

THIS IS NOT A WOMAN: LITERARY BODIES AND PRIVATE SELVES IN THE
WORKS OF THE CHINESE AVANT-GARDE WOMEN WRITERS

by

BRYNA MEREDITH TUFT

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

December 2012

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Bryna Meredith Tuft

Title: This Is Not a Woman: Literary Bodies and Private Selves in the Works of the Chinese Avant-Garde Women Writers

This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures by:

Dr. Tze-lan Sang	Chair
Dr. Maram Epstein	Member
Dr. Alison Groppe	Member
Dr. Bryna Goodman	Outside Member

and

Kimberly Andrews Espy	Vice President for Research & Innovation/Dean of the Graduate School
-----------------------	--

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded December 2012

© 2012 Bryna Meredith Tuft

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Bryna Meredith Tuft

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures

December 2012

Title: This Is Not a Woman: Literary Bodies and Private Selves in the Works of the Chinese Avant-Garde Women Writers

During the period of economic expansion and openness to personal expression and individuality following Deng Xiaoping's reforms, the Chinese avant-garde women writers engaged in a project of resistance to the traditionally appropriated use of the female body, image, and voice. This resistance can be seen in the ways they consciously construct a private space in their fiction. In this dissertation, I argue that this space is created by presenting alternative forms of female sexuality, in contrast to the heterosexual wife and mother, and by adding details of their own personal histories in their writing. Key to this argument is the Chinese concept of *si* (privacy) and how the female avant-garde writers turn its traditionally negative associations into a positive tool for writing the self. While male appropriations of images of the female body for political or state-authored purposes are not new to the contemporary period or even the twentieth century, the female avant-garde writers are particularly conscious of the ways in which their bodies are not their own. Moreover, contemporary criticism that labels the works of the female avant-garde writers as self-exposing, titillating, and trite overlooks the difference between authorial intent and commercial or political appropriation, which has led to a profound misunderstanding of these works. In addition, it has also led to a

conflation of the female avant-garde writers' works with those of the later body writers. Therefore the purpose of this dissertation is to provide a closer look at the concept of *si-privacy* and how it intersects with various forms of self-writing, and how it is used as a narrative strategy by three contemporary female authors, Xu Kun, Lin Bai, and Hai Nan. Specifically, I consider the similarities and differences in the ways that these authors create and orient themselves in both their memoirs and their self-referential fiction.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Bryna Meredith Tuft

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
University of Colorado, Boulder

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Philosophy, Modern Chinese Literature, 2012, University of Oregon
Master of Arts, Modern Chinese Literature, 2005, University of Colorado at
Boulder
Bachelor of Arts, Chinese, U.S. History, Asian Studies, 2001, University of
Colorado at Boulder

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Modern and Contemporary Chinese Literature
Women's and Gender Studies

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Lead Instructor, University of Oregon, "A Chinese Cultural Odyssey," Summer
2007, 2008, 2009, 2010
Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Oregon, Chinese language and
literature, 2006-2011

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Foreign Language and Area Studies Summer Language Fellowship, 2011
Foreign Language and Area Studies Dissertation Research Fellowship, 2009-2010
Center for the Study of Women in Society Dissertation Research Grant, 2009-
2010
Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures Graduate School Award,
University of Oregon, 2009
East Asian Languages and Civilizations Department Fellowship, University of
Colorado at Boulder, 2003-2004 and 2004-2005

PUBLICATIONS:

Translator, "Why the Salesman Went Missing" (推销员为什么失踪), by Wang Shou 王手. In, *Best Chinese Short Stories 2009-2010* published by MerwinAsia (Portland, Me) (forthcoming).

Translator, "The Time of Cat's Passion" (猫的激情时代), by Lin Bai 林白. In *Renditions*, published by The Research Center for Translation, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, (planned, Spring 2013).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Professor Tze-lan Sang and Professor Maram Epstein for their continuing support and encouragement. I also thank the Center for the Study of Women in Society at the University of Oregon for a research dissertation research grant, as well as the Center for Asian and Pacific Studies at the University of Oregon for a Foreign Language and Area Studies Grant, both of which provided the opportunity to continue to research and work on this project. I additionally thank Jiang Hongyan and Lin Danya for allowing me to take part in the Ninth and Tenth International Symposiums on Chinese Women's Literature held in China, and the opportunity to interact with other scholars and learn additional perspectives on this topic. Finally, I thank Leah Foy and the faculty and staff of the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures, as well as the Women's and Gender Studies Department and the University of Oregon for the opportunity to pursue this degree and their help in bringing it to fruition.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Terminology.....	27
Structure.....	28
Notes	32
II. WRITING THE PRIVATE BODY.....	35
“Private Writing” and Autobiography	36
“Private Writing” and “Individualized Writing”	47
Conclusion	52
Notes	59
III. THE PUBLIC-ATION OF THE PRIVATE BODY	62
Li Xiaojiang and Dai Jinhua’s “Corporeal” Feminisms	69
The Avant-Garde Writers: Reclaiming the Self and Mediating Consumption.....	74
Conclusion: The Chi Li Phenomenon and the Trap of Publication	85
Notes	88
IV. SELF-ISH WRITING: MEDIATING HISTORY, THEORY, AND THE FEMALE BODY IN THE WORKS OF XU KUN.....	92
Mediating Patriarchal Culture and Women’s Writing: Xu Kun’s <i>Notes on My Life</i>	93
Self-Writing and the Theoretical Body: <i>The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring</i>	100
Conclusion	118
Notes	119

Chapter	Page
V. SELF-ISH WOMEN: INDIVIDUALIZED WRITING AND PRIVACY IN THE WORKS OF LIN BAI	122
<i>The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life</i>	123
<i>One Person's War</i>	131
Conclusion	153
Notes	155
VI. SELF-ISH PASSION: HAI NAN'S <i>A DISSOLUTE LIFE: NOTES FROM MY LIFE AND MY LOVERS</i>	160
<i>A Dissolute Life: Notes from My Life</i>	161
<i>My Lovers</i>	170
Conclusion	178
Notes	179
VII. CONCLUSION: PUBLIC EXPOSURE: THE BODY WRITERS AND WOMEN'S "SELF-WRITING"	181
Mian Mian's <i>Candy</i> and the New <i>Liumang</i>	185
Wei Hui's <i>Shanghai Baby</i> and <i>Linglei</i> Culture.....	194
Notes	207
REFERENCES CITED.....	210

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Time is an artist. I am a stone rubbing: the lineaments of a range of peaks, of the caves of a grotto. Before I came into this world, the picture was already complete. As I slowly proceed along the watercourse of this segment of time, I discover my place in it. I see that the picture itself is a piece of history, a depiction of the life of all women.”

Chen Ran, *A Private Life*

In 1994, Lin Bai published her novel *One Person's War* (*Yigeren de zhanzheng*) at the Gansu People's Publishing House, a publisher known for having released other sexually-explicit novels.¹ The response to the novel, which was printed with a picture of a naked woman on the cover, was two-fold—it brought Lin quite rapidly into the public eye, and caused her novel to be denounced as perverse and sexually inappropriate.² Lin would eventually change both the content of the novel and her publisher, after a long and fruitless search to republish *One Person's War* in its original form. What was it about this particular novel that made it so distasteful to the reading public? More graphic depictions of female sexual behavior had been published before, so why was this particular novel deemed “perverse” and “sexually inappropriate?” The answer to this question suggests the purpose of this dissertation.

This study is not the first to ask questions about the relationship among women, modernity, and writing in China. Indeed, as we move ever closer to the hundredth anniversary of the May Fourth Movement and its espousal of women's liberation, investigations of that project have become both more common and more relevant. The iconoclastic “male feminist” writers of the May Fourth generation were extremely

concerned about the oppression of women that they saw as a result of a Confucian patriarchal system. Recently more and more scholars of women's writing have raised questions about the accuracy of the May Fourth claim that women were kept completely cloistered and illiterate in the "women's quarters" with no ability or opportunities to add their voices to the great Chinese literary tradition. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to look back at the entire pre-modern period, it is grounded in this history. Adding my voice to the chorus of others seeking to work against the May Fourth myth and its lasting effects on the study of Chinese literature is just one of the goals of this study.

The purpose of this project is twofold: first, to investigate in some detail the self-referential fiction of the female avant-garde writers in the contemporary period and second, to refine discussions of *si* (私) in contemporary women's writing. *Si* is difficult to translate into English; while often glossed as "private" this translation carries with it the distinction between public and private in a Western context. The Chinese context is not entirely synonymous. It is more accurate to translate *si* as a conglomeration of "personal," "private," and "selfish;" or to discuss it in its traditional pairing with *gong* (公 public). To that end, a little clarification in terms is necessary.

First, it is appropriate to begin with a simple definition of what the concept of private/privacy means in English. Bonnie McDougall provides a very useful discussion in her Introduction to *Chinese Conceptions of Privacy*:

English now distinguishes between the adjectival form *private*, which may refer to selfish interests or to property rights (including access to property), and the substantive *privacy*, which denotes a state or condition relating to intimate conduct and relationships in which the subject controls access and makes autonomous decisions.³

With this definition in mind, as we consider these concepts in Chinese, “public” and “private” might be closer to the traditional Chinese concepts of *wai* (外 outside) and *nei* (内 inside). In general, men inhabit the world of *wai*, the outer “public” world, while women inhabit the realm of *nei*, the inner chambers, the “private” domestic sphere. However, the parallel breaks down when we turn to the family and try to determine its place in this schema.

As Habermas discusses in the European context, as ideas of “the public” developed, the family was taken as a private entity, theoretically beyond the intrusion of the state but subject to the dictates of it.⁴ This is not entirely the same in the Chinese context. The family, or what is thought of as the domestic sphere in the West, functions differently in the Chinese context because it occupies a different place vis à vis the construction of the state—it is the fundamental building block, and therefore like the state it falls into the realm of *gong*. Again, in English, *gong* is usually translated as “public,” but it has more to do with the idea of society.⁵ That is to say, what in Western thought is called “public” is a conflation of both *gong* and *wai* in Chinese—and the site of that conflation is the family. Going all the way back to Confucius, the hierarchical and structured relationships within the family were both constructive of and parallel to the expected behavior of a man in civil society. On a functional level this would manifest as *xiao* (孝 filial piety), the way a son treats his father as the basis for and parallel to *zhong* (忠 loyalty), the way a subject should act towards the ruler. As such, the family does not occupy the same domestic-private space that it does in the Western context, but rather

that of *gong*; at the very it least becomes a place where these different fundamental ideas intersect.

This being the case, it is possible to understand how forms of writing that refer to the domestic and which might be looked at as private in the Western context, are arguably still a part of the *gong*-public realm in the Chinese context.⁶ An example is a letter written by Lin Juemin just a few days before his participation in the Guangzhou uprising in March 1911. Although he thinks back on the some of very intimate moments of his life with his wife, that he also talks about national problems as he faces his own death shows the extent to which the state and the family were intertwined as public spaces, and as I will argue, also male-oriented and heterosexually-aligned. The same can be said of the very personal memoir accounts and the so-called “wound” fiction written by both male and female authors after the end of the Cultural Revolution and the fall of the Gang of Four—extremely intimate and personal stories are invested with meaning precisely because of their relationship to the party-state. In this case, and as I will discuss later, the party-state has taken the place of the traditional family, however the positioning of the personal as a theoretically transparent aspect of an individual’s life within the party-state remains the same as that of an individual in a traditional family.

Given this understanding of what constitutes *gong*, it is then possible to understand what makes up *si*, as its dialectic opposite. What I mean to say is that although there are two binaries at work here: man/woman and *wai/nei*, which in theory at least correspond to each other, the *gong/si* pair does not follow along in the same parallel manner. So then how to deal with this concept of *si*? As the dialectical opposite of *gong*, in English it translates as “private,” but the kind of privacy which does not involve the

state or public society; one which is both personal and selfish and which, as I will show, functions as a resistance to the projects of the state and informs the works of these authors. It is also worth noting that when *si* has a negative connotation in Chinese (which seems to be more often than not), it is precisely because of its bearing on the personal at the exclusion of *gong*. As McDougall writes:

The Chinese word *si* covers both “private” and “privacy”; in parallel with English usage, *si* may refer to private ownership, private interests or selfishness, private as distinct from public service, private as underhand or secretive conduct, *and privacy as a state of seclusion to which access is controlled by the subject.*⁷

Rather than attempt to trace the development of concepts of *si* in Chinese thought, literature, law, etc., or get involved in a long explication of the various mechanisms of private versus public, it is McDougall’s last point which is the topic of interest in this study. My argument stems from the idea that the avant-garde women writers of the post-Mao period sought to create a space of female privacy in their literature as “a state of seclusion to which access is controlled by the subject” as a space of resistance, and investigates the ways in which they attempt to create this space.

What bearing, then, does this idea of *si* have on women’s writing? At first glance it may seem somewhat problematic to employ more traditional terms such as *gong* and *si* for theorizing contemporary Chinese women’s writing; however, despite their pre-modern implications these terms are still quite relevant, much like Habermas describes when he writes that, “[T]he very conditions that make the inherited language seem inappropriate appear to require these words, however confused their employment.”⁸ In as much as the English terms “public” and “private” come from their own tangled histories and must be understood as the products of those histories, so too is it important to understand how the traditional concepts of *gong* and *si* influence ideas about what is

public and what is private in contemporary China. Here, it is the question of women's resistance to the heteronational appropriation of their voices and bodies and the creation of literary privacy which concerns this study. As such, my focus is more closely aligned with the project of women's literary feminism, particularly as discussed in recent works by Amy Dooling, Wang Lingzhen, as well as a collection of essays edited by Mayfair Yang.

As the title of her book indicates, Amy Dooling is primarily concerned with understandings and constructions of gender and the projects of feminism as they pertain to women writers in the first half of the twentieth century.⁹ She questions both the May Fourth appropriation of the female image, as well as the scholarly interpretation which reinforces women's passivity by association. She notes:

It is one thing to critique the ways in which women and women's liberation have been strategically appropriated by contending modernizing discourses, it is quite another to conclude that such processes effectively precluded women from asserting their own visions, voices, and desires as historical subjects.¹⁰

Dooling makes a point of distinguishing between women writers and feminist writers. Her distinction has to do with their purposes for writing—the feminist writer specifically seeks to question performative gender and sexual norms created by society. To that end, their works are often more didactic, and therefore seemingly less “artistic.” Dooling questions this literary judgment. She reads certain autobiographical forms of writing, such as the diary, as a part of the feminist project. Dooling's idea of “alternative and autonomous discursive spaces for women,”¹¹ particularly as created by autobiographical or self-reference is of special importance to my discussion below. Her discussions of womanhood and forms of literary creation are invaluable, as well as the way she positions literary images of women and feminism against masculine discourses of

nationalism and modernity. However, while I draw on her discussion of literary feminism and use it as a foundation for my own inquiry it is primarily questions of *si-privacy* which motivate this dissertation.

Wang Lingzhen also takes a feminist reading of modern and contemporary Chinese women's autobiographical practice in her book, *Personal Matters: Women's Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth-Century China*. Although motivated by an interest in women's semi-autobiographical privacy fiction, the central question of my study is at heart very similar to the one Wang Lingzhen asks. As she says, "The subaltern—modern and contemporary Chinese women here—do sometimes speak. The question, however, is how we can hear their voices without reducing them to the meanings produced by the dominant mode of representation."¹² Indeed it is as much the case with the fiction of the avant-garde women writers as it is of contemporary women's autobiography that:

[T]he selves they represent do not necessarily correspond to the dominant, institutionalized notions of the self and writing. They either fall outside the frame of official history and literary studies or are appropriated by the dominant cultural discourse to further codify female personhood as the other/mirror of the endorsed male self: either feminine/traditional/virtuous or immoral/transgressive/dangerous. This explains why women's autobiographical writings have been on the one hand largely dismissed by established scholars of history and literature but on the other hand read by the public as revealing the truth of women writers' virtuous/selfless or narcissistic/transgressive lives.¹³

Wang's assessment of the appropriation of women's autobiographical writing reveals the complexities of interpretation of women's autobiographical practice, complexities which are equally applicable to the female avant-garde writers. In addition to issues of conformity/transgression which Wang discusses above, critics of women's privacy fiction also generally fall into two camps, These debates generally focus on whether these

works represent a contribution to the literary canon or should be read as soft pornography, as well as whether these works show a strong feminist and political sense or are simply the trivial, overly personal jottings of women seeking to capitalize on the market's recent voyeuristic fascination with women's lives.

Feminism and the call to relocate, revitalize, and reappropriate women's writing are certainly motivating factors behind this work as much as the many others, such as Dooling's and Wang's, which have recently come out both in China and in the West. However, it is also interesting that none of these authors themselves describe their works as feminist, in the same way that they resist the label "woman writer," no matter who is applying that label. While it is impossible to separate the fact of "woman" from these authors and their fiction, ultimately I argue that they are attempting to write beyond gendered experience in the feminist sense. That is to say, that rather than focus on "women's writing" or representing women's lived experiences, these writers are narrating individual selves in their fiction, ones which exist outside of the socially-proscribed roles determined for them as "women." For to talk about gendered experience is to talk about feminism, as in the oft-repeated phrase "the personal is political."¹⁴ As Wang reasons, "The personal is political, not only in the sense that what is personal is socially and politically defined, but also because the personal can never be reduced to a purely ideological frame and thus always stands counter to dominant appropriations."¹⁵ The problem with reading the personal as a counter to dominant appropriations is the long history of male appropriation of the female voice, form, and even biography in the Chinese literary tradition. Also, in treating these works as political in their intent, feminist readings force these works into the realm of the *gong*-public and in doing so run

the risk of both denying the fundamentally *si*-private topical nature of these works as well as, ironically, falling into the same trap of essentializing female behavior and desire. To put it another way, as Wang Lingzhen writes, “A feminist approach to women’s autobiographical practice requires a new perspective that focuses not on what autobiography is or should be but on what autobiographical writing does or can do.”¹⁶ Applying this line of reasoning to the semi-autographical privacy fiction of the female avant-garde writers, I argue that these authors’ overall interest in creating a private space for themselves through the use of the self-referential semi-autobiographical form (as one of the most important narrative techniques in their fiction) requires a discussion of what that fiction both is and does, to use Wang’s words. To discuss what that fiction “should be” risks either a return to more structuralist discussions of gender essentialism or forces it to otherwise fit into dominant cultural and social expectations, while asking what this fiction “can do” implies a fundamentally political and public intent. In focusing on issues of privacy, then, this study walks the fine line between “should be” and “can do.” That is to say, while the motivating interest behind this study is absolutely feminist in nature, it is the lens of *si*-privacy, rather than feminism per se, that will provide the means to interpret and understand these stories.

The collection *Spaces of Their Own: Women’s Public Sphere in Transnational China*, edited by Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, grounds my own focus on expressions of *si*-privacy and the use of the female image. Coming out of a conference on women and the media in transnational China, which Yang defines both culturally and linguistically, this collection of essays looks at the development of the public sphere as a masculine space, and how women both work to create their own spaces within this arena as well as how

they resist the discourse of gender politics or use that discourse to their own ends. In a certain respect, it can be said that this collection represents a specific (local), gendered response to Habermas' universalized theory of the public sphere. Looking at such varied topics as film, television, the first women's museum in Hunan, women's role in consumer society, and the development of state-sponsored feminism as a masculine discourse, Yang describes her focus as "two spatializations of women in the realm of *cultural production* in transnational China:"

First, the book will examine the positioning of women in domestic or public space in Chinese mass media and public discourse. Here, although figures of women are prevalent, they appear mainly as *objects* of representations by men; women are encoded and excluded from the production of discourse. Second, the book also documents what Lefebvre calls the fugitive "representational spaces" of women who live a semiclandestine life and try to carve out a larger space for themselves in the male public discursive world.¹⁷

Much like Yang and her contributors, I am interested in the ways in which the female avant-garde writers construct a space for themselves, as well as how they resist the male/state/heterosexually appropriated image of women. Moreover, in attempting to answer the question of what it means when these writers publish (i.e. make public) their works of so-called "privacy literature" Yang and the other contributors' discussions of the nature and function of the male-dominated sphere of public discourse, especially those of feminist theorists Dai Jinhua and Li Xiaojiang, are invaluable. Ultimately, however, this study seeks to understand not how these works function on a public level, but rather how these authors articulate a space of *si*-privacy which necessarily precedes, and to a certain extent hinders, its public reception.

Without these works, and the many others like them, which complicate the very simple picture of women presented by the May Fourth writers, my work would not be

possible. And yet without the addition of “public” and “private” to discussions of women’s literary expression it is difficult to fully appreciate how the male May Fourth writers were able to erase women’s voices so effectively that it should take almost a century to relocate them.¹⁸ This erasure, I will argue, comes from the male intellectual appropriation of the female image and voice. Although this erasure is not unique to the May Fourth writers, it is in the May Fourth period that the image of women becomes completely overwritten by the idea of the nation, so much so that women’s liberation largely became a synonym for national salvation. As Dooling says:

In terms of Chinese feminism, then, the fact that the idea of the emancipated woman was from the outset “mainstreamed” may well mean that the conditions conducive to the emergence of a subversive female subject never fully materialized. It may help explain, for instance, the thwarted formation of autonomous cultural institutions—presses, magazines, bookstores, and so forth—through which women themselves could promote and represent issues of importance to them.¹⁹

As a result of this male and national appropriation, woman’s voices have been largely covered over, relegated forever to the realm of allegory. It is for this reason that recent scholars of women’s writing have found such an urgent need to ask what constitutes an authentic female voice, to uncover it from the shroud of traditional literary interpretation which cloaks it. The many scholars who contributed to *Chinese Concepts of Privacy*, which touches on the expression of *si* in various forms throughout Chinese history from the ritual bronzes of the Zhou to the writers of the post-Mao period, provide the foundation and much of the vocabulary which I will use to more fully explore the female avant-garde writers’ project of privacy, and their resistance to the publicly co-opted image of “woman.” A simple overview of the appropriation that these women seek to

work against is helpful to understanding the topography of the literary landscape inhabited by the avant-garde women writers of the 1980s and 1990s.

The male appropriation of the female image and voice has a long tradition in Chinese literature, with the relationship between a ruler and his ministers thought of as parallel to the relationship between a husband and a wife. This can be seen, for example, in the standard political interpretation of the *Classic of Poetry (Shijing)*, which holds that poems in which the female voice bemoans the absence or loss of her husband or lover are read as allegorical of the male poet's feelings towards his ruler. This allegorical treatment of female desire as symbolic of male political yearnings would continue on in poetry throughout imperial history.

With the rise of Neo-Confucianism and the Cult of Qing in the Song Dynasty and the accompanying obsession with female chastity, over time male literati's use of the female voice became more and more associated with naturalness, as opposed to the cultured/cultivated male voice. To invoke a woman's voice allowed the male writer, in theory, to access a more true and pure form of emotional existence than he could as an educated literatus. We see this technique of appropriation more in fiction as it develops as a genre; as Maram Epstein reminds us in her work *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction* the poetics of gender and the highly sentimentalized aesthetics of the cult of *qing* were one means by which the male literatus found the freedom necessary for reclaiming and expressing his own authentic feelings, although it was not without complication. She writes:

[I]n fact, in most writers' hands, unconventional behavior, emblematic of authenticity, became a necessary stage in reclaiming the conventional orthodox values of filiality and loyalty as authentic rather than rote. The appropriation of a highly sentimentalized femininity was one of these unconventional expressions of

authenticity. The imaginings of a reinvigorated literati culture based on the subjective and dynamic qualities of *qing* animate much of late Ming and Qing fiction and drama; yet, even in fiction, the tensions between the desire for the benefits of community-centered orthodoxy and individualistic authenticity were never fully resolved.²⁰

This tension Epstein describes revolves around concerns about the motivation for invoking the feminine in written subjective expression. As she notes, these motives should ultimately privilege *gong*, that is, “community-centered orthodoxy,” over *si*, “individualistic authenticity.” Thus even here it is possible to see how a discussion of *si*-privacy is relevant to the development of fiction and the female image.

In addition to these more personal appropriations of the female image, literati writers of fiction in the Ming and Qing could also invoke the female body as the site of both desire (欲 *yu*) and emotions (情 *qing*). This would allow them to explore the consequences of individual action and morality, as well as present a critique of the mores of the time, as in works like *The Plum in the Golden Vase* (*Jinping mei*), and perhaps the greatest work of traditional fiction, *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng*), amongst others. The publication of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is important not only for the ways in which it presents the height of development in the traditional novel, and as such the opportunities for playing with the problems of conformity and transgression, as Keith McMahon talks about in his work *Causality and Containment in Seventeenth-century Chinese Fiction*; but also for the way it spurred women to write as they never had before.

These traditional appropriations of the female image and voice set the stage for the Republican period. Writers and intellectuals during the Republican period came to feel that the reason why China had become so weak was that it was backward. For them,

Chinese ideas of gender and marriage, for example, had not evolved in step with the West and still clung to outmoded traditional ideas, particularly Confucianism. As a result of this, Republican-era intellectuals' writing began to be focused on women: both the (Neo-)Confucian prescriptions for women, and women's physical bodies. These intellectuals came to the conclusion that women, and particularly women's bodies, were symbolic of the fate of China. Traditional women were physically weak, hobbled by footbinding, uneducated, and relegated to the home, with little or no chance for contact with the outside world. The answer to women's physical weakness, as symbolic of national weakness, also came in female form—Nora, from Ibsen's play "A Doll's House." From the beginning of the May Fourth Movement in 1919, the forces of nationalism and feminism have been intertwined, as when the May Fourth reformers encouraged young women to become "Chinese Noras" and reject tradition—only in this way could the Chinese people and the Chinese nation become strong again. Thus, although promoting a pro-woman stance, the May Fourth (and later reformers) use of the female image and voice towards their own ends marks a continuation of this tradition of male appropriation, rather than a break from it.

Interest in individual emotional authenticity as a part of the cult of *qing* (sentiment) also became a fundamental part of the May Fourth writers' project. Haiyan Lee, in her recent work *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*, looks at the role *qing* plays in changing conceptions of subjectivity, modernity and nationalism in the first half of the twentieth century. She identifies the modern subject as being a sentimental one; the modern nation is then, as she calls it, a "community of sympathy." Her project is to provide a reading of sentiment as it developed from the late

Qing “Confucian structure of feeling,” which finds *qing* expressed as social virtue, to the May Fourth, “enlightenment structure of feeling,” in which *qing* becomes synonymous with modernity, subjectivity, and free love/desire, and finally ends with the “revolutionary structure of feeling” in which *qing* was harnessed by the Communists to stir nationalist sentiment and loyalty to the state. Lee’s focus on modern subjectivity and sentiment in her work is important to this study of women’s literary privacy. The question she seeks to answer is, “In what sense was the changing meaning of *qing*—from asexual virtue to romantic love, sexual desire, and patriotic fervor—part and parcel of the changing conceptions of self, gender, and community in modern China?”²¹ Lee provides a potential framework for discussing the state and society against which these authors were writing when she discusses the various “structures of feeling.” She asks, “[H]ow the discourses of sentiment situated the individual in society, what kind of power relations they sought to undermine and reinforce, and what kind of community they endorsed and sought to realize.”²² In as much as I too am concerned with the relationship between the self and society and the ways in which the female authorial self writes against the state this paper follows very much in her footsteps; however, unlike Lee, my primary focus is neither to understand the changing nature of emotion, nor is it oriented towards discussions of nationalism and modernity. It is rather the question of women’s resistance and the creation of a private literary space which concerns this study.

As the Republican Period continued, there were more and more changes in China’s political, economic, and social climate. Women, for example, were allowed to leave the home and seek employment, and footbinding was outlawed. Also, the idea that a person was free to choose whom he or she loved and married became more prominent,

although certainly still subject to social perceptions and constraints. These changes also appeared in the literature of the day. Much of it tends to focus on a young woman seeking freedom and making choices between her ideal and her gender role. As Meng Yue discusses in her article, “Female Images and National Myth,” these young women and their journey to education, maturity and independence were allegories for China’s education, maturation, and independence.²³ In the end, the young women in these stories often end up choosing what is best for the nation rather than what they would themselves prefer, because they are metaphors, and therefore, not “real.”

As Meng shows, when we consider Republican era women’s writing in particular, often there is a conflict between the single woman’s fortune and the fate of the nation. Women had been placed in the precarious position of appearing as symbols of their country’s journey to maturity and independence, and their writing reflects this feeling of being pulled in two directions. Their choices could not be made just for themselves, but rather always with the good of the nation in mind. We also find, as with writers like Lu Yin, that writing became a forum for reflection on the self and female desire under the shadow of male discourses.²⁴ Nevertheless, the women in Lu Yin’s stories are still symbolic of China, and their journey is still an allegorical one. Works that would seem to show women as independent still place them in relation to men. Even writers like Lu Yin, who wrote freely about such subjects as female-female desire in works like “Lishi’s Diary” (“Lishi de riji”) ultimately end with the female protagonist leaving her (often schoolmate) female lover for a man.

As we turn then to the Mao period, from 1949 to 1976, the idea of male-female equality begins to look more and more like male-female similarity, that is, men and

women are not just equal they are the same. This certainly complicated, if not effectively erased, all gender difference at least in theory. Official party rhetoric of the time encouraged young people to become “revolutionary bolts” in the machinery of Communism. Party propaganda again and again depicted images of a masculinized female body hard at work alongside her male counterparts. At the same time more feminine gender expressions, such as permed hair styles and make-up, were denounced as “bourgeois” and “reactionary.” This is not to suggest that on an individual level women somehow began to think of themselves as men, or that people were no longer aware of biological differences, but rather that the way gender was both marked and read had become a somewhat masculinized form of “neutral.” We also find an injecting of the state-public into the individual-private, as the Communist government intruded more and more into the lives of its people. As discussed earlier, as the party-state took over the place left vacant by the imperial government, much like the situation in pre-modern times, the family was still conceived of as a *gong*-public space. As Meng explains, in this period too, women and women’s bodies were also symbolic, although now they had become representative of either an oppressed class or of the party and the party’s authority.

After his talks at Yan’an, where Mao announced the idea that “literature serves the people,” we find that the idea that the party has the authority to intrude into the traditionally more private parts of life is reinforced by literature. Because of this, very strict regulations were placed on what kinds of literature could and could not be produced. Meng details the three kinds of story lines that can be found in this period. In the first story line, a woman from a “lower” class is exploited by a man, typically from a

“higher” class. When she is liberated by the Communist party it is symbolic of the liberation of her whole class. In such stories, the female protagonist stands for the laborers, the peasants, and all of the other people that the Communist party claimed as its own, just as the man who exploits her in the story represents the traditional, feudal-minded, landowning classes that the Communists opposed. An example of this sort of narrative is *The White-Haired Girl* (*Bai mao nü*) by He Jingzhi. According to Meng, what is important in this kind of storyline is that the protagonist is female—she is exploited, often sexually, weak, and unable to help herself so that she needs the help of the party. This serves to reinforce the party’s ultimate authority, as a father/protector/provider.

In the second story line from this period we find an individual “mobile” female character who matures through her own experiences and encounters many “immobile” male characters, ultimately choosing to live as a Communist. In most cases, this means that she chooses to love, and marry a Communist man, often against great odds or at great cost to herself. We can see an example of this in Yang Mo’s story, “Song of Youth” (“Qingchun zhi ge”). As Meng discusses, this kind of storyline echoes the earlier Republican narrative where the woman is an allegory of the national myth: as China developed it passed through many stages, ultimately choosing the correct path, that of Communism. So too does the female protagonist move past many men, ultimately choosing the “right” one—the Communist. Again, this kind of literature serves to reinforce the authority of the party. Much of women’s writing during this time falls into this category.

In the third and final story line, we find a politically mature female character reconstructing a male political “infant” as a good Communist. As Meng explains, the

female figure provides the means by which the male becomes educated and able to enter society as a functioning member. These kinds of stories reinforce the authority of the state. They also play on the myths of the liberation of women, and women's equality. In this particular genre that we find the Communist "strong woman"—this era's response to masculinist discourse. Meng shows how the "stronger," more mature woman, who has been liberated from the shackles of her gender by the Communists, yet who is actually still bound by heteronormative gender roles, acts as mother-figure, and effectively raises her male counterpart to enter society as a fully-developed Communist. The woman is there to fill this role and this role only. As such, she is only equal to her male counterpart on a superficial level.

Both Republican and Mao-era literature erase the feminist journey of an individual woman by placing her in relation to others. The female protagonists may be more mobile, have a better education and more opportunities than her pre-1911 counterparts, but she is still defined by the men in her life. It is in the 1980s and 1990s, and specifically in the works of the avant-garde women writers, that the journey of the individual woman finds expression, away from her relation to the rest of the world, and men in particular. It is in this period, in the works of these authors, that it is possible to find women creating a literary space for their personal expressions of self.

The era of reform and opening in the 1980s when these women are writing is in itself important to understanding their project of female literary privacy. These authors were all born just before the Cultural Revolution, and grew up during this period when in theory the individual was subsumed by the state. It is no coincidence, however, that after Deng Xiaoping's reforms increased both the acceptance of individual expression as well

as individual ability to consume according to personal tastes, that Lin Bai, Xu Kun, and Hai Nan began to write and publish fiction. As the boundaries between the state-public and individual-private resolidified, these authors found the opportunity to create a space apart from the constraints of traditional social expectation and understanding. Moreover, the Fourth World Conference on Women organized by the UN Commission on the Status of Women held in Beijing in 1995 did as much to open up new opportunities for women writers to publish their writing as it did to commercialize that writing and call into question their motivations for writing. As such, the works of the female avant-garde writers should be read in light of the “culture fever” that came in the wake of Deng’s “Open Door” (*gaige kaifang*) reforms, rather than as the commercialized, hyper-sexualized writing of the “body” writers, such as Wei Hui, who expose the private details of their sexual experiences for commercial gain. In the last two decades, specifically in the works of the avant-garde women writers, these writers have been able to use this period of cultural opening to narrate their private, individual selves in their literature, as distinct or distanced from their relationship to the rest of the world, and masculine-centered society in particular. It is in this period, in the works of these authors, that it is finally possible to find women creating a literary space for their personal expressions of self. In this sense, their writing is best described as *si-private*.

However, even after Deng Xiaoping’s reforms and the increasing validity of individual expression, the persistent social norm that defines a woman in relation to a man remained in the public consciousness. As contemporary feminist critic and theorist Dai Jinhua says:

Since 1949, Chinese society was on the whole one of gender equality. But there was also a customary way of thinking that women must belong to a man

in order to be a person. She has no status of her own. As a wife or even as a lover you have a status which your relationship with men can force on you. If you belong to no one, then there are doubts about your character. You are thought strange. People will either think you are a corrupted woman who sleeps with many men, or that you are an abnormal, sick woman with problems. It's as if the whole world has a duty to monitor single women.²⁵

Despite the state-sponsored feminism which had been promoted in China since at least 1949, the underlying patriarchal hegemony has remained intact. Moreover, because the literature of the twentieth-century appeared to show women as more and more liberated from this system while actually subtly reaffirming it, the female body retained its symbolic currency. That is to say, because the female image and voice only have validity in relation to a man, their meaning is always determined by men. Given this context, a woman's voice and even body never truly belong to herself, and as such, she is never really "real."

The desire to relocate women's voices informs the second purpose of this project: an investigation of the avant-garde women writers of the post-Mao period. Much time has been spent trying to answer the question of what women's writing is, and how to identify it, particularly in the late imperial and Republican periods. Relatively less attention has been paid to the post-Mao period. It is my belief that in addition to looking at how women wrote and how they positioned themselves vis à vis society, that it is also necessary to fully flesh out how they resist the appropriation of the female image and create instead a space for themselves. As Yang writes:

[D]uring the Maoist era on the Mainland, while making strides in women's education, basic rights, and employment, state feminism was concerned mainly to give women entrance to the public realm of labor, while women's production in the public realm of discourse was denied by the dominance of state discourse and by a state "erasure of gender" (*xingbie mosha*), especially female gender. In the current period of China's entry into global capitalism, at the same time that women are in decline in the public sphere of labor and are being sexualized

by a male business and entertainment culture, the heightened awareness of gender difference and discrimination also contributes to the awareness of women's subjectivity.²⁶

As Yang notes, both the Mao-era "interruption" in women's, and indeed everyone's, articulations of a *si*-self in favor of *gong*-transparent state rhetoric and ideology, as well as the post-Mao resurgence of sexological discourse based on gender difference, are important to understanding how women articulate their own subjectivity. However it is important to remember that reading those women who participate in exhibitions of the newly re-feminized female body or who capitalize on the re-sexualization of the female body as simply victims of male culture also negate their expressions of self as resistance to both the de-feminized Mao-era woman, as well as the de-sexualized virtuous wife and mother of eras past. In order to locate this resistance we must look more at the concept of *si*. The central question I ask of these writers is how they articulate a literary space of *si* for themselves in their works, and how this articulation sets these writers apart from other groups of women writers of the twentieth-century.

What makes the writing of these avant-garde women writers different and unique is the way in which they use both gender and sexuality to resist the publicly/nationally co-opted image of the heterosexual woman and thereby create in their works a private place away from the intrusion of the state. Tze-lan Sang's work on the modern development of depictions and discussions of female-female same-sex desire is highly informative here. Just as it is necessary to be careful about using the words "public" and "private" in English to represent the Chinese terms *gong* and *si*, so too is it important to avoid the transnational trap, as it were, of simply importing the Western history and terminology of feminism and same-sex desire onto the Chinese case. Sang's primary

concern is to understand how depictions of female homosocial and homoerotic behavior went from being considered innocent and sweet to titillating and finally destructive and abnormal. Her work directly informs my own, for it is my contention that the avant-garde women writers play with constructions of gender and female sexuality as narrative techniques, resisting the publicly co-opted image of the heterosexual woman by presenting alternative forms of female desire. This goes to the heart of the question which I originally asked, as to why *One Person's War* was denounced. When the avant-garde women writers describe alternative forms of female sexuality they present female desire in a way that is not aligned with the state and society, and as such, fall outside the acceptable norms. This use of female sexuality as a narrative technique is directly related to the concept of *si*-privacy as indicating both intimacy as well as obstructed access, and is what makes their works ones of resistance, as Sang says, "Autonomous female sexuality, mediated neither by patriarchal control associated with marriage nor by the demands of reproduction, constitutes a threat to the model of sexual and marital harmony upheld by the dominant discourse."²⁷ This threatening sexuality typically takes one of three forms, that is, desire for oneself (masturbation), desire for other women which may fall anywhere along the spectrum of homosociality to homoeroticism to homosexuality; and desire for no-one (i.e. the women who does not have sex at all). For example, in some narratives Lin Bai depicts female autoerotic and homosexual behavior, while others suggest more homosocial friendships, or subtly suggest female-female homoerotic longings.

In Lin's writing, female-female desire or self-desire takes on the uplifting attributes of *qing*, its sublime nature. Heterosexual relationships are portrayed at best as

strange or somehow twisted, and at worst as destructive and unhealthy. In terms of placing Lin in the imagined tradition of women's private writing, where we find weak or unattractive male characters in Lu Yin's fiction, for example, we find aberrant and abhorrent male characters in Lin Bai's works. I believe that this reflects the different times in which these two women were writing; for Lu Yin male-female relationships, while damaging to a woman's independence, were still more clearly demarcated by gender roles that had not yet been destabilized by the Communist project of equality/similarity, whereas for Lin Bai, commonly held ideas of gender had been effectively neutralized for the last thirty years during Mao's rule. For her, male-female relationships are not only particularly damaging to women, they are also completely unfamiliar and unsettling. Lin often describes her writing as a tool with which to fend off the oppression of cultural norms, metaphoric meaning, and the male gaze and carve out a space where a self, in this case a female self, can exist; a tool which revels in the individual and personal.

To present another example: although she writes with the same tools and for the same purpose, Chen Ran in her novel *A Private Life* (*Siren shenghuo*), tackles both female-female desire and heterosexual desire, opting in the end for a first non-sexual then autoerotic option. That Lin's and Chen's works are very different speaks to their individual styles. That they use the same kinds of narrative techniques to create similar spaces for women's literary expression and individuality speaks to the project of this group of writers as a whole. As Sang writes:

In this time of many contradictions, the representations of female homoeroticism by serious women writers such as Chen Ran and Lin Bai are caught in a whirlwind of competing interpretations. While feminist literary critics (including some seemingly liberal male critics) in the PRC extol the authentic "female

consciousness” and the portrayal of “sisterhood” in their works, conservative male readers accuse them of a whole gamut of crimes ranging from the neglect of women’s duty as loving mothers of mankind to solipsism, self-indulgence, and intellectual pettiness. Furthermore, profit-oriented publishers package their works as food for the masses’ voyeuristic consumption.²⁸

In extolling “female consciousness and sisterhood” or in condemning the works as lacking female virtue we can see the essentializing of femininity, which these writers question. This questioning of an essential femininity is then coupled with the insistence on mediated *si*-privacy, as when critics describe these works as “self-indulgent” and “solipsistic.” It is my hope that by accompanying discussions of female sexuality with discussions of the self and *si* that it will be possible to avoid this trap that Sang describes, while also highlighting the inherent contradictions that come with the making public (publishing) of these private discourses.

Moreover, as a result of public expectations about the way women’s private lives “should be” expressed, we should understand this insistence on alternative forms of female sexuality as another kind of resistance as well. Wang Lingzhen shows convincingly how the autobiographies of Yu Luojin, as a temporal precursor to the four authors included here and the subject of much debate, were scrutinized and ultimately devalued as a result of her sexual experiences. The fact that she had been divorced twice as well as having admitted to at least a couple of extra-marital affairs made it possible to dismiss her experiences—to silence her voice—as that of a “decadent and ‘careless’ woman.”²⁹ As Wang points out:

For a woman, becoming a public figure always meant exposing herself to charges premised on the vulnerable and personal mark of female gender. Her public career was constantly endangered by rumors about her private life, which was sexually connoted and repeatedly emphasized as the most important realm for investments of both state interest and conventional values. Women who wrote or otherwise performed in public more directly

faced this danger inherent in their social existence as gendered beings. In its reception, women's writing was very much determined by the gendered embodiment or signature of its authors.³⁰

Here again we find echoes of the same traditional values which concerned writing women in the Ming and Qing. Despite all of the feminist and socialist rhetoric of the preceding fifty or so years, women were still associated with a domestic sphere that, while not a part of the *wai*-public social sphere, should still be transparent to and in line with the values of the *gong*-public nation/party-state. When a woman enters the *wai*-public social sphere, whether she be a writer or otherwise, any aspects of her self which fall outside the *gong*-public boundaries (i.e. those aspects labeled as *si*-private) naturally become the means by which that woman would or could be discredited. And so it is from this perspective that the works of the female avant-garde writers can be understood as operating on a second level of resistance. By focusing on alternative forms of female sexuality these writers not only resist the appropriation of the female form, but they also effectively take the very means by which their writing might be publicly discredited and use it for their own purposes.

Lastly, the way in which these authors incorporate self-reference as another key narrative technique is fundamental to this project. I do not mean to suggest that these works are autobiographical, but that in privileging the private, feeling self over mainstream readings of womanhood and femininity, the use of self-reference as a narrative device is a necessary part of their project of mediated privacy. Lee discusses how:

The repeated appeal to personal experience, the elevation of eyewitness accounts above grandiose histories and fantastic tales, the belief in the importance of painting a "true picture" of "real events" without "touching up," the assumption that the life experience of an ordinary person, simply because it is faithfully told,

should be of interest to others—all of this points to a new epistemic paradigm, one that is best encapsulated in the concept of “authenticity.”³¹

As before, Lee is not specifically referring to the works of these female avant-garde writers; nonetheless, her point holds true. As already noted, because these writers are primarily concerned with the expression of selfhood, and in that self find the means to resist the appropriation of the female image and voice, to invoke the personal and elevate it over the collective helps to further and strengthen their creation of private literary space. In very concrete terms this means that they may inject personal details of their lives into their narratives by using a fictional-autobiographical form, use the “I” narrator, or use other forms of self-reference to make more concrete the sense that these works are the works of a real, authentic subject rather than mere symbols. It is tempting, of course, to over-read these narratives as being the “truth” of these authors’ lived experiences, especially in terms of their feminist dimensions; much like the traps of essentializing femininity and sexuality which Sang describes above, this too will be necessary site of critical inquiry.

Terminology

The words “personal” and “private” are very blunt terms in English. They could refer to those things which are not public, that is, outside the purview of the state and civil society; they could just as easily refer to those intimate, subjective details which separate one individual from another. Although it is far easier, and perhaps more accurate to simply use the Chinese terms *si* and *gong*, this does nothing to further an understanding of them in English, nor to help distinguish between the various permutations that they present. To that end I reserve the right to use a flexible

terminology in this dissertation. In the case of *si*, I will most frequently use the terms: “personal,” “private,” “selfish,” and “the self” depending on context, although I may also attach the term *si* itself as a prefix (as above) if clarification is necessary. Likewise, for *gong* I will most frequently translate it as “public,” again attaching the Chinese term as a prefix to the English one if it helps to make my argument more clear. For those terms which have also been investigated in other studies, such as female-female desire in Tze-lan Sang’s work, or women’s literary feminism in Amy Dooling’s, I will defer to their usages, clarifying if and when necessary.

Structure

As this study is primarily a textual analysis, the structure is fairly simple. This dissertation focuses specifically on the ways in which the avant-garde women writers consciously tried to resist the appropriation of the female image by imagining and writing about alternate forms of female sexuality, and how this conscious resistance is informed and created by the *si*-personal; it is not concerned with an investigation of any and all women’s private writing. In Chapter I I consider various forms of self writing, including autobiography, “individualized writing” (个人化写作 *gerenhua xiezu*), and “private writing” (私人化写作 *sirenhua xiezu*). The goal of this chapter is to understand some of the fundamental distinctions between the publicly-oriented autobiographical form, and then inward-looking self-referential fiction of the female avant-garde writers. While these generic classifications are both large and fluid, in order to understand how female avant-garde writers create a space of privacy in their fiction, and how that space functions

as one of resistance, it is necessary to be able to distinguish it from other self-referential forms.

In Chapter II I consider the question of what it means when these women make public (publish) their works of private fiction. When the female avant-garde writers publish their fiction, they cross the boundary between the private and the public sphere. Their literary works exist in a borderland which is neither completely private (because it has been published), nor entirely public (because of the insistence on inaccessible private experience). In this chapter I will consider the theoretical implications of the private body made public in terms of the corporeal feminisms of Dai Jinhua and Li Xiaojiang, as well as the mediated consumption of these bodies as a kind of borderland, a term I borrow from Gloria Anzaldúa.

In each of Chapters III through V I focus on three different avant-garde writers. For each of these authors I will consider their development as a writer in relation to their overall corpus of writing, their use of alternate forms of female sexual desire, as well as autobiography and self-reference as narrative techniques, and how and to what end they are concerned with resisting the appropriation of the female body/image. Of course each writer takes a slightly different approach, and I will present the unique aspects of their writing alongside these topoi, which bind them together.

In Chapter III, I look at two of Xu Kun's works: her collection of essays, *Notes from My Life (Wode rensheng biji)*, and her semi-autobiographical novel *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring (Chuntian de ershi'er ge yewan)*. Herself an academic and theorist trained at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Xu Kun's works as a whole tend to have a strong theoretical undertone, particularly when it comes to feminism. And while

she, like the other writers considered here, also portrays how damaging heterosexual relationships can be for women, her depictions of female sexuality tend to be closer to social norms than those of Lin Bai and Hai Nan, for example. Xu Kun maintains what might be described as the most status quo position while still working towards the ultimate goal of creating a space for herself in her literature. As such, her writing can be thought of as one end of this spectrum of privacy literature.

In Chapter IV, I consider Lin Bai's self-referential novel *One Person's War* and her own collection of memories and observations, *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes on My Life (Qianshi de huangjin: Wode rensheng biji)*. While there have been many scholarly studies written about *One Person's War* since its initial publication in 1994, most of this has been a theoretical tug-of-war between one group of critics who argue that Lin's fiction is little better than pornography and lacking in any literary value and another group who argue that Lin's work is ultimately representative of the feminist cause and an indictment of patriarchal culture. While I too argue that Lin's fiction ultimately can be read in a feminist light, it must first be understood in light of the self (or selves) that Lin narrates in her fiction and the way that she creates a space of *si*-privacy where that self can exist on its own terms, away from the demands of heteronormative society. Moreover, I also discuss the way that Lin creates this *si*-private space of self-reflection and self-creation not just in *One Person's War* but also in her other works, and between her other works, in a way that produces a web that the reader can only partially penetrate—they are able to enter the space the Lin creates only in as much as they are familiar with Lin's other works. That this web of meaning is never fully open to anyone, produces yet another aspect of the private in Lin's private writings.

In Chapter V I consider Hai Nan and her *A Dissolute Life: Notes from My Life* (*Shuixing shenghuo: Wode rensheng biji*) as well as her work of self-referential fiction, *My Lovers* (*Wode qingrenmen*). Hai Nan is neither as academic a writer as Xu Kun, nor does she weave the same kind of poetic web throughout her body of writing like Lin Bai; however, like both of the other authors, she too narrates two different kinds of self in her works. Hai Nan's *A Dissolute Life: Notes from My Life* is different from both Xu Kun and Lin Bai in that she spends very little time talking about her development as a writer, or her feelings about the current social conditions. Rather, Hai Nan covers much of the same subject material in her *A Dissolute Life: Notes from My Life* as she does in her work of self-referential fiction, *My Lovers*. As a result, comparing the two different works provides a more focused example of how she creates a space of *si*-privacy in her fiction, as compared with the "literary self-portrait" she narrates in *A Dissolute Life: Notes from My Life*.

Finally in my conclusion I will consider the concept of "women's writing" and the differences between these avant-garde writers and the "body writers," a group of female writers who appear around the same time as the female avant-garde writers and who write about similar kinds of subjects (women's private and intimate experiences), but for very different reasons. Works such as Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby* (*Shanghai baobei*) and Mian Mian's *Candy* (*Tang*), with their explicit descriptions of female desire and sexual activity can be more aptly described as exhibitionist works expressly intended for public consumption. As such, this kind of writing also falls outside the scope of this study, where the primary focus is on the creation of women's literary privacy and the feminist politics of the self.

Notes

¹ Tze-lan Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 176.

² Ibid.

³ Bonnie McDougall and Anders Hansson ed., *Chinese Concepts of Privacy*, (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 5.

⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Thomas Burger, tr., (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991). See Chapter One, especially his discussion of “*oikos*,” p.3-4, and the development of the market economy and “depersonalized state authority” in relation to the family unit and modernity, 19-20.

⁵ Take for example the terms *gongyuan* (公园 public park), *gonggong qiche* (公共汽车 public bus), or *gongyong de* (公用的 for public use) in modern Chinese.

⁶ Lin positions himself and his personal feelings for his wife as being constitutive of his feelings for the suffering of his countrymen, in the same way that the family remains a *gong*-public space constitutive of the nation. For example, he opens the letter by writing, “I love you dearly, and it is precisely because this love for you which gives me the courage to court death. Since the day we met, I have wished a happy ending for all lovers in this world. Yet in times such as ours, when the stench of blood sweeps the earth and dogs of death roam the streets, how many families can boast of happiness?...It is thus my love for you which urges me to help everyone in this world love their beloved; this is why I dare to die before you do, seemingly oblivious of your feelings. I hope you will understand my wishes, and in your grief will think of the people of this world. If you do so, you will surely be glad of the sacrifice of our individual happiness for the lasting happiness of all.” Lin Juemin 林觉民, “Lin Juemin: Last Letter to His Wife,” 林觉民：绝笔书, Eva Hung, tr., *Renditions* 41 & 42 (double issue, Spring and Autumn 1994), 162.

⁷ McDougall and Hansson, 6. Emphasis mine.

⁸ Habermas, 1.

⁹ Amy Dooling, *Women’s Literary Feminism in Twentieth Century China*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

¹⁰ Dooling, 4-5.

¹¹ Dooling, 14.

¹² Wang Lingzhen, *Personal Matters: Women's Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth-Century China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 5.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ See Wang Lingzhen's discussion theorizing the personal in her book and the use this phrase in connection with contemporary Chinese writers, as well as its implications, 13-14.

¹⁵ Wang Lingzhen, 158.

¹⁶ Wang Lingzhen, 5.

¹⁷ Mayfair Mei-hui Yang ed., *Spaces of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 5.

¹⁸ Referring again to the May Fourth myth that as a result of Confucianism, pre-modern women were completely illiterate and had no means to make their voices heard. While not many women had the means to write, the May Fourth intellectuals' claim is certainly an overstatement. Many recent studies have focused on these writings, in the process calling the extent to which the May Fourth claim is valid.

¹⁹ Dooling, 14. This is not to suggest that there have not been "subversive female subjects" at all during the May Fourth period and after—Bing Xin's writing, for example, often delves into similar areas as the contemporary female avant-gardists. However, in both the popular and critical imagination, the connection between women's liberation and national salvation as put forth by Republican reformers and May Fourth intellectuals has dominated readings of women's writing.

²⁰ Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial China*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2001), 8.

²¹ Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 6.

²² Lee, 8.

²³ Meng Yue, "Female Images and National Myth," in *Gender Politics in Modern China*, Tani E. Barlow ed., (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 126.

²⁴ Meng, 127.

²⁵ *Through Chinese Women's Eyes*, VHS, directed by Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang (1997; New York, NY: Women Make Movies).

²⁶ Yang, 11

²⁷ Sang, quoting from Harriet Evans, 180.

²⁸ Sang, 27.

²⁹ Wang Lingzhen, 155.

³⁰ Wang Lingzhen, 155

³¹ Lee, 47.

CHAPTER II

WRITING THE PRIVATE BODY

“Better to write for yourself and have no public than to write for the public and have no self.”

Cyril Connolly, "Miscellany: Last Words," in *The New Statesman*

Before is it possible to take a deeper look at the avant-garde female writers' project of resistance, it is necessary to look first at what constitutes this space of literary *si*-privacy and its relationship to the literary bodies that these writers narrate. To that end, it is important to first understand self-writing and the many generic forms that it takes. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson introduce the term “life writing,” and define the term as, “A general term for writing of diverse kinds that takes a life as its subject.”¹ Forms of life writing might include biography or works of fiction that follow the course of one character's life from birth to death, for example. It also includes what Smith and Watson call life narrative, “*Life narrative* [i]s a somewhat narrower term that includes many kinds of self-referential writing, including autobiography.”² Life narrative excludes biography and works of pure fiction, and shifts the focus from the writing of “a life” to the writing of “one's life.” As forms of self-referential writing, autobiography, “individualized writing” (*gerenhua xiezu*), “Notes from My Life” (*wode rensheng biji*), and “private writing” all fall into this category. Moreover, it is important to note that “private writing” (私人化写作 *sirenhua xiezu*) and “privacy literature” (隐私文学 *yinsi wenxue*), while related, also refer to slightly different styles of writing within the “self-writing” genre. It is in looking at the differences between these various forms of self-writing that it is possible to understand the semi-autobiographical privacy fiction of the

female avant-garde writers. As Smith and Watson remind us, “Conventions that are culturally and historically specific govern storytelling options, narrative plotting, and the uses of remembering. And those conventions have histories: that is, at certain historical moments and in specific milieux, certain stories become intelligible and normative.”³ Each of these generic forms has its own history, its own form, and its own set of cultural implications. Moreover, as forms of self-writing, autobiography, “Notes on My Life,” and “private writing” are related to each other and the boundaries which separate these various generic forms are permeable and fluid. While it is beyond the scope of this study to detail the development of individualized writing in Chinese literary history for example, a brief comparative look at each of these different styles of writing the self provides the foundation for looking at the semi-autobiographical privacy literature itself in subsequent chapters.⁴

“Private Writing” and Autobiography

The self-referential fiction of the female avant-garde writers is most frequently misread as autobiography, particularly their full-length novels which make frequent and extensive use of personal details, and which are discussed in Chapters III, IV, AND V. However, there are fundamental differences between the self-referential private writing these authors create and the autobiographical form, differences that necessitate a different reading and that are also fundamental to the female avant-garde writers’ project of resistance. While autobiography is a very difficult genre of self-writing to define, it can be thought of a specific kind of self-writing that is more focused in its approach to the self than other related forms of self-writing such as the self-referential fiction of the

female avant-garde writers. In their work on the history and development of autobiographical life writing, Smith and Watson tie the development of the Western autobiographical tradition to the rise of liberal humanism during the Enlightenment. While there had been forms of self-writing that predate this liberal humanist subject, according to Smith and Watson, “‘Autobiography,’ now the most commonly used term for such life writing, thus described writing being produced at a particular historical juncture, the early modern period in the West with its concept of the self-interested individual intent on assessing the status of the soul or the meaning of public achievement.”⁵ As Smith and Watson point out, this is the most commonly applied definition of autobiography: a person of great achievement reflecting on the whole of their life and past accomplishments. It is telling that this particular way of defining autobiography links the individual and the public, either through their service to the nation, or to their contributions to culture or society. However, as Smith and Watson also note, it is a problematic way to define the genre because of the way that it limits who is capable of writing an autobiography. Because of social conventions that gave them no access to a public voice, or placed severe restrictions on the kinds of subject matter deemed acceptable for them to write about, women and minorities were not able to write what would have been considered an autobiography under this particular definition. However, even when considering who could and could not write an autobiography, it is important to note that even under this very limited definition, the genre of autobiography served the purpose of linking the exceptional individual to the realm of the public. While Smith and Watson are not specifically describing the development of autobiography in China, which has its own long tradition, the same connection between an exceptional

man writing the story of his life of official service makes similar connections between the individual and the *gong*-public realm.

Expanding the definition of autobiography, Marxist writer and theorist Antonio Gramsci also offers a similar definition that ties the narrative form to the public. He writes:

Autobiography can be conceived ‘politically.’ One knows that one’s life is similar to that of a thousand others, but through ‘chance’ it has had opportunities that the thousand others in reality could not or did not have. By narrating it, one creates this possibility, suggests the process, indicates the opening. Autobiography therefore replaces the ‘political’ or ‘philosophical essay:’ it describes in action what otherwise is deduced logically. Autobiography certainly has a great historical value in that it shows life in action and not just as written laws or dominant moral principles say it should be.⁶

Like the previous definition, Gramsci ties the narrative of the individual self to the narrative of the collective and the narrative of history. For him, the autobiographical form is a universalizing story in which the common man finds reflection in the image of the extraordinary man. Moreover, Gramsci’s definition is more flexible, allowing inclusive theoretical space for the autobiographies of women and minorities previously excluded from the canon of autobiography because of their traditional lack of access to a public persona. In these kinds of autobiographies, the individual’s story becomes symbolic of the collective and as such is reminiscent of the feminist phrase, “the personal is political.” People who traditionally had no access to the kind of public voice that Smith and Watson describe in the Enlightenment autobiographical subject, or in the pre-modern Chinese autobiographical subject, are able to write their personal narrative with the understanding that the narration of the experiences and life story of the exceptional individual are representative of the experiences of the collective. Many of the so-called “scar” or “wound” narratives produced after Mao’s death in 1976 can be read into this

category, as can the memoirs of former Red Guards or sent-down youths published both within and outside of China.⁷

Similarly, Wang Lingzhen points out the problems with the liberal humanist self-narrated in autobiography and how it became increasingly politically destabilized:

The public/private distinction, central as it was for the assertion of individual liberty in the west, nevertheless acted as a powerful principle of exclusion. Through the identification of the private with the domestic, it played an undeniably important role in the subordination of women. Through redefining the political, feminists concluded that the supposedly separate worlds of private and public are actually interrelated, connected by a common patriarchal structure. The personal, therefore, had to be conceptualized within a politically constructed private domain, which liberalism had long claimed as nonpolitical.⁸

Both Gramsci and Wang point to the ways in which the traditional autobiographical form gave a voice to certain individuals and denied that voice to others and attempt to provide a new understanding of autobiography which links the personal narration of a single life to the collective reading of a group, necessarily making autobiography into a public, political form. It is precisely this public, political reading which the female avant-garde writers are resisting in their fiction, and therefore, why their fiction at most should be read as self-referential. For example, both Wang and John Ming Chen touch on this idea in their respective discussions of one of the most important examples of contemporary female autobiography in China, that of Yu Luojin. According to Wang:

Yu Luojin was among the most controversial of women—and of writers—in China in the early 1980s. Her brother's posthumous fame as a national hero, her several published biographical and autobiographical works, and her unconventional record of marriages and divorces all contributed to her emergence at the center of numerous heated national debates. The topics of these debates ranged from the literary value of her writing to women's rights of marriage and divorce; from the representation of history to whether her behavior was suitable for a Chinese woman.⁹

Like the avant-garde women writers, Yu faced similar kinds of public criticism for her self-narration, however one of the most striking and important differences in that criticism revolves around the political value of the narrative (women's rights) and the representation of history. When supporters of avant-garde women's self-referential fiction also read a political element into the female avant-garde writers' novels, they are doing so with the idea that these works are autobiographies. According to Chen, women's autobiographies are important because of their value in both giving subaltern voices the ability to speak for themselves and because of the power that those voices have to rewrite the patriarchal, orthodox narrative of history. As he says:

Now a historical 'record', now a highly personal account, now a political indictment, now a revelation of innermost feelings and thoughts, the autobiographical impulse produces works that are the genuine voices from the kitchen and the bedroom and of economic exploitation and sexual oppression therein; that invite the reader to political/sexual voyeurism; that tear to tatters any pretense to traditional and patriarchal sense of decency or propriety, moral or social.¹⁰

This way of looking at the autobiographical impulse is very similar to purpose that Gramsci attributes to autobiography. Women's autobiographies provide a counter-narrative to the narrative of orthodox, patriarchal history by giving a voice to those who previously had no voice within this system. As Chen suggests, and as we can imagine that Gramsci would agree, when one woman narrates her autobiography as a counter-discourse to history, she opens up a space for the stories of countless other women like her whose common experiences are reflected in the narration of the individual. In doing so, the narration of the extraordinary individual's life story is necessarily linked to both the collective and the histori-political. Her story becomes representative of the collective

experiences of women who live(d) in the same time, culture, class, etc. Again, turning to Yu's autobiography as an example, Chen illustrates this point, saying:

Yu's chosen autobiographical form calls into question conventional Chinese—and predominantly male at that time—ways of writing autobiography. The intensely personal quality of her-story challenges the then prevalent mode of autobiography as a mere reflection of collective or national history, with the glorification of the Party as the socialist teleology as the *sine qua non*. . . . No official records or history can replace her own version of truth. Indeed, her autobiography seriously challenges the existing history of the Party, written in a single-voiced, often authoritarian manner that admits no other contentious voices or differing interpretations.¹¹

Yu's autobiography is clearly linked to a political and historical reading, which gives her autobiographical impulse a necessarily public intent. The works of the avant-garde women writers, however, avoid making links to larger political and historical narratives. While moments from history may appear from time to time in their fiction, their self-referential fiction is neither oriented towards, nor framed by the same publicly-oriented concerns that motivate Yu's autobiography, and autobiography in general. As such, while they do share a similar underlying autobiographical impulse, are not works of autobiography per se.

In order to better understand why the works of the avant-garde women writers are not autobiographies like that of Yu Luojin, Nancy H. Miller poses helpful questions about the role of gender and the possibility of implied universality within the autobiographical narrative are helpful. She says:

The doxa of gender identity has indeed meant that women writers have had to wrestle with a series of powerful prohibitions: about the legitimacy of picking up the pen; about revealing their sexuality; about claiming exceptionality; about the desire for public fame. The *biography of gender* lays down a grid against which the autobiographer necessarily strains. The constraints of these ideological restrictions have shaped both patters of self-expression and the reception of texts.¹²

The social rules which have prevented women from writing so-called canonical autobiographies, rules predicated on when women can write and what is permissible for women to write about, become the very means by which a woman's individual story is discredited. If she writes candidly about her sexual history, as Yu Luojin does, she opens herself to criticism and dismissal as a "bad woman." Moreover, while there are aspects to her story that invite mass identification, for example the suffering of one woman during the Mao era as representative of the suffering of all women during the Mao era, these kinds of universal readings also synecdochically negate the individual woman's voice and make her instead a metaphor all women's voices. This impulse on the part of the audience to take a metaphorical or allegorical reading, the very reading that the avant-garde women writers are struggling against, will be taken up more in the following chapter.

However, this still leaves the question of what constitutes an autobiography unresolved. In his definition of autobiography, French theorist Philippe Lejeune discusses the "autobiographical pact" between writer and reader as being a major component of what makes a work autobiographical. He writes,

It is thus in relation to the *proper name* that we are able to situate the problems of autobiography....The entire existence of the person we call the *author* is summed up by this name: the only mark in the text of an unquestionable world-beyond-the-text, referring to a real person, which requires that we thus attribute to him, in the final analysis, the responsibility for the production of the whole written text....But the place assigned to this name is essential: it is linked, by a social convention, to the pledge of responsibility of a *real person*.¹³

For Lejeune, in order to be considered an autobiography, and not an autobiographical novel, a work must have the autobiographical pact, and in labeling a work as such both the author and the reader are entering into a kind of social contract where author agrees

that the self being narrated within the pages of the text is the same as the name of the cover page, as he says:

The autobiographical pact is the affirmation in the text of this identity, referring back in the final analysis to the *name* of the author on the cover. The autobiographical pact comes in diverse forms; but all of them demonstrate their intention to honor his/her *signature*.¹⁴

This seems a very simple method of identifying an autobiography, and as Paul de Man points out, one which turns the autobiography into a social work rather than an individual narrative, as he says, “While modifying that concept of the pact to account for the fictionality of the proper name, however, Lejeune reconfirms the necessity of an author-reader pact as a starting point for both the writer and reader.”¹⁵ In the presentation of an autobiographical self, the author agrees that the self he or she presents is identifiable to the reader as the author, and the reader in turn agrees to understand the protagonist narrated in the text as the author. While Lejeune also goes on to make other claims about who can and cannot write an autobiography; his fundamental definition revolves around this pact. And while simply looking at the autobiographical pact does not necessarily inherently invite larger political or historical readings, it does necessarily make the autobiography into a social act rather than an individual one, and as such, also links the form to the realm of the public. And once again, when we turn to the works of the female avant-garde writers, we find that this pact is also missing; an idea which will be discussed later in this chapter. Suffice it to say, that even when we look at autobiography from a number of different angles, using various definitions from various points in the development of the genre, there is a necessary connection between autobiography and publicness; a linking of the individual with the larger forces of society, history, and/or the nation. Because their project is one of privacy and the reclamation of the female body

back from its connections with history and nation, it is possible to see how it is a misnomer to call these works autobiographies.

Much of this mislabeling springs from the fact that autobiography itself is a difficult generic form to define, as Paul de Man discusses:

Empirically, as well as theoretically, autobiography lends itself poorly to generic definition; each specific instance seems to be an exception to the norm; the works themselves always seem to shade off into neighboring or even incompatible genres and, perhaps most revealing of all, generic discussions, which can have such powerful heuristic value in the case of tragedy or of the novel, remain distressingly sterile when autobiography is at stake.¹⁶

Indeed, much time and effort has been spent in the field of autobiography studies on trying to determine exactly what form a narrative must take in order to be considered an autobiography, of which the preceding definitions are just a few. Like Lejeune, de Man also suggests that the key to reading autobiography is in the mutual recognition and agreement between author and reader that the life being narrated or read is the same life as the author's; however, de Man critiques Lejeune's insistence that it is the autobiographical pact alone which makes a work of self-narrative into an autobiography. de Man writes:

From specular figure of the author, the reader becomes the judge, the policing power in charge of verifying the *authenticity* of the signature and the consistency of the signers behavior, the extent to which he respects or fails to honor the contractual agreement he has signed.¹⁷

This critique is particularly relevant to the works of the avant-garde women writers. Both Lejeune and de Man suggest that there must be some mutual understanding between author and reader to make an autobiographical reading possible, however, in the case of the female avant-garde writers this mutual agreement is missing. While their use of self-referential details may tempt the reader to understand the work as one of autobiographical

self-narration, their insistence on the creation of a private, inaccessible space in their fiction negates any possibility of mutual understanding and forces their works into the realm of the *si-private*. Moreover, as de Man points out, if that mutual agreement is “contractually” expected by the reader, it gives them the power to police the self that is being narrated in the work, to judge whether it is acceptable, valid, or valuable in any one of a myriad of socially and culturally determined ways. By using alternative forms of female sexuality and culturally unreadable female bodies as narrative techniques, the female avant-garde writers deny the reader this power of judgment. This denial is fundamental to their project of resistance, and as such, one of the most compelling reasons against reading their works of self-referential fiction as autobiographies.

Another compelling reason lies in what de Man describes as the purpose, and the danger of autobiography. de Man suggests that rather than try to define autobiography in terms of form, it is more productive to talk about the function of autobiography, which he suggests is prosopopetic. Prosopopeia is the narrative act of giving a speaker who is absent or imagined a voice; as de Man says, “Prosopopeia is the trope of autobiography, by which one’s name...is made as intelligible and memorable as a face. Our topic deals with the giving and taking away of faces, with face and deface, *figure*, figuration, and disfiguration.”¹⁸ It is particularly telling that de Man links the autobiographical narrative act with the giving of not just a voice but a face or figure precisely because it is in the narrating of selves, or bodies, which resist the cultural definitions of woman that make these works ones of resistance. de Man is also sensitive to the problems that come not only with the use of language to give voice to a self, but also with the inherent risk of prosopopeia. He writes:

To the extent that language is figure (or metaphor, or prosopopeia) it is indeed not the thing itself but the representation, the picture of the thing and, as such, it is silent, mute as pictures are mute. Language, as trope, is always privative....To the extent that, in writing, we are dependent on this language we all are...not silent, which implies the possible manifestation of sound at our own will, but silent as a picture, that is to say eternally deprived of voice and condemned to muteness....[A]utobiography (the prosopopeia of the voice and the name) deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores.¹⁹

By insisting on reading the female bodies in these self-referential works as autobiographical, and therefore public and “speaking” on behalf of the subaltern Other that is “woman,” (prosopopeia) the actual woman’s voice is silenced. The story a woman narrates in her autobiography by necessity invites comparisons between her body and all other female bodies, as Gramsci suggests, as well as offers the reader the power of judgment over the veracity and validity of her experiences, as Lejeune and de Man note. An autobiographical reading, through the prosopopetic act, tries to make private, personal experience accessible to the public via language which by necessity turns both the experience and the self (body) that experienced it into metaphor and therefore mutes the original voice. Taken together, these reasons highlight why a strictly autobiographical reading does not work for the self-referential fiction of the female avant-garde writers, whose goal is to rescue their voices and forms from the realm of metaphor.

However, the intention towards self narrative that is a part of the autobiographical act is not entirely absent from these works of self-referential fiction. The goal of the avant-garde women’s self-referential fiction is two-fold: first, to resist the metaphoric reading of their bodies as somehow representative of all women’s experiences and reclaim their voices and forms, and second, to create a space in their fiction that exists just for them, a *si*-private space where they can exist as individuals. In order to create this space as one of both resistance and existence, the female avant-garde writers use

details from their own lives, in varying degrees of opacity, which allows them to narrate a complete female self whose body and voice belong solely to herself. Not only is this female self only partly accessible to the reading public, which will be discussed in the next chapter, but the motivation for the creation of this self can still be described as an act of self-creation, even if the work as a whole is not intended as an autobiography. As Smith and Watson point out:

What had been assumed by earlier generations of critics to be a universal ‘self’—achieving self-discovery, self-creation, and self-knowledge—became, in the wake of multiple theoretical challenges of the first half of the century, a ‘subject’ driven by self-estrangement and self-fragmentation. Moreover, the relationship of language to what it claims to represent becomes problematic. Any simplistic notion that writers could ‘intend’ what they say is undermined. As a result, the project of self-representation could no longer be read as direct access to the truth of the self. The truth of autobiographical acts had to be understood differently as an always inaccessible knowledge.²⁰

Like the writers of autobiographies, these avant-garde writers also desire to tell the story of themselves as individuals; although their motivations, and therefore the form of their self-writing, are different, both engage in the act of self-creation in order to reach that goal. The female avant-garde writers, freed from the social and political constraints of morality and metaphor, attempt to narrate a self in their fiction whose whole truth is ultimately only completely knowable to themselves and in doing so create in the fiction a space of *si*-privacy. As such, the privacy fiction of these authors is best thought of as self-referential rather than autobiographical.

“Private Writing” and “Individualized Writing”

In addition to autobiography, the fiction of the female avant-garde writers is also often termed “individualized writing” as well. And like autobiography, this term is not

entirely accurate to describe the three self-referential novels which will be discussed in later chapters, although it should be pointed out that it is very possible to read a lot of their other fiction, particularly that of Xu Kun, under this rubric. And while there are clear linkages between the self-referential private writing of the female avant-garde writers and the self-referential fiction of their male counterparts, as well as connections to women's autobiographical writing and memoirs, it is also clear that in focusing on the creation of a space of *si*-privacy at the same time that they are writing the self in their fiction, that the female avant-garde writers are engaged in a project of resistance to the male/heterosexual/state appropriated image of woman. This can even be seen in the terminology used to describe the different kinds of generic forms of self-writing: "individualized writing" versus "private writing." While "individualized writing" refers to the self or the individual (*geren*), it also traces its lineage as a term to the May Fourth writers and their project of nation building. As Janet Ng writes:

The notion or the invention of the *geren* (the individual) is complicit with nationalism. Just as the assertion of the linguistic/epistemological category of the *individual* is a political and social act, autobiography must be seen as a part of this political and social program. The new modern autobiographical form [which found its genesis during the May Fourth Movement], then, is a method of discursive management of contemporary political and social ideology.²¹

"Private writing," on the other hand, by its very nature draws attention to the opaque and inconsumable nature of the self being presented in highlighting the *si*-private aspects of that literature—the "obstructed access" which has previously been discussed as a key element of the term *si*.²² It is for these reasons that the works of the female avant-garde writers should be understood as works of resistance which exist in the borderland between "public" and "private," as well as works of rearticulation, in turning the usually negatively-associated concept of *si*-privacy into a positive tool for writing the self. While

they are not specifically referring to the differences between individualized writing and private writing, Smith and Watson also raise the issue of the connection between the individual and history saying, “Life narratives, depending on the memory they construct, are records of acts of interpretation by subjects inescapably in historical time, and in their relation to their own ever-moving pasts.”²³ When we consider the individualized fiction of the male avant-garde writers, works such as *To Live (Huozhe)* by Yu Hua and *Red Sorghum (Hong gaoliang jiazhu)* by Mo Yan, this is exactly what we find: the articulation of an individual faced with the forces of history and nation. Yu Hua himself remarks on this when he writes:

I write because I cannot give up writing at all. Writing has become an integral part of my life, since I began writing some fifteen years ago. I know that writing can chance a person turning a strong-willed, resolute person into a tearful, wavering type, a real lively person into a writer. I don't mean to devalue writing. On the contrary, I want to stress the importance of writing for individuals, because the ultimate power of literature is to soften one's heart, and to make people who love literature love each other, after they have been separated by thousands of miles and experienced life and death.²⁴

Yu Hua sees his writing as a means not only to express himself and his individual memories and experiences, but also as a way to connect with other individuals across space and time. And while Yu Hua's fiction, like that of the other male avant-garde writers, does not have the overtly political intention of “scar literature,” his main focus is placing the individual in relationship to history, society, and the nation, thus giving it an inherently public-facing purpose.

Moreover, Yu Hua and many of the other male avant-garde writers have been heavily influenced by Fredric Jameson (amongst other Western critics and theorists), whose work on “third-world” literature and capitalism has been both widely read and widely criticized.²⁵ One of Jameson's main arguments is that all “third-world” literature,

in this case, literature written in developing countries, is necessarily to be understood as a kind of national allegory, where the individual's fate stands for that of the nation.

Certainly, there is much about May Fourth literature, for example, that invites this kind of reading, as there is about the fiction written by the male avant-garde writers in the 1980s.

As Jameson argues:

All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel. Let me try to state the distinction in a grossly oversimplified way: one of the determinants of capitalist culture, that is, the culture of the western realist and modernist novel, is a radical split between the private and the public, between the poetic and the political, between what we have come to think of as the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of secular political power: in other words, Freud versus Marx.²⁶

While Jameson's argument that all narratives written in developing countries not only make the individual a metaphor for the nation, it is useful to help us understand the difference between the male and female avant-garde writers; between individualized writing and private writing. Just as Jameson draws a clear distinction between "the private and the public, the poetic and the political," and between the imagined or unconscious world of dreams which exists at the level of the self and the real world of individual experience which can be shared by many selves, so too do the male avant-garde writers. I am not arguing that the literature of the male avant-garde writers should be read as allegory per se, but that because of the connections between the May Fourth individual that Janet Ng points out, as well as the publicly-oriented focus that the male avant-garde writers maintain, there is a fundamental difference between the male avant-garde writers and the female avant-garde writers.

The fiction of the female avant-garde writers does not fit easily into the simple dichotomy that Jameson presents. Their fiction blurs the boundaries between public and private, between political and poetic, between Freud and Marx, and as such must be considered as a different kind of writing that the individualized writing of the male avant-garde writers. For example, both Yu Hua and Lin Bai talk about the role that memory plays in their writing. According to Yu Hua:

Such is the way of life: experience is always more vivid and powerful than memory. Memory appears when the past disappears, like a straw floating above the water for the drowning person. Self-salvation is merely symbolic... My experience is that writing continuously awakens memories. I believe that such memories do not just belong to me but are images of an era, or imprints of the world in the depths of one's mind—indelible scars. My writing awakens in the memory numerous desires that appeared in my past life or that never appeared, that were fulfilled or were never fulfilled. My writing puts them together and makes them legitimate in imaginary reality. Ten years later I have discovered that my writing has taken on a life of its own. Simultaneously, my writing and my real life move forward. Sometimes they crisscross each other, and sometimes they are widely apart. Hence I tend to believe that writing is beneficial to the health of one's mind and body, because I feel that my life is gradually becoming complete. Writing allows me to possess two lives, one real and the other imaginary. Their relationship resembles health and sickness. When one becomes stronger, the other inevitably deteriorates. Consequently, as my real life becomes more and more impoverished, my imaginary life becomes extraordinarily rich.²⁷

For Yu Hua, his writing becomes the means by which he connects his own personal memories and experiences with the memories and experiences of a whole group of people or of a particular period of time. While this is not the national allegory that Jameson describes, it is one of the representative characteristics of individualized writing—the connection between the individual and the group and between individual memory and experience and national history and culture. Yu Hua's *To Live* and Mo Yan's *Red Sorghum* are perfect examples of the public orientation of individualized writing. On the other hand, for Lin Bai:

For me, individualized writing (*gerenhua xiezu*) is built upon the basis of personal experience and personal memory. Through individualized writing, we release from repressed memory those personal experiences which have been regarded by the collective narrative as taboos. I watch these personal experiences soar: they appear marginal and strange in the collective discourse of the nation, the state, and politics. It is this strangeness that has established the uniqueness of the personal experiences. As a woman writer (*nixing xiezuozhe*), I face a double oppression--the mainstream narrative and male narrative (sometimes these two overlap). The double oppression can easily destroy an individual like me. I am trying to resist such oppression and destruction...by my own individualized writing.²⁸

Although Lin also uses the term “individualized writing,” what she is describing here is very different from the writing that Yu Hua describes. Rather than Yu Hua’s “images of an era,” Lin Bai’s memories (and by extension her writing) do not fit so easily with the “collective discourse of the nation.” They become the means by which she is able to resist the collective discourse; as she says, by articulating those parts of the self which had previously been labeled taboo she is able to create a space in her fiction where her individual experiences can exist apart from the nation or society. While Lin has remarked in interviews that she avoids using the term *si* in relationship with her own writing because of the negative connotations of the term, it is also clear from the way that she describes her own “individualized writing” that the purpose of her fiction is to create a private space for self-articulation. As such, like the fiction of the other female avant-garde writers, this kind of writing is better termed privacy writing in order to separate its inward-looking focus from the publicly-oriented individualized writing of many of the male avant-garde writers.

Conclusion

Having looked at both the differences between autobiography and individualized writing and the self-referential fiction, it is much easier to say what this fiction is not;

however, this still leaves unresolved the question of what this fiction is. As noted in the introduction, and as de Man draws our attention to when he raises the problem of generic definition, any definition of what this fiction is necessarily limits it by including some works and excluding others. Rather, it is in what private writing offers as potential that is important here—the motivation of the female authors who create it and the means by which they do so—that becomes the method for distinguishing it from other forms of self-writing. As previously mentioned, there are two main strategies that the female avant-garde writers use to create a space in their fiction for articulations of a female self that resists a metaphoric reading: the frequent use of details from their own lives in their fiction, and depictions of alternative forms of female sexuality beyond that of the heteronormative wife and mother. These strategies allow the female avant-garde writers to create this private space in their fiction because it allows them to resist a larger political or historical reading, as well as the social forces which have shaped the publicly accepted image of “woman.”

As such, I suggest that we consider the concept of *ostranenie*, or “estrangement,” and the possibilities that it offers as a means to understanding how the self-referential fiction allows the female avant-garde writers to create a private space of self in their novels. Developed as a concept by the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky, *ostranenie* refers to those times in art or poetry when the artist takes an image that is commonplace and puts it in a new context or uses it in a new way in order to reinvest it with meaning. Looking to the future and concerned about the automatization and anaesthetization of life, Shklovsky argues that it is the purpose of art not merely to represent, but to allow us to see. As he explains, when we get used to seeing certain images in certain contexts

they are only being represented, or in the case of the female avant-garde writers, being read as metaphoric, and we therefore become anaesthetized to them. In order to actually see that image, it is necessary to estrange it from its usual context. As he says:

A writer reveals life to his reader in a way that enables the latter to examine it better. He shows his reader what the latter sometimes cannot see. Art sharpens the perceptions of life, disclosing and renewing its contradictions, restoring differences in what no longer is differentiated....In order to cognize the connection of things anew, it is sometimes necessary to destroy the connections that existed before. When a protagonist, being perplexed, talks about ordinary things but is amazed at them as at something absurd, we have the introduction of a new way of seeing. This takes place when a writer wants to destroy the coherence of a world outlook that has become alien to him.²⁹

In the case of the female avant-garde writers, we can understand the act of estrangement as being the destruction of the metaphoric female body on both the individual and collective level so that the individual female voice can be expressed, that is, “restoring differences in what no longer is differentiated.” Moreover, the destruction of representation that Shklovsky describes here does not mean that the original image ceases to exist, but that the reader or viewer’s automatic response to its representation is disrupted, thereby breathing new life into the original image, as Alexei Bogdanov explains:

The forms that are being destroyed in the life-affirming process of *ostranenie* do not actually die; they continue to live in the “automatized” realm of ordinary, non-poetic utterances and thus retain the surplus of signification (acquired of the period of their existence) that allows their further incarnations or resurrections in various dialogic contexts of poetic discourse.³⁰

When the female avant-garde writers estrange the female form from the meanings it has been given as an appropriated body, those metaphoric connections which are necessarily tied to the nation and thereby the public, do not cease to exist. Rather for them this estrangement of the female form from its representation as heterosexual wife and mother,

is both in the narration of female selves who desire outside the boundaries of social convention and what allows for the reappropriation of that self, that is, the creation of a literary space of *si*-privacy. In the process of estranging the female body from its representations, the female avant-garde writers allow the reader to differentiate individual female voices rather than “woman;” however, because they have estranged the individual voice, they also are able to limit the extent to which the reader is able to interact with that voice, thereby creating for themselves a space of *si*-privacy. Additionally, drawing on Shklovsky’s and explanation of *ostranenie*, the “new way of seeing” allows us to understand how the estrange the concept of *si*-privacy from its traditionally negative associations and invest it with new, positive meaning—that of a space for the articulation of self.

However, it is also because of this estrangement that it is very difficult to pin down a precise definition of privacy literature, because it necessarily takes slightly different forms for each individual author. Bogdanov points out that, “In the most common cases of *ostranenie*, the object still remains recognizable, but it undergoes a transition on the plane of representation and signification that involves a revelatory participation of the other (reader) who experiences this shift [*sdvig*] as in instance of Being-as-event (in Bakhtin’s terms) or as vision (in Shklovsky’s terms).”³¹ This particular description of estrangement is more easily applied to the novels of Xu Kun, for example, whose work represents one end of a spectrum of the “making strange” of the female body, and whose work will be considered in Chapter V. Bogdanov goes on to say that, “The most radical manifestations of *ostranenie*, such as ‘*zaum*’ and non-objective art, give us verbal and visual forms that are totally unidentifiable. The apophatic

response ‘not this, not that’ to such forms not only comes naturally to the reader, viewer, critic, or the artist himself, but also opens itself to a mystical interpretation.”³² In the same way that we can think of Xu Kun’s works as representing one end of a spectrum, at the other end finds Can Xue, who has been called the “Chinese Kafka,” and whose work is often so strange as to be almost incomprehensible. In between Xu Kun and Can Xue are Lin Bai and Hai Nan, whose work ranges from the transparent to the opaque, and who are the subjects of Chapters IV AND V.

There is one other form of life writing which has bearing on this study, that of the “Notes From My Life” (*Wode rensheng biji*). Not quite an autobiography, because it does not contain enough of a coherent narrative of self, and yet more than a collection of essays or *belles lettres* because the self occupies the primary subject position, this Chinese genre of writing is perhaps best described as what Michel Beaujour describes as the literary self-portrait, “Self-portraiture is not self-description but ‘the mirror whose reflecting function is mimicked in the symmetrical statement: me by me.’”³³ Zhang Ailing, in her own collection of sketches called *Written on Water* (*Liu yan*), hints at some of the generic tension present in the “Notes” form when she writes:

Still, the kind of familiar writing that’s full of “me me me” from start to finish ought to be taken to task. I recently came across a couple of lines in an English book that might serve as a rather fitting jibe at authors excessively interested in themselves: “They not only spend a lifetime gazing at their own navels but also go in search of other people who might be interested in gazing along with them.” Unsure as to whether what follows constitutes a navel exhibition, I have chosen to write it all the same.³⁴

As Andrew Jones, translator of *Written on Water* explains in his introduction, “The essay form became a means for Eileen Chang constantly to redefine the boundaries between life and work, the domestic and the historic, and meticulously weave a rich private life

together with the concerns of a public intellectual.”³⁵ Jones’ description of Zhang’s collection might be the best way to understand what exactly what the “Notes From My Life” genre is, and why it is both different from autobiography (and memoir) as well as from the self-referential fiction of the female avant-garde writers. Like autobiography, “Notes” take an individual self as their main subject, however, not all of the essays in the collection that forms a “Notes” work are focused on the self, rather they may cover the author’s point of view on larger social, political, or historical issues, as Zhang Ailing does in her essay, “A Chronicle of Changing Clothes,” or describe the author’s surroundings and sensory experiences at a particular point in time, as in Zhang’s essay, “Notes on Apartment Life.” These essays all either narrate memories and experiences of the author, or narrate the author’s point of view and so in that sense come together to create a portrait of the author, but not necessarily of the author’s life and so is necessarily different from autobiography. Similarly, the “Notes” genre, like the self-referential fiction of the female avant-garde writers, demonstrates the author’s impulse toward self-creation, and like the avant-garde writers’ self-referential fiction, is often a site of resistance. As Jones says of Zhang’s work, “The narrative voice is neither the passive receiver of a system of established social customs, values, and stereotypes of femininity nor a spokesperson for the ‘progressive’ nationalist ideological agenda of the May Fourth era.”³⁶ However, unlike the self-referential fiction of the female avant-garde writers, the “Notes” genre still retains more connections to a public persona, often providing the author a space to critique contemporary social phenomena, and in doing so resist them, or to trace the development of their own work. For example, as I will discuss in Chapter V, Xu Kun’s “Notes” often have a far more overtly feminist tone that does her self-

referential fiction. Similar to what Jones has pointed out about *Written on Water*, the three authors' "Notes" lack the same end-goal of creating a private space of self as their fiction does. Rather, they blend aspects of the private and the public together. As such, the concept of the literary self-portrait is the most fitting way to understand "Notes" as a genre, and how it is distinct from other forms of self-referential writing.

This distinction is key, because in those differences lies the key to exploring the self-referential private writing of the female avant-garde writers; it becomes a question of understanding the estranged self that is narrated in their fiction as juxtaposed with the represented self that they narrate in their "Notes," for as Smith and Watson remind us:

[T]he self is a fiction, an illusion constituted in discourse, a hypothetical place or space of storytelling. A true self can never be discovered, unmasked or revealed because at its core is a *mise en abîme*, an infinite regress. The origin and history of the self, then, are fictions, although the history of utterances of that fiction can be traced. Because the self is split and fragmented, it can no longer be conceptualized as unitary. At a given moment what calls itself the self is different from itself at any other given moment. As Virginia Woolf remarked, "'I' is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being."³⁷

Reading these two different articulations of self alongside each other not only allows us to avoid the pitfalls of needing one definition that can contain all forms of women's private writing, as well as understand how each author uses the narrative strategies outlined in this chapter in their writing, ultimately driven by the same goal of rearticulation and reappropriation. Moreover, when taken together, these two genres might be said to make up the "split self" of life narrative. Therefore it is with this understanding in mind that I turn to each of the three authors in question in this study and look more closely at their fiction and their memoirs, their narrative strategies and their use of estrangement, the types of private selves that they narrate and the kind of literary bodies that they present.

¹Notes

¹ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 2001. 2.

² Smith and Watson, 2.

³ Smith and Watson, 71.

⁴ There have been many works published which cover aspects of self-writing in China in greater depth, particularly Wang Lingzhen's *Personal Matters: Women's Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth-Century China* and Janet Ng's *The Experience of Modernity: Chinese Autobiography in the Early Twentieth Century*. See bibliography for full citation.

⁵ Smith and Watson, 2.

⁶ Gramsci, Antonio. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith ed. William Boelhower, tr., *Selections from Cultural Writings*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 132.

⁷ Although not all of these works would be considered complete autobiographies, wound narratives such as, *The Good Women of China*, and memoirs such as *Wild Swans* and *Spider Eaters* are representative of this kind of narrative. For a more detailed investigation, see Wang Lingzhen's, *Personal Matters: Women's Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth-Century China*.

⁸ Wang Lingzhen, 14.

⁹ Wang Lingzhen, 140

¹⁰ John (Zhong) Ming Chen, "Women's Autobiography As Counter-Discourse: The Cases of Dorothy Livesay and Yu Loujin," in Huihua Chen and Whitney Crothers Dilley ed., *Feminism/Femininity in Chinese Literature*, (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2002), 39.

¹¹ John Ming Chen, 36

¹² Nancy Miller, "Representing Others: Gender and the Subjects of Autobiography," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 6 no.1 (1991), 17.

¹³ Philippe Lejeune, Paul John Eakin ed. Katherine Leary tr., *On Autobiography*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 11.

¹⁴ Lejeune, 14.

¹⁵ Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-facement." *MLN* 94 No. 5 (December 1979), 919-930. Quote, 923.

¹⁶ de Man, 920.

¹⁷ de Man, 923.

¹⁸ de Man, 926.

¹⁹ de Man, 930.

²⁰ Smith and Watson, 124.

²¹ Janet Ng, *The Experience of Modernity: Chinese Autobiography if the Early Twentieth Century*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 16.

²² See Introduction for Bonnie McDougall's definition of *si*.

²³ Smith and Watson, 24.

²⁴ Liu Kang, "The Short-Lived Avant-Garde," *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 63 no. 1 (March 2002), 95. Quoting from Yu Hua and Shaoyun Huan, "Eight Questions for Yu Hua," (Ba wen Yu Hua) *Love (Nü you: female friends)* 7 (1999): 10.

²⁵ Liu Kang, 99-100.

²⁶ Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Autumn, 1986), 69.

²⁷ Liu Kang, 92. Quoting from Yu Hua, *Collected Fiction of Yu Hua: World Like Mist (Yu Hua xiaoshuo: Shishi ruyan)* (Beijing: Xin shijie chubanshe, 1999), 3.

²⁸ Lin Bai, "Jiyi yu gerenhua xiezu" (记忆与个人化写作 Memory and individualized writing), *Huacheng* (Flower city) 5 (1996): 125. In Zhang Jingyuan, "Breaking Open: Chinese Women's Writing in the Late 1980s and 1990s." In Pang-yuan Chi and David Der-wei Wang, *Chinese Literature in the Second Half of a Modern Century: A Critical Survey*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000. 161-179. Quote, 172.

²⁹ Peter Rossbacher, "Shklovsky's Concept of Ostranenie and Aristotle's *Admiratio*," *MLN* 92 no. 5 (December 1977), 1040.

³⁰ Alexei Bogdanov, "Ostranenie, Kenosis, and Dialogue: The Metaphysics of Formalism According to Shklovsky," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 49 no. 1 (Spring, 2005), 53.

³¹ Bogdanov, 51-52.

³² Bogdanov, 55.

³³ Smith and Watson, quoting from Michel Beaujour, 138-139

³⁴ Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing), *Written on Water*, Andrew Jones tr., (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 2.

³⁵ Andrew Jones in Chang, xii

³⁶ Jones in Chang, xviii.

³⁷ Smith and Watson, on Lacan and Derrida, 132-133.

CHAPTER III

THE PUBLIC-ATION OF THE PRIVATE BODY

“An author is not a person. He is a person who writes and publishes.”
-Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*

To look at the following authors through the lens of *si*-privacy begs the question of what it means when these authors publish, or make public, their private bodies and private selves. As Wang Lingzhen asks, “[H]ow are we to read or hear voices that, despite their active engagement with the commercial mode of representation, also refuse to be completely consumed and appropriated by market forces in contemporary China, thereby conveying different messages?”¹ In order to answer this question, it is necessary first to understand the tension and interplay between what these writers hope to accomplish in their writing and how these works have been understood by critics and the reading public alike. I argue that by accompanying discussions of female sexuality with discussions of the self and *si* it is possible to provide an alternate reading of the works of avant-garde women writers which neither essentializes female behavior and sexuality, nor criticizes it as being titillating or vulgar, while also highlighting the inherent contradictions that come with the making public (publishing) of these private discourses. This public-ation of the private is therefore central to the avant-garde women writers’ project of resistance.

The making public of a woman’s literary body in order to imbue it with meaning is not unique to the avant-garde women writers. Joan Judge shows how various politically motivated groups have appropriated the biographies of “virtuous women” in

an attempt to show what a woman should be, as the symbolic potential for what the Chinese nation could be.² She seeks to complicate, as she puts it, “elucidate,”³ understandings of the period by presenting, “a range of the often hybrid materials simultaneously available to a single turn-of-the-twentieth century reader,”⁴ and then working through these various presentations, appropriations and meanings of the female exemplar. She shows convincingly how the actual situation of the time was far more complex than the usual reform-minded, eventually iconoclastic, readings of the late Qing and Republican periods, especially with regard to the “woman question.”

In order to do this she has devised a schema to help sort through the many varied and often competing discourses of the time. This is especially useful as many of these discourses advocate the same goal though they hope to reach it through different means. Her schema is made up three vertical distributions, which she identifies as the processes of modernity; and four horizontal categories ranging from progressive reformers to conservative traditionalists, which group the various voices of the period under a larger hermeneutic umbrella. She then works her way through three major kinds of female exemplar—the virtuous woman, the talented woman, and the heroic woman—laying the grid she has created out on top of these “biographies of worthy women,” and showing how these images served both the aims of the group appropriating them, as well as the processes of modernity. In other words, she shows how the various groups each used the biographies of worthy women to advocate their positions regarding both the “woman question” and the “China question” (i.e. how to make China strong again), and how these various appropriations overlapped or were at odds with each other as well as how the

various groups were often advocating the same end point—national strengthening and modernization.

Judge raises several points that are of particular interest here. The first of these is her discussion of female students and sexuality. As she writes:

Critics blamed female education for not only producing social ambiguities between reputable and disreputable women, but for creating gender and sexual ambiguities. They disparaged the masculine appearance of many female students. . . . Opponents of female education also believed that new schools promoted perverse intimate relations between women. Female same-sex love was first identified as a social issue at precisely the time formal female education became a controversial political issue. It remained intricately linked to the figure of the female student and the milieu of women's schools from the turn of the twentieth century through the Republican period. The ostensible site of "unorthodox" erotic practices between various permutations of female students and teachers, girls' schools were identified as a threat not only to the long-standing gender order but to the existing economic and reproductive order.⁵

While the discussion over what constituted a "good" woman was certainly not a new one, Judge shows how the opening of public spaces for female education complicated this debate, as well as opening a space for reformers who resisted the appropriation of the female body by the nationalist cause with what could be argued is a proto-radical-feminist rhetoric.

Secondly, Judge shows how no matter which group (and by association, set of goals) she focuses on, there are certain kinds of women who remain socially unacceptable. By and large, this seems to be the result of the woman's overly private motivations—whether they are in service of private sexual desire, the preservation of their own virtue, or even in the service of the family at the exclusion of the nation. For example she writes:

Chaste women were figures of public controversy because of their intensely private actions: taking up residence in their dead fiancés homes; cutting off hair, ears, and noses in the inner chambers; or hanging themselves from the rafters of

the women's quarters. At the opposite pole of the regime of feminine virtue were women who provoked debate not because of their private devotion to the principles of female virtue but because of their alleged public flaunting on those very principles.⁶

While discussions of privacy (and alternative female sexuality) are not a part of the project of her book, it is informative that issues of appropriation of the female image and the female voice are wrapped up with issues of privacy and the self.

Tani Barlow also takes up the question of women, women's bodies, and meaning, albeit from a more historical-linguistic perspective, in her work, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*. Like Judge, she seeks to understand how to "read" women; in Barlow's case it is by understanding how various terms for women in Chinese were deployed and the relationship between those terms and the corresponding arguments being made about female selfhood. She traces the development of these terms from the late Ming and Qing catachresis *funü* to the May Fourth and Republican era *nüxing* and finally into the Communist redeployment of *funü*. She is careful to point out that these terms do not represent the "truth" of women, but rather the socio-linguistic possibilities for talking about women. As such, she calls these terms "catachreses," which, "[R]efers to a particular misuse of a proper noun, where the term's referent is, theoretically or philosophically speaking, inadequate."⁷ That is to say as she explores the development of terms for women in pre-1911 China she discusses how women were defined by their relationship to the family line, so that the term *fu* (married woman) plus the term *nü* (unmarried woman) becomes the catachresis *funü*, "women," implying that the only way a woman could be defined was by her relation to the family as mother, daughter, or wife.

After the fall of the Qing Dynasty, and China's contact with Western sexological and eugenic theories in particular, there was a move to change this traditional

nomenclature to reflect women's changing position in society and China's move towards modernity. Barlow describes this shift as bringing about the use of the neologism *nüxing* or, "one who is sexually (i.e. having the sexual organs of a) female." Barlow points out that this term was not much better as it overemphasized the link between women as (hetero)sexual beings and their *renge* (selfhood), and while it may have liberated women of their ties to the Confucian family line the new term reinforced the necessity of women's heterosexual reproduction for the betterment of the nation. As Barlow writes, "[T]he new woman, the woman of standing, was also very explicitly theorized to be a sexual being who required a 'new lijiao'⁸ to clarify appropriately ethical means of exercising her own legitimate will to pleasure."⁹ Certainly not all of the Republican era thinkers discussed the subject *nüxing* in the same terms; as Barlow shows, certain writers questioned women's ability to fully become agents in a system where their ability to choose is circumscribed by the necessity that they bear children; by and large, however, Barlow shows how writers like Gao Xian, Lin Zhaoyin, and Y.D. (Li Rongdi) were most influential in their arguments that in order to come into possession of their own personhood, women must be allowed to make their own (heteronormative) sexual choices.

Similarly, Barlow discusses how in the language of the Chinese Communist Party, the *term funü* is used to stand for all normative and decent women. This redeployment of *funü* combined elements of the earlier association of *funü* with the discourse of class, situating these women first in the family and then in the nation. As Barlow describes, the Maoist *funü* subject was no longer the all-encompassing either married or unmarried female subject of traditional Confucian ethics, nor the

“‘Westernized,’ ‘bourgeois,’ ‘individualist,’ erotic’¹⁰ subject implied in the term *nüxing* deployed by the earlier Republican sexologist reformers. The Maoist term, “[I]maged a national woman, *funü*, intertwined directly in state processes over the period of social revolution and socialist modernization who, because of her achievements as a state subject, would modernize family practices....*Funü*...formed a part of the ‘system of designations by...which’...Party ‘political authorities regulate[d] all important social relationships.’”¹¹ In all three cases Barlow discusses how the subject woman is constructed socio-linguistically; however, after Deng Xiaoping’s Open Door reforms once again opened spaces for debate, the question of how the liberated female subject who has personhood would be constructed once again become a topic of inquiry. Contemporary feminist theorists Li Xiaojiang and Dai Jinhua provide their own responses to this question, as will be discussed later.

While the term *funü* is still actively used by the Party, especially through such Party organizations as the All-China Women’s Federation (Fulian),¹² in the post-Mao years, with China’s newly opened economic and cultural spaces creating opportunities for individuals to express themselves in ways not possible during the previous era, essentialized gender difference and heteronormative sexual practices once more came to the front of social awareness. In the same climate in which young women find themselves looking for so-called “pink-collar” jobs, and contemplating “eating the rice bowl of youth,”¹³ Chinese feminist theorists such as Li Xiaojiang and Dai Jinhua have been and continue to promote their own kinds of “corporeal feminism” as a means to counteract the kinds of gender oppression these new “Chinese Noras”¹⁴ are experiencing. Their discussions of how to read the meaning of women provide one of the keys to

understanding the avant-garde women's creation of a private space, and why the publication of their literature of privacy is so important to their project of resistance. However, by locating female identity in the female body, this "Corporeal" Feminism also runs the risk of essentializing gender difference, at the same time that it begs the question of what exactly constitutes a woman.

It is in this context that the avant-garde writers must be understood. These writers grew up with images of a female body as synonymous with the success of the Communist vision, as depicted in films and posters, with phrases like "The happy family life Chairman Mao gave us (1954)," and "It is a revolutionary requirement to marry late (early 1970s)," as well as the "iron girls," or as Meng Yue shows, in the way that narratives in literature of the period place female subjects in relation to the Party.¹⁵ Moreover, these women came into their own as writers in the early post-Mao years surrounded by the discourse of bodily feminism and political wounds,¹⁶ the self-referential form became the only antidote, the only means to recapture the female body and voice from the realm of public symbol. Moreover, in publishing these stories these writers draw on the Chinese literary tradition which validates the feelings and experiences of the private self through writing. However, by choosing to publish stories of alternate forms of female desire, the bodies and selves these writers present remain only partially accessible to the reading public, and in this way allow these writers to control access to those bodies and by doing so prevent the meaning of these stories from being solely determined by society and the reading public.

Li Xiaojiang and Dai Jinhua's "Corporeal" Feminisms

In the 1980s and 1990s, with the growth of the market economy, as well as the "Culture Fever" (*wenhua re*), which followed in the wake of foreign ideas and goods as they flowed into China for the first time in thirty years, the situation facing women again changed dramatically. Zhang Zhen describes it well when she writes:

By the 1970s, the image of the iron maiden...with her steel shoulders and desexualized look, vital to the nation builders of the 1950s and 1960s, was already fast fading from popular memory. In the 1980s, fashion and new trends discreetly but decidedly began to reshape Chinese women's self-perception and gender awareness. By the early 1990s, however, flourishing media (popular magazines, television, film, video, karaoke, advertising, and so on) began to transmit on a much broader scale images of a new breed of young women, emphasizing fashion, sensuality, sexuality, social mobility, and the fast-moving tempo of a postsocialist consumerist society.¹⁷

Along with these new images of feminine bodies came such ideas as the "rice bowl of youth," (青春饭 *qingchunfan*) the post-Mao era's response to the earlier socialist concept of the "iron rice bowl" (铁碗饭 *tiewanfan*). Where the "iron rice bowl" refers to the certainty of work and security in old age in socialist China, the "rice bowl of youth" illustrates the extent to which consumerism and the revitalization of sexological discourse in post-Mao China had an effect particularly on young women's images of self. Zhang Zhen defines the term in this way:

The *rice bowl of youth* refers to the urban trend in which a range of new, highly paid positions have opened almost exclusively to women, as bilingual secretaries, public relations girls, and fashion models. Youth and beauty are the foremost, if not the only, prerequisites to obtaining lucrative positions, in which the new "professionals" often function as advertising fixtures with sex appeal.¹⁸

As more and more space opens for expressions of self, and men and women alike negotiate the changing gender dynamics of an increasingly consumer-oriented and global society, once again many Chinese intellectuals find themselves attempting to untangle the

“woman question.” For feminists such as Li Xiaojiang and Dai Jinhua, this means the re-gendering of the female body, in response to the sexless mass body of socialist feminism. Both scholars use their own kinds of “corporeal feminism” to draw attention to how the state’s discourse of equality effectively both masculinizes and neutralizes female bodies by making men the standard to which women are compared. As Lisa Rofel points out, “[P]ost-Mao feminists decry the invisibility of women’s bodies, as least those bodily experiences that are distinct from labor. They argue that this invisibility keeps women tied to an outmoded state feminism. It also makes it impossible for women to speak about new forms of devaluation they experience.”¹⁹ However, the notion of corporeal feminism is limited, as it begs the question of what kind of body constitutes a woman, and how representations of that body are used both to further female agency as well as to reinscribe gender discrimination.

Li Xiaojiang began writing in the 1980s, and is considered the founder of women’s studies as an area of academic investigation in China. Her efforts led to the creation of the first women’s studies classes and the first women’s studies department in 1985, as well as the Women’s Culture Museum, now housed at the Shaanxi Normal University in Xi’an. In her writing, she advocates for what Tani Barlow has called a kind of “market feminism” in which women express their agency and subjectivity through consumption, particularly of domestic goods and services. For her, the erasure of gender expression during the height of socialist China led to a denaturalization and masculinization of women’s bodies; Li argues that by participating in the new consumer economy, women can recover a sense of their feminine selves, as distinct and different from men. As Tani Barlow says:

It was not that the collective mass subject woman was wholly regrettable, in Li's view, so much as that Maoist women had no body. The ideologically constructed [Maoist female subject] funü's body did not menstruate, give birth, feel sexual desire, or seek out pleasure. If the positive features of funü were that it enabled individual women to achieve and affirm the rights of women in positive terms, the negative features of massified women were that she could not confirm her difference from man affirmatively.²⁰

According to Li, because women had been awarded liberation by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), they had not yet had to earn for it for themselves, and the need to fight for their recognition as a group distinct from men drives the need for contemporary women to express their feminine singularity in the market economy, as well as for the government to support policies that allow women the space to express themselves this way. Related to this is her concept of the "double burden" in China: the idea that while Communism offered equality of employment outside the home to women, it did not change the older patriarchal structures which made women responsible for domestic labor inside the home, so that women shouldered twice the responsibility of men. She writes that she did not herself come into full self-knowledge as a woman until the birth of her first child. Thus for her there is also a connection between reproduction and female awareness. For Li, it is in the active presentation of the female body as gendered female, by purchasing makeup and wearing more feminine clothes for example, as well as the biologically female component of giving birth to a child, that a woman comes to recognize herself as a gendered individual.

Dai Jinhua, whose writing represents trends more associated with the 1990s contrasted with Li Xiaojiang in the 1980s,²¹ has a somewhat different take on the female body, although she too advocates a kind of corporeal feminism. As a Lacanian literary critic and film studies scholar, she is interested in both postsocialist developments and

mass culture. She reads the social landscape of the 1990s as a “city of mirrors” that is always reflecting back on itself images which are both full of meaning and empty signifiers at the same time. Like Li Xiaojiang, Dai is critical of the state feminism of the Mao-era, and the way it denaturalized the female body by making equality synonymous with masculinity. She is also concerned with female awareness of self, particularly in regards to representations of the female body. Like Li, for Dai gender difference is located in the female body and heterosexually aligned. However rather than calling for women to express themselves economically as consumers and to follow a more or less maternal path to female self-awareness, Dai expresses concern both with the politics of consumption and representation, as well as with the idea that the “truth” of female existence is knowable and rooted in female experience. Rather, Dai argues that women become female when they write or otherwise represent themselves, particularly in the age of global media. In her construction, much like Li’s, gender difference is fundamental to her argument that women “excavate”²² themselves out of masculine culture. She is also sensitive to the problematic nature of desire and the male gaze, for in as much as women create themselves by writing, so too are they bound by the forces of the market. She writes:

Although Chinese culture in the New Era (post-1979 period) can be seen as patriarchal culture’s counterattack against the gender equality of the previous era, the emergence of women’s writing is nevertheless one of the most important new developments on the cultural scene. However, one problem is that while men’s writing openly presents its male perspective as the mainstream paradigm to be followed, women writers are always vague in the expression of their gender....Meanwhile, as a voice of gender and political resistance against the official discourse of “women’s liberation,” women’s writing stresses gender differences. Yet that stress, on the one hand, leads them into the old rut of classic gender essentialism and, on the other hand, makes it easy for the patriarchal discourse to appropriate.²³

That is to say in as much as women create themselves by writing the self, the representations of the female body that they create can also be used to support the patriarchal order, or to serve male desire and the male gaze. An example of this can be seen in the “rice bowl of youth” phenomenon mentioned above. Young women who have started to “eat the rice bowl of youth” both assert themselves as individuals at the same time that they reinforce gender norms and the male gaze. As Zhang Zhen reminds us, while there is no doubt that the so-called “rice bowl of youth” has brought to young women a kind of agency that had never existed before in China, in their ability to consume as they please and determine where and for whom they will work, it is a double-edged sword. Their agency is tied to both their youth and beauty, and also reinforces the association of women’s bodies with “pink collar” and other sexualized jobs, and requires that these eaters of the rice bowl of youth express themselves according to the value system of male desires. As Mayfair Yang notes:

It is not so much that the meaning of woman is expressed through sexual difference, as the meaning of woman comes *to be* sexual difference. In the sexual economy, women are invested (literally and economically) with the quality of “to-be-looked-at-ness,” and their function is to provide a contrastive background against which male subjectivity is foregrounded and brought into sharper relief. The effect of making women palpably visible is to make viewers identify with the subject-position of the male eye. In this way, male subjectivity and its power are made invisible, as in the Maoist gender order, but this invisibility is not based on an erasure or blurring of genders but depends on the hypervisibility of the female image.²⁴

To put it another way: as women begin to make use of and capitalize on the newly opened and opening public spaces to express themselves and assert themselves as agents, they also become vulnerable to the dominant culture’s interpretation of those selves. That is to say, in order to express themselves in the public sphere they must conform to the public expectation of what a woman is, thereby reinforcing the validity of that

singular interpretation of the female body. The female avant-garde writers, on the other hand, purposefully write bodies which are only partially consumable by the reading public, insisting on their own private experience and private selves as a means to resist the dominant culture's appropriation and interpretation of the female form.

The Avant-garde Writers: Reclaiming the Self and Mediating Consumption

The criticism most frequently aimed at the avant-garde women writers is that they are self-exploitative, and capitalize on the reading public's desire to know the most intimate and titillating details of women's sexual lives. As Kong Shuyu writes:

Privacy literature has caused a storm of controversy over the past eight years. Feminists have defended its descriptions of "gendered experience" (*xingbie jingyan*); moral apologists have accused it of being little different from soft pornography. Much of the controversy has revolved around the misleading impressions given of these women writers' works, first spread by publishers and, more recently, encouraged and exploited by the writers themselves.²⁵

For example, two of the contributors to *Chinese Concepts of Privacy*, Chen Xiaoming and Robin Visser, also focus on issues of privacy in the works of the female avant-garde writers. McDougall summarizes their arguments, saying:

The flagrant self-exposure in the so-called "women's privacy fiction" appears to reduce the content of privacy to sexual experience and diminish its function to commercial profit and narcissism. Privacy for sale demands a high price: the loss of the writer's own privacy.²⁶

While this is certainly one valid interpretation of the avant-garde women's literature of privacy, it privileges the publishers' commercial intentions over the authors' purposes in writing. Xu Kun, one of the three authors highlighted in this study, wrote of the publishing phenomenon which surrounded the Fourth World Conference on Women organized by the UN Commission on the Status of Women held in Beijing in 1995 in her

article, “Brighter and Brighter from Now On.”²⁷ Perplexed by the tension between the interest in women’s writing and the commercialization of “selling women” as she calls it, she presents a different view of the situation and sudden interest in women’s writing, saying that:

We all yearn for success, but we cannot attain it on our own by directly combating the patriarchal culture. So instead we participate in this collective show, creating a spectacle in order to “sell” ourselves. They [the male-dominated publishers, editors, and mass media] can sell us at a higher price than if we tried to sell ourselves....Our lost and forgotten gender and sexual identity are now suddenly remembered with the approach of the UN World Women’s Conference. Captivated by the huge potential profits, they deliberately emphasize our femaleness, and we feel that we cannot escape from our sexWe certainly need not worry that the tickets won’t sell and our performance will have no audience. But who are the viewers and the director? And who the performers? Who will watch our naked parade and see us perform out earnest striptease?²⁸

As Xu Kun and Kong Shuyu note, the relationship between these competing intentions and the extent to which publishers’ desire to market and sell this literature had an effect on the content of that literature. Kong goes on to describe the process by which publishers helped to mediate the way these works of literary privacy were consumed by the reading public. While in the early 1990s publishers offered high-quality collections of women’s writing, by the mid-1990s the quality of these collections had fallen significantly. As she writes:

They were now shockingly vulgar, little different from the pulp fiction and popular magazines sold at private bookstalls. This was quite incongruous, considering that their content had not changed at all. This sensationalism of the changes is clear when we compare some of the new titles with the originals: *Memory and Feeling*, the original title of the personal essay volume, had become *Trapped Women: Women’s Confessional Literature*; and *Privacy Revealed*, one of the fiction volumes, became *Imprisoned: Women’s Sexual Literature*. Other title changes: the wicked-sounding *Dream Demons: Feminist Literature* instead of the innocuous original, *Endless Sadness*; and *Variations: Women’s Heretical Literature* instead of the rather sober *One Kind of Memory and Emotion*.²⁹

Moreover, using the case of Lin Bai's *One Person's War* as an example, Kong goes on to show how publishers would print these works with overtly sexual covers and titles, or with the text of the work changed to highlight the descriptions of sexual behavior. These kinds of changes not only led to increased sales for the publishers themselves, but also to a misunderstanding of these writers' literature of privacy as being entirely focused on sex and sexuality rather than on the insistence on private, individual experience.

Feminists such as Dai Jinhua on the other hand, have praised the female avant-garde writers for representing female experience in its totality as necessary and appropriate. As previously discussed, for Dai it is in the process of fashioning images of womanhood that women counteract the oppression of state feminism and male culture.

She writes:

The most noteworthy works thus produced are the autobiographies and semiautobiographies by a group of young women born in the sixties. They bravely write "my body" and "my self," narrate their gender and sexual experiences, and record their fear of and longing for sisterhood and lesbian relationships. Not since 1949 has women's writing entered the cultural scene in a more shocking manner than it does now. However, patriarchal culture, especially patriarchal commercial culture, has at the same time started an operation in order to use and then sacrifice this rich resource of women's culture. Brave and frank confessions of women are constantly dug up and invested with commercial value. Male publishers and male critics time and again repackage women writers' candid expositions of the female body, female desire, and their self-inquiry into a marketing formula...But women's writing continues to appear in a clearer and more forceful voice, resisting the new cultural exploitation. The resistance is unprecedentedly clearer and more forceful, and also fully conscious of the present state of women's gender existence. It is deeply introspective, once again transcending and subverting the old gender order to a new cultural level. Sisterhood is no longer defined in the narrower lesbian sense, or in the sense of women's escapist utopia, but has become a clear depiction of a female space and an expression of an ideal feminist society.³⁰

In addition, feminist writers have also argued that commercialization can provide a means for women to resist the oppression of male culture through market demands for depictions of female sexuality. As Mayfair Yang says,

Mass consumer culture supplies this missing ingredient in state feminism: the power of sexuality in reconstructing gender. The potential that this new sexual culture harbors for a women's movement is infusing women with an active female desire so that feminism can rely less on the protection of a paternal state.³¹

It is therefore important to understand that depictions of female sexuality liberated from male desire and injected into the consumer culture of male-sponsored Chinese state feminism, which insists on a gender-neutral mass subject and considers the so-called "woman question" solved, can be both a tool for women to excavate themselves out of that culture as well as a means by which the images of these female bodies are reappropriated for commercial gain and for the pleasure of the male gaze, as Dai Jinhua notes. Given these two competing ways of looking at women's literary depictions of female sexuality, how are we then to distinguish literature for profit from literature as resistance? And more specifically, how can we argue that the avant-garde women writers' use of alternative forms of female sexuality as a narrative device is being used to create a space for their personal expressions of self rather than towards commercial ends? It is because these writers depict alternative forms of female sexuality that remain partially veiled to the reading public that they are able to create a space of *si*-privacy in their fiction, a space which allows for these writers' explorations of self and which is strengthened by their inclusion of self-referential details.

As such it is perhaps more useful to consider Patricia Waugh's term "metafiction" to describe the semi-autobiographical works of the female avant-garde writers and how this form relates their project of *si*-privacy. As Todd Kontje discusses in his work on the

German *bildungsroman*, the term “metafiction” refers to, “fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to itself as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality.”³² Specifically, in defining the term, and also the genre, of literary creation that is metafiction, Waugh writes that:

What it does is to re-examine the conventions of realism in order to discover—through its own self-reflection—a fictional form that is culturally relevant and comprehensible to contemporary readers. In showing us how literary fiction creates its imaginary worlds, metafiction helps us to understand how the reality we live day by day is similarly constructed, similarly “written.”³³

That is to say, metafiction draws attention to itself as a constructed literary form in order to expose the both the artifice of language as well as that of society built on language. However, metafiction does not completely overthrow novelistic convention; as Waugh says, while metafiction plays with the conventions of realism, “it does not ignore or abandon them.”³⁴ Metafiction rather can be seen as the post-modern step following the progression of eighteenth and nineteenth century realism and the alienation and juxtaposition between self and other in modernism. It is this self-consciousness of fiction as a critical medium that separates it from the autobiographical or semi-autobiographical form: the female avant-garde writers are not simply concerned with writing the self, but also with fashioning a private female body which both resists appropriation by the dominant (male) culture, and which can be only partially consumed by the reading public.

Although Kontje presents the German *bildungsroman* as precursor to the postmodern form, there are many points of overlap which make an understanding of the *bildungsroman* in eighteenth century Germany useful to a general understanding of fiction in China at the end of the twenty-first century. Superficially at least, post-Deng

and Open Door Policy China is much like Kontje's description of Germany and German nationalism during the period the *bildungsroman* developed as a form: a switch in literary tastes from more orthodox reading material (Latin theology in Germany and state-approved material in Cultural Revolution-era China) to the novel. Furthermore this "literary revolution" happened rather late in both places and with impressive speed, leading to the subsequent commercialization of the form and a resulting tension between the writers' intentions and the public's desires. As Kontje writes, "The book had become a commodity, and if the writers hoped to profit from their publications, they had to give the public what it wanted, not what the writers felt it needed."³⁵ In the case of the German *bildungsroman*, Kontje argues that the authors who developed the form instead ended up creating a kind of pre-postmodern form, which existed between both high and popular culture, "Neither intoxicating the readers with sensory stimuli, nor browbeating them with moral lessons."³⁶ This "pre-postmodern" form, with its insistence on sharing personal experience with the reading public, as well as the corresponding tension between the authors' creative impulses and the publishers' and reading public's desires closely mirrors the avant-garde women writers' situation in China, especially in their desire to create and publish (make public) a private self. Moreover, there is within the *bildungsroman* genre a focus on self-reflection as well as what Steven Greenblatt calls "self-fashioning:"

Self-fashioning derives its interest precisely from the fact that it functions without regard for a sharp distinction between literature and social life. It invariably crosses the boundaries between the creation of literary characters, the shaping of one's own identity, the experience of being molded by forces outside one's control, the attempt to fashion other selves.³⁷

While much of the fiction produced by men and women in post-Mao China engages in a project of self-fashioning, it is particularly important for understanding what it is that makes the fiction of the female avant-garde writers unique. Coupled with their particular use of *si*-privacy, this project of self-fashioning actually results in what is normally seen as a negative value, the overly self-involved *si*, used as a positive tool. As Waugh says, “Metafiction thus converts what it sees as the negative values of outworn literary conventions into the basis of a potentially constructive social criticism.”³⁸ This applies as much to those works by the female avant-garde writers which are “similar modes”³⁹ to metafiction such as the “self begetting-novel,” which Waugh describes as “[A]n ‘account usually first person, or the development of a character to a point at which he is able to take up and compose the novel we have just finished reading,’” as in Lin Bai’s *One Person’s War* and Chen Ran’s *A Private Life*. Thus we can see how the self-referential novel form is a fundamental part of the avant-garde women writers’ project: it allows them to not only redefine *si*-privacy, for them no longer a negative attribute, and use it instead for their own positive reclamations of self; but also how important the act of publishing (i.e. making public) such a novel about a *si*-private self would be, as metafiction by its very nature exposes the artifice of language and society. In doing so these works, like Virginia Woolfe’s *A Room of One’s Own* and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, become acts of resistance to the male/heterosexual/state appropriation of female voice and image.

Considering Chinese women’s avant-garde writing and their reclamation of *si*-privacy as a positive tool for expressing themselves in terms of metafiction helps to resolve some of the tension between the authors’ intentions and the publishers’ aims.

That is to say, in writing works of fiction which in and of themselves draw attention to themselves as works of fiction and play with both social and novelistic conventions, it becomes less problematic that publishers also seek to capitalize on these works than if they were labeled as autobiographies or memoirs, for example. While critical reasoning reminds us that the genres of autobiography and memoir are as much constructed by the author as are works of fiction, as Philippe Lejeune notes, the reader can accept the autobiographical form as verifiable because of what he calls the “autobiographical pact” between author and reader.⁴⁰ When publishers market women’s avant-garde self-referential fiction as the “truth” of women’s personal experiences, it allows them to play to a voyeuristic consumer market by invoking this “autobiographical pact.” Closer inspection, however, shows that these female writers are drawing on a form of fiction which references itself as fiction and injecting details of their personal lives into that fiction in order to disrupt and resist the appropriated female body. In playing with novelistic forms and injecting details of lived experience into the fictional worlds they create, the avant-garde writers as a whole engage in projects very similar to other metafictional writers to whom they are often compared, such as Gabriel García Márquez (Mo Yan) and Jorge Luis Borges (Yu Hua). Specific to the female avant-garde writers, as in the case of the German *bildungsroman*, this helps to explain why they are often so abstract, opaque, and otherwise difficult for the reader to fully understand. Their fiction explores the tension between fiction and reality and blurs the boundaries between the public and the private, the self and society. It also helps to explain why the female avant-garde writers insist on alternate forms of female experience beyond the heterosexual wife and mother—in fashioning what Judith Butler calls “abject” bodies, the female avant-

garde writers represent female bodies which are outside the dominant paradigm, and thus beyond the pale of easy appropriation and consumption.

In *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* Judith Butler considers how bodies, and by extension, gender and sexuality are constructed rather than given. She problematizes both the notion of an essentialized body/gender/sexuality, which says that because one is born with male or female sexual organs their behavior is biologically determined, as well as the idea that gender is simply performative. As she says:

[I]f I were to argue that genders are performative, that could mean that I thought that one woke in the morning, perused the closet or some more open space for the gender of choice, donned that gender for the day, and then restored the garment to its place at night. Such a willful and instrumental subject, one who decides *on* its gender, is clearly not its gender from the start and fails to realize that its existence is already decided *by* gender.⁴¹

Rather, Butler argues that bodies are materialized, that is, given meaning by the normative functions of society, and out of these meanings come the performative aspects of gender and sexuality. She discusses how hegemonic societal norms are written onto the body from the moment of birth. Thus an infant born biologically male will be instructed in what society has determined is male gender performance, and the same for those born biologically female. When these embodied subjects perform their genders in the socially approved manner their bodies become "intelligible." Subjects who do not perform according to social norms become "abject," as Butler describes:

This latter domain is not the opposite of the former (*viz.* intelligible bodies), for oppositions are, after all, a part of intelligibility; the latter is the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside.⁴²

Here Butler is saying that abject bodies are not the opposite of intelligible bodies, but rather that group which is beyond the pale of the intelligible—"those who do not matter

in some way.”⁴³ She goes on to argue that sex as a discursive category is just one way in which a body is made intelligible or abject—societal norms dictate that the heterosexual body is livable, while the homosexual body is not, and therefore it becomes abject.

Understanding bodies as being materialized as well as constructed is significant to the works of the avant-garde women writers given their project of privacy as being bound up in the self. Returning again to the criticism usually aimed at the works of the female avant-garde writers, Butler’s theories of materialization and embodiment provide an alternate reading. Rather than look at the publication of these works as a loss of privacy, I argue that the publication of the private spaces constructed by the female avant-garde writers in their fiction represents the attempt to make that which is unreadable (unlivable, abject, valueless), readable (intelligible, valuable). From the point of view of male-centered society the female body already borders on the unlivable, and the only way to rescue that body is to reconstruct it in terms that male-centered society can understand: heterosexual wife and mother. As Dai Jinhua discusses, the Chinese cultural landscape of the 1980s pitted the male intellectual against the power of state authority in what she describes as a father/son relationship.⁴⁴ She goes to say that, “[I]n this allegory of Chinese history with a father-son relation as its central metaphor, women must accept the terms of the male-identified culture.”⁴⁵ The female body which does not conform to the social expectations of heterosexual partnership is by definition unreadable. Tani Barlow’s reading of the linguistic catachreses for “woman” as implying either unmarried girlhood or married motherhood shows how there is literally no way to write an alternate form of female existence. And more than just being a linguistic difficulty to write about women, because of the political appropriation of the female image and the female voice it

becomes doubly impossible to convey female experiences that exist beyond the level of metaphor; because a women's body and voice already exist in the public consciousness on the level of symbol, its meaning is never determined by her, never her own. The female avant-garde women writers choose to write about bodies which exist beyond the pale because these are bodies which are not already burdened with pre-determined meaning within the Chinese political and social context.⁴⁶ Moreover, rather than forcing the abject bodies they write about to become intelligible, i.e. ending up happily married and having children, and in that sense reifying the cultural forces which made them abject in the first place, these authors maintain unincorporated abject bodies in their fiction. Take, for example, two of the most well-known works by female avant-garde writers: *One Person's War* by Lin Bai and *A Private Life* by Chen Ran. In *One Person's War*, the protagonist Lin Duomi begins and ends the novel as a woman "marrying herself." As Tze-lan Sang describes:

It opens with a little girl gazing at and pleasuring herself in front of a mirror. The image is echoed at the end of the novel, this time with a grown woman watching and penetrating herself. The little girl has matured and experienced adventure, love, and marriage. However, unable to find affection and trust in her male lovers, and equally unable to find a passage leading her back to the primordial women's paradise of her fantasies, she becomes her own lover once more....Far from the crude assumption that the *one person's war* of the title is simply Duomi's declaration of war against men, her personal declaration of independence, as it were, the words allude to many different battles, including one against the self....Only after she has experienced humiliation and debasement at the hands of a series of selfish and unloving men does she realize the worth to a woman of freedom and self-reliance.⁴⁷

In the course of the novel Lin Bai describes a girl who is fascinated by her own body and engages in erotic play, who grows up to be fascinated by beautiful women, but is never fully able to express her attraction to them either; a woman who has no special feelings of

attraction to men but who has a number of damaging relationships with them until in the end she becomes her own lover once again.

Were it Lin's intention to make her protagonist intelligible in the Butlerian sense, she gives herself ample opportunities to do so. Duomi could have easily found herself in one of the unequal, loveless marriages one finds in Zhang Jie and Wang Anyi's fiction. However, in ultimately having Duomi choose herself as her lover at the end of the novel, Lin resists reconstructing her heroine in a socially-readable body. This allows her to limit access to that body and as such presents another kind of resistance, in addition to that of the appropriated female body/image/voice. And so it is in this sense that the description McDougall offers, of privacy as controlled access, is the most fitting way to understand the works of the female avant-garde writers.

Conclusion: The Chi Li Phenomenon and the Trap of Publication

The concept of materialization becomes doubly relevant when these works of the avant-garde women writers are adapted for television and film. The very nature of these visual media forces us to consider the relationship between "public" and "private," for while films and television shows are made for public consumption, they often present facets of life which are considered to be the exclusive province of the private individual. Mayfair Yang writes:

Television...broadcasts endless representations of private domestic life to a general public. This making public of a private domestic sphere can have the effect of opening up the private to public discussion and debate...so that gender relations within the home are brought to public reflection and revision. Thus, television is an important medium that interpenetrates public and domestic spheres and can also serve as a facilitator (although usually not an arena) for the public sphere.⁴⁸

Much like the fiction of the avant-garde women writers, television too can be said to be a kind of “borderland.” Unlike the avant-garde women writers, while television programs do blur the lines between public and private and, as Yang says, bring certain issues into the public debate, ultimately that debate reifies the underlying dominant discourse rather than providing alternatives to it. A perfect example of this is the “Chi Li phenomenon,” and how it highlights some of the inherent problems of media-crossing and materialization.

While not usually considered an avant-garde writer, Chi Li presents an interesting case to look at in the framework of embodiment and materialization. Much like her avant-garde counterparts, she was born just before the Cultural Revolution (1957) and began writing in the 1980s. Her works of Neo-Realism resist the rigidly structured, over(t)ly political fiction of the Socialist Realists by focusing the individual. In the 1990s, several of her works were adapted for film and television and became hugely popular, sparking what critics call the “Chi Li phenomenon”—the on-screen fascination with the quotidian aspects of “normal” people’s everyday lives. Yet when these works have been adapted for television, the same appropriation of the female image that we have seen in previous areas and public forms presents itself again, although in a new guise. Lu Hongwei’s analysis of the four main female characters in Chi Li’s novella *Comes and Goes* (*Lailai wangwang*) details how they are adapted from the written page into public figures fit for mass consumption and mass idealization.⁴⁹ Although Chi Li as an author may be concerned with the level of the individual and personal experience, once these characters have been cast into real, physical bodies they again become metaphors, either for the outdated Maoist social order (Duan Lina) or the sexualized

transnational capitalist (Lin Zhu); or as the symbolic representation of the self-involved new generation (Shi Yupeng). In either case, in the transition from the written word to the visual image, these women have lost their validity as actual feeling subjects and can only exist at the level of social symbol, breathing new life into patriarchal gender codes.

It is telling for a number of reasons that several works by the male avant-garde writers have been adapted for film, such as Yu Hua's *To Live*, Mo Yan's *Red Sorghum*, and Su Tong's *Raise the Red Lantern*. These include the elevation of an individual's story, such as the "I" narrator's story of his grandfather and grandmother's experiences in the early decades of the twentieth century in *Red Sorghum*, to the level of allegory, as well as the expected (self-)orientalized depictions of trauma on screen. In these depictions it is once again women's bodies which become metaphoric; in this visual medium they also become the eroticized objects of the male gaze, as in Gong Li's characters in *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Red Sorghum*. This is equally true of the wound writers as well; while their stories represent the sum of an individual's experiences during the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, together they represent a mass critique of Mao's policies, and play to the expectations of the reading audience. Rather it is in the works of two other Fifth Generation directors, Hu Mei and Peng Xiaolian, that we can see the extension of the female avant-garde writers project of privacy made public and maintained in the translation to the visual medium of film. Their works, whether adaptations of fiction, like Hu Mei's *Army Nurse* (*Nü'er lou*, 1985), or films that they have written themselves, like Peng Xiaolian's *Women's Story* (*Nüren de gushi*, 1989), reflect similar concerns with the female avant-garde writers. As Hu Mei says, "The most important thing is to stand in a position where one can see the world from what is

completely a woman's angle. Only if this is achieved will we be able to produce a real 'women's cinema.'"⁵⁰ While it is beyond the scope of this paper to look at the development of such a "women's cinema" in China, an investigation of the dynamics of self-expression and expressions of *si*-privacy in the works of female directors such as Hu Mei, Peng Xiaolian, and Huang Shuqin amongst others is certainly warranted.

Notes

¹ Wang Lingzhen, 5.

² Joan Judge, *The Precious Raft of History: The Past, the West, and the Woman Question in China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008). Introduction in particular.

³ Judge, 2.

⁴ Judge, 16.

⁵ Judge, 79-80.

⁶ Judge, 59.

⁷ Tani E. Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 1.

⁸ See Barlow's analysis of *lijiao*, or the Confucian code of ethics, in *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism* Chapter One, pages 25-26 in particular.

⁹ Barlow, 120.

¹⁰ Barlow, 38.

¹¹ Barlow, 38.

¹² Fulian (*Zhonghua quanguo funü lianhehui* 中华全国妇女联合会) began to refer to itself as an NGO in 1995, although it is still strongly influenced by Party doctrine.

¹³ See Zhen Zhang's definition in, "Mediating Time: The 'Rice Bowl of Youth' in Fin de Siècle Urban China," *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000), 94.

¹⁴ This refers to the May Fourth era New Woman, after Nora's character from Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. The May Fourth Chinese Nora" left her home and traditional roles in

pursuit of education and self-determination, especially the freedom to choose her own marriage partner. The term surfaces again in the 1980s, especially in feminist writing.

¹⁵ See note 22

¹⁶ Referring to the “wound literature” (*shanghen wenxue* 伤痕文学) that became very prevalent in the early 1980s. These stories were often written as memoirs or as thinly veiled self-referential works of fiction and usually dealt specifically with trauma suffered during the Cultural Revolution.

¹⁷ Zhang Zhen, 98.

¹⁸ Zhang Zhen, 94.

¹⁹ Lisa Rofel, “Museum as Women’s Space: Displays of Gender in Post-Mao China,” in Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, ed., *Spaces of Their Own: Women’s Public Sphere in Transnational China*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 122.

²⁰ Barlow, 275.

²¹ Although both scholars are still quite active and their work continues to adjust to the changing situation of contemporary China, the core of their respective approaches remains the same, and reflects to a certain extent the times in which they each began writing.

²² See Barlow’s summary of Dai Jinhua, 306-307.

²³ Dai Jinhua, “Rewriting Chinese Women: Gender Production and Cultural Space in the Eighties and Nineties,” in Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, ed., *Spaces of Their Own: Women’s Public Sphere in Transnational China*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 202-203.

²⁴ Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, “From Gender Erasure to Gender Difference: State Feminism, Consumer Sexuality, and Women’s Public Sphere in China,” in Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, ed., *Spaces of Their Own: Women’s Public Sphere in Transnational China*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 50.

²⁵ Shuyu Kong, *Consuming Literature: Best Sellers and the Commercialization of Literary Production in Contemporary China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 102

²⁶ McDougall and Hansson, 23.

²⁷ Kong, 99-100.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Kong, 101.

³⁰ Dai, 204.

³¹ Yang, 61.

³² Quote from Patricia Waugh in Todd Kontje, *Private Lives in the Public Sphere: The German Bildungsroman as Metafiction*, (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 11.

³³ Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), 18.

³⁴ Waugh, 18.

³⁵ Kontje, chapter 1; see especially pages 1 and 2. In the case of China, the kind of literary revolution Kontje describes is not new to Chinese literary history, as discussions of the development of fiction in China (see McMahon, Epstein, Lee, et al.) have previously covered, although after the narrow confines of the Cultural Revolution certain parallels can be drawn. Quote, pg. 4

³⁶ Kontje, 4.

³⁷ Quote from Steven Greenblatt in Kontje, 8-9.

³⁸ Waugh, 11.

³⁹ Waugh, 13.

⁴⁰ See Chapter 1; also Note 43

⁴¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), x.

⁴² Butler, xi.

⁴³ Butler, xi.

⁴⁴ In fact, Dai refers not just to the 1980s but Chinese history as a whole, although in the context of 1980s cultural production. See Dai, 193-194.

⁴⁵ Dai, 193.

⁴⁶ Another possible area of inquiry into how self-writing and writing the abject body intersect would be to look at fiction written by people with disabilities, as the disabled body represents another kind of socially-unintelligible body. Such an inquiry, however, is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

⁴⁷ Sang, 194-196.

⁴⁸ Yang, 27.

⁴⁹ Lu Hongwei, "TV Romance and Popular Cultural Mood: The Chi Li Phenomenon," *The China Review* 6:1 (Spring 2006).

⁵⁰ Chris Berry, "Interview with Hu Mei," *Camera Obscura* 18 (September 1988), 36.

CHAPTER IV

SELF-ISH WRITING: MEDIATING HISTORY, THEORY, AND THE FEMALE

BODY IN THE WORKS OF XU KUN

“I prefer that kind of penetrating, forceful writing, which pierces through all of those tempered appearances and embodies the true essence of human nature, and unceasingly, torturously interrogates life.”¹

-Xu Kun, *Notes on My Life*

Xu Kun was born in March 1965 in Shenyang. She attended Liaoning University from 1982 to 1989. From 1990 to 1996 she was in the Asia-Pacific Culture and Literary Studies Department at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. She began writing in 1993 and is currently in residence in the Literature Studies Department at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. She is a top-level writer in the Beijing Writer's Association, and a committee member in both the Beijing Youth League and All China Writer's Association. Called the “female Wang Shuo,” and heavily influenced by Wang Meng, her unique approach caused literary circles to take notice of her and follow her as a writer, and she has won multiple literary prizes for her works of fiction. Of the writers examined here, Xu Kun's fiction has the most theoretical overtones. She frequently engages with history, often focusing on educated youth and the Cultural Revolution in her fiction. Given her relationship to the Party, vis à vis her political affiliations, there is quite a bit about her writing that invites comparison with other writers such as Tie Ning, Zhang Jie, and Wang Anyi. Moreover, her work also shows the influence of Chinese feminists such as Dai Jinhua, who is in fact frequently mentioned in the reference materials included alongside Xu Kun's works. However, she is also one of the

“youngest” writers; whereas Can Xue began writing in 1983 and Lin Bai in 1982, Xu Kun herself did not start until much later, after both the height of the Culture Fever of the 1980s and the events of June 4, 1989 and the subsequent tightening of restrictions and commercialization of the literary market. As previously mentioned, comparisons are also frequently made between her work and both Wang Shuo and Wang Meng; while her characters are not quite the “hooligans” that Wang Shuo writes in his fiction, they are frequently similarly unsympathetic and coarse. This is mirrored in her use of extremely colloquial Northern speech patterns and slang, although she also frequently employs a poetic voice, much like Lin Bai. Like Wang Meng she too writes frequently about social conditions and relationships, and like him she also has more experimental works. But binding all of these different facets of Xu Kun’s fiction together is her fundamental interest in the condition of women’s lives as viewed through multiple lenses: the historical, the feminist, the political, the academic, and above all a fundamental interest in women’s writing and the creation of a female self. And it is in this creation of the female self through writing that Xu Kun, like Hai Nan and Lin Bai, engages in a project of *si-privacy*.

Mediating Patriarchal Culture and Women’s Writing: Xu Kun’s *Notes on My Life*

In Xu Kun’s theoretical writing, two main themes emerge: the interrogation of history and search for women’s subjectivity. She writes on many different topics, most of which focus either on women’s lives and experiences in history or with literary production and artistic creation. Her 2001 collection *Men’s Feelings Women’s Feelings* (*Xingqing nan nü*) is a series of short essays written about other writers and

contemporaries, as well as topical essays, several of which would also be reprinted in her 2006 *Notes from My Life*. These essays were originally serialized in both *Fiction Monthly* and *Youth Literature*. Xu Kun was motivated to write by many of the same concerns as her contemporaries, most notably the problems that artists and writers face in an increasingly commercialized market. She remarks on this in a later essay also titled “Men’s Feelings Women’s Feelings” and its effect on her development as a literary personality as well as her literary creation of self in the course of writing these serialized essays.² She describes how these serialized essays were written during a particularly difficult period in her life and how the writing of these essays allowed her both to get through that period as well to grow as an individual. Moreover, she remarks how it was in the writing of these essays that she came into full knowledge of herself as an individual, that is, how through the act of writing she created herself:

Now, when my fingers caress my past writing, an impalpable strange feeling wells up in my heart: is it possible that I really wrote this? Did I really previously ever even briefly have literary talent? Amidst this indulgence in self-admiration, it seems like I don’t recognize myself, and like I am meeting myself again.... As I listen to the sound of these clean pages rustling at my fingertips, it turns out to be the tinkling sound of the glacier in my heart blossoming little bit by little bit into happiness.³

She often makes connections between the act of writing and the author’s physical body, particularly when that writing is done by hand. She has a particular disdain for internet writing, remarking that there is no way to get a real sense of the author from words that appear on the computer, that they are too mechanical; in this her opinions are very similar to those of Lin Bai, who also prefers the more personal act of writing by hand rather than typing on the computer.⁴ For Xu Kun, the act of writing has already been culturally-predetermined as a male act, because of the dominance of patriarchal culture, and

therefore it is impossible to uncover a woman's true voice from inside this form, however, it is in the act of writing that a woman learns how to regard herself, how to construct herself. When she looks back at the pages of her own writing she can finally gaze at herself and see herself, and thereby construct a self that is complete. She discusses this connection between self-creation and literary talent at length in her collection of essays titled, *Notes on My Life*.

Notes on My Life is divided into five sections, "Sensing the Flavor of True Emotions," "The Creative Process," "For My Friends, A Faithful Representation," "How I View Feminism," and "My Life: Miscellanea." The essays, written between 1995 and 2006, are grouped according to these general section headings and cover a variety of topics ranging from her family, marriage, and post-divorce life, her development as a writer, her struggles and successes, and her views on writing, culture, history, education, and feminism, to her feelings about soccer and popular culture, such as the Icelandic singer Björk. As previously mentioned, two topics which figure most prominently in these essays are the connections between women, writing, and culture, and her own development as a writer. She speaks at length about the difficulties of being a "woman writer," and takes a highly theoretical and academic approach to understanding the relationships between women, writing, culture, patriarchy, and feminism. For her there is no one simple solution for how women might best come into possession of themselves as agents of culture, although the act of writing figures very prominently in how she believes that women might best begin to counteract the effects of patriarchal culture.

For example, in her essay titled, "A Room of One's Own," Xu Kun laments the way that women are cut off from full subjectivity by society. Written as a response to

and meditation on Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, Xu Kun describes reading both Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* as a young woman, and how this has shaped her understanding of contemporary Chinese women's writing. She says:

At that time we twenty-some-year-olds, literary young women immediately opened our eyes and were enlightened out of barbarism to understand that the reason why women cannot write good fiction and cannot become great literary masters—is that we don't have a room which belongs to ourselves!⁵

While Xu Kun acknowledges that Woolf, an English woman writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, faced the oppression of inequality in a way that she herself and her contemporaries at the end of the twentieth century do not, she argues that Woolf's basic point holds true—in order for a woman to truly come into possession of herself as a complete subject she must have access to a space that is all her own where she can create herself through her writing. This “room of one's own,” in other words, is a space of *si-privacy*, where these female authors are free to create themselves as individuals, away from the state appropriated and culturally determined meanings that their bodies carry.

Xu Kun goes on to comment in this essay that not only women but men too are subject to the same state forces that prevent them from having a “room of their own.” She uses the metaphor of the room to argue that because of state power neither men nor women have the ability to freely acquire a room for themselves where they can create this private space. However, she then goes on to acknowledge that despite this, men still have access to the benefits that system offers by virtue of their gender. She explains that, “‘Gender’ refers particularly to ‘women’s’ gender; male literary history already has no need to stress such a thing. The whole of recorded human history is their history, and even more so with ‘literature,’ this small branch of learning.”⁶ As she points out, maleness has been so socially encoded as being synonymous with personhood, that when

academics speak of “gender problems” (性别问题 *xingbie wenti*) or “gendered writing” (性别写作 *xingbie xiezu*) they are actually speaking about the problems that women face, or writing which focuses primarily on women. Men, because of their dominant position in patriarchal culture are subjects, while women are gendered subjects. In another essay she goes on to say that:

Men have mastered this society’s philosophy, religion, ethics, and law, as well as the right to define and explain all social regulations. They have even taken full responsibility for indicating and annotating what is meant by “man,” and what is meant by “woman.” In this kind of situation, women have even lost the right to decide how to regard themselves; they are only in a position “to be looked at” or “to be spied on.” If one wants to know what it means to be a woman, in the end, they must make use of a male education and lexicon before they can know. A woman has never had her own eyes to observe herself (as a matter of fact, she also doesn’t know the right way to regard herself, she has never had her own mode of consciousness). She must always pass through a man’s vision to face herself and start to reflect on herself and perceive things intuitively.⁷

As such, while men may not have complete autonomy as agents of their own lives, they still carry more status than women, who have neither status nor the means to create this private space. Returning to the “room of one’s own,” she writes that this, “[R]oom’ as a concept not only possesses a material quality, it also becomes a metaphor with formidable symbolic meaning, indicating all of the biased and unjust treatment which women bear in society.”⁸ In the end, Xu Kun wants to see the creation of a new world where men and women both have access to “rooms of their own,” without being asked about their gender. As discussed previously, this insistence on individuality apart from gender is what highlights the project of these female writers’ fiction as that of writing the *si*-private self.⁹

In addition to commenting on her own creation of self in her writing as well as the need for women to have a private space where they can write, Xu Kun also speaks at

length about the effect of history and the role of feminism in relation to women's bodies. She is particularly concerned with the absence of great female literary masters from the canon of Chinese literature, and as she notes above, the idea that women cannot or do not write great works of fiction. For her, the root of the problem is the ways in which women have been written out of history, literary or otherwise, and written over by patriarchal culture. As she says:

They (male writers) have all intentionally omitted all of the great female masters from the historical records. On the one hand, they have painstakingly defined our female gender as "the secondary sex" and made us be conscious of ourselves as women, while on the other hand they do not permit us to our female voices to speak. When a woman wants to make her voice heard in the midst of patriarchal culture, she must use male writing, follow the customs of male thinking, and use the male gaze to understand and depict this world. Over the course of time, in our writing our female identity has gradually faded from our memory, and when we open our mouths to speak, in the end our voices have become imitations of men's raucous voices. In this way women have accepted pressure of the mechanisms of patriarchal aesthetics, and in the middle of an existence based on writing find it very difficult to shoulder the burdens of their own fragmented selves.¹⁰

Xu Kun highlights patriarchal culture and male dominance as the very reason why women have difficulty articulating themselves as complete subjects, because not only does patriarchal culture keep women in a secondary position to men, but it also denies them the means to voice their own forms of experience. Because women have no choice but to write using men's words, men's modes of thinking, and men's literary customs there can be no real change in the status of women as the secondary producers of culture, as gendered or partial subjects, for as Audre Lorde reminds us, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."¹¹

Moreover, Xu Kun goes on to discuss that while feminism provides some solutions to this predicament, in the end it too has its problems. She writes:

How can feminism be “done¹²”? Every woman who has had to go out to take care of business is a latent feminist, just as our status as women cannot be feigned, nor can she drive it off, even if we were beaten to death we would not turn into men. And even more so, however, it also can provide another way solution, that is, the cultural “Mulan Situation,” that is because of patriarchal culture’s unyielding pattern of training and influence, that we can thus put on stage makeup and perform a man’s role. Generally speaking, women who are able to reach the highest levels of culture all have identical fates in the end, that is, after falling into such a pattern of conformity they become products which have been imprinted by the mechanisms (of patriarchal culture) and are adjusted to that kind of uniformity.¹³

Here Xu Kun describes one of the possible “traps” of feminism, and specifically the state-sponsored feminism so often critiqued by other theorists such as Dai Jinhua and Li Xiaojiang. Though women have been “liberated,” according to state-sponsored feminism, nothing has changed about their inherent status as gendered subjects. The most that women can hope for is what Xu Kun calls a “Mulan Situation,” where they begin to act like men. However this does nothing to change the fact that they are not men, and the underlying patriarchal system which has put women in this secondary social position to begin with, rather, it simply reinscribes the superiority of masculine culture. And while, Xu Kun notes, some women do reach positions of power, they do so by adjusting themselves to this power dynamic rather than by challenging it. We can draw the same conclusion about state-sponsored feminism from Xu Kun’s commentary that Meng Yue has about the trajectory of representations in modern Chinese literature: women appear to be more mobile and the system of patriarchal domination appears to have weakened while actually it has simply become more difficult to see that women are still in a secondary position.

At the same time that Xu Kun points out the problems with state-sponsored feminism and the ways that it subtly reaffirms patriarchal culture, especially in regards to

women's writing, she also points out another problem with feminism: that it places an unnecessary amount of importance on the "femaleness" of women as well, as she says, "Feminism here sounds too much like a derogatory term!"¹⁴ Again and again in her writing, like the other female avant-garde writers as well, Xu Kun makes it quite clear that her goal in writing is not to draw attention to her femaleness per se, but rather to create a space for self-creation. As such, while she has been greatly influenced by feminist theory, and while her motivations for writing are very much in line with the feminist project, she would not necessarily call herself a feminist. Rather, this discussion of women's historical bodies has particular relevance to her own development as a writer, as will be discussed later. Taken together, it becomes clear from Xu Kun's essays and theoretical writings that what motivates her is a concern about women's ability to determine the meaning of their own bodies, as well as the knowledge that only when women have a space for themselves can they write themselves as individuals separate from the pre-determined meaning of their gender identity. In order to better understand how Xu Kun creates this space of self, this space of *si*-privacy, I turn to now to her fiction.

Self-Writing and the Theoretical Body: *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*

As previously discussed, Xu Kun focuses on the relationship between women's writing, in particular the way that women are able to represent themselves in their writing, and patriarchal culture in *Notes from My Life*. Again and again she returns to the conflict she sees between male-authored history and women's writing, and in particular the way that women have been excluded from the literary canon. She writes:

Women are missing from history, and also essentially missing from literary history. In literature, representations of women are all created by men; from their quality of their external appearance to the shape of their interior being, the male writer's pen determines and controls all of it. The sporadic women who appear in history also lack enough accounts (of them) and attention (paid to them); there is a lack of female masters. The so-called, "women's writing style" is also viewed and determined according to male aesthetics. We still don't know what a genuine "woman's way of thinking" is, what produces women's desire and in the end how it is represented; all along we can only adopt the style of writing of male masters to regard and spy on (ourselves). Besides the men placed at the fore by history, women's history, including the life stories of individuals as they matured and the course of their emotional development as well as how they both came to desire as well as the methods they used to mediate that desire, have basically been unable to achieve expression in literature.¹⁵

Not only is this exclusion that she describes important to understanding her motivation in writing *Notes on My Life*, but also to understanding the differences between it and her self-referential novel *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*. In *Notes from My Life*, the self that Xu Kun presents is her public self, Xu Kun the writer and theorist. Of the sixty-six essays included in *Notes from My Life*, at least eighteen of them focus in a major way on her own development and experiences as a writer, compared to ten which focus in one way or another on feminism and eight which focus on love and family relationships, either hers or those of women in general. Taken together, these thirty-six essays make up slightly more than half of all of the essays in the collection. Again and again she returns to the forces which have shaped her as a writer; she spends a great amount of time thanking the various editors (all male) and presses which helped her to make a name for herself early on in her career, as well as talking about the various awards she has received and conferences she has attended. She also mentions the comparison often made between her work and Wang Shuo's, remarking that she finds it a bit humorous.¹⁶ The common thread which binds all of these various essays together is her central position. This repeated insistence on her public self, her struggles and achievements, brings to mind

Smith and Watson's definition of autobiography discussed in Chapter I as, "the self-interested individual intent on assessing the status of the soul or the meaning of public achievement,"¹⁷ as well as Gramsci's notion of the autobiography as narrating one person's unique story in order to speak on behalf of or to reflect the common experiences of a group of people—Xu Kun, the extraordinary female writer, as representative of all female writers, etc. While *Notes from My Life* is not an autobiography per se, but rather a generic form which is much more similar to a memoir,¹⁸ nevertheless the same impulse towards the creation of a public persona that exists in the autobiographical form also is present in *Notes from My Life*. It is clear from the amount of time that Xu Kun spends discussing her development as a writer that she is engaged in a project of self-reflection, on the nature and meaning of her literary career, as well as justifying her status as a writer of note, regardless of her gender. Moreover, it is also clear in discussing her own history, and in representing herself the way she does—as a highly educated theorist and highly accomplished author—that she is also arguing for the inclusion of other women writers in the canon, that is, making herself into a representative for other women (writers) who have gone unnoticed or less-than-noticed. In the telling of these moments from her life we can see the reflection of a myriad of other women's lives, as Gramsci, suggests, "By narrating it, one creates this possibility, suggests the process, indicates the opening."¹⁹ As such, the self that Xu Kun narrates in *Notes from My Life* should be read as her public self, in contrast to the *si-private* self that she creates in *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*.

Before turning to Xu Kun's self-referential novel *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, however, it is useful to look at yet another of her self-referential works, and the subject of one of the longest essays in *Notes from My Life*—her play *Men's Feelings*,

Women's Feelings. Written in 2005 and performed in 2006, the play tells the story of a married man who falls in love with another woman and begins an extramarital affair, which is later discovered by his wife. They divorce, and the man marries his new love. After some time, the man again falls in love outside of his marriage and again divorces. The plot centers on this triangle: the man and his two wives, the former and the current. In her play as well as other writing, Xu Kun's views on gender, society, and patriarchal culture are always present, even if they are not the main topic of discussion. She writes:

I have striven to express my reflections about human affairs in this play. What is love? What is marriage? And even more so, in the end, what is life? Everyone might have their own understanding. In the play, the leading man marries, has an extramarital affair, divorces, marries again, has another extramarital affair, and once again has to deal with the trouble of divorce...he is never able to attain satisfaction, as if he is always living in some other place. Moreover, the two women in the play, his former wife and the one who currently holds that position, ultimately their goal is the hope for love that will be loyal through thick and thin and a happy family. It can be seen that, in marriage, men's needs and women's needs are not completely identical. In the play, the man's behavior causes the women to become completely disappointed. They realize if trying to make a man remain faithful to his principles is as difficult as getting a dog to not chew on bones. Because gnawing on bones is a dog's nature.²⁰

Much like in *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, it is relationships between men and women that form the basis for this play. Like the other female avant-garde writers, these relationships are portrayed as being inherently damaging to women, although certainly not to the same extent that some of the other writers represent them. For Xu Kun, a woman's relationship with a man is as damaging to her selfhood as patriarchal culture is to women's writing. She is always the "secondary" member in the relationship, subject to the whims of her husband. When he leaves, as Xu Kun says that he eventually will, she loses her hopes of having the one thing she has wanted, while the only consequences for him are the troubles associated with divorce.

In addition, as in much of her writing, much of her inspiration came from her own personal life and experiences. As she says:

It is possible to make out traces and shadows of my personal life experiences and emotions in the characters, plot, and story of the play. Even though I myself once suffered the loss of a marriage, when it comes to my beliefs about life, on the whole I am a cultural conservative. I still yearn for that kind of classical love where “treating one’s spouse with respect” and “growing old together hand in hand” is the foundation. In today’s era of diversity and the emphasis on individual freedom and the excessive expressions of self, this kind of opinion might seem unrealistic and even a little outdated, but toward those families and people who can be faithful in a loving marriage, I still want to extend my highest praises and express my feelings of respect and admiration.²¹

Although she admits that she longs for an “old-fashioned” relationship, and also implies that perhaps there has been too much of a turn toward individual freedom in contemporary society, this does not necessarily clash with her desire to create a private self in her other works of self-referential fiction. The “shadows” of herself that appear in *Men’s Feelings*, *Women’s Feelings* and the self that she creates in *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring* are not the same; her own experiences and emotions have become the raw material form which she draws inspiration, however as she notes, it is not her intention to narrate herself in the work, either public or private, but rather to look at the nature of heterosexual relationships, to raise questions about love and human nature. However, understanding her feelings about relationships between men and women is important for understanding *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*.

In *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring* we meet Mao Zhen, whose life often closely parallels Xu Kun’s own life. It is told largely in the third person, and except for the occasional “slip” into first person narration, Xu Kun makes no attempts to portray the interior thoughts or feelings of any of the other characters besides Mao Zhen—the novel is totally focused on her and her mental and emotional development. While it is set

during a two-year span from 1999 to 2001, in developing Mao Zhen's story, Xu Kun spends a great deal of time describing events that began in 1986 when Mao Zhen came to Beijing for the first time, and the subsequent ten or so years. The novel opens on the last night of 1999, with Mao Zhen going to her friend-and-sometime-collaborator's home for dinner. This friend, Pangda Gu'ai, is a television director, and has, from time to time, asked Mao Zhen to write for him. By the end of the evening they wind up in bed together, and thus begin a relationship. It also causes Mao Zhen to reminisce on her life up to that point, and the years that have passed since she had first come to Beijing. She remembers first coming to Beijing in 1986 with her then boyfriend Chen Misong. At the time they were both college students in Shenyang, just about to graduate. When they go back to Shenyang, Mao Zhen starts graduate school while Chen Misong moves to Beijing to work. Two years later they marry and Mao Zhen moves to Beijing. By 1996 she has started to make a name for herself as a writer and he is growing busier and busier with his work at the publishing house, and in 1999 they divorce, just as she is about to finish her doctorate. The period after her divorce is a very difficult one for her, and she considers suicide as an option. That is until she meets Pangda Gu'ai, a charming older man who is himself divorced. He sweeps her off her feet, and she begins to heal from her relationship with Chen Misong. He even proposes to her, and the two start to discuss a possible marriage; she even broaches the topic of having a child with him. Around the same time she also meets one of Pangda Gu'ai's friends, a businessman named Wang Xinquan. As their friendship develops, he expresses an interest in Mao Zhen, which she does not return because of her relationship with Pangda Gu'ai. In the end, however, she discovers that Pangda Gu'ai has several lovers, and she leaves him, eventually choosing

to move in with Wang. It is during her relationship with Wang that she finally feels her growing sense of independence come to maturity, and despite being in a fairly comfortable relationship, Mao Zhen eventually leaves and decides to live on her own. The novel ends with her choosing to live alone, and continuing to work towards building her professional career.

There is a lot of Xu Kun's own life in *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*. Both Xu Kun and Mao Zhen attended university and graduate school in Shenyang from 1982 to 1989, and then begin doctoral studies in Beijing in 1996. Both Xu Kun and Mao Zhen were married in 1988 and divorced in 1999. Both use writing as a means to get through this difficult period in their lives, and both often talk about the pleasures and difficulties of living as a single woman. Even the hesitation that Mao Zhen's parents express when she tells them of her plan to marry Chen Misong echoes the reservations that Xu Kun's parents expressed at her own marriage, and which she discusses in *Notes from My Life*.²² She also makes several references to her other writing in the novel; for example Mao Zhen's book, *Damn Soccer (Gaisi de zuqiu)*, has nearly the same title as one of Xu Kun's works, *Fucking Soccer (Gouri de zuqiu)*;²³ similarly, one of the letters that Mao Zhen writes to her friend Ah Zhen is actually the final paragraph of one of Xu Kun's essays written to her friend Li Hongzhen.²⁴ Like Xu Kun, Mao Zhen is considered to be an avant-garde writer, although in the novel Mao Zhen remarks that this was the result of her housing situation at the time, "Later, people also said that her writing style was very avant-garde, very modern. Actually, they didn't know that this was the result of having to hold her bladder in the block-style housing—her normal train of thought and the flow of her thinking was completely broken by the need to pee."²⁵ However, unlike the public

self that she presents in *Notes from My Life*, the Xu Kun that is reflected in Mao Zhen is inward-looking character, an individual self who comes into her own despite the confines of her relationships with men. And like the fictional selves of the other avant-garde female writers, Mao Zhen chooses a life that is not bounded by her socially-defined role as a woman; although perhaps less radical in her choices than those of Lin Bai's Lin Duomi and Chen Ran's Ni Niuniu, for example, nevertheless, her eventual choice to live as an independent woman represents a form of resistance to patriarchal culture's definition of what a woman, "should be."

Mao Zhen's development is both slow and painful, and the process of learning about herself and becoming the agent of her own life is not a fast one. From the vantage point of her first night with Pangda Gu'ai, with her divorce to Chen Misong only recently finalized, Mao Zhen begins thinking back on her relationship history and what has brought her to this point. She remembers when she was in college, and how by the end of their first year all of her female classmates were already looking for boyfriends. It was around this time that she herself met Chen Misong. As she recalls this period in her life, she also remembers what happened to the girls who were not successful in finding boyfriends for themselves, saying, "By the time they had reached their fourth year of college, those girls who still didn't have any boys chasing after them commonly began to feel a certain sense of inferiority and anxiety well up inside them, and they often became a bit strange."²⁶ While not a part of her own experiences at that point in her life, Mao Zhen's memory of these girls indicates just how great an effect patriarchal culture has had on these young women, that their ability to judge their own self-worth is directly

connected to their ability to attract a man. For Mao Zhen this question also becomes very personally important later in her own development as well.

It also sets the foundation for the Xu Kun's own reflections on the damaging effect of the socially-defined relationships between men and women on women, a theme common to all of the avant-garde women writers. Early in her marriage to Chen Misong, Mao Zhen defines herself in relationship to her husband. He is the leader, and she, the follower. She defers to him in terms of decision-making as well as in terms of his desire—he is described as being the initiator in all cases but one. The one time that she does take the lead in their sexual relationship is when she goes with Chen Misong to visit his parents after their wedding. The next morning she is reproached, albeit subtly, by both Chen Misong and his mother for keeping him from getting enough sleep. She takes exception to this, angry that she should be reproached for initiating what she considers normal behavior between two recently-married people. In this incident, it is possible to make out traces of the inequalities of expectations placed on men and women; Xu Kun implies that male desire is the active element while female desire should be passive and yielding. This episode is particularly telling in light of her earlier novella *Nü Wa*, in which the destructive relationship between a mother-in-law, Popo, and daughter-in-law, Yu'er, directly affects four generations of the Yu family. This relationship is toxic to all involved precisely because of the traditionally defined roles for men and women, with men as the active initiators of desire and women as the passive receptacles, saddled with the burden of bringing that male desire to fruition by producing a child. Coupled with the fact that traditionally a woman's only access to power within the family, generally speaking, came through her husband or sons, there is an inherent tension built into this

kind of triangular relationship, a tension which is not absent from Mao Zhen's marriage, although it is significantly less than that which the characters in *Nü Wa* experience.

Mao Zhen also experiences a certain amount of loss of her identity after her marriage to Chen Misong as well. While she does eventually decide that she wants to make a name for herself as a writer, the idea of pursuing her own fame is only mentioned briefly from time to time throughout the course of the novel. Rather, it is Mao Zhen's journey from a naïve young woman who defines herself by the men in her life to the independent, more mature writer that she becomes in her thirties that is of interest to Xu Kun. One of the first moments in this process of growth comes for Mao Zhen after she and Chen Misong move into their first apartment of their own. It was arranged for them by Misong's work unit, and is mostly populated by his male coworkers; there are very few other women there. In this atmosphere, Mao Zhen completely loses her identity to Chen Misong; while she often spends time playing mahjongg with Chen Misong and some of the other men in the building, she is never given an identity, or even a name, which is hers alone, rather, she is always an extension of her husband. As Xu Kun describes, "At that time, with them, she practically had no name. She had lived with these people in this Communist-style block housing for so many years and yet basically no one knew her name. They called her 'Chen Misong's wife' if they were being slightly more respectful; or 'Chen Misong's lover,' etc. if they didn't know any better. She lived in this unit's block housing and lost her name."²⁷ At the time, Mao Zhen doesn't seem to mind too much, although the more mature Mao Zhen who remembers these events betrays a certain amount of dissatisfaction with this situation.

One of the most important events in Mao Zhen's development as a subject comes in 1991 when she and many of the other recently graduated graduate students are sent to the countryside for a year for training. While she is there, Mao Zhen not only becomes stronger physically, but also linguistically, learning how to speak quickly and forcefully like her other female compatriots. This new ability is one that she brings back to Beijing with her, and one which serves her well in her quest to make a name for herself as a writer. She is able to keep up with her male counterparts, and becomes known for her forceful writing-style, much like the real Xu Kun. She also returns to Beijing with a newfound sense of purpose, and a new sense of independence and self-reliance. She has decided, and is determined, to make a name for herself as a writer. Xu Kun writes, "When she came back, she seemed to have become like a different person, hardworking, diligent, not fond of playing around. Heavy pressure piled up on her heart. She spent the whole day reading and writing. Every day, except for making food for Chen Misong, washing clothes, and a few other times, she ran to the library and didn't come back until the evening, writing well into the night."²⁸ However, despite her newfound ambition, Mao Zhen still continues to perform her duties as wife—cooking, cleaning, and doing the laundry—for Chen Misong, who is also very intent on making a name for himself, and is himself writing a book. It is only later, when they are both so busy with their work that Mao Zhen has stopped performing this role that their marriage begins to break down. Once again, Xu Kun draws the reader's attention to the inequalities that exist within heterosexual relationships, and pressures that still exist for women within patriarchal culture, however liberated or enlightened it (and they) have become. It is only in being removed from this situation, in this case, sent to the countryside and surrounded only by

other female compatriots, that Mao Zhen begins to grow into an individual subject in her own right.

Despite her new sense of self, Mao Zhen has not completely developed an identity of her own, and still relies on the men in her life for validation. This becomes particularly relevant after her divorce from Chen Misong; she goes through a period of deep depression, and feels that she is no longer able to like, or even trust, herself. She suddenly gains a lot of weight and begins to question her body's ability to produce children, and goes to the doctor for a complete physical. She is relieved to learn that she is capable of having children, and soon her weight returns to normal. Shortly thereafter, she meets Pangda Gu'ai, and begins her relationship with him; although there is a lot about him that she doesn't particularly like, and he does not make the best companion or partner for her—he is often very selfish, and set in his ways, living the life of a confirmed bachelor—she still allows herself to proceed with him, because at this point in her journey to selfhood, she still needs this kind of male attention to feel complete. Xu Kun describes Mao Zhen, saying, “At this time, during the confused period where her self-confidence had already been completely destroyed, knowing that there was someone thinking of her, who liked her, for the person that she was then this was so important, so important! That feeling really was completely unforgettable.”²⁹ In fact the turning point does not completely begin for Mao Zhen until after Pangda Gu'ai has broken her heart, and Mao Zhen is trying to pull herself together. After they separate, Mao Zhen gets very sick. After a few days, however, she has started to recover, and she decides that it is time for her to take her fate into her own hands. Xu Kun writes:

A week later, when her high fever had gone down and her strength had returned, she purposefully climbed off her bed and, facing her mirror, got dressed up and

put on makeup. She said to herself in the mirror: you're not too old yet; she had to say to herself: you're not so hard on the eyes; she still yet needed to tell herself: even though you've been married once, there's no reason people should look down on you—if you hadn't been married by your age it would be really shameful.³⁰

Mao Zhen has decided to pursue Wang Xinquan, who had previously expressed his interest in her, although at that time she was still seeing Pangda Gu'ai and therefore was unable, and uninterested, in returning his advances. In this moment, Mao Zhen has turned the corner in her own development as a subject. She finally is facing herself, looking at herself, rather than being the object of her male partner's gaze. She does not berate herself for being unable to keep her partner, or despair at the prospect of being alone, but rather encourages herself. However, she is still in the process of coming into full possession of herself, and so the reference to her acceptability as a woman still uses patriarchal culture's expectations for her as a guide, that is, she marry, although even this hold on her is beginning to weaken somewhat.

After giving herself this bit of encouragement, Mao Zhen calls Wang Xinquan and arranges to meet him for dinner, and they begin a relationship, her final one in the novel. Unlike her relationship with Chen Misong, which was based on love, and her relationship with Pangda Gu'ai which started with lust, Mao Zhen's relationship with Wang Xinquan is one of convenience. They enjoy each other's company, and are good friends, and Mao Zhen moves in quite quickly. This goes on until one day when Mao Zhen gets a phone call from Wang Xinquan's former girlfriend, who begs Mao Zhen to leave him. His former girlfriend explains that she needs Xinquan, and that she will be good to him, and asks Mao Zhen to give him up, saying that she knows that Mao Zhen will be okay on her own. Faced with this situation, Mao Zhen finally decides that she has

had enough of men and prefers to live on her own; she then moves out, back to her old apartment. Although this choice is not ideal, for Mao Zhen it is the only possible choice to be made after her experiences with Chen Misong, Pangda Gu'ai, and Wang Xinquan.

Xu Kun writes:

When she was alone with herself, she also wasn't completely happy. "A room of one's own" isn't enough on its own to provide happiness; one needs people in that room who give them love before they can be happy. "I belong to myself" also isn't happiness, and simply isn't sustainable. People cannot live only for themselves, and if they do, sooner or later they will find that they have been living an empty life, living an inane life. She would always want to live for someone else before she herself would feel somewhat alive. Otherwise, she might lose her life.... But she understood that they were all sick, Pangda Gu'ai and Wang Xinquan—those successful people from the capital who looked so shiny, so slick on the outside—their sickness was deeper than hers. No matter what she could still hold on to some things, while they, however, threw themselves out completely. This cycle of behavior became ever deeper, ever more of a trap. Maybe it was because she was merely at the beginning, while they had already been trapped here for so long, too long; they had already cultivated a kind of indiscriminant inertia. She and them, they were all sick people. Sick people cannot seek stability from other sick people. They should all wait for the arrival of a healthy person to give them some stability. She should also learn patience in waiting for that healthy person to come and help bring some stability to herself.³¹

While Mao Zhen admits to herself that she will always want to live for someone else, that her life will always be incomplete without someone else in her "room of her own," she also acknowledges that the kinds of relationships that she has had with these men are not healthy, for her or for them. And although the path that she takes to discovering how unhealthy these relationships are is different from both Lin Bai's and Hai Nan's protagonists, Mao Zhen's realization of the damaging effects that heterosexual relationships have for women and her choice to live a solitary existence is one of the aspects which makes *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring* a work of resistance, and one of the ways in which Xu Kun creates for Mao Zhen a space of *si*-privacy in the novel.

In addition to this, Xu Kun's depictions of Mao Zhen's sexual development also reinforce the *si-private* self that she creates in *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, as well as mirror her development into an autonomous subject. Her first sexual experiences are with Chen Misong, after they have arrived in Beijing for the first time in 1986. Away from home and alone together for the first time, they still must work to "steal" some time with each other. Their first sexual encounter is a clandestine one, as they are afraid of being caught by the other couples that they have traveled to Beijing with. And in the midst of her first hurried sexual experience, it is Chen Misong's passion which leads Mao Zhen, rather than her own. Xu Kun writes of Mao Zhen's experience that, "She felt him with her body, smothering her, gasping for breath; two young, immature bodies who had not yet learned resentment, desperately trying to stick as closely together as possible, chaotically rushing towards each other, chaotically pushing together, hating that they cannot press the other one's life out. What he feels, she feels. When he trembles, she trembles."³² He is the active agent in this sexual encounter, and while Mao Zhen also feels desire, it is mostly in response to his desire. He wants to enter her, and she acquiesces. He first feels the pleasure of her body, and then she feels pleasure. And because these meetings are surreptitious, their early sexual history is marked by the sense that they are doing something shameful, and a certain amount of insecurity on Mao Zhen's part.

Their furtive meetings continue after this until they are finally married. At this point, the feelings of shame and insecurity melt away, as their sexual relationship has been sanctified by the bonds of matrimony. Xu Kun describes their wedding night, saying:

In the hotel room, they could finally face each other completely naked. This was the time they had looked forward to for so long, the first time they could clearly look at each other's bodies, open and aboveboard, leisurely enjoying the sight of gazing at each other's bodies, a body of the opposite sex. Muscles, frame, hair, blood. This was the first time.... Now, this layer of mystery could finally be open and aboveboard, open and legally revealed!³³

Mao Zhen is finally able to take a more active role in the relationship—she can gaze at him just as he gazes at her; now that their relationship has been made into one which meets social requirements for legitimacy, she is free to express her desire. However, as mentioned above, Mao Zhen is not completely free to act on her desire, as she is reprimanded by her mother-in-law for keeping Chen Misong from getting his proper sleep. Despite the legitimacy of marriage, Xu Kun still hints at the dangers of female desire, and points out that Mao Zhen is still expected to be passive to her husband's desire rather than actively act on her own. This is a very difficult lesson for her, and she is understandably angry that this kind of attitude still exists even in the current day and age. It is also the last mention of Mao Zhen's sexual relationship with Chen Misong, although Xu Kun does hint that as their respective lives become busier and busier, that Mao Zhen and Chen Misong stop being intimate altogether, and that this may have been a factor in their divorce.

The next mention of Mao Zhen's sexuality, rather, comes while she is in the countryside working. It is the first time she makes close female friends; previously Xu Kun tells the reader how Mao Zhen dislikes spending time with women, because they are not as direct and straight-forward as men, and that Mao Zhen finds it much more pleasurable to spend time with Chen Misong and his colleagues in their housing complex, playing mahjonn. Once she is sent to the countryside, however, Mao Zhen is

surrounded by women, and for the first time in her life develops very close female friendships. And while Xu Kun never goes so far as to define these friendships as explicitly homosexual, she does imply a certain degree of homosociality. For example, when describing Mao Zhen's relationship with her friend Ah Zhen, Xu Kun writes, "They became practically inseparable. In today's vocabulary, they had certain 'Comrade' or homosexual inclinations. But at that time, what did they understand about messing around for fun? They didn't understand. Their friendship was as pure as the moonlight in the countryside, big and round, without the slightest impurity."³⁴ Rather than the sweaty, surreptitious fumbblings of her "illicit" sexual relationship with Chen Misong prior to her marriage, or the completely exposed relationship that they have after their marriage, Mao Zhen's relationship with Ah Zhen is made only partially visible to the reader, left in a borderland space that exists between friendship and physical desire, a space which Xu Kun describes as innocent and pure. And it is here that, like the other female avant-garde writers, Xu Kun uses this alternative form of female sexuality to create a space of *si*-privacy in the novel.

This relationship, whatever it may ultimately have been, does not continue as anything other than a close friendship after Mao Zhen returns to Beijing from the countryside. However, as previously noted, Mao Zhen returns a new woman, with a newfound sense of determination. She also remains quite close with Ah Zhen, relying on her friend for strength during her divorce from Chen Misong. After the divorce, Mao Zhen feels as though her body has died—she no longer feels any desire, either sexual or otherwise. In fact it is not until she meets Pangda Gu'ai that her desire is rekindled. On the night when he has invited her over to his house for dinner, Pangda Gu'ai at one point

remarks that Mao Zhen isn't very womanly; while he means it in a complimentary way, she takes offense, and tries to leave. Determined to make amends, Pangda Gu'ai convinces her to stay, and the two begin to drink quite heavily. When she gets up to look at one of his books, he moves to help her reach it from a high shelf, and Mao Zhen finds that her body misses the feeling of another body. Xu Kun writes:

A big pair of hands, warm, wrapping around her waist from behind. She moved the nape of her neck backwards, exploring—regular puffs of hot breath. The smell of an unfamiliar man. The smell of alcohol. Tentatively stroking her hair, saying nothing. A huge body sticking close to her, a virile and powerful body, burning hot, stuck close behind her, his heart frantically pounding “dong dong dong,” for a second, with each beat, pounding against her heart, her chest also burning hot, as though it were being fried. A thousand, tens of thousands of red hot ants tickled him, moved from his hands to her body... she tried to dodge them, instinctively tried to dodge them, afraid his stubble might scratch her, and raised her hands to ward him off. In doing so, she felt his hands and found that they were covered in soft, fine hair.³⁵

It is interesting to note the way in which Xu Kun narrates Mao Zhen's desire. After the first bodily memory of what it is to be near a man, Mao Zhen also remembers the dangerous feeling of heterosexual desire; much like Chen Misong's desire threatened to smother her, so too does the pounding of Pangda Gu'ai's heart. It is not until she brushes his hands (trying to get away from him), and feels how like her own hands they are that she finally gives in to her own desire, and to him. Unlike Lin Duomi in Lin Bai's fiction, no explicit mention of female autoerotic desire is ever made in *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, however it is clear from her sudden change in disposition that it is precisely this discovery, that his hands are like hers, that turns her apprehension into arousal. Her relationship with Pangda Gu'ai is also her most sexually free; Xu Kun most frequently portrays Mao Zhen, not Pangda, as the initiator of their sexual encounters. This parallels Mao Zhen's development as a subject; as she becomes more and more of an individual

agent of her own life, so too is she more able to actively able to pursue her desire. She is not completely free, as she is a little embarrassed leaving Pangda Gu'ai's house the next morning to run into any of his neighbors, however compared to her relationship with Chen Misong, Mao Zhen is far more able to act on her own wishes and desires. And just as her choice to live a solitary life is one way that Xu Kun creates a space of *si*-privacy in her fiction, in narrating Mao Zhen's desire as active rather than passive as well as taking other forms beyond social convention, Xu Kun reinforces this *si*-private space as one of resistance, and one which is only partially transparent to the reading public.

Conclusion

Despite the relatively conventional nature of the content in Xu Kun's work, it is interesting to see that like the more graphic *One Person's War*, *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring* is also criticized for its lack of literary value. Online commentator Yiyan Wang writes:

The story takes too much from the author's life, and is therefore limited by reality. The emotional significance of similar events in Xu Kun's personal life limits her creativity, allowing it to be superseded by excessively subjective characterization and plot. The appeal of the text is consequently limited to readers familiar with and interested in the author's life.³⁶

Returning to Xu Kun's previous comments in *Notes from My Life*, because of the expectations of patriarchal culture, the kind of story that she narrates in *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring* is not one which is likely to gain her acceptance into the lists of literary masters. As Wang points out, the context of *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring* is too personal, too subjective. Moreover, Wang claims that this subjective stance limits Xu Kun's creativity to a mere representation of events that had actually taken place.

However, it is possible to make out the shadow of Xu Kun's successful creation of a *si-private* space from within Wang's critique. In being "excessively subjective," The *Twenty-Two Nights of Spring* actually presents a world that the reading public can only partially enter, only partially consume. Xu Kun, rather, has created a space in which she has successfully narrated a self, a self that has had many of the same experiences as the author, but whom we cannot say for sure is the author herself. Rather, *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring* resists a historical or social reading, and shies away from the more public-oriented subject matter of *Notes from My Life*. As such, despite its more moderate stance relative to the works of some of the other avant-garde female writers, it is clear that *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring* should be read through the lens of *si-privacy*, while *Notes from My Life* should be read as a work oriented toward public recognition.

Notes

¹ Xu Kun 徐坤, *Wode rensheng biji* (我的人生笔记 *Notes on My Life*), 104. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine and remain as close to Xu Kun's original wording as possible.

² Specifically, she discusses one of her contemporaries, Qiu Huadong 邱华栋. Like Xu Kun, he began writing in the early 1990s and often on similar problems. She specifically mentions his *Private Notebook* (私人笔记本) Xu Kun, "Men's Feelings Women's Feelings," (性情男女 *Xingqing nan nü*) in *Sitting to Watch the Clouds as They Rise* (坐看云起时 *Zuo kan yun qi shi*), 71.

³ Xu Kun, "Men's Feelings, Women's Feelings," in *Beijing and North* (北京以北 *Beijing yi bei*), 74.

⁴ Xu Kun, "Remembering the Age of Handwritten Drafts," (怀念手稿时代 *Huainian shougao shidai*) in *Notes on My Life*, 71-73; Lin Bai, *One Person's War*, 10.

⁵ Xu Kun, "A Room of One's Own," (一间自己的屋子 *Yijian ziji de wuzi*) in *Notes on My Life*, 202.

⁶ Xu Kun, “The Exhaustion of Gender,” (性别之累 *Xingbie zhi lei*) in *Notes on My Life*, 150.

⁷ Xu Kun, “Who Is the ‘King’ and Who Is the ‘Concubine’?” (谁是“霸王”谁是“姬”?) *Shei shi ‘Ba Wang’ shei shi ‘ji’?*) in *Notes on My Life*, 159. The title of this essay is an allusion to *Farewell My Concubine* (*Ba wang bie ji*) from the Han Dynasty and Peking Opera, not to be confused with the novel by Lilian Lee or the film directed by Chen Kaige.

⁸ Xu Kun, “A Room of One’s Own,” 203.

⁹ See the discussion of feminism in the introduction; while grounded in feminism, I argue that these writers resist being labeled as feminist writers because of the corresponding insistence on gendered female identity. This is particularly important for Xu Kun, and is addressed below.

¹⁰ Xu Kun, “The Exhaustion of Gender,” 151.

¹¹ Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” in Reina Lewis and Sarah Mills ed. *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 27.

¹² In the performative sense; the Chinese word here is 搞.

¹³ Xu Kun, “Li Hongzhen: Tonight Let’s Go Have a Drink,” (李红真: 今晚出喝一杯 *Li Hongzhen: Jinwan chu he yibei*) in *Notes from My Life*, 123.

¹⁴ Xu Kun, “Li Hongzhen: Tonight Let’s Go Have a Drink,” 123.

¹⁵ Xu Kun, *Notes from My Life*, 191.

¹⁶ Xu Kun, “Me and *China Writer Magazine*,” (我与《中国作家》 *Wo yu Zhongguo zuojia*) in *Notes from My Life*, 68.

¹⁷ Smith and Watson, 2

¹⁸ The *Notes on My Life* (*rensheng biji* 人生笔记) form is itself a genre of writing in the Chinese literary canon, with its own long history. See Chapter One.

¹⁹ Gramsci, 132.

²⁰ Xu Kun, “How I Came to Write a Play,” (我是怎样写起话剧的 *Wo shi zenyang xie qi huaju de*) in *Notes from My Life*, 101.

²¹ Xu Kun, “How I Came to Write a Play,” 102.

²² Xu Kun, “Little Twinges of Anger,” (小愤情 *Xiao fen qing*) in *Notes from My Life*, 27-28.

²³ Xu Kun, *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring* (春天的二十二个夜晚 *Chuntian de ershi'er ge yewan*), 222.

²⁴ Xu Kun, Xu Kun, “Li Hongzhen: Tonight Let’s Go Have a Drink,” 125 and *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, 114.

²⁵ Xu Kun, *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, 91.

²⁶ Xu Kun, *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, 38.

²⁷ Xu Kun, *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, 80.

²⁸ Xu Kun, *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, 86.

²⁹ Xu Kun, *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, 232.

³⁰ Xu Kun, *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, 339.

³¹ Xu Kun, *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, 371.

³² Xu Kun, *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, 39.

³³ Xu Kun, *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, 59.

³⁴ Xu Kun, *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, 84.

³⁵ Xu Kun, *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, 20.

³⁶ One of the few mentions I have been able to find about *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, scholarly or otherwise. “Twenty-two Evenings in Spring,” last modified February 2003, <http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/English/e2003/e20032/3cu7.htm>

CHAPTER V

SELF-ISH WOMEN: INDIVIDUALIZED WRITING AND PRIVACY IN THE WORKS OF LIN BAI

“A person’s ability to act in accord with her own conscience depends upon the degree to which she can go beyond the limits imposed by the society in which she lives, to become a citizen of the world. The most important quality she must possess in this is the courage to say no, the courage to refuse to obey the dictates of the powerful to refuse to submit to the dictates of public opinion.”
Chen Ran, *A Private Life*

Lin Bai was born Lin Baiwei in 1958 in Beiliu, Guangxi Province. She began writing poetry and a little fiction while in college, from 1978 to 1982. By 1987 some of her short stories were being published in such magazines as *Renmin wenxue* and *Shanghai wenxue*. In 1989, she won critical acclaim for the short story, “True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate” (“Tongxin lianzhe bu neng fenshou”), and in 1990 she moved from Guangxi to Beijing. In 1994 she published her novel *One Person’s War* (*Yige ren de zhanzheng*), first in *Huacheng* magazine, and subsequently in full-length novel form. This brought Lin Bai into the public eye, as the content of *One Person’s War* was denounced as being sexually inappropriate. Eventually she would change both publishers and the text itself. In 1997, a collection of her works was published, including the original text of *One Person’s War*. She continues to write and publish her short stories and essays. It is in Lin Bai’s work, perhaps more so than any of the other female avant-garde women writers, that it is possible to see how the self-referential space of *si*-privacy is created and functions as a space of resistance, as well as the reading public’s critical response to it. As Wang Lingzhen notes:

A whole new set of *si* terms appeared in analyses of Lin's autobiographical novel... Although these terms seemed neutral, at least when deployed by literary and cultural critics, the traditional and conventional connotations of the word *si*, especially when it was exclusively tied to *nü* (female), strongly invited an illicit imagination and a negative interpretation. She [Lin] cannot have been happy that her *Self at War* was advertised as (and accused by some critics of being) *zhun huangse* (quasi-pornographic) and low.¹

Given the importance that *si* plays in the critical response to Lin's novel, it is necessary first to look at how she writes herself in another form, that of the *Notes from My Life* genre, and then use these two different representations of self to understand how Lin creates a space of *si*-privacy in her fiction, and also from where this negative critical response springs.

The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life

Like Xu Kun, Lin Bai has also written a work in the "Notes from My Life" genre. The essays in this collection are not organized into sections, nor by any particular theme; they cover aspects of Lin's life from the death of her father and her largely absentee mother to her writing and her development as a writer, and even her feelings on art, photography, and movies. She speaks often of her parents and her daughter, however, she only mentions her husband once, in passing.² Unlike Xu Kun, whose works are a mixture of history, theory, and the personal, the distinction between Lin's *Notes from My Life* and her self-referential fiction is more blurry, however it is still possible to make out; that is, in *Notes from My Life* Lin presents a more public version of herself as a writer, whereas she preserves her self-referential fiction as a *si*-private space for self-creation and self-reflection.

Lin Bai favors the poetic in her writing. Time and again in her *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life* (hereafter *Notes from My Life*) she returns to the subject of poetry to explain her writing and her development as a writer, as well as to explain how her style of fiction has developed over time. Ultimately, while she enjoys writing fiction, and often writes of how her fiction is the means by which she eases her personal anxieties and calms her mind, when it comes to writing, poetry is her first and truest love. Poetry is that form of writing that comes from the deepest, most personal places in her inner self. She writes:

Poetry is strange like this. You don't know when it will appear, but if you are not silent, if you don't hold some expectation of its coming in your heart, then it will never arrive. And fiction is certainly very noisy, because it is formed from a pile of words inside which stand characters, fates, stories, worlds, and turmoil. It is in another time and space. Poetry however, hangs high above the crown of one's head, harboring another kind of emotion and intelligence. If fiction is fortunate to intersect with poetry, I think this kind of fiction is both hard to come by and excellent.³

For her, writing in general is a respite from the outside world, and within the space of writing, poetry is the purest form of expression of the self. It only comes when the writer is quiet and still—when the writer has looked into their inner self and has made a space for that poetry to fill. In this sense, for Lin Bai, poetry is the private, personal world of self-expression that the avant-garde writers are trying to create in their fiction. However, Lin says, one never knows when that poetry will come and so if the fiction that she writes is able to share some common features with poetry, then that fiction can serve as a secondary *si-private* space. As such, it is never quite as personal or ultimately as fulfilling as poetry, as she says:

I have been bogged down in fiction for too long, and the road back to poetry is longer and longer. But I have always had an eager attention for poetry, and I will solicitously wait for poetry, no matter whether I write fiction or I don't. I regard

poetry as my private place. After twenty years of this superficial poetic career, I am once again a beginner. I will write poetry in the deepest part of the night, but I cannot force those poetic words out. They will always be my secret blossoms; born in the darkness they will actually turn into ashes. This timid emotion is my highest respect for poetry.⁴

Moreover, for Lin, while her poetry is the most private of all of the literary spaces that she creates for herself, she sees the boundaries between the various forms, poetry, prose, novels, and short-stories, as fairly fluid, and she devotes a lot of time to explaining her views on these various forms in *Notes from My Life*. To that end, while most of the essays that she includes in this volume are works of prose, either discussing her feelings on literature or describing various memories from her past, she also includes some fiction as well, for example her short story “One Whom I have Long Since Remembered.”

While in general it is clear that Lin values poetry as the highest form of expression, and that her fiction and prose show a definite inclination toward the poetic in her choice of language and the way she structures her writing, she regards the difference between the various generic styles as somewhat superfluous, as she says, “I have a few works of fiction which some people believe are more like essay-like fiction. So I have plucked out these few prosodic paragraphs from my fiction, fixed a topic and turned them into a work of prose. I feel that this is a little like a person changing an article of clothing.”⁵

Ultimately, since the purpose of all literary creation is self-expression, whether one writes poetry or prose is of somewhat less importance to Lin. Moreover, each form serves its own purpose, and has had its own place in her life. In her youth, Lin wrote more poetry, turning then to short stories and novels, all the while preserving her feelings about poetic creation. And despite the sense of dissatisfaction or fatigue that pervades some of her

essays on fiction in *Notes from My Life*, it is also clear that she is not finished with the form, and will continue to use it as it suits her in the future. She says:

In all reality, I am a frail person. I don't beat myself to pieces, and even if I don't do battle I am still defeated. For this kind of person, writing is not a choice, but rather a kind of predestination. Very early on I started to keep a diary. Words like my dead father and faraway mother, and also like my thick blankets which allow me to block out the world appear from my pen and return to my heart; they become rays of light in my dark inner being. Reality is promptly forgotten, and in my delusion I become big and powerful. Every word holds a sword or halberd in its hand; skillfully, bravely they march forward. How many ferocious enemies have had their throats closed with those swords, how many more will never again receive tender feelings? Proceeding from my own inner self, they pass through words and change into petals falling on my shoulders. They start in my diaries and reach my poetry, and from my poetry reach my fiction. For more than twenty years now writing has already become my way of life.⁶

One of the main themes that Lin develops in *Notes from My Life* is her focus on her own “inner being” (内心 *nei xin*), and how fiction has become her sole means of expressing, protecting, and comforting that inner self.

In addition to her discussions of art and literature, her development as a writer and as a person, and her memories of her family, hometown, and her youth, Lin also discusses many of the problems faced by women and women writers in society. In this respect as well, it is clear that *Notes from My Life* has a more publicly oriented focus than her fiction and poetry, which remains her own personal space for self-creation. Several of the essays in *Notes from My Life* deal with women's reproductive issues, such as “Related Words: ‘Getting Rid of It,’ ‘Induced Abortion,’ and ‘Termination,’” in which she discusses abortion and its implications; in “The Origin of Cold Sweats,” she writes about menstruation, and in “Women's Youth,” she talks about the pressures that women face in society as a result of aging. She also devotes a fair amount of space to discussing

the relationship between women and writing. For her, as for Xu Kun, there is no question that women's literature is different from men's, as she writes:

Women's literature exists. Women's grasp of the world is somewhat different from men's, women's excellence is also not very similar to men's; and women's beauty is even more intrinsically different from men's. Of course, this variety of difference might possibly be suggested to everyone by patriarchal culture. And the gap between individual difference and gender difference is even greater, even more deserving of being turned into literature.⁷

Like Xu Kun, Lin Bai also recognizes the pressures that patriarchal culture place on women, and women writers in particular, to conform to a certain standard. When it comes to women's writing, Lin says that these expectations have caused (male) critics to question the validity of her writing, or to criticize her work for not conforming to certain standards. But as she says, "In my opinion, novels have no boundaries. Writing that takes a long form is called a novel; it is the sum total of one person's feelings, opinions, recollections, cries, curses, despair, and smiles for the world. It ought to have one billion forms, and not just one hundred forms."⁸ For her, there is no one right way to write a novel, and each person's work must come from within themselves, must be a space where they can represent their own self in the manner that they find most appropriate. This stands in direct opposition to the patriarchal canon of literature, which conflates the individual's story with that of the nation, as in the case of individualized writing (*gerenhua xiezu*) or the autobiographical form, as discussed in Chapter I.

However, like Xu Kun, Lin also has reservations about describing herself as a feminist. While she expresses the highest respect for feminists and the goals that they are working for, she says that she is not strong or forceful enough of a person to completely take up that cause or to call herself a feminist. She says:

I revere feminism, and feminists like Elfriede Jelinek.⁹ But I think a formidable person of talent can become a feminist, a warrior, a hero; but I am rather soft and tenderhearted by nature and have an inherent fear of those fierce roles. Even if other people, whose inner selves are valiant, choose the same path as Jelinek, I am willing to be a small and weak person.¹⁰

Just as literature is the place where Lin finds relief from the outside world, a place which she feels is suited to sensitive, timid, unusual, or otherwise frail people who are unable to or uncomfortable with the pressures and the demands of the public space of the “real” world, feminism is also too fierce a battleground for Lin. Rather, she prefers to write about different kinds of women, women who find themselves at odds with social expectations. As Lin describes:

A woman, if she is thirty years old and still unmarried, if she is a little narcissistic, has a little bit of an inferiority complex, a little bit of a tendency to blame and censure herself, and also regards herself as a little bit aloof from worldly matters, is a little bit resigned to her fate, and also a little bit not resigned to it, if she scorns common custom a little and also fears common custom a little, then she is not too distant from literature.¹¹

Much like her own fascination with ghosts and fox spirits, as well as her preference for poetic language, Lin’s interest in describing unusual women springs from her own feelings of strangeness, anxiety, and timidity. Time and again in her writing she returns to herself as the basis for her literature, emphasizing that it is a place of personal expression, of self-creation. Moreover, much like her reluctance to label herself a feminist or to tie her writing to larger social causes and thus give it an publicly-oriented intent, she insists on writing women’s bodies which are only partially visible to the reading public. These bodies exist only in the *si*-private space she creates in her fiction, and like that space, are easily destroyed if that space is disturbed too much, as when critics read these female bodies as Lin’s own in the autobiographical sense, or when they

attempt to make the women that Lin writes about representative of women as a social group. As Lin writes:

The kind of woman that first appeared in my fiction has now disappeared. They were once strange, mysterious, and hysterical; they blamed and censured themselves. They were also erotic, also graceful; but now they are lost. Their whispered talk on overcast rainy days, their stories of the window curtains' mingled contrast of light and shadow, the sight of their screams, groans, shouts, and depressions remain until the very end. And also their long hair that has been cut off—they live in my paper; up until now it has been more than ten years, hasn't it? But as soon as one says disappear they just disappear, just like steam drying as soon as the sun comes out.¹²

For her, as soon as these larger forces are invoked, or as de Man might say, as soon as we mistakenly assign a prosopopetic value to Lin's stories and the women that she narrates within them, the *si*-private space that she is attempting to create is opened up and thus stripped of its power as a space of self-creation. Therefore, like Xu Kun, while we can say that Lin's project of self-creation as one of resistance has a lot in common with the feminist project it is not feminist per se.

Additionally, Lin Bai also addresses the idea that one person's literature, or indeed that the works of a few women writers, should speak for, or speak to, all women. While she does not state so directly, it is clear from her essay that she takes issue with criticism of her work as not being representative of women from the lower strata of society and only pertaining to educated women, or former educated youth. She writes:

One must pay attention to the lowest layers, but I hope I hope that I am not standing outside peeping in but rather that I have placed myself amongst them, which is to say, that it proceeds from my own life, and diffuses the flavor of my life. It is explaining myself but not speaking on behalf of myself. Do I have the ability to speak for myself? Do I have the right to speak for myself? It seems as if I don't. The important thing is, I feel, that explaining myself has even more consciousness than speaking on behalf of myself.¹³

Like Xu Kun and the other female avant-garde writers, Lin Bai resists the idea that her literature must be representative of some larger idea; for her, literature is a space for self-creation, a *si*-private space where she is free to reflect on herself and try to get to the truth of herself, apart from the demands that society has placed on her. It is, as she says, a place for “explaining” herself, rather than “speaking on behalf of” herself. As de Man has noted about the way prosopopeia functions in the autobiographical form, to speak on behalf of someone is take away their voice, or to make them representative of larger social phenomena, the forces of history, or the hopes of the nation at the cost of the individual’s identity. As such, it is clear, that no matter whether she is writing fiction or poetry, that for Lin writing is a place for personal expression, a place where she can collect her thoughts and express her feelings; a medium where she is free to create a personal, private space away from the demands of the world. It is a place of resistance and freedom. She remarks on this when she writes:

For many years now I have completely isolated myself from the world; my inner self, gloomy and cold, permeated with anxiety and unsettled, intensely untrusting of others. This is how I shut the passageway between the world and myself. For many years now I have only passionately loved my life on paper, and have turned a blind eye to many things. For me, writing is everything and the world is nonexistent.¹⁴

Given this distinction, it is clear that the self (or selves) that Lin Bai narrates in her fiction are different from the self that she presents in *Notes from My Life*; in the latter, Lin speaks on behalf of her work, gives a voice to those voiceless works of fiction to defend them against what she sees as critics’ misreading, whereas the former is a space she has created just for herself, a place of *si*-privacy where she is free to express herself, a space that can only be partially entered by the reading public.

One Person's War

In contrast to Xu Kun's *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, *One Person's War* is a non-linear collection of memories and observations. In it, Lin Bai loosely narrates the life story of Lin Duomi. However, much like Xu Kun, Lin Bai writes a lot of herself into Duomi. The novel itself switches back and forth from a first person narrator to a third person narrator; in fact it is not until well into the first chapter that the reader learns that "I" and Duomi are one and the same.¹⁵ Duomi was born in *B-zhen*, and like Lin Bai, her father passed away when Duomi was three. Duomi's mother is a doctor and often away from home, and Duomi spends the majority of her childhood alone. Also, as a result of this time spent apart, Duomi's relationship with her mother is always strained at best, and she is never entirely comfortable spending time with her mother. When Duomi is eight her mother remarries, and Duomi never develops a relationship with her stepfather either. In addition to all of the time that Duomi spends alone as a child, she also realizes early on that she is very different from other children, particularly when it comes to her early sexual explorations. Her mother is an obstetrician and gynecologist, and Duomi very early on becomes fascinated with the female body, both her own and those of other women. This feeling continues into Duomi's adulthood, which causes her a lot of anxiety. When Duomi is nineteen her first poems are accepted for publication, and Duomi leaves *B-zhen* for *N-cheng* for the first time. She is offered a job with a film production unit, however ultimately she chooses to take the college entrance exam instead. She tests very well, and leaves *G-sheng* to go to university at *W-da*. After university, Duomi moves back to *N-cheng* to work at the film production unit. When she is twenty-four, Duomi both loses her virginity as well as meets the first love of her life;

these two experiences will be discussed further below. Finally, by the time Duomi is thirty years old, she has moved to Beijing, and met her second love, the greatest and last love of her life. This affair does not end well, and at some point after Duomi marries an older man with whom she has a comfortable, if loveless, relationship. The novel ends in the same place that it begins, with Duomi gazing at herself in the mirror, pleasuring herself.¹⁶

Much like *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, there is almost no mention of history in *One Person's War*. In fact, the only time that any historical events are mentioned directly is when Duomi is reflecting on her status as an “educated youth,” and how the situation they face has improved over the years. Lin writes:

The cadre leading our educated youth production brigade was surnamed Li; the educated youth and peasants alike called him Comrade Li. Originally he was an ordinary cadre of a cement plant, and didn't know how he had been sent to serve as a leader. Starting from 1975, because someone named Li Qinglin had written a letter to Chairman Mao, there had been improvements in the educated youth's situation; when they were sent to the countryside the government allocated quilts and mosquito nets for them, and gave everyone in the production brigade a family resettlement allowance and a farm tool allowance. The first year everyone received 10 *yuan* each month, and food and oil were still supplied by the government, etc.¹⁷

In this case, much like those of the other female avant-garde writers, History is only important in as much as it affects the selves that they are creating in their fiction. This is an important distinction between the female avant-garde writers' privacy writing, and the individualized writing of the male avant-garde writers.¹⁸

Like Mao Zhen in Xu Kun's *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, Duomi is also a writer. Duomi also initially longs to make a name for herself with her writing, and this pushes her to first publish her poetry and then later on her short stories. She even comes to the conclusion that she needs to write a novel for herself, which the reader then

understands to be the novel that they are in the process of reading. Lin's use of the metafictional "self-begetting novel" form further helps to obscure the boundaries between Lin the author and Duomi the character, which also helps her to create a space of *si-privacy* within the novel, unlike the self that she represents in her *Notes from My Life*, where little if any attempt is made to obfuscate the way Lin represents herself.¹⁹

Moreover, like Lin in *Notes from My Life*, Duomi spends a great deal of time thinking about the role that writing plays in her life. In this sense, much like Xu Kun/Mao Zhen, Lin Bai and Duomi share very similar feelings about what purpose writing serves in their lives. Both Lin Bai and Duomi discuss how certain events from their real lives become the material out of which they build their fiction, and how writing is the only way to ease their anxieties, and both Lin Bai and Duomi have a special place in their hearts for poetry more than fiction. However, for Duomi, the act of writing is a more bodily act than it is when Lin Bai discusses it. In order for Duomi to enter a state suitable for writing, she must first have bodily sensations from which to draw, as she explains:

I hid in the room, the curtains which were always drawn made the light in the room pleasantly dim....The dormitory area was silent; I took off my clothes and walked paced back and forth half-naked....This is my usual trick when I planned to enter a writing state. My body is very sensitive, and even a very thin layer of clothing can make me feel heavy and restricted. My body must be exposed to the open air—every pore is an eye, an ear; I expose them to the open air and listen attentively to that subtle voice which comes up from the depths of my memory, or which has been blocked by layer after layer of the passing years. At the same time there cannot be any breeze; only this way can I enter into the most beautiful state.²⁰

In fact, the need for bodily experiences drives much of Duomi's later actions, particularly in her twenties. That Lin Bai ties Duomi's writing so closely to her own physical experiences emphasizes the connection between Duomi's body as a unique individual

rather than a representation for all women, as well as helps Lin to build a space of *si-privacy* in the novel—while the reader may have had experiences which allows him/her to empathize with Duomi, because her experiences are grounded in her body they ultimately are her own and thus never fully opened to public consumption.

One of the reasons that it is so difficult to separate the private self that Lin Bai narrates in *One Person's War* from the public self that she presents in *Notes from My Life* is there is a significant amount of overlap between the two in terms of content. In *Notes from My Life*, Lin Bai speaks often about growing up in Beiliu, which in *One Person's War* becomes B-zhen (B镇). In fact, the essay “Reverie of Death” from *Notes from My Life* is an almost verbatim reprinting of a passage from *One Person's War* about Beiliu's ghosts and its mention in *Cihai*.²¹ In addition, other important places from her life appear in both *Notes from My Life* and *One Person's War*: Nanning, which becomes N-cheng (N城), Guangxi Province or G-sheng (G省), and Wuhan University or W-da (W大).

Beyond the inclusion of important places from her life as the same important places for Duomi, certain moments from Lin Bai's life are recreated in Duomi's life as well. For example, in, “Climbing Emei shan Alone” in *Notes from My Life*, Lin Bai describes traveling to Emei shan in Sichuan, and meeting a young man there named Li Huarong. He is a local student, and offers to help show her around Emei shan, as she is traveling on her own. Initially she is a bit suspicious of him, but in the end discovers that he is being honest with her. He even goes to his home to borrow clothing from his sister to give to Lin Bai, as she has not packed appropriately for the weather. They part ways when Lin begins to ascend the mountain. When she returns home she tries to find him to return the clothing, and is unsuccessful; the selection ends with her wondering about him

and what has happened to him. The same episode appears, with only minor changes, in *One Person's War*, after Duomi goes to Yunnan and encounters the woman who would later become her Zhu Liang.²² Similarly, in “The Pause in My Education,” her memories of being moved to her uncle’s house after her mother remarried, which makes up the first portion of that selection, are repeated in their entirety in *One Person's War*, as is her experience when she goes to Nanning at the age of nineteen to edit her poems prior to her first publication in “Reaching Nanning.”²³ While it is not entirely clear from these episodes themselves why Lin would choose to narrate them so faithfully in both her self-referential fiction as well as her *Notes from My Life*, it is clear that this strategy is one which both helps Lin to create a space for self-reflection and self-creation in her fiction, and preserve that space as one of mediated access. That is to say, when Lin blurs the lines between what is fiction and what is the “truth” of her own lived experiences by including similar moments in both her self-referential fiction and her publicly-oriented *Notes from My Life*, which she has already described as being as simple as someone “changing their clothes,”²⁴ she controls the amount of access that the reader has to her self; readers who are more familiar with the corpus of Lin’s work will likely have a greater degree of access to the *si*-private space that Lin creates, however, in the end only Lin herself knows what is “real” and what is “fake.” As such, we can see how Lin weaves together various forms of self-narration to create her space of *si*-privacy, a space that goes beyond just *One Person's War* and encompasses all of her fiction.

Far more so than in Xu Kun’s or Hai Nan’s writing, Lin Bai weaves her space of *si*-privacy together out of her corpus of writing as a whole, interconnecting stories between them which span the course of her history and development as a writer. There

are several important sections from *One Person's War* which appear not only in her *Notes from My Life* but also in her other fiction as well, a technique which encourages readers to familiarize themselves with all of Lin's writing in order to have greater access to the self that she creates in that fiction, but at the same time limits the extent to which the reader is able to know, or consume, that self. These moments appear in some of her most well known stories, and often in more than one place. For example, the following passage from *One Person's War* appears in *Notes from My Life* as well. In *One Person's War*, Duomi has been describing dreams that she often had as a child—about the deaths of family members, especially her mother, and eventually of herself as well. She also dreams that she is getting married:

In addition to dreaming about death, my most terrifying dreams and the ones I dreamt most often were about marriage. I don't know how I could dream about marriage at that young of an age. In my way of thinking marriage is also a dreadful affair. I think I am never going to marry, I am another kind of person; but often in my dreams I am being controlled by a powerful force, forced to marry against my will. My dreams about marriage are always at the wedding ceremony, like the adult wedding ceremonies that I had seen many times, I don't know why. For absolutely no reason whatsoever I am then put in front of a table and some other people tell me that this is my wedding. If the bridegroom standing at my side is not the most deficient boy in the class then he is the most ugly boy in B town. I immediately then startle awake from out of my dreams, my whole body drenched in cold sweat. When I am half-awake and half-asleep real and false are indistinguishable, I desperately think: it's all over.²⁵

These dreams are some of the reader's first clues about Duomi's character, about her feelings and fears. Furthermore, as the passage goes on, she also describes a dream she had long forgotten about rainbows that she would have when she was sick as a child, and how later in life she would remember that dream. She writes:

Twenty or more years later, the year I was thirty, my boyfriend at the time gave me a small black clock, roughly the same size as the palm of a hand, square-shaped. There was one night when I discovered that the clock face radiated rainbow rays of light; these rainbow rays of light were reflected on the shiny

tabletop and became small slices of lifeless rainbow light. The clock face and the tabletop were reflecting each other's rainbows, which composed an extremely peculiar pattern. This made me remember suddenly that dream I had when I was small. Until now I am unclear what this mysterious relationship predicts. It wasn't until after my relationship with that person ended that I suddenly discovered, the black clock is a dreadful token, its slim white clock hands and black base, like a black cat's face with white whiskers, sinister as the passing years.²⁶

She repeats her description of the clock word for word in one of her most well known short stories, "True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate," for which she won critical acclaim in 1989.

In "True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate," Lin tells several different stories, that of the "woman in white," of "I," and of Du Lu. The "I" narrator's story overlaps significantly with Duomi's story in *One Person's War*: they are both women in their thirties who fall in love with a man who always remains somewhat distant. During the course of their respective affairs, both Duomi and the "I" narrator in "True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate" become pregnant, and are forced to choose between the child and the man that they love. In both cases, the man, called "N" in Duomi's case and "Tiancheng" (Libra, his astrological sign) in the "I" narrator's case, tells her that if they are determined to keep the child, that he will marry her, but then he will leave and never come back. After Duomi and the "I" narrator choose to have an abortion, in both cases he still ends up leaving. For both women, this love affair is very powerful and very destructive; Duomi's relationship with N will be discussed further below.

In addition to the parallels between this love story in *One Person's War* and "True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate," there is another connection between the two stories—that of the "woman in white" and Duomi's friend Meiju. In "True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate," the "I" narrator's story mixes with that of the "woman in

white,” at times becoming indistinguishable. The “woman in white” is a reclusive beauty, whose house on Sand Street is always closed tightly to the outside world.²⁷ She is a former film star, who has withdrawn from the world as the result of her own painful love affair gone wrong; at times it is unclear whether it is the “I” narrator who has become pregnant, or if this was a moment from the “woman in white’s” past, or both. In *One Person’s War*, on the other hand, Meiju is the woman that Duomi lives with when she first moves to Beijing. Lin Bai also describes Meiju in a similar fashion to the “woman in white,” saying:

Meiju was the woman Duomi called teacher. Meiju’s age was somewhere between forty and fifty; her features were beautiful and ice-cold. Her whole life she had never married, and she had maintained her figure and her breasts were still firm. This made Duomi feel completely amazed. Meiju lived alone in a two-room house. All of her windows had rough homespun cloth curtains with a dark blue background and white flowers. No matter whether it was daytime or late at night, the curtains were always drawn, and inside it was always shady and cool and dim. There were a lot of mirrors. As soon as one entered the door there was a mirror which covered half of the facing wall, like the makeup room backstage in a theater. A full-length mirror that went all the way to the ground.²⁸

Both women are obsessed with mirrors, and both women have withdrawn from the outside world, existing solely within a private world of their own making. This is particularly important for Duomi, as she too withdraws from the world after her own painful and failed love affair—as Lin points out, Duomi calls Meiju her “teacher.” And as a result of the muddled overlapping between her own past that she narrates in *Notes from My Life* along with Duomi’s story in *One Person’s War* and both the “I” narrator and the “woman in white” in “True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate,” we can see yet again how Lin Bai is creating a space of *si*-privacy for herself in her fiction, a space which both becomes easier to define as the reader becomes more familiar with Lin’s

writing, while at the same time remaining only hazy at best, a place that the reading public can only partially enter.

A whole section of another of Lin's stories, "The Rose Corridor," (*Meigui guodao*) appears in its entirety in *One Person's War*. And just as in the case of "True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate," there are strong parallels between the "I narrator" in "The Rose Corridor," the "I" narrator in "True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate," and Duomi in *One Person's War*. In "The Rose Corridor," the "I" narrator describes her love for a man who is no longer with her, although where he has gone is unclear; it is also unclear whether or not he is still living. The building where he used to live has been torn down and another is being built in its place, and as the "I" narrator gazes at the construction site from her own window she remembers the man she had once loved. Given the parallels between "True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate" and *One Person's War* that already exist and the details of the "I" narrator's love story in "The Rose Corridor" it is easy to conclude that that man who is no longer present in "The Rose Corridor" is N from *One Person's War* and Tiancheng from "True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate." At one point the "I" narrator remembers spying on the man, left nameless in this story interestingly, to see if he is with another woman. What she sees, and what Duomi sees in *One Person's War*, is completely the same in both cases, as Lin Bai describes:

Once I saw that bicycle of his from the window with a red woman's-style bicycle lined up together. A woman's-style bicycle was a woman, that is to say, there was a woman with him, what was he doing with her? Drinking coffee or in bed? I discovered myself not at all calm and indifferent. Almost every minute I wanted to go look out the window, determined to get a glance of this woman's appearance, to see if she was pretty or not, fashionable or not, graceful and easy, tall, short, fat, thin: to see this all clearly. What kind of low-quality woman was this? Then I saw that his bicycle was not there. That red bicycle was still there

though. That red bicycle was still there and his bicycle was already gone. The red bicycle was there alone; there were no other bicycles. Only a small red bicycle on the empty, swept-clean cement ground, the other bicycles had all gone to work. Only it didn't need to go to work; he also didn't need to go to work. Maybe he left to buy her things to eat. Sure enough his bicycle did return again, placing his bicycle next to hers. You think this must be real. He certainly did take that roasting pot with the pale flowers on it to go buy her some rice noodles; she is eating them, she must be extremely hungry. In the afternoon I saw his bicycle had left and the red bicycle was still there; I relaxed a sigh and lay down on my bed, feeling weak from head to foot, and thought, the red bicycle apparently did not have any relationship with him. But at the same time I also thought that maybe he let her stay alone in his room. I needed to see with my own eyes who was riding this bicycle. I was glued to the window, at last near evening I saw a short fat man come riding this bicycle. When he tried to get on it he had a difficult time moving his leg to straddle it. This is all extremely boring. I cannot put up with myself. I always want to go to the corridor, to look at his window and see if his bicycle is there or not. I cannot tell him, cannot let him know; I also cannot talk to my girlfriends. I want to come off as casual and elegant.²⁹

While this event is not significant in and of itself except for its repetition, it is yet another example of how Lin Bai muddies the assumed transparency of a female author's autobiographical writings.

There are also a number of other repeated passages that are also significant for Lin Bai and Duomi. For example, for both women, the passing of their fathers when they were three years old was a very traumatic event, and one that both women often return to in their respective stories. One particular passage appears in both *Notes from My Life* and her short story "The Eye on the Wall" (*Qiang shang de yanjing*). Once again, in "The Eye on the Wall" there is an "I" narrator, who tells the story of her younger brother Doudou. It is worth pointing out that the narrator in "The Eye on the Wall" is one of Lin's most obscure; except for a single brief mention in passing, there are absolutely no clues as to the narrator's gender.³⁰ For both the "I" narrator in "The Eye on the Wall" and Duomi in *One Person's War*, after their respective mothers remarry, all visual

reminders of their respective biological fathers are removed. As Lin writes in “The Eye on the Wall:”

Owing to the arrival of our second father, our photographs of our biological father were gathered together and stored away. They had originally been placed in a purplish-red cloth photograph album together with many pictures of our young mother. The album was placed in a drawer; on countless days while mother went out to work, I often turned it over. . . . On the top there were a few picture slots that didn't have any pictures; on that thick black paper they floated alone, sometimes several whole consecutive pages would not have a single picture. The pictures of our mother when she was young were left in the photo album; there was a kind of startling feeling of bleakness and desolation. That completely full photo album, laden with our parents' youthful images was not there. When it appeared the next time it was just like a blind person and a husky voice.³¹

While Duomi never speaks specifically about this photo album, her memories of the loss of her father are equally traumatic and painful. For her, as for Lin Bai in *Notes from My Life* and the “I” narrator in “The Eye on the Wall,” it is this loss which takes away all of her feelings of safety, and indirectly leads to their childhoods spent alone and their distant relationships with their mothers. Even the time that Duomi and Lin Bai must each miss school, an episode which is repeated almost verbatim in both *One Person's War* and *Notes from My Life*, can be tied back to their father's death.³² And just as in the case of “True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate,” yet again Lin Bai builds her space of *si*-privacy out of and between her various works, both inviting the reader to discover more about Lin Bai herself and yet always mediating the amount of that self that the reader is actually able to make out clearly.

Also, much like Xu Kun ascribes works she has written to Mao Zhen in *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, so too does Lin Bai have Duomi author works of fiction which have the same name as Lin's own. For example, at one point Duomi goes traveling in Malipo County, Yunnan. While there, she meets a beautiful woman who

seems to know her, although the two have never met. This woman instantly has a very powerful effect on Duomi, as Lin describes:

This was how I saw her—a woman wearing an old-style *qipao* standing in a large courtyard, a thin layer of mist suspended in front of my face, reflecting the fallow light. This made her silhouette seem a bit unclear, as though it had been cut off by some kind of heavy curtain that was difficult to describe. This woman is the one who would appear about ten years later in the short story I wrote called “The Seat on the Verandah.” Before she had reached the tip of my pen I met her.³³

However, unlike Xu Kun’s references to her own writing in *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, where the titles of Mao Zhen’s works are close approximations of Xu Kun’s actual works, in *One Person’s War* Duomi’s stories share the same titles as Lin’s own stories, adding yet another layer which obscures Lin Bai’s “real” life from the self that she narrates in her fiction. As Lin discusses in her *Notes from My Life*, it was actually seeing an old photograph of one of friend and fellow author Fang Fang’s family members dressed in a *qipao* that inspired Lin to write “The Seat on the Verandah.”³⁴ On the other hand, on *One Person’s War*, Duomi is traveling by herself through a remote part of Yunnan when she finds the old mansion that Zhu Liang used to live in, and her encounter with Zhu Liang can be as easily understood as an encounter with a real woman as it can with a ghost, or even a dream that Duomi has had, as Lin writes:

Ten years later, sure enough as Zhu Liang had predicted I came again to this place, I found that woman’s living quarters. An old gatekeeper told me that fifty years earlier Zhu Liang has been the concubine of the master of the house, Zhang Mengda. She had gone to a foreign school, and had been the beauty of her generation, but she had died fifty years ago. I knew that Zhu Liang was certainly waiting for me in that mysterious room covered with mirrors, but in her haste she had forgotten to tell me how to return. I could only stay outside that yellow light, and fix my gaze on the image imprisoned in the deep recesses of that time.³⁵

For Duomi, the boundaries between reality and dreaming as well as those between real people and spirits are extremely fluid, and she often remarks that the only way that she

can tell the difference between reality and fantasy is by keeping a diary. Lin Bai also writes about how she has kept diaries since she was young, about how the act of writing helps her to soothe her anxieties, as well as record her past experiences. For both women the act of writing is central to their lives, just as it plays a similar role in the other works by the female avant-garde writers and the selves that they narrate in their fiction as well.

Moreover, it is not just in her copious use of self-referential details, or the web of interconnections that she weaves between her various stories that we can see how Lin Bai creates her space of *si*-privacy in her fiction, but also in her use of alternative expressions for female sexuality and desire. Compared with Xu Kun's description of the development of Mao Zhen's desire in *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring* Lin Bai's are much more graphic, and much less conventional. In Lin's writing, the uplifting attributes of passion (*qing*)—its sublime nature—are usually connected with female expression, be it of desire, of power, or of resistance; heterosexual or patriarchal relationships are usually portrayed at best as strange or somehow twisted, and at worst as destructive and unhealthy. As previously mentioned, this sublime fascination with the female body begins early on for Duomi, when she is only five or six. It is unclear (and also unimportant) whether this fascination comes from secretly spying on her mother at work, or from playing with the anatomical models that are lying around her house as a result of her mother's work, or simply as the result of early childhood sex play—all of which are possibilities that Duomi suggests when trying to make sense of the fact that she not only started to explore her body around the age of five or six, but also engaged in this kind of experimentation with her friend Lili. For Duomi, the possibility that she is actually a

homosexual is a one which she wrestles with over the years. For example, when Duomi thinks back on the game that she used to play with Lili as a child, Lin writes:

Remembering this matter made me feel extremely panicked. I was completely afraid that I was a innate homosexual, that this is a chronic psychological problem. It was like a thick plot, in the future would I be forever cut off from normal people? I stubbornly resisted this idea.³⁶

However it is also clear that Duomi's anxiety is not actually that she might be a homosexual, but rather that by being herself she might be cut off from mainstream society, an anxiety which plagues her in various forms over her whole life. She often remarks that she is not like other girls, and some of her colleagues even tell her that her writing is like a man's.³⁷ Rather, for Duomi, despite her eventual sexual encounters with men as an adult, women are far more attractive, intoxicating, and memorable than are men.

Duomi's fascination is not limited to physical desire either. Rather, she loves everything about women from the way that they look, dress, and behave to the way they smell and feel.³⁸ Moreover, Duomi, like Meiju and the "woman in white," also really likes mirrors. While she does not find herself beautiful, she often speaks about staring into the mirror, saying, "I like mirrors; I like to look at private places. In the subtropical regions, those endlessly long summer days, I would be alone in the shower room taking showers, looking at myself for a long time, and also gently caressing myself."³⁹ Again and again, Duomi expresses a preference for those secret, hidden, or otherwise private things in *One Person's War* just as Lin Bai herself does in *Notes from My Life*. "Secret" (秘密 *mimi*), "hidden" (隐秘 *yinmi*), and "concealed" (隐藏 *yincang*) appear frequently in all of her writing, along with a number of other similar words. It is clear that for Lin Bai, part of the sublime quality of the female form comes from its private, hidden

aspects—what she is fascinated with in her own body and what she desires from other women’s bodies is knowledge of these secret places. Moreover, that Lin Bai writes Duomi as a character like many others in her fiction who desire to know these secrets for themselves rather than for the purpose of exposing them returns again to Lin’s ultimate purpose in writing, that is, to create a *si*-private space in her literature where she can narrate a female form which has not been appropriated by the nation or society and given another meaning or turned into an allegory for all women’s experiences; a space of resistance.

Duomi’s sublime feelings extend to the other women in her life as well—these are the only relationships which are fulfilling or meaningful for Duomi in any way. This is an important distinction that Lin makes between these homosocial female friendships and the more socially codified heterosexual or familial relationships, all of which remain unfamiliar and uncomfortable for Duomi throughout her life, and which will be discussed further below. She has two other significant female friendships, in addition to her relationship with Lili when they were children. The first of these, with a dancer named Yao Qiong, happens when Duomi is eight years old, and goes to see a performance of the ballet *The White Haired Girl*. Yao Qiong dances the lead role in the ballet, and right away Duomi is taken with her—the grace, strength, and beauty of her body. Duomi’s mother arranges for Duomi to be able to watch the performances from backstage, and Duomi becomes Yao Qiong’s assistant, often helping her change clothes. One night, Duomi even spends the night at the theater with Yao Qiong because it has gotten too late for her to go home. This relationship is significant for Duomi in that it is one of her first close friendships with an older woman. Duomi’s relationship with her mother is strained

and awkward, whereas she is relaxed and happy when she is with Yao Qiong. And while Duomi's relationship with Yao Qiong is tinged with desire, it is a double-layered desire, as Lin herself explains: a desire for Yao Qiong, and a desire to grow up to be like Yao Qiong.⁴⁰

The second major female relationship that Duomi has is when she is twenty-four years old, and living in *N-cheng*. She meets a younger woman named Nandan, who is twenty-one, and who helps draw Duomi out of her completely reclusive state. As Duomi describes her:

Nandan was the first unusual relationship that I had with a woman in my life. This is a very strange thing, that because of this girl who was a few years younger than I, I would find my feminine self. I had had lost this feeling in my childhood—I would never act coquettishly, nor would I behave coyly. I couldn't make the myriad forms of flirtatious expressions. I lived like a genderless person, without any feeling for any men; and on the other hand, at the same time, I didn't need the slightest bit of love.⁴¹

Nandan shows Duomi how to dress and wear makeup, and helps her to feel comfortable being more social and more feminine. They originally meet as a result of a conference on poetry, after which they become very close very quickly. However, the end of the relationship comes when Nandan confesses to Duomi that she is a homosexual and tells Duomi that she is in love with her. This is around the time that Nandan is taking her exams to finish university; at this point Nandan has already written and mailed the letter, but Duomi has not yet received it. Every night after Nandan's tests are over she comes to stay with Duomi. Originally, Duomi tells Nandan that she is unable to sleep with other people; even when she was small Duomi could only fall asleep alone. Nandan says she understands, and goes to great lengths that night to make sure that Duomi is unaware of her presence so she will sleep well, which she does. The second night, Nandan returns to

spend the night, and Duomi feels confident that she will be able to pass the night without incident. However, that night Duomi has terrible nightmares. One the third day, Duomi again has nightmares all night, after which Nandan's letter arrives. Duomi destroys the letter, afraid that one of her colleagues will discover it, and pulls away from Nandan.

While their relationship ultimately ends poorly, is it a very important turning point for Duomi. First, it is the most significant relationship that Duomi has with another person up to that point in her life, and Nandan is the first person that Duomi is able to open up to. And despite her own reluctance to give in to her homosocial urges, Nandan is the first person that Duomi feels real emotion for, above and beyond her sublime passion for the female body. Secondly, as a result of her relationship with Nandan, Duomi opens up to the possibility of experiencing the world herself, which then leads to another one of the most significant events in Duomi's life—when she loses her virginity, also when Duomi is twenty-four. Moreover, Lili, Yao Qiong, Nandan, and Meiju are just four of the women who pass through Duomi's life who leave a lasting impression on her; there is also a woman named Wang who is one of her roommates while she is in college, and several other women that she meets in various places as she remembers moments from her past and talks about their influence on her writing. For Duomi, it is in the bodies, and secrets, of other women that she sees her desire reflected and her poetry inspired—they are the mysterious, other-worldly beings who arouse her most sublime of passions, and the people that she remembers most clearly throughout her life.

On the other hand, Duomi's relationships with men are largely unsettling and unfamiliar if not outright destructive. From her distant relationship with her stepfather to her comfortable if loveless relationship with her own husband, the socially normative

heterosexual roles offer none of the uplifting aspects of passion to Duomi that her relationships with women do.⁴² This is true from her very first encounter with a man, in her last year in college. She has gone into the forest near the university to read, and while she is there, she is attacked by a young man. First he chokes until she almost loses consciousness, and then he drags her into a nearby air-raid shelter to rape her. However, even in the middle of almost being raped, Duomi discovers that her attacker is a bit unusual, as Lin Bai describes:

As soon as Duomi got used to the light in the air-raid shelter she realized with a shock that this rapist was a bright-eyed and beautiful young man. His skin was white and delicate, and he seemed to be blushing; especially conspicuous were his lips, which were red and mumbly like a little girl's. There were no boys in Duomi's class who had lips like this, and Duomi saw that above his lips was a layer of delicate blond hair. Completely inexperienced, he moved around on Duomi's body. Disappointedly he said, you're really thin. He did up his pants again, realized that Duomi was watching him, took a handkerchief out of his pocket and covered Duomi's eyes, saying: you're not allowed to watch. And then he anxiously went to the corner and started to play with himself.⁴³

Not only is her attacker seemingly too inexperienced around women to know how to rape Duomi, but he is also unable to pleasure himself in her presence. Moreover, there is something almost feminine about his appearance as well, and when he is not able to climax, Duomi starts a conversation with him. The whole episode ends with this young man walking her down from the forest, buying her some small things to eat and drink, and asking if he can be her boyfriend, although they only see each other one more time before Duomi leaves *W-da* to work in *N-cheng*. Additionally, Duomi is not even able to remember his name clearly after all this time; she thinks it might be Wang Guoqing or Wang Jianguo, but she is not sure. Despite the violent nature of her introduction to heterosexual passion, it seems to make very little impression on Duomi, except for the young man's girlish red lips, which she mentions several times.

Rather, it is not until she is twenty-four, when she loses her virginity, that Duomi discovers just how painful and strange heterosexual relationships are for her. While she is traveling she meets a man who sweeps her off her feet. After Nandan, Duomi decides that she wants to experience everything, and this man, who she calls Tiancun (a pseudonym), offers her that possibility. When she is concerned that she will miss seeing a famous landmark in the night as they pass, he offers to wake her up; once he does so and they are alone, he kisses her so passionately that she feels her sexual desire awakened for the first time. He tells her that he is twenty-seven, and they decide to go to a hot spring together. Later on, Duomi learns that everything Tiancun had told her about himself was a lie; he is not twenty-seven but thirty-seven, and he has a wife and children. Like the former girlfriend who goes to visit Mao Zhen, Duomi learns all of this from Tiancun's wife, when she comes to face Duomi and "size her up."

However, while Duomi is still unaware of this, the two disembark and go to the hotel to check in before visiting the hot springs. Duomi does not realize that Tiancun has obtained a fake marriage certificate for them, so that they can sleep in the same room together. It is not until they get to the room and Duomi discovers that there is only one bed that she realizes what his true intentions are. She makes him promise to leave and get his own room, but in the end he is able to take what he wants from her, almost without her realizing it:

A burst of severe pain remained inside Duomi's body; as long as the man was moving this pain would increase as though there were a fire burning her in that certain part of her body, burning painfully. The pain was like a thick, coarse fabric, and covered over all other fine and delicate sensations. Even for the next few days, as the pain gradually receded, she did not get the slightest amount of pleasure.⁴⁴

Lin Bai's description of Duomi's sensations during her first sexual encounter are remarkably similar to Xu Kun's descriptions of Mao Zhen's sexual encounter with Pangda Gu'ai—a fiery burning which threatens to consume her. In Duomi's case, this burning sensation is so intense that it destroys all of those other delicate bodily sensations that are so important to her—they are the source of her own desire and the means by which she is able to write. As such, it is clear how destructive heterosexual desire is for Duomi, especially as her night with Tiancun continues:

Filled with pain she fell asleep. In the middle of the night he woke her up because he wanted her again, and she said: I hurt so badly. But she had no strength, and no way to prevent him from entering her body again. The feeling of burning pain rose in her again, and she started to be aware that he felt absolutely no tenderness for her, this man on top of her had not the slightest amount of concern for her desires. He was a scoundrel, and a lecher, and in the end, with her eyes wide open she had let him trample on her “wedding night.”⁴⁵

It is not until she has actually experienced heterosexual desire that Duomi truly learns how destructive it is for her, how completely lacking in any of the beautiful or uplifting aspects that her feelings for women have. And much like her depictions of heterosexual desire in her other fiction as well, it is in Lin Bai's portrayal of socially normative desire as unfamiliar and damaging that she is able to use the space of *si*-privacy that she creates in her fiction as one a place of resistance.

Moreover, it is not just in her depictions of heterosexual physical desire that Lin is able to show how damaging normative roles are for women, but also in her portrayal of the psychology of male-female relationships. For example, when Duomi is thirty years old, she meets a man she identifies only as N. It is interesting that the three most important men in Duomi's sexual past are all identified either by pseudonyms, as in the case of Tiancheng and N, or are left more or less nameless, as in the case of Wang

Guoqing/Jianguo. Additionally, the male character who resembles N in “True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate” is also referred to by a pseudonym, Tiancheng, and the same character in “The Rose Corridor” is left completely nameless. While it would take a much more detailed investigation of the whole corpus of Lin’s work to answer definitively, it is reasonable to assume that these men are left nameless either because it further destabilizes the socially-constructed roles that they represent, or because in doing so, they become symbolic of all men, thus allowing Lin to turn the more common appropriation of the female body on its end and instead use her representations of the male body as an indictment of the patriarchal system which has created the very socially-constructed roles she resists in her fiction.

Returning to *One Person’s War*, however, Duomi’s relationship with N is quite different from her relationship with Tiancun. He works at the film production unit as well, as a director, and she falls for him completely. They begin a passionate affair, albeit somewhat one-sided—Duomi’s feelings for N are far more intense than his, and she is willing to do anything for him:

My love for him was inexhaustible. I longed for him to come every day, and after he arrived I longed for him to stay, hoping that he wanted me. Actually, when I made love with him I had never been aroused; sometimes it was even a little bit physically unbearable. But I thought, he’s a man, and men certainly will want to, so I ought to do my part. It only took a few days of him not coming for me to feel that I couldn’t go on living, to think about suicide.⁴⁶

Duomi’s feelings for N are so intense that she is willing to put up with her physical discomfort with heterosexual sex and her lack of desire in order to make him happy; she even feels that she is losing herself in the relationship and cannot exist without him. As such, just like sex with Tiancheng destroys all of the delicate feelings that Duomi values

so highly, Lin Bai shows the destructive nature of heterosexual love for Duomi, which threaten to swallow up her very life.

The destructive aspect of heterosexual relationships extends not only to Duomi herself, but also to the product of their sexual union: Duomi's pregnancy. Like the "I" narrator in "True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate," in the course of her relationship with N Duomi realizes that she is pregnant. Duomi decides she wants to keep the baby, even if it means raising the child on her own. However, when she tells N about the child and her plans to keep it, she is unprepared for his reaction. Secretly she had hoped that he would be excited about the child, but rather he tells her that he will have a marriage certificate prepared for them, and then leave directly and never come back. When Duomi asks if he will ever contact her, he responds by saying no, and even refuses her request to leave a photo of himself behind so that the child might know what his/her father looks like. Faced with the choice between the love of her life and her unborn child, Duomi chooses to have an abortion, mistakenly thinking that this will right everything between N and herself. In the end, however, he not only makes no effort to see how she is doing after the procedure, but also leaves her entirely. Shortly thereafter, Duomi learns that N has in fact been seeing another (younger) woman, and has asked her to marry him. After this, Duomi's relationship with N ends, and shortly thereafter she moves to Beijing and manages to forget him.

While Duomi mourns the loss of her child, it is important to note that she does not blame herself for loss of her child; rather, she blames N, at one point even remarking that he has killed their child. This is not the first time that the subject of abortion comes up in *One Person's War*, in fact, it is possible (if unclear) that Duomi also was pregnant with

Tiancheng's child and had another, earlier abortion as well.⁴⁷ Whether or not Duomi has had an earlier abortion, what is most important to note about her experience with N is that she does not assign fault to herself for the death of her child; rather, she blames N, at one point even telling him that he has murdered their child. As such, we can see yet again that there are no redeeming qualities to Duomi's love for N; her relationship threatens her physically, emotionally, and even reproductively. And in doing so, it is another example of how Lin Bai portrays heterosexual relationships as dangerous to Duomi's selfhood, completely lacking in any of the uplifting, sublime qualities that her relationships with other women have. From her distant relationship with her mother and stepfather, to the men who have used and abused her physically and emotionally, Lin Bai's portrayal of heteronormative relationships in a negative light, when placed alongside her very positive descriptions of alternative forms of female sexuality is yet another of the techniques that she uses to resist the socially-constructed, and publicly-appropriated, image of the female body and create for herself a *si*-private place of resistance in her fiction.

Conclusion

In addition to the criticism often aimed at Lin's work, as Wang Lingzhen has noted at the very beginning of this chapter—that it is little more than glorified pornography—Lin Bai's fiction is also often read by feminist critics as antidote to male writing and patriarchal culture. These critics also focus on the ways in which Lin uses gender and sexuality in her fiction, as Wang points out:

In autobiographical works by Chen Ran and Lin Bai, for example, gendered perspectives predominate, sex is a major topic, and privacy is the book's very trademark. Personal voices triumph as the most conscious and valuable presence, while public morality regarding love, marriage, and sex is mocked, transgressed,

and rendered irrelevant...Lin Bai...adheres to personalized writing, stating that public-oriented and collectively framed memory destroys personal memories and thus makes personal selves disappear.⁴⁸

Similar to the way contemporary academics and critics alike shy away from using terms like “private writing” or “privacy literature” when talking about the fiction of the avant-garde women writers in favor of the more neutral term “individualized writing,” Lin herself also dislikes using terms such as these because of the negative connotations associated with the term *si*. As she has commented in her own writing and in various interviews, and as Wang notes above, what she is most interested in is the excavation of the individual from under the weight of the collective, and the use of individualized, personal memories to resist the forces of history and (male-) culture. As Kay Schaffer and Song Xianlin discuss in their article on the four different kinds of Chinese women’s writing which depict a uniquely Chinese feminist point-of-view; the female avant-garde writers make up one of these groups. As Schaffer and Song note:

Poststructural writers like Lin Bai and Chen Ran produce experimental prose that challenges both Chinese traditions and contemporary patriarchal discourses. Far from being confined to the personal, this writing discursively connects the personal to social, political, historical, and economic dimensions of Chinese society...It introduces a female aesthetic that refuses the boundaries of male-centered discourses and practices.⁴⁹

While I agree that functionally, Lin Bai’s fiction does address the “social, political, historical, and economic dimensions” that Schaffer and Song refer to, I argue that this is a by-product of the Lin’s ultimate project of self-writing. And while it is impossible to separate the self that Lin writes about from her femaleness, it is important to remember that her project is not specifically feminist per se, as she herself talks about in *Notes from My Life*. For to overread the femaleness that Lin describes in her fiction is to essentialize

the self that she writes about, and force the space that she creates for herself in her fiction into the realm of the public. As Tze-lan Sang says:

The unfolding of half a lifetime through an extended, undulating narrative, in an imagistic diction rich with light, sound, odors, taste, and touch, is more humane and comes closer to Lin's being than taxonomic classifications. Her pursuit as an artist is not to collapse experiential plenitude into one work, much less into identity politics.⁵⁰

That is to say, when read as feminist in intent and attached to larger social movements such as the identity politics that Sang mentions, or the social and political forces that Schaffer and Song discuss, the individuals that Lin writes about in her fiction become, to however small an extent, representative of the situation faced by all women, just as she as a writer becomes representative of a whole group of female writers. And in doing so, these critics collapse the space that Lin creates for herself in her fiction. As such, and in order to preserve this space, it is necessary to add a discussion of how Lin creates this *si-private* space in her fiction—through the use of self-referential details and alternative forms of female sexuality connected with the sublime aspects of *qing*. Only once we understand how Lin creates this space for herself in her fiction is it possible to investigate how this space functions to question heteronormative culture and its effect on an individual woman's selfhood, and how it reaches the same end goal as other pointedly feminist writing, while not being motivated by feminism in and of itself.

Notes

¹ Wang, 176. Also note that there are several translations commonly used for the title of Lin Bai's *Yigeren de zhanzheng* (一个人的战争): *Self at War*, as Wang Lingzhen mentions; there are also *A War With Oneself*, and *One Person's War*, which I use in this

chapter. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine and remain as close to Lin Bai's original wording as possible.

² Lin Bai, "Some Words for Fang Fang," (语言口中的方方 *Yuyan kou zhong de Fang Fang*) in *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life* (前世的黄金：我的人生笔记 *Qianshi de huangjin: Wode rensheng biji*), 152.

³ Lin Bai, "Secret Flowers," (秘密之花 *Mimi zhi hua*) in *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life*, 74.

⁴ Lin Bai, "Secret Flowers," 74-75.

⁵ Lin Bai, "Prose and Me," (我与散文 *Wo yu sanwen*) in *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life*, 115.

⁶ Lin Bai, "The Birthplace of My Inner Self," (内心的故乡 *Neixin de guxiang*) in *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life*, 63-64.

⁷ Lin Bai, "Where Is Life's Passion: A Few Words About Things Related to My Writing," (生命热情何在：与我创作有关的一些词 *Shengmeng reqing he zai: yu wo chuangzuo youguan de yixie ci*) in *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life*, 8.

⁸ Lin Bai, "Time Has Been Taken from Me Here, Give Me Some Back," (时光从我这里夺走的，你又还给了我 *Shiguang cong wo zheli duo zou de, ni you huan gei le wo*) in *The Gold of Previous Incarnations*, 83.

⁹ Elfriede Jelinek is an Austrian novelist and playwright. She was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2004. Many of her works have highly political overtones, and often deal with such topics as female sexuality and other feminist tropes.

¹⁰ Lin Bai, "Don't Read Jelinek's Arguments," (不读耶利内克的理由 *Bu du Yelineikedede liyou*) in *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life*, 192.

¹¹ Lin Bai, "Literature Stands in Front of You," (文学站在你面前 *Wenxue zhanzai ni mianqian*) in *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life*, 66-67.

¹² Lin Bai, "All of the Myriad Wild Things," (野生的万物 *Yesheng de wanwu*) in *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life*, 92.

¹³ Lin Bai, "Where Is Life's Passion: A Few Words About Things Related to My Writing," 4.

¹⁴ Lin Bai, "The World Is So Vast Like This," (世界如此辽阔 *Shijie ruci liaokuo*) in *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life*, 68.

¹⁵ Lin Bai, *One Person's War*, 19: "After a week the weather was clear, and I was in my dormitory casually flipping through a magazine when the voice of one my classmates called in to me: Duomi, there's a boy here to see you."

¹⁶ See the discussion of *One Person's War* in Chapter Two.

¹⁷ Lin Bai, *One Person's War*, 62.

¹⁸ See Chapter One for a further discussion of the difference between privacy writing (*sirenhua xiezu*) and individualized writing (*gerenhua xiezu*).

¹⁹ See Chapter One for a discussion of the *Notes from My Life* genre, as well as Chapter Two for Patricia Waugh's discussion of metafiction and the self-begetting novel.

²⁰ Lin Bai, *One Person's War*, 32-33.

²¹ Lin Bai, "Reverie of Death," (死亡的遐想 *Siwang de xiaxiang*) in *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life*, 137 and *One Person's War*, 13.

²² Lin Bai, "Climbing Emei shan Alone" (一个人上峨嵋山 *Yigeren shang Emei shan*) in *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life*, 35 and *One Person's War*, 141.

²³ Lin Bai, "The Pause in My Education," (失学的日子 *Shixue de rizi*) in *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life*, 18-20 and *One Person's War*, 110-114. Also "Reaching Nanning," (到达南宁 *Daoda Nanning*) in *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life*, 118-123 and *One Person's War*, 57.

²⁴ See note 4

²⁵ Lin Bai, *One Person's War*, 6-7; similar dreams about the death of her family members and her wedding can be found in "My Dreams When I Was Little," (小时候的梦 *Xiao shihou de meng*) in *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life*, 10-12.

²⁶ Lin Bai, *One Person's War*, 8; similar fever-induced dreams about rainbows and a black clock given to her by her boyfriend can be found in, "True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate," (同心爱者不能分手 *Tongxin aizhe bu neng fenshou*) in the *Collected Writings of Lin Bai*, 154 and "My Dreams When I Was Little," in *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life*, 10-12.

²⁷ Incidentally, Sand Street is where Lin Bai lived in Beiliu from when she was eight years old until she was thirteen. Lin Bai, "Where Is Life's Passion: A Few Words About Things Related to My Writing," 2.

²⁸ Lin Bai, *One Person's War*, 87-88. See also "True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate," 123-158. Regarding Duomi's relationship with N and her pregnancy and abortion, see *One Person's War*, 174 and the section "Regarding Tears," (关于眼泪 *Guanyu yanlei*) in "True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate," 135-137.

²⁹ Lin Bai, “The Rose Corridor,” (玫瑰过道 *Meigui guodao*) in *The Collected Writings of Lin Bai*, 41-42 and *One Person’s War*, 166.

³⁰ Lin Bai, “The Eye on the Wall,” (墙上的眼睛 *Qiangshang de yanjing*) in *The Collected Writings of Lin Bai*, 24. In the whole short story, there is only a single character—older sister (姐 *jie*)—which points to the narrator’s identity.

³¹ Lin Bai, “The Eye on the Wall,” 23-24 and *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life*, 30.

³² See note 22

³³ Lin Bai, *One Person’s War*, 148

³⁴ Lin Bai, “Some Words for Fang Fang,” 153.

³⁵ Lin Bai, *One Person’s War*, 151-152.

³⁶ Lin Bai, *One Person’s War*, 43. See also, *One Person’s War*, 23.

³⁷ See Lin Bai, *One Person’s War*, 20 and 22.

³⁸ While Duomi’s feelings for other women are often homoerotic, she never has an actual sexual experience with another woman. Her only experiences touching a woman’s body come from touching her own.

³⁹ Lin Bai, *One Person’s War*, 3.

⁴⁰ See Lin Bai, *One Person’s War*, 27-28.

⁴¹ Lin Bai, *One Person’s War*, 30-31.

⁴² In fact, her marriage to her husband is mentioned only briefly after her relationship with N ends. And like her other heterosexual partners, Duomi’s husband also remains nameless. See Lin Bai, *One Person’s War*, 182.

⁴³ Lin Bai, *One Person’s War*, 17.

⁴⁴ Lin Bai, *One Person’s War*, 129.

⁴⁵ Lin Bai, *One Person’s War*, 130.

⁴⁶ Lin Bai, *One Person’s War*, 172.

⁴⁷ For her other references to abortion see Lin Bai, *One Person’s War*, 15, 123, 164, and 174. See also “Related Words: ‘Getting Rid of It,’ ‘Induced Abortion,’ and ‘Termination,’” (有关的词: 做掉、人工流产、堕胎 *Youguan de ci: zuo diao, rengongliuchan, duotai*) in *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life*, 182.

⁴⁸ Wang, 167.

⁴⁹ Kay Schaffer and Song Xianlin, “Unruly Spaces: Gender, Women’s Writing and Indigenous Feminism in China,” in *Journal of Gender Studies* 16 No. 7 (March 2007), 26.

⁵⁰ Tze-lan D. Sang, “At the Juncture of Censure and Mass Voyeurism: Narratives of Female Homoerotic Desire in Post-Mao China,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8 No. 4, (2002), 544.

CHAPTER VI

SELF-ISH PASSION: HAI NAN'S *A DISSOLUTE LIFE: NOTES FROM MY LIFE* AND *MY LOVERS*

“No woman poet can avoid talking about her own gender experience. Only on the basis of experience can guesses, hypotheses and fictionalized things be represented.”
Hai Nan, interviewed by Zhang Xiaohong

Hai Nan, who was born Su Lihua in Yongsheng in Yunnan in 1962, is considered one of the most controversial representatives of women's literature from the 1980s. Like Can Xue, another of the female avant-garde writers, Hai Nan's writing is both difficult to categorize as well as difficult to decipher, as Zhong Xiaohong writes:

Hai Nan has been a controversial public figure since the publication of her poem series 'Woman' (*Nüren*) in 1987. A prolific poet, Hai Nan has published four poetry collections...Hai Nan's best poetry is characterized by seeming nonsense and near-nonsense, semantic gaps, repetition, the collage of disjointed contexts, fragmentary syntax, and allegories.¹

She began writing in 1981, and her first collection of poetry was published in 1987. She has penned four major poetry collections and more than fifteen novels, including *Woman's Biography* (*Nüren zhuan*), *Private Life* (*Sishenghuo*), and *Body Sacrifice* (*Shenti ji*). While her fiction and poetry often touches on very personal aspects of her life and memories, she jumps from fragmented piece of narration to fragmented piece of narration. While there are several striking differences between the two other authors discussed in this study and Hai Nan's writing, as will be discussed below, in favoring this kind of disjointed, almost stream-of-consciousness-style writing, she is able to create a private space for herself in her fiction that the reading public is not fully able to enter or understand. As such, Hai Nan represents yet another way in which the female avant-

garde writers each use their own strategies to write a space of literary privacy for themselves.

A Dissolute Life: Notes from My Life

Published in 2006, Hai Nan's *A Dissolute Life: Notes from My Life* (hereafter *Notes from My Life*) is very different from Xu Kun's *Notes from My Life* and Lin Bai's *The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life*. In fact, there is more similarity between Hai Nan's *Notes from My Life* and her self-referential novel *My Lovers* than there is generically between her writing and the two other authors discussed in this study. That being said, however, there are still certain aspects of Hai Nan's *Notes from My Life* that both speak to her project of literary privacy in her self-referential fiction, as she says, "This book records a few of my secret lives from amongst the narration of my recollections."² Even from the very beginning, Hai Nan alerts the reader to the centrality of privacy in her writing.

Notes from My Life is arranged in four sections: "The Basin I Was Born In," "Uncovering Love in *The Flower Banquet*," "My Body's Secret Truth," and "For My Lovers."³ Like Lin Bai and Xu Kun, Hai Nan also discusses a range of topics in her *Notes from My Life*, including memories of her childhood and her family, her early interest in writing and the works of other authors who would later inspire her own writing, marriage, children, and her experiences with love and sex. Like both Lin Bai and Xu Kun, Hai Nan also devotes a significant amount of space to discussions of her development as a writer. Like Lin Bai she devotes several essays to her travels, especially in Yunnan, where she grew up. And like Xu Kun, she also writes about

Virginia Woolf and the importance of having a room of one's own. However, unlike Lin Bai and Xu Kun, Hai Nan does not devote much space in her writing to discussions of the relationships between men and women or feminism; rather, these topics appear from time to time, primarily in relation to her writing or to her recollections of certain experiences in her life.

One of the most prominent themes that Hai Nan writes about in *Notes from My Life* is privacy. This is also one of the most striking differences between Hai Nan's *Notes from My Life* and the similar works by both Lin Bai and Xu Kun—while Lin Bai and Xu Kun do discuss privacy in their fiction and how they work to construct a space of privacy for themselves, they do not always tackle the subject directly. Hai Nan, on the other hand often writes quite frankly about her sense of privacy. She frequently mentions her “private life” (私生活 *sishenghuo* or 私密生活 *simi shenghuo*), and how it a necessary component of her writing, as she does in the “Preface” to *Notes from My Life*:

It follows impartial time from the enchantment already sent forth from a person's secret life, just as that wild southern fox follows the lure of its sense of smell, passing that treacherous road of life that is overgrown with weeds. Our intelligence originates from our privilege of private (*simi*) language so, from the similarity between the enchantment put forth from our bodies and the most private moments in the development of all things, that is a secret which has been ripped open by the burning sun, by the gloom, as well as by the rainy season; it is a secret which emerges from its smashed shell.⁴

From the very beginning, Hai Nan explains how privacy and secrets are one of the most important and fundamental parts of her life. This privacy is a source of inspiration as well as the means by which she creates a language of her own, that is, distinguishes her voice from others. And yet at the same time this privacy is also obscured, “overgrown with weeds,” as Hai Nan so poetically describes. She details how knowing that there are certain aspects of herself and certain experiences that she has had that belong solely to

her is a source of pleasure. She also links this sense of privacy directly to her physical body, as in her essay “Bathing Naked.”⁵ In this essay she describes the tactile sensations of bathing, as well as the appearance of the other women’s bodies that she sees while bathing. Far from being voyeuristic, in narrating these experiences Hai Nan invites the reader into her private world and allows them to experience them with her.

Moreover, in writing about her private experiences, Hai Nan also discusses Virginia Woolf and the influence of Woolf’s writing. Woolf is significant for Hai Nan in that she is both influential for writing as well as the way that she talks about women writing, so much so that when Hai Nan moves to Kunming from Beijing she writes, “In 1991, there were actually no episodes in my obscured private life. The stockpiled words in my inner being spurred me to steadfastly look forward to a room of my own.”⁶ In need of an outlet, Hai Nan writes about the words that have accumulated inside her, and her need for privacy in order to release them. This is clearly a veiled reference to Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, in which Woolf discusses how in order to write well a women must have a room of her own. Furthermore, Hai Nan goes on to write, in yet another essay, that:

Virginia Woolf said to her friends, “I must be private, secret; concealing as far as possible my namelessness and sink into oblivion so that I can go on writing.” This is also precisely the state of my existence. During a pause in my writing I go to the flower garden downstairs to walk. Separated by the railings, I can see the slow attitude of the peasants in the fields working. I am absorbed by this attitude. If we can start to slow down in everything, then, then our minds can look for ourselves.⁷

Here we can see the connections between privacy and writing for Hai Nan—her private, personal experiences become the material from which she draws inspiration for her

writing, and in creating a private world for herself in her writing she able to investigate the most interior aspects of her self.

However, other than Virginia Woolf, Han Nan does not discuss feminism or overtly political questions of women's liberation at all in *Notes from My Life*, although she does discuss these questions somewhat in interviews, as she does in this one with *Everyone Magazine*, "I've actually never thought of being a feminist. My writing has no connection with any 'ism' or school of thought."⁸ It is interesting that for a writer so frequently read as a "feminist writer" that she should so utterly avoid the topic. This may be due to the very frank descriptions of female desire that she offers in works such as *My Lovers*, as well as the fact that she often discusses both her own decision to reject marriage as well as the effect that marriage has on women.

Her own rejection of marriage is a topic which comes up several times in *Notes from My Life*, particularly as she discusses her past lovers. For example in her essay, "Men Should Go Stay in a Hotel," she talks about a former lover who has asked her to marry him:

After daybreak, I became another me, rejecting this person who had come from afar to ask my hand in marriage, rejecting his love for me. And before daybreak, I actually snuggled up to him. Maybe in this kind of peaceful or deep sleep I already dreamt about my future with him: we would be separated by a distant country, we would be solitary travelers in two different worlds, we would never have a way to be together or live a truly common life.⁹

In this essay, the man that Hai Nan has fallen in love with is an artist who lives overseas. While she is temporarily smitten with him, and with the idea of marrying him, in the end she decides against it and rejects both the idea and the man himself. Like her other relationships, she refuses to follow tradition simply for the sake of obeying social norms; time and time again she insists on her autonomy and agency to choose as the most

important factor in any of her decisions, whether it be to love someone, to sleep with them, or to marry.

Similarly, in “Gorgeous Customary Wedding Song,” she writes about her friend Ding Lili, and her wedding. Ding Lili is a beautiful girl who has decided to use her body and her looks to marry into a comfortable life, despite the fact that she does not love the man she is marrying. Hai Nan finds this attitude towards marriage problematic:

When a girl is rushes toward her gorgeous customary wedding car, she can abandon the lively rhythm of her body; she can hide away her bright and beautiful fantasies; she can betray her body’s patterns.....Will it leave a mark behind on her body? And yet, in her fashionable dress that she designed for herself I honestly cannot see this kind of mark. She put both her legs up on that motorcycle and followed that man, like the original wedding car that she was stepping onto. Maybe she really didn’t feel the gloom that I felt once, because she has her privacy (*simi*), she has her ideals, she has the right to choose her own life. So, she is indifferent to life’s changes, since she can use her body and she also can search for happiness for herself.¹⁰

Hai Nan feels that Ding Lili’s wedding is a betrayal of herself, that it will force her to hide or change the natural state or desires of her body in order to suit her husband.

However, despite her difficulty understanding Ding Lili’s decision to marry, and her own concerns that it will adversely affect Ding Lili’s bodily happiness, Hai Nan also writes that it is Ding Lili’s own private decision to do so. As such, she implies that it is in embracing one’s own private desires that a person, and especially a woman, is able to find herself, or at least provides a means for a woman to search for her own happiness. As such, Hai Nan implies a kind of feminist position which makes a woman’s right to choose paramount. This right to choose, however, is grounded in a woman’s autonomous self, and the freedom to use that privacy to make whatever decisions for herself that she feels are best.

Moreover, while marriage is not a choice that Hai Nan makes for herself, in “The Small-Town Man Seeking My Hand in Marriage,” she recounts the story of one of her former lovers, a writer from a small town who eventually asks for Hai Nan to marry him. Once again she refuses him, because she knows that she has already given herself to her writing:

I refuse to walk into a marriage birdcage, and yet I know I have no way to resist writing. I want to write. This is something I originally simply couldn't imagine. When other people hear this it doesn't sound like wishful thinking; it's mythic. And yet, on that dawn when I suddenly awoke I was destined to enter that blue shadowed path...¹¹

Unlike Lin Bai and Xu Kun, Hai Nan never discusses her relationship status outright. It is difficult to tell simply from reading *Notes from My Life* if she eventually married or not; while she openly discusses her previous relationships with men, she does not touch on this topic except in those cases where she has refused to marry. It is also not a subject which she discusses in her interviews. And while some of the photographs that are included in *Notes from My Life* would seem to be of her child, these too are not captioned in such a way as to clarify the point. This is yet another difference between Hai Nan's *Notes from My Life* and both Lin Bai's and Xu Kun's: Lin Bai only mentions her husband in passing but writes frequently about her daughter, and Xu Kun's divorce is a common topic of discussion. Hai Nan, on the other hand preserves her marital status as a part of her private self, hidden from the reader. In all three cases, however, these writers decide what information and to what extent they will allow the reader access to their private lives; moreover, they all distance themselves from being defined by their marital status. In this way, although these three authors approach the question differently, they all use

the idea of privacy to create an identity for themselves that is not defined by their relationships with men.

Like Lin Bai and Xu Kun, Hai Nan also spends a great deal of time discussing women's bodies. In fact, more than either of the other two writers, Hai Nan's sense of self and writing are completely grounded in her own body. Her descriptions of female desire are far more vivid than either Lin Bai and Xu Kun; this will be discussed further below. And while Hai Nan clearly revels in her own physical being, and uses this physicality as a means to access her private self as well as create a space of privacy for herself in her writing, she rejects the idea that her body has a biologically predetermined purpose:

Women's reproductive organs are for creating life. In addition to this, they are for having sex and having periods...this melody of happiness and pain which has always been born by women's flesh and blood, as far as I am concerned, is completely distant from me.¹²

Although it is possible, as discussed above, that Hai Nan has actually had a child, as some of the photos in *Notes from My Life* would seem to indicate, it is not a topic which she discusses in any detail. Rather, her depictions of female bodies take one of two forms: discussions of her own body in connection with discussions of her desire, and descriptions of other women's bodies. Like Lin Bai, Hai Nan is fascinated with and enchanted by other women's bodies. Several of the essays in *Notes from My Life* deal with public bathing, a topic which also comes up frequently for Lin Bai. Both authors also discuss their childhood fascination with brassieres, an article of clothing which in and of itself suggests adult womanhood. As Hai Nan writes:

Curious, I slid down the wall. My good friend, a girl in pigtail braids and born the same month and year as I, gasped quietly. This caused me to catch sight of that spotlessly white brassiere drying in the sun on the iron wire in the compound. My

girlfriend pressed close to me and whispered in my ear that her mother also wore this kind of brassiere; only hers wasn't as spotlessly white as this one, or as big. Clearly, at our age brassieres were unfamiliar, no more than a small article of clothing. As far as we were concerned, brassieres had no private (*simi*) significance. . . . In the end, when a woman becomes naked to herself—this isn't a philosophical question, but simply a private bodily question.¹³

As Hai Nan points out, it is not the brassiere on its own that holds any private significance, but rather what it suggests, that is, both motherhood and female sexuality. It indicates a girl's transition into womanhood, and her ability to desire, as well as to produce life. And once again, for Hai Nan the process by which a woman comes into possession of her own body, the same process which makes a brassiere strangely fascinating, is a private one that each woman must determine for herself. Once again, she resists reading this process as what she calls a "philosophical question," that is, she refuses to link this process to any particular school of thought whether it be feminist or heteronormative, for example, but rather highlights a woman's bodily privacy as the key past of coming into possession of herself.

In addition to being the site and source of a woman's privacy, Hai Nan also discusses at length the connection between her body and her writing. For her, the need to write springs from somewhere deep inside her:

I don't know why my body is permeated with unceasing desire to write poetry. Maybe I am inherently able to write poetry; only when I have put down in writing those poetic records will the poetic desire within my body ease. Besides writing poetry there is also reading; there have been so many times when I have turned over and stroked gently a book's cover. This really is heaven on earth.¹⁴

Writing, her body, and desire are all linked together for Hai Nan—they are more than just her profession, but rather a physical imperative. She draws not only inspiration but also pleasure from other authors' works that she has read, as well as from her own bodily sensations and desires. And she is able to draw from all of these aspects to create a space

of privacy for herself in her fiction. While she does not devote as much time to discussions of her development as a writer as do both Xu Kun and Lin Bai, it is clear that her interest in poetry and writing developed from an early age and have been a fundamental part of who she is ever since. In almost every essay in *Notes from My Life* Hai Nan mentions some experience that she had or book that she read which has had an influence on her as a poet, and later on her fiction. She speaks more directly to this in an interview:

In this world, everyone can send out their own voice. I only hope my voice can be different from anyone else's. If my readers can distinguish my voice from the multitude of others, then I am really Hai Nan. Writers "giving their readers an electric shock" is a social phenomenon driven by economic interests; every writer can make their own choice.¹⁵

The interviewer had asked her about her writing style, and if she feels that her writing really can be distinguished from that of other authors. Given Hai Nan's ultimate goal, her answer is not surprising. Rather than commercialize her writing, as will be discussed in regard to the body/beauty writers in the following chapter, or force her writing to fit a mold so that she might be labeled as part of a faction or "ism," as discussed above, Hai Nan uses her own unique voice as a way to express herself, a way to create a space for herself in her writing which belongs only to her. While her writing style is completely unique and unlike any of the other avant-garde writers, in resisting both commercialization as well as being labeled but rather pursuing her own project of self-narration Hai Nan shares the same project as the other female avant-garde writers—that of the creation of a space of *si*-privacy in their fiction.

My Lovers

There is a significant amount of overlap between *A Dissolute Life: Notes from My Life* and *My Lovers*. In fact, the fourth section of *Notes from My Life*, “For My Lovers,” covers several of Hai Nan’s most significant relationships, all of which appear within the pages of *My Lovers*, as well be discussed below. In an interview with Zhang Hong, Hai Nan explains why she decided to write *My Lovers*:

At the beginning of the 1990s I wrote *My Lovers*; who was I then?...At that time I was immersed in writing about “male-female” relationships....We must admit that from the time we are born, we live in “male female” relationships. We see our parents’ “male-female” relationships, see our relationships with our fathers, see the “male-female” relationships of our neighbors to either side. This is our earliest introduction to our long period of “male-female” relationships.¹⁶

And it is clear from the content of *My Lovers* that Hai Nan is using many of her own personal experiences to work out her feelings about male-female relationships, as well as deal with some of the pain that these relationships have caused her. At the same time, however, just as with the works of the other avant-garde women writers, it is too much to read *My Lovers* as an autobiographical or semi-autobiographical work. Rather, Hai Nan uses references to herself and her lived experience as a way to create the private space that she has written so much about in *Notes from My Life*, as she says in an interview with Liu Yilin:

I asked, “In regard to this reality of this work, what do you have to say?” Hai Nan replied, “Perhaps *My Lovers* is a true story, and maybe it is a made up one. No matter what, all of the stories and characters in my novel exist; the reader only needs to earnestly recall briefly their own lives and they will discover that the scenarios in my novel can be seen everywhere, even in themselves.”¹⁷

For Hai Nan, what is important about *My Lovers* is not whether or not the men that Su Xiu has relationships with are actual men out of Hai Nan’s own past, but rather that in the narration of these relationships Hai Nan is able to create a private space for herself. This

private space is one which Hai Nan hopes her readers will be able to identify with, although as discussed above, if they are not able to understand or identify with what she writes this is not her concern; as she points out:

I seldom take readers into account in the course of writing. Once setting my pen to paper, I fall into a forgetful state, not consciously, but automatically. Writing is an autonomous act. It is like a labyrinth. Authors who have entered their self-created labyrinths are no longer connected with external reality.¹⁸

Rather than being an act of communication directed at an “other,” for Hai Nan the primary function of writing is to give a voice to the sensation, emotions, and experiences that she has had—her so-called “private life”—whether it is in her poetry, her prose, or her fiction.

Perhaps the best way to introduce *My Lovers* is by looking back to *Notes from My Life* and the fourth section of that book titled, “For My Lovers.” Hai Nan writes:

The third love song in my private life is related to trains. I was sitting in the train compartment. I am in love with taking trains, and because of this by myself, bored and fanciful, I got on the train at a small train station called Yuanmou next to the Jinsha River. My first love song came about because of my love for a stove and my secret love for a blacksmith; the second love song came about because of I was fascinated with a bicycle and captivated by the man who rode it; and the third love song, because I am fascinated with trains, I secretly loved the passenger who was sitting next to me.¹⁹

The various relationships that Hai Nan mentions here, and in this whole section of her *Notes from My Life* provide clues to reading the relationships she narrates in *My Lovers*.

It is difficult to summarize the plot of *My Lovers* as Hai Nan moves randomly from the stories of one lover to the next, often in the middle of that story. These jumps usually occur in a stream-of-consciousness fashion, as something about the situation she is describing will remind her of another person or another situation and immediately the first story is left behind and the second story takes its place. These jumps also move

backwards and forwards in time, so it is very difficult to get a sense of linear chronology. Instead the novel focuses mainly on Su Xiu, the heroine, and three of the most important men who have passed through her life: Charley (Qiaoli), Hao, and Jie. While he was not the first man that she had fallen in love with, Charley is the first very intense, very serious relationship that Su Xiu has. They part ways after he asks her to marry him and she refuses, although after his death it is unclear if he was already married at the time and Su Xiu was his mistress. After Su Xiu starts seeing Hao she learns that Charley has died in a motorcycle accident, and she is devastated. All of her relationship with Charley is narrated in the form of recollections of him after his death.

After Charley comes Hao, a younger man who has the longest relationship with Su Xiu. He is twenty-two years old and she is twenty-eight, and they live together in Beijing. He is also from south China, just like Su Xiu. They are together for quite a while, and just like Charley before him, Hao asks Su Xiu to marry him. Again she refuses, and eventually Hao leaves her for a younger woman named Feifei. Feifei goes crazy, however, and Hao is forced to put her in a mental institution. Although they never date again, Hao and Su Xiu remain very close, and he is often the first person that she turns to in times of distress.

After her break up with Hao, Su Xiu returns to Yunnan. Some time later, Su Xiu meets a man named Jie, and they begin to date. At the time when they meet, Jie is in love with another woman named Xiao, but she does not love him back. Su Xiu had also been in a previous, short-lived relationship with a man named Le who was in love with another woman (named Wan); as soon as Su Xiu found this out she broke off her relationship with Le. However, while Jie is love with Xiao, she is not in love with him and has

actually run away from the city that they are living in to get away from him. Slowly Jie forgets Xiao and falls in love with Su Xiu, and like her two other serious boyfriends before him, eventually asks her to marry him. While she initially resists him, he tells her that he is going to build a house for her next to the ocean modeled after a house that she has described in one of her poems. Because of this, for the first time, Su Xiu actually considers it, saying:

Marriage, this is the first time that I had carefully considered marriage....marriage is a man and a woman set on an island, carefully separating the great things and the minutia of the world. The final point in resolving a man and woman's relationship is marriage, and yet, how can one approach and continuously escape from this method of resolution?²⁰

Moved by his connection to her poetry that has given him a deeper insight into who she is, she eventually tells him that she will marry him someday, although this does not come to pass as he too eventually dies. He does leave her the house by the seaside, however. All in all Hai Nan also narrates Su Xiu's fifteen lovers; in addition to Charley, Hao, and Jie there are: Mancun, Xiazi, Le, Hongye, a stranger she has a one-night stand with, Chao, Yan, Lashi, Haiming, Yi, Ding, and Nameless. She also narrates the stories of several fictitious men: Si, Wo, Po, Mingsheng, Mi, Langmao, Leming, and Zhongfu. Sometimes these men are fantasy lovers of hers, and sometimes they are men she imagines for other women; for example she imagines Xiao's love for a man named Si in one of these episodes as the reason why Xiao does not love Jie. Some of the men's stories are narrated through the course of the novel and some of their stories are very short. For example, Hongye, the man she loses her virginity to warrants little more than a few pages, while the stranger with whom she has a one-night stand gets his own small section of a chapter. Mancun was the first man that she ever really loved, and the novel

begins with a short piece of their story, before switching quite quickly and abruptly to Su Xiu's story with Hao. Mancun was also the first of her lovers to die; of the fifteen lovers that Su Xiu has within the pages of the novel, roughly half of them are dead. These are Mancun, Charley, Hongye, Haiming, and Yi; the last time that Su Xiu sees him he is waiting to die.

Like the self-referential works of the other avant-garde female writers, Hai Nan uses many details from her own life to narrate Su Xiu's life. The first connection between the two is that they share a family name, and are both from Yunnan, near the Jinsha River. They were also both born in the same year and are both poets. Additionally Su Xiu moves back and forth between Yunnan and Beijing at roughly the same points in her life as Hai Nan does, although given the difficulty of identifying a concrete chronology in the novel, this is somewhat harder to make out. It is also probable that several of the really meaningful relationships that Su Xiu has in *My Lovers* have been based on similarly important relationships that Hai Nan describes in *Notes from My Life*. Su Xiu's love for Mancun, an older man, springs from his ability to play the bamboo flute, just as Hai Nan describes in "Love Story 1982." It is likely that Hao is modeled after the man that Hai Nan describes in "Fourteen Year-Old Love Song," as both men are blacksmiths. Similarly, in "Sea Dyke" she describes her relationship with a man named Jian, who probably became the inspiration for Charley—both men die in car accidents. By revealing certain details and concealing or obscuring other, just as in the cases of Lin Bai and Xu Kun, this self-reference allows Hai Nan to create a space of privacy in not only *My Lovers*, also one which exists between *My Lovers* and *Notes from*

My Life. Much like Lin Bai's writing, this web may extend to Hai Nan's other writing as well.

Although *My Lovers* is not written in the more linear "self-begetting" metafictional form in which the works of Lin Bai and Xu Kun are written, nevertheless she still uses many of the same narrative techniques to create her private space of self in her fiction. The most powerful of these are her descriptions of female desire. Unlike Xu Kun's more academic treatment of female desire as an expression of female empowerment, and Lin Bai's homosocial/homoerotic descriptions of female-female desire and female self-desire, Hai Nan's descriptions wholeheartedly embrace heterosexual sex. Her narration of Su Xiu's sexual feelings is very open and frank; however, far from being the self-exploitative descriptions of sex that the body/beauty writers offer in the pages of their fiction, Hai Nan's descriptions of Su Xiu sexual feelings includes the same uplifting aspects of *qing* that Lin Bai writes about in relation to Lin Duomi. For example, Hai Nan describes one of Su Xiu's encounters with Mancun:

That afternoon when I shut my eyes tightly and laid down in Mancun's arms, I saw flock after flock of migratory birds circling above our heads. The migratory birds made my body produce an unfathomably mysterious desire—as if to say that it wasn't actually Mancun but the birds above our heads that helped me enter a kind of carnal desire that day. From that point on, every time I saw or dreamt about migratory birds circling above my head I would have the intense desire to have a man enter my body. Maybe it was the sounds of their wings flapping in relation that caused my body to be full of passion and desire. Consequently I came to a mysterious conclusion: men's reproductive organs are their wings, which is also to say that the wings they use to fly are not their two arms, but rather their radiant, bizarre, poetic organs.²¹

Su Xiu's desire and sexual delight allow her to take flight just like the birds that she sees overhead. Her desire is a release rather than a burden. Moreover, Hai Nan only focuses

on Su Xiu's desire, rather than Mancun's—she delights in her own body and the pleasure that it gives her. Su Xiu has similar feelings for Hao, as Hai Nan describes:

A sexual rendezvous signifies that a person has already started to weave rings of light into their private life. A beautiful private life leads to the overthrow many of the obstacles in life. Their secrecy does not have a purpose, only the happiness and grief of the creator and collector of their secrecy.²²

For Su Xiu, sexual pleasure is one of the fundamental aspects of her private life, and one of the ways in which a woman is able to search for her inner being. Given Hai Nan's own feelings about the connections between her physical body, privacy, and self-representation, this connection is also not surprising.

Moreover, most of the descriptions of sexual behavior in *My Lovers* centers on Su Xiu and her desires; like the other female avant-garde writers when Hai Nan narrates male desire it is often colored by a certain sense of negativity, whether it be that the man is only taking advantage of Su Xiu for his pleasure, or that he is trying to bend her desires to his will and keep her with him. For example, at one point, after Hao has told Su Xiu how pretty she is, she starts to wonder at what point in her life she became attractive to men:

When was it after all that I became a woman? When was it after all that men started to praise my legs and fecund navel as well as my breasts?...When was it after all that at the same time men started to praise me they also sent me roses, necklaces, and love letters written in elegant style, full of beautiful symbolic significance? When was it after all that my navel would give off the sound of rustling silk? When men were confronted with their pitch-black sleepiness they would breathe, with their noses they would sniff the fantastic scent of my body; they were constantly breathing in the fragrance of my breasts and the faint blue light coming out from between my legs.²³

In these moments, rather than focus on Su Xiu's delight in her own body and her feelings of pleasure, Hai Nan describes Su Xiu's female body as the means by which the men

around her reach some goal of their own, regardless of her desire. At one point Su Xiu wonders if the men she has had sex with are simply looking for a path back to their mothers' wombs via her body; likewise, after one her short-lived relationship with Le ends, Su Xiu remarks that when they would have sex, she knew that he was simply trying to forget his love for Wan. And at yet another point, Su Xiu wonders what drives men's behavior with women, after Jie has unexpectedly brought her flowers:

Men, oh men! Men's dreams and actions are related. Men always turn their dreams into reality, for example, sending a bouquet of fresh flowers to a woman. Flowers represent love, and even more significantly symbolize their dreams. They like the vitality of these fresh flowers, because they hope that a flower can represent a woman's life.²⁴

While Hai Nan does not explore the range of alternative female desire in the same way that Lin Bai and Xu Kun do, she does portray Su Xiu's desire in a way that is not usually represented within the boundaries of the heterosexual wife and mother: Su Xiu does not marry, she has multiple sexual partners, some of whom are strangers, and she delights in the physical pleasure of the body. As such, her narratives of female desire in *My Lovers* are as much ones of resistance as are the other avant-garde women writers'.

Su Xiu's lifestyle choices also extend to the realm of reproduction. While she is disinterested in marriage, Su Xiu would have been willing to be a mother, as she says:

I was pregnant once, that was something that happened when I was 25 or 26. I didn't tell anyone, even the father of the child. I came to the seaside thinking I would live alone for a while. I wanted to have my child, but later on I had a miscarriage, I don't know why.²⁵

Like Lin Bai's brief mention of her husband, Su Xiu's mention of her lost child takes up less than a page, and the child's father is never named. However, it is interesting that had the child been carried to term Su Xiu would have chosen to raise the child as a single mother; this kind of lifestyle choice can be thought of as the opposite end of the spectrum

from Mao Zhen's decision to live as a single, childless woman (or even a married woman with no children). In all three cases, these female characters resist the socially proscribed image of heterosexual wife and mother, offering instead depictions of alternative ways that women choose to live their lives. In this way, Su Xiu's rejection of marriage but temporary choice to be a mother is very much a part of the female avant-garde writers' project of resistance.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered how Hai Nan's writing is both similar to and very different from the other works of the female avant-garde writers represented in this study. While Hai Nan does offer graphic depictions of empowered, uplifting female desire as the other avant-garde women writers do, she does not portray heterosexual desire in the same kind of threatening or destructive way that Lin Bai and Xu Kun do. And while Hai Nan discusses the importance of privacy at length, she resists any connection to larger social movements or concern for women in particular, as Lin Bai and Xu Kun do in their respective *Notes from My Life* volumes. However, in describing the connections between her body and her writing, Hai Nan does touch on some of these topics, and imply their importance. Perhaps the most striking difference between Hai Nan's work and those of the other avant-garde women writers is in the way that Hai Nan plays with language and form in her writing—it would be interesting to compare Hai Nan's fiction with the writing of another female avant-garde writer known for her abstract and fragmented fiction: Can Xue. Despite the differences between Hai Nan's self-referential fiction and that of the other writers considered here, it is clear that they are

all using their own unique voices to create for themselves a space of *si*-privacy in their fiction, a space which functions both as resistance to the patriarchal image of the female body and voice, as well a space where these women can narrate themselves.

Notes

¹ Zhang Xiaohong, “Far and Away: Three Authors from Yunnan,” *HAS Newsletter* #34 (July 2004).

² Hai Nan, “Preface,” (序 *Xu*) in *A Dissolute Life: Notes from My Life* (水性生活：我的人生笔记 *Shuixing shenghuo: wode rensheng biji*), 1. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine and remain as close to Hai Nan’s original wording as possible.

³ Literally, *hua’er yan* 花儿宴. *Hua’er* can also refer to a kind of folksong popular in Gansu, Qinghai, and Ningxia; given Hai Nan’s relative proximity (in Yunnan), it is also possible that she is referring to this style of music.

⁴ Hai Nan, “Preface,” 2.

⁵ Hai Nan, “Bathing Naked,” (裸身沐浴 *Luo shen muyu*) in *A Dissolute Life: Notes from My Life*, 36-40.

⁶ Hai Nan, “Renting a Small Room,” (出租小屋 *Chuzu xiao wu*) in *A Dissolute Life: Notes from My Life*, 207.

⁷ Hai Nan, “From Now to the Future,” (从现在到将来 *Cong xianzai dao jianglai*) in *A Dissolute Life: Notes from My Life*, 221.

⁸ “A Dialogue with Hai Nan: The Magic Spectacle of Language,” last modified July 19, 2007, <http://mastermag.blog.sohu.com/55952300.html>

⁹ Hai Nan, “Men Should Go Stay in a Hotel,” (男人应该去住旅店 *Nanren yinggai qu zhu lü dian*) in *A Dissolute Life: Notes on My Life*, 100.

¹⁰ The Chinese literally reads, “she can search for happiness for her own body.” Hai Nan, “Gorgeous Customary Wedding Song,” (艳俗的婚礼曲 *Yan su de hunli qu*) in *A Dissolute Life: Notes from My Life*, 144.

¹¹ Hai Nan, “A Small-Town Man Seeking My Hand in Marriage,” (求婚的小镇男人 *Qiuhun de xiaozhen nanren*) in *A Dissolute Life: Notes from My Life*, 159.

¹² Hai Nan, “The Body on the Horsecart,” (马车上的身体 *Ma che shang de shenti*) in *A Dissolute Life: Notes from My Life*, 28.

¹³ Hai Nan, “Me, the Voyeur,” (偷窥者的我 *Toukuizhe de wo*) in *A Dissolute Life: Notes from My Life*, 117-118.

¹⁴ Hai Nan, “Countryside School,” (田园学校 *Tianyuan xuexiao*) in *A Dissolute Life: Notes from My Life*, 202.

¹⁵ “A Dialogue with Hai Nan: The Magic Spectacle of Language,” last modified July 19, 2007, <http://mastermag.blog.sohu.com/55952300.html>

¹⁶ Zhang Hong, “Conversation: Talking about Men and Women with Hai Nan,” posted on Hai Nan’s blog, February 8, 2009. http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4adc86af0100buly.html

¹⁷ Liu Yilin, “Preface One: Composing a Religion of Ourselves,” in Hai Nan, *My Lovers* (我的情人们 *Wode qingrenmen*), 6.

¹⁸ Zhang Hong, “Conversation: Talking about Men and Women with Hai Nan,” posted on Hai Nan’s blog, February 8, 2009.

¹⁹ Hai Nan, “Love Story 1987, Part 1,” (恋曲一九八七 (之一) *Lianqu yi jiu ba qi (zhiyi)*) in *A Dissolute Life: Notes from My Life*, 188.

²⁰ Hai Nan, *My Lovers*, 276.

²¹ Hai Nan, *My Lovers*, 43.

²² Hai Nan, *My Lovers*, 106.

²³ Hai Nan, *My Lovers*, 45.

²⁴ Hai Nan, *My Lovers*, 261.

²⁵ Hai Nan, *My Lovers*, 274.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION:

PUBLIC EXPOSURE: THE BODY WRITERS AND WOMEN'S "SELF-WRITING"

"I said, 'You know, sweetie, you're like a novel, with all your plot twists, always leading me down some new path.'"
—Mian Mian, *Candy*

"My body fluids were becoming black ink, oozing out of me into my pen, trickling into each word and phrase I wrote."
—Wei Hui, *Shanghai Baby*

Throughout this study I have argued that, while they each construct this space in different ways, the goal of the female avant-garde writers is to create a space of literary space of resistance in their fiction, a place where they are not bound to nor determined by heteronormative patriarchal social expectations of what a women should be. Moreover, I have argued that in creating this space for themselves in their fiction, that the female avant-garde writers have taken the overly-selfish traditionally negative concept of *si* and turned it into a positive tool for narrative female bodies and female voices which have not been overwritten by the symbolic and metaphorical meanings ascribed to women by male intellectuals and the state. Each of the three authors examined in this study use have their own styles and voices; from Xu Kun's works which have been heavily influenced by theory to Lin Bai's "misty" web of poetic prose, to Hai Nan's lyrical romances, each author has her own unique and distinctive method for creating in her fiction this space of literary *si*-privacy. At the same time, all three authors also make use of similar techniques to create this space. They have all written works of self-referential metafiction, often using the so-called "self-begetting" form to narrate a female self who

shares significant overlap with the author's own life, but yet which remains a work of fiction rather than autobiography. They also all portray heteronormative relationships in a negative way: for Mao Zhen, the heroine of Xu Kun's *The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*, patriarchal culture has made not only all of the men in her life "sick" but also she herself, and she decides that it is better to live a solitary life rather than be involved in another damaging relationship. In Lin Bai's *One Person's War*, Lin Duomi learns after several painful encounters with men in which they attempt to rape her, lie to her, or take advantage of her both physically and emotionally that heteronormative relationships are not a source of refuge for her. While Duomi ultimately marries, it is her relationships with women and with herself where she finds beauty. And Hai Nan's Su Xiu, in *My Lovers* again and again falls for men who die, leaving her alone and heartbroken. Rather, all three writers have their protagonists choose to express their desire in alternative ways to the socially proscribed heterosexual wife and mother; Mao Zhen is a divorcée who chooses to live alone; Lin Duomi marries, but ultimately derives her greatest sexual gratification from pleasuring herself, and Su Xiu refuses to marry, preferring to take a series of lovers instead.¹ This refusal to portray their female protagonists fulfilling the socially normative roles of wife and mother is just one way in which these authors create their space of literary *si*-privacy in their fiction as one of resistance.

The female avant-garde writers' project of literary *si*-privacy becomes much clearer when compared with the generation of writers who begin writing in the 1990s: the so-called "body" or "beauty" writers. Heavily influenced by the increasing commercialism present in cultural production in the 1990s, Kay Schaffer and Song Xialin describe the body/beauty writers as:

A very different group of globally-connected, urban-based writers offer new perspectives on contemporary Chinese women. Young writers, like Wei Hui and Mian Mian born in the 1970s, marked the new millennium with a host of so-called 'bad girl' novels, aimed at both local Chinese and global markets. Totally absorbed in Western modernity, their novels engage the reader in fantasies of freedom, autonomy, sex, drugs, spending, and self-expressive hedonism.²

While the body/beauty writers are often read by critics in a similar fashion, it becomes clear in that while the female avant-garde writers resist the male gaze by portraying alternative forms of female desire, the body/beauty writers use both male desire and the male gaze to gain public recognition. I will return to this point below, in examining two representative works of the body/beauty writing genre: Mian Mian's *Candy* and Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby*.

Additionally, all three of the avant-garde women writers discussed here write details of their own lives into the lives of their female protagonists. Because of this overlap between author and character, these works are often misread as autobiographies. However, as discussed in Chapter I, there is a fundamental difference between the publicly-oriented autobiographical form, and the self-referential fiction of the female avant-garde writers. Once again, it is informative to compare the works of the female avant-garde writers to the semi-autobiographical fiction of the body/beauty writers. As Shaffer and Song point out:

Even though Wei Hui and Mian Mian differ considerably in the content and style of their writing, they are often mentioned together as representatives of the new 'body writing' in China. Both write provocative, sexually explicit prose, both narcissistically exploit their own appearance as women, and both have reaped substantial financial rewards. Their fiction challenges thousands of years of women's sexual repression and the neutering of women's sexuality during the Cultural Revolution.³

Both Mian Mian's heroine Hong and Wei Hui's heroine Nikki (Ni Ke; also known as Coco) display a high degree of overlap with the authors' own lives. And yet it is

interesting that neither work is read as autobiography, whereas one of the main criticisms leveled at the works of the female avant-garde writers is that the autobiographical works discussed in this study are lacking in any literary value. Ultimately, although both Mian Mian's and Wei Hui's works have been banned in Mainland China for their overt descriptions of sexual behavior, a closer look at how they portray their relationship with self-narration is a necessary point of comparison for understanding both the differences between the body/beauty writers and the avant-garde women writers, as well as one which helps to clarify the avant-garde women writers' project of literary privacy as being separate and distinct from the body/beauty writers' desire for public recognition.

Finally, it is in considering how the female avant-garde writers and the body/beauty writers position themselves with regard to feminism that differences between the two groups of writers become clear. Many scholars, and in particular Western scholars, tend to read the body/beauty writers' depictions of female sexuality as politically motivated, as Zhong Xueping illustrates:

[A] Group of young women writers—collectively known as *meini zuojia* (or “beauty writers”) and including the author of *Shanghai Baby*—emerged and have most positively, and publicly, identified with ‘feminism’.⁴

Zhong is not incorrect in asserting that the body/beauty writers are engaging in a feminist project of visibility when they openly and bluntly discuss their sexual desire and sexual behavior. However, much like the situation faced by young women who “eat the rice bowl of youth” discussed in Chapter II, the question becomes to what extent they resist the male gaze in asserting their own desire, and to what extent they invite it. Shaffer and Song summarize this precarious position, saying:

Although asserting women's autonomy, these women refuse notions of female sisterhood or solidarity. They wear their ‘feminism’ diffidently, often engaging in

public spats, sometimes on the Internet to an audience of thousands. Their sexualized performances of femininity, their self-fashioning as beauty objects, their enactments of sexual rivalry between themselves both challenge and enhance phallogocentric notions of woman-as-other.⁵

Indeed, much like the corporeal feminism espoused by Li Xiaojiang, the recent commercialization of cultural production in China makes answering this question very difficult. In fact, the idea of the empowered female consumer, and even cultural producer has become so synonymous with the male gaze as to spawn a whole range of related terms, as Gary Xu and Susan Feiner point out:

Economic growth in China is no exception, and the term *meinü*, meaning beautiful women, is an example of this process. A popular prefix, it is used to form many new compounds regularly used in casual conversation, state-sponsored media, the press, and the Internet. The Chinese language now includes dozens of words with the prefix *meinü*, such as *meinü zuojia* (beautiful woman writer)...all of them express the acceptance of the male gaze. In China, as in other patriarchal cultures, the male gaze reinforces the social construction of woman as “other,” and the “object” of history and culture, rather than as the agent of her own subjectivity.⁶

Rather than try to sort out whether the body/beauty writers are ultimately engaged in a resisting or upholding the male gaze in their works, it is more informative for understanding the differences between the female avant-garde writers and the body/beauty writers to look at how the authors themselves position themselves politically, vis a vis feminism. In addition to looking at expressions of female desire and self-narration in Mian Mian’s and Wei Hui’s works, this too will be an important point of distinction below.

Mian Mian’s *Candy* and the New *Liumang*

In 1997 Mian Mian published her first novel, *La la la*, which according to Jonathan Napack, “[S]poke (not surprisingly) of love, music, drugs, and despair in

Shenzhen.”⁷ Then in 1999, Mian Mian published her semi-autobiographical novel *Candy*, which contains a lot of the same subject material and tells the story of Hong, whose life parallels Mian Mian’s own. Mian Mian is often considered a representative voice of the body/beauty writing genre, particularly because of her very graphic depictions of rebellious female behavior. In addition to reading Mian Mian as a body/beauty writer, it is important to understand her rebellion. This, in turn, helps us to understand her motivations for writing and how her writing, as representative of other body/beauty writers, differs from that of the female avant-garde writers.

Although she does not specifically describe herself as such, Mian Mian portrays Hong in *Candy* as part of the urban *liumang*, or “hooligan,” subculture. As Geremie Barmé explains:

Liумang is a word with some of the most negative connotations in the Chinese language. Here the expression is used loosely in an attempt to describe both a social phenomenon and its cultural refraction....The term *liumang* has a venerable pedigree in modern Chinese urban life, appearing as early as a century ago when it was first used to describe the rootless rowdies and petty criminals who plagued the growing port of Shanghai. This definition was expanded to include a range of sexual misdemeanours, giving the term its most common range of meanings today.⁸

The “rootless rowdies and petty criminals” that Barmé describes here can easily include the group of young Shenzhen natives and Shanghainese who have relocated to Shenzhen that Mian Mian writes about in *Candy*.

In the novel, Mian Mian tells the story of Hong, a young middle class Shanghainese girl. After a classmate commits suicide when they are sixteen, Hong drops out of school and eventually finds her way to Shenzhen where she begins trying to find ways to get rich. At a café one day she meets a young man named Saining, and quite quickly they begin seeing each other. Their relationship is very intense—he frequently

cheats on her and they frequently break up only to get back together. They live a feckless life, working when they need to, usually playing music in clubs, in order to pay for their alcohol and marijuana. However, this is a fairly happy time for Hong, and her relationship with Saining is much deeper than their superficial fighting would indicate.

Things for Hong and Saining start to change after they travel to Beijing to perform. Hong leaves early, and Saining comes back to Shenzhen addicted to heroin. While Hong does try heroin with Saining that night she is unimpressed, and begins to pressure him to go to rehab. Eventually he agrees, and while he is gone, Hong begins to drink heavily. When Saining is released from rehab their relationship has changed and he soon goes back to using heroin; Hong for her part has become a functional alcoholic. Their destructive relationship continues until one particularly intense fight, after which Hong moves out and they end their relationship for what seems like the final time. However, as in the past, after some time apart Saining and Hong begin to spend more time together, and together they both decide to give up their respective addictions: he, heroin, and she, alcohol. When he starts using heroin yet again, Hong throws him out and this time he disappears for real. Heartbroken and lost, Hong decides to become a heroin addict herself, and she does exactly that. Her parents take her to Shanghai and put her in rehab at one point, and as soon as she is discharged she immediately returns to Shenzhen and starts using heroin again. She even loses her voice to her addiction, and is never able to sing again. Finally, after being beaten up and having all of her hair shaved off, Hong returns again to Shanghai with her father who has come to put her in rehab once more.

This time Hong is successful in her attempt to quit using heroin, and it is also around this time that Saining reappears in her life. He too has stopped using heroin, and has been traveling. It is at this time that Hong starts writing: first, as a kind of prescription to maintain her sobriety, and eventually as a way to find herself. And while Hong and Saining remain a part of each other's lives, their relationship never goes back to the way it was in the beginning—they are never able to recapture their lost love. Hong's writing begins to attract some attention, and she publishes her first novel. She also faces an AIDS scare with one of her close friends, has her first orgasm, and starts running. Slowly but surely Hong comes into possession of herself, all the while capturing the process in her writing. The novel ends with Hong and Saining discussing their failed love, and Hong promising to write a novel for Saining.

Considering the cast of characters who appear in *Candy*, it is easy to see how the world that Mian Mian describes is populated by a new generation of *liumang*; her friends in both Shenzhen and Shanghai include a motley crew of musicians, artists, prostitutes, madams, drug dealers, and local toughs, each of whose stories Hong recounts in detail, as Barmé describes:

They're bored and frustrated, creating their own diversions. They don't give a damn whether normal people sympathize with them or view them with distaste. They do nothing, and treat those who go about their business earnestly with ridicule and derision. In practical terms they are the 'dregs' (*zhazi*) rejected by society; their actions show them to be blatantly out of step with or in oppositions to the moral order and the moral precepts of the society. Their psychological makeup determines that they are completely incompatible with the environment, and then when the rest of us look down upon them with disgust and displeasure they respond with an even more dismissive attitude.⁹

Whether in Shenzhen or Shanghai, Hong and the people that she spends time with have all been pulled into their current lifestyles by a desire for fame and fortune, as well as a

general lack of interest in “playing by society’s rules.” Many of Hong’s prostitute friends had been brought into this lifestyle because of a man. Even Hong herself comments on the kind of life she has chosen for herself:

In this meaningless youth of mine, I was the victim and the assassin; I felt ashamed and unworthy, which was why I couldn’t just end this weird trip I was on right then and there. In the end, maybe I forced myself to go on living, but wasn’t the fear of death that saved me; it was my own self-loathing.¹⁰

Much like the description that Barmé offers of *liumang* youth, Mian Mian too describes Hong as being a directionless, “self-loathing” young woman, by turns both defiant and rebellious as well as aimless and barely managing to survive. At first, Hong deals with her conflicted feelings of self with drugs and by performing on stage, losing herself in the music that she performs. Later, after she has lost her voice and finally given up her drug habit, it is writing which provides an outlet for her to express her rebellious feelings, as well as work out her own identity. Moreover, as Hong’s writing becomes more and more intertwined with her self-identity, it becomes increasingly important for her to make that identity visible, which is what makes her *liumang* fiction fundamentally different from the privacy fiction of the female avant-garde writers.

Like the works of the avant-garde women writers, *Candy* is not an autobiography in the strictest sense. Rather, Mian Mian both claims and disavows the self that she writes about in the pages of her novel:

I am in a ditch where water has collected after the rain, my name is Mian Mian, and this story is not the story of my life. My life story will have to wait until I can write nakedly. That’s my dream....Right now the real story has everything to do with my writing, and nothing to do with my readers....this remembered world is mine, I possess it, and it is everything to me.¹¹

Written in the last pages of the novel, after several long sections of text which are written in the first person and represent both Hong’s and Saining’s internal monologues, Mian

Mian's claim here reads very much like Lin Bai's claim in "True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate" that, "[T]hat woman isn't me."¹² Rather, Hong's life in *Candy* parallels Mian Mian's own to such a degree that it is more appropriate to read it as "semi-autobiographical fiction," as is much of the fiction of the body/beauty writers. For Mian Mian, there is a strong connection between her writing and herself, much like that of the female avant-garde writers; it is the means by which she narrates her self, as well as creates a space for herself in her fiction:

What I really wanted to get out of writing was to arrive at some deeper understanding of things; but the only thing I knew for sure was that writing had, at least for the time being, made me into a hardworking woman.¹³

For the first time since the death of her classmate when they were sixteen, Hong feels that she now has some direction in her life, direction that has been provided by her writing. In trying to narrate herself Hong is forced to confront herself, to try to figure herself out. This in turn has given her a purpose—to continue writing. And much like the female avant-garde writers also express the need to understand themselves through their writing, Hong's physical self becomes the foundation for her self-narration, as she says, "I believe in my body. More than anything else, I believe in my body, and my body conceals limitless truths. I need to live in my emotions."¹⁴ Like Xu Kun and Mao Zhen work out their painful experiences with love in their writing, and Lin Bai's Duomi prefers to write in the nude in order to be closer to her poetry, so too does Hong draw inspiration from her own physical self, as well as her life experiences:

I am someone who sees herself as a problem. For me, writing is a method of transforming corruption and decay into something wonderful and miraculous. I used to be the sort of person who was always on the lookout for excitement and novelty, but now I've somehow come to sense that if any marvels are going to appear in my life, they will undoubtedly spring from the act of writing. Actually,

the prospect of marvels doesn't really excite me anymore. I feel that writing is the only thing that has meaning for me.¹⁵

While she does not specifically refer to herself as a *liumang* youth, Hong does describe herself in those terms. She “sees herself as a problem,” someone who has, “always been on the lookout for excitement and novelty.” She also recognizes that the aimless *liumang* life she led in Shenzhen took her down a dark path, and that writing is the means by which she has recovered from that path, the means by which she is able to make something good come out of her past. This is an important point because it lays the foundation for understanding how Mian Mian's fiction, and that of the body/beauty writers like her, is different from the fiction of the avant-garde writers. While both groups use writing as a means to narrate themselves, and create a space of self in their fiction, for the avant-garde writers that space is also a space of resistance. For Mian Mian, on the other hand, the space of self that she creates in her fiction is one of redemption, a place which enables her to rejoin society rather than hold it at a distance, as the female avant-garde writers do.

The connection between her writing and herself does not stop at redemption for Mian Mian. It is also the means by which she is finally able to gain public recognition, as Hong points out:

Really I was writing simply to gain a clearer understanding of myself. I wrote for myself, for my good friends, and sometimes for men with whom I'd once been close. As I wrote, I became more ambitious, and I wanted lots of people to read what I wrote—I wanted the whole world to see what I'd written. After the writing was done, I wanted to become famous, but was there really anything that great about being famous? I'd already imagined what that would be like. I'd set myself on this path, the path of a writer, and only now did I realize that it wasn't necessarily going to bring me peace.¹⁶

Never able to make a name for herself as a singer or musician, Hong nevertheless has always enjoyed being looked at, and her writing provides a new way for her gain the attention that she enjoys. In fact the more she writes, the more she wants people to look at what she's written. And because of the connection that she feels between her writing and herself, when the "whole world" looks at what she's written, they are effectively looking at her. This desire to be looked at is fundamentally different from the female avant-garde writers project of literary privacy, and their desire to create a space in their fiction where they can control how and how much of their bodies can be read by the public.

Another fundamental difference between Mian Mian's *liumang* body/beauty writing and the privacy literature of the female avant-garde writers is in their descriptions of sexual desire, and sexual behavior. The female avant-garde writers use alternative forms of female sexuality in order to resist the socially constructed image of woman as wife and mother. Instead, the uplifting aspects of *qing* are usually homosocially or autoerotically expressed, while heterosexual relationships are portrayed as being unfamiliar and harmful. Like Lin Bai's Duomi, Hong's first sexual experiences are autoerotic, the result of her boredom and teenage angst:

Strange days overtook me, and I grew idle. I let myself go, feeling I had more time on my hands than I knew what to do with. Indolence made my voice increasingly gravelly. I started to explore my body, either in front of the mirror or at my desk. I had no desire to understand it-I only wanted to experience it.¹⁷

She first starts to explore her own sexuality as a kind of release after her friend commits suicide. In experiencing her own body she is able to reassure herself of her own existence; it has no greater meaning for Hong than proof that she is alive. Absent from her description of this behavior is an discussion of her own pleasure. In fact, Hong does

not seem to derive much pleasure from traditional sex either, other than reassurance. For example when she loses her virginity to Saining, for her point of view the experience borders on rape—she feels nothing but fear, pain, and self-loathing afterwards, “The face I saw in the crooked mirror was an ugly face. Never in my life had I felt so disgusted with myself. And ever since, I have carried the shame of that moment in my body.”¹⁸ Throughout her relationship with Saining, and in her other relationships with men, what she gets most from her sexual encounters with them is the knowledge that she is desirable. The initial sense of self-loathing that marks her sexual encounters with Saining bleeds into her other relationships with men; it even takes nearly ten years for when she loses her virginity to when she is almost thirty years old for Hong to have her first orgasm. And while she does describe getting physical gratification from her heterosexual relationships, it is always colored by a hint of shame. As such, it is neither a means to an end, as will be discussed below with Wei Hui, nor is it something to be resisted, as it is for the female avant-garde writers. Rather, it is just one more aspect of Hong’s life which is representative of her *liumang* lifestyle.

Furthermore, rather than resist heterosexual sex and the negative feelings that it leaves behind, as some of the characters the female avant-garde writers do, Hong actually seeks out these feelings:

It seems to me that love was invented by men. I used to think of myself as a woman who wouldn’t have been ashamed to die for a man, and I saw it as a sign of my own courage and greatness. Inhabiting that man’s world turned me into a weak woman for a long time. I was so weak, so desperate for love, and, deeply aware of my own pathos, I developed a knack for displaying my self-absorption and self-pity. That was my closed, intense inner world, and I thought that it was beautiful.¹⁹

While sex with Saining (and her other lovers) may not be filled with the uplifting aspects of *qing* that the female avant-garde writers seek out in their relationships with women or in their autoerotic behavior, it is also not something which Hong feels she needs to avoid or resist, but rather a way for her to be sure of her own body and her own existence:

I wanted to be controlled by him because I didn't know it could be otherwise, and there was something absolute and pure about our need to obey our emotions, and this gave me certainty. I reveled in the shameful feelings our couplings gave me, as if this was what I was living for.²⁰

Rather than choose to live alone, as both Xu Kun's Mao Zhen and Hai Nan's Su Xiu do, or downplaying the importance of her marriage, as Lin Bai's Lin Duomi does, Hong enjoys the negative feelings that she associates with her relationship with Saining and her sexual relationships with men in general. They become a source of reassurance for her emotionally, and a source of inspiration for her writing. As such, while there may be some aspects of overlap, Mian Mian's depictions of Hong's sexual behavior are just one more point of difference between her *liumang* body/beauty writing, and then privacy writing of the female avant-garde writers.

Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby* and *Linglei* Culture

Like Mian Mian's *Candy*, *Shanghai Baby* also shares certain aspects in common with the female avant-garde writers, and like *Candy*, also shows the same outward-turning focus towards fame and wealth that is missing from the self-referential privacy fiction of the female avant-garde writers. Whereas Mian Mian writes about herself as a member of what I describe above as an new urban *liumang* subculture, Wei Hui openly and refers to herself as *linglei*, literally "another kind," as Zhong Xueping describes:

In *Shanghai Baby*, the author constructs the fantasy world of the young urbanites known as *linglei*, or ‘other-kind’, individuals who live and write like Ni Ke, the protagonist and, by implication, Wei Hui, the author. Her voice is explicitly sexual and her cultural references are almost exclusively Western, a combination that seemed to draw the attention of various forces, be they the state the market, ‘international opinion’, Western China scholars and feminists or readers, critics, writers and scholars in China.²¹

As one of the new various Western-influenced subcultures to emerge after the events of June 4, 1989, *linglei* is a slightly younger social phenomenon than *liumang* discussed above. As David Drissel explains in his study of post-June Fourth Tiananmen subcultures:

In the literary realm, self-described *linglei wenxue* (“alternative literature”) writers such as Wei Hui (*Shanghai Baby*) and Chen Sue (*Beijing Doll*) have championed an ostensibly de-politicized form of subcultural prose. Known popularly as “babe writers,” such young women have made a major social impact on Chinese popular culture and provoked intense controversy with their incredibly frank novels.²²

The distinction between the self-referential fiction of the female avant-garde writers and the highly commercialized and sexualized novels of the body/beauty writers boils down to their different goals in writing. Where the avant-garde women writers seek to create a private literary space for themselves in their fiction, *linglei* writers like Wei Hui and Chen Sue seek public recognition and financial gain. As such, it is in understanding the *linglei* culture of 1990s Shanghai that it is possible to understand the differences between Wei Hui’s particular kind of “body” writing as a representative work of the genre, and the works of the female avant-garde writers.

In *Shanghai Baby*, Wei Hui tells the story of Nikki (Ni Ke), who her friends call Coco, after Coco Chanel. This is the first thing that we learn about Nikki—that she admires and models herself after this French fashion mogul, and desires a similar kind of fame, as Nikki says:

Every morning when I open my eyes I wonder what I can do to make myself famous. It's become my ambition, almost like my *raison d'être*, to burst upon the city like fireworks....Anyway, I'm just twenty-five, and a year ago I published a collection of short stories that didn't make any money but got me attention.²³

From the very first moment the reader meets Nikki, Wei Hui's alter-ego, she presents herself as a driven woman who is looking for fame and fortune, and her writing is a means to that end. As Nikki provides more and more information about herself we learn that she grew up in a relatively well-off family, and attended Fudan University. She works part-time at the Green Stalk Café in the beginning of the novel, which is where she meets her shy and artistic boyfriend Tiantian. Nikki also has a cousin who is slightly older than she, whose name is Zhu Sha, and who is the very epitome of modern feminine grace. Nikki often compares herself to Zhu Sha, feeling that she can't live up to that high standard of beauty and quiet capability that Zhu Sha embodies. Tiantian convinces Nikki to give up her job at the Green Stalk Café, and start working on her novel. Nikki is easily convinced, and begins work right away. Originally her intention is to write a grand historical love story, however as things begin to happen to Nikki, the heroine of her novel begins to mirror her own life more and more. In this sense, much like the "self-begetting novels" of the female avant-garde writers, we can see how at a certain level *Shanghai Baby* also functions as a self-referential work of metafiction: aspects of Wei Hui are mirrored in Nikki, and likewise aspects of Nikki are mirrored in her own novel's heroine.²⁴ Similarly, this is also the case in Nikki's first published work, which is also the title of Wei Hui's first published work, *The Shriek of the Butterfly*:

Everyone was whispering about this risqué book, and rumor had it that I was a bisexual with a predilection for violence. Students were caught stealing my book from bookstores. I got letters, with erotic photos enclosed, from men via my editor, wanting to know what my relationship was with the heroine of the book.²⁵

For both Wei Hui and Nikki, their self-referential fiction becomes the means by which they become visible in the public eye; in their narration they expose themselves in order to gain notoriety. This is one key difference between the body/beauty writers and the female avant-garde writers: one group is focused on public recognition, while the other is concerned with the creation of a private space. This is a point I will return to below.

During the course of her relationship with Tiantian, Nikki meets a German man named Mark, and the two begin a clandestine sexual affair. Mark is married and Nikki is wholeheartedly in love with Tiantian, although Tiantian is impotent and unable to satisfy her sexually. So when Nikki meets Mark and begins sleeping with him, it seems like an ideal solution to her predicament. However, Mark's sexual desire and the pleasure that he gives her physically begins to threaten Nikki's relationship with Tiantian, as well as her own sense of self. One night, when they have met in a club, he drags her into the bathroom to have sex. During the act she is consumed by passion, which quite quickly gives way to a feeling of loss:

I began to cry. This was all so inexplicable. I was increasingly losing my self-confidence and suddenly felt even cheaper than the prostitutes dancing downstairs. At least they had professionalism and a certain coolness, while I was awkward and horribly torn between two personalities. I couldn't stand the face I saw reflected in the grimy mirror. Something in my body had been lost, leaving a gaping hole.²⁶

Nikki's description here of both the psychological and physical effect of this intense heterosexual encounter are very similar to Mian Mian's descriptions in *Candy* discussed above. For both women, having sex with their respective male partners threatens to overwhelm their own identities, and leaves them feeling emotionally vulnerable and somewhat self-loathing. In addition, this kind of "violent" heterosexual sex also leaves them with a physical sensation of loss, that is, that something has been taken from their

bodies. While not all heterosexual sex is portrayed as threatening as dangerous as Nikki's relationship with Mark or Hong's relationship with Saining, this is one aspect of both *Shanghai Baby* and *Candy* that is similar to the female avant-garde writers—the portrayal of heterosexual relationships as damaging to female selfhood.

While Nikki feels tremendous guilt for cheating on Tiantian, and while she tires of being overwhelmed by Mark's sheer masculinity, she also finds herself unable to stop seeing him. Tiantian leaves to go to Hainan for a while and relax while Nikki works on her novel. She consoles herself by reminding herself that she will not let Mark or any other man get in the way of her pursuit of fame and fortune. She even goes so far as to tell herself, "Women whose lives are littered with ex-lovers are a dime a dozen; when they pass thirty, their faces reveal their lack of inhibitions. *I sometimes wish men would treat me as a writer and not as a woman*, I thought to myself disingenuously."²⁷ This is a question to which Nikki returns time and time again: whether she wants to be seen as a woman or as a writer, and a point to which I will return to later.

As Nikki's communication with Tiantian becomes more sporadic, she eventually goes to Hainan to look for him and discovers that he has become addicted to morphine. She convinces him to come back to Shanghai with her and go to rehab. When Tiantian gets out of rehab, everything is better between them for a while. In the meantime, Nikki has also more or less finished her novel and is now working with her publisher to promote it. At this point, Mark learns that he is being transferred back to Germany and so Nikki goes to spend a few days with him before he leaves; when she finally returns to the apartment where she lives with Tiantian she finds him gone. Eventually, Nikki tracks Tiantian down at a friend's house, where he has gone after finding out that Nikki had

been cheating on him. Shortly afterwards he begins using drugs again. In the end, two days after Mark returns to Germany, Tiantian overdoses and dies. Distraught, and finishing the last few pages of her novel, Nikki finds herself trying to figure out who she really is, now that she has lost both the man she loves and the man she desires, and the novel ends with this question, as Zhong summarizes, “Ni Ke’s voice can be recognized as a late twentieth-century echo of Sophia’s as yet another cultural challenge from a woman writer confronting the public with a woman’s sexual desire and conflicted feelings about that desire.”²⁸ Here Zhong is referring to Ding Ling’s “Miss Sophia’s Diary,” and Sophia’s own situation stuck between Ling Jishi and Weidi. And ultimately, it is in understanding Nikki’s desire to understand herself in the face of her relationships with these two men that many of the differences between *Shanghai Baby* and the works of the female avant-garde writers become clear.

Much like the female avant-garde writers, Nikki’s most meaningful heterosexual relationship is far from ideal. As mentioned previously, Nikki meets Tiantian at the café she works at, and quite quickly falls in love with his gentle spirit and artistic soul. However, from the start of their relationship he is unable to pleasure her physically, and she frequently describes alternately both begging him to try to satisfy her physical desire and masturbating because he is unable to perform. However, unlike the female avant-garde writers, it is not that heterosexual relationships in general for Nikki are damaging, but rather that there is not a necessary connection between love and sex. Like the female avant-garde writers, Nikki has sworn off conventional marriage and children, at least while she is young and fashionable; unlike the avant-garde women writers Nikki’s lack of interest in these normative social roles has to do with her desire to use her youth and

beauty to make a name for herself rather than be tied to a husband and a home. Similarly, heterosexual relationships become one means for Nikki to take control of her future, particularly given the connection that is made between Nikki the author and the characters in her books. Because of her appearance, Nikki is able to attract readers and promote both herself and her writing. Whereas the female avant-garde writers resist heteronormative relationships in order to create their space of literary privacy, *linglei* writers like Wei Hui play use sex and sexuality as a tool to gain public appeal.

Nikki also engages in some homoerotic behavior at one point in the novel, although it is brief. At a dinner party with Mark and some of his friends, Nikki meets a lesbian named Shamir. For her part, Shamir is enchanted by Nikki's intelligence and beauty, while Nikki is aroused by Shamir's praise and desire:

Thanks to those words of appreciation, before we parted we stood at the entrance to Park 97, kissing intimately in the shadow of the trees. Her moist, inviting lips attracted me like an exotic flower, and I felt a sudden carnal pleasure as our tongues intertwined smoothly and perilously, like silk. I can't explain why I overstepped the bounds of ambiguity with this unfamiliar woman—from chatting to kissing, from a good-bye kiss to a passionate one.²⁹

Rather than providing an uplifting outlet, as do the various expressions or suggestions of female-female homoerotic desire for the female avant-garde writers, Nikki gets pleasure from being looked at and desired, be it by a man or by a woman. And in this case, it is not just Shamir's desire which arouses Nikki, but her words of praise for Nikki's beauty and ability—much like her desire for fame and public recognition, Nikki's ego is also the key to her sexual desire. And it is this connection between her ego, her desire, and her writing which makes up most of the story of *Shanghai Baby*.

Wei Hui emphasizes the connection between not just sex but also Nikki's own physical body and writing throughout *Shanghai Baby*. Much like Lin Bai's Lin Duomi,

Nikki feels a connection between herself and her writing, and often reproduces in her “real life” what her characters are experiencing in her writing. At one point, as she becomes more and more absorbed by her novel, Nikki writes:

I was hypnotized by my novel. To convey one torrid scene as authentically as possible, I tried writing naked. Many people believe that there’s a connection between the body and the mind...I certainly believe there’s a secret connection between writing and the body. When my body shape is relatively full, every sentence I write is pithy and poignant, whereas when I’m thinner, my writing is full of overlong sentences like dense clumps of silky-soft seaweed.³⁰

This is the point at which works like *Shanghai Baby* is most similar to the works of the female avant-garde writers. All of these women emphasize the connections between writing and their own physical bodies, and reference the physicality of the process of writing in their fiction. It would be easy to say that this is simply the result of these authors’ engagement with contemporary Chinese feminism, à la Li Xiaojiang and Dai Jinhua, however I suspect that the situation is far more complex. Certainly it is a question which deserves further investigation in the future.

Moreover, Wei Hui does not simply emphasize the connection between writing and physicality in *Shanghai Baby*, but also the connection between her writing and the narration of self. Unlike the female avant-garde writers, Nikki’s persona shifts depending on whose company she is in, depending on how she wants or needs to present herself to get what she needs or reach her goals. Large sections of *Shanghai Baby* are taken up with Nikki trying to decide what to wear in order to make the right kind of impression—does she want to present herself as a quiet, intellectual writer, or a sexy, cosmopolitan woman? As noted before, this is the biggest question to which Nikki, and by extension Wei Hui, returns again and again. And it is in her writing that Nikki ultimately finds a way to show a side of herself beyond the carefully crafted veneer:

I gave up embellishment and lies. I intended to put a completely genuine version of my life before the public's eye. This didn't require too much courage, just obedience to that mysterious force. As long as it felt good, that was enough; I didn't have to play naïve or cool. This is how I discovered my real self and overcame my terror or loneliness, poverty, death, and all other potential disasters.³¹

Like the female avant-garde writers, Nikki finds in her writing a place where she can drop all of her pretenses and portray her more “genuine” self. However, because of Nikki's previous and repeated confessions that she became a writer to gain fame and fortune, as well as her frequent discussions of how to present herself, the reader cannot completely trust that the self that Nikki discusses narrating in the pages of her novel (the self that we can assume that Wei Hui is narrating through Nikki) is her “genuine” self and not another façade designed to increase Nikki's (and Wei Hui's) public visibility. Nikki herself draws the reader's attention to this point while she is writing her novel. While she has previously expressed some frustration with the fact that particularly her male readers are unable to effectively separate her as an author from the characters that she writes about, as discussed above in regard to *Shriek of the Butterfly*, she also feels a certain amount of satisfaction that she has been able to inspire these kinds of reactions in her readers, and knows that this will only add to her fame. However, in writing her new novel, as more and more of her own life creeps into the pages of her writing Nikki starts to feel certain concerns:

The novel had brought me a new worry. I didn't know how to disguise myself effectively to my readers. In other words, I didn't want to mix my novel up with my real life, and to be honest, I was even more worried that as the plot developed, it could have an impact on my future.³²

Ultimately, since the narration of a “genuine” self is neither Nikki, nor Wei Hui's, goal this additional layer of uncertainty is beside the point, however, it also is another point of

difference between Wei Hui's *linglei* literature and the self-referential privacy literature of the female avant-garde writers.

Through Nikki, Wei Hui also discusses feminism, and like the female avant-garde writers, she expresses a certain amount of reluctance to label herself as a feminist. For example, one night Nikki is having a conversation with one of her friends, an older woman named Madonna. They are discussing Madonna's experiences as a young woman, and the way that she became a madam. Madonna remarks that she would like to write a book one day, in order to help women learn how to take advantage of men. Nikki responds by saying:

“When you get down to it, the social system still devalues the needs of women and doesn't support their efforts to recognize their self-worth,” I said. “Girls who are street-smart are put down as crude, and those who are gentler are treated like emptyheaded flower vessels.”...I wouldn't set myself up as a women's lib warrior, but what she said rang true, and it helped me discover the hidden place in her mind that housed her deeper and more mature thoughts.³³

In fact, neither Nikki nor Madonna considers themselves as feminists. Yet, much like the female avant-garde writers, they are very much aware of the inequalities that face women in contemporary society. However, unlike the female avant-garde writers, while Nikki and Madonna both express a desire to use this inequality to their advantage—they are both attractive, fashionable, and financially well-off, which gives them the means to exploit these inequalities. In Madonna's case, she was able to parlay her beauty into a profitable business as the madam of a brothel for wealthy men; for Nikki, she is able to use her beauty as a way to market herself and her writing in order to become famous. For both women, although they decry the “male gaze” and the effects that it has on women, they also know exactly how to manipulate that gaze for their own gain. This desire to

exploit patriarchal culture rather than resist it, as the female avant-garde writers do, is yet another way in which the body/beauty writers differ from the female avant-garde writers.

Rather, it is in Nikki's internal thoughts that she sounds the most similar to the female avant-garde writers. At one point, while she is still immersed in writing her novel, she goes with Madonna to swim in the pool at a hotel. Madonna convinces her that being out and being seen will help Nikki feel better. However, after they arrive at the pool, Nikki finds herself oddly put off by the experience of being looked at:

Usually the expressions of strangers looking at me half naked gave me an instinctive sense of satisfaction, but as soon as I thought of myself as a dessert exposing myself in broad daylight, I became uncontrollably angry. Feminism reared it head. What was it that made me seem so like an empty-headed Barbie doll? Those men probably couldn't guess I was a novelist who'd just shut herself in a room for seven days and seven nights, and they probably couldn't care less either. When one notices an unknown woman, one needs only to check out her three key measurements; one needn't consider what she's got upstairs any more than one might consider the number of steps up to the White House.³⁴

It is in these more personal moments, when Nikki is thinking to herself rather than when she is putting on a particular persona, that Wei Hui creates for Nikki a private space where no one else can enter. And in this private space, Nikki has similar reactions to patriarchal culture and the male gaze as the female avant-garde writers. Moreover, like the protagonists in the self-referential fiction of the female avant-garde writers, only Nikki has access to these thoughts: while on the outside she has several different public faces that she presents, depending on with whom she is interacting; her interior monologue, rather, becomes a place where she is able to freely express herself and her thoughts, a space that belongs only to her. Unlike the female avant-garde writers, however, Wei Hui only juxtaposes these two different sides of Nikki in a few key places. Her goal is not to create a private space for self-reflection in the character of Nikki, but

rather to get noticed in the public eye. In order to understand Wei Hui and Nikki's desire for public recognition, it is useful to look at *linglei* culture, and what it means when Wei Hui narrates Nikki as a member of that subculture.

At several points throughout *Shanghai Baby*, Nikki describes herself and her friends as *linglei*. Largely appearing on the cultural scene in the 1990s and after, there is much about *linglei* that is influenced by the increasing commercialization seen in the 90s and after. The term literally means, "another kind," and refers to:

[E]lements such as being 'alternative', 'funky', 'provocative', etc. However, unlike many alternative youth movements which exist elsewhere, the *linglei* in China seldom have any political agenda. Although it can be assumed that the limited freedom of speech in China prevents such agendas, when looking carefully at the *linglei* phenomenon and its roots, it is evident the most *linglei* only want two things: To express themselves out in the open and to resist the 'mainstream'. It is not a movement that happens to be a minority and hence an 'alternative', but rather a movement which is produced as a counter response to the Chinese mainstream.³⁵

It is clear from this definition how in describing Nikki and her friends as *linglei* in *Shanghai Baby*, that Wei Hui is setting herself apart from the female avant-garde writers. While I have discussed in previous chapters how the female avant-garde writers are not explicitly political in their attempts to create a space of *si*-privacy in their fiction, this act of resistance and reappropriation is at the very least motivated by their dissatisfaction with the public representation of women in society. And the roots of this dissatisfaction are politically-motivated. That is to say, and as it has been the purpose of this study to show, while it is too much to call the self-referential fiction of the avant-garde women writers overtly political (and therefore publicly-oriented), the act of reappropriation is in itself an inherently political one. However, the *linglei* subculture has from the very beginning been motivated by a desire for public recognition and financial success. In his

article, Drissel discusses the evolution of the term *linglei* alongside the commercialization of culture. He notes:

Originally the term was clearly pejorative; often associated with disreputable hooligans, hoodlums, loafers, and other riffraff categorized as *liumang*. Labeled as “the other species,” *linglei* people were almost uniformly viewed with disdain and disrespect. But within the past decade or so, a growing number of subcultural entrepreneurs have proudly admitted to being *linglei*, thereby seeking to redefine the term as an “alternative lifestyle” that is hip and cool.³⁶

Thus as Drissel notes, while at one point there may have been some overlap between the rebellious and indolent *liumang* described by Wang Shuo in the 1980s discussed above, as increasing commercialization took over cultural production in the 1990s a different subculture developed whose primary motivation was gaining public recognition. Nikki herself comments on this connection between her *linglei* friends and the desire to be seen:

The circuit she meant is composed of artists, real and phony, foreigners, vagabonds, greater and lesser performers, private entrepreneurs of industries that are currently fashionable, true and fake *linglei*, and Generation X types. Members of this circle move in and out of the public eye, now visible, then hidden, but ultimately dominating most of the city’s trend-setting scene.³⁷

The key point of overlap amongst all her friends is that they are all so-called “trend-setters.” In order to set a trend, be it a fashion or art etc., one must be visible to a lot of people, and must make their fashion or art or cultural production accessible to those people. This visibility and accessibility epitomizes the differences between Wei Hui’s *Shanghai Baby*, and *linglei* body/beauty writing in general, and the avant-garde women writer’s works of literary privacy.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the clearest distinction between body/beauty writing, as represented by works like Mian Mian’s *Candy* and Wei Hui’s *Shanghai Baby*, a distinction which boils down to a difference in orientation. While the body/beauty writers are often read in a similar fashion to the female avant-garde writers, or praised for

their graphic depictions of female sexuality as an expression of the extent of women's liberation. Indeed, both groups of writers use similar elements in their fiction, combining self-referential elements with depictions of female sexuality and discussions of self-narration. However, as Schaffer and Song point out, while reading the body/beauty writers as taking control of their own sexuality, at the same time, "They extend the reach of a sexualized woman-centered culture, shamelessly seeking notoriety through a self-style exploitation of themselves through the commodification of their bodies."³⁸ Influenced heavily by the increasing commercialization of the 1990s, the body/beauty writers write about their bodies and themselves in order to be seen—to gain public recognition and financial gain. In comparison, and as this study has shown, it is in the way the female avant-garde writers reappropriate the traditionally negative concept of *si* and use it as a tool to resist the patriarchal culture and heteronormative social roles by creating for themselves a space of literary privacy in their fiction.

Notes

¹ If Duomi derives any sexual pleasure from her husband she never mentions it.

² Schaffer and Song, 24.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Zhong Xueping, "Who Is a Feminist? Understanding the Ambivalence towards *Shanghai Baby*, 'Body Writing' and Feminism in Post-Women's Liberation China." *Gender and History* 18 no. 3 (November 2006), 636.

⁵ Shaffer and Song, 25.

⁶ Gary Xu and Susan Feiner, "*Meinü jingji*/ China's Beauty Economy: Buying Looks, Shifting Value and Changing Place," *Feminist Economics* 13 no. 3-4 (July/October 2007), 308.

⁷ Jonathan Napack, “Banned in Beijing: A Rebel Writer’s Message,” *International Herald Tribune*, February 8, 2001. Reprinted in Mian Mian, *Candy* with permission.

⁸ Geremie Barmé, “Wang Shuo and *Liumang* (‘Hooligan’) Culture,” *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 28 (July 1992), 28-29.

⁹ Barmé, 33; quoting from Yan Jingming, “Wanzhu yu dushide chongtu- lun Wang Shuo xiaoshuode jiazhi xuanze; [The *wanzhu* and the City Clash—On Value Choices in Wang Shuo’s Fiction], *Wenxue pinglun* [Literary Criticism], no. 6, 1989, 87.

¹⁰ Mian Mian, *Candy: A Novel*, Andrea Lingenfelter tr., (New York: Little Brown and Co., 2003), 142.

¹¹ Mian Mian, 269.

¹² Lin Bai, “True-Hearted Lovers Cannot Separate,” in *The Collected Writings of Lin Bai*, 137.

¹³ Mian Mian, 149.

¹⁴ Mian Mian, 162.

¹⁵ Mian Mian, 171.

¹⁶ Mian Mian, 184.

¹⁷ Mian Mian, 8.

¹⁸ Mian Mian, 17.

¹⁹ Mian Mian, 142.

²⁰ Mian Mian, 41.

²¹ Zhong, 643.

²² David Drissel, “Reinventing Rebellion: Alternative Youth Subcultures in Post-Tiananmen China,” *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences* 3 no.10, 50.

²³ Wei Hui, *Shanghai Baby*, Bruce Humes, tr., (New York: Pocket Books, 2001), 1.

²⁴ In addition to *The Shriek of the Butterfly*, Nikki also attended the same university as Wei Hui (Fudan University) and they both graduated in the same year, 1995. Nikki shares enough of these superficial details in common with Wei Hui that she is often read as Wei Hui, although *Shanghai Baby* is not typically read as an autobiography, but rather semi-autobiographical fiction.

²⁵ Wei Hui, 68.

²⁶ Wei Hui, 74.

²⁷ Wei Hui, 109, emphasis mine.

²⁸ Zhong, 642.

²⁹ Wei Hui, 210.

³⁰ Wei Hui, 167-168.

³¹ Wei Hui, 167.

³² Wei Hui, 92.

³³ Wei Hui, 121.

³⁴ Wei Hui, 173.

³⁵ “‘Linglei.’ The Possibility to Oppose the Mainstream,” last checked May 2012,
<http://thinkingchinese.com/linglei>

³⁶ Drissel, 48.

³⁷ Wei Hui, 39.

³⁸ Schaffer and Song, 25.

REFERENCES CITED

- “A Dialogue with Hai Nan: The Magic Spectacle of Language,” *Everyone Magazine* (*Dajia zazhi* 大家杂质) last modified July 19, 2007, <http://mastermag.blog.sohu.com/55952300.html>
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: The New Mestiza (La Frontera)*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007.
- Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Barlow, Tani E. ed. *Gender Politics in Modern China: Writing and Feminism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.
I Myself Am A Woman: Selected Writings of Ding Ling. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.
The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Barmé, Geremie. “Wang Shuo and *Liumang* (‘Hooligan’) Culture.” *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 28 (July 1992), 23-64.
- Berry, Chris. “Interview with Hu Mei.” *Camera Obscura* 18 (September 1988). 32-41.
- Bogdanov, Alexei. “Ostranenie, Kenosis, and Dialogue: The Metaphysics of Formalism According to Shklovsky.” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 49 no. 1 (Spring, 2005). 48-62.
- Brownell, Susan and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom ed. *Chinese Femininities Chinese Masculinities: A Reader*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex.”* New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Chang, Eileen (Zhang Ailing). *Written on Water*. Andrew Jones tr. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.
- Chen, John (Zhong) Ming. “Women’s Autobiography as Counter-Discourse: The Cases of Dorothy Livesay and Yu Luojin.” In Huihua Chen and Whitney Crothers Dilley ed. *Feminism/Femininity in Chinese Literature*. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2002. 33-44.
- Chen Ran 陳染. *Siren shenghuo* 私人生活 (*A Private Life*). Beijing: Writer’s Press 作家出版社, 2004.

- Chi, Pang-yuan and David Der-wei Wang ed. *Chinese Literature in the Second Half of a Modern Century: A Critical Survey*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.
- Chien, Ying-ying 簡瑛瑛. *Hechu shi nüer jia* 何處是女兒家 (*Where is the home of daughters?*). Taipei: Lianjing, 1998.
- Chow, Rey. *Women and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading Between West and East*. Theory and History of Literature, Volume 75. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, (1991) 1997.
- Dai, Jinhua. "Rewriting Chinese Women: Gender Production and Cultural Space in the Eighties and Nineties." In Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, ed., *Spaces of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. 191-206.
- de Man, Paul. "Autobiography as De-facement." *MLN* 94 No. 5 (December 1979), 919-930.
- Dirlik, Arif and Zhang Xudong ed. "Postmodernism and China: A Special Issue." *boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture* 24, no. 3 (Fall). Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Dooling, Amy. *Women's Literary Feminism in Twentieth Century China*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.
- Drissel, David. "Reinventing Rebellion: Alternative Youth Subcultures in Post-Tiananmen China." *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences* 3 no.10, 39-59.
- Epstein, Maram. *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Foucault, Michael. *The History of Sexuality*. Robert Hurley, tr. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Gilmartin, Christina, Gail Hershatter, Lisa Rofel, and Tyrene White ed. *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from Cultural Writings*. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith ed. William Boelhower, tr. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985.

- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Thomas Burger, tr. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991.
- Hai Nan 海男. *Shuixing shengshuo: wode rensheng biji* 水性生活：我的人生笔记 (*A Dissolute Life: Notes on My Life*). Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe 时代文艺出版社, 2006.
Wode qingrenmen 我的情人们 (*My Lovers*). Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe 中国文联出版社, 1994.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text* 15 (Autumn, 1986), 65-88.
- Judge, Joan. *The Precious Raft of History: The Past, the West, and the Woman Question in China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.
- Kong, Shuyu. *Consuming Literature: Best Sellers and the Commercialization of Literary Production in Contemporary China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.
- Kontje, Todd. *Private Lives in the Public Sphere: The German Bildungsroman as Metafiction*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992.
- Larson, Wendy. *Women and Writing in Modern China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Lee, Haiyan. *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- Lejeune, Philippe. *On Autobiography*. Paul John Eakin ed. Katherine Leary tr. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- Lin Bai 林白. *Lin Bai wenji* 林白文集 (*The Collected Writings of Lin Bai*). Nanjing: Jiangsu Arts and Literature Press 江苏文艺出版社, 1997.
Qian shi de huanjin: wode rensheng biji 前世的黄金：我的人生笔记 (*The Gold of Previous Incarnations: Notes from My Life*). Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe 时代文艺出版社, 2006.
Yige ren de zhanzheng 一个人的战争 (*One Person's War*). Hong Kong: Cosmos Books Ltd., 1998.
- Lin, Juemin 林觉民. *Lin Juemin: Jue bi shu* (*Lin Juemin: Last Letter Home*). Eva Hung, tr. *Renditions* 41 & 42 (double issue, Spring and Autumn 1994).

- “Linglei:’ The Possibility to Oppose the Mainstream,” last checked May 2012,
<http://thinkingchinese.com/linglei>
- Liu, Kang. “The Short-Lived Avant-Garde.” *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 63 no. 1 (March 2002). 89-117.
- Liu, Lydia. *Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China 1900-1937*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Liu, Yilin 刘以林. “Xu yi: Gousi women zijide zongjiao” 序一：构思我们自己的宗教 (“Preface One: Composing a Religion of Ourselves”). In Hai Nan, *Wode qingrenmen 我的情人们 (My Lovers)*. Beijing Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe 中国文联出版社, 1994. 1-10.
- Lorde, Audre. “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.” In Reina Lewis and Sarah Mills ed. *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2003. 25-28.
- Lu, Hongwei. “TV Romance and Popular Cultural Mood: The Chi Li Phenomenon.” *The China Review* 6:1 (Spring 2006). 125-152.
- Mann, Susan and Yu-Yin Cheng, ed. *Under Confucian Eyes: Writings on Gender in Chinese History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- McDougall, Bonnie and Anders Hansson, ed. *Chinese Concepts of Privacy*. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
Fictional Authors, Imaginary Audiences: Modern Chinese Literature in the Twentieth-century. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2003.
- McMahon, Keith. *Causality and Containment in Seventeenth-century Chinese Fiction*. Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1988.
- Meng, Yue 孟悦 and Dai Jinhua 戴锦华. *Fuchu lishi dibiao: xiandai funü wenxue yanjiu 复出历史地表现现代妇女文学文学研究 (Emerging From the Horizon of History)*. Beijing: China People’s University Press 中国人民大学出版社, 2004.
 “Female Images and National Myth.” In *Gender Politics in Modern China*. Ed. Tani E. Barlow. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993. 118-136.
- Mian Mian. *Candy: A Novel*. Andrea Lingenfelter tr. New York: Little Brown and Co., 2003.
- Miller, Nancy. “Representing Others: Gender and the Subjects of Autobiography.” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 6 no.1 (1991). 1-27.

- Napack, Jonathan. "Banned in Beijing: A Rebel Writer's Message." *International Herald Tribune*, February 8, 2001.
- Ng, Janet. *The Experience of Modernity: Chinese Autobiography of the Early Twentieth Century*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003.
- Robertson, Maureen. "Voicing the Feminine: Constructions of the Gendered Subject in Lyric Poetry by Women of Medieval and Late Imperial China." *Late Imperial China* 13, no.1 (1992), pp.63-110.
- Rofel, Lisa. *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.
 "Museum as Women's Space: Displays of Gender in Post-Mao China," in Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, ed., *Spaces of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. 116-131.
- Rossbacher, Peter. "Shklovsky's Concept of Ostranenie and Aristotle's *Admiratio*." *MLN* 92 no. 5 (December 1977), 1038-1043.
- Sang, Tze-lan D. "At the Juncture of Censure and Mass Voyeurism: Narratives of Female Homoerotic Desire in Post-Mao China." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8 No. 4, (2002). 523-552.
The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Schaffer, Kay and Song Xianlin. "Unruly Spaces: Gender, Women's Writing and Indigenous Feminism in China." in *Journal of Gender Studies* 16 No. 7 (March 2007). 17-30.
- Sieber, Patricia. *Red Is Not the Only Color: Contemporary Chinese Fiction on Love and Sex Between Women, Collected Stories*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001.
- Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Wang, Lingzhen. *Personal Matters: Women's Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth-Century China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- Wang, Yiyan. "Twenty-two Evenings in Spring," last modified February 2003, <http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/English/e2003/e20032/3cu7.htm>

- Wang, Zheng. *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, London and New York: Methuen, 1984.
- Wei Hui. *Shanghai Baby*. Bruce Humes, tr. New York: Pocket Books, 2001.
- Widmer, Ellen. *The Beauty and the Book: Women and Fiction in Nineteenth-century China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989.
- Xu, Gary and Susan Feiner. "Meinü jingji/ China's Beauty Economy: Buying Looks, Shifting Value and Changing Place." *Feminist Economics* 13 no. 3-4 (July/October 2007), 307-323.
- Xu Kun 徐坤. *Beijing yi bei* 北京以北 (*Beijing and North*). Beijing: Kunlun chubanshe 昆仑出版社, 2004.
- Chuntian de ershi'erge yewan* 春天的二十二个夜晚 (*The Twenty-Two Nights of Spring*). Shenyang: Chun feng wenyi chubanshe 春风文艺出版社, 2002.
- Wode rensheng biji* 我的人生笔记 (*Notes from My Life*). Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe 时代文艺出版社, 2006.
- Zuo kan yun qi shi* 坐看云起时 (*Sitting to Watch the Clouds as They Rise*). Shenyang: Liaoning sheng Xinhua shudian chubanshe 辽宁省新华书店出版社, 2000.
- Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui Yang ed. *Spaces of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- "From Gender Erasure to Gender Difference: State Feminism, Consumer Sexuality, and Women's Publics Sphere in China." In Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, ed., *Spaces of Their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. 35-67.
- Through Chinese Women's Eyes*. VHS. Directed by Mayfair Mei-hui Yang. 1997. Women Make Movies.
- Zhang, Hong. "Conversation: Talking about Men and Women with Hai Nan." Posted on Hai Nan's blog, February 8, 2009.
http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4adc86af0100buly.html

- Zhang, Jingyuan. "Breaking Open: Chinese Women's Writing in the Late 1980s and 1990s." In *Chinese Literature in the Second Half of a Modern Century: A Critical Survey*. Ed. Pang-yuan Chi and David Der-wei Wang. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000. 161-179.
- Zhang, Zhen. "Mediating Time: The 'Rice Bowl of Youth' in Fin de Siècle Urban China." *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000). 99-113.
- Zhang, Xiaohong. "Far and Away: Three Authors from Yunnan." *HAS Newsletter* #34 (July 2004).
- Zhong, Xueping. "Who Is a Feminist? Understanding the Ambivalence towards *Shanghai Baby*, 'Body Writing' and Feminism in Post-Women's Liberation China." *Gender and History* 18 no. 3 (November 2006), 635-660.