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Between Name and Reality:
Monogamy and Concubinage in the
Republican “Sisters” in “Two Sisters
and a Man” Popular Fictions

By

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Abstract

In the early 20th century popular newspapers, a certain kind of stories demonstrating “two sisters and a man” romances had been popular. “two sisters and a man” stories had its late imperial prototypes which demonstrated romances that puts a male in the center and two sisterly girls at two sides. Inheriting and transforming its late imperial prototypes, the early Republican “two sisters and a man” made the roles of secondary sisters paradoxical in two ways: First, the stories emphasize the relationship among the man and two sisters, while the secondary sisters’ participation in the romance were in fact very few. Second, the sisters’ “happiness” appear frequently in the text, while the subjectivities of both sisters are misrepresented and muted in the stories. This kind of paradoxical roles of the sisters serves a reaction to the discussions on concubinage and monogamy that co-exist with the stories on the newspaper that dispute concubinage as harming monogamy and reversing household hierarchies. The de-emphasized roles of Republican “secondary sisters” could be understood as a compromise to the ongoing critiques that pointed out the danger of concubinage. However, the emphasized participation of the secondary sisters in the relationship speaks for a readers’ demand that still expects to preserve concubinage. In this sense, the stories could be understood as a mediation between two sides of the issue of concubinage. These stories on the newspapers created a middle realm between welcoming monogamy as a newly promoted lifestyle in the media discourse, and expecting a preservation of the conventional household hierarchy in marital lives. The readers’ taste in welcoming this kind of stories showed their implicit attempt to preserve concubinage in their everyday household experiences, under the condition of accepting the media-promoted “new” marital life style among the metropolis middle-class readers.

Introduction

At the turn of the late imperial and the early Republican periods, the Chinese metropolises witnessed radical collisions of the “new” and conventional concepts, as well as a series of different specific principles in all walks of lives. In the realm of life within household, the “new” concepts of feminism, free love and monogamy were frequently promoted in the nascent periodicals and newspapers. Many articles on the newspapers like *Shen Bao* and *Dagong Bao* argued about the necessity of promoting monogamy and abolishing concubinage. However, co-existing with such discussions on the newspapers and periodicals, many popular fictions still depicted romances of “two beauties and a man”, which seems to violate the popular principle of monogamy. The existence of such stories has complicated our possible understandings of the readers of these popular newspapers, about their attitudes towards concubinage: Under the context of the popular discussions of abolishing concubinage and promoting monogamy in the newspapers, how did the stories of “two beauties and a man” satisfy its readers? Did the stories make compromise to the discussion of abolishing concubinage, or did they satisfy a need of the readers that still welcomes concubinage?

To answer this question, it is necessary to take a deeper observation on the Republican “two beauties and a man” stories. After Rey Chow’s work that observed the early Republican popular fictions through a perspective of “feminization” (Chow 76), the gender aspects of the early Republican popular fictions have been an academic focus. However, the stories of “two beauties and a man” has been less noticed by recent scholars. Yun Zhu’s book “Imagining sisterhood in modern Chinese texts” was one of the few books that had some observation on several late imperial and republican stories which discussed the relationship among multiple

women in their romance with the same man. Zhu observed the stories from a perspective of sisterhood. In Zhu's observation on a story named "two flowery sisters", Zhu argues that through description on the rivalry relationship between sisters the triangle relationship with the same man, the story showed anxiety for the no-longer solvable conflict of triangular love in the modern setting, and for the "indigenous (masculine) subjectivity" (2018: 79)

Nevertheless, not all Republican stories presented the "two sisters and a man" stories in a triangular way. Many sisters in the Republican stories were mutually supportive of each other's romances with the male character, and they were not jealous of each other. Zhu's observation of "anxiety for the no-longer solvable conflict of triangular love in the modern setting" no longer seemed able to explain this kind of mutual support between the sisters. Thus, to understand what kind of readers' demand were these stories satisfying, the Republican context of the popular discussion on concubinage under the principle of monogamy should be considered. Due to some legal and conventional reasons¹, the concept of monogamy was rather ambiguous in the early Republican times. This ambiguity has left room for many discussions to go on about the relationship between monogamy and the conventional lifestyles like concubinage. Co-existing with such discussions on the popular newspapers, the accounts of the Republican "sisters and a man" stories can be complex, and should be observed with consideration of the popular discussion on concubinage and monogamy.

Before considering the social context of monogamy, it is necessary to compare the stories with their late imperial prototypes, to understand what aspects of the stories were coming

¹ Current research on Republican concubinage focused on two dimensions of the problem: Legal and public. Many scholars demonstrated the legal rights and status of concubines in the Republican era. Kathryn Bernhardt demonstrated the limited property rights of concubines in the Republican period. (1999). According to Lisa Tran, the Republican concubines were constructed by the jurists as household members, which identity coexisted and interacted with the concubines' identity of "minor wife" as inherited from Qing dynasty. (2009) In the public sense, as stated by Xia Shi, although concubines obtained more opportunities of public exposure in the early Republican era, their identities of concubines still brought them and their nationalities disgrace to some extent. (2018: 233)

from its literary prototypes, and what were the “Republican” features. Thus, this paper will observe several stories published on *Unfettered Talk* 自由谈 (supplement of *Shen Bao*) in the early Republican times, which are “*Zimei Tong Lang* 姊妹同郎” by Shouhe Jiugai 瘦鹤酒丐 (real name was Zou Tao 邹弢), “*Xiaoxiangying Tanci* 潇湘影弹词”, “*Bingdi Yuan* 并蒂缘”, and “*Huanchang Paoying* 欢场泡影”. Since the “two sisters and a man” stories has its prototypes back in the imperial times, this article will observe the Republican stories in their comparison with the late imperial stories of “Qiaoniang 巧娘” in the “*Liaozhai Zhiyi* 聊斋志异”, and the chapter of “Elder Sister Realizing Dream in Afterlife; Little Sister recovered From Illness and Continues the Romance [Dazi hunyou Wan Suyuan, Xiaomei Bingqi Xu Qianyuan 大姊魂游完夙愿, 小妹病起续前缘]”, in “*Chuke Paian Jingqic* 初刻拍案惊奇”. Through observation on the authorships, plots, and characters of the stories, this paper is trying to find out the “Republican” ways of structuring the relative images of the “sisters”, as well as the relative positions of heroine, secondary sister, and the man in the stories. Then, this article will observe the comments and arguments that co-existed with the Republican stories in the newspapers like *Shen Bao*, and to observe to how the stories explicitly and implicitly reacted the hotly discussed topics about concubinage and monogamy.

Through analysis on the specific ways of the stories’ explicit and implicit attitudes towards the sisters, this paper is trying to argue that the Republican “sisters and a man” stories mediated between two sides of the discussion on concubinage and monogamy, and between media discussion and the real everyday marital imaginations of the early Republican newspaper readers. Observation on the stories were deeply invested into the daily lives of wide-reaching readers from middle- and higher- class citizens. Through these observations, this research may shed light on understanding the urban civilian imaginations of the newly

promoted familial principles, especially when it conflicts with some conventions that had been existing in the readers' everyday experiences. The nuances of these everyday reactions may serve as an element, although underlying and reactive, still frequently and significantly mediating the identities of "new women" and the "traditional" women, as well as the new and conventional familial structures in the early Republican period.

Sisters and a Man Stories: Prototypes from the Ancient Myths to the Late Imperial Fictions

In the early Republican popular fiction, sisterly relationships are always intertwined with heterosexual love. Stories about sisterly relationships in these popular fictions can be divided into several major types: The first type is sisters having heterosexual relationships with the same man (voluntarily or involuntarily, explicitly or implicitly). The sisters might have relationships with the same man at the same time or one after another. Just like the word "sister" in imperial Chinese, sisters in this kind of story do not have to be blood-connected. Instead, they just need to be intimate friends so they could be "sisters" of each other. Some stories present the sisters in rivalry ways, but some do not. The second type of "sisters and heterosexual love" stories is sisters not having heterosexual relationships with the same man but were engaging in each other's heterosexual relationships through conversations. In those conversations, women are usually giving advice to their sisters' heterosexual relationships, based on their own experiences or their notions of virtue, true love, and the happiness which can be sustained. Compared to the second type, the sisters in the first type of stories are engaged in a more direct and complex unraveling of heterosexual romance and sisterly friendship, as well as male expectations and sister's subjectivities. Thus, this paper will mainly discuss the first type of stories, in which sisters are more deeply and directly engaging

in each other's heterosexual love relationships. This kind of story is quite common in the popular media in Republican times, and they have incorporated both characteristics of late imperial fiction and influences of western ideologies and literary genres. (Link 1981:8)

The story of sisters getting engaged in heterosexual relationships with the same man, according to Peng Zhaorong, has a long history that could be traced back to the myths of early ancient China. Peng argued that the prototype of "two women and one man" firstly appeared in the myths of Shun 舜, who was a mythical emperor, and his wives, Ehuang 娥皇 and Nüying 女英, who called each other sisters. (Peng 1994:106) In the story of Shun, Ehuang, and Nüying, the behavior and character of the two sisters instead of Shun occupied major parts of the story, but the focus of the sisters' actions were Shun. Peng argued that the two sisters "deconstruct themselves to structure the male world" (Peng 1994: 120)

In the late imperial period, this prototype is more commonly applied in many "talented scholar and beautiful woman" stories, as well as classical literary works like *Dream of the Red Chamber*, and *Liaozhai Zhiyi*. According to Sun Yue, the late imperial "sisters" had more stable relative characteristics: they were contrasting and mutually complementary. In combination of "beauty" and "kindness", as Sun stated, they each represented the maternal and wifely ideal images of women. (Sun 2016:91-92)

Inheriting these prototypes, the Republican stories continue to tell romances of "two sisters and a man" and to satisfy its intended readers. Now, this article will analyze the stories in their comparison with its late imperial prototypes from several influential publications.

Late imperial stories: Unparalleled but balanced relative positions and complementary identities of secondary sisters

According to Sun Yue, the prototype inherited from ancient myths evolved into the late imperial “two beauties and a man” stories. In the stories, the sisters always had some similarities in their identities, social status, while they were always different in their personalities and inner values. (Sun 2016: 92) Indeed, In the two story of Qiaoniang in “Liaozhai Zhi Yi” and “Elder Sister Realizing Dream in Afterlife; Little Sister recovered From Illness and Continues the Romance [Dazi hunyou Wan Suyuan, Xiaomei Bingqi Xu Qianyuan 大姊魂游完夙愿, 小妹病起续前缘]”² in “*Chuke Paian Jingqi* 初刻拍案惊奇”, the distinct characteristics of the two sisters differentiated their personal experiences in the stories. However, this unparalleled way of structuring the two sisters did not marginalize one of the sisters compared to another. Instead, sisters’ different aspects of romantic experiences in the stories contributed to their relative balance. This unparalleled but basically balanced relative characteristics of the sisters and of their engagement in the romantic experiences became one of the major features of the late imperial “two beauties and a man” romantic stories.

In the story of Qiaoniang, the clues for the two sister’s unparalleled experiences are sown from the beginning: the narrative of the hero meeting the two sisters is structured differently, implying the two sisters’ later involvement in the romance would be distinct. As the story begins, one of the sisters, Qiaoniang took precedence over her sister in meeting the man, Lian. At first sight, Qiaoniang was depicted by Lian as “extremely gorgeous”. (1989: 190) Qiaoniang’s engagement in the romance with Lian started from here. Then, when Qiaoniang’s sister, Sanniang, met Lian by a chance given by Qiaoniang, the depiction of Sanniang was only “beauty” through Lian’s observation. Starting from here, the relative higher significance of Qiaoniang, as the more important lover of Lian, has been illuminated.

² Abbreviated as “Dazi” in the following text.

The unparalleled nature of the relative image of the two sisters thus appeared to be increasingly clear.

However, the special romantic experiences obtained by the secondary sister, Sanniang, indicated that the Sanniang was also an important character in the story. In this way, the romance was structured as a frame that puts Lian at center and moves back and forth between Qiaoniang and Sanniang, thus maintained relative balance between the sisters. In the text, soon after illuminating the primary position of the heroine, the romantic frame was moved to Sanniang's side: As Lian came to live with Sanniang and Qiaoniang, Sanniang was the one who accidentally helped Lian to heal his impotence, and had sexual relationship with the just-recovered-Lian. Soon, when Qiaoniang accidentally died, Sanniang married to Lian. By this means, Sanniang was participating in physical romance before Qiaoniang. Despite Sanniang's opportunity of marrying Lian before her sister was given by her sister's absence, Sanniang seemed to take precedence over Qiaoniang at some points of the romance here. Then in the story, the romance was then taken over by Qiaoniang again: After marrying Sanniang, Lian finally heard the loud crying of Qiaoniang's ghost, saved Qiaoniang, and married her. Qiaoniang went out of the tomb with a baby in her body. (1989: 192-193) Having Lian's love and his baby, Qiaoniang took the position of the heroine at the end of the story, both in the sense of mind and body; and Sanniang, as the first person to marry Lian, remained in the romance. After all this vibration, the frame of romance ended up including both sisters, in which Qiaoniang occupying more of the emotional romance, Sanniang occupying more of physical romance.

In the complex and "back and forth" romances of Qiaoniang and Sanniang with Lian, Lian was put at the center of the frame. Qiaoniang and Sanniang at two sides of the relationship seemed to pull the frame back and forth, despite Qiaoniang seemed to occupy a relative primary and emotional role compared to Sanniang who occupied the erotic realm

more. The relative interactions between Qiaoniang and Sanniang, which was presented as prevailing back and forth in the romance, was quite rivalry, despite the competitiveness was implicit.

The unparalleled but relative balanced positions of “mind and body” of the two sisters in the romance, as well as the implicit rivalry between them was made much clearer in the story of “Dazi”. The sisters in “Dazi”, Xingniang and Qinniag, participated in the heterosexual romance in completely disjoint ways: Xingniang occupying the mind, and Qinniag occupying the body. In the story, the elder sister, Xingniang, was a ghost who returned to her fiancé using the body of her sister, Qinniag, and finally promoted Qinniag’s marriage with her fiancé, Cui. The story was very clear from the beginning that Qinniag, who had engagement with Cui since childhood and who came back after death because of unrealized romance, was the relative heroine of the story. In the story, the “subjectivity” of Xingniang was extremely strong and powerful, in a way that she could control her spirit to come back to human world, and she could deprive the body of her sister for a year. However, Qinniag, the younger sister of Xingniang in the story, was much more passive in the sense of her body, as well as her mind. When Xingniang used Qinniag’s body to realize her romantic ideal with her fiancé, Qinniag lost her manipulation on her body and was in a coma when she had no conscious of what is going on with her body. It seems that until now, Xingniang was the absolute dominant one in the relative relationship between the sisters. Qinniag both had subjectivity of body and minds, and had realization of the romantic love with Cui. However, the story turns around at this point. Since Xingniang’s spirit could no longer stay at the human world after a year, Xingniang asked her parents to marry the real Qinniag to her fiancé, Cui, in order not to make Cui lonely. (Ling 2014: 227) In this way, the younger sister, Qinniag, although had no romantic eager to Cui, married to Cui and lived with Cui throughout their lives. In the story, all the subjective efforts made to achieve the romance

with Cui were all made by Xingniang, while all the concrete and physical contact with Cui are realized by Qinniag. In this sense, Xingniang and Qinniag were explicitly separated by their romantic “functions”, and they together make up a full image of an ideal woman. The author himself commented at the end of the story that “Elder sister's mind and younger sister's body, combine in a perfect way that there is no sense of you and me.” (Ling 2014:229)

In a word, in the late imperial stories, the romances in "two beauties and a man" stories were always structured as a frame with the man at center, and two sisters at two sides, with one of each occupying the romantic realm of mind or body. The heroine, who was always more closely engaged with the subjective emotion of “qing”, illuminated the themes of these late imperial stories which subjects are closer to “romantic” than “erotic”. By contrast, the sister of the heroine was always implementing the heroine's absense in physical romance and in other accidental scenes. In the implicit rivalry between the sisters, the secondary sister always served as a complement in the romance of the heroine. In other words, the heroine’s romantic experience always had dissatisfaction for the secondary sister to fill. The secondary sister’s mission of filling the gap of the heroines’ inabilities (especially in the physical sense) seemed to make necessary the role of the secondary sister of the late imperial stories. In this way, the relative roles of the two sisters in the late imperial stories, despite not paralleled, was balanced.

Republican stories: Secondary Sister’s Disappearing Participation in Romantic Practices

The Republican “sisters and a man” stories basically inherited the late imperial prototype of non-paralleling relationships between sisters. Nevertheless, the Republican stories seemed to disturb the balance between the heroine and sister in the stories. This

disturbance is primarily realized by de-emphasizing the sisters' roles of filling the gaps in the romance of heroine and hero. In the story of "*Zimei Tonglang 姊妹同郎*" and "*Huanchang Paoying 欢场泡影*", the secondary sister no longer fill the gap in the heroine's romantic experiences. At the same time, the secondary sister's participation in the romance in the story was weak and obscure. The secondary sisters in the story, in a word, were losing significance in engagement in the romantic practices and "qing" when compared to the heroine.

In "*Zimei Tong Lang*", the beginning of the story demonstrated the sisters in quite similar ways with the late imperial "unparalleled but balanced" prototype. Ying and Yuxiang were "similar in appearance, but Yuxiang was more intelligent than Ying." (Shouhejiugai *Unfettered Talk* Oct 15, 1912: 10) The pattern of the sisters' unparalleled relative images in the matter of romance and sensitivity of Ying and Yuxiang takes shape here. However, later in the story, the relative characters of the sisters became extremely distinct in their emotional and physical romantic interactions with the male character, Wang. Both in mind and body, the degree that the secondary sister involved into the romance was radically lower than the heroine. The heroine, Yuxiang, appeared to be extremely sensitive to her state of love, both in mind and body. In the text, there are two times that Yuxiang was told that she could not marry her lover: The first time, she was extremely upset and seriously ill. The second time, her health condition rapidly worsened and finally died. After she died, she figured out her unfinished romantic destiny in the human's world, which is to marry a man named "Wang". With an unfinished fate of "qing" illuminated to her, Yuxiang's body magically resurged from death, and she came back to Wang Lang, healthy and delighted. Both times of tragedies happening to Yuxiang's romantic ideals shows that Yuxiang's body and her mind here seemed to react very sensitively to, and even controlled by her state of romance.

By comparison, her sister, Ying, was much less sensitive to heterosexual romance, and was taking almost no participation in it before the very end of the story. When Yuxiang was

obsessed with lovesickness, Ying teased Yuxiang as “Chi [crazy about love]” (Shouhejiugai *Unfettered Talk* Oct 16, 1912: 10). When Yuxiang on her deathbed was about to commit Ying to the man, Wang Lang, Ying pretended to accept, with the intention of “hoping her sister’s body would cure” (Shouhejiugai *Unfettered Talk* Oct 20, 1912: 3), while she avoided marrying the man then. Throughout the text, Ying did not explicitly appear to be obsessed by the man, or to have any physical contact with the man, not to mention having special romantic experiences with Wang that was not experienced by the heroine.

In “*Huanchang Paoying 欢场泡影*”, the description of the two sisters were quite similar to that in “*Zimei Tong Lang*”. The sister prostitutes, Mengqu and Zhongqin, were described as “both have their own special charm, but Zhongqin was especially gorgeous”. (Jianchi 1913: 13) This description sets a basic tone that Zhongqin will be the relative heroine, compared to her sister. In the following text, all the romantic interactions with the man were done by Zhongqin, or by the sisters collaboratively. However, Mengqu, on her own, kept her calm personality and was only interacting with her sister. For example, when Zhongqin was deeply obsessed by the man, Mengqu was also teasing her sister of “Chi [crazy about love]” (Jianchi 1913: 13), in a way similar to Ying in “*Zimei Tonglang 姊妹同郎*”. When Zhongqin was about to be separated with Mengqu, Mengqu was for the first and the only time frustrated, jumped up and said “We sisters get along really well. How would you have the heart to separate us?” (Jianchi 1913: 13). Similar with Ying in “*Zimei Tonglang 姊妹同郎*”, Mengqu was not having emotional and physical romantic interactions with the man.

Compared to the Late imperial stories, the relative roles of the two sisters in the Republican stories seemed less balanced, in a way that the hero and the heroine were at the center of the romantic frame, while the romantic significance of the secondary sister is de-emphasized. The Republican “secondary sister” no longer had special romantic experiences that was not possessed by the heroine. Thus, there is no way that the Republican secondary

sister could fill the gap in the dissatisfaction of the heroine's romance. Instead, the Republican stories seemed to construct perfect romances between only the heroine and the hero, making it unnecessary for the secondary sister to participate in the romance at last.

Compared to the late imperial stories, the relative position of the two female characters in the Republican stories was explicitly divided by their different degree of physical and mental involvement in the relationship with the man. This kind of transformation creates a paradox: The romantic involvement of the secondary sister is de-emphasized, while her participation in the marriage or the relationship became part of the central points of the story. The body and mind of heroines are more reactive to the realization of heterosexual romantic ideal. By contrast, the heroine's secondary sister seemed to only emotionally and explicitly connected with the heroine in the text, instead of the man. In this sense, the text seemed to be absurd: There is no longer a gap in the heroine's romance for her sister to fill. It is no longer necessary for the secondary sister to participate in the relationship with man but not to participate in the romance.

Late Imperial Reason for Secondary Sister to Marry the Man: The Explicit Center of the Man

Then, the problem would be, why does the sister character has to participate in the relationship or the marriage, while keeping distance with the romantic experiences? Before looking into the writer's account and discourse context, it is necessary to know how this question is answered in the text, by many of the heroines, as well as the male character themselves. One typical place, both in the late imperial and in the Republican stories, where the heroine is to discuss the reason why she wanted to marry her sister to her lover, was when the heroine was dying or have died.

In this kind of plots in the Late imperial stories, no matter through the narratives of the man or the heroine, the man's happiness was placed at a center of the "romance" among the three characters in the stories: Happiness of the man was clearly described as the major reasons for the man marrying the secondary sister. For example, in the story of "Dazi", after the heroine Xingniang occupied her sister's body to live with the man, her sister, Qiniang has been seriously ill in the bed. Xinniag realized that she could not occupy her sister's body in that way forever. Therefore, she decided to confess to her parents about what she did, and ask her parents to marry Qinniag to her lover. Knowing that she could not accompany her lover forever, Xingniang said to her parents: "How could I leave Mr. Cui to be so lonely? [...] We must marry my sister to him." (Ling 2014: 227-228) Instead of considering her romantic ideal that driven her back to the human world, as well as her sister's subjective intentions, Xingniang was regarding her lover's demand for romantic companionship as the reason of committing her sister to her lover.

In the story of "Qiaoniang", the decision of the man marrying two sisters was made not by the heroine, but by the man himself. Although the text did not explicitly state the reason why Lian promoted his marriage with both girls, all along it was the male character, Lian, who subjectively promoted his marriage with the two sisters. The first time that he considered marrying the sisters, Lian was motivated by the mother of the "secondary" sister and realized it was time to marry the two sisters. Therefore, he went on his journey to home to persuade his mother that he "has to marry the two sisters" (1989: 192) Then, after the heroine's accidental death, Lian successfully married the secondary sister, Sanniang, and kept thinking about the heroine, Qiaoniang. It was all along the male character, Lian, whose interest was leading the marriage of "two sisters and a man". By contrast, the two sisters participated in the marriage relatively passively.

In both late imperial stories, no matter stated by the heroine or the hero, the decisions of the man marrying both sisters was made out of the interest of the man. This motivation is made quite explicitly and directly that it does not seem like what the texts intended to justify or emphasize, but only as a premise that should be taken for granted.

Republican Reason for committing sister to lover: Secondary Sister, Heroine, or the Man?

The two late imperial stories made it quite explicit that the reason why both sisters had heterosexual romance with the male character was to satisfy the romantic need of the man. However, the motivation of the “two beauties and a man” endings in Republican stories are demonstrated quite differently: In the two stories of “*Zimei Tonglang* 姊妹同郎” and “*Xiaoxiangying Tanci* 潇湘影弹词”, there were plots in which the heroine deliberately committed her sister to her lover when she was about to die. The heroines always state their reasons of commitment as considerations for the secondary sister’s happiness. However, regarding the lack of romantic participation of the secondary sisters, and sometimes the unwillingness that the secondary sister expressed, such commitment seemed quite arbitrary. Making the decisions for their sisters, the heroines did not consider the willingness of their sisters. The heroine in the text tend to advertise herself as considering the happiness of their sisters, rather than casting control over their sisters’ lives.. In this sense, this plot creates a paradox that the secondary sisters’ happiness was seemingly promoted in this plot, but in fact de-emphasized considering the whole text. Besides, the heroines who made such absurd commitments also seemed less humane in the story. Thus, subjectivities of both sisters in the Republican stories are in fact de-emphasized, in a way that is more implicit than late imperial stories.

In the plot of commitment, the heroines often demonstrate their reasons of commitment as happiness of the secondary sisters. For example, in “*Zimei Tonglang 姊妹同郎*”, the dying heroine was trying to persuade her sister that,

“Although Wang Lang is poor now, I believe that he will be wealthy and illustrious in the future. Sister, if you can marry him, you will be serving a good man. I just didn't expect us to marry the same man! Now my wish has been completed. Dear sister please take care and don't be sad for your ill-fated(薄命) sister.” (Shouhejiugai 1913: 10.)

In this quote, the heroine, Yuxiang, was justifying her suggestion using a promising future that her lover Wang could give to her sister. It seems that Yuxiang was being considerate to her sister's happiness. However, her suggestion was actually imposed on Ying, since Ying actually did not show her willingness to marry her lover before in the text. It was just Yuxiang deciding for her sister that Ying needs to marry a “good man” whose excellence has been recognized by Yuxiang, instead of Ying. This kind of imposed, and even compulsory “suggestion” seemed hypocrisy, especially when Yuxiang insisted that she was making the suggestion for the happiness of Ying. The context of Yuxiang's deathbed even escalated this hypocrisy situation: On her deathbed, Yuxiang was transforming the suggestion to a “last wish”, a command, thus completely depriving the right of choice of her sister, Ying. Similarly, in “*Xiaoxiangying Tanci*”, the heroine also attributed the reason to her sister's happiness when she was trying to persuade her sister to marry her lover as she was dying. To justify her suggestion, the heroine said to her sisters that “He would not have the heart to disappoint me, and he would treat you as well as he treated me.” (Tianxuwosheng 1914: 4) It sounds here like that she was truly considering the happiness of the sisters after her death. However, the sisters also did not have romantic interactions with the man before in the story, and even the life of her lover was uncertain. Therefore, this commitment seemed only like an imposition.

Faced with the hypocrisy commitments, the secondary sisters were generally not enthusiastic about them. Instead, the secondary sisters' assent was always reluctant, or unspoken, or in return for the heroines' kindness. For example, in the story of "*Zimei Tonglang* 姊妹同郎", The first time that Yuxiang was trying to commit Ying to Wang, Ying pretended to consent, hoping that her sister will recover from illness, while the consent was neither serious, nor having to do with romance. (Shouhejiugai *Unfettered Talk* Oct 20, 1912: 10) The second time that Yuxiang suggested her sister to marry Wang, Ying responded that "My family is broken and separated, and my life is like a burden. I just hope to have a clean room, and to wear "shuitianyi 水田衣 [patchwork of bits and pieces of cloth]" to spend the rest of my life." (Shouhejiugai *Unfettered Talk* Oct 24, 1912: 10) Never had any romantic contacts with Wang, Ying's ideal for life is made quite explicit that did not involve romance with Wang. However, the heroine still had Wang's mother "forced" (Shouhejiugai *Unfettered Talk* Oct 24, 1912: 10) Ying to wear the wedding dress and finished the ceremony. Similarly, in *Bingdi Yuan* 并蒂缘, faced with the dying heroine, the secondary sister approved the heroine's suggestion to marry her lover. The secondary sister said: "I shall pay back to you." (Liaoqing 1913: 13). In this quote, the secondary sister described her consent to marry her sister's lover as requiting her sister, rather than love for her sister's lover. Compared to the heroines' desire for romance, the secondary sisters seemed to consent to participate in the marriage only out of their intimate connections with the heroines, not the men.

In this sense, the heroines' arbitrary commitment of their sisters to their lovers showed a textual paradox of seemingly promoting the secondary sisters' "happiness", and actually de-emphasizing the secondary sisters' subjectivities. There exists a gap between the nominal considerations of such plots and the actual concerns that the heroines expressed: The text states to consider for the happiness of secondary sisters, but in fact it represented somebody else's interest.

Given that the heroines' commitment was not considering for her secondary sister's happiness, the question of who does she make the commitment for is answered by some of the stories themselves. In the text of "Xiaoxiangying Tanci", the heroine explained her commitment as actually considering for herself: After her sisters married her lover, the heroine was hoping that her sister will "be able to serve a good man", and she will thus be "as happy in death as I was in life, because I will feel the happiness as if I am sharing your bodies. [不啻一身同受也]" (Tianxuosheng 1914: 4) This idea of "sharing your bodies" echoes quite closely with the story of "Dazi": Compared to "Dazi", this heroine occupied her sister's body not in a tangible way, but in an imaginary way. In her visions of realizing her heterosexual romantic ideal using her sisters' bodies, the heroine regarded her sister as an unintentional container for both the heroine's soul and the heroine's romantic ideal. However, she also did not regard herself as the user of the container. The heroine's commitment seemed quite weird here: It does not make any sense for the heroine to "continue" the romance on her sister's body after her death. When she is dead, it is no longer the heroine but actually the man that is able to still enjoy the romantic relationship.

In this sense, in the heroine's seeming consideration for the happiness of secondary sister, it is actually not representing the happiness of the secondary sister, but the heroine's ideal for romance. In the textual emphasis on the heroine's ideal for romance, it actually is not representing subjectivity of the heroine, but that of the man. In other words, although the Republican stories pretended to promote the secondary sisters' happiness, as well as the heroines' romantic ideals in the text, male interest was still put at the center of the stories and the romances. Compared to the late imperial stories, the Republican male interest in the stories are much more implicit, hiding under the names of heroines and secondary sisters.

Paradox: Muted Subjectivities behind the Emphasis on the Relationship between Sisters

In the plots in which heroines commit their sisters to their lovers, male interest in the Republican stories was implicitly emphasized under the names of sisters' happiness. In fact, the sisters' considerations for each other did not only appear in the plots of commitment, but in the whole text. In other plots in which sisters considered for each other, the subjectivities of both sisters are also de-emphasized. The whole story created a hypothetical web, that implicitly expressed male interests of occupying two women lovers, in the name of the sisters' happiness.

In the late Qing stories, the sisters were to some extent close to each other, but to some extent rivalry in their triangle relationships. For example, in the story of "Qiaoniang", when the heroine found out that her sister had sex with her lover before her, she shouted to the mother of her sister that: "When Sanniang learnt embroidery, I have taught her a lot of secret techniques. How could she be so jealous of me!" (1989: 192). Although Qiaoniang did not directly provoke a dispute between she and Sanniang, Qiaoniang's blame on Sanniang's mother pointed straightly at Sanniang occupying of Lian's body before her. In the late imperial stories, the romantic experiences that sisters possessed provided ground for the rivalry between sisters. The Republican story of "two flowery sisters" that was discussed in Zhu's book basically inherited and intensified this rivalry relationship from the prototypes of late imperial stories.

However, in many other Republican stories, since the sister of the heroine no longer had romantic experiences with the male character, the rivalry between them had no space to exist. In "*Zimei Tonglang* 姊妹同郎", the sisters were not at all rivalry, but very close to each other. Their close relationship is presented in two ways: First, the sisters were depicted as

close friends and nearly as real sisters. Second, the sisters would facilitate each other's participation in the romances.

The first kind of close relationship is always presented as description of how the two sisters lived together and went on well. Nevertheless, heterosexual love instead of friendship is more emphasized in this kind of plots. For example, in “*Zimei Tong Lang* 姊妹同郎”, the relationship between sisters were very close and sincere. At the beginning of the story, the close relationship between sisters is demonstrated as “The sisters went along really well, dressed alike, and was just like kinship sisters. At night, they sleep together with their legs lapping, as if they are husband and wife.” (Shouhejiugai *Unfettered Talk* Oct 15, 1912: 10) The expression of “同胞[kinship sisters]” was a typical way in such stories of demonstrating the close relationship between the sisters. However, the author then compared their relationship to “夫婦[husband and wife]”, which conferred their sisterly relationship a sense of heterosexual romance. In this analogy to heterosexual love relationship, the author intended to emphasize the sincerity and genuineness of the sisterly friendship. However, this analogy showed the author's idea that heterosexual romance is an absolute symbol of sincerity and affection, and it acts beyond friendship.

The second way that the close sisterly relationship is emphasized is through description of how they promoted each other's participation in the romance. In this type of plots, the emphasis on male's interest in heterosexual love becomes more clear. In “*Zimei Tong Lang*”, after the heroine, Yuxiang, went back to human world with intact and healthy body, she successfully lived with her lover, Wang. It seems that her heterosexual romantic ideal has already been realized. However, at the end of the story, Yuxiang was extremely excited about meeting Ying again, and she suggested Ying again to marry her husband, Wang. This suggestion at this point weird, because Yuxiang was no longer dying, and her romantic ideal no longer had gaps for her sister to fill. Yuxiang even said to her sister that “Although I have

married Wang, I am still keeping my virginity to wait for you. I have always had this in mind, and I can live up to the gods.” (Shouhejiugai *Unfettered Talk* Oct 24, 1912: 10). In this quote, Yuxiang kept her virginity only to wait for her sister to marry Wang, and depicted her insistence on keeping her virginity and wait for her sister as a necessary condition for her to “live up to the gods”. This insistence neither come out purely of romantic ideal, nor out of friendship. Instead, in Yuxiang’s idea of “marrying Wang Lang together with her sister”, she mixed her romantic ideal of marrying Wang with her friendship ideal of staying together with her sister. In this way, Yuxiang regarded Ying as an unintentional instrument for her mixture of romantic and friendship ideals, and deprived Ying’s subjectivity to pursue her own life ideals.

In this sense, the textual emphasis on no matter the heroine considering for the second sister, or the sister considering for the heroine, were both hypocrisy, as that was in the commitment plots. The sign of the sisters considering for each other in the story was not a sign of solidarity among sisters, but a representation of the male writer depriving and borrowing the subjectivities of the sisters.

Thus, two paradoxes are created around the roles of the two sisters: First, the stories emphasize the relationship among the man and two sisters, while the secondary sisters’ participation in the romance were in fact very few. Second, the sisters’ “happiness” appear frequently in the text, while the subjectivities of both sisters are misrepresented and muted in the stories. To understand what specific motivations are contributing to these paradoxes, it is necessary to look into the writers and the popular discourse.

Writer’s Account: Strong Familiarity with “Two Beauties and a Man” Prototypes

Such instabilities in the Republican text, as well as the paradoxical identity of the secondary sisters pointed to the accounts of the authors, as well as the social context in the discourse where the Republican stories were published. In the sense of the writer of “*Zimei Tonglang 姊妹同郎*”, the paradoxes about subjectivities of sisters, as well as the awkward existence of the secondary sister cannot be attributed to lack of literary techniques of the writer, since the writer was known as a skilled imitator of *Liaozhai Zhiyi*, and extremely familiar with the prototype of “Two Beauties and a Man” stories.

Zou Tao[邹弢], author of one of the stories “*Zimei Tonglang 姊妹同郎*”, was known as a huge fan of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Liaozhai Zhiyi*. Zou was especially a fan of Lin Daiyu. Zou gave himself a gracious name of “Servant of Xiaoxiang Guan [潇湘馆侍者]”. “Xiaoxiang Guan [潇湘馆]” was the name of Lin Daiyu’s garden in the Grand View Garden [大观园]. According to Zou’s book “*Sanjielu Bitan 三借庐笔谈*”³, Zou had a radical argument against his friend Xu Boqian on the relative images of Lin Daiyu and Xue Baochai. The debate on Lin Daiyu and Xue Baochai has been persistently popular, since the textual emphasize of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* on the two girls were relatively balanced. Therefore, we could conclude that Zou was quite familiar with the text of *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, as well as the relatively balanced images of Lin Daiyu and Xue Baochai depicted in *The Dream of the Red Chamber*. Besides, Zou was also known as an excellent imitator of *Liaozhai Zhiyi*. Zou was born in the late imperial period, 1850. Grown up in a poor peasant family, Zou’s family struggled to support his study for the imperial examination but Zou finally failed the exam. Then, Zou began his literary production. In this period, Zou composed “*Jiaochou Ji 浇愁集*”, which is known as imitated from *Liaozhai Zhiyi*. As Wang argued, “*Jiaochou Ji 浇愁集*” was composed as an imitation of *Liaozhai Zhiyi*, and that

³ [I still lack a good source of this book...]

imitation was clearly declared by Zou. Zou imitated *Liaozhai Zhiyi* in its structures, styles, plots, and themes. Although less fantasized and more directive in its critics of reality, as stated by Wang, “*Jiaochou Ji 浇愁集*” was regarded as an excellent imitation of *Liaozhai Zhiyi*. (Wang 2013: 51-55)

In this sense, Zou’s experience manifested his proficient literary skills and absolute familiarity with text of *Liaozhai Zhiyi*. As an excellent imitator of the styles and themes of *Liaozhai Zhiyi*, and as a writer who was very familiar with the character setting of two balanced beauties (Lin Daiyu and Xue Baochai, as well as other sisters in *Liaozhai Zhiyi* stories), Zou would not have presented a paradox on the significance of secondary sisters in his own “two beauties and a man” story, because he was skilled at and familiar with the topic. Instead, Zou’s choice on breaking the balance of the two sisters, and de-emphasizing involvement of secondary sisters in the romances while emphasized their participation in the marriage must have resulted from other factors. It could be that Zou was particularly intended to express something, or that the discourse that Zou published his story was particularly conscious about certain issues that made him compromise to the accounts of his readers. Thus, it is necessary to understand more about the discourse where these Republican stories were published on and its readers, especially about other discussions in the discourse that was related to the “two beauties and a man” type of romance.

Discourse Context: The Debated Concubinage under the Newly Promoted Monogamy

According to Sun, the sisters in the prototype of “two beauties and a man” stories each represented maternal and wifely ideal images of women. (Sun 2016:91-92) This statement is not only based on the text itself of the late imperial period, but also on the household tradition

at that time: in the late empire, both the mother and the wife had certain property rights, inheritance rights and family management rights in the family. Thus, mother and wife are considered two major counterparts of women in the households. Concubines, by contrast, had few of these rights, and received less attention. However, in the early Republican era, the public attention concubines received has radically increased, since social discussion of whether concubinage violates the principle of monogamy had been flourishing. In the popular periodicals and newspapers where the Republican popular fictions were published, there were abundant articles suggesting that concubinage conflicts with monogamy, and thus should be abolished. In this sense, the stories of “two sisters and a man” romances have new realistic meanings in the Republican times. The sisters’ implications are transforming from “(the man’s) mother and (the man’s) wife” to the man’s “wife and concubine”.

Concubinage had long history in China and participated as an essential element in the everyday life of citizens during the entire late imperial era. As western ideologies were imported to China in the late imperial period, concubinage has already started to be disputed as part of the conventional traditions that prevented absorption of monogamy. According to Tran, Republican concubines had dual identity: “minor wife” and “household member”. Concubines’ identity of “minor wife” has been inherited from the late Qing. In the late imperial period, according to Tran, a man can only have one legal wife (main wife) at a time, but can have multiple “minor wives”. The main wife and the minor wives are radically hierarchized in their legal status, participation in household management, marriage process, inheritance rights, as well as the status of their children. In this way, the late imperial concubinage has been constructed as “semi-legitimate marriage” (2009: 124-126) This “semi-legitimate” notion of concubinage has been inherited by the Republican popular perception of concubines. Thus, whether concubinage violates the principle of monogamy became a central issue of social discussion.

Under such conditions, as stated by Tran, the Republican Jurists began to construct concubines' identities beyond "minor wife", as "household member". According to Tran, in 1913, the Republican Department of Justice (Sifabu 司法部) denied concubines' legal identities of wives, thus argued that concubinage does not construct bigamy. (2009: 133) However, this declaration only denied concubinage from bigamy, but failed to define what concubinage exactly is. As Tran argued, later in some legal cases, concubines' identity of "household member" (Jiashu[家属] or Qinshu[亲属]) has been gradually constructed. (2009: 138-139)

Despite the efforts of the Republican jurists "to disassociate concubinage from its semi-marital connotations acquired during the Ming and Qing" (2009:122), the gap between the conventional perception of concubines and their newly constructed legal identity as family members continued to bother the citizens who are the major contributors and readers of the popular publications. In the 1910s periodicals and newspapers, concubinage became a hotly debated topic. Many critics argue that concubinage conflicts with monogamy. Co-existing with those criticisms, the "sisters and a man" stories which discussed romance among two women and a man thus could not circumvent from serving as reactions to the ongoing debate.

Mediation of the Debate on Concubinage and Monogamy

In the Republican periodicals and newspapers, the debate on concubinage mainly included several topics: Whether concubinage conflict with monogamy; Whether concubinage leads rivalry between wives and concubines, and disturbs the marriage between husbands and wives. Most of the discussions argue that concubinage does conflict with monogamy, and does disturb the conventional household structure. The discussion around monogamy and concubinage was the relatively major one. Pointing out that concubinage

conflicts with monogamy, these arguments generally dispute concubinage as harmful and even immoral tradition that should be discarded. However, it is worth noting that those who promote concubinage seldom argue back on the newspapers and periodicals. Instead, they tend to only express their advocate for concubinage by keeping concubines. This kind of one-sided discussions on newspapers made a situation for the “sisters and a man” stories to make some compromises and mediations between concubinage and anti-concubinage.

Although the concept of monogamy had been imported to China as early as mid 19th century, the discussion on monogamy and concubinage did not start before the early 20th century, on several major newspapers such as Shen Bao and Dagong Bao. At first, most discussions focused arguing concubinage conflicts with monogamy and should be abolished. For example, in 1903, an feminist proposal called “*Feminism is Going to Flourish* [女權將伸]” published in Dagong bao argued that:

The law of monogamy should be reinforced. Those whose concubines have already given birth to children can keep their concubines. However, those concubines who have not given birth to children should be dismissed and should never have the disgraceful title of “concubine”. Those who never had concubines will not be allowed to have. (Lujian 錄件 22 Dec. 1903.)

This feminist appeal calls for a reserved abrogation of concubinage based on the promotion of law of monogamy. Monogamy being the reason, this appeal implied that concubinage conflicts the law of monogamy, thus it should be abolished. Shen Bao was another major battlefield of such discussion. In 1912, an article called *Financial Policy* [理財策] proposed the Republican government to introduce a “concubine tax”. The writer argues that the reason why “concubine tax” should be introduced is that “Monogamy is a common humanity. Polygamy is a bad custom of our country. However, many people still enjoy it

today.” (Nong *Unfettered Talk* 24 Nov 1912: 10) In this argument, the author equals concubinage with polygamy, and implied that concubinage conflicts with monogamy. Holding a perspective that concubinage conflicts with monogamy, the article argues that concubinage is a large barrier to the new monogamy society.

This trend of promoting the abolition of concubinage corresponds with newspaper discussions on the real legal cases related to the monogamy and concubinage issue. In 1913, a legal case aroused public attention on the topic of concubinage and monogamy: In Guangdong, a concubine of a man named Liao Ligeng was seduced and raped [和奸] by another man, Qiu Shuren. Qiu in the court argued that Liao already had a wife, thus the concubine, Chen Wumei, should not be considered as having a marriage. (*Dali Yuan Judges Qiu Shuren in the Rape Case 大理院判決邱樹人和姦案判詞* 22Jan 1913: 6) Qiu’s argument was finally approved by Dali Yuan [大理院] and he won the case. Qiu’s winning of the case led to wide discussion beyond the case itself. For example, as a response to the legal case of Chen Wumei, Wang Dungen’s article mocked those who promoted concubinage and kept concubines as absurd and harmful: Wang made up a story about the anxious Liao Ligeng calling up other supporters of concubinage to organize a “polygamous party”. In the story, Wang made these celebrities members of the "polygamous party", and had them eloquently giving speeches to defend their concubine keeping. In Wang’s text, Wang attributed the main reason why the "polygamous party" promoted concubinage to their absurd insistence of customs: In Wang’s story, a member of the "polygamous party" argued: “China has a long history of polygamy... I have two wives, and I regard myself as following the example of Ehuang and Nüying.”. Another member followed: “In the imperial era, emperors had thousands of women in their harems. How cannot we aristocrats occasionally have one concubine?” (Dungen 13Feb. 1913: 10) In this quote, Wang does not seem to distinguish concubinage and polygamy: Ehuang and Nüying were characters of mythical stories, and

they are both wives of Emperor Shun. By contrast, women in the emperor's harem were the concubines of the emperor, whose status and identities were radically different with the empress, wife of the emperor. Developing these statements together, Wang's generalization of the two identities of reflects Wang's perception that concubinage is a manifestation of polygamy, and it makes little difference with having two wives.

A comment in the Random Comments (Zaping [杂评]) section of Shen Bao also responded to the legal case of Chen Wumei, with more sense of criticizing the immorality of concubinage. According to the author, based on the judgement of case of Chen Wumei, the relationship of men and their concubines were not legally permitted, and even should be defined as "Random strangers [泛泛無關係]" or "paramours[姘識]". (*You Qie Zhe Jian 有妾者鑒* 22Jan. 1913: 6) The word "paramours[姘識]" to some extent implied immorality. Not only devaluing the marriage of men and their concubines as illegal, the author took one step further to argue that the relationship of men and their concubines was immoral. Promoted by the judgement of legal cases like Chen's, the discussions on abolition of concubinage became more radical and severe: Concubinage is criticized in the discourse as a large barrier to monogamy, and is illegal and immoral.

In this whole discourse containing such legal decisions and public discussions, commentaries and legal cases mostly suggest that concubinage conflict with monogamy, and imply that concubinage is immoral and should be abolished. These discussions are woven into a powerful web, demonstrating the strong notion that concubinage is a large barrier to the monogamy society, and thus concubinage is immoral and harmful. Co-existing with this kind of discussions on concubinage, the "two sisters and a man" stories which tried to de-emphasize the involvement of the secondary sisters in romance seemed like a compromise, which was made by the authors to accommodate to the popular arguments of concubinage being conflicted with monogamy and being immoral. However, the stories were making

compromises to another direction either. The “two beauties and a man” stories still emphasized the men’s dominant positions to the secondary sisters’ marriages. This emphasis on the second sister being “occupied” by the man could be considered as satisfying the readers who keep concubines or still have eagerness to keep concubines. This part of readers’ interest is relatively less presented in the social discussions on concubinage. Although implicitly, the stories manifested that there is a readers’ imagination of preserving concubinage that needs to be satisfied. In this sense, the Republican “sisters and a man” stories were making a mediation between two sides of the debate, and between the explicitly promoted principle of monogamy and the implicitly presented eager of the middle-class readers to preserve concubinage.

Mediation of the Debate on Household Hierarchies

Besides of the debate on concubinage and monogamy, in discussions about the abolition of concubinage, many discussions also focused on another issue of concubinage: the relationship of wife and concubines. One of the major doubts of concubinage is that it might lead to rivalries between concubines and wives, and even result in the abolition of wives and the reversing of the relative positions of wife and concubines. In this way, the discussions expressed their fears that concubinage might not only threaten the principle of monogamy, but also threaten the moral realm of the men in their loyalty to their marriages with their wives.

The fear of concubinage leading to rivalry between wife and concubines were very commonly mentioned in the discussion. Often, these discussions begin with the argument that women are good at jealousy, and further point out that keeping concubines can easily lead to the inversion of wife-concubine relationships and even threaten the marriage of wives and

husbands. For example, in the article of Donald MacGillivray, an English missionary⁴, John pointed out the risks of “monogamy”, such as “Spoiling concubines’ bullying wife; Conniving at wife’s abuse of concubines; Divorcing wife and remarrying” (Donald MacGillivray 24Jul. 1913: 1) Through demonstrating several explicit possible consequences of “polygamy”, MacGillivray pointed out these consequences might lead to disintegration of the family, implying the risk of inversion of the wife’s status in the familial hierarchy. Wang’s satiric article about the imaginary “Polygamous Society [多妻会]” imagined how people having concubines would respond to the critics like MacGillivray’s argument. In the text, Wang imagined the concubine-bearer's dignified abolition of his formal wife is presented in a satirical tone :

“There is a new counsellor to the Netherlands named Jin Zhi who followed to speak: According to Jin, men had been "affectionate [多情]" since the ancient times, and they have to be in love with more than one woman... I abandoned my original wife because I am not allowed to have two wives at the same time. If I had been able to, I wouldn't have the heart to give up my wife of many years to others.” (Dungen 13Feb. 1913: 10)

In Wang’s satiric imagination, those who keep concubines regard concubinage as a way to prevent amorous man from abandoning his wife for another woman that he loves. Wang implies a moral judgement here about the immorality of these “amorous men”: The immorality of abandoning wife, as well as the righteous excuse of being “affectionate [多情]” confers the argument with absurdity. This absurdity thus devalues the morality of those who keep concubines.

This kind of destruction of husband-wife marital relationship is not only regarded as immoral, but also regarded as leading to bad consequences in the husband’s life. For

⁴ According to Shen Bao, the article was signed as “Donald MacGillivray from England 英国季理斐”. Donald MacGillivray was in fact a Canadian.

example, as stated by MacGillivray, concubinage might lead to dissociation of a family, and not only will not lead to success, but also brings implicit risk of failure (for family). Thus, MacGillivray argues that concubinage is “ominous [不祥]” (Donald MacGillivray 24Jul. 1913: 1) Taking one step further from arguing the immorality of the risk of abandoning wife and concubines, MacGillivray pointed out the severe risk of inversion of the household hierarchy that ensures husband’s absolute control of the family, as well as wife’s status and authority that acts only below that of her husband.

As the critiques shown, under the risk of disobeying moral values and disintegrating familial hierarchies of husband-wife-other female household members, concubinage faces with large crisis in the field of social discussion. In this sense, if we go back to observe the story of Republican “two beauties and a man”, the stories’ emphasis on the sisters’ close intimate relationship is a resistance to the ongoing critiques. It speaks for an argument that concubinage does not lead to conflicts, and it will not reverse the hierarchy of husband-wife-other female household members. However, as demonstrated in the analysis before, the close and intimate relationship between the sisters was structured in a quite hypocritical way, in which both sisters’ subjectivities had been de-emphasized. This de-emphasized subjectivity of sisters manifests another side of the readers’ and writers’ account that still expects a household structure of a man dominating a wife and a concubine. Such expectation is especially strengthened, when the stories use “two sisters and a man” structure as their titles or as their endings. In this sense, the stories seemed to compromise to the popular discussions on abolishing concubinage, but in fact stands for the imagination of the readers for preserving concubinage.

Mediation between Media Discussion and Readers’ Expectations for Everyday Marital Experiences

As argued above, the Republican textual paradoxes and the seeming self-contradictory attitudes actually served as a mediation supporting and abolishing concubinage under the principle of monogamy in the public discourse: The explicitly de-emphasized role of the secondary sister seemed to correspond the discussions on the newspapers about the abolition of concubinage and the new concepts of monogamy. On the other hand, the stories' implicit de-emphasis on both sisters' subjectivities, as well as its implicit emphasis on the male expectations was a manifestation of the stories actually trying to satisfy a certain expectation that still welcomes concubinage. In other words, although compromising to some extent to the popular discussion of abolition of concubinage in detailed ways, the early Republican "two beauties and a man" stories in the public discourse still showed its loyalty and insistence on concubinage. In their emphasis on the "two beauties and a man" structure generally at the end of the stories, the text protested to the prevailing argument in the public discourse on the abolition of concubinage. In a different way, compromising to the social debate on abolition of concubinage, while insisting the expectations of the conventional husband-wife-concubine hierarchy, the stories structured themselves as a mediation of the diversity of readers.

Besides, the mediation is not only made around different expectations for concubinage, but also between media discussion and readers' expectations for everyday marital lives. As shown in the previous sections, the newspaper discussions were mostly about abolishing concubinage, while the persons who promote concubinage seldom argue back in the newspapers on these topics. Thus, there was a gap between the spheres of the newspapers and the everyday experiences of the citizens: Discussions of promoting monogamy was going on hotly on medias and received welcome from readers, while in the everyday household lives of the readers, they still had expectations which resisted the newspaper accounts that they possibly promoted. In this sense, combining the name of "monogamy" and the nature of

“concubinage”, these stories on the newspapers created a middle realm between welcoming monogamy as a newly promoted lifestyle in the media discourse, and expecting a preservation of the conventional household hierarchy in marital lives. This middle realm is created for the readers’ implicit imaginations about their everyday lives under an irresistible trend of “new” concepts. In this sense, we could say that the stories are not only a mediation between two sides of the debate on concubinage, but also a mediation between the media-promoted “new” marital life style, and everyday household experiences. The readers’ taste in welcoming this kind of stories showed their implicit attempt to preserve concubinage in their everyday household experiences, under the condition of accepting the media-promoted “new” marital life style.

In the sense of literary transformation, the function of the “sisters in the stories”, different from the stories of the late Qing Dynasty, no longer emphasized the romance in the entanglement of two women, but made compromises and mediations on the diversity of readers who hold entirely different views on concubinage and household structures. Satisfying both sides of readers, the stories themselves are disrupted and to some extent incoherent. The tension between the writers’ disrupted accounts and the inherited “two sisters and a man” prototypes makes the relative images of the sisters and the romance harder to be balanced and impressive. The stories thus are fragile and aimed less at demonstrating the beauties of romance. Instead, the literary functions of the stories might serve as a painkiller for diversified readers to find their places to relax.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Republican “sisters and a man” stories that this article studied were both inheriting and transforming the prototypes of late imperial “sisters and a man” stories. The late imperial stories created a frame of romance that centered around the man, and puts

both sisters at both sides. The frame moves back and forth between the two sisters, and explicitly represents the subjectivities of the man, as well as the subordinate positions occupied by the two sisters. However, in Republican stories, the secondary sisters' roles were getting awkward. Their roles in the stories became hypocrisy, in two paradoxes: First, the stories emphasize the relationship among the man and two sisters, while the secondary sisters' participation in the romance were in fact very few. Second, the sisters' "happiness" appear frequently in the text, while the subjectivities of both sisters are misrepresented and muted in the stories. These paradoxes brought more instability to the Republican stories, showing the complexity of the readers' expectations for these stories.

Given the writer of *Zimei Tonglang* was very familiar with the late imperial prototype of "sisters and a man" stories, more attention needs to be placed on the discourse context, instead of on individual literature techniques of the writers, when understanding the motivations of the stories. In early 1910s, in the discourse of popular newspapers, especially *Shen Bao* and its supplements, criticism of concubinage based on the principle of monogamy was flourishing. The criticism includes two major aspects: Critics argue that concubinage conflicts with monogamy. They also argue that concubinage leads to rivalry between wives and concubines, and disturbs the marriage between husbands and wives. Co-existing with these criticisms on the newspapers, the "sisters and a man" stories could not circumvent from making reactions to these discussions on concubinage and monogamy. In this sense, the stories could be understood as a mediation between two sides of the issue of concubinage: The de-emphasized roles of Republican "secondary sisters" could be understood as a compromise to the ongoing critiques that pointed out the danger of concubinage. However, the emphasized participation of the secondary sisters in the relationship speaks for a readers' demand that still expects to preserve concubinage.

In this sense, the stories' deviations from the late imperial prototypes could be considered as a reflection of the complex expectations of popular readers to the intersections of the media-promoted principle of monogamy and their daily marital lives that still expect concubinage. Between the media discussion and citizens' everyday experiences within household, the stories made a mediation, and tried to bare many different interests in implicit ways to satisfy more readers. Besides, this eagerness of satisfying more readers has led to a disruption of the texts of Republican "sisters and a man" stories. Occupying an awkward role in the romance, the secondary sisters no longer satisfied readers' expectations for romance or expectations for balanced literary texts, but only acted as a painkiller when it comes to the "new" concept of monogamy permeating into individuals' daily lives.

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