CHAPTER TWELVE

THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER AND GENRE IN THE 1910S NEW MEDIA: EVIDENCE FROM THE LADIES’ JOURNAL

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Funü zazhi 婦女雜誌 (The ladies’ journal) was one of the most well-known and widely circulated periodicals in the Republican era (fig. 12.1). Its publication lasted for more than one decade, from 1915 to 1931, a period that witnessed dramatic changes and transformations in sociopolitical and cultural domains. Tracing the revisions and shifts of editorial strategies of The Ladies’ Journal, this chapter will focus on the intertwined relationships among women, literature, and the emergence of modern China. It will also look into a bewildering question in literary history, namely, how do we approach literature of the ambiguous period between the late Qing era and the May Fourth period? In the early years of the twentieth century, what exactly was going on between the writers of the thereby labeled “traditional” or “old-fashioned” school and those of the “new” school? Is there any possibility of reconstructing the historical reality of this period? By no means do I propose to answer these questions completely but rather to raise them and to offer possible conduits to their solution.

In the past ten years or so, scholars of Ming-Qing history as well as literary history have successfully given women of China from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries new images. For example, the ideas of victimization and oppression no longer suffice to portray the experience of Chinese women. We have come to realize, through literary and artistic pursuits, that many women tried to construct self-identities, express their innermost feelings, and even achieve some of their ambitions and ideals. Curiously enough, however, when we shift our attention to the early twentieth century, we encounter a series of novel questions. Was there a continuation or a gap between the tradition of literary women and the emergent paradigm of the New Woman? When major trends were shifting, what happened to cainü, the talented women, as individuals, if they did not vanish overnight? Did they convert and become New Women? Or did they continue to live in their own way?
Figure 12.1. Cover page of Funü zazhi. Source: Funü zazhi (The ladies’ journal) 1.1 (January 1915).