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The Paradox of Gender among West China Missionary Collectors, 1920-1950

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Abstract
During the turbulent years between the Chinese nationalist revolution of 1911 and the communist victory of 1949, a group of missionaries lived and worked in West China whose social gospel theologies led to unusual identification with Chinese. Among the regular social actors in their lives were itinerant “curio men” who, amidst the chaos of feuding warlords, gathered up the heirlooms of the deposed Manchurian aristocracy and offered these wares for sale on the quiet and orderly verandahs of the mansions inside the missionary compounds of West China Union University. Although missionary men and women often collected the same types of Chinese antiquities, these became variously specimens, fine arts, commodities and household effects because their collecting practices were framed within different cultural and gendered domains of value. The scientific and connoisseurial male-gendered collecting paradigms often bolstered the anti-imperialist Chinese nationalist modernities of the Republican state. They were therefore paradoxically at odds with female-gendered collecting paradigms that drew in part upon feminist discourses of capitalist consumerism. Coupled with residual ideals of domesticity and philanthropy, these fluid female discourses resonated with emergent Chinese New Woman modernities and inspired missionary women in creative bicultural identity projects.

Résumé
Durant les années turbulentes entre la révolution chinoise de 1911 et la victoire communiste de 1949, un groupe de missionnaires vécut et travailla en Chine occidentale ; leur théologie du christianisme social les amena à une identification inhabituelle avec la population chinoise. Parmi les acteurs sociaux de leurs vies se trouvaient des « vendeurs de bibelots » itinérants qui, au milieu du chaos résultant des combats entre seigneurs de guerre, réunirent

* I am grateful to members of the many West China missionary families whose participation has been invaluable to this study. I also wish to thank Sarah Cheang, Jeff Kyong-McCain and two anonymous reviewers for Social Science and Missions for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper. All errors and omissions remain my own.
le patrimoine de l’aristocratie manchoue déchue et faisaient le tour des vérandas calmes et ordonnées des maisons dans l’enceinte missionnaires de la West China Union University pour y vendre leurs marchandises. Même si missionnaires hommes et femmes collectionnaient souvent les mêmes types d’antiquités chinoises, le destin de ces biens variait, passant du statut d’échantillon à celui d’objet d’art, de marchandise ou d’objet ménager, parce que les pratiques de collection renvoyaient à des systèmes de valeur différents en fonction de la culture ou du genre. Les paradigmes masculins de collection qui répondaient à des critères scientifiques et d’amateurs éclairés mettaient souvent en avant la modernité nationaliste et anti-impérialiste chinoise de l’état républicain. Ils étaient en conséquence paradoxalement en désaccord avec les paradigmes féminins de collection qui se basaient, eux, en partie sur des discours féministes de consumérisme capitaliste. Associés à des idéaux résiduels de domesticité et de philanthropie, les discours féminins faisaient écho à la modernité émergente de la Nouvelle Femme Chinoise et ils furent une source d’inspiration pour les femmes missionnaires en quête d’un projet identitaire biculturel créatif.

Keywords
gender, collecting, museums, modernity, nationalism, New Woman, West China Union University

Mot-clés
genre, collection, musées, modernité, nationalisme, Nouvelle Femme Chinoise, West China Union University

Introduction

Missionaries in various regions of the world collected cultural artifacts while on active duty in the mission field. Some scholars have argued persuasively that in doing so certain missionaries acted, consciously and unconsciously, as agents of colonial exploitation. These missionaries’ collecting played a central role in processes of culture change in which the loss of cultural heritage can be directly related to the loss of indigenous political power. In such cases, missionaries’ complicity in cultural imperialism is clear. Their purpose for being there, after all, was to convert “others” to their beliefs and practices, a process which inherently destroys

indigenous culture. In the mission field of West China, however, forces within Chinese society propelled Chinese culture on a modernization course that intersected with missionary goals. Missionary men and women from many different Protestant denominations and nationalities came to Chengdu, Sichuan province, to teach and work at the West China Union University (WCUU). The interdenominational structure of this institution was rare at the time, and proved to be a fertile ground for cross-cultural communication, collaboration and transformation. WCUU was the focal point for a broader community of Protestant missionaries stationed in educational, medical and other institutions in Chongqing and rural villages throughout the region. Missionaries stationed in these Sichuan missions not only witnessed, but experienced firsthand the traumatic historic events that marked China’s path to political independence. They also had a hand in the historic processes through which Chinese culture and society were refigured into modernity. This article explores the exchange of ideas, beliefs, social customs and material culture that was integral to this cross-cultural encounter in particular relation to missionaries’ collecting cultures in which men and women enacted and interpreted collecting practices within gendered domains of value. As such, it responds to Arif Dirlik’s call to historicize capitalist modernity and to identify alternative modernities.  

Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism describes a “discourse of power,” by both Westerners and Chinese, of Euro-American power over Asia. Despite the process of “sympathetic identification” in which participants in this discourse identify with the object of their representations, its “metonymic reductionism” is essentially a distancing strategy. In this respect, Orientalism is an appropriate model for the colonial mode of collecting. In contrast, West China missionary discourse about China includes complex and contradictory reflections on lifetimes of work in and for China. As I shall elaborate, the socio-political context of early twentieth century Sichuan, and the Social Gospel approach of many of the missionary collectors there, underlay differences between their cultures of collecting and

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4) For a description of Social Gospel approaches and a discussion of its application among West China missionaries, see Alvyn Austin, Saving China: Canadian Missionaries in the
the widely accepted interpretation of missionary collecting as colonial exploitation. The local urge to modernize in a political environment that changed from provincialism to competing nationalisms resonated with the primarily medical and educational goals of these Social Gospel missionaries. As Ryan Dunch points out, rather than view these missionaries' influence on Chinese society and culture as “cultural imperialism,” we should recognize that missionaries and Chinese reformers “shared a common frame of reference: a modernist narrative of world history, according to which ‘China’ … had to be ‘liberated’ from its past and take its place in a world order of nation-states through a process of political, economic, technological, and social ‘development.’”

In this Chinese nationalism project, however, male and female missionaries were positioned differently. The emergence of the New Woman globally during this period accorded in some respects with the democratizing modernization processes in which missionaries and Chinese were collaborating more generally. Simultaneously, however, the Woman’s Movement appropriated capitalist consumerism as a mechanism for constructing female identities in the public realm. Thereby consumer capitalism was instrumental in the liberation of women. This strategy clashed with the class struggle against capitalism that played out in the normative public male realm. Because collecting is a consumer activity, this historical paradox between class and gender liberation had profound implications for gendered differences in collecting cultures.

As Margo Gewurtz demonstrated, women missionaries suffered low status in the church even as they embodied emancipation and worked towards that of Chinese women. There were two classes of missionary women. The Women’s Missionary Society (WMS) employed paid single
women who had leadership roles in mission fields almost exclusively dealing with other women. Married missionary women undertook professional occupations without official assignments from their home missions, and without pay. As a consequence, the vast majority of the work they performed was not documented in the official records of their churches. Rather, indications of their activities can be found only in obscure publications of the missionary community, in their own diaries and letters, in photographs, and in artifacts. Many of these sources, however, remain in the private collections of their offspring. Museum curators typically accept only items that meet standards of “scientific” and “artistic” merit. This selection process has virtually eliminated the public record of women’s missionary economic development programs in embroidery production, as well as that of the modification of Chinese heritage textiles for personal use.

Anti-materialist values in both traditional and progressive Christian theology posed moral challenges to male collecting. In the particular historical environment of Nationalist West China, however, male collectors circumvented these objections by framing their collecting practices within the standards of scientific and connoisseurial discursive practices rather than religious ones. Anti-materialist ethics also made collecting problematic for the WMS women because they too purchased “curios” with money from their own salaries. Yet, the focus of their missions on Chinese women’s emancipation framed their collecting activities in light of economic development programs that produced goods for female consumers in

9) Access to these sources has influenced my research questions and theoretical approaches. Family collections and oral narratives yield quite different information and perspectives than I found in museums and archives. Starting from museum records, for example, one would not know the extent of missionary women’s collecting because the donor files list only the missionary men or the missionaries’ sons and daughters. For a similar case in which the photographic record was crucial to recovering the biography of a missionary, see Gewurtz, “Looking for Jean Dow.”
Western societies. Within missionary society’s gendered domains of value they also shared in common missionary wives’ domestic context of collecting as an aspect of their duties in household management. Missionary wives undertook these duties with their husband’s salaries. In contrast to their female relatives and friends “at home,” Chinese cultural artifacts were often the only purchases that they were able to make personally. Because marketing is a defining feature of Chinese male roles, they necessarily relied on male servants for their marketing needs. By collecting within the rapidly changing and largely unmonitored framework of capitalist consumerism in domestic economies, both classes of missionary women engaged in creative identity projects that expressed their life experiences at the juncture of class, race, gender and modernity.

West China Missionaries’ Culture of Collecting in the Context of Chinese Nationalism

The Social Gospel West China missionaries were dedicated to a mission of social and technological transformation and modernization in which religious evangelism played only a minor role. Due to this theological orientation, as well as their precarious position as foreigners in China, the phenomenon of collecting based on the simple exchange of “fetishes” for bibles observed in other mission fields did not apply to them. During the period before the Boxer Rebellion and the 1911 Nationalist Revolution, however, there were a few notable exceptions. The well known Bishop William White, for example, began his collecting career by noting the displeasure of potential converts after a frenzy of religious fervor burning the surrendered religious paraphernalia of converts. After the next conversion

11) John Munro, Beyond the Moon Gate: A China Odyssey, 1938-1950, Adapted from the Diaries of Margaret Outerbridge (Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 1990), p.121; William Willmott interview.
12) Susan Rigdon, “Communism or the Kingdom”; Jeff Kyong-McCain, “Making Chengdu ‘The Kingdom of God as Jesus Conceived It’: The Urban Work of West China Union University’s Sociology Department”, Social Science and Missions Vol.23 No.2 (2010), pp. 165-9.
ceremony he kept the idols and other religious items. For the Social Gospel West China missionaries during the period between 1920 and 1950, however, the main impact of their missionary vocation on their collecting practices was that it embedded them in inland China for substantial periods of time, and their theology led them to support Chinese nationalism. Although there is extensive literature on collecting in the context of colonialism, there is very little discussion of collecting cultures within nationalist/modernist frameworks. Recent work on West China missionary David Crockett Graham is the only work I know of that discusses Westerners living, working and collecting within foreign nationalist/modernist frameworks. Because identity formation is inherent in both collecting practices and nationalism, I suggest that the nationalist framework of the West China missionaries resulted in gendered differences in collecting identity projects because there were gendered differences in nationalist modernities.


Elsewhere I developed a set of criteria for the differences between colonial and nationalist collecting cultures which can be usefully applied to gain an understanding of nationalist collecting culture in West China.\(^{18}\) In colonial collecting culture, objects “functioned as souvenirs and trophies of conquest” which were displayed and discussed in private venues and exclusive social circles in the “home” nation of the collector. In nationalist collecting culture, however, objects served the need of nation-states to produce an educated public that could “reproduce the shared medium of culture through which the state binds its citizens and sustains its industrial production.”\(^{19}\) Nationalist identities are created by appropriating a nation's indigenous ‘Others’ into its ‘Self,’ thereby highlighting its unique identity in relation to other nation-states.\(^{20}\) This process is accomplished in part by the creation of public educational institutions such as museums and schools, which teach citizens the symbolic structure of national identity.\(^{21}\) As a corollary to public education the democratizing influences of capitalist consumerism enable citizens to participate in national identity through “possessive individualism,” that is, the individual self created through the possession of accumulated property and goods.\(^{22}\)

To be sure, during the height of colonial control prior to the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 and the Nationalist Revolution of 1911 there were missionaries in China who fit the colonial model precisely. The British missionary John Henry Gray amassed a collection of Chinese artifacts during his residence in Canton in the 1850s and 1860s which he displayed at world’s fairs and other public European venues during the 1870s and 1880s.

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These exhibitions were organized into themes such as “Engines of Torture” which demonstrated the barbarism of contemporary China, akin to that in historic Britain, in contrast with the progressive justice of contemporary Britain. This “othering of the Chinese subjects” facilitated touristic spectacle of mock executions and consumption of Chinese artifacts as tourist souvenirs.\textsuperscript{23} In the 1880s, Robert and Mary Jane Davidson pioneered the first Quaker mission in Chongqing. During their forty years of residence in Sichuan, they likewise accumulated a substantial collection of Chinese artifacts. In an 1892 report, Robert wrote that he trusted that the sight of the idols he sent to England would “give further encouragement to all who pray for China and the little band of Friends working there.”\textsuperscript{24} This classic “othering” strategy likewise emphasizes the essential difference between Christianity and Chinese religions.

In contrast with what occurred in the majority of colonial situations, missionaries in China prior to the nationalist revolution of 1911 frequently wore Chinese dress.\textsuperscript{25} Although Carol Chin suggests that these missionaries were “only playing” at Chinese identities,\textsuperscript{26} I suggest this dress practice was both serious and complex. Whereas Alvyn Austin states that the adoption of Chinese dress revealed theological beliefs, his own data reveals more varied factors at work, including differences between coastal and inland penetration of foreigners and shifting political currents.\textsuperscript{27} At least a few of these missionaries regarded it as a necessary evil to get the job done.
in a hostile anti-foreign environment, one which they immediately discarded in 1911. Whereas Bessie Lutley shared this view when she donned Chinese dress upon first arriving in Shanghai in 1893, a few years later she and her groom chose to wear a “cashmere ‘Sanza’” and scholar’s gown for their wedding in Tientsin. This suggests that some missionaries embraced particular elements of Chinese dress in their personal lives. The Davidsons wore Chinese dress on tour in England while on furlough in 1895 to gather support for their West China mission. While there, they sold to Frederick Horniman a collection of Chinese artifacts consisting of “338 ‘specimens,’ which were listed and described in ... a ‘Special Catalogue’”. Since Horniman collected to some extent according to scientific principles, maintained a public museum and sponsored public lectures, the Davidsons were thereby participating in the transformation of collecting culture from colonialist “curiosity cabinets” filled with trophies of personal conquest to the public and educational culture of ethnographic typologies more characteristic of the nationalist collecting model. The evolutionary framework of ethnography in which the “savage other” provided the counterfoil for the progress of the “civilized self” justified the colonial plunder of colonized peoples’ material culture. The savage/civilized opposition that formed the basis of this Social Darwinism, however, can also be interpreted as a byproduct of modernity, which is itself linked to nationalism. In this respect, colonialism and nationalism co-existed in

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28) Austin, China's Millions, pp. 67-8, 127; Brandt, Massacre in Shansi, p.65; Stursberg, The Golden Hope, p.85.


complex ways in the contexts of international and internal relations. For this reason, the question of the physical and ideological location of collecting identity projects, and even of the collections themselves, becomes critical to selecting the appropriate framework(s) in which to understand collecting cultures.

The collecting careers of the Canadian Presbyterian minister James M. Menzies and the Anglican Bishop William White illustrate this point. They both entered the Honan mission field in 1910. 34 Four years later, Menzies was “shown some dragon bones by local children; he recognized them as being the same as the bones he had seen in the Peking medicine shops.” 35 Not long after, he discovered the remains of the capital of the Shang Dynasty in the nearby “Wastes of Yin” and began his lifelong career of collecting, documenting, translating and analyzing oracle bones upon which he found the earliest known form of Chinese writing. The Mission Board viewed his activities with ambivalence, denying and granting academic postings at various critical points in his career. As Linfu Dong commented, “Menzies was a scientist consciously assembling a scholar’s collection for future generations”. 36 His collecting practices were “scholarly” in several respects. First, he purchased mainly broken bones that had no commercial value. He distrusted antique dealers, instead relying directly on local farmers who found the specimens in situ and brought them to him. This practice not only circumvented the rampant fraud in the antique business, but also allowed him to express Christian charity by supporting the local peasants while satisfying science by acquiring more detailed and accurate provenance. Second, he drew and made stencils of his specimens. This scientific practice was crucial to the continuance of his work when, during the 1927 evacuation, Bolsheviks destroyed his specimen collection and library. His drawings and stencils were saved, however, and later published. After his return to Anyang in 1931, he collaborated with Chinese

archaeologists excavating the site and thereby made a new collection of oracle bones which he brought with him to his new post as a professor at Cheeloo University. He repeatedly refused offers by the Royal Ontario Museum’s (ROM) director, Charles Currelly, to sell his oracle bones or to act as a purchasing agent. His oracle bone collection remained in China when he left the mission field in 1936. Insofar as Menzies’ scholarly collecting supported rural peasants and was oriented towards the work of Chinese scholars, it can be cast within the framework of Chinese nationalism within both international and national contexts.

Bishop White met Charles Currelly on his Toronto furlough in 1924, precisely when railroad construction was daily unearthing invaluable archaeological finds in Honan. Since there were no laws forbidding the export of cultural heritage until 1930, this constellation of circumstances put him in the right place at the right time to collect Chinese artifacts. Between 1924 and 1934, when he left China, he collected prodigiously for the ROM, accumulating the most important collection of Chinese art outside of China. White established a connection with a Buddhist antique dealer in Kaifeng where he was posted who enlisted a network of secret “spies and informants” who found archaeological objects for him, sometimes through looting. Since he did not visit the sites in situ, however, he had to rely upon the advice of his dealer to authenticate these objects. At times he purchased items from families whose fortunes had turned for the worse, and “kept his eye on” ailing wealthy individuals whose surviving family members might be persuaded to part with objects. The type of artifacts he sought also differed from Menzies’ specimens. White was interested in imperial history; in particular, ancient bronzes found in royal tombs and religious sites.

There was some controversy about the ethics of White’s collecting frenzy even beyond the church officials’ general disapproval of missionary collecting. On the one hand, it was a massive salvage operation to save Chinese heritage at a time when both state modernization projects and rampant

bandits threatened to destroy it. On the other hand, White’s zealous and sometimes unscrupulous means for obtaining and exporting heritage items appear exploitative. Upon retirement from the China mission, White founded the East Asian program at the University of Toronto and became the first curator of East Asia at the ROM. For a period Menzies was employed under him as a research assistant, a situation that resulted in conflict between the two.\textsuperscript{40} Within the international context, White’s collecting practices exhibit traits of colonial collecting culture insofar as the artifacts and locus of identity were in Canada. In the national context, however, the project can be seen in the framework of a nascent Canadian nationalism because his goal was to bring the collection to a public museum in Canada, thereby establishing a legitimate place for Canadian scholarship in the international arena.

Several scholars have pointed to the degree of indigenous agency in missionary and colonial contexts of collecting as a measure of imperial impact.\textsuperscript{41} Bishop White’s example alerts us to complications in any simple formulation for measuring indigenous agency because there are competing interests and factions within any given society. Nevertheless, the modes and networks of exchange, as well as the contexts of consumption, can reveal whether or not collecting practices implied colonial exploitation. Much like Menzies’ peasant suppliers, who came to him with specimens, the West China missionaries acquired the vast majority of the artifacts in their collections on their own front porches. Unlike the urban Chinese “antiquities” market, which was based on archaeological finds resulting from industrial growth such as the building of railways, canals and highways,\textsuperscript{42} the interior market consisted mainly of arts and artifacts cast off by financially stressed and/or culturally transformed members of the Chinese aristocracy and peasantry. Mainly due to political upheavals

\textsuperscript{40} Dickson, \textit{The Museum Makers}, pp. 74-85; Walmsley, \textit{Bishop in Honan}, pp. 140-44; Stursberg, \textit{The Golden Hope}, pp. 92-5.


\textsuperscript{42} Stursberg, \textit{The Golden Hope}, p.92; Austin, \textit{Saving China}, p.225.
and instability, these Chinese flooded the market with luxury goods ranging from Tang Dynasty bronzes to Qing Dynasty dragon robes at inexpensive prices throughout the entire first half of the twentieth century. In contrast to ancient Chinese archaeological artifacts, which Western markets classified as "art," Qing dynasty textiles, ceramics, carvings, and furniture often circulated in Europe and America as household commodities in the department store market. In China, however, they formed an integral part of the familiar milieu that was the missionaries' permanent abode.

Interviewees who observed firsthand the acquisition process of missionaries in Chengdu remembered Chinese itinerant “curio-men” who, carrying sacks of artifacts flung over their shoulders, visited missionary homes around lunch time several times a week. The gatekeepers let them in the courtyard while the family was dining. They would then open their sacks, which were actually just large pieces of cloth tied into a bundle, lay this out on the large verandahs, and spread out their wares on it (Figure 1). At times there were two or three of these curio men at once. Then a bargaining session would ensue in which each party attempted to outwit the opponent. The curio men were well versed in the tastes of both their male and female missionary clients’ and took great pains to procure the especial items they favored. This market was driven by a considerable degree of indigenous agency among the commodities’ former owners and the itinerant sellers who sought out their missionary customers at their homes. Although some of the missionaries actively engaged the itinerant sellers to seek out particular items, most of them were fairly passive in this process, rarely leaving their own front yards to acquire the artifacts. Indigenous agency even played a role at the consumer end on occasion. For example, the infant Joy Willmott’s Chinese nursemaid purchased a coveted embroidered collar for her when her father refused, saying it was too frivolous. On other occasions, however, Christian charity influenced

44) W. Willmott and William Skinner interviews; Transcript of “Interview with Mr. L. E. Willmott,” August 15, 1974, p.1, MOA-UBC Kilborn Collection Accession File 37. Also see Munro, Beyond the Moon Gate, pp. 22, 220.
missionary women to purchase even “frivolous” items from the curio men. This was one of the few practical means by which they could help avert poverty without either creating an unrealistic expectation of “free hand-outs,” which would financially ruin them, or cause impoverished Chinese to “lose face,” a social crime self-respecting Chinese would want to avoid at all costs.\(^\text{46}\)

\(^{45}\) Photograph with caption, “A gift of love from Kwang Da-niang” (Willmott Family Papers); Donald Willmott interview.

\(^{46}\) Margaret T. Simkin, \textit{Letters from Szechwan, 1923-1944} (Burnsville, NC, Friend in the Orient Committee, Pacific Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1978), pp. 18-19, 28; Elizabeth Willmott, ed., “Dearest Mother” (Willmott Family Papers); D. Willmott and W. Willmott interviews. Although missionary men may also have had this motivation at times, I have not come across any evidence of it, so I cannot assume one way or the other.
The location of identification is also an important factor. At WCUU, especially after 1928, the missionary community increasingly began to identify with their Chinese colleagues, both the literati and the rising mercantile middle classes. As members of an educated elite, and as educators themselves, members of the WCUU missionary community had a great regard for the uplifting effects of education. For this reason, many of them greatly admired the Confucian and monastic scholarly traditions in Chinese culture. West China missionary orientation training lasted from one to two years of language and culture instruction. In addition to daily lessons with personal tutors, new missionaries enjoyed group outings to Chinese heritage sites and lectures on Chinese culture by both foreign and Chinese experts. Once settled in their mission posts, West China missionaries had ample exposure to Chinese monastic religion during the summer months when almost the entire community retreated to their summer cottages within the ancient monasteries nestled in the nearby mountains. Although elitist tennis courts carved out of the mountainside made a colonial stamp upon the sacred geography, missionaries’ relations with the monks were friendly, personal and respectful. Theological discussions with the Buddhist monks tended to increase the missionaries’ interest in Chinese philosophy, and several of them became scholars of Chinese art and religion. Missionaries also became enchanted with Chinese classical poetry and some embarked on collaborative translation projects with each other and/or with Chinese colleagues. Moreover, collecting was not unknown among members of the Chinese elite. Several missionaries mention visits to the homes of wealthy Chinese where every family member had his or her own line of artistic endeavor. One of the young men specialized in the collection of jade and another in “good china and pottery from all dynasties.”

49) Katherine Hockin (Chengdu) to “People” (location unknown), Oct. 11th, 1949, United Church of Canada Woman’s Missionary Society fonds, Acc. 1983.058C, Box 66-2, UCCA; Munro, Beyond the Moon Gate, p.200.
Gendered Collecting and Exchange Relations

Because the very definition of collecting often hinges on the “separate” quality of the male mode, that is, removing the exchange and use value of the objects, women’s collecting has often been excluded from the elite social circles and categories of Western culture, not only in historical actuality, but also in theoretical analysis. Case studies also show that even when women collected in male modes, they and their collections were often excluded from the male-dominated public discourses on art and science. In the case of married couples, museums typically record collections under the husband’s name, thereby eliminating the female presence from the history of collecting. Craig Clunas explains that women were excluded from British public discourses on Chinese art because, unless they were ancient and rare, Chinese artifacts were classed in the feminized world of domestic consumption. In this context, Sarah Cheang has drawn attention to the ways in which British consumption of colonial commodities was a form of imperialism that taught consumers about the extent of the British Empire. Insofar as the household became the materialization of individual identity within a network of family relations, the introduction of Western Chinoiserie in the household brought the Empire into the personal “domain.”

Yet, the unique position of the multi-national West China missionaries within the exchange networks of nationalist China provided different lessons and identity projects. In contrast with the glittering aisles of the

Liberty Department Store in London,\textsuperscript{56} the mode of exchange in Sichuan was largely based on bartering in cash and in kind for local products from local vendors. Male servants purchased the vast majority of the missionaries' food and clothing and processed them within the household. Although glamour was frowned upon, missionary women had sporadic access to publications and shopping venues that helped to keep them apace with the changing trends of global fashion.\textsuperscript{57} News and magazines from home, as well as brief stopovers in Shanghai, also kept them apprised of developments within the Euro-American Woman's Movement which appropriated capitalist consumerism as a means to infuse agency in the creation of individualized feminine selves.\textsuperscript{58} Especially after their sojourn in Shanghai in 1927-1928, West China missionary women were also exposed to Chinese social reformers' similar appropriation of capitalist consumerism in print media such as women's journals and Shanghai calendar posters.\textsuperscript{59} Whereas these latter were aimed at Chinese women, their message conveyed the transformative agent of capitalist consumerism: the idea that women can construct their own identities through consumer purchasing. On the WCUU campus missionary women were living their lives in concert with the Chinese women students who embodied the educated Chinese “New Woman.” They were thus equipped with the newfound freedom and power of consumerism and education as means of identity transformation, while poised at the intersection of local and global representations of style in a context that lacked both political stability and corporate marketplaces. This was a powerful combination for the free play of choice and creativity.

Various scholars have interpreted collecting practices within the framework of “possessive individualism,” a socio-cultural phenomenon in which identity is constructed through the possession of material things.\textsuperscript{60} Yet, as Celia Lury points out, the concept of “possessive individualism” does not

\textsuperscript{56} Cheang, “Selling China.”

\textsuperscript{57} Eula C. Lapp, \textit{China Was My University: The Life of Hulda May Carscallen} (Agincourt, Ontario: Generation Press, 1980), pp. 40-1; Munro, \textit{Beyond the Moon Gate}, p.69; D. Willmott interview.

\textsuperscript{58} Finnegans, \textit{Selling Suffrage}, pp. 8-9.

\textsuperscript{59} Ellen J. Laing, \textit{Selling Happiness: Calendar Posters and Visual Culture in Early Twentieth-Century Shanghai} (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2004.)

adequately explain the processes through which the possession of things may become conscious, creative, strategic and experimental identity projects, a process which she calls “prosthetic culture.” Whereas possessive individualism tends to reinforce dominant social categories, prosthetic culture tends to subvert them.  

In contrast to Susan Pearce’s conclusion that there is “not much evidence that people collect in order to subvert the gender roles available to them,” I suggest that possessive individualism may be associated with male-gendered collecting while prosthetic culture may find fuller expression through female-gendered collecting. This is because, as Pearce concluded, the male mode is “intense, specific, separate and serious,” while the female mode is “relational, unemphatic” and integrated with their everyday lives. These differences themselves are due to the public/private dichotomy associated with the gendered social practices of collecting. The “seriousness” of men’s collecting is due to the scrutiny of the public view, in particular its association with museums and other cultural institutions. In contrast, the privacy of the domestic realm, within which the meanings and values of the female mode take form and circulate, allow more room for “play,” albeit play in the serious project of identity transformation.

Male Gendered Scientific Collecting in West China

Among the WCUU men there were both scientific and connoisseurial collectors. These categories derived their meaning from, and referred back to, the social spheres of the “home” nations. Under the public scrutiny of a Christian anti-materialist moral code, male missionary collectors could not risk being perceived as merely accumulating. This meant that their collecting had to display systematic purpose and the objects they collected had to be stripped of exchange and use value. Whether “specimens” or

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“artworks,” men’s collections functioned to advertise their possessors’ discerning, discriminating and distinguishing character, in the realms of science and art, respectively. Display of such character admitted the collector into elite social circles at “home” and in China.

Many of the WCUU professors had genuine archaeological and ethno-graphic interest which extended beyond collecting to documentary photography and academic writing. In 1922, a group of them founded the West China Border Research Society (WCBRS), which brought together mostly amateurs in natural science, archaeology and ethnology for monthly meetings. The society also published a journal for several decades with articles on the tribal groups on the borders of Sichuan province. As scientists in various branches themselves, many of the WCUU male faculty members approached Chinese material culture with an eye to taxonomy and classification akin to professional archaeologists and ethnographers of the time period. Moreover, as Dru Gladney argues, “the representation of the ‘minority’ in China reflects the objectifying of a ‘majority’ nationality discourse”.  

Indeed, Jeff Kyong-McClain and Geng Jing argue that David Crockett Graham, the first curator of the university museum and professor of archaeology at WCUU, was engaged in just such a Chinese nationalist project. Graham was the only professionally trained anthropologist among the WCBRS ethnographers. In addition to studying regional archaeology and ethnography, he had long been collecting biological samples for the Smithsonian Institution. He published several of his ethnographic studies after his return to the United States in 1948. In Sichuan, he also participated in local archaeology projects which were often initiated by public works projects. In a brief 1938 report, Graham wrote that he found a

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67) See for example, D. C. Graham, *The Customs and Religion of the Ch’iang* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, December, 1958.)
Sung dynasty kiln heap at a tomb site near Chongqing. As a result of the influx of over one thousand war refugees to Chongqing, however, “many similar tombs have been destroyed.” He applauded the efforts of Rev. C.B. Rape and Principal Yang of the Chungking Middle School who saved one tomb from destruction and set aside space in the school to begin an archaeological museum. He hoped that “their example [would] be followed by other Chinese and foreigners.”

By 1934, the WCUU museum already had a long history and contained over 53,000 objects (Figure 2). Daniel Sheets Dye, another member of the WCBRS, was one of the founders of this museum. Although a physicist by training, he became well-known for his unique and rare collection of the

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woven belts of Chinese minority peoples and his authoritative work on Chinese lattice designs.\textsuperscript{70} Published in 1937, his lattice research was sponsored by the Harvard-Yenching Institute with which he had a connection. Another Harvard-Yenching scholar, Carl Schuster, stayed with Daniel Dye when he passed through in 1935 on a fieldwork mission of collecting vernacular cross-stitch textiles.\textsuperscript{71} Schuster collected thousands of pieces of antique cross-stitch which he believed were “degenerating” and dying arts. His collecting agenda was narrowly focused by his theory that the designs on these textiles held the key to the evolution of ethnic identity whose global diffusion could be traced much like that of language and race.\textsuperscript{72} He never completed his analysis, however, because he had only time to catalogue his collection before his untimely death in 1969. One can easily picture the two ethnographers, Dye and Schuster, comparing notes on Chinese visual symbolism until the wee hours of the night. Perhaps inspired by Schuster, Dye also collected hundreds of vernacular cross-stitch textiles.\textsuperscript{73} In view of Dye’s extensive notes and correspondence about his collection, it seems likely that he, and not his wife, was the main collector of the couple.\textsuperscript{74} The fact that both men collected textiles, a characteristically female object type, forces us to look beyond the gendering of artifact types. Their collecting agenda appears to have been driven by the “progress” narrative of the social evolutionary framework which accorded with Chinese nationalist modernization programs.

**Male Gendered Connoisseurial Collecting in West China**

Whereas scientific collecting is concerned with the meanings, values and functions of objects in their own cultural contexts, connoisseurial


\textsuperscript{71} Carl Schuster Papers, “China 1935 Travel Notes”, Field Museum of Natural History (FMNH), Acc. 2724.


\textsuperscript{73} Daniel Dye’s artifact collection is mainly housed at the Denison Museum, but he also deposited papers and photographs at Yale University Divinity School.

\textsuperscript{74} D.S. Dye Accession Files, Denison Museum.
collecting focuses on formal aspects of objects in particular relation to the virtuosity of the artist creators. While connoisseurial collecting was more morally ambiguous than was scientific collecting, it attained esteem due to its resting on the principle of “pedigree” common to both Western and Eastern collecting traditions. This concept entailed an “authenticated line of descent, providing for the potential buyer a guarantee of the value of the purchase.” 75 “Pedigree” in the context of West China meant extensive scholarly study on the stylistic and technical features of genres and/or authoritative verification of the archaeological source of the item. In the field of Chinese art, snuff bottles are the quintessential form of the miniature, a visual trope that “draws the viewer’s attention to the maker’s consummate mastery.” 76 This explains their appeal for connoisseurial collectors. 77 The passion of Lewis Walmsley for snuff bottles is proverbial among second generation descendants of missionaries. His fame as collector may be bolstered by the fact that, following in the footsteps of Bishop White, he attained a curatorial position at the ROM upon his return to Canada. Walmsley was artistically inclined and painted Chinese landscapes in the style of the Canadian Group of Seven as a hobby. He also published a book on a renowned Chinese painter. 78 Walmsley’s reputation for scholarly study of Chinese art no doubt contributed to his appointment at the ROM, since his formal education bore no relation to curatorial, ethnographic or archaeological work. Ironically in view of his appointment at the ROM, but totally consistent with connoisseurial collecting, Walmsley’s snuff bottle collection is now dispersed through inheritance and private sales. 79

76) Phillips, Trading Identities, p. 74.
79) Informal interviews with Omar Walmsley, Marion Walker, David Walmsley and Steven Walmsley.
Walmsley was by no means the only snuff bottle connoisseur in Chengdu at the time. Walmsley’s brother-in-law, Dr. Leslie Kilborn, was also a prolific collector. In 1960 he wrote Audrey Hawthorn, former director of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia (MOA-UBC), that he had “about 600” Chinese snuff bottles that he wished to donate. Among the 226 artifacts in his collection at MOA-UBC, fifty-three are snuff bottles. The disparity between the number offered and that taken reminds us of the process of curatorial selection that takes place when artifacts are accessioned into museum collections. Commenting on a number of collections in the MOA-UBC in a 1974 interview, Earl Willmott remarked:

I don't think any of these people, with the possible exception of Dr. Leslie Kilborn, really went at collecting in a kind of concerted organized way and he got so interested in jade snuff bottles that everybody knew he was collecting them and I think the Chinese dealers would come and every new type of bottle that he saw, he would buy....

Roy Spooner, professor of chemistry and Dean of Sciences at WCUU, also developed a passion for snuff bottles. While some of these are now in museum collections, a great many of them are proudly displayed in a special “open storage” display in his son, David Spooner’s, living room. Spooner’s connoisseurship, which David and his wife Rosalie have continued and elaborated, is illustrated by what David described as the “crowning glory” of his father’s snuff bottle collection. David and Rosalie Spooner have removed it from the set of bottles, placed it on a pedestal, and displayed it as a singular item on a side table. They have subsequently collected snuff bottles that they do not consider worthy of membership in their “collection.” These are displayed on the mantle in the family room. Thus, even today, a second generation of connoisseurial collectors embrace the discourses surrounding authenticity that underpinned the interwar Chinese “antiquities” market, corrupt with imitations and fakes, and linked to the commercial fine art market in the West. The role of the Spooners’

80) Someone, possibly Daniel Dye or David Graham, was collecting them for the WCUU Museum (Figure 2).
82) Leslie Earl Willmott interview, MOA-UBC transcript.
connoisseurial collecting activities as an identity project is evident in the fact that they also collect Inuit art to express their Canadian nationalism. The effect of Chinese and Inuit art displayed throughout their domestic space expresses exactly the bicultural identity of the sons and daughters of missionaries who were born and raised in China, and then came to Canada, their “home,” only as teens or adults. The Canada/China foci may also be seen as a metaphor for Rosalie and David’s thoroughly collaborative collecting practices in which female-gendered capitalist consumerism binds seamlessly together with male-gendered connoisseurship in a bicultural identity project.

Female Gendered Domestic Collecting in West China

Whereas removing the exchange and use value of the objects is essential to the definition of masculine collecting modes, the retention of these value systems is characteristic of many of the missionary women’s collections. In fact, their circulation in commercial and domestic economies during these collectors’ lifetimes undoubtedly contributed to the perception of them outside the realms of museums and scholarship. Interestingly, however, women were not the only collectors of Chinese artifacts whose collections circulated in these realms. In the broader context of China missions, the Catholics made a regular practice of purchasing heritage items of varying levels of monetary worth specifically for sale in the gift shop adjacent to their museum in Montréal. Although clearly connoisseurs, Lewis Walmsley and Roy Spooner share traits of female gendered collecting insofar as their collections were thoroughly integrated into their domestic lives. Such “integration” is demonstrated by a degree of intimacy with artifacts and genres that enabled them to make modifications for their own purposes. For example, Roy Spooner made a lamp out of shadow puppets that he probably purchased from the “curio man” and a carved wood stand that he commissioned from local artisans. It is now integral to the décor of David and Rosalie Spooner’s living room (Figure 3).

84) David and Rosalie Spooner interview.
Figure 3. Roy Spooner’s shadow puppet and carved dragon lamp gracing the living room of the David and Rosalie Spooner Ontario home (Photo by Cory Willmott; courtesy of D. and R. Spooner).
Conversely, some of the women missionaries’ collections exhibit some of the characteristics of scientific and/or connoisseurial collecting. They include purposeful series of artifacts which, after their return to North America, missionary women often used in lectures and exhibitions. Many of these collections were donated to museums or sold on the commercial art market in the same manner as those of the men.\textsuperscript{85} Katharine Willmott, for example, collected rank badges, a form of embroidered silk panel on Qing Dynasty imperial robes that served as insignia for civic and military positions. In England, department store marketing laid especial emphasis on items, such as rank badges, associated with the fallen Imperial Court.\textsuperscript{86} The forty-one rank badges in Willmott’s collection at MOA-UBC, however, could possibly embody the principle of “salvage ethnography”. Not only are they members of a systematic series, but Willmott collected them and took them out of China in order to save them from destruction by the People’s Liberation Army. As symbols of the ancient imperial regime they were particularly vulnerable to attack. Elizabeth Johnson, a retired curator of MOA-UBC, recalled that in her Vancouver home Katharine spoke of the rank badges as the most important items in her collection. There is no evidence, however, that while she was yet in China she or anyone else framed these objects in terms of their ethnographic value. Rather, those who observed her purchases frequently mentioned her admiration for the technical “virtuosity” and aesthetic beauty of Chinese artifacts, particularly textiles and porcelain.\textsuperscript{87} Her husband, Earl, remembers that she “loved some of these things as you see, particularly the porcelain and the cross-stitch and the embroideries and things like that.”\textsuperscript{88} In emphasizing her emotional response to aesthetic beauty, these observers framed Willmott’s collecting within the feminine context of capitalist consumption in the domestic economy in which taste was a mark of class, but not of the specialized knowledge of connoisseurship.

In a letter in which she described the visit of an “embroidery man” to their summer cottage on Mount Omei, Willmott herself spoke of the objects in her collection in terms of their use value in a domestic economy.

\textsuperscript{85} Willmott Family Papers; Jack and Lou Mullett interview; W. Skinner interview.
\textsuperscript{86} Cheang, “Selling China”, pp. 6-8.
\textsuperscript{87} Elizabeth Johnson interview.
\textsuperscript{88} E. Willmott, “Dearest Mother.”
Her friends “all rushed down to see the fun,” while she had a “grand time selecting, raving, and ‘jewing’ [bartering] them down.” She passed by a “blue panel” priced at $50 Mexican dollars on account of her daughter’s education fund, although she notes that it would be worth ten times that amount “at home.” Earl bought her a “sweet little kimono though, with butterflies on it.” To her North American friends and family, she cast herself in the feminine roles of recipient of male gifts and discerning consumer, coupled with the stereotypically Chinese and “Jewish” skill of shrewd haggling.

Once objects were brought into the domestic economy, they were to be used to dress the home or family members, but not to be exchanged as commodities that could make money for her daughter’s education fund. Earl Willmott did not condone Katharine’s “curio” collecting. Through the egalitarian lens of his Social Gospel theology, he believed collecting supported the decadence of the overthrown imperial state and corrupt local warlords. Whereas the removal of use and exchange value from scientific and connoisseurial collecting enabled accumulation to be seen in a positive light, the presence of these realms of value in female gendered collecting cast accumulation as extravagance. Interviewees suggest, however, that Willmott, like many of her friends and colleagues, was motivated by Christian charity to purchase items to alleviate poverty through the bargaining process which prevented the recipients from losing face.

In the context of their Chinese missions, these women saw themselves in a similar light as female philanthropists working among the urban poor in the “home” countries. Their position within two cultural worlds enabled them to reconcile, or at least simultaneously uphold, the seemingly conflicting values of capitalist consumerism and reciprocal exchange of North American and West China socio-economic systems respectively.

Willmott was also among a group of missionary women who collected the same types of vernacular cross-stitch embroidery as did Dye and Schuster. The 113 cross-stitch textiles in Kathleen Spooner’s collection at MOA-UBC, for example, testify to her prolific and purposeful collecting practices. Like Carl Schuster and Daniel Dye, all of these women’s

89) K. Willmott (Mt. Omei) to Carrie Dodds Geyer (Ohio), August 4th, 1924 (Willmott Family Papers).
92) Kathleen Spooner Accession File 567, MOA-UBC.
collections include examples of the most prized type of cross-stitch, the bed valances that Chinese women brought with them into marriage as part of their dowries.\footnote{Besides Willmott, West China women missionaries who collected peasant cross-stitch include Bertha Hensman (Ashmolean Museum), Bea Mullett (ROM, Textile Museum of Canada, Costume Museum of Canada and Denison Museum), Mary Collier (Human Ecology Collection, University of Alberta) and Kathleen Spooner (MOA-UBC). I have studied the Mullett, Schuster, Dye, and other Collections in museums, as well as many that remain in the private possession of missionary offspring.} Access to private family collections, however, reveals that the women’s collections also include a high proportion of cross-stitch household linens: runners, pillow cases, tablecloths, placemats, napkins and handkerchiefs, as well as antiquated items such as stocking, handkerchief and glove cases. These textiles are of two kinds: those that missionary women used in their own homes, and those that were made for sale in Europe and America by Chinese women in the embroidery program of the Women’s Missionary Society. During the 1930s, Dr. Irma Highbaugh oversaw an embroidery economic development program at Gin Ling Women’s College in which “dozens of women” were “adapting their old blue-thread patterns to modern use.”\footnote{Munro, Beyond the Moon Gate, p.60. Regrettably, I have not the space here to provide a detailed discussion of these economic development programs.} Schuster visited a similar program in Ichang where the “poor people from the country” were making “ugly colored cross-stitch, bed-spreads, etc.”\footnote{Carl Schuster Papers, “China 1935 Travel Notes”.} Whereas the ethnographer lamented the “degeneration” of the work, missionary women were engaged in adapting it to the aesthetic and functional preferences of Western consumers in order to revive the art while relieving poverty. This complicity in the “contamination” of the “pure” specimen or artwork may explain why Dye and Schuster published studies of vernacular textiles, but both Irma Highbaugh’s and Bertha Hensman’s manuscripts on cross-stitch textiles were never published.\footnote{Irma Highbaugh, “The Family Life Motif in Jenshow Embroideries”, n/d (unpublished manuscript, Willmott Family Papers); Bertha Hensman, “Symbols and Designs in Peasant Blue-Thread Embroideries of West Szechuan”, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1988 (Copy courtesy of Beth Lutley-Leach).} Nor were any of these women collectors ever members of the WCBRS.

Missionary women employed both new and used embroideries in their homes. New embroideries were sometimes commissioned as, for example,
a cross-stitch “banquet cloth” that Ralph Outerbridge commissioned for his wife’s birthday.\textsuperscript{97} Many of the table linens in the Willmott family collection are soiled from use, which demonstrates unequivocally their utilitarian value (Figure 1). Missionary women also modified these antique textiles to repurpose them towards contemporary usages. In this practice they were, perhaps, following that of impoverished Chinese women who recycled family heirloom embroideries to make children’s clothing.\textsuperscript{98} For example, a set of nine placemats in Bea Mullett’s collection was made from the embroidered medallions on bed valances (Figure 4). Perhaps more than Dye and Schuster, missionary women were aware of the local domestic context of these textiles. In repurposing them to domestic use, they expressed identity with local women rather than with the broader Chinese nationalist identity project.

**Domestic Collecting and Performative Identities**

The ways in which the female mode of collecting facilitates prosthetic culture may best be illustrated in the realm of dress, the type of material culture with the most power to express personal and group identity. After 1911, missionary men reverted to Western dress almost exclusively, while missionary women continued to wear Chinese dress for ceremonial occasions. Not coincidentally, the male missionary dress practices coincided with those of their peers in the Chinese educated middle and upper classes. Chinese students and scholars continued to wear the scholar’s gown, while Chinese businessmen adopted the Western suit. For both Western and Chinese men, dress codes were determined by the need to conform to dominant social conventions in the public realm. Thus, Chinese scholars continued to express their exalted position, while global dress provided models for newly emerging Chinese masculine modernities. In most

97) Munro, *Beyond the Moon Gate*, pp. 72-3. Margaret Outerbridge’s diary relates that her husband designed the embroidery pattern of this cloth using conventional phoenix motifs in circulation among the embroiderers. This tablecloth is probably the phoenix motif tablecloth in the Margaret and Ralph Outerbridge Collection at MOA-UBC (Accs. 1458/19).

98) Irma Highbaugh, “The Family Life Motif”.
colonial situations women’s dress continued to express ethnic identity precisely because they were excluded from public political and economic life. In China, however, missionaries and Chinese were mutually engaged in a program of bringing Chinese women into the public domain. Thus,

both Western and Eastern female modernities were fluid and experimental. With new leadership roles arising out of new educational opportunities, identity constructions hinged on both the performance of these new roles and the appropriate dress to signal them. This situation resembled the colonial culture of New Guinea, in which there was “great uncertainty about the mass of social relations”. In this context, dress became “radically performative” insofar as it could “actually make a difference to states of affairs in the world.”

Although Willmott’s collecting clearly did not receive the same respect as did that of Daniel Dye, Lewis Walmsley, and Roy Spooner, her intimate relationship with Chinese material culture enabled her to participate in experiments in dress that helped define the Chinese “New Woman.” As Chinese women ceased to bind their feet and were integrated into public life for the first time, Chinese reformers introduced the idea of androgynous dress. Educated Chengdu women adopted the men’s full length scholars’ gown. In Shanghai, this style combined with the Manchu style long gown and foreign influences in textile design to form the now ubiquitous qipao or cheongsam. Like their female Chinese students, Willmott and other female professors at WCUU adopted the scholars’ gown for everyday casual wear (Figure 1). Willmott explained that these gowns were

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101) Numerous photographs in Willmott, Walmsley/Kilborn and Mullett Family Papers show this trend. For published photographs and discussion of WCUU female scholars’ dress, see Chongjiu Lu, Zhang Liping and Yang Zhenhua, Memory of West China Union University, (Chengdu: Sichuan University Press, 2006), pp. 112-20.
“comfortable for the climate,” but they also raised women’s status. In Western capitalist consumerism, East Asian styles opened opportunities for women to pursue identities based on choice and desire. In Chinese systems of signification, scholars were at the apex of the traditional social hierarchy.

As with the household linens, missionary women collectors also modified the imperial silk embroideries that were readily available at bargain prices. In accord with fashion all over the world, in Chengdu Chinese silk embroidered upper garments were in vogue for social occasions such as afternoon teas and dinner parties. Bea Mullett was well known as a gracious hostess and her social circles included M. Chiang and other highly placed Chinese. Her collection includes not only several kimono-style Chinese robes, but also a qipao and six fitted jackets made from cut-up Han women’s panel skirts (Figure 5). Many missionary women were adept seamstresses themselves, while others relied upon their female Chinese servants who were also expert with the needle, thread and sewing machine. Insofar as these jackets were custom made and worn in China in mixed Western and Chinese company, they bore different signification than exported Chinese garments and chinoisere imitations worn in the West. In Sichuan, the generalized symbolism of Orientalism gave way to the specificity of the symbolic enactment of the made-over Mandarin woman, whose prior “backwardness,” represented by the unchanging tradition of the panel skirt, was literally rearranged into the modernity of a fashionable upper garment that retained its ancient luxury while cutting a figure-enhancing silhouette. This multivalent garment thereby enacted identification with modern Chinese upper class women whose liberation

104) W. Willmott interview.
105) Cheang, “Selling China”, p.3.
107) Mullett interview; also, two photographs in the Walmsley Family Papers show M. Chiang with Harrison and Bea Mullett at one of the latter’s garden parties.
108) One of the jackets is at Denison Museum; the rest are at the Canadian Museum of Costume.
109) Munro, Beyond the Moon Gate, p.87.
Figure 5. Back view of a tailored women’s jacket owned and presumably worn by Bea Mullett which has been modified from a Han women’s silk embroidered panel skirt. The skirts’ side pleats form the sleeves, while the front panels form a decorative motif at the lower back. (Photograph by Cory Willmott; DU2010.2, c.1930s, Courtesy of the Denison Museum, Denison University, Granville, Ohio).
nevertheless was not as radical as educated or working women, symbolized by the scholar's gown and qipao, respectively. The audience for these modified garments read them in a semiotic field of nuanced emergent Chinese female identities demarcated along lines of class, education and occupation.

Conclusion

Theorists have argued that collecting is a normative practice that can be explained as a form of possessive individualism. Moreover, scholars suggest that collecting in China was a form of colonialism which reinforced imperial power imbalances and that missionary collecting aimed to hasten the demise of indigenous religions. Missionary collectors such as John Henry Grey and Bishop White demonstrate that cases of this kind can be found. Yet, a closer examination of collectors' practices in light of gendered collecting models reveals exceptions to these generalizations, some of which may be seen as "alternative modernities." Among West China missionaries, there were three contexts of discourse and social institutions that framed collecting cultures: connoisseurial, scientific and domestic. West China connoisseurial collectors fit the possessive individualism model to a significant extent. The strong identification with Chinese literati that filtered down into subsequent generations, however, casts doubt on a simple classification as colonial exploitation. The upper class perspective on Chinese nationalism among these collectors did not cause paradoxical conflict with the capitalist consumerism of emerging feminist identities. Thus, missionary women such as Bea Mullett could accumulate collections without appearing materialistic, while today the acquisitiveness of both capitalist consumerism and connoisseurial collecting blend harmoniously in David and Rosalie Spooner's bicultural identity project.

The paradox of gender, rather, is found in contradictions in the ways in which scientific and domestic collecting cultures intersected with gendered Chinese nationalist modernization projects. Many of the male missionary collectors actively collaborated with Chinese nationalists in modernization projects. The artifacts they collected were often actually, or symbolically, casualties of modernization, specifically the leveling of the class structure and the appropriation of ethnic minority identities.
In contrast, some of the artifacts collected by women were products of modernization. The WMS, for example, modified vernacular arts in order to transform them into modern household commodities. Whereas the scientific nationalist model aims to save the “authentic, pure” artifacts thereby undermining modern identities for lower class and indigenous Chinese, the economic development aspect of the domestic model aimed to raise the consumer value of traditional arts and thereby that of lower class and indigenous women. Framing these artifacts within the domestic consumer economy, however, lowered their scientific value, and thereby the authority of both the WMS missionary women and the Chinese artisans. Nevertheless, the domestic framing of women’s entry into the public realms of education, philanthropy and consumerism enabled missionary wives to participate with Chinese women in creative identity projects which included inventing new bicultural genres of dress and household linens. These missionary women used Chinese heritage items in their homes, modified them for domestic use, and oriented their sartorial performances towards a Chinese audience to a remarkable degree. The discourse surrounding their collecting emphasized the aesthetic taste and emotional response indicative of upper and middle class female domesticity. Although the gendered hierarchy of collecting cultures still affects the meanings and values attributed to these women’s collections, at the time these women partially resolved the paradox of class conflict versus capitalist consumerism through framing purchases in terms of philanthropy and identification with the lower class women who created local vernacular textile arts.

Whereas these collecting models can reveal significant patterns of gendered experience, they should not be applied too rigidly. There was overlap in the types of items that male and female missionaries collected, as well as where and how they acquired them. The male connoisseurs’ collecting practices displayed traits of the female mode, particularly in the modification of artifacts for use in the household. The WCUU missionary women’s collecting paralleled the scientific and connoisseurial models in terms of purposeful series and aesthetic sensibilities. Yet, men and women collectors were framed in gender-specific models regardless of their actual practice. Moreover, the power differential of these models remains clear. Men’s status did not drop as a result of domestic modifications, yet women collectors’ adoption of scientific and connoisseurial practices did not
raise their status. Whereas some male missionary collectors achieved recognition in Western ethnographic and art museum circles, missionary women collecting similar series were not taken seriously as scientists or connoisseurs. Questions regarding the variety of statuses and complexities of collecting projects among West China missionary women remain to be investigated.
Erratum

In Social Sciences and Missions, Volume 25, No. 1-2, 2012, the captions to Figure 4 (p. 159) and Figure 5 (p. 162) in the article by Cory Willmott, “The Paradox of Gender among West China Missionary Collectors, 1920-1950” were not published correctly.

The correct captions should read:

Figure 4. Blue and White cross-stitch placemat modified from a bed valance, a traditional form of vernacular embroidery used as dowry in weddings. This is part of a set of nine placemats and a table runner made from three medallions. Signs of wear suggest that the valances were used in Chinese homes, and that the set was in use in the Mullett household in Chengdu (Photo by Cory Willmott; DU2010.2, c.1930s, Courtesy of the Denison Museum, Denison University, Granville, Ohio).

Figure 5. Back view of a tailored women’s jacket owned and presumably worn by Bea Mullett which has been modified from a Han women’s silk embroidered panel skirt. The skirts’ side pleats form the sleeves, while the front panels form a decorative motif at the lower back. (Photograph by Cory Willmott; Cat. # 1998.27, Courtesy of the Canadian Museum of Costume, Winnipeg, Manitoba).

Please accept our apologies for these errors.