

# Rejection of Postmodern Abandon: Zhu Tianwen's *Fin-de-siecle Splendor*

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## ABSTRACT

This essay first situates Zhu, in the history of "literary gendering" in Taiwan, as a follower of Zhang Ailing, Taiwan's "literary mother" who stood over against the literary father, Lu Xun. While her critics claim that Zhu has rejected such postmodernist, politicized feminist concerns as selfhood, economic autonomy and sexual awakening in her writing, returning instead to an implicitly apolitical, traditional Mainland Chinese lyricism, it is argued here that they misunderstand the author, particularly in her most recent phase. For Zhu has moved from neo-traditionalism to neo-nativism: as we see in her fiction (*Splendor*) and her screenplay for the Taiwanese film *City of Sadness*, she is indeed in touch with the most avant-garde "postmodernist" currents, breaking down such binaries as China/West, colonizer/colonized, tradition/modernity, ego/desire, unity/chaos. This highly sophisticated reading of the author brings into play recent postcolonial theory, "third cinema," Lyotard's, Kristeva's and Deleuze's views on sublimity, chaos, abjection and desire. Her critics' claim that Zhu is somehow "ahistorical" or "apolitical" misses this author's (very contemporary) complexity, her negotiation of a space "in-between."

## KEY WORDS

neo-traditionalism  
third cinema  
deconstructed binaries  
the object  
desire

neo-nativism  
postmodernism  
postcolonialism  
sublimity



Why and how gendering becomes an issue in the history of Taiwan literature is a vastly interesting question from which to approach women's literature. It is no coincidence that a male writer, Lu Xun, has been promoted as a literary father in China, with the rise of his reputation along with each political movement during the past fifty years, whereas a woman writer, Zhang Ailing, was chosen to represent the literary achievements in Taiwan<sup>1</sup> (D. Wang 1993). It has been noted that Zhang was set up as the literary mother, representing a literary trend of the lyrical and sentimental strain in opposition to Lu Xun's school (D. Wang 1988: 186). Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang uses the term "The Eileen Zhang [Zhang Ailing] phenomenon" (1988: 203) to evince the growing popularity of Zhang's fiction in Taiwan between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s.<sup>2</sup> Among Zhang's followers<sup>3</sup>, Zhu Tianwen (b. 1956) is probably the best-known woman writer who has gone through rather different stages to achieve her popularity. Unlike other Taiwanese women writers, she never enacts familiar feminist motifs such as selfhood, economic autonomy, sexual awakening, patriarchal domination, motherhood, or sisterhood. These issues for her are no longer problems as they are already subsumed under the spectacular decadence termed as "postmodern" by the writer herself.<sup>4</sup> In Taiwan, Zhu is one of the writers who are concerned with a new global epoch of postmodernity, as her critics have pointed out. However, I will argue in this paper that her critics, in supporting the agendas of modernity, misrecognize Zhu's resistance to Western hegemonies as well as her efforts to establish a common ground for the construction of empathy among people of different classes, gender, and ethnic backgrounds. Because of their failure to

see how she brings the repressed voices of history back into the historical agenda, they hold a pessimistic view of Zhu's notion of "postmodern" Taiwan. My discussion will first trace the drastic change in Zhu's writing career and then contend with Zhu's critics reading the writer's concern with Taiwan's contemporary society.

### From Neo-Traditionalist to Neo-Nativist

Until the publication of *Fin-de-Siecle Splendor* (1990), Zhu was a fairly obscure object of acclaim, both in and out of the academy. Although from a literary family with her father Zhu Xining, a famous veteran writer and editor of the Sansan Bookshop, promoting her books, she had been considered a "narcissist,"<sup>5</sup> "nostalgic" for the glories of old China,<sup>6</sup> and therefore "a neo-traditionalist"<sup>7</sup> reacting against the Nativist literary movement in the 1970s. What is characteristic about her early books, aside from their contemporary subjects, is their irredeemably lyrical texture that stood in sharp contrast to the angrier, realist works of other women writers such as Li Ang, Liao Huiying, Xiao Sa, and even the sarcastic Yuan Qionqiong. Sungsheng Yvonne Chang in her study of Zhu attributes her sinocentric cultural views to an influence from Hu Lancheng, former husband of Zhang Ailing. Calling Hu "grandpa" or "Master Lan," Zhu showed her admiration for his teaching of "authentic Chinese writing" (*Hanwenzhang*) (Chang 1992: 64). S. Chang comments that "[h]er belief that one could attain the intangible 'true color,' or 'true essence,' of Chinese culture through individual literary style is pronouncedly idealist. Her ensuing endeavor to master the traditionalist language style has undoubtedly benefited her art after years of practice" (64).

At a time when the KMT government primarily defined Taiwan's identity in anti-communist terms—Free China—Zhu identified herself with the mainlanders,<sup>8</sup> most of whom looked down on Taiwanese culture as a hybrid of the Chinese outback and Japanese imperialism and hence marginalized it as something of value only to foreign anthropologists. The significance of Taiwan's existence, explained the KMT regime, lay in its strategic position as the last out-

post of traditional Chinese high culture. Taiwanese folk arts, in particular opera and festivals, did thrive, but as low culture. In the dispute over Taiwan's cultural history polarized as "China complex" and "Taiwan complex" in the early 1980s, Zhu and her literary friends organized the Sansan group to support the former tenet. Their display of traditionalism, in S. Chang's observation, "served the purpose of reinforcing the hegemony of the orthodox language, an emblem of the 'Central Plain' Chinese culture" (Chang 1992: 65). However, this romanticized patriotism was soon abandoned as Zhu grew older and began to work with progressive young intellectuals in film production, later known as "the New Cinema."

Zhu has written or co-written screenplays for young film directors who experiment with film convention. The best-known among them is Hou Xiaoxian,<sup>9</sup> who, like Zhu, is a second-generation mainland, a "hybrid" product of mainland Chinese heritage, Taiwanese upbringing, and Western and Japanese influences. He refuses to simplify, reduce, or deny any of the complicated and multifarious elements that make up Taiwanese "identity" or Taiwanese "history." In his re-examination of Taiwanese history in *City of Sadness* (1990), for example, Hou does not adopt the merely oppositional strategy of constructing a single coherent indigenous counter-narrative to challenge the official history posed by the KMT government. Instead, the ambivalence and heterogeneous texture of his films questions the limitations of such binary oppositions themselves. Rather than reduce the complexities of human existence into a single authoritative "truth," Hou opens "history" up to include multiple voices, multiple narratives, and multiple forces that co-exist and are in constant contention. Similarly, Hou breaks down the binary oppositions that are set up between Taiwan's Chinese past and its more Westernized present, between its rural traditions and its industrialized future. Although he follows the Nativist writers in exploring the profound sociocultural differences between the country and the city in some of his films, he does not seem to be searching, as so many nationalistic films do, for an "authentic" or "pure" Taiwanese identity that he hopes to save from the destructive forces of modernization and cultural imperialism.

Instead, he seems much more interested in the dynamic tension between many different forces, and in the way individuals are able to grow by creating and recreating themselves as they move between multiple cultures—particularly in *Daughter of the Nile* (1987).

Under the influence of the interaction with Hou Xiaoxian and his friends,<sup>10</sup> Zhu Tianwen has undergone so drastic a change that she bears slight resemblance to her patriotic days. In an interview with Andrew Leonard, representative of *Far Eastern Economic Review* in Taipei, Zhu reveals her response to the attack about her ambiguous attitude toward ethnic conflicts in her screenplay *City of Sadness*. She argues that “in politics, ethnic background is still very important, but in daily life and in cultural terms it is not that significant.”<sup>11</sup> In her most recent works starting from *City Inferno*,<sup>12</sup> she recognizes that it is precisely from this modern intermingling of diverse cultures that new and unexpected combinations of human beings and ideas emerge.

Zhu's switch of interest from politics to culture, in my observation, is still connected to her pursuit of nationalism, but now, rather than being nostalgic of cultural authenticity embodied in the romanticized tradition of Han and Tang dynasties, she is working on a nationalism that can distinguish its culture from those presented by China and Hong Kong, particularly in filmmaking. In the preface to her screenplay *City in Sadness*, Zhu asserts that Taiwanese films in competition with China and Hong Kong for an international market need to self-nativize their own culture in the conceptualization of the past and the present.<sup>13</sup> While the Chinese directors have used emperors, empresses, major eunuchs, sympathetic poor peasants in the countryside and Hong Kong directors used gangsters, prostitutes and Kungfu masters, Hou Xiaoxian and Yang Dechang (Edward Yang) adopted frustrated young people to represent their culture.

Zhu's concept of nationalism is easily understood in light of the theory of “Third Cinema,” which, as defined by Teshome Gabriel in his *Third Cinema in the Third World: An Aesthetics of Liberation*, is “that cinema of the Third World which stands opposed to imperialism and class oppression in all their manifestations” (Gabriel 2). Since Third Cinema has been conceived of as an anti-imperialist and coun-

ter-hegemonic movement, its early practitioners and theorists embraced the essentialist dichotomies—foreign versus native, urban industrial versus rural agrarian, print culture versus oral culture, the West versus the non-West—that best enabled it to distinguish itself from imperialist cultures and the dominance of Hollywood cinema. In its articulation of a sense of “nation,” Taiwanese New Cinema likewise begins with the binary oppositions—of Mandarin Chinese versus Taiwanese, of city versus country, of the present versus the past, of young versus old—inherited from the anti-imperialist nationalist rhetoric of Taiwanese Nativist literature. However, what distinguishes Taiwanese New Cinema from its literary predecessor are the beginnings of a shift away from the binarisms of modern nationalisms towards a more “postcolonial” or “postmodern” understanding of “nation” that is neither essentialist nor caught up in notions of “cultural authenticity.” Instead, it attempts to move beyond the anti-colonial strategy of defining a native self against a dominant foreign other—merely reversing the terms of an existing binary opposition—towards a more radical questioning of the dichotomy itself. Taiwanese New Cinema acknowledges the intricacy of the ties between the social and the cultural, and is founded upon a recognition of the complex multifariousness of Taiwanese society. Paul Willemen has noted that more recent theories of Third Cinema, influenced by postcolonial and postmodern critical discourse, call for a more sophisticated recognition of “the many-layeredness of . . . cultural-historical formations, with each layer being shaped by complex connections between intra- as well as inter-national forces and traditions” (Willemen 4). Hence, Third Cinema rejects homogeneity in all forms, whether the hegemony of a colonizer’s culture, the homogeneity of Hollywood-style filmmaking, or the construction of a monolithic “national” culture. It is seen as a strategy not only to define the borders of a “nation”—to separate an “us” from a “them”—but also to foreground the multiplicity of difference within those borders, “revealing divisions and stratifications within a national formation, ranging from dialects to class political antagonisms (Willemen 17).

Notably, however, in spite of the abundance of ethnographic

details that fill in the Taiwanese New Cinema, what distinguishes Hou from the other directors' representation of Taiwan is Hou's, or Zhu's, efforts to reinforce the lyrical component which, in Zhu's words, is the "poetic" style. The following paragraph reminds us of Zhang Ailing's *cenci dueizhao* art view which stresses unsorted or no clear-cut classification in representation of reality, as Zhu writes,

The poetic way is to present the reality in "reflection" and in "cenci dueizhao" instead of by way of contrasts. As poetry does not depict sorrow by way of dramatic conflicts, it does not appeal to "redemption" for its final solution. Poetry reflects the flux of time and Change of space which often occur in a wink . . . It is eternal singing and meditating. (Zhu 16)

She further cites Chen Shixiang, Berkeley professor of Chinese literature, for his comparing "silent tragedy" in the nineteenth century Western drama to Chinese poetry, and concludes that a good "national film" of Taiwan should be poetic in style and "Taiwanese" in content. By the time she published *Fin-de-siecle Splendor* in 1990, her name was already connected with Hou Xiaoxian and she acted as the soul of his filming group.

### ***Fin-de-siecle Splendor* as a Breakthrough**

*Splendor* became the talk of the town in Taipei literary circles the moment it was published (see Leonard). The characters in the seven stories are the people who populate present-day Taipei: "the new species" (*xin renlei*) of young men and women zipping about on their red Fiat scooters; the McDonald's waitresses, homosexual artists, fashion models and soap opera directors—all struggling with the alienation and destabilization of a society that has gone from rural, rice fields and oxcarts to subway lines and cellular phones in the wink of an eye. This collection sold much better than Zhu's previous works (three printings within two years) and in a short time found accep-

tance by serious critics. It was considered as Zhu's "breakthrough"<sup>14</sup> book. Special attention was paid to Zhu's linguistic strategy in her exploration of Taiwan's contemporary cultural condition (Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang), her ambivalence toward the city (Leonard), lament of the disappearance of youth (Zhan Hongzhi), and the stories as a call for political allegory (David Der-wei Wang).

The question as to why a particular literary work "breaks through" to a mass audience is a question hard to answer due to little evidence and therefore is subject to much speculation, as in the following: (1) The book is written for a wide range of urban readers, aged from 20 to 70. As the Taiwanese elderly (7% of the population) place Taiwan in the "aged phase" with the developed countries,<sup>15</sup> the subject of aging in five out of the seven stories may have attracted readers.<sup>16</sup> (2) Featured as a recollection of Taipei's past and prophecy of its future, *Splendor* bears a sense of *carpe diem*, full of melancholy baroque sensibility. (3) The central concern of the collection is a culture in crisis; thus, it raises the consciousness of the critique of Taiwan's modernity. (4) The juxtaposition of classical literary language and the modern jargon of science, sports and the street as well as twisted idiomatic phrases provides great entertainment. First-person narrators, the electronic media, futuristic fashion, the power of consumer culture to revolt and seduce, popular culture in various guises—all of these elements feed into *Splendor* in order to form the insidious environment of Zhu's contemporary people. (5) *Splendor* is Zhu's tenth book. To that point she was well known to reviewers and a cadre of readers as a gifted writer who had published nine books in the space of a decade or so. By the time of *Splendor*, Zhu's career has gathered some momentum and is poised at the edge of breakthrough, if only she will write the right sort of stories.

The speculation I favor is the one about the successful presentation of baroque sensibility, a sentimental form that, I think, best characterizes the postmodern Taipei viewed by Zhu Tianwen. To illustrate my point, I will first define the baroque as a visual experience that creates the effect of grandeur or splendor, then apply theories of Lyotard and Kristeva to the observation of the baroque sentiment, and



finally problematize the anachronistic postmodern theories endorsed by the critics of Zhu in the discussion of "Master Chai," "Fin-de-siecle Splendor," and "Cardinal Bodhisattva."

### The Baroque and the Postmodern

Martin Jay in his "scopic Regimes of Modernity" quotes contemporary French philosopher Christine Buci-Glucksmann about seeing the baroque as "a permanent, if often repressed, visual possibility throughout the entire modern era . . . It is precisely the explosive power of baroque vision that is seen as the most significant alternative to the hegemonic visual style we have called Cartesian perspective" (Lash 187). Jay summarizes Buci-Glucksmann as follows:

[T]he baroque self-consciously revels in the contradictions between surface and depth, disparaging as a result any attempt to reduce the multiplicity of visual spaces into any one coherent essence . . . Baroque vision . . . sought to represent the unrepresentable and necessarily failing, produced the melancholy that Walter Benjamin in particular saw as characteristic of the baroque sensibility. As such, it was closer to what a long tradition of aesthetics called the sublime, in contrast to the beautiful, because of its yearning for a presence that can never be fulfilled. Indeed, desire, in its erotic as well as metaphysical forms, courses through the baroque scopic regime. The body returns to dethrone the disinterested gaze of the disincarnated Cartesian spectator. But unlike the return of the body celebrated in such twentieth-century philosophies of vision as Merleau-Ponty's, with its dream of a meaning-laden imbrication of the viewer and the viewed in the flesh of the world, here it generates only allegories of obscurity and opacity. Thus, it truly produces one of those "moments of unease" which Jacqueline Rose sees challenging the petrification of the dominant visual order. (Lash, *Modernity and Identity* 187-88)

Zhu's *Splendor*, in terms of its visual impulse, can be identified with the baroque.<sup>17</sup> As the postmodern discourse elevates the sublime to a position of superiority over the beautiful, baroque vision is surely the "palimpsests of the unseeable" (Lash 189). Contemporary theories of the sublime are found in the work of Kristeva (1982, 1988) and Jean Francois Lyotard (77-82). Lyotard posits an aesthetics of the sublime as definitive of modernism and postmodernism. He is concerned with the metaphysical sublime. Kristeva links the sublime inextricably to the abject, and problematizes the distinctions between the metaphysical and psychological sublime. The postmodern, as defined by Lyotard, turns out to operate within *Fin-de-siecle Splendor* in a manner remarkably similar to that of the true-real. Analysis of the relationship of postmodern and true-real in *Fin-de-siecle Splendor* puts into question the relation of the abject to the sublime and ultimately that of the abject sublime to the true-real. But it must be noted that Lyotard's definition of postmodernity is not unanimously accepted. For example, *The Postmodern Condition* has come under attack from feminist critique because it fails to examine changing sexual roles, feminist research and the impact of both on representation and the construction of knowledge and therefore is an anachronism, in the nostalgic, not the subversive, sense. However, despite these reservations, Lyotard's work does offer interesting mediations between the writing of Zhu and of Kristeva.

Interpretations of *Splendor* as a metaphysical work have stressed Zhu's exhaustion of language, causality and plot, her attempt to make us look elsewhere for reality (S. Chang 1992 and D. Wang 1992). The pointing direction to an "elsewhere" shrouded in unknowing situates Zhu's fiction in the context of modernist art, as described by Lyotard, "I shall call modern the art which devotes its 'little technical expertise' . . . to present the fact that the unrepresentable exists" (1984: 78). In so far as *Splendor* is "modern" in Lyotard's terms, it is also sublime. The sublime sentiment occurs "when the imagination fails to present an object which might, if only in principle, come to match a concept" (78) and is triggered by a confrontation with the unknowable, the impossible, the Real.

In *Splendor*, this modernism was eclipsed by the postmodern component, which according to Lyotard always subsists within the modern: "The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself" (81). This is echoed in the habitual sparseness of Zhu's recent works. In their resistance to interpretation, Zhu's short stories "enable us to see only by making it impossible to see" (Lyotard 78).

If modern aesthetics can be said to be an aesthetics of the sublime, postmodern aesthetics can be said to be an aesthetics of the true-real. Reading the seven stories in *Splendor* one can trace the analogous operations of the postmodern and the hallucinatory icons. Master Chai's young girl, Lin Xiaoyang's King of the Nile, Cheng Jiawei's "Prince J. J." and Xiang Ge's "Red Rose," make the true-real "loom forth as a jubilant enigma" (Kristeva 1986: 230). When these hallucinatory icons are described as "unreachable," "unknowing," they become literally an "allusion to the unrepresentable" (Lyotard 1984: 78). This allusive quality is an indicator of the sublime for Lyotard.

The true-real is explicitly associated by Kristeva in her essay "The True-Real" with the pre-Oedipal and with the foreclosure of castration and separation from the maternal body (1986: 215, 218). In *Tales of Love* (1988), Kristeva further connects the true-real with the abject and the sublime, the linked couple which are crucial to Kristeva's discussion of love and amatory discourse. As the true-real is the fold in discourse which allows the real to manifest itself in the register of the symbolic (Kristeva 1986: 230), the post-teleological end of contemporary narrative is "to communicate the amorous flash" (1988: 368) which is "the focus where the sublime and the abject . . . come together" (368). Kristeva sees the true-real in the context of a psychotic disavowal of death. This disavowal "places us in the series of the signifier alone" (1986: 225). And within Kristeva's framework, writing is a disavowal of death. Zhu writes Death. In "Fin-de-siecle Splendor," the title story, Zhu presents the possibility that the woman Miya who subsumes into herself the role of originator of truth and the authority of the ending is Death. This death is indisputably the resur-

gence of biology and of body. As the last lines of the story read: "When she is old and her beauty has faded, Mia will be able to support herself with her handicrafts. The abysmal blue of the lake tells her that the world men have built with theories and systems will collapse, and she with her memory of smells and colors will survive, and rebuild the world from there" (D. Wang's translation in Wang 1992: 47).

In Kristeva's work, the maternal body, from which one is eternally separated, which one eternally desires, fulfills a similar function to that of absolute truth in the work of Zhu. Such similarity of function does not suggest that the maternal has become an absolute, but that the "truth" of Zhu's writing is the impossibility of the absolute. The problem with this interpretation is that when Zhu's fiction marks the search of the realistic novel for a reality to represent, it can be read, in light of Lyotard and Kristeva, to produce a model of fictional time which is anachronistic. This reading could be appreciated as the newly unleashed feminine imaginary if we did not recognize a larger narrative pattern in Zhu's works that acknowledges the power of social and historical determinism. Within Zhu's own framework, the only possible authority is that which derives from society. Although some of her critics insist that the form of Zhu's argument is about absolutes and meaning, I remain skeptical of Zhu's indulgence in the potential originary space prescribed by Kristeva. As Spivak criticizes Kristeva in her *In Other Worlds*, Kristeva's project "has been not to *deconstruct* the origin, but rather to *recuperate*, archeologically and formulaically, what she locates as the potential originary space *before* the sign" (146). I am both fascinated and estranged by Kristeva's materialism that is said to exist in timeless manner. The following discussion of three stories in *Splendor* will focus on the questioning of the dominant "aesthetic" criticism which privileges art works as its central site of analysis.

### "Master Chai"

The young woman patient in "Master Chai" is symbolized as the

object of nostalgia for Master Chai, a geomantic expert and masseur in his seventies, triggering his memories of the past and feelings of the present. The whole story is more like a free indirect discourse narrated by the old man than by Zhu. The contrast of past and present is skillfully done through free association. Besides coexistence of past and present, there are binary exchanges of tradition and (post)modern culture, old and young, male and female, loss and gain, and home and non-home.

Living with his sons who run MTV shops, Master Chai has his medical business proceed in the living room. In several passages, his clinic is described as such: "His considerate sons partitioned off the living room with panels and turned the upper half into a Buddhist hall for him. The long row of steel file cabinets for storing the sutras takes up a big chunk of the living room, . . . In the Buddhist hall two lamps that stay on all day long shine like two large strawberries. Behind them are a pair of scrolls inscribed with his master's teachings. . . . In the narrow living room a black steel rack contains eight shelves from floor to ceiling. On each shelf is a VCR, except on the top shelf where the ancestral tablet sits" (D. Wang 1994: 92, 93). Also, "there is a large scroll in the middle of the wall with the Buddha character; it is a photocopy of his master's handwriting from half a century ago. His master did not leave any writings behind; this was the only piece" (95). In another scene at Mrs. Yang's apartment, we see "a fax machine . . . in the Buddhist hall, which now doubles as an office" (94). In these passages, Zhu delineates a bizarre and postmodern environment with the juxtaposition of the religious shrine and electronic equipments, gods and ghosts, black silence of Chinese written script (itself a photocopy, as Chai himself is not a "genuine" doctor) and white noise, the mystic black/white silence of calligraphy—elegant painted script—and the black noise of street-cleaning truck. With all this electronic technology thriving within less than twenty years, it seems that Taiwan had largely bypassed black noise, at least in Chinese, for Chinese typewriters performe horripilated with so many rods and prods, and performe were serviced by so many key-faces, that the Mechanical Age was best bypassed. Taiwan leaps to the Technologi-

cal Age, but keeps the Traditional side by side. When Modernism was promoted by the government and cultural institutions earlier, the Traditional was rejected or strategically selected with a hope to achieve a synthetic mode (as in the Movement of Cultural Renaissance in the 1960s). Now that Taiwan has settled into the Postmodern, which juxtaposes black/white silence and white noise, and sometimes—at the MTV, KTV, and discotheques—just plain noise, how does an old man like Master Chai cope with this postmodern society that does not restate the modern “dialectic” of Tradition and Modernity?

Master Chai both benefits and suffers from the incongruities that happen every day in his life. For example, he is making a good living by practicing traditional Chinese medicine and non-institutionalized Taoist/Buddhist geomancy. Despite his “fake” or “unauthorized,” professional status, his business is thriving because he has been successful in treating patients who cannot be helped by doctors of Western training. And in his relations with Taiwan, Chai has learned to appreciate this “exciting, barbaric place” (91) like many of his friends, who have visited the mainland after the lifting of martial law in 1987 but decided to come back. Taiwan is his home now though he feels alienated for not being able to speak Taiwanese, the language of his wife, his sons and their families. After his wife’s death, his sons and their families treat him well by inviting him to live with them and most of the time abide by the traditional codes of familial piety. Just when he thinks he has gone beyond the mundane turmoil (“He is a Taoist, whose heart belongs in the pure land of transcendence” [93]), the appearance of a young woman patient disturbs his heart. “How was it that the sight of the Adidas on the girl’s snow white feet sent his heart pounding? He watched the girl open her acrylic pencil box—what a cute pencil box!—in a translucent peacock blue that reminded him of jelly beans, with seven figurines painted in jolly rainbow colors” (93). The girl has evoked his memories and feelings, which are structured as the unconsciously remembered relations he has with reality. The story ends with the old man’s self-inquiry: “Will the girl come?”

Among all Zhu’s works, “Master Chai” has received the greatest

critical esteem (see Zhan, D. Wang) and has been translated into English (see D. Wang 1994). However, David Der-wei Wang in his brief introduction to the story characterizes the piece as "a lyrical rewriting of the epic narrative" by giving a negative comment on the protagonist:

We thus see a life that has been wasted and a figure whose existence, in a society that cannot wait to deny its historical ties with the mainland, seems only a useless decoration, a relic of some almost-forgotten event. Zhu Tianwen's story intrudes into the most unlikely life an epiphanic moment, one that casts a sudden light on the pathos of one generation's fate. The innocent patient embodies for the masseur an escape to the realm of youth and hope. Through massaging (or fondling) the girl's naked body, the masseur undergoes an erotically charged ritual of spiritual rejuvenation; each touch leads him closer to the forever-exiled past, recalling, obscenely or rhapsodically, one generation's dreams of sorrow and meaning. (Wang 1994: 252)

Reading Wang's comment was an estranging experience for me. I see in his passage a fragmented and chaotic condition of life of an dirty old man (perhaps symbolizing the incapacitating KMT regime), who needs a young female body to achieve some kind of mental/physical escapism from the waste land. A modernist lament, indeed. However, in light of poststructural or postmodern theory associated with Derrida and Lyotard, this man's "fragmented" state of mind could be read as a confrontation with the impossible or "a jubilant enigma," which discloses an attempt to become free of reality's constraints (a positive escape instead of negative escapism)<sup>18</sup> and hence can resist the hysterical anxiety of drifting.

To make a point of my interpretation of the story, I suggest that we start with a cross-cultural review of the post-structuralist notion of the human ego in relation to "going-on" and "pure signifier" in the Derridean sense. In Robert Magliola's research on Derrida and Na-

garjuna in his *Derrida on the Mend*, he suggests that Derrida, in order to avoid the quandary of the mind split from the outside in the traditional Western epistemological model, should regard the "going-on" (*yathabhutam*, or the "real" in the non-Cartesian and also non-dialectical sense) as a Nagarjunist co-arising (which is approximated *sous rature* by Nagarjuna's "pure effect" or Derrida's "pure signifier") which is forever constituting/negating. Human ego, in this sense,

is a phase "on the swing" towards greater and greater objectification. That is, the goings-on "constitute" along a range of possibilities, from devoidness (where there is no objectifying) through a gradually crystallizing entitativity and on to the most elaborate of logocentric formulae. What I have heretofore called language/behavior is, then, a constituting which moves towards greater and greater objectification (or "making of objects," including one's "self"). The Buddhist "wise man" dissolves objectification, at will, when he becomes the going-on at work in a devoid (off/entitative) way. (Magliola 124-25).

The question we ask now is: is Master Chai, a believer in non-orthodox Buddhism in line with Nagarjuna, a wise man who knows how to constitute/negate objectification? I suggest that the whole story be read as a process of "going-on": his desire for the girl has constantly been displaced by his nostalgic feelings for a home-like object lost in the past: an oasis (in place of the desert city), a familiar hometown accent, his youth, the right disciple (who will pass on his "unorthodox" but useful knowledge and who won't alienate him as his descendants do), and the town Kunming (a mainland city with distinct seasons in contrast to tropical Taiwan) that impressed him when he visited it forty years ago. The girl's appearance makes him cultivate an attachment to the psychological, social, and linguistic patterns that used to give him order and meaning to his past experiences. But then he experiences the variety of his consciousness-states: after he alternately anguishes and celebrates, hopes and waxes the



nostalgic, as indicated by the metaphor of the rise and fall of dusts ("In the sunlight in the Buddhist hall, the golden dust of the mundane world roils up and down" [99]), he reaches a moment of serenity and awareness. During the whole process, the rotation of constitution and negation goes on to the point that the binary exchanges of loss and gain is blurred. The sorrow is certainly there, but the escape from the constraints of the real world in light of postmodern (Buddhist) sliding provides some blissful moments for the old man. Whether the girl will show up or not is no longer at stake; rather, the process of "going-on" in the form of "palimpsests of the unseeable" provides ongoing vigor. This reading thus helps me to understand Zhu Tianwen as she talked about her ambivalent attitude toward the filthy city: "Taipei is very curious. It is utterly chaotic, but it has a tremendous energy, with every kind of potential" (Leonard). The energy she refers to could mean *karma* that is produced to continue the objectification, but the same *karma* could also be turned into a kind of power that exercises the capacities of mind to liberate one from conventional patterns, as in the case of Taipei.

I would like to clarify here that I am not running through the gamut of white poststructuralist theorists trying to say that "the story is about a question of the Mind, and therefore is ahistorical or apolitical." I would like to show, however, that Master Chai (as well as the characters of other stories in *Splendor*) has completely moved away from any commitment to any ideological position in a way that labeling him political would miss the point.

Two other stories in *Splendor* further explore the question of desire as the source of "chaos" and "energy." Here we must bear in mind that desire has been the major concern in Buddhism, as well as in contemporary French philosophy and British/American literary criticism. By citing the recent research on the comparison of East-West notions of desire, I hope to resituate Zhu's postmodern style in Taiwan's historical context in the 1980s; i.e., "postmodern" in Taiwan should be seen as a process in which a self-nativizing culture persistently subverts—by way of constituting and negating—the conventional binary opposition of tradition and modernity (but keep them

side by side), and from there people gain new energy to move on. At the same time, the conflicts and struggles should not be erased by the false image of a fractured postmodern doctrine, promoted by Baudrillard's notion of implosion,<sup>19</sup> in flattering need of the remedy of wholeness provided by some critics.

### “Fin-de-siecle Splendor”

“Fin-de-siecle Splendor” is about the 25-year-old fashion model Miya (the Americanized name, if pronounced in Taiwanese, means “some [petty] thing”), who indulges herself in beauty to the extent that she cannot bear conventional values such as loyalty, marriage, and love. Set in the fall of 1992, the story foregrounds chronological disorder, seemingly creating “a sense of eschatological melancholy and the urge to *carpe diem*” (D. Wang 1992: 42). Being the leader of her “gang” and figured as “the queen bee” (182), Miya plays seductive games with both male and female friends. She then loses the interest in these games, and her boredom with the pursuit of fleshly love turns many of the guys into gay men and her lesbian friend Baby into a self-hating housewife and mother. She chooses to live with a successful architect, a middle-aged married man with two sons. Despite the fact she is only two years older than the man's big son, Miya keeps Old Duan her lover because he is able to “recognize her artistic taste” (187) and “treat her like his wife, rather than mistress, when he asks her to keep the money not used up” (174).

The reason that Miya picks Old Duan is worth noting. She considers Old Duan her *liangren* [a literary term for “loving husband”] that can be relied on, although she does not need him to support her. The father/lover role that Old Duan plays for Miya is connected to her memory of the smell of the sun emitting from the laundry just dried under the sun. She remembers her young revolt against her mother, who forbids her to put women's clothes above men's so as to avoid a “natural disaster” that could be incurred by the woman's act of disrespect for men (174). This revolt has become sweet memory now after all these years, with only the smell of the sun left for Miya. “It is the

smell of *liangren*, mixed with the smell of cologne and tobacco," Miya thinks, "it is Old Duan" (174). Like Master Chai who finds himself in a nostalgic situation after he thinks he has achieved a professionally successful life, Miya, after trying all sorts of sex games in order to be *a la mode*, still maintains some nostalgia for the traditional marital value, in which a woman finds happiness by keeping a reliable loving husband who spoils his wife. Her affection for Old Duan, therefore, combines her gratitude toward his understanding of her artistic attainments and her feeling of being spoiled; i.e., the aesthetics of the sublime and that of the true-real. This is further evinced by her criticism of a Japanese model, who used to be her favorite dream lover, for his excessive self-love. She comments that "narcissistic women can be accepted for they look lovely, but narcissistic men are simply spineless" (180). Here we see Miya act like a New Woman despising the marital system, but she keeps her hallucinatory icon posed by her idealized traditional notion of *liangren*. Whether Old Duan is her *liangren* or not is not important, and actually she never expects him to be one, as she has prepared herself for her future life without Old Duan—to live with her memory of smells and colors. As in the previous story, we have a juxtaposition of Old and New, timeliness and timelessness. The contrasts are not reconciled by modernist synthesis nor by a burst into non-sense, but by a postmodern negotiation to find a space "in-between," a notion further to be discussed later.

Either from the perspective of Baudrillard's "simulacrum" or from the discussion of fashion as the art of being frivolous and trivial, this story is taken as a wonderful portrayal of the arrival of a postmodern Taiwanese society. If we compare the following two passages about the piece, we find that the "postmodern" for the critics means anachronism. D. Wang sees Zhu's Taiwan whirling down into an abyss; he writes:

Zhu Tianwen thus injects into her story a "trivial" historical sense with regard to Taiwan's fate. Taiwan has prospered on borrowed time. As the century is drawing toward

its end, the island Chinese society is hurtling toward her eternal downfall in a most dazzling, spectacular way. Taipei appears in her vision like an East Asian "Sodom decorated with flowers and perfumes," as one critic [Zhan Hongzhi] puts it. Zhu Tianwen cuts the cloth of conventional narrative discourse into pieces and sews her own *salvation* for her own brand of Taiwan feminist fin-de-siecle writing. Is there any Zhance of *salvation* for her Taipei or Taiwan? Zhu Tianwen is not as sure of the circular course of time, but there is an ironic hint of *hope* to the story, which ends with a scene in which Mia learns to make her own scented paper, a skill with which she will make a living. (D. Wang 1992: 47, my emphases)

S. Chang, on the contrary, observes a celebration of hybridity in Taiwan's postmodern condition:

Finally, the new condition in which Taiwan finds itself in the nineties—with easy access to the First World—has dissolved many old worries and ambitions that have obsessed the Chinese for a hundred years, such as modernization, neo-traditionalism, Westernization, and nativism, among others . . . there is no more need for an inferiority complex. (Chang 1992: 77)

But she continues to alert the reader to "see through" the optimistic illusion. She says:

Some special attention . . . must be paid to "Splendor." While ostensibly unconventional, the work nonetheless betrays the modernist impulse that seeks a correspondence between form and content, language and referent. . . . Zhu's story envisions a hollow existential condition that has resulted from the unbridled development of materialist urban culture. While prospects for a future in "Splendor"

are not as bleak and pessimistic as those in the other two books, the story implicitly laments the loss of meaning and depth. (Chang 1992: 78, 79)

I see meta-theory in these comments and uncritical acceptance of "salvation," "hope," "meaning and depth." Both critics quote Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard to support their observation of the postmodern condition in Taiwan, and I wonder if this is an appropriate way to read a text which refuses to be reduced to a fixed discourse (i.e., political allegory for D. Wang, and Modernist dilemma for S. Chang). I must point out that among the theorists quoted, David Harvey has been criticized for the orthodox determinist features of his Marxist theses (see Meagan Morris). Harvey's doctrine (and his resolution of complex problems of causality and influence) is all too often "time-space compression and flexible accumulation" or, more classically, "capital and labor." His narration, epic yet meticulous in describing the intricate moves of capital, is profoundly reductive in impulse. We see "a simpler and more direct notion of determination" (Morris 255). In other words, Harvey avers that what happens in the economy has a direct effect on what happens in culture.

D. Wang and S. Chang, therefore, seem reductive in their interpretations of "Splendor." For example, there is an event in "Splendor" where Miya and her friends imitate Madonna in a contest (which actually occurred in 1984 in Taipei). This contest is turned into an image in a MTV video tape, in which these fake Madonnas are juxtaposed with two political narratives: Mme. Aquino of the Philippines and Wu Shuzhen, wife of a Taiwanese political dissident Chen Shueibian, who were demonstrating on behalf of their prosecuted husbands. Wang's interpretation is that all images edited into the tape are to "undercut each other on the MTV . . . Zhu Tianwen thus injects into her story a 'trivial' historical sense with regard to Taiwan's fate" (47). The reason why Zhu's "politics of the detail" in Wang's observation leads to the conclusion that Taiwan "is hurtling toward her eternal downfall" is not clear to me. Wang seems to assume that the political inertia of Taipei citizens, represented by Miya, will cause the

destruction of the city (or country); therefore, the feminist sentiment at the end of the story becomes "an ironic hint of hope" for Wang: Miya's resistance tends inexorably toward fragmentation, pastiche or traditionalism. Wang concludes that "[f]or Zhu Tianwen, who focuses on a woman's empty role in love and career, the fin de siècle results in an ironic ostentation of the marginal" (58). I feel uncomfortable with this reading precisely because he offers little evidence for this assessment.

Chang's comment is "Miya's knowledge of the newest fads in Paris, Milan, and Tokyo, and the fashion contest of the Chinese Madonnas, while best illustrating the notion of 'simulacrum,' copy without origin, also vicariously bring together geographically distant worlds of commodities into one space" (1992: 77). Here Chang simply imposes the "grand narrative" of economical determinism on the image of copied Madonnas. In her eyes, Taiwan is free from struggles, "no more need for an inferiority complex." It follows, then, that Chang, as well as Wang, cannot recognize Miya's Madonnas as images charged with narrative tension. Instead of seeing them as engaged with the historically specific relationship between images and stories producing "woman" in Asian cultural/political tension, Chang seems to see in them a vaguely metaphysical insistence on the ultimate concern: "Zhu's story evasions a hollow existential condition that has resulted from the unbridled development of materialist urban culture" (79). This translation of the historical and female is ensured by the indeed metaphysical assumption, pervasive in Chang's article on Zhu Tianwen, that image is to narrative as "surface" is to depth, "appearance" to reality, shallowness to complexity and space—at least aesthetic space—to time. These slippages also ensure that images cannot be read as actions in "counter-attack"; Miya's story about the story of femininity in political struggles is unreceivable.

Chang's interpretation of the "Splendor" asserts a kind of back-to-basics perspective. It is obvious to me that Chang buys Harvey's notion of postmodernism (which derives from Lyotard's) that "there is much more continuity than difference between modernism and postmodernism"; the latter is "a particular kind of crisis within the

former" (Harvey 116). Chang writes, "[d]espite the postmodern content of stories in *Splendor*, I would hasten to add that their aesthetic modes are nevertheless predominantly realistic, or modern, rather than postmodern" (1992:78). This means that aesthetic forms for Chang are always thought of as strictly external to the processes of social change. This notion has recently been challenged by Cultural Studies scholars like Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Tony Bennett, and many others. As Meagan Morris in her critique of Harvey writes, "postmodernism is not the only reason why the attempt to read culture as 'aesthetic,' aesthetics as ideology, and ideology as false consciousness has long been largely abandoned in cultural analysis" (265).

Chang's article offers a reading of Taiwan's culture that depends on a massive exclusion of feminism rather than critical dialogue with it, and so assumes the Modernist primacy that it claims to argue for; its token reference to feminist implication in the last paragraph of her article is, to say the least, muddled when not erroneous. She writes:

[I]t would be extremely fruitful to regard this statement not as a comment on the future of civilization but as a feminist declaration . . . By suggesting that the senses have the potential to save humanity from destruction, Zhu obviously hints at some structural deficiency of the male-dominated world of "theory and systems," and thereby projects a vision of an alternative form of civilization. This feminist utopianism, with its abundant positivistic connotations, is more modern than postmodern and may be regarded as the fruition of a certain legacy of Eileen Zhang. (1992: 80)

Here, the "feminist declaration" is again subtended in Modernist notion of aesthetics. Zhu Tianwen's contempt for theories (meaning and depth) disappears in S. Chang's quotation; what we see here is difference represented as sameness. On the other hand, similarity is not identity: Zhu's pragmatics of discourse is incompatible with Chang's reflection theory, that Zhu envisages a war against totality rather than

the image is at odds with Chang's foundationalism. It seems to me that Chang has taken the materialist aspects seriously in return for a recognition of metaphysical spaces of power to hold her "meta-theory." I am sympathetic to this attempt, as my fascination with Lyotard's and Kristeva's theories of sublime has shown. Yet the reductive spirit of most of Chang's text suggests that she can only analyze postmodernity by first rewriting as "the same" (modernism); consequently, whatever the reasons for the commercial success of *Splendor*, this collection represents no radical departure from its author's uncommercial earlier work: Zhu retains her neo-traditionalist phase.

Miya in my reading is more like desire, a pure signifier, like the Lacanian signifier (which Lacan refers to as "lack") that subverts the primacy of signified. Like an abyss, without a definite form, it eats up all the new-coming signifieds (contents) to change its own "form" as a signifier. Since the signifier itself cannot be in a controlling position, it has to be "co-arising," dependent on the new coming signified. Miya as "formless" or "multi-form" or "woman," changes her identities according to historical and geographical truths that not only characterize Taiwan's capitalism in its present phase, but also include complexities of the reader as someone whose identity is always at stake in Zhu's splitting of gender, race (First/Third World), and ethnic conflicts (mainlander/ Taiwanese): we are asked to read multiple narratives and voices that co-exist and are in constant contention in the story. My reading of "Splendor" is in support of the feminist claim that there is no such meta-theory, and that there are good reasons why we should not pretend to deploy it. I would like to argue that the postmodern feminist gesture in "Splendor" and other stories is not just a way of looking, but more important, a program of doing; or, in Zen Buddhist term, a process of "going-on." By creating the possibility of a critical re-reading of modernity, this kind of postmodernism offers us the chance to reconsider all that was "left unsaid." As Zhu has brought the repressed voices of the underprivileged mainlanders, old and young, back into the historical agenda in her recent works, she is against historical necessity and for historical contingency, in-



jecting its areas of opacity and resistance with the potential for new, as yet undiscovered, meanings. The narrative discourse of "Splendor" featuring the near future, henceforth, can be understood as a space "in-between," created to articulate different discourses that were not equally weighed at the time of her writing the story.

### **"Cardinal Bodhisattva"**

In "Cardinal Bodhisattva" the topic of desire is further explored by a gay man, Tong, a "yuppie" artist in his thirties. Since he "was turned into" and soon "discovered himself" a homosexual at the age of 15, he has tried to satisfy his own desire by grabbing whoever is available around him or has offered himself to whoever needs him. By the time he meets Zhong Lin, he has always looked love-stricken "like a mummy soaked through in the sea of desire" (55), but he is also on the verge of impotence: one morning when he wakes up, thinking of his lover Zhong, he finds his shorts are bolstered up "like a pyramid"; at the next moment, "a sudden fit of frustration, a mood of world-weariness surrounds him and the desire betrays him. He sees the once ever-lasting pyramid collapse in front of him and his fertile heart is immediately turned into waste land" (63). A series of Buddhist images occur as follows: a beauty with her "true" face as a white skeleton; karma sutra, erotic figures in Indian art, an Indian prince feeding a tiger with his own body, etc. Tong realizes that he has inherited sexual desire from those that have obtained enlightenment. Those saints were no different from him, so he decides to take his erotic feelings toward his lover easy. He goes to meet Zhong at a tea house, and they chat like old friends, exchanging their memories, in the form of litany, of the TV programs and commercials that were popular twenty years ago. Zhong gets aroused and decides to cancel his date with his girlfriend that evening in order to stay with Tong. Tong almost spills his tea on hearing this. He knows that if he rejects Zhong today, he will be able to learn to reject desire completely in an expected period of time. Once he is no longer bothered by desire, would he be happy or sad? He does not know the answer.

This story, like all originals, remains necessarily and delightfully elusive, but not beyond reach. As the title implies, a Bodhisattva is an enlightened person who refuses to enter nirvana—the pure land free of sorrow—but voluntarily stays in the mundane world to help other sentient beings. A “cardinal Bodhisattva” obviously refers to the sacrifice of one’s own body—like the Indian prince who feeds the tiger with his own flesh. Tong in the story is on the verge of becoming a Buddha who will not need desire any longer. Will he choose to become impotent (a Buddha)? He does not seem eager to do so. Desire for him is his Nature (*benxing*), lagging behind while his ego presses onward (to become Buddha). It is his atavism. Tong is positioned between the two Truths, in Buddhist terms, or between logocentrism and deconstruction, in the Derridean sense. Either choice (i.e. attached to logocentrism or deconstruction) will block the freedom of his mind.

The body is both a prison and non-prison for Tong. In other words, the prison and the non-prison are the same but not identical. This brings us to Zhu’s notion of the co-existence of two binary oppositions: no synthesis but constant struggles. It also reminds us of the conclusion made by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their *Anti-Oedipus* about the “going-on” process:

... the new earth (“In truth, the earth will one day become a place of healing”) is not to be found in the neurotic or perverse reterritorializations that arrest the process or assign its goals; it is no more behind than ahead, it coincides with the completion of the process of desiring-production, this process that is always and already complete as it proceeds, and as long as it proceeds. . . . (382)

In conclusion, the stories in Zhu’s *Splendor* have demonstrated the possibility of negotiating a space “in-between” through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated in order to articulate the different discourses, both on the Taiwanese complex and the China complex, that have grown around the question of

women and underprivileged people in Taiwan, and Zhu has examined them by playing them off against one another. The most remarkable thing about *Splendor* is not just that different positions articulated and set out in various relationships with one another, but that none of them are ever resolved in any way. It becomes impossible to point to any one thing and say that this is what the collection is about. It is about a number of things, not just ethnic differences and nationalism and class and sexuality and power but also the ways in which these are held together and used by different people for different ends. It is quite sophisticated in that it discerns these strands as discourses that are deeply determined by class and gender and ethnic backgrounds, in short, by positionality.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Many scholars have pointed out that Lu Xun's work poses a question of taking writing as a service of the powerless: if writing has always been the possession of the educated classes, how might it be justified for social revolution? Writing eventually becomes a self-defeating process. In contrast, literature for Zhang Ailing is a kind of leisure that would allow it to be read as the resistance-in-silence that literature theoretically provides. See Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity*, 112-20.

<sup>2</sup> There is a detailed analysis of Zhang Ailing's literary influence over Taiwan's women's literature in Chapter Two of my unpublished dissertation. See Chiang.

<sup>3</sup> See David Der-wei Wang, 1993, 337-41. In the article, Wang gives a long list of "Zhang Style" authors, including male writers (Bai Xianyong, Guo Qiangsheng, Lin Junying, Lin Yuyi) and women writers (Shi Shuching, Zhu Tianwen, Zhu Tienxin, Zhong Xiaoyang, Su Weizhen, Yuan Qionqiong, San Mao). In his "The Modern 'Ghost' Stories of Women Writers" (1988) he includes Li Ang, Xi Xi, and Li Li.

<sup>4</sup> Zhu's reference to a "postmodern" style can be found in "Take Me with You, Moonlight" and "Fin-de-siecle Splendor" in *Fin-de-siecle Splendor* (Taipei: Sansan, 1990; Yuanliu, 1992), 77, 187.

<sup>5</sup> This is Yuan Qiongqiong's comment on her in Yuan's interview with Chien Ying-ying. See Chien.

<sup>6</sup> See Andrew Leonard, "Formosa Fin-de-siecle," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (May 28, 1992): 34.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Zhu's father was a soldier arriving in Taiwan with the KMT regime. Her mother, Liu Musha, Taiwanese with Hakka ethnic background, is an established translator of modern Japanese literature. Zhu herself obtained a B.A. degree in English literature from Tamkang University. Like many other second-generation newcomers to Taiwan, Zhu grew up in isolation from the majority of native-born Taiwanese as a result of her upbringing in a military family housing compound (*juancuen*); hence, she developed a sense of wistful nostalgia for ancient Chinese glory. In her early essays, she connected herself to Zhang Ailing by sharing Zhang's notion of "small and clean moral system."

<sup>9</sup> The films Zhu has (co-)written for him include *The Boys from Fengguei* (1983), *Dust in the Wind* (1986), *The Time to Live and The Time to Die* (1986), *A Summer at Grandpa's* (1984), *Daughter of the Nile* (1987), and *City of Sadness* (1990).

<sup>10</sup> See Zhu's Preface to *City of Sadness* (Taipei: Sansan, 1989), 25-26, 28-30.

<sup>11</sup> See Leonard.

<sup>12</sup> After *City Inferno* and *Splendor*, Zhu wrote "Descendants of the Sun God" (1992) and *Huangren shouji* [Notebook of a Desolate Man] (1994). The latter won her the first prize in a literary contest sponsored by *China Times* in 1994. The award is one million NT dollars, approximately US\$37,700.

<sup>13</sup> Rey Chow in her review of a Hong Kong film "Rouge" argues that the recent waves of nostalgia in Hong Kong constitute a cultural politics of self-nativizing for "fantasizing a 'community' amid the identity-in-crisis of contemporary Hong Kong" (Chow 1993: 60). I borrow her term "self-nativizing" in my discussion of Zhu Tianwen's nationalism.

<sup>14</sup> David Der-wei Wang in his introduction of Zhu to *Running Wild* uses the word (Wang 1994: 264). Zhan Hongzhi in the preface to the *Splendor* writes something similar about Zhu's progress. See Zhan, 10.

<sup>15</sup> See D. Phillips, *Ageing in East and South-East Asia*, 131.

<sup>16</sup> The title of Zhan's article is "An Ageing Voice."

<sup>17</sup> Critics like Zhan Hongzhi and S. Chang stress Zhu's writing as mature and flamboyant. Chang pays special attention to Zhu's linguistic strategy. She writes, "In most of the stories in this book, Zhu . . . has skillfully mixed two languages: an elegant, *baroque*, 'literary' language based on a canonical style . . . and a vividly rendered contemporary sociolect used by young and middle-aged urbanites like Zhu herself. . . . While the former is a legacy of the romantic nostalgia that marked Zhu's earlier career, the latter . . . betrays her concern for a social group that constitutes a new sociological force in Taiwan today. This new sociolect represents, in Bakhtin's term, a heteroglossia that comes from below and, with carnivalesque energy, challenges the dominance of the official dialect." (1992: 73, my emphasis)

<sup>18</sup> I borrow Gerardine Meany's distinction of escapism and escape: the former is an attempt to evade reality whereas the latter is an attempt to become free from reality's constraints. See Meaney 229, n. 7.

<sup>19</sup> A discussion of what Baudrillard calls "implosion"—the "reduction of difference to absolute indifference, equivalence, interchangeability" is in Craig Owens's "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism." See Foster 58.

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