

Introduction

Telling Stories of Ginling

In this book I am not aiming to present a traditional college history. Instead, I will scrutinize some of the epoch-making events surrounding the foundation and development of Ginling College (Jinling nūzi wenli xueyuan 金陵女子文理學院, 1915–52), an all-women’s missionary institution of higher education in China, in order to explore the uneasy relationships between tradition and modernity, nationalism and internationalism, and memory and history in twentieth-century China. Although Ginling’s institutional history has inevitably been shaped by various sociopolitical and cultural forces, I will adopt a “microscopic” rather than “macroscopic” approach, and examine the written and oral materials produced by the Chinese and American women involved in the building of Ginling from “ground level up.” That is to say, not only will I privilege the personal, subjective, and apparently idiosyncratic (re)interpretations of dominant institutional discourses by individuals, but also, when examining seemingly cut-and-dry official documents, I will seek to shed light on both the intricate motives and dynamic interactions that created them and the physical and psychological consequences that they have had in individual lives.

I adopt this approach partly because of the nature of available sources and the state of scholarship on Ginling. I also believe that to create an effective history of an institution of higher learning, we should listen to the lively ensemble of intermingling voices that not only constantly change the shape of the college during its lifetime, but also give the institution its enduring afterlife. Furthermore, since individual cognition, the kernel of any intellectual history, always integrates diverse sensory impressions and affective responses, I suggest that an institutional history can be shown to its best advantage in an embodied and individuated form. Therefore, although my analysis of individual storytelling will reveal shared narrative

patterns shaped by the larger sociohistorical context, I will focus more on the ever-shifting personalities and events that defined Ginling's institutional character at various points and on the college's enduring impact upon those involved in this collective enterprise called "education." Since I will trace diverse contours of people and events, at times my discussion may appear dispersed and embedded in specific historical moments. However, I will try to demonstrate how issues of modernity, nationalism, and gender affected the ways that a unique group of Chinese women experienced and influenced twentieth-century Chinese history.

Discursive constructs are arguably not historical realities. Nevertheless, I will treat written and oral materials on Ginling as both symbolic responses to and molding forces of concrete historical situations. In so doing, I hope to break the deadlock caused by rigid moralist denunciations of Western imperialism in China, and to capture some of the rich visions and experiences of Chinese modernity missing from existing master narratives of twentieth-century Chinese history.

GINLING COLLEGE

A brief sketch of Ginling history will reveal its deep immersion in the political upheavals of twentieth-century China. It was founded in 1913 through the united efforts of eight American women's mission boards: Baptists (North and South), Disciples, Episcopalians, Methodists (North and South), and Presbyterians (North and South), and it officially opened in Nanjing, China, in 1915. On the one hand, Ginling was born out of a fortuitous combination of international and national factors: particularly the Social Gospel Movement and the Student Volunteer Movement in the United States that recruited many female college graduates for the mission field in China, and the Qing (1644–1911) government's more receptive attitude toward "new learning" for Chinese women. Yet its birth also testified to a moment of profound national distress in Chinese history. The repeated defeats and humiliation suffered by the Qing army and navy at foreign hands had forced Chinese cities to open to foreign businesses and missionaries, while making plain to the political and intellectual elites of the time the necessity of Western education for any possible Chinese rejuvenation. A heightened and widespread sense of national crisis caused by foreign encroachment into the economy, politics, and social life of China gave rise to increasingly radical schemes of national self-strengthening and Chinese modernization.¹ From the model of constitutional monarchy espoused by reformers such as Kang Youwei (1858–1927) and Liang Qichao (1873–1929) to the Republican model of Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925),

intellectuals became more and more sympathetic to the total renunciation of traditional Chinese culture and full acceptance of Western modes of modernization. The birth of Ginling College at such a trouble-ridden historical juncture foreboded a thorny path for the institution, but also promised a vibrant site of discursive engagements from the very beginning.

Not surprisingly, Ginling witnessed many cultural and political convulsions of twentieth-century China during its lifetime. Among them were two large-scale traumas. In 1927, American faculty members had to evacuate Nanjing when the Nationalist Northern Expedition Army captured it, and there was arson, looting, and shooting that caused considerable chaos and distress within the college. In 1937, the faculty and students of the whole college had to scatter to Shanghai, Wuchang, and Chengdu to escape from the invading Japanese army. Only an emergency committee headed by one of the American missionaries stayed in Nanjing to oversee the college properties and open its door to Chinese refugees during the horrendous Nanjing Massacre. In 1938 the majority of the members of the college reunited and settled down with five other colleges in Huaxi ba (華西壩), an area a little outside of the city limits of Chengdu in Sichuan. It was not until 1946, several months after the anti-Japanese war ended with the unconditional surrender of Japan, that members of Ginling returned to their much-damaged campus in Nanjing.

Here they stayed when the Chinese Communist army entered Nanjing in 1949 following the ouster of the Nationalist government. After a series of workshops organized by the Communist government that attempted to “reeducate” missionary faculty members and students with the new ideology of dialectical materialism, Ginling College returned to more or less regular academic work. However, with the eruption of the Korean War and the Chinese government’s efforts to reorganize and control higher education, officially called “Adjustment of Colleges and Departments” (yuanxi tiaozheng 院係調整), Ginling College first merged with the University of Nanking (Jinling daxue 金陵大學), its missionary “brother” college and neighbor in Nanjing, in 1951 to form the public institution Jinling University. In 1952 the Normal College and several departments of Jinling University finally combined with various departments from other colleges to form Nanjing Normal University, also a public school. The last class of Ginling College graduated in the same year, bringing the total number of Ginling graduates up to about a thousand.

In the next thirty-some years the name “Ginling” all but disappeared from public view, but it was never absent from the minds of those who had played a part in its life. What has differentiated Ginling from its missionary peers that have also been dispersed and reorganized lies in its surprising

resurrection. Before Ginling's former Chinese president Wu Yifang passed away in 1985, she, with the help of various influential alumnae both in China and overseas, convinced the Chinese government of the necessity to reopen Ginling. After her death, alumnae organizations both in China and abroad launched vigorous and widely successful fund-raising campaigns. The more than half a million dollars that was raised helped to build a classroom-office building on the original site of Ginling College. The first group of students entered the reinstated Ginling College, a unit under the large umbrella of Nanjing Normal University, in 1987. In the twenty years since then, this college has graduated about two thousand students, twice the total number of Ginling graduates from 1915–1952.² Moreover, it offers several of the most popular majors at Nanjing Normal University, such as applied English, nutrition, and international accounting. The resurrected Ginling College celebrated the eightieth, eighty-fifth, and ninetieth anniversaries of its founding in 1995, 2000, and 2005, respectively, and, most recently, the twentieth anniversary of its reinstatement in 2007.

THE FAMILY DISCOURSE

Ginling's history poses an intriguing question. Namely, given its relatively short life span and small number of graduates, not to mention its "suspect" status as an American-founded all-women's missionary college in mainland China after 1949, how can we explain its remarkable staying power and extraordinary comeback where all other, purportedly more influential, missionary institutions such as Yenching (燕京) University have failed? I suggest that the answer lies in its powerful discourse of the Ginling family.

Ginling College certainly faced challenges similar to those faced by its missionary peers in its attempts at bringing Christian higher education to China. Not only did its nature as an American transplant in China create competing demands on its members and result in conflicted loyalties of its members, but its infrastructure also seemed fraught with tensions. For, although hailed by its missionary founders and Chinese supporters as a symbol of Chinese women's increased educational and professional opportunities, it depended on foreign sources for financial support and, in its early years, for filling most of its faculty positions. Moreover, at Ginling, as was the case in other missionary colleges at the time,³ Chinese and American faculty members were subject to different salary scales, with Chinese members receiving less compensation for the same rank and seniority. The rationale of the trustees was that the missionaries' living expenses were higher and that they could be paid

by their boards following American salary standards, while the Chinese faculty members should be compensated according to the rule of “economy,” since they could only draw their salary from the tuition and fees that Ginling collected from its students.⁴ This policy created inequality between its Chinese and American members. Moreover, in the early years Ginling’s American faculty members clearly dominated the decision-making processes concerning the curriculum, the faculty and student governance, and the institutional relationship with the Chinese government. All these seemed to have forecast troubled relations between its Chinese and American constituencies even as the missionary founders espoused the indigenization of missionary education and a family atmosphere transcending the issue of race.

Furthermore, both the American and Chinese members of the college faced their own sets of dilemmas. Of course, Ginling College provided an invaluable venue of self-actualization for the American missionaries. For some missionaries, it meant professional achievements. For others, it provided a new way of religious devotion. And for still others, it promised adventures and exotic experiences. For all, the experience at Ginling College added breadth and depth to their lives and offered an alternative path to the traditional expectations for women. However, their freedom and power of self-determination came at a price. Material difficulties were the least of it, though as a rule female missionaries were less well paid than their male colleagues in China. Many of them also had to go through difficult psychological adjustments, since they lived in an alien land far away from their own family, feeling the loneliness and self-doubt all the more acutely when their family demands competed with their missionary work. The rising nationalist fervor in early twentieth-century China often forced them to face their own identity as members of colonial powers such as the United States and Britain in a semicolonial Chinese society. Their extraterrestrial privileges in China, although helpful in building Ginling and shielding the institution from government interference and Japanese molestation at times, also inevitably separated them from the very people they had vowed to serve. While not completely unaware of the irresolvable conflict between their privileged status in China and their proclamation of Christian love for the Chinese people, most of these missionary women shared their male colleagues’ firm belief in the innate superiority of Western civilization and Christianity. Because of their steadfast adherence to their cherished project of rejuvenating China through Christian higher education, they often had to wrestle with dissenting opinions both from radical male intellectuals from the outside, and from the Chinese members within Ginling.

Missionary institutions often came under fire in twentieth-century China because of their connections to colonial forces. For example, the World Christian Students Association held their eleventh convention at Tsing-hua (清華) University in Beijing in 1922, and incurred nationwide protests from non-Christian Chinese intellectuals in cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Nanjing, Xiamen, and Changsha.⁵ A telegram sent by students in Shanghai accused missionaries of perpetrating cultural imperialism and “raising running dogs [zougou 走狗] of foreign capitalists.”⁶ Ginling further angered radical male Chinese intellectuals and even male members of other missionary institutions because of the missionary women’s disapproval of students’ political activism and their opposition to coeducation. In addition to aspersions cast on their character from external sources, they also had to tackle discontent from within. Although anyone in a position of power may too easily become a figure of both attraction and repulsion, some missionaries who were inclined to enforce discipline became easy targets of resentment by Chinese students because of the obvious American dominance on campus in Ginling’s early years.

The Chinese women students and faculty members at Ginling College encountered their own particular challenges as well. On the one hand, they enjoyed more educational and career opportunities than the majority of Chinese women of their times. Many of them also achieved remarkable success in their professions as scientists, social workers, teachers, and doctors after graduation. However, they had to negotiate their way through their professional aspirations, traditional expectations for women in Chinese society that revolved around marriage and children, and the nationalist sentiment of their compatriots, which they frequently shared. On a mundane level, they had to choose between working for their alma mater as “returned daughters” at a reduced salary and jobs that paid better at government institutions, and between demonstrating their devotion to Ginling and earning a living wage adequate to provide for their own families. Moreover, they had to pick sides when the issue of race and nationality came into play in various political upheavals. The May Fourth Movement in 1919, the May Thirtieth Incident, in 1925, and the 1927 Incident, when the Nationalist army captured Nanjing, were just a few of the events that tested their mettle as both members of a missionary college and Chinese citizens.

In light of the complex racial and cultural dynamics both outside and within Ginling College, the missionary founders urgently needed a powerful means to create solidarity. This they found in the discourse of the Ginling family. Although they invoked the model of the traditional multigenerational Confucian family based on a strict hierarchy of age-,

gender-, and status-grading, they also made several important changes. For one thing, they insisted on a uniform gender makeup of the student body, strenuously defending Ginling's identity as an all-women's college. This effort created what Estelle Freedman has called a "female public sphere," and demonstrated that female institution building could form among middle-class women an empowering community that mediated between women's domestic world and the public sphere.⁷ The missionaries also invoked Christianity as a shared spiritual bond of the Ginling family, and thereby provided another important tool of empowerment for Chinese women who, as Elizabeth Littell-Lamb has demonstrated through her study of the YWCA in China, often used Christianity as a "heterodox" religion to structure and give new meanings to their lives.⁸ The missionaries further asserted that the common goal of the Ginling family lay in the training of Chinese women as well-educated, spiritually elevated Christian leaders who would help create a strong and harmonious new national family in China. Their invocation of a Chinese nationalist agenda, although moderate in tone and not without inherent contradictions, not only neutralized the charge of cultural imperialism directed against them, but also appealed to the Chinese students and their families swept up in the national salvation movement of early twentieth-century China.

We can see that the missionary discourse of the Ginling family conflated several different types of family: using the traditional Chinese Confucian family as its original model, the founders also sought to conjoin their Christian belief and the nationalist aspirations of their Chinese students and colleagues, all while promoting a social feminist agenda⁹ of raising Chinese women's status. In addition to enunciating this set of core values, this discourse also demarked the center and periphery of the Chinese national family that the missionaries had envisioned. For them, an ideal Chinese national family should be guided by a group of elite Chinese women who had mostly come from privileged family background and been educated at a Western-style Christian institution, since they could serve in leadership roles to transform the common masses in Chinese society with the help of Christianity. The experience of Ginling College in the twentieth century would test the elasticity of this discourse, and show how its attempts at integration into Chinese society and the boundary it set up contributed to Ginling's successes and setbacks at various historical moments. The detailed description and analysis of the enactment of Ginling's family discourse will be the task for the remainder of this book. For now, let me try to provide a preliminary exploration of both the power and inherent contradictions of

this discourse, an exploration I hope will illustrate the generative analytical focus of this book.

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“The family is the single-most-important place where a child learns about love, authority, and power,” Martha Vicinus has said,¹⁰ and it is often invoked as a useful trope to instill intragroup bonding. The deployment of the family metaphor for missionary institution building was thus not unique to Ginling. Yenching University was also purportedly steeped in a family spirit, thanks to the diligent efforts of its American missionary president, John Leighton Stuart (1876–1962).¹¹ However, Ginling’s family discourse proved unique in its reiterative versatility, encompassing institutionalization, and lasting impact. The context of its origination can provide some clues to its wide success at Ginling. Since “the family offered an indispensable figure for sanctioning social hierarchy within a putative organic unity of interests,”¹² missionaries were able to make the group dynamic of missionary authority and student obedience seem more natural by invoking the family metaphor. Moreover, the family discourse found the Chinese members of Ginling impressionable and malleable, perhaps because of their intimate experience with the traditional Confucian family hierarchy.

In other words, the missionary founders’ choice of the trope of the family was able to strike a resonant cord with both the Chinese and American members at Ginling because the values and needs of the two groups overlapped at this particular historical juncture. In addition to its obvious utility for establishing missionary authority and a hierarchical structure, the founders found this discourse attractive also for its power to create a feeling of community. Because these missionaries were single foreign women residing in an alien land and culture, the image of an institutional family, however deliberately manufactured, provided them with much-needed emotional support. At the same time, the teachers got emotional feedback from a group of young Chinese women who had left their own natal families to live in a residential college among peers mostly unrelated by blood. The family discourse thus dislodged Chinese women from a kinship system dominated by Confucian ethics and helped them to explore new relationships and form new identities, while in the process offering both the Chinese and American members a stable community to call home.

The secular and liberal Ginling curriculum served to attract Chinese students who craved either practical knowledge for professional

advancement or a glimpse into a different culture. The words of the missionary John Mott accurately captured missionary understanding of Chinese interest at the time: "It is Western education that the Chinese are clamoring for, and will have. If the Church can give it to them, plus Christianity, they will take it; otherwise they will get it elsewhere, without Christianity—and that speedily!"¹³ It also should be noted that Ginling's missionary founders belonged to the group of "modernists" in the mission field¹⁴ who were more interested in preparing elite Chinese women for "Christian leadership," than in proselytizing illiterate and poverty-stricken Chinese masses. They envisioned Ginling graduates as intellectual and spiritual leaders who would transform their people and nation not so much through evangelization as through their work and lives of "Christian consecration." Therefore, although Ginling was in principle a missionary college, the faculty from the very beginning took pains to build it into a bona fide institution of higher education that possessed rigorous academic standards as well as an impeccable Christian character. Their broadly conceived curriculum was thus able to attract a large and relatively diverse pool of Chinese women, some of whom had grown up in families of Confucian literati who had resisted the promulgation of Christianity.

Ginling's missionary founders proclaimed a tripartite mission of educating Chinese women in body, mind, and spirit. Because of their own educational experiences, the missionary founders of Ginling adopted the curriculum of elite American women's liberal arts colleges in New England in order to produce the kind of Chinese women who could meet the perceived needs of contemporary Chinese society. Ginling's curriculum deserves our attention for its strength in three particular areas compared to other colleges at the time: English, physical education, and home economics. As will be shown later in this book, these curricular emphases not only prepared their students for study abroad and career development, but also became a crucial part of these students' interpretation of the meaning of a Ginling education and of their identity as Ginling graduates, not the least because such emphases provided the students with rare freedom and broadened their scope of self-development and even self-invention.

In addition to the institutional mission and curriculum, the profile of the individuals who built the college also added to its secular and liberal flavor, and thereby further increased its attraction for middle- and upper-class Chinese women of the time. Recruited by the Student Volunteer Movement, female American educational missionaries were mostly college graduates who, according to Reverend Arie DeHaan, a recruiter of female college graduates for the mission field in China, were on the whole "practical, unemotional persons" rather than the traditional "religious

people,”—that is, ardent evangelists.¹⁵ Women who came to Ginling to teach “wanted more for themselves than they saw in conventional alternatives. Some of them wanted more opportunities for achievement; some, more renown; others, satisfaction, independence, adventure, status.”¹⁶ Most of the American women who established and developed Ginling College had either come from privileged families, or received the highest level of formal education among women of their time and culture, or both. Because of the missionaries’ personal backgrounds and powers of articulation, their words and deeds functioned as cultural conduits through which the experience of American culture was disseminated and reinvented. Notably, they tended to integrate religion and “civilization” in their instruction at Ginling.

Just as captivating for the Chinese students as the missionaries’ academic qualifications was the way that these American women embodied Western lifestyle and material culture. Although placing less emphasis on official endorsement of Western etiquette than their missionary neighbor, the University of Nanking,¹⁷ Ginling faculty members taught their Chinese disciples table manners and other rules of “civilized” social behavior just as assiduously (and perhaps even more effectively, given Ginling’s smaller size and residential character) through their frequent tea parties and other social interactions. The Chinese students, consequently, imbibed at Ginling not only academic, religious, and moral instruction, but also training in gender- and class-inflected Western etiquette that left an indelible impression on their minds. Later they would repeatedly invoke this kind of training as an indispensable part of their collective identity; it was encapsulated, so they claimed, in a unique Ginling *qizhi* (氣質), or mien and spirit, in which they would always take inordinate pride.

The family discourse at Ginling College attracted and molded Chinese women who entered its door. However, they were not merely passive receptacles of this powerful institutional ethos. The family discourse also enabled them to form new identities and attempt new ways of self-representation, a perhaps unintended consequence of its missionary creators that nevertheless further endeared Ginling to its Chinese members. Although apparently occupying a location of privilege because of their family background and their access to modern education at a time when many middle- and upper-class Chinese women were not allowed to step out of domestic space, mission-educated Chinese women still had to overcome various obstacles hindering their intellectual and professional growth. Compared to their male counterparts at missionary colleges, these women had to face both Chinese and American gender stereotypes in order to make something of their lives. They also had to tackle

racial stereotypes, cultural prejudices, and at times political persecutions because of their unique geopolitical location as Chinese citizens with a semi-Western (and religious) institutional affiliation living in an era of rising nationalism in China. As a result, these women often had to rework dominant discourses to represent and advance themselves. For Ginling women, opportunities came with the circulation of the dominant institutional discourse of the Ginling family.

In a move resembling what Martha Vicinus calls “the non-normative in dialogue with the normative,”¹⁸ the Chinese women undertook an imaginative reworking of the familiar trope of the family. In response to the missionary exhortation to build the collective Ginling family, the Chinese women were able to free themselves, at least temporarily, from the all-too-real confinement of family obligations and gender roles at home, and achieve self-representation through a seemingly paradoxical integration of the individual and the collective. That is to say, on the institutional level, they were able to narrate and signify their individual experiences through enthusiastic cooperation with American missionaries in the collective enterprise of building Ginling and constructing its institutional history. In the larger national context, the family metaphor also provided them with a certain leverage to negotiate for power—including freedom from missionary control—precisely because of the missionaries’ promotion of Confucian ethical values and Chinese rejuvenation. By using the family discourse to legitimize their filial and patriotic duties as daughters to their own parents and “daughters” of China, the Chinese women were able to transcend both the institutional boundary and the demand of complete devotion to Ginling and Christianity made on them by the foreign missionaries.

Both Ginling students’ Chinese heritage and Ginling’s unique institutional temperament account for why the Chinese women used such a seemingly indirect way for self-representation. Tani Barlow, after examining the sinologist Mou Zhengyun’s genealogy of the Chinese term for women, *funü* 婦女, concludes: “There is no term present before the twentieth century that might indicate women as a group outside of the family [in China].”¹⁹ Rather, Chinese women “were gendered by virtue of the protocols specific to their subject positions and not necessarily or even in the first case by virtue of the physiological ground they may or may not share with people outside the kinship group.”²⁰ In other words, they were either *nü*, unmarried daughters of their natal families, or *fu*, married women, and wives and mothers who belonged to their husbands’ families. Since Chinese women’s subject position had always been defined within patrilineal kinship before the twentieth century, it followed that Ginling

students would find the family metaphor both an easily recognizable and a useful discursive tool with which to seek their individual and group identities outside of the kinship network. As will be illustrated throughout this book, the Chinese women at Ginling indeed frequently invoked the trope of the family to legitimate both their pursuits as individuals and their nationalist endeavors.

As mentioned above, the Qing government had become more interested in introducing Western education as a result of its military defeats at foreign hands. In 1906, it issued an imperial edict sanctioning Chinese women's education. Consequently, Chinese women of middle- and upper-class families found it easier than before to step out of their homes to explore new possibilities at Western-style educational institutions. Ginling College, as one of the few colleges that admitted women at the time and a small, residential, all-women's institution at that, particularly attracted young Chinese women and their families not only because of its academic quality, but also due to its emphases on strict chaperonage and careful moral and religious instruction. In this regard, it represented to the families of the Chinese students a halfway house between Chinese women's complete seclusion and their radical liberation; thus, it was able to appeal to both Christian and non-Christian elite families, and in some cases even to radical anti-Christian male intellectuals who nevertheless wanted their daughters to attend an all-women's institution without the distraction of male pursuit and radical politics.²¹

The historical origin of Ginling, as seen from both nationalist and missionary perspectives, determined that Ginling's Chinese students would have to carry the burden of high Chinese and missionary expectations. But this heritage was neither unique among "new women" of the time nor an unmitigated liability, for it also contributed to their collective self-image as pioneers in Chinese women's education, career development, and nation-building. In other words, although hailing from a distinctive missionary institutional affiliation, the Ginling women belonged to the same group of modern Chinese women who, as promoted by radical male Chinese intellectuals of "patriotic" persuasion, left their families in order to pursue a modern education and career outside of home, and to participate in China's nation-building project. Like other "new women," Ginling students participated in the building of their national family, because this was one of the few viable courses for Chinese women of the time to step into the public arena and make their experiences count.²² Yet their sense of mission and trail-blazing, not dissimilar from that felt by their missionary teachers, also contributed to the formation of both their individual and group identity and a community of pioneers.

Ginling's residential character, with its emphasis on close interactions and bonding between its members, and its institutional motto oriented these women toward a collectivist rather than individualist approach in their self-representation. The Ginling College motto of "Abundant Life" promoted by the missionaries and their Chinese colleagues emphasized to the students an internal "family spirit" and "service" to Chinese people. This institutional philosophy reveals the American founders' concerted and self-conscious attempts at creating a collective identity that could transcend a narrowly defined religiosity and at reconciling the conflicts between the college's China location and American affiliation. In proclaiming this motto, the missionaries could use moral and religious terms to justify Ginling's existence and the founders' functions in it. However, this motto also represented an institutional ethos that appealed to the Chinese women who sought individual realization through their participation in a collective project of high moral and spiritual worth: they were pursuing "transcendence,"²³ following the example of their missionary teachers. For Chinese women who had just started to test their strengths in the public arena, a collective undertaking couched in moral and spiritual terms provided a justification, a training ground, and at times even a venue for more individualistic pursuits.

The powerful discourse of the Ginling family gave both Chinese and American women an institutional home and a way to combat the limitations their own cultural traditions placed on women. But at the same time, both groups of women eventually also had to tackle its inherent contradictions and constraints. This was not only because the large socio-political context they lived in often impinged on the autonomy of their college. Nor was it simply due to its invocation of Confucian ethics that this discourse constantly came into conflict with both the antitraditionalist discourses disseminated by radical Chinese intellectuals and the idea of liberal democracy promoted by the missionaries. We can trace its innate contradictions to even more complex sources.

Mirroring their Chinese protégées' experiences, missionary women at Ginling ascended to positions of power unavailable to them at home. As Ann McClintock rightly points out: "The rationed privileges of race all too often put white women in positions of decided—if borrowed—power, not only over colonized women, but also over colonized men."²⁴ Moreover, female missionaries were able to rely on their geopolitical location in China as what Lydia Liu calls a "distancing factor" to help them acquire personal power and freedom, for "the extent to which they could imagine themselves as liberated individuals and gain their own freedom from patriarchal bondage depended on their physical removal from the

network of patriarchal institutions at home.”²⁵ Yet, although they were all-powerful white women vis-à-vis “the yellow race” of Chinese, they were nevertheless marginalized in their own patriarchal traditions, even as such traditions were transplanted to China and temporized by missionary zeal for the “work” of evangelism shared by both male and female missionaries. This contradiction inherent in female missionaries’ position of both power and vulnerability was clearly shown in Ginling’s struggle for independence as an all-women’s college against the plan by the Advisory Council of East China Christian Colleges and Universities that proposed a federated “East China University” in order to streamline missionary education.²⁶ Moreover, although less inflammatory (albeit no less significant) a divergence from the “master plan” devised by male missionaries in China, the liberal arts curriculum they adopted at Ginling not only conflicted with the prevalent Chinese wish to train technocrats who could help with China’s industrialization, but also effectively contested the consensus of the influential China Education Commission of 1921–22, led by Ernest Burton, then vice president of the University of Chicago, and consisting of a group of educators based in both the United States and China, including Ginling’s president, Mrs. Thurston.²⁷ Although conceding that specialized training at missionary institutions should not be “narrowly technical,” the commission did recommend that colleges “offer and emphasize courses preparatory to a limited number of professions, choosing these with reference to the specific needs of the community in their region.”²⁸

Yet, despite the pressures on them from male missionaries, their perception of both their own cultures and the significance of Ginling in the national picture of China took its own path. Residing in an enclave removed from direct patriarchal rule (though not from coercive attempts) and shedding the forced passivity mandated by the cult of ideal Victorian womanhood in their home countries, the female missionaries were temporarily able to entertain a double illusion shared by their male colleagues: their unreasoning assumption of the superiority of Western traditions and their confidence in having discovered in Christianity an efficacious spiritual remedy for all of China’s ills. In a sense they lived in a bubble in China, an experience that made their perception of Western cultures out of sync with real time. Between the two world wars, the United States moved toward secularization and consumerism, while public opinion took a conservative turn regarding women’s education.²⁹ At the same time, however, female missionaries still tried to inculcate into their Chinese students a somber missionary take on life and work, and promised students rosy prospects for the liberal arts education they received at Ginling. Yet, the contemporary realities of both China and the United States too often

brought home to them the instability of their position. They encountered irreconcilable conflicts: between the missionaries' privileges of extraterritoriality guaranteed by gunboats and their self-image as good Samaritans, as ambassadors of Christianity and apostles of peace and civilization; and between the Chinese masses' need for a sustainable economy and the missionary sponsorship of a moderate spiritual evolution with Christianity as its guiding light.

The Chinese students under their tutelage, in turn, had to deal with their own conflicted identities as daughters of Ginling and citizens of China despite, or, precisely because of, their support for Ginling's family discourse. To some extent, they formed a love-hate relationship with Ginling's missionaries and harbored complicated emotions of both admiration and resentment toward them. This was because, for one thing, the nationalist fervor of their compatriots often forced them to take sides in political upheavals. Furthermore, the education they received at Ginling and the family atmosphere that had nurtured them through college to some extent did them a disservice, precisely because of the idealized "family" picture to which it had acclimated them. As Hu Xiuying, a Ginling alumna and later a professor of biology at Harvard, pointed out, "Our advisors described too clearly the contour of an ideal society of truth and beauty but rarely forewarned us of the dark, evil sides. Thus we often say, 'In the intimate Ginling family we feel at home but graduation feels like being married off' [Jinling yijia qin, zaixiao ru jiating, biye ru jianü 金陵一家親, 在校如家庭, 畢業如嫁女]. In other words, at school we feel the family spirit, but upon graduation we feel all the more the pain of homelessness."³⁰ It can be seen that Ginling's emphasis on family spirit at times left their students vulnerable to harsh realities and crushing disappointments in Chinese society. The existence of Ginling's powerful family discourse may also explain the difference between Ginling and Nanking students in their self-positioning vis-à-vis Chinese society. As some scholars have commented, Ginling graduates typically demonstrated a more conciliatory attitude toward the Chinese government, while Nanking graduates more often questioned authorities and voiced dissent.³¹ Since Ginling and Nanking were both missionary institutions and close neighbors to each other in Nanjing, Ginling's emphasis on both consensus and conformity "within the family" and constructive action toward society may well have shaped Ginling students' apparently less critical attitude towards the Chinese authorities.

Yet, not just the advantages but also the drawbacks of the family discourse at Ginling College make it an invaluable lens with which to investigate the various tensions in twentieth-century China. First of all, given

the maneuvers and countermoves, the conflicts and negotiations between tradition and modernity constantly waged through the deployment of the family discourse at Ginling, we can explore a set of questions both essential to Chinese women's modern experiences and useful for the investigation of enactments of gender, race, and class at Chinese missionary institutions: What did it mean to be "daughters" of Ginling in an era of rising nationalism in China? Why did the Ginling women, as so often happens with graduates of elite American all-women's colleges, seem unable to "get over" their college experience? How did they find and free their own voice in a society and cultural tradition dominated by men? How did they secure means of empowerment against apparently unbeatable odds?

The dynamic transmutation of the family discourse in Ginling history will also shed new light on the tensions between memory and history inherent in modern Chinese historiography. As Wang Ban has pointed out in his *Illuminations from the Past*, the mainstream May Fourth discourse of history adopted the Western Enlightenment view of history, and "[t]he tenor of Enlightenment thought is antitraditional, antimemory and privileges modern, forward history at the expense of the cultural past."³² Therefore, the radical intellectuals of the time typically undertook to rescue history from memory: to exorcise the lingering memories of cultural traditions in order to enable China to participate in the grand project of historical progress. In advocating a clean break with Chinese traditions, they sought to propel China toward modernity and equal status with modern Western nations on the international stage. This was of course a simplistic view of history that they never managed to carry out completely. In fact, they inevitably drew on specific Chinese accomplishments and memory, and thus achieved a "multilayered immersion in tradition"³³ in their construction of a master narrative of modern Chinese history. However, this did not prevent them from deploying a variety of foils to accentuate their own modernity, such as the stereotypical conservative Confucian forces that clung to the glorious Chinese past, and foreign missionaries who paid tribute to Chinese traditions with the ulterior motive of obstructing Chinese progress toward modernization. In contrast to this simplistic representation of modern Chinese history, a reexamination of the ways that Ginling women represented their own roles in the making of the institution and of Chinese modernity will reveal to us a more nuanced picture of Chinese modernity. It will challenge the standard May Fourth master narrative of Chinese modernization and historical progress by providing a glimpse into alternative and at times even diametrically contrasting paths excluded from the May Fourth narrative.

Thus, I believe my inquiry will add to the nuances of modern Chinese history, and also facilitate the exploration of some theoretical questions related to history writing. In his book *Voices of Collective Remembering*, James Wertsch provides a comparison of the meanings of “collective memory” and “history” as they are conceptualized in contemporary scholarship.³⁴ While history is seen as objective, disinterested, critical, and self-reflective, collective memories are often dismissed as being too subjective, too unselfconscious, and too quick to exclude ambiguities and alternative voices. However, given the inherent problematic in the radical Chinese intellectuals’ anti-memory stance, can “subjective,” “emotional” memories such as those produced by members of Ginling College in fact help to retrieve voices that had been removed from the supposedly more objective history? Does memory in this case actually play an equally important role as history in furthering our understanding of twentieth-century China? How can we bring memory and history together rather than locking them into unproductive deictic positions? Or to ask a question particularly pertinent to my inquiry: Can the narratives constructed by the Ginling women, their “herstories” of diverse voices, form a mutually explicatory and constitutive relationship with the existing “history” of Chinese modernization?

In summary, a tracing of the family discourse throughout Ginling’s institutional history will illustrate not only the dynamic changes experienced and effected by Ginling and its members, but also how local interpretations and enactments of gender and cultural identities interacted with the sociopolitical and historical context of twentieth-century China. In this way, my project will bring the microscopic into dialogue with the macroscopic, in that the stories told by Ginling members will not only challenge the May Fourth master narrative of Chinese modernity, but also reveal its limits as a tool of interpretation of twentieth-century China.

SOURCES AND SCHOLARSHIP

The discussion of Ginling’s family discourse above demonstrates the complex strands woven into its institutional history. My project seeks to reveal its full richness in order to fill a gap in existing scholarship on Ginling College. Ginling has so far commanded little space in the official histories of both the People’s Republic of China and the American mission movement. Granted, the college had only produced a meager total of one thousand graduates by the time of its dissolution in 1952. Yet a surprisingly high percentage of its alumnae and former faculty members played important and publicly acclaimed roles in Chinese cultural modernization and nation-building at a time when Chinese women enjoyed little public

visibility or formal power. For instance, besides producing a significant number of well-known educators, administrators, scientists, and doctors, Ginling even had three alumnae who became female generals in the Communist People's Liberation Army. Furthermore, Ginling College possessed the significant position of being one of the only two independent all-women's colleges and one of only a dozen or so missionary institutions of higher education in twentieth-century China. Perhaps most importantly, the college's extraordinary internal cohesion and enduring impact deserve our serious attention.

Ginling's longtime invisibility resulted not only from reader's apathy toward women's experience, but also from the severe political atmosphere in the several decades after the establishment of the Communist government in China. For those with Ginling connections, the choice to stay in China after 1949 effectively prevented their voices from being heard, since they were often identified by the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as belonging to the cohort of Chinese intellectuals sympathetic to "American imperialists," and as less than wholehearted in their support of the Chinese government. Because of these stringent criteria of political correctness, these women's representations of their experiences of modernity were either ignored completely or appropriated as a conversion narrative of self-reform in order to fit the master narrative of the PRC.

Fortunately, in recent years some Chinese scholars, most notably the Chinese historian Zhang Kaiyuan, an alumnus of the missionary University of Nanking, have turned their attention to missionary institutions and their roles in the cultural modernization of China.³⁵ Yet in the series on seven Chinese missionary colleges that Zhang has edited, the volume on Ginling College authored by Sun Haiying includes little beyond a translation of the original English institutional history written by its founders half a century ago. Nor have Chinese researchers demonstrated much enthusiasm about Ginling College in articles published in mainland China, though they have produced insightful studies of other missionary institutions such as Yenching University and of the national context of missionary education. Some master's theses have indeed investigated Ginling, such as Zeng Fangmiao's "Minguo jiaohui nūzi jiaoyu—Jinling nūzi wenli xueyuan de ge'an yanjiu" (Women's Missionary Education in Republican China: the Case of Jinling College) and Huang Jiezhen's "Cong Wu Yifang yu Jinling nūzi daxue kan Jidu jiao jiaoyu linian de shijian" (The Practice of Christian Educational Theory as Seen in the Example of Wu Yifang and Jinling College).³⁶ But as unpublished works, they can only expect occasional citations in published books such as a comparative study authored by Zhu Feng.³⁷

Most recently, a group of Ginling friends and associates has produced two scholarly books—*Wu Yifang de jiaoyu sixiang yu shijian* (The Educational Theory and Practice of Wu Yifang), and *Jinling nūzi daxue xiaoshi* (A History of Ginling Women's College)—and four volumes of autobiographical or biographical essays published under the collective title *Jinling nūer* (Daughters of Ginling). *The Educational Theory and Practice of Wu Yifang* particularly represents outstanding recent Chinese scholarship. It has not only included previously overlooked materials, but also sought to use the category of gender to analyze Wu's life and achievements. But it is limited by its scope as mainly a biographical study of an individual educator. Moreover, as the works mentioned above are studies of localized interest and impact, Ginling has yet to kindle widespread and serious academic research in China. Although adding more materials to the original institutional history penned by American missionaries, these Chinese works have not treated the subject of Ginling College itself with the full critical and analytical attention it deserves.

Paralleling the recent increase of interest in Ginling in China, research on Ginling outside China has also been sporadic until recently. The American missionaries directly involved in the founding and running of the college published at least three books recording its history and dramatis personae: *Ginling College* (1955), coauthored by Matilda Thurston, Ginling's first president, and Ruth Chester, also a senior faculty member at Ginling; *Sunshine and Storm: A Canadian Teacher in China, 1932–1950* (1991), written by Florence Kirk, a Canadian missionary and longtime English professor at Ginling; and *This Stinging Exultation* (1972), a biography of Wilhelmina (Minnie) Vautrin, another notable personage connected to Ginling, written by Mary Treudley, a former professor of sociology at Ginling. In this book I will treat these works mostly as primary sources rather than as “transparent” secondary literature, since they were written by missionaries directly involved in the project of Ginling College.

American historians of missionary activities have produced three books that discuss American missionary education in China, including: *China and the Christian Colleges, 1850–1950* (1971) by Jessie Lutz; *Christian Higher Education in Changing China, 1880–1950* (1976); and *Ever New Horizons: The Story of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, 1922–1975* (1980), both by William Fenn. However, these English-language studies were published almost thirty years ago, and the authors of these works paid scant attention to missionary women's unique contributions. Furthermore, their estimate of missionary impact in China remained largely gloomy. Having fallen short of realizing the ambitious missionary slogan, “Evangelize the whole world in our generation,” they

often lamented the “unfinished encounter” between China and Christianity.³⁸ Evaluations of the evangelical efficacy of Chinese missionary colleges were equally pessimistic: “Their contribution to China was of lasting importance; their contribution to Christianizing China or sinifying Christianity was marginal.”³⁹ The authors complained that the colleges did not fulfill their original goal of producing a critical mass of religious professionals: “Fewer graduates became Christian ministers; the average was 5 percent, and the proportion was declining.”⁴⁰

However, examined in broader terms, missionary colleges such as Ginling not only spearheaded educational, medical, and social reforms in China, but also enabled Chinese women to explore roles of social mobility and power often denied them by their own traditions. The more recent English-language research on American missionary activities in China, whether published or not, reflects this new understanding. Jane Hunter, Dana Robert, and Gael Graham all have pointed out female American missionary women’s conflation of evangelism and “civilization” and their contributions to Chinese women’s gain of agency.⁴¹ Carol Chin’s article on American women missionaries attempts to go beyond examining Christianity in China only as “cultural imperialism.”⁴² In her dissertation Elizabeth Littell-Lamb discusses the history of the YWCA in China and its role in aiding social feminist undertakings in China. Mary Jo Waelchli has also completed a biographical study of Ginling’s two presidents, Martilda Thurston and Wu Yifang, in her 2002 dissertation.⁴³

Still, none of these works have fully treated the historic events involving Ginling, nor do they particularly privilege methods of discourse analysis. By suggesting an examination of the role of words in the making of the institution, I do not mean to advocate that the study of Ginling be isolated in a formalistic vacuum or that its history be reduced to pure linguistic difference and historical insignificance. Rather, I would argue that an interrogation of the complex interactions between different narrative voices will help us to see a more nuanced picture of the intertwining social and cultural forces that shaped both the institution and the identities of its members. This approach works especially well with Ginling, whose institutional history has only been imperfectly preserved by written documents due to Chinese and international political exigencies of the past century. The available primary sources on Ginling consist mostly of English-language materials, collected by the United Board of Christian Higher Education in Asia and now housed at the Yale Divinity School Library archives; Chinese-language materials prove scant at Yale and in Chinese archives. Moreover, the collection of materials is weighted more heavily to the early part of Ginling history, before China’s War of Resistance against