

## INTRODUCTION

Following the collapse of the Qing Empire and the establishment of the first Chinese nation-state in 1912, the Chinese Christian women's magazine *Nü duo* (*Woman's Messenger*, 1912–51) published the following editorial:

During the early days of China's revolution, many passionate Chinese women, eager to contribute to the nation's cause, formed groups to join the military. Some even enlisted without telling their families. While it is admirable to join the military, not every woman should take that path. It's said that the foundation of a nation is built within the family. Women, by nature, have the responsibility to manage the household well. And this is no small task—it is as important as any military effort.

To Westerners Chinese homes were often seen as the dirtiest and most unkempt. Imagine if women came together to study household management—using the kitchen as a base of operations and treating every broom and dustpan as a tool of strength—what a profound impact we would have! Managing the household with care and respect is a divine duty for women.

If we, my fellow women [who] were awakened by this divine call, could see the nation emerge from ignorance to clarity, transforming from dullness to brilliance and rejecting falsehoods in favor of the true Lord. Every household would rise to a state of perfection,

creating a great and civilized nation akin to paradise. In this all women should share the credit. Otherwise, the darkness that has long shrouded Chinese women will persist.<sup>1</sup>

The Chinese characters 女鐸 (*Nü duo*; “Woman’s bell”) refer to an ancient practice of using wooden bells to make proclamations.<sup>2</sup> Appropriating the spirit of this practice, Laura M. White (1867–1937) issued this “divine call,” announcing this first-ever Chinese Christian women’s magazine and its vision for gender ethics and ideal womanhood. An American missionary and the founding editor of the magazine, White was known in Chinese as Liang Leyue; her designated surname, meaning “light” or “bright,” was to symbolize her role in enlightening Chinese women perceived to be in darkness.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, *Nü duo* advocated a particular brand of female domesticity—of sacrificial service embodied in motherhood, homemaking, and child-rearing—that connected to a global discourse spread by Western missionary women at the turn of the century.

*Nü duo* was more than just a home magazine sitting quietly in a corner of its readers’ houses. It captured the adventures and dangers experienced by women at critical historical junctures in modern China, including the nation-building project, the New Culture Movement, the New Life Movement, Japanese occupation, civil war, and the rise of Communism. The magazine featured two dominant discourses in the Republican period (1912–49) that were underpinned by a nationalist mindset and often intertwined: ideals of womanhood and discussions of family reform. Throughout China’s long twentieth century, women’s issues have been predominantly framed within the context of “national modernity.”<sup>4</sup> Late Qing reformers and Republican intellectuals alike viewed Chinese women as integral to national progress, both as subjects and objects. Classical writings and Republican periodicals identified women’s low status as a problem and considered a new, modern womanhood essential to reviving the nation.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, family reform was seen as essential to transforming Chinese society. Republican intellectuals, whether defining the family as “small families” (the conjugal family) or as an economic unit, considered it key to national rejuvenation. Within this framework women were envisioned as agents of domestic modernization.<sup>6</sup> Discussions of women’s issues and their roles in a modern nation were predominantly led by men. However, *Nü duo* presented an alternative set of ideas to secular male-dominated discussions about women’s roles.

Female authorial subjectivity was growing, despite the dominance of male editors and male voices. As Zhang Yun notes, commercial women's journals in the early Republican era created a mixed-gender public space where women could engage in public debates and experiment with new textual modes. Although male editors were influential, female writers challenged their authority by negotiating with the dominant masculine narrative on women's issues.<sup>7</sup> *Nü duo* stands out as a rare archive rich with female subjectivity and editorial agency. The founding editor in chief White and the two succeeding Chinese editors in chief, Li Guanfang (李冠芳; 1896–1937?) and Liu Meili (劉美麗; 1906–?), as well as most contributors, were female. While the editorial team included male workers, they were in subordinate positions, supporting the circulation of the magazine. The editorial structure led by women created a space for women's voices on important issues and empowered them to promote change on a wider scale.

The female editorial agency in *Nü duo* foregrounded an ideal world imagined and constructed by both foreign missionary women and local women. The religious magazine combined discourse about women's roles in a modern family with discussion of Christian ideals. The ideal promoted by the editors and contributors was a Christian domesticity of women equipped with modern knowledge of household management and child-rearing. Articles published in *Nü duo* were authored by individuals who adhered to Christian beliefs or whose ideas aligned with the magazine's advocacy. It upheld women's spiritual role as guardians of the domestic sphere and recognized their intellectual capacity to engage with modern knowledge, sharply contrasting with traditional Chinese family ethics, which feature a rigid patriarchal hierarchy and gender norms that idealize ignorance as a virtue for women. The forty years of the magazine's publication was an ongoing effort by foreign missionary women and Chinese women to transform traditional Chinese families into modern Christian families, channeling nation-building and modernization discourses.

This book traces the intellectual journey of Chinese women as they encountered both Christianity and the dramatic events of modern Chinese history. *Nü duo* was the longest-running Christian women's magazine in China. Its longevity contrasts sharply with short-lived, popular, secular women's periodicals of the Republican era such as *Funü zazhi* (*Ladies' Journal*, 1915–31) and *Nüzi yuekan* (*Ladies' monthly*, 1933–37), which were overseen by male editors. *Nüzi yuekan*, for example, was an influential journal targeting female readers. While many editing staff members were female,

4 Li Xiaohong argues that the male founder and lead editor, Yao Mingda, assumed the patriarchal role of “enlightening” Chinese women.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, public debates about new modern womanhood surged in the 1920s and 1930s, but, as Louise Edwards has noted, these were largely attempts by male reformist intellectuals to reclaim their “power and influence over the modernization process” that was increasingly lost “at the expense of commercial and military interests.”<sup>9</sup> By contrast, *Nü duo* offers insight into how gender notions were conceptualized by Christian women and negotiated in women’s everyday lives. Through an analysis of the magazine’s trajectory, this book delves into the ways that Chinese women, influenced by their faith, navigated and redefined gender roles in local contexts. It reveals the interplay between Christianity and daily practices in non-Western settings, shedding light on the unique experiences and perspectives of Christian women working to shape gender norms in modern China.

At a time when women had limited opportunities to express their thoughts in the secular press, *Nü duo* is unique for providing forty years’ worth of insights into Chinese women’s views about what constituted women’s problems.<sup>10</sup> An exploration of the magazine has much to contribute to existing scholarship on gender history by shedding light on a sizable group of educated Chinese women whose concerns were underpinned by their everyday experiences and religious beliefs. Through an analysis of both the magazine’s creators and its readership, this book thus adds to the important feminist scholarship on May Fourth female journalists who advocated for women’s suffrage and legal rights.<sup>11</sup> In addition to women’s revolutionary awakening, *Nü duo* points to the subtle yet profound engagement of Chinese women in reconceptualizing quotidian life and in exploring and contesting ideas about God, gender, the nation, and warfare.

The magazine’s female editors and contributors articulated their views on women’s roles at home when the institution of family, as Patricia Buckley Ebrely observes, was dramatically affected by state, economic, religious, and cultural transformation.<sup>12</sup> While the idea of the nation-state firmly underpinned family-reform discourse in the non-Christian community, *Nü duo* offers a crucial index for how the Christian press addressed national concerns by contrast. In what ways should the notion of the ideal home life respond to changing sociopolitical settings? How should Christian women navigate the struggles and dilemmas they inevitably encounter when advocating a divine life based on women’s domestic femininity? What theological rationale ought to guide educated Christian women when envisioning an ideal notion of womanhood? These were crucial issues addressed in *Nü*

*duo* as women patterned their lives based on their understanding of how they should live in a modern world.

When Chinese women succeeded Laura White as the editors of the magazine, they infused it with new agendas. The articles in *Nü duo* and the choices of its three editors vividly illustrate how local agents transformed Western ideas about gender roles for the Chinese context. This book highlights the emergence of modern female subjectivity in China and argues that Chinese Christian women played a pivotal role in reshaping intellectual discourse on gender, family, and the nation. My analysis of *Nü duo* reveals the spiritual and secular awakening of educated women as they pursued evangelical revival, national salvation, and Christian truth in an increasingly interconnected world. The course of the magazine represents a crucial period in which Christian women used theology and self-expression in print media to promote, debate, and search for women's place in the modern world. The magazine shows that the notion of ideal Christian womanhood was contested; the plural understandings of the ideal reflected a lack of theological, historical, and cultural models for women's political and national engagement. By analyzing these dynamics in the magazine, this book uncovers missing links between the role of women and Christianity in the making of a modern nation.

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### The Global Literature Movement for Women

*Nü duo* was part of a global movement led by American missionary women to create Christian households. Driven by ideas from the Second Great Awakening (1798–1857), the mission movement of the time emphasized the conversion of individuals and a global vision for Christianity. Under this renewed theology, laypeople, including men and women, traveled overseas with evangelical fervor. Initially, married women were allowed to travel to foreign mission fields only with their missionary husbands, but post-bellum American women started to form their own overseas missionary societies to send single women to foreign lands, and American missionary women were increasingly active on the global stage from the mid-nineteenth century. By 1890 two-thirds of American missionaries were women, and by the turn of the twentieth century there were forty-one American women's mission boards.<sup>13</sup> Due to highly gendered contemporary church ethics, women's missionary boards designed and organized their work, including in foreign missions, as “woman's work for woman.” Women in foreign

6 missionary fields were prohibited from church ministry but were able to serve as agents of modernization through their work in education, medicine, and evangelism. As such, thousands of American missionary women involved in evangelical activities in non-Christian countries became agents promoting the transnational flows of modern ideas.

A global literature movement for women in mission fields emerged in the early twentieth century, signifying a fundamental change in American women's missionary activities. Since writing had conventionally been the domain of male missionaries as an extension of their preaching work, evangelical literature was a new undertaking for missionary women, who had typically been limited to roles supporting church ministry. While there had been literary efforts by missionary wives in mid-nineteenth-century Ningbo—one of the five treaty ports opened to Western missionary activity with the signing of the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, following China's defeat in the First Opium War—these were sporadic and local attempts.<sup>14</sup>

It was not until the turn of the century that a worldwide endeavor was established to promote evangelical literature for women and children. Triggered by the request of a British missionary in China who asked for a Methodist missionary woman to work on a Christian women's magazine, the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society (WFMS) of the Methodist Episcopal Church cautiously placed the issue of Christian literature for local women on its agenda. Uncertain about the necessity of women's evangelical literature work, Clementina Butler (1862–1949) of the WFMS sought suggestions from James L. Barton, the secretary of the Foreign Department of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. In her letter to Barton on December 19, 1911, Butler questioned the need for a magazine of this sort. In response Barton confirmed the importance of such an initiative and pointed out that no board had assigned a woman missionary to literary work in China. He believed that publications in China should be issued in the Mandarin language, which he was informed was used by three hundred million Chinese people. In Barton's view the proposed magazine targeting female students would be of great value and should be an interdenominational publication.<sup>15</sup>

Barton's comment on literature for students echoed a wide consensus in the missionary enterprise following the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, where the emphasis was to retain students as Christians after they graduated from mission schools. Noting an increasing number of female graduates in mission lands, missionary women believed the time was ripe for Christian literature to be developed for local women. A plea for

a unified effort to reach women and children in mission fields through print media was raised at the triennial conference of Woman's Boards of Foreign Missions in January 1912, leading to the establishment of the interdenominational Committee on Christian Literature for Women and Children in Mission Fields (CCLWC). Organizational structures were put in place to support the initiative. A Central Commission in each field would collect information concerning publications suitable for women and girls as well as existing publications for local women. Upon receiving that information, the CCLWC would then prepare lists of books desired in each field, secure financial aid from various organizations, and ensure the appointment of at least one woman in each field for literary work. The aim of the CCLWC was to establish at least one interdenominational Christian periodical in every field that could be used by every mission.<sup>16</sup> *Nü duo* thus became the first magazine supported by the CCLWC, showing women's emerging role in transforming the male-dominated intellectual landscape of China and other mission fields.

Over several decades the CCLWC, sponsored by the Federation of Woman's Boards of Foreign Missions, established a global literature enterprise. The CCLWC expanded its support to magazines, books, and pictures for homes, schools, and churches in many mission lands, such as China, Japan, India, Egypt, and Africa. In 1942, with the support of the committee, magazines and other literary works were created in twenty-six languages and circulated in nine countries. The committee made magazines a primary objective, believing that "the message coming into the homes month after month" served as "the best means of permanent help [to live a Christian life]."<sup>17</sup>

In the 1940s, prompted by the Committee on World Literacy and Christian Literature, whose executive secretary approached the CCLWC and foregrounded the need for literacy work among the illiterate, the organization paid more attention to less educated women. In the following years, the CCLWC financially supported various literacy projects and created reading materials for newly literate people. For example, in 1946 it sponsored the women's section in *Tianjia banyuebao* (Christian farmer, 1934–57), a prominent Christian publication for rural China.<sup>18</sup> The CCLWC's support for such initiatives exemplified its broader commitment to expanding Christian literature. By 1962 the committee had either completely or partially supported twenty-seven magazines in sixteen countries, forming a global empire of Christian literature for women and children.<sup>19</sup> The work of the CCLWC attests to the rise of modern female subjectivity, utilizing print media to

8 conceptualize an ideal world among Christian women. With consolidated resources and great mobilization power, this centralized approach to evangelical literature for women and children led to the distribution of an ideal notion of home life to places far and wide.

### A Genesis of *Nü duo*

The CCLWC marked a new era in world Christianity, in which women engaged in evangelical literature like their male counterparts had done for many decades. When the pioneer Protestant missionaries first arrived in China in the early nineteenth century, there was an imperial decree in place that forbade them from proselytizing. These missionaries—all men at the time—therefore focused their efforts on Bible translation and religious tracts. Following the Convention of Peking, signed in 1860 after the Second Opium War, foreigners were permitted to move throughout the Qing Empire. Subsequently, thousands of both male and female missionaries came to China to fulfill their evangelical vocation, resulting in the presence of twenty-seven Protestant missionary societies in China.<sup>20</sup> Compared with male missionaries, whose work centered on church ministry, missionary women were confined by gendered church ethics as well as Confucian expectations of gender segregation. They worked among Chinese women in the private sphere.

The late Qing reform period marked a turning point, as the role of women in the country was increasingly discussed by Chinese elites. Between 1898 and 1911, forty-four Chinese women's journals were published in China and Japan, taking Chinese women as a subject of broader political transformation.<sup>21</sup> The British missionary Timothy Richard (1845–1919), who viewed the transformation of China from a broader social, political, and cultural perspective, noticed the burgeoning of secular women's periodicals and envisioned a Christian magazine for Chinese women. Associated with the Baptist Missionary Society, Richard first came to China in 1870. For several years he worked in Zhifu (formerly known as Chefoo; present-day Yantai in Shandong Province), where the famines in the late 1870s greatly influenced his evangelical approach. Being an active administrator of famine relief, Richard believed “that only Western scientific expertise could avert similar disasters and that the right approach in China was to target the educated and religious elite with a message that yoked Christianity to the attractions of Western civilisation.”<sup>22</sup>

In 1891 Richard became the general secretary of the Christian Literature Society (CLS).<sup>23</sup> As the prominent Protestant publisher located in Shanghai, the CLS aimed to disseminate Christian and general knowledge among Chinese people. In contrast to the publications of early missionaries, which focused on individual salvation, the CLS represented a renewed commitment to evangelize the educated populace.<sup>24</sup> It produced a wide range of publications, aspiring to enlighten the “governing classes and students” with the “vital forces of universal progress” to help them place China “in the race of nations for progress.”<sup>25</sup> One item on Richard’s reform agenda was transforming the mindset of Chinese women. He had supported the Society for Women’s Learning during the 1897–98 campaign for women’s education in Shanghai, and his wife, Mary Richard, was involved in the establishment and operation of the first Chinese non-Christian girls’ school.<sup>26</sup>

Along with promoting women’s work in the non-Christian community, Richard sought to find an ideal candidate to advance evangelical literature for Chinese women. When he met the American Methodist missionary Laura M. White at the first convention of the Christian Endeavor Society in Shanghai in 1894, he believed White was the ideal person to edit a Christian women’s magazine for Chinese women.<sup>27</sup> Richard invited White to his home for dinner and asked her to work on women’s literature. Due to the demands of her evangelical work in female education in Nanjing, White declined the invitation. Richard nevertheless, according to White, kept up his interest in her and eventually requested that the Methodist Church lend her to the CLS for literary work for one year.<sup>28</sup>

Despite declining Richard’s invitation, White maintained her friendship with him. She started spending part of her time working on women’s literature before becoming the editor of *Nü duo* in 1912. White’s pioneer literary work turned out to be a success and was published in a serialized form under the title of “Wu geng zhong” (Five calls), in *Tong wen bao* (*Chinese Christian Intelligencer*), a Christian weekly periodical established in 1902 and published in Shanghai by the Presbyterian Missions in China.<sup>29</sup> With the popularity of her work “Wu geng zhong” and the growing recognition of the importance of literature among the Protestant missionary community—highlighted at the 1907 China Centenary Missionary Conference in Shanghai, where appeals were made for financial support and more workers for Christian literature—White turned her attention to evangelical literature.<sup>30</sup> In a private letter asking the recipient to send her articles and old magazines about domestic science, White wrote, “I think there is a turn of ways just now in woman’s work in China. The time has come when an

10 appeal is not only to be made to the individual woman, but when we must furnish new ideals, new customs, new paths of service for a whole nation of women who have rejected the old ways, who demand freedom, who wish to enter every path that men tread.<sup>31</sup>

From 1912 she worked in Nanjing on *Nü duo* as a part-time editor for the CLS.<sup>32</sup> The circulation of *Nü duo* surpassed that of two major periodicals of the CLS—*Da tong bao*, founded in 1904, and *Zhongxi jiaohui bao*, founded in 1891 (changed to *Jiaohui gongbao* in 1912). Available documents show that the annual production in 1916 was 15,000 copies for *Nü duo*, 8,400 for *Da tong bao*, and 9,600 for *Jiaohui gongbao*.<sup>33</sup> It is highly likely that similar production levels were maintained when White worked on the women's magazine in Nanjing until 1914. Due to the good sales of the magazine, her increasing faith in evangelical literature, or both, White went to Shanghai in 1914 and became an associate worker for the CLS in 1915.<sup>34</sup>

*Nü duo* received financial support from many sources. Its major financial backer was the WFMS, which provided White's salary and rent and later supported Li Guanfang and Liu Meili. Other financial supporters of *Nü duo* were the Women's Federated Mission Boards of America and the Ladies' Auxiliaries of Glasgow and Edinburgh.<sup>35</sup> The CLS tried various approaches to stimulate the circulation of its many publications, including *Nü duo*. In its early years, the publisher used discounts to encourage sales and facilitate wider circulation. In the 1920s the publisher enlisted various groups of people, including pastors, the Mission Book Company, and superintended colporteurs, to distribute the magazine.<sup>36</sup> As a result of these efforts, *Nü duo* achieved a higher circulation than secular women's magazines. Its circulation peaked at twenty-three thousand copies in its first year and continued to exceed ten thousand copies per year until the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in the 1930s. It gained popularity more quickly than other popular women's periodicals such as the monthly periodical *Funü zazhi*, published by the Commercial Press, which commenced with a circulation of around three thousand copies in the 1910s and peaked at only about ten thousand copies annually in the 1920s.<sup>37</sup> During wartime, when most periodicals suffered a loss of reader interest, *Nü duo* continued gaining customers. For example, during the Chinese Civil War period (1945–49), the editorial board of *Nü duo* had received two thousand orders by May in 1947, and a total of three thousand subscriptions had been paid for by the end of that year.<sup>38</sup> The magazine serves as a precious archive, documenting women's thoughts and activities even during periods of great upheaval.

As a religious magazine with a relatively wide circulation, *Nü duo* played an important role in the formation of an understudied community of educated Chinese women. The target readership of *Nü duo* was female students from mission schools and literate girls at home.<sup>39</sup> Given the low literacy rate of women in early twentieth-century China, around 2 percent, *Nü duo*'s readers were mostly from the middle and upper classes.<sup>40</sup> In 1912, when the Republic of China was established following the 1911 Revolution that toppled the Qing dynasty, a missionary article indicates that *Nü duo* was promoted among the gentry class. Margaret E. Faithfull-Davies from the Church Mission Society in Fujian, who was a contributor to *Nü duo* under the name of Zhou Yingzhu, provided such an account:

Of all the changes brought by the Revolution, the strangest is that in the mental outlook of Chinese women. That women are the equals of men is now a fact accepted by people of all classes. The city of Foochow leads the van of progress in the province of Fuh-Kien. . . . At Dr. Timothy Richard's suggestion, I started about three months ago a reading club for Chinese ladies. . . . I am the president. . . . Members promise to read the appointed book for half an hour a day and the Club meets at the house of one or other of the members every Thursday afternoon. . . . We call ourselves "The Foochow City Ladies' Reading Club." . . . "The Woman's Messenger," which started in April, has articles in classical Chinese on hygiene, the care of children, and educational subjects, with also good fiction, and plenty of Christian teaching. I sent for a number of sample copies to distribute, and my first subscriber was the wife of the Governor of the Province. Now in many heathen homes of this city the "Woman's Messenger" arrives monthly and is eagerly read.<sup>41</sup>

*Nü duo* was widely distributed among female students and Chinese churches, inviting interactions with its readers. From 1912 to 1924, the magazine encouraged readers to participate in translations and quizzes by offering prizes such as books and money. During this period a total of 385 letters were sent, mainly from girls' schools and churches in Shanghai, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Guangzhou, Fuzhou, Beijing, and Tianjin. The places mentioned during this period demonstrate that *Nü duo* not only was influential in Chinese coastal cities and interior provinces such as Jiangxi and Hubei but had also reached Hong Kong and Australia. Junior and senior

12 students in fourteen mission colleges and universities listed *Nü duo* in a 1925 survey as one of the most helpful magazines for informing their religious lives.<sup>42</sup> Even during the Sino-Japanese War in the 1930s and 1940s, readers' letters circulated by the magazine indicate its ongoing influence among educated women. The magazine's deep engagement with its readers fostered vibrant discussions among Chinese women and provided them a valuable medium to exchange ideas and address concerns.

### A Global Initiative: Creating a Divine Domesticity

The notion and site of home in Republican China became increasingly globalized, leading to the creation of new classed and gendered identities among the urban elites. Existing scholarship shows that China's family in the early twentieth century was transformed linguistically, socially, practically, politically, and spatially.<sup>43</sup> Though understudied, the CCLWC's literature initiative introduced global, gendered religious perspectives on the already-complicated discourse about family reform. *Nü duo*, a pilot project of the CCLWC, represents a dynamic expansion of Protestant missionary women's overseas work in the intellectual sphere. The evangelical literature for women promoted by the CCLWC expedited the global distribution of modern Christian ideals and the church gender norms of the time. By facilitating cross-cultural communication, according to Ryan Dunch, the missionary movement was a crucial element in creating a globalized modernity.<sup>44</sup> As Hyaewool Choi points out, missionary women promoted a type of Christian modernity that linked material and technological progress with the moral and spiritual role of Christianity.<sup>45</sup> Christian women's literature written in local languages brought modern knowledge within reach of local women and integrated women from specific localities into a global community of Christian homes.

The CCLWC focused their work on the home and the needs of women and children. Magazines supported by the CCLWC distributed modern knowledge about household management, creating a global community in which women with shared concerns about home life could be active members. Through reading and writing, women engaged in conceptualizing an ideal modern family, and, by applying household knowledge in their everyday lives, readers became a part of the global home-reform movement. The CCLWC envisioned that their print messengers would bring modern household management and Christian doctrines to local women, sowing

seeds of Christianity in their minds that would eventually lead to spiritual awakening. For example, the *Treasure Chest*, one of the major undertakings of the CCLWC established in India in 1922, featured “articles on science, health, entertainment, games, puzzles and biography” to provide reading materials for women at home and schoolgirls. By engaging with materials on modern knowledge and child-rearing, local women were introduced to the modern notion of domesticity promoted by the missionary women’s literary movement. The magazine avoided inciting “antagonism by being labeled as ‘Christian’ or ‘missionary,’” while still incorporating “distinctively Christian teaching,” such as “chapel talks, Bible verses and hymns in every issue.” It promoted Christian ideals including “kindness, trust in others, truth, perseverance and courage under difficulties.”<sup>46</sup> The magazine strategically integrated Christian values into its promotion of an ideal home life.

The notion of Christian domestic femininity was prevalent among Anglo-American missionary women. The idea of the Christian home, Dana L. Robert argues, was “an enduring component of Anglo-American mission theory because it combined the social and evangelistic functions of mission,” which “provided a rationale for the participation of women in all aspects of mission work.” With its roots during the industrialization and evangelical revival of the early 1800s, the dominant discourse of domesticity developed into a mission ethos found in missionaries’ encounters with non-Western cultures. While American missionary women in the early twentieth century promoted progressive ideas that focused on institution building rather than household duties, the ideal of the Christian family thrived, and by 1938 it had evolved into a significant mission theory embraced by Western and non-Western women.<sup>47</sup> In China the advocacy of women’s domestic duties was noticeable among both Christian and non-Christian Chinese intellectuals during the Republican period.<sup>48</sup>

The themes of *Nü duo* represent a global vision of domesticity. From the outset the CCLWC hoped that the Christian magazine *Nü duo*, published in Mandarin Chinese, would “reach the official classes all over the land” with messages about “homemaking, domestic science, health and kindred topics, together with editorials on modern reforms, and distinctly Christian articles.”<sup>49</sup> One of the founders and the chair of the CCLWC, Clementina Butler, argued that providing reading materials to local women and children was a matter of urgency, as women were “so far behind their privileged husbands and brothers in the Orient that such things as appeal to them are above the comprehension of the mass of the womenfolk.” She emphasized the role of

print media, especially periodicals, in shaping the “modern woman,” who was “supposed to be in the United States” and now was also in China. The ability to “control the tone of popular periodicals and secure the circulation of good books,” as Butler perceived it, would enable women’s missionary boards to “command the situation.” A magazine with “matters of everyday interest to the hearts of women” should be filled with “Christian ethics and healthy fun.”<sup>50</sup> Missionary women such as Butler imagined that Christian women’s magazines underpinned by this unanimous vision would foster a sense of unity among women from non-Christian countries. However, as this book shows, the emergence of local female subjectivity did not quite match this overarching narrative.

### The Trajectory of *Nü duo* Under Three Editors

*Nü duo* was circulated at a time when an international dimension was present in China on various levels, including state capitalism and modern political culture. William C. Kirby even argues that the history of Republican China “was defined and shaped—and must ultimately be interpreted—according to the nature of its foreign relations.”<sup>51</sup> Kirby’s call for an international lens highlights China’s external connections as it became a modern nation. At the same time, foreign presences in China were often met with Chinese nationalism and anti-imperialism. For example, when the news of the loss of Shandong Province in the Treaty of Versailles, produced by the Paris Peace Conference at the end of World War I, reached China, citizens and students took to the streets to protest imperialism in May 1919, sparking China’s first nationwide patriotic movement. The following decades saw the Chinese populace increasingly demand sovereignty and autonomy.

The rise of nationalism and anti-imperialism impacted the trajectory of missionary women’s work in China, as shown in the work of Sasaki Motoe. In the early twentieth century a group of college-educated American Protestant women entered China to conduct work in schools and hospitals. Their aim to transform Chinese women into modern independent female citizens free from feudal bondage led to the formation of a cohort of New Women. However, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, according to Sasaki, a widening gap developed between American missionary women and their local counterparts. Sasaki notes that both American New Women missionaries and Chinese New Women were drawn into the whirlpool of world politics that influenced their views of historical progress and positions as

historical agents. Sasaki argues that New Women, as the agents of modernity, were “also a source of agency tightly entangled with the competition for survival and the idea of historical progress in an age in which modernity was being adopted and incorporated in non-Western countries such as China.” At a time when Chinese New Women influenced by Communism were focusing more on the masses and questioning the US model of national revolution, the role of American New Women missionaries as “historical agents of modern progress gradually gave way to the idea that they were merely icons of bourgeois modernity.”<sup>52</sup> The growing sense of solidarity among local women marked their shift toward broader revolutionary movements.

Christian women’s engagement in literature work is a complex issue, requiring an analytic framework that goes beyond nationalism and imperialism. It is notable that the issue of power dynamics between Western missionaries and local counterparts was evident in transnational women’s organizations. Foundational scholarship by Leila Rupp, Ian Tyrrell, Antoinette Burton, and Louise Michele Newman demonstrates how broader structures of imperialism and racial ideologies impacted international women’s organizations and their work in non-Western societies. The attitude of racial superiority prevalent among progressive Anglo-American women in these organizations led to conflicts and struggles when implementing their universalist agenda in mission fields.<sup>53</sup> The Christian magazine *Nü duo*, however, provided space for local women to engage in producing literature, like their Western counterparts. Throughout the entire Republican era, the magazine, a joint effort of Chinese and foreign Christians, presents a discourse that was not completely in tune with what was happening in its local and global contexts. It published Christian women’s thoughts, which were embedded in the matrix of local and international flows of ideas and at the same time were shaped by women’s subjective perceptions of the world. As Gail Hershatter notes, some “practices and beliefs . . . perish across political regimes or . . . change in ways not easily correlated with the tempo of political events.”<sup>54</sup> The development of this magazine showcases a history of Chinese women’s agency in conceptualizing a modern world.

*Nü duo* had three chief editors in separate periods who, despite close interpersonal relationships, held different views on gender norms. As the editor of the first Christian women’s periodical supported by the CCLWC, Laura M. White translated the notion of Christian domestic femininity for Chinese readers. White’s engagement in Christian literature for Chinese women led to the development of a gendered theology that advocated a

universal framework of women's historical progress. Through White's literary work, the gendered church norms that had undergirded her teaching at girls' mission schools were for the first time theorized and localized using the Chinese language. This critical node in the global Christian women's literature enterprise also engaged local Chinese women. Some of White's previous students worked on the magazine from the beginning. The process of reconfiguring an ideal womanhood for local readers was thus accompanied by the growing power of Christian women, especially local believers, in conceptualizing gender relations in a modern world.

In the 1920s, when Chinese nationalist sentiments were at their peak following the Paris Peace Conference, White contended with a changing gender ethos and defended the idea of domestic Christian womanhood. Surrounded by the plethora of new ideas published in non-Christian magazines about family and women's proper roles tied to national revival, under White's editorship *Nü duo* published articles that articulated a woman's true freedom as something that would manifest when "the Eve within is converted into the Mary" through fulfilling motherly duties.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, women's growing patriotism within and outside of the Chinese Christian community added a new layer of complexity to the discourse on gender ethics in *Nü duo*.

For some time after White stepped down as editor, *Nü duo*'s articles and images continued to advocate an ideal notion of domestic womanhood. But, under the editorship of Chinese Christians, the magazine gradually began to negotiate questions of gender, Christianity, and the nation for local educated women. White ceased her editorship due to illness in 1929 and was succeeded by her student from the Nanjing Huiwen Girls' School (Nanjing Huiwen nüzi zhongxue, also known as the Nancy Lawrence High School) Li Guanfang, with whom she had worked since the commencement of the magazine.<sup>56</sup>

A graduate of Ginling Women's College (Jinling nüzi daxue, also known as Ginling College), Li was deeply influenced by her mentor. She had helped with White's work on the magazine and contributed several articles while studying at the girls' school. Yet under Li's editorship the magazine placed a growing emphasis on strengthening the nation through social reform. It even published political speeches following the Mukden Incident in 1931, when the Japanese army seized the city of Mukden (now Shenyang). Reflecting a bitter sense of national humiliation, local Christians who were active in the making of a new China based on Christian ideals were driven by a strong desire to save the nation from foreign imperialism. Chinese Christians

turned away from Western notions of Christian womanhood and developed their own understandings of what it meant to be a Chinese Christian woman. Discussions in *Nü duo* during this time show that the idea of a nonpolitical Victorian domesticity had become controversial and outdated in the context of women's increasing social and national engagement.

Li resigned the editorship in 1935 to contribute to national revival through social activism. She later went to Fukien Christian University and became a Communist Party member to save China from foreign encroachment. Sources indicate she died in 1937, when the Guomindang (GMD; the Chinese Nationalist Party, also known as Kuomintang or KMT) government launched attacks on the Communists in Fujian.<sup>57</sup> Echoing the trajectory of self-awakening among Chinese New Women noted by Sasaki, Li's departure from *Nü duo* signified a division between herself and her American mentor in terms of how progress should look. Under White's editorship *Nü duo* had advocated a religious approach to transforming home life based on Christian values, which represented the Victorian notion of domestic virtue as the highest point of progress in history for women. Thus the earliest iteration of the magazine focused on religious reform rather than a political agenda. However, the exclusive emphasis on women's domestic virtues conflicted with the rising tide of nationalism in the national crisis of the late 1910s and especially the mid-1930s, when Chinese Christians such as Li struggled to reconcile Victorian Christian ideals with their Chinese identity.

Liu Meili, also known as Mary Liu, took over from Li as editor of *Nü duo* in 1935. The transition between them illustrates the increasingly complex gendered discourse in competing visions of historical progress. Liu owed her survival to Western missionaries, having received surgery for severe frostbite at the Methodist hospital in Nanjing when she was a child. The surgery left most of her four limbs amputated, but she learned to write Chinese calligraphy using her left arm and right thumb while studying at missionary schools. She shared a special relationship with White, who was considered her guardian and even arranged to take little Liu to have her artificial hands and legs made. After graduating from Ginling Women's College in 1929, Liu followed in White's footsteps to become an editor, joining the CLS and working on Christian literature for Chinese women. Liu was the editor of *Nü duo* until 1951, working on the magazine throughout the Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese Civil War, and the Communist takeover of China, with only a brief pause when the publisher moved to Sichuan due to escalating warfare in the late 1930s.

The ideal Chinese Christian womanhood advocated in *Nü duo* under Liu appears shaped by a concern for readers' spiritual and mental welfare rather than gendered theology or nationalism. Unlike Li's sociopolitical activism, under Liu's editorship the magazine dealt with the changing political regime cautiously. Liu attempted to live up to White's hopes and expectations, faithfully maintaining the focus on women's feminine virtues that had been established by her American mentor. However, rather than White's dogmatic representations of how Christian women should conduct themselves in the home, she broadened the focus to women's individual circumstances. *Nü duo* thus moved away from the dominant discourse of nationalism, which, as Kenneth M. Wells puts it, "can normally fulfill itself only by curbing the expression and pursuit of other views."<sup>58</sup> Readers' letters and the responses of the editorial board during this time reflect a publication that put consideration of human suffering at its core. By 1951, when Liu ceased publishing *Nü duo* due to political censorship in the religious publishing industry, compounded by the cutoff of US financial support during the Korean War, this Christian women's magazine had been in circulation for forty years. The course of the magazine provides a history of Chinese women's enlightenment that took place in everyday life. It serves as a historical archive, capturing educated women's ideas and lived experiences and providing valuable insights into women as historical agents who conceptualized and shaped the world around them.

### Mapping Women's History: Scholarly Approaches and Key Concepts

The study of women's history has developed from the idea of what feminist scholars have described as "adding to history" to "the use of gender as a key analytical tool."<sup>59</sup> With an increasing scholarly emphasis on women's specific existence and agency, the history of women reveals their diverse experiences in conjunction with social, political, cultural, religious, and economic transformations. Following the approach of Kwok Pui-lan, who treats Chinese Christian women as "historical subjects in the encounter between China and Christianity," a growing number of studies have examined the activities of Chinese Christian women in the making of a modern nation.<sup>60</sup> Connie A. Shemo's work on female Chinese Christian physicians Kang Cheng and Shi Meiyu demonstrates how Christian women envisioned a strong nation through their medical ministries. By synthesizing the American missionaries' vision of China and Chinese reformers' nationalist

dreams, Kang and Shi represented a new professional pathway for Chinese women to contribute to the nation.<sup>61</sup> With the social gospel movements of the 1920s and the mounting national crisis of the 1930s, urban Chinese Christian women found new expressions of engagement in nation building through sociopolitical activism, as shown in Emily Honig's study of Deng Yuzhi, the leader of the Chinese Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Labor Bureau.<sup>62</sup>

*Nü duo* provides different insights into the history of Christian women. It encompasses a sizable group of educated Chinese women whose ideas and activities helped shape the family rhetoric that was closely intertwined with the process of nation building. It shows women's diverse experiences through their active involvement in the intellectual transformation of ideas about gender, family, and the nation. The experiences of Li Guanfang, for example, demonstrate the evolving and complex process of one Chinese woman's engagement with the global missionary movement, society, and the state. Li bears similarities to Deng Yuzhi, but there are sharp distinctions. Unlike Honig's finding that Christianity was one of the many ideologies Chinese women could choose and prioritize based on the call of the era, Li Guanfang demonstrates how Chinese women might withdraw from or even reject Christianity if they reached the point where they viewed it as powerless to save China. They could view the notion of ideal domestic womanhood detached from the impending national crisis of the 1930s and even question the idea of Christian salvation within a nationalist context. This book highlights women's agency and illustrates the differences among them. Christian women's endeavors to shape gender norms reveal a dynamic history in which educated women delved into theology to construct an identity that was constantly being contested due to sociopolitical upheavals.

In offering a case study of a women's community formed through print media, this book resonates with Joan Judge's influential work *Republican Lens*, which examines the popular commercial women's magazine *Funü shibao* (Women's Eastern times, 1911–17). Judge employs a dual approach: vertically, by studying a particular theme across several different journals over time and, horizontally, by examining various cultural registers—such as articles, advertisements, and pictures—to restore the ecology of a single publication. Her primary goal is to “engage the complexities of a journal and a demographic of women that do not neatly map onto our existing social and cultural categories.”<sup>63</sup> Judge shows how *Funü shibao*—as a non-Christian women's magazine in the early Republic—captures a neglected period of quotidian life situated between the promotion of new citizenry by late

Qing reformers and a radical new culture advocated by May Fourth iconoclasts. My dual reading of *Nü duo* similarly highlights key themes in modern Chinese history that do not necessarily align with the dominant sociocultural narrative. However, unlike *Funü shibao*, which featured male editorship, *Nü duo* spans the entire Republican period through the lens of female editorial agency. Rather than examining a space shaped by an imbalance of editorial power between men and women, this book sheds light on a public space created by, for, and about women. It therefore offers a window not only into projected ideals of Christian womanhood but also into the complexities of women's lived experiences and their engagement with Christian faith and sociopolitical turmoils of the time.

This book shows that a changing social and cultural ethos and a mounting national crisis generated momentum, leading to the shifts in each phase of the magazine's life. The contextualization in each chapter enables a dialogical interpretation of the encounter between foreign missionary women and their local counterparts as well as between the Christian community and wider Chinese society. Furthermore, a chronological framework highlights the impact of different periods of sociopolitical change on the magazine. This text-context analysis is accompanied by an examination of *Nü duo*'s three chief editors, including their relationships and their individual impacts on the magazine. Under each editor the magazine reflects various views on women, family, and the nation shaped by the ideas and political developments in different periods.

Two analytic concepts are useful to interpret the Christian women's press. One is the concept of the "middle realm," discussed by Philip C. C. Huang and Eugenia Lean. In understanding modern nation building and social developments in China, Huang proposes the "third realm" as the middle realm between the state and society. Instead of viewing the relationship between state and society in dichotomous opposition, as in Jürgen Habermas's conceptualization of a bourgeois public sphere in eighteenth-century Europe, Huang argues that communities and organizations in China were in a third realm that had complex relationships with state and society.<sup>64</sup> In contrast to the publics defined in Habermasian thought, scholars have found evidence that the so-called public sphere in modern China was less defined as a physical place and more as processes and practice and should be understood as a space where new ideas could be normalized.<sup>65</sup>

The concept of the middle realm has frequently been adopted by scholars working in women's studies. Elizabeth A. Littell-Lamb uses this interpretative framework to understand the work of women's institutions that actively

mediated between state and society, such as the Chinese YWCA. Littell-Lamb also notes the usefulness of this concept in understanding the role of the women's press in the creation of public life for Chinese women. Supporting Judge's argument that the women's press was a new social institution in the middle realm, Littell-Lamb argues that women's periodicals helped to create a public life for Chinese women in which ideology and practice mediated each other.<sup>66</sup> In her monograph *Republican Lens*, Judge advances research on the role of print media in shaping key gender concepts and trends in the Republican era. Likewise, *Nü duo* points to complex influences and interactions between ideas and women's lived experiences as well as between Christianity and the Chinese context throughout the entire Republican period. By utilizing the nationwide Christian distribution network to promote Christian ideals, the magazine had considerable normalizing influence. As a channel between Christian feminine virtues and educated Chinese women, *Nü duo* situated itself in the middle realm, featuring cross-cultural flows of ideas prompted by the global women's missionary movement.

The second analytic concept that informs my analysis is "in-betweenness." Examining the Christian intersection of China and the West, Song Gang argues that "this key concept, frequently seen in literary criticism, translation studies, and cross-cultural studies," opens space for scholars to see historical encounters in a more complex and fluid way that is not confined by influential frameworks such as Eurocentrism or Sinocentrism.<sup>67</sup> The concept of in-betweenness allows us to see the often-multidirectional interactions between transnational flows of ideas. Chinese Christian women engaged in producing *Nü duo* navigated a space broadly situated between Western ideals and local sentiments. On the one hand, they were influenced by Western models of Christian domesticity and understanding of gender roles. On the other hand, they had to negotiate the tension imposed by a form of nationalism that was anti-imperialist, anti-foreign, and even anti-Christian, amid a mounting national crisis and political pressures. By employing the concept of in-betweenness, this book reveals Chinese women's dynamic encounter with their local milieu, challenging the presumption of a simple Sino-Western dichotomy from a gendered perspective.

### Organization of the Book

This book is composed of four chapters, in addition to the introduction and the conclusion. Chapter 1 and chapter 2 examine the magazine under White's

editorship (1912–29). Women's increasing visibility in the public sphere, driven by the new doctrines of the 1911 Revolution, was an integral part of what Huang refers to as “third space” or “middle realm,” which highlights the complexity of sociopolitical changes and the need to look at the intersection of both spheres. By focusing on the early years of *Nü duo* under the editorship of the American missionary White, chapter 1 argues that *Nü duo*, as a prominent women's periodical, occupied the middle realm in shaping key gender concepts. Its advocacy of motherhood and feminine virtues, as conceived by White, pacified the anxious Chinese gentry class. Meanwhile, White promoted a new notion of an ideal woman who was equipped with scientific knowledge that addressed the nation's need for modernization. The magazine occupied a crucial niche in shaping Republican gender norms with the language of modernity and the promise of stability amid sociopolitical upheaval. It also integrated Chinese women into the global missionary women's movements in making Christian homes. The work of Chinese contributors, including future editor Li Guanfang, demonstrates how local women engaged in creating the magazine from the outset. Li's early years working with White are introduced to illustrate how Li's thinking evolved in subsequent chapters. In addition to Li's biographical information, I introduce Liu Meili's encounter with missionary women to show how Liu's relationship with White paved the way for her literary career.

Domestic and international circumstances in the 1920s brought new challenges, disrupting the middle realm previously dominated by the notion of domestic womanhood. China's loss of Shandong to Japan at the Paris Peace Conference in May 1919 foregrounded a national crisis and ushered in strong patriotic sentiments. Chapter 2 identifies three challenges that confronted *Nü duo* at this time: competing notions of ideal womanhood in the secular press prompted by the New Culture Movement after 1915, the anti-Christian movement of the 1920s, and the consequent indigenous movement among Chinese Christians that questioned foreign missionaries' monopoly of the Christian enterprise in China. *Nü duo*, as this chapter demonstrates, transmitted ideas inspired by complex interactions between Western notions and local sentiments. In addition to a text-context analysis of the magazine, this chapter also examines the activities and thoughts of Li and Liu in the 1920s, including Li's growing interest in transforming Chinese society and Liu's early encounters with Christianity.

Li Guanfang's succession of Laura White as editor of *Nü duo* occurred in the context of the growing indigenization movement in the Chinese Christian community. In chapter 3 I discuss how, under Li's editorship, the

magazine began to emphasize indigenous agency and adopted a broader concern for Chinese women. As a Western-trained intellectual, Li took an active role in evangelical literature and social movements in an enlarged middle space for women's sociopolitical activism. Under Li *Nü duo* was involved in the national campaign for Christianizing Chinese families and started to publish articles that touched on politics. I argue that Li's life demonstrates how Chinese Christian women influenced by social gospel, feminism, and leftist thinking negotiated and broadened the boundaries of the Christian gender ethics established by foreign missionary women.

Chapter 4 discusses *Nü duo*'s response to the political upheavals and intermittent warfare of one of the most tumultuous periods in modern Chinese history. In this period *Nü duo* was edited by Liu Meili, another student of White's. This chapter explores how Chinese Christian women used print media to frame their everyday lives amid the chaos of political instability rather than becoming embroiled in it. The magazine's content from this period reveals a cautious and nuanced engagement with ruling authorities, reflecting a complex response from Chinese Christian women in an increasingly politicized public sphere. Rather than aligning with dominant nationalist narratives, these women focused on their own spiritual growth within the context of their daily domestic lives. Given Liu Meili's experiences with disability and her encounter with Christianity, she emerged as an ideal editor for *Nü duo*, guiding it as it addressed readers' questions on theodicy and the ordeals of everyday life in wartime.

In the conclusion I synthesize key insights discussed throughout the book. Spanning the entire Republican era and the early years of the Chinese Communist Party regime, *Nü duo* documents how local women as historical agents actively participated in the intellectual transformation of a modern nation. The evolution of *Nü duo* relates a modern history in which Chinese women were engaged in global missionary movements, nation building, local sociopolitical activities, and theology. While demonstrating modern female editorial agency, the case of *Nü duo* raises further questions about modern female subjectivity among marginalized groups of women within and beyond China's context. The agency of local women promoted by the global literature initiative of the CCLWC, as shown in their advocacy of an ideal notion of womanhood, was integrated into a broader world that they envisioned and inhabited.