

Comparative Studies of Chinese and Western Feminism/Femininity

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ABSTRACT

By way of introducing the articles to follow, this essay provides a brief overview of studies of femininity and feminism in China and the West, from the early 20th century up to the present, focussing mainly on Chinese/Western comparative studies carried out by Chinese scholars. Two dominant Western influences on Chinese theories have been Henrik Ibsen and Virginia Woolf. Chinese comparative studies have responded to these "feminisms" in various ways. Also we find laid out here the two fundamental "differences" with which any such comparative study is concerned: that of China/West and that of male/female. As for the former, Tam distinguishes the Chinese process of identity formation—identity is formed through relation-to-others—from the Western—identity formed through distinction-from-others. As for the latter, one of the more recent studies is that of Gilligan, who distinguishes a female focus on the context of human relationships from a male focus on competition and the drive toward success of individual egos. The contributors to this volume, whose essays follow this one, are thus set here within both an historical and a theoretical context.

KEY WORDS

comparative study
Ibsenism
Femininity
Patriarchy

comparative framework
identity formation
feminism
cross-cultural dialogue



Feminist literary criticism, both in the West and in Asia, thrives on provocation and dissent, and its continuation depends on the promotion of new ideas and methods of interrogation. Recent studies in Western feminist scholarship include the narrative, identity, and representation of the female body (Curti, 1998), New French feminism (Cixous, 1991), feminism and imperialism (Spivak, 1987), women's melancholia (Kristeva, 1989), and studies of feminism, Bakhtin, and the dialogic (Bauer and McKinstry, 1991). At the same time, comparative feminist criticism and feminism in Chinese literature has, in a sense, a multiplicity of origins and directions. The aim of this volume is to make available to those interested in feminist comparative literature a broad collection of essays which does justice to the range and diversity, as well as the challenge, of recent comparative studies in feminist/feminine critical theory and practice within the Chinese diaspora.

This volume of *Tamkang Review* deals with the concept of female literature and feminist literary criticism; for our purposes, a distinction may be drawn between feminism as a political position, femaleness as a matter of biology, and femininity as a set of learned characteristics or traits. Many feminist critics contend that a woman's societal position and domestic experience, educational level, and degree of oppression—differences in social psychology—create a distinctly different femininity, including linguistic differences, as well as differing approaches to narrative. For example, the essays in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, edited by Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka, explore in various ways the question of the

relation between women's sociological place and epistemology.¹ Josephine Donovan, in "Toward a Women's Poetics," argues that "traditional women's experience and practice in the past and in nearly all cultures"—semiotics, poetics, and writing techniques—are bound by interruptibility and circularity.² Moreover, Nancy Miller, in "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," arrives at the conclusion that historically, women's experiences have led them to a different sense of what is a believable and acceptable narrative plot.³

One of the earliest accounts of Western influence in the field of Chinese literary feminism is that of the influence of Ibsen's work, particularly the theatrical drama *A Doll's House*, the influence of which was so far-reaching that the most major twentieth-century Chinese writers and critics, Hu Shih, Lu Xun, and Mao Dun all dealt with this work in their writings. Hu Shih, the critic and chronicler of many important developments in twentieth century Chinese literary history, was, in 1918, the first to publish a study on the subject entitled *Ibsenism*, which was printed in the influential May-fourth era journal *New Youth*. In addition, the 1920's saw the publication of many influential journals related to topics of feminism. These journals included *Women's Bell* [Nuxing zong], *Women's Magazine* [Funu zazhi], *Women's Review* [Funu pinglun] and *Women's Life* [Funu shenghuo]—all journals which had a proliferation of articles and translations of Western feminist works, and served to raise consciousness among nascent Chinese feminists, who took Ibsen's Nora as their role model for individualism.

Kwok-kan Tam discusses Ibsenism as a comparative framework for understanding the female concept of self in Chinese fiction. Tam posits that the notion of self-identity in China is fraught with difficulty because the term "identity" has a different connotation from its western, psychologically-based counterpart. In traditional Chinese culture, the term for identity has historically referred to the socialization process involving the body and the mind, and identity itself has been typically understood in relationship to an "other" (the term "rentong" means "to recognize one's commonality with others"), while in the western tradition, "identity" means "that which distin-

guishes oneself from others." Thus, Tam demonstrates the difficulties of further definition of the "female identity" in China, especially in light of recent debates in western literary criticism which tend to take the construction of female identity as a process.⁴ The traditional Chinese Confucian view of identity is in direct opposition to the western view of identity because according to the *Great Learning* and the *Analects*, the individual cultivates his identity in ways to fulfill relational roles, i.e., in relationship to the family, to the state, and to the world. However, from the time of the May Fourth Movement of 1919, the traditional concept has been challenged by great Chinese thinkers who appropriated and promoted western trends such as democracy, individualism, European Romanticism, and Ibsenism. This latter trend, Ibsenism, is important because it held direct correlation with the development of women's identity in China in the twentieth century.

Male and female writers alike seized on Ibsenism to represent a defiant alternative to Confucianism, as is attested by such writers as Lu Xun (who used the existential and uncompromising Ibsen character of Dr. Stockmann as a model for individualism) and Hu Shih (who not only published an early critical introduction to Ibsenism in the *New Youth* in 1918, but also echoed Ibsen's more revolutionary politics in his attacks on the Confucian Chinese moral, legal, and religious systems). The best-known authors of the May Fourth Movement, including Lu Xun, Guo Moruo, Tian Han, and Mao Dun, often portrayed their novels' heroes in an odyssey-like search for selfhood and individualism, rebelling against the shackles of traditional Chinese social institutions. Male authors necessarily dealt with the issue of female as well as male identity. For example, Lu Xun's "Regret for the Past" (*Shangshi*, 1925) narrates the account of a young couple resisting tradition by elopement and self-dependence. The female protagonist's character is strongly drawn to resemble Ibsen's Nora, according to Tam, in that she shares with Nora the desire for personal independence and selfhood. In Mao Dun's "Creation" (*Chuangzao*, 1928), the similarity of Mao Dun's two main characters to Ibsen's Helmer and Nora is even more pronounced, as the male protagonist, Junshi, attempts to mold his wife, Xianxian, by assigning her a read-

ing list to develop her mind into his own ideal. As Tam points out, Junshi's plan backfires, and Xianxian's educational process takes on a life of its own when a friend introduces her to feminism and politics. Junshi is left in the flustered and baffled position of Helmer as Xianxian makes a departing speech which, as cleverly illustrated by Tam, echoes the departure scene between Nora and Helmer in *A Doll's House*.

Most significant of all is Tam's analysis of Bing Xin's short story "Two Families" ("Liangge Jiating," 1919), because it is one of the earliest attempts by a Chinese female author to deal with the influence of Ibsenism and new individualism on the construction of Chinese female identity. Tam demonstrates that Bing Xin's ultimate conclusion is a surprisingly conservative one—that a woman need not undergo revolution to become a self-actualized individual—instead Bing Xin advocates that women in the role of housewives have the opportunity within those circumstances to become independent individuals. By contrasting the roles of two wives in two families, Bing Xin provides an object-lesson which demonstrates her view that a wife who stays at home is the ideal model, that a woman need not leave home as a means of carving out individual identity. Through this story, Bing Xin advocates a more moderate stance which resists rebellion and revolution.

In contrast to this, Mao Dun's viewpoint grows more and more radical in his later writings, especially in his novel *Rainbow* (Hong, 1929). In this work, Mao Dun deals with the political and revolutionary implications of women's liberation, and demonstrates a movement beyond feminism to a model of a new politicized vision of the ideal woman. This is a woman who defies her own sex for the sake of the greater political cause. In this case, it is not Ibsen's Nora, but the character of Mrs. Linde, who sacrifices herself sexually in order to help others, who is the role model. Tam observes that here Mao Dun (as well as Lu Xun in earlier attempts), constructs a "national" self, rather than a "female" identity. Tam indicates that Mao Dun's and Lu Xun's characterizations of the female are less sympathetic to the female plight in China than Bing Xin's androgynous female. Thus, Tam

observes, the modern Chinese female self, as portrayed by the generation of May Fourth writers in 1920's China, is rather undefined, and risks being sacrificed to the greater political and ideological cause. While writers in the 1920's succeeded in a break from typical Confucian discursive writing, on the whole they were still unsuccessful at articulating what a viable modern female identity should resemble. Communist collectivism had thus merely replaced Confucian morality as a controlling force for national identity.

In a pioneering study of the subject of female identity in the work of Zhang Xinxin and Virginia Woolf, Lao Kam-fung covers the familiar territory of female identity in Western literature, especially the writings of Virginia Woolf, whose work has been championed by feminist critics—of both radical and more moderate camps—for more than half a century. Lao throws new light on a familiar subject with her discussion of Woolf in juxtaposition with the literary developments of Zhang Xinxin. Comparative studies such as this bring a refreshing new perspective on western canonized works, especially ones that have been treated in such detail as Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Lao takes as a starting point the prevailing western critical stance on female identity, that is, woman as man's subordinate under the patriarchal system. She demonstrates the similarity between the traditional Western view, where women has no individual self, and the woman's role in traditional Chinese culture: first as servant to her father, then to her husband, and finally, after the death of her husband, as servant to her own son. Lao demonstrates how this traditional role is questioned in such works as Zhang's *On the Same Horizon* and Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

Lao explicates the narrative of *On the Same Horizon* by demonstrating how the female protagonist sacrifices her own identity as she performs the role of a wife in post-Mao China. Lao constructs a meta-framework for analysis of the novel wherein the husband/wife relationship is given a parallel with the historically ambivalent relationship between a servant of the state and the Chinese Communist Party. Lao demonstrates that the female's sacrifice of self for the sake of the husband in marriage has a telling parallel in the process by which the

individual sacrifices his personal life for the sake of Communist collectivism. Lao quotes Tong-lin Lu's *Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth Century Chinese Society*, in which Lu deals with the question of "the aborted women's emancipation in China." Lao explains that the ideological foundation for traditional patriarchal society was set when the communist party, as a replacement for the father figure, required total submission—a new form of patriarchal politics. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf equally challenges the prevailing view of the female as man's subordinate. Woolf, like Zhang, challenged women not only to find self-realization in their careers instead of limiting their focus to the family, but to take a vocal and politicized stance on the issue of women's rights by becoming writers. Zhang's narrative, while not so much of a call to arms, does feature a protagonist who—like Woolf's character—sacrifices her marriage and her family to become a career woman.

The woman who attempts to construct a new identity in China will face many difficulties, for she is without role models. To quote Zhang's novel: "This world has not changed much for men, but it has changed tremendously for women."⁵ In Zhang's account, the female protagonist faces tremendous self-doubt as she suffers guilt over an abortion, leaves her husband, and flounders in her career aspirations. However, this difficulty is anticipated by Virginia Woolf, who has determined in *A Room of One's Own* that the greatest barrier to women's freedom is a woman's own psychological weakness. Lao sets up another parallel: In the world of Virginia Woolf, Woolf points out that woman is not taught to develop her individuality, nor is she actually trained to challenge the prevailing patriarchal system. Likewise, in Zhang's account, the female protagonist suffers because she must cultivate a new female identity at the expense of traditional femininity and the family. This, as Lao points out, effectively presents the woman with a psychological and moral dilemma.

Lao concludes that Virginia Woolf's 1957 essay foretells many of the difficulties experienced by the Zhang protagonist in the fictional narrative account "On the Same Horizon" depicting female condition of the late eighties in China. Woolf notes that, due to the histori-

cal establishment of patriarchal authority, a woman's journey toward individuality will be fraught with difficulty. However, as Lao points out on an optimistic note, the new female identity constructed in "On the Same Horizon" and *A Room of One's Own* both conclude, along with standard feminist criticism, that gender is culturally constructed, and that it is therefore possible, through the force of human decision and will, to be changed and made afresh.

John Zhongming Chen gives a perspective on feminist literary development through a comparativist consideration of the cases of the twentieth century Canadian author Dorothy Livesay and the Chinese novelist Yu Loujin—two female writers who gained notoriety among their contemporaries with their groundbreaking narrative strategies and explicit sexual descriptions. Zhongming Chen attempts here to illustrate the three most dynamic innovations to women's autobiography that were embodied in the work of the two authors. The first aspect he considers is the need to tell a women's story, with its unique voice; the second is a combination of so-called masculine and feminine styles; and the third is a boundary-crossing pastiche of private and political subject matter.

The first point, the telling of these narratives from a distinctively female voice, is accentuated by the unique montage of materials (letters, newspaper clippings, essays, prose, poems, paintings, etc.) included by Livesay in her narrative. Livesay's forceful, almost overwhelming, approach demonstrates the sort of desperation she encapsulates when she writes about struggling to be heard in the traditionally male literary discourse in Canada—a male discourse which tended to marginalize women's autobiography. Livesay fights this convention by adopting a unique approach to her material—juxtaposing seemingly unconnected passages rather than resorting to typical male editorship techniques, which demand a single, artificially unified vision. *A Chinese Winter's Tale* also experiments with dramatically innovative story-telling techniques. Rather than presenting her autobiography in a traditional linear time sequence, Yu Loujin employs her emotions as the foremost factor, and opens the novel with a temporal flashback. She also experiments with the notions of revelation

and contact, exposing the reader to her secret, personal life without warning or signal. Like Livesay, she includes letters, poems, photographs, and even supporting documents, such as the diaries of her much-celebrated brother, Yu Louke. In this way, Yu Loujin challenges not only traditional Chinese male autobiographical standards, but the existing history of the Chinese Communist Party with its single authoritarian voice.

To support his second point, Chen documents the tradition-defying notions of masculinity/femininity by illustrating the two autobiographies' use of unusual literary devices. For example, both books employ a novel syntax—at times, even ungrammatical. Livesay's work, because of the 1930's-50's time period it encompasses, illustrates the rhetoric of Marxist discourse prevalent in North America in that period. Yu Loujin's autobiography also employs a strategic parody of Maospeak—demonstrating how party propaganda politicized the ordinary language of the people into a heavy, ridiculous jargon. Chen also quotes a Livesay poem to demonstrate the comingling of natural elements (rain, flower buds) with the political struggle for power, the blending of her poetic lyricism with political propaganda. Yu Loujin, as well, uses poetic lyricism to comment on, and, in her case, to refute the political glorification inherent in the cult of Mao. Chen defines this as an intermingling of masculine with feminine styles and images. In addition, Chen praises Yu Loujin and Dorothy Livesay for bringing poetry and lyricism to the normally sober and factual presentation of the autobiography.

Third, Chen demonstrates that the two autobiographies blend genres—and even cross genres—in a collage of the private and public that defies definition. Several labels can be applied, but none precisely fits: an historic document, a personal journal account, a political statement, or an intimate revelation. He mentions a topless photograph of Livesay that appears in her work, which received much criticism from her patriarchal-minded friends, even in the relatively liberal 1970's. Through her friends' reactions, Livesay documents the double standard held by her "comrades" in Marxism who allowed her political "equality," but kept her right hand "tied to the kitchen sink."

You Loujin similarly challenges Chinese convention by her open discussion of sexual experience, challenging the prevailing view that in China politics may be openly discussed, but not sex. With her detailed description of her first sexual encounter—basically rape by her husband—she crosses a boundary of “decency” that no one had previously challenged in Mao’s China. Chen also includes passages from the book’s “Introduction” in which Yu Loujin begs her editors not to delete or censor the sexual descriptions. She asks to take full responsibility for the work, and writes to her editors that if they insist on removing the sexually-charged passages, she would prefer the book not be published at all. Referring back to Lu Xun’s “iron house” metaphor for China, Chen demonstrates that Yu Loujin’s courageous purpose for the explicit sexual material was to be a loud call to awaken people to the reality of sexual ignorance in China. He quotes from her work:

Surely our society ought to take some of the blame for all this? We are like simpletons as far as sex was concerned—so naïve about sex for people of our age! Surely we should have been taught something about it, as part of our general knowledge.⁶

Chen draws several rich parallels between the work of Livesay and Yu Loujin. By Livesay’s social and political activism, she proves that for her, as well as for Yu Loujin, the personal is equivalent to the political, and the private is necessarily the public. The two writers highlight the hitherto denied and trivialized women’s personal voice by shocking the reader with intimate detail. Chen reiterates that the two works demonstrate remarkable similarities in their multi-media format, and in the way that they challenge the linear pattern of traditional autobiography. In addition, Livesay uses different typesets to introduce a code of printed materials, while Yu Loujin challenges Maoist dogmatism and propaganda with images of nature. In conclusion, Chen observes rightly that while the political purposes of the books differ greatly, they share a similar powerful stance in the lit-

erature of their respective cultures—one of daring innovation in the genre of autobiography.

In "Filmic Transposition of the Roses: Stanley Kwan's Feminine Response to Eileen Chang's Women," Joyce Liu takes an inter-art and inter-semiotic approach to film and literature suggested by Norman Bryson's 1987 work on the pictorial borrowing from precursors and the mix of a visual multiplicity of styles in painting, also suggested by Harold Bloom's theories of revisionism and influence in literature. She argues that the 1994 Stanley Kwan film *Red Rose/White Rose* should be read as a "feminine" re-reading of a "feminist" writer, in this case Eileen Chang, one of the most influential Chinese female writers of the twentieth century. Liu argues that Kwan has essentially re-read the story from a postmodernist perspective, and in blatant ways changed the plot, politicized the gender issue, and completely re-fashioned Eileen Chang to highlight "feminine" aspects in her writing which are not found in the 1944 source text. In addition, Liu argues that the film deflates the power of Eileen Chang's words, particularly her tendency to portray her central female characters as negative, incomplete, with details and fragments missing, or as Rey Chou has said, in situations of "entrapment, destruction, and desolation."⁷ (This was in opposition to the trend of well-known female Chinese writers in the first half of this century to portray their female protagonists as heroic "New Women.") Liu further argues that in Kwan's feminine re-reading of the text, Chang's central but hidden patriarchal idea of the madonna/whore complex represented by *Red Rose and White Rose* is literally and metaphorically cancelled out. Liu refrains from passing judgment on these artistic liberties, but notes that Kwan's film enlarges the possibilities presented by Eileen Chang's source text in a number of ways; first, by presenting a "feminine" cinema, which manipulates the subtext of the film as a commentary on Chang's "reticence," or her tendency to draw characters and histories in fragments; second, in Liu's own words, Kwan "unveils the possibility of the fluidity of female desire and the growth of female subjectivity, which are both denied by Eileen Chang."

In discussing Chang's "reticence," Liu takes as a point of departure the quotation opening her essay, which is a strongly suggestive line from Eileen Chang's 1944 narrative: "I seemed to have heard every word spoken by Uncle Zhengbao, even the things he did not utter."⁸ Chang's writing was significant for its fragmentary and disjointed telling, and Liu focuses on the possibilities left open by this unuttered narrative. However, in the hands of Stanley Kwan, this subtextual narrative actually finds a voice. In such images as the lightning flashes of shelling, the muffled sounds of bombing, newspaper headlines, and radio reports, Kwan places his narrative squarely within the historical context of the Sino-Japanese war. In addition, Kwan employs split-screen techniques and the editing and mixing of aural tracks and visual tracks to indicate telling details, such as the juxtaposition of a visual image of an ornate wedding cake with the soundtrack of Zhengbao's dalliance with a prostitute, and the juxtaposition of a sound montage of Zhengbao's discussion with a prostitute with an offscreen radio broadcasting a report on the advantages of a collective wedding ceremony. Taking even further creative license in a highly effective and humorous way, Kwan triumphs with a scene in which Zhengbao's wife confesses to an extra-marital affair, while Kwan plays with the film techniques, imitating both Chinese soap opera and the manner of a standard mandarin radio drama.

Liu's idea that Kwan opens up the possibility of the "fluidity" of female desire is demonstrated by Kwan's remodeling of the character of Yenli from Chang's original vision in *Red Rose and White Rose*. Yenli demonstrates a self-possession and capacity for growth unknown to other Chang heroines. The boldness that Yenli displays in facing Zhengbao's illicit affairs, and the fact that she suggests divorce, demonstrates Kwan's re-fashioning of Eileen Chang's morbid female sensibility. Kwan, once again, demonstrates the artistic license to transform Chang's passive female character into one who is capable of change and growth. Another filmmaking device which influences Kwan's presentation of Chang's female characters is the filmic silence which allows them a breadth that Chang did not originally intend. As Liu notes, Chang's female characters are presented with

transparency; their negative thoughts and self-involved neuroses are revealed plainly to the reader by Chang's penetrating narrative. However, in Kwan's presentation, the character of Yenli is offered much latitude by the filmic silence, which allows the audience to re-interpret her character. In Kwan's version of the narrative, the character of Yenli is metamorphosed into a woman of sexual self-possession and free-flowing desire. As Liu argues, this is a postmodern take on the story which dissolves the madonna/whore complex indicated by the original title, and instead presents a fluid view of woman's sexuality.

Shu-chen Chiang microfocuses on the question of gendering in the history of Taiwan literature by dealing with the notion in the writing of Zhu Tianwen's breakthrough work, *Fin-de-siecle Splendor*. Chiang sets Zhu Tianwen apart from other Taiwanese women writers in that Zhu Tianwen avoids the obvious feminist motifs, such as the anti-male rhetoric of radical feminism, and instead aims for a post-modern approach in her writing. However, Zhu Tianwen has been misread by critics who have incomplete comprehension of her attitude toward the West as well as her efforts to construct a postmodern view of Taiwanese society. Chiang traces the personal history of Zhu Tianwen back to her roots as a China mainland-oriented supporter of traditional high Chinese culture in Taiwan's polarized cultural history. However, Chiang documents how Zhu Tianwen's contact with the younger generation associated with New Cinema, particularly *City of Sadness* director Hou Xiaoxian, ultimately altered her artistic approach. Chiang asserts her opinion that Zhu Tianwen's fundamental paradigm shift involved a move from association with the authentic Han and Tang dynasty artistic tradition, to seeking definition of a more complex and chaotic postmodern Taiwan which stands in contrast to the filmic voices of China or Hong Kong. Thus Zhu Tianwen wishes to define and set apart Taiwanese New Cinema as a cinema which articulates a multi-layered cultural milieu; rejecting the notion of cultural authenticity in favor of a multiplicity of difference, a complexity of intra-national traditions.

The breakthrough popularity, and acceptance by serious literary

critics, of Zhu Tianwen's *Fin-de-siecle Splendor* is attributed by Chiang as being due to "a sense of *carpe diem*, full of melancholy baroque sensibility." Applying the theories of Lyotard and Kristeva, Chiang does a thorough analysis of this baroque sensibility, and also cites Magliola and Derrida to demonstrate that the disengaged characters in *Fin-de-siecle Splendor* cannot be associated with any clear ideological position or political stance. Especially applicable is Lyotard's assertion that "The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forth the unrepresentable in the presentation itself."⁹

In examining the seven stories of *Fin-de-siecle Splendor*, and in focussing on the three "Master Chai," "Fin-de-siecle Splendor" and "Cardinal Bodhisattva," Chiang illustrates Zhu Tianwen's marvelously incomplete allusion to the unrepresentable. In doing so, Chiang strives to redefine the postmodern in Taiwan as a constant subversion—negating the overly obvious notions of tradition and modernity. Chiang's discussion of the title story, "Fin-de-siecle Splendor," is especially insightful as she reads the central character, Miya, as a signifier in the Lacanian sense. She demonstrates rightly that Miya is "formless," or "multiform," as a representation of the multiple narratives of Taiwan's present historical and ethnic complexities. As a signifier, Miya is dependent on the "signifieds" to mold her own forms. Chiang concludes that the most striking aspect of Zhu Tianwen's breakthrough novel is that not only are different positions—political, social, historical, ethnic, and sexual—represented in a cacophony of collected voices, but that none of these voices are ever reconciled; no artificial conclusion can be reached. This echoes the conclusion of Cixous: "Writing is precisely working (in) the in-between, inspecting the process of the same and of the other without which nothing can live, undoing the work of death."¹⁰

Wang Ning's lucid account of the relationship between Western feminist theory and contemporary Chinese literature discusses not only the interpretation of current Chinese women's writing using tenets of Western feminist theory, but also the Chinese modification of Western theory in application among Chinese writers and critics. To begin with, Wang outlines the recent history of Western feminism,

from the nineteenth century era of political and social protest over patriarchal society, to twentieth century developments since the 1960's, which focus on a combination of Marxism, poststructuralism and Lacanian psychoanalysis. His detailed summary traces the political and social development of feminist discourse up to its contemporary pluralistic orientation. Current feminist or women's studies topics in the West include five diverse fields: 1) sexual politics, 2) Marxist feminism, 3) female writing and female criticism, 4) French academic feminism, and 5) lesbian studies and Third World criticism. He then deals with the subject of Chinese avant-garde female writing by tracing the history of its development in a parallel comparison with international feminism. In theorizing these Chinese female avant-garde writers, Wang discovers five fundamental trends in their work: 1) the continuous pursuit of uniquely female artistic endeavor (Zhen Min, Wang Anyi), 2) the attempt, through female avant-gardism, to create a world of their own (Tie Ning, Chen Ran, Lin Bai, Hai Nan, Yi Lei, Hong Ying and Jiang Feng; Wang ties this to the "female" phase in the development of Western feminism), 3) the "re-casting of history in opposition to traditional male-centered history (Zhao Mei, Xu Lan), 4) a focus on the daily travails of ordinary people in contrast to the "grand narrative" (Chi Li, Fang Fang, Fan Xiaoqing, Han Xiaohui), 5) an exploration of abnormal psychology (Can Xue, Xu Xiaobin), and 6) a presentation of female intuitive apprehension of the complexities of male-female relationships as a type of existentialism (Dai Houying, Liu Suola).

Wang Ning offers some timely suggestions in his article. First of all, he observes that with the flourishing of the international feminist movement, coupled with the wide reach of current feminist inquiry and criticism in China, the maturity of Chinese women's literature is approaching the international global standard. However, he warns against isolationist tendencies in mainland China, but instead calls for the use of Western feminist theory as a frame of reference for Chinese female literature—as a way of entering into the debate in international scholarship. Second, he warns against the tendency toward "female narcissism" and the constructing of an artificial binary opposition

between "male" and "female." Using Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1963) as an example, Wang insists that this artificial binary opposition is ultimately a disadvantage for the women's rights debate, and must be transcended by pursuing a universal humanistic language. Concern about a new war between the sexes, accentuated by the explosion of feminist publications following the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, has made Wang wary of the appearance of a new hierarchy or a "female hegemony." This type of posturing does nothing to remedy the many still prevalent injustices against women cited by Wang in contemporary Chinese society.

Recent challenging studies published by Harvard University Press, such as that of Carol Gilligan in her controversial work *In a Different Voice*, argue that men and women reason, communicate, and choose differently according to gender identity, and this behavior is based on one fundamental difference: the priority of task versus relationship. From interviews with young professional women in the United States, Gilligan defined female identity thus:

Identity is defined in a context of relationship and judged by a standard of responsibility and care. Similarly, morality is seen by these women as arising from the experience of connection and conceived as a problem of inclusion rather than one of balancing claims.¹¹

On the other hand, through extensive research with male participants, Gilligan found that identity is based on a different set of perceptions.

For the men, the tone of identity is different, clearer, more direct, more distinct and sharp-edged. . . . The male "I" is defined in separation Instead of attachment, individual achievement rivets the male imagination, and great ideas or distinctive activity defines the standard of self-assessment and success.¹²

From another Harvard study, it was found that women are four times more likely than men to be depressed, and eight times more likely to struggle with eating disorders such as bulimia, or relationship difficulties such as codependency.¹³ This backs up Kristeva's claim that melancholia can be appropriated through poetry and writing. Kristeva has investigated the subject of melancholia, using the Lacanian paradigm, by presenting three female depressives and deconstructing the paradigm of the melancholic in four artists (Holbein, Nerval, Dostoevsky, and Marguerite Duras).¹⁴

The refusal to accept a binary opposition or a traditional dichotomy comes not only from feminist deconstructionists with a focus on psychoanalysis, such as Kristeva and Cixous, working with and occasionally against the theories of Freud and Lacan. Other challenges to the binary opposition exist in important arguments, such as that of Luce Irigaray. Irigaray writes that she wishes to be considered separate but equal: "The question of the other has been poorly formulated in the Western tradition, for the other is always seen as the other of the same, the other of the subject itself, rather than an/other (a subject which is other), irreducible to the masculine subject and sharing equivalent dignity."¹⁵ Lidia Curti raises the argument about "difference" to a global level: "The constant movement between the necessity of overcoming globalising differences, and the contrasting need for separatedness, reaffirms the richness that can come from the co-existence (far from pacific) of such positions."¹⁶

The many incarnations of feminist literary criticism, and the elaboration and expansion of thought that ensues from them, are a necessary part of a field which thrives on its lack of homogeneity, and which finds its foundation in the notion that differences must necessarily exist and co-exist. The comparative debate in Chinese and Western scholarship has an assured future; the broad range of topics outlined in this volume is a testimony to the historical richness of the feminist tradition and its comparative possibilities.

NOTES

¹ Sandra Harding, and Merrill B. Hintikka, eds. *Discovering Re-*

ality: *Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* (Dordrecht, Holland, D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1983).

² Josephine Donovan, "Toward a Women's Poetics" in *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 3.1-2 (1984): 99.

³ Nancy Miller, "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," *PMLA* 96 (1981): 36-48.

⁴ See Judith Kegan Gardiner, "On Female Identity and Writing by Women," *Critical Inquiry* (1981): 349.

⁵ Zhang Xinxin, "Zai tongyi dipingxian shang" [On the Same Horizon]. In *Zhang Xinxin de daibiaozuo* [The Representative Works of Zhang Xinxin], (Zhengzhou: Huanghe wenyi chubanshe, 1988) 95.

⁶ Yu Loujin, *A Chinese Winter's Tale*, trans. Rachel May and Zhu Zhiyu (Hong Kong: Renditions, 1986) 106.

⁷ Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East* (Minnesota: of Minnesota Press, 1991) 85.

⁸ Eileen Chang, *Red Rose and White Rose*, serialized in *Zazhi Yuekan* (Magazine Monthly), May 1944, 125.

⁹ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984) 81.

¹⁰ Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," in R. R. Warhol and D. Price Herndl, eds. *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1991) 340.

¹¹ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1982) 160.

¹² *Ibid.*, 160-3.

¹³ Dana Crowley Jack, *Silencing the Self: Women and Depression* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1991) 1.

¹⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989).

¹⁵ Luce Irigaray, "The Question of the Other," in Lynn Huffer, ed., *Yale French Studies* 87 (1995): 18.

¹⁶ Lidia Curti, *Female Stories/Female Bodies* (London: Macmillan, 1998) 26.