the existing system of marriage and divorce, so much as they saw co-habitation as a legitimate form of modern marriage, an authorized alternative to accepted social units.

Finally, the wartime years offered co-habitation a certain degree of acceptance in mainstream discourse. Su Qing, who along with Zhang Ailing was one of the most prominent writers of wartime Shanghai, wrote an essay "On Women" published in the May 10th, 1944 issue of the Shanghai-based journal *Tiandi* 天地 that ended with the following emphatic lines: "Considering on the behalf of women, the most ideal life would be the abandonment of marriage, freedom of co-habitation, giving birth to children but then passing them back to the grandmother to raise, and subsidies from the state."[82] Obviously, Su Qing is listing a number of ideals that would not be terribly practical, but for a major author to have openly shared such a progressive view-points to at least a semi-liberalizing discourse. Of course, Su Qing, as an elite intellectual, would have more room to theorize about progressive values than the average person, however this was still to some extent co-habitation being promoted in mainstream public discourse in an exceedingly positive light. At the same time, co-habitation in practice was not necessarily a paradise of free-love for women. It would require further research, but co-habitation may also have been a way for men to be involved with women without any of the responsibilities inherent in marriage and written into the GMD civil code.[83]

B. "War Wives" and "War Husbands" (*kangzhanfuren yu kangzhanzhangfu* 抗戰夫人與抗戰丈夫)

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[82] Su Qing 蘇青, "Tan nü ren" 談女人 [On Women], *Tiandi* 天地 no. 6 (1944): 19.

[83] This insight was suggested by Mark Baker, who importantly pointed out that while on the one hand co-habitation can be seen as a positive means of empowerment, one also cannot deny its potential to curb individual freedoms and liberties. Mark Baker, email to the author, 15 December 2017.

Another way in which wartime allowed citizens to challenge the GMD definition of modern marriage was through the practice of taking "war wives" (*kangzhan furen* 抗戰夫人) or "war husbands" (*kangzhan zhangfu* 抗戰丈夫). Social disruption of war split many couples up, often with the husband travelling inland with the government or to do business while the wife stayed in occupied areas. For the duration of the war, one or both sides may have taken a new companion – the "war wife" or "war husband." In other words, with their former significant other physically absent from their side, they began what essentially was a new life with a new partner. Depending on whether the new couple simply moved in together or underwent a ceremony, this practice was essentially adultery or bigamy. However, because of the extreme circumstances of the war, public discourse gave the practice its own name, thus identifying it as a unique feature of wartime conditions. Public discourse, then, offered the practice slightly more moral legitimacy, as if everyone understood that once the war was over, all would return to normal.

B1. "Fallen Wives"（lunxian furen 淪陷夫人）

In order to talk about "war wives" and "war husbands," we need to acknowledge that there were a fair number of women who were left in occupied Shanghai by their husbands who went inland at the outbreak of the war. The occupied areas were referred to as "fallen areas" (*lunxian qu* 淪陷區), meaning that they had "fallen" to the Japanese. Thus, women who were left in areas of occupation were designated as the "fallen wives."[84] In the years following the end of the war with the Japanese, numerous literary and filmic representations attempted to make sense

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[84] Although the term "fallen wives" has connotations of morally degenerate or sexually impure, the term here (*lunxian furen* 淪陷夫人) was used without pejorative moral implication, most often merely to distinguish them from the "war wife" (*kangzhan furen* 抗戰夫人).

of the destruction, chaos, and suffering of the past eight years.[85] These artistic representations largely dramatized the hardship that many women endured having been left behind in occupied Shanghai by their husbands – that is, they depicted the lives of these so-called "fallen wives." For instance, the popular 1947 film *Yi jiang chunshui xiang dong liu* 一江春水向东流 [A Spring River Flows East] portrayed a "fallen wife," Sufen, as she singlehandedly supported her mother-in-law and her young son after her husband Zhang Zhongliang left her in Shanghai to travel to the interior. The film followed her hardship, suffering, and strength in surviving her husband's eight-year absence.[86] In the end, Zhang Zhongliang returned to Shanghai with a "war wife" from Chongqing and rejected Sufen and his child, ultimately resulted in Sufen's tragic suicide.

Literary and filmic representations of life during the war still leave much room for skepticism regarding historical accuracy. However, we can also find letters of advice sent after the war that reflect actual cases of abandoned wives in occupied areas. The context for these letters was usually that a woman's husband had come back from the interior with a new wife in tow. In writing for advice, these wives often bitterly detailed how much they had suffered alone in the past eight years and how angry they were that the return of their husband from the interior had dashed their expectations of returning to pre-war arrangements. For instance, on January 1st, 1945, the advice column of the third issue of the Shanghai periodical *Fu nü* 《婦女》 [Women] published a letter from a Ms. Wenying, in which she implored the editors to extend advice and

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[85] Paul G. Pickowicz, "Women and Wartime Shanghai: A Postwar Perspective," in *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun: Shanghai Under Japanese Occupation,* eds. Christian Henriot and Wen-Hsin Yeh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 346.

[86] *Yijiang chunshui xiang dongliu* 一江春水向東流 [A Spring River Flows East], dir. Cai Chusheng 蔡楚生 and Zheng Junli 鄭君里, 1947, Film.

guidance as to her current marital plight.[87] Ms. Wenying lamented how her husband left her in

Shanghai at the outbreak of the War of Resistance to head to the wartime capital of Chongqing

for business. She detailed how she had suffered alone in Shanghai, raised their two young

children and cared for her elderly mother, relying only on a small pool of savings and aid that

was initially sent by her husband. Her life, she said, had only gotten harder and harder with each

passing day.

Of course, to garner sympathy, these "fallen" wives had reason to exaggerate their plight.

In her letter, Ms. Wenying reported selling bracelets and valuables in order to survive. That she

had valuables to sell in the first place betrays that she had been moderately well-off prior to the

war. Furthermore, because she had a level of education high enough to be an avid follower of the

periodical as well as write a letter of her own, she must have been a lower-middle to middle-class

resident. Additionally, that Ms. Wenying's husband had enough resources to move into the

interior and yet lacked the means to take Ms. Wenying and the family with him places them

securely within the middle class – not the richest in town, but not the poorest either. This would

match the implied "petty urbanite" target demographic of these sorts of periodicals.[88]

The rampant inflation and skyrocketing prices of material goods that Ms. Wenying

pointed to as a major factor in her suffering can be corroborated by outside sources.[89]

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[87] Wen, Ying 文英, "Xinxiang: Guanyu kangzhanfuren" 信箱： 關於抗戰夫人 [Mailbox: On War Husbands], *Funü* 婦女 3 (1946): 20.

[88] "Petty urbanite" (*xiaoshimin* 小市民) was a blanket term liberally used to city people who were of middle or lower-middle social ranks. Perry Link, who originally coined the term, describes petty urbanites as "small merchants, various kinds of clerks and secretaries, high school students, housewives, and other modestly educated, marginally well off urbanites." Link also notes that "petty urbanites" constituted a huge urban audience for periodicals. Cited in Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2004), 61-62.

[89] See pages 8-9 of this work for details.

Additionally, as Esherick wrote in his piece on 1940s urban society, those in the middle-class were very much affected by the economic crises as well.[90] It does not seem like too much of a stretch to believe that Ms. Wenying was conveying the truth when she depicted a lack of food and a difficulty in daily living due to high prices. Furthermore, in reply, the editors wrote that when they received her letter, they could not help but be furious not only on Ms. Wenying's behalf, but also on behalf of the many women with fates similar to hers, implying that what Ms. Wenying was facing was a wide spread phenomenon that they had heard of in other contexts as well.[91]

In the editors' reply, instead of responding to Ms. Wenying's individual concerns as products of social upheaval and economic duress particular to wartime life, the editors of *Fu nü* curiously decided largely to use their response to attack the long history of female oppression in a society that was created to benefit men. Consequently, while the letter briefly addressed her question of divorce and offered some concrete solutions for Ms. Wenying's actual problem – being that her husband had remarried someone during their separation caused by the war and now she lacked economic resources to survive - it largely opted for a theoretical May Fourth type critique of the traditional oppression of women in society that unequally favors men. Here, we can see a discrepancy between the abstract, idealistic May Fourth definitions of the modern marriage and realities of practical decisions that needed to be made in order to survive during wartime.

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[90] Esherick, "War and Revolution," 2.
[91] Editorial Board of *Funü* 婦女編輯部,"Xinxiang: Guanyu kangzhanfuren" 信箱： 關於抗戰夫人 [Mailbox: On War Husbands], *Funü* 婦女 3 (1946): 20.

B2. "War wives" and "War Husbands" (kangzhan furen yu kangzhan zhangfu 抗戰丈夫與抗戰

夫人)

  Having established that many women were left alone in occupied areas and that many

men travelled into the interior, we can now turn our attention to those men and women who took

the situation one step further – by taking a "war wife" or "war husband." For instance, female

author Pan Liudai's 1949 *Tui zhi fu ren zi zhuan* 退職夫人自傳 [An Autobiography of a Former

Career Woman] depicted a young woman of the same name as the author through her career as a

reporter and editor in wartime Shanghai and followed her trials and tribulations in romance.[92]

We cannot take the piece to be a completely factually accurate record of Pan's life, however, we

can expect it to have been in dialogue with relevant discussions and social practices of the time

period. In *An Autobiography of a Former Career Woman,* Pan recounted her romance with a

young man whom she affectionately terms A-Cheng. The two were living in occupied Shanghai

during the war when A-cheng told Pan he was travelling to the interior, promptly abandoning a

pregnant Pan to fend for herself in an increasingly inhospitable environment. It turned out that A-

cheng actually did not go into the interior, but was using that as a front to cover for an affair with

an older woman. Nevertheless, during this time, Pan made the acquaintance of a Mr. Kang,

whom she knew already had a wife and many children. Yet because Mr. Kang was providing her

with economic support, Pan accepted her dependence on him for the time being. As she so

vividly described, "when one is lost at sea and cannot find a ship, then just finding a piece of

wood to hang onto is a good thing; although the piece of wood may not be of much help, it will

at least allow one to find some support to a greater or lesser extent."[93]

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[92] Pan, Liudai 潘柳黛, *Tuizhi furen zizhuan* 退職夫人自傳 [An Autobiography of a Former
Career Woman] (Hong Kong: Xinqi Chubanshe, 1949).
[93] Pan, *Tuizhi furen zizhuan*, 138.

Furthermore, in left-leaning playwright Tian Han's 1946 stage play and later film adaptation *Lirenxing* 麗人行 [Women Side by Side], [94] Liang Ruoying had been left wondering whether her husband was still alive after she had failed to receive any news of him in the three years since his departure from Shanghai to join the resistance at the front.[95] In the meantime, Liang had since taken another husband in Wang Zhongyuan, a wealthy banker with ties to the collaborationist government. Typical of patriotic plays from the late 1940s, *Lirenxing* ultimately condemned collaborator Wang, leaving him to live out the rest of his morally destitute life with a local prostitute. However, it was subsequently banned when the CCP took over because they felt the portrayals of Wang Zhongyuan and Liang Ruoying were too sympathetic for contemporary revolutionary needs. It was only rehabilitated in the late 1970s.[96] In fact, relatively speaking, *Lirenxing* treated Liang and Wang with a good level of nuance and a certain degree of understanding as it explored the complicated grey area between collaboration and resistance.

It helps that Pan Liudai's work was in her own admission a semi-ethnography, but reliance on fiction for historical accuracy leaves much to be desired.[97] But the practice of war wives was also a very well-talked about and publicized issue in both GMD controlled areas and in occupied regions. By the end of the war, women had begun to hear rumor after rumor of men who had gone to the interior and had taken up another life with another woman. Many authors

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[94] The play was completed in Shanghai immediately following Tian Han's return from Chongqing in 1946. It was first performed in Wuxi on March 9, 1947 and later in Shanghai, beginning on April 24. Paul G. Pickowicz, "Women and Wartime Shanghai: A Postwar Perspective," in *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun: Shanghai Under Japanese Occupation,* eds. Christian Henriot and Wen-Hsin Yeh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 347.
[95] Tian Han 田漢. *Lirenxing* 麗人行[Women side by side]. Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1980.
[96] Pickowicz, "Women and Wartime Shanghai: A Postwar Perspective," 346-361.
[97] Pan Liudai 潘柳黛, "Daixu" 代序 [Preface], in *Tuizhi furen zizhuan* 退職夫人自傳 [An Autobiography of a Former Career Woman], (Hong Kong: Xinqi chubanshe, 1949).

used the issue of "war wives" as a springboard for more general social commentary on contemporary marriage practices and the relationship between husband and wife. An early 1947 article in the Shanghai based periodical *Xiandai Funü* 現代婦女 [Modern Women] identified the taking of "war wives" as a veritable trend, and cited the amount of men in Chongqing who took "war wives" at around 200,000 - 300,000.[98] There is good reason to be skeptical about these numbers because there is no indication of where they came from and because the periodical had reason to inflate the numbers for sensational journalism. However, it is almost impossible to put an exact number on the "war wives" taken during this period.[99] In public discourse, the wife taken in Chongqing was dubbed the "war wife" (*kangzhan furen* 抗戰夫人) was pitted against "fallen wives" (*lunxian furen* 淪陷夫人) previously discussed. The issue of "war wives" was a major point of public discourse, to the point where the periodical *Nü sheng* 女聲 [Women's Voices] featured a panel discussion with local lawyers and editors on the topic in their December 2nd, 1945[100] In the panel, the editorial board wrote, "because this issue [of war wives] has inevitably given rise to so much conflict, today we at *Nü sheng* have specially invited a number of participants to take part in a round-table discussion on this new development…". Opinions ranged from sympathy for the men who took "war wives," reasoning that they must have felt

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[98] Han Xuezhang 韓學章, "'kangzhanfuren' yu 'lunxianfuren'" ['War wives' and 'war husbands'], *Xiandaifunü* 現代婦女 8, no. 4 (1947): 6.

[99] Returning to a limitation discussed at the start of this piece, one approach to determining an approximate number of "war wives" could be to collect all of the records of post-war court filings in which a husband was sued for taking a second wife during the war. This still would not include all occurrences, since some couples opted to settle the dispute privately without the court, however, this would allow us to get closer to an accurate number.

[100] Ge lüshi, Ouyang Meirong, Huang Xinming, Bao Zhongting, and Editorial board of nüsheng 葛律師，歐陽美容，黃新茗，包仲亭，本社編輯. "Kangzhanfuren wenti zuotan" 抗戰夫人問題座談 [Rondtable Discussion on the Issue of War Wives]. *Nü sheng* 女聲 3, no.24 (1945): 8-9.

lonely and merely craved companionship, to scathing criticism of the men's inability to make

such insignificant sacrifices when many of their compatriots were putting their very lives on the

line for their country. They debated whether women too should be held responsible, noting that

while some women had no qualms marrying men whom they knew already had wives, it was

very possible that some "war wives" did not even know they had a counterpart back in the

occupied regions, making them a victim as well. It was clear that the panelists took the issue

seriously and genuinely wanted to engage in dialogue about a new societal phenomenon.

In the literary and filmic descriptions described earlier, we saw that at the same time that

men in the interior were taking " war wives," women left in occupied areas were also taking

"war husbands" (*kangzhan zhangfu* 抗戰丈夫). This too can be corroborated by outside sources.

Tabloids reported comical stories of women taking war husbands in urban occupied areas. One

October 5th, 1946 article from a Shanghai-based entertainment periodical entitled *Jinghua* told

the story of a young man named Fang Shiyu who had married his wife, Li Quanbao, through the

help of a matchmaker.[101] In the 26th year of the Republic, that is, at the start of the war in 1937,

Fang joined a squadron heading to the city of Kunming in the interior. During his time in the

interior, Fang lost contact with his wife. On her end, Li Quanbao felt like she had no recourse

because of extreme difficulties (*poyu shenghuo* 迫於生活) than to remarry a Mr. Wang A Quan.

Li's husband returned at the conclusion of the war, and once he became aware of the

circumstances, he immediately demanded that Li's new husband compensate him for the expense

of his original marriage. Wang, however, was not able to gather funds of that scale, so in a

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[101] "Zhangfu kangzhan guilai furen yi lunxian" 丈夫抗戰歸來， 夫人業已淪陷 [A husband
returns from the war, but the wife's business had already fallen]. *Jinghua* 精華 2 (1946): 9.

somewhat comical turn of events, the end settlement had Wang paying for Fang's one-way

airplane ticket back to Kunming.

Two issues later, the same Shanghai-based entertainment periodical printed an October

19th, 1946 article that told of a Zhenjiang city native Jin Youqing, a long-term service member of

the military who had been living with his wife Linling in their hometown of Zhenjiang.[102] In

autumn of the 26th year of the Republic (1937), Jin Youqing left his wife to join the retreating

Chinese army in Hankou. At only nineteen years old, Jin Youqing's wife Jin Linling was left in

responsibility not only of a household but also of their young son. Times became difficult and

making a living proved demanding, but luckily for Jin Linling, a wealthy, influential neighbor,

Wu Songlin, had taken an interest in her and had been offering her regular allowances to help her

get by. As the article went, the gratitude Jin Linling developed towards Wu Songlin blossomed

into feelings of affection and the two began a relationship. When Jin Linling encountered living

conditions of extreme duress (*huanjing jidu kunnan zhixia* 環境極度困難之下), Jin Linling

move in with Wu Songlin (*tongju* 同居). Although their relationship quickly progressed, even

producing a daughter, the article lamented that the young wife Jin Linling could not help but

think back on her previous husband, Jin Youqing. However, Jin Linling cited Wu Songlin's help

in helping her while she was in dire straits and his care of Jin Youqing's aging mother as reason

enough to accept the situation as it was. For the next six years, things proceeded smoothly with

few disturbances (*xiangan wushi* 相安無事). But, as one could imagine, this was not to last

forever. The article reports that in August of 1945, Linling's previous husband Jin Youqing

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[102] "Lunxian zhangfu yichangchunmeng" 淪陷丈夫一場春夢 [Erotic Dream of the War
Husband], *Jinghua* 精華 29 (1946): 5.

suddenly returned from the interior only to find that his wife and family had moved with Wu Songlin to Shanghai. Because Jin Youqing recognized Wu Songlin's commitment and contribution to his family, he was not willing to sue him for adultery. But the "shared wife" issue was a thorn between them that had to be settled. In the end, Linling decided to she would rather divorce her former husband and stay with Wu Songlin. The article dubbed this one of the human tragi-comedies of China's victory in the War of Resistance (*yimu minjian beixiju* 一幕民間悲喜劇).

Here, we see that the most common explanation for "war husbands" is that the woman was left by her husband at the outbreak or sometime after the outbreak of the war, but then could not support herself on her own, and thus felt like she had no choice but to turn to the support of a man who could help her. Interestingly, all of articles above included a distinct element of humor. When periodicals discussed men marrying "war wives," they adopted a relatively more serious tone, as if they were analyzing a serious societal problem. And yet in the case of women taking "war husbands," mass media wrote about the phenomenon in playful, joking terms. Additionally, some publications amiably joked, "if they can have war wives, why can't we have war husbands?"[103] In this article, the author jested that if male-female equality was really to be achieved, shouldn't women be allowed to keep their "war husbands" after the war? This is certainly a double standard, but humor is much more accepting than outright condemnation. Rather than the heavy-handed critique of a social moral crisis that we might expect, the semi-satire present in these articles demonstrate a certain level of acceptance and a peculiarly liberal attitude towards practices that in other contexts would be unacceptable. In this way, public

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[103] "Laogong jiyoule kangzhanfuren laopo qikewu lunxianzhangfu"老公既有了抗戰夫人老婆豈可無淪陷丈夫 [If husbands can have 'war wives,' then why can't wives have 'war husbands?'],*Guangzhou mengbaoshe* 廣州猛報社, May issue (1946): 18.

discourse assisted women in temporarily normalizing a new definition of a more open modern marriage. To be clear, this is not to say that polygamy or polyandry was widely accepted in urban areas at this time, rather it was tolerated and made light of in the extreme circumstances of war.

V.   Conclusion

Co-habitation and the taking of "war husbands" and "war wives" were not exclusive to the wartime period. During the Nanjing Decade, couples certainly found ways to subvert both reformist and state imposed marriage ideals; bigamy, adultery, and moving in with partners without a formal ceremony were not new inventions. In this sense, this paper does not seek to introduce phenomenon that were new to the urban landscape. However, although these practices were not new, I have drawn from newspapers, periodicals, and fictional representations to argue that widespread social dislocation, an economy in shambles, and wartime resource scarcity were crucial in providing space in which middle-class urban couples incorporated alternative marriage practices into common practice and discourse. I have identified two main themes within alternative marriage practices: co-habitation and "war wives" and "war husbands." These practices illustrate that women and men in wartime were both constrained and empowered by the chaos and hardship of wartime conditions. Similarly, these practices in turn both further empowered and constrained the lives of those individuals involved. Shifting marriage practices remind us that as much as the war was a time of destruction and devastation, it was also a time of *life,* as wartime chaos allowed new modes of life to thrive – for better or for worse.

Not only did these alternative practices increase, but wartime conditions offered them a certain amount of acceptance in public discourse. When co-habitation increased, so too did its open reporting in major newspapers. Couples treated co-habitation arrangements much like they

would legal marriage and divorce agreements. Although "group marriages" were the state-preferred solution to avoiding exorbitant wedding costs, co-habitation was tolerated as a new cost-saving solution for the modern marriage. Similarly, sympathy for the wartime displacement of husbands to the interior and the struggle of wives left in occupied areas to survive gave what would otherwise have been called "bigamy" or "adultery" a new name in "war wives" and "war husbands." Tabloids wrote humorously about men who returned from the interior to find that their wives had remarried during the war in order to support themselves. And, literary and filmic representations casted women and their war husbands in a sympathetic light.

Although they tested the boundaries of social norms, these practices were largely tolerated in public discourse because of the extreme circumstances of the war and because many assumed that they would end following the war's conclusion. However, the conclusion of the War of Resistance against the Japanese failed to bring an end to many of the factors that were causing co-habitation and "war wives and husbands," instead precipitating the Chinese Civil war. Likewise, the end of the Chinese Civil War similarly failed to magically restore marriage ideals. Rather, it was into this environment of large-scale familial displacement and morally ambiguous alternative definitions of marriage that the newly empowered Chinese Communist Party began their own reforms with the 1950 Marriage Code.

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