INTRODUCTION

The Errant Gaze

In a photograph taken late in her life, Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908) stands in front of her imperial throne, holding a small mirror in one hand and inserting a long-stemmed flower into her hair with the other. Positioned above the throne is a banner identifying her expansively as “The Empress Dowager, the sacred mother of the Great Qing Empire, motherly, auspicious, upright, blessed, healthy, dignified, long-lived, respectful, reverend, and worshipful” 大清國當今慈禧端佑康頤昭豫莊誠壽恭欽獻崇熙聖母皇太后, followed by the date the photograph was taken: “Guangxu 光緒 [reign], guimao 癸卯 [year],” which corresponds to 1903 in the Gregorian calendar (see Fig. 1). The empress’s contemplative face, dramatically illuminated from the upper right, is oriented in the general direction of the small mirror she is holding in her left hand. Her actual gaze, however, is subtly yet distinctly turned away from the mirror and toward an indeterminate point below and outside the frame of the photograph altogether.

This photograph is one of several that Cixi’s court photographer Xunling 功龄 (1874–1943) took between 1903 and 1905—photographs in which Cixi used carefully staged poses and settings to shape not only how she wished to be perceived but also how she wanted to imagine herself. This particular image is one of a set taken in front of her residence in the Summer Palace’s Leshou Hall, where a throne, tripartite screen, pyramids of apples, and other traditional props had been
arranged in order to allow Xunling to take advantage of the natural light available there.¹

Dating from the brief period between the beginning of the twentieth century and the 1911 collapse of the Qing dynasty, Cixi’s photographs were taken precisely as China was changing from a “traditional” dynastic system to a “modern” republican one. In this particular image, the moment of historical and political transition is articulated in visual terms through the strategic contrast between the embedded mirror and the meta-representational frame of the photograph itself. As I argue in this book, the mirror and the photograph represent the two paradigmatic visual technologies of the premodern and modern eras, respectively, together with the epistemological and ontological assumptions each presupposes. The schematic opposition in this image between specularity and photography, however, is fractured by Cixi’s skewed gaze, which appears to be directed neither at the mirror nor at the camera, nor toward any other identifiable region within the image itself. Cixi’s gaze not only originates from the focal point of the image, virtually at the center of the photograph as a whole, but furthermore functions here as an example of what Roland Barthes calls a punctum—an incongruous element within a photograph that startles and captures the viewer’s attention, disrupting the smooth viewing of the image as a whole.²

Cixi’s errant gaze simultaneously draws attention to, and disrupts, the schematic opposition proposed here between specularity and photography and, more broadly, between the general historical periods emblematized by these two paradigmatic visual technologies. In this study, I take Cixi’s wandering gaze as my own starting point for considering different discourses of visuality within three distinct historical moments: the nineteenth-century, late imperial period; the mid-twentieth-century, high modern era; and the contemporary moment. I argue that each period was characterized by a different dominant visual mode—

¹ Lily Kecskes (“Photographs of Tz’u-hsi”) notes that this was done in order to avoid the shadows that would have been produced by the artificial light available inside the Leshou Hall at that time. For a good discussion of Cixi’s interest in photography during this period, see also Cheng-hua Wang, “Presenting the Empress Dowager to the World.”
² Barthes, Camera Lucida.
Fig. 1  The Empress Dowager Cixi gazing at a hand mirror. 1903.
Photographer: Xunling (1874–1943).
of specularity, spectatorship, and screened projections, respectively—but at the same time that these historical periodizations reflect not a smooth, unidirectional temporal movement but are bound up in a complex process of retrospection and anticipation. My focus is not so much on visual imagery per se but on the ways in which visuality itself has been perceived and imagined, and their implications for processes of gendered and national subject formation. I approach these issues primarily through the lens of narrative fiction, using an eclectic selection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century works to identify distinct constellations of visual attitudes for each period.

In the remainder of the Introduction, I analyze Cixi’s 1903 mirror photograph to introduce the methodological and theoretical considerations I draw on throughout this study. In particular, I read the photograph through its historical context, focusing on Cixi’s attitudes toward photography. I also consider this image through the prism of Lacan’s mirror-stage model, especially that model’s emphasis on the role of processes of projective identification and anticipatory retrospection in subject formation. Finally, I bring these twin historical and theoretical approaches together by proposing a radical rehistoricization of the mirror-stage model itself—essentially reading Lacan’s model against its own textual history—and then using that rehistoricized psychoanalytic model to rethink the historical assumptions on which the concept of Chinese (visual) modernity itself is predicated.

Fractured Mirrors

What is Cixi looking at? Although the object of her gaze cannot be determined, the fact that she is clearly looking away from the mirror in her hand suggests a fracturing of the specular gaze that is the ostensible subject of the portrait. Needless to say, Cixi’s act of looking in the mirror was from the beginning precisely that: a mere act, performed for the camera and designed to yield a photograph that would in turn mimic the function of the original mirror image. The resulting substitution of the photograph for the mirror image nevertheless requires the insertion of an external gaze into the original closed circuit of specular reflection. In contrast to the presumptively direct act of seeing one’s own reflection in a mirror, the process of viewing a photographic
self-portrait involves a complex mediation with several external gazes. In posing for the photographer, for instance, Cixi was literally putting herself on display for an outside observer, and even she herself then had to view the resulting photograph from an external vantage point. Cixi’s view of her own photographic image was necessarily mediated through these two external gazes, and it is only by suturing over the perceptual rifts created by this double insertion that the resulting portrait is able to mimic the dynamics of the original mirror scene.

In this image, the subject’s negotiation with these putative external gazes also has important implications for the ways in which gender is produced and understood. By the time this photograph was taken, Cixi had, for nearly half a century, been the most powerful figure in the hyper-masculine Qing imperial court, repeatedly positioning herself as a surrogate for immature or politically emasculated male emperors. For instance, the reign name used to date the photograph in the overhead banner refers to her nephew, the Guangxu emperor (r. 1875–1908), whom Cixi had placed on the throne 28 years earlier at the age of five, and in whose place she had then ruled until he reached maturity. At the time the photograph was taken, the now-adult emperor had been under effective house arrest in the Forbidden City for nearly five years, following his support for the failed Hundred Days Reform movement of 1898, and remained similarly powerless (with Cixi continuing to rule in his place) until his death on November 14, 1908—precisely one day before Cixi herself passed away. Guangxu was not the only infant emperor whose power Cixi had appropriated—he had been preceded by his own cousin (and Cixi’s son), the Tongzhi emperor (r. 1861–75), who similarly assumed the throne at the age of five. The Guangxu emperor, meanwhile, was succeeded by China’s last emperor, the Xuantong emperor Puyi (r. 1908–12), who was only two years old when Cixi arranged, just hours before her own death, for him to replace Guangxu on the throne.

Against this backdrop of the imperial court—represented metonymically by Cixi’s throne and the freestanding wooden screen behind it—Cixi adopted the distinctively feminine pose of adorning herself in front of a mirror, as though in her own private boudoir. This convention of the boudoir mirror scene is a familiar one in late imperial Chinese art and literature, but its gendered implications are complicated by
the fact that, although the figure gazing at the mirror is almost invariably a woman, the actual representations were typically created by and for men. Consequently, the genre of the boudoir mirror scene becomes implicitly voyeuristic—insofar as the female subject’s intimately specular gaze is figuratively appropriated by the artist’s external one. In the case of Cixi’s photograph, this gendered inversion of the gaze is redoubled, with Cixi herself appropriating the implicitly voyeuristic gaze as her own and then using it to negotiate her own mediated self-regard.

These contradictory gendered implications of the gaze in Cixi’s mirror photograph come together in a visual allusion suggested by the specular image at the heart of the portrait itself. Although invisible to the outside viewer, the image appearing in Cixi’s hand mirror is that of her inserting a flower into her hair—or, literally, a flower appearing in a mirror, as in the expression jinghua shuiyue 鏡花水月 (like a flower in a mirror and the reflection of the moon in water). This familiar Buddhist aphorism uses the explicitly feminine symbols of the flower and the moon to suggest the ephemeral nature of both visual imagery and mortal existence, thereby ironically undercutting both Cixi’s ostensible act of self-adornment and the fascination with specular and photographic representation that grounds the portrait as whole.

The “flower in a mirror” (jinghua) component of this Buddhist aphorism is a synthesis of several different but essentially fungible visual metaphors in early Buddhist texts—metaphors that compare dharmas alternatively to illusions, flames, mirror or dream images, or the reflection of the moon in water. Curiously, however, although these sutras contain many separate references to both flowers and mirrors, the two are rarely if ever explicitly paired in these early texts. Literally invisible in these early discussions of visual ephemera, the figure of the flower in the mirror later comes to function as a nodal point for that entire earlier array of visual tropes. By the same token, the flower in the mirror image nested invisibly at the heart of Cixi’s mirror portrait similarly functions as an empty node at which the contradictory vectors of visuality and gender that inform the image intersect.

3. See Chung-Fang Yu, Kuan-yin, for a survey of some of these early antecedents of the flowers in the mirror formulations.
If Cixi’s 1903 mirror photograph illustrates the conceit of the flower in the mirror, allusions to the parallel moon in water trope can be found in another famous series of photographs for which she posed a few months later. In these photos, Cixi appears in the guise of Guanyin, the bodhisattva of compassion, seated in the middle of a lotus pond and surrounded by two similarly disguised personal attendants (see Fig. 2). The banners over Cixi’s head in these photos identify her as “Guanyin of Putuo Mountain” 普陀山觀音大士. As in the mirror photograph, the visual logic underlying these Guanyin images is clearly one of projective identification—Cixi is producing a visual reminder of how she would like to be perceived. She herself is reported to have remarked:

Whenever I have been angry, or worried over anything, by dressing up as the Goddess of Mercy it helps me to calm myself, and so play the part I represent. I can assure you that it does help me a great deal, as it makes me remember that I am looked upon as being all-merciful. By having a photograph taken of myself dressed in this costume, I shall be able to see myself as I ought to be at all times. (Italics added)

In these photographs, Cixi adopted the fictional persona of the bodhisattva in order to see herself as she would like to imagine herself being seen, just as, in the Leshou Hall photograph, she similarly “posed” as the empress dowager in order to accomplish the same purpose. In other words, the patently fantastic quality of the bodhisattva merely underscores the inherently performative and fictional dimension of even those identities that are ostensibly Cixi’s “own.”

The paradigmatically feminine Guanyin, one of the most recognizable figures within the contemporary East Asian Buddhist pantheon, originated in the masculine figure of Avalokitesvara in Indian Buddhism. Avalokitesvara was introduced into China as early as the third century CE via translations of Buddhist scriptures such as the Lotus Sutra, but it was not until several centuries later that artists began representing the deity as androgynous and eventually as unmistakably

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4. These photos were taken on July 16, 1903. For a detailed account of the preparations Cixi ordered for these images, see Lin Jing, “Cixi shouxue shihua,” 84.
5. Der Ling, Two Years in the Forbidden City, 225.
Fig. 2  Empress Dowager Cixi in the guise of Avalokitesvara.  
1903. Photographer: Xunling.
feminine. One of the earliest examples of this feminine version of the bodhisattva can be found in the “water-moon Guanyin” tradition from the Tang Dynasty (618–907). Although the “water-moon” label refers specifically to the trademark moonlike halo surrounding the bodhisattva’s head in this iconographic tradition, its association with the transgendered figure of Guanyin suggests a gendered correlate to the visual skepticism articulated in the Buddhist phrase itself. In other words, the scopic skepticism implicit in the “flower in a mirror / moon in water” aphorism is imbricated over a skepticism of the reliability of gendered appearance—a skepticism particularly appropriate here given that it pertains to a figure whose gendered transformation derived from the evolution of a specifically representational tradition.

Cixi’s Guanyin photographs therefore illustrate her projective identification with this paradigmatically feminine icon, together with the connotations of gender fluidity and visual indeterminacy which that icon has historically embodied. By the same token, Cixi’s earlier flower in the mirror photograph features her appropriation of the inherently feminine “boudoir mirror” tradition, combined with her implicit affiliation with the voyeuristic gesture of gendered ventriloquism on which that same literary and iconographic tradition is predicated. In both instances, Cixi was using these photographs to assert a specific (feminine) gender identity while simultaneously underscoring the performative and fluid nature of gender identity itself. In other words, in posing for these photos, Cixi was performing not only femininity but more generally the very possibility of gender performativity itself.

The allusions to the Buddhist “flower in a mirror / moon in water” formula in these images neatly encapsulate one of the key paradoxes inherent in Cixi’s early twentieth-century fascination with photography. Just as the Buddhist aphorism combines a fascination with visual imagery and a critique of the inherent ephemerality and unreliability of

6. The association of this “water-moon” phrase with Guanyin is further reinforced by the later popularity of depicting Guanyin peering at her own reflection in a pool of water. Two examples of this latter tradition may be found, for instance, in Tang Xianzu’s seventeenth-century play Mudan ting (The peony pavilion), which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 1 (see Tang Xianzu, Mudan ting, scene 28, p. 153, and scene 37, p. 200; idem, The Peony Pavilion, 158 and 216).
those same images, Cixi’s interest in photography similarly joins her captivation with photography’s unprecedented verisimilitude and her insistence on using it as a vehicle of fantasy projection. More generally, even as Cixi’s 1903 photographs are positioned at a historical watershed between what I will call a specular and a photographic, or spectatorial, visual economy, both the premodern and the modern periods on either side of this divide feature a combination of foundational and antifoundational attitudes toward visual representation, just as gender identity—which, in any case, is perceived primarily in visual terms—in these periods is also simultaneously understood as both an irreducible component of individual identity and a performative construct.

“The Age of the World Picture”

Pioneering photographer John Thomson reportedly took Cixi’s photograph as early as 1861, in the first year of her virtual reign as empress dowager. Although this claim may well be spurious (and, at any rate, no such photograph exists today), Cixi appears not to have developed a genuine passion for this hyper-mimetic representational medium until nearly forty years later. More specifically, Cixi’s (re)discovery of photography took place in the context of the court’s increasing concern, around the turn of the century, that she was acquiring a negative image within the foreign community in Beijing and, more generally, among the international community as a whole. As a result, Susan Conger, the wife of the U.S. minister to Beijing and an increasingly close confidante of the empress, decided to use portraiture to help Cixi improve her public image: “For many months I have been indignant over the horrible, unjust caricatures of Her Imperial Majesty in illustrated papers, and with a growing desire that the world might see her as she really is, I had conceived the idea of asking her Majesty’s permission to speak with her upon the subject of having her portrait painted” (italics added). Conger suggested that her friend, the American painter Katherine Carl, come to Beijing for this purpose.

7. See Sun Yanjing et al., Wanqing yijing, 73. Thomson is sometimes spelled Thompson.
Cixi was initially apprehensive about the prospect of being painted, given the associations in Chinese culture between portraiture and postmortem commemoration—associations that must have had a particularly urgent resonance since she was preparing to celebrate her seventieth birthday. Ultimately one of her attendants, the seventeen-year-old Deling 德齡 (1886–1944), helped convince her to proceed. In particular, Deling—whose father, Yugeng 裕庚,⁹ was a Manchu official who had recently served as imperial consul to Japan (1895–98) and France (1899–1902)—showed Cixi a portrait of herself (Deling) that Katherine Carl had painted while she was in Paris. After Deling explained to Cixi why she would have to pose for the portraits in person (rather than have someone pose in her place, as Cixi suggested at one point), Cixi finally acquiesced.

Although it was the sight of Deling’s oil portrait that helped convince Cixi to have her own portrait painted, an accidental glimpse of a different kind of portrait, also dating from Deling’s period abroad, made a much deeper impression on the empress dowager. Prior to Katherine Carl’s visit, Cixi wandered into Deling’s bedroom in the Summer Palace and saw photographs of Deling taken while she was in France. Deling recalled that the Empress Dowager had been deeply impressed with the verisimilitude of the images, insisting they were much “better” than Carl’s oil portrait from the same period. Although still willing to have her portrait painted, Cixi requested that arrangements be made for her photograph to be taken as well. Deling’s brother Xunling, an amateur photographer who had brought some photographic equipment back from Paris with him, was recommended for the task. The very next morning, he began taking staged shots of Cixi outside the Leshou Hall—including, quite possibly, the mirror photograph.¹⁰

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⁹. Being Manchus, Yugeng and his family would never have used their given name and clan names together. Yugeng’s children, however, are sometimes misidentified as having the surname 郑, erroneously borrowed, apparently, from the first character in Yugeng’s given name.

¹⁰. Der Ling, Two Years in the Forbidden City, 214–18. Although, Deling does not mention the mirror photograph explicitly, her description of Cixi’s first set of photographs appears to match that of the mirror photograph closely.
Xunling remained in the palace for the next two years as the court’s first official photographer, and his unique position as a figurative lens into court life is represented emblematically by the fact that he was also granted a unique exemption from the rule prohibiting eyeglasses in the empress’s presence. During this period, Cixi posed for dozens of pictures for him, including not only the Leshou Hall and Guanyin images but also several series of shots of her and her attendants on the Imperial Barge, in a royal pageant at Kunming Lake, and in other more informal settings. Some of his photographs feature physical settings, such as images of Cixi’s empty throne room. There are even photographs of two of the oil portraits that Katherine Carl painted of the empress later that year, including one of the famous portrait subsequently displayed at the 1904 St. Louis World Expo (see Fig. 3). Since Cixi’s interest in photography initially developed in anticipation of these portrait sittings, these photographs of the portraits bring this entire cycle of portraiture and photography full circle—yielding a virtual hall of mirrors in which photography and portraiture are recursively embedded within one another. Indeed, Katherine Carl herself was under the impression that Cixi had become interested in being photographed precisely from seeing these pictures of Carl’s oil portraits:

The precedent having been established, the idea of a representation of the Sacred Person of a Chinese Majesty being seen by the world having been accepted, the painting of Her Majesty’s first portrait not having been followed by the dire results that the Chinese had prophesied, the traditional prejudice was overcome, and when she saw how quickly the photograph was made of the portrait, and how satisfactory it was, she decided she would have the photographer try one of herself, and she was not to stop at a single trial.

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11. Kecskes, “Photographs of Tz’u-hsi,” 88. Compare the debate years later over whether Puyi should be allowed to wear glasses (as depicted, for instance, in Bertolucci’s The Last Emperor).

12. The Freer Gallery owns a collection of 44 photo-negatives of these photographs. Reproductions of many of these images, including six in which Cixi appears in the guise of Guanyin, are reproduced in Liu Beisi and Xu Qixian, Guogong zhencang renwu zhaopian huicui.

13. Carl, With the Empress Dowager of China, 305.
Fig. 3 Photograph of a portrait of the Empress Dowager painted by Katherine Carl (1865–1938).
Breathlessly, Carl insisted that it was her portrait that had whetted Cixi’s interest in photography—which in a sense may well have been true, although the inspiration appears to have come not from the St. Louis portrait itself but from Carl’s earlier portrait of Deling together with the prospect of her subsequent portrait of Cixi herself. The inverted chronology of Cixi’s interest in photography that Carl (unwittingly) proposes here is symptomatic of the inverted temporality of the historical moment represented by the mirror photograph itself—insofar as the premodern specular visual economy is, I will argue, a retrospective projection of the photographic economy of the “world picture,” which remains on the virtual horizon of this particular image.

Just as these meta-representational photographs of Carl’s oil portraits underscore the portraits’ status as both image and physical artifact, Cixi herself was clearly interested not only in the photographs as images but also in their status as artifacts, particularly their potential reproduction and circulation within a transnational visual economy. She is said, for example, to have kept a photograph of Queen Victoria at her bedside, and in 1904 she sent one of her own photos to the wife of Queen Victoria’s grandson, Emperor Wilhelm II of Germany. Furthermore, in a dramatic break from the traditionally strict restrictions on the circulation and display of imperial portraits in China, Cixi permitted her photographs to be enlarged, reproduced, and distributed to officials and visitors; she even allowed some to be published and advertised for sale in a popular newspaper.

Thus, Cixi’s encounter with her mirror photograph, although it did not take place until the eve of her seventieth birthday, apparently marks the symbolic beginning of a new awareness of the increasingly hegemonic role of photographic technologies in mediating perceptions of the modern world—an awareness, in other words, of what Heidegger called “the age of the world picture.” In his 1938 essay of the same title, Heidegger argued that the “fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture”; by the concept of “world picture,” he meant not merely “a picture of the world but the world conceived

15. See Shibao (Eastern times), June 12, 1904; cited in Pang, “Photography, Performance, and the Making of Female Images in Modern China,” 64.
and grasped as a picture.” Furthermore, according to Heidegger, this modern process of representation has implications not only for how the world is conceived but also for the way in which observers situate themselves as subjects. For subjects to perceive the world as a picture, they must simultaneously picture themselves as perceiving subjects. This act of picturing the world effectively positions the observer within the broader model of the “world picture,” even as it is predicated on his or her theoretical ability to perceive the world as if from some imaginary Archimedean fulcrum necessarily positioned outside the picture being viewed.

Cixi’s fascination with photography during the early twentieth century could similarly be seen as part of a broader conceptual shift in understanding of the image(ry) of the world. Xunling’s photographs allowed Cixi to see her own image in a new light and also to gain a new appreciation of the visual medium through which these images were produced and disseminated. This new appreciation had important implications both for how the world would be “pictured” and for how subjects like herself would perceive their position within this new “world picture.” In these portraits—made possible by photography’s unprecedented mimeticism and reproducibility—Cixi actively projected herself into a new economy of visual representation and, in the process, positioned herself as a new kind of viewing subject. Rather than attempting to see herself “directly,” as in a mirror, she was instead perceiving herself as mediated through this array of external gazes—gazes she figuratively appropriated as her own even as she projectively identified with the external images associated with those gazes. As a result, the self-image of Cixi that was being perceived, projected, and constituted is itself, in a sense, an artifact of the portraitive process itself.

The Mirror Stage Revisited

In her memoir, Princess Deling recalled that Cixi insisting on watching as the first batch of photographs was being developed (to the point of ruining one print by exposing it to light prematurely); after the

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17. “That the world becomes picture is one and the same event with the event of man’s becoming subjectum in the midst of that which is” (ibid., 131).
photos were finished, she “took the whole of them to her own room and sat down on her little throne, and gazed at them for a long time. She even took her mirror in order to compare her reflection with the photographs just taken.”

Cixi’s reaction to the photographs reveals not merely a fascination with their inherent mimeticism but also more specifically a displaced and uncanny (mis)recognition of her own image. She appeared to see in these novel images less a reflection of herself and more a plenitude and symbolic power that significantly exceeded her existing self-conception, as represented by her mirrored reflection. As a result of this alienated recognition of the photographic image, Cixi apparently engaged in a process of projective identification, wherein she sought to appropriate the larger-than-life image of herself that she perceived in the photograph and then project it back onto the literal mirror image—and, by implication, onto her own prior self-understanding. This dialectics of (mis)recognition and projective identification operated not merely at the level of the photographic image itself but also at the level of the sociocultural connotations of the photographic medium. Cixi, in other words, appears to have been fascinated less by her image itself and more by her image as embedded within a distinctively modern visual economy. In having her pictures taken, what Cixi was attempting to (re)appropriate visually was therefore a transnational visual embeddedness which did not yet fully exist, but which that seminal moment of photographic recognition helped to begin to make possible.

Cixi’s comparison of her photographs to her own mirror reflection could be seen as a transposition and inversion of the moment of alienated recognition that Lacan famously outlined in his mirror-stage essay. Referring to a developmental stage that takes place when an infant is between six and eighteen months old, Lacan described the “startling spectacle of the infant in front of the mirror”—at a point when it still perceives its own body as an amorphous, inchoate mass “in bits and pieces”—“jubilantly” identifies with an external image of a unified body as it appears in the mirror. Given the contrast between the infant’s
self-perception and the image it perceives in the mirror, the moment of specular “recognition” is really a moment of misrecognition (mécognition), in which the infant actively asserts a relationship of equivalence (between itself and the external image), which is itself ultimately a product of the process of “identification” itself. Cixi’s initial reception of her photographs, therefore, could be seen as a second-order mirror scene: she already recognized the image in the mirror as an emblem of self-conception; now the photograph came to constitute the “startling spectacle” with which she sought to projectively identify.

Like Heidegger in his near-contemporary description of the historical transition into the era of the “world picture,” Lacan proposed an image-based model to describe the infant’s entry into subjectivity. Whereas Heidegger located his “world picture” model in geohistorical terms, however, Lacan suggested that the mirror stage’s “historical value” lies instead in its identification of a “decisive turning-point in the mental development of the child.” Lacan also claimed for his model more universal implications, asserting that it “typifies an essential libidinal relationship with the body image” (italics added). The claim to have identified an essential psychological process suggests that the model is, in theory, potentially applicable to any culture or era, and indeed Lacan’s mirror stage is routinely invoked to describe a remarkably diverse array of social and cultural phenomena. On the other hand, this same aspiration of universality is also the model’s Achilles’ heel, inviting the critique that the model elides cultural and historical difference, particularly when it is extrapolated to describe not merely infant development but more general processes of socialization, acculturation, and subject formation.

I will argue, however, that this sort of psychoanalytic approach is potentially useful in making sense of culturally and historically disparate phenomena, including Cixi’s mirror photograph, and that a rehistoriciization of the model suggests a way of appreciating the potential transcultural and transhistorical relevance of the theory itself. To this

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20. Heidegger’s essay was published in 1938, and, as will be discussed below, Lacan first presented his theory of the mirror stage in 1936 and would have published it in early 1937.
end, I consider the historical implications of Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage by, first, reflecting on the way in which the model simultaneously gestures both forward and backward to two crucial transitions in Lacan’s career roughly thirty years apart and, then, considering the way in which the understanding of temporality and historicity posited by the model itself is similarly predicated on a continual double gesture of anticipatory retrospection and retrospective anticipation.

Lacan’s mirror-stage model is now almost universally known primarily by a few famous lines from his 1949 essay of that title, in which he described how the infant, finding itself supported in front of a mirror, instantly recognizes and identifies with the external image—what Lacan calls the *imago*—of that autonomous and corporally unified self that the infant itself has yet to become:

This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject.22

The mirror-stage model itself, however, was itself not a static image but an organic concept that evolved throughout Lacan’s career. For instance, the first line of the 1949 essay explicitly gestures back to another discussion thirteen years earlier23—Lacan’s “looking-glass phase” presentation at the Fourteenth Congress of the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) in 1936.24 This 1936 talk was Lacan’s debut presenta-

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23. “The conception of the mirror stage that I introduced at our last congress [sic; it was actually two congresses earlier], thirteen years ago, has since become more or less established in the practice of the French group” (Lacan, “The Mirror Stage,” 1).

24. Actually, the French titles of Lacan’s 1936 and 1949 presentations at the IPA congresses used the same title, *le stade du miroir*, with the phrases “looking-glass phase” and “mirror stage” appearing only in the translated titles in the *International Journal of*
tion to the IPA and is considered his first formal theoretical contribution (after his dissertation) to psychoanalysis. Consequently it can be seen as a figurative mirror-stage moment marking his entry into the externalized *imago* that was the professional community of the IPA itself. Lacan’s most influential revision of the mirror-stage model came nearly three decades later in a series of seminars he gave in 1964, in which he substituted for the proverbial mirror the figure of a screen as a site of cultural projection with which the subject may then either identify or disassociate itself. Known collectively as “Seminar XI,”25 the lectures in which this model of the screen was proposed were presented on the heels of Lacan’s infamous excommunication from the IPA in late 1963.26

Just as the model of the screen that Lacan developed in Seminar XI dramatically illustrates the way in which both the mirror-stage model itself and Lacan’s own “mirror stage” identification with the IPA continued to evolve and transform themselves throughout his career, similarly the latter screen model is itself concerned with ways in which processes of projective identification continue to inform a subject’s self-perception well beyond the precise developmental moment specified in the mirror-stage essay. To this end, the later model stresses a process of mediated identification not with a mirror but with a nexus of culturally produced images, which are then projected onto a space that Lacan refers to metaphorically as a “screen.” The subject, then, (mis)recognizes him- or herself within those images while positioning him- or herself in relationship to the socially normative gazes that are inextricably linked with those same images.

In the Seminar XI discussions, the figure of the screen symbolizes the point of intersection between the subject’s corporeally localized

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*Psychoanalysis.* For simplicity, I use “looking-glass phase” to refer to the 1936 presentation and “mirror stage” to refer to the 1949 version of the essay.

25. “Seminar XI” appeared in English under the title *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis.*

26. This was actually the culmination of a decade-long struggle between Lacan and the IPA, dating back to 1954. The truncated seminar of which Lacan had delivered one lecture when he received the news in 1963 that the IPA was revoking his license as a practicing analyst was, appropriately enough, named “Names-of-the-Father.” For a discussion, see Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou’s special issue “Names-of-the-Father,” *Lacanian Ink* 27 (2006).
“look” and a disembodied culturally produced “gaze.” That is to say, the figure of the screen represents a fluid, imaginary space wherein the subject identifies with (or against) not only an array of sociocultural subject-models but also the delocalized “gazes” informing the ways in which those models are perceived in the first place. More generally, the figure of the screen functions as the hinge between the decontextualized and presumptively universal “gaze” of psychoanalytic theory itself and the culturally embedded “look” that necessarily conditions the specific subjects (in both senses of the term) which that theory is used to elucidate. As Kaja Silverman argues, the figure of the “screen” represents precisely “the site at which social and historical difference enters the field of vision.”

This screen, in other words, marks a space of cultural and historical difference—and not merely difference at the level of superficial appearance (e.g., cultural “images”) but, and what is more important, difference at the level of the underlying perspectives and epistemologies that make those images meaningful and intelligible in the first place (e.g., a culturally specific “gaze”).

Lacan’s Seminar XI was presented immediately following the termination of his professional affiliation with the IPA, and it simultaneously marked a figuratively new beginning for him, both personally and professionally. In 1964, for instance, he inaugurated the École Freudienne de Paris. That same year, precisely during the course of his Seminar XI, Lacan first met Jacques-Alain Miller, who not only later became his son-in-law but would subsequently undertake the formidable task of publishing all of Lacan’s year-long seminars in written form—starting with Seminar XI. Far more than mere transcription, the process of textual redaction involved taking assorted incomplete and contradictory notes from the seminars and from them reconstructively creating a singular and unitary text that would then stand in for the fragmentary and fleeting oral original. As Miller explained in his introduction to the subsequent publication of Seminar XI, his goal was to “obtain from Jacques Lacan’s spoken work an authentic version that would stand, in the future, for the

28. Technically, it is not necessarily the oral presentations that were fragmentary and incomplete (although they may very well have been so) but the various written notes from the presentations that happened to have been preserved.
original, which does not exist.”

In other words, Miller was seeking to create an external mirror image of the original oral seminar—a unified and stable text that would then substitute for the fragmentary, inchoate, and, in a very real sense, nonexistent seminar itself.

Perhaps the most intriguing example of this process of textual transcription functioning as a virtual mirror stage can be found in Lacan’s original looking-glass-phase presentation at the IPA congress on August 3, 1936, of which he had previously delivered a preliminary lecture to the Société psychanalytique de Paris on June 6, earlier that same summer. Had that seminal June presentation been an actual child, then the following January it would have been seven months old and entering its own mirror stage. As chance would have it, the June 6/August 3 talk was published, as the editor of the 1977 English edition of Lacan’s *Écrits* carefully notes, “in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 18, part I, January, 1937, under the title, ‘The Looking-glass Phase.’” This meticulously precise bibliographic citation, however, comes across as perhaps a little odd. Odd, not merely on account of the curiously overdetermined use of both italics and inverted commas in citing the essay’s title, or because the detailed attention to the publication’s date is paired with a failure to provide page numbers for the essay in question. Rather, the chief oddity in this assiduously detailed bibliographic citation lies in the fact that, as Jane Gallop has famously pointed out, the essay in question does not exist. The January issue of

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30. As Elizabeth Roudinesco (“The Mirror Stage,” 26) notes, Françoise Dolto took detailed notes of that earlier lecture; for reasons discussed below, these unpublished notes have become the only direct textual record of the “original” version of the mirror-stage essay.
31. “[The mirror stage] can take place . . . from the age of six months” (Lacan, “The Mirror Stage,” 1).
32. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, xiii. This abridged translation of Lacan’s *Écrits* was published in 1977 and was one of the primary gateways to Lacan’s thought for English readers until it was supplanted by Bruce Fink’s translation 25 years later (a similarly abridged volume of Fink’s translations appeared in 2002, followed by the first complete English translation of the entire *Écrits* in 2006).
the journal indexes only the title of the talk and does not provide the accompanying text. Why, then, did Alan Sheridan, the editor and English translator of the *Écrits*, make such a glaring mistake? Why was the need to posit a specific textual origin for the mirror-stage model so strong that it resulted quite literally in the creation of a nonexistent document?

Ostensibly, Sheridan was attempting to justify his placement of the (1949) mirror-stage essay at the head of his chronologically arranged, abridged version of Lacan’s *Écrits*, despite the fact that the essay is not the earliest work included in the translated volume. Sheridan’s need to assert the chronological primacy of the concept of the mirror stage (as opposed to the actual essay) was so strong, therefore, that he ended up fabricating a redundant and unnecessary textual origin to justify it.34 This overcompensatory specification of a prior publication date is unnecessary because it presumably would have sufficed simply to have cited the date of the conference presentation, as does the French version of the *Écrits*—though even there, too, the question of origins is rather knotted. The bibliographic guide at the end of the French *Écrits*, for instance, specifies the precise time of the August 3, 1936, presentation down to the minute: 3:40 in the afternoon, though Lacan himself noted in the same volume that this “original” presentation was itself incomplete—“exactly ten minutes into my text” Ernest Jones, then-president of the IPA and chair of the proceedings, halted the talk, ostensibly because Lacan had exceeded his allotted time.35 Lacan was apparently so miffed by the perceived snub that he left the conference the next day, to attend the Berlin Olympics. In other words, the insistence in the French *Écrits* on specifying the precise time of the 1936 presentation belies the fact that even that oral “origin” was itself aborted and ultimately incomplete.

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34. As Gallop (ibid.) explains, Sheridan saw the reference to the citation of the *title* of the looking-glass phase in the original French-language *Écrits* and mistakenly assumed that what it was citing as having been published in the *IJP* was the entire article. Since the French *Écrits* was citing the *IJP*’s English translation of Lacan’s title, that explains why the title appears italicized within the inverted commas. In the context of Sheridan’s own English-language volume, however, the preservation of the italics becomes oddly redundant.

The compulsion to retrospectively posit a temporally stable point of origin for Lacan’s mirror-stage model, therefore, appears to be directly proportional to the inherent ambiguity and indeterminacy of that origin itself. In this respect, the history of the model directly mirrors the model’s own implicit historicity, insofar as the mirror stage itself is structured around a retrospective positing of origins, and the moment of “recognition” in front of the mirror is intelligible as such only in retrospect, after the infant has already identified with and internalized this external image. Similarly, that original temporal indeterminacy may have helped lay the ground for many of Lacan’s subsequent attitudes toward time and temporality. For instance, it is very tempting to see a link between the IPA president’s decision to cut off Lacan’s presentation precisely at the end of his ten-minute allotment, and Lacan’s subsequent unorthodox espousal of “variable sessions” of indeterminate length in his own psychoanalytic practice—an espousal that would become the single-most important factor in his subsequent conflicts with, and eventual excommunication from, the IPA. As Elizabeth Roudinesco observes, “All his life, Lacan would struggle with an impossible control over time.”

Although Lacan implies that Jones’s interruption of his IPA presentation of the looking-glass phase paper was the reason he subsequently neglected to submit the manuscript for publication, he may also have been distracted during that period by the imminent arrival of his first child, Caroline, who was born on January 8, 1937. In other words, Lacan’s daughter quite literally displaced the looking-glass-phase presentation’s own figurative mirror stage (as textual publication), and her resulting status as a living stand-in for that figurative imago is ironically underscored by the alternative name Lacan gave her: Image. Through another uncanny and tragic coincidence, “Image” Lacan, this living embodiment and displacement of the mirror stage’s own image, subsequently died in a car accident on May 30, 1973— which also happens to have been the same year in which Lacan’s post-mirror stage theory of

37. As Roudinesco (Jacques Lacan, 136) explains, Lacan added this second name in accordance with the tradition, in his wife’s family, of assigning everyone a “nickname or diminutive.”
the screen (developed in Seminar XI) was finally published. The daughter’s entire life, therefore, was framed quite precisely by these two paradigmatic mirror-stage moments of her father’s own mirror-stage model. In other words, the original moment of specular recognition between the 1936 oral presentation and what would have been its textual correlate was finally realized 36 years later, when “Image” Lacan’s premature death coincided with the publication of the textual transcription of the model’s most significant and influential revision.

Just as “Image” Lacan’s life was framed quite precisely by Lacan’s mirror-stage theory of the image, Cixi’s life proceeded in uncanny lockstep with the demise of the dynasty she ultimately came to personify. For instance, two of the pivotal mid-century events that helped set the stage for the ultimate collapse of the dynasty half a century later were the (first) Opium War (1839–42) and the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64). Cixi, born four years before the start of the Opium War, assumed virtual power over the dynasty when her young son was crowned emperor three years before the Taiping Rebellion was suppressed and would then to retain an almost continual grip on power until her death in 1908, three years before the ultimate collapse of the dynasty itself. These chronological coincidences are, of course, merely another way of saying simply that Cixi’s life and career were closely intertwined with the gradual dénouement of China’s last formal dynasty. Here, however, I will use these questions of chronology first to return to Cixi’s 1903 mirror photograph and then to think through some of the historical implications of the preceding re-historicization of Lacan’s mirror stage.

Cixi’s mirror photograph was taken in early 1903, on the eve of her seventieth-birthday celebrations later that year. Cixi’s seventieth sui birthday was actually not until 1904 but, because it had been determined that that would be an inauspicious year for the celebration, she moved everything up to 1903. In planning the actual celebrations, furthermore, Cixi was determined to pull out all the stops, in order to make up for having reluctantly had to cancel her sixtieth-birthday celebrations due to Chinese losses in the Sino-Japanese War (the Chinese calendar was organized around 60-year cycles, and therefore the sixtieth birthday is traditionally a pivotal one). As a result, Cixi’s 1903 mirror photograph was positioned at a peculiar juncture in her life—oriented simultane-
ously toward her forthcoming and her previous, decadal birthday celebrations. At the same time, these seemingly opposed sentiments of anticipation and nostalgia are intimately bound up with one another, insofar as Cixi looked forward to her seventieth birthday precisely because it would compensate for her aborted sixtieth, just as her recollection of her nonexistent sixtieth was displaced into a compensatory anticipation of her seventieth.

This dialectics of anticipatory nostalgia and retrospective anticipation is, I argue, one that Lacan’s mirror stage both embodies and attempts to theorize. Just as the mirror-stage essay simultaneously looks forward to its revision in the Seminar XI and backward to its origins in the looking-glass-phase paper, similarly the moment of specular (mis)recognition the model describes is itself one that not only simultaneously looks forward to the unified subjectivity that will follow and backward to the “body in bits and pieces” that precedes it, but furthermore actually creates and makes possible both that future unity as well as the past disunity. As Jane Gallop argues:

The mirror stage is a decisive moment. Not only does the self issue from it, but so does “the body in bits and pieces.” This moment is the source not only for what follows but also for what precedes. It produces the future through anticipation and the past through retroaction. . . . What thus occurs in the mirror stage is the formation of what in the future will be an antecedent, what grammatically can be called a “future perfect.”

In other words, the mirror stage not only postulates its own past and future but also simultaneously creates its own identity as a transitional moment mediating between the two. In more general terms, this re-reading of the mirror-stage model suggests a model of history grounded not on linear teleologies but on intimately interwoven process of anticipation and retrospection that simultaneously create the future and the past as dialectically dependent on one another. The past, in other words, does not exist as a self-evident category; rather, it is a retrospective projection against which the present seeks to distinguish its own future, just as the future has significance only in comparison to a

history that is constantly being reconceived from the perspective of the present.

This rehistoricization of Lacan’s mirror-stage model, in turn, invites a similar reconsideration of Cixi’s 1903 mirror photograph. Cixi’s early twentieth-century mirror portrait symbolically marks a “decisive moment” in her entry into visual modernity. We may imagine how, like Lacan’s swaddling infant seeing its mirrored reflection for the first time, the elderly Cixi may have glimpsed in this photograph an image of how she wished to be publicly perceived, particularly on a global stage. More generally, Cixi perhaps might have also been seeing the possibility of an as-yet-unrealized “age of the world picture”—a “world picture” that would increasingly determine not only how the world is perceived but also how subjects like herself understand their position as observers. This age of the world picture, however, is as aspirational for Cixi as is the unified *imago* for Lacan’s swaddling infant, and by the same token the premodern “specular” space with which it comes to be contrasted is one that becomes visible only in retrospect.

I have argued that the mirror photograph is positioned within, and itself depicts, a stark transition from a premodern specular to a modern photographic scopic regime, together with the epistemological and ontological implications of each. Now, however, I would go a step further and suggest that the transitional moment represented and embodied by the 1903 photograph inevitably folds in upon itself. Like the mirror stage itself, the historicity of the moment embodied by this mirror photograph is one that, in a sense, is an artifact of that transitional moment itself. Just as Cixi herself was simultaneously looking both backward to her cancelled sixtieth birthday and forward to her seventieth, similarly the contrasting premodern and modern scopic regimes posited by this particular image can be seen as projections of this particular moment itself. The ideal of specularity as representing a direct and unmediated perception of the self is arguably one that never existed except as a retrospective projection of a post-photographic age, which, in 1903, still remained on the historical horizon. By the same token, the role of photography in helping to frame and ground a sort of transnational identity (e.g., Heidegger’s “age of the world picture”) arguably never existed except as phantasmic anticipation.
The Mirrored Screen

Deling, in her description of Cixi’s first photo session with Xunling, mentioned that Cixi temporarily interrupted the session after a few preliminary shots in order to receive an official audience. Deling and some of the other attendants hid behind the “exquisitely carved wooden screen” behind the throne and remained there until the visitors had left and Cixi was ready to resume the session. This act of hiding behind the screen appears to have been a common occurrence, since Cixi (according to Deling’s recollections) explicitly instructed that Deling hide herself in this manner during imperial audiences, noting that, from behind the screen, “You [Deling] can see all right, but I don’t wish that you should be seen.”

The tripartite screen was the same one that, after the Empress Dowager’s audience that particular morning, was then moved outside along with her throne for the Leshou Hall photo shoot. In the context of the photo shoot, this screen functioned simultaneously as a physical artifact, a visual image, and a locus of a variety of external gazes. First, as a physical artifact, the screen blocked from view what lay behind it while simultaneously serving as one of the visual props (like the throne and the pyramids of apples) within the photograph. Second, in addition to being a visual artifact, the screen contains several embedded images—including what appear to be a pine tree in the center panel and mei plum blossoms in the two side panels. These embedded images are then re-embedded within Xunling’s photographs, where they are clearly used as symbolic projections of Cixi’s own self-identification with Chinese culture and literati identity. Third, the screen not only contains specific images but also connotes a variety of culturally specific gazes or perspectival orientations, including not only the traditional Chinese cultural perspective against which Cixi seeks to orient herself but also Deling’s destabilizing and culturally liminal gaze. That is to say, Cixi’s earlier instruction that during official audiences Deling watch from behind the screen—able to see out, but herself invisible to outsiders—implicitly transforms the throne area in front of the screen into a virtual

panopticon, wherein the physical space becomes inflected with the potential presence of Deling’s absent gaze. Deling’s gaze, moreover, was located quite precisely at the very intersection of China/tradition and foreign/modernity that Cixi is in the process of negotiating with the mirror photograph itself. After all, Deling’s oil portrait and photographs inspired Cixi to have her portraits done, just as Deling’s experience abroad positions her as part of the target audience for whom these same portraits were created (given that they were undertaken quite explicitly to rehabilitate Cixi’s image within the foreign community). The invisible insertion of Deling’s latent gaze, via the screen, into the mirror photograph, therefore, precisely mirrors the way in which Cixi’s own errant gaze wanders out of the frame of the photo, and part of the function of the image as a whole involves the figurative suturing of the two unrelated gazes.

This study, *The Naked Gaze: Reflections on Chinese Modernity*, takes as its starting point the contested space between Cixi’s, Xunling’s, and Deling’s respective gazes, which is to say, between the figures of the mirror, the camera, and the projective screen. On one hand, Cixi’s specular gaze originates from the virtual center of the image but then wanders out of the frame of the photograph. Xunling’s photographic gaze is positioned outside the frame of the picture even as it simultaneously frames the picture. Deling’s invisible (and, indeed, absent) voyeuristic gaze originates from behind the screen with which Cixi is attempting to frame her own self-presentation and then forcibly reinserts itself into the scene to dominate the photograph as a whole. The intersection of these three gazes marks the space of the mirror photograph itself, but it is the historical transition point that produced the photograph.

Below, I examine the implications of these shifting understandings of visuality by considering a variety of nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts. I focus in particular on their use of visual tropes as a lens for considering issues of identity and subject formation, particularly the constitution and contestation of gendered and national identity. In my readings, I attempt both to consider the texts as they see themselves and to mobilize an “outside” gaze in order to read the same texts against the grain. The goal of these readings is to reflect on the significance of Chineseness, modernity, and Chinese modernity, as well as to propose an inverse “reflection” of the naturalized category of “Chinese
modernity” itself. I will suggest that it is not an immanent concept in its own right but the product of a continual process of projective identification, anticipatory retrospection, and retrospective anticipation.

This study is divided into three parts, with each part centering around one of the visual components of Cixi’s mirror photograph. Part I takes as its starting point Cixi’s mirror gaze and reflects on tropes of reflexivity and involution during the nineteenth century. Part II orients itself around Xunling’s photographic gaze and more generally looks at issues of observation, spectatorship, and visual mimicry during the mid-twentieth century. Part III takes its inspiration from the figure of Cixi’s tripartite screen, which it uses as a prism through which to consider the role of visual imagery as a recurrent site of projective identification during the late twentieth century, particularly the ways in which visual imagery is repeatedly invested with symbolic significance despite an explicit awareness of the ephemerality or impossibility of the images themselves.

In each of these three parts, I address the discursive implications of the visual mode in question primarily through a detailed examination of a selection of strategically chosen narrative texts. At the same time, I argue that the visual mode correlates to dominant sociocultural tendencies of that particular historical period. In Part I, for instance, I focus primarily on two nineteenth-century “literati novels” that revolve around the figure of mirror. I discuss how, in each text, mirroring is used to interrogate conventions of gender differentiation and sexual orientation. More generally, I suggest that the very genre of the literati novel—which explicitly foregrounds a “literati” fascination with literary, linguistic, and cultural allusions—is symptomatic of a tendency in late imperial culture that could itself be described as “specular” or involutive—in which cultural production often came to assume the form of an accumulation of recursive allusions to a common cultural legacy.

During the early to mid-twentieth century, cultural production and intellectual orientation shifted away from a recursive engagement with an existing Chinese tradition to an increasingly self-conscious awareness of how China was being perceived from “outside.” During this same period, new representational practices and technologies were introduced into China from the West, such as photography, cinema, and various specific artistic and other mimetic techniques. These two
tendencies converge (as they did in the case of Cixi’s fascination with photography near the end of her life) in a parallel interest both in processes of external observation and in mediated identification with external representations. Here, I focus on the thematization, in works by three influential mid-century authors, of processes of mediated identification with respect to different visual media, including not only photography but also Western art and even traditional “picture manuals.”

In the contemporary period, both the unitary category of “Chineseness,” together with the presumptive dichotomy between China and an external “foreign” gaze, have become less and less meaningful. “Foreign” and “Chinese” culture and society are ever more intertwined, even as the category of “China” itself is itself becoming increasingly fractured by political schisms, transnational migration, and the growing visibility of minority groups (ethnic or otherwise) within China, Taiwan, and other Chinese regions. In visual terms, this period is characterized by a shift away from an attention to specular reflections and the observation of external images, to a deconstructive focus on these images themselves. To borrow a cinematic metaphor, images of all kinds are increasingly perceived as screened projections.

Underlying this general diachronic periodization from an early modern culture of reflection to a postmodern culture of screen projections, however, is a synchronic recognition that the three distinct visual modes mapped out above are, at the same time, inextricably intertwined. Just as the specular image, in the nineteenth-century texts, contains within itself a spectatorial and projective dimension, the contemporary skepticism of visual imagery as mere projection nevertheless comes to function as a site of mediated specular identification.

At the heart of this study, therefore, is a concern with the logic of the gaze, specifically the gaze that is constantly bound up with constructions of gender and articulations of desire. An attention to this “naked” gaze not only permits a reflection on the development of China’s modernity but also, by underscoring the underlying continuities of visual logic that extend through the premodern, modern, and postmodern periods, may provide a potentially surprising inverse “reflection” of conventional understandings of that same modernity.