Asian Literary Voices

From Marginal to Mainstream

Edited by
Philip F. Williams

Amsterdam University Press

Asian Literary Voices

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Acknowledgments

This book has been a global effort, having been initiated and administered in the Netherlands, developed part-way in New Zealand, and finally carried through to completion in the U.S. and the Netherlands. The contributors to this volume span the Northern Hemisphere, starting from the Pacific shores of northeast Asia, then across to the Indian subcontinent, over to north-eastern Africa, and then on to central Europe – and finally ranging all the way westward across the Atlantic Ocean to the heartland and west coast of North America.

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Introduction: Asian Literary Voices

Philip F. Williams

Gathering together some of the most original contemporary research on Asian literature and culture, this volume presents a wide range of formerly marginalized Asian voices from all three of the primary cultures of northeast Asia – China, Japan, and Korea – along with the Indian subcontinent to the south and west. The topics covered extend from Sanskrit poetesses of over a millennia ago to Chinese women novelists and bloggers of the twenty-first century. Originally presented at biennial conferences of the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS), each chapter has undergone a competitive selection process and then been carefully revised – both to enhance its value to the academic specialist and to make it accessible to the general reader.

The transnational orientation of the book emerges clearly from the first chapter, in which Susan Lee compares Chosŏn period Korean (1392-1910) and Edo period Japanese (1600-1868) genre paintings about everyday life in which elite male scholar-officials are frequently paired with well-educated, talented courtesans. Lee reveals how a somewhat idealized image of the "talented woman" in northeast Asia was in part constructed on the basis of such portraiture in genre paintings, thereby taking issue with the over-literalizing interpretations of this type of art by many Japanese and Korean folk historians. This chapter's inclusion of prints of exemplary genre paintings adeptly complements Lee's analysis in the text itself.

The focus shifts from painting to fiction in northeast Asia in Daniel J. Sullivan's analysis of a seminal nineteenth-century work of historical fiction, entitled "Musashino", by the Japanese novelist Yamada Bimyō. At first glance, merely one among innumerable historical narratives about military conflagrations and decimated samurai families of centuries past, "Musashino" turns out to be every bit as groundbreaking in its style as local critics had long acclaimed it to be. Many well-translated excerpts from the text of "Musashino" vividly demonstrate Sullivan's conclusions about Yamada's stylistic innovations in that writer's handling of colloquialisms, regional and pseudo-classical dialects, and dialogue reminiscent of theatrical variants.

Shifting westward to China, my chapter on rural-to-urban migrants in twentieth-century Chinese narrative underscores a development from

atomized portrayals of relatively isolated Chinese migrants in the first half of that century to portrayals of them as being highly networked by the latter decades of that century. Since the middle of the twentieth century, the household registration system in the People's Republic of China (PRC) has placed rural migrants in such a disadvantageous socio-economic position compared with their urban compatriots that diligent networking has been more of a necessity than a luxury for sojourning Chinese villagers. Such rural Chinese sojourners already exceeded a hundred million in number by the dawn of the twenty-first century, so it is little wonder that imaginative portrayals of their strivings and travails have turned a new page in contemporary Chinese narrative literature.

Another prominent motif in contemporary Chinese literature has been love and eroticism, and when the risqué and self-reflexive aspects of this motif have been accentuated by relatively youthful PRC women writers, the latter have often been dubbed "bad-girl" writers. Shelley W. Chan extends her purview of bad-girl writers to include particularly famous or notorious on-line bloggers and photo-essayists as well as their more traditional counterparts who work mostly in print, publishing novels or short-story collections. Arguing that bad-girl writing stems in large part from the explosive growth of a consumerist mentality in the PRC, Chan points out that this type of writing's gradual shift away from print and toward the internet has also served to somewhat reduce government control over its dissemination.

Extending her purview back to the first half of the twentieth century in China, Mao Chen adopts a contemporary perspective in re-examining the major female short story writer and essayist Bing Xin. Chen draws on various contemporary critics to discuss the effectiveness of Bing Xin's liberal use of male narrators in her stories, as well as the type of feminism that she exemplified. Bing Xin emerges as a writer and thinker who draws as heavily upon humanistic strands of pre-modern Chinese thought as she does from Western-influenced currents of modern Chinese literature and philosophy.

Instead of emphasizing the impact of Western culture on one or more northeast Asian cultures, Georg Lehner looks westward to trace the development of Chinese studies or sinology in Europe from its marginal beginnings in the eighteenth century to the point of emerging as a reasonably coherent field of study by around the middle of the nineteenth century. Drawing both up on leading contemporary scholarship in this area as well as oft-neglected but fascinating nineteenth-century European source material in three languages, Lehner probes the stumbling block of paralyzing misconceptions about the Chinese language that European scholars had to toil their way past before making enough headway in studying Chinese culture to found sinology as a serious field of academic inquiry in the West. Lehner's mastery of a wide range

of sources pertaining specifically to the formative stages of Asian studies in Europe makes it entirely unnecessary to bring in ideologically alluring but conceptually bankrupt American notions such as the bugbear of "orientalism" as the supposed origin and motivation behind all academic Asian studies in the West.

Among the late twentieth-century PRC performing arts that were most strongly influenced by their Western counterparts was experimental theater. Izabella Łabędzka's chapter embarks upon an in-depth exploration of both representative examples of PRC experimental plays as well as the body of theoretical and critical commentary that supported such plays and thrived in their midst. Through such innovations as refigured stage and seating arrangements and the placement of some actors amongst the audience, Chinese experimental playwrights and directors have catalyzed the audience's active involvement and even participation in theatrical activity to an extent that would have been unimaginable in more traditional theatrical contexts.

Turning from the experimental theatre Western-influenced artistic and literary perspectives within a Chinese setting, we encounter a Western literary sensibility's attempt to fit within a Chinese setting in André Malraux's famous novel *La Condition humaine*, the title of which is usually translated as *Man's Fate*. William D. Melaney's chapter explores a number of interesting ironies about this novel, such as the way it presents a Eurocentric vision of China's communist revolution that is dominated by European and other non-Chinese revolutionaries who crowd the cast of protagonists – when in fact history indicates that indigenous Chinese revolutionaries were actually in control of their own revolution, notwithstanding a combination of support and interference from the former Soviet Union's Comintern. By revealing how the mentality and aesthetics of Malraux's revolutionary protagonists such as Gisors were at odds with the May Fourth New Culture Movement's anti-traditionalism, Melaney demonstrates the importance of giving this novel a critical or "double" reading that recovers or at least acknowledges representative Chinese voices who have remained silent or marginalized within this novel.

Just as indigenous Asian voices with much to communicate may be unwittingly marginalized by a largely sympathetic non-Asian writer such as André Malraux, the dynamism of a pre-modern female Asian readership can be underestimated by a largely male group of scholars. This is the situation that Sohyeon Park investigates with respect to the reception of Chinese vernacular fiction by a largely female readership in late Chosŏn Korea. Going back as far as the fifteenth-century invention of the phonetically-based and highly efficient *han'gŭl* Korean script to replace the orthographically ponderous Chinese characters that had previously been used to write the Korean language, Park deftly brings

together multiple strands of the complex story of how women became the dominant readership of Korean translations of Chinese vernacular fiction – as well as what this meant to their patterns of social networking and its role in the development of indigenous Korean literary forms such as *kasa* poetry.

The volume's chapters turn south to India to conclude with an investigation of women poets in Sanskrit, most of whom flourished at least several centuries ago, and sometimes more than a millennium in the past. Individual women poets and their poems in Sanskrit have previously been anthologized and discussed by various commentators, but have not been brought together and compared in the fashion that Supriya Banik Pal has achieved in her chapter. Pal's discerning selection and translation of excerpts from this group of women poets in Sanskrit reveal a range of remarkable poetic sensibilities and evocative imagery.

The numerous international awards won over recent decades by cinematic directors from all four of the Asian nations featured by this book – Japan, India, China, and Korea – not to mention the vibrant popular culture that each of these countries sustains – suggest that the marginalization of Asian literary and artistic voices will continue to shrink in the twenty-first century, and perhaps even become a footnote in history eventually. The contributors to this volume have each done their part to articulate and uncover the literary and artistic dynamism that northeast and south Asia have embodied over the past several centuries and up to the present day.

1 Korean and Japanese Portraits of Ideal Lovers

Susan Lee

This chapter is broadly concerned with the concept of the "talented woman" in the cultures of China, Korea, and Japan. It investigates how the ideal was constructed in these societies where the participation of women in the political, intellectual, and artistic spheres was rigidly circumscribed by Confucian ideals of womanhood and women's assigned roles within the political, social, and familial orders. Of narrower interest is the phenomenon of the "talented woman" ideal and its common identification with the courtesan or high-class prostitute in these three cultural traditions; this is precisely what occurs in two paintings that serve as the focus of inquiry here. Taking the specific examples of a late eighteenth-century Korean painting album and a mid-seventeenth-century Japanese pair of painted screens, this chapter explores the theme of the romantic and sexual pairing of the elite male literatus with his courtesan lover.

The literati traditions within the artistic discourses of China and Korea – and of Japan as well, but in markedly different ways – pivot crucially on the identity of members of the Confucian male elite as thoroughly authoritative artistic agents. An intriguing facet of the idealized pairing of the male literatus with a "talented woman" lies in the effort to construct the female counterpart in romance and love-making as an intellectual and artistic equal to her lover. In other words, the "talented woman" is potentially assigned an artistic subjectivity and agency comparable with that of the male literatus. The romantic pairing of such idealized lovers is ubiquitously represented in East Asian cultures, and scholars of Chinese art and particularly Chinese poetry have written in-depth histories of literati-courtesan romances as both the subject matter of and impetus for artistic production.[1] In contrast, there has been less scholarly focus on these idealized pairings in Korean and Japanese historical contexts. Yet as the images investigated in this chapter will reveal, the paradigm of this type of romantic pairing was a compelling one of socio-political significance both in Chosŏn Korea (1392-1910) and Edo Japan (1600-1868).

In addition to examining how the "talented woman" was visually constructed in the respective historical contexts, this chapter also delves into the historiography of genre painting, a category of painting that

takes scenes from everyday life as its main subject. Genre painting is the pictorial category under which both of these two works have been subsumed (*pungsokhwa* in Korea and *fūzokuga* in Japan) in the art-historical discourses of the two nations. A detailed historiographical examination is necessary because the definition of this category of painting and its purposeful deployment have been directly responsible for the widespread erasure of the "talented woman" from standard interpretations of these images – as well as from the broader cultural fields of Korean and Japanese early modern history.

This process of erasure in Korea and Japan may explain why the Chinese case was different from its counterparts in northeast Asia; the Chinese "talented woman," either as part of the artistic persona or as subject of artistic production, has consistently been treated *within* the discourses of art and artistic agency. In Korean and Japanese discussions of genre painting, by way of contrast, the dominant modes of interpretation have jettisoned consideration of the art or artifice of the imagery or the functions of artistic identities in favor of valorizing the paintings as "genuine," unmediated expressions of the life of the national subjects of the past. In this way, genre paintings such as those examined here have been corralled under the purview of folk historians, scholars who understand and use the images as primary-source documentation of the activities of the ethnic national folk (*minjok/minjung* in Korea and *minzoku/minshū* in Japan). I address the conventional framing of *pungsokhwa* and *fūzokuga* as a means to confront the dominant approaches to these images so that we may overcome the interpretive limitations of many past accounts and delve deeply into the meanings of the idealized pairing of the literatus and courtesan, and in particular the significance of the "talented woman" figure in late Chosŏn Korea and early Edo Japan. Was this "talented woman" figure merely a fictional trope, or did it have real consequences for real women?

The paintings

The Korean painting entitled "Listening to the lute and enjoying lotus blossoms" comprises one leaf from the *Hyewŏn jŏn sinchŏp* (translated as *Genre Pictures of Hyewŏn Sin Yunbok* – or simply *Hyewŏn Album*, as I will refer to it henceforth).[2] Painted by Hyewŏn, the sobriquet of the court painter Sin Yunbok (b. 1759), the album consists of thirty leaves whose themes revolve around romantic or sexual encounters between men and women. Although the figures throughout the album as a whole comprise a fairly wide spectrum of social types – including commoners, Buddhist priests, prostitutes, and *yangban* aristocrats – the painter's distinct interest is in the romantic pairing of the male aristo-

crat (the *yangban*) and a particular type of accomplished prostitute called the *kisaeng*, a high-ranking courtesan valued for her artistic talents, and comparable to the Japanese *tayū* or later Edo *geisha*.[3]

In this particular leaf, three *yangban* males and three *kisaeng* are pictured in a garden as they listen to lute music while occupied with various levels of sexualized engagement.[4] What is unusual about such an image in the context of the Chosŏn dynasty is its frank, matter-of-fact sensuality. No less unexpected is the fact that the protagonists of such a display include male members of the ruling aristocratic class. A culture established firmly on the rather conservative social mores of Neo-Confucian philosophy, people of this historical period rarely countenanced the portrayal of sexual dalliance in the fine arts – much less the portrayal of such dalliance in which *yangban* males were the leading protagonists. The governing ideal of the ethically upright literatus male as the pillar of society forbade his implication in such compromising scenarios, that is, in the field of painted representations (this qualification will be addressed later in the chapter), wherein the manner of his depiction was rigidly circumscribed by more conventional tropes of literati painting practice. As can be seen in additional leaves, these Confucian rules of sexual decorum are boldly flouted as the painter presents visually alluring *kisaeng* as objects of a sexualized gaze, portrayed as engaging in illicit nighttime trysts, and taking part in elegant leisure pastimes with their *yangban* lovers.

The Edo period painting on the following page dates to the mid-seventeenth century (see Illustration 1). Referred to as a "picture of pleasure" (*yūrakuzu*), numerous images from this era portray dazzling spectacles of worldly pleasures.[5] What is represented in sumptuous detail is an elaborate and raucous party underway. The painter has depicted over four hundred people engaged in a variety of entertainment activities spanning the breadth of two screens. Roughly half of the figures are presented on the right screen, and are in an outdoor setting. The artist has depicted an urban public entertainment district reminiscent of sites like the highly popular Shijō Riverbed, the center of public theater and amusements that thrived in early seventeenth-century Kyoto. On the left screen, there is a grand building complex. Three large groups of figures made up of samurai attendants, professional performers, and a group of *fūryū* dancers (dancers moving in circular formations) are positioned outside the gated walls of the complex. The rest of the figures relax in the central two-storied building, in a steam bath, and on the banks of a private pond. They engage in leisure activities such as court football (*kemari*), the tea ceremony [*chanoyu*], archery, playing cards (*karuta*, a new import from Portugal), smoking long pipes (another recent import from Spain), *nō* drama chanting, dancing, playing double-sixes (*sugoroku*, a board game similar to backgammon), reading, and boating. Like the

Illustration 1 Pleasures and Amusements *(17th c.), Tokyo, courtesy of Tokugawa Art Museum, owner*

Korean subjects of the *Hyewŏn Album*, these fashionably dressed and attractive Japanese figures express visual interest in one another. They flirt and are engaged in a variety of gazes, both as individuals and as groups. Many of the beautiful females are high-ranking courtesans accompanied by their young female attendants (*kamuro*). Musicians play the samisen, the three-stringed banjo-like instrument that had recently been introduced to Japan from China; the samisen quickly became a Japanese symbol of the public prostitution quarter. Most of the male figures are stylishly attired young samurai, proudly displaying their double swords, the conspicuous sign of the military estate. These clues suggest that the location is a high-class bordello, the site of sexual patronage of the high-level *tayū* courtesan by nattily attired elite samurai males.

As in the *Hyewŏn Album*, the primary scenario of the pleasure seeking consists of the romantic coupling of an elite male with a female courtesan. Although the historical contexts are quite different, the samurai elite, i.e. the ruling elite of that era, were just as intent as the Chosŏn *yangban* upon presenting themselves according to the dictates

Illustration 2 *Kano Eitoku*, Four Accomplishments *(2 panels of 4 total), ink and gold wash on paper, c. 1566. Kyoto, Japan, Jukōin; image courtesy Dallas Museum of Art*

of authoritative ideals of bureaucratic leadership. Contemporary paintings such as Kano Eitoku's *Four Accomplishments* (ca. 1566) presented the conventional persona of the Confucian gentleman, an ideal image of the ruling elite that was authoritative in both early Edo Japan and Chosŏn Korea (Illustration 2).[6] Learned, erudite, and cultured, the paradigmatic ruler type is shown nestled in the pure and pristine landscape environment engaged in the activities befitting a man qualified for the

serious duties of leadership: music, letters, the chess-like board game *go*, and painting, activities collectively referred to as the "four accomplishments." Such a literati ideal was a pictorial staple in China, Korea, and Japan. In stark contrast to such sober images of upright gentlemanly demeanor and behavior, both the *Hyewŏn Album* and the screens revel in the portrayal of rakish playboys in uninhibited sexualized dalliance with accomplished prostitutes. We might well wonder what type of cultural arena would have served as the environment in which such images circulated. Who were the contemporary makers, patrons, and viewers of these paintings, and what possible meanings could they have engendered for the viewers?

The categories of *pungsokhwa* and *fūzokuga* within art history

Unfortunately, the mainstream responses to these questions in the scholarly literature of art history have been more problematic than illuminating. The foundational source of the problem lies in the framework of the pictorial category into which these individual images have been subsumed, namely within the rubric of "genre painting." Taxonomic schemes have been devised to organize an unwieldy mass of historical data so that, ideally, we might make better sense of selected cultural artifacts or practices. However, as a consequence of the fact that the discourse on genre painting in both nations developed through an intimate interaction with politically charged historical narratives, the baggage that the genre has accumulated has grossly distorted our understanding of the individual paintings subsumed under this category. Histories of the modern nation, wholesale adoption of Western art historical models of framing and organizing painting genres, and the political uses of the construct of "the national folk" [*minjok/minjung*, *minzoku/minshū*] have intertwined messily to position *pungsokhwa* and *fūzokuga* as categories of genre painting with a particular political significance within the respective national art canons.[7]

In the case of Korea, the problematic nature of the conventional framing of genre painting is a symptom of an all-encompassing modern-day nationalistic historical project. The nationalistic paradigm has so dominated the historical presentation in the past century, according to Carter Eckert, that it has "obfuscated, subsumed, or obliterated virtually all other possible modes of historical interpretation" (1999: 366). Hyewŏn, in particular, has been instrumental in the construction of nationalistically driven Korean narratives of the country's art history, folk history, and national history. Popularly characterized as a "folk hero" of the late Chosŏn dynasty, the man and his work have been valorized as the exemplary expression of the folk spirit, the indomitable

spirit of the Korean people that, according to one Korean nationalistic narrative (of particular significance in post-colonialist discourse) would serve as the seeds of the nation's internal self-awakening or modernization in the eighteenth century.

In the case of Japanese *fūzokuga*, it has been the *mingei* movement's Yanagi Soetsu's (1889-1961) romantic construct of the "unknown craftsman" as the purest artistic paradigm that has driven the mainstream readings of *fūzokuga* imagery. Yanagi was an instrumental figure in the aesthetic world of early twentieth-century Japan. His theory of art, closely akin to the ends of the Arts and Crafts Movement – born in the latter half of the nineteenth century in England – sought to resurrect authenticity in Japanese art through the jettisoning of mechanical means of production and by rejecting the valorization of the identity of the "modern artist." In opposition to the practices of the modern art movements current at the time, Yanagi exalted the largely anonymous rural potters of Japan who selflessly wrought "pure art," objects that, to him, were manifestations of "true" Japanese artistry.

Many Japanese screen paintings like the one discussed here can be traced to the central Kano studios, which was one of the authoritative producers of leading images of its day. However, a romanticized legend developed around the *machi-eshi* [townsman painters], painters who were re-imagined as nameless yet noble craftsmen who naïvely produced unmediated documentary records of daily life. This legend has dominated the scholarly interpretation of genre paintings such as the Japanese screen painting featured in this chapter.

Although the discourses of genre painting as they have developed over the past century are distinct in the two nations, they do share some fundamental features. First, they have both foregrounded the artists as primary to meaning-making, thereby neglecting the roles of patrons and viewers, the other historical agents participating in the visual sphere. While Hyewŏn is canonized as a named individual artistic genius, the way in which he is constructed as a "folk hero" is in many ways similar to the deployment of the "unknown craftsman" model as the maker of early Edo screens. What is central to the "folk hero" myth of Hyewŏn is his non-*yangban* status.[8] This fact figures into the two dominant readings of the *Hyewŏn Album*, his most famous work. While these interpretations contradict one another, they both fit neatly into the standard interpretive narrative of the artist as a *minjung* [folk] activist.

Some commentators argue that such a folk artist exposes the moral hypocrisy of the decadent ruling elite. Those who take this position claim that the painter documents the unfortunate, tawdry reality of the ruling elite; therefore, the representation of sexuality serves as socio-political critique of the ruling elite. In contrast, other scholars claim that such frank and matter-of-fact depictions of daily life amount to a cele-

bration of humanity. What is at the base of this alternative reading has to do with how genre painting is framed within folk history; class distinctions get willfully and selectively erased. Ironically, Hyewŏn's commoner status is deemed to manifest the classless humanity of the Korean *minjung*. These readers celebrate the eroticism of Hyewŏn's paintings and argue that humanity – conflated here with sexuality – is most forcefully expressed by the unbridled sexuality the painter is capable of representing so authentically.

A similar maneuver of constructing the folk is at work in the historical representation of the *fūzokuga* screen painters. This leads us to the second problematical feature of the conventional scholarship on these images: namely, the contention that these are unmediated documentations of social realities. The interpretive valorization of *pungsokhwa* and *fūzokuga* has claimed these as "natural" and genuine expressions of folk history, a reading that willfully overlooks the factor of social class in the historical past, while also refusing to acknowledge the role of artifice of the representations. There is a reductive binary at work at the very foundation of folk histories – one that pits nature against culture, while giving precedence and favor to the former. Idealized representatives of the folk, the non-*yangban* artist Hyewŏn and the anonymous commoner craftsmen, are constructed as the pure and natural conduits through which the voices of the folk are manifested.

The consequence of this characterization of genre paintings as a type of pictorial representation is the complete de-historicizing of the subject matter in the paintings' images. The genre paintings are claimed to be innocent pictures of ordinary daily life. Traditional commentators would generally admit that such paintings are specific to a historical moment, yet would typically insist that these paintings ultimately manifest an unchanging cultural essence.

Reexamination of genres and themes

I propose that these images be re-contextualized into their historical and cultural frame where, among other concerns, social class was central to the meanings and functions these paintings communicated and served in their contemporary viewing environments. Needless to say, these images are hardly unmediated documentations of daily life. They are artificially constructed narratives of idealized love affairs and the practice of activities presented as stylish pastimes – stories that were narrated by social agents to present specific images of class-related sexual and artistic identities.

To take the Edo example first, I would argue that the Kano screens have to do with a *samurai* elite's cultivation of an oppositional aesthetic

style. It presents a bold transformation of the practice of elegant pastimes. These paintings broach a dialogue with contemporary "court" imagery, such as that characteristic of Sotatsu – a prominent establishment painter who died ca. 1643. Sotatsu famously illustrated various classical literary texts such as the *Tales of Ise* (a mid-tenth century narrative). Replacing the paradigmatic romantic pair of classical courtiers with a rebellious urban dandy – a representative of the samurai elite posturing as a *kabukimono*, a contemporary model of the reckless rebel – and his well-heeled prostitute lover, the patrons (and likely the viewers) construct and deploy an oppositional aesthetic style used to create and maintain the samurai's social distinction. In the cultural field of the early to mid-seventeenth century, the *bakufu* [centralized military government] was generally concerned with the legitimization of its rule. The military elite aspired to cultural distinction from the aristocracy, and certain groups within the warrior estate adopted a transgressive "aesthetic stance." The image is about breaking open the notions of value and taste and challenging presumptions about the custodianship of art, and amounts to an assertion of an authoritative aesthetic produced by the military culture. The figures in the scene break the rules of noble decorum in order to assert "higher rules." To paraphrase Pierre Bourdieu, the self-aware transgression of a canonical aesthetic announces a new aesthetic, and in the process asserts the distinction of the breaker of rules (1984: 255). In the specific historical context of the genre painting at hand, this aesthetic stance was constructed by the military elite in dialogue with the courtly canon of art and nobility. The image parodies the ruling male ideal of both the aristocratic and Confucian discourses, presenting a "Bohemian" pose that is transgressive and iconoclastic, offering an eccentricity in aesthetic style, and ultimately claiming a higher cultural authority over the canonical standard of the court.

The significance of the *Hyewŏn Album* is much more difficult to determine. The circumstances of the artist's life and career are shrouded in mystery. The lack of textual documentation is exacerbated by the hegemonic nationalistic force of the myth of "Hyewŏn as folk hero," which has discouraged historically grounded examinations of such paintings. However, the artist's inscriptions on select paintings may offer some clues for speculation. They may indicate that not only might Hyewŏn have been concerned with a *yangban* patronage base, he may have also cultivated a literati identity himself, perhaps one invested in the power of transgressive posturing similar to the Edo case. Non-*yangban* status meant that an aspiring painter needed creative strategies for refashioning or re-branding the self in the complex sphere of eighteenth-century Korean artistic circles. Many court painters of this era, including the other folk hero of *pungsokhwa*, Danwŏn Kim Hongdo (1745-1806), aspired to the status of literatus, only to be frustrated by the lim-

its of their acceptance by their *yangban* patronage base as well as by their fellow artists – mainly amateur literati painters of *yangban* lineage.

About the painting "Listening to the lute," Kim Hongdo wrote, "My hall is always full of guests, / My wine cups are never empty" (Kim 1983: 39). This quotation from the ancient Chinese Confucian scholar Kong Rong (153-203) is interpreted by some art historians as support for Hyewŏn's personal disapproval of the *yangban* depicted in the painting. The gist of the argument is that just as Cao Cao (155-220) had Kong Rong executed for his hedonistic excesses, the artist condemns the male human subjects in his painting. Could it be, however, that the Daoist nonconformist excesses of a Kong Rong are actually being celebrated as a form of "stylish and elegant" [*pungryu*] lifestyle? Just as the third-century Chinese Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove as well as the Japanese samurai elite patrons and viewers of the Kano screen one-up the traditional ethical code by violating it in the name of what they claim is a loftier or transcendent moral code, could Hyewŏn and perhaps other *yangban* hopefuls or disenfranchised *yangban* have embraced a transgressive style? After all, the *yangban* never amounted to a monolithic entity, especially during the eighteenth century.

We may have another clue to Hyewŏn's career ambitions and strategy in one of his inscriptions on a *kisaeng* painting. Hyewŏn has been commonly celebrated for having introduced *kisaeng* into pictorial subject matter for the first time. Although the *kisaeng* figure had been common in vernacular literature, *p'ansori* performances (narrative songs accompanied by a drummer), and *sijo* poetry (a popular poetic form consisting of three lines), it had never previously been featured in the visual sphere until Hyewŏn achieved this innovation. In one of his paintings of a single *kisaeng* figure, he wrote, "Predecessors thus far have not portrayed a figure of this type; this could be considered quite new and unique" (Cho 1993: 227). He may be claiming his artistic distinction by asserting the novelty and uniqueness of his subject matter. Although the lack of verifiable historical information about Hyewŏn makes it difficult to ascertain his intentions with certainty, these statements reflect the artist's efforts to cultivate an authoritative artistic identity. The apparent boldness (such as the "courage" to depict sexual dalliance) of his imagery has been interpreted as *minjung* activism. However, such boldness may have more likely been part of a strategy to cultivate an artistic identity that would help him advance in the competitive artistic circles outside of the Court Bureau of Painting, from which he departed early in his career.

The "talented woman"

The female lovers of the bold and brash transgressive playboys depicted in both the *Hyewŏn Album* and *Kano screens* are certainly beautiful and elegant, but are they "talented"? It is clear that in these two images the viewers are presented with women of cultured sensibilities. As courtesans, these women are no common streetwalkers; they belong within the highest ranks of the hierarchy of prostitutes. They are the *kisaeng* and *tayū*, women well trained in the arts of poetry, calligraphy, painting, music, and dancing. Not only were these feminine ideals the subject for painters; their identities were also constructed through dialogue found in literary and theatrical representations of their group, as well as the myth building surrounding actual *kisaeng* and *tayū* of early modern Korea and Japan.

Contemporary descriptions of famous *tayū* in early Edo Japan made frequent allusions to figures such as Ono no Komachi (canonical Heian period poet, born ca. 820) and Yang Guifei (favorite consort of the eighth-century Minghuang emperor of the Tang dynasty). The ideal female model that the image of the *tayū* was built upon was the cultivated and beautiful noblewoman, the object of desire for emperors and notable courtiers. In many vernacular novels written during the early seventeenth century, the female lover was a woman of noble class background. The heroine of *Uraminosuke* (late 1610s) was Yuki no Mae, the daughter of a retainer of Toyotomi Hidetsugu who was later adopted by the noble Konoe family. Yet as seen in the *Tale of Kazan* (early 1600s), the ideal figure's identity began to blur together with that of a professional entertainer. In novels such as the *Tale of Tsuyudono* (ca. 1622-1623), the figure of the female lover was totally transformed into a *tayū* courtesan. The ideal, however, never lost its ties to a courtly model. Both the Yoshiwara (the official prostitution quarter of Edo) and Rokujō Misujimachi (the official prostitution quarter of Kyoto in the early seventeenth century) *tayū* – the lovers of the male protagonist, Tsuyudono – supposedly hailed from a lineage of the military elite.

As most historians of prostitution note, the word "prostitute" in its common usage and understanding does not often accurately reflect the type of identity associated with sellers of sexual services in variously unique historical and cultural instances. This is certainly the case in early Edo Japan. Its prostitution during the early seventeenth century was based on a complicated hierarchy of assorted types of men and women. The female counterpart to the samurai male aesthete described in the previous section was a specific type exemplified by the term *tayū*. Her identity was not limited to the selling of sex, but demanded the mastery of the arts and a noble comportment in keeping with the traditional courtly codes of nobility. Those who drew upon the image of the *tayū*,

who was mythologized in artifacts of erotic culture in that era, described her as a beautiful and artistically cultivated woman of aristocratic or high-ranking military lineage who, through unfortunate circumstances beyond her control, had been forced to live the life of a courtesan. According to the myth, she practiced her arts, and because of her noble breeding she insisted on the privilege of deciding herself which patrons to accept for her services. The level of connoisseurship of the male patron was expressed not only through his ability to recognize and appreciate an artistically worthy and true-hearted *tayū*, but also through her acceptance of *him* as her lover. A number of *tayū* prostitutes – especially in the early years of the seventeenth century – appear to have hailed from highly-placed families, and many were trained in the elegant arts. The lofty image of the *tayū*, however, was an ideal that was cultivated by women (and their bordellos) to increase the fee they could fetch for their services. It was this myth that was maintained and reproduced when women like Yoshino (born 1606) of the Rokujō Misujimachi quarter emerged repeatedly in various fictional narratives throughout the seventeenth century.

Within the practice of aesthetic activities by the samurai elite, the *tayū* embodied a parallel to the valuable collectible – such as finely crafted tea-brewing implements coveted by practitioners of the tea ceremony – and an aesthetic advisor and companion such as the Muromachi *dōbōshū* (*dōbōshū* were advisers to the shogun who advised the military leader on matters of art). *Tayū* were at times called "*daimyō*'s articles," likening them to valuable tea bowls or other objects of value in the collections of the elite warrior leaders who governed large territories and answered to the central authority of the shogun. These men in the military elite were highly competitive, particularly when publicly demonstrating their aesthetic sophistication. During the early decades of the seventeenth century, famous *tayū* were among the featured performers and special guests at parties of the powerful *daimyō*. Many a top *tayū* adopted a *daimyō* name, perhaps as an indication that she was a mistress of her *daimyō*. These *tayū* would be hired, sometimes over the span of several days, to make and serve tea, and provide other services during the celebrations. This involved competition among *daimyō* as they aspired to hire the most popular *tayū* of a given time and locale. These famous courtesans were transported to the *daimyō* mansions in such luxurious palanquins that it was written that they were sometimes mistaken for ladies of the highest court nobility.

The eighteenth century in Chosŏn Korea also saw a pervasive myth-making process centered on the *kisaeng*. The *p'ansori* drama *Chunhyang-jŏn* was written sometime during that century. The daughter of a *kisaeng*, Chunhyang possessed all the qualities of the talented woman. Just as in early Edo narratives of the *tayū*, there was a palpable level of

anxiety in the artistic representation of the talented courtesan: she was actually a "true" noblewoman at heart, and found herself in the wretched position of having to sell her physical charms merely because of an unavoidable set of unfortunate circumstances. Chunhyang is burdened by the ignoble circumstances of her birth (the result of a *yangban-kisaeng* dalliance), but her faithfulness to her own *yangban* "husband" (they never actually wed) is valorized as the supreme expression of female Confucian virtue. Although the *kisaeng* Hwang Jini (b. 1502?) lived in the early sixteenth century, her reputation as not only a desirable woman but a formidable poetic talent was already solidly entrenched by the eighteenth century.[9] Kevin O'Rourke demythologizes Hwang by tracing the textual references to her and her *sijo* [lyric] poetry that began to be written half a century after her death (2003: 96). One of the most oft repeated anecdotes is what she reportedly told one of her prominent scholar lovers, Seo Gyŏngdŏk. In a statement expressing great confidence in her talent, she is said to have claimed that Songdo, the city from which both of them hailed, was renowned for three glories: Pag'yŏn Falls (a famous waterfall), Seo Gyŏngdŏk, and herself (O'Rourke 2003: 104). We have some comments by male scholars that may indicate that some men shared such high regard for *kisaeng* poetry. Hong Manjong (1643-1725) praised Hwang Jini, saying "Two women poets, Chini from Songdo and Kyesang from Puan, have emerged recently to rival the literati" (O'Rourke 2003: 114).

Analogous to the art historical narrative's isolation of Hyewŏn, the folk hero artist, outside of any artistic discourse, the women depicted in images such as "Listening to the lute" have been addressed not as culturally constituted fictive ideals participating in discursive constructions of late Chosŏn ideals of womanhood and female sexuality, but subsumed in folk ethnic nationalist stories of either a timeless "Korean" sexuality, or more narrowly, the unique customs of late Chosŏn daily life. Such a limited approach to the representation of the *kisaeng* figure forecloses the questioning of significant related issues. For example, what dynamic guided the association of visual and literary representations of the *kisaeng*? Did prominent *kisaeng* such as Hwang Jini wield real authorial agency during their poetic careers? Or did the lionizing of her image after her death instead advance the goals of a distinctly masculinist agenda?

The issue of reception is pertinent concerning the album and the related body of vernacular fiction and unofficial histories [*yadam*] that touched upon literati-*kisaeng* romances. As Jahyun Kim Haboush has argued, the notion that "popular literature" of the late Chosŏn embodied a "popular consciousness" is fundamentally problematic (1995: 175). It has been established that "the audience of *p'ansori* ranged widely in class constituency from the royal court to the peddlers in the market

place." Moreover, upper-class women appear to have been the most conspicuous readers of vernacular fiction. Who the writers of these texts may have been and what type of reading the readers of these texts undertook are important questions that have yet to be adequately investigated.

In discussing the "scholar-meets-beauty" genre of vernacular fiction in the late Ming and early Qing China, Keith McMahon has noted that some of the texts allowed for "active female self-direction ... at least in the imaginary realm" (1994: 228). Similar vernacular novels were being written in Korea alongside the importation of Chinese novels. Scholars in Chinese studies have noted that the Qing dynasty's rise in the growth of companionate marriages may relate to the fact that scholar-meets-beauty narratives of extramarital romance declined in number. In Korea, by way of contrast, the figure of the *kisaeng* tended to remain dominant throughout the period in question. Historically grounded examinations of the dialogue between China and Korea in this area and differences in the ideal of talented women within each culture may yield extensive insights to future investigators of such topics.

Conclusion and questions for further consideration

The main objective of this chapter has been to present two case studies of pictures of ideal lovers as evidence of the need to transcend the limiting and distorting framework of "genre painting" by re-contextualizing the individual images within their historical viewing spheres. I have questioned who the relevant historical agents may have been, and what investments they may have had in these objects. This chapter has offered but an introduction to the many important and intriguing issues connected to these paintings and what they may say about the construction of the "talented woman." I would like to conclude by offering a few questions that deserve further investigation, namely the significant role of actual women in our understanding of these artifacts. This is directly relevant to the Kano screen, because its very likely owner was a woman. The Kano screen discussed in this paper was recovered from the mortuary temple of a woman named Sōōin (Okame no Kata, 1568-1642) who was one of Tokugawa Ieyasu's consorts and the mother of his ninth son, Yoshinao (1600-1650).

The early modern era was characterized by urbanization, expansion of the printing industry and attendant growth of literacy, and an increase in social mobility. What happens to women in early modern Japan and Korea is a scholarly topic of great import. As Paul Ropp (1994: 348) has written, representations of women in China's past are dominated by "caricatures that miss much of the complexity and ambiguity

of the past." "As a result, Chinese women are too easily seen as passive victims of the traditional society, and their participation in the system's perpetuation is too easily dismissed as a result of false consciousness and/or powerlessness." Keith McMahon and Kang-i Sun Chang have written of both vernacular fiction and song lyrics (*ci*) in the late Ming shaping literary cultures of the time. Some women were expressing their sexuality to "subvert the idea of male centrality" (Ropp 1994: 363, 369).

Was there a body of literature in Edo Japan and Chosŏn Korea that subverted the dominant ideologies around gender during those periods? How did images such as these function in women viewers' self-fashioning, both in terms of their estate membership but also with respect to their sexual and artistic identities? Could women have been involved in the patronage or viewership of images like those in Hyewŏn's screen painting?

Kisaeng of near mythical scale such as Hwang Jini were palpable models of authoritative artistic agency. Similarly in Japan, certain Edo period celebrity courtesans, as well as classical poetic icons re-cast as courtesans, were celebrated as models of female artistry. Could the identity of a *kisaeng* or a *tayū* have been useful to Korean or Japanese women outside of the demimonde of prostitution who had ambitions to explore their artistic talents or sexual agency?

Notes

1 Katherine Carlitz, Kang-i Sun Chang, Grace Fong, Dorothy Ko, Susan Mann, Keith McMahon, Maureen Robertson, Paul Ropp, and Ellen Widmer are just a few of the scholars who have examined courtesan literature, the courtesan-poet identity, and literati-courtesan romance as literary and poetic subject matter. In the field of art history, Marsha Weidner, Ellen Johnston Laing, and James Cahill have written of courtesan artists in the Chinese tradition.

2 This painting album is owned by the Kansong Museum in Seoul, South Korea. At the time this book went to press, the painting by Sin Yunbok could be viewed through the following web link: http://www.silkqin.com/01mywk/themes/korea.htm.

3 The prostitution quarter within various cities of early modern Japan was governed by a strict and elaborate hierarchical system. At any given time, hundreds of different terms denoting the rank and type of a particular courtesan or prostitute were part of the common vocabulary used within the quarter's bordellos, taverns, and other gathering places. In the early- to mid-seventeenth century, the "*tayū*" denoted a courtesan of the highest rank.

4 Norms of gendered behavior amongst the *yangban* were so tightly circumscribed by Confucian ideals that *yangban* women were rigidly limited to activities within the inner quarters of their households. Primarily for this reason, high-ranking courtesans were regularly solicited to function as the artistic, romantic, and sexual partners to *yangban* men as they engaged in social events outside of the domestic sphere. While the way in which the romanticized ideal of the *kisaeng* was cultivated was as the clear

"other" of the *yangban* wife, *yangban* women will not be discussed at length in this chapter; all references to the *yangban* will be limited to male members of this social class.

5 This pair of eight-paneled folding screens is owned by the Tokugawa Reimeikai Foundation and Tokugawa Art Museum of Tokyo, Japan.

6 At the time this book went to press, the painting by Kano Eitoku could be viewed through the following web link: http://www.stolaf.edu/courses/2004sem2/Art/260/Michael/secondpage.html.

7 The problems in the framing of genre painting that are confronted in Korean or Japanese art histories are not completely exclusive to these traditions. The position that claims genre paintings as innocent documentations of social customs, along with the bias toward associating genre painting (as a category) with the lower classes, are actually part of the conventional framework of discussing genre painting in the European tradition. These biases were indiscriminately appropriated by both Japanese and Korean art historians and subsequently incorporated into art historical narratives of folk or nationalistic bent.

8 One dominant reason why *pungsokhwa* and the artistic model of the "folk" painter have been favored and sometimes lionized can be found in what Andre Schmid has written about the project to "decenter the Middle Kingdom." As he writes, "A crucial component of the reconstruction of Korean national identity [in the early years of the twentieth century] was the attendant reinvention of the category Chinese. Just what it was that marked this particular nation as Korean was to be counterbalanced with just what it was that made their neighboring nation Chinese" (2002: 61). Within the context of decentering China, the choice to privilege a non-literati artist is understandable, considering the authority of the Chinese tradition. More accurately, it explains the persistent desire of locating Hyewŏn completely outside of artistic circles informed by literati aesthetic ideals.

9 To this day, Hwang Jini remains an iconic female artist. Recent years have seen the publication in both North Korea and South Korea of novelistic renderings of her life story, a publishing phenomenon that has received extensive media coverage. Hong Sŏkjong, *Hwang Jini* (Seoul: Daehun Sŏjŏk, 2002). Chŏn Gyŏngrin, *Hwang Jini* (Seoul: Irum, 2004).

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2 Yamada Bimyō's "Musashino" and the Development of Early Meiji Historical Fiction

Daniel J. Sullivan

Yamada Bimyō (1868-1910) established his position at the forefront of the Japanese literary establishment with the publication of his short story "Musashino," which first appeared in the November and December issues of *Yomiuri shinbun* in 1887, and was later reprinted in his critically acclaimed collection entitled *Natsukodachi*. In this chapter, I will explore some of the rhetorical devices unique to "Musashino" – and how its publication contributed to the revitalization and transformation of Japanese historical fiction in a way not seen since the zenith of the Edo period (1603-1868) *yomihon* genre.[1]

To claim that a single work had such a profound effect on the way Japanese historical fiction was subsequently written is problematic. It would perhaps be more appropriate to argue that "Musashino" and other contemporaneous works of historical fiction were products of a much larger process of transformation, and therefore no single work can rightly be regarded as being innovative in and of itself. However, as many writers and critics of the time attest, "Musashino" is unique in many ways, and its publication was a defining moment in the evolution of the Meiji period (1868-1912) historical novel.

My primary objective in this chapter is to identify the particularities of "Musashino" that make it an innovative text in the realm of Meiji historical fiction. I consider "Musashino" a work of progressive fiction; yet I also hope to demonstrate how the text can be regarded as anti-modern and, especially, antithetical to Tsubouchi Shōyō's proposed program for modern literature. To this end, the focus of my scrutiny will be the narrative structure and language of the text, and its fresh treatment of the historical past, elements of which are recognizable in much of the historical fiction produced in the post-Bakinian era (following the death of Kyokutei Bakin, 1767-1848).

Before discussing the narrative qualities of "Musashino," a brief summary of the story's plot is in order. Written entirely in Yamada Bimyō's fashion of *genbun-itchi* [unification of the colloquial and literary styles] and consisting of three parts, it is set shortly after the Battle of Musashino, which was fought in 1352 between the forces of Ashikaga Takauji and an army led by Nitta Yoshioki and his brother Yoshimune. After a lengthy introduction, Part One introduces two samurai – one young

and brash, the other older and more experienced – who are fighting on the side of Emperor Go-Daigo's Southern Court with the Nitta clan. Having just suffered a crushing defeat in battle, they are making their way to Kamakura to rejoin the forces of their routed army. Along the way, however, they are slain by members of the Ashikaga cavalry. Part Two takes place in a diminished samurai residence in a distant mountain village. Here, the text presents two new characters: a mother and daughter, who are the wives of the two samurai killed in Part One. In spite of her mother's constant reprimands, Oshimo, the wife of the younger samurai, worries incessantly about the fate of her husband and father. As an accomplished practitioner of the martial arts herself, she equips herself with armor and weaponry and slips out at night to search for the two men. In Part Three, a village man visits the mother the morning after Oshimo's disappearance to report that her husband and son-in-law have indeed been slain in battle. Her daughter's body, we learn, has been found as well, apparently mauled by a bear.

On the surface, "'Musashino" seems a rather unsophisticated tale, and it does retain some of the same elements that mark Yamada Bimyō's earlier work as a practitioner of Bakin's *yomihon* style.[2] To deem it as simply another tired reworking of the *yomihon*, however, would be to ignore the universal praise it received for the novelty and excellence of its style by contemporaneous writers and critics such as Tayama Katai, Ishibashi Ningetsu, and Uchida Roan.[3] In terms of its narrative structure and experimental language, it represents the first step of the historical novel's break from the *yomihon* genre and its nascent development into a modern form.

As already mentioned, the main story of Part One is deferred until after an introduction of some three pages. This portion of the narrative, which is roughly a third of Part One, is devoted to establishing the setting of the main story and a brief tract on the practice of warfare during Japan's medieval [*chūsei*] period. The first part of the preface begins as follows:

> Ah, Tokyo of today, the Musashi Plain of long ago. It is so bustling now that one could not even prop up a gimlet, but long ago it was too spacious to establish a checkpoint. Even the crows, which today are scowled at by young dandies in Nakano-chō, once managed to scrape by in what is now Ryōshi-machi in Umibata Shigo-chō. And the moon, which is now appreciated by beautiful young women in Yanagibashi, was so destitute in times past that "it did not have a mountain to hide behind." Indeed, what at present is home to one million people once accommodated nothing more than billions of sprouting grasses. There was a chorus of insects on its unbounded green stage, from Ara-

> gawa in the north to Tamagawa in the south; and the only company solicited by the pampas grass was probably just some fox, deer, rabbits, and wild horses.[4]

An introduction such as this is by no means unusual for a work of historical fiction. In fact, most begin with a few opening remarks on their spatial and temporal setting – many even devote several pages to dates, important events and bibliographical sketches of historical figures germane to the story. However, the manner in which the opening lines of "Musashino" emphasize the here-and-now of when the story was published, and its explicit contrast to the past portrayed in the unfolding drama, discloses an historical perspective unique to this work. Compared with earlier and some contemporaneous works of historical fiction, the historical perspective in "Musashino" reflects the new awareness of the past emerging in Meiji Japan following its opening to Western nations, by which Japan's presence was re-emplotted as something distant and lagging. This does not mean that earlier literary historical treatments are devoid of some consciousness of the past. However, in works such as *Taiheiki*, *Heike monogatari*, and Bakin's *Nansō satomi hakkenden*, references to the past are often couched in a dry, didactic tone, similar to the style of a chronology. More importantly, they by and large lack the explicit posturing from, and comparison with, the present as manifest in "Musashino." This treatment of the past as a "foreign country," to borrow David Lowenthal's formulation, is one defining characteristic of historical fiction that persists even to this day.[5]

Once the first part of the preface establishes a clear delineation between the immediate present and distant past, the narrative is set in motion and commences to ease the reader across space and time to the setting of the story. Immediately following the passage above, the text continues:

> But the turmoil of this world inevitably came to such a place in the form of a battle at some time in the past. Scattered here and there were several rotten, terribly wretched corpses; and, as was the way of war in those days, there were no priests to bury them. There were mounds of dead bodies all around, which seemed to have accumulated when one of the armies was fleeing in retreat. They were covered with bits of grass, earth, and tatters of blood-stained encampment screens. The bodies were all weather-beaten, and their hands and feet were torn and broken, probably because they had been picked over by birds and other beasts. Several of them even lacked heads, perhaps because they had been taken as trophies.

The narrative of "Musashino" then goes on to recount the horrors of war and the dreadful manner in which so many samurai fell in battle, and how their loved ones back home would wait in vain for their return – unaware that they had been "skewered by blades, crushed by a shower of arrows, and had perished in a foreign land." The final portion of the preface then proceeds to refute the idea that war was fought and won by hyperbolized heroic figures, which dominate many *yomihon* and war tales from the Edo and *chūsei* periods. Instead, Yamada informs the reader that more often than not it was the pitiable conscript soldier who actually carried out the bloody deeds of his lord. After a brief account of an anonymous mother and father saying farewell to their son, who has been conscripted into such an army, the narrative continues thus:

> They were spurred on by the war bells and drums when they departed for the demon road; and the moss of the deep mountains and the sand of beaches served as their bedding. And then, the enemy ... drums ... the general's orders to his subordinates ... death. And so it was that the field came to be so. Perhaps they writhed in agony before they perished; or clenched their teeth still clinging to the hope that they might yet survive. Blood flowed, changing the color of the grass. Spirits left their bodies to dwell elsewhere. Guts spilled wistfully from slash wounds; and on them the surviving antagonists, the fly generals, adorned in golden armor, took their positions, while the maggot generals gathered their troops in the dry pools of the corpses' eyes. A side wind blew vigorously over the plains, carrying with it the perfume of an anomalous sachet ... the stench of blood.

Yamada Bimyō's sanguineous description of the battlefield is evocative of similar scenes in works such as *Heike monogatari*, *Taiheiki*, and Edo *yomihon*, but the level of detail far exceeds that of earlier texts. In part this may owe to the trend for realistic depiction in literature, which was becoming more prevalent when Yamada wrote "Musashino." Yet more important to note here is the implicit function of the narrative, which helps to transport the reader from the familiar Meiji present to a richly illustrated and barbaric distant past.

That one of the characteristics of the "Musashino" narrative is its capacity as a temporal and spatial transportation device is further revealed in the commencement of the story in Part One, and the repeated use of this device, albeit with different characters, to begin Part Two. After establishing the diegesis and ferrying the reader to a mental landscape of the past, the narrative shifts to a description of the setting for the main story.

> It was sometime past four in the afternoon. Ceremoniously, the sun was beginning to emit rays of madder red as it approached the ridgeline of the Hakone Mountains, and little by little its light filled the recesses of the distant plain with a pale orange glow; and the far-away mountains were gradually turning purple as if they had imbibed some sort of poison. The evening mist ceaselessly created mirages at the terminus of the plain. It is autumn. Here and there the trees, which grow to their liking, have already been stripped of their green coats; were they trembling in the wind because they were cold? Migrating starlings were twittering consolingly. Two warriors were approaching on foot at a quick pace from the west. They appear to be on a journey.

What is conspicuous about this passage, and consistent throughout the rest of the narrative, is the switch to historical present narration. As Yanagida Izumi informs us, it was Yamada who first started using the historical present for his historical fiction in this manner (Yanagita 1976: 406). Beginning with "Musashino," this verb tense helps to establish the first step of a unique zooming technique characteristic of Yamada Bimyō's early works, and contributes to the narrative's spatiotemporal displacing design. Following a description of the setting, there is a brief depiction of the characters from a distance, then a more detailed account of each character, and finally the dialogue, which invariably begins midway in their conversation. This "cinematic" narrative technique hastens the overall illusion that the reader has experienced a sort of time travel to a living and breathing past and is witnessing it firsthand (Yamada 1992: 25; Yamada 2001: 343-344).

Another unique feature of the narrative is Yamada Bimyō's use of a particularly intrusive heterodiegetic or third-person narrator. The narrator makes its first explicit appearance after a description of the two samurai and part-way through their conversation by addressing the reader in the following way:

> And so with this the reader understands that these men are on the side of the Nitta. And considering what has been said about Takauji being pursued in Ishihama last year, and that these two men are quickly making for Kamakura, one may surmise that they are, without a doubt, members of Nitta Yoshioki's army.

A little later, at a rather tense moment in the narrative, the narrator proffers the following observation:

> Their conversation came to an abrupt end. Did it really break off, or was it just swallowed by the wind? It is difficult to tell. But in-

> itially it seemed there was certainly a moment of silence in their conversation, especially when one considers that throughout their conversation the older of the two was speaking so proudly of his experiences, and the younger soldier was replying with such profound modesty. Wouldn't you agree, my readers?

And in Part Two, the narrator recounts the first appearance of Oshimo to the reader with the same sort of presence and immediacy.

> One's eyes first come to rest on a seemingly young and sprite individual, who is obviously a young woman, even in this darkness. A simple pine and beeswax torch barely lights the room, and pitch darkness fills the area where the firelight's two-foot radius terminates. But her face is illuminated just enough to see that she is indeed quite young. Her age is indeterminable, to be sure, but considering that her facial features have not fully developed, she could not be very old. She has very good posture, and, unlike the frail hands of most young women, her wrists are quite thick. Her eyelids are somewhat swollen, and ... well, if she has any defects at all, it is the way she looks at people ... so very ... no ... let's just say grim or cold. She has a soft layer of full flesh under her chin and a splendid brow, which frames her face and naturally displays the highlights of her features. She had been wearing a coat emblazoned with a white chrysanthemum until just a moment ago, but has since removed it and is now clothed in a simple garment of *kudzu* fiber, through which its cattail cotton padding can be seen.

The narrator of "Musashino" is reminiscent of those found in the fictions of the Edo period, especially the *sharebon* and *ninjōbon*. As Peter Kornicki points out in *The Reform of Fiction in Meiji Japan*, the narrator in such works "revels in describing appearances but professes and actually expresses ignorance of matters that are not immediately obvious to the onlooker" (1982: 67). In this regard, therefore, this anachronistic element of "Musashino" represents a step backward, and retards Yamada's unequivocal effort to deliver a wholly progressive form of the novel. However, in the context of the narrative's implicit effort to transport the reader to the past to "experience" the tale firsthand, such a device is appropriate. Due to the lingering popularity of Edo fiction in the Meiji period, this type of narrator would have been readily familiar to contemporaneous readers, but its execution would have felt fresh and inventive. Rather than devalue "Musashino" for embodying such an archaic technique, it would be more appropriate to acknowledge the innovative way in which Yamada incorporated this technique into the narrative for

his own purposes. The device itself is not a "modern" one, to be sure; however, Yamada's execution of it is arguably so.

The final mechanism Yamada Bimyō employs to transport his readers to the past is language. Consider, for example, the following note to the reader, which appears at the head of the "Musashino" text:

> Although there are no prior examples of this, because "Musashino" is an historical tale, I wrote the speech of the characters in a single style, which is a mixture of the spoken languages of the Keichō era and the Ashikaga period and, therefore, generally suitable for the time depicted therein.

Like the intrusive, heterodiegetic narrator, the language of the spoken parts of "Musashino" is evocative of those in works such as Tamenaga Shunsui's *Shunshoku umegoyomi* (1832-1833) and other Edo colloquial fictions. Further, it is reminiscent of the roadside raconteur style found in the *sokkibon* of Sanyūtei Enchō (1839-1900), with whose work Yamada Bimyō was certainly familiar. More specifically, as Uchida Roan points out, owing to the prevalence of the *-ojaru* sentence ending in the dialogue, it is especially similar to the recorded spoken word of late-*chūsei* and early-Edo *oku-jōruri* dramas (1994: 167).

Again, what is important to keep in mind is the explicit function of the dialogue Yamada Bimyō proposes in the note to the reader at the beginning of the text: the language of "Musashino" is suitable for the tale in that it matches the spoken word of the temporal setting. Yamada's choice to use a pseudo dialect composed of spoken languages coeval with the tale is, therefore, a further example of his effort to actualize a vivid historical aura for the reader. In other words, it is integral to his program to create the illusion of spatiotemporal transference. As the author and critic Ishibashi Ningetsu later wrote regarding his impressions after reading "Musashino," "I cannot praise this work enough for the way its language helps to convey the time period of its story."[6] This technique of using a pseudo-classical dialect to imbue a text with a historical "spirit" is yet another distinguishing feature of the historical fiction still in practice today.

"Musashino" is very much a successful experiment with language, especially with the unprecedented possibilities of colloquial (or quasi-colloquial) speech. Like Tsubouchi Shōyō and Futabatei Shimei, Yamada Bimyō is credited for his efforts to fashion a language expedient to the modern novel. In particular, he is remembered for making the earliest efforts to write a literary work entirely in the colloquial language, including both the dialogue and narrative. (His first attempt, for example, appeared in the Number Nine issue of *Garakuta bunko* in November 1886 when he began to serialize "Chōkai shōsetsu tengu" [Ridiculing a

vain novelist], the same year Tsubouchi finished *Shōsetsu shinzui* and eight months before the first installment of Futabatei's *Ukigumo*.)

Yamada Bimyō experimented with *genbun-itchi* throughout his career, but after the appearance of *Ukigumo*, his contributions to the new written style were often overlooked. As some critics interpret it, Yamada Bimyō's frustrations over his lack of recognition gradually developed into his alleged hostility toward Futabatei's style and especially Tsubouchi's method for the modern novel. His irreverence for Tsubouchi Shōyō reached a climax in 1887 when he first published "Musashino," and is implicit in the note on language at the beginning of the text. As Yamada Yūsaku suggests, "Musashino" reflects Yamada Bimyō's rejection of Tsubouchi's contention that the modern novel must "portray the interiority of individuals living at the time of its conception," and that for the narrative of a historical novel "the use of the vernacular is extremely unsuitable, and requires, instead, a style that utilizes elements of both elegant and vernacular language [*gazoku no kotoba*] for it to be successful" (2001: 348).

His dismissal of Tsubouchi is also evident in his return to the *chūsei* period as the subject of most of his later fictions. Still, Yamada Bimyō was no doubt aware of the reverberations of Tsubouchi's program in the literary world, and he proceeded cautiously so as not to blemish his rising fame. By embracing the classical period, with which he was most familiar, and opting not to write narratives set in the present, Yamada knew that he had to push himself beyond anything reminiscent of his earlier *yomihon* pastiches. The result, as Yamada Yūsaku and Yanagida suggest, is "Musashino," which brought Yamada Bimyō his much-desired recognition.

"Musashino," Yamada Bimyō's first prose work of consequence, is representative of some of the earliest attempts of young Japanese writers to reform the novel during the Meiji period. Like many works published at this time, it still retains some elements unique to earlier forms of fiction. Yet in many ways it displays characteristics that testify to its rightful designation as a ground-breaking precursor to the modern historical novel. In particular is his unique vision for historical fiction by which he reanimates the spirit of the past, through distinctive applications of language and narrative devices, so that the reader vicariously experiences bygone eras. Although his legacy is largely forgotten now – or, as is often the case, worthy of mention only in footnotes – Yamada Bimyō's endeavors, beginning with "Musashino," mark a definitive turning point in the evolution of one of Japan's most popular literary genres.

Notes

1 *Yomihon* [books for reading] typically adapted Chinese fiction to Japanese cultural settings.
2 An example is the prevalence of *shichigo-chō* (seven-five rhythm), also known as Bakin-*chō*, in the opening and descriptive portions of the text.
3 See, for example, Uchida (1994: 169), *Omoidasu hitobito*, Tayama (1995: 307-308), *Meiji meisaku kaidai*, and Ishibashi (1995: 30), "Natsukodachi."
4 Translations of all excerpts from "Musashino" and other Japanese sources are my own.
5 Lowenthal's argument is based on the idea that the past is "largely an artifact of the present," and that no matter how we try to preserve or appropriate the past from the temporal position of the present, "Life back then was based on ways of being and believing incommensurable with our own" (1985: xvi). Throughout the work, Lowenthal attempts to demonstrate "how the past, once virtually indistinguishable from the present, has become an ever more foreign realm, yet one increasingly infused by the present" (1985: xix).
6 As quoted in Yamada (2001: 349), *Gensō*. See also Ishibashi (1995: 30), "Natsukodachi."

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3 From Atomized to Networked: Rural-to-Urban Migrants in Twentieth-century Chinese Narrative

Philip F. Williams

Introduction

The migrant worker from the countryside [*nongmin gong*] has become an increasingly noticeable and ubiquitous figure in most large cities of the People's Republic of China (PRC). This has especially been the case since the 1990s, when the "floating population" [*liudong renkou*] came to make up between one-fourth and one-third of the total population of China's largest cities, Shanghai and Beijing (Medeiros 2008; *RedOrbit* 2008). Near the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, there were approximately five million migrant workers each in Shanghai and Beijing.[1] Yet widespread discrimination has resulted from the way the PRC government's household registration system [*huji zhidu*] has remained in place from the 1950s to the early twenty-first century.[2] Chinese villagers have thereupon belonged to what a leading specialist on internal Chinese migration has called "a separate, inferior class or status group" *vis-à-vis* urbanites, and have encountered numerous roadblocks designed to discourage their migration to urban areas (Solinger 1999: 36).

In fact, commentators and scholars from both ends of the political spectrum generally agree that the rural-versus-urban divide has probably been the most salient socio-cultural distinction in the PRC (Williams 1998/1999). Writing under a foreign pseudonym, an insecure PRC urbanite named Wang Shan has cited dubious statistics that blame rural migrants for most contemporary urban crime, demanding even more stringent governmental restrictions on village migrants' mobility than those already in place (Leuninger 1994). In contrast, the PRC social scientist Gong Xikui has criticized the household registration system as a sort of government-imposed caste system that should have long since been thoroughly overhauled, if not abolished (Gong 1989). Nonetheless, Gong Xikui and Wang Shan could at least agree on many of the factors that have led Chinese cities to become magnets for migrant rural labor. Namely, PRC cities have far more capital in circulation and employment opportunities than the countryside, while urban employers often prefer to hire rural migrants for their endurance in the

face of harsh and sometimes dangerous working conditions, long workdays with little or no overtime pay, relatively low wage levels, and few if any fringe benefits. The reduction in business expenditures achieved when switching from long-term regular urban employees to short-term rural migrant workers has appealed to managers of many types of firms, including state-owned enterprises (Unger 2002: 123-124).

The serious portrayal of rural-based migrant workers in Chinese narrative literature is not as common as one might have expected, but it has increased quite considerably since the early 1980s. This body of writing provides reasonably thoughtful perspectives on such issues as migrants' resourcefulness or "agency," patterns of networking and their interactions with both rural peers and urban "betters," and the degree to which migrants feel accepted or alienated within their new urban abode. By comparing these contemporary literary portrayals of migrants with a sampling of those dating back to the 1920s and 1930s, certain differences in the objective conditions of migration and patterns of response before and after 1949 should become clearer, along with subjective differences in these authors' portrayal of migrants before and after 1949.

The rural Chinese migrant as an atomized individual in the early 20th century

A villager's migration to an unfamiliar urban abode has always presented some risks. From a late nineteenth-century perspective, Arthur Smith noted how sons who left crowded heartland villages to seek employment opportunities in China's northern Manchurian frontier were often never heard from again, and seldom found by relatives who went in search of them (Smith 1899/1970: 244). However, the Chinese state did not actively discriminate against villagers or erect barriers to urban-bound migration before 1949, so there was no pressing need for migrants to protect one another by migrating collectively with others from the same village or settling down together with other migrants in ghetto-like enclaves on the edges of Chinese cities, in the matter observed from 1983 to 1995 at "Zhejiang Village" in the southern outskirts of Beijing.[3]

For example, in the Anhui writer Wu Zuxiang's (1908-1994) semi-autobiographical 1934 short story "Firewood" [*Chai*], an itinerant woodcutter or "short-term laborer" [*duangong*] from impoverished rural Jiangbei recounts various hardships of his life to the genteel young narrator (Wu 1934/1988: 75-85).[4] The woodcutter is traveling alone from one job to another, and does not have anyone to go back to stay with in his home village, as his parents are dead and his wife has eloped with an-

other man. There are other woodcutters from his home region doing menial tasks within earshot, but rather than chat or network with them, he prefers to mind his own business when not in the company of the young narrator from a higher social class and a more prosperous region – Jiangnan, off the southern bank of the lower Yangzi valley.

Similarly, the orphaned protagonist Xiangzi in Lao She's (1899-1966) novel *Camel Xiangzi* [*Luotuo Xiangzi*], first serialized in 1937, has no home village relatives or friends with whom he wishes to remain in contact after moving to Beijing at age eighteen – nor does he preserve any of the village farmland that his parents had left to him (Lao She 1982: 6). Xiangzi not only assumes that he can readily thrive in Beijing without help from any contacts in his home village, but that his infatuation for his adopted city can substitute for his lack of assistance from either relatives or close friends. Here is the joy the protagonist expresses after having returned to his beloved Beijing after escaping from a warlord army unit that had kidnapped him, forcing him to toil as their unpaid coolie:

> Xiangzi wanted to get down on all fours and kiss that stinking grey dirt of the city. He had neither parents nor brothers, no relatives or other family – his only friend was that ancient city. This city gave him everything. Even if he were to starve, far better to go hungry here than back in the countryside. There were things to look at and sounds to listen to – color and voices everywhere. All you needed was to sell your strength, as there was money here beyond what could be counted. There were a myriad things here that could never be worn out or eaten up (1982: 34).

During the early and middle stages of Xiangzi's career in Beijing, he cannot begrudge the time it would take to form a network with fellow rickshaw pullers or even swap friendly pleasantries with them during breaks from work. It is only after Xiangzi loses most of his hope for steady work and starting his own family that he deigns to befriend other rickshaw pullers and assorted menial laborers. Unfortunately, by that stage of his life, it is too late for Xiangzi to learn much of a constructive nature; instead, he merely tends to pick up various vices and unwholesome habits of his fellow laborers. Increasingly lazy, shiftless, and coarse in his behavior, Xiangzi eventually loses the last shreds of his once formidable moral fiber. Having neglected to maintain connections with his old village and failed to establish a local urban network, Xiangzi sinks to the level of a dirty and shiftless vagrant without any direction in life other than searching for handouts or an occasional odd job. Though mingling physically with city crowds, he has become an isolated individual with nothing to contribute to society.

A final example of how rural migrants from the 1920s and 1930s tend to be portrayed as atomized individuals without a social network comes from the orphaned village protagonist of Jiang Guangci's (1901-1931) novella of 1926 entitled *The Youthful Drifter* (Jiang 1926/1979: 1-84). Utterly lacking in ties to his native village, the young male protagonist, named Wang, drifts from job to job in one town after another, never lasting long enough in any occupation to settle down in any particular place. As is the case with Xiangzi in Lao She's novel, Wang's one chance to create new family ties with a woman whom he truly cherishes is foiled by interference from her father. Wang winds up facing death alone as a mortally wounded soldier on the Northern March [*beifa*] against regional Chinese warlord armies.

Although the novelist tries to describe Wang in grandiose romantic terms as a heroic martyr to China's revolutionary cause, to relatively sober readers Wang usually comes across as pathetically ineffectual – a kind of self-pitying Pierrot whose isolation within society is self-inflicted and ultimately fatal. Wang and Xiangzi are thus extreme cases of how perilous a migrant's fate may be when their support network is weak or non-existent.

Networking rural migrants in PRC narrative literature since the 1980s

Since the 1980s, Chinese writers have tended to move away from isolated close-up portraits of the atomized rural migrant of the 1920s and 1930s, instead portraying this type of sojourning individual as maneuvering within a network of relationships that typically extends to both the natal village and the new urban residence. As C. Cindy Fan has demonstrated, patterns of rural migration during recent decades have generally been circular, with *guanxi* network connections back to the old home village being important to maintain for most Chinese migrants (Fan 2008: 117).

Occasionally, a rural worker in contemporary narratives may find it necessary to migrate afar precisely because his or her natal head of household has had some sort of falling out with an influential member of the local elite, who may have retaliated by firing or demoting the worker at the local workplace. In a story from 2002 by Liang Xiaosheng (b. 1949), entitled "The Right to Silence" [*Chenmo quan*] this is exactly what happens to Zheng Qiang, the married 21-year-old son of the old village man Zheng Shangwu (Liang 2002). The old man has infuriated the neighboring county seat's Public Security Bureau Chief by suing him over his effective cover-up of his son's rape of Zheng's teenaged daughter. In retaliation, the Public Security Bureau Chief persuades his

factory-owner crony to fire Zheng Qiang from the latter's job at the provincial capital's cement factory. Realizing that his father's lawsuit has caused him to be blacklisted from large local employers by the provincial capital's power elite, Zheng Qiang has a falling out with his father, and has no choice but to leave his wife and baby behind at his mother-in-law's home [*niangjia*] and migrate to a place that is far enough away for prospective employers to be oblivious to the local scandal involving the Zheng family (Liang 2002: 170).

More often, however, a rural migrant's native-place ties and overall *guanxi* network play a more constructive role, even if not an entirely positive one. For example, in Zhang Xianliang's (b. 1936) 1983 story "Shorblak – Bitter Springs," native-place ties [*tongxiang guanxi*] initially cause the migrant participant-narrator from a village in Henan province to lose his first job prospect in Xinjiang (Zhang Xianliang 1986). His would-be employer suspects that the two Henan teenaged girls accompanying him – and with whom he is barely acquainted – are in fact his illicit paramours; the young women have just made exaggerated claims of friendship with him during their job interviews in hopes of following his example and securing jobs there for themselves. The straight-laced employer thereupon indignantly rejects the job applications of both the teenaged girls and the narrator. In this way, native-place ties have impeded the narrator in his quest for a steady livelihood.

More often, however, native-place ties can play a major role in employment networking. The day following the withdrawal of the narrator's provisional job offer, he overhears a familiar Henan accent at a truck stop, and soon makes the acquaintance of a truck driver from Henan. Taking a liking to the young fellow provincial, the veteran truck driver eventually becomes the narrator's "master" [*shifu*], taking him on as his apprentice driver (Zhang Xianliang 1986: 77). This enables the job-seeking migrant narrator a chance to settle into a decent and secure job that pays well enough to support both him and eventually his new family. Moreover, it is through the narrator's *guanxi* network that he wins the affections of the young woman he would eventually wed – no doctor would have been willing to get out of bed in the middle of the night to treat the woman's severely ill toddler son unless the doctor had owed the narrator a favor for a past kindness – precisely the situation in this incident.

Overall, native-place ties and a *guanxi* network prove to be indispensable factors in this migrant narrator's success with finding steady employment and starting a family, particularly at the formative stage of these endeavors. Even the two teen-aged girl migrants from Henan who had not completed elementary school understand the necessity for a network of "acquaintances" [*shuren*], as they apologetically ask for the narrator's assistance in the wake of their rejection by the straight-laced

employer: "Then what will we do? We've spent all our money, and aren't acquainted with anybody here, yet can't return to our old village home" (Zhang Xianliang 1986: 74).

Perhaps no contemporary narrative literary work better illustrates the importance of native-place ties and a *guanxi* network among migrants than the full-act play by the contemporary PRC playwright Zhang Mingyuan (b. 1954) entitled *Wild Grass* (originally entitled *A Rainy Summer)* [*Duo yu de xiatian*] (Zhang Mingyuan 1989/2003). A middle-aged villager, Seventh Uncle, leads approximately ten young men, all from the same impoverished village in Shandong, to travel together to work as sojourners in the construction industry in Qiqihar, Heilongjiang, the northernmost large city in Dongbei (Manchuria). They all share the same Spartan living quarters, cook and eat the same food, and take on construction jobs as a group, with Seventh Uncle responsible for supervising them and negotiating the terms and conditions of their labor with the foreman.

As is typical among such migrants, the young migrant workers are eager to work long hours and earn as much money as possible while away from their home village for an extended time. This is an especially pressing matter for Fourth (Lao Si), who has not been able to marry his cherished village fiancée Erqin due to lacking both money and steady employment.

Unfortunately, after having spent over three years of working year-round in Qiqihar, Fourth has merely saved a pittance, and realizes that Seventh Uncle has been derelict in the elder's responsibilities to set up a sufficient number of good-paying jobs for the group to do. Within two weeks, Fourth discovers that Seventh Uncle has been taking under-the-table bribes from construction foremen in return for defending the latters' withholding of some or all of the wages due his village work group.

The incident that spurs Fourth to embark on a risky scheme to take over the leadership of the work group from Seventh Uncle is when a slippery middle-aged boss called Foreman Wu claims that he is unable to pay the work group any wages for their two months of labor on a construction job for him. Several days later, Fourth waylays Foreman Wu on a deserted street, menacingly pulls out a kitchen cleaver, and insistently demands all of his work group's unpaid wages for their two months of work. After a scuffle and much haggling, Foreman Wu angrily hands Fourth over five thousand *yuan* in unpaid wages. This becomes Fourth's working capital, which he continues to build up after replacing Seventh Uncle as the group's leader.

Fourth proves himself very capable at keeping accounts, managing the laborers under his direction, and finding an ample number of good-paying construction projects. Before long, Fourth joins the ranks

of successful construction foremen in Qiqihar, and helps his fellow migrants to earn far better and steadier wages than they ever had under Seventh Uncle's corrupt and incompetent leadership.

Instead of viewing Fourth's rise to prominence as an unlikely Chinese version of an Horatio Alger "rags-to-riches" narrative, the reader or theatergoer should put aside common assumptions about the supposed ignorance of so-called "peasants," and consult social-science scholarship pertaining to the educational background of rural Chinese migrants. Studies by Borge Bakken and others from the 1990s indicate that most of the "floating population" of migrant workers from rural areas are married and "relatively high" in educational level. Even in a prosperous and cultured city like Shanghai, there tends to be a higher proportion of illiterates among Shanghai's local population than among the migrant workers who have moved to Shanghai from the countryside (Bakken 1998: 13). After all, rural migrants tend to be a select group of at least fifty million of the most enterprising and talented people within the massive group of at least 200 million surplus or underemployed Chinese rural laborers (Cheng Li 1998: 30, 39). Mostly in their twenties and thirties, these migrants tend to have a lower illiteracy rate than the local urban population, which is older on average.

Another way in which this play does not fit the Horatio Alger model is that it highlights Fourth's failures as prominently as his successes, causing the one-time triumphant young hero to end up as a tragic failure. By outbidding some of the entrenched local construction bosses on various big construction jobs in Qiqihar, Fourth unwittingly incurs their wrath, and ignores the danger signs of their likely retaliation. The other construction bosses manage to frame Fourth as a scapegoat in the latest "strike severe blows" [*yan da*] police crackdown on white-collar bribery and other crime – in spite of the way that bribery is a routine "backdoor" [*houmen*] business practice among the construction bosses in town. Fourth's lack of a legitimate urban residence registration certificate makes him especially vulnerable to prosecution. By the end of the play, Fourth realizes that he will have to go to jail, if he does not actually get executed by a government fond of making an example of such convicts during highly publicized crackdowns on crime.

Aside from having failed to protect himself from legal prosecution and a likely jail term to follow, Fourth has become so intent upon financial success that he rejects his original plan to marry his faithful village fiancée Erqin, and instead prepares to marry a woman whom he does not love: the crippled niece of a powerful official on the Party's municipal construction committee. Fourth could have easily cashed out of the construction business while still ahead, used the capital to start a small business, and marry Erqin, who has traveled all the way up from Shandong to accompany him. However, Fourth's yearning to climb ever

higher in the local municipal construction trade has gradually become an obsession for him. He feels that he cannot set his vaulting ambitions aside merely for the sake of conjugal love. At one point late in the play, Fourth explains to Erqin some of the motivations and circumstances behind his preoccupation with rising to the top of the local urban construction business:

> Erqin, you don't know how hard I've had it just to try staying human – or how hard a struggle it's been to have gotten as far as I've come. In a city as big as this, there was nowhere we could get a footing. Other people would curse us as migrant rovers, darkies, or third-class citizens. We'd work so long and hard we nearly keeled over, but we couldn't get so much as a word of thanks for our labors. When we'd go into a store or stroll through an open market, other people would give us a wide berth. If we wanted to establish our position in the city, we had to work; if there was no work to do, we'd just have to starve to death! We had no backer to help us; if we got too poor to pay the rent, the only thing we could count on would be a swift kick out of the place! I'd had my fill of poverty. When I got hold of some money, I wanted to go back to redeem you from service to your husband's family. But if I'd redeemed you, we'd still be paupers now. If I wasn't able to give you a really good life, I'd rather just suffer on my own. So I used that stash of money to find work for all the fellows from back home. That's what I spent a lot of money buying. Ever since that time, all the fellows have trusted me, and I've smoothed out a path for them to follow. The more I pursued this line of work, the more wrapped up I got in it – and the more addicted I got to it. Without knowing what was happening, I let other people impose upon me. Once I'd done that, I couldn't disentangle myself (Zhang Mingyuan 1989: 16-17).

This passage reveals how a migrant's reliance upon native-place ties and a *guanxi* network can go too far at times, becoming a preoccupation with connections and advancement that can lead a migrant into a very imbalanced life. On the other hand, Erqin subsequently finds the next best thing in the way of ordinary family life and a devoted spouse: a capable but less ambitious construction worker and foreman named Qiuzi. Moreover, all of Fourth's fellow migrant laborers can keep working on construction sites, though henceforth in the more prosperous and alluring southern metropolis of Guangzhou. The only person among these Shandong migrants likely to suffer severe privation in the near future is Fourth, the risk-taker whose diligence and sense of re-

sponsibility to his fellow migrant laborers enabled so many of his fellow villagers to prosper.

Conclusion

All of the above literary examples of rural migrants could be considered descendants of what the Beijing University professor of Chinese literary studies Chen Pingyuan has called the late Qing dynasty fiction character type of "the traveller who turns his back on hearth and home" [*bei jing li xiang de lüxingzhe*] (Chen 1989: 226). Focusing upon this kind of venturesome character, the reader can vicariously partake of the character's navigation of a new and somewhat forbidding societal environment. As social upheavals and an acceleration of historical change in modern times have made the figure of the traveler quite prominent in Chinese narrative literature since at least the late Qing, the migrant laborer has emerged as a significant subset of this character type. Fiction writers and dramatists alike have tended to view the migrant's struggles with sympathy and concern, even if the unwise choices made by certain migrants have evoked disappointment or sometimes even horror in the reader.

During the May Fourth decades of the 1920s and 1930s, the migrant laborer was often portrayed as a somewhat passive or reactive character whose sojourns often lacked a master plan, much less contingency plans for unforeseen or even threatening developments. These writers seemed to favor portrayals of migrants that downplayed the importance of native-place ties and networking amongst the protagonist's strategies to cope and thrive in the new environment. To make a cinematic analogy, literary portrayals of migrants during this period generally stressed individual portraiture and close-up shots of lone migrants, as opposed to panoramic shots of a group of migrants. These migrants have individual voices and a degree of subjectivity that renders them round literary characters. On the other hand, the migrants of this period often come across as the buffeted objects of forces much larger than themselves and their immediate social surroundings – and sometimes beyond these characters' comprehension as well. Their educational level tends to be fairly low, to the extent of being virtually nonexistent with an illiterate protagonist like Lao She's village orphan Xiangzi, whose career aspirations did not extend beyond pulling a rickshaw.

By the 1980s and in subsequent decades, the social existence and strategic relationships of migrant workers in both the natal home and site of sojourning were attracting more attention among writers and playwrights. Native-place alliances and networking capabilities loomed considerably larger in migrant thought and action than was the case ear-

lier in the century. Migrants now tend to have a decent level of education, and are sometimes capable of assuming leadership responsibilities in an effective manner. In other words, the educational gap between rural migrants and settled urbanites had narrowed considerably, even as the income gap between villagers and urbanites continued to widen throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century. Migrants now were not so much the passive objects of larger forces beyond their control and understanding, but resourceful subjects with support networks and an array of rational strategies for coping with an often unfamiliar social environment. Finally, the allegedly "blind" [*mang*] quality of the migrants' economic sojourning has become less a reflection on the migrants themselves than on a particular type of groupthink among various insecure urban commentators who are so uninformed as to continue to underestimate or dismiss rural migrants with anachronistic labels.

Notes

1 By 2009, the estimated approximate population for Shanghai and Beijing was nineteen million and eighteen million, respectively.

2 Although the PRC government has begun to wind down certain aspects of the household registration system since 2005, by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, PRC citizens with rural household registrations who are working in urban areas have continued to be denied most if not all of the educational and welfare benefits that urban residents receive.

3 Zhejiang village was demolished by a "strike force" of thousands of Beijing police and cadres during the winter of 1995-1996 (Dutton 2002).

4 Jiangbei refers to relatively poverty-stricken parts of Jiangsu and Anhui provinces situated to the north of the Yangzi River, and has been one of the major sources of Shanghai's unskilled menial or coolie labor since the latter half of the nineteenth century. For more detail, see Honig 1992.

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4 Sex for Sex's Sake? The "Genital Writings" of the Chinese Bad-Girl Writers

Shelley W. Chan

The three decades since the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) have witnessed a dramatic change in Chinese women's literature from the People's Republic of China (PRC). Zhang Jie's "Love Must Not Be Forgotten" written in 1979 and in some ways inaugurating post-Mao women's writings, is known for its questioning of the Cultural Revolution era's taboo on sympathetic portrayals of love outside of marriage. In this story, the male and female protagonists are afflicted with love for each other and the impossibility of being together, for the man has a wife whom he married out of a sense of responsibility instead of for love. Both being disciplined Communist Party members, their story is doomed to be a tragic tale of mutual isolation under the particular socio-cultural circumstances.

Platonic love is the only possible result of the story. Having been in love for more than twenty years, neither of them so much as touches the other's hands; the cumulative time they spend together over a span of two decades does not even amount to twenty-four hours altogether. The story was widely discussed on the literary scene mainly because of having broached a groundbreaking topic in China at that time: love, and extramarital love in particular. Nevertheless, however bold and cutting-edge the story might be, what the story describes is merely spiritual love; physical love and the body are still totally absent.

Over the past thirty years, Chinese women's literature has startled many readers and become controversial in part because of its increasing openness in terms of physical descriptions of love and eroticism. For instance, Wang Anyi, the pioneer in the 1980s of writing about intimacy between lovers, opened up new territory for post-Mao literature. In the 1990s, Lin Bai and Chen Ran go further in portraying such themes as women's sexual awareness and lesbian relationships. Aside from writing about the personal sexual experiences of a woman in a coming-of-age novel during the 1990s, Hong Ying also likens sex to revolutionary activism, referring to the Spring 1989 student-led democratic movement in particular. Although the works of these writers have aroused controversy, they nonetheless remain within the domain of serious literature, and their authors are still "good women,"

in contrast with the "bad girl" PRC writers who appeared a few years later.

Mian Mian's *Candy* (1999) and her rival Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby* (1999) signify the emergence of a new generation of women writers. Replete with portrayals of sex, recreational drugs, prostitution, and suicide, these two novels attempt to throw off the prudential strictures of both Communist Party ideology and traditional Chinese mores – and have led Chinese fiction into unexplored domains. If these novels are milestones of *fin-de-siècle* decadence and self-indulgence, then the "Mu Zimei Phenomenon" that became a hot topic of discussion in China during the summer of 2003 marks an even more brazen challenge to traditional mores. Mu Zimei, a then 25-year-old columnist who reveals her one-night-stand adventures explicitly on her blog, became a national controversy and celebrity. Her online hosting has had such mass appeal that it is said to have attracted ten million website visits per day. Subsequently, she collected her online diaries and published them as a book entitled *Ashes of Love*.

The first woman to disclose her own sexual experiences on cyberspace in China, Mu Zimei joins the ranks of other bad-girl writers. This group includes the above-mentioned Mian Mian and Wei Hui; it also comprises Jiu Dan and Chun Sue [Chun Shu]. Jiu Dan writes about Chinese women students who engage in prostitution in Singapore, while Chun Sue, a then-eighteen-year-old girl from Beijing, overtly describes some of her casual sexual encounters in her novel about young people in China. If we take writing in a broader sense, an instructor at a famous university in Guangzhou named Zhuying Qingtong, who displayed nude photos of herself online and gained overnight fame, also belongs to this group.

Have these writers courageously subverted the sexual hierarchy and struck a blow of vengeance at society for having traditionally oppressed Chinese women – or have they willingly commercialized and objectified the female body? Despite the improvement in Chinese women's social status since the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and the Communist victory in the Chinese civil war of 1946-1949, Chinese women's physical desires have nearly always remained hidden and silenced. Therefore, it is not surprising that PRC narratives about women's desires and sexual experiences have become controversial, and that the elements of casual sex and eroticism in the largely autobiographical novels of Mian Mian, Wei Hui and Chun Sue have been regarded as going far beyond the limits of decency, thereby causing considerable consternation.

The impact of these writings and images has been intensified by the self-referential nature of the authors' subject matter. Mu Zimei's online sexual diaries and Zhuying Qingtong's nude photos amount to a totally undisguised exhibition of female desire, which in turn portrays the fe-

male body as little more than an object of male desire. The autobiographical orientation of these works functions to bring the body to the foreground and make it the focus of attention: it is no longer an empty or general signifier like that of a fictional character; instead, it has a genuine and concrete signified – the writer herself.

Traditionally, the enjoyment of sensual pleasure has been reserved chiefly for men; sex for women has been largely a means of reproduction. Nowadays, these women writers not only write with the body, but also overtly celebrate their enjoyment and love for the body. "Why should I feel ashamed?" remarks Zhuying Qingtong. "I take nude photos of myself because I'm drawn by an irresistible impulse to do so. I want to see my lovely form, and let others see it. I'm wondering if I will go out of my head one day and die of love for myself" (Anon. 2005).

At the same time, while the male body has traditionally been the chief subject of erotic pleasure, the bad-girl writers have instead presented the male body as an object of female desire. For instance, Mu Zimei has proclaimed the following notorious manifesto: "A male reporter who wants to interview me must sleep with me first; how long the interview will last depends on how much time he can give me in bed" (World Executive Group 2003-2007). By disclosing the names of the men with whom she has slept and offering frank comments on their performance and appearance, Mu Zimei has taken advantage of the male body and turned the long-established sexual hierarchy upside down. Putting moral judgments aside, Mu Zimei and her peers have certainly challenged social norms for Chinese women.

Curiously, the bad-girl writers have brought about an important social conversion. It has been observed that during the revolutionary period or Mao Era, the public space represented by Maoist discourse made serious and invasive inroads on people's private space. This was particularly the case during the Cultural Revolution, when Mao Zedong's portrait and little red book of quotations could be found in practically every household, and the politicized and militant accents of Maoist lingo were on the lips of practically every PRC citizen, whether consciously or merely by force of habit. During that period, there was almost no such thing as privacy, for all of the details of an individual's life were subject to the surveillance of the so-called "masses." The bad-girl writers have reversed the situation by disturbing public space with accounts or images of their private life. Whereas in the past the invasion of private space was imposed upon ordinary citizens, the revelation of these women's own sex lives is at best a violation of their private space, and at worst an invasion of public space with their private escapades.

One might argue that it is up to the reader whether or not to read a given revelatory passage or look at a certain compromising image. In

other words, the reader can choose to stop reading or cease looking and thus avoid being invaded – thereby to some extent forestalling the invasion of public space. However, people in post-Mao China have been fascinated by all types of fashionable developments that were initiated in the West such as the Internet, which could be equally, if not more, powerful – and certainly more attractive than Maoist discourse. As a result, what makes it different with the invasion of private space a few decades ago is that the invasion of public space takes the form of a mutually constitutive action, in which there is cooperation between authors and readers instead of the uni-directional imposition of something like a Maoist propaganda campaign. In a male-oriented culture, public space is usually considered to be dominated by men, while the private domain is for women. Considered from this point of view, what these women writers have done can also be regarded as an invasion or occupation of the masculine sphere by a feminine space or presence.

As the literary scholar Peter Brooks has argued, "The erotic body both animates and disrupts the social order" (Brooks 1993: 6). This is the case with the type of body represented by these young women writers, who are at once admired and condemned. Whereas some people regard them as vanguards of sexual liberation for women and advocates of feminine desire, or find them provocative simply because they pique people's curiosity or even arouse a voyeuristic pleasure, others criticize them as "prostitute writers."

Those who categorize the works of Mu Zimei and others of this group as feminist writings believe that "from the angle of advocating feminism on the web, 'Mu Zimeis' take advantage of the medium of the internet extremely well to articulate the self-consciousness of women" (Chen 2004). For these critics, the domain of information technology has been predominately a male kingdom ever since it came into existence; sex discrimination was simply transferred from ordinary society to the Internet community, where it has thrived in new forms such as sexist computer games and web pornography. Therefore, these proponents conclude, what Mu Zimei and her peers have done is to have subverted male dominance and established feminine discourse and female space on the web.

Opposition to the bad-girl writers has come from both official and unofficial channels. On the one hand, the PRC government has suppressed many such risqué writings and images through a number of means, including the censoring or banning of books and the deletion of parts or the entirety of websites deemed offensive. Unofficial opposition has also been strong, especially from mothers out to protect their young daughters, as well as from wives of the men whose names and performance as sexual partners of Mu Zimei came up for discussion in her diaries. As a result, an alliance of the Party-state censorship apparatus

with unofficial forces has been formed in the name of morality protection to resist this invasion of the public space by this particular private space.

Brooks claims that "the body is a social and linguistic construct, the creation of specific discursive practices, very much including those that construct the female body as distinct from the male" (1993: 7). Not surprisingly, the body has been a focal point in discussions about women writers and their writings. When Chen Ran and Lin Bai wrote in the 1990s about the psychological and physical development of women, including their consciousness and experience of sex, their works were generally characterized as fiction that was *sirenhua* [personalized] and under the category of *shenti xiezuo* [body writing]. Chen Ran's *Siren shenghuo* [A private life] is a good example, for it describes the female protagonist Ni Niuniu's sexual awakening, her heterosexual relationship with one of her teachers, and her homosexual relationship with a neighbor.

With respect to interpretive discussion of the bad-girl writers, the term *shenti xiezuo* has also been frequently employed for their works, but with a much stronger negative connotation than was used to discuss Chen Ran or Lin Bai. Moreover, more recent and specifically erotic appellations such as *qiguan xiezuo* [organ writing] and *xiati xiezuo* [lower-body writing] have been used as alternatives to "body writing."[1] As for the bad-girl authors themselves, people have called them everything from *meinü zuojia* [beautiful women writers], *jinü zuojia* [prostitute writers], and *wenxue wei'anfu* [literary comfort women], to "a Pan Jinlian with a Harvard degree."[2]

For psychoanalysts, the body is the original object of symbolization, and provides the first field of exploration for the infant's budding curiosity (Klein 1950). For feminists, the body emphasizes the consciousness of female subjectivity and the discovery of female identity. For Mikhail Bakhtin, the bodily image in his work on Rabelais "stresses the centrality of the body in the world-turned-upside-down of Renaissance carnival" (Brooks 1993: 4). However, when the term "body" or "body writing" is mentioned in China, it is obviously associated with obscenity. At once the subject and object of sexual activity, the body has been one of the most sensitive topics and among the most imposing taboos throughout Chinese history. Brooks points to what can occur when such taboos and sensitivities decline in modern times:

> In a more traditional culture, the meaning of bodies was in large measure assigned by social structure and practice, by inherited conceptual systems, and by an enforced consensus on the place of bodies in a hierarchy assumed to be largely immutable and underwritten by divine law. With the decline of traditional sys-

> tems of belief, the meanings of the body no longer are assigned; they must be achieved. This means that each body must in turn be made semiotic – receive the mark of meaning (1993: 54).

Arguably, the meaning of Chinese bodies has also been assigned by social practice and divine law as adumbrated by such belief systems as Confucianism and Communism. Post-Mao China has witnessed the decline of these belief systems, and while the assigned meanings of the body have been fading, new meanings are being achieved to take their place. Noticeably, the new meanings carry a strong color of capitalist consumerism, which in the case of the bad-girl writers is embodied by a close interweaving of sexuality and textuality.

A mixture of sexuality and textuality is nothing new in Chinese history, as a considerable amount of pornography exists in Chinese literature and art in spite of the moral strictures and warnings about carnal desire in Confucianism and Buddhism. While the Ming novel *Jin Ping Mei* may be the most famous repository of pornographic passages in pre-modern Chinese literature, there is also plenty of similar material in folk literature such as *Shan'ge* [Mountain Songs], collected and edited by the famous Ming literatus Feng Menglong (1574-1646). However, those Chinese who formerly wrote about sex or otherwise depicted the female body in an erotic manner were almost entirely men, whereas with the advent of the bad-girl writers, the body is now the subject of narratives and exhibitions by a number of women as well. Apparently, the female body has to some extent been rescued, as women have more autonomy than was previously the case – yet there is a paradox in this increased autonomy. On the one hand, women seem to have gained control over the achievement of female identity by choosing to display their own body through words or images. On the other hand, women can still easily fall into the trap in which their identity is largely determined by males.

Have the bad-girl writers been of benefit or detriment to the search for female identity? And are these writers convincing when they argue or suggest that the origin of women's emancipation is the awakening of the female consciousness of sex? Some quotations from these writers may provide an answer. Jiu Dan claims that she would rather be called a "prostitute writer" than a "beautiful woman writer," and that "if you want to praise a woman, there is nothing better to call her than a prostitute" (Jiu Dan 2005). When asked whether or not she regards herself as a "beautiful woman writer," Jiu Dan's reply was as follows:

> As for whether a woman is beautiful or not, aside from basic comments from herself and others of the same sex, those from men are more important. Therefore, whether or not women

> meet the qualifications for beautiful women has to depend on what men have to say – men who have seen them, who have dealt with them, and who have even slept with them ... I don't want to be a beautiful woman writer. As for whether I am prettier than the other writers you have mentioned, you have to ask the men who have had a relationship with me and seen me (Jiu Dan 2001: 6).

Mu Zimei also points to the actions or evaluations of men as a point of departure: "My wickedness is manifested in the fact that I have always evoked men's wickedness" (Mu Zimei 2005). When a woman's beauty has to depend upon the judgments of men – or her particular characteristics such as Mu Zimei's "wickedness" have to be juxtaposed with the same nature of men – this woman is surely a victim of male-identification. Once the bad-girl writers place the discovery of the "self" within the framework of a male-oriented sexual hierarchy, the self, or female identity, is impossible; instead, it is lost within a male value system again. In short, as long as the women writers are trapped by the binary opposition of the sexes and male-identify the female body, a true female subjectivity cannot be achieved.

As one scholar asserts, "Women's writing will be more accessible to writers and readers alike if we recognize it as a conscious response to socio-literary realities, rather than accept it as an overflow of one woman's unmediated communication with her body" (Jones 1981: 367). Consequently, the writings of women "need to be looked at and understood in their social context if we are to fill in an adequate and genuinely empowering picture of women's creativity" (Jones 1981: 367).

One critic has argued that "the nature of the so-called beautiful women writers is economic rather than physical" (Sun 2004: 184). The opening of China to the West and its burgeoning market-based economy has brought about tremendous change in Chinese society, in people's lifestyles and their mentality, and in their mentality of sexuality in particular. Among other things, people's attitudes toward sex have been changing at an astonishing speed. During recent years in China, the economy has been a key deciding factor in almost all aspects of cultural life, including women's writing – women writers have been able to attract a noticeably larger readership by writing about sex and the body. Bearing this in mind, the bad-girl writers have not hesitated to respond to the market economy. Chun Sue, the youngest in this group, claims overtly: "We should promote a slogan such as 'We want orgasm, not sexual harassment'" (Chun Sue 2005). Wei Hui also declares, "Our philosophies of life are embodied in simple materialistic consumption, unconstrained mental games, ... the worshipping of all kinds of desires, and the full communication of life's ecstasies, including the profound

mystery of orgasm ..." (Wei Hui 2005). To many young adult readers, what would be more provocative yet appealing and fascinating in China than a woman writer discussing orgasm? Not surprisingly, the bad-girl writers' books sell well, although they are usually not approved for release by the authorities. In fact, government bans on the bad-girl writers' books have become one of the significant factors behind their popularity.

The commercialization of the body is exemplified by the "battle of the bad-girl writers" in the form of ad hominem attacks they have been launching at one another. For instance, Chun Sue lashed out at two of her competitors at once: "Writers like Wei Hui and Jiu Dan don't have a body at all; what they have is silicon gel!" (Chun Sue 2005) Wei Hui has disapprovingly claimed that Jiu Dan "is experienced at selling her body" like a prostitute (Wei Hui 2005). Mian Mian has directed dismissive comments to Wei Hui about the latter's well-known novel: "Please don't tell me you are a feminist. I personally think that there is no equality of the sexes, no independence, and no love in your book ... *Shanghai Baby* is the poorest book I've ever read since I was born" (Mian Mian 2005).

A key result of the battle of the bad-girl writers has been to promote the sale of their books due to readers' curiosity about what the fuss is all about. As a result, both sexuality and textuality have been commercialized. Some observers might imagine that the bad-girl writers have instigated a revolutionary celebration of the renaissance of the hidden and suppressed body in Chinese culture, along with a new representation of women's consciousness. Upon closer examination, however, their body writing appears to be nothing more than a product of capitalist consumerism, and the body, whether male or female, has merely been transformed into yet another commodity. Whereas the male body has been consumed by both the writer and the reader – particularly in the case of Mu Zimei's diary blog – the female body has similarly been an object of consumption, for the "phallic gaze" appears to be inescapable in a phallocentric tradition.

In conclusion, the bad-girl writers have in turn aroused both uneasiness and applause in PRC society. Their rise to popularity and fame signifies "a drastic alteration of people's behavior patterns in a society deeply rooted in traditional morality such as China's," according to Li Yinhe, a prominent Chinese sociologist (2005). The phenomenon of the bad-girl writers symbolizes the triumph of a consumer culture that has become mainstream within the PRC, rather than merely representing an alternative culture, as some critics have suggested. For the bad-girl writers, sex is not only for the sake of sex, but also for the sake of fame and wealth. On the other hand, the fact that the Internet has enabled the private sphere to disturb public space and to globalize the

subject of Chinese bad-girl writing signifies a new variety of textuality over which the governing authorities have limited control.

Notes

1 The "organ" in "organ writing" refers to the reproductive organ or genitalia.
2 Pan Jinlian is a prominent female character in the famous Ming novels *Shuihu zhuan* [Water Margin] and *Jin Ping Mei* [Plum in the Gold Vase]. In both novels, Pan Jinlian is notorious for her insatiable sexual appetite and licentious conduct. Chinese people have come to invoke her name as a synonym for "slut."

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5 In and Out of Home: Bing Xin Recontextualized

Mao Chen

Bing Xin stands as a unique and important figure among the many prominent Chinese woman writers of the twentieth century. Her early involvement in the May Fourth New Culture Movement, which began in 1919, has placed her among the generation of writers who challenged tradition and advocated the reappraisal of Chinese culture. Like so many other May Fourth authors, Bing Xin assumed the responsibility of "revealing the problems of society to the reader" in her literary work. Her so-called "issue stories" [*wenti xiaoshuo*], dealing with social injustice, family conflicts and feminism, stirred considerable debate among literary critics. Her unique style, dubbed the "Bing Xin Style" [*Bing Xin ti*], combines poetic expression that is prominent in classical Chinese lyricism with narrative realism in a lucid and provocative synthesis.

Hu Shi's commentary on Bing Xin's work has been cited by Charlotte Boynton: "Most writers in *baihua* [vernacular Chinese] were searching for a style suitable to the new form, and many of them were crude; some were vulgar. Miss Icy Heart [Bing Xin], he understood, had been given a good grounding in the great Chinese poets. She had brought to the new medium a delicacy and refinement which made her writing fresh and direct" (Bing Xin 1989: 93). On the other hand, her treatment of protagonists in many short stories has sometimes been criticized for supporting a "pessimistic" and even "self-indulgent" outlook. This common assessment needs to be qualified in view of the writer's historical commitments.

As some critics have suggested, the element of "lyric" in modern Chinese literature has its origin in classical poetry. This lyrical quality contributed in important ways to the modern epoch in Chinese writing. However, modern Chinese literature has always amounted to more than an expression of the author's private feelings and sensitivities. Bing Xin's writing follows the dominant ethos of May Fourth literature when it exemplifies the progressive writer's interest in influencing – and in some cases articulating – the attitudes of a socially engaged reader, rather than merely expressing personal attitudes and private sensitivities. Her feminist commitments, which need to be presented to the Western reader as unique to this particular writer, as well as her political commitments to Chinese nationalism – especially during the period

leading up to the Japanese Occupation during World War Two – were crucial to her literary reception in her own time, and placed an indelible stamp on the form and content of her fiction.

The first nine stories in Bing Xin's short story collection *About Women* initially appeared in a number of issues of the Chongqing journal *Weekly Review* in 1941. Not long thereafter, Bing Xin wrote seven additional stories, and the entire collection of sixteen stories was published by Heaven and Earth Press in September 1943. The second edition of *About Women* came out during the final year of the War, having been published by Kaiming Bookstore in February 1945. In 1980, the third edition was published by Ningxia People's Press. The fourth edition was issued in December 1992 by Kaiming Press in Beijing. People's Literature Press in 1993 published a new collection, *About Women and Men*, which includes all sixteen pieces as well as several new ones. A glance at the history of successive editions of *About Women* suggests the enduring popularity of this evolving work.

There are three compelling reasons for returning to Bing Xin's work today. First, Bing Xin was a talented writer whose use of narrative voice constitutes a subtle challenge to conventions of gender construction that have been important to most traditional and much modern literature. As a woman writer, Bing Xin contributes to the modernist tradition in her precise and ironic style, which enables her to challenge male authority. Second, Bing Xin enables the contemporary reader, but especially the woman reader, to envision a broader political struggle that lies beyond the horizon of gender disputes. Hence, without ceasing to be a feminist, Bing Xin offers us a view of Chinese modernity that reflects the social and political realities of twentieth-century China. Finally, Bing Xin is a Chinese writer who offers her own interpretation of feminism that is neither a clear expression of her modernist style, nor reducible to her historical commitments. Let us now examine in more detail each of these reasons for reading Bing Xin today.

Exploring narrative voice

About Women [*Guanyu nüren*] demonstrates that Bing Xin's feminism can be considered in terms of her use of narrative voice as an ironic ploy. The sophisticated male narrator that disguises the gender of the author functions subtly to undermine male authority and its appearance of total mastery. In the second preface, written in 1945, Bing Xin expressed the opinion that "gentlemen" would be more likely to read her book than women. However, she also maintained that the "inspiration" for this collection came from her female friends, who sometimes even provided outlines for the characters themselves (1980: iv). Perhaps Bing

Xin intended to reach her male readers by describing various women, and decided on the title "About Women" in order to create the impression that she had not assembled a purely literary work. The sixteen stories that form the collection as a whole offer a variety of images of women. The first two stories are especially important in terms of the issues raised as well as the viewpoint on women in general.

The first story in *About Women* raises the question of who is more qualified – a man or a woman – to discuss the problems facing modern women. In "Women Deserve My Utmost Respect and Consideration," the narrator reinforces Bing Xin's opening remarks by asserting his own male authority, just as he contends that the entire collection was inspired by female acquaintances (1980: 1). Since the only woman in his life thus far is his mother, the narrator has never sustained a serious relationship with a female schoolmate or colleague. As a successful man who expresses an interest in marriage, however, he makes us wonder why he is still single at the age of nearly forty. The narrator argues that if a man wants to talk about the ideal qualities of a woman, he should first try to discover such qualities in himself. At the end of this story, Bing Xin alludes to the dilemma of the career woman who is caught between her career and housework, her role in society and her role at home.

The second essay, "My Standards for a Wife," exhibits the standards that a man commonly imposes on the woman of his choice. The male narrator lists as many as twenty-six qualities that he believes are important when judging a woman as a potential spouse (1980: 5-8). These qualities range from age, looks, and clothes to hobbies and personal interests. It is obvious that the narrator is caught up in a conventional game that belies a stereotypical masculine point of view. The Chinese reader would not know for sure that the author of this essay is a woman, but ambiguity with respect to gender would create enough suspicion to cast a shadow on the male narrator's urbane attitudes. The ironic tone of this story reaches its climax when a friend challenges the narrator's better judgment. The narrator then states that it might be possible for him to bargain for what he wants, thus revealing the utterly contrived nature of his preferences:

> ... Instead of making presumptuous demands I am just bargaining on the capital I already own. Even though this doesn't mean I am "casting a brick to attract jade" [*pao zhuan yin yu*], what I'm doing is at least "casting a brick to attract another brick" [*pao zhuan yin zhuan*]. There is nothing wrong with setting any number of standards. However, while I do object to some details as far as tastes and habits are concerned, I generally prefer to accept things as they are rather than become excessively preoccupied

> with my wife's appearance, disposition and aptitude for earning a living (Bing Xin 1980: 8).[1]

Instead of directly presenting images of women, the first two essays set the tone for the whole collection. Problems involving women are introduced through the prism of what is considered to be the "ideal" type of wife by the male narrator. The problem of the woman's vocation is presented in terms of a conflict between the role of wife and that of a more completely social being. This conflict is dramatized when such an idealization is carried to such an extreme that it loses credibility. The character who emerges in these stories on the basis of the narrative voice must ultimately confront the truth of women in various circumstances. Hence, while the voice of the male narrator plays an important role in traditional Chinese literature, Bing Xin's use of this voice becomes particularly ironic when it suggests the speaker's limitations, and through doing so questions received ideas about masculinity. Instead of reproducing the author's standpoint in a direct manner, this voice introduces irony into the representation of everyday life and encourages the reader to view relationships between a man and a woman in new ways.

Bing Xin's stories, therefore, cannot be interpreted from the standpoint of a purely omniscient narrator. The narrative voice that she most commonly employs is easier to interpret as symbolic and ambiguous than would have been the case if the role of the voice were restricted to the limitations that tradition might impose upon it. Moreover, within the broader framework of *About Women*, Bing Xin's use of the male narrator combines objective narration with destabilization of gender in literary representation. The social world that emerges as a consequence of this special use is clearly depicted, but the *kinds* of voices that can be heard in this world are practically limitless. The convention of the sophisticated male narrator might seem to restrict the potential range of voices, or even to subordinate them to some hierarchical conception of an allegedly appropriate tone of authority. However, Bing Xin prevents this restriction from occurring, and therefore produces what Julia Kristeva, strongly influenced by Lacan and Bakhtin, has called *polyphony* in connection with the modern novel (Kristeva 1980: 159-200). Bing Xin's fiction is polyphonic in multiplying a variety of female voices in a manner that does not involve personal identification with a single female character.

Integrating social and political contexts of Chinese modernity

Bing Xin's reputation as a Chinese writer is largely based on her ability to represent the condition of ordinary women in enduring narratives

that are socially complex and emotionally convincing. As a May Fourth participant who came to write in an increasingly political atmosphere, however, she was often compelled to relate her own version of feminism to the pressing demands of Chinese nationalism. Bing Xin rejected the suggestion that she was producing a specifically "women's literature," since this term in Chinese applies more readily to literary works that are intended for women alone. During the War of Resistance, she would not have been able to advocate a variety of feminism that ignored the concerns of men and women alike.

The social situation for Chinese women during the 1940s was largely unfavorable to feminist modes of address. In her work as a writer, Bing Xin reveals that women faced numerous obstacles both in society and at home. Most women were compelled to place marriage and family before their careers, and their work was rarely viewed as being important or politically necessary. Bing Xin's response to this situation was not to abandon her feminist position, but to integrate it into a nationalist stance that created a new role for women in solidarity with others.

About Women contains many characters whose nobility and pathos is directly related to the author's belief that national unity can be projected among men and women in diverse circumstances. The early stories in this collection employ the male persona ironically, whereas the latter stories depict the hardships of everyday life, thereby greatly reducing the reader's aesthetic detachment. From this broad standpoint, Bing Xin's use of voice not only challenges male-versus-female gender construction, but also immerses the reader in a process of decentering that occurs in the space of history. Like many of her Western counterparts, such as Joyce and Faulkner, Conrad and Woolf, Bing Xin ultimately employs her modernist breakthroughs to express a more comprehensive view of a specific moment in historical time. In a manner that evokes a literary pattern that would be familiar to Western readers, Bing Xin employs a sophisticated male narrator who functions in an aesthetic mode and thus destabilizes a text that cannot be fully understood apart from the historical conditions that helped produce it. The conflict between gender and historical objectivity is what prevents the reader from accepting the narrator's point of view as unambiguous. By employing a narrator who is both gendered and detached, Bing Xin not only undercuts formalistic interpretations of her work, but also suggests that polyvocal concerns are important to her committed writing.

Furthermore, in destabilizing narrative and carrying the reader beyond the confusions inherent in so-called point of view, *About Women* succeeds as fiction just as it bespeaks an underlying commitment to social change. This means that the world of Bing Xin is only superficially the world of a male observer who adopts an ironic stance on women in general. The false standards of normativity that the narrator offers at

the outset of this work are not simply degrading to women; they also parody formalistic approaches to literature. Bing Xin thus moves beyond formalism in creating a stereotypical male persona, and in developing other literary characters that also show the reader how actual men and women constitute the historical struggle of their time.

The patient reader of *About Women* is therefore drawn into a world in which the voice of the narrator becomes increasingly marginal to various actions that possess diverse meanings. Relations between women of unequal social standing emerge as crucially important once the defense of China becomes an urgent concern. Nonetheless, Bing Xin's espousal of nationalism only occasionally assumes propagandistic overtones. The movement beyond aesthetic formalism that occurs in her early work is generally a literary event, rather than strictly a political one. The ironic use of humor and the satiric deflation of vanity and pretense continue to provide her stories with a literary texture, even when the theme of national unity acquires decisive importance.

Hence, Bing Xin's inability to separate feminism from politics is ultimately an affair of literature, since it enables the reader to gain access to a turbulent period on the basis of written texts that challenge both the conventions of gender and the tendency of many modern writers to oppose the autonomy of literature to questions of personal and public belief. The lessons of Bing Xin will not be forgotten in a time when feminists the world over have become aware of the need to contribute their skills and capacities to the attainment of broader political goals that are central to the continuing survival of the human community as a whole.

Imparting a personal view of feminism

What lies at the core of Bing Xin's feminism? This question is not related in obvious ways to either the author's modernist style or to her political commitments. Her literary modernism does not prepare us for the semiotic approach that she employs in her portrayal of Chinese women. By adopting the sophisticated male narrator as a foil that cannot fully conceal her own perspective on the world, Bing Xin demonstrates how the male-versus-female opposition only possesses relative significance within an open economy of signs. In truth, Bing Xin's special form of feminism is inseparable from a pre-modernist concern for human qualities that are often misleadingly labeled as traditionalist. While occasionally demonstrating the "hard edge" style that Western readers easily identify with High Modernism, her fiction can also be read as an exploration of gender that opens up many questions that cannot be resolved within the framework of contemporary feminism.

Bing Xin is well known for maintaining that a woman can be a "kind wife and virtuous mother" without ceasing to be politically engaged. Her position is this regard is elaborated in "My Mother," the third story in the collection. This story might be interpreted autobiographically as an account of the author's own mother, but it can also be read to argue that certain personal qualities, sometimes considered to be feminine, are consistent with a form of autonomy that may or may not be overtly political. In this story, the mother is not only "open-minded," but also a woman who believes in the social importance of the family. The male narrator is in this case the son who portrays his own mother in a convincing way:

> It is natural that at least seventy percent of all sons believe their own mother to be the best one in the world. For my part, I think that my own mother was the *very* best among the best mothers in the world. Not only do I think so, but also many of my friends say so. She was not only my mother, but also my bosom friend. I dared to say to her much of what I would not dare to say to my father or even to my friends. Open-minded, she was consistently and impartially accepting of everything proper to modern times. She loved the "family" ardently in the belief that a perfect family is the source of all happiness and strength. She hoped that I would soon marry, because she wanted to see me settle down as soon as possible, both physically and mentally, in the warmth and happiness of a family. (Bing Xin 1980: 11)[2]

This mother also took a keen interest in political affairs: "Mother became interested in the May Fourth Movement of 1919 soon after it began. She read books and newspapers, refusing to allow herself to be left behind by the times" (Bing Xin 1980: 13). Bing Xin's conception of independence has been questioned by certain feminists who believe that a woman should adopt overt power-seeking strategies in her sphere of activity, and that the responsibilities of a wife and mother can only interfere with this strongly political project.

Bing Xin would argue in response that certain human qualities have a feminist meaning that Simone de Beauvoir has identified with a deeply *realistic*, rather than implicitly mythic, conception of women today (de Beauvoir 1980: 253-263). The portrait of the woman that Bing Xin evokes in the epilogue to her collection of short stories is compounded of traits that are largely familiar: "She is neither the goddess as is described by the poet, nor the devil in the eyes of the man disappointed in love." From this standpoint, a woman should possess "feeling and rationality," but would also be "more sensitive, quicker in response and livelier in action" (Bing Xin 1980: 111). Bing Xin's work in fiction both

confirms the author's view of what a woman could be in the China of her own period and provides hope for a more humane tomorrow.

Notes

1 This passage is a typical example of Bing Xin's ironic use of narrative voice. All translations from the text are my own. The ordinary figurative meaning of "casting a brick to attract jade" [*pao zhuan yin yu*] is the making of commonplace remarks in order to elicit valuable opinions from others.

2 In my translation of this passage, I have tried to communicate the combination of emotional sensitivity and personal dignity that Bing Xin associated with her mother's character.

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6 From Enlightenment to Sinology: Early European Suggestions on How to Learn Chinese, 1770-1840

Georg Lehner

Up until the early nineteenth century, there were practically no scholars in Europe who were known to be devoting most of their time and energy to the study of the Chinese language. However, European scholars engaged in the study and teaching of Near Eastern languages, a field with deeper roots in Europe, sometimes took an interest in the Chinese language as well. These men had to draw information on the Chinese language from various manuscript sources available in major European repositories of knowledge.[1] Apart from the books published by Theophil Siegfried Bayer (1694-1738) and Étienne Fourmont (1683-1745), there were no monographs written by European scholars that were entirely devoted to the Chinese language (on Bayer see Lundbaek 1986, on Fourmont see Leung 2002). The rather unjust and prejudicial assumption that the proper study of the Chinese language would require an entire lifetime caused much delay to the dissemination of Chinese studies in Europe. In a scholarly sense, the field of Chinese studies as well as the term "sinology" thus did not emerge in Europe until the early nineteenth century (Lehner 2003).

Eighteenth-century European scholars with an interest in the Chinese language typically depended on information provided by Jesuit missionaries in China. Learned men in eighteenth-century Europe could also draw some information on the Chinese language from general dictionaries or encyclopedias. The sources used by the compilers of these encyclopedias were mostly the published works of Jesuit missionaries and travelogues of authors from various European countries.

Before discussing the various proposals made in late-Enlightenment Europe as to why (or why not) and how to learn Chinese, we will go through the entries on "China" and "Language" in some encyclopedias published in Germany, France, and England throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This survey will reveal the overall scope of that era's European knowledge concerning the Chinese language in general.

The most extensive alphabetically arranged encyclopedic dictionary ever compiled in eighteenth-century Europe is the *Universal Lexicon*, which was initiated by the German publisher Johann Heinrich Zedler

(1706-1751). The *Universal Lexicon* provides but a small amount of information on Chinese writing (Zedler 1743: col. 1562 f.), mainly drawn from the travelogue published by Johan Nieuhof (1618-1672) and from the works of Jesuit missionaries such as Gabriel Magalhães (1610-1677) and Louis Lecomte (1655-1728). This encyclopedic dictionary also contains the heading for an annotation on "Chinese language" [*Sinesische Sprache*]. There, the reader is referred to "China" [*Sina*], where one finds a paragraph on Chinese writing, but no information on the Chinese language per se.

Another German encyclopedic dictionary published during the eighteenth century, the *Deutsche Encyclopädie* [German Encyclopedia], contains some information on the Chinese language. Aside from the complexities of Chinese writing, the tones and pronunciation of the language were said to present the most difficulties to the foreign learner. The reader discovers that learning Chinese is easy in some aspects, yet difficult in others: it is relatively easy to learn the grammatical structures, but difficult to master the variety of meanings (*Deutsche Encyclopädie,* s.v. "Chinesische Sprache" [Chinese language] and "Chinesische Schrift" [Chinese writing]).

The plates displaying "Caractères et alphabets de langues mortes et vivantes" in Diderot's famous *Encyclopédie* [Encyclopedia] are accompanied by explanatory remarks concerning various writing systems (*Encyclopédie*; *Recueil des planches*, "Alphabets anciens"). After an introduction to the 214 Kangxi Dictionary radicals and a rebuttal of Fourmont's "theory of a metaphysical dimension" of these radicals (Standaert 2001: 899), the article provides information on the *liu shu* (six-principles' writing theory, i.e. the six categories of Chinese character composition),[2] on the difficulties concerning pronunciation, and a short note on the beginnings of printing in China. The article also gives a very favorable summary concerning the Chinese language, which reads as follows in the French original:

> The Chinese language, despite some shortcomings that have to be mentioned, is beautiful and very expressive; its beauty consists mainly of a conciseness that is very troublesome for a foreigner, but it deserves to be studied. Learning the language may also be amusing for a philosopher in search of the way things are perceived by a people totally separated from us. Furthermore, it deserves to be studied because of the number of excellent works of all kinds with which it can provide us, and of which we have already quite a number at the Royal Library. In accordance with its structure, this language could be utilized as a universal language; Leibniz might not have searched for another example of a universal language if he had already known Chinese (*Ency-*

> *clopédie, Recueil de planches,* "Caractères et alphabets de langues mortes et vivante alphabets anciens": 17).

The entry "érudition" in the *Encyclopédie* contains suggestions concerning possible benefits of learning Chinese. Similar to the rich scientific tradition of the Arabs, some of the Chinese traditions could be of benefit if made known to Europeans. Like the study of various other Oriental languages, the study of Chinese also "requires the entirety of a scholar's energies" [*demand un savant tout entire*], since textbooks, grammars and dictionaries have yet to be compiled. The works of the pioneers will be used and revised by others interested in Oriental languages. While a Renaissance scholar would spend his whole life learning Greek, for eighteenth-century scholars this required merely a few years (*Encyclopédie,* vol. 5 [1755]: 916).

The *Cyclopaedia*, published by Ephraim Chambers (c. 1680-1740) in 1728, informs the reader that Chinese "has no analogy to any other language in the world," and that the language consists of only 330 words:

> [These 330 words] are all monosyllables; at least they are pronounced so short, that there is no distinguishing above one syllable, or sound in them. But the same word, as pronounced with a stronger or weaker tone, has different significations: accordingly, when the language is accurately spoke, it makes a sort of music, which has a real melody, that constitutes the essence and distinguishing character of the *Chinese* tongue (Chambers 1741: s.v. "Chinese").

The first edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, published from 1768 to 1771, repeated the entry of the *Cyclopaedia* almost word for word. The former's article "Language" further states that Chinese characters "are as singular as the language" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1st ed., s.v. "Chinese"). Moreover, the *Britannica* labels Chinese as an "unintelligible language" (ibid., s.v. "Language"). Editions of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* published in the early nineteenth century drew their information on Chinese language mainly from Grosier's *Description générale de la Chine* [A general description of China] and Barrow's *Travels in China* (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 5th ed., s.v. "China," 123: The Chinese Language). As can be seen from this entry, which was published in 1817, Chinese was no longer categorized as "unintelligible." In connection with the richness of the language it reads:

> In like manner a whole dictionary might be composed of the words that are employed to express the parts of the emperor's palace, and those that are in a manner consecrated to it; others

> being employed when the palaces of princes or mandarins are spoken of. Thus the number of their characters are augmented beyond all bounds, so that the greater part of their literati spend all their lives in studying them (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 5th ed., vol. VI: 39).

The *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*, edited by David Brewster (1781-1868), provides the following information:

> The Chinese language is so entirely original and unique, in its whole construction, and in its constituent parts, that it may be considered as affording no inconsiderable evidence of the great antiquity of the nation. The subject, till very recently, was but little understood in Europe; and a variety of opinions, or rather conjectures, prevailed among the learned, respecting the origin, progress, and structure of this extraordinary language.

The article mentions publications by John Barrow (1764-1848), Chrétien Louis Joseph de Guignes (1759-1845), Joshua Marshman (1768-1837) and Robert Morrison (1782-1834). Relying on these works, "a more complete and consistent view may be formed of the subject, even by those who have no knowledge of the language itself, than could be collected from the varying and contradictory statements of the earlier writers upon this topic." These remarks clearly indicate that the early years of the nineteenth century saw a kind of "take-off" concerning the formation of Chinese studies in Europe (*Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*, s. v. "China": 269 f.). The *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia* also contains information on how to learn Chinese. Contrary to the mode of teaching observed in China, it would be best to learn the signification "of the simple roots, and the analysis of the compound characters" (*ibid.*: 274).

Following this survey of the presentation of the Chinese language in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century European encyclopedias, we now turn to the early suggestions and proposals made by European scholars on how to learn Chinese. These remarks shall reveal the transnational nature and truly "European" character of discussion about the Chinese language. For reasons of language proficiency, my presentation is limited to sources from England, France, and the German-speaking countries.

Chinese language studies in France

In France, knowledge about China was mainly derived from the letters and reports of French Jesuits living and working at the imperial court in

Beijing. In 1735, Jean Baptiste Du Halde (1674-1743) published his four-volume *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique et physique de l'empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise* [A geographical, historical, chronological, political, and physical description of the Empire of China and Chinese Tartary], which was published in several editions and translated into various European languages. With respect to the Chinese language, Du Halde mentions the singularity of the Chinese language and points to the difficulty of learning it; after three or four years of zealous study, a missionary would be adept at conversing with people he has encountered on a regular basis. Yet in conversation with a Chinese person whom he had not previously met, the missionary would still need to rely on assistance from an interpreter (Du Halde 1736: 2,278).

The Jesuit missionaries further pursued their studies of the Chinese language. In 1764, P. Pierre Martial Cibot SJ wrote a letter on the Chinese language, which was published at Brussels in 1773 as *Lettre de Pékin sur le Génie de la Langue Chinoise* [Letter from Peking on the genius of the Chinese language].

Oriental studies in France developed in the institutional setting of the Royal Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres. (Kriegel 1996: 263 f.). After the death of Fourmont, his pupil Joseph de Guignes (1721-1800), Professor of Syrian at Collège de France, repeatedly referred to Chinese sources, mainly for his history of various Central Asiatic people and for various treatises published in the proceedings of the French Academy. In one of these treatises, read before the Academy in early 1767, and published somewhat belatedly in 1774, de Guignes labelled the Chinese language "a quite barbarian language" [*une langue assez barbare*]. In his opinion, the language "was neither formed nor polished yet" [*n'est pas encore formé ni poli*]. The Chinese would prefer their written language to their spoken language: "All is clear in writing, all is obscure in the spoken language by the distinction of words" [*tout est clair dans l'écriture, tout est obscure dans le langage pour la distinction des mots*] (de Guignes 1774: 162 f.).

>Joseph de Guignes' son Chrétien-Louis-Joseph went to China to serve as a French consular representative at Canton. After his return to Europe, the younger de Guignes supervised the publication of the dictionary compiled in the seventeenth century by the Italian missionary Basilio Brollo de Gemona (1648-1704). Basilio Brollo's manuscript dictionary was among those described by the Parisian orientalist Louis-Mathieu Langlès (1763-1824) in his *Notice des livres élémentaires de la langue Chinoise qui possède la bibliothèque nationale* [Note on elementary books on the Chinese language owned by the national library] (Langlès 1801). In his travelogue on his seventeen years' stay in the East, the younger de Guignes also included a chapter on the Chinese language (de Guignes 1807: 2, 378-391).

While de Guignes prepared the publication of this dictionary, a young doctor of medicine, Jean-Pierre-Abel Rémusat (1788-1832), made remarkable progress in his study of the Chinese language. In 1811, Rémusat published an *Essai sur la langue et la littérature chinoises* [Essay on Chinese language and literature] with the purpose of inspiring those interested in learning Chinese and to facilitate their studies. Rémusat mentions the difficulties involved in looking up characters in a Chinese dictionary, including the need to count the number of strokes of such a character (Rémusat 1811: i [preface], ix-x, 47). In a review of Rémusat's *Essai*, Julius Klaproth (1783-1835) writes that Rémusat had clearly refuted the widely held belief that it is nearly impossible to learn Chinese in Europe. Rémusat demonstrates that it is possible to learn Chinese within five years – roughly the same amount of time required for a European to learn a different major Asian language such as Arabic or Farsi (Klaproth 1811b: 329).

In a speech presented on 16 January 1815, Rémusat mentioned the various advantages of studying the Chinese language. Apart from scholarly purposes, the knowledge of Chinese could also be important for individuals preparing to travel to the East (for an English translation, see Rémusat 1817).

During the previous year, Rémusat critiqued the various efforts made by Julius Klaproth and Antonio Montucci in the field of Chinese studies (1814: 53). Rémusat criticized both of these scholars for having written more about ways to overcome the difficulties of learning the Chinese language than about how to proceed with actually learning the Chinese language itself. For the sake of study and future teaching of the Chinese language in Europe, Rémusat proposed to collect the various notes on this subject that were scattered through the works of missionaries and earlier European scholars. These notes had to be collected and arranged conveniently in a single treatise. Such a treatise would be of great utility for future generations of students. In combination with a dictionary, yet to be prepared, this would be a proper textbook. By making use of this method, any student would be able to make good use of all kinds of Chinese books (Rémusat 1814: 80).

Over the following years, Rémusat himself produced such a textbook. His *Élémens de la grammaire chinoise* [Elements of Chinese grammar], published in 1822, was a result of the courses in Chinese language that he had been teaching at the Collège de France. This book provided a much more convenient way for European learners to become acquainted with the principles of the Chinese language. For the benefit of future students, Rémusat recommends the use of the dictionaries published by de Guignes and Morrison as indispensable. Students should also favor the use of published translations of Chinese works to practice the explanation of Chinese texts. Rémusat prefers using Morrison's dic-

tionary, which contained not only single-character entries, but also entries of the polysyllabic expressions that are so important to anyone attempting to gain a mastery of the Chinese language. He also recommends the use of the supplement to de Guignes' Dictionary. This supplement compiled by Julius Klaproth contains a table showing characters having obscure classifiers. Of Chinese texts, Rémusat recommends his edition of the *Zhongyong* [The doctrine of the mean].[3]

Apart from these editions, students should consult other works displaying extensive portions of texts in the original Chinese: the editions of *Lunyu* [The Confucian analects] and *Daxue* [The great learning] prepared by Joshua Marshman, *Dialogues and detached sentences from the Chinese* by Robert Morrison, the *Sanzi jing* [The three-character classic] edition published by Morrison and reprinted by Antonio Montucci, the text of an edict of the Kangxi emperor edited by Christoph Gottlieb Murr (1733-1811) in 1802, and some earlier published works of Thomas Hyde (1636-1703) and T. S. Bayer. Beginners might also find useful material in some of the minor works by Montucci, Klaproth and Morrison (Rémusat 1822: xxix-xxx).

Those students living near libraries containing holdings of Chinese books could proceed in their preparatory work in comparing European translations with the respective Chinese original. The Jesuits Prospero Intorcetta (1626-1696) and François Noël (1651-1729) have published translations of works commonly attributed to Confucius. Rémusat also advises the student to make use of Gaubil's translation of the *Shu jing* [The classic of documents], the edition of the *Éloge de Moukden* and "other works wholly or partially translated." Using all of these as a kind of guide to Chinese literature, the student would soon be able "to work independently" [*d'aller seul*]. Those with access to the Royal Library at Paris would be able to make use of the five thousand Chinese volumes preserved there. These Chinese "treasures" will be sufficient to provide "twenty zealous scholars with work for fifty years." Rémusat believed that after two or three years of study, a student would be able to gain access to the vast field of Chinese literature (Rémusat 1822: xxxi-xxxii).

British proposals for the study of Chinese

Despite the importance of British trade relations with China, the study of Chinese had long been neglected in Britain. This has been repeatedly pointed out in studies of the history of Chinese studies in Britain (Stifler 1938: 46, Barrett 1989: 55).[4] The *Asiatic Researches* published in Calcutta from 1784 onwards contained some pieces on Chinese language and literature. The first volumes of this series were translated into German (Kleucker 1795-1797) and also into French (Langlès 1805).

However, in England itself a "singular listlessness" (see the title of Barrett 1989) towards Chinese studies seemed to prevail. A reviewer of Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes' *Voyages à Péking* [Travels to Peking] mentioned this "singular listlessness" of the British. This review, published in *The Edinburgh Review*, was most likely written by John Barrow:

> The nation which, above all others, maintains the greatest intercourse with China; the nation which, above all, has the greatest interests dependent on that intercourse; the nation which has had so many of her sons living for so many years on Chinese ground, was under the necessity of going to Naples for an interpreter, when she thought of sending an embassy to China; and in selecting the presents intended to display at once her grandeur and friendship, sent such things as the people were too rude to value, and which they threw aside as little better than lumber (*Edinburgh Review* [1809]: 412).[5]

Although traveling into the interior of the Chinese Empire was not allowed for Englishmen residing in Guangzhou during the early nineteenth century, they could avail themselves of the opportunity to purchase Chinese books. However, in order to learn the language, it was necessary to find a Chinese person who would be able and willing to teach the language to foreigners. The example of George Thomas Staunton (1781-1859) has proven that even a young boy could make considerable progress in studying the Chinese language over a comparatively short period. It obviously would not be that difficult, "as, among other fancied prodigies, was once believed." The reviewer mentioned a book on Chinese law – presumably George Thomas Staunton's translation of the *Da Qing lüli* [The legal code of the Qing dynasty] – and recommending this translation to his readers, he posed the following questions:

> But, where is the Englishman that can interpret it? How many other books might, by the advantage of the English intercourse, be obtained, which would enable us to ascertain beyond controversy every point in the state of China which it would interest us to know? Why have they never been procured? Why has it not been made a point to have Englishmen acquainted with the language of China?

The reviewer compared British preparedness in its dealings with India to its lack of preparedness in sending Englishmen to China without the necessary language skills:

> No one [British person in China] has yet done any thing; nor, from the nature of their situation, is any thing to be expected from them, till they receive that encouragement which a wise and liberal government ought long ago to have afforded (*Edinburgh Review* [1809]: 412 f.).

For anyone interested in the subject, the advantages of the study of Chinese seemed obvious:

> It is rather remarkable, indeed, that notwithstanding the great commercial intercourse which England has now maintained with China, for more than a century, the work before us should have been the very first ever rendered out of that language directly into our own. It appears to us, however, to be at least as important in itself, as it is remarkable for its rarity (*Edinburgh Review* [1810]: 477).

The *Quarterly Review* also published a book review of Staunton's translation of the *Da Qing lüli*. This book reviewer offered up proposals for the study of the Chinese language. The Chinese texts made available through translations by Catholic missionaries have not always amounted to the best choice for European students of China's language and culture. The preparation of translations and commentaries merely on the Chinese classics could be compared to compiling a Chinese translation of the eleventh-century *Domesday Book* by a Chinese person in order "to give his countrymen an idea of the present distribution of landed property in England" (*Quarterly Review* [1810]: 289). A German reviewer of a French book of exercises intended mainly for the use of beginners later drew similar comparisons. Instead of the *Domesday Book*, the German scholar compared the utility of some of the classical Chinese texts used by Europeans for learning Chinese to the use of a Gothic translation of the Christian Bible for Chinese students engaged in learning German (*Leipziger Repertorium* 1846: 362).

From 1809 to 1815, Joshua Marshman and Robert Morrison published several works on the Chinese language. From a review of these works, we learn that they were not widely recognized or circulated at that time:

> Why are the works of these learned and indefatigable missionaries not advertised in the daily papers like other books, that the nations of Europe may know what rapid advance had been made of late years in oriental literature by our countrymen, the neglect of which had so long been their reproach? In France and Germany, the study of the Chinese language has recently been

> renewed; yet we verily believe that, were it not for our journal, these countries would remain in ignorance of the lead, which England has taken in this pursuit. Russia too, who has long kept up a commercial intercourse with the northern parts of China, on the frontiers of the two empires, is at length cultivating a task for Chinese literature (*Quarterly Review* [1816]: 375).

The article mentioned the announcement of the publication of a dictionary and the personal interest taken by Tsar Alexander to promote this project.

In 1817, Robert Morrison published *A View of China*. In the conclusion of this work, he described how to proceed in learning Chinese: Without a "Chinese Assistant," persons in Europe will scarcely be able to study the Chinese language: "Perhaps the following course may be the best for anyone about to acquire the Language" (Morrison 1817: 120). He recommended starting with works of fiction [*xiaoshuo*], many of which are written in the colloquial style. The best way would be to go through the *Haoqiu zhuan* [The fortunate union] and the *Honglou meng* [A dream of red mansions], the latter one in the Beijing dialect. Morrison also mentioned the difficulties of this kind of literature: "In attempting to read these, the lines of poetry at the commencement of each section will be found too difficult for a beginner." Descriptions of clothing, houses, the meaning of inscriptions above doors and in rooms [*bian'e*], and sentences brushed onto rolls of paper [*duilian*] are "generally unintelligible" unless the student has acquired some knowledge of "what may be called Classical [*wenyan*] Literature of the Chinese." Most of the allusions to be found in these kinds of texts are related to persons, places or events "which cannot be perceived, but by those who are acquainted with the tales of other times." Compared with this, it would be easy to understand "what the persons, mentioned in the narrative, did and said ..."

In his endeavor to get acquainted with Chinese literature, the student will find "considerable assistance" from the *Shengyu guangxun zhu* [Explanation of the amplified instructions on the Sacred Edict], according to Morrison. The text of that book is in the Classical or *wenyan* style: "To each section there is a colloquial paraphrase." Students then may advance to the four classic works edited or inspired by Confucius: in the *Sishu he jiang* [The *Four Books* with commentary], they may find "much concise and perspicuous definition." For further study, Morrison recommends students move on to the "older Classics": the *Qinding wujing chuanshuo* [The Imperially Commissioned Commentary on the Five Classics] provides the student with a commentary "in a lucid and good style" (Morrison 1817: 120 f.). Having gone through these works, the Chinese "give up themselves to general reading." In the end, Morri-

son doubts whether many Europeans could succeed in learning Chinese: "A European can have little motive to enter on the study of Chinese; or at least, can scarcely have motive sufficiently strong to carry him successfully through" (Morrison 1817: 121).

George Thomas Staunton (1781-1859), who took an active part in the founding of the Royal Asiatic Society, mentioned the difficulties of learning Chinese in his *Note on the Chinese Language and Poetry*. Learning Chinese should be combined with studies concerning the "ordinary habits, amusements, received notions and superstitions, of the people ..." Staunton further argued that any person "with tolerably quick parts and a retentive memory" could learn about five thousand Chinese characters (1822: 69 f.). It would be much more difficult to obtain "complete possession" of every single character, "to understand it in its proper sense whenever it occurs, and to know, in all cases, when and how to make a proper use of it." This process would require as much time as the acquisition of the graphic appearance of the abovementioned five thousand characters.

In April 1827, an anonymously published article in *The Asiatic Journal* expresses skepticism about the importance of learning Chinese. Chinese philosophy would be "a source of wonder and delight ... Yet it is to scholars and philosophers alone, and those of a courageous temper, to whom the literature of China can ever become an object of much interest" (S. 1827: 465).

Oriental scholars warmly welcomed the publication of Joseph-Henri Prémare's *Notitia Linguæ Sinicæ*.[6] In his book *The Chinese*, John Francis Davis (1795-1890) mentions that the Munich-based scholar Karl Friedrich Neumann (1793-1870) has tried to show that Rémusat's Chinese grammar of 1822 was "greatly indebted to this work." As Davis points out, Prémare chose a "proper way" to arrange and present the material:

> Where there is so little of what can strictly be called grammatical rules, the proper way to teach is by examples rather than precepts, and this is what Prèmare has done, illustrating the subject by quotations from the best works in the native character.

Davis complains ("with a view to general utility") that Prémare's book had been published in Latin. Nevertheless, with the aid of Prémare's book and Morrison's *Dictionary*, everyone can take the opportunity to learn Chinese – "as far as *books only* are concerned. To be able to converse in it, he must get to China" (Davis 1836: 2,156 f.).

Westerners who intended to go to China had to be trained in elementary Chinese before leaving for the East. Late in 1838, the young James Legge (1815-97) – together with William C. Milne (1815-63) and Benja-

min Hobson (1816-73) – began their Chinese lessons under the direction of Samuel Kidd (1799-1843). In these lessons, they made use of Morrison's *Dictionary of the Chinese Language*. The three students had to learn and use the radicals to make proper use of the dictionary. The next step was to locate the meaning of characters. Afterwards, they made use of the dictionary to learn about the meaning of words in Robert Morrison's translation of the New Testament. Other texts comprised the *Lunyu* [Confucian analects] and "two unnamed pamphlets" by William Milne (1785-1822), the deceased father of one of the three students (Pfister 2004: 1,114). After a few months, Legge had mastered the 214 radicals "well enough to find terms in Morrison's dictionary" (Pfister 2004: 1, 116).

Attitudes among German scholars about the learning of Chinese

Unlike France and England, eighteenth-century Germany was still part of the Holy Roman Empire, and as yet had very few commercial interests in East Asia. Information on China was mainly drawn from French and English works. To be sure, a number of Chinese books were deposited at the Royal Library in Berlin, at the Imperial Library in Vienna, and at the Ducal Library in Wolfenbüttel – all three of which were limited-access collections. Yet apart from a limited number of individuals with access to one of those three libraries, it must have been quite difficult to make use of Chinese books in Germany at that time.[7]

In 1768, the German oriental scholar Johann David Michaelis (1717-1791) discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the study of the Chinese language. Michaelis emphasized the significance of the Chinese language, and thus recommended the learning and instruction of this language. By that time, a number of European libraries had acquired Chinese books. The study of the Chinese language would be a key to use these holdings for scholarly work. These holdings would help European scholars to discover a whole new world. Therefore, at least a few glimpses into this new world would be possible if the Chinese books deposited in European libraries could be read by European scholars (Michaelis 1768: 175-177).

During the late sixties of the eighteenth century, no German scholar was engaged in studying the Chinese language.[8] Consequently, nobody could study the language at any German university. Who could be found to engage in Chinese studies? Michaelis recommended would-be Asia scholars to seek out instruction from the French scholar Joseph de Guignes. If German universities had a scholar like de Guignes, would such a scholar find students? The study of Chinese is neither a pleasure nor fashionable ("*nicht Annehmlichkeit und Mode*"). Michaelis was op-

posed to the proposition that instructors of Oriental languages – i.e., near Eastern or South Asian languages – should also teach Chinese. He argued that the Chinese language was entirely unrelated to the various "Oriental" languages. Instead, he favored a combination of a newly created Chair of Chinese language and literature with a Chair of Asian history (Michaelis 1768: 177).

His fellow orientalists did not share Michaelis' favorable opinion. In 1784, the young scholar Samuel Friedrich Günther Wahl (1760-1834) published a general history of Oriental languages. This book contains a section on the Chinese language. In his introductory remarks, Wahl stated that there is not only one Chinese language but various Chinese *languages* (Wahl 1784: 43). Due to its special characteristics, the Chinese language would be very difficult for Europeans to learn. Unless the learner resides in China, it is quite impossible to acquire a considerable proficiency in that language (Wahl 1784: 48). Wahl clearly opposed further European studies of the Chinese language. He argued that it might be useful to be acquainted with Chinese writing. Everyone who is acquainted with Chinese writing will be able to read Chinese characters in his native tongue. On the contrary, he mentioned that for European scholars the study of the Chinese language would be a "useless and idle" pursuit [*unnüz* (sic) *und eitel*].

In the opinion of Wahl, European scholars would hardly find anything of interest to research in Chinese literature (1784: 55-56). He did not share one iota of the enthusiasm many of his contemporaries felt about China and the Chinese. He believed that any scholar who devoted his efforts to study of the Chinese language would come to regret this as having been a waste of time (Wahl 1784: 57). Wahl's disparaging remarks about the Chinese language received severe criticism in a review published in the leading review journal of eighteenth-century Germany. This reviewer points out that Wahl's presentation of the Chinese language is very weak, and his disparaging description of the Chinese people would be unbearable for most of his readers (Schulz 1785: 563). In 1788, Wahl wrote that due to the manifold difficulties of Chinese, it is the only language that deserves to be studied on its own [*"welche ein ganz eignes ... Studium erfordert"*] (Wahl 1788: 34).

Besides compiling various widely used German dictionaries and grammars, the librarian Johann Christoph Adelung (1732-1806) was interested in comparative linguistics. In his *Mithridates*, he intended to give versions of the Lord's Prayer in more than five hundred languages and dialects (Trabant 2003: 236-239). For each section, he wrote introductory remarks dealing with both the history of the respective country and the development of the respective language (Adelung 1806). Adelung (1806: 34-64) placed his section on Chinese at the beginning of the first volume. In 1807, the section on Chinese was published in a

French translation (Lanjuinais 1807). To Adelung, an incomplete language and a highly inconvenient writing system seemed to be the reasons "why the Chinese did not attain a sufficient degree of scholarly culture" [*warum der Sinese es bisher zu keinem erträglichen Grade der wissenschaftlichen Cultur hat bringen können, noch es jemahls bringen wird*] (Adelung 1806: 49). The fourth and concluding volume of *Mithridates* contains extensive bibliographic addenda (Adelung 1817: 11-31, 463-466). These addenda reveal the remarkable progress that Chinese studies achieved in early nineteenth-century Europe.

From the second volume onwards, the linguist Johann Severin Vater (1771-1826) had edited *Mithridates*. In 1820, Vater published a short notice on the Chinese language. He referred to works published by the British missionaries Robert Morrison and William Milne. Vater discussed the main principles of Chinese writing, as far as they were known then in Europe. He pointed out the main reasons for studying Chinese and the most promising methods of studying the written language. Concerning the study of written Chinese, Vater first described how the Chinese themselves learned their written language. After mainly practicing the pronunciation and tone of each character, young Chinese are trained in writing. At the age "of fourteen, fifteen or sixteen" they began to study the meanings of the characters using a dictionary. In this way, they become acquainted with a small number of more or less suitable texts (Vater 1820: 21-28).

Europeans studying the Chinese written language had to pursue a method very different from the one for native speakers described above. Not mentioning those who wish to use the language in personal intercourse with Chinese persons, Europeans need to develop methods that help to diminish the efforts every student of the Chinese language has to undertake. One of these methods could be the graphic analysis of the graphic structure of Chinese characters. Vater stated that the analysis of characters is necessary to define the radical and the number of strokes in a given character. Only by following this approach can a scholar search through a dictionary and find a character he does not recognize at first glance (Vater 1820: 4). Concerning the kind of people engaged in study of the Chinese language, one might ask whether the results would justify all of the considerable exertions they had made. Chinese studies in Europe would benefit only from the liberality of a government interested in the promotion of Oriental studies (Vater 1820: 13).

In his review of Antonio Montucci's *Remarques philologiques* [Philological remarks] (Montucci wrote under the pseudonym Sinologus Berolinensis), Klaproth took issue with the author's claims about the difficulties of memorizing all 214 of the radicals. For Klaproth, these claims mainly reveal how difficult it must have been for Montucci to have pursued his Chinese studies without a teacher. The commonly accepted

system of the 214 radicals had replaced almost all previous systems for looking up Chinese characters in a dictionary. Therefore, the compilers of the *Kangxi zidian* had adopted it, too. Klaproth called it an adequate equivalent [*ein würdiges Seitenstück*] of the Linnaean system of botanical classification. Just as the Linnaean system includes the relatively cumbersome botanical category of cryptogams, the system of 214 radicals contains a group of characters whose radicals are somewhat difficult to pinpoint (Klaproth 1811a: 272).

Vater described the efforts made by Montucci to ease the task of learning Chinese. Montucci demonstrates various difficulties in counting the strokes and pinpointing the radical in a given Chinese character. Further analysis of Chinese writing performed by European scholars led to the omission of some of the 214 keys and to the development of fixed rules for the convenience of beginners (Vater 1820: 24 f.). For any advance to be made in studies of the Chinese language, it would be necessary for the student to be acquainted with those keys. A list printed in Paris would be very helpful for this task. After overcoming the difficulties of looking up an unfamiliar character in a dictionary, the student has to be careful about the meaning and function of each character in order to make proper use of any information provided in the Chinese text that contains that character (Vater 1820: 26-28).

In 1821, the philologist and Orientalist Ernst August Philipp Mahn (1787-1846) made proposals for far-reaching reforms of Oriental studies in Europe. Inspired by the example of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, he recommended the establishment of Asiatic Societies in Baghdad, Beijing, Istanbul, Mecca and Cairo to pursue Oriental studies on the spot. These academies should prepare the most important works of Oriental literature for press. The Oriental texts should be appended with European commentary or critique. Unlike Michaelis in 1768, Mahn was opposed to sending German students to Paris to pursue Oriental studies. Returning to Germany, these young men who had received merely a type of scholarly "baby food" [*Kinder-Speise*] would sometimes be hailed as famous Orientalists (Mahn 1821: 16).

In his survey of Oriental studies, Mahn also discussed the study of Chinese. Aside from mentioning some longstanding prejudices against the study of Chinese, he stressed the importance of learning this language. According to Mahn, the "vast and very ancient silkworm nest of China" [*Das große und uralte Seidenwürmer-Nest China*] should not be neglected. Despite the fact that it may take an entire lifetime to memorize a sufficient range of Chinese characters, Chinese literature – at least as far as it was known to Europeans in 1820 – contains so much useful information about Chinese culture that European scholars should be eager to learn more about it. Mahn listed possible fields of research: history, palaeography, philosophy (including number symbolism), poli-

tics, technical inventions, mathematics, natural sciences, and so on. Ignoring the oddity of many things Chinese, a sensible scholar will be enthusiastic and not despise the Chinese Empire. China's literary treasures will be made known to Europe through scholarly efforts undertaken in such centers of learning as Calcutta, Paris, and St. Petersburg. The East India Company and Russia are obliged to disseminate Chinese texts for the benefit of progress in craftsmanship, arts, and sciences. In Russia, Manchu studies have also been supported. Julius Klaproth had prepared an inventory of Manchu books. Through existing Manchu translations of Chinese literature, the latter would be more easily accessible to Europeans (Mahn 1821: 101). Some years before publishing his survey on Oriental studies, Mahn had written a review of the Chinese-Latin-French dictionary published by de Guignes in 1813 (Mahn 1816).

All of these remarks relating to the value of the Chinese language to Europeans were written before Rémusat published his *Élémens de la grammaire chinoise* [Elements of Chinese grammar] in 1822. The young scholar Friedrich Ferdinand Helmke (1801-1870) published a review of Rémusat's book early in 1825. In 1823, Helmke, together with the young Wilhelm Schott (1802-1889), had taken the opportunity to study Chinese under the guidance of two Cantonese temporarily living in Halle, Germany. Both Helmke and Schott felt compelled to inform the public about their own progress in studying Chinese. In his review, Helmke intended to discuss the method used by Rémusat to explain the peculiarities of this interesting language (Helmke 1825).

The young Göttingen Orientalist Heinrich Ewald also published a short notice on Rémusat's *Élémens de la grammaire chinoise*. For decades, Ewald noted, the study of Chinese was delayed in Europe because of strong objections to the difficulties of learning this language. Instead of informing the beginner about the Chinese language, the works of Bayer and Fourmont instead sow confusion in his mind. For Ewald, Rémusat's *Élémens de la grammaire chinoise* finally met the needs of European scholars who wanted to learn Chinese. In concluding his review, Ewald wrote: "The grammatical rules are developed so clearly and displayed so aptly with printed Chinese characters that even beginners can get acquainted with it" (1826: 160).

One of the young Germans studying under the direction of Rémusat was Karl Friedrich Neumann. In a notice for the periodical *Das Ausland* [Foreign countries], Neumann informed the reader that after devoting himself to the study of Chinese for nearly two months, he had already been writing out translations from Chinese into German. All learners who were serious about their study of the Chinese language would make similar progress (Neumann 1828: 893).

For a long time, French, German and English suggestions as to how best to learn Chinese depended on the rather weak knowledge Euro-

pean scholars had of the nature of the Chinese language. In Enlightenment Europe, encyclopedic dictionaries mostly disseminated Jesuit views about the Chinese language; these views tended to focus upon the restricted number of syllables in the sound system, along with the huge number of characters in the writing system. Both factors laid the groundwork for the prejudice that even a whole lifetime would not be sufficient for a European to learn Chinese properly. This prejudice and others like it began to fade away only after Rémusat published his grammar of Chinese in 1822.

From the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, European scholars discussed the possible advantages and methods of learning Chinese. Most scholars who engaged in these discussions pointed out that the study of the Chinese language would provide access to the treasures of Chinese literature and culture (Deguignes, Michaelis, Mahn). Occasionally, some Orientalists expressed their opposition to their contemporaries' study of Chinese by dismissing such study as a useless and idle pursuit (Wahl). Such negative pronouncements were compounded by the fact that throughout the eighteenth century, it was generally very difficult for European scholars to obtain books and dictionaries from China.

In the early nineteenth century, the advent of Sinology as an academic discipline and the beginning of British and French missionary activities in and around China led to the publication of Chinese grammars (Rémusat) and Chinese dictionaries (Morrison). These useful learning aids were warmly welcomed throughout Europe. They were helpful in acquainting the learner with the basic structures of the language, and for enabling the learner to develop a basic knowledge of it within a reasonable period of time.

Notes

1 On the history of Chinese studies in eighteenth and early nineteenth century Europe, see "Origins of European sinology" in: Standaert 2001: 896-899, Honey 2001: 20-29 (France), 118-122 (Germany), 167-177 (England); Girardot 2002: 756 f. (bibliographical notes on "Sinology and Academic History").

2 The *Encyclopédie* seems to be the first encyclopedic dictionary to inform Europeans about the *liu shu*. Encyclopedias that were published later also included information about the *liu shu*. Later references to the *liu shu* include Schott 1827: 365, n. 7; *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*, vol. 5 (1830): 271 f. , in which it was glossed as follows: "Six following classes, to which they [the Chinese] give the name of Lo tchoo." The fifth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Edinburgh 1817-1820) has nothing on the *liu shu*. See ibid., vol. 6: 38-40. On the *liu shu*, see Qiu Xigui 2000: 151-163.

3 On the history of European translations of the *Zhongyong*, see Plaks 1999.

4 Major collections of Chinese books reached England only in the first half of the nineteenth century. For further bibliographic references on early donations of Chinese books to British libraries, see Lehner 2004: 218 n. 62; 226, n. 116.
5 The author referred to events occurring during the Macartney mission to the Qing court. On the Collegio dei Cinesi, see Bertuccioli & Masini 1996: 193-197.
6 On the *Notitia Linguae Sinicae*, see Lundbaek 1991. On the publication of Prémare's book, see ibid.: 176 f. On the limited spread of the published work, see Alleton 2004: 211 f.
7 This might be assumed from the introductory remarks to a German edition of Guillaume Thomas Raynal's influential *Histoire des Deux Indes* (French original published in 1770), where Paris is characterized as a center for information on all matters of non-European people. In Germany, it must have been very difficult to obtain books in Spanish or Portuguese ("nearly as rare as Chinese books"). Quoted in Lüsebrink 2002: 91. As a sort of another "transfert culturel triangulaire," English works on Oriental literature were collected at Göttingen University Library. See Jefcoate 1998.
8 Examples of the eighteenth-century reception of works about the Chinese language by German scholars include Murr (1777) and Büttner (1784).

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7 Chinese Avant-garde Theater: New Trends in Chinese Experimental Drama near the Close of the Twentieth Century

Izabella Łabędzka

Terminology

Near the end of the 1970s, a spirit of experimentation began to flourish in the People's Republic of China (PRC), slowly at first, but gaining momentum and purpose with the passage of time. It permeated literature – especially poetry – along with painting, sculpture, film and theater, but it also influenced everyday life, affecting people's lifestyles and morals. This experimental spirit generated some of the most interesting and perhaps most valuable phenomena in China's cultural heritage at the end of the twentieth century. The effects and influences of the spirit of experimentation can be seen in a particular theater movement that emerged over the final two decades of the century. The Chinese call it the "theater of exploration" [*tansuo xiju*], the "theater of experiment" [*shiyan xiju*], or the "avant-garde theater" [*xianfeng xiju*]. This terminology is based on Western nomenclature, but the Chinese terms do not entirely match up with the closest equivalent Euro-American dramaturgical concepts, which were created by Western artists familiar with various currents of the artistic avant-garde during the first half of the twentieth century as well as during more recent times.

Researchers on Chinese theater have also suggested that various new phenomena in the performance arts differ considerably in Chinese versus Western theater (Wu Weimin 1998: 78-102; Wu Hung 1999: 12-22). Wu Hung explains why he prefers such terms as "experimentalism" over the term "Chinese avant-garde":

> I employ an alternative term – "experimental art" or "experimentalism" – which is often used by contemporary Chinese artists and art critics themselves. Renato Poggioli states in his *Theory of the Avant-garde* that the "experimental factor" is crucial to any invention of avant-gardism. But the desire to experiment is certainly not limited to avant-garde artists, nor must an experiment result in a revolutionary style or concept. Therefore, Poggioli also distinguishes avant-garde experimentalism from other kinds of

> experimentalism. Similar differences are found within contemporary Chinese experimental art. Some artists exhibit more antagonism and nihilism toward society and fit a Western notion of the avant-garde more closely; other types of experimental art may simply focus on stylistic or technical matters, including "experimenting" with (i.e., imitating) newly introduced Western art forms (Wu Hung 1999: 15).

The Chinese avant-garde near the end of the twentieth century shared with its Western counterpart an attraction to all things new and original.[1] This drive for originality is manifested both in the subject matter and in the language of artistic communication and expression. This drive has also brought with it an awareness of the autonomous character of the language and a striving to enrich its range of expression. The avant-garde has been rebellious, keeping its distance from the surrounding reality of the day, and at times it has even seemed to be belligerent and provocative. Avant-garde artists have often appeared to equate real life with art. Art has become these artists' way of life, although it has hardly brought them enough material rewards to make a living on. Artists seem to be motivated by their common passion for creation and experimentation rather than by the expectation of material gain or secure full-time employment.

This small group of individualists has tended to operate within an elite environment. On the other hand, their elitist nature derives from their unique approach, as well as from the way they have ventured outside of established artistic conventions and disrupted audience expectations that have been shaped by the experience of years of politically correct art. "In contrast to the mass media," Sheldon H. Lu observes, "avant-garde art is not officially promoted by the Chinese state and is often subject to censorship. The Chinese nation-state was rarely a site, locus, or market for experimental art in the 1990s" (Lu 2001: 20).

In exploring the new phenomena within Chinese avant-garde or experimental theater, it is more enlightening to take a wider approach and see it as an artistic activity that escapes historical limits, traverses established aesthetic patterns and means of expression, and contests the official cultural, moral and political climate. It is better to see it as a development that has its own philosophy of understanding the world and man, and presents this view through art.

The concept of "experimental theater" seems to be less problematic in describing certain aspects of modern Chinese theater to the extent that it encompasses – as Patrice Pavis argues – the artists' attitude towards the institutionalized theater, tradition, theatrical language and the relations between the stage and the audience. A theatrical experiment usually involves a search for new solutions with respect to acting and to

the dramatic interpretation of the text. The text ceases to be seen as absolute, and instead is considered to be just one of the many sign systems available in the art of theater.

An experiment also concerns architecture and stage setting, and results in novel arrangements of theatrical space and innovative uses of light and sound techniques. According to the above-cited French scholar, experimental theater has abandoned the traditional divisions between theatrical genres in order to focus on the purity of a poetics of drama. It has become a melting pot in which various cultures and artistic traditions meet and mingle. It also focuses on the process-like character of performance, and on the creation of meaning during the course of performance (Pavis 2002: 374-376).

Chinese avant-garde stage directors have defied certain forms of theater, particularly the fossilized type that is impervious to creativity and yet has been routinely approved and recommended by authorities within the Communist Party. Nevertheless, experimental artists have striven to recover what they could from the older strata of tradition and reuse anything that could serve as an inspiration. This new theater is heading towards a more interdisciplinary and intercultural artistic scene, and it tends to draw upon a combination of arts and techniques. The old ideal of seeking a homogeneity of genre is no longer valid. A marriage of arts from various cultural environments is now possible, even desirable, and hardly anyone is surprised any more by exotic combinations such as Beijing opera together with theater of the absurd, or a Western-style mime show combined with Chinese puppet or mask theater.

This new experimental Chinese theater has also attached considerable importance to the interaction between the actor and the spectator within a physical space. In searching for a different type of contact with the audience, experimental theater has often turned aside from traditional theater halls and instead moved performances into non-theatrical premises such as gym halls and university canteens. The choice of unusual performance locations, the departure from traditional perceptions of narrative methods and plot, the diversity of materials used for the performance, and the complex message that results from the combination of these factors place the audience in a totally different position. Their sensory inputs are amplified, and their participation in creating the theatrical message is far more significant than is typical under normal circumstances in ordinary commercial theater.

Under such circumstances, the actor is an agent who delivers messages of complex imaginative and intellectual character (Pavis 2002: 374-376). Compared with actors in traditional spoken drama, actors in experimental theater are required to be more technically versatile, as well as willing to broaden their acting skills and improvisational abilities.

Among the three terms given above to designate trends in Chinese theater near the end of the twentieth century, the term "exploratory theater" [*tansuo xiju*] seems to be the most valid, as it embraces the broadest range of features summarized above. This term encompasses a number of characteristics of avant-garde or experimental theater. However, Martha P.Y. Cheung and Jane C.C. Lai explain the critics' predilection for this term in a different way:

> It is significant that the Mainland critics have chosen the slightly more tentative term "exploration plays" to describe the more adventurous works of the 1980s rather than "experimental plays" (*shiyan ju*) or "avant-garde plays" (*qianwei ju*) current in Western critical vocabulary. The term "exploration" is more neutral in its ideological connotations and therefore less provocative to the authorities. Besides, the Mainland critics are probably also aware that the kinds of exploration carried out in these works are, by the standard of Western theaters, no longer experimental or avant-garde due to the developmental time-lag – a result of the political situation which had isolated China for over decade (Cheung and Lai 1997: xvi).

The concept of *tansuo xiju* has been particularly useful in the way it can encompass the exploratory work, originally timid and later more daring, of the small theater companies that have operated on the margins of official state-subsidized Chinese theater. The creativity of these small theater companies was born of their dissatisfaction with the dominant aesthetic conventions of China's official state-subsidized theater. Although these small theater companies fought against various aspects of the theatrical tradition, they did not wish to go so far as to destroy their predecessors. Their experiments seem to be more about a search for alternatives to mainstream trends than a revolution or takeover designed to depose the dominant group. The first pre-exile dramas by Gao Xingjian, staged by the Beijing Capital Theater, are excellent illustrations of the aesthetics of this specific kind of confrontation.

The generation of relatively youthful stage directors who made their debut in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, and who have set many of the current standards for alternative theater, call the theater of the 1980s the "theater of exploration" while referring to the theater of the 1990s the "theater of experiment," and in so doing imply an increase in courage, independence, and original creativity over the course of two decades. This attitude is typical of young avant-garde artists, in that they are often concerned with building an image to define themselves as extraordinary or advanced in comparison with their predecessors.

The two trends of exploration and experimentation in alternative theater are both different and similar. The differences can be related to the changes that were taking place in Chinese society during the 1980s and 1990s. Practically all of those who were active in the PRC theatrical world in the 1980s were adversely affected by the Cultural Revolution, and were often haunted by persistent memories of traumatic personal experiences. Most of the reform-minded artists from that period were middle aged, and were often driven by a desire to make up for lost time. In contrast, for the relatively youthful avant-garde stage directors and actors working at the beginning of the 1990s, the Cultural Revolution was for the most part a hazy childhood memory. In relation to this, creative freedom has grown in spite of continued political fluctuations, social unrest, and censorship.

In contrast, prior to the 1980s, a playwright or a director of avant-garde theater was wholly dependent on the good will and whim of a Communist Party official who knew hardly anything about theater or other performing arts, but was usually an expert in political manipulation. As Gao Xingjian knew from personal experience, sometimes any pretext would be used by such an official to obstruct the opening of a play and to condemn its playwright and director to what amounted to artistic exile and oblivion.

In addition, until the mid-1980s, the new theater in China had developed largely in isolation from world theater. Just a few theatrical artists enjoyed the rare privilege of traveling to the West and directly experiencing live performances of experimental theater in Europe or America. Naturally, this does not imply that new developments within Euro-American theater were completely alien to the Chinese. At the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, discontinued theater and literature journals were brought back into publication and new ones were established, containing articles that discussed Western experimental theater, among other topics. A number of anthologies of innovative Western literature in Chinese translation were published in 1980, including an important anthology of plays of the absurd and the first PRC anthology of Western modernist works.[2]

In the 1990s, Chinese avant-garde artists began to gravitate more towards the West. Foreign grants and direct contacts with European, American or Japanese theaters became the rule and not the exception. This strengthening of relations has resulted in changes to the repertoire of the experimental theater with a younger generation of PRC stage directors, who alongside Chinese drama stage Western plays by such playwrights as Jean Genet (1910-1986), Eugène Ionesco (1912-1994), Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), Dario Fo (b. 1926) and Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953). Paradoxically, these younger stage directors have generally considered themselves to be artistically independent, while they have of-

ten characterized their older colleagues as being dependent on the Western theater and the concepts of Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) and Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940) (Jie and Meng 2000: 351).

The reality is that the new Chinese theater has become a part of an international theater culture. Chinese theatrical performances have received recognition at a number of international festivals, thereby illustrating that contemporary Chinese theater is increasingly universal in its appeal, and has begun to be governed by the same types of economic mechanisms as in the West. Some theatrical projects have been financed by playwrights, while others have been funded by foreign sponsors.

Moreover, the stage directors of the past fifteen years have been able to work in an intellectual and artistic atmosphere that has been far more relaxed than it was for their predecessors. "The influence and impact of Western popular culture (music, film, fashion), new telecommunication and audio-visual technologies (TV, fax, internet, mobile phone, VCD [video compact disc]), and private and transnational investments – all of these heterogeneous forces have weakened the grip of the state" (Lu 2001: 17). The changes brought about by the market economy and technological progress appear to be irreversible, and have brought with them freedoms that encourage artistic creativity.

The decade of the 1980s witnessed mere dozens, not hundreds, of PRC experimental theatrical performances, so the number itself is not that significant (Zhao 2000: 4-6). Given the size of China's population and the diversity of its theatrical traditions, this number is quite modest. However, in recent years the new theater of exploration has been discussed in a growing number of critical and historical publications on this general topic. Researchers have attempted to systematize and identify the characteristics of this phenomenon, along with situating the phenomenon both on the theatrical map of China and within a global context by reference to the theater abroad. Such research has always led the reader to the starting point of new theater in the PRC: the plays written by Gao Xingjian and directed by Lin Zhaohua. Some critics have even claimed that Gao is the ultimate avant-garde artist (Wu Weimin 1998: 85). It is worth recalling that the revolutionary character of Gao Xingjian's early concept of alternative theater simply amounts to moving beyond the rigid framework of realist stylistics, breaking the monopoly of Henrik Ibsen and Konstantin Stanislavky, and thereby shaking the foundations that had underpinned the concept of modern "spoken drama" [*huaju*] for decades. He did so by reaching back to the folk forms of ritual theater and dance in China, as well as drawing upon the idea of the poor theater by Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999) and the narrative strategies typical of the theater of the absurd.

New aesthetic awareness

The circumstances that gave rise to the experimental theater at the beginning of the 1980s were as complex as those leading to the development of spoken, non-operatic drama in the first decades of the last century. At that time, China went through one of its deepest cultural metamorphoses.[3] Awareness of this phase has grown over time, and this manifested itself in the numerous intellectual debates that called for a general re-evaluation of the Chinese cultural heritage. The crisis of the contemporary theater was already noticeable in the late 1970s and early 1980s as one of the symptoms of the general impasse in Chinese art. The imposed poetics of socialist realism that had blighted the PRC for decades and the disgrace of the Cultural Revolution affected not only the performing arts, but also literature and the fine arts.

Yet even as the late 1970s and early 1980s brought a sense of disappointment and disillusionment, there were also some positive elements that resulted from the economic transformations and the unprecedented space for freedom of thought. In spite of various social problems, unwise ideological campaigns, and various political problems, science, culture and art have undergone considerable changes, as have people's moral codes, values, and lifestyles. The PRC intellectual elite that had been suppressed for decades began to re-emerge, and academic communities experienced a revival. These phenomena were of paramount importance for the alternative theater, as most of its artists and audience hailed from such communities.

Gradually, the main purpose of the PRC theater began to be perceived in a different way. A program issued in 1989 for *The Great God Brown* by Eugene O'Neill, directed by Mou Sen, the driving force behind one of the experimental theatrical groups, reads as follows:

> We have chosen theatrical creation as our way of life, to make our existence perfect, fully satisfactory, and solacing. We have chosen theatrical creation as our way of life, but in addition to that we hope that our performance will become an aesthetic experience for every spectator, and will lead him or her to a sublimation of emotions. We are undergoing unceasing sublimation and purification, as if engaging in religious practices. In the course of such a process of sublimation, theatrical art serves us as a vehicle that transfers to the audience the shine of our own existence, which becomes contagious. We desire a spiritual communication. We know that this is extremely difficult to achieve, and we do not expect any results (Meng 2000: 4).

Avant-garde artists at the end of the twentieth century wanted to change the world, and their methods seemed to be very sophisticated intellectually and artistically. The artists agreed on the following: "One must increase the level of perception and aesthetic awareness; one has to intensify the spectators' ability to perceive beauty. We know that this process is long and tedious, involving considerable costs, but we are willing to incur them" (Meng 2000: 6).

In order to develop new aesthetic awareness, it was necessary to hold debates and conduct theatrical experiments. In fact, around the beginning of the 1980s, debate and experimentation went hand in hand. At that time, specialist journals hosted several discussions on the idea of a theater [*xiju guan*], focusing for the first time in years on artistic form, not merely content.[4] For example, one important topic was the renewal of artistic form and new approaches to both domestic and Western theatrical traditions. The tendency to discuss the finest details of theatrical art and to propose new routes seems logical at a time when there was a crisis of values, in which the social order and its underpinning Maoist ideology appeared to be collapsing. The Cultural Revolution is evidence of the final defeat of the utopian view that claimed that the rationalization and total unification of PRC society would lead to a state of harmony and mutual bliss. However, the Cultural Revolution went even further in revealing more than its proponents had intended. It demonstrated that ideological models such as those advanced during the Cultural Revolution are suffused with the absurd, and that they hide potential forces of chaos that can destroy any social order, even one marked by an outward appearance of stability. The demand for heterogeneous stylistics proved to be one of the first responses against the homogenous artistic style that had been forced on PRC audiences during the course of the revolution.

The first half of the 1980s was marked by a growing sense of the demise of realist poetics, and of the need to cross the boundaries of a narrowly constrained socialist realism.[5] This gave rise to concepts that united realism with symbolism, as well as joining realism to the absurd. Haiping Yan has commented on these developments from 1985 on:

> The theatre world from 1985 onward was increasingly dominated by "modernist" dramas. These dramas, like some of the earlier modernist experiments, absorbed certain Western modernist sentiments of alienation from the state and a rebellious spirit toward socio-cultural orthodoxy. More important, and unlike some of the earlier modernist dramas, they further inherited great amounts of socio-cultural nihilism built within the organizing principles of Western modernist theatre, in the light of which the ideology of Marxist socialism and its moral traditions were

> rejected. The spirit of individual rebellion against society embodied in Western modernism was transplanted into the Chinese context to deconstruct established cultural and moral systems, even as the conventional values of Western modernity were penetrating China to fill the ideological void created by such modernist deconstruction and the furthering of economic denationalization and internationalization (Yan 1998: xxvi).

The shedding of Maoist ideological dogma, including its tendency to reduce all things to a single dimension such as class struggle, was accompanied by a new-found ability to recognize the multi-layered structure of man's internal and external worlds. This multi-layered structure could be expressed only by means of an equally complex, multi-layered artistic form. The process of differentiation in the contemporary theater was reinforced by the manifold structure of modern life and the complexity of human relationships in a community undergoing tumultuous transformation. This process was accompanied by the individualization of a dramatic work and its author. New plays tried to present a separate and individual interpretation of the world, which was seen from the point of view of the playwright and his subjective internal self. The freedom of the theater became equivalent to the freedom of expression, which in turn justified the application of a diversified poetics (Lin 1988: 227-246)

The violation of the foundation of realist poetics proved to be a call for the rejection of mimetic art. Before long, the model of a theater of illusion was resolutely challenged by a theater based on convention and symbolism. This resulted in a revaluation of the Chinese theatrical heritage, which embraced both traditional Chinese operatic drama [*xiqu*] and modern spoken drama [*huaju*], and contributed to a new perception of Western theater. The artists felt a strong need for self-reflection, and the emphasis shifted from things external to theater, to the theater itself. An awareness of the autonomous character of theatrical art has increased, along with the feeling that the theater must see itself in the context of the rich world of the performing arts, and break down the boundaries between the different arts.

The experimental theater also held that the model of dramatic performance based on unity of subject matter or structure – as embodied by varieties of both classical Western and classical Eastern theater – is by no means the only solution available to the playwright or director. Experimental directors and playwrights gradually abandoned linear plots, and began to use frameworks made up of episodes with the aesthetics of non-linear narratives and fragmentary characters. The construction and re-construction of messages in the course of a performance proved to be more important than a logical sequence of events in the text of a play.

As has been the case in the other arts, audiences began to expect the modern-day theater to be thought-provoking, not merely capable of arousing emotions in the onlooker. In other words, the value of a theatrical performance began to be measured in terms of its intellectual freight instead of its skill at plucking the heart-strings of the audience (Ren 1992: 192-233). Even though a number of playwrights still felt strongly committed to realist poetics, they nonetheless attempted to enrich the philosophical and aesthetic aspects of their work. A simple plot was made more complex by presenting a wide variety of viewpoints and could thus impart a more comprehensive, many-sided image of reality. A good example of the gradual departure from the realist canon in experimental drama is Gao Xingjian's *Alarm Signal* [*Juedui xinhao*] (1982), which offers solutions typical of narrative prose works such as internal monologue and stream of consciousness. In another play, *The Other Shore* [*Bi'an*] (1986), Gao was even more adventurous, making numerous references to symbolist drama, as well as adopting the fragmentary structure and poetic quality of dreams in his writing.

A predilection for deeper philosophical reflection and an interest in character psychology were distinctive features of the new Chinese drama of the 1980s. This trend seems to be a natural response to the existing one-dimensional literature of socialist realism and the distortion and falsity that resulted from presenting the world in such a simplistic manner. The increasing contact with various philosophical and artistic phenomena of the West also contributed to the development of this trend. PRC audiences of the 1980s knew more than ever before about Western modernism; they were generally fascinated by existentialism and often viewed postmodernism as fashionable (Wang Ning 2000: 21-40; Zhang 1997). The Chinese theatrical world grew increasingly familiar with Western trends such as epic theater and the theater of the absurd.

The most important theoretical texts by Bertolt Brecht, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Jerzy Grotowski, Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) and Peter Brook (b. 1925) were soon translated into Chinese, along with numerous new Western plays. Specialist journals published plenty of Chinese and foreign features on leading characters and other phenomena related to twentieth- century European and American drama. The reformers, whose names are mentioned above, had a significant impact on Chinese theatrical experimenters. These reformers not only created a new theatrical language, but also were directly inspired by the traditional performing arts of the Far East. The awareness of the latter became an additional stimulus for the Chinese artists for the reconsideration of the aesthetics of local traditional operatic drama.

The more the alternative theater artists tried to break with Konstantin Stanislavsky's method, and the more they tried to discover the es-

sence of theater, the more they found themselves analyzing the traditions of traditional Chinese operatic theater.[6] The disengagement from overly mimetic art, a growing emphasis on theatrical conventions, and a search for solutions based on the dialectics of illusion and anti-illusion required the embrace of specific techniques known from the Beijing Opera and folk performing arts. This included using one or more characters as the narrator or commentator of a play, as well as the gestural conventions of local operatic drama. During the past twenty years, many Chinese reformers have been attracted to the traditional theater and still feel this affinity at present. They have been fascinated with its aesthetics, which are based on a synthesis of performing arts and a mastery of complex acting techniques. Consequently, the avant-garde has adopted traditional Chinese operatic theater as the foundation on which it has built a new concept of the "total theater" [*wanquan de xiju*]. In doing so, it has concentrated less on educational goals and has revived the traditional aim of entertainment, albeit a type of entertainment that inspires reflection or contemplation. Instead of imitating or attempting to reproduce the surrounding reality, the Chinese avant-garde theater has created a new artistic reality. It has liberated itself from domination by the printed literary text and the playwright, and has replaced the cult of dialogue with a renewed focus on acting. Finally, it has revived the former concept of acting as a synthesis of singing, speaking, acting, and martial-arts acrobatics [*chang, nian, zuo, da*].

Increasing dominance of the stage director

An attempt to describe the theater using such concepts as drama's total and synthetic character raises the question of who is tasked with uniting the various theatrical elements into a coherent whole. The experimental theater has been clear about this, arguing that this is the task of the stage director.

At the end of the twentieth century, Chinese theater became increasingly conscious of the importance of stage direction. In contrast, traditional Chinese operatic drama has never used a stage director in the modern sense of the word. Such operatic drama is a conventional art form in which trade secrets are passed directly from the master to the apprentice. Once a student of traditional Chinese opera has absorbed all of the requisite knowledge and is qualified as a trained actor, he would know exactly how a role should be played and how this could be achieved. The practicalities of the overall operatic performance are left to the theater manager, while artistic expression and the style and quality of the acting are the actor's responsibility.

Although spoken drama of the twentieth century has usually utilized a stage director, the latter's role has often been a minor or marginal one. During the first decades of its existence, spoken drama was instead mostly an author's province. As long as it was dominated by a style of realism, performances aimed mainly at producing a faithful rendition of the essence of the text written by the playwright. Although later decades saw some outstanding and creative stage directors of spoken drama, the situation changed radically at the end of the century when the role of the director grew beyond the confines of an ordinary professional in artistic circles. By the end of the twentieth century, the stage director came to combine the roles of an interpreter of the text, teacher and coach for the actors, and creator of the artistic form of the performance; he became the "thinker of theatrical art" (Hu 1995: 392-396).

The development of the role of stage director in the experimental theater is often related to the autonomy of theater with respect to literature. As theater makes use of different arts and means of artistic expression, the need for a single individual to organize and draw everything together becomes more necessary. The task of the stage director is to search for an individual approach within the constraints of the text, the theatrical space, the technical possibilities, and various other factors.

It seems that the author and the literary text are no longer dominant in Chinese experimental theater, as compared with more traditional types of Chinese theater. Many PRC stage directors of the past twenty years have demonstrated that they can interpret local and foreign classical works in new ways, and they are able to adopt texts that initially appear to be non-theatrical and successfully transfer them to the stage. In doing this, stage directors have developed their own particular strategies for direction – to the extent that we can now discuss the separate styles of Lin Zhaohua (b. 1936), Mou Sen, and Meng Jinghui (both Mou and Meng were born in the 1960s), among many others. Mou Sen seems to be particularly keen on new solutions with regard to both acting and directing. He perceives the development of a performance as a process of self-education, of learning how to overcome internal barriers, and of becoming aware that this is a never-ending process. Mou Sen's projects are educational, and he envisions them as helping young people to liberate themselves from dogmatism, doctrinaire thinking, and false ideals that are instilled into each generation by a petrified system of official education (Salter 1996: 221-222).

The theater, as a place of "deconstruction," and at times even destruction, teaches its creators and audience the art of making the right choices. Interviews with Mou Sen suggest that he does not start to direct a play with a complete plan of its performance already in his mind. He seems to attach much more importance to the very process of creating the performance during rehearsals than to the initial ideas or the fi-

nal result (Wu Wenguang 2000: 338-346). The director expects his actors to be actively engaged in developing the performance, and this kind of theater gives them greater opportunity for individual improvisation and personal interpretation. Instead of providing the actors with ready-made solutions, Mou Sen has preferred to follow a path of exploration. The director is no longer someone who enforces ideas, but is more like a guide facilitating the journey along a more appealing path.

The dominance of the stage director in Chinese theater in recent years has forced playwrights to think about their texts increasingly in terms of theatrical categories. The new-style stage directors have also had an effect on their actors, who have been given far greater freedom than has ever been the case for actors in either the spoken drama or traditional Chinese operatic drama. The departure from the comfort zone of realist theater has meant the need to learn and absorb diverse acting techniques derived from various types of theatrical performances. While improvisation usually had a negligible role to play in traditional Chinese operatic theater, it has become a very important aspect of acting in experimental theater.

Theatrical space

Chinese experimental theater amounts to more than merely a new view of the tasks performed by stage directors, playwrights, and actors. It offers a wholly novel approach to theatrical space that often differentiates it from its modern Western counterpart. According to Pavis, the use of non-theatrical space in dramatic performances is no longer associated in the West with modernity and experimentation. Once this technique had subverted various rules of theatricality, it ceased to be of interest to the audience. Theatrical experimentation in the West now often reverts to the traditional, Italian-style stage (Pavis 2002: 375). Things have been slightly different in China, where for the last quarter of a century innovative stage directors have tended to move performances out of the theater hall altogether.

The ways to implement space in Chinese experimental theater seem to be endless (Wang Xiaoying 1994: 19-26). The more limited the setting and the use of sophisticated machinery, the more scope there is to stimulate the actors' and spectators' imaginations. Gao Xingjian was aware of this quite early in his career, and made use of it in his 1983 play *The Bus Stop* [*Chezhan*], suggesting that this play should be performed on a small stage in a conference hall or outdoors in the open air. If the play were to be staged in theaters, he suggested that the stage should be extended outwards into the theater in order to bring the actors and audience closer together (Gao Xingjian 1988a: 123). In *The*

Wild Man [*Yeren*] (1985), he put forward an even bolder tactic of staging the play in a public arena – and if this were not possible, he proposed that the play should be performed throughout the entire theater, not just on stage. According to Gao, reducing the distance between the audience and actors would result in a more informal, relaxed atmosphere. In addition, the arrangement of space emphasized the illusory nature of the play, reminding the audience repeatedly that they were in a theater and not observing something from real life. He still advocated using light and sound effects if they were necessary to create imaginary space or to support the acting (Gao Xingjian 1988b: 134; Huang 1988: 42-48).

Moving the site for performing a play outside of the theater building has given experimental theater the artistic freedom of its ancient predecessors. No pre-modern Chinese folk theater troupe was likely to have had a sophisticated building or large hall at their disposal. Instead, a traditional opera troupe would usually perform on a makeshift stage. However, on many occasions Chinese officials have feared the untamed forces that these itinerant theatrical performances could unleash through laughter and mockery, leading to a carnivalesque abandonment of social standards. They were constantly trying to keep the theater groups under their control, limiting the performances to certain districts where they could be controlled through a system of registration and licensing procedures. By the twentieth century, at least in urban areas the theater was confined to grand buildings – somewhat reminiscent of "prisons" and typically equipped with sophisticated machinery and props. In these theatrical halls, however, the theater's vitality gradually ebbed away as the system of governmental supervision and interference grew in strength and ambition.

The authorities' anxiety about the disruptive influence of theater in non-theatrical places and the overwhelming desire of the innovative theater makers to escape the confines of cavernous and soulless theater halls both seem understandable. Theater artists soon adopted the concepts originating from Western environmental theater and various forms of the theater of participation.[7] In 1989, *Xiju yishu* [The art of theater] published Richard Schechner's (b. 1934) text about the arrangement of space in the environmental theater. Critical discussions focused on the interdependence between actor and spectator on the one hand, and audience participation and theatrical space on the other. A particular issue was that theatrical events can take place both in a space used incidentally as well as in a space that has been specially assigned for this purpose. This space can be freely transformed and become a place where many performance-related events happen simultaneously. Environmental theater has followed in the footsteps of historical proto-theater in order to establish its dynamic presence within the space of every-

day life, thereby converting much of the audience from passive spectators into active participants.

In Chinese theater, the endeavor to meet the audience halfway – both literally and in a metaphorical sense – originated at the beginning of the 1980s, but intensified over the next decade as market-economy mechanisms took hold. The theater had to actively seek out and encourage people to buy tickets and attend performances. This was by no means easy, as many new competitive leisure and entertainment options were appearing as part of an increasingly Americanized life style.

Temporary stage setups gave directors exceptional freedom to arrange the space as they wanted, and so established a new type of contact with the audience. Stage directors used the temporary stages to test in practice various feasible methods of arranging the acting area *vis-à-vis* the audience, including a central arrangement with seating enclosing the stage on all four sides; a contrasting arrangement in which the stage enclosed the audience on all four sides; an arrangement in which the stage was surrounded by the audience on three sides; and an arrangement in which the stage was split into a few separate areas.

All of the experimental arrangements described in the paragraph above aimed to increase the spectator's sense of participation. The introduction of elements from environmental theater, which involved spectators in the plot and erased the boundary between reality and theater, was instrumental in breaking down the barrier between the stage and the audience. From the late 1980s onwards, theater groups would partially leave the theater building and stage performances outdoors in order to engage more fully with the audience. In 1989, when the Shanghai People's Art Theatre staged Sun Huizhu's *Tomorrow He'll Be Out of the Mountains* [*Mingri jiuyao chu shan*], they used the lawn in front of the theater as well as the building itself. Surrounding the stage with the audience or surrounding the audience with the actors increased the sense of intermingling between the two key groups, and encouraged interactive performance and observation (Ye 1998: 29). In 1994, Anton Chekhov's (1860-1904) *The Cherry Orchard* was staged in the halls, staircases, and garden of the Central Academy of Theatre in Beijing. The acting space kept moving from one area to another, overlapping or intruding into the space occupied by the audience (Ye 1998: 31-32).

The Chinese version of the "environmental theater" [*huanjing xiju*] has aroused both interest and anxiety in its breaching of the barrier between life and art. Some spectators have considered environmental theater damaging to their sense of theatricality. It is as if they had been deceived – they have felt that they lost their status as a spectator in having been compelled to take part in a strange world that demanded they should be both an active participant and an uninvolved observer at the same theatrical event. Others have felt a desire to participate in these

dramatic performances, but at the same time have been anxious about the process as it unfolded. The creators of these kinds of performances have undoubtedly been attempting to upend their audience's habits of perception, thereby coaxing intellectual reflection by undermining people's sense of self. In general, stage directors have intended to amplify the active perception and psychical involvement of the audience by breaking down traditional structures of theatrical space and mixing actors and audience into varied and dynamic new configurations (Ye 1998: 29-31).

The concepts of the environmental theater, the theater of participation, and the poor theater became fashionable in the theatrical community of mainland China during the final two decades of the twentieth century. These concepts had some impact on local experimental theater. However, there was already a long tradition of similar forms in Chinese theater. William Hui-zhu Sun recalls one of these – a theatrical initiative launched from 1932 to 1937 in Dingxian, northern China, with the assistance of Xiong Foxi (1900-1965) (Sun 1990: 155-166).[8] Likewise, Gao Xingjian refers to the even older traditions of folk ritual and performances of ancient origin that survive even to this very day, particularly in southern China around the Yangzi River basin. These performances, which take the form of theatrical and para-theatrical events, coexist with seasonal exorcist rituals. The aesthetics of this specific variety of the poor theater of participation have strongly influenced the poetics of early plays by Gao. Regrettably enough, the Chinese avant-garde of today hardly ever refers to the magical beauty of this unique theater of mask, puppet and actor.

Word, text, and theater

Chinese theater began to relinquish the *scène à l'italienne* at the beginning of the 1980s in the institutional theaters throughout the country. A phenomenon which began as a modest experiment intensified during the next decade as the experimental groups clearly showed a preference for acting in venues that are normally considered non-theatrical. Abandoning the regular stage meant learning to manage a more extensive and flexible open space. This affected the acting style, the interaction between the actor and the audience, and the ways of perceiving the theatrical work. Routine procedures and fossilized conventions were abandoned as theatrical pioneers ventured alone off the beaten track, leading them far away from the main road of official state-supported theater.

We may say, however, that in the course of experimentation, the Chinese theatrical avant-garde never managed to attain the levels of

achievement of its Western counterparts. On the other hand, the measure of avant-garde achievement should be its reaction to local tradition, not to external classics. Although the phenomenon of theater without text, plot or characters is not as popular in China as in the West, the elements of its aesthetics have infused Chinese experimental groups. As Henry Y.H. Zhao noticed:

> The major difference between Gao Xingjian and these new theatre experimentalists such as Mou Sen and Meng Jinghui lies in the fact that the latter are "Postmodern" in their anti-literary stance: they refuse to prepare a script, sometimes not even a plot outline. The reason why Mou Sen gave up Gao's *The Other Shore* and used a poem instead was that he wanted virtually no script but just some word-clusters that could provide an excuse for body language and the sounds uttered by the actors (Zhao 2000: 136).

Sometimes the literary text serves merely as a springboard for an autonomous theatrical work in which the logic of the plot, the principle of cause and effect, and the concept of characters are virtually undetectable. Instead, such performances are unpredictable and tend towards improvisation in the way they incessantly undermine accepted aesthetic standards and staging customs.

Contemporary Chinese theater often seeks to make playscripts out of literary texts that had not originally been designed for on-stage performance. An example is *File Zero* [*Ling dang'an*], directed in 1994 by Mou Sen and based on a poem by Yu Jian (b. 1954) with the same title (Yu 2000: 341-363). The performance marked a departure from the tradition of the finished theatrical form. One can develop a sense for Mou Sen's preferences along these lines by considering his choice of an avant-garde poem as the main text. In this play, entitled *File Zero*, a Kafkaesque atmosphere is generated through the dry bureaucratic language style of an official document: File Zero, as named in the title. This official document exerts a controlling influence over a given citizen's entire life from birth to death, thereby reflecting human submission to the mechanisms of state control. File Zero becomes symbolic of a secret, destructive force that cannot be controlled by man. The performance is constructed around the very metaphor of destruction (Salter 1996: 219-228). The poem itself contains no characters or plot in the traditional sense, so the characters to be staged were instead described to the actors during rehearsals. The actors were also free to incorporate fragments of their own life stories into the performance. The performance of *File Zero* is a tangle of fragments of stories derived from the biographies of performers, poetical metaphors, facts, and fiction. The stage di-

rector does not come into the theater with a ready-made concept of the stage performance of the text. The development of this performance was a process that evolved through the metamorphoses that occurred during the course of rehearsals in which actors were actively involved and encouraged to contribute snippets of their own personal experience (Wu Wenguang 2000: 338-346).[9]

In the performance of *On the Road* [*Zai lushang*] (1998, directed by Cao Kefei), the text is definitely no longer the dominant sign system.[10] It has the same status as any other aspect of the play, relinquishing a linear plot configuration in favor of a loose, collage-like structure. At times, the text even plays a secondary role in relation to messages conveyed by gesture, sound, and/or light. The structure of this performance, which explores the character of human existence using the metaphor of a road, emphasizes the perception of existence by means of a collage of separate elements. The performance is a sequence of symbolic images with an elaborate visual approach. Loosely structured episodes are bound together not only by the road metaphor, which implies movement in space, but also by recurrent musical motifs and excerpts from films. Released from its everyday communicative function, the word is translated into unintelligible noise, desperate and angry shouting, and contrasting moments of silence.

I Love xxx [*Wo ai xxx*] (1994), directed by Meng Jinghui, offers another way of using the word in the new theater.[11] Critics discern in Meng's performances many features typical of postmodernism, such as the tendency to combine various styles and means of expression, a taste for pastiche and parody, the use of new technologies such as video, and the departure from conventional principles of composition. Kwok-Kan Tam has described *I Love xxx*:

> There is rock music and dance, mixed with Chinese acrobatics, to produce visual effects of chaos, polyphony, repetition and disharmony. Yet after the scene of visual movement and chaos, the stage suddenly changes to a scene composed mainly of repetitive speeches constructed on a number of contradictory sentences based on the theme "I love something something." The speeches are delivered by two actors against the backdrop of slide projections of scenes taken from documentary films about revolutions, wars, strikes and demonstrations that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. This scene of speeches reminds the audience of the revolutionary speeches popular in the Cultural Revolution. It also creates a strong ironic effect which trivializes and negates what is meant to be great in revolution. At the meta-theatrical level, the production explicitly shows that on the stage only movement and

> gesture remain to carry meaning, while dialogue is reduced to the function of punctuation or footnote (Tam 2001: 207-208).

Paradoxically, on-stage movement is reduced to a minimum, and the dominating message in the performance seems to be the word, on which Meng comments willfully: "Language per se is part of our life ... Peasants can love their beasts of burden – why shouldn't we love language?" (Huot 2000: 77).

Even at the beginning of the 1980s, one could hear sonorous voices in the Chinese theater circle demanding not only that the subject matter of the plays should be more diverse and up-to-date, but also that the theatrical language should undergo a radical reform. It has become more and more urgent to develop a modern dramatic structure, a new model of acting, and a rethinking of the strategies of representation. The slow farewell to the mimetic concept of art was accompanied by a shift towards the positions of meta-art. Increased interest in theatricality was expressed by a continually asked question: what is the essence of theater? This was evident in the fact that the theater increasingly began to question itself. Plays by Gao Xingjian are an excellent illustration of this phenomenon, for the author constantly thinks in theatrical categories, employs a sophisticated theory of acting, and meticulously arranges theatrical space, thus leading to a renewal of the art of theater. It becomes a symptom of transgressing areas that had already been captured by language – an issue that dominates realist theater. In the new theater, the word frees itself from the obligation to communicate clear messages, and regains its original poetical force, thus acquiring musical value.

Chinese experimental theater has been a triumph of the intellect. The exposition of the intellectual character of a theatrical work positions it closer to the Western avant-garde. The audience comes to the theater seeking not only entertainment and leisure, but also in order to think and to be critical. Intellectualism results from a striving towards a more creative process of reception. An avant-garde theatrical work has been characteristically fragmentary, bears a sense of being unfinished, and its open structure requires completion on the part of the audience. Authors want their works to be open in order to encourage multiple interpretations, in stark contrast to previous dramas of socialist realism, which preferred a closed structure of transparent and unambiguous messages.

The contemporary Chinese avant-garde has been characterized by an ability to combine passion for experimentation with a sensible approach to tradition, both indigenous and foreign. In Chinese theater, the traditional and the contemporary have ceased to exclude each other. The past – especially the distant past – has provided what seems to be an inex-

haustible source of ideas when rethought and reinterpreted from the perspective of modern aesthetics. These developments have proved invaluable in stimulating the ongoing regeneration of the language of the new Chinese theater.

Notes

1 More about the Chinese avant-garde may be found in Noth (1994) and Gao Minglu (1998, 2001).
2 The first PRC anthology of Western theater of the absurd (Shi 1980) contains plays by Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot*), Eugène Ionesco (*Amédée or How to get Rid of It*), Edward Albee (*The Zoo Story*), and Harold Pinter (*The Dumb Waiter*). The first PRC anthology of Western modernist works (Yuan 1980) includes plays by August Strindberg (*The Ghost Sonata*), Georg Kaiser (*From Morn to Midnight*), Ernst Toller (*Masses and Man*), and Eugene O'Neill (*The Hairy Ape*). The second volume of the above anthology (Yuan 1981) contains Jean-Paul Sartre's *Morts sans sépultures* [The victors]. See also Tay 1990: 111, 117.
3 For a detailed analysis of the changes, see Zhang 1997.
4 The most important articles were collected in *Xijuguan zhengming ji* (1988).
5 For more about the demise of realistic poetics, see Quah 2004.
6 Konstantin Sergeivich Stanislavsky (1863-1938) was a Russian actor, director, and teacher of acting. "Rejecting the current declamatory style of acting, he sought for a simplicity and truth which would give a complete illusion of reality" (Hartnoll and Found 1996: 480).
7 The term "environmental theater" was coined by Richard Schechner, an American stage director and scholar, to indicate new tendencies in the theater of the 1970s such as endeavors to establish a new kind of relationship between the stage and the audience.
8 Xiong Foxi was a playwright and theater educator. After graduating from Yenching University in 1923, he went to New York to study drama at Columbia University. In 1926, Xiong returned to China and was appointed Professor of Drama at the Beijing Arts Academy, Yenching University, and Beijing University. "In 1932 Xiong Foxi left Beijing to head a theater project in the Dingxian village movement in Hebei, an ambitious rural reconstruction initiative inaugurated as a modernizing alternative to socialism and Communism" (McDougall and Louie 1997: 176).
9 For more about this performance, see Huot 2000: 80-82.
10 The VCD recording of the performance may be seen in Xu 1998.
11 The VCD recording of the performance may be seen in Meng 1994.

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8 Malraux's Hope: Allegory and the Voices of Silence

William D. Melaney

André Malraux's novel, *La Condition humaine* [Man's Fate], evokes broadly Hegelian expectations concerning the possibility of political action and the dialectical resolution of long-term conflicts. However, this same novel also frustrates these same expectations when it articulates matters of style, art and politics in a Chinese setting. The "world" of the novel is not defined in terms of a unified native tradition, but its international features are historically revealing and socially significant. Moreover, the cultural subtext that underlies the novel's plot constitutes an index for determining the nature of socio-cultural praxis under difficult conditions.

Hence, Malraux's novel can be shown to interface with cultural history in three distinct ways. First, the major protagonists in the novel embody an ambiguous but important connection with progressive ideology. Second, the cultural differences that figure prominently in the novel provide a material dimension to the network of signs that governs the structure of the work itself. Third, the emergence of "discontinuous" history in the novel complements a sense of narrative fictionality that provides the reader with a socially mediated view of historical transformation.

Ambiguities that invite a double reading

The critical reception of Malraux's novels was shaped during its formative period by French political styles that largely dominated the middle years of the twentieth century. The break with French Symbolist tradition, the rise of existentialism, and the ascendancy of neo-realism constituted the horizon for reading his novels as literary expressions of political activism. From this standpoint, Malraux's apparent individualism is complementary to his political stance. By following this trajectory, various critics have dismissed his late work in art history as basically unrelated to his undertakings as a novelist. A possible conflict between art and politics can be resolved in advance when cultural history is relegated to the margins of the author's biography. The identification of the

young Malraux with political activism thus reinforces a critical bias in favor of readings that would minimize ambiguity in interpretation.

It is perhaps curious that more recent criticism continues the political approach to the novel that originated during an earlier period. Whereas Post-War existentialism and a more recent turn toward literary content are concerned with how artistic representation reflects historical reality, contemporary critics have examined the author's political attitudes as structural features in his belief system. For instance, Marie-Paul Ha emphasizes that practically all of the revolutionaries portrayed in *La Condition humaine* are ethnically non-Chinese, a fact that seems to support an "Orientalist" conception of political revolution (2000: 60).[1] This reading is important, even if it is not entirely persuasive, as a corrective to the failure of previous generations of critics to confront the problem of Eurocentrism. The paucity of significant Chinese personages in the novel suggests that Malraux may not have had an entirely coherent view of cultural change in an East Asian context. However, in writing this novel, Malraux is not necessarily trying to represent a political revolution in the strict sense of the term. His novel might be better interpreted as an image of a society undergoing a crisis in stability than as an attempt to represent a distinct phase in a revolutionary process. Moreover, from a less specifically political standpoint, the novel might be read in terms of how nationhood emerges as a unique event in constituting modern China.

What appears to be retrograde in Malraux's novel, therefore, might be reconceived even today in terms of a double reading to the degree that a single set of practices might be interpreted in two contrasting ways. The presence of Eurocentrism or Orientalism in a novel does not necessarily reveal the cultural biases of the author. On the contrary, these tendencies may be present as motivating factors in an actual historical situation, in which they function as symptoms of an underlying malaise. At the same time, these same tendencies could just as easily suggest the possibility of ideologically complex links between China and the West. When connected in this way, the more questionable traits of various individual characters in the novel indicate on another register how May Fourth ideology underscored a certain relationship between China and Western modernity, just as it served a basically progressive function in the Chinese national context.[2]

From the standpoint of this double reading, the three main characters in the novel, namely, Gisors Senior, Kyo and Chen, represent the "outsider" status of key persons in the revolutionary struggle, just as they figure as remnants of a surviving ideology. In the first reading, outsider status would be a reflection of the author's own situation as a Western observer, whose perspective on the moment of change would naturally focus on the heroism of exceptional individuals, rather than

on the anonymous contributions of local or indigenous groups. At the same time, this somewhat alien perspective has the more positive meaning of opening up a space for a multicultural reading of a necessarily fragmented social text. The small social group that occupies the center of the novel can be situated in the interstices between an international culture with no real political commitments and a national cultural that has not yet acquired a definite political identity. From this standpoint, Malraux is a profound realist insofar as he accurately portrays what would have been a likely situation facing disaffected rebels during this period in modern Chinese history. The second reading, in contrast, would allow the novel to be interpreted in more strongly historical terms. By viewing the same subject matter as the dim reflection of a constituted ideology, we can relate apparently unconnected details of plot and character to an ongoing narrative that encompasses all of the events depicted.

The place of the three main characters in the novel demonstrates how this double reading can provide a basis for interpreting the underlying narrative as both cultural and historical at the same time. On the one hand, Gisors Senior, Kyo and Chen depart from native traditions in background, education and knowledge of the world. Gisors combines Orientalist proclivities for opium addiction with an aesthetic attitude toward life that both recalls the formal values of High Modernism and isolates him from the turbulent Chinese world that constitutes the topic of his theoretical reflections:

> Kyo habitait avec son père une maison chinoise sans étage: quartre ailes autour d'un jardin. Il traverse la première, puis le jardin, et entra dans le hall: à droite et à gauche, sur les murs blancs, des peintures Song, des phénix bleu Chardin; au fond, au Bouddha de la dynastie Wei, d'un style presque roman. Des divans nets, une table à opium. Derrière Kyo, les vitres nues comme celles d'une atelier (1946: 35).[3]
> [Kyo lived with his father in a single-storey Chinese house: four wings surrounding a garden. He passed through the first one, then through the garden, and entered the hall: right and left, on the white walls, Song dynasty paintings, Chardin-like blue phoenixes; at the end, a Buddha of the last dynasty, nearly Romanesque in style. Plain divans, an opium table. Behind Kyo, the windows, bare like those of a workshop.]

This family residence, while obviously synthetic in the way that it mingles a clutter of cultural styles from different periods, also contains aesthetic meanings that are irreducible to matters of moral decline. The Song dynasty paintings that resemble the "phénix bleu Chardin"

[Chardin-like blue phoenixes] are classical in some cross-cultural sense, whereas the carving of the Buddha is "d'un style presque roman" [nearly Romanesque in style], thereby refuting its assimilation to Eastern iconography. The reference to "les vitres nues comme celles d'une atelier" [the windows, bare like those of a workshop], introduces an element of simplicity that also implies austerity. Hence, what appears in one context as a miscellaneous collection of items that belong to an "international style" of dubious cultural value can be translated into a Chinese idiom containing historical meanings that are emblematic of a particular place and time (Frohoch 1952: 78).

Gisors himself combines elements of May Fourth ideology with conservative attitudes that compromise his role in the revolutionary movement. As readers of the novel, we learn that as Professor of Sociology at Beijing University, Gisors was dismissed as a subversive, and then went on to organize political cadres in northern China (1946: 35). His name derives from that of a provincial French town, while his opium addiction and artistic interests separate him from mainstream Chinese culture (Roudiez 1978: 303).

Gisors embodies a spirit of self-denial that is in some sense "classical," just as it establishes a connection to an ancient world: "Vivons-nous pour nous? Nous ne sommes rien. Nous vivons pour l'État dans le prèsent, pour l'ordre des morts à travers la durée des siècles ..." (1946: 47) [Do we live for ourselves? We are nothing. We live for the State in the present, for the order of the dead that lasts through the centuries ...]. He sympathizes with the revolutionary movement and by no means capitulates to the forces of reaction. However, Gisor's link to the past binds him to a premodern mentality that is perhaps vaguely Confucian, and thus separates him from the anti-traditionalism of May Fourth New Culture Movement ideology. His radicalism is primarily theoretical rather than practical, and his patriarchal aura prevents him from emerging as a full-fledged equal in the revolutionary movement.

For all of these reasons, Gisors forms a neat contrast to Chen, his former pupil and activist disciple. In terms of his nationality or ethnicity, which is a mixture of Han Chinese and European, Chen often seems to come closer than anyone else in the novel to assuming the role of an indigenous national revolutionary. His Western-style education in a Chinese Lutheran missionary school and his adoption of an ascetic attitude toward the body predispose him to a life replete with risk and danger (55). His belief in the value of action is what more strongly distinguishes him from Gisors, but it also implicates him in an obsession with political ends and the belief in expediency for its own sake. Indeed, Chen's attempt to assassinate Chiang Kai-shek turns out to be a dismal failure. There is something demented about Chen, while his inhuman attitudes partake of immersion in the sacred (123). Chen is an agent of

extremism, for his active embrace of death in a high-risk assassination attempt is more of a personal choice than a politically responsible act.

Gisor's son, Kyo, constitutes the center of the novel in taking up a political position that is more broadly credible, just as he represents the possibility of love in an often violent world. While obviously sympathetic to the revolutionaries, Malraux's understanding of them is nuanced, and cannot be summarized in terms of the career of a single individual. He offers us a picture of China's Nationalist Party, or *Guomindang* [*Kuomintang*], at a turning point in the history of modern Chinese politics when the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek has become increasingly problematic. Kyo, in this context, represents the split between the Guomindang and the emergence of a new kind of nationalism that is neither fully articulate nor bound to political orthodoxy. Although of Japanese descent, Kyo gravitates toward Communism, which he interprets as more of a will to revolutionary action than a doctrine requiring a uniformity of standpoint. In his arguments with Katov, he articulates and defends an arguably proto-Maoist position concerning the key role of rural farmers and the need for rural revolution and land reform. Kyo's belief in the overriding importance of the rural masses, however, distances him from both Guomindang ideology and the existing official Chinese Communist ideology, which, during this first decade of its development in the 1920s, remains in many ways inflexibly beholden to Moscow and its Comintern. Hence, despite Kyo's outsider status, he represents a forward-looking kind of nationalism that does not yet possess the delimited meaning that it would begin to acquire in less than a decade.

Moreover, in his relationship with May, a young woman of German descent whose political commitments overwhelm her personal identity, Kyo establishes an unstable intimacy that transcends action. His close companionship with her has less to do with individualist desire than with the discovery of some inner core of being that can be affirmed on a deeply emotional level.[4] It is May who introduces the possibility of solidarity in the face of death: "Pourquoi des êtres qui s'aiment sont-ils en face de la mort, Kyo, si ce n'est pour la risquer ensemble?" (1946: 163) [Why do people who love one another face death, Kyo, if not to risk it together? (May asks)].

The theme of freedom finally emerges as a mutual one within the context of their common project. May wears a mask of indifference upon accepting Kyo's departure as a political activist, but the bond between them proves to be more powerful than the conflicts and differences that separate them. When captured and subjected to König's police interrogation, Kyo refuses to implicate his fellow revolutionaries or otherwise capitulate to the authorities, but instead remains steadfast in the belief that his uncompromising silence under police interrogation

has collective significance. May's reaction to Kyo's subsequent death reveals the truth of her devotion as she learns that "c'était quelque chose d'elle-même, non d'étranger, qui lui était arraché" (253) [it was something of herself, not foreign, that was torn from her].

Kyo's ideological role, while problematic in some respects, occupies a unique place in the novel. Gisors and Chen take up positions of radical solitude, whereas Kyo ultimately affirms the value of the other in his love for May and in his confrontation with political repression. While consciously progressive in his attitudes, Gisors is detached from life and views Marxism as flawed by a terrible element of fatalism or inevitability. The death of Kyo sends him into a deep depression, in which his own son's features become less real to him than the lost world of former emperors. Chen bungles his supreme act of political terrorism in a manner that suggests a neglect of practical personal safety measures. Kyo, however, adopts a positive attitude toward Marxism and opposes the members of the Guomindang, who are in collusion with non-Marxist Western interests in China. And yet, Kyo's existential anxieties tend to isolate him from his fellow revolutionaries and from the Chinese people as a whole. While occupying the nationalist position in a manner that is both original and forward-looking, he also testifies to the pathos of the individual who maintains a basically abstract relationship to others.

Beyond the Hegelian dialectic

Malraux's novel can also be read as an antidote to Hegelian conceptions of narrative and political identity, which emphasize ideal unity at the expense of cultural difference. The problem with such conceptions is not that they favor concreteness and historical density over more formal approaches to human experience. Hegel's approach has become suspect in recent times for very different reasons. Primarily, it has fallen into disfavor due to its integration of classical teleology into the dialectical method. Few commentators still believe that the contending positions of thesis and antithesis inevitably converge in producing a unified result or Hegelian synthesis. Observing that the different nationalisms in Malraux's narrative do not combine to support a satisfying view of the future, we easily become suspicious of "dialectical" readings of the novel.[5] The death of Kyo is tragic from the perspective of a progressive ideology, just as May's exile to Moscow offers little hope for those who must live in the shadows of a thwarted dialectic.

However, the novel also opens up post-Hegelian perspectives in foregrounding the material dimension of life as it emerges though human interaction. Malraux allows us to criticize Hegelian idealism on the level

of verbal communication, which ceases to be a token of pure transparency.

In a conversation with Lu, Kyo remarks that he was not able to recognize his own voice when listening to it in a recording. Lu responds that the confusion cannot be explained as technical distortion: we are simply not used to hearing our own voice from an external perspective, and thus have no way of recognizing it easily when it is detached from its point of origin (1946: 17). This phenomenon is more than a matter of mere habit. Other persons do not hear us in the same way that we hear ourself. Furthermore, we would experience ourself *as other* to ourself if we heard ourself as other persons hear us. This is another way of saying that we have little control over how others perceive us. The sound component in language acquires an unstable meaning once it enters into a communicative matrix that cannot be controlled from the outside. Malraux discusses the significance of this experience with respect to the title of his novel in *Les Voix du silence*:

> I have written elsewhere of the man who fails to recognize his own voice on the gramophone, because he is hearing it for the first time through his ears, and not through his throat; and because our throat alone transmits to us our inner voice, I called this book *La Condition humaine* (1953: 630).

Standard readings of Malraux's novel interpret this experience in narrowly existential terms, that is, as a confirmation of the individual's radical solitude. Gisors remarks on how the throat alone allows us to hear ourselves speak, and then compares this hidden movement to the withdrawal of the opium addict (1946*:* 38). However, in another context, Kyo relates these remarks to what is irreducible to human action – which, in his case, could be communicated only through love (46). While others hear this voice and judge him on the basis of external signs, May alone opens up the difference between life and deeds as well as the possibility of reciprocal recognition: "Pour May seule, il était pas ce qu'il avait fait, pour lui seul, était tout autre chose que sa biographie" (46) [To May alone, he was not what he had done; to him alone, she was something other than her biography].

This final meaning returns us to the issue of mediation, since love involves a possible relation between self and other that challenges the dominant existential paradigm. Kyo's confrontation with König may not result in political success, but it does serve as a test that enables him to demonstrate his solidarity with others. Death enters his world as a precondition for a political decision that involves a solemn pledge – in other words, the pledge of silence that testifies to his membership in a dedicated revolutionary community.[6] Before Kyo stands opposed to Kö-

nig, we know that he is in any case a foreigner in the eyes of his Chinese associates (1946: 232). Nonetheless, he defends Communist ideology and rejects collaboration. At the same time, the space in which he finds himself as he contemplates suicide is like the waiting room that Pascal identified with the human condition. Prior to taking his own life, Kyo recalls his own voice as it always sounded to others: "Il se souvint – le Coeur arête – des disques phonographe. Temps oú l'épair conservait un sens!" (246) [He remembered – his heart stopped beating – the phonograph records. A time when hope retained a meaning!]. What is particularly ironic about this memory is that it marks the disjunction between self and other that verges on non-meaning itself.

In Malraux's novel, therefore, the prospect of hope is related to the threat of incoherence and non-meaning, rather than to dialectics per se. The memory that brings Kyo hope during his final hours is a material residue, which evokes other signs of non-meaning in a world that often reverses temporal sequences. In an image that clearly has Orientalist overtones but also marks his intentions, Chen is compared to "un épervier de bronze egyptien" (47-48) [an Egyptian bronze hawk]. Ferral, the arch-imperialist, decorates his office with early Picassos that might already seem "postmodern" in a financial setting that includes a Fragonard sketch and a black stone carving, "achetée sur les conseils de Clappique et que Gisors croyait faussee" [bought on Clappique's advice and which Gisors believed to be false]. The difference between Clappique's ill-informed advice and Gisor's marginalized expertise allows us to relate the Western colonial mentality to a commercial project that undermines historical knowledge. We should note as well that this is also the fictional setting in which a representative of Chiang Kai-shek seeks to obtain Western intervention against Communist forces.

Material references thus enable us to look backward as well as forward in a narrative that is composed of breaks through which key incidents acquire ambiguous meanings. Such breaks often announce the rift between the nation and history that widens as the novel unfolds.[7] Malraux indicates how the Shanghai insurrection produces the schism that split the Guomindang into rival factions, just as he suggests how Moscow contributed to the scenario of betrayal. However, cultural signs remain proof that alternative histories retain credibility in a situation that might have had a different outcome. When Kyo fails to recognize his own voice on the gramophone, he is not simply imprisoned in an "inner voice" that isolates him from others. The discrepancy between the way that I perceive myself and the way that others perceive me might be described in terms of the distance between "inner" and "outer" worlds. However, this distance is related to a cleavage that lies at the heart of experience itself. The militants who populate Malraux's novel are engaged in constituting the political and ideological apparatus of a

revolutionary party. Partly for this reason, they are acutely aware of how human deeds can acquire unintended meanings that either block the future or else contribute to what might bring about a more satisfactory outcome.

Historical interpretation of *La Condition humaine*

Malraux's conception of history as expressed in both his novels and art criticism has been contested with respect to its meaning and implications.[8] The problem of historical interpretation becomes particularly crucial to a reading of *La Condition humaine* that attempts to ground the text in actual events and living persons. James Greenlee has discussed the role of Zhou Enlai in helping to organize a union-led general strike, which resulted in "a model uprising" and the proclamation of a "citizens' government" in Shanghai (1975: 6). After arriving in Shanghai from the north, Chiang Kai-shek negotiated agreements with foreign interests and underworld bosses, turning against the Communists, his erstwhile allies who had been in control of much of Shanghai since the successful completion of the workers' uprising. Zhou Enlai subsequently managed to escape to Guangzhou [Canton], thus averting capture or death at the hands of the Guomindang (61).

Zhou Enlai's function in this truncated narrative is comparable to Kyo's role in Malraux's novel. David Wilkinson refers to Kyo as a Bolshevik hero, but acknowledges that the term has a special meaning in Malraux's case (1957: 70-71). The general import of these historiographical reflections might enable us to read Malraux's novel as an allegory in the traditional sense. However, this reading does not allow us to see how radical discontinuity enters the texture of the novel in the form of breaks and ruptures that complicate the plot. Samir Amin has critically examined the notion of "progressive history" that strongly figures whenever the movement from classical Greece to capitalist Europe assumes the status of a received idea (1989: 89-90). Surely Malraux's novel decenters this movement by introducing the dilemma of Chinese nationalism and demonstrating how this dilemma involves ideological considerations that are not unique to China.

In *La Métamorphose des dieux*, Malraux defines "discontinuous history" as an approach to the past that would cease to identify ancient Egypt with "the childhood of humanity," but instead envisions it as a moment in time that has been left behind (1960: 32). History becomes discontinuous, since it cannot be equated with a series of totalizations that tend to produce incontestable results. From a critical standpoint that rejects totalization, this failure to appreciate historical discontinuity would not only emerge in "Orientalism," but in "Occidentalism" as

well. Xiaomei Chen discusses how Occidentalism involves the false attempt of political authority to appropriate the Western Other as ideologically neutral in sustaining the nationalist project.[9]

May, Katov and Hemmelrich embody political styles that predate the Sino-Soviet split. All of them represent versions of Westernization that involve the repression of cultural differences, if not the support of nationalist ideology. The false sense of continuity between East and West that they variously suggest runs counter to the disruptive features of Chinese nationalism. In contrast, May Fourth ideology on its radical side was anti-traditionalist in a manner that involves a break with China's past, rather than a gesture of ultimate reconciliation with the West. The value of discontinuous history in Malraux's historical vision can be related to the question of whether or not it allows us to imagine a possible future that is unlike China's pre-modern past.

While basic to the discussion of cultural history that has been pivotal to my argument, this question could be rearticulated in terms of Malraux's largely convincing but non-dialectical account of modern Chinese history. Support in this regard comes unexpectedly from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's essay, "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," which identifies Malraux with Hegelianism while also acknowledging the writer's acute sensitivity to matters of style and expression. Merleau-Ponty contrasts the fragments of Heraclitus' philosophical writings with broken statues and fragments of ancient sculpture that can merely communicate mythically: "In short, language speaks, and the voices of painting are the voices of silence" (1964: 81). Yet his own analysis of language not only emphasizes the differential nature of words, but clarifies how the "spaces" between words prevent us from turning discrete utterances into the locus of verbal meaning. Malraux's novel, ironically enough, often employs cultural history and material references in ways that enable "the voices of silence" to be heard as constituting the "allegorical" image of an unknown future.

From this standpoint, *La Condition humaine* is once again susceptible to a double reading, since the voices that are silenced in the crushing of the Shanghai uprising also help constitute an alternative history. While the death of Kyo comes to symbolize total defeat for old Gisors, we readers are invited to interpret this same event as a prelude to a national awakening that has not yet discovered its appropriate political form. Kyo's unwillingness to betray his fellow militants while under police interrogation implies a bond of solidarity that potentially unites all of the Chinese in the struggle against foreign oppression. The future that this bond anticipates would be based on practical ties among individuals from diverse backgrounds, but it also points back to a common historical experience. The significance of allegory in this case would not be limited to the presence of actual correspondences between

fictional and historical persons. On the contrary, the novel could be read in a more open manner as the largely Utopian projection of an ideal community that required commitment and sacrifice in order to spring into being.

Moreover, allegory in this context would not be the abstract expression of theory, but a concrete instance of a history that might have actually occurred under a set of different circumstances. From the perspective of this moment of supreme engagement, we might interpret the "tragedy" of the Shanghai uprising as an allegory of both closure and hope. The figure of Kyo in this double reading could be linked to irrational desire and a failure to communicate, but also to an acceptance of death that has political implications beyond the setback of his evident defeat.

The clearest literary analogue to the novel, if read in this way, would surely be Sophocles's *Antigone*, a work that reverberates in the philosophical tradition as well as in the Western literary canon. Hegel's reading of the play becomes especially important in this context as an attempt to assimilate tragedy to the dialectics of the Spirit, which retains a "trace" on the margins of presence of what cannot be assimilated to an ongoing movement. While most interpretations of Hegel emphasize the transitional nature of the Antigone legend in the ongoing movement of his thought, we are not necessarily amiss in arguing that his peculiar failure was perhaps to have overlooked the connection between reason and non-reason that animates the drama in question. Hegel clearly identifies Haemon with rationality, which can be defined as praxis on the basis of his verbal confrontation with Creon's unjust authority.[10] Antigone, in contrast, is associated with both the eternal laws and the religious guardians of the hearth, whose political significance is more strictly limited. In Hegelian terms, the relationship between them merely constitutes the site where the dialectic breaks down, instead of providing a potential bridge between attitudes that point toward another future in which the role of universality is no longer assigned to the male leader as a matter of course. Returning to Malraux's novel, we might envision a reversal of roles whereby May assumes the more "rational" identity at the end of the novel, suppressing her emotions and accepting exile in a Western society that offers solace on its own terms. Kyo, like Antigone, perishes at an embattled site where the voices of silence confer meaning on a world that is yet to be born. Once again, however, the situation seems to be one of closure insofar as the modern male protagonist has merely changed places with the female protagonist in classical tragedy, while the difference between them remains unclarified.[11]

We might conclude that Malraux, like Hegel, empties the female figure of the political role that may be necessary if a dominant male

authority is to be deprived of his representative status. May's exile to the Soviet Union is falsely dialectical, because it does not take into account the political possibilities of Chinese nationalism that are better represented by the Shanghai insurgents than by those who achieve a temporary victory through a historical compromise. However, Malraux's Kyo embodies a spirit of solidarity that, on a different level, develops Antigone's symbolic gesture of union with the dead brother, which offers the ultimate pretext for her political defiance. His place in the double reading is thus that of a fragile human link that opens up the possibility of intersubjectivity through a symbolic appropriation of material inscriptions, but it is also that of a figure providing the condition of nationhood as the perpetual recurrence of death and mourning. This perpetual recurrence is modern in the precise sense that it attempts to ground the nation in definite acts of historical meaning, but it goes beyond the modern in retaining a trace of what cannot be given a home in historical time.

Notes

1 The idea of "Orientalism" advanced in this paper is consistent with that of Edward Said, who attempts to ground the concept historically as an ideological ally of Western imperialism. By insisting that the heyday of imperialism was basically the late nineteenth century, Said emphasizes the historical nature of his reflections in *Orientialism* (1979: 3). Orientalism might be present in the tendency of Western ideology to attribute acts of rebellion to a mythic Other, instead of interpreting them in practical terms. However, the confused nature of political consciousness in pre-War China would have made it very difficult for Maulrax to have presented the Shanghai uprising as an entirely indigenous uprising.

2 To a large extent, the view that the May Fourth Movement is a progressive and quasi-socialistic response to Western hegemony is corroborated by the standard accounts. See Chow Tse-tsung (1960), Lin Yu-sheng (1978) and Vera Schwarz (1986).

3 See André Malraux, *La Condition humaine* (1946). All translations from this text are my own.

4 Tannery argues that Kyo and May are a "true couple" who symbolize the attempt to overcome "possessive individualism" in their shared political experiences and joint devotion to a political cause (1991: 24). To be sure, their relationship is politically significant, yet in an indirect way, it also exposes the fault-lines in a political alliance that would break up during the Maoist ascendancy for largely nationalistic reasons.

5 The novel's tragic ending precludes a strongly Hegelian reading that would attempt to reconcile historical optimism with the realities of the Shanghai uprising. A tendency to interpret the novel in broadly Hegelian terms persists, however, whenever any single discourse is elevated over all of the other discourses. For instance, the eulogy on work that can be found near the conclusion of the novel might be assigned a dialectical meaning that defines the goals of history in providential terms. It would be more sensible, nevertheless, to read the novel as a set of related discourses than as the image of a predetermined future.

6 In discussing the struggle for recognition in his major work, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel demonstrates how the Bondsman contributes to the formation of genuine self-consciounsess in confronting the specter of death, which is represented by the sovereign Lord. This famous parable has political meanings that extend well beyond Hegel and were developed later by Marx and his followers. Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of the "pledge group" is a more recent transformation of the earlier Hegelian paradigm (417-428).

7 The basic thesis of Prasenjit Duara's important book, *Rescuing History from the Nation* (1996), argues that since hegemonic nationalism often works against the development of historical consciousness, we should be hesitant to identify any single political organization with the "meaning" of history. Duara's comments on nationalism in modern India might be useful for suggesting how other Asian societies might benefit from popular forms of social organization that are less centralized than what tended to be dominant in twentieth-century China.

8 Gombrich emphasizes Malraux's indebtedness to "the extremist philosophies of Nietzsche and Spengler," which enabled him to point to historical discontinuities and revolutionary ruptures that separate one culture from another, while allowing us to perceive their radical otherness in terms of "myths" that we ourselves have made (1976: 169).

9 From this standpoint, Occidentalism is a "discursive practice" that construes the Western Other in active terms but also sustains the West's appropriation of the East in a nationalist project that is politically suppressive (Chen 2002: 2-3). While Occidentalism and Orientalism seem to be contradictory processes, we can imagine situations in which both ideological positions conspire to suppress what gives non-Western cultures their historical originality.

10 Hegel identifies Antigone's brother, Haemon, with a movement in consciousness that transfers authority from the sphere of the family to that of the state: "The brother is the member of the Family in whom its Spirit becomes an individuality which turns towards another sphere, and passes over into the consciousness of universality" (1977: 275).

11 Judith Butler's fascinating study, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (2000), argues that the issue of gender should be integrated into a new assessment of Antigone's significance. By crossing the boundaries between family and state, as well as life and death, Antigone as a female protagonist opens up ethical perspectives that continue to have political resonance. My post-Hegelian reading of Malraux's novel, *La Condition humaine*, ultimately assigns Kyo a similar role in a general economy of love, absence, and desire.

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9 Reception, Reappropriation, and Reinvention: Chinese Vernacular Fiction and Elite Women's Reading Practices in Late Chosŏn Korea

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In her article "Female Virtues in Chosŏn Korea," Martina Deuchler defines Chosŏn elite (*yangban*) women as "Confucian women" who contributed to the perpetuation of the Confucian system well into the twentieth century (Deuchler 2003: 165). Such remarks aptly sum up the persistence of the Confucian indoctrination of Korean women during the Chosŏn period (1372-1910).

Since at least the fifteenth century, Korean women's education had been regulated by the Chosŏn government, which was convinced that women's moral education was vital to the social transmission of Confucian norms and values, as well as to the perpetual maintenance of Confucian dominance in state and society. A broad variety of pedagogical moral tracts for women that were published by the government or established families throughout the Chosŏn dynasty illustrate how seriously the ruling strata regulated women's education.[1] Most likely, the publication of many such texts that were aimed at women implies the emergence of large numbers of Korean women whose level of literacy had increased substantially from earlier times.

A few well-educated Korean women such as Queen Consort Sohye, mother of King Sŏngjong (1457-1494), who compiled the *Naehun*, argued that female education was imperative not only for the sake of preparing women for their proper roles as daughters-in-law, wives, and mothers in the inner quarters, but also for enhancing the moral condition of public life in general.[2] In this sense, we may presume that the idea of increasing women's knowledge by means of written texts was not at odds with the orthodox Confucian tradition – as long as those texts conveyed the essence of Confucian ideology. Such historical evidence demonstrates the fallaciousness of received wisdom about conservative Neo-Confucian learning supposedly serving as an obstacle to women's acquisition of reading and writing skills in traditional East Asian societies.

However, it is by no means a simple task to understand what sort of impact this Neo-Confucian learning had on the self-cultivation and cultural autonomy of pre-modern Korean women – or at least on women in pre-modern Korea's social elite, who had enough resources and lei-

sure to pursue such learning. Not surprisingly, we can come across quite a few negative views about women's education in the Chosŏn dynasty: that is, such learning contributed less to women's cultural autonomy than to the Confucianization of Korean women. Despite Chosŏn elite women's active role as guardians of Confucian values, Deuchler also argues that these women failed to build the kind of "female networks" that were so celebrated in the urbanized and commercialized Lower Yangzi, or Jiangnan, region in late imperial China, because "not only were the boundaries of the inner quarters more strictly observed, but most elite women lived in isolated villages that were remote from towns and marketplaces" (Deuchler 2003: 165).

Should we conclude along with Deuchler that the restricted and isolated milieu in which Korean elite women typically dwelled must have prevented them from constructing female networks that extended beyond the household – and that there thus remained few possibilities for the development of a women's culture of their own? Even in the case of late imperial China, that country's celebrated women's culture was limited to Jiangnan elite society during part of the Ming-Qing period (1368-1911): it was far from a generalized condition throughout the entire empire and multiple dynastic eras, but instead circumscribed within a narrow regional and historical context. In the case of Korea, we might find a parallel to the late imperial Jiangnan elite female network in the affluent *yangban* elite society, commonly called *kyŏnghwa sejok*, which existed in Seoul, the capital and imperial court of the Chosŏn dynasty. Judging from the case of late imperial China in which increasing female literacy rates were vital to the formation of women's culture, should we instead reconsider the roles that *han'gŭl* (the highly efficient Korean orthography invented by a few distinguished scholar-officials in the fifteenth century) and Korean vernacular literature played in facilitating female networks and formulating women's culture in pre-modern Seoul?

By distributing Confucian precepts and moral tracts among the people on the one hand and banning the circulation of rebellious or obscene books on the other, Korean ruling elites attempted to confine the role of the *han'gŭl* script and popular texts mainly to a medium for the moral edification of the illiterate and semi-literate masses, especially elite women. However, a closer look at the reading material available during that time indicates that there was a sizeable gap between what the ruling elites exhorted women to read and what most literate women actually read. The spread of *han'gŭl*, coupled with urbanization, the expansion of commercial printing, and the development of popular culture, led to the "uncontrolled" production and consumption of numerous types of popular literature and other entertainment texts. As far as women's culture is concerned, *han'gŭl* and vernacular literature transformed it into "a culture of a reading public," and softened the ostensi-

bly rigid boundaries between such polarities as male vs. female, inner vs. outer, public vs. domestic, visible vs. invisible, and readable vs. unreadable. This suggests that women's use of *han'gŭl* and the production and consumption of vernacular literature did not achieve the sorts of results that the government or the political elite had been hoping for.

In this sense, it is worth examining how Korean elite women, through their reading and writing practices, shaped, diffused, and preserved their own culture without seriously challenging the Confucian socio-political order or violating existing literary norms, dominated as the latter were by male elites. Even more surprisingly, educated women gradually persuaded many men to acknowledge the fact that women's education and women's written culture played a key role in transmitting elite standards and norms from one generation to the next, while they constructed their own women's cultural tradition by revising and subverting Confucian norms in various subtle ways.

In studying the female reading public and women's literate culture in Chosŏn Korea, Chinese vernacular novels are of particular interest, in that these kinds of writings proved to have great appeal both to male and female pre-modern Korean readerships. It was not until the seventeenth century that the circulation of Korean translations of Chinese vernacular novels moved beyond a small group of elite male readers to reach a truly popular readership in which elite women became the majority component within the overall popular readership.

My main focus in this chapter is on the Chinese vernacular fiction that was translated into vernacular Korean for a wide readership – along with elite women's reading patterns beginning with the seventeenth century. Despite the sketchiness of historical records and hard statistical data, it is not an impossible task to infer the degree to which women appreciated popular literature and reconstructed their own subculture by borrowing, reinterpreting, and reinventing the cultural meanings of those popular texts. In particular, what concerns me most is to reveal how popular texts penetrated women's subjective life; how women, despite elite male trepidations about this kind of reading, turned "popular" reading into a natural component of daily life; and how women built up their own cultural domain and expanded their cultural networks through their reading and writing practices.

The world of readers

There is no doubt that the emergence of elite women as popular readers in the late seventeenth century was closely linked with the overall political, economic, sociological and cultural changes of that era. As a matter of fact, Chosŏn society underwent unprecedented turmoil and

dislocation during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. For example, that historical period witnessed the full-scale Japanese invasions of Korea in 1592 and 1596, along with the Manchu attacks on Korea of 1627 and 1636. In addition, the Chosŏn government's capitulation to the "barbarian" Manchus and the subsequent fall of China's Ming dynasty in 1644 were viewed by Chosŏn elites as the complete breakdown of the existing world order.[3]

This extreme social and political turmoil led the country's elite to a search for fresh approaches to thinking about possible solutions – to what nowadays might be considered new paradigms. Although the state continued to declare its allegiance to Neo-Confucian orthodoxy and attempted to reinforce state control over the scholarly community, it was unable to prevent the rise of new cultural movements during the seventeenth century. Intellectual diversity emerged as one of the most marked cultural tendencies in new cultural movements such as *sirhak* [practical learning]. The *sirhak* movement reflected not only traditional schools and varieties of Confucianism, but also new intellectual tendencies such as the Qing dynasty *kaozheng* [evidential research] school, Western science, and Christianity. In this intellectual milieu, Korean literati tended to be less concerned with statecraft and government than with cultural projects such as compilation, philology, and literary and artistic creation.[4] The rise of popular culture during this period cannot be dissociated from such social and cultural upheavals.

Along with the gradual expansion of the book publishing market during the late Chosŏn period, many Korean intellectuals were more fully exposed than ever before to currents in Chinese culture by the large-scale importation of Chinese books. This huge influx of Chinese books into Korea would have not been possible without China's own commercial publishing boom and concomitant expansion of its book market. In particular, Korean readers were enthralled by the emerging popular literary genres, especially the vernacular novel, which attained literary sophistication and thus respectability probably for the first time in seventeenth-century China.

By the reigns of King Yŏngjo (r. 1724-1776) and King Chŏngjo (r.1776-1800), known as an age of Korean "cultural renaissance," Korean literati appear to have enjoyed relatively easy access to the bulk of Chinese vernacular novels and dramas that had been published during the Ming and the early-to-mid Qing.[5] The notable commercialization of printing techniques facilitated the mechanical reproduction of relatively expensive Chinese books, and these shoddy marketplace editions of Chinese books reprinted in Korean publishing houses found a new middle-class urban readership that included low-ranking government functionaries, doctors, merchants, craftsmen, and literati of limited means. Such a wide circulation of Chinese novels beyond the bound-

aries of high society eventually facilitated the large-scale production of Korean-language translations of Chinese novels, along with the emergence of a popular readership for home-grown Korean vernacular literature.

Furthermore, Korean readers' much-improved access to various Chinese vernacular novels significantly reduced the level of contempt that had been traditionally expressed for vernacular fiction in Korea. For the first time in Chosŏn Korea, this popular genre received serious scholarly attention from both Confucian literati and progressive *sirhak* scholars. Many intellectuals tended to re-evaluate the potential contribution of vernacular fiction to bringing literacy and education to the largely illiterate masses, even if they did not go as far as a few *sirhak* scholars such as Pak Chiwŏn (1737-1805), who viewed such fiction as a significant medium for literary representation and self-expression.[6] It was precisely this sort of cultural milieu that made it possible for Korean elite women to emerge as a key segment of the popular readership.

Surprisingly, constant governmental efforts to suppress the dissemination of vulgar and rebellious fictional texts were lacking in effectiveness. In fact, many Korean intellectuals remained unabashed readers, writers, annotators, publishers, and translators of fiction. These intellectuals seldom confined themselves to reading fiction passively: some of them translated Chinese fictional works into vernacular Korean in an effort to share their reading experiences with family members or larger readerships who could read only vernacular Korean with facility; inspired by the example of Chinese popular fiction, other intellectuals wrote new stories in vernacular Korean partly to raise the educational level of the masses.

Influence from the educated elite was inevitable in the process of literary translation: male intellectuals who were acquainted with Chinese fiction tended to appreciate its potential as a pedagogical tool, especially for the instruction of less educated segments of society. It was almost inevitable that many Korean male readers of fiction in turn devoted themselves to translating foreign fiction into Korean. They were by and large supportive of women in their own households who wished to read fiction in their leisure time, even though numerous conservative Confucian scholars in Korea still considered fiction to be inappropriate for female readers in general.[7] This may be regarded as one of the reasons why it was not middle-class or lower-class women but rather upper-class women who eventually emerged as the most significant segment of the readership for Korean vernacular fiction.

The invention of *han'gŭl* and the dualism of literate culture

It was not until the promulgation of the *Hunmin chŏng'ŭm* [Right sounds for teaching the people] by King Sejong (r. 1418-1450) in 1443 that people had recourse to a systematic writing system for the Korean language. In contrast to the transliteration method, *han'gŭl* was an integral writing system completely disassociated from Chinese characters: by this remarkably scientific and efficient system of phonetic representation, the Korean language was recorded in a simple, precise, and practical manner without relying on orthographically unwieldy Chinese characters.[8]

Nevertheless, as far as Korean literature or *belles lettres* was concerned, for at least another few hundred years, writings in *han'gŭl* were considered marginal or at best supplementary to Korean writings in classical Chinese. *Han'gŭl* was seldom viewed by Korean literati as an appropriate vehicle for sophisticated literary expression. Although the bulk of *sijo*, a fixed form of verse recorded in *han'gŭl*, were composed by well-known literary poets from the fifteenth century onwards, all other major Korean literary genres continued to be composed exclusively in classical Chinese. For centuries, the invention of the *han'gŭl* script failed to reverse the prevailing situation in which classical Chinese was employed as the dominant means for written communication among male members of the Korean elite.

In the *Hunmin chŏng'ŭm,* which outlined both the goals behind the invention of the *han'gŭl* script and an explanation of its general usage, women were never specified as the main intended target of the writing system. Instead, as implied in the title "teaching the people" (*hunmin*), the text indicates that the invention of *han'gŭl* was originally intended to enable commoners to express themselves in their own words through writing. From the very beginning, however, most students who were given an opportunity to not only learn how to read and write the Korean script but also come into contact with vernacular texts were upper-class women, including women in the royal court. In spite of government policies that attempted to ban the promulgation of Buddhist ideas and teachings, it was probably due to the Buddhist influence on upper-class women that the bulk of Buddhist sutras were translated into vernacular Korean and published by the Translation Board [Chŏng'ŭmch'ŏng] of the court in the fifteenth century.[9] Ongoing translation projects, however, were more closely linked with women's education: the focus in governmental publication was less on the Buddhist sutras than on Confucian precepts and didactic books for women such as the *Naehun* and the *Samgang haengsildo*.

It is thus apparent that from the very outset, Korean vernacular literature was oriented toward women's culture. Early Korean vernacular lit-

erature, in particular, consisted largely of didactic literature for women. This suggests that male intellectuals tended to be aware of the inseparable relationship between female literacy and women's moral education.

Yi Tŏngmu (1741-1793), for instance, emphasizes that the acquisition of reading and writing skills is a prerequisite for women's education in his *Sasojŏl* [A digest of precepts for the gentry]:

> *Humin chŏng'ŭm* comprises consonants and vowels, initial, middle, and final sounds, clear and murky sounds, and sibilant and lingual sounds. The addition and subtraction of these syllables were not made by accident. Even a woman should understand the profound principle of formation and transformation of the syllables. Were she not to understand, her way of speaking and writing would be too awkward and too unrefined to conform to propriety ... By and large, women should read history, the *Analects of Confucius, The Classic of Poetry, Lesser Learning,* and *Four Books for Women* well enough to understand their basic teachings. They should recognize a few Chinese characters for the hundred surnames, ancestral genealogy, the titles of various dynasties, and the names of the sages. However, they should not compose poetry and disseminate it in public (Yi 1980: 74).

However, Yi does not forget to add a note of caution about the potentially devastating consequences for women with a habit of reading fiction:

> Women should not read too much Korean vernacular fiction. For by doing so, they would fall short in taking care of the household, would neglect their women's chores, and would even waste money by renting fiction. In this way, there are many women who would thereby squander the family fortune.

Although Yi Tŏngmu sought to prohibit Korean women from indulging themselves in popular literature such as fiction and poetry, he nonetheless supported women's education to the extent of advocating specific curricula for women's learning. The curricula he recommended for women were not limited merely to the basic skills of reading and writing, but also included the study of a variety of writings from the Confucian classics to works of history.

Korean women's acquisition of knowledge was still differentiated from that of men: the former were likely to depend upon texts in the Korean script, *han'gŭl*. Although a few scholars such as Yi Tŏngmu held *han'gŭl* in high esteem for its usefulness, most Korean male intellec-

tuals of that era tended to look askance at it as a "female script" (*amgŭl*). The thinking of such intellectuals was generally governed by a number of hierarchical distinctions, such as between *han'gŭl* and Chinese characters, between Korean vernacular literature and classical Chinese literature, and between female learning and male learning. On the other hand, the reality of what would nowadays be called "gender discrimination" opened up a new possibility for Korean women's education in a paradoxical way: women were given a rare chance to construct their own realm of literacy without needing to confront the conventional perception that reading and writing are chiefly a male privilege.

Such a gender-based dualism in Chosŏn culture, as Ōtani Morishige points out, is remarkable in comparison with the situation with women's literacy in late imperial China and Japan. Korean women appear to have had more freedom to express themselves by means of *han'gŭl*, while Chinese and Japanese women had to confront a sense of male anxiety, if not more hostile forms of antagonism, over female literacy (Ōtani 1994: 375-376). In the Confucian tradition, the proper sphere of women's learning tended to be set in accordance with *li*, the principle of propriety. If a woman strove to explore the male world of literature in pursuit of literary sophistication, her actions were likely to be regarded as a serious challenge to the Confucian system. A woman who studied men's books and published her own writings was likely to violate the boundary between the female domestic sphere and the male public sphere as defined in the Confucian tradition.

Dorothy Ko argues that quite a few Chinese women writers from the seventeenth century dared to make themselves visible to the world by publishing their writings. However, their existence was always double-edged, for the ideal virtuous woman in the Confucian tradition was not expected to be literate, whereas many highly educated women in Chinese history such as Ban Zhao (CE 41-ca. 115) utilized their writings to promulgate Confucian morality and thought. Furthermore, these phenomena were basically limited to women from elite families in affluent areas such as Jiangnan (Ko 1994: 17). In general, women's learning was dependent on privileged social backgrounds in which families had adequate resources and the personal motivation to see to it that their daughters received a high-quality education.

The situation for women's education in Chosŏn Korea was not so different from that in China. However, it seems that female subjectivity was more explicitly represented in Korean women's vernacular writings, for well-educated women in the Chosŏn, in contrast with their Chinese counterparts, felt free to articulate their thoughts and express their emotions through their own writing system without any need to seek legitimacy or approval from the male literary elite. As can be noted in the case of Queen Sohye, the problem was not that Korean women were

somehow barred from receiving an education in classical Chinese writing. By means of *han'gŭl*, however, women were not compelled either to disguise their femininity or else to explore new literary terrain in a textual world that was dominated almost exclusively by men. In fact, *han'gŭl* was defined by the male elite as a women's script: it belonged to Korean women's domestic sphere, just as Chinese characters belonged to Korean men's public sphere.

Unlike the orthodox classical curriculum for male education, however, women's education through *han'gŭl* remained informal and practically invisible. So, too, was the production of Korean vernacular texts: information on authors, dates, and motivations for writing literary texts, whether they were translations or original compositions, is almost nonexistent. The channels of production and consumption of vernacular texts were also managed in private. The majority of surviving Korean vernacular texts exist only in manuscript form, and only a few printed versions were available in much later periods – from the nineteenth century on. Surprisingly, it seems that commercial printing played an insignificant role in the circulation of Korean vernacular fiction: fewer than twenty percent of extant fictional works that were written in *han'gŭl* appeared in commercial print editions (Kim T. 1994: 237). Yet even in these relatively uncommon print editions, references to the author, translator, publisher, date of publication, and place of publication are more often omitted than included. This paucity of printed Korean vernacular texts is particularly striking, considering the fact that quite a few classical Chinese texts were reproduced in cheap marketplace editions from the seventeenth century on.

In spite of the scarcity of information about such Korean vernacular texts, it is still possible to glean scattered references from a variety of sources and to speculate as to how *han'gŭl* became an indispensable element in Korean women's cultural life, particularly among the upper classes. Women's use of *han'gŭl* for written communication was already widespread in the sixteenth century. Presumably, *han'gŭl* was already well established as a vehicle for women's education by the eighteenth century, judging from Yi Tŏngmu's comments on how important it was for an upper-class woman to practice the proper methods of writing letters and calligraphy. It was as important for her to practice calligraphy in *han'gŭl* as to practice women's chores [*yŏgong*] such as cooking, weaving, and embroidery during her childhood. A poem in classical Chinese that was written by the poet Yi Ok portrays an eighteenth-century bride who was good at calligraphy:

> Having practiced Court-style calligraphy from an early age, the consonant *yiŭng* that she writes has a little horn. Her parents-in-

> law are so delighted to see her elegant writing, and say, "we have a female examination inspector for *han'gŭl*." (Im 1997: 309)

To be sure, it seems that there was no embarrassment in the bridegroom's family over this well-educated bride: her talent made her parents-in-law all the more proud. In fact, a new bride sometimes brought her parents-in-law manuscript copies of vernacular fiction that she had herself copied as part of her dowry.[10] Surprisingly, elite women seem to have had relatively easy access to Korean vernacular fiction: for their writing practice, they were allowed to keep fictional texts in their quarters, even though Confucian elites continued to reject vernacular fiction as being improper as instructional material for women.

We may thus infer that the use of *han'gŭl* did not entirely conform to Confucian norms. From a Confucian perspective, *han'gŭl* would be expected to serve as a medium to reinforce the premise of the distinctions of male versus female, central versus peripheral, and the public sphere versus the domestic sphere. That is, the use of *han'gŭl* would be expected to remain invisible and exclusively feminine within the inner quarters. However, upon closer examination, one can see that the distinctions were not as rigid in practice as they appeared in theory.

For one thing, the production and consumption of vernacular literature was not confined entirely within the domestic sphere. Notwithstanding Korean elite males' public and sometimes ostentatious objections to *han'gŭl* and Korean vernacular literature, it is not difficult to find evidence that many of these same men took an active part in the production and consumption of vernacular literature as authors, translators, publishers, and readers, just as women did. The majority of upper-class males became literate in *han'gŭl* at an early age under the influence and tutelage of their literate mothers and sisters, just as some elite women learned classical Chinese under the influence and tutelage of their male relatives.

For instance, Kim Manjung (1637-1692), author of *Kuun mong* [The dream of nine clouds], notes in a memoir that his mother taught him *han'gŭl* through vernacular Korean renditions of the Confucian classics. This was not merely because she had to supervise her young son's education in place of her deceased husband; she was also literate in classical Chinese and could have taught her son the classical editions with equal facility (Kim, M. 1980: 420). Vernacular Korean renditions of the Confucian classics were commonly used as school textbooks not only for women and commoner males, but also for boys from elite families. After all, the demarcation between male learning and female learning was not all that clear in reality.

Similarly, the line between didacticism and entertainment, and the boundary between books for men and books for women, were often

blurred. In reality, women devoured all kinds of books that were available to them, such as collected moral precepts, histories, novels, and poetry. Many Korean men also seem to have enjoyed reading books that were written for a female readership, and did so without any apparent embarrassment.

Most remarkably, however, *han'gŭl* facilitated communicative possibilities within and outside the domestic sphere: not only did it help women communicate with the outside world beyond the confines of the household, it also played a significant role in constituting "women's communities." In this sense, reading and writing were far more than private and individual acts. Literate women were far from being passive or reticent, but conversely more active and more expressive than ever: they formed networks through reading and writing, and furthermore forged their own communities.

The poetic genre *kasa* [song lyric] provides a prominent example of how women drew upon vernacular literature to constitute women's culture. *Kasa* is a form of verse in which each line comprises exactly four phrases, and each phrase contains three or four syllables. In parallel with *sijo* poetry, its regular pattern makes this verse form easy to recite and simple to memorize. Yet in contrast with the limited length of a *sijo*, the lines of a *kasa* can be extended almost indefinitely. This is why the subject of a *kasa* can be more varied and more complicated than the theme of a *sijo*.

A few *kasa* poems were attributed to male literary figures, but this genre was quickly dominated by literate women to the extent that it is now known as "boudoir *kasa*" [*kyubang kasa*].[11] Many *kasa* poems are expressive of women's domestic life. Through these poems, not only were women's sentiments expressed – their daily life, chores, boudoir, and various aspects of their domestic milieu were also depicted in much detail. The popularity of this genre in the inner quarters remained strong all the way up to modern times; according to literary scholar Cho Yunje, women cherished *kasa* so much that they considered it shameful to remain in ignorance of these poems (Cho 1948: 345).

The production and consumption of *kasa* poetry included a broad variety of women's activities such as reading, writing, reciting, collating, hand-copying, distributing, and preserving the poems. By means of these activities, the social effect of reading was to a considerable extent heightened: it is obvious that *kasa* played a significant role in forging connections between women in the form of informal communities. For instance, a variety of *kasa* poetry called *hwajŏn ka* [songs of flower cakes] was more often than not composed by women who gathered for special occasions such as the *chŏngmyŏng* festival (*qingming* in Chinese) in the early spring. In this type of *kasa*, women's activities during the festival are depicted in detail: from all kinds of games, special food, and

special garments for the festival to their excitement at gathering together. Oral transmission was thus not the only way of reinforcing and expanding women's culture: eventually, *han'gŭl* and vernacular literature became indispensable elements of women's culture.

Along with the spread of *han'gŭl* throughout Korea, Korean women's culture was transformed into a "culture of a reading public." Ko describes this women's literate culture in China as a "floating world" in an attempt to point out the fluidity of its boundaries:

> The reading woman inhabited a world much larger than her boudoir by exercising her intellect and imagination; she became all the more entrenched in the public world when she was moved to wield the brush herself. In this sense, reading opened up a floating world in which the familiar constraints on her life appeared less formidable and more open to negotiation (Ko 1994: 30).

Ko also employs the term "floating world" to characterize the close link between print culture and the emergence of literate women in seventeenth-century China. In the case of Chosŏn Korea, even though the spread of vernacular literature in the inner chambers was indebted to the rise of the market economy and urban culture, it was not necessarily associated with the rise of commercial printing. Nevertheless, it is impossible for us to overlook how Korean vernacular literature and the culture of the reading public played a key role in the formation of women's culture.

Women's culture and women reading fiction

Irrespective of their social status, women who lived under a Confucian state such as Chosŏn Korea have often been assumed to suffer as victims of Confucian patriarchy. However, investigations of women's culture and daily lives suggest that these women were not necessarily helpless and submissive victims who were forced to follow official norms slavishly. On the contrary, these women tended to function as "negotiators" who reinterpreted official norms through their daily practices and made use of these norms in their own way.

What, then, is "women's culture"? What I mean by "women's culture" here, as Dorothy Ko correctly defines it, is a culture created by networks of women, marked by their family ties and bonds of friendship, and with its own distinct rituals; a culture associated with domestic, social, and public communities of women; and a culture based on a women's tradition transmitted from one generation to the next in the inner quarters (Ko 1994: 14-17). Reading and writing constituted the es-

sential part of women's culture, and helped women construct their self-identity, develop their own creativity, and consequently shape their own tradition. As long as we define "women's culture" in this way, we should not overlook the fact that a kind of female network actually existed in Chosŏn Korea, and their own culture was cherished by Korean elite women as well.

In our understanding of women's culture, female reading practices, especially the consumption of popular texts such as vernacular fiction, are marked in the sense that they facilitated the formation of women's communities. In particular, the emergence of women as "popular" readers played a significant role in constituting female networks and reinventing women's culture.

What, then, makes the Korean woman reader a "popular" reader? Can we suggest that a typical woman reader, as distinct from an average male reader, made attempts to subvert elite standards and to reinvent new cultural meanings from given texts? To answer this, we should first develop a grasp of the "popular tactics" by which popular culture in general blurs socio-cultural boundaries, reproduces different cultural meanings, and consequently subverts the dominant order without actually confronting it.[12]

Korean elite women often used the rules, practices, or beliefs that were imposed on them by the dominant culture, and as a result, as Michel de Certeau points out, "made something else out of them; they subvert them from within – not by rejecting them or by transforming them, but by many different ways of using them" (de Certeau 1984: 32). These different ways of using the dominant culture may be understood as popular tactics. If this is correct, we may consider Korean elite women's reading practices to intersect with the realm of popular tactics in various ways.

Kyenyŏ ka [Song to admonish daughters], composed in the form of a *kasa*, exemplifies women's "popular tactics." This sub-genre of *kasa* poetry seems to emulate Confucian precepts for women such as the *Kyujung yoram*, and to reiterate didactic messages almost literally. In this genre, the mother's voice contrasts greatly with the patriarch's authoritative, very stern voice: the verses are full of her own memories, experiences, practical wisdom, and complex emotions towards daughters. In this genre, women never appear to directly confront the patriarch's authority or Confucian norms, but instead reinterpret, personalize, and transform these norms in their own words.

Vernacular fiction and women's reading practices reveal these sorts of popular tactics even more clearly. The passage below demonstrates how vernacular fiction became an indispensable part of women's lives:

> My mother copied dozens of volumes of the *Sŏju yŏnyŭi* [The romance of the Western Zhou] (a Korean rendition of the Chinese novel *Fengshen yanyi*) in vernacular Korean, but the book was incomplete because of one missing *juan* volume. She always felt dissatisfied about this. After a long while, she was finally able to gather together a complete set by borrowing the *juan* she had lost from a book collector and making a copy of it. Before long, a village woman who had been on good terms with my mother entreated my mother to lend her the novel, and thus my mother gave the whole set of volumes to her. Later, when the woman came to return the novel, she said, "Thanks for lending me the novel. But please forgive me. I dropped one *juan* somewhere on the street. I searched everywhere, but was unable to find it. My crime is deserving of death." My mother forgave her, asking which *juan* she lost. Finding out that it was none other than the missing *juan* my mother had recently supplemented, she greatly regretted having lent it out (Cho 1992: 459).

> The *Sanguo zhi* is a manuscript that my grandmother née Yi of Hampyŏng strove to copy on her own. It originally consisted of three volumes, two of which were lost by Wŏl Songsuk's wife, who borrowed them when my uncle was sick. I was so shocked by the news that I brought back the remaining volume and asked my grandson Cheŭng to redecorate it, change its cover, and rewrite its title. I then put it in a box, and placed it in the ancestral shrine (Kwŏn 1770s?).

> As I have observed, what women in the inner quarters would like to do most these days is to treasure fiction. The number of works of fiction thus increases day by day, amounting to hundreds and thousands in all. Book merchants make a clean copy of these books in an attempt to earn profits in the book rental business. Ignorant women pawn their hairpins and bracelets or otherwise run into debt in order to borrow these storybooks, and spend time reading them all day (Ch'ae 1997).

From these instances, we can see that even respectable elite women not only enjoyed reading "vulgar" storybooks along with their sons and daughters, but also unabashedly took an active part in rewriting, reproducing, and circulating them. As such, reading and writing played an important role in female sociability and networking.

The books that women cherished so much in these cases are Korean translations of well-known Chinese historical romances. Although fiction reading in the inner quarters was officially forbidden by conserva-

tive male elites, it is not difficult to find evidence of how women treasured storybooks in their poems, memoirs, and letters. In contrast with the third case above, fiction reading in the inner quarters was not totally rejected by elites as a waste of time and money that prompted women to neglect their family responsibilities.

The manuscript *Ogwŏn chaehap kiyŏn* [The reunion of a couple of jade mandarin ducks made by extraordinary karma; hereafter *Ogwŏn*] illustrates the enjoyment and circulation of vernacular novels among networks of elite women. This work is a full-length Korean vernacular novel consisting of twenty-one chapters. The author of the novel and its date of composition are unknown, but it has been confirmed that three generations of women from a distinguished elite family – Yi Yŏngsun's (1724-1801) wife and her daughter-in-law and granddaughter-in-law – collaborated on the hand-copying of the extant manuscript between 1786 and 1790.[13]

These three women were ardent fiction readers indeed: they not only strove to copy this voluminous novel out by hand, but also recorded a list of 45 titles of popular fiction on the inside of the covers of the fourteenth and fifteenth fascicles. This list contains fifteen titles of Chinese vernacular novels, most of which are historical romances.[14] Moreover, it is likely that the majority of the Chinese novels catalogued in the *Ogwŏn* were translated into Korean and widely circulated among women readers during the eighteenth century.

The evolution of Korean vernacular fiction was closely linked with the rise of women's culture as well as popular culture. Notwithstanding governmental concern for novels' supposedly "antisocial" effects on people, such fiction hardly amounted to "rebellious" or "obscene" texts, but instead played a significant role in the popularization of the Confucian system of values. Such fiction was often referred to by the moniker *yŏsa kodam*, "old tales for women scholars." Elite males generally believed that in comparison with other literary genres, fiction was far more intelligible in its form and style to female readers, with their supposedly limited intellectual capacities. Therefore, a wide variety of fictional narratives were utilized as textbooks in the education of women. In particular, the Chinese historical romance was recommended by renowned scholars as a type of elementary-level textbook that conveys moral precepts and basic information about Chinese history.

Furthermore, a female reader of Korean fiction was less commonly a secretive reader who indulged herself in silent, individual reading in her private room than she was a family-oriented "Confucian" reader, whose oral recounting of the book in a group-based domestic setting was by no means in conflict with family values or social unity. Considering the association of women's reading practices with the elite family system, we may have doubts about which elements in this kind of read-

ing exemplify the aforementioned "popular tactics." However, we cannot overlook the fact that elite women's reading practices contributed to the construction of women's communities and women's culture beyond the boundaries of the elite family system, even though it was put into practice within the context of an elite family tradition. Its close link with elite family rituals and with family values may be viewed as either a clever disguise or an inevitable compromise. Otherwise, the growth of a female readership would not have been possible.

How, then, did the woman reader make a difference in reading popular texts? First of all, the typical female way of "consuming" popular texts was hardly a passive mode of consumption. Prior to the emergence of lending libraries and bookstores in the eighteenth century, the reproduction of vernacular texts and their wide circulation for the most part relied on elite women's reading practices, including various activities such as reciting, lending, borrowing, copying, editing, and rewriting. Even after the spread of commercial printing, elite women often preferred well-decorated manuscript copies to shoddy marketplace printed editions.

Secondly, in the course of reciting, copying out by hand, and circulating fiction, women's reading practices were not limited to the confines of the individual home, but instead extended to a wider range of networks than the household, such as relatives, neighbors, and friends. In the first example above, for instance, a respectable elite woman contributed to the expansion of the female reading community by lending storybooks to a village woman who appears to have been a commoner. Indeed, such interactions created more diverse social and communicative possibilities than practically any other social practice performed by women was likely able to produce.

Furthermore, women's reading practices often crossed the boundaries between the public and domestic spheres, between male and female learning, and between didacticism and entertainment. The boundaries between male and female learning were not impossible to negotiate, when both male and female family members tended to take part in "popular" reading side by side. In reality, women devoured all kinds of books that were available to them: on the other hand, men probably also enjoyed reading novels that had been intended for a female readership.

After all, women's education and their reading practices contributed to women's constant negotiation with the dominant culture for their own cultural autonomy as much as to the popularization of Confucian norms. Vernacular fiction was a literary genre in which this kind of constant conflict between elite and popular culture was well represented in a subtle way.

Fiction provided both men and women with irresistible enjoyment. Even royal family members did not strive to hide the fact that they

themselves were fervent readers of fiction. A large variety of imported Chinese vernacular novels were translated into vernacular Korean – initially as reading matter for court ladies and elite women. Yet elite males were often not only furtive novel readers, but also the translators, editors, and publishers of vernacular novels. Such elite males were the first Koreans to reinterpret, revise, and re-create Chinese vernacular novels for women readers.

Nonetheless, the role played by elite males in the production of this vulgar genre was often considered illegitimate and offensive, and therefore their participation was often kept secret. Even when the male writer of the vernacular novel did not conceal his authorship, he more often than not claimed that his work was intended by and large for a female readership such as his own mother, and that he wrote the novel out of sentiments of filial devotion. Women's direct and indirect intervention in the course of producing vernacular novels, therefore, was by no means improbable.

It is not surprising that womanly desires were reflected on novel writing: women's favorite sub-genre of fiction was the novel of manners or family novel such as *Honglou meng* [A dream of red mansions]. This novel's great popularity with Korean female readers led to the translation into Korean of the entire *Honglou meng* series. Furthermore, women's novel reading facilitated female creativity and the emergence of women as "popular" writers. *Wanwŏrhoe maengyŏn* [The oath-taking banquet of the Enjoying the Moon Club], for instance, is an extremely extensive family novel amounting to 180 chapters, written by women writers and designed mainly for elite women readers, which explores the meaning of womanhood in Confucian society.

Elite women readers, as we have seen, were not mere cultural inferiors or passive consumers who were supinely subject to the dominant culture, but rather active producers who persistently exercised their own reading practices, which differed in many ways from those of elite males. Indeed, elite women readers reinterpreted the dominant ideology, reproduced different cultural meanings, and reinvented their own culture.[15]

Notes

1 The early Chosŏn government's concern with women's education reflected by and large on two Korean vernacular texts published in the fifteenth century: *Samgang haengsildo* [The illustrated guide to the three bonds] and *Hyogyŏng ŏnhae* [The classic of filial piety translated and annotated]. The other marked pedagogical text for women is *Naehun* (*neixun* in Chinese), which was compiled by Queen Consort Sohye (1437-1504) in 1475. This compilation may have been inspired by the Ming text *Neixun*, but there is no direct connection between the two. For the compilation, Queen Sohye not

only selected excerpts from Chinese moral tracts, such as *Lienü zhuan* [Biographies of exemplary women], *Nüjiao* [Precepts for women], *Xiaoxue* [Elementary learning], and *Mingjian* (Presumably *Mingxin baojian* [A precious mirror to illuminate the mind]), but also included her own preface and commentary. Her *Naehun* was published in classical Chinese along with its Korean rendition. During the late Chosŏn period, the publication of well-known Chinese moral tracts for women such as *Lienü zhuan* and *Nü sishu* [Four books for women] in vernacular Korean was frequently ordered by the kings. As for precepts published by established families, the earliest one is *Kyujung yoram* [A handbook for the inner chambers) written by Yi Hwang (1501-1570), one of the most renowned Neo-Confucian scholars in Chosŏn Korea. Other well-known moral tracts published by male elites in later periods include *Kyenyŏ sŏ* [Precepts for daughters] written by Song Siyŏl (1607-1689), who vigorously advocated the conquest of the north (that is, the Qing empire), and *Sasojŏl* [Digested precepts for the gentry] written by Yi Tŏngmu (1741-1793), a renowned *sirhak* [practical learning] scholar. In addition, from the late Chosŏn period, the publications of biographies of virtuous Korean women by male elites also became very popular.

2 See Queen Consort Sohye (1974), Preface, *Naehun*.

3 Regarding the overall impact of the Japanese and Manchu invasions on Chosŏn culture and society, see Ch'oe (1975), Han (1999), Kim et al. (1992), and So (1980).

4 For *sirhak* and the emergence of new literary trends, see Cho (1994: 205-242) and Kim, K. (1996: 171-96).

5 According to Min Kwandong's research, more than one hundred titles of Chinese fiction are found in a number of historical sources, bibliographies, and literary collections. Hundreds of different Chinese fictional texts have survived to the present (Min 2001: 217-314).

6 A type of "fiction criticism" was made explicit by many talented writers whose literary interest went far beyond Confucian canons in their varied literary anthologies. For more detail, see Min (2001: 317-444) and Yi, M. (2002).

7 Except for elementary Confucian textbooks or morality primers, women's leisure reading and female participation in any kind of creative writing such as poetry were apparently forbidden by well-known Confucian morality tracts such as Yi Hwang's *Kyujung yoram* and Yi Tŏngmu's *Sasojŏl*. Yet it is not difficult to find examples of how a secret mania for leisure reading arose among many elite women, especially those from relatively affluent families.

8 For the *Hunmin chŏng'ŭm* and the invention of *han'gŭl*, see Kim, T. (1976: 108-109). This book was later translated into English and published in Tokyo. For the English version, see Kim, D. (1980: 90-91).

9 During the reign of King Sejo, translations of Buddhist sutras amounted to the majority of official translation projects. For more detail, see Kim D. (1980: 91-92).

10 For more detail, see Kim, C. (1994: 433-471).

11 This term was first proposed by Kwŏn (1980). For a recent study of *kyubang kasa*, see Sŏ (1996). Also see Kim, K. (1996: 122-136).

12 Re popular culture and popular tactics, see de Certeau (1984: 1-42).

13 For more detail, see Ch'oe, K. (1994: 161-201).

14 The Chinese fiction titles in the list are as follows: *Son Pang yŏnyŭi* [Chinese title, *Sun Pang yanyi*]; *Kaebyŏk yŏnyŭi* [Chinese title, *Kaipi yanyi*]; *T'anok yŏnyŭi* [Chinese title, *Zhuolu yanyi*]; *Sŏju yŏnyŭi* [Chinese title, *Fengshen yanyi*]; *Yŏlguk chi* [Chinese title, *Dong Zhou Lieguo zhi*]; *Ch'o Han yŏnyŭi* [Chinese title, *Xi Han yanyi*]; *Tong Han yŏnyŭi* [Chinese title, *Dong Han yanyi*]; *Tang Chin yŏnyŭi* [Chinese title, *Tang Jin yanyi*]; *Samguk chi* [Chinese title, *Sanguo zhi*]; *Nam Song yŏnyŭi* [Chinese title, *Nan Song yanyi*]; *Puk Song yŏnyŭi* [Chinese title, *Bei Song yanyi*]; *Odae sa yŏnyŭi* [Chinese title, *Wudai shi yanyi*]; *Namgye yŏnyŭi* [Chinese title not identified]; *Sŏyu ki* [Chinese title, *Xiyou ji*];

Ch'ung'ŭi Suho chi [Chinese title, *Zhongyi Shuihu zhuan*]; *and Sŏngt'an Suho chi* [Chinese title, *Shengtan Shuihu zhuan*]. Among these titles, there is no way to identify two of the titles, *T'anok yŏnyŭi* and *Namgye yŏnyŭi,* with extant works, now that neither the original texts nor the translations of them into Korean survive. *Sŏngt'an Suho chi* can be positively identified as Jin Shengtan's (1611-80) commentary edition of the *Shuihu zhuan*.

15 Research on women's reading practices in late Chosŏn Korea deserves further scholarly attention, and is ripe for fresh perspectives and innovative theoretical approaches.

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10 Some Women Writers and their Works in Classical Sanskrit Literature: A Reinterpretation

Supriya Banik Pal

Leading male poets in the Sanskrit literary tradition have garnered much attention from the scholarly world in the form of analysis and interpretation of their poetry. This chapter focuses instead on poetry by women writers in the Sanskrit tradition, and aims to demonstrate the importance and creativity of these poetesses.[1] The most famous of these female Sanskrit poets range from as early as the ninth century of the Common Era (CE) to as late as the fourteenth century.[2]

Going back before the Common Era to the early dawn of Vedic Sanskrit literature, female seers figured prominently. For instance, in the Hindu *Upanishadas*, female seekers of truth and wisdom are well represented. In Buddhist Sanskrit literature, a number of women poets contributed to the *Theri Gathas*, which are rich in spiritual motifs and beautiful metaphors.

The active participation of women in the Sanskrit literary tradition continued during the subsequent Classical period of the Common Era. Moreover, classical Sanskrit poetesses have not lagged behind their male counterparts in terms of compositional skills and imagination. Yet these women poets have remained relatively neglected in comparison with their more celebrated male counterparts; little attempt has been made to provide an assessment of their contributions to poetical expression in the Sanskrit tradition. This can be observed in the way that the literary achievements of women poets in Sanskrit have rarely entered into scholarly discourse except through various anthologies of Sanskrit poetry and studies of rhetoric, such as may be found in *Alamkarasastras* [treatises on rhetoric]. The relevant anthologies are generally called *subhasitas* or *suktis*, which are collections of eloquent sayings or epigrams. These verses are didactic by nature, and collectively amount to assemblages of miscellaneous poems. Most of the writings of the Sanskrit poetesses are found in the *Muktakas* [Miscellaneous verse], but sometimes the larger work from which a given verse was quoted has passed into oblivion.

There are altogether approximately forty women poets whose writings are in Sanskrit, with a total of over 200 poems to their credit. These women poets who wrote in Sanskrit include Silabhattarika, Vijja, Marula,

Morika, Lakshmi, Vikatanitamba, Gauri, Indulekha, Bhavadevi, Jaghana-capala, and Madalasa, among others. Sarngadhara lavishes special praise for the erudition of the first four poetesses above in his *Sarngadhara-paddhati* (1888: 26-28):

> Sila-Vijja-Marula-Morikadyah
> Kavyam kartum santi vijnah striyo'pi.
> Vidyam vettum vadino nirvijetum
> Visvam vaktum yah pravinah (Sarngadhara 1888: 26-28)
> (Verse 163).
> [Silabhattarika, Vijja, Marula, and Morika are poetesses of renown with great poetic genius and erudition. Those who have command over all branches of learning, having participated in dialogues with other scholars and having defeated them in debates, are regarded as sound scholars and experts. Consequently, they alone are venerable in the scholarly world.]

The most famous woman Sanskrit poet is Silabhattarika, at least some of whose verse was collected by most of the compilers of the major Sanskrit literary anthologies. The tenure of this poetess has been confirmed to be in the ninth century. Her writings have been quoted and cited by numerous rhetoricians and literary critics in the Sanskrit tradition. Approximately forty-six poems have been ascribed to Silabhattarika, as cited by K.P. Parab in his *Subhasitaratna-bhandara-garam* (1991). Touching upon all aspects of life, she sketches the contours of love, morality, politics, nature, beauty, the seasons, insects, anger, indignation, codes of conduct, and the characteristic features of various kinds of heroines.

A particularly renowned stanza by Silabhattarika has been quoted by numerous literary critics of classical Sanskrit *belles lettres*. This stanza memorably depicts the poetic speaker's anxiety to be reunited with her old husband:

> Yah kaumaraharah sa eva vara-sta-schandra-garbha nisah.
> Pronmeelan-nava-malatisurabhayah prourah kadambanilah.
> Sa caivasmi tatha'pi caurya-surata-vyaparalila-vidhau.
> Revarodhasi vetasi-taru-tale cetah samutkanthate
> (Jahlana 1938: 301) (Verse 9).
> [My husband, who was my first love and has ravished my womanhood with amorous sports, is the same. These are the same moonlit nights as of yore. The same old breeze embalmed with the fragrance of the *malati* flower [white jasmine] in full bloom is wafting through the *kadamba* grove.[3] I myself am the same,

too. My heart still longs for enjoyment with him under the cane creepers on the bank of the Reva River.]

The expression of feeling in the stanza above is rough-hewn and straightforward. It is somewhat surprising that the verse has come down to us from the pen of a poetess in the hoary past. Not generally regarded as a literary critic, Lord Chaitanya, a great philosopher of modern India and a reformer of *Vaisnava* sects in unified Bengal, has offered a new interpretation of this verse. He sees the speaker's anxiety as a metaphor for the yearning of the ordinary person for achieving unity with the Supreme Lord – the Absolute, or what has been considered the controlling principle of life.

In another poem, Silabhattarika portrays the reverse picture of the frustration experienced by an estranged poetic speaker, who is passing sleepless nights thinking longingly of his beloved secondary wife. It appears that when the poetic speaker's primary wife is present in his household, he is unable to remain in contact with his secondary wife. In this poem, we sense indignation or *mana* through the anguish of the lonesome husband instead of through the melancholic thoughts of his secondary wife:

Priya-virahitasyasya hridi cinta samagata.
Iti matva gata nidra ke kritaghnamupasate
(Vallabhadeva 1886: 202) (Verse 1197).
[Thought has arisen in the heart of one separated from his beloved – seeing this, sleep has deserted him. Who would adore a faithless one?] (Translation in Chaudhuri 1939: 96).

In yet another verse, Silabhattarika condemns poverty as a force that suppresses all individual personal qualities, and does not allow the personality of the poor to blossom forth in its full richness. In this verse, she describes the distress of an impoverished person who sinks into a mood of grief when he discovers that his beloved mate no longer has her gold bangle studded with precious jewels. When he further notices that their earthen cooking pot is empty of grain, his heart positively overflows with sorrow:

Duye kantakaram viksya mani kankana-varjitam.
Atah param param duye manikam kana-varjitam
(Parab 1991: 68) (Verse 10).
[I am deeply anguished at the sight of my beloved's bracelet bereft of jewels. Yet now my heart breaks to see our earthen cooking vessel without any morsel of food left in it.]

A universal truth comes to light through the pen of the poetess when she describes the importance of learning, writing, discussion, and consultation with teachers. Like the lotus that blooms only when drenched with the sun's rays, the personality of a human being blossoms forth only upon coming into contact with the mind of a teacher.

> Yah pathati likhati pasyati pari-pricchati panditan-upasrayati.
> Tasya divakara-kiranair-nalini-dalamiva vikasyate buddhih
> (Parab 1991: 177) (Verse 760).
> [The talent of the man who engages himself in studies, cultivates exercises on writing, possesses a clear view, participates in discussions and debates with scholars, and exchanges his views with senior experts will blossom forth in its rich abundance like the lotus unfolding its petals at the touch of the sun's rays.]

Simplicity and sweetness are prominent features of Silabhattarika's poetical style. She is highly honored for her *Panchali* literary style of poetical expression, and is ranked at the same level as Bana, a distinguished writer of classical Sanskrit prose literature. Rajasekhara, an eminent rhetorician and dramatist in the Sanskrit tradition who was active from the late ninth century to the early tenth century, has identified Silabhattarika as a prominent practitioner of the *Panchali* literary style:

> Sabdarthayoh sama gumphah panchali-ritir-isyate.
> Silabhattarika vaci Banoktisu ca sa yadi (Vallabhadeva 1886: 130)
> (Verse 197).
> [The *Panchali* type of literary style, consisting of the maintenance of a balance between words and meaning, can be traced in the works of Silabhattarika – and possibly in some of the compositions of Bana.][4]

Credited with more than thirty-five of the verses compiled by K.P. Parab in his *Subhasita-ratna-bhandagaram*, Vijja is the most eminent and versatile woman poet in the realm of Sanskrit literature.[5] Like Silabhattarika, Vijja's verses are found compiled by the major anthologists and numerous rhetoricians of Sanskrit poetics. Her poetic creation exhibits eloquent poetical expressions, charm and rhetorical perfection. She employs long compounds, and her verses are marked by rhythmical sound effects and musicality. She brims with confidence in her great talent for poetry, and even considers herself an incarnation of *Devi Sarasvati*, the Goddess of Learning, whose identifying pigment is white. Yet since the color of her skin instead resembles a blue lotus flower petal, she claims that the famous sayings of various literary critics and the rhetorician Dandin happen to be wrong:

Nilotpaladalasyamam Vijjakam mamajanata.
Vrithaiva Dandin proktam Sarvasukla Sarasvati (Parab 1991: 38)
(Verse 54).
[Not knowing me, Vijjaka, dark as the petal of a blue water lily,
Dandin has vainly declared that Sarasvati is "all white."]
(Warder 1983 vol. 4: 421)

Vijja portrays the necessity of conservation of plants and trees, describing the miserable condition of a *campaka* tree – a tree of the magnolia family, *michelia champaka* – that has been neglected by a farmer who is ignorant of its real worth. In another poem, she sketches images of an unnamed tree that provides cool shade and bears sweet fruit:

Kenapi Campaka-taro bata ropito'si
Ku-grama-pamara-janantika-vatikayam.
Yatra pravriddha-nava-saka-vivriddha-lobhad
Bho bhagna vata-ghatanocita-pallavo'si (Parab 1991: 249)
(Verse 67).
[Oh, *champaka* tree! You have been planted by someone in a garden near the home of a wicked wretch, living in a miserable village, where through his greed for the more luxuriant growth of wild plants, your foliage has been reduced to such a condition as to resemble a house in ruins.] (Translation in Chaudhuri 1939: 110).

Nature, changes of season, the sea, and the beauty of the heroine are the subjects of her poetical sketches. Like many poets in the Sanskrit literary tradition, she describes the rainy season in some of her verses. According to a traditional concept in Sanskrit literature, rain plays the role of the tormentor of an estranged lover. Vijja illustrates the passion of love on a broad canvas of poetry where cloudy skies, dazzling flashes of lightning, torrential showers, and flooded bodies of water are the main characters.

A satiric barb directed at society itself is launched in a stanza in which the poetess presents images of dire poverty and distress of the poor. The poetess describes poverty as a sign of death, for poverty shrivels a person into a state of inarticulate passivity and afflicts him with bewilderment and fear.

Gaterbhango svaro hino gatre svedo mahadbhayam.
Marane Yani cihnani tani cihnani yacake (Parab 1991: 76)
(Verse 9).
[All of the maladies prominent in death – immovability, a feeble

voice, a perspiring body, and terrible fear – are equally identifiable in an impoverished person.]

The literary art of Vijja is marked by her employment of finely chiseled expression and the maintenance of a balance between musicality and sense in her verse. Her poetry also exemplifies a deft interplay between word and meaning.

Marula is another famous woman poet, whose verses are mentioned in the oldest anthologies like the thirteenth-century *Suktimuktavali* of Jalhana (1938) and the fourteenth-century *Sarngadhara-paddhati* of Sarngadhara (1888). Only five of her poems are extant; most of these were compiled by K.P. Parab (1991) in the *Subhasita-ratna-bhandagarah*. Although we have no compelling evidence as to when Marula lived and wrote, it would be safe to assume that it was prior to the thirteenth century.

In one of her poems, Marula depicts the deep pathos of an estranged lady, whose separation from her paramour casts a pall of gloom in her mind. Tears trickle down and dampen the upper parts of her bed sheets as she passes through yet another sleepless night.

Gopayanti viraha-janitam dukhamagre gurunam.
Kim tvam mugdhe nayana-visritam vaspapuram runatsi.
Naktam naktam nayana-salilair-esa adreekritaste.
Sayyo-pantah kathayati dasam-atape sosyamanah
(Jahlana 1938: 140) (Verse 13).
[Hiding away your grief at separation from your beloved one, why are you, my lovely lassie, checking the flood of tears, overflowing your eyes? The edge of your bed, dampened night after night by tears and dried in the sun (next morning), is bearing evidence of your sad plight.] (Translation in Chaudhuri 1939: 84).

In another poem, Marula sketches the inner psychological plight of an estranged woman who loses interest in eating, ignores her health, and neglects her appearance even when encountering her partner. Observing her disheveled appearance and low spirits, the male poetic speaker considerately asks her what has been bothering her. The woman is moved by her partner's concern; casting aside her previous aloofness toward him, she re-establishes a mode of intimacy with her partner.

Morika is another prominent and renowned woman poet in the Sanskrit literary tradition. While few in number, her poems may be encountered in all of the major Sanskrit literary anthologies, and are often quoted in important Sanskrit rhetorical treatises. The anthologist Sarngadhara has ranked Morika among the top four woman poets in the

Sanskrit tradition, yet we do not know for certain the century in which she lived. Because Morika's poetry was anthologized as early as 1257, she must have flourished no later than the thirteenth century. As in the case of Marula, Morika's poetry contains keen psychological insights into feminine psychology, particularly with respect to issues of love and the various phases of emotional attachment.

In one poem, she evokes the deepest pathos and sorrows of the female poetic speaker, who counts the number of days she has been separated from her paramour by means of marks she has scratched on the floor and moistened with tears she has shed out of heartache. This scene strongly resonates with the image of the estranged consort of *Yaksa* – a type of demigod who is appointed to guard treasure – in Kalidasa's *Meghaduta*, the most renowned lyrical composition in all of Sanskrit literature.

> Likhati na ganayati rekha nirjharavaspambudhautagandatata.
> Abadhidivasavasanam ma bhuditi samkita vala (Vallabhadeva 1886: 138) (Verse 1072); and (Jahlana 1938: 134) (Verse 8).
> [The love-lorn lass makes marks on the floor representing the days which she has still to spend without her lover, yet does not count them lest the number of days before he can return to her be increased. Her cheeks are being bathed by tear drops flowing like stream.] (Translated in Chaudhuri 1939: 84).

The intricate relationship between a man and a woman depend upon the couple's mutual understanding. Moreover, the bonds that unite a woman and a man extend from both parties. No relationship is complete without the presence of the other. In one poem, a maidenly messenger is appointed by the woman in love with the male poetic speaker. The maiden tries to convince the indignant poetic speaker that he and his lover are as inseparable as nightfall and the moon. In the absence of either nightfall or the moon, the role of the other would be futile. Morika has thus evoked different phases of love, various sentiments of women, and undying truths of human life in her writings.

Laksmi deserves special mention because of the imagery and rhythmic patterns she utilizes in her poetry. There are only four extant poems attributed to her (Parab 1991). Because Sarngadhara included one of Laksmi's verses in *Sarngadhara-paddhati*, she may be assumed to have written during or prior to the fourteenth century.

Laksmi's poetry effectively blends philosophical insights with expressive charm. One of her poems remarks upon the indestructibility of supernatural Providence, opining that the self of man is identical with the self of Nature, and that these two are in turn identical with the self

of the universe. In this poem, she addresses the issue of human destiny in the manner of a catechism. Why does the bee seem to have little interest in sniffing the aroma of flowers while roaming through clusters of flowers? The poetic speaker replies that this behavior occurs because of the will of the all-pervading self, namely Providence.

> Bhraman vanante nava-manjareesu
> Na satpado gandha-phaleem-ajighrat.
> Sa kim na ramya sa ca kim na ranta
> Baleeyasee kevalam-eesvareccha (Parab 1991: 96) (Verse 59).
> [The bee, while roaming through clusters of fresh-blown blossoms, did not smell the *priyangu* plant. Was the *priyangu* not enjoyable, and did the bee not delight in it? It is the will of Providence that alone is omnipotent.] (Translated in Chaudhuri 1939: 82).

Another famous Sanskrit poetess is Gauri, who has eighteen verses to her credit and is believed to have lived during the fourteenth century (Sarngadhara 1888). Her poems have been included in various anthologies and works on rhetoric. Gauri's poetic talent is versatile and spontaneous. Her unbridled imagination ranges through themes such as nature, passion, love, kingship, and the beauty of women. Gauri is keenly aware of royal politics and the king's hostility toward enemies of the state, describing armed conflicts and the weapons used therein. As was common in the monarchical social order of her age, Gauri ascribes godhood to the king, praising him as the preserver of the subjects in his realm.

Nature is also one of Gauri's favorite subjects. She describes a cool and aromatic morning breeze as if it were a gallant lover taking his beloved lady in a soft and gentle embrace. Gauri's description of the *kalpavriksa* or celestial tree, which is supposed to fulfill all humanly desire, depicts the all-pervasive strength of desire's fulfillment. In one poem, she presents herself as woman of fair complexion and unparalleled beauty – and a uniquely exquisite product of divine creation:

> Visvesvarenaiva vinirmiteyam
> Arddhamganatvam pratipadya yatnat.
> Atastrilokee-mahilopamaya-
> Madvaiti-bhavena vibhati gauri.
> *(Padyaveni* (MS) Foll.1-76; 27x12cm 11.10) (Verse 175).
> [Thus Gauri, the fair woman, whom the Creator of the Universe has created with utmost care as one half of the total physical frame of the Lord, gloriously shines without any parallel among

all the women in the three terrestrial regions of Heaven, Earth, and Hell.]

Vikatanitamba flourished in the early half of the ninth century, since which time her verse has often been quoted and cited in renowned rhetorical works and anthologies of Sanskrit literature. Sixteen of Vikatanitamba's poems have come down to us. Her subject matter includes royalty, maidenly beauty, the passions and trysts of conjugal couples, springtime, and nature. Avoiding compound terms and other obscure words in her writing, Vikatanitamba writes with spontaneity and yet in an elegant and gracious style. Rajasekhara, a renowned rhetorician of Sanskrit poetics, has gone so far as to insist that a man might well dishonor his own beloved partner, but it would not be possible for him either to ignore or to improve upon Vikatanitamba's sweet and melodious poetry:

Ke vikatanitambena giram gumphena ranjitah.
Nindanti nija-kantanam na maugdhya-madhuram vacah
(Jahlana 1938: 47) (Verse 92).
[Can anyone who has been entertained with the enchanting compositions of Vikatanitamba fail to ignore even the honeyed addresses of one's own sweetheart?]

In one poem, Vikatanitamba eulogizes the king in her comments on the royalty. The poetic speaker portrays the army of the enemy as if it were a newly married bride. Just like a newlywed bride who hesitates to accept the warm invitation of her spouse, who does not show off her dress and ornaments, and who cannot bring herself to dominate her husband, the army of the enemy cannot venture out into the open for a fight to show off their strength and valor. Vikatanitamba's extended metaphor applies equally well to both the army and the bride, achieving a remarkable symmetry.

Sanskrit poetesses such as Silabhattarika, Vijja, Morika, Marula, and Vikatanitamba thus utilize romantic love as a prominent theme in their works, and make the appetites of the body a focal point of celebration. These female poets commonly draw upon somewhat stereotypical images commonly associated with romantic love such as the moonrise, evening darkness, bees, perfume, and morning breezes. Some of these poetesses aim sardonic barbs at wealthy people who are unwilling to help the poor, while condemning poverty for preventing the personalities of poor people from blossoming forth in their full richness. Other female Sanskrit poets praise royalty and offer up obeisance to divine qualities. Amidst the topical and tonal variety of this poetry, romantic

love nonetheless remains the central focus of description, which is often articulated with tremendous depth, insight, and energy.

While male writers in the Sanskrit literary tradition have worked largely in such extended forms as the epic, drama, and fiction, most of their female counterparts have specialized in miniature forms such as individual poems or small clusters of verses. Societal attitudes in that era may well have been responsible for this. The society in which these female poets lived and wrote preferred male poets to their female counterparts, and did not encourage women to compose drama or lengthy poetry such as the epic. Moreover, Sanskrit literary theory frowned on the representation of free love outside of marriage bonds in court epics or drama. Instead, the traditional theorists nearly always favored the representation of love within marriage, establishing the view that while love arises from the body and its physical dimension, it should ultimately be transformed into spiritual love. Sanskrit poetesses were able to identify readers' demand for freer depictions of love and passion, and thus naturally were drawn to miniature representations of passion as in the first poem by Silabhattarika quoted above. Poems such as hers garnered a large following in society, and could be ranked in quality and impact at a level commensurate with such distinguished male writers of Sanskrit prose literature as Bana and Subandhu.

Comparisons between female and male Sanskrit writers lead to another issue worthy of careful consideration. There has been much talk of late about male chauvinism, with some commentators claiming that in centuries and millennia past, male folk dominated their female counterparts, treating them as virtual slaves. Such claims do not stand up to careful scrutiny, for the boldness with which many women Sanskrit poets addressed the passions of the body testifies to their untrammeled freedom from restrictions of various kinds, including state-supported orthodox literary theory.

The works by female poets discussed in this chapter are but a modest sample of the rich vein of creative writing produced by women writers in the Sanskrit tradition. Unfortunately, many of these poems and the women who wrote them have been relatively neglected by literary scholars. A painstaking assessment of these women poets' many contributions is sure to unearth more complexities in the fabric of society in their time.

Notes

1 I herewith convey my deep gratitude and thanks to Dr. Ramaranjan Mukherji and Ashok Kumar Hajra for their suggestions and helpful comments.

2 All dates provided throughout the remainder of this chapter should be assumed to be in the Common Era (CE) unless specifically noted otherwise.
3 The *kadamba* [anthocephala kadambus] is a tree within the *rubiaceae* family.
4 According to Visvanatha Kaviraja in his *Sahitya Darpana*, a famous treatise of poetry criticism, "Styles are properties of the flavors [sentiments], just as heroism and the like are properties of the soul ... Styles are ornaments are to the language of the poetry, just as bracelets and earrings are ornaments to the human figure ... There are four varieties: the Vaidharbhi, Gaudi, Panchali and Lati, prevalent respectively in Vidarbha, Gauda, Panchala and Lata" (Ballantyne and Mitra 1956: 12, 328) (Texts 5 and 625). According to A.K. Warder, "The Panchali is moderate in the use of both compounds and alliteration, but favors the use of words in transferred senses" (Warder 1983 vol. 1: 105).
5 Variants of Vijja's name include Vijjika, Vijjaka, and Vidya. There are conflicting opinions about whether Vijja's career fell in the eighth century or the ninth century of the Common Era (CE). Most critics have placed her in the latter part of the eighth century. However, on the basis of the above reference to the name of Dandin, other scholars have concluded that Vijja may have flourished at the same time as Dandin (ninth century).

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