

## *Changes in Female Roles in Taiwanese Women's Magazines, 1970–1994*

PING SHAW, *National Sun Yat-sen University\**

Women in traditional Chinese society existed mainly to supply male heirs [1]. As Li noted, 'Few societies in history have prescribed for women a more lowly status or treated them in a more routinely brutal way than traditional Confucian China' [2]. Discrimination against women was institutionalized within all the usual structures of Taiwan's society: family, the economy, education, culture and the political system [3]. Take the family, for example: an authoritarian hierarchy based on gender, generation and age have dominated life within the family in Taiwan. The oldest male had the highest status; women's status, although it increased with the birth of sons and age, was lower than that of any man [4].

However, in the 1960s Taiwan's economy began to take off, and the status of women improved significantly. Gallin summarizes the economic transformation of Taiwan in the last 30 years. Initially the government strengthened agriculture in order to provide a base for industrialization, pursued an import substitution policy in the 1950s, and then followed a policy of export-oriented industrialization [5]. Extremely rapid growth in industry caused incomes in Taiwan to skyrocket—from US\$50 per year in 1950, to US\$200 in 1964, to more than US\$3000 by the mid-1980s. The annual per capita income in Taiwan passed US\$10,000 in 1992 [6].

Women have benefited from the industrialization of Taiwanese society in terms of educational opportunities and employment options. Well aware of the links between education and development, in 1953 the government made six years of primary education free and compulsory, and in 1968–1969, it added three more years of junior middle school, also free and required. The result of this expansion of educational opportunities was reflected in a dramatic increase in school attendance at every level. Though the number of girls attending school initially lagged behind that of boys, especially at the upper educational level, the gap between the sexes narrowed rapidly. In 1951, only 37% of all Taiwanese students were female; less than 27% were in high school, and only 10% of college undergraduates were female [7]. But, by 1993, almost half of all students were female [8]. Economic development also brought an explosion of job opportunities for women, followed by a massive entry of women into the labour force. In the past, few women were employed outside the home. In 1961, 35.8% had other jobs. In 1990, the figure was 44.5%—about the same percentage as in the United States and the countries of Western Europe [9]. Perhaps even more telling is the fact that 42.5% of married women work [10]. However, the occupational distribution in Taiwan still reflects very significant gender segregation. Women suffer decidedly from wage discrimination: their earnings were about 71% of men's earnings in 1988 [11]—and probably have not improved significantly since then. Moreover, women generally remain excluded from the top levels of ownership and administrative–managerial positions, and

they are grossly over-represented at the bottom of the occupational ladder as unpaid family helpers. Many women in agriculture appear trapped in a declining sector by their age and lack of education, and many younger women factory workers still remain within what is a traditional patriarchal and exploitative system [12].

Still, the changing conditions of opportunity helped give rise to a women's movement in Taiwan beginning after the 1970s. By 1982, Taiwanese women began to organize as a social movement and produced the first feminist magazine, *Awakening*. Since then, the movement has attacked the pardoning of men who kill wives suspected of adultery, exposed rape, sought new divorce laws and the protection of teenage prostitutes, and successfully resisted the construction of a dangerous chemical plant [13].

Women's magazines have responded. The gist of these changes are captured in the masthead of the journal *Women—ABC*, which once meant 'adorable, beautiful, contemporary' but now means 'assertive, beautiful, and creative' [14]. Taiwanese women's social and economic status has improved significantly over the last few decades and women's magazines seem to have noticed. But their status is still not equal to that of men.

### The Role of Women's Magazines

Women's magazines, as Shevelov argues, attempt to exert influence as a purveyor of values through their direct engagement with their readers' lives [15]. She and others have argued that they provide implicitly normative accounts of social structure and behaviour. Similarly, Ferguson argues that women's magazines collectively comprise a social institution that help to shape both a woman's view of herself, and society's view of her. In promoting 'a cult of femininity', Ferguson claims, these journals reinscribe traditional female roles in society, but also offer a powerful source of definitions of, and socialization into, these roles [16].

Most scholars accept the view that women's magazines have been instrumental in socializing women and in creating a traditional and idealized image of woman, whether or not these scholars approve of the editorial content of these publications. One feminist writer who roundly criticizes these magazines for inventing and perpetuating a feminine mythology is Betty Friedan. Her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, criticized women's magazines for helping to create and promulgate the 'problem that has no name'. Friedan suggested that the post-World War II era had seen the rise of a 'feminine mystique', whereby women were fulfilled only in their domestic service to others. And magazines were one of the major purveyors of this mystique: 'In the magazine image', Friedan wrote, 'women do no work except housework and work to keep their bodies beautiful and to get and keep a man' [17].

Several studies corroborate the view that women's magazines have been instrumental in perpetuating the feminine mystique. For example, Flora reports that fiction published in women's magazines, as a rule, reinforces the concept of passive females [18]. Franzwa's study in 1974 compares government statistics on women who work outside the home to those that appear in a sample of stories taken from some women's magazines during the years 1940 and 1970. In her sample, Franzwa discovered that the one constant in all the stories was that of defining women in terms of men; that is, the women were portrayed in one of the following four roles: 'single and looking for a husband; housewife—mother; spinster; widowed or divorced—soon to remarry'. Notably not one married woman character in her study had a job outside the home. As Franzwa

remarks, all these images of women in magazine fiction contradict reality, as in 1967, for example, 37% of married women held paying jobs [19].

Loughlin analysed issues of *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and *McCall's* from 1979 to 1981, and found the typical adult female character to be attractive and happily married, between 26 and 35, with two children, living in a house in the city. She was college-educated, middle-class, held a job outside the home, and was concerned 'with family-oriented problems that were psychological in nature'. However, that job outside the home was considered secondary and, in fact, was often not identified at all. 'In general, fictional characters are younger, better educated and have fewer children than their real life counterparts', Laughlin concluded [20].

Indeed, many have argued that the women's press has long served as a powerful factor in influencing women to resist social change. Mickish and Searles, who have examined images of female gender roles at the turn of the century, argue that the media 'influenced people's conception of reality and guided them in the process of constructing attitudes and action'. Analysing fiction in the *Ladies Home Journal* during 1905, they found only conventional images projected. Women are seen as traditional, 'good-hearted, self-sacrificing people, embracing their "natural" roles as wives and mothers'. Subtly, *The Journal* discouraged any social change that might have altered this idealized status. The implicit assumption in the fiction, Michish and Searles argue, is that love will overcome all obstacles, and solve all problems. Independence and career are seen as undesirable for women [21].

Yet some other scholars have uncovered a somewhat different story. Looking at women's magazines from a slightly different angle, Tortora concludes that women's magazines have found it in their best interests to provide editorial commentary on contemporary women's issues. Although these magazines have not always taken a liberal or progressive stance, they have offered their opinions on education for women, universal suffrage, and minimum wages. As an exception to this pattern, however, Tortora notes that fashion magazines did not acknowledge the rapid changes in women's roles that characterized the period from 1930s to 1960. Tortora explains this fact by pointing out that the questions raised by working mothers are irrelevant to the needs of the fashion industry, observing that these magazines present only the 'image' of the liberated woman, not her 'substance' [22].

Prisco analysed selected issues of *Mademoiselle* from 1970 to 1980. She found that the American woman revealed is educated, ambitious, career-oriented, independent, successful, and believes she should look attractive. In general, Prisco concluded that 'through the 1970s, *Mademoiselle* has reflected this changing woman in a changing society' [23]. Demarest and Garner performed a thematic content analysis on articles published in the *Ladies Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping* magazines over the period of 1954 to 1982. Their study revealed a gradual decline in the number having themes of women as wives, mothers, and homemakers, and an increase in articles with political, social and economic themes. Nevertheless, what they see as traditional sex roles still dominated the pages of these and most other women's magazines, they found [24].

A woman in Western culture can learn from the pages of women's magazines—from *Seventeen*, *Mademoiselle* and *Elle*, to the single-girl-on-the-go magazines like *Glamour*, *Redbook* and *Vogue*, to the more mature-audience favourites such as *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies' Home Journal*—what it means to be a woman virtually across a life span. Although scholars have produced a considerable body of research on Western women's magazines, little attention has been paid to women's magazines in Third World

countries. This neglect is a serious omission considering the range of titles that now target Third World women. In Taiwan, for example, the number of women's periodicals has grown rapidly. In 1986, 70 women's magazines were available. By 1993, the number had increased by 44.3%, with 31 more titles in 1993 than in 1986 [25]. This increased market reflects not only the growth in women's disposable income, and the commodification of female culture following the economic development of Taiwan since 1960s [26]. But what might these changes mean for the gender images that underwrite women's lives?

## Methodology

To pursue this question, I selected *Woman* magazine (1968–1994) and *New Women* (1970–) because they have been in publication since at least 1970, and are monthly magazines with large circulations.

The two magazines differ in significant respects, however. *Woman*, which is no longer published, targeted middle-class women, including homemakers and working wives. While its major topics were infant care and child-rearing, dress patterns and recipes, beauty and grooming tips, home medical advice, and ways to achieve marital happiness and successful family life, the feminist thoughts discussed in a few of its articles published in the 1970s were quite significant at that time (see Table 3).

*New Woman*, still in print, targets working-class women. It covers much of the ground considered typical of women's magazines elsewhere. The magazine discusses the lives of movie stars and singers; fashion and beauty; romance and the problems with love; relationships between friends, lovers, colleagues, as well as bosses and workers; hygiene and health; and in particular, sex.

The July issues of both magazines were examined at three-year intervals between 1970 and 1994. Eight issues of each magazine were analysed from the years 1971, 1974, 1977, 1980, 1983, 1986, 1989, and 1992. In all, 607 articles in 16 issues of the magazines were examined for this study. Based on Ku's chronology of the women's movement in Taiwan, the period from the late 1970s to the early 1980s can be considered the revitalization of the most recent phase of feminism [27]. Therefore, in order to examine any content differences based on the women's movement, this study compares four subgroups of the sample: (1) *Woman* (1971–1981); (2) *New Woman* (1971–1981); (3) *Woman* (1982–1992); and (4) *New Woman* (1982–1992).

All editorial content in each magazine was categorized according to pre-selected themes based on the previous studies of Prisco, Demarest and Garner, and Shaw [28]. Thirteen coding categories comprised the following themes:

1. beauty and fashion (e.g. cosmetic application, hairstyles, clothing, accessories);
2. marriage and family (e.g. marriage, love, child care);
3. efficient homemaking (e.g. home decorating, budgeting, do-it-yourself, helpful cleaning hint, cooking and recipes, sewing);
4. interpersonal relations;
5. health (e.g. fitness, weight loss, diet, nutrition, medicine, illness);
6. sex;
7. entertainment (e.g. celebrities, male and female stars, movies, books, music, arts);
8. political and social awareness (e.g. legislative action, social programmes, social issues);

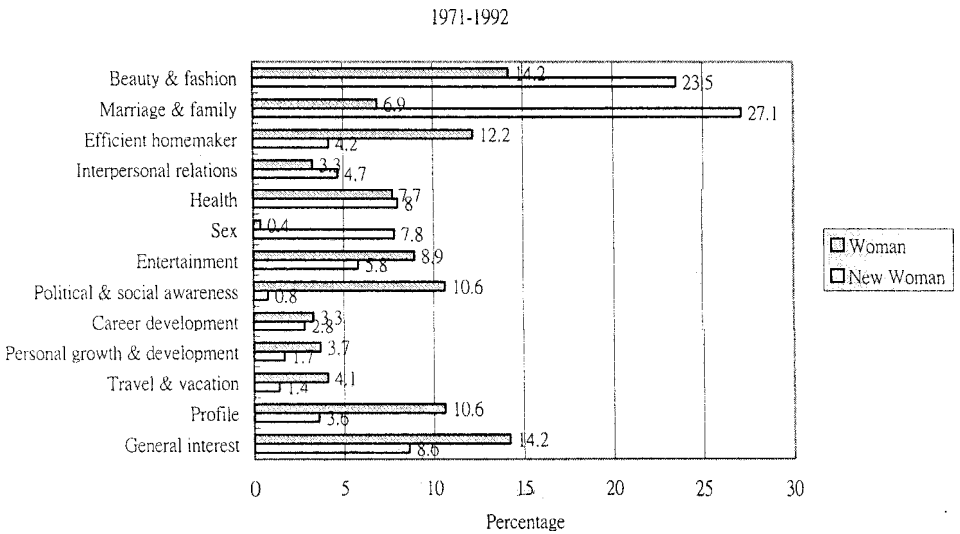


FIG. 1. The percentage of articles in *Woman* and *New Woman* categorized by thematic content, 1971–1992.

9. career development (e.g. job interview techniques, resume writing, management style);
10. personal growth and development (other than career, fitness, or beauty);
11. travel and vacation;
12. profile;
13. a category labelled general interest, which included all other content.

Each article was coded according to these themes by two independent raters. Inter-coder reliability was calculated for 64 articles in sample issues. The value was 0.75.

The number of articles in each of the thematic categories was tabulated separately for each 10-year period since 1971. The two periods represent the decade preceding the initiation of the feminist movement (1971–1981), and the decade of growing awareness of and interest in the movement (1982–1992). Figure 1 gives the portion of editorial space given to 13 topics in the selected issues of *Woman* and *New Woman* from 1971 to 1992.

In all time periods, beauty and fashion makes up 14.2% of the editorial content for *Woman*, efficient homemaker takes up another 12.2%, and most surprisingly, the category political and social awareness comprises a very close third place, at 10.6%. Marriage and family makes up about 27.1% of the editorial space for *New Woman*, beauty and fashion 23.5%, and health 8%. The categories least represented in the pages of *Woman* were sex (0.4%), interpersonal relations (3.3%), career development (3.3%), and personal growth and development (3.7%). In *New Woman*, the least represented categories were political and social awareness (0.8%), travel and vacation (1.4%), and personal growth and development (1.7%).

Table 1 lists the percentage of articles of *Woman* and *New Woman* categorized by thematic content in two 10-year periods, from 1971 to 1981 and from 1982 to 1992.

From 1971 to 1981 the theme of beauty and fashion accounted for 20.2% of *Woman* articles, but between 1982 and 1992 this dropped to 9.1%. The category efficient homemaker, however, remained the same percentage—at about 12%—of *Woman*'s space

TABLE 1. The percentage of articles in two periods of *Woman* and *New Woman* categorized by thematic content

Theme	Magazine and period of publication			
	1971–1981		1982–1992	
	<i>Woman</i>	<i>New Woman</i>	<i>Woman</i>	<i>New Woman</i>
Beauty & fashion	20.2	17.2	9.1	30.3
Marriage & family	4.4	35.5	9.1	18.3
Efficient homemaking	12.3	1.6	12.1	6.9
Interpersonal relations	1.8	7.5	4.5	1.7
Health	9.6	8.6	6.1	7.4
Sex	0.9	12.4	0	2.9
Entertainment	9.6	2.2	8.3	9.7
Political & social awareness	5.3	0	15.2	1.7
Career development	1.8	2.7	4.5	2.9
Personal growth & development	4.4	1.1	0	2.3
Travel & vacation	0.9	0	6.8	2.9
Profile	10.5	2.7	10.6	4.6
General interest	18.4	8.6	10.6	8.6
Total number of articles per period	114	186	132	175

over the two periods. Marriage and family changed from 4.4% to 9.1% over the years. In contrast, the features related to political and social awareness increased almost threefold, from 5.3% to 15.2% of *Woman*'s content. Articles on career development also changed, increasing from 1.8% to 4.5% over the periods.

In *New Woman*, the category marriage and family decreased from 35.5% in the 1971–1981 time period, to 18.3% in the period between 1982 and 1992. However, beauty and fashion increased from 17.2% to 30.3%, and efficient homemaking from 1.6% to 6.9%. Few articles on the themes of political and social awareness, career development, and personal growth and development ever appeared in *New Woman*.

These data are shown by the two time periods in Table 2 for the combined categories of traditional themes (including beauty and fashion, marriage and family, and efficient homemaker), and nontraditional themes (including political and social awareness, career development, and personal growth and development).

Traditional themes decreased from 36.9% of the articles appearing in *Woman* in the 1971–1981 period to 30.3% in the period between 1982 and 1992, but they remained the

TABLE 2. The percentage of articles in two periods given to traditional themes and nontraditional themes

	<i>Woman</i>	<i>New Woman</i>	<i>Woman</i>	<i>New Woman</i>
	1971–1981	1982–1992	1971–1981	1982–1992
Traditional themes	36.9	30.3	54.3	55.5
Nontraditional themes	11.5	19.7	3.8	6.9

TABLE 3. Illustrative article titles from *Woman* and *New Woman**Beauty & Fashion*

- “How to Make You Look Beautiful” (*New Woman*, July 1971)  
 “Famous Fashion Designers in New York” (*Woman*, July 1977)  
 “How to Choose a Suitable Swimsuit” (*New Woman*, July 1983)  
 “What’s Wrong with Your Hair” (*Woman*, July 1983)  
 “The Ways to Reduce Your Weight Based on Your Personality” (*New Woman*, July 1986)

*Marriage & Family*

- “Will Your Boyfriend Become Your Husband?” (*New Woman*, July 1977)  
 “The New Woman Man Loves” (*New Woman*, July 1986)  
 “How to Tell If It Is True Love or Not” (*New Woman*, July 1989)

*Efficient Homemaker*

- “The Easy Way to Cook” (*Woman*, July 1974)  
 “The Ways for Housewives to Save Electrical Power” (*Woman*, July 1980)  
 “How to Be a Housewife with Creativity” (*Woman*, July 1983)

*Political & Social Awareness*

- “How the Role of American Women has Changed in 25 Years” (*Woman*, July 1977)  
 “Female Lawmakers Should Speak for Women” (*Woman*, July 1983)

same percentage, about 55%, in the content of *New Woman*. Feminist themes increased from 11.5% to 19.7% of *Woman*, and from 3.8% to 6.9% of *New Woman*.

Chi-square statistics were calculated for the data in Table 2. For *Woman*, the proportion of traditional and nontraditional articles changed significantly from the first decade to the second decade:  $\chi^2(1, N = 125) = 4.23, p < 0.05$ . However, the data for *New Woman* did not reach accepted levels of significance:  $\chi^2(1, N = 217) = 0.88, p > 0.05$ .

To further illustrate the article content thrust of *Woman* and *New Woman*, Table 3 presents examples of articles by title in salient categories for this study. Although titles can be misleading, aptness disparity was generally low. Moreover, it was clear that most titles were phrased to capture the attention of female readers. Titles themselves often conveyed dualistic messages across issues, as indicated by articles such as ‘How to Make You Look Beautiful’ [29], ‘The Easy Way to Cook’ [30], ‘The New Woman Man Loves’ [31], in contrast to ‘To Share Housework between Husband and Wife’ [32], and ‘To Lead a Happy Single Life’ [33].

### Discussion: changes in women’s roles in Taiwanese women’s magazines

The main question addressed in this research was whether traditional women’s magazines would reflect the changing roles of women in Taiwanese society. It is not surprising that established traditional women’s magazines in Taiwan continued to purvey more traditional messages to readers than nontraditional ones. Both middle-class and working-class magazines studied here reflected and reinforced traditional sex role stereotypes, in which youth and good looks were emphasized and women were defined by the children and men in their lives. While the middle-class magazines contain some articles suggesting broader social horizons for women (such as the articles about work and political awareness), these articles remain less common than those indicating a more passive or vicarious female role.

The middle-class magazines appear to walk a line between presenting messages for a liberated woman, and messages for a reader who is still traditional. This finding mirrors MacLachlan's observations of Mexican women's magazines, if to a lesser extent:

The conclusion one is forced to draw from a study of women's magazines is that the modern Mexican middle-class female is in an inferior position. The demands of modernization have modified her status and opened up various questions but to a surprisingly limited degree. [34]

In general, it appears that the changing image of women in women's magazines has been class specific in Taiwan. *Woman*, the magazine with a middle-class audience, was more responsive to changes in women's roles, whereas representations of women in working-class magazines, like *New Woman*, remained more passive and traditional. The Taiwanese feminist movement, which was influenced by the US women's movement in the 1960s, was directed toward middle-class women. Due to the limits of martial law, however, before the 1980s, it was impossible for women to change the patriarchal structure in an organized way. Therefore, some mass media, those more sensitive to the changing social structure, became mediators of the thoughts of 'new feminism' and 'women's rights'. One of these was *Woman*, which published some important articles in the 1970s on the development of the women's movement including 'Should Male-Centered Society Come to an End?' [35], 'Women Still Have Less Privileges than Men' [36], 'Be a Human First, and Then Be a Woman' [37], 'The Movement for Women's Rights Cannot be Avoided' [38], and 'How Taiwanese Women Look at the Movement for Women's Rights' [39]. Some of these titles, in fact, are stronger than many to be found in similar US women's magazines of the same era.

Both Carden and Freeman have argued that increased media coverage of issues and events concerning the women's movement has raised the awareness of many who had overlooked or were not knowledgeable about these issues [40]. Thus the expansion of media coverage may have accelerated the growth of the movement, especially among the middle class [41].

Nevertheless, it is important to note *Woman* portrays feminism and developments in the women's movement from a sceptical point of view. For instance, in an article entitled 'What Women Got in the Sexual Liberation Movement' in the November 1975 issue, the author argues that the women's movement in Great Britain has led to some terrible 'disasters', such as women's alcoholism, abortion, divorce, and others [42]. Changes in the female role depicted in American magazines marketed for middle-class women, such as *Redbook* from 1955 to 1976, as well as *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping* from 1954 to 1983, reveal a similar parallel with changes in American society [43]. This attitude raises the question of the influence of *negative* publicity on accelerating—or depressing—the growth of the movement.

In any event, it remains true that women's magazines have moved farther and faster on representations of women than other media in Taiwan [44]. Contrary to those who see women's magazines as staunchly conservative and unchanging, it appears that women's magazines do change to reflect the changing interests of their reading audiences [45]. In the period between 1961 and 1990, newspapers in Taiwan continued to under-represent women and to portray any woman 'in her place', no matter what kind of ownership they had [46]. Images of women on Taiwan's TV dramas are still dependent, silent, indecisive, stupid and passive [47].

Women's magazines in Taiwan seem to be more sensitive to changes in society and women's lives than these competing media, but they still remain reticent, perhaps

because of their own economic constraints [48]. Thus, it would seem that, despite more than 20 years of awareness of women's movement, the image and the reality of women's roles as depicted in women's magazines are still far apart.

*Correspondence:* Ping Shaw, PhD, Assistant Professor, Institute of Communications Management, National Sun Yat-sen University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. E-mail: shawpin@cm.nsysu.edu.tw

## NOTES

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