

One rainy morning in 1947, Chinese American writer Lin Yutang and his daughter arrived at the door of the Remington Typewriter Company in New York City. After being shown into a solemn, rectangular conference room where a dozen executives sat at a table, Lin lifted a plastic-covered wooden box onto one end of the table and opened it to reveal the product of over thirty years of work and over \$120,000 (much of which he had borrowed): a prototype of an electric Chinese typewriter.¹ Launching into his presentation, Lin detailed many of the arguments he had stated in an article in the magazine *Asia* just one year before. The word “amanuensis,” he explained, “seems almost a forgotten English word today, while in China, the amanuensis or the man who copies by hand all correspondence in neat, orthodox, professional-looking calligraphy, is still an indispensable part of any office staff.”² Producing all of its official discourse “by hand,” the Chinese nation-state was at a severe disadvantage in a rapidly technologizing global order: “When the Executive Yuan wants to issue an order of three thousand words to the provincial governments, and twenty to thirty copies have to be made in writing because they may not be mimeographed, an army of amanuenses have to be set to work till midnight to get the order out by the next day.” But, Lin argues, if one had a Chinese typewriter, “the same work could be done by two expert typists in an hour. . . . The whole office atmosphere would be changed, the drowsy tempo quickened, and a Chinese office would start to click and come to life” (“ICT,” 58).

Lin’s rather deterministic faith in the power of his new technology was not without historical precedent. During the late nineteenth and

early twentieth centuries, the rapid ascendance of the typewriter as a central mechanism of Western modernity paralleled a dramatic proliferation in bureaucratic inscription (consolidating various modes of official discourse and accelerating colonial and international channels of communication), even as it signaled the final dominance of alpha-mechanical orthography over more “tribal” or “primitive” modes of inscription. Regarding the typewriter and Chinese characters more specifically, the general consensus in the United States for many years was not that Asia would someday solve the mechanical problem of producing a typewriter, but rather that the typewriter would eventually solve Asia’s orthographic dilemma by simply convincing Asians that it made more sense to more fully “modernize” by learning English. *The Story of the Typewriter*, published in 1923 by the Herkimer County (N.Y.) Historical Society to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the invention, explains that there are two “ideographic” languages, Japanese and Chinese, that “lie outside the pale of the writing machine,” and while nothing was mechanically impossible it would be some time before one could expect an ideographic typewriter to appear. “Meanwhile, the Chinese and Japanese buy typewriters—thousands of them; not to write their own languages, of course, but other languages, usually English. . . . Thus it may be said that the typewriter has not only facilitated the use of language but has been no mean influence in determining the spread of language itself” (130). As the triumphant “of course” implies, to “lie outside the pale of the writing machine” was to exist beyond the borders of progress. What the typewriter signaled throughout the twentieth century—whether for the philosophical antimodernism of Martin Heidegger or the exultant media theatrics of Marshall McLuhan—was the inscriptive authority of an exclusively Western modernity.

Given the centrality of the typewriter in critical studies of Euro-American modernity (such that nearly every major commentator on technology in the twentieth century had something to say about it), the absence of any critical study on Lin Yutang’s widely publicized efforts to invent and mass-produce an electric Chinese typewriter during the 1930s and 1940s is rather surprising.³ In terms of his status as a native interpreter of Chinese culture for Western readers, Lin’s influence and authority was unmatched during the first half of the twentieth century. His first book in English, *My Country and My People* (1935), was reprinted seven times in just four months and was translated into

a number of European languages. Just a few years later, Lin's *The Importance of Living* (1937) became the best-selling nonfiction book in the United States during 1938, topping the *New York Times* best-seller list for over fifty weeks. Nominated twice for the Nobel Prize (in 1940 and again in 1950), Lin's career, and particularly his work on the Chinese typewriter, would seem like the perfect topic for analysis in the new transnational American studies. Strangely, however, Lin's work has been largely ignored in American studies, deliberately disregarded—at least until very recently—in Asian American studies, and only selectively attended to in Asian studies. Much of this inattention and misreading, I argue, has been the result of a failure to see how Lin's engagement with the discourse on technology (and especially his decades-long attempt to invent an electric Chinese typewriter) was central to both his literary work and its transnational circulation. Whereas some scholars have argued that Lin simply internalized the basic tenets of Euro-American orientalism, I contend that his typewriter provides evidence of an aggressive attempt to modify and subvert those discursive practices for Asia's benefit.

Before turning to the events surrounding Lin's Chinese typewriter, however, it will be useful to map out some of the critical misprisions of his work over the last few decades. The varied reactions to Lin's 1948 novel *Chinatown Family* offer a particularly telling example of the erratic reception of his work across various scholarly disciplines. On the one hand, there have been some recent attempts to recuperate Lin's writing in the field of Asian American studies.⁴ The blurb on the recent republication of *Chinatown Family* by Rutgers University Press, for example, aims to promote the text within the field of Asian American studies: "Lin Yutang, author of more than thirty-five books, was arguably the most distinguished Chinese American writer of the twentieth century." It cites the book's "engrossing" treatment of "issues of culture, race, and religion," noting that the novel addresses interracial marriage and family life at a time when such marriages were "frowned upon and it was forbidden for working-class Chinese men to bring their families to America."⁵ Such a characterization of Lin, however, is a much more engaging and positive picture of him than had initially emerged in Asian American studies. Scholars such as Elaine Kim, on the other hand, can barely contain their disdain for Lin. In her groundbreaking volume *Asian American Literature*, Kim condemns Lin's writing as "superficial, pithy pieces about China that

are in perfect keeping with the American popular view.”⁶ He is a “bourgeois anti-Communist” whose descriptions of the Chinese “as backward, childlike, superstitious people, loveable but incapable of taking care of themselves, [are] in perfect keeping with the Western colonial view of them.” *Chinatown Family* is an “uncomplicated” novel whose characters are simply “modeled after familiar stereotypes.” According to Kim, Lin does not even take Chinese American life seriously, and writes with “apparent boredom with [his] subject.”⁷

In contrast to the initial reception of Lin’s work in Asian American studies as self-orientalizing and blatantly stereotypical, responses were more positive in studies by scholars in Taiwan (where Lin spent the last years of his life, and where his home has been turned into a museum) and in English-language Asian studies more generally. In these studies, careful attention is paid to his satirical style, particularly its significance to Chinese politics during the 1920s and 1930s.⁸ However, by focusing primarily on Lin’s early political career and his later time in Taiwan, many of these scholars overlook crucial developments in the decades Lin spent in the United States writing in English. Diran John Sohigian’s 719-page study, *The Life and Times of Lin Yutang* (1991), for instance, never once mentions *Chinatown Family*, and Sohigian even fails to include the novel in his twelve-page bibliography of Lin’s writings.⁹ A recent introduction of Lin’s work as part of a Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibit similarly fails to mention the novel, even while referring to every other work he produced during the late 1940s and early 1950s.¹⁰ In Asian studies, then, a work like *Chinatown Family* is seen as hardly relevant, whereas in Asian American studies the same book becomes the target of a great deal of animosity. As I will demonstrate, however, recasting Lin’s career (and particularly his efforts to invent an electric Chinese typewriter) in the context of a discourse I call “Asia-as-*technê*” not only provides a more accurate picture of Lin’s transnational literary development; it also opens a space for a reading of *Chinatown Family* that dramatically alters the typical Asian American understanding of his work and offers an important contribution to the larger critical discourse on the place of technology in American studies.

I am borrowing Heidegger’s notion of *technê* here not because he began writing “The Question Concerning Technology” (1954) while dabbling in orientalism (as interesting as that is), but rather because it reflects a general antimodernist tendency to explore therapeutic

alternatives to the overtechnologization (what Heidegger identifies as *Gestell* or “enframing”) of Western modernity.¹¹ In this essay, Heidegger returns to the etymological roots of the word “technology” in an effort to rescue forms of thinking and handicraft from the systemic metaphysics of modern technology—in short, to distinguish between what might be called the modern “techno” and the originary *technê*. As he explains, “There was a time when it was not technology alone that bore the name *technê*. Once, the revealing that brings forth truth into the splendor of radiant appearance was also called *technê*.”¹² Not simply a return to “nature,” the move toward *technê* is an attempt to resurrect some ancient skill or craftsmanship, and to identify—against the efficient and inhumane technologies of modernity—an aesthetic more conducive to a romantic concept of organic wholeness. The various moves toward *technê* in Anglo-American intellectual history have been amply documented.¹³ However, in trying to contextualize Lin’s fascination with technology and the role of the East in modern culture, T. J. Jackson Lears’s *No Place of Grace* details an especially interesting and generally overlooked tendency in U.S. culture to characterize Asia’s *technê* as the potential solution to the problems of Western overtechnologization.¹⁴ As Lears’s extensive research illustrates, a number of Anglo-Americans saw in the East a particular form of *technê*, generally feminized and mystical, that might somehow provide a therapeutic alternative to Western industrial or Taylorized forms of mass production and machine technology. Unlike the more traditional protocols of orientalist discourse (in which the East is either characterized as stagnantly “tech-less” or else dangerously imitating Western technoculture), the advocates of Asia-as-*technê* asserted that the technologically superior West had too aggressively espoused the dictates of industrial life and that it was necessary to turn to the culture and tradition of the East in order to recover the essence of some misplaced or as-yet-unfulfilled modern identity.

From one perspective, of course, these Western versions of Asia-as-*technê* only reinforce the classic orientalist denial of coevalness. That is, the “masculine” and “modern” techno-West turns momentarily to the “feminine” and “premodern” *technê*-East as a means of resolving its own problems within a certain form of knowledge (specifically technology) precisely in order to maintain Western global superiority.¹⁵ However, from a more transnational perspective Asia-as-*technê* offered legitimate opportunities to subvert the classical ori-

entalist characterizations of Asia as either tech-less or techno. That is, the discourse of Asia-as-technê could be adopted as a means of developing more positive and organic forms of modernity outside the racialized hierarchies of traditional Western technics. Karen Leong has argued, for example, that a distinct transformation in American orientalism during the 1930s produced “a romanticized, progressive, and highly gendered image of China” that allowed figures such as Pearl Buck, Anna May Wong, and Mayling Soong to more actively influence civic and consumer life in both the United States and China—and this phenomenon took place precisely in the context of “the modernization wrought by technology, increasingly complex relations, and a population shift toward urban areas.”¹⁶

Lin Yutang's Asia-as-Technê

Even a cursory reading of Lin's major works demonstrates how important the discourse of Asia-as-technê was to his thinking. In *The Importance of Living* (1937), for instance, Lin repeatedly warns against what he calls the dangers of the “mechanistic mind.” The problem with “modern industrial life,” he argues, is that it “imposes upon us a different conception of time as measured by the clock, and eventually turns the human being into a clock himself.”¹⁷ People in the West have begun to “degenerate into automatons” (58), such that the “gloriously scamp-like qualities of reacting freely and incalculably to [one's] external surroundings” have suddenly been replaced with “the model of the ants” (84). But Lin does not leave his readers without hope. The answer to these perils of machine culture, he suggests, is that the West must begin to emulate the Chinese in their “sense of freedom” and their “love of vagabondage” (2). For Lin, these were inherently (and positively) gendered distinctions. As he explains earlier in the same volume, “It would not be at all far-fetched to say that Oriental civilization represents the female principle, while Occidental civilization represents the male principle” (107). Throughout his writings, these gendered characterizations are drawn very clearly along the lines of techno and technê.¹⁸

In his 1943 collection of essays titled *Between Tears and Laughter*, Lin accelerates this gendered critique of machine culture, claiming that unless the West turns to the wisdom of the East for cultural redemption, the world will continue to spiral into chaos and war. Indeed, he

says, Western culture has become “incorrigibly mechanical.”¹⁹ The “development of the machine” (in addition to the evils of “nationalism, racial prejudice, [and] militarism”) has caused the world to begin to “fall apart” (87). Again and again, Lin argues that Western culture has become overtechnologized, and that the only legitimate “challenge to this mechanical age” is traditional Chinese philosophy, and specifically figures such as Laotse, Chuang-tzu, and Mencius (212). For example, it was Mencius who,

in recovering for us a spiritual concept of man, has provided us with a doctrine of equality of all men, a basis for world co-operation among the races of mankind, and the possibility of freedom. He has given us a more flattering view of man than that of mechanical robots which the thousand scientific idiots of the past century have been trying to tell us that we are. (213)

Given Lin’s arguments that the cultural and aesthetic “handicraft” of China (an entity he once referred to as that “great mystical *Dasein*”²⁰) held the answers to the perils of the “mechanistic mind,” it might seem logical to assume that his views on the “mechanized” writing of the typewriter would have paralleled those of other antimodernist figures. Heidegger, for example, proposes that the typewriter specifically inhibits philosophical reflection: “[W]hen writing was withdrawn from the origin of its essence, i.e. from the hand, and was transferred to the machine [by means of the typewriter], a transformation occurred in the relation of Being to man” (85). For Heidegger, the typewriter simply underscores his larger claim that modern technology has only further entrenched humanity’s metaphysical blindness to Being: “[T]he typewriter veils the essence of writing and of the script. It withdraws from man the essential rank of the hand, without man’s experiencing this withdrawal appropriately and recognizing that it has transformed the relation of Being to his essence” (85). Isn’t the typewriter, then, the very essence of what Lin had condemned as the “steady hum of . . . clicking and clanking machines”? Isn’t the typewriter merely evidence that people in the West had begun to, in Lin’s words, “degenerate into automatons”? How, then, can we reconcile Lin’s decades-long obsession with creating a Chinese typewriter with his simultaneous polemic against Western machine culture? How does his role as one of the most popular architects of the discourse of Asia-as-technê in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s work

against (or along with) his effort to engineer this fundamental move in the production of *Asia-as-techno*?

The Technê-Whim

In turning to a discussion of Lin's typewriter, it will be useful to understand how his fascination with machine culture emerged at the crossroads of a series of transnational movements and imperial-cultural interactions. Lin's father was a Presbyterian minister from a rural town in Fujian Province, very much committed to the idea that his sons would receive an education in English with particular attention to Western science. As a young student at a Christian missionary school in Xiamen in 1905, Lin was entranced by the steam engine paddleboats he would see floating along a nearby river. He became fascinated with the techno-cultural forms described in his physics and engineering textbooks and would sometimes copy out the diagrams of engines in his journals. When he attended St. John's University in Shanghai in 1915, he enrolled in a number of humanities courses, primarily because he had become so proficient in English and was looking forward to studying literature in the United States. But his fascination with science and technology continued: "Don't be surprised," he told his friends, "if when I'm fifty years old, I suddenly enroll at MIT and switch to engineering."²¹

At about this time, however, Lin arrived in Beijing, where (given his Western education) he experienced a kind of culture shock that ran counter to that experienced by most other Chinese intellectuals during this period. As he explained later,

Imagine my shame when plunged into Peking, the center of China. It was not only my studies, but the Christian background. I had been forbidden to see Chinese theaters, from which all Chinese learned about Chinese famous men and women. I knew all about the trumpets of Joshua which brought about the fall of Jericho, but I did not know how Meng Jiangnü's tears washed away a section of the Great Wall. And yet I was a college graduate and therefore considered an *intelligentsia*.²²

As several scholars have shown, the intellectual atmosphere in urban China during the late 1910s was marked by excited calls for China to abandon the traditional strictures of Confucianism and Taoism and to

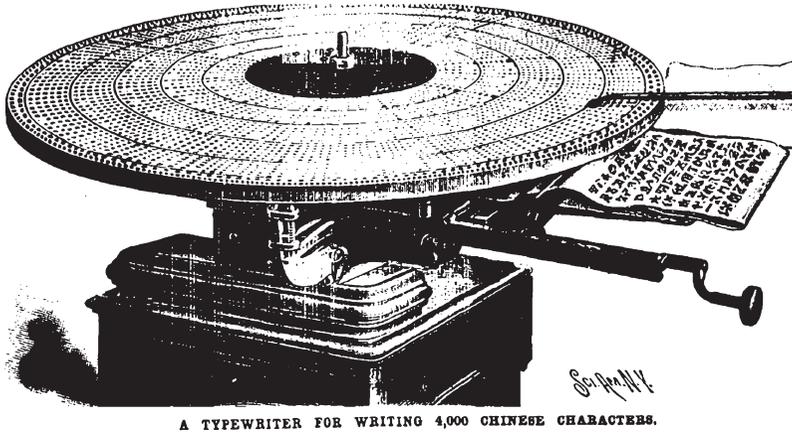


Figure 1 D. Z. Sheffield's Chinese typewriter, *Scientific American*, 3 June 1899, 359.

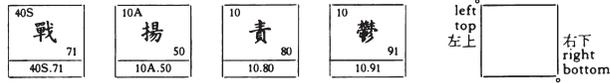
turn more directly to Western models of democracy, science, and technology.²³ Lin's position during these upheavals can best be described as ambivalent. On the one hand, his fascination and expertise in Western thought and technology made him quite comfortable with these new ideas. But on the other hand, his growing interest in traditional Chinese culture during his time in Beijing convinced him that while Western machine culture offered an important means of advancing Chinese modernity, something of China's past must be preserved—not only because such a past was inherently valuable but also because the imperialist context of China's modernization seemed to equate such a process with Westernization.²⁴ As Shi-yee Liu has shown, "At a time when the majority of the educated elite immersed itself in Western learning, Lin turned to China's past."²⁵

During his studies in China, Lin came across a number of previous attempts to invent a Chinese typewriter.²⁶ Large and unwieldy, these "typewriters" were more often simply massive trays or rotating drums with individual character blocks inside them (see, for example, fig. 1). Without an alphabetic or other rapid system for organizing the characters on the drums, typists often had to spend months memorizing where the characters were, and even then the machines were not as fast as simply handwriting individual characters. Such typewriters, Lin knew, could hardly be used on a "whim." But as Darren Wershler-Henry reminds us, McLuhan's famous description of the

typewriter as an “Iron Whim” is a complex Joycean pun: the word “whim” can refer to not only “a capricious notion or fancy” but also “a pun or play on words; a double meaning” and, even more surprising, “A machine . . . consisting of a vertical shaft containing a large drum with one or more radiating arms or beams.”²⁷ Thus, the real problem with previous Chinese typewriters—if one can characterize the problem by reframing Wershler-Henry’s particular “whim” (or pun)—was that they required the use of a “whim” (rotating drum) but did not allow for textual production on a “whim” (or capricious fancy). As Lin would comment years later while reflecting on these early efforts, the “principal problem in inventing a Chinese typewriter” was not one of making a machine that could produce Chinese characters, but rather one of inventing a “quick and sure-fire index keyboard” (“ICT,” 58). The task was not simply to mechanize China’s orthography, but rather to discover some hidden, inner systematic logic to the Chinese characters that was already there, a kind of technê-essence that could then be transferred onto a mechanical grid. He could not accept the idea, as some had argued in early discussions on the (im)possibility of a Chinese typewriter, that there was no underlying system already coded into Chinese writing.

By the mid-1920s, Lin felt he had discovered the answer. By dividing Chinese characters into their top-left and bottom-right components, a system he called 上下形 (*shang xia xing*), he found that he could organize tens of thousands of characters according to a kind of Chinese “alphabet,” which disregarded a character’s pronunciation and focused instead on a combination of relative stroke positions (fig. 2).²⁸ His solution, then, was to ignore the phonetic and sequential qualities of the characters (the alphabetic sound and stroke order) and focus instead on their spatial structure. It was as if the relative slowness of Chinese writing in an era of mechanization could be solved by ignoring the temporal elements of the orthography and focusing instead on their spatial aesthetics—a vivid corollary to Lin’s turn toward technê as a means of appropriating the classic orientalist denial of coevalness and recasting it as an aesthetic advantage in the search for a way out of (and into) modern technics.

In 1931 Lin traveled to England as a representative of Academia Sinica for a conference, taking with him a blueprint for a potential Chinese typewriter. In England he hired an engineer to help develop a prototype of his machine, spending all of his savings on the project.



THE CHINESE ALPHABET

了 00	十 10	廿 20	三 30	四 40	五 50	六 60	七 70	八 80	九千 90
01 小 02 水	11 土 12 大	21 上 22 下	31 丁 32 フ	41 囧 42 囧	51 厂 52 尸	61 广 62 六 63 六	71 弋 72 心	81 人 82 义 83 一	91 夕 92 夕 93 夕

Figure 2 Dictionary Index System using Lin Yutang’s *shang xia xing* (上下形) or “up-and-down” classification method, in Lin Yutang, *Chinese-English Dictionary of Modern Usage* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Chinese Univ. Press, 1973).

Perhaps not realizing how expensive and complicated the actual mechanical production of the typewriter would be, Lin quickly ran out of money and returned to China with an unfinished prototype. In 1934, at the urging of Pearl Buck (and with the help of her future husband, Richard Walsh, who owned the John Day Publishing Company), Lin began writing what would become his first international bestseller, *My Country and My People*. By October 1935, the book was on the *New York Times* bestseller list and was widely praised in the United States as an accurate picture of China.²⁹ The basic, gendered distinction between the techno-West and the technê-East that Lin would develop as evidence of the East’s superior culture in later publications appears in this collection of essays as well, but with one important distinction: in *My Country and My People*, Lin sets up this dichotomy as a way of illustrating not only the relative virtues of China’s technê-culture but also some of its shortcomings in the modern era.³⁰ Here Lin argues that while traditional Chinese culture has been invaluable to China’s development, it has become entrenched, preventing China from adapting the modernizing power of technology needed in order to progress as a nation.

It is in this 1935 volume, for example, that Lin notes the tendency of Chinese technê-inventiveness to reflect “the handicraft stage” but then goes on to argue that “[b]ecause of the failure to develop a scientific method, and because of peculiar qualities of Chinese thinking, China has been backward in natural science” (78). Lin notes that the

Western techno-world has led to a degeneration of the “art of living,” but he simultaneously suggests that the Eastern technê-world has been too content with this same art of living: “The Chinese as a race, are unable to have any faith in a system. For a system, a machine, is always inhuman, and the Chinese hate anything inhuman. The hatred of any mechanistic view of the law and government is so great that it has made government by law impossible” (111). He praises the Chinese penchant for “the rural life” and “reasonableness” and “humor.” But while humor is a generally a good thing, he argues, it is also “ruining China.” It is possible to “have too much of that silvery laughter” (71). Put simply, Lin thought that the “feminine” technê culture of traditional China was both a potential liability in China’s rapid push toward modernization and its most valuable asset in counteracting the global perils of “masculine” Western technologies. As he explains in *Between Tears and Laughter*, “This weakness of ancient China [is] also her greatest strength” (74). Western “mechanical thinking,” he writes later in the same volume, had failed in every effort to “create or devise a world peace” (167). By contrast, Lin insists, the approaching modernization of Asia offered revolutionary possibilities: “The emergence of Asia simply means this: the end of the era of imperialism” (20). China’s legitimate entrance into the “masculine” realm of machine culture would not only benefit the “feminine” China but would also assist in the “liquidation” of a “whole imperialist system of a world half free and half slave” (36).

It may seem like something of a stretch, at first, that the invention Lin introduced in order to assist in China’s “feminine” modernization (and the world’s salvation) was a Chinese typewriter. However, as Lin also makes very clear in *My Country*, Chinese characters were in his mind one of China’s most valuable assets, connected as they were to the Chinese art of calligraphy: “So fundamental is the place of calligraphy in Chinese art as a study of form and rhythm in the abstract that we may say it has provided the Chinese people with a basic aesthetics, and it is through calligraphy that the Chinese have learned their basic notions of line and form” (284). To simply alphabetize Chinese orthography would be to allow the machine to eliminate all traces of this vital and originary art form. Indeed, it is through calligraphy that “the Chinese scholar is trained to appreciate, as regards line, qualities like force, suppleness, reserved strength, exquisite tenderness, swiftness, neatness, massiveness, ruggedness, and restraint or freedom;

and as regards form, he is taught to appreciate harmony, proportion, contrast, balance, lengthiness, compactness, and sometimes even beauty in slouchiness and irregularity” (285).

But beyond the role of Chinese characters, everything Lin would have read about Western typewriters at the time seemed to agree that the invention of the writing machine had destabilized an entire system of gender differentiation. Reports from the U.S. Census Bureau in 1943, for example, show an exponential rise in the numbers of women working as stenographers and typists. In 1870, only 4.5 percent of typists and stenographers were women, whereas by 1930, 95.6 percent were women.³¹ There can be little doubt that Lin would have been aware of the highly gendered (and technologically deterministic) discourse surrounding the typewriter. Wilfred Beeching’s *Century of the Typewriter* notes that as early as 1881 the Young Women’s Christian Association had introduced typing classes for girls, and it was not long before typewriter manufacturers instituted typing programs in order to train young women “and then more or less ‘sell’ them to business houses with their machines.”³² *The Story of the Typewriter* even characterizes Christopher Latham Sholes (the man credited with its invention) as “symbolizing” the feminist movement.³³ A frontispiece illustration for the volume shows a montage image of a Moses-like Sholes sitting at a typewriter with a line of women in the air above him floating angelically as they gradually file away from an almost Egyptian (or Chinese?) fortress. A leaf of translucent vellum paper at the front of the book covers the frontispiece with an epigraph that reads “EMANCIPATION,” and then a small quotation from Sholes: “I feel that I have done something for the women who have always had to work so hard. This will enable them more easily to earn a living” (fig. 3).³⁴

Thus, at the time Lin was contemplating his typewriter the general (and technologically deterministic) consensus was that typewriting had dramatically “feminized” the modern field of bureaucratic inscription—a consensus that more accurately contextualizes Lin’s efforts to “liberate” Chinese orthography so that it might participate in the technological and material basis of international discourse without losing what he perceived as the value of an essentially feminized Asian techné culture. For Lin, to have simply alphabetized Chinese writing (thereby rendering his invention unnecessary) would have been to betray the vital techné-essence of the Chinese people. To lose the ideograph into the technological world of the alphabet would be

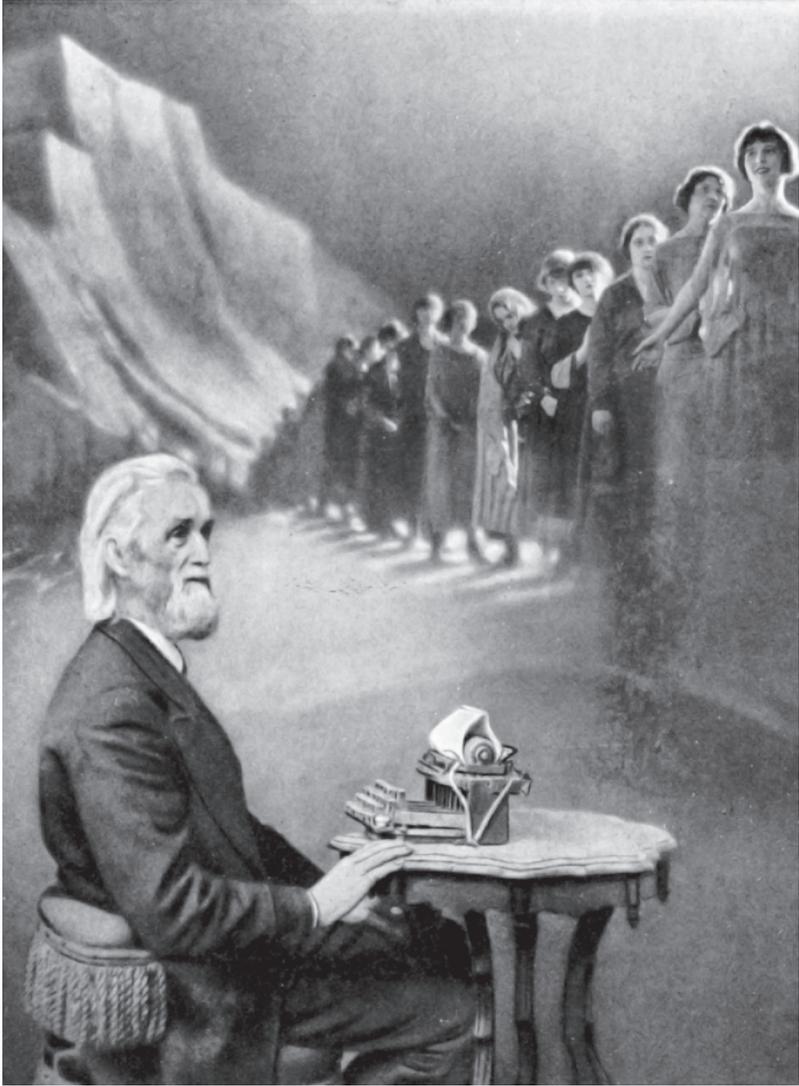


Figure 3 Frontispiece of Christopher Latham Sholes, artist unknown, *The Story of the Typewriter*, Herkimer County Historical Society (New York, 1923).

to not only masculinize China, but also to jeopardize China's role in saving the world from the West's global overmechanization.

In 1945 Lin completely set aside his literary endeavors to devote his time to solving the final problems of his typewriter. Not bothering to secure outside funding, he tried to tackle the problem entirely on his own, getting up every morning at 5:00 a.m. and working in his office, smoking his pipe, drawing diagrams, lining up or arranging characters, working on the keyboard, and retiring only late at night. In the words of Shi Jianwei, "[H]e was like a man possessed."³⁵ While the outline of Lin's invention was relatively simple, its mechanical translation proved to be much more complicated than he had anticipated. In fact, the closer he came to success, the more difficulties he encountered and the more expensive the project became. Lin's daughter remembers her mother getting very nervous as she watched their savings drain away.³⁶ Perhaps inevitably, before Lin had finished his prototype he ran out of money and requested a loan from Walsh. Despite the fact that Walsh had benefited enormously from Lin's success, he was not convinced that Lin's typewriter was a wise investment. Disgruntled at this rejection, Lin called on some wealthy Chinese friends and eventually took out a large loan from the bank to finish his prototype.

Lin's patent application for the "Chinese Typewriter," submitted on 17 April 1946, reveals a great deal about the type of work he thought it could accomplish. Because of the "great number of characters" in Chinese writing, Lin explains, it had been impossible heretofore "to provide practical devices for printing or transmitting correspondence or news in the Chinese language" (1). The question of "transmitting correspondence" had become crucial by the time Lin was submitting this patent application. As Michael MacDonald has argued, the popular media in the United States (particularly in movies such as *Destination Tokyo*) had characterized the Second World War as, at least secondarily, a "battle of typewriters."³⁷ Accordingly, before he had even finished the prototype, Lin was attempting to market his typewriter as much more than simply a bureaucratic lubricant for the acceleration of official government business. As he explains in his patent, "The selector keys may easily be applied to establishing circuits in a Teletype or radio typewriter. Therefore, the invention should not be considered as restricted to typewriters only, but instead should be considered as being directed to all forms of typewriting" (7). But as he would contend

in *Asia*, what “all forms of typewriting” meant for Lin was not only the mechanical realms of war, science, and bureaucratic inscription. He also saw it as an opportunity for Chinese literary artists to “return to ultimate simplicity” (“ICT,” 60). Rejecting “archaic words” found only in “flamboyantly bad prose,” Lin built his typewriter to eliminate these less valuable ideographic elements and to reproduce more effectively the “artistic variants” indulged in by China’s great poets (“ICT,” 61). Thus, Lin saw his machine as making possible the ascendance of his own sense of China’s technê-culture to the global status of what had previously been an exclusively Western technological form. What the rotating cylinders of his new machine were designed to inscribe was a graceful fusion of the technê and the techno—not a slavish mimetic type of “modernity” and not a resistance to it, but a form of perfect cultural balance between art and technics (fig. 4).³⁸

Chinatown Family

Having invested so much work and money into his invention, one can only imagine the anguish Lin must have felt that morning in 1947 when, standing before a dozen Remington executives at their Manhattan office, he directed his daughter to begin the demonstration and the machine did not respond. Walking over to the typewriter, Lin tapped on the keys himself, but again nothing happened. After several uncomfortable minutes, he quietly put his invention back in its wooden case and awkwardly left the room. In the taxi on the way home, he did not say anything. He was no doubt very nervous, as he had arranged for a press conference the next day to announce his invention. When he got home he called the factory engineer who came over and, with just some minor tweaking, was able to get the machine working again. Unfortunately, however, this incident only foreshadowed the ultimate demise of Lin’s dreams for the typewriter. In May 1948, Lin signed a contract with the Mergenthaler Linotype Company to investigate the possibility of mass-producing his invention. While the contract provided Lin with some hope, Mergenthaler would soon discover that the enormous complexity of the machine meant that even after mass production, the typewriter would have had to retail at over \$1,000, which made it much more expensive than any other typewriter for sale at the time. With China in the throes of a violent civil war (and then communist isolation), there was never any realistic market for it.³⁹

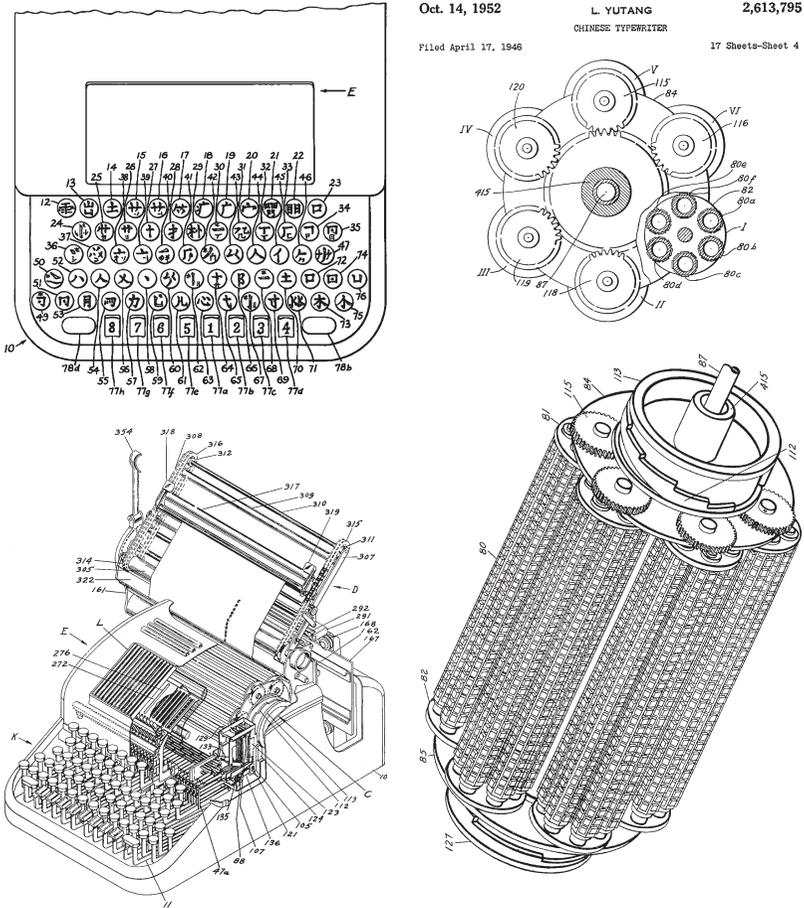


Figure 4 Patent images for Lin Yutang's Chinese typewriter; U.S. Patent #2,613,795.

Despite Lin's embarrassing visit with the executives at Remington, news reporting on his achievement was very enthusiastic. Articles on the invention appeared in most of the major papers, usually with a large photograph of the strange new machine. The *New York Times* reported that the invention was "expected to revolutionize Chinese office work and publishing." In a change that reveals something of the trouble Lin would have marketing his typewriter, the *Times* would not use the word "revolutionize" in a second article on Lin's invention when the patent finally cleared in 1952, noting that Lin "applied for

the patents before the current unpleasantness in the Orient began.”⁴⁰ The *San Francisco Chronicle* quoted Lin as stating that the typewriter would “move the clock of progress in China forward by 10 to 20 years.”⁴¹ Lin must have been especially pleased with an article in the Chinese-language newspaper *Chung Sai Yat Po*, based in San Francisco, which had asserted that if Lin’s typewriter were mass produced, “his contribution to cultural progress [would] be no less than that of Gutenberg.”⁴²

All of these praises notwithstanding, Lin’s most pressing task after finishing the typewriter in 1948 was to get back out of debt, and for that he turned to a more reliable source of income: novel writing on his English-language typewriter.⁴³ It was during this year that Lin wrote *Chinatown Family*, which follows the triumphs and heartbreaks of an immigrant family during the 1930s, including their work in a basement laundry, the father’s tragic death in a car accident, the son Tom’s marriage to another Chinese immigrant, and the family’s success in opening a Chinese restaurant. Although *Chinatown Family* has been by turns praised, panned, and more often ignored, I argue that it has never really been understood in critical discourse, primarily because its true source of inspiration—Lin’s invention of a Chinese typewriter—is never actually mentioned in the text. Indeed, no study of the novel has noted the degree to which Lin’s work on his typewriter became a part of *Chinatown Family*.⁴⁴

The book opens with two young Chinese siblings, Tom (the protagonist) and Eva, who with their mother have just arrived in New York from China. Their father has already been in the United States for some time working as a laundryman. Tom is lying in bed on his first night in New York, and his mother has just “clicked off the switch” of the electric light, “leaving for a second a streak of liver red that danced across his eyes” (3). Tom’s sister Eva tiptoes back over to the switch, “Click, click! Click, click! The light over his head went on and off three times” (4). Tom gently scolds his younger sister for playing with the light, but then thinks to himself,

It was electricity! Momentous word in Tom’s mind, symbolic of all that was new and marvelous in this new world of miracles. Tom had scrutinized the crisscross pattern of the filaments; . . . He knew that he was going to explore that incomprehensible marvel someday; just now he only wanted to understand that nice, neat infallible click. . . . Electricity was lightning, and he had lightning over his bed. (4)

As Tom sits pondering these wonders, a “mad rushing sound” approaches his window and the Third Avenue El train roars by. Machines, Tom suddenly realizes, are everywhere: “America was a country made all of machines, and machines were of course noisy, and, Tom reasoned, America should be noisy and full of that rushing motion, speeding motion, going somewhere—click—stopping—click—progress—click, click!” (5). Here Lin’s text itself starts to perform like a machine, and one can only imagine how this sentence must have sounded to Lin as he composed it on a typewriter—click, click!

But these opening passages are only the beginning of a recurring motif in the novel that could be most aptly described by what David Nye has called a discourse of the “technological sublime.”⁴⁵ Tom is constantly pondering over the mechanical mysteries of this new land: escalators, vending machines, skyscrapers, bridges, and on and on:

The first thing that had impressed him on his second day in America was an electric orange squeezer at a lunch counter. Americans squeeze oranges by machines, mix chocolate drinks by machines, shovel earth by machines, haul cargo by machines, sweep snow by machines. He went all the way to Pennsylvania Station to see the electronic door. It was ghostly. All these things he did not understand. Would he be an engineer one day when he was a man? (98)

At one point in the story, Tom visits a Catholic cathedral and is quite taken with the majesty of the arches and columns, but then thinks that it is only “almost” as beautiful as the light of the sunset over the skyscrapers of Manhattan (96). Even more than the skyscrapers, the two most powerful symbols of machine architecture for Tom are the El train and the bridge: “Sometimes Tom walked alone to the head of the Queensboro Bridge, drawn by a mysterious power like his early fascination with the El. . . . The bridge contained a mystery, a secret of human knowledge in a vast realm that he did not understand. . . . The bridge itself became a symbol of the power of the age of machines” (97). Like the bridge, the El appears in *Chinatown Family* almost as a recurring character or a distant observing God; for example, when an Italian American marries Tom’s older brother and sets out to convert the family to Catholicism (which is why Tom eventually visits a cathedral), she finds the family accepting but rather indifferent: “The family accepted the existence of God. It was like accepting the existence of the father and the mother and the Third Avenue El” (82). With

a Christian minister for a father, Lin was no doubt familiar with “El” as another name for “God,” and it is fitting that in *Chinatown Family* the El is described as “the artery of this great cluster of life” (40), breaking the occasional silence of city life with a breath-like “intermittent rumble” (48).⁴⁶ It is portrayed as the very tissue of Tom’s mental and physical life in the United States: “Only thirty feet away on the avenue loomed the dark steel trusses and bars of the Interborough Rapid Transit Elevated Railroad, with its lurching trains moving swiftly past his corner, carrying passengers seated at their windows. Tom was satisfied” (19).

But the El is central to the narrative in two more ways that provide important clues as to how Lin is writing his typewriter into the novel. First, *Chinatown Family* is a story about not only machine culture but also language and its effects and means of production. For Tom there is an unmistakable interweaving of the mechanical technologies of the “El” and the alphabetic technologies of the “L.” When Tom’s teacher uses the word *smuggle* at school, he is fascinated by it and asks her to explain it:

Miss Cartwright tried to explain what the word *smuggle* meant.

“I know what it means from the Chinese dictionary.”

“Why do you like the word?”

“I like the sound of it. We have no sounds like *gle* in Chinese. I like all the words like *giggle*, *juggle*, *jumble*, *scramble*. (53)

Hearing the “intermittent rumble” of the “El,” and the intermittent “gle” created by the “L,” Tom is assimilating the vital technologies of America. Being able to pronounce the “L” at the appropriate times is of course central to the stereotypical characterization of linguistic assimilation. After the earlier passage when the El roars by and “Tom was satisfied,” we read that the family is sitting down for the evening, enjoying the light of a new electric lamp. The father asks, “‘Well, Tom and Eva . . . You are now in America. How do you like it?’ The father could trill the *r* after more than thirty years’ stay in this country. It was his pride that he could say ‘America’” (22). Tom’s brother, Freddie, however, never quite understands how to be an American, can’t manage his money, and is constantly talking about “Amelica” and “Amelicans.”⁴⁷ In *Chinatown Family*, there is a distinct corollary between knowing how to use the technologies of the “El” and those of the “L.”

Tom’s grasp of the cultural logic of both the “El” and the “L” also

becomes important when he falls in love with the recently immigrated Chinese girl *Elsie* (El-see?). Whereas Tom comes to embody the drive for techno, Elsie very clearly embodies the virtues of technê. Given that Tom's heroes are "Newton. And Watt and Edison and Singer" (73), it comes as no surprise that for his first date with Elsie, he takes her to a bridge, telling her, "Perhaps I shall take engineering. Look at those bridges, aren't they the most inspiring things in the world?" (149). He even pulls out a copy of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (that great hymn of American techno-romanticism) and reads to her, "You flagg'd walks of the cities! You strong curbs at the edges! You ferries! You planks and posts of wharves! You timberlined sides! You distant ships!" (149). But Elsie does not share Tom's enthusiasm for American techno-culture. Elsie is from a scholar's family in China, and "her background had given her a knowledge of ancient Chinese that even the most modern Chinese college students lacked" (128). Thus, when Tom first meets Elsie, it is appropriate that she emerges in the act of reproducing Chinese technê-culture: "He saw a beautiful young Chinese girl come out of the narrow door, gingerly holding in her two hands a paste pot and a poster, the characters on which were freshly written and not quite dry yet" (128). When the techno-acculturated Tom meets the technê-embodied Elsie, "[i]t was like hearing exotic music that he had known and forgotten, had hidden somewhere deep in his being, and now he heard it and recognized it as something belonging to other lands, other times" (129). Everything about Elsie suggests the ancient technê-culture of China:

Tom stood near and looked on, fascinated by the way she wrote, the way she drew, and by her whole figure. He watched beneath her dark tresses the soft contours of her small face . . . To see a modern Chinese girl holding a Chinese brush, her hand bent at the wrist at a steep angle, writing such Chinese characters, was like entering a world unknown to him. Not only her writing, but all her movements and gestures had something of the old China about them . . . (130)

As Tom's infatuation with Elsie grows, he begins to sense that he needs to know something more about this ancient technê-culture that he has forgotten or perhaps never learned: "[I]t appeared more and more important to him that he should know Mandarin and Chinese literature. He formed a new equation—Chinese literature was Elsie Tsai, and Elsie Tsai was Chinese literature" (138). Their courtship becomes

a kind of romance between techno and technê. Tom begins practicing Chinese calligraphy and reading Laotse, who is described as a “dazzling light . . . so blinding that it took some time for Tom’s mind to adjust itself to him” (189); in time, however, this reading “helped him to understand Elsie better” (189). Meanwhile, Elsie becomes more acquainted with American techno-culture, visiting the 1939 New York World’s Fair with Tom’s family, where they encounter “chromium-plated machines, miniature models, giant motors, and the humming, flashing, flickering signs of the progress of science and industry” (215). It is fitting in the end that Tom and Elsie’s first date is a visit to a New York bridge: the final result of this courtship is that they begin to bridge the cultural gap between the techno and the technê, which brings us even closer to an allegorical representation of Lin’s Chinese typewriter.

There is even a moment when the precise mechanical structure of Lin’s typewriter is represented in the novel. After the family opens its ground-level Chinese restaurant, the young Tom sets out to invent a number of gadgets and systems that will help make their work more efficient. For one of these systems, Tom strings two long wires along the floor of the restaurant against the wall: “This was for signals between Tom and [his sister] Eva. A red light over the sink blinked when Tom or the mother was needed outside. A green light meant that a handsome customer had walked in” (181). His mother tells him it’s a silly invention, but Tom insists,

“You see, with three lights, red, green, and blue, I can have seven kinds of signals”:

“What do you want seven signals for?”

“I will write it down for you.” Tom showed his mother a pad of paper, on which he had written down:

A—red

B—green

C—blue

A Loy wanted

B Mother wanted

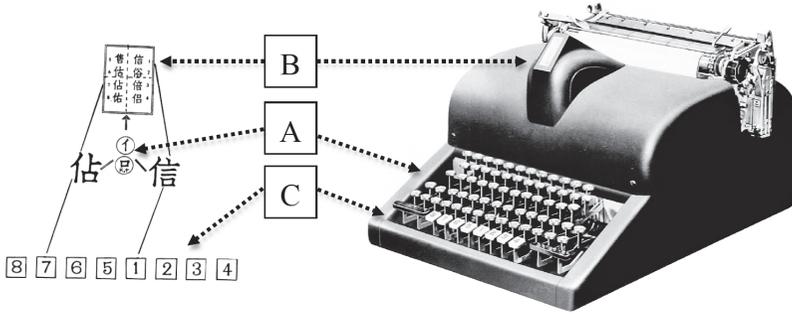
C Tom wanted

AB Something exciting in the street

AC A handsome customer

BC A beautiful girl

ABC Something *very* exciting (182)



- A) Typist selects a combination of two Character keys.
 B) Typist sees eight possible characters in the “Magic Eye.”
 C) Typist selects one of the characters with one of eight selection keys.

Figure 5 Prototype and diagram for the “Magic Eye” process in Lin Yutang’s Chinese typewriter, in Lin Taiyi, *Lin Yutang Zhuan* (Taipei, Taiwan: Linking Publishing, 1993), 233–34. Images courtesy of Linking Publishing, Taiwan.

With this schema, we see the operating logic of Lin’s Chinese typewriter. To illustrate the symbolic significance of Lin’s textual device here, it is useful to know that Lin’s typewriter utilized a process involving what he called a “magic eye” (fig. 5): “By pressing one top and one bottom key, a unit of characters with the same tops and bottoms is shown in the ‘magic eye’ in the center of the machine, with a maximum of eight characters. This ‘magic eye’ is an important feature of the machine” (“ITC,” 60).

After seeing the eight most common characters created by pressing two of the typewriter’s keys, the typist visually selects which of the eight characters is desired, and then presses one of the corresponding eight white keys at the bottom of the keyboard—a process that allowed the typist to produce over seven thousand different characters (and theoretically, up to ninety thousand rarely used characters). In short, one presses *three* buttons to produce something “very exciting”: the technê-cultural orthography of Chinese characters. In *Chinatown Family*, the narrator explains what that special “ABC” code transmitted: “So it turned out that when Elsie was seen passing in the street, Eva at the front of the restaurant flashed AB. But when Elsie walked into the restaurant, Eva flashed all three lights” (182). The information about Elsie’s arrival is thus transmitted via three buttons—literally via the technology of “ABC”—and an exciting fusion of technê-China and the techno-West begins to emerge.

Ultimately, Tom and Elsie get married and the novel ends in chiastic form with another “click.” The family has come to visit their father’s grave, and they decide to take a picture. “When the camera was focused and the exposure set, Freddie set the self-timer and dashed back to his place. The camera clicked. A spring breeze blew softly across the grass, and it seemed at that moment that the spirit of their father was with them” (248). Here Lin associates the mechanical “click” of the camera (the sound of yet another “magic eye”) with the spiritual presence of the father. Before Tom and his sister and mother immigrated to the United States, his father had seemed like “a dream, a legend, a reality so remote that it was unreal” (6). He had been more like a “mystical entity” than a real person (7). Arriving in the United States, Tom finds his father and older brothers working in the laundry, moving about “under the glow of hundred-watt lamps like silent robots” (11). When Tom’s father dies, it is because he is “struck by a motor car near the ramp of the Manhattan Bridge,” crushed by a machine on this symbol of the machine age, “dying a typically American death” (166–67). In essence, Tom’s father (like “El” the Father) paves a spiritual and sacrificial path for Tom to gain access to this machine culture and, by extension, redemption in Elsie; thus in the final scene of the book, the spirit of the father appears with the mechanical “click” of an American “magic eye”—making possible the union of technè-Elsie and techno-Tom that provides this journey with its happy ending.

Lin wanted to become the transnational embodiment of this marriage. He saw his straddling of world cultures as a means of transcending the entrenchment of China’s technè-culture and the overmechanization of the techno-Western world. As I have been arguing, Lin’s obsession with the creation of a Chinese typewriter did not just inform his own aesthetic production; it also reflected a general discursive move to secure and advance what he understood to be Asia’s most valuable assets in a perilous age of globalizing Western technologies.

Such a moment has important implications for the place of technology in American studies. Consider, for instance, the degree to which Lin’s search for technè helps clarify the theoretical interventions of his friend and fellow antimodernist Lewis Mumford. Often identified as one of the “Intellectual Founders of American Studies” and “the last of the great humanists,” no one did more during the 1930s through the 1960s to question the place of technology in American life than Mumford.⁴⁸ In 1952, the same year Lin would finally secure the patent for his

Chinese typewriter, Mumford published *Art and Technics*, a collection of lectures he had given at Columbia University. “The great problem of our time,” Mumford argues, “is to restore modern man’s *balance and wholeness*: to give him the capacity to command the machines he has created instead of becoming their helpless accomplice and passive victim.”⁴⁹ In words that would have resonated with Lin, Mumford focuses on the dangers and miraculous advantages made possible by typography and mechanical printing. On the one hand, he claims, typography offers all the benefits of “the repeatable, the standardizable, the uniform—which is to say, again, the typical—that is the essential field of technics” (79). Whereas handwriting, and particularly Chinese calligraphy (which Mumford posits as the ultimate example of individualized human expression) tells “so much at every stroke, about the individuality of the writer, about his tone and his temper and his general habits of life,” such a form can nonetheless become “a handicap to the widest kind of communication” without some form of typographic uniformity and rational impersonality (68). However, the danger with “mechanized” writing, Mumford continues, is that “man’s relation to the machine must be symbiotic, not parasitic” (73). While the creation of typographic fonts without “serifs or shading may make letters look a little more mechanical,” such development “does not in the least make them more legible” (74–75). In short, to lose sight of “man’s” ordinary forms of “handicraft” and “symbolism” would be to allow the machine to “wantonly trespass on areas that do not belong to it” (81). The principal task illustrated in the example of typography involved completely transforming the “world of technics”: “[S]alvation lies, not in the pragmatic adaptation of the human personality to the machine, but in the readaptation of the machine, itself a product of life’s needs for order and organization, to the human personality” (14).⁵⁰

What Mumford points to here, I would suggest, is exactly the type of quest Lin had undertaken (only more dramatically and at a greater personal cost) in his efforts to invent a Chinese typewriter: the possibility of imagining therapeutic and alternative forms of modernity outside the Euro-American myths of progress and white, Western superiority. Of course, this is not to say that these efforts were entirely successful. Mumford’s typically unironic insistence that “man’s” relationship with the machine should be symbiotic rather than parasitic, much like Lin’s constant positioning of the “feminine” as the repository of ethnic tradition, shows how entrenched and pervasive the authoritarian discourse

of modern technics has been, how much further toward a truly radical questioning of patriarchal modern technics these figures might have gone.⁵¹ As Michel Foucault explains, the effort to produce “other” modernisms has appeared, at various moments, almost “unthinkable.” In his famous passage regarding Jorge Luis Borges’s “Chinese encyclopedia,” an apparently anxious Foucault asks, “[W]hat kind of *impossibility* are we faced with here?”⁵² The dynamic that produces such an anxious “shattering” laughter in Foucault is precisely the transgression of boundaries that occurs between a series of disconnected categories and the strict implications of an “alphabetical series” (xvi). It is that “vanishing trick that is masked, or, rather, laughably indicated by our alphabetical order, which is to be taken as the clue (the only visible one) to the enumerations of a Chinese encyclopedia” (xvii). I think Lin would have very much liked to present his typewriter to Foucault, despite its obvious shortcomings, as an instantiation of that “unthinkable space” Foucault finds in Borges—a romantic attempt to inscribe the Chinese ideograph into “the blank spaces of this grid” in which “order manifests itself in depth as though already there” (xx). And perhaps Foucault would have agreed that Lin’s attempts to bring together gendered stereotyping and mechanical linguistic typing—in both his invention and his literary work—provide us with a dynamic opportunity to rethink the techno-cultural divisions that have been central to our discursive constructions of East/West epistemes.

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Notes

Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own. For helpful comments on previous drafts, I would like to thank Jerome Christensen, Jesse Palmer, Colleen Lye, Peter Leman, Erik Rangno, Mark Goble, Dorothy Fujita-Rony, and John Carlos Rowe.

- 1 See the biography of Lin Yutang by his daughter Lin Taiyi, *Lin Yutang Zhuan* (Taipei, Taiwan: Linking Publishing, 1993), 236.
- 2 Lin Yutang, “Invention of a Chinese Typewriter,” *Asia* (February 1946): 58. Further references to this essay will be cited parenthetically in the text as “ICT.”
- 3 Since writing this article, I have discovered two other scholars currently at work on Lin Yutang and his typewriter: Thomas S. Mullaney at Stanford University and Jing Tsu at Yale University. Beyond these scholars’

works-in-progress, the only other academic treatment of Lin's typewriter I have found is "Lin Yutang and His Chinese Typewriter," an undergraduate senior thesis by Micah Efram Arbisser at Princeton University (23 April 2001).

- 4 See for example Xiao-huang Yin, "Worlds of Difference: Lin Yutang, Lao She, and the Significance of Chinese-Language Writing in America," in *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1998), 176–87; and Yunte Huang's *Transpacific Displacement: Ethnography, Translation, and Intertextual Travel in Twentieth-Century American Literature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2002), 113–37.
- 5 Lin Yutang, *Chinatown Family* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2007). Further references to *Chinatown Family* are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.
- 6 Elaine H. Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1982), 28.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 104–5.
- 8 See Diran John Sohigian, "Contagion of Laughter: The Rise of the Humor Phenomenon in Shanghai in the 1930s," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 15 (spring 2007): 137–63. See also the published proceedings of "A Stride Over/Forward—Cultural Fusion/Function in the Study of Lin Yutang: An International Conference" (Taipei, Taiwan: Lin Yutang House, 2007).
- 9 Diran John Sohigian, "The Life and Times of Lin Yutang" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1991).
- 10 Shi-yee Liu, *Straddling East and West: Lin Yutang, A Modern Literatus* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007), 16–17.
- 11 See Otto Pöggeler, "West-East Dialogue: Heidegger and Lao-tzu," in *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, ed. Graham Parkes (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 1987), 50–51.
- 12 Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 34.
- 13 See, for example, Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1934); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964); Alan Trachtenberg, *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1965); and Cecilia Tichi, *Shifting Gears: Technology, Literature, Culture in Modernist America* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1987).
- 14 See T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), 218–60.

- 15 On the “denial of coevalness,” see Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1983), 31.
- 16 Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2005), 1, 29.
- 17 Lin Yutang, *The Importance of Living* (New York: William Morrow, 1998), 162. Further references to *The Importance of Living* are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.
- 18 See especially Lin Yutang, *My Country and My People* (Beijing, China: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1998), 78–81; *The Importance of Living*, 106–110; *With Love and Irony* (New York: John Day, 1940), 175–76; and *Between Tears and Laughter* (New York: John Day, 1943), 76–79.
- 19 Lin Yutang, *Between Tears and Laughter*, 80. Further references are to the 1943 edition and are cited parenthetically in the text.
- 20 Lin Yutang, *My Country and My People*, 4.
- 21 Quoted in Shi Jianwei, *Lin Yutang Tsai Hai Wai* (Lin Yutang Abroad) (Tianjin, China: Bai Hua Wei Yi, 1992), 101.
- 22 Lin Yutang, *Memoirs of an Octogenarian* (Taipei, Taiwan: Mei Ya, 1975), 31.
- 23 See Mark Borthwick, *Pacific Century: The Emergence of Modern Pacific Asia* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2007), 175–76; John King Fairbank, *China: A New History* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1994), 266–69; and Peter Gue Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution, 1895–1949* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 133–37.
- 24 On this question, see Eric Hayot’s brilliant “Chineseness: A Prehistory of Its Future,” in *Sinographies: Writing China*, ed. Eric Hayot, Haun Saussy, and Steven G. Yao (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008). Hayot writes, “It only makes sense to wonder about what modernization can ‘do’ to Chineseness if you believe that they are totally different things (that is, that Chineseness somehow lies outside of modernization, or that the latter occurs fully independent from Chineseness)” (25).
- 25 Liu, *Straddling East and West*, 12.
- 26 Two interesting early attempts were Reverend D. Z. Sheffield’s Chinese typewriter in 1897 (pictured in fig. 1) and Chinese engineer Chou Hou-k’un’s in 1911. See “A Chinese Typewriter,” *Scientific American*, 3 June 1899, 359; and Lin, “ICT,” 58.
- 27 See the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for “whim” and Darren Wershler-Henry, *The Iron Whim: A Fragmented History of Typewriting* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 2007), 37–38.
- 28 Lin Taiyi, *Lin Yutang Zhuan*, 228–30. This design would later become the basis for the character index system in Lin’s famous *Chinese-English Dictionary* (Hong Kong: Chinese Univ. of Hong Kong, 1972).

- 29 See “Best Sellers of the Week, Here and Elsewhere,” *New York Times*, 7 October 1935, 13; and Huang, *Transpacific*, 127.
- 30 The joke among the Chinese intelligentsia who did not appreciate Lin’s frankness about China’s problems was that the book should have been called *Mài Country and Mài People*, with a pun on *mài*, the Chinese word for “to sell” or “to sell out”; see Elaine H. Kim, “Defining Asian American Realities through Literature,” *Cultural Critique* 6 (spring 1987): 94–95.
- 31 U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Population* (Washington, D.C., 1943); quoted in Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1986), 184. Kittler argues that prior to the invention of the typewriter, a series of privileged material experiences were the exclusive domain of men: specifically, the very “metaphysics” of (hand)writing (including, of course, the oppressive socioeconomic systems that generally prevented women from having the time or means to write) associated the stylus with the phallus and the clean white sheet of paper with femininity and virginity. Then, according to Kittler, into this “monopoly of writing” emerged the typewriter, causing the disappearance of both the intimate, sexualized experience of one’s hand on the page and the correlative association of the stylus and the phallus.
- 32 Wilfred A. Beeching, *Century of the Typewriter* (New York: William Heinemann, 1974), 35.
- 33 Herkimer County (N.Y.) Historical Society, *The Story of the Typewriter* (New York: 1923), 9, 140; see also Wershler-Henry, *Iron Whim*, 86–87.
- 34 As several scholars have shown, however, such language overestimated the liberatory effect of the typewriter for women. See, for example, Margery W. Davies, *Woman’s Place Is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers, 1870–1930* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1982), 170; and Christopher Keep, “The Cultural Work of the Type-Writer Girl,” *Victorian Studies* 40 (spring 1997): 412.
- 35 Shi, *Lin Yutang Tsai Hai Wai*, 103.
- 36 Lin Taiyi, *Lin Yutang Zhuan*, 235.
- 37 Michael MacDonald, “Empire and Simulation: Friedrich Kittler’s War of Media,” *Review of Communication* 3 (January 2003): 88.
- 38 Given his esteem for Edison, the fact that Lin chose cylinders as the structural basis for his machine is telling. As Lisa Gitelman has shown, “[T]he rotating cylinder has been described as part of Edison’s ‘style’” (*Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999], 185).
- 39 Lin Taiyi, *Lin Yutang Zhuan*, 240. Lin Taiyi also notes that in 1985 the Mitac Automation Company of Taiwan bought Lin’s keyboard system, but like many computer systems, it too would be superseded by subsequent innovations (246–48).

- 40 See “New Typewriter Will Aid Chinese,” *New York Times*, 22 August 1947, 17; Stacy V. Jones, “New Chinese Typewriter Triumphs over Language of 43,000 Symbols,” *New York Times*, 18 October 1952, 30; “New Chinese Typewriter Developed,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 23 August 1947, 3; and “Chinese Typewriter: A Real Character Study,” *Business Week*, 30 August 1947, 16.
- 41 “Lin Yutang Invents Chinese Typewriter,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 22 August 1947, 6.
- 42 “Faming Huawen Daziji,” *Chung Sai Yat Po*, 22 August 1947, 1.
- 43 For a fascinating analysis of the efforts by Richard Walsh, Lin’s publisher at John Day, to require that Lin’s novel adhere to the ethnographic and political “reality” of Chinese American life (thereby making his story more marketable), see Richard Jean So’s “Collaboration and Translation: Lin Yutang and the Archive of Asian American Literature” (forthcoming in *Modern Fiction Studies*).
- 44 For previous analyses of *Chinatown Family*, see Shirley Geok-Lin Lim, “Twelve Asian American Writers: In Search of Self-Definition,” *MELUS* 13 (spring/summer 1986): 59; Sau-ling C. Wong and Jeffrey J. Santa Ana, “Gender and Sexuality in Asian American Literature,” *Signs* 25 (fall 1999): 196; C. Lok Chua, “Introduction,” in Lin Yutang, *Chinatown Family*, xv; Cyrus R. K. Patell, “Emergent Literatures,” *The Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume 7: Prose Writing 1940–1990*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 645; and Katherine A. Karle, “Flamingos and Bison: Balance in *Chinatown Family*,” *MELUS* 15 (summer 1988): 93.
- 45 David Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), xiv. See also Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, 219.
- 46 On “El” as another name for “Yahweh” (preserved in Hebrew names such as Israel and Ishmael), see Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Random House, 1994), 14–15.
- 47 For example, Freddie says, “Amelican children don’t study. Dey play all day” (59); “Dey are in Amelican school” (106); and “De Amelicans like me” (111).
- 48 On Mumford as a founding figure in American studies, see Gene Wise, “‘Paradigm Dramas’ in American Studies,” in *Locating American Studies*, ed. Lucy Maddox (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1999), 171. The “humanist” phrase is Malcolm Cowley’s (Cowley to Julian Muller, October 1978, Lewis Mumford Collection, University of Pennsylvania, Charles Patterson Van Pelt Library, Department of Special Collections, Philadelphia); quoted in Donald L. Miller, *Lewis Mumford: A Life* (New York: Grove Press, 2002), xvii. On Mumford’s friendship with Lin, see *The Letters of Lewis Mumford and Frederic J. Osborn: A Transatlantic Dialogue, 1938–70* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 483.

- 49 Lewis Mumford, *Art and Technics* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1952), 11, my emphasis. Further references are cited parenthetically in the text.
- 50 Perhaps not surprisingly, in his search for technê Mumford would occasionally turn to Asia. See, for example, *Mumford on Modern Art in the 1930s*, ed. Robert Wotjowicz (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2007), 208, 224; Mumford, *Interpretations and Forecasts: 1922–1972* (New York: Harvest Books, 1973), 283; and Mumford, *Art and Technics*, 155.
- 51 On these questions more specifically, see Janet Biehl, *Rethinking Eco-feminist Politics* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1991).
- 52 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994), xv.