


**FEMALE LITERARY MENTORSHIP IN  
WARTIME WOMEN'S MAGAZINES:  
THE CASE OF TAMURA TOSHIKO AND *WOMEN'S VOICES***

Jiayu Gui<sup>1</sup>  
*Harvard University*

Throughout Japanese literary history, literary mentorship has always been highly gendered. Natsume Sōseki (1867–1916) and Ozaki Kōyō (1868–1903) were well-known for their expansive literary clans, while Tayama Katai (1872–1930) and Shimazaki Tōson (1872–1943) fictionalized their inappropriate relationships with female students in several I-novels. Compared to the numerous cases of male mentorship, it seems extremely unusual to associate women writers with the role of a literary mentor. However, Tamura Toshiko (1884–1945), the one-time disciple of Kōda Rohan (1867–1947), started her career as a literary mentor and magazine editor in a foreign land, Japanese-occupied Shanghai, from 1942 to 1945. This rare case of female literary mentorship is worth further investigation.

*Women's Voices* (*Nūsheng* 女聲) was a monthly Chinese women's magazine published in Japanese-occupied Shanghai from May 1942 to July 1945, featuring Tamura Toshiko as its chief editor. Tamura herself is a contentious feminist novelist whose literary trajectory spanned the Taisho and Showa periods. She is also one of the earliest professional female writers known for her consummate depiction of female sexuality. As the chief editor of a Chinese women's magazine whose targeted readership was Chinese women from different social strata, Tamura held a dominant role in the editorial process and reviewed every piece of contribution despite the language assistance she received from her Chinese colleagues (Tu 42). Among Tamura's Chinese colleagues, Guan Lu, an undercover member of the Chinese Communist Party whose identity was possibly unknown to Tamura, took over the editorial responsibility after Tamura passed away in April 1945 and served as the chief editor of the final two issues (27). As the name "Women's Voices" indicates, Tamura made her editorial principles for this magazine clear in the first issue as "voices of women, voices for women, and voices by women."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>  <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-3044-4574>

<sup>2</sup> 「女聲」含有三大意義：（一）乃婦女呼聲（二）為婦女而聲（三）由婦女發聲；*Nūsheng* no. 1, 1.

In fact, *Women's Voices* has spurred scholarly interest in the Chinese, Japanese, and English academic world primarily since the late 1990s. Scholars approach this long-forgotten magazine from the perspectives of its location of circulation (Japanese-occupied Shanghai), the identity of the chief editors (the contentious female professional writer Tamura Toshiko and Chinese writer Guan Lu who had long been regarded as a “traitorous writer” (Tu 137–8; Chen 202) until the 1980s), and the intricate composition of the contributors that included undercover members of the Communist Party who utilized *Women's Voices* as a platform to get in touch with the leftist Japanese writers whose activities were forced underground, writers bearing connection with the Wang Jingwei regime, and the “general” contributors. The extant scholarship features historical investigations of the launching process, column composition, and basic information of the chief editors,<sup>3</sup> and examinations of the sophisticated relationships between Tamura and Guan Lu as well as their relations to *Women's Voices*,<sup>4</sup> but recently scholars divert their focus to the close reading of respective columns, especially those that are regarded as written by Tamura herself, including the “foreword,” “afterword,” and “mailbox” column.<sup>5</sup>

This essay focuses on the “literature” column, another column that has gathered scholarly attention since the 2010s. The “literature” column is a critical component of *Women's Voices* for three reasons. First, it accounts for the largest proportion of every issue, usually taking up six to ten pages out of a 40-page magazine, whereas the remaining columns often were condensed into one or two pages.<sup>6</sup> Second, it contains the largest variety (or number) of authors’ names, which can reflect the diversity of the

<sup>3</sup> See Kurosawa Aiko, “Toka zengo no Tamura Toshiko: Toshiko etsu shokan nikki o megutte;” Watanabe Sumiko, “Satō (Tamura) Toshiko shinron;” Tu Xiaohua, *Shanghai lunxian shiqi Nüsheng zazhi yanjiu*.

<sup>4</sup> See Wu Peichen, “Shanghai jidai (1942–45) no Satō (Tamura) Toshiko to Chūgoku josei sakka Kan Ro: Chūgokugo josei zasshi Josei o megutte.” Tang Yiduo, “Zhanzheng jiafeng zhong de ‘xin nǚxing’” (Dissertation).

<sup>5</sup> See Yamazaki Makiko, “Tamura (Satō) Toshiko kara Zuo Junzhi e, senjika Shanhai Josei ni okeru shinshō: Watashi tachi no koe no yukue,” Zhang Bei, “Senjika no Shanhai ni okeru Tamura Toshiko no koe: Zasshi Josei no shinshō o megutte.”

<sup>6</sup> For instance, in the fourth issue of the first volume, the “literature” column takes up ten pages, “commentary” three pages, “theater and cinema” three pages, “world knowledge” two pages, “housekeeping” two pages, “observations and hearsay” two pages, “the children’s column” two pages, “women and professions” two pages, with the other columns such as “Japanese,” “entertainment,” “hygiene,” and “mailbox” each occupying one page. This represents the typical distribution of different columns in *Women's Voices*.

contributors to some extent, despite the possibility that several pen names could be attributed to one contributor. Taking the first volume (12 issues in total) as an example, the “literature” column alone contains 32 authorial names, followed by “housekeeping” (20 names), “education” (13), and “observations and hearsay” (10). Third, it was tremendously popular among readers, which can be observed in the “afterword” of the third issue.

Recently, we have received many letters from readers. In their letters, aside from expressing praise and affection for this magazine, there are also many valuable criticisms and guidance. We have now roughly categorized the readers’ opinions into two types: (1) There is too little literary content, not up to standard, and (2) the themes are too mundane, easily falling into clichés. Indeed, we acknowledge these two shortcomings. However, in “Our First Voice,” we mentioned that the purpose of our publication is to be a voice for women, so it is not a purely literary magazine. We ask for readers’ forgiveness on this point. Because of this issue, we have discussed it several times and aim to expand the literary section to satisfy all readers in the short term. (*Nüsheng* no. 3, 36)<sup>7</sup>

In spite of the significant role of the “literature” column and relevant scholarly discussions, little attention seems to be paid to the actual content of the literary contributions and Tamura’s role in the selection process that resembles a literary mentor similar to that of Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972) in the “Conte” column of “New Women” (*Shinjoen* 新女苑). Since fiction takes up over half of the “literature” column and Tamura is most famous for her identity as a novelist, the present essay focuses on fictional stories (or *xiaoshuo* 小說) published in the “literature” column. In Tu Xiaohua’s “A Study on *Nüsheng* in Japanese-occupied Shanghai” published in 2014, she identified half of the contributors of the “literature” column. With Tu Xiaohua’s solid research on *Women’s Voices* paving the factual foundation, I find that the first volume is likely to contain the most diversified body of contributors. Meanwhile, Tu also identified the undercover members of the Chinese Communist Party among these

<sup>7</sup> 近來我們接了許多讀者的來信，在他們的信中，除開表示對於敝刊的讚美與愛好而外，還有許多可寶貴的批評與指導，現在我們把讀者的意見大略分為兩種：（一）文藝讀物太少，不到水準上，（二）題材未免太平凡，容易犯了老生常談。的確，我們承認這兩個缺點；不過我們在「第一聲」裏，曾經說過，本刊的宗旨是為婦女的呼聲，所以本刊並非純文藝的刊物。這一點要讀者原諒的。因為這一個問題，我們也討論好幾次，在短期內使讀者人人滿意，要將文藝欄擴大起來。

contributors; in Table 1, their names appear in boldface, with those of the identified female members underlined.

Table 1

	Authors (Real name unless their identity has yet to be confirmed by the extant scholarship)
Volume 1 (19)	Yi Wen, Lu Que, Chu Du, <b><u>Guan Lu</u></b> , Jing Di, Wen Li, <b><u>Zhong Shu</u></b> , Yao Jishang, <b>Ding Jingtang</b> , Song Qingfeng, Xiu Juan, Liu Lang, Ru Ye, <b><u>Yang Zhicheng</u></b> , Cao Jia, Da Ji, Bu Jian, Sha Jin, Ji Yuling <sup>8</sup>
Volume 2 (11)	<b><u>Yang Zhicheng</u></b> , Bao Shiyong, Ye Su, Bing Yan, Bo Ren, <b><u>Guan Lu</u></b> , Nameless One, Yu Qie, <b><u>Chen Shanchen</u></b> , Wang Yang, <b><u>Chen Xinhua</u></b> <sup>9</sup>
Volume 3 (14)	<b><u>Guan Lu</u></b> , <b><u>Chen Lin</u></b> , Ye Su, <b><u>Chen Xinhua</u></b> , Tang Minzhi, <b>Ding Jingtang</b> , Xu Zhenduo, <b><u>Li Zuliang</u></b> , <b>Hao Yang</b> , Zhe Ren, Lu Bin, Ouyang Fuzhi, <b><u>Du Shuzhen</u></b> , Bao Shiyong <sup>10</sup>
Volume 4 (3)	Yu Qie, Xin Guo Feng, <b><u>Du Shuzhen</u></b> <sup>11</sup>

Building on Tu's foundational research, this essay considers the first volume of *Women's Voices* and ask two main questions: First, how do the published stories reify Tamura's editorial principles and the feminist character of *Women's Voices*? Second, what was Tamura's mentoring style and possible influence on the contributing authors? In order to address these questions, I will introduce three stories that, in my opinion, represent the "literature" column of *Women's Voices* and are reflective of Tamura's mentoring philosophy, namely "The Heart of Youth" (*Qingnian xin* 青年心), "The Story of A'meng" (*A'meng de gushi* 阿萌的故事), and "The Autumn Wave" (*Qiuchao* 秋潮).

"The Heart of Youth," published in the sixth issue, was awarded the second prize in the first short-story contest organized by *Women's Voices* and received Tamura's special remark in the "afterword" of the sixth issue.

<sup>8</sup> 以文, 路鵲, 初犢, **關露**, 靜蒂, 文黎, **鐘恕**, 姚吉上, 丁景唐, 宋清風, 秀娟, 柳琅, 如也, **楊志誠**, 艸段, 達祭, 步建, 沙金, 籍雨玲

<sup>9</sup> **楊志誠**, 鮑士用, 葉甦, 冰燕, 波人, **關露**, 無名氏, 予旦, **陳燿忱**, 望洋, **陳新華**

<sup>10</sup> **關露**, 陳林, 葉甦, **陳新華**, 唐敏之, 丁景唐, 徐振鐸, 李祖良, 號羊, 哲人, 魯賓, 歐陽英之, **杜淑貞**, 鮑士用

<sup>11</sup> 予旦, 新楓風, **杜淑貞**

Now it is also necessary to note that the second prize work ‘The Heart of Youth,’ although its writing was not very mature, was from a sixteen-year-old child. (*Nüsheng* no.6, 44)<sup>12</sup>

The protagonists are a young woman called Zhu Geli and her lover Li Muming. Upset with the patriarchal family and her arranged marriage, Geli runs away from home, giving up her privileged life. She manages to find a job as a Chinese teacher at a junior high school and expresses her aspirations through the play “The Heart of Youth” while devoting herself to her job to realize her social values. Together with the efforts of her lover, they break free from the bonds of their families. Eventually, Geli inherits a fortune from her father, who unexpectedly passed away, and lives happily with Muming from that time forward.

Undoubtedly, Geli embodies the “new woman” ideal who is intellectually outstanding. She is brave enough to rebel against the patriarchal marriage system and refuse to be objectified as a “gift” between two patriarchal families in a Levi-Straussian sense. Meanwhile, the story also reveals the institutionalized subordination of women by comparing the different levels of difficulties experienced by Muming and Geli in terms of the resistance from the patriarchy and the cost of obtaining a free life when confronted by an arranged marriage.

However, the flaw in the “new woman” narrative is also obvious. Stories like “The Heart of Youth,” with protagonists from traditional bourgeois family backgrounds, feature an idealistic ending and obscure the realistic adversity faced by Chinese women from lower social strata. Consequently, in the middle of the first volume, Tamura expressed her dissatisfaction with the overflow of such contributions and called for works with a more realistic style. In the “afterword” of the sixth issue, Tamura noted that “we warmly welcome submissions from our readers, but we want them to be more reflective of the real life,”<sup>13</sup> and continued in the seventh issue to urge the readers to “write less about the soft matters of ‘sitting behind closed doors at home’ and focus more on things related to the real lives of women.”<sup>14</sup>

As a result, in the latter half of the first volume, the number of stories such as “Sister Yun” (*Yunjie* 芸姐, the tenth issue), “She Is Pathetically

<sup>12</sup> 現在還要聲明一聲，第二名徵文「青年心」雖在文字上不很成熟，但是一個十六歲的孩子寫的；*Nüsheng* no. 6, 44.

<sup>13</sup> 我們非常歡迎讀者的來稿，不過稿中希望多多寫一些關於現實生活的東西；*Nüsheng* no. 6, 44.

<sup>14</sup> 少寫「閉門家中座」的柔軟的事情，多寫一些與實際的婦女生活有關的東西；*Nüsheng* no. 7, 44.

Cowardly” (*Ta nuoruo de kelian* 她懦弱得可憐, the tenth issue), “I Pity Her” (*Wo lianmin ta* 我憐憫她, the eleventh issue), and “The Story of A’meng” (*A’meng de gushi* 阿萌的故事, the twelfth issue) that depicted low-class women’s miseries increased significantly.

“The Story of A’meng” features a female character named A’meng who is raised as a child bride and endures difficult days with the belief that her husband working in Shanghai would give her a good life. Thanks to her encounter with the first-person narrator, a girl from the city, A’meng begins to attend night school, and her talent surprises the teachers. However, she is talked out of receiving an education and again relies on the hope that her husband will provide for her survival. Ultimately, she is abandoned by her husband and dies of illness in despair. The pattern of depicting a child bride’s hopeless life resonates with another story published in the 11th issue of the third volume, “Beside the River Lou” (*Loujiangpan* 婁江畔), and together, these stories demonstrate the impossibility of rural women who suffer inhumane treatment escaping the brutality of patriarchal oppression.

Although stories with a tragic ending dominated the rest of the first volume after Tamura’s announcement made in the sixth and seventh issues, the only novella of this volume, “The Autumn Wave” (*Qiuchao* 秋潮, serialized from the 10th to the 14th issue) which is also the sole prize-winning work in the first novel contest organized by *Women’s Voices*, stands out with its tragic but hopeful ending. The female protagonist, Yan Jingyue, is a gifted writer, intelligent and thoughtful, who lives in a patriarchal family and constantly suffers from poor physical and mental health due to long-term familial oppression. Encouraged by Teacher Huang, she devotes herself to a play called “My Way” to raise money for charity but learns in secret that her parents intend to suspend her education. Betrayed by her male cousin and faced with her father’s rage, she commits suicide in despair and loneliness.

Nevertheless, “The Autumn Wave” does not have a despairing conclusion. The death of Jingyue further awakens her female peers, prompting them to reestablish women’s solidarity and devote themselves to careers that will advance women’s liberation and education. Serialized from the tenth issue of the first volume to the first issue of the second volume by a female member of the Communist Party, Yang Zhicheng, the same author of “The Story of A’meng,” “The Autumn Wave” seems to strike a balance between the idealistic mode manifested in “The Heart of Youth” and the abject hopelessness conveyed by the “realistic” stories with “The Story of A’meng” as the representative.

Going back to the editorial principles Tamura made clear in the inaugural issue—"voices of women, voices for women, and voices by women"—one can see that the published stories demonstrate the voices of women from different social strata with immensely different access to resources clashing with the patriarchal society. They also reveal women's institutionalized subordination and the significance of women's education, female role models, and the (re)establishment of women's solidarity and community. In this sense, the first two principles of the founding statement can be regarded as achieved. However, one needs to ask: what about "voices by women"?

As mentioned before, Tu Xiaohua has identified many undercover members of the Communist Party among contributors to the "literature" column. Ding Jingtang, a male undercover member of the Party who published extensively in *Women's Voices*, recalled that not only did he use different pennames and borrow those of his female colleagues to submit poetry and fiction, but he also appealed to his fellow Party members and liberal teenagers with relatively high literary attainment to proactively contribute to *Women's Voices* with the hope of turning the magazine edited and published by the Japanese colonists into a front to disseminate anti-Japanese ideology.<sup>15</sup> Combined with the fact revealed by Table 1 that the undercover members of the Communist Party account for approximately half of the contributing authors of the "literature" column, it is evident that the "apolitical" feminist literary space that Tamura intended to make for Chinese women was severely complicated by the wrestling of political forces. The ultimate complexity of this feminist project also prompts one to contemplate the issue of authenticity of the "women's voices" conveyed through the stories: Despite Tamura's obvious preference for a "realistic" style, to what extent do these stories represent the situations Chinese women were put in in the 1940s? And to what extent are the feminine experiences depicted in the stories altered by the revolutionary sentiment and communistic ideology due to the participation or "infiltration" of figures like Ding Jingtang?

That being said, these questions do not negate Tamura's translingual efforts to carve out a feminist literary space during the wartime environment. Facing Tamura's preference for female contributors, male members of the Communist Party who hoped to get their works published were pressured to adopt feminine pseudonyms, reverting the conventional gender dynamics in which female writers throughout history were only able to get their works published by assuming masculine pseudonyms.

---

<sup>15</sup> Tu Xiaohua, *Shanghai lunxian shiqi Nüsheng zazhi yanjiu*, 54.

Moreover, Tamura reduced obstacles for women to enter the male-dominant literary world by adopting a selection standard equal to both renowned writers and amateurs.

There are no specific restrictions for the selection of manuscripts for this magazine. As long as the submission is innovative in thought and fluent in writing, it will be eligible for selection. Whether the author is a well-known writer or a literary lover new to writing, all have an equal opportunity to be chosen. (*Nüsheng* no.4, 36.)<sup>16</sup>

As noted by Tu (53) as well, compared to the major literary journals in Japanese-occupied Shanghai, such as *Wanxiang* 萬象 and *Tiandi* 天地 that relied on a fixed group of contributors with their names already established, *Women's Voices* adopted a more inclusive and newbie-friendly stance and provided aspiring female writers with more opportunities to enter the literary world in Shanghai that had been dominated originally by male writers before the Japanese occupation.

Furthermore, despite the difficult political and financial conditions in wartime, Tamura attempted to create a financially sustainable environment for women to continue their literary production by offering comparatively higher pay for the selected contributions and monetary awards for prize-winning stories. As Ding Jingtang and Shen Ji recalled, the remuneration of selected submissions offered by *Women's Voices* was relatively high compared to those more well-known magazines (Tu 40). In addition, the first literary contest for short stories awarded the first place with 300 yuan and the second with 200 yuan, which was increased to 2,000 yuan for the first place and 1,000 yuan for the second place in the second literary contest intended for novels.<sup>17</sup> Considering the fact that the annual subscription fee for *Women's Voices* was merely 15 yuan,<sup>18</sup> it is reasonable to speculate the significance of the financial support provided by Tamura to the contributing female writers in such an economically difficult time.

Tamura's intent to create a financially sustainable environment for women's writing reminds one of her own financial struggles in the early stage of her literary trajectory. Since her marriage to Tamura Shōgyo (1874–1948), also a disciple of Kōda Rohan, the couple were caught in

<sup>16</sup> 本誌的選稿，並無什麼限制，只要來稿的造意新穎，文筆流暢，便有當選的資格了。至於作者是否成名的作家，或是初試寫作的文藝研究者，都有同等的被選機會。

<sup>17</sup> See *Nüsheng* no. 2, 40; *Nüsheng* no. 7, 44.

<sup>18</sup> The annual subscription fee was 11 yuan when the second issue was published, but rose to 15 yuan with the seventh issue.



constant argument because of their financial hardships. In 1911, Tamura was half-forced by her husband to participate in the novel contest organized by Osaka Asahi Newspaper and eventually won a 2,000-yen monetary award with the novella “Resignation” (*Akirame*), which largely eased the financial difficulty in her household (Odaira and Naitō 8–9). Tamura’s identity as a female professional writer and the personal experience of struggling between literary pursuits and financial difficulties possibly influenced her way of treating female writers of younger generations.

In conclusion, by looking into the fiction published in the “literature” column of *Women’s Voices*, I argue that the selected works in the “literature” column successfully reified Tamura’s feminist editorial principles. On the one hand, the selected stories depict the voices of women from different social strata and with different levels of resources to resist the patriarchy and deliver messages that were imperative for Chinese women’s empowerment and liberation. In this sense, Tamura’s feminist project can be seen as partially achieved. On the other hand, this feminist space that was supposed to serve aspiring women writers was complicated by the wrestling of political forces. It is hard to tell if the massive contribution of the undercover members of the Communist Party lifted the overall quality of the “literature” column or reduced the supposedly multifarious space reflective of voices of women from diversified backgrounds into a monolithic one. Nevertheless, as a rare case of female literary mentorship, Tamura’s efforts to carve out a feminist literary space in the shade of war, open up the entrance for aspiring women writers, and create a financially sustainable environment for contributing authors demonstrate the idiosyncrasy of Tamura’s female mentorship and her identity as one of the earliest female professional authors in modern Japanese literary history.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Chen Qingsheng. *Kangzhan shiqi de Shanghai wenxue*. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1995.
- Kurosawa Ariko. “Toka zengo no Tamura Toshiko: Toshiko etsu shokan nikki o megutte.” *Nihon bungaku shiyō* 38 (1987): 12–18.
- Mu Dan. “Tamura Toshiko toiu zasshi henshūchō: Josei keisai Miyazawa Kenji ‘Chūmon no ōi ryōriten’ no yakuwari.” *Kokubungaku kō* 246 (2020): 1–10.
- Odaira Maiko and Naitō Chizuko. *Tamura Toshiko*. Tokyo: Hitsuji shobō, 2014.

- Odaira Maiko. *Nazoru koto, kirisaku koto*. Tokyo: Ibunsha, 2023.
- Tu Xiaohua. *Shanghai lunxian shiqi Nüsheng zazhi yanjiu*. Beijing: Zhongguo chuanmei daxue chubanshe, 2014.
- Tang Yiduo. “Zhanzheng jiafeng zhong de ‘xin nüxing.’” PhD diss., East China Normal University, 2013.
- Watanabe Sumiko. “Satō (Tamura) Toshiko shinron.” *Daitō bunka daigaku kiyō jinbun kagaku* 44 (2006): 105–119.
- Wu Peichen. “Shanghai jidai (1942–45) no Satō (Tamura) Toshiko to Chūgoku josei sakka Kan Ro: Chūgokugo josei zasshi Josei o megutte.” *Hikaku bungaku* 45 (2003): 125–139.
- Yamazaki Makiko. “Tamura (Satō) Toshiko kara Zuo Junzhi e, senjika Shanghai Josei ni okeru shinshō: Watashi tachi no koe no yukue.” *Ajia yūgaku* 205 (2017): 200–213.
- Zhang Bei. “Zasshi Josei toiu ba: Chūgoku kyōsantō chika tōin Chō Keitō no katsudō o chūshin ni.” *Kokubungaku kō* 247 (2020): 17–30.
- Zhang Bei. “Senjika no Shanghai ni okeru Tamura Toshiko no koe: Zasshi Josei no shinshō o megutte.” *Kindai bungaku shiron* 58 (2020): 1–15.