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**From Feminism to Postfeminism: A Feminist Critique
of The Works of Hong Ying and Li Bihua**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in 2014

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Declaration for PhD thesis

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Table of Content

Acknowledgements

Abstract of Thesis

Introduction	1
Chapter 1 The Feminist Ideas in Hong Ying's and Li Bihua's Earlier Literary Texts	35
Chapter 2 The Postfeminist Ideologies in Hong Ying's and Li Bihua's Later Literary Texts	85
Chapter 3 The Differences between the Original Works and the Adaptations of Li Bihua's and Hong Ying's Works	151
Chapter 4 Discussion of Web Literature: Postfeminist Ideas on Hong Ying's and Li Bibua's Blogs	208
Conclusion	255
Bibliography	262

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Abstract of Thesis

The aim of the thesis is to investigate the development of female consciousness under the impact of Western feminist ideologies in Chinese female writings by examining specific works of Hong Ying and Li Bihua using a feminist and a postfeminist approach. By analysing the earlier and later works of Hong Ying and Li Bihua, one is able to recognise the shifts from feminist to post-feminist ideas that are apparent in the works of the two authors. The thesis is divided into four main sections and will include; the feminist and post-feminist ideologies of the two aforementioned authors' works, the different representations of women in the authors' original texts with their sequential movie and TV adaptations, and finally the impact of internet weblogs on Chinese women writings.

In the first two core chapters, I use both feminist and post-feminist approaches to scrutinize the earlier and later literary work of Hong Ying and Li Bihua. Despite the fact that the two authors have very different writing styles, their common interest is to rewrite Chinese historical women with a hint of feminist rationale. Therefore, through comparing and contrasting the feminist ideologies in both writers' works, the development of feminism in and the impact of Western Feminism on China can be revealed.

Apart from literary texts, owing to the widespread movie and TV adaptations of the two authors' literary writings, I examine the ramifications caused by the difference between the original and the adapted forms of representation of feminist ideas in the works of the Hong Ying and Li Bihua in the third core chapter.

Seeing that both authors also maintain Internet weblogs (blogs), which are accessed by numerous Internet users, especially in China, therefore, in my last core chapter, I employ a cyberfeminist approach to read the blogs of the authors in order to show how feminism works different on the Internet.

Introduction

We now believe that the word feminism should be written feminisms, a word that better accounts for the variety of experiences and expressions that fall under the category.¹

Women's writing in contemporary China generates from different Chinese customs, literary traditions and the impact of globalised culture. It also incorporates the legacy and historical context of semi-colonialism, Chinese Marxism and the transformation of Chinese socialism in the twentieth century. Owing to the diversified historical and cultural context in contemporary Chinese women's writings, different frameworks are required for reading and interpreting these texts. Also, they need to be read transculturally, with reference to Western and Chinese cultural contexts, so that they can be incorporated into a dialogic approach to literature.² Investigating the narrative themes, literary styles and feminist concepts that engage with a transnational flow of ideas and theories in contemporary Chinese women's writings will be beneficial for providing a better understanding of women's lives and formations of gender in the Chinese context.³ This thesis will investigate the feminist concepts, in particular, the feminist and postfeminist⁴ themes in the works of two Chinese female authors: Hong Ying and Li Bihua (Lee Pik Wah/Lilian Lee).⁵ These two authors have been selected as there is significant evidence that second-wave (feminist) and third-wave feminist

¹ This is a comment by Wendy Larson, and it has been quoted in Ya-chen Chen's *The Many Dimensions of Chinese Feminism*, p. 1.

² This comment is inspired by Kay Schaffer and Xianlin Song's *Women Writers in Postsocialist China*, p. 5.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ I shall follow Stephanie Genz's idea of omitting the hyphen in 'postfeminism' in order to signify reliance and continuity, p. 19.

⁵ I shall use the Hanyu Pinyin form 'Li Bihua' throughout this thesis in order to balance with the presentation style of "Hong Ying" (who only has Hanyu Pinyin as the form for her name).

(postfeminist) ideologies could be applicable as an approach to analysing different forms of Chinese female writers' literary production: literary writings, the visual adaptations of literary works and online blogs. In my arguments, I focus on the discussion of diversified feminist ideologies in Chinese literature and film rather than investigating Chinese feminism as a social movement as a whole.

Contemporary Chinese female writers include mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwanese and overseas Chinese writers; therefore, it is useful to study literary works by Chinese female writers from different Chinese communities, as their writings reveal different perceptions of Chinese feminism in literature. Partly because of their different geographical locations, these Chinese female writers use diverse subject matter to present their perspectives on life and demonstrate a more conscious resistance to the patriarchal preconceptions of Chinese society. Based on the above criteria, I intend to focus on the work of Hong Ying (mainland China/United Kingdom) and Li Bihua (Hong Kong) as the main subject of my thesis. Their works portray strong themes of opposition to female victimization and subordination that have been characteristic of Chinese society, traditional or modern. Born and raised in mainland China, on the one hand, Hong Ying had a wholly Chinese upbringing that has entitled her to write about her experience of being a Chinese woman in mainland China, while on the other hand, the fact that she lived in the United Kingdom for more than fifteen years has allowed her to become exposed to American and French feminist ideologies and female writings. Therefore, her feminist ideas were influenced greatly by her experience in the country. Li Bihua's works are full of characteristic elements of local Hong Kong culture, and even though Li did not apparently intend to include any feminist ideologies such as the tactics of body writing or deconstructing the gender binaries in her writing, using a feminist lens to read her works is beneficial

in terms of showing the development of (Chinese) feminism in Hong Kong as most of her female protagonists carry strong feminist characteristics.

Another reason for choosing to concentrate on these two writers is their close relationship with popular culture. Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley observe that “most people become conscious of feminism through the way it is represented in popular culture” and “for many women of our generation, formative understandings of, and identification with, feminist ideas that have been almost exclusively within popular culture”,⁶ so in this light, using popular culture to illustrate feminist ideologies would be most appropriate. Given that both Hong Ying and Li Bihua have a high correlation with popular culture—Hong Ying actively promotes herself as a feminist writer on many television talk shows, and Li Bihua is a well-known popular fiction writer in Hong Kong—their works are a good starting point for a discussion of Chinese feminist ideologies.

Hong Ying was born in Chongqing in 1962. She grew up during the Cultural Revolution. She graduated from Lu Xun Academy in Beijing and attended some creative writing courses at Fudan University. Then, she started her career as a freelance writer in the 1980s and mainly wrote fiction and poetry. Her first novel was *Summer of Betrayal* [*Beipan zhi xia*] (1995), but she earned her fame through her first autobiography, *Daughter of the River* [*Ji'e de Nu'er*] (1997). Owing to her controversial topics and writing style, some of her publications, such as *K: The Art of Love* [*K*] (1999), have been banned in China. In 1991, she went to England and settled in London until 2006. She is now based in Beijing.

⁶ Hollows, Joanne and Rachel Moseley, “Popularity Contests: The Meanings of Popular Feminism”, in Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley (eds): *Feminism in Popular Culture*, p. 2.

In contrast, there is little information about Li Bihua's personal life, as she rarely appears in public and seldom accepts interviews.⁷ Li Bihua, who was born and raised in Hong Kong, is a journalist (she has an interview column), television screenwriter, film screenwriter and ballet choreographer. Her film works include *Father and Son* [*Fu yu zi*] (1981), *Rouge* [*Yanzhikou*] (1988), *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* [*Pan Jinlian zhi qianshi jinsheng*] (1989), *Terracotta Warrior* [*Qin yong*] (1989), *Kawashima Yoshiko* [*Chuan Dao Fong Zi*] (1990), *The Temptation of the Monk* [*You seng*] (1993), *Farewell My Concubine* [*Bawang bieji*] (1993), and *Green Snake* [*Qingshe*] (1993). She regards those works as “spilled water” (that is, outpourings that have limited connection with the author's original intentions) and only hopes that her best work is yet to be written.⁸ Her columns and novels have been published in newspapers and magazines in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Malaysia, and these writings have been compiled in over fifty books.

Despite the fact that the two authors have very different writing styles, their common interest is in rewriting Chinese historical women. They like using parody to recreate stories about famous Chinese figures in history and literature such as Ling Shuhua (in Hong Ying's case) or Kawashima Yoshiko and Pan Jinlian (in Li Bihua's case). Even though Hong Ying had lived outside China for twenty years and Li Bihua has always lived in Hong Kong, they do pay special attention to the political situation in China since both have published literary writings on the issue of June Fourth—Hong Ying's *Summer of Betrayal* (1991) and Li Bihua's *The Old and New Ghosts*

⁷ The only official recorded interview was with Shen Chenxi in 1986, and the title of the interview was “Spilled Water”. The whole interview has been posted on the website of Cosmo Books: < http://www.cosmosbooks.com.hk/topic_3/page_2.asp?docid=9 >. I visited the website on 18 October 2006; the title of the interview was “Spilled Water: In the World of Li Bihua's Words” and followed by “Three Dreams” as the heading, yet the website has removed the “Spilled Water” part and only keeps the heading “Three Dreams”.

⁸ *Ibid.*

from Tiananmen Square [*Tian'anmen jiu po xin hun*] (1990). Given the fact that June Fourth is still a taboo topic in China, it is inevitable that the books would have been banned in China. Living outside mainland China gave them opportunities to express their feelings about this tragic event, and in light of this, a study of the two authors' works can reveal Chinese women's thoughts about controversial issues in modern politics. Through this example, the transnational nature of Chinese feminism could be considered as part of the transnational feminist framework. According to Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, transnational feminism could be defined as "women in similar contexts across the world, in different geographical spaces, rather than as all women across the world".⁹ Even though the two authors were not in China during the June Fourth Incident, they both address the issues through fictional writing in order to criticise the Chinese government. In such light, Chinese feminism or, to be specific, Chinese feminist ideologies apply to different Chinese cultural contexts in different geographical locations.

With her works translated into twenty-three languages, Hong Ying is arguably regarded as one of the most popular Chinese female authors and draws wide attention from audiences in the West, in mainland China and in Taiwan. In many of her interviews, Hong Ying has declared that she is a radical feminist writer. She emphasises her efforts to turn the tables on patriarchal hegemony in her works.¹⁰ This argument is consistent with the postfeminist ideals of empowerment through femininity and the importance of the body in women's writing. In contrast, Li Bihua is a famous writer and screen playwright in Hong Kong and mainland China. Her

⁹ Alexander, M. Jacqui and Chandra Talpade Mohanty: "Introduction: Genealogies, Legacies, Movements", in M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (eds.): *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, p. xix.

¹⁰ I carried out an interview with Hong Ying on 20 May 2008, and she agreed with the assessment that she is a feminist writer. Besides, she stated clearly her viewpoint on feminism on her blog on 22 December 2009.

works have been translated into ten languages. Since her novels have been adapted into movies that have been very successful at the box office, Li Bihua is also famous in the Hong Kong cinematic world. Unlike Hong Ying, Li Bihua does not openly proclaim herself to be a feminist writer; nonetheless, the issues of the oppression of women and female subjectivity could be perceived in her earlier work, and the idea of ‘girl power’ can also be discovered in her recent works.

The main texts by Hong Ying (given here in chronological order by date of publication) that I shall analyse are *Summer of Betrayal* (1995), *Curse of the Maize* [*Yumi de zhouyu*] (1995), *Daughter of the River* (1997), *Lord of Shanghai* [*Shanghai Wang*] (2003) and *Death in Shanghai* [*Shanghai zhi si*] (2005). The reason I have chosen these particular texts is because they use different narrative styles to portray a unique stance on the fate of women. This selection of works also provides a multidimensional understanding of her literary world since *Daughter of the River* is an autobiography, *Summer of Betrayal* is a novel about June Fourth, *Curse of the Maize* is a collection of short stories, *Lord of Shanghai* is a saga of the Shanghai underworld and *Death in Shanghai* is an espionage tale.

The main texts by Li Bihua that I shall examine are *Rouge* (1985), *Green Snake* (1985), *Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* (1989), *Terracotta Warrior* (1989), *Kawashima Yoshiko* (1990),¹¹ *The Old and New Ghosts from Tiananmen Square* (1990), *The Woman Who Eats Eyes* [*Chi yanjing de nüren*] (2000), *The Last Piece of Chrysanthemum Cake* [*Zuihou yikuai juhua gao*] (2000), *The Red String* [*Yanhua sanyue*] (2002) and *Dumplings* [*Jiaozi*] (2004). Like Hong Ying’s works, these texts

¹¹ The above five novellas had been all reprinted in 1998, and this edition contains the pictures from the adapted film. I shall use the new edition in my discussion. The films include Stanley Kwan’s *Rouge* (1988), Cheng Xiaodong’s *Terracotta Warrior* (1989), Clara Law’s *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* (1989) and *Temptation of a Monk* (1993), Eddie Fong’s *Kawashima Yoshiko* (1990), Tsui Hark’s *Green Snake* (1993) and Fruit Chan’s *Dumplings* (2004).

include both novellas and short stories: *The Red String* is biographical work, *Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* and *Kawashima Yoshiko* are novels based on historical figures, whilst *The Woman Who Eats Eyes* and *The Old and New Ghosts from Tiananmen Square* and *The Last Piece of Chrysanthemum Cake* are collections of short stories. By comparing the earlier and the later novellas by Li Bihua, the transition from second-wave feminist ideologies to third-wave feminist ideologies in her works is revealed. Before introducing the methodology and current scholarship on Chinese women's studies and the two authors' work, I would like to go back to the beginning by providing a general description of different types of feminism which will help understand the two authors' works and their particular ways of exploring women's subjectivity.

Fundamental Feminism¹²

It is believed that modern feminism began with Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792, although the terms 'feminist' and 'feminism' were not used until the nineteenth century.¹³ According to Ann Stephens, the history of feminism could be divided into three waves.¹⁴ The first wave took place in the mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The main objective of this movement was to seek equality between the sexes and in particular for political rights for women. Sally Haslanger, Nancy Tuana and Peg O'Connor have provided a detailed explanation of 'first-wave feminism':

¹² I have borrowed this term from Judith Grant's book title, *Fundamental Feminism: Contesting the Core Concepts of Feminist Theory*.

¹³ Sanders, Valerie: 'First Wave Feminism', in Sarah Gamble (ed.): *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, pp. 15-24.

¹⁴ Stephens, Anne: *Ecofeminism and Systems Thinking*, p.15.

In the mid-1800s the term “feminism” was used to refer to “the qualities of females” and it was not until after the First International Women’s Conference in Paris in 1892 that the term, following the French term *féministe*, was used regularly in English for a belief in and advocacy of equal rights for women based on the idea of the equality of the sexes. Although the term “feminism” in English is rooted in the mobilization for woman suffrage in Europe and the US during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, of course efforts to obtain justice for women did not begin or end with this period of activism.¹⁵

Hence, first-wave feminism had a very strong political affiliation, and what women asked for during that period was simply their own civil rights—they wanted to have the same rights as men and not be slaves to men.

First-wave feminism provided a good foundation for the fight for women’s rights, but there was a disruption in the development of Western feminism due to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. Despite the fact that so-called ‘women issue’ were not the main agenda during the 1940s and 1950s as many countries endeavoured to rebuild after the chaotic war period, feminist consciousness did not die. It is in this context that we should understand the 1949 publication of a very important feminist text—Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*. This book was not part of the women’s movement in the United States in the 1950s and has come to be regarded as defining a kind of “French feminism”. However, it is believed that it was de Beauvoir’s “account of the cultural construction of women as *Other* which laid the foundations for much of the theoretical work in the 1970s”.¹⁶ The reappearance of a strong women’s movement did not happen in the Western world until the 1960s, most

¹⁵ Haslanger, Sally, Tuana, Nancy and O’Connor, Peg, “Topics in Feminism”, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2011 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/feminism-topics/>

¹⁶ Thornham, Sue: “Second Wave Feminism”, in Sarah Gamble (ed.): *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, p. 29.

notably as part of the widespread ‘social movement’ in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. In terms of its intellectual underpinnings, it is believed that the movement (re)started with Betty Friedan’s book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963.¹⁷ This period of the women’s liberation movement is also known as early second-wave feminism. In this second wave, the main objective for the feminists was to question the essential gender difference and push beyond the early quest for political rights to fight for greater equality across different institutions, which meant that they wanted greater gender equality not only in the political sense but also in more aspects of life such as in schools, in the workplace and in the family. There are generally two strands of feminism during this period of time—liberal feminism and radical feminism.¹⁸ Second-wave feminism has often been equated with ‘Seventies’ feminism.¹⁹

Derived from these political movements, different types of feminist thought emerged, which implies that feminist theory is interdisciplinary. They covered a wide range of aspects—historical, literary, philosophical, psychological, anthropological and sociological,²⁰ and in light of this diversity, different types of feminism grew such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, existentialist feminism and so on. Not only can feminist theory merge with different

¹⁷ Farber, David R. and Beth L. Bailey: *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960s*, p. 127. According to Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* in America in 1963, “was characterized throughout the 1960s and 1970s by extensive and active networks of informal women’s groups”. Kemp, Sandra and Judith Squires: “Introduction”, in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires (eds.): *Feminisms*, p. 3.

¹⁸ According to David Farber and Beth Bailey, liberal feminism endeavours to seek equality for women in the existing system through different political channels, while the radical movement was a type of women’s liberation movement and emerged from the New Left and civil rights movements. Like other radical movements of the era, it sought fundamental and revolutionary change in existing American society. *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Barrett, Michèle and Anne Phillips: “Introduction” in Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips (eds): *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*. Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992, p. 2.

²⁰ Kemp, Sandra and Judith Squires: “Introduction”, in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires (eds.): *Feminisms*, p. 4.

disciplinary schools of thought, but it can also be categorised into different national schools of thought.

American Feminism versus French Feminism

The two main national schools which dominated the whole of second-wave feminism were the American and the French feminist schools. As already mentioned, second-wave feminism emerged in the United States; therefore, the American feminist school played a very important role in shaping second-wave feminist ideologies. Generally speaking, American feminism has always been associated with radical feminism.²¹ In her book *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America*, Alice Echols describes radical American feminists as follows:

They criticized liberal feminism for pursuing “formal equality within a racist, class-stratified system”, and for refusing to acknowledge that women’s inequality in the public domain was related to their subordination in the family. Radical feminists articulated the earliest and the most provocative critiques of the family, marriage, love, normative heterosexuality, and rape.²²

This comment highlights the key point that American feminism argues about the oppression of women. If women want to gain back their female subjectivity, they have to overthrow the existing patriarchal system. All social institutions were created by men; therefore, they needed to be changed, as they represented constraints on women. In other words, women were the victims of oppressive men.

²¹ Kathleen Barry draws this conclusion in the Forward to Ginette Castro’s *American Feminism: A Contemporary History*, p. x.

²² Echols, Alice: *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in American 1967-1975*, pp. 3-4.

French feminism refers to feminist writers who wrote in French even though they were not necessarily French nationals. Dani Cavallaro proposes the following:

French Feminism cultivates a thought-provoking dialogue between notions of equality and difference. Equality is the aspiration of several theorists who intend to rectify women's exclusion from dominant structures and relations of power by supplying them with civil rights and cultural credentials identical to those traditionally enjoyed by men. The critics that promote the principle of difference, conversely, alert us to the dangers inherent in the pursuit of equality: primarily, the reduction of feminism to the advocacy of women's admission to a normative and normalizing patriarchal system ... It may then become feasible to move from the concept of man-as-enemy and towards a deconstruction of patriarchal and phallographic structures themselves.²³

According to Cavallaro's definition, French feminists did ask for equality, but they did not agree to pursue gender equality within the patriarchal system. They intended to 'deconstruct' the gender dichotomy and the label of 'women' for women that had been created by men. Furthermore, Nancy Fraser articulated the two main strands of French feminism—deconstructive and psychoanalytic—and for many English speakers today 'French feminism' is simply used as shorthand to refer to the theories of Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous.²⁴ This comment directly pinpoints the influence of two important (male) French philosophers Jacques Derrida (who is famous for his 'deconstruction' theory) and Jacques Lacan (who is famous for his psychoanalytical theory) on the development of French feminism. So despite the fact that both American feminism and French feminism agreed that the fundamental

²³ Cavallaro, Dani: *French Feminist Theory: An Introduction*, p. xiii.

²⁴ Fraser, Nancy: "Introduction: Revaluing French Feminism", in Nancy Fraser and Sandra Lee Bartky (eds.): *Revaluing French Feminism: Critical Essays on the Difference, Agency and Culture*, p. 1.

objective of feminism is to end sexism, that is, to end the oppression of women, French feminism is different from American feminism because of the French philosophical tradition, as most French feminists depended heavily on the works of Derrida and Lacan in forming their core arguments. In the traditional thinking of French feminism, feminists deemed that a pen represents a metaphorical penis: “the text’s author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis”.²⁵ From this type of feminist point of view, it is believed that language is a means for men to objectify the world and that they can therefore speak in place of everything and for everyone (including women). Following this assumption, French-school feminists Cixous, Kristeva and Irigaray emphasise that language signifies patriarchal hegemony over women and that women have been deprived of a voice in literary history.²⁶

In recent decades, there has been a rapid increase in the number of post-colonial, global and transnational studies, and this has meant that “critical theory flowed across the Atlantic from France and took root in highly divergent forms in the United States”,²⁷ in particular the Derridan and Lacanian theories—post-structuralism. In light of this, “the hybrid blending and clashing of French post-structuralism and American feminism” led to the rise of third-wave feminism and postfeminism.²⁸ And the dominance of Internet culture in media studies led to the rise of cyberfeminism, which I simply define as how feminist theories are being applied to the study of

²⁵ Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar: “The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination”, in Mary Eagleton (ed.): *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (3rd edition), p. 85.

²⁶ According to Imelda Whelehan, “Most second wave feminism focused on social constructionist, rather than essentialist, arguments and therefore casting men as the ‘enemy’ was tacitly accepted as a temporary socio-historical subject positioning which would be open to transformation”. Whelehan, Imelda: *Modern Feminist Thought: From The Second Wave to ‘Post-Feminism’*, p. 177

²⁷ Friedman, Susan Stanford: *Mappings: Feminisms and the Cultural Geographies Encounter*, p.11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

virtual behaviour. I shall discuss the notion and the ideologies of third-wave feminism and postfeminism in Chapter 2 and cyberfeminism in Chapter 4 in greater detail.

The Problems of the Term “Waves” in Feminism

Despite the term “waves” having been widely used to describe different generations of Western feminism, many feminist scholars criticized “the waves metaphor for its reductive effects on chronicling feminism’s history”, saying that even as it “does seem to reflect something true about historical, political, and generational change, it also imbues that change with a particular set of associations and meanings”.²⁹ This is because the main problem is that the waves metaphor assumes that feminists of a particular age and generation share a singular ideological position.³⁰ Judith Butler would be one prominent example to challenge the age-based wave metaphor. As listed above, the second wave took place during the 1960s and 1970s; Butler, who was born in 1956 and brought up during the ‘60s and ‘70s, should be considered as a second-wave feminist; nonetheless, she has been regarded as “at the centre of third-wave Foucauldian feminist theory”³¹ and a third-wave feminist due to her contribution to post-structuralist feminist and queer theories. In such light, referring to the wave metaphor as an age-based demarcation would be highly problematic.

Nonetheless, instead of seeing the wave metaphor as a marker for different generational periods of feminist movements, the wave metaphor could be interpreted as “wave trains” that link up the multiplicity of feminist legacies and trajectories in

²⁹ Henry, Astrid: “Waves”, in Catherine M.Orr, Ann Braithwaite, Diane Lichtensten (eds.): *Rethinking Women’s and Gender Studies*, pp. 102-103.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 105.

³¹ Reveaux, Monique: “Feminism and Empowerment: A Critical Reading of Foucault”, in Susan Hekman (ed.): *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault*, p. 226.

order to provide a broader picture of the development of feminist thought over centuries.³² Despite the existing opposition to using the term “waves” in the discussion of the development of Western feminism in general, I would argue that the wave metaphor is still helpful in order to differentiate different stages of feminist thought, not from an age-based or generational sense but in a sense of what Ednie Kaeh Garrison called “radio waves”.³³ Instead of being lineal and singular, radio wave emerges out in multiple directions, and this wave metaphor allows us to see that feminist movements in different periods are multiple and diverse. Based on this assumption, I keep the term “waves” in my discussion for the general development of ‘Western feminism’ and ‘Chinese feminism’.

The Fluidity of ‘Feminism’

Whenever the term ‘feminism’ is mentioned, one may automatically associate it firstly with politics and secondly with a social movement initiated by a group of white middle-class women in the West. However, this thought might reduce the complexity of the terminology, as feminism itself is a troublesome term.³⁴ Susan Stanford Friedman states that “the plural form of the noun feminism forced a recognition of difference as a way of refusing the hegemony of one kind of feminism over another”, which implies that there is no superiority of one feminism over another. She continues discussing the issue by stating that the pluralisation of feminism expanded and diversified the meaning of the term and that it is vital in the development of “a

³² Aikau, Honkulani, Karla A. Erikson and Jennifer L. Pierce: “Introduction”, in Honkulani Aikau, Karla A. Erikson and Jennifer L. Pierce (eds.): *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations: Life Stories from the Academy*, p.6.

³³ Garrison, Ednie Kaeh: “Are We on a Wavelength Yet? On Feminist Oceanography: Radios and Third Wave Feminism”, in Jo Roger (ed.): *Different Wavelengths: Studies of the Contemporary Women’s Movement*. New York and London: Routledge, 2005, p. 237-256.

³⁴ Beasley, Chris: *What Is Feminism: An Introduction to Feminist Theory*, p. 1.

multicultural, international and transnational feminism”.³⁵ In light of this, feminism can be seen as a fluid concept and can appear in multiple forms.

Despite the fact that the term feminism was coined in the West, there are some fundamental values, such as the recognition of women’s individual personhood in feminism, that could be applied to different cultures and that have led to the appearance of the term ‘global feminism’.³⁶ This is supported by Shweta Singh’s definition of ‘global feminism’:

Global feminism is the global application of feminist thought, displaying both unique and overlapping characteristics in its focus as it advocates for a positive and culturally relevant change in women’s outcomes. The concept of intersectionality that emerged from Black Feminist thought and its emphasis on race, postcolonial feminism, and emerging postmodern and post-structuralist thought has been instrumental in forming the framework of global feminism. It is also as part of the third wave feminism.

Third wave feminism is composed of cultural, postcolonial and postmodern feminism. The three major characteristics of third wave feminism apply to global feminism as well.³⁷

However, ‘global feminism’ is a complicated term, and my employment of this expression is not to homogenise feminism; instead, I want to emphasise the flexibility of the ideologies in feminism. Based on this rationale and following Susan Friedman and Shweta Singh’s arguments, a conclusion could be drawn—that ‘Chinese

³⁵ Friedman, Susan Stanford: *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter*, p. 4.

³⁶ Ferree, Myra Marx and Aili Mari Tripp (eds.): *Global Feminism: Transnational Women’s Activism, Organising, and Human Rights*. In the introduction to this collection of essays, Ferree and Tripp state that feminism has global dimensions in the twenty-first century. It is diversified and different in terms of national culture and policy (p. vii). Also, the feminist scholars Amireh and Majaj suggest that the term ‘global feminism’ has strong affiliations with post-colonialism. Amireh, Amal and Lisa Suhair Majaj (eds.): *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers*, p. 20.

³⁷ Singh, Shweta: “Global Feminism”, in Mary Zeiss Stange, Carol K. Oyster and Jane E. Sloan (eds.): *The Multimedia Encyclopedia of Women in Today’s World*, p. 628.

feminism' can and does exist. Western scholars such as Tani Barlow and Sharon Wesoky have also contributed to validating feminism in China, as they publish extensively on the topic of Chinese feminism. For instance, in *The Question of Chinese Feminism*, Tani Barlow states that “feminist thinking in modern Chinese history is an integral part of contemporary deliberations about the nation and its development”; it has been always a core concern in the studies or writings of Chinese intellectuals.³⁸ When feminism was first imported to Chinese culture, not only were Chinese women being affected by different forms of feminist thinking, members of the educated male gentry class such as Jin Tianhe and Liang Qichao had been greatly inspired and helped to translated a lot of Western feminist thought into Chinese as part of the motto to ‘strengthen the nation’ in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.³⁹

The Emergence of Women’s Rights in Modern China

In the later years of the nineteenth century, China underwent a drastic change in the popular perception of its national identity. This is because the Treaty of Shimonoseki and the Boxer Protocol not only forced China to pay a huge amount of reparation that weakened the national economy but was also perceived as a source of profound humiliation for Chinese nationals.⁴⁰ From this moment onward, foreign powers started to overshadow China’s own government, and the Chinese intellectuals were

³⁸ Barlow, Tani. E. *The Question of Chinese Feminism*, p. 3. Also see Sharon Wesoky’s *Chinese Feminism Faces Globalization*.

³⁹ Liu, Lydia, Rebecca E.Karl and Dorothy Ko: “Introduction”, in Lydia Liu, Rebecca E.Karl and Dorothy Ko (eds.): *The Birth of Chinese Feminism: Essential Texts in Transnational Theory*, p.6.

⁴⁰ The Treaty of Shimonoseki was signed after the first Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, and the Boxer Protocol was signed after the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion by the Eight Nation Alliance forces in 1900. Sudo, Mizuyo: “Concepts of Women’s Rights in Modern China” (translated by Michael G. Hill), in: Dorothy Ko and Wang Zheng: *Translating Feminisms in China*, p. 13.

desperate to strengthen the nation by “adopting Western thinking in many matters”.⁴¹ Among foreign countries, Japan was by far the most influential nation for Chinese intellectuals following their defeat of China during the first Sino-Japanese War in 1894-1895. Chinese intellectuals believed that “Japan had already fundamentally restructured its own social and political order according to Western models” since the second half of the nineteenth century; therefore, instead of learning directly from the Western models, Chinese intellectuals decided to borrow from the Japanese models which had been already inspired by and developed from Western models. This policy was advocated on the basis that Japanese culture was closer to Chinese culture, and hence this would involve a less radical transformation process.⁴²

Among the new ideologies adopted from the Japanese models, the idea of *quan* (power and rights) had been widely applied within China, through the development of concepts such as *renquan* (human rights). Amid all the imported concepts of *quan*, the concept of *nüquan* (women’s rights) has been seen as a “milestone in the history of China”.⁴³ Many scholars believe that there is a strong historical connection between the emergence of feminism and the new nationalism in China. As Marina Svensson states,

Women’s rights were advocated in the belief that the contribution of women was needed in order to save China, a contribution that would not be forthcoming if women remained illiterate and with bound feet. As was the case with rights talk generally, the struggle for women’s rights was for the most part

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Charle, Christophe: “Introduction to Part II” in Christophe Charle, Jürgen Schriewer and Peter Wagner (eds.): *Transnational Intellectual Networks: Forms of Academic Knowledge and the Search for Cultural Identities*, p.199. In addition, Mizuyo Sudo states that China borrowed the ideas from Japan instead of the West directly due to the closer language system between the Chinese and Japanese. Sudo, Mizuyo: “Concepts of Women’s Rights in Modern China” (translated by Michael G. Hill), in Dorothy Ko and Wang Zheng (eds.): *Translating Feminisms in China*, p. 15.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 14.

motivated by and subordinated to nationalist needs and considerations.⁴⁴

It is believed the term *nüquan* firstly appeared in an article entitled “On the Relations between Men and Women”, a translation of an 1899 essay by the Japanese reformer Fukuzawa Yukichi, published in the reformist journal *Qingyi bao* on 11 March 1900.⁴⁵ Besides, other journals during that period of time, such as *Nüjie Zhong*, promoted women’s rights within the context of anti-Manchu protests, as many women activists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries believed that the Qing monarch was the primary hindrance to women’s liberation and national well-being. Therefore, these journals called for Chinese men and women to rise up against the Manchu “dictatorship”.⁴⁶ Zheng Wang argues that participating in anti-Manchu activities was the first stage of an actual process of achieving women’s equal rights, and Qiu Jin, the most famous martyr of the 1911 Revolution, exemplified this generation of women activists.⁴⁷ Qiu Jin was born in 1875 into a scholarly family and was tutored with her elder brother. This strong educational background resulted in her acquiring a good knowledge of the classics, history and poetry.⁴⁸ Thanks to her special interest in feminist ideas nurtured by both a general awareness of gender inequalities and the particular circumstances of her own life, Qiu Jin became an early female revolutionary. She was married to the son of a wealthy family but was dissatisfied with the marriage and fled her husband, departing for Japan in 1904.⁴⁹ In January 1907, she returned to China from Japan to take up the position of chief editor

⁴⁴ Svensson, Maria: *Debating Human Rights in China: A Conceptual and Political History*, p. 106.

⁴⁵ Sudo, Mizuyo: “Concepts of Women’s Rights in Modern China” (translated by Michael G. Hill), in Dorothy Ko and Wang Zheng (eds.): *Translating Feminisms in China*, p. 17.

⁴⁶ Wang, Zheng: *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories*, p.42.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Rankin, Mary Backus: *Early Chinese Revolutionaries: Radical Intellectuals in Shanghai and Chekiang, 1902-1911*, p.40.

⁴⁹ Sudo, Mizuyo: “Concepts of Women’s Rights in Modern China” (translated by Michael G. Hill), in: Dorothy Ko and Wang Zheng: *Translating Feminisms in China*, p. 22.

for the *Zhongguo nüabo* (Chinese Women's Newspaper), and she heavily promoted the idea of women's education as the basis of her revolutionary campaign.⁵⁰ The most famous example of her writings about "women's rights" would be her song "Promoting Women's Rights".⁵¹ Qiu Jin believes that men had suppressed Chinese women and in order to gain equal rights with men, women should receive education, as it would be the means for women's emancipation.⁵²

Despite the effort of the revolutionaries to fight against the Qing government in order to strengthen China, they failed their initial campaign. Qiu Jin was arrested and beheaded on 15 July 1907 because of her revolutionary activities. Nonetheless, after the collapse of the Qing government and the founding of the Republican period, "Qiu Jin has been praised a symbol of the republican revolutionary cause and as a pioneer of Chinese women's emancipation."⁵³ Owing to the imported Western ideas and their own revolutionary campaigns in the late Qing period, Chinese intellectuals started paying more attention to women's rights and the issue of women's emancipation. This helped to create the image of the 'new woman' during the May Fourth period.

As discussed above, feminism is a Western ideology that was introduced into China relatively recently; therefore, when the term is translated into Chinese, it creates linguistic and conceptual problems. According to Dorothy Ko, there are two common renditions of the English term 'feminism' in Chinese. Feminism as *nüquan zhuyi* (women's rights or power-ism) connotes the stereotype of a man-hating woman who hungers for power; hence, it is a derisive term in China today except within a

⁵⁰ Ma, Yuxin: *Women Journalists and Feminism in China, 1898-1937*, p. 67.

⁵¹ Sun, Xiaoping: "A Song Promoting Women's Right (1906)" in Tiffany K. Wayne (ed.): *Feminist Writings from Ancient Times to the Modern World: A Global Sourcebook and History*, p. 387.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 389.

⁵³ Wang, Lingzhen: *Personal Matters: Women's Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth-century China*, p.27.

small circle of scholars and activists.⁵⁴ The other translation is *nüxing zhuyi* (female or feminine-ism), which seems to be less threatening than the other translation since it avoids the use of the word “power”. This term has become popular recently because of its semantic flexibility. This is because *nüxing zhuyi* is often taken to mean an ideology promoting femininity and thus reinforcing gender distinctions to scholars who work on gender issues in China, especially Anglophone readers.⁵⁵ Kwok-kan Tam’s explanation of the two terms also helps to provide a clear perspective of the two translations:

The term “*nüxing zhuyi*” (an ism of female-ness, or feminism) was never used in any Chinese discussion of women before the 1990s. References to related issues can only be found in the term “*nuquan zhuyi*” (women’s rights/power-ism), which is apparently a concept adapted from English.⁵⁶

I believe that *nüxing zhuyi* would be more appropriate to refer to the more recent works that contain postfeminist ideas, as the two authors shift their attentions to the issues of ‘femininity’, which (as noted by Tam) is one of the prominent elements in postfeminist arguments. Like ‘Western feminism’, the term ‘Chinese feminism’ has multiple connotations. This argument has already been made by Ya-chen Chen, in her book *The Many Dimensions of Chinese Feminism*, as she compares and contrasts different forms of representations of ‘Chinese feminism’ in mainland

⁵⁴ I conducted an interview with Dai Jinhua, a famous cultural critics and scholar in China at Beijing University on 3 June 2008. During the interview, she has stated that “the term ‘*nüxing zhuyi*’ was popular among overseas Chinese scholar in the 1980s”.

⁵⁵ Ko, Dorothy and Wang Zheng: “Introduction: Translating Feminisms in China” in: *Gender and History* 18.3, p. 463.

⁵⁶ Tam, Kwok-kan, “Introduction”, in: Kwok-kan Tam and Terry Siu-han Yip (eds.) *Gender, Discourse and the Self in Literature: Issues in Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong*, p. xvii.

China, Taiwan and Hong Kong.⁵⁷ I would like to outline the general development of ‘Chinese feminism’ in mainland China and Hong Kong in the following section in order to provide clearer background information to further the discussion of the works of my two chosen authors.

The Rise of Women’s Studies in China in the 1980s

China’s ‘open-door’ policy in the late 1970s accelerated the cultural and intellectual exchange with foreign countries. Even though Western feminism had begun to be imported into China in the early twentieth century, the connection between China and the West stopped immediately after the Chinese Communist Party takeover in the 1950s, and this created a hiatus in the impact of Western feminist ideology in China. Not until the 1980s did Western feminist ideologies reappear in China. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the circulation of Chinese feminist thoughts stopped in the 1950s. Given the fact that one of the major aims of the Chinese Communist Party was to promote proletarianism, this meant that gender was irrelevant; no matter whether they were men or women, as long as individuals had the ability to work, they were expected to contribute to the work force. This ideology liberated women from the Confucian society in which they were considered as ‘dependent’ and has endorsed women’s liberation from the 1950s onwards. Even though there is still controversy about the application of this theory during the Mao period, women’s status undoubtedly changed dramatically compared with the Republican period. China’s reconnection with the West in the 1980s created a wave of women’s studies. Esther Chow, Naihua Zhang and Jinling Wang commented on the development of women’s studies in 1980s China:

⁵⁷ Chen, Ya-chen: *The Many Dimensions of Chinese Feminism*.

[The wave] has been characterized by the rise of women's consciousness about themselves as women, the formation of women's organizations, and the creation of new forms of activism to protect women's rights and interests and to embark on a new discourse on women.⁵⁸

Under such a political, social and intellectual climate, it is not surprising to see that many major scholarly studies of Chinese female writers appeared, from both Western and Chinese scholars. Furthermore, this social atmosphere opened a huge market for Chinese female writers to create and publish their work. Evidence for this can be found in Guo Shumei's "New Modes of Women's Writing in the Age of Materialism", where she states that anyone can write as long as there is a publisher willing to publish the work; therefore, it is very easy to publish a book, and anyone can take part in literary creation in the contemporary materialist era. In addition, there had been a marked increase in the number of channels for writers to present their works, as newspapers and magazines need many contributions. The field had become more open, free and liberal.⁵⁹ Apart from this, helped by the introduction of the Internet, large numbers of women started to write on the web, which offered yet another vehicle for them to express themselves. The importance of this is such that I shall present a more thorough discussion of Internet writing in the final chapter of this thesis.

⁵⁸ Chow, Esther Nain-ling, Naihua Zhang and Jinling Wang: 'Promising and Contested Fields: Women's Studies and Sociology of Women/Gender in Contemporary China', in: *Gender and Society*, 18.2, p. 163.

⁵⁹ Guo, Shumei: 'New Modes of Women's Writing in the Age of Materialism', in Tam Kwok-kan and Terry Yip (eds.): *Gender, Discourse and Self in Literature: Issues in Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong*, p. 162.

The Two Waves of Feminism in China⁶⁰

According to Lin Shuming and He Songyu, Western literary criticism created two waves of Chinese feminism in literature. The first wave took place in the late 1980s, and the second wave took place in 1995 when the Fourth World Conference on Women was hosted in China. During this year, many publishing houses, literary periodicals and scholarly journals devoted special publications to feminist literature and criticism, and this promoted the study of feminism in China. Therefore, 1995 has been regarded as a year of feminism in China.⁶¹ This was also because some prominent feminist texts were published in that year, including a collection of essays edited by Li Xiaojiang, Zhu Hong and Dong Xiuyu entitled *Gender and China (Xingbie yu Zhongguo)*, *Feminism and Literature (Nüxing zhuyi yu wenxue)* and *An Introduction to Western Feminist Studies (Xifang nüxing zhuyi yanjiu pingji)*. As well as this, an academic journal, *Foreign Literature Review (Waiguo wenxue pinglun)*, published a special section on the latest developments in Western feminist theories in 1995 which showed the impact of Western feminism on the development of Chinese feminism.⁶² Because of all these important publications, it could be claimed that there were already great achievements in feminist literary criticism in China by the end of twentieth century, and this throws new light onto the development of Chinese feminism in terms of its literary impact.

Furthermore, a new group of feminist critics who openly claimed to be feminists had emerged in mainland China in the mid-1990s, which helped to consolidate the development of Chinese feminism. In addition to Li Xiaogang, a well-

⁶⁰The wave metaphor is similar to my argument about the wave metaphor in feminism. It is crucial in helping to layout the multiple meaning of Chinese feminist' ideologies with a certain period of time.

⁶¹Lin, Shuming and He, Songyu: "Feminist Literary Criticism in China since the mid-1990s", in Kwok-kan Tam and Terry Siu-han Yip (eds.): *Gender, Discourse and the Self in Literature: Issues in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong*, p. 35.

⁶²*Ibid.*

known Chinese feminist on the mainland, more and more Chinese female scholars asked for the reconsideration of the status of Chinese women and Chinese female writings. This can be supported by Lin Shuming's and He Songyu's detailed descriptions of the literary publications since 1996:

By the end of the twentieth century, there were already great achievements in feminist literary criticism in China, which brought modern Chinese literary criticism to new heights. Influenced by feminist ideas, more and more studies on sex, sexual problems and gender began to emerge on the scene of contemporary Chinese cultural studies. Representative works include *Tang Goddess and Venus* (*Gao Tang shennü yu Weinashi*), *Female Literature of the Song Dynasty* (*Songdai nüxing wenxue*), *Beijing Opera, Stilts and Gender in China* (*Jingju, qiao he Zhongguo de xingbie guanxi*), *Dunhuang Sex Culture* (*Dunhuang xing wenhua*), and *A History of Female Ci Poetry* (*Nüxing cishi*). In the last decade of the twentieth century, there was further diversification of Chinese feminist criticism into gender studies and critiques of Chinese cultural translations.⁶³

Lin and He's comments provide crucial evidence of the development of feminist ideologies and criticism in Chinese literature. This is because their studies proved that Chinese scholars started paying attention to issues such as sex and gender at the end of the twentieth century, and this laid a solid foundation for the spread of Western feminism in China, in particular using Western feminist ideologies to read Chinese female writings.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Moreover, as a consequence of the Western political interest toward Asia, there has been a rise in the West in scholarship on Chinese women's studies.⁶⁴ Chinese female authors' literary works have become a noteworthy topic of discussion within wider research about Chinese women. Also, since the mid-1990s, there has been further development of feminist criticism in China; feminists in China are eager to re-examine the significance of Western feminist criticism with a view to seeking inspiration for their work in China, and as a consequence, not only do Western scholars employ a feminist perspective to read the work of Chinese female writers, but local Chinese feminist critics also pay attention to the feminist elements in Chinese female authors' writings. Therefore, feminist critical approaches are important in one way or another to studying most Chinese female writers' work. Not only has the field of Chinese literary criticism been influenced by Western feminism, but Chinese female writings themselves have been affected. This is because most of the literary works published by women in the 1980s focused on the theme of how women had to fight against patriarchy while they continued to be deprived of their right to work and were forced to do household chores at home. Some examples are Zhang Xinxin's "On the Same Horizon" (*Zai tongyi dipingxian shang*) and Zhang Jie's "The Ark" (*Fangzhou*).⁶⁵ Hidden under the social theme of equity for women is a new consciousness that women need to reinvent and redefine themselves in mainland China. For these reasons, it is appropriate to employ Western feminist ideologies to read Chinese female writings.

⁶⁴ Teng, Jihua Emma: "The Construction of the 'Traditional Chinese Women' in Western Academy: A Critical Review", in: *Signs*, 22.1, p. 120.

⁶⁵ Tam, Kwok-kan, "Introduction", in Kwok-kan Tam and Terry Siu-han Yip (eds.): *Gender, Discourse and the Self in Literature: Issues in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong*, p. xvii.

The Background to Feminist Writing in Hong Kong

Despite the fact that Hong Kong was a British colony, consciousness of female subjectivity was not prominent in the works of Hong Kong female writers in the early twentieth century when first-wave feminism appeared in the United Kingdom starting at the end of the nineteenth century. One of the main reasons for this is that Hong Kong literature continued to have close ties with traditional Chinese literature and that Hong Kong literature has always been seen as a sub-branch of mainland Chinese literature. According to Wu Baozhu, the period from the 1920s to the 1940s was the period when Hong Kong female writings started; the 1950s was the germinating period of Hong Kong women's writings, and female authors started to show a consciousness of female subjectivity in their writings in the 1960s, but they did not dig down deeply into the issue, talking instead about daily personal experiences. As with the situation in mainland China, feminist writings began to shed new light in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when there was an influx of female writings in the Hong Kong literary market.⁶⁶ Also, according to the distinguished Hong Kong literature scholar Liu Denghan, the creation of a specific Hong Kong literature underwent a rapid change in the late 1970s, when there was a sudden increase in the number of female writers. Before this period, there were only a few female writers in Hong Kong, such as Xia Yi, Xi Xi and Wu Xubin, but the situation had changed greatly by the 1980s as many female writers emerged and caused the literati arena to blossom. At this time, women become a prominent force in the creation of fiction in Hong Kong. These writers used their unique female sensitivity and personal perspectives to create their literary worlds. Their writings are unique in that they cannot be replaced

⁶⁶ Wu, Baozhu: *Writing Women and Women Writing: A Study of 1980s and 1990s Hong Kong Female Writer*, pp. 5-9.

by those of their male counterparts, especially when they write about the issues of female subjectivity, family and marriage.⁶⁷ Thus, in the development of feminist ideologies in Hong Kong, the late 1980s and the 1990s represent a watershed for the progression of feminist thinking in the writings of Hong Kong female authors.

Earlier Scholarship on the Two Authors

Given the fact that Hong Ying has consistently claimed to be a feminist writer, it is not surprising to see that most of the literary critics who comment on her work focus on the feminist perspective in her works. Chinese scholars such as Luo Chenli,⁶⁸ Hu Zhifeng,⁶⁹ Huang Hua⁷⁰ and Yu Wenbo⁷¹ all put emphasis on the feminist thought in Hong Ying's early novels and short story such as *Far Goes the Girl*, *Daughter of the River* and "The Carnation Club" respectively. In their articles, these scholars try to depict the influence of Western feminist thoughts in Hong Ying's novels and how Hong's work can reveal the impact of second-wave feminist ideologies in Chinese women's writings. Apart from these direct comments on the idea of feminism in Hong Ying's earlier novels, other sinologists such as David Der-wei Wang have pinpointed the uniqueness of the female experience in Hong's autobiography, *Daughter of the River*, by emphasising the theme of hunger. He states,

Like thousands of women of her age, Hongying has all along been troubled by a deep-seated hunger: she is fed up with the revolutionary spiritual food and starving for more sensuous kinds of food: a full meal,

⁶⁷ Liu, Denghan: *Xianggang Wenxue Shi*, pp. 370–371.

⁶⁸ Luo, Chengli: 'Zhiming de feixiang – ping Hong Ying de *kangnaixin julebu*', pp. 46–50.

⁶⁹ Hu, Zhifeng: 'Wenhua zhong wei jiushu de qingai – Hong Ying changpian xiaoshuo de muti', pp. 30–33.

⁷⁰ Huang Hua: 'Nüxingshenfen de shuxie yu zhonggou – shi lun dangdai haiwai huaren zuojia shenfen shuxie', pp. 69–72.

⁷¹ Yu, Wenbo: 'Hong Ying xiaoshuo chuanguo zhong de nüquanzhuyi sixiang', pp. 101–106.

love, sex. Even years after the hunger years, she can never forget the deficiency and desolation. In both the literal and the symbolic sense, hunger embodies her experience of becoming a woman.⁷²

Wang's comment highlights the fact that Hong Ying's *Daughter of the River* not only gives an account of her personal suffering during her childhood in China, but that her work also speaks on behalf of other Chinese women as they suffer from spiritual as well as physical hunger. Her writings could be seen as a revelation of the suppressed desires of Chinese women under patriarchal constraints. And the most recent English scholarship on Hong Ying's *Daughter of the River* and *Summer of Betrayal* would be Kay Schaffer and Xianlin Song's *Women Writers in Postsocialist China* (2014) as they have a chapter on the discussion of 'self' in the two novels.

As mentioned above, most of the Chinese scholars who have analysed Hong Ying's writings focused mainly on the ideas of second-wave feminism expressed in her early works, but there are exceptions, scholars such as Zhang Weiwei, who has commented that Hong Ying's later work *The Lord of Shanghai* did not use a feminist approach, as she emphasised the dream-like motif of the book.⁷³ Seeing that the female protagonists in Hong Ying's most recent works contain postfeminist characteristics, I would like to apply a postfeminist reading to analyse Hong Ying's *Lord of Shanghai* and *Death in Shanghai* in order to contrast them with the feminist ideas found in her earlier writings.

In contrast, even though Li Bihua is a famous writer in Hong Kong, Li's works have received comparatively little scholarly attention, especially criticism in English. The only exception is the chapter directly discussing Li Bihua in Aijun Zhu's

⁷² Wang, David Der-wei: *The Monster That is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-Century China*, p. 146.

⁷³ Zhang, Weiwei: 'Hai shang fanhua you shi meng – shi xi Hong Ying xinzuo *Shanghai wang*', in: *Hehai dai xue xue bao*, pp. 71–74.

Feminism and Global Chinese: The Cultural Production Women Authors.⁷⁴ This can be explained by the localization in Li Bihua's writing style, as she uses a number of vernacular expressions used only in Hong Kong society. This serves to discourage scholars who are not sufficiently familiar with Hong Kong culture to offer an analytical view of her works. It is therefore not surprising to see that most of the criticism and analysis of her writings are in Chinese and have been made by scholars working in the field of Hong Kong literature such as Cao Huimin⁷⁵ and Chen Ya-chen,⁷⁶ or by those who are based in Hong Kong, such as Chen Anfen,⁷⁷ Chen Guoqiu⁷⁸ and Chen Bingliang.⁷⁹ Even in Chinese, the only book-length criticism is a collection of essays titled *Literary Hong Kong and Lilian Lee*.⁸⁰

Nevertheless, seeing that Li Bihua has been regarded as an exceptionally experienced and famous writer in Hong Kong,⁸¹ scholars of Chinese literature outside Hong Kong, especially critics from mainland China, have attempted to evaluate her work in reference to her special Chinese writing style; in Feng Xiaoyan's article "Time and Space, the Balance and Changes—The Skills for Legendary Narrating of Li Bihua's Novel", she states that it is Li's unique writing style and special subject matter that makes Li's work so distinctive and popular in Hong Kong.⁸² In a similar vein to Feng's comments, Yang Songning and Gao Xiaojuan also focus on the writing

⁷⁴ Even though Rey Chow wrote an article entitled 'A Souvenir of Love' to discuss Li Bihua's novel and film, *The Rouge*, the article was first published in Chinese and then translated into English. Aijun Zhu's chapter was first written in English.

⁷⁵ Cao, Huimin (ed.): *Tai Gang Ao wenxue jiaocheng*.

⁷⁶ Chen, Ya-chen (ed.): *Ba wang bie ji: tongzhi yuedu yu kua wenhua duihua*.

⁷⁷ Chen, Anfeng: 'Hushe xixue yu dianfu: lun Li Bihua xiaoshuo zhong de 'wenben' yu 'lishi'.

⁷⁸ Chen, Guoqiu (ed.): *Wenxue Xianggang yu Li Bihua and Ganshang delücheng zai Xianggang du wenxue*.

⁷⁹ Chen, Bingliang *Xianggang wenxue tanshang*.

⁸⁰ Chen, Guoqiu: *Wenxue Xianggang yue*.

⁸¹ Wang, Ying: 'Wu zhi zhaoxun de jingshen guiyi – Li Bihua: cong *Yanzhi kou dao Yanhua san yue*', pp. 139–143.

⁸² Feng, Xiao-yan: *Shikong: bingzhi yu huixuan – shi lun Li Bihua xiaoshuo de chuanqi xing xushi*, pp. 99–102.

style of Li Bihua, and their emphasis is more on the writing structure of Li's works rather than her choice of subject matter. They appreciate the criss-cross use of the dichotomy of reality and fantasy in Li's works as they believe that this can bring out the theme of alienation in the contemporary human world.⁸³ However, most scholars have not commented on the feminist perspective of Li Bihua's works, as they appear to believe that her idiosyncratic writing style is the main reason for her fame in Hong Kong. In contrast, I would like to employ a different approach—using both second-wave feminist and postfeminist ideologies to discuss the prominent ideas of changing from 'female victimisation' to 'women who possess power' in Li's works in order to show the development of feminism in China (in particular in the Hong Kong context) and the multi-dimensional feature of feminist ideologies in Chinese female literary writings.

Methodology

As I have stated in the section above, the works of Chinese female writers have been subjected to the scrutiny of a second-wave feminist lens by some Western and Chinese scholars. However, with the onset of the post-modern era, the use of a feminist approach to read these texts is inadequate. I think that adopting a postfeminist perspective, in particular, to critically analyse works by Chinese female writers is of extreme importance, as it could add another dimension to the understanding of the development of female consciousness in Chinese female writings. Inspired by Western feminist theories and related studies of postfeminism in literature and film, I shall employ a thematic approach through a close textual and

⁸³ Yang, Songning and Gao Xiaojuan: 'Xianshi yu chuanqi de jiujiu', in: *Daiqing gao deng zhuan ke xue xiao xue bao*, pp. 48–49.

filmic analysis to investigate the works of Hong Ying and Li Bihua in order to illustrate the dominance of feminist themes in their works and the existence of Chinese feminism in literature, film and popular culture. As I am going to employ different feminist theories (both second-wave and third-wave) for my analysis, I shall introduce these theories at length at the beginning in each individual chapter.

Hong Ying's collected works reveal a series of different aspects of feminism. Hong Ying's early works, such as *Summer of Betrayal*, *Curse of the Maize* and *Daughter of the River*, are more in agreement with the second-wave feminist argument on female victimization. However, the shift from feminist to postfeminist ideals is apparent in Hong Ying's later works, particularly in *Lord of Shanghai* and *Death in Shanghai*. In these later novels, there are displays of the attributes of postfeminist themes rather than feminist themes, that is, empowerment as opposed to victimization. The female protagonists in Hong Ying's postfeminist works proactively fight to achieve self-fulfilment and happiness in the patriarchal world.

As with Hong Ying, many of Li Bihua's writings, such as *Rouge*, *Green Snake*, *The Terracotta Warrior*, *Temptation of a Monk*, *The Old and New Ghosts from Tiananmen Square*, *The Woman Who Eats Eyes* and *The Red String*, cling to the idea of traditional feminism, which includes the victimization of women. Nonetheless, postfeminist ideas are also prominent in some of Li's popular works: examples are *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus*, *Kawashima Yoshiko*, *Dumplings* and *The Last Piece of Chrysanthemum Cake*. The female characters in these novels are no longer the victims of the 'patriarchal world'; they are the 'subjects' and the 'controllers' of their lives.

Structure of the Thesis

Inspired by the development of feminist ideologies in the West, I will employ a similar logic to start the discussion with the traces of Western feminist thoughts in contemporary Chinese literature through the works of Hong Ying and Li Bihua, and gradually move onto the analysis of the postfeminist ideologies in their writings and their subsequent film adaptations following the emergence of third-wave feminist thinking in the 1990s. And finally, with the onset of cyberfeminism in the field of virtual media studies, I will apply cyberfeminist ideologies to analyse the blogs of Hong Ying and Li Bihua. The thesis is divided into four main sections; the feminist and the postfeminist ideologies of the two selected authors' works, the different representations of women in the authors' original texts with their sequential movie and television adaptations, and finally, the impact of Internet weblogs on the writings of Chinese women.⁸⁴ Since I shall employ different types of feminist theories including french feminist, postfeminist and cyberfeminist theories in different sections, I will incorporate the definition and theoretical framework of these theories in detail in each respective chapter.

In the first chapter, I shall employ second-wave feminist ideologies and some traditional Chinese literary themes to analyse Hong Ying and Li Bihua's eight short stories and two other pieces of biographical writing. The first section of Chapter 1 explores the theme of the strong mother-daughter relationship from the feminist perspective and also how the female characters in the stories turn themselves from victims into aggressive men-haters. The second half of the chapter focuses on how subordinate Chinese women could speak either through their own writings or through other people's writings. By comparing the works of the two authors, it might be

⁸⁴ Apart from Hong Ying's *Summer of Betrayal and Daughter of the River*, all the quotations from the texts of Hong Ying and Li Bihua are originally in Chinese and I have translated them into English in this thesis.

possible to realise that Chinese female writers can present their feminist thought through different styles of writing, but they can still address the issues which affect women exclusively.

In the second chapter, I shall investigate the postfeminist themes in the later literary works of Hong Ying and Li Bihua. Although the two authors have very different writing styles, their common interest is in rewriting Chinese historical women with a hint of postfeminist rationale. Therefore, by comparing and contrasting the postfeminist ideologies in the works of both writers, the impact of Western feminist thoughts on Chinese Literature and the traces of the appearance of postfeminist Chinese writings can be revealed.

Apart from the literary texts, because of the enormous success of various movie and televisions adaptations of the two authors' literary writings, I shall examine the ramifications of the differences between the original and the adapted forms of representation of feminist ideas in the works of the Hong Ying and Li Bihua in the third core chapter. Also, seeing that both authors also maintain Internet weblogs (blogs),⁸⁵ which are accessed by many Internet users, especially in China, in my final chapter, I shall therefore employ a cyberfeminist approach to read the blogs of the authors in order to show how feminism works differently on the Internet.

In the Conclusion, I propose to compare and contrast Hong Ying's and Li Bihua's work in order to show the parallel yet different development of feminist ideologies in the West and in China in terms of literature and popular culture. In addition, I will state my main contribution to the field of modern Chinese literature

⁸⁵ According to Yaokun Lu, "a blog is a web-based publication that consists primarily of articles (normally in reverse-chronological order). Although most early blogs were updated manually, tools to automate the maintenance of such sites made them accessible to a larger number of people, and the use of browser-based software is not a typical aspect of blogging." Lu, Yaokun: "The Blogs: Chinese Women Carve out a Niche in Cyberworld", in: *Women of China*, 7, p. 42.

and film in three aspects: first, I will provide more detailed English-language scholarship on Hong Ying and Li Bihua than has been done to date, as there hardly any research has been done on either of these authors in Western academia; secondly, I will provide a new perspective on postfeminist Chinese writing, as my thesis represents one of the first to be written in this field; and thirdly, since there is very little scholarship on comparing and contrasting literary texts together with their film adaptations and Internet blogs, my thesis will shed a new light on this type of study, as it widens the scope of multimedia comparisons.

Chapter 1. The Feminist Ideas in Hong Ying's and Li Bihua's Earlier Literary Texts

Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Women must put themselves into text—as into the world and history—by her own movement.¹

In this chapter, I will use several second-wave feminist theories and some traditional themes in Chinese literature to examine the writings of Hong Ying and Li Bihua in order to show the idiosyncratic features of Chinese feminist writing. Different cultural backgrounds and writing periods of Hong Ying and Li Bihua contributed to their distinctive writing styles and ideas. The feminist ideologies presented in their work vary from one to the other. Given the fact that Hong Ying actively proclaims herself as a feminist, it is not surprising to see that there are more explicit traces of feminist arguments in Hong Ying's work than in Li Bihua's writings. In order to compare and contrast the feminist creeds in the earlier works of the two authors, in the first section of this discussion of the feminist ideologies in their works, I shall focus on four of Hong Ying's short stories: "The Orphan, Little Six" [*Gu'er xiao liu*], "The Deer with a Saddle" [*Dai an di lu*], "The Woman Who Disappeared from the Forked Road" [*Xiaoshi zai fenchu lu di nüren*] and "The Carnation Club"² and four short stories by Li Bihua: "The Woman Who Eats Brined Goose" [*Chi lu shui e di nüren*], "The Woman Who Eats Egg Tart" [*Chi danta di nüren*]³, "Eating Husbands [*Chi fu*]" and

¹ Cixous, Hélène: "The Laugh of the Medusa" in Vincent B. Leitch (ed.): *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, p. 2039.

² These four stories are from Hong Ying's short story collection, *The Curse of the Maize*.

³ These two stories are from the short story collection, *The Woman Who Eats Eyes*.

“Blue Spider” [Nan zhizhu].⁴ In the second section, I shall compare Hong Ying’s long novel *Summer of Betrayal* and her autobiography *Daughter of the River* with Li Bihua’s short fiction *The Old and New Ghosts from Tiannamen Square* and her biographical writing *The Red String* in order to illustrate different types of women’s writings that contain diverse feminist thoughts. Before starting my textual analyses, I will talk about the development of the issue of female subjectivity in modern Chinese writing in particular female writings.

The Awakening of Contemporary Chinese Female Writers

Inheriting the literary legacy from the late Qing period, Chinese writers in the Republican Period (including male writers) started paying more attention to female subjectivity thanks to the impact of the translation of Western feminist literature. It is believed that among all the published translations of the feminist literature, the translation of Henrik Ibsen’s theatrical drama, *A Doll’s House*,⁵ played one of the most prominent roles in shaping Chinese feminist ideologies.⁶ This is because “Nora’s struggle for recognition as a human being is rightly considered an exemplary case of women’s struggle for political and social rights”,⁷ and this inspired the formation of the idea of the ‘new women’ for the Chinese during the May Fourth period. As noted by Ying Ying Chien,

⁴ These two stories are from the short story collection, *The Last Piece of Chrysanthemum Cake*.

⁵ According to S.H. Siddall, “*A Doll’s House* has often been appropriated by supporters of feminist movement. Nora’s slamming the door has been taken to announce a sexual revolution”. Siddall, S.H.: *Henrik Ibsen: A Doll’s House*, p. 54.

⁶ With reference to Yiman Wang, the introduction of Henrik Ibsen as an “iconoclastic playwright began with Lu Xun’s two essays in 1909”. Hu Shi translated *A Doll’s House* and published his theorisation of Ibsenism in 1918 and published the translations as the Ibsen special in the journal, *New Youth* (Xin qingnan). Cited in Lingzhen Wang’s *Chinese Women’s Cinema: Transnational Contexts*, p. 242.

⁷ Moi, Toril: “‘First and Foremost a Human Being’: Idealism, Theatre and Gender in *A Doll’s House*”, in: *Modern Drama*, 49.3, p. 257.

Hu Shi and Lu Xun were two of the most influential elites whose different, if not contradictory, interpretations of Ibsen and Nora had great effect on how ‘foreign’, new ideas and representations of modern women were to be received in China at that time.⁸

One of the prominent examples of this influence is Hu Shi’s short comedy, *The Greatest Event of My Life* (*Zhongsheng dashi*) in 1919. It is a story about a young woman who refused the arranged marriage forced upon her by her parents and her elopement with her boyfriend. The female protagonist later came to be described as “the first Nora in China”.⁹ The individualism embodied in her character represented to the newly-awakened Chinese young women a new morality based on the concept of individual self. This assisted the promotion of the notion of ‘self’ in Chinese literature, and it also helped to shape the idea of ‘new women’ in the literature of the 1920s.¹⁰ Not only this, the publication of feminist journals such as *Women’s Bell* (*Nüxing zhong*), *Women’s Magazine* (*Funü zazhi*), *Women’s Review* (*Funü pinglun*) and *Women’s Life* (*Funü shenghuo*) also contributed to spreading feminist consciousness in China in the 1920s. These journals published articles criticising the patriarchal confinements of women, such as arranged marriages and foot-binding.¹¹

However, regardless of the emergence of ‘new women’ in Chinese literary history during the May Fourth period, women writers such as Bing Xin, Ding Ling and Chen Hengzhe who did address women’s personal thoughts still failed to deliver their convictions in an outspoken way. A prominent example would be Ding Ling’s “Miss Sophie’s Diary”. This text has been considered arguably the first feminist story

⁸ Chien, Ying-Ying: “Feminism and China’s New ‘Nora’: Ibsen, Hu Shi and Lu Xun”, in: *The Comparatist*, 19, p. 98.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Tam Kwok-Kan, “Introduction” in: *Gender, Discourse and Self in Literature: Issues in Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong*, p. xv.

¹¹ Chen, Peng-hsiang and Whitney Crothers Dilley: “Introduction”, in Peng-hsiang Chen and Whitney Crothers Dilley (eds.): *Feminism/Femininity in Chinese Literature*, p. 2.

in modern Chinese literature as Ding Ling employs a technique that allows the protagonist to explicitly express her inner feelings including sexual secrecy, though this may be thought to happen in a very narcissistic manner.¹² The main female protagonist in the story, Sophie, is sick and has to stay at home, which provides her with free time to write a diary to express her personal thoughts. Although Sophie has the linguistic ability to convey her personal sentiments, like the stereotypical women in “Madwoman in the Attic”, she belongs to the ‘abnormal’ type as she is physically unwell and needs to withdraw herself from ‘society’. In this sense, in this type of literature, even though women started to write about their personal thoughts and experiences, their writings could not be recognized as ‘proper writing’; they had to be in a ‘disadvantaged’ group in order to have the ‘advantage’ to write. As a result, readers might assume that what they had written would be affected by their illness and isolation, and therefore there would be no need to take their writings seriously.

Given the fact that the macro-social environment was about collective identity in the 1930s, the socialist construction of the female subject as a collective self in mainland China dominated in the 1930s too—women were represented as subjects of a class structure, particularly in the fictional works of famous male writers such as Mao Dun and Lao She, who saw the definition of femininity as a political issue in the women’s movement.¹³ In this sense, the female subjectivity that began to permeate the waves of the socialist collective spectrum in the works of the 1930s were for a long time regarded by literary historians as the peak of modern Chinese literature as well as the origin of the socialist orientation. Since this tradition continued into the Mao era, in all major histories of modern Chinese literature published on the

¹² Louie, Kam: *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*, p. 102. In addition, this type of writing style is also reminiscent of Japanese Naturalism.

¹³ Tam Kwok-Kan, “Introduction” in: *Gender, Discourse and Self in Literature: Issues in Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong*, p. xvi.

mainland since 1949, social construction has been the dominant representation of women.¹⁴ According to Zheng Wang,

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party created three models of pre-1949 women in the public memory: women who had joined the Communist revolution and who, therefore, rose to the status of heroines; women who have been oppressed by feudalism, imperialism and capitalism and thus [need] to be liberated by the party; and bourgeois wives [*taitai*] who depend on their husbands and therefore were the embodiment of a decadent, parasitic and exploitative class to be eliminated.

In numerous literary texts, including novels, biographies, movies, plays and operas produced during the Mao era (1949-1976), the transformation of women victims into revolutionary victims was a prominent and popular theme, whereas the third model only appeared occasionally, as a backdrop prop.¹⁵

Wang's description of the representation of pre-1949 women during the Mao period pinpoints the fact that the Chinese Communist Party had to (re)construct the image of women in order to fulfil their propaganda purpose: women who were willing to serve the Party were the 'real' heroines.

Inspired by the enlightenment of Western feminist thought and the women's liberation during the post-Mao period, women writers in China started focusing more on writing about their physical and psychological needs. This is because in order to fight against the suppression of the patriarchal constraints, second-wave feminists insisted that women writers should deconstruct the 'male-centred' language and employ a type of new language that addressed their own womanhood. One of the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Wang, Zheng: *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories*, p. 120.

prominent representations of this type of feminist writing in post-Mao literature is “new-state-of-affairs fiction” (*Xin zhuangtai xiaoshuo*).¹⁶ According to Wang Ning, new state fiction (‘new-state-of-affairs fiction’) is “particularly good at delving into the very depth of women’s privacy and sexual life and love affairs in an attempt to expose it in a faithful way to the reader.”¹⁷ Given the fact that “new-state-of-affairs fiction” puts heavy emphasis on writing about female bodies, this somehow shows the influence of the main ideology of the French feminists—*l’Écriture féminine*.

Referring to the quotation from Hélène Cixous at the beginning of this chapter, it can be noted that because women’s writings were based on the rationale of anti-patriarchal dominance, this highlights the cruciality of feminine writings—women should use their own language to express their feelings of being oppressed by men under the patriarchal hegemony, in particular their anger towards men, and their biological feelings that men could never understand. Based on this, I shall demonstrate that this is the period in which Chinese women came to know how to present themselves more comprehensively as they started to express their physical needs as women.

In addition, the period of 1989-1992 was a turning point in the history of Chinese culture, in particular the year 1992, as the term “‘socialist market economy’ became the official label for the new organization of social resources, and various policies were instituted to extend market reforms to new areas of economy”¹⁸; this

¹⁶ With reference to Jason McGrath, “new-state-of-affairs literature” (*xin zhuangtai wenxue*), “post-new-era literature” (*houxinshiqi wenxue*), “new urbanite fiction” (*xin shimin xiaoshuo*) and “new experiential fictiona” (*xin tiyan xiaoshuo*), the generation came of embody the transformed condition of Chinese literature in the 1990s, which appeared as vastly different that of the early reform era up to the transitional moment of 1989 to 1992”. McGrath, Jason: Review of *I Love Dollars and Other Stories of China* by Zhu Wen. <<http://mclc.osu.edu/rc/pubs/reviews/mcgrath.htm>>

¹⁷ Wang, Ning: “Feminist Theory and Contemporary Female Literature”, in Chen Peng-hsiang and Whitney Crothers Dilley (eds.): *Feminism/Femininity in Chinese Literature*, p. 204.

¹⁸ McGrath, Jason: *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature and Criticism in the Market Age*, p.3.

greatly influenced the orientation of cultural production as it was subjected to the imperatives of market competition.¹⁹ In other words, the “socialist market economy” signifies commercialism and consumerism. Under this new social-cultural context, a new type of female writers emerged on the Chinese literary scene. In the late 1990s and during the turn of the twenty-first century, more and more female authors were promoted as “beauty writers” (*meinü zuojia*), and their works were described as “body writing” (*shenti xiezu*) in Chinese literature.²⁰ With reference to Sheldon H. Lu, the term “body writing” was invented by Ge Hongbing, a professor at Shanghai University, in “Bodies Melting into Words” in *China Daily* on 4 December 2003 to refer to the writings of Wei Hui, Mian Mian and their likes, and these writers’ writings “are characterized by unabashed, unprecedented foregrounding of female sexuality”.²¹ Given the fact that this new type of women’s writings have mostly been set in cosmopolitan Shanghai in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the female discourse shifts from a national to a globalized focus, and the analysis of these types of writings will shed new light on Chinese feminist ideologies.

Not only have Chinese female writers come to know their rights as women, but they also pay more attention to their individual wants and take more initiative to claim their needs, rather than just airing their grievances on paper. The eight short stories that I have chosen for this discussion all contains traces of consciousness about female subjectivity. By comparing these short stories by Hong Ying and Li Bihua, I intend to pinpoint how women writers with different writing styles can present similar feminist thoughts, such as ‘the accentuation of the mother–daughter relationship’, ‘the

¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 3–4.

²⁰ Lu, Sheldon H: “Popular Culture and Body Politics: Beauty Writers in Contemporary China”, in *Modern Language Quarterly* 69:1, p. 167. I argue that the Chinese term was coined by Ge Hongbing but the idea of “body writing” was original from Hélène Cixous’s “The Laugh of the Medusa”.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 169.

monstrous feminine, ‘victimisation and revenge’ and ‘the subaltern can speak’, in distinctive ways.

Hong Ying’s “The Orphan, Little Six” is an experimental short story.²² It depicts a little girl who has been abandoned by her parents and is travelling on an imaginary journey into her past. On the journey, she meets her parents, her sisters and her neighbours as they were during her childhood. She dreams that her mother confesses to not being a proper mother and to abandoning her; at the same time, she meets another strange woman (the imaginary ideal mother) who shows motherly love to her. However, everything disappears as she awakens from the dream. This is a story about searching for one’s subjectivity or inner reality. Through the dream-like setting, a little girl (the main female protagonist) regains her ‘self-value’, as she has been abandoned by her mother in reality. The appearance of an imaginary ideal mother provides her redemption.

Similar in nature to “The Orphan, Little Six”, “The Deer with a Saddle” is a story full of symbolic meaning. It delineates the main protagonist, ‘I’, meeting her best friend, Yang Sui, in a dreamlike setting back in her hometown. ‘I’ discovers requests from Yang through various indirect means (a letter and a necklace with three little golden flowers) to find the culprit behind Yang’s mysterious death. After encountering Yang’s spirit, the protagonist comes to feel that Yang’s husband’s narrative is unreliable and that Yang’s real murderer is men (as represented by patriarchy).

Like “The Deer with a Saddle”, “The Woman who Disappeared from the Forked Road” is another story of suspense. The narrator, again the first-person

²² Tonglin Lu states that the characteristics of experimental fiction (*shiyan xiaoshuo*) are “to subvert the conventions of social realism, which has dominated mainland Chinese literature for about half of a century”. Lu, Tonglin: *Misogyny, Cultural Nihilism & Oppositional Politics: Contemporary Chinese Experimental Fiction*, p. 13.

singular 'I', describes the case of a missing Chinese woman, Linda Lin, and her husband Mark, an American man. The story begins with Mark and a policeman having a conversation about the disappearance of Mark's wife. The more Mark tells the policeman about Linda, the clearer the picture of the couple's relationship becomes to the readers. Mark's narrative of how he had been attracted to the exotic Linda highlights the Orientalised Chinese culture from a Western point of view. At the end of the story, Hong Ying twists the tale, as Mark suddenly makes a Freudian slip and admits to killing his wife.

Lastly, "The Carnation Club" tells of a group of women that have been physically and psychologically damaged by men and decide to take revenge by castrating them. The storyline jumps back and forth between personal accounts of the main female protagonist, Di Dong (Rainbow). Di describes how she had been raped by her biological father and abandoned by her boyfriend Gu Heng, and how she set up the man-hater club—"The Carnation Club"—with other patriarchally victimised women. Compared with the other three stories, "The Carnation Club" is the most outspoken second-wave feminist piece of writing, as the main idea of the story is based on the 'men are women's enemies' rationale.²³ Radical second-wave feminists, particularly the American feminists, believe that women are being oppressed by men and that removing men from women's lives is the only way out: women cannot gain their freedom in any other way. In this light, the female protagonists' determination to get rid of men in "The Carnation Club" is a clear representation of this polemic.

On the other side of the discussion, unlike Hong Ying, Li Bihua has never presented herself as a feminist writer, but her writings explore women's subjectivity

²³ According to Imelda Whelehan, "Most second wave feminists focused on social constructionist, rather than essentialist, arguments, and therefore casting men as the 'enemy' was tacitly accepted as a temporary socio-historical subject positioning which would be open to transformation". Whelehan, Imelda: *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to 'Post-Feminism'*, p. 177.

and womanhood in both implicit and explicit ways. The first two stories under consideration here, “The Woman who Loves Brined Goose” and “The Woman who Loves Egg Tarts”, come from the same collection—*The Woman who Eats Eyes*. The whole collection talks about four different women who have four distinct types of eating habits. First, “The Woman who Loves Brined Goose” starts off by detailing Mrs Xie’s (the main protagonist’s mother) success in running a *Chiu Chow* (Chaozhou) restaurant that is famous for brined goose and describes their strong mother–daughter relationship following the sudden disappearance of the husband/father. Later on, ‘I’, the narrator (the daughter), tells the readers about her own romantic life and the broken relationship between her parents. Right before the night of her wedding, the mysterious disappearance of her father is solved—her mother had chopped her father’s body up and put the pieces of the corpse into the brine sauce after he died over the course of martial arts training. The narrator also discloses her own private secret—she implies her recognition of her mother’s ‘indirect’ murder of her father by casting a curse on his martial arts training weapons.²⁴

Compared with “The Woman who Loves Brined Goose”, “The Woman who Loves Egg Tarts” is presented in a more realistic way, as there is no supernatural element involved. The main protagonist, Wan Jing, tells the readers that she has loved egg tarts since she was very young and has been looking for good egg tarts over the years. She deliberately uses ‘egg tarts’ as a metaphor for men, which means that she is desperately seeking a good man. As Wan Jing shares her experiences with the reader about her process and enjoyment of finding egg tarts, she reveals more of her past

²⁴ ‘Indirect murder’ here refers to the fact that Mrs Xie had caused her husband’s death by rubbing his sword with her sanitary towel. I will explain this argument in more details in the section of “The Accentuation of the Mother–Daughter Relationship in Li Bihua’s and Hong Ying’s Work” later in this chapter.

love stories to the reader. At the end of the story, she admits that she has yet to find the best egg tart (man) and that there is a long way for her to go. From a feminist perspective, this story obviously challenges the traditional stereotype of women in which the female protagonist is placed in a 'passive' position with respect to sexual desire. As with Hong Ying's "The Orphan, Little Six", through the process of finding a man, the narrator, 'I', here goes through a journey to discover her female subjectivity, as she comes to believe that she has the right to choose a man who suits her and not to be a man's possession.

In contrast to the two stories described above, "Eating Husbands" and "Blue Spider" are more provocative in delivering their feminist messages. Both of these short stories depict women turning into horrible insects that eat men in order to get rid of them. Li Bihua used a sarcastic tone to write "Eating Husbands", and she depicts the two incarnated creatures, the Mantis and Spider, as man-eaters. They prey on men and kill them during sex. The opening of the story takes place in court: the plaintiff, Mr Zhu, accuses the defendant, Miss Mantis, of killing her lovers while they were having sex. Because of his peeping-Tom behaviour, Mr Zhu has figured out Miss Mantis's cruel methods of killing men and calls his mother, Mrs Zhu, as his witness. However, when Mrs Zhu (the spider) gives her evidence, she reveals that she did the same thing to her husband. Sharing a similar viewpoint to that of Miss Mantis, Mrs Zhu proclaims that men are useless 'creatures'; they only care about sex, so the best way to 'consume' them is to have sex with them and kill them in the process.

Akin to "Eating Husbands", the main female protagonist (who is not given a name) in "Blue Spider" transforms into a spider and consumes men while she has sex with them. The story depicts the main female character, who is a mistress/secretary of the boss in a small company, having a strange encounter with a blue spider. The blue

spider used to stay at her home, and the female protagonist did not really pay attention to it. However, her perception of the blue spider's significance changed after being abandoned by her man and meeting a mysterious woman dressed in black at a bar. In a dreamlike setting, the mysterious woman kisses the main protagonist and makes her lose consciousness. When she becomes conscious, she realises that she has acquired a spider tattoo on her back and has been dressed in the black clothes left by the mysterious woman. After this encounter, whenever she has sex with men, she becomes a blue spider and eats them with enjoyment during the act of sexual intercourse. As she cannot finish the men in one go, she decides to put them into cans in order to preserve their freshness. Li ends the story ironically by stating that the blue spider woman has encountered a big problem——she has accumulated a lot of emptied cans (she has dumped a lot of men) and does not know how to deal with them. Using a feminist perspective to analyse “Blue Spider”, this story expresses the belief that sexual desire is not only for men; women can also have the same feelings. Furthermore, the willingness to express this desire is a characteristic of ‘body writing’.

In “Eating Husbands” and “Blue Spider”, the female protagonists are not passive in their sexual relationships with men, and they are not being ‘used’ by men; on the contrary, they use sex to seduce men and kill them. To read the stories in a feminist sense, one might claim that these women are finding their female subjectivity through expressing their sexual desire.²⁵ The fact that their desire is damaging to men is representative of literature at this stage of feminist thought. Even though Li did not intend to write these two stories to express feminist concepts, because of the common

²⁵ Hong Ying's novel, *K: The Art of Love*, is a very good example to illustrate the idea of writing about women's bodies, as the book is about how the female protagonist finds her self-identity through an affair with a famous British writer. However, I would like to focus on short stories of the two authors; therefore, I do not include this novel in the discussion in the first section of this chapter. However, I will briefly talk about this story in Chapter Four, as Hong Ying has used this book as an example to illustrate her feminist claims.

issue of sex—a key element in second-wave feminist criticism, especially in French feminist theories—a critique of the two stories might show the impact of Western feminist thought in Hong Kong female writings.

Apart from using a feminist perspective to read these stories about eating, the theme of “eating” in Chinese literature should be taken into consideration, as it reveals the distinctive Chinese features in Li Bihua’s writing. According to Gang Yue, “we should not be surprised to find that the history of twentieth century China can be conceived as a saga of ‘eating’”, as “the Old China was a monstrous human-eating feast; only through revolution could the oppressed masses free themselves of that devouring system and transform it into egalitarian revelry”.²⁶ Applying this concept to reading the female protagonists’ act of eating, their revolutionary act could be clearly shown. Unlike Gang Yue’s comment, the female protagonists here are not ‘passive’ to be eaten up by Old China (the traditional values and rituals of Chinese culture); instead, they take up the roles of eating. This could be interpreted as the female protagonists eating up their patriarchal confinements (which was symbolised as men in the story) that have been imposed on them. Having eaten them up, they will be free in terms of fleeing from the patriarchal hegemony.

On the contrary, the theme of “cannibalism” could be used to scrutinise the three stories: “The Woman who Loves Brined Goose”, “Eating Husbands” and “Blue Spider”. In the Chinese literary tradition, the theme of “cannibalism” has a long history. According to Gang Yue, the first idiom about cannibalism is *shirou qinpi* (eating one’s flesh and sleeping on one’s hides), which appears in a section of “Duke Xiang 21st Year” (552 B.C.E).²⁷ Also, Lu Xun’s “Diary of a Madman” would be

²⁶ Yue, Gang: *The Mouth That Begs: Hunger, Cannibalism and the Politics of Eating in Modern China*, p. 2.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 53.

considered as a classic example dealing with the theme of cannibalism, as he explicitly condemned traditional Chinese rituals as being cannibalistic (*li jiao chi ren*). Instead of reading the theme in a literal way, the act of cannibalism could be interpreted symbolically. Rhetorically, the intention of eating someone up could signify the rage of the subject towards his/her counterpart, which could be seen as a form of “revenge cannibalism”.²⁸ The above stories all contain features of “revenge cannibalism”.

In “The Woman who Loves Brined Goose”, the protagonist’s mother, Mrs Xie, has been oppressed by the father in several ways throughout their marriage. These incidents make her hate him so much that she has to chop him up and ‘eat’ him. Being a *Chiu Chow* (Chaozhou) man, Mr Xie has strong patriarchal thoughts and made him disrespect woman.²⁹ In one incident, Mr Xie forces Mrs Xie to have sex with him, even though she warns him that she might be pregnant: “Please be softer...I might be pregnant”. He replies, “How would know about women’s stuff? How can I control myself?”³⁰ Even though Mrs Xie shows her unwillingness and asks him to stop, he forces himself on her and makes her have a miscarriage in the end. This example shows that the protagonist’s father does not respect the mother; this scene could even be interpreted as a crime of rape. Another incident that contributes to Mrs Xie’s anger towards Mr Xie is his extra-marital affair:

Whenever mum thinks of dad’s egotism, his disloyalty by spending time and efforts on another woman, her anger erupts. She has to dissimulate her anger through eating. She has to consume a big feast, eating all the flesh up and

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 55.

²⁹ Chaozhou men are famous for patriarchal dominance. See Michele Tang’s online article “Gender Inequality in Household”. <<http://www.com.cuhk.edu.hk/varsity/9905/inequ.htm>>

³⁰ Li, Bihua: “The Woman who Loves Brined Goose”, p. 18.

sucking up the marrow from the meat. Eating is the best way for her to heal.³¹

Although the context of this quote does not explicitly talk about eating Mr Xie's flesh, it is very obvious that "the flesh" in the context is referring to the flesh of the father. Mrs Xie is angry with Mr Xie and wants to 'eat him up' to relieve her anger. This could be considered as an act of "revenge cannibalism" and could be justified by Gang Yue's comment on one of the intentions of committing cannibalism in ancient China: "the destruction of the enemy's body does not end with his killing but should be carried further by dissolving the enemy's physical being into one's own mouth and guts."³² When the story plot goes on, the readers would realise that Mrs Xie did "eat up the flesh and suck the marrow" symbolically at the end of the story, which I will discuss in greater detail in the following section, "The Accentuation of the Mother–Daughter Relationship".

In "Eating Husbands" and "Blue Spider", the act of cannibalism takes place when the female protagonists transformed into a mantis and a spider. In such a light, the idea of "sexual cannibalism" could be applied to read the two stories. Sexual cannibalism is commonly found in black widow spiders and praying mantises.³³ According to Mark A. Elgar, sexual cannibalism is defined as "a female killing and eating her mate during courtship, copulation or shortly after copulation".³⁴ In such light, sexual cannibalism would literally be a normal, natural phenomenon, as the female protagonists transformed themselves into a mantis and a spider. The killing and eating of their male counterparts would be less provocative, as the male

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 20.

³² Yue, Gang: *The Mouth That Begs: Hunger, Cannibalism and the Politics of Eating in Modern China*, p.53.

³³ Wood, Allan: *Livestock*, p. 103.

³⁴ Quoted in Mark A. Elgar and Jutta M. Shneider's "Evolutionary Significance of Sexual Cannibalism—Introduction", in Peter J.B Slater, Jay S. Rosenblatt, Charles T. Snowdon, Timonthy J. Roper, H. Jane Brockmann and Marc Naguib (eds.): *Advances in the Study of Behaviour*, p. 135.

protagonists symbolically transformed into the same ‘species’ as the female protagonists. In such sense, it could be interpreted that men have been ironically ‘downgraded’ to the insect level and they are not humans. Nonetheless, if one sees the female characters as the monsters and the male protagonists as the “real humans”, the subversive application of “sexual cannibalism” in this context would be more provocative, as it is act of “revenge cannibalism”. This is because women have been used to satisfy men’s sexual pleasure and have been suppressed by them; therefore, in order to take revenge on men for being mistreated, the female protagonists eat them up.

The Accentuation of the Mother–Daughter Relationship in Li Bihua’s and Hong Ying’s Work

Despite the fact that Li Bihua is a female writer with no interest in being an active supporter of feminism, some of her work does share similar feminist ideas with the work of Hong Ying, who *is* an active feminist writer. One of their correspondences emphasise motherhood, as both authors focus on the special bond between mothers and daughters—an exclusive relationship to women in their writings. The mother–daughter relationship is a significant argument in psychoanalytic feminism.

According to Yi-lin Yu:

Psychoanalytic feminism has its focus in interesting and illuminating ways of exploring the mother–daughter relationship, and in particular on an evaluation of the mother–child relation in the pre-Oedipal phase ... Psychoanalytic feminism such as Chodorow’s and Flax’s object relation theory and Irigaray’s and Kristeva’s post-Lacanian peruse the most frequent problems that mothers and daughters

confront and recommend specific ideologies to mend these relationships.³⁵

Based on Yi-liu Yu's comment, using a psychoanalytic feminist perspective to study the theme of mother–daughter relationships in Hong Ying's and Li Bihua's selected stories has opened up a new perspective from which to interpret the stories. Although psychoanalytic feminist theories are very different from psychoanalysis, which is largely based on Sigmund Freud's theories, to a certain extent, it depends largely on Freudian theories. Freudianism (*Fuloyide zhuyi*) or Freudian ideas had been assimilated into Chinese literature since the early twentieth century,³⁶ and Freudian theory was known fairly widely to the public, as Freudian theories were familiar to many Chinese intellectuals by the mid-1930s.³⁷ Thus, by using psychoanalysis together with psychoanalytic feminist theories to read the selected texts in my discussion, female consciousness in the stories can be subject to scrutiny.

In Li Bihua's "The Woman who Loves Brined Goose," the mother–daughter relationship is a strong one, not least thanks to the absence of the husband/father. The narrator 'I' believes that the disappearance of her father is a consequence of his disloyalty, as he had a mistress in mainland China. However, the truth revealed in the end is that her mother had chopped up her father's body and put his parts in brine. To make the story more absurd, Li Bihua discloses to her readers that the main protagonist, the 'I' narrator, knows her mother did little tricks—such as casting a curse—on his martial arts training weapon—so that her father killed himself:

³⁵ Yu, Yi-Lin: *Mother, She Wrote: Matrilinial Narratives in Contemporary Women's Writing*, p. 35.

³⁶ According to Jinyuan Zhang, the beginning of the implications of Freudian theory with Chinese literature could be traced back to a letter of correspondence between Sigmund Freud and Chinese scholars in 1929. Zhang, Jinyuan: *Psychoanalysis in China: Literary Transformations: 1919–1949*, pp. 5–6.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 24.

Mum, I saw you going up to father's exercise room on the roof secretly; you took out a used sanitary towel to wipe it thoroughly on the blade of father's exercise knife. I did not really understand why you had to do this during that period of time. But now, I realise why father is not afraid of the black dog's blood but hates women's menstrual blood—it is the most wicked curse in the world for men. It's you who 'sharpened' the knife. It's father who killed himself by his knife. Of course it won't be you, mum, because you are just such a 'weak' woman.³⁸

This long monologue by the narrator shows that she will never betray her mother, even though she believes from the beginning that her mother's curse led to her father's death. Interpreting this quote from another perspective, the comment on the 'weak' woman is highly sarcastic. It is obvious that, for the mother who is 'the murderer' of the narrator's father, the action of murdering is totally contradictory to the 'intimate', 'meek' and submissive image that the mother (or in broader terms, Chinese wives) have. The sarcastic tone highlights the rebellious intention of the mother and the daughter, as she becomes her ally in getting rid of the father (the patriarch). The ultimate reason for her hiding the secret is because she sympathises with her mother for being a woman:

We are mother and daughter who have forethoughts and wise planning for future needs. We have no choice—not being willing to be suppressed by men or by other women. I only know that we are in the same boat, so mother, we will be standing on the same line forever.³⁹

³⁸ Li, Bihua: "The Woman who Loves Brined Goose", p. 58. According to Chinese folk legend, although the blood of black dogs has been considered as the most unfortunate thing in Chinese culture, women's menstrual blood is the wickedest curse for Chinese men.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

On the basis of the two extracts given above, the exclusive mother–daughter relationship emphasises the motherhood of the mother and reveals the strong connection between the two women. Knowing that her mother has suffered a lot as a result of her father’s betrayal, ‘I’ knows that her mother is the only family she has, and in this light, even though she knows what her mother had done, she would never denounce her because she feels pity for her. Towards the end of the story, ‘I’ tells her mother directly, “do not worry about me, I will have a good life and not let other men bully me”.⁴⁰ This explicit feminist claim reveals Li’s viewpoint of women’s suppression. Li admits that women live in conditions of patriarchal constraint whereby they are always the victims being bullied. In this respect, women should support each other in order to resist the oppression caused by patriarchal hegemony. The unique mother–daughter relationship allows women to have such an unbreakable bond.

Like Li Bihua, Hong Ying also pays special attention to the mother–daughter relationship. In “The Orphan, Little Six”, the persona ‘I’ has been haunted by her past experience of being abandoned by her family. On a dreamlike adventure to the past, she dreamt that her mother confessed to her and begged for her forgiveness:

Little Six, you can scold me or you can refuse to claim that you know me, you can do to me whatever you want. But please believe me, I tried every means—putting personal advertisements in newspapers, going to the police station and asking people for help—to look for you.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Li, Bihua: “The Woman who Loves Brined Goose”, p. 59.

⁴¹ Hong, Ying: “The Orphan, Little Six”, pp. 213–214.

Seeing that this confession is not a ‘real’ one but part of a dream, Little Six’s eagerness to have a reunion with her mother can clearly be seen. This unconscious desire is fully revealed in her dream, in which she cannot suppress it any more. Even though she has been abandoned by her mother, she does not sense the psychological distance from her mother. This is because, when the confession goes on, Little Six’s mother bluntly proclaims that “you lived in my womb for ten months”.⁴² This strong emphasis on the physical connection between mother and daughter makes Hong Ying’s work a piece of feminist literature; she very strongly emphasises experiences that only women can have. As stated by Elizabeth Wallace:

The uterus [womb] is one of the primary reproductive organs in a woman’s body. Due to its capacity for supporting the development of new life during pregnancy, the uterus has come to associated with the powers of femininity in both physical reproduction and artistic creation. At the same time, the uterus has been represented as a source of female fluidity and instability, both through its link with the physical flows of blood in menstruation and child birth ... For feminist theories, the uterus has served as a locus for debates regarding the relation between women’s reproductive capabilities and social and cultural definitions of female subjectivities.⁴³

In addition, in her article “The Laugh of the Medusa”, Hélène Cixous emphasises the strong connection between women through the uterus metaphor:

Woman for women—There always remains in woman that force to which produces/is produced by the other—in particular, the other woman. In her, matrix, cradler; herself giver as her mother and child; she is her own sister—

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Wallace, Elizabeth Kowaleski (ed.): *Encyclopaedia of Feminist Literary Theory*, p. 578.

daughter...Everything will be changed once woman gives woman to the other woman. There is hidden and always reading in woman the source; the locus for the other. The mother, too, is a metaphor. It is necessary and sufficient that the best of herself and return in love the body that was “born” to her.⁴⁴

Provided with the facts that only women have the ability to give birth and uterine features are exclusive to women, by emphasising the connection between the mother and daughter through the symbol of the womb, Hong Ying highlights the idiosyncratic features of female bodily experience. Not only this, the encounter with the mysterious woman in the dream also portrays the keenness of the ‘I’ narrator to reconnect with the womb, as she allows the mysterious woman, who she thinks shares the same smell as her mother, to hug her when she is naked. This act reveals that the ‘I’ narrator fantasies herself as being a baby again and staying in the womb (in the embrace of the mysterious woman) of her mother. The strong mother and daughter relationship has been specifically described to the reader.

Women Possess Supernatural Power and the Monstrous Feminine

As well as emphasising the mother–daughter relationship, both Hong Ying and Li Bihua explore supernatural elements in their stories, which could be interpreted as a way to attack the patriarchal constriction of women in real life. Supernatural themes have a long history in Chinese literature. Before the Tang Dynasty, most literary works were either based on moral teachings derived from Confucian philosophies or historical records such as *Zuozhuan*. Hence, short stories containing fact and fantasy did not appear until the Six Dynasties. Even when fictional materials appeared in

⁴⁴ Cixous, Hélène, “The Laugh of the Medusa” in Vincent B. Leitch (ed.): *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, p. 2045.

zhiguai—collections of tales about supernatural and strange events produced during the Six Dynasties period—these stories were nonetheless presented in the guise of fact⁴⁵ to entertain or to communicate a message to the audiences.⁴⁶ Pu Songling’s *Strange Stories from Liaozhai (Liaozhai zhi yi)* has been regarded as the most influential book in this genre. The theme of the supernatural—in particular, the images of ghosts, fox-spirits, forebodings, dreams of premonition, metamorphoses, fortune-tellers and magical objects—has been used by experimental, modernist or postmodernist mainland Chinese writers in order to highlight the modernist or postmodernist traits.⁴⁷ By using supernatural themes in their writings, both Hong Ying and Li Bihua allow non-human characters to convey messages to their readers.

In “The Deer with a Saddle”, Hong Ying arranges for her female protagonist to meet with a mysterious female ghost in order to reveal the suppression and jeopardisation of women in the patriarchal Chinese society. Like Maxine Hong Kingston, Hong Ying uses the ‘ghost metaphor’ as a reminder of the haunting past.⁴⁸ This is because both authors imply that a ghost can be interpreted as reminiscent of the past from a social and historical perspective rather than conveying any horrifying connotation to the reader. In her book, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Avery F. Gordon states that “the ghost is simply not a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to the dense site where history and subjectivity make social life”.⁴⁹ Applying this argument to Hong Ying’s ‘The Deer with a Saddle’, the appearance of the mysterious female ghost in

⁴⁵ Hightower, James. *Topics in Chinese Literature: Outlines and Bibliographies*, p.77.

⁴⁶ Edwards, E.D: *Chinese Prose Literature of the Tang Period A.D 618–906*, pp. 12, 15.

⁴⁷ Wedell-Wedellsborg, Anne: “Haunted Fiction: Modern Chinese Literature and the Supernatural”, in: *The International Fiction Review* 32.1&2.

<<http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/IFR/article/view/7797/8854>>

⁴⁸ Maxine Hong Kingston portrayed the Chinese ghosts as the haunting past in her first novel, *The Woman Warrior: Memoris of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*.

⁴⁹ Gordon, F. Avery: *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, p. 8.

the story is not to create a horrific effect but to represent a 'social figure' who is a victim of patriarchy, as she has been murdered by the 'male-dominated hegemony'. By lifting the veil on the cause of Yang Sui's mysterious death, the second-wave feminist rationale—'men-as-women's-enemies'—can be clearly seen.

The title itself, "The Deer with a Saddle", connotes a strong feminist implication—that women have been manipulated by men. In the story, the deer symbolises the dead woman, Yang Sui, and the saddle ironically represents her husband, or can even be interpreted as the whole patriarchal system. A deer is a gentle type of wild animal that lives in the natural world and has the freedom to do whatever it wishes. However, placing a saddle (a means of control) on the deer implies that the deer has lost its own freedom. Furthermore, putting a saddle on a deer is a profoundly unnatural act; by doing so, the animal's wild nature is violated. By using a feminist viewpoint to read "The Deer with a Saddle", the reader can clearly see Hong Ying's outspoken criticism of marriage. As a married woman, Yang Sui (the deer) has lost her freedom, as she has to fulfil the obligations of being a wife; in this sense, she is just like a deer with a saddle—a metaphor that symbolizes the marriage institution under the patriarchal hegemony: it is a violation of the woman's fundamental nature. In the story, the 'I' narrator (assumed to be a woman because the narrator normally represents the voice of the author) reveals Yang Sui's death to the reader. Even though the cause of Yang Sui's death appears to be mysterious, Yang's husband does not seem to be bothered enough to discover the truth and just passively accepts the fact that Yan Sui is dead. Not until the narrator encounters Yang's ghost does it become obvious that the truth has not been fully uncovered. When Yang Sui was still alive, she had no opportunities to voice her needs; she had been deprived of any way to express herself by her husband. Not until she returned to the human world in the

form of a ghost did Yang Sui finally have a chance to voice her thoughts when she encountered the narrator of the story. The different attitude of the narrator and Yang's husband towards Yang's death highlights the ultimate gender difference—there is a strong connection between women but not with men. Women feel more sympathetic towards each other and care about each other, even when one of them is a ghost. The strong friendship between Yang Sui and the narrator could be interpreted as a type of sisterhood, which incorporates one of the main fundamental arguments in feminist theories. According to Janice Raymond:

The necessity for sisterhood arose out of the recognition that women were all oppressed in all cultures throughout all periods of history. In sisterhood, feminists began to struggle against all forms of tyranny over women—rape, pornography, battering, international sexual slavery—and so on, and to realize that women had much in common. Sisterhood became a way of expressing the spirit of women's resistance to the common global reality of women's oppression ... Different schools of feminism all stressed the necessity to build a strong solidarity of sisterhood.⁵⁰

Raymond's remarks explain the motivation behind the narrator's persistence in finding out the truth about Yang Sui's death, as they are facing the same 'oppression'—the patriarchy. Hence, the narrator has a mission to speak out for Yang Sui even though she is dead.

Unlike Hong Ying, Li Bihua included supernatural elements in her stories by transforming her female protagonists into man-eating monsters. Because male writers dominated the Chinese literary tradition in pre-modern China, it is not surprising to

⁵⁰ Raymond, Janice G.: *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection*, p. 28.

see that most monsters or evil spirits in Chinese literature are women. The most common evil supernatural figure in the Chinese literary tradition is the *hulijing* (fox spirit), which are always in female form. This could be justified by Zhu Ling's comment on *hulijing* in Chinese literature: the angelic women and the monstrous women in Western and Chinese literature are the "gentle lady" (*shunü*) and the "fox spirit" (*hulijing*), respectively. The monstrous or *hulijing* represents male's fear of femininity—"the fear that the woman, her sexuality in particular, might exceed male control".⁵¹ The most representative literature of this genre is Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhi yi*.⁵² As noted by Fatima Wu:

It is not difficult to find that most Chinese traditional fox spirits are female. More than half of the fox characters in the tales are female. Female fox spirits are especially common when the tale is concerned with [a] man-and-woman relationship. When the woman is the seducer, she is always a fox spirit... The modern expression *hu-li-ching*, 'fox spirits', refers to a 'bad' woman who seduces a man sexually and tricks him into giving her whatever she desires. In modern language, the term is never used to refer to the male sex.⁵³

Wu's comment highlights the 'feminine features' of the supernatural figures (in particular, evil spirits) in the Chinese literary tradition. In such a light, it is understandable the two female authors are both using an old literary technique—female supernatural figures—as their spokespersons in order to convey their feminist thoughts to the readers.

⁵¹ Ling, Zhu: "A Brave New World? On the Construction of 'Masculinity' and 'Femininity' in The Red Sorghum Family", in Tonglin Lu (ed.): *Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature and Society*, p.129.

⁵² Wu, Fatima: "Foxes in Chinese Supernatural Tales (Part I)", in *Tamkang Review*, Vol. XVII No.2, p. 121.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p.140.

As described by Anne Wedell-Wedellsorg, supernatural events are strongly associated with the world of the individual subconscious and have Freudian connotations. Thus, apart from just using a traditional literary perspective to read these female supernatural characters, it will be useful to analyse these characters from a psychoanalytical feminist approach. Monsters in the Western literary tradition are always male—typical examples include Dracula, Frankenstein, vampires and werewolves; they target innocent women as their victims. This is because, through extreme displays of feminine masochistic suffering, there is always a component of either power or pleasure for the woman victim. However, the existence of female monsters in literary history should not be ignored, as they are worth examining, in terms of revealing the male psyche of creating such characters in literature. The well-known classical example is Medusa, who has been regarded as a feminist icon of the man-eater. In his article ‘Medusa’s Head’, Sigmund Freud stated that:

If Medusa’s head takes the place of a representation of the female genitals, or rather if it isolates their horrifying effects from their pleasure-giving ones, it may be recalled that displaying the genitals is familiar in their other connections as an apostrophic act. What arouses horror in oneself will produce the same effect upon the enemy against whom one is seeking to defend oneself.⁵⁴

This quotation reveals that the threat female monsters (in this case, Medusa) impose on the male audience is only the male psychological projection, which means that the sense of fear is generated within their own psyche. In this light, according to Freud,

⁵⁴Freud, Sigmund: “Medusa’s Head”, in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Beyond Pleasure Principle Group Psychology and Other Works* vol. 18, p. 274.

the appearance of female monsters is used to affirm the phallogentric culture, as they are the extensions of the male fantasy.

However, if we use a more provocative female perspective to view female monsters, they might not only act as the psychological projection of their male counterparts, but can also be interpreted as a feminist revolt against the patriarchal hegemony. In her book *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Barbara Creed provides an insightful comment: “As with all other stereotypes of feminine: from virgin to whore, she is defined in terms of sexuality. The phrase ‘monstrous-feminine’ emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity.”⁵⁵ In other words, unlike Freud’s comment, the main difference between male and female monsters is that the focus is not on the level of their monstrosity but on their sexual difference. In males’ writings, female monsters represent the ‘distorted other’, as their existence help to strengthen the male psyche and satisfy males’ fantasies. On the other hand, the female monsters (or the haunting ghosts of Hong Ying) represent an agent to air their grievances and voice their needs.

Applying this rationale to Li Bihua’s “Eating Husbands” and “Blue Spider”, the feminist voice of the female monsters can be clearly heard. In both stories, the female protagonists possess monstrosity, as they can transform into man-eating insects: the two female protagonists turn into a mantis and a spider in “Eating Husbands”, and the anonymous protagonist also becomes a spider in “Blue Spider”. On the one hand, these female characters appeal to men as normal women who possess charming qualities, but when they have found their target, they will reveal their monstrous faces to consume their ‘prey’. Compared with Hong Ying, Li Bihua uses a more sarcastic tone to mock the disloyalty of men and reveal how patriarchal

⁵⁵ Creed, Barbara: *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, p. 3.

constraints have suffocated women. Since most of the female characters have been victimised by their male counterparts, the only way for them to avoid being hurt again is to get rid of the male species.

One prominent example is Miss Tang's (the Mantis) comment from "Eating Husbands": she states that the only thing men want is sex. They would use all their means to pursue her in order to have sex with her, yet they might not love her at all. In order to get rid of the 'rubbish species', she uses sex to seduce them and then kill them one by one as a way to prevent other females from being hurt by them. The only way for women to survive is to get rid of men. This idea coincides with what I have talked about "sexual cannibalism" in the section discussing the cannibalist theme above. According to Göran Arquist and Locke Rowe, in the insect world, males are potentially able to mate with multiple females but, in some species such as black widow spiders, the females tend to consume specific males before or during copulation in order to avoid being self-sacrificed.⁵⁶ Applying this idea to the two stories, the female protagonists have to swallow their male partners in order to avoid being killed after copulating with them; in other words, the act of consumption is a kind of self-protection.

The blunt comments highlight the feminist consciousness to be found in Li Bihua's work and provide a new perspective from which to view the female monsters, which have been stereotyped by male-dominated culture. This is because, from a feminist perspective, women are 'powerless' and do not have the ability to overthrow the patriarchal hegemony, as they live in a male-dominated society; the societal norms and rules are constructed to benefit men. In this light, Li Bihua empowers her female protagonists to fight against men (the patriarchy) by transforming them into powerful

⁵⁶ Arnqvist, Göran and Locke Rowe: *Sexual Conflict*, p. 50.

‘monsters’. Even though the transformation is a symbolic one and can only exist in a literary setting, the second-wave feminist consciousness can be clearly revealed. This ties in with Kristin J. Anderson’s comment on the extreme feminists’ perception of a utopian world—the extinction of men: “if only all the men are gone, as the theory goes, women could go about building the perfect society. These feminists want to have a divorce from the entire population of the world”.⁵⁷

Despite the fact that Hong Ying and Li Bihua insert different forms of supernatural elements when creating their stories, both authors use this special writing technique to convey their revolt against male-dominated hegemony. Through using the supernatural genre, the authors bring the readers to an imaginary world that is contradictory to reality. By confronting the discrepancies between the supernatural world and the real world, one could view the real world from another perspective that one might not be able to see. In such light, the two authors try to arouse their readers’ awareness of such contrastive comparison.

From Victims to Terrorists—the Revenge of Women in the Short Stories

In the eight short stories discussed above, all of the women have either been emotionally hurt by men or murdered by them. Among these short stories, the female protagonist Linda Lin, in Hong Ying’s “The Woman Who Disappeared from the Forked Road” is the best example of a ‘female victim’ under a patriarchal system. She is absent throughout the whole story, which implies that she does not have a voice at all. Without the account of the ‘I’ narrator, the murder of Linda Lin and the brutality of Mark (Linda’s husband) will never be revealed. Given the fact that Hong Ying

⁵⁷ Anderson, Kristin J.: “The Great Divorce: Fictions of Feminist Desire”, in Libby Fork Jones, Sarah McKim and Webster Goodwind (eds.): *Feminism, Utopia and Narrative*, p. 85.

intended to use Linda as the key character of the story, in that the title “The Woman Who Disappeared from the Forked Road” refers to Linda’s disappearance, Linda nonetheless does not play an active role in the development of the plot.

On the contrary, the narrator becomes the round character in the story, as he/she is the one revealing the mysterious case to the readers. By comparing Linda’s passiveness with the narrator’s active participation, Linda has become an inferior character and a victim, as she does not have any right to proclaim the wrongs inflicted on her. She has no voice at all in the whole story. However, it is a better alternative for Hong Ying to use the narrator as the main persona, as the narration can be more objective. Seeing that there is very limited information about the narrator, in particular, there is no information about this character’s gender; hence the accusation that the patriarchal constriction of Linda is legitimated, as there is no gender bias issue involved.

Apart from the fact that she is absent in the story, the victimisation of Linda can be manifested through the cultural conflicts between the East and the West. As Linda is a Chinese woman and her husband, Mark, is an American, it is not surprising to see their cultural differences. From the conversation between the narrator and Mark, the misconception from the West of the East can easily be demonstrated. One typical example from the story is the couple’s different views on pregnancy. In a conversation between Mark and his friend, he questions Chinese women’s concept of family and children:

She [Linda] was very angry when I threw away her contraceptive pills two weeks ago; she threatened to leave me and not allow me to have

sex with her. I thought Chinese women love to have kids and their own families, is it not true?⁵⁸

Mark assumes that all Chinese women are still very traditional—staying at home to fulfil the Confucian doctrine of *fudao*.⁵⁹ Despite Linda being a Chinese woman, there is no information about her background, apart from her surname, Lin. However, Linda can be perceived as a comparatively Westernised person, as she introduces herself by her English forename and not her original Chinese name. Nevertheless, Mark, her husband, does not agree with this perception of Linda and still uses an ‘orientalised’ conception to understand his wife. He has been trapped in his own exoticised image of Chinese women and assumes that Linda will behave like how he imagines other traditional Chinese women act. As a result of his obsession with Chinese women, Mark starts to fall for Linda simply because she is a Chinese woman. He makes his account explicit in the story:

The reason for me coming to study at Berkeley was because of the Chinese women here. When I was young, I really liked the oriental women in the movies. I like Chinese cuisine but I like Chinese women who wear the *qipao* more as they are really mysterious and sexy to me. When I first saw Linda, I knew she would be gorgeous when she wears the *qipao*.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Hong, Ying: “The Woman who Disappeared from the Forked Road”, p. 112.

⁵⁹ In ancient Chinese culture, women should follow the ‘three obediences and four virtues’. The three obediences are that: unmarried women should obey their fathers, married women should obey their husbands and finally, when women grow old, they should be submissive to their sons. According to Dorothy Ko, “the age-old Confucian Four Virtues are womanly speech, womanly virtue, womanly deportment, and womanly work”. Ko, Dorothy: *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*, p. 143.

⁶⁰ Hong, Ying: “The Woman who Disappeared from the Forked Road”, p. 114.

Mark's comment about Chinese women reveals his voyeuristic perception of Chinese women, as he sees them as objects of appreciation. First, he fantasised that all Chinese women would be the same as the stereotypes of Chinese women depicted in Hollywood movies—exotic, submissive and timid.⁶¹ Second, he used his 'male gaze' to view Chinese women, as he only pays attention to their bodies,⁶² in this case, imagining how sexy Chinese women would be if they wore a *qipao*. On this basis, Mark has identified Chinese women as an inferior oriental counterpart; therefore, it is possible to say that Linda has been doubly jeopardized as both a victim under the Chinese patriarchy and a victim of Western hegemony. Furthermore, Linda's consistent absence and silence in the story reveal that she belongs to a suppressed group and does not have a right to speak at all.⁶³

In addition, given the fact that the biographical information on the missing female protagonist is very general—she is a Chinese woman who lived in the United States whose name is Linda Lin (her Chinese name is not even mentioned)—Linda may be considered to be a representation of Chinese women in general in the eyes of Western men (Mark also acts as a representative of Western men). This is because the main reason that Mark falls for Linda is her appearance, rather than her personality, as he reckons that she would look gorgeous in a *qipao*, which implies that Mark will like any Chinese woman who has a figure good enough to wear a *qipao*. This generalization of Chinese women in Mark's eyes hints that Chinese women lose their

⁶¹ One typical stereotype of Asian woman in Hollywood movies is Suzie Wong. Luk, Thomas and James P. Rice (eds.): *Before and After Suzie: Hong Kong in Western Film and Literature*, p. 74.

⁶² The idea of the 'male gaze' is from Laura Mulvey's famous essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". I will discuss the concept in greater detail in Chapter 3 when I talk about the image of women under the male directors' camera.

⁶³ In her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that women in Third World countries doubly suffer from both racism and sexism under a patriarchal system, and in this light, seeing that China has been categorized as a third-world country, it is assumed that Chinese women would suffer from racism and sexism in Western societies from the feminist perspective. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg (eds.): *Marxism and the interpretation of Culture*, pp. 271–313.

female subjectivity under both the patriarchal and Western hegemony. I would argue that it was Hong Ying's intention to provide very little information about the female protagonist in order to highlight the double jeopardisation of Chinese women.

On the other hand, not all the female protagonists are like Linda in being so passive and unvoiced. In "The Carnation Club", Hong Ying strives to portray another type of female character who is domineering and will resist this patriarchal hegemony. Even though the main female characters in the "The Carnation Club" have been both physically and emotionally abused by men, in contrast with the traditional perception of what is appropriate for Chinese women, they do not remain mindless victims but transform themselves into brutal women to fight back against the men who have dominated them, which is reminiscent of the second-wave feminist ideologies. Adopting the ideology of second-wave American feminists, Hong Ying makes her female characters in "The Carnation Club" all man-haters. From the creed of the Carnation Club, strong second-wave feminist ideologies can be discerned:

Women should unite together; we have to reform our society by resisting the constrictions of the patriarchal hegemony and defeating men's sexually-motivated deprivation of women. We cannot deviate from this motto as this shows the fundamental values of our movement.⁶⁴

As can be seen from this proclamation, the women in "The Carnation Club" see men as their enemies. Men have oppressed them in so many respects; in light of this, the only way for women to live happily is to eliminate men. Due to this 'extreme' mentality, the members of the Carnation Club turn themselves from passive victims to

⁶⁴ Hong, Ying: "The Carnation Club", p. 71.

aggressive ‘terrorists’. This interpretation can be supported by Julia Kristeva’s comment on women turning into terrorists due to the long-term exploitation and violent treatment in the Middle East and Western Europe:⁶⁵

[When] a subject is too brutally excluded from this sociosymbolic stratum; when, for example, a woman feels her affective life as a woman or her condition as a social being too brutally ignored by existing discourse or power (from her family to social institutions); she may, by counterinvesting the violence she has endured, make of herself a “possessed” agent of this violence in order to combat what was experienced as frustration—with arms which may seem disproportional, but which are not so in comparison with the subject or more precisely [the] narcissistic suffering from which they originate.

In the story, Hong Ying deliberately reveals these women’s brutal behaviour by using the channel of newspaper reports contained within in the story in order to demonstrate the stunning impact of their actions. She writes:

A lot of small newspapers have reported that there is an abnormal phenomenon happening in town; there are long queues in the urology departments in hospitals. After a thorough investigation, most people waiting for consultations are men. Despite the fact that they do not have life-threatening diseases, they have all lost their male sexual organs. These small newspapers believe that there is a group of people starting to collect male sexual organs as a hobby just like other people

⁶⁵ In the section “The Terror of Power or the Power of Terrorism” in Julia Kristeva’s “Women’s Time”, Kristeva talks about women joining terrorist groups such as Palestinian commandos, the Baader-Meinhoff Gang and the Red Brigades in Middle Eastern and Western European countries. Although the women characters in Hong Ying’s “The Caranation Club” are not ‘real terrorists’, I would like to borrow Kristeva’s comment to highlight the rationale of my comment of seeing these women characters as ‘terrorists’ in the story. Kristeva, Julia: “Women’s Time”, Alice Jardine and Harry Blake (trans.), in: *Signs*, 7.1, p.28.

have hobbies of collecting advertisement cuttings, tin cans and wooden buttons.⁶⁶

Seeing that the phallus symbolises men's power, the Carnation Club members' brutal castrations of men have made them terrorists in society, as they boldly challenge the doctrine of patriarchy.⁶⁷ According to Craig Owens, "the phallus is a signifier (that is, it represents the subject for another signifier); it is, in fact, the privileged signifier, the signifier of the privileged, of the power and prestige that accrue to the male in our society". By removing men's penises, women made men become eunuchs, and this will take over their 'symbolic' power and the self-esteem of being the superior to women.⁶⁸ According to Holger Brandes:

In most cultures [including Chinese culture] castration had the meaning of emasculation in the sense of an incomplete or mutilated masculinity associated with a social devaluation and, on the part of the affected individual, with a subjective feeling of low self-esteem and humiliation.⁶⁹

The castration act shows these female characters' intention to take revenge on the male characters who have hurt them via means of humiliation. Likewise, the action of castration here could be analysed through the Chinese literary concept of "violence and justice". The theme of violence has been a great feature in the Chinese literary tradition and is not just a theoretical issue. According to David Wang:

⁶⁶ Hong, Ying: "The Carnation Club", p.76.

⁶⁷ Owens, Craig: "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism", in Hal Foster (ed.): *Postmodern Culture*, p. 61.

⁶⁸ Castration "was a common practice in Chinese imperial palace, where male servants were castrated to pressure the the purity of palace women who belong solely to the rulers." Zhang, Jingyuan: *Psychoanalysis in China: Literary Transformations 1919–1949*, p. 8.

⁶⁹ Brandes, Holger: "Castration", in Michael Kimmel and Amy Aronson (eds.): *Men and Masculinities: A Social, Cultural, and Historical Encyclopedia*, p. 126.

The mutual implication of violence and justice can never be understood as simply what happened ‘out there’ and why some activity had to be punished. One must understand justice as a discourse in which some forms of violence are condemned while others are taken for granted.⁷⁰

Applying Wang’s comment to interpret the castration act, the female protagonists are not trying to take over men’s power in the sense of seeing being equal with men; instead, they are carrying out justice—taking revenge for what they have suffered because the men in the story raped them.

Although there are traces of a man-hating rationale in Li Bihua’s work, Li tends to use more subtle means to convey this feminist thought, as she inserts many supernatural elements to make the presentation less confrontational. As mentioned above, the female protagonists in “Eating Husbands” and “Blue Spider” are ‘man-eaters’; nonetheless, they do not perform the act when they are in human form but more in an ‘insect’ way. Instead, they transform themselves into monstrous creatures, which makes the whole ‘man-eating’ scenario more surreal. Also, in the story “The Woman who Loves Brined Goose”, Mrs Xie only chopped up her husband’s body after he had ‘accidentally’ killed himself, which implies that, even though she is also a ‘brutal terrorist’, as Hong Ying’s other female characters are, she is less explicit. Li Bihua’s characters never aim to take power from their ‘male others’, they just want to release themselves from suppression and escape from the position of being ‘victims’.

The Subaltern Speaks: Chinese Women Writers’ Viewpoint on the June Fourth Incident

⁷⁰ Wang, David Der-wei: *The Monsters that Is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-century China*, p. 43.

Having discussed the short stories of Hong Ying and Li Bihua, in the following section, I shall examine the feminist issues in Hong Ying's novels *Summer of Betrayal* and *Daughter of the River*, together with Li Bihua's short story collection *The Old and New Ghosts from Tiananmen Square* and her biographical writing concerning a comfort woman, *The Red String*. First, I shall examine *Summer of Betrayal* in detail alongside *The Old and New Ghosts from Tiananmen Square*, as both writings address the June Fourth Incident. Despite the fact that the two books feature the students' movement at Tiananmen Square in a half fictional and half factual way, the two authors use distinctive approaches to present their viewpoints on this contemporary massacre. Hong Ying's *Summer of Betrayal* uses a prominent feminine narration, as she tells the audience her story through the voice of a female persona: Lin Ying. Rather than making a direct criticism of the Communist Party's actions against the June Fourth Movement, Hong Ying uses a love triangle between three characters, Lin Ying, Chen Yu and Li Jiangjiang (the two main male protagonists), to describe the process of the Tiananmen Square Massacre and the impact caused by the incident.

The story starts with Lin Ying's discovery of Chen Yu's betrayal, as she finds him in bed with his ex-wife after she has escaped from Tiananmen Square on June Fourth. Lin meets Li Jiangjiang after she escapes from Chen's place; she decides to stay with Li, as she finds that she has no place to go during this unstable period. Lin thinks that she can start a new life with Li Jiangjiang and forget Chen Yu, but her hopes are crushed when she later finds out that Li has actually been sent by Chen to look after her. Because of her insecurity, Lin Ying ends up joining an orgy to 'free' herself, yet, this is ironically the reason why she is arrested at the end of the novel.

On the other hand, Li Bihua's *The Old and New Ghosts from Tiananmen Square* is a collection of short fiction that directly delineates the process and the impact of the June Fourth Incident. The collection is divided into two sections: the first part contains five stories that describe the course of the massacre through a fictional narration, and the second part comprises Li Bihua's personal diary writings about the Tiananmen Square Massacre. All five of these short fictions use the 'I' narrator as the main persona, and these characters are all students who have participated in the Tiananmen strike in June in Beijing.

Just as in *Summer of Betrayal*, in the story "Missing the Chance to Fall in Love", Li Bihua uses a female persona to criticise the Chinese government's actions and the students' strike on June Fourth. The story begins with the narrator, who is a female student at a drama school, participating in the Tiananmen Square Strike because of her crush on student movement leader Örkesh Dölet (Wuer Kaixi), who was a real-life leader during the June Fourth Movement. Through the narrator's eyes, the repressive strike in Tiananmen Square is vividly replayed.

Since the 'June Fourth Incident' is still a taboo subject in mainland China, both *Summer of Betrayal* and *The Old and New Ghosts from Tiananmen Square* have been banned, due to the powerful accounts they give of the carnage. Given the fact that the two authors were not residents in the People's Republic of China at the time of publication (Hong Ying was living in London and all her novels were first published in Taiwan, while Li Bihua was living in colonial-period Hong Kong), they had the freedom to express their criticisms. Although Hong Ying and Li Bihua have very different writing styles, they both chose romance as the subject matter to convey their patriotism. According to Doris Sommer, "romance was fuelled by a patriotic, productive mission; and patriotism claimed legitimacy as the result of unfettered,

natural desire”.⁷¹ One special feature of women’s writing is that women tend to write about their personal experience and feelings, as “personal writing [has] traditionally been associated with women more than with men”.⁷² In light of this, the interwoven relationship of romance and patriotism provides a good channel for the two authors to voice their chauvinism towards their motherland.

Body Writing Versus Butterfly Literature⁷³

As an active feminist writer, Hong Ying wrote *Summer of Betrayal* on the basis of feminists’ rationale—writing about women’s own bodies, in particular their sexual desire in this context. By applying Hélène Cixous’s ideas of ‘body writing’ to reading Hong Ying’s narration of Lin Ying’s sexual desire, the strong feminist connotation of Hong Ying’s writing can be recognized. This is because admitting the difference between the male and female *libido* (sexual desire) is crucial, as it can give rise to a different language—a language about women’s own feelings. In the story, Hong Ying explicitly describes how Lin Ying’s security is based on sex during the period of political instability. After being betrayed by Chen Yu, her lover, she does not care about her chastity anymore and decides to sleep with Li Jiangjiang, as she needs some sort of security:

⁷¹ Sommer, Doris: “Love and Country in Latin America: An Allegorical Speculations”, in: Marjorie Ringrose and Adam Lerner (eds.) *Reimagining nation* 1993. Quoted in Wendy Larson’s *Women and Writing in Modern China*, p. 86.

⁷² Connors, Robert J.: *Composition Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory and Pedagogy*, p. 66.

⁷³ ‘Butterfly Literature’ comes from the term ‘Mandarin Duck and Butterfly Literature’. According to Rey Chow, Mandarin Duck and Butterfly Literature (yuanyang hudie pai) was “first used to refer to Xu Zhenya’s *Yü li hun* [‘Jade Pear spirit’], a bestseller published in 1912. A related series of jokes and rumours among some writers of the period resulted in the use of ‘Mandarin Duck and Butterfly’ as a pejorative label for the authors of this type of sentimental love story”. In her PhD thesis, Rey Chow shortened the term to Butterfly Literature and provided a general definition of the term; she stated that “‘Butterfly fiction’ henceforth included not only the love stories but also ‘social’ novels, ‘detective’ novels, ‘legendary’ novels and others”. This broader definition of the label remains the one adopted by Chinese Communist critics today, while non-Communist writings tend to adhere to its narrower definition as ‘love stories’ only. In this thesis, I shall take the narrow definition of Butterfly Literature as referring only to love stories.

Her [Lin's] fingernails clawed at Li Jiangjiang, her heart contracted until it was like a shrill little mouse squeaking in distress. She had to grab onto something, anything at all, whatever it was or whether or not it belonged to her made no difference. Every physical sensation seemed heightened. Chen Yu? No need to think of him. She was not responsible for him, just as she was not responsible for her own life or for what came next.⁷⁴

This quotation draws the reader's attention to Lin Ying's sexual desire, as she thinks that she is helpless both during the June Fourth Incident and in her relationship with Chen Yu. Instead of worrying about her future, Lin Ying gives vent to her despair through sex, and the detailed description about her longing for sex lays out a clear picture of her inner thoughts and a very personal account of her needs. This idea can also be seen in another explicit description of Lin Ying's attitude towards sex:

Sex should not concern itself with anything but sex. Like now, whether she knew this man under her or not, she was equally glad to regard him as a stranger. At this moment, she wanted the feeling of strangeness, a brand new feeling. She grabbed his hair, bent over, and slowly pressed her body to his—not to please him but to satisfy herself.⁷⁵

This description shows that women can also ask for sexual pleasure and enjoy themselves when they have sex, rather than being treated as a 'sex tool' for men. According to Jiang Haixin, "the rewriting of female desire for sensual, emotional, and intellectual satisfaction from sexual relationships in contemporary women's fiction convey a distinctive female consciousness that re-narcissises the 'inferiorised' female

⁷⁴ Hong, Ying: *Summer of Betrayal*. Martha Avery (trans.), p. 25.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 74.

body".⁷⁶ In such light, women could assert their own power over the female body instead of being manipulated by men as a sex toys.

Conversely, seeing that Hong Ying used the June Fourth Incident as the background of the story, it is possible to read the parallel line between the betrayal by Chen Yu of Lin Ying and the betrayal by the Chinese government of the Beijing students in the Tiananmen massacre. The romantic element has been used to convey Hong Ying's criticism of the treachery of the Communist Party. In the story, not only does Lin Ying have sex with other men after being abandoned by Chen Yu, she even joins in an orgy. This change in her attitude towards sex could be perceived as a way for her to forget the hurt caused by Chen Yu and to challenge the authority of the mainland Chinese government. At the end of the story, when the policemen barge in on the orgy, Lin Ying refuses to put her clothes on and defies the policemen's order:

Lin Ying thought that she had never been happier than at this moment, facing the policeman with his loaded gun. She knew that her nudity no longer meant sex to anyone, that her flesh and licentious dance were only making people uncomfortable. Most of them were probably upset, blaming her for bringing trouble on everyone. Or perhaps they really thought she had gone crazy. She didn't need to explain anything to anyone: whether they understood or not had nothing to do with her.⁷⁷

If one interprets Lin Ying as the Beijing students and the orgy as the democratic movement in Tiananmen Square on June Fourth, the quotation above reveals the Beijing students' yearning for freedom. Lin Ying's (the Beijing Students') nudity

⁷⁶ Jiang, Haixin: "Female Consciousness in Contemporary Chinese Women's Writing", PhD Thesis, p. 35.

⁷⁷ Hong, Ying: *Summer of Betrayal*, p. 180.

(strike) might cause a disturbance to the public but she (they) just insists on doing what she (they) wants to.

On the other hand, Li Bihua adopts a more traditional form of romantic literature to vent her anger about the Tiananmen Square Massacre. She uses a first-person narrative to portray the June Fourth Incident, using the narrator to give readers a vivid image of the Chinese government's cruelty. Unlike *Summer of Betrayal*, in "Missing a Chance to Fall in Love", the romance in the story is a subtle one, as the narrator never falls in love with Wuer Kaixi; her feelings towards him are only the effect of admiration. Conversely, compared with Hong Ying, Li Bihua's tone in her novel is more aggressive, as she explicitly castigates the Communist Party's actions during the petition. She writes:

Freedom is the basic human right for everyone, and democracy is the highest level of human emotion. But in China, we have to use our lives to exchange freedom and democracy: would the Chinese nation be proud of herself for allowing this to happen?⁷⁸

Although Li Bihua does not emphasise the female narrator's sexual desire, similarly, I would argue that Li Bihua also uses the romance in the story to dilute her direct criticism of the Chinese government. She employs the female narrator as her spokeswoman to air her grievances at the deaths of the Beijing students. By using the element of romance, both Hong Ying and Li Bihua evince their 'patriotism' as they are upset by the deaths of the 'innocent students' who participated in the June Fourth Movement.

⁷⁸ Li, Bihua: *The Old and New Ghosts from Tiananmen Square*, p. 45.

Regardless of having different agendas in their writings, both Hong Ying and Li Bihua use their pens to explicitly criticise the Tiananmen Square Incident, which has been regarded as a taboo subject in mainland China. On account of their geographical location and their ability to write, these two Chinese female authors prove that the ‘subaltern can speak’, despite the fact that they are only representing the minority. This proposition is justified by Gail Hershatter’s comment on the subaltern voice, in particular women in the Third World⁷⁹:

The subaltern cannot represent herself in discourse with many subalterns making cacophonous noise, some hogging the mike, many speaking intermittently and not exactly as they please, and all aware to some degree of the political uses of their own representation in that historical moment.⁸⁰

It may be that the voice of the subaltern is not strong enough to reveal the truth in history; however, the cacophonous noise made by the subaltern Chinese female authors contributes to creating a clearer picture of the forbidden truth. In this sense, regardless of the limited representation of the June Fourth Incident in the two author’s writings, they do arouse people’s attention concerning the Tiananmen Massacre on the world political stage and encourage other Chinese to speak out. Therefore, the first step is to appreciate that such a voice exists.

Autobiography Versus Biography: Writing Women’s Own Stories

⁷⁹ Hershatter’s comment is in response to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s famous article, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, an authority in Third World women’s studies. However, since my focus is not on post-colonial feminism in this section, I will not discuss the issue of ‘First World’ and ‘Third World’; I only share Hershatter’s viewpoint of ‘subaltern’.

⁸⁰ Hershatter, Gail. “The Subaltern Talks Back: Reflections on Subaltern Theory and Chinese History”, *Positions* 1, p. 125.

Inasmuch as ‘*écriture féminine*’ (feminine writing) emphasises women’s personal feelings and experiences, biography (including autobiography) is an appropriate genre in which to convey women’s thoughts, as autobiographies have been regarded as the earliest example of feminism in life writing.⁸¹ As reflected in the development of women’s literature, despite the existence of women writers in the literary canon before the twentieth century, they did not receive much attention or have a wide readership among their male counterparts because women were not encouraged to express their thoughts in public. As a direct result of this, most female writers chose to write about their lives through the form of diaries or letters in order to avoid direct criticism from society. Even though women wanted to voice their discontent with society, they had to hide underneath the masquerade of the ‘unconventional woman’ by portraying themselves as either mad or sick, presenting their ideas through diaries,⁸² or disguising themselves by using a male protagonist or a male name.⁸³ Stemming from the conditions described above, it is not surprising to see that autobiography became the traditional form of women’s writing because it allowed them to express their voice without being criticized by the male-dominated society. On the other hand, I also argue that biographical writing could be used as a tool to reveal feminist thoughts, as female biographers can use their pens to write life stories for women who have passed away or are illiterate. In the following section, I shall compare and contrast Hong Ying’s autobiography with Li Bihua’s biography of a Chinese comfort woman in order to illustrate how feminine writing provides space for Chinese women to denounce the patriarchal constraints on them.

⁸¹ Winslow, David: *Life Writing: A Glossary of Terms in Biography, Autobiography and Related Forms*, p. 25.

⁸² One of the best-known examples would be Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper”. Knight, Denise D. (ed.): *The Yellow Wallpaper and Selected Stories of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, 1994.

⁸³ Woman writers such as Bing Xin employed this writing style in her early work.

As stated by Philippe Lejeune, it can be argued that an autobiography is a proof of history because it records factual personal events that took place in a particular period of time.⁸⁴ For this reason, writers, especially those who are female, tend to choose this form of writing to voice their thoughts because it is usually more persuasive than a purely fictional work. Since autobiographies are literary works that portray the authors' factual lives and thoughts, feminists preferred to use autobiographies to examine the female voice in early literature. In light of the important contribution of female autobiographies to feminist studies, many female writers have continued the tradition by choosing to write autobiographies to express their suppression and grievances. As Hong Ying admits to being a feminist herself, it is not surprising to see that she has written an autobiography to share her personal 'sufferings' with her readers and to reflect on her personal development throughout the years. This bears out Linda Anderson's comment on women's autobiographies; she stated that autobiographies "seemed to provide a privileged space for women to discover new forms of subjectivity".⁸⁵

Daughter of the River is the account of Hong Ying's childhood and adolescence. Born as an illegitimate child during the period of the great famine (the 1960s), not only did Hong Ying carry the burden of being unwanted and despised in the family, but she also suffered from hunger. She was torn between her biological and foster father, knowing that developing a strong father–daughter relationship with either one would hurt the other. In order to experience the feeling of being wanted and loved, Hong Ying fell in love with her history teacher (who was married) when she

⁸⁴ This comment has been cited in Yuan Shu's "Cultural Politics and Chinese Female Subjectivity: Rethinking Kingston's 'Woman Warrior'", in: *MELUS*, 26.2, pp. 199–223.

⁸⁵ Anderson, Linda: "Autobiography and the feminist subject", in Ellen Rooney (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, p. 119.

was eighteen. However, this love story came to an abrupt end, as the history teacher's suicide pushed Hong Ying to the edge of a breakdown and led to her leaving home.

In spite of having written some short essays and magazine columns about her personal thoughts, Li Bihua is comparatively a more reserved woman writer, as she has not written an autobiography; nevertheless, she has deliberately spoken out on behalf of other women. *The Red String* is a biography of a Chinese comfort woman, Yuan Zhulin. Li Bihua first wrote the story about Yuan Zhulin (also known as Granny Yuan) in her magazine column "Spattering Ink" in *Next Magazine*. In this column, Li retold Yuan Zhulin's story of how she had become a Chinese comfort woman for Japanese soldiers during the Second World War and how she lost contact with her husband Liu Kui because of the rectification of the Communist Party. After the publication of the essay, Li unexpectedly received many responses from her readers, and some of her readers even took the initiative to look for Liu Kui. Because of positive responses about traces of Liu Kui, Li started planning to take Yuan Zhulin to Heilongjiang to find Liu. After losing contact for thirty-eight years, Yuan Zhulin finally met Liu Kui; however, Liu had started another family in the meantime, a circumstance which meant that the estranged couple could not be reunited. In the end, Yuan Zhulin left Heilongjiang with disappointment but with no regrets.

Using a Pen as a Weapon to Fight Back

Even though *Daughter of the River* and *The Red String* belong to different types of biographical writing, Hong Ying and Li Bihua both used their power (having the ability to write) to criticise the social constraints on Chinese women during the Communist era. Hong Ying's and Yuan Zhulin's lives are full of suffering; they did not have any chance to escape and had to live through a series of calamitous events.

As a well-educated person, Hong Ying has the competence to express in words her feelings about being a poor Chinese woman during the period of the great famine. The Chinese title of *Daughter of the River* is *Ji'e de nü'er* (literally: Daughter of the Famine), and not only does Hong Ying describe her physical hunger in her childhood, she also describes her spiritual hunger to learn more about what life really means to her. She wrote: “maybe my own writing could eventually satisfy the hunger that had existed in my heart since the day I was born”.⁸⁶ Through writing, Hong Ying has been given the opportunity to discover herself and what it means to be a Chinese woman. This is supported by Rita Felski’s observation:

Feminist autobiographical writing often took the form of confession at this time, offering to its readership an intimate and frequently painful experience which is also seen as part of progressive revelation to the self and other women’s fate under patriarchy and the need for change.⁸⁷

As autobiography is based on people’s own real-life stories; thus, it is important for the authors to provide historical facts to prove that their works are convincing. In the case of Hong Ying, because she was born in a poor area of Chongqing, it is not hard to believe that other people who lived in that area would have suffered from starvation too. She tells the story of the zoo keeper to reveal the ugly truth of starvation:

Then came the famine, and the zoo keeper suffered from hunger like everyone else. Somehow, he managed for the first year but before he’d made it through the second, he began holding back one of the rabbits

⁸⁶ Hong, Ying: *Daughter of the River*, Howard Goldblatt (trans.), p. 267.

⁸⁷ Felski, Rita: *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*, p. 91.

earmarked for the tiger each week, killing and cooking it for himself. People said it wasn't just gnawing hunger that caused the tiger to tear its keeper limb from limb one day, but the smell of rabbit that clung to him.⁸⁸

She also describes her mother's suffering when she was pregnant with her: "hunger was my embryonic education. Mother and daughter survived the ordeal, but only after the spectre of hunger was indelibly stamped in my mind. I haven't the heart to think about what cruel sacrifices she made to keep me alive".⁸⁹ These two concrete examples show how people had endured hunger during the famine period; however, without Hong Ying's autobiography, the story of the zoo keeper or even Hong Ying's mother's tough life would never have been heard. Even though we do not know whether the zoo keeper and Hong Ying's mother were literate, in Hong Ying's indirect account, one might guess that both of them had not received much education, compared to Hong Ying, and did not possess the ability to write. In this sense, not only does Hong Ying use writing as a channel to air her own grievances, but also makes herself the spokesperson for the people who had suffered in China during the tragic famine period.

Just like Hong Ying's mother, Yuan Zhulin is also illiterate, so instead of having her daughter as her spokeswoman, she has Li Bihua retell her tragic story in order to reveal the disastrous impact of the Japanese soldiers' cruelty on Chinese women. The title of Chapter 7 of the book, "I Have Hatred in My Heart", directly displays Yuan Zhulin's anger towards the Japanese soldiers who treated her as a comfort woman. This statement was made by Yuan Zhulin when she was in Canada attending a conference about Chinese comfort women. By using this strong statement

⁸⁸ Hong, Ying: *Daughter of the River*, p. 38.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 41.

as the title of the chapter, Li makes Yuan Zhulin's story more persuasive, in terms of complaining about the scars that the Japanese soldiers left her with. Moreover, since Li Bihua wrote about Yuan Zhulin's story in her column, Yuan's story has been spread far and wide, which helped her to find her long-lost husband, Liu Kui. Without the help of Li Bihua, Yuan Zhulin's dream of meeting her husband again would never have been fulfilled. Hence, through the medium of writing, Chinese women who have been suppressed by society can also have a channel to voice their needs and their sorrows.

Through different forms of biographical writing, the two writers protest about the sufferings of women in China and challenge the identification of Chinese national culture with masculinity, as they provide a 'female version' of some particular historical events. This interpretation is supported by Zhang Zhen's comment: "many women writers devoted their writing to representing the trauma of the collective repression of the immediate past and reconstructing an individual identity largely predicated on liberal humanism".⁹⁰ Since both Hong Ying and Li Bihua lived outside mainland China when they wrote the two books under consideration here, they took advantage of the more tolerant and liberal political policies in the United Kingdom and in colonial Hong Kong. Therefore, writing autobiographies or biographical-based fictional works about lives in China provided them with opportunities to reconstruct their female subjectivity in China. According to Betty Berglund, "the central issues in autobiographical scholarship revolve around meanings associated with 'self', 'life' and writing linked to the term auto/biography".⁹¹ As the self is the main element for composing biographical writings, women (auto)biographers have to define their self-

⁹⁰ Quoted in Hershatter, Gail: "The Subaltern Talks Back: Reflections on Subaltern Theory and Chinese History" in *Positions*, 1, p. 125.

⁹¹ Berglund, Betty: "Autobiography and American Culture", in: *American Quarterly*, 45.3, p. 446.

identity in order to write books that accurately reflect this issue. In addition, the comparison of *Daughter of the River* and *The Red String* highlights the transnational feminist nature of Chinese female writings, as the two authors address the issues of female subjectivity through different forms of writing and different geographical locations.

To sum up, I have employed second-wave feminist theories, specifically *Écriture féminine* (French feminism) and ‘men-as-women’s enemies’ (American feminism), to illustrate the female consciousness in Hong Ying’s and Li Bihua’s selected short stories, novels and biographical writings. Even though there are some common feminist situations, such as the focus on the mother–daughter relationship, the victimisation of women and the empowerment of women through writing, the two authors present these ideas in very different ways due to their contrasting writing styles. Given the fact that Hong Ying has claimed herself to be a feminist, it is not surprising that feminist ideas such as “body writing” penetrate her work. For example, *Summer of Betrayal* could be perceived as a text that coincides with Hélène Cixous’ concept of “l’écritue de feminie”.

On the other hand, the feminist ideologies are comparatively subtler. Instead of focusing on the idea of expressing women’s sexual needs, Li Bihua prefers to use irony to highlight the suppression of women. Her female protagonists can only obtain power through transforming into ‘man-eating monsters’ in the form of “revenge cannibalism”. Despite the difference, I would argue that, by comparing and contrasting the works of Hong Ying and Li Bihua, it is possible to realize that Chinese female writings can be used as different channels for transmitting transnational Chinese feminist ideologies, particularly to serve other Chinese women who have no voice to speak out about their own hardships.

Chapter 2. The Postfeminist Ideologies in Hong Ying's and Li Bihua's Later Literary Texts

I do my own laundry. I clean, iron and cook (occasionally). I also like to wear make-up and sometimes a short skirt. I love my husband and hope to have children. I work full-time, and I enjoy teaching my students. I am a member of a feminist association, and I have a weakness for shopping and celebrity magazines. What does this make me? A housewife, narcissist, wife and (potential) mother, worker, feminist, consumer? A schizophrenic?¹

After discussing the second-wave feminist ideologies and the traditional literary themes in the works of both Hong Ying and Li Bihua in Chapter 1, I now shift the focus to the notion of femininity (a fundamental idea of postfeminism) in the later novels of the two authors. Before starting my investigation of the implications of postfeminist ideas in Hong Ying and Li Bihua's works, I shall provide a general outline of the idea of postfeminism.

The Rise of Postfeminism

The various women's emancipation and women's movements in the 1960s and 1970s marked a significant change in the status of contemporary women. Women started developing their consciousness to view themselves as no longer the secondary sex to men and began to become more financially independent. However, these women did not come to a conclusion that was as extreme as what the second-wave feminists would have drawn—that 'men are the enemies of women'.² The application of such feminist thought did not adequately address the problems created by living in the existing patriarchal world.

¹ Genz, Stéphanie: *Postfemininities in Popular Culture*, p. 1.

² See related comment in footnote 26 in introduction.

When the feminist movement reached the 1980s and 1990s, many feminist scholars, such as bell hooks (Gloria Jean Watkins) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, found that the current feminist theories did not reflect the needs of many women. The idea of feminism at the time was suggested by white, middle-class females, and there were concerns that its appeal may not have included females in different classes or races. Furthermore, the rapid development of the idea of feminism resulted in greater numbers of women aspiring towards sexual equality and the development of their self-identity. Nevertheless, these feminist ideas were not comprehensive enough and perhaps in some cases too radical to describe the real situation of women in the contemporary world. As Susan Faludi points out, “it is more likely that the feminist revolution has petered out, leaving so many women discouraged and paralysed by the knowledge ... [that] the possibility for real progress has been foreclosed”.³ In light of this, a new feminist theory emerged that brought along new insights for present-day women.

Postfeminism emerged from feminism as a result of the social circumstances and academic theories that evolved at the time. Examples of the other theories that grew from the existing ones include structuralism and post-structuralism, modernism and post-modernism, colonialism and post-colonialism. The term ‘post-feminism’ is problematic, as postfeminists have different interpretations of the notion. According to Lynne Alice:

Postfeminism (usually written as ‘post-feminism’) was coined in the period between the achievement of women’s suffrage in the U.S. and the rise of ‘second wave’ feminism during the 1960s. It denoted the

³ Cited in Imelda Whelehan’s *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to Post-Feminism*, p. 222.

successful outcome of struggles by women for the right to vote, hold public office and the choice to occupy many more personal spheres.⁴

Alice further notes that the term has taken on an unforeseen interpretation through its use in the popular media during the late 1980s and early 1990s. This ‘popular’ connotation of postfeminism has led to an emphasis that women should always push the boundaries and demand social recognition. The term ‘postfeminism’ was arguably first used in public discourse in a *New York Times* cover article entitled “Voices from the Postfeminist Generation”, written by Susan Bolotin. In this sense, Bolotin’s article on postfeminism provides an insight into the initial intention for the term.⁵

Alternately, postfeminism can be used to describe a movement encapsulating irregular changes in time and geographical area.⁶ Alice argues that postfeminism should be viewed as another option to the feminist image of the ‘superwoman’ as a measure of success.⁷ Feminist scholars such as Susan Faludi and Brenda Polan, who share similar viewpoints to those of Alice, suggest that postfeminism is the ‘backlash of feminism’. This point can be illustrated by Faludi’s comment: “post-feminism is the backlash. Any movement or philosophy which defines itself as post-whatever came before is bound to be reactive. In most cases it is also reactionary”.⁸ In contrast, Judith Stacey claims that post-feminism is not the same as antifeminism; rather, the theory attempts to understand the changing social environment caused by the post-industrial society and the notion of family, which has been already influenced by

⁴Alice, Lynne: ‘What is Postfeminism or Have it Both Ways?’ in Lynne Alice (ed.): *Feminism, Postmodernism, Postfeminism: Conference Proceedings*, p. 7.

⁵Walters, Suzanna Danuta: *Material Girls: Making Sense of Feminist Cultural Theory*, pp. 117–118.

⁶Brooks, Ann: *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms*, p. 2.

⁷Alice, Lynne: ‘What is Postfeminism or Have it Both Ways?’ in Lynne Alice (ed.): *Feminism, Postmodernism, Postfeminism: Conference Proceedings*, p. 17.

⁸Faludi, Susan: *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*. p.15.

second-wave feminism.⁹ Apart from these interpretations of postfeminism, Michèle Barrett suggests that postfeminism has two connotations:

1. A popular feeling that a drearily militant feminist politics has been succeeded by a new phenomenon—we can shorthand it as ‘girl power’—which puts the femininity back into women’s sense of identity and aspiration; and
2. Academic developments that have transformed feminist theory through the incorporation of ideas from post-structuralist theory. These ideas cut away so much of the conceptual ground on which feminist theory previously rested, they justify the use of the term ‘postfeminist’.¹⁰

The new postfeminist ideas presented in the above definitions provide innovative perspectives from which to understand the ‘new woman’ of the twenty-first century. Despite the fact that there are different interpretations of the term ‘postfeminism’, this paper will employ Michèle Barrett’s definitions as the criteria to illustrate the postfeminist elements in the works of both Hong Ying and Li Bihua.

Postfeminist Thought in the Media: Madonna as an Icon of ‘Girl Power’

The first of Barrett’s two connotations of postfeminism refers to the propagation of ‘girl power’ by the media. Regarded as a pop icon since the 1980s, Madonna has created a new image of women in the post-modern era through her confrontational musical performances and non-conforming social behaviour over the years. Despite the controversy and negativity associated with Madonna’s image at various times, the

⁹ Stacey, Judith: ‘Sexism by a Subtler Name? Postindustrial Conditions and Postfeminism ‘Consciousness in Silicon Valley’, in Karen V. Hansen and Ilene J. Philipson (eds.): *Women, Class and The Feminist Imagination: A Socialist-Feminist Reader*, p. 338.

¹⁰ Barrett, Michèle: “Post-Feminism”, in Gary Browning, Abigail Halcli and Frank Webster (eds.): *Understanding Contemporary Society: Theories of the Present*, p. 46.

longevity of her popularity is evident. The image that she exudes challenges the existing foundational legitimacy of sex and gender. Her persona has therefore been the subject of feminist studies and many social commentators regard her as a post-modern feminist and a postfeminist.¹¹ Feminists have noted that Madonna's use of many faces raises interesting issues concerning identity and, more importantly, illustrates her 'girl power', which is achieved through financial independence and ownership of her original image.

Consequently, scholars in the field of cultural studies have used the Madonna phenomenon as a means of analysing power relations, especially those involving the media. Most notably, John Fiske has argued that Madonna's general image and videos offer her young female fans the semiotic tools to encourage self-understanding and forge identities that break away from the limiting models presented by patriarchal culture. Madonna's image of personal autonomy from a male-centred society is thus transferred to her fans as well. Fiske writes:

Madonna offers her fans access to semiotic and social power; at the basic level this operates through fantasy, which, in turn, may empower the fan's sense of self and thus affect her behaviour in social situations ... Madonna's popularity is a complexity of power and resistances, of meanings and countermeanings, of pleasures and the struggle for control.¹²

¹¹ Concerning the postmodern feminist issue, Cathy Schwichtenberg comments that Madonna is a model that "may be a point of departure in the articulation of postmodern feminism". Schwichtenberg, Cathy: "Introduction", in Cathy Schwichtenberg (ed.): *The Madonna Connection: Representational Politics, Subcultural Identities, and Cultural Theory*, p. 9. In relation to the observation that Madonna may be viewed as a postfeminist, Pamela Robertson states, "As a female superstar, Madonna challenged a lot of the established positions of academic and activist feminism and functioned on both sides of the 'postfeminist' debate as a touchstone for the rearticulation of a host of feminist issues including pornography, fashion, make up and sex". Robertson, Pamela: *Guilty Pleasures: Feminist Camp From Mae West to Madonna*, p. 125.

¹² Fiske, John: *Reading the Popular*, p. 112–113.

This comment reflects the realisation that Madonna's power is derived from her success in controlling and manipulating her own image by operating outside the limitations of male-formulated stereotypes of women. The use of mixed images by Madonna reflects the fact that we are living in a post-modern era, an era of hybridity. Similarly, one single theory cannot adequately describe the complexity and ambiguities arising from the feminist issues in modern times. In light of this, I shall now proceed to examine Barrett's second interpretation of postfeminism, which involves the use of post-structuralism to analyse contemporary Chinese literature.

The Intersection of Postfeminism, Post-Modernism, Post-Structuralism and Post-Colonialism

As discussed above, postfeminism arose due to the insufficiencies of feminist ideas; hence, the issues underlying postfeminism are closely connected to the concepts driving the feminist movement. In order to study the relationship between postfeminism, post-modernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism, their relevance to each other must first be identified. In his *Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, Bill Ashcroft suggests that feminism, post-modernism and post-colonialism challenged earlier epistemologies, which "presupposed a foundation of undislocatable-binaries-centre/margin, self/other, colonizer/colonized".¹³ Whilst post-colonial theory aims to break down the binarisms of the colonizer/colonized discourse,

¹³ Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin: "Part III: Representation and Resistance—Introduction" in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds.): *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, p. 86.

similarly, postmodernism deconstructs the “logocentric master narrative” society created by European culture.¹⁴

In order to highlight the importance of post-colonialism, Ashcroft further argues that ‘Third World’ feminism and post-colonialism share the same objective:

[Third World] Feminism and post-colonial discourses both seek to reinstate the marginalized in the face of the dominant, and early feminist theory, like early nationalist post-colonial criticism, was concerned with inverting the structures of domination, substituting, for instance, a female tradition or traditions for a male-dominated canon.¹⁵

Seeing that post-modernism, post-colonialism and Third World feminism focus on the concept of marginalisation, it is possible to consider that the concepts work fittingly together as a pluralistic web of resistance, a model that Anna Yeatment describes as “interlocking oppressions”.¹⁶

The combined use of post-colonial and post-modern viewpoints in second-wave feminist studies broke down the differences between the ‘margin’ and the ‘centre’. However, post-structuralism should also be included in a study of marginalisation because the main idea of post-structuralism is the deconstruction of the centre (the subject),¹⁷ which helps feminists to challenge the existing notion of ‘women’ and to perform a step-by-step deconstruction of the binary opposition

¹⁴ Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin: “Part IV: Postmodernism and Post-Colonialism—Introduction” in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds.): *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, p. 117.

¹⁵ Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin: “Part VIII: Feminism and Post-Colonialism — Introduction” in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds.): *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, p. 249.

¹⁶ Brook, Ann: *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms*, p. 107.

¹⁷ According to Jacques Derrida, “The centre is at the centre of the totality, and yet, since the centre does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its centre elsewhere. The centre is not the centre”. Derrida, Jacques: ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Science’, in David Lodge and Nigel Wood (eds.): *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, p. 90.

between men and women. As noted in Michèle Barrett's definition discussed above, the use of post-structuralism in feminist studies is an important move away from the traditional foundations of feminist thought and progresses toward the development of a new 'postfeminist' discourse with a greater emphasis on deconstruction.

Among postfeminists, Judith Butler has been significantly influenced by post-structuralist theorists and has therefore based many of her ideas on the arguments of Lacan, Foucault and Derrida. Using post-structuralist theories, Butler challenges the assumption that gender behaviour (masculine, feminine) is necessarily linked with the sex of a person (male, female). She argues that gender is socially constructed and therefore will change as social norms are challenged and developed over time. In light of this, she suggests the notion of "gender as performativity" in order to deconstruct the existing binary opposition of 'man' and 'woman' in the heterosexually and patriarchally-dominated world. Butler's application of post-structuralist ideas to feminist studies has provided great insight into the question of gender. Her work has been categorised as representative of post-structuralist feminism, and queer theorists have referred to her work in their discussions on the issue of homosexuality.

Postfeminism as Third-Wave Feminism

Postfeminism is a new feminist theory comprised of different elements adapted from other theories, such as post-modernism, post-colonialism and post-structuralism. Hence, it is not surprising that feminist scholars from the mid-1980s onwards have claimed themselves to be third-wave feminists in order to distinguish themselves from the different values held by their predecessors. Third-wave feminism, which is the term often used to describe the current movement of feminist activity, critically reflects on previous claims of male hegemony by past feminist theorists. However,

the theory extends beyond addressing gender inequalities and patriarchy. Third-wave feminists now seek to deconstruct gender and take other social dimensions, such as class, ethnicity and wealth, into significant consideration.¹⁸

The terms ‘postfeminism’ and ‘third-wave feminism’, which originated from the discussions and writings about the intersections of feminism and racism in the mid-1980s, have been used interchangeably by the media. As Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake remark: “recently much media attention has been [given] to writings about third-wave feminism, often labelled ‘postfeminism’”.¹⁹ Whilst they acknowledge the occurrence of this phenomenon, Heywood and Drake do not agree with the synonymous use of the terms because they believe that third-wave feminism is actually a transition period between second-wave feminism and post-feminism. They state:

The slippage from ‘third wave feminism’ to ‘postfeminism’ is important, because many of us working in the ‘third wave’ by no means define our feminism as a groovier alternative to an over-and-done feminist movement ... ‘postfeminist’ characterizes a group of young, conservative feminists who explicitly define themselves against and criticize feminists of the second wave”.²⁰

Similarly, Amber Kinser disagrees with the idea that third-wave feminism is equivalent to postfeminism. She argues that third-wave feminists are able to reflect and build upon the previous writings of the second-wave feminists, thereby

¹⁸ Kinser, Amber E.: ‘Negotiating Spaces For/Through Third-Wave Feminism’, in: *NWSA Journal*, pp. 124–153.

¹⁹ Heywood, Leslie and Jennifer Drake (eds.): *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*, p.1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

determining their position as somewhere between second-wave feminism and postfeminism. Once this is ascertained, women can learn “how to negotiate the particular space between these two”.²¹ Some critics identify third-wave feminism and postfeminism differently because they believe that post-feminism is seen as a ‘backlash’ from second-wave feminism. In contrast, third-wave feminism is viewed as a new movement that encapsulates a wider use of different deconstructive methodologies, developed as a result of the inadequacies of second-wave feminism.

However, from the above analysis, there is still no concrete definition of postfeminism, as the theory itself continues to grow and different postfeminists have expressed contrasting comments, depending on the context. Hence, postfeminism should be perceived as broader than a mere backlash of second-wave feminism. This can be justified by Sarah Gamble’s comment that “this—or any—attempt to differentiate between Third Wave feminism and post-feminism may be achieving nothing more than a little juggling with semantics. Some will undoubtedly argue that, whatever the third wavers say, they’re no more than a hipper, slicker branch of postfeminism”.²² In the light of this comment, I agree with Gamble’s argument and believe that the terms are interchangeable.

Although Heywood and Drake do not agree with the argument that third-wave feminism is the same as postfeminism, I would like to borrow their ideas about the characteristics of third-wave feminism in order to analyse the features of postfeminism because I concur with Gamble’s comment that the two terms can refer to the same period of feminist theoretical development. They define the characteristics of third-wave feminism as chaotic—gender and racial identities

²¹ Kinser, Amber E.: ‘Negotiating Spaces For/Through Third-Wave Feminism’, in: *NWSA Journal*, p. 136

²² Gamble, Sarah: ‘Postfeminism’, in Sarah Gamble (ed.): *The Icon Critical Dictionary of Feminism and Postfeminism*, p. 53.

become blurred and performative. For example, girls may want to act as boys and vice versa, whilst white people desire to act as black people or blacks may want to live as whites. Heterosexual tendencies are challenged and the tensions between community and individuality bring the concepts of the ‘centre’ and the ‘marginalised’ into question.²³ Based on the above remark, the conclusion can be drawn that third-wave feminism possesses a strong influence from post-structuralism, as it attempts to break down the border line between the binary opposition of men and women, which, to a certain extent, has become an intrinsic feature of postfeminism.

Postfeminist Ideologies in Contemporary Chinese Women’s Writing

After explaining the rise of postfeminism and identifying the different interpretations of postfeminism, I would now like to examine how postfeminist thoughts could be applicable as an approach to reading Chinese female writings. In *Does a Sex Have a History: ‘Women’ and Feminism*, Denise Riley argues that although the biological existence of women has continually been recorded through time, the historical discourse on ‘women’ is discontinuous because it has been constructed in relation to other social subjects, which have changed over time. She explains: “‘Women’ is a volatile collectivity in which female persons can be very differently positioned so that the apparent continuity of the subject of ‘women’ isn’t to be relied on”.²⁴ For this reason, the historical accuracy of texts involving women figures is questionable and therefore acts as a natural starting point for postfeminists to express their viewpoints. Both Hong Ying and Li Bihua have used historical Chinese women figures as the subject matter of their works, which is why I wish to examine their writings in detail

²³ Heywood, Leslie and Jennifer Drake (eds.): *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*, p. 8.

²⁴ Riley, Denise: ‘Does a Sex Have a History: ‘Women’ and Feminism’, in: *New Formations*, p. 35.

in order to illustrate how they present a new postfeminist perspective of women in the past.

Through the annals of history, feminine beauty has been perceived as both empowering to women and a danger to patriarchal society. In dynastic Chinese history, beautiful women were traditionally portrayed negatively by historians because of their ability to influence men with their physical attraction, particularly the prominent male leaders of society. When empires collapsed, these attractive women were often recorded in history texts as having been involved with the cause of failure.²⁵ The seductive powers of women were therefore associated with deceit and the manipulation of traditional male norms. Furthermore, women from the past with astonishing beauty were frequently regarded as *femmes fatales*; most of the beautiful women in history and in literary works had unfortunate fates. In light of this, it is not surprising to see that the four most beautiful women in Chinese literary history, Xi Shi, Wang Zhaojun, Diao Chan and Yang Guifei, all suffered more or less tragic ends.²⁶

Approximately two thousand years later, the postfeminist movement in the West provides a new and positive perspective of feminine beauty.²⁷ Whilst beauty is still recognised as a challenge to the male-dominated world in modern times, the emphasis is now on the use of beauty as a legitimate means of empowering women, which will ultimately lead to their independence. Although the factual past cannot be altered, historical perceptions have the ability to change and inspire a future female

²⁵ See Xin Tang Shu: 'Woman leads to disaster' in Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi: *Xin tang shu*, p. 154. Also, in *Xin wudai shi*, "Beautiful women lead to the downfall of a kingdom. Starting from Nüwa, the most serious disaster will cause the downfall of the kingdom [and] one's family and lead to one's death". Ouyang Xiu: *Xin wudai shi*, p. 127.

²⁶ Xi Shi (Spring and Autumn period), Wang Zhaojun (Han dynasty), Diao Chan (Three Kingdoms) and Yang Guifei (Tang dynasty).

²⁷ According to Charlotte Brunsdon, a distinction can be made in Western feminism between what they called 1970s 'feminism' and 1990s 'post-feminism'. Brunsdon, Charlotte: *Screen Tastes: Soap Opera to Satellite Dishes*, p. 84.

generation. In this sense, postfeminists in the post-modern era are attempting to rewrite female historical figures in order to provide a new perspective on women in Chinese history. Unlike the image of Chinese female figures presented in traditional Chinese novels and historical records, the historical female characters used in contemporary Chinese female writings are no longer portrayed as men's subordinates; rather, the men are their subordinates and have to submit to them. Furthermore, some of the contemporary female writers depict how these female characters make use of their power to manipulate the male characters in the novels.

In the following discussion, I shall examine how both Hong Ying and Li Bihua have rewritten women in different periods of Chinese history using a postfeminist approach in order to present the idea of 'girl power' and to challenge the issue of gender identity under the patriarchal norm. I shall use two postfeminist methods—'gender as performativity' and 'disappearing men/women'—to analyse two novels by Hong Ying and two by Li Bihua. The four novels collectively are Hong Ying's *Lord of Shanghai* and *The Death in Shanghai* and Li Bihua's *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* and *Kawashima Yoshiko*. Hong Ying's *Lord of Shanghai* and *Death in Shanghai* are new versions of the Qing novel *Haishang hua liezhuan* (*Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*).²⁸ Therefore, I propose to compare and contrast the female characters in *Lord of Shanghai* and *Death in Shanghai* with the female characters in *Haishang hua liezhuan* in order to compare the different representations of 'Shanghai courtesans' in the Qing dynasty versus in the contemporary era.

²⁸ On the covers of *Lord of Shanghai* and *Death in Shanghai*, Hong Ying claimed that her intention was to rewrite *Haishang hua liezhuan*.

Similarly, Li Bihua's two stories provide a new perspective on two notorious women in Chinese history: Pan Jinlian and Kawashima Yoshiko. Li's *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* is a story about Pan Jinlian, a figure from two Ming novels: *Shuihu zhuan* (*Water Margin*) and *Jin ping mei* (*The Golden Lotus*).²⁹ In addition to recreating the story of a fictional woman from Song dynasty China as she appears in two Ming dynasty novels, Li also attempts to produce a new image of Kawashima Yoshiko (originally known by her Manchu name of Aisin Gioro Xianyu), a real figure in Chinese history who was accused of being a Japanese spy during the Sino–Japanese War. In the following discussion, I shall highlight the differences between the selected works of the two authors and the original texts, and discuss how the new versions by Hong Ying and Li Bihua help to create a new image of these historical women in the contemporary era. Furthermore, I shall reference the writing techniques used by the two writers to recreate a fresh and novel image of women in the past.

Rewriting Women in Chinese History: A New Life for Chinese Historical Female Figures

Since males were the dominant figures in Chinese history, women have always played a minor role in historical records. From a feminist perspective, the female figures in Chinese history can be regarded as victims of the patriarchal society because they were placed in a subordinate position to men. Given the fact that Confucianism was the leading doctrine from the time of the Han dynasty onwards, social norms were a reflection of these teachings. In one of his rare comments to reference women,

²⁹ Li Bihua clearly stated on the back cover of *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* that the story was inspired by *Jin ping mei cihua*. According to Dai Hongsen, “*Jin ping mei cihua* is the masterpiece of all the different versions of *Jin ping mei*”. The references to the *Jin ping mei* text in this paper will be based on this version. Dai, Hongsen: ‘Introduction’ to *Xiaoxiao Sheng: Jin ping mei cihua*, p. 1.

Confucius suggested that women were posed with particular problems within social relationships; in *Lunyu (The Analects)*, the Master says: “Women and underlings are especially difficult to handle: be friendly, and they become familiar; be distant, and they resent it”.³⁰ The statement reflects the perception that women, placed in the same category as underlings (literally *xiaoren* or petty people), were regarded as inferior to gentlemen (*junzi*). The fact that Confucius categorised women along with men of low social and moral standing implies that, in the binary opposition between men and women, females should be submissive to their male counterparts. As Confucianism was deeply rooted in Chinese culture, women continually had to suffer under these patriarchal confinements. Therefore, women had to sacrifice their own interests and desires, while men were faced with choices between benefits and detriments.

In the postfeminist era, contemporary female writers such as Hong Ying and Li Bihua have attempted to write fresh fictional accounts of Chinese historical women in order to provide a ‘new’ postfeminist image of them. Despite the differences in approach between the two authors, their common interest is in writing stories about women from the past. Even though the female protagonists in both Hong Ying’s and Li Bihua’s works suffer under the patriarchal system at some point, they do not become the scapegoats or victims of the patriarchal hegemony. Instead, the main female characters become the heroines and are seen to be successful at the ends of the novels. For example, the protagonists Xiao Yuegui, Yu Jin and Shan Yulian (Pan Jinlian’s current life) are portrayed as the sex objects of men, and Kawashima Yoshiko is shown to have been raped by her foster father in Japan (an event based on historical fact). However, unlike the stereotypes of female characters entrenched in Chinese literary history, these female characters do not accept the fate of being

³⁰ Leys, Simon (trans.): *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 89.

victims and yearn to control their own lives. Thus, they develop their own power through manipulating the rules set by men and playing along with them.

Because of this particular type of characterisation by Hong Ying and Li Bihua, I would consider both authors to be ‘conservative postfeminist’ writers; they rewrite stories about historical Chinese women by displaying power feminism instead of victim feminism, in which they transform the main female characters from victims to heroines. This supports Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake’s argument on ‘conservative postfeminists’. They claim that:

Conservative post-feminism thinking relies on an opposition between ‘victim feminism’ (second wave) and ‘power feminism’ (third wave), and suggests that ‘power feminism’ serves as a corrective to hopelessly outmoded ‘victim feminism’; to us, second and third wave feminism are neither incompatible nor opposed.³¹

Although the two Chinese authors place their female protagonists in historical settings, they do not follow the stereotypes of ‘victimised’ women that have been created and recorded in the past. Ironically, they initially present their female protagonists as victims, but in the end, they become heroines, thereby illustrating the movement from second-wave to third-wave feminist ideologies in their postfeminist works.

The Difference between the Qing Novel *Haishang Hua Liezhuan* and Hong Ying’s *Lord of Shanghai* and *Death in Shanghai*

In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Shanghai, prostitution was understood as a quintessential urbanized and materialistic pleasure, which made courtesan life a

³¹ Heywood, Leslie and Jennifer Drake (eds.): *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*, pp. 2–3.

major topic for late Qing novels exploring city life.³² Among these courtesan novels, *Haishang hua liezhuan* received the greatest admiration from twentieth-century Chinese scholars, such as Lu Xun (1881–1936), Hu Shi (1891–1962) and Zhang Ailing (1920–1995).³³ Because of this, *Haishang hua liezhuan* has been used by many writers and filmmakers as the blueprint for their own adaptations.³⁴ As a result of the direct influence of *Haishang hua liezhuan* on Hong Ying's *Lord of Shanghai* and *Death in Shanghai*, I shall investigate the different portrayals of Shanghai sing-song girls in order to highlight the distinctively modern representations of Shanghai courtesans from the pen of this postfeminist writer. Beauty writers' comments here.

Haishang hua liezhuan was written by Han Bangqing (1856–1894). The novel contains more than two dozen courtesans and their patrons as major characters. The courtesans in the novel were portrayed as the subordinates and possessions of men because they relied on the patrons for their livelihoods. In these circumstances, they did not have any power to control their own fates. One prominent example can be seen in Chapter 8 of the book, through the conversations between Zifu (the patron) and Cuifeng (the courtesan). The incident begins with Cuifeng requesting that Zifu leave an important security box with her as a bond, ensuring that he would not sponsor another courtesan. Zifu hesitates, and Cuifeng remarks, “If I need money, I will ask you for one thousand eight hundred dollars, that is not really a large amount for you; if I do not need money, I will not ask you for a penny.”³⁵ Being a famous

³² Wang, David Der-wei: *Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849–1911*, p. 53.

³³ Lu, Xun: *Zhongguo xianshuo shilüe*, pp. 273–283. Hu Shi wrote a preface for the story. Hu Shi: ‘Preface’ to Han Bangqing: *Haishang hua liezhuan*, pp. 1–22. Also, Zhang Ailing provided footnotes for her translation of the section in *Haishang hua liezhuan*, which is written in Wu dialect in *Haishang hui kai*.

³⁴ Hong Ying used the subject matter ‘Shanghai courtesan’ for her novels *Lord of Shanghai* and *Death in Shanghai*, and the Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao Hsien made a movie, *Flowers of Shanghai*, which is based on *Haishang hua liezhuan*, in 1998.

³⁵ Zhang, Ailing: *Haishang hua kai*, p. 72.

courtesan in Shanghai, Cuifeng's comment highlights her financial relationship with Zifu, her patron, which reflects the openly commercial relationship between courtesans and patrons in that particular period, in contrast to earlier historical eras when romantic and companionate relationships between these two groups were more stressed. This behaviour by Cuifeng supports Catherine Yeh's image of 'Shanghai commercialised courtesans' at the time. She states that:

This [type of] courtesan was neither fantastic nor romantic, neither sentimental nor idealistic. Employing realism in the broadest sense, these works portrayed her as cunning, unscrupulous, a time-based and forever scheming woman with her eyes fixed only on her business enterprise and her own sense of fulfilment.³⁶

These comments reveal the unglamorous realities of the occupation and the lack of actual emotional dependence shown by the courtesan to the patron. For the courtesan, her affection was a commodity and her decisions were based on the promotion of her personal self-interest. In many respects, their entrepreneurial behaviour represented the modern woman making the best of their patriarchal situation during that particular period. Although they lived on the generosity of the patrons and under oppression, the commercial attitude adopted by the courtesans quite possibly contributed significantly to the material urban culture of China today and was arguably a greater influence on the social fabric than the words of the great reformers.³⁷ Because of the negative feminist views of their occupation, the use of courtesans by Hong Ying provides an

³⁶ Yeh, Catherine: *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals & Entertainment Culture, 1850-1910*, p. 249. Also see Guoqun Sun's biography for Lin Daiyu. Sun, Guoqun: "Lin Daiyu", in: Lily Xiaohong Lee and A.D. Stefanowska (eds.): *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women: The Qing Period, 1644-1911*, S.W Shing (trans.), p. 130.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 11.

interesting platform for the creation of her new postfeminist image of Shanghai courtesans in the rewritten versions of *Flowers of Shanghai*.

Hong Ying's *Lord of Shanghai* is set in the period from the 1900s to the 1940s. The main character is Xiao Yuegui, a country girl who transforms herself from a maid in a brothel to the controlling power behind the Lord of Shanghai (an underworld Triad leader). The brothel in which she works is controlled by the Triads, and her unique temperament attracts the affection of the Triad leader at the time, Chang Lixiong. By the end of the story, the Lord of Shanghai is her puppet, as she wields her power over him. Hong Ying's other novel under consideration here and part of her Shanghai trilogy, *Death in Shanghai* is a story about the activities of Yu Jin, a Chinese spy during the Second World War, before the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour. Because Yu Jin's foster father is American, she helps American intelligence agents by collecting information on the Japanese under the guise of an actress. After some time, the Japanese begin to suspect that Yu Jin is a spy, but instead of yielding to the enemy, she elects to commit suicide. In the end, she is treated as the heroine of the story because she chooses to sacrifice herself in order to protect her fellow spies.

Although Hong Ying claims that *Lord of Shanghai* and *Death in Shanghai* are rewritten versions of the *Haishang hua liezhuan*, the two stories are substantially different from the original text in terms of their characterisations and story plots. This is because Hong Ying does not use the original characters that appeared in *Haishang hua liezhuan* in her two novels. Rather, she only employs the idea of Shanghai sing-song girls as the subject matter for her novels. As Hong Ying's first attempt to rewrite *Haishang hua liezhuan*, *Lord of Shanghai* is closer to the original text than its sequel, *Death in Shanghai*, in terms of social background and settings. In *Lord of Shanghai*, she follows *Haishang hua liezhuan*'s traditional hierarchy for prostitutes, 'shuyu',

‘*changsan*’ and ‘*yao'er*’,³⁸ as well as its ranking system for the brothels. These social devices of the nineteenth century were used to provide the main setting in Hong Ying’s novel. However, Hong Ying does not use the same characters that appear in Han’s novel; instead, she references a real courtesan who worked in nineteenth-century Shanghai. The name of one of the main female characters in *Lord of Shanghai* is Xin Daiyu, which is a modification of the name of the famous courtesan Lin Daiyu, who lived during that period.³⁹

Not only does Hong Ying make use of a ‘real figure’ from the nineteenth century in her novel *Lord of Shanghai*, but she also depicts her female protagonist as sharing a similar fate to many Shanghai courtesans in the nineteenth century. In the story, Xiao Yuegui’s ‘master’, Chang Lixiong, wants to marry her, but nothing comes of it because he is murdered. As a result of this tragedy, Xiao Yuegui trains herself to become a singer and later becomes the famous star of *shenqu*, a musical genre that she invented. As Christian Henriot notes, courtesans who did not manage to marry young sometimes ended up in a theatrical troupe.⁴⁰ Therefore, Hong Ying made her rewritten version of *Haishang hua liezhuan* faithful in reflecting the real characteristics of Shanghai courtesan life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

On the other hand, even though Hong Ying claimed that *Death in Shanghai* is the sequel to *Lord of Shanghai*, the novel shows less influence from *Haishang hua*

³⁸ According to Christian Henriot, there were three categories of courtesans: “the *shuyu*, sought to be distinguished from girls whom they considered to be prostitutes. The *changsan* later adopted the same discriminatory attitude toward the next lower ranking category of prostitutes, the *yao'er*”. Henriot, Christian: *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai: A Social History, 1849–1949*, p. 23.

³⁹ Yeh, Catherine: *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals & Entertainment Culture, 1850–1910*, p. 38.

See also Guoquan Sun’s biography for Lin Daiyu. Sun, Guoqun: “Lin Daiyu”, in: Lily Xiaohong Lee and A.D. Stefanowska (eds.): *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women: The Qing Period, 1644–1911*, p. 130.

⁴⁰ Henriot, Christian: *Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai: A Social History, 1849–1949*, p. 40.

liezhuan; there are very few elements in common with the original text, apart from the fact that the storyline is set in Shanghai. Unlike the nineteenth century, attitudes towards Shanghai sing-song girls during the Second World War changed; they were no longer regarded as glamorous and respected, mainly for political reasons. As *Death in Shanghai* is based around the time of the Second World War, Hong Ying portrayed the female protagonist, Yu Jin, as a film star instead, but implied that she possesses the qualities of the Shanghai courtesans of old. However, unlike Xiao Yuegui, Yu Jin does not sell her body to earn a living. Instead, she uses her body as a political means of seducing a Japanese general into disclosing secret information for the benefit of the American government.

In order to portray a new image of modern Shanghai sing-song girls, Hong Ying depicted the two protagonists, Xiao Yuegui from *Lord of Shanghai* and Yu Jin from *Death in Shanghai*, as intelligent and brave women with alluring temperaments. This particular technique of characterisation helps to promote the ‘girl power’ of Xiao Yuegui and Yu Jin. According to Michèle Barrett, the term ‘girl power’ first appeared in general media discussion and described girls who were academically bright, sassy, unafraid, confident and even violent.⁴¹ Since the characters of Xiao Yuegui and Yu Jin were created by a female writer during the postfeminist period, it is not surprising to see that they possess the ‘girl power’ features described above, even though they are women of the ‘old Shanghai’ tradition.

In *Lord of Shanghai*, Xiao Yuegui is portrayed as a smart and brave yet violent woman. There are two particular examples that illustrate her bravery and toughness. The first example appears at the beginning of the story, when Xiao

⁴¹ Barrett, Michèle: ‘Post-feminism’, in Gary Browning, Abigail Halcli and Frank Webster (eds.): *Understanding Contemporary Society: Theories of the Present*, p. 46.

Yuegui's lover, Chang Lixiong, is assassinated in the brothel where she works. Most of the women in the house are crying, apart from Xiao Yuegui, who at that moment, does not care about her own life and rushes towards danger in an attempt to save Chang Lixiong:

Xiao Yuegui tries to free herself from the maids who attempt to pull her back and rushes out blindly. She stands in front of the enemies surrounding Chang Lixiong and exclaims: 'Stop fighting!' However, she is shot in her left shoulder and though her body shakes, she still manages to stand and say, 'All the men have died, why carry on fighting?'⁴²

Compared with the descriptions of the other women in the brothel, Xiao Yuegui's bravery is instantly apparent through her bold actions. This is because, in the binary opposition under the patriarchal norms, women are believed to be 'weaker' than men; therefore, it is acceptable and even desirable for women to show their frailty in front of other people, Chinese women being no exception. However, the above scene demonstrates Hong Ying's intent to highlight Xiao's 'heroic' quality by using the other women as her foils. Unlike the other women, especially the mistress of the brothel, Xin Daiyu, Xiao Yuegui is not afraid to intervene in the fight between the Triads, because she only cares about Chang Lixiong. This attitude can be contrasted with the inaction of Xin Daiyu, who also likes Chang Lixiong and used to be his lover; she is in shock and does nothing when she sees that he has been shot. Consequently, Xin Daiyu's fright in the circumstances emphasises Xiao Yuegui's fearless attitude and affirms her persona as a courageous girl who is different from the stereotypical 'normal' woman.

⁴² Hong, Ying: *Lord of Shanghai*, p. 62.

Another incident that shows Xiao Yuegui's valour is her plan to assassinate her second lover, Huang Peiyu. This example again illustrates the fact that she is not afraid of men. After she discovers that Huang betrayed Hongmen (the dominant Triad in Shanghai) and murdered her first lover, Chang Lixiong, Xiao Yuegui decides to take revenge. She pretends to be kidnapped and asks Huang to pay the ransom to free her but is actually setting a death trap for him. Even though she believes that she could also die when the bomb set for Huang explodes, she does not care because she only wants to exact revenge for Chang. From Hong Ying's description, Xiao's determination is obvious:

Xiao Yuegui carefully calculates that the trunks of the trees in the vicinity of the imminent explosion can protect her, yet it is totally unpredictable whether she will be safe when the bomb explodes—this is because her proximity with Huang must be close enough to convince other people that she is not involved in this conspiracy.⁴³

In addition, Hong Ying makes use of another important figure, Yu Qiyang (Xiao Yuegui's third lover), to acknowledge Xiao's heroics when he comments that "Xiao Yuegui is braver than I".⁴⁴ Not only does Hong Ying use other women in the brothel as Xiao's foil to show her bravery, but she also uses Yu Qiyang, a male character, to further emphasise Xiao's 'girl power' and to subtly indicate to the audience that she is the real controlling power in Shanghai at the end. Yu Qiyang explicitly states:

Everybody knows the leader of the Shanghai Triad, Hongmen, is you, Xiao Yuegui, only you can resolve all the conflicts in Hongmen. The senior member in Hongmen said that you are brave and talented and

⁴³ Hong, Ying: *Lord of Shanghai*, p. 296.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

you can understand the crux of the situation with a glance. Therefore, others are convinced and the senior member has promised that all the people in Hongmen will listen to your orders.⁴⁵

Like Xiao Yuegui, Yu Jin's 'girl power' in *Death in Shanghai* is expressed through her bravery. The most prominent example is her willingness to sacrifice herself for a greater cause. As the story is about the espionage activities of Japanese and American spies, the audience may suspect the high possibility of Yu Jin, an American spy, eventually being caught as the story unfolds. Towards the end of the story, the Japanese government suspects that Yu Jin is acting as an American spy and has killed Bai Yunchang (a Japanese spy). She realises that, once the Japanese government has gathered the required information and obtained the telegraphic machine used by the American spies, she will be tortured in order to extract a confession and be forced into disclosing information about the other American spies. Since she wishes to avoid humiliation by the Japanese officials and does not want to betray the other American spies, she decides to commit suicide without revealing any secrets to the Japanese government. During the imperial period, women who committed suicide for their husbands and family members had been regarded as virtuous women, and this type of behaviour was praised above all other expressions of female virtue.⁴⁶ In addition to her heroic suicide, a comment from Xia Piluo (Shapiro) (a Jewish–American spy) directly shows Yu Jin's bravery: "She is the

⁴⁵ Hong, Ying: *Lord of Shanghai*, p. 355.

⁴⁶ This has been recorded in "Biographies of Women" in *History of Ming Dynasty* and is cited in Du, Fanqin and Susan Mann: "Competing Claims on Womanly Virtue in Late Imperial China" in Dorothy Ko, JaHyun Him Haboush and Joan R. Piggott (eds.): *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea and Japan*, p. 229.

bravest woman I have ever seen”.⁴⁷ This comment highlights Yu Jin’s ‘girl power’, as her courage is recognised and validated by men.

In contrast to Xiao Yuegui, Hong Ying does not describe Yu Jin as explicitly possessing violent tendencies. Instead, she uses another female character, Bai Yunshang, to reveal the violent aspect of ‘girl power’. The brutality of Bai is evident in the scene where she castrates Mo Zhiyin. She seduces him to have sex with her and, while he is enjoying himself, she suddenly “holds up her hands and grasps his penis in them, then her right hand holds a sharp knife and cuts the penis; blood bursts out like a snake that has had its head chopped off”. Bai then disgustedly throws the bloody knife and the detached penis onto Mo’s body and says, “You reattach it yourself!”⁴⁸ Like the other female characters do in “The Carnation Club”, this scene attempts to show Bai’s intention to wipe away Mo’s male superiority. According to Sigmund Freud, castration is an important element in differentiating male from female and is used to explain why men perceive themselves as superior to women. The penis is associated with power: “at first, the boy thinks that only unworthy women are castrated, and it takes him a long time to realise that all women (especially his mother) do not have penises”. Freud further elaborates that the boy’s renunciation of castration is based on the fact that he possesses a penis in a world of phallic dominance, while the girl’s rejection of castration stems from not possessing a penis.⁴⁹

Applying Freud’s theory of the castration complex onto the act of castration by Bai Yunshang on Mo in *Death in Shanghai*, it can be argued that the violence is a challenge to the phallic primacy of the patriarchy. Based on Freud’s argument, the

⁴⁷ Hong, Ying: *Death in Shanghai*, p. 294.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 241.

⁴⁹ Bass, Alan: ‘Time and the Witch: Femininity, Metapsychology and the Temporality of the Unconscious’, in: *MLN*, 91.5 p. 876.

phallus is the symbol of power for men and the main criterion that makes women inferior. Therefore, the act of removing the penis from men translates into the stripping of power from them. In light of this, Bai's castration of Mo places him in an inferior position and illustrates her ability to deprive men of their power and 'superiority'. In this case, Mo is helpless and is portrayed as the victim, which once again challenges the gender binary opposition that, unlike men, women are stereotypically passive and the victims of violence. This is because she is underlining his powerlessness to regain dominance once he has lost his penis and hence his power. On the contrary, this fictional act and the 'butt-kicking postfeminist icon'⁵⁰ of Bai Yunchang provide a fantasy world for women to relate to the avenging female action, which is a kind of revenge against male violence. Here, 'girl power' does not refer to women using beauty to manipulate men; instead, 'girl power' here refers to "rebellious girl power",⁵¹ which reflects another of Michèle Barret's definitions of girl power as sassy and violent.⁵²

Bai's castration scene also portrays the phenomenon of "strong women and weak men" (*yinsheng yangshuai*),⁵³ which is one of the special features in some Chinese women's writing. In traditional Chinese culture, yin-yang theory has always been the representative dichotomy of femininity and masculinity, whereby yin is female and yang is male.⁵⁴ One of the prominent postfeminist features draws on the post-structuralist idea of deconstructing the gender binary. Therefore, in order to understand the gender discourse in China, a close examination of the concepts of

⁵⁰ This idea was inspired by Dawn H. Currie, Devidre M. Kelly and Shauna Pomerantz's 'Girl Power': *Girls Reinventing Girlhood*, pp. 42–44.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Refer to footnote 41 in this chapter.

⁵³ Zhu, Aijun: *Feminism and Global Chineseness: The Cultural Production of Controversial Women Authors*, p. 155.

⁵⁴ Louie, Kam: *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*, p. 9.

‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ in Chinese culture is fundamental. In discussing the Chinese gender system, ‘yin’ and ‘yang’ must be taken into consideration. According to Bret Hinsch, ‘yin’ and ‘yang’ were the third pair of cosmological abstractions that influenced gender concepts in early imperial China and artists started using binary symbolism related to yin/yang to express ineffable cosmological abstractions, which included gender, during the third century B.C.E. By the Eastern Han, some thinkers saw the intercourse (*jiao*) of yin and yang as an analogue to the sexual intercourse of female and male, giving an explicitly sexual dimension to this dichotomy.⁵⁵ Since yin represents female and yang represents male in Chinese culture, femininity and masculinity are placed in a dichotomous relationship where yin is female and yang is male.⁵⁶ Kam Louie states that femininity was associated with passivity and submissiveness in relation to sexual desires, whereas masculinity had to do with the ideologies of mastering, controlling and moderating sexual desires. Moreover, the opposite of masculinity does not mean femininity in terms of sexuality. In such light, impotence and castration would not be considered as feminine but just refers to the lack of sexual dominance and control.⁵⁷ The castration scene of Mo makes him a ‘weak man’, as he loses his power to master and control his sexual desire, which shakes his masculine self. In such light, this castration scene not only shows Bai Yunchang’s rebellious girl power, but also provide a chance for readers to think upon the meaning of masculinity through Mo. In *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*, Kam Louie claims:

⁵⁵ Hinsch, Bret: *Women in Imperial China*, p. 163.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Louie, Kam: “Chinese, Japanese and Global Masculine Identities”, in Kam Louie and Morris Low (eds.): *Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan*, p. 8.

For men... [a notion of self] is also drawn upon from a man's experience of how his sexual pleasure is produced and his prowess is perceived. Male sexuality may be socially constructed, but our bodies do more than passively accept the culture inscribed upon them—they alter and transform themselves in response to their environments and generate patterns of change within cultural trends.⁵⁸

Mo's masculine self has been shaken, as the means (his penis) of his sexual pleasure has been taken away and he might not be able to gain his pleasure (self) back, even though he 'sticks' his penis back. In other words, the castration scene provides a critical scrutiny for the issue of self, for both Chinese male and female sexuality.

The postfeminist elements of Hong Ying's work as discussed above present a new image of Shanghai courtesans that is very different from the image formed in Han Bangqing's *Haishang hua liezhuan*. The characters portrayed by Hong Ying attempt to dispel the stereotypical perceived weaknesses of women—for example, their reliance on emotional support and their fear of violence. She empowers the main protagonists with bravery and attempts to demonstrate that violence may also be an element of girl power. In *Lord of Shanghai*, Xiao Yuegui's courage is shown as she attempts to save Chang Lixiong and takes revenge on Huang Peiyu. Likewise, in *Death in Shanghai*, Yu Jin pays the ultimate price for remaining loyal to the American government. Furthermore, the reader is shocked by Bai's castration of Mo, which demonstrates that postfeminist women can exercise power over men and a revision of Chinese masculinity through the character of Mo. Taken together, these examples reveal the strong postfeminist influence in Hong Ying's works.

⁵⁸ Louie, Kam: *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*, p. 6.

Li Bihua's New Perspective of Golden Lotus and Kawashima Yoshiko

Both Golden Lotus and Kawashima Yoshiko have been categorised in Chinese history as 'bad women'. Golden Lotus, a fictional character said to have lived during the Song dynasty, appears in two Ming dynasty novels, *Shuihu zhuan* and *Jin ping mei*. However, as mentioned before, Chinese literature and history before the early twentieth century were highly patriarchal; therefore, it was not surprising to see that the women were used as scapegoats or portrayed as immoral individuals. Similarly, Kawashima Yoshiko has been denounced in Chinese history as a Japanese spy who killed many Chinese people during the Sino-Japanese War, in spite of the many problems and contradictions in any such assessment. Nevertheless, Li Bihua rewrites the stories of Golden Lotus and presents Kawashima Yoshiko in a new light, as she adds a number of fictional elements that bear no resemblance to events recorded in historical texts. Consequently, the two female characters can now be treated as 'postfeminist' figures.

As *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* is based on *Shuihu zhuan* and *Jin ping mei*, it is important to first provide brief historical accounts of these original texts so that the various works may be compared and contrasted. *Shuihu zhuan* was written by Shi Nai'an (1290–1365). It is vaguely based upon stories involving a genuine historical figure—the bandit Song Jiang—and his one hundred and seven companions. The group was active in the Huai River region and eventually surrendered to government troops in 1119. Folk stories about Song Jiang circulated during the Southern Song. Pan Jinlian is the sister-in-law of Wu Song, one of Song Jiang's companions, and therefore plays a substantial role in the novel, appearing from Chapter 23 to Chapter 32 of the *Shuihu zhuan*. Pan Jinlian is portrayed as a licentious woman who becomes infatuated with Wu Song at their first meeting. Even though her

thoughts are not expressed in action, the description of her imagination strongly supports her notoriety:

They're brothers with the same mother, but how well-built this one is ... If only I'd married this one instead, life would really seem worth living! There's absolutely no comparison with my Three-Inch Poxy Midget, who's only three parts man and seven parts ghost! Oh, how unlucky I am! Judging by the way he killed the tiger, Wu Song must be terrifically strong! Apparently he isn't married yet, so why not get him to come and live here? Surely it's fate that brought him to me!⁵⁹

The translation above shows that Pan Jinlian has no regard for *fudao*, a fundamental doctrine for women under the Confucian teachings.⁶⁰ According to Mencius: “to make a duty of obedience is the Way for concubines and women”.⁶¹ This implies that women should be submissive to men, especially towards their husbands if they are married, as well as towards their elders. However, it is evident that Pan Jinlian shows no respect for her husband by criticising his phallic primacy, and she yearns to have an affair with another man—a situation made worse by the fact that the man in question is her brother-in-law.

The revelation of Pan Jinlian's ‘improper thinking’ is the main reason for her disrepute. In *Shuihu zhuan*, she is characterised as a cold-blooded woman who murders her husband, Wu Dalang, after she commits adultery with Ximen Qing.

Whilst the reader may have sympathised with Pan Jinlian's murder of Wu Dalang if

⁵⁹Young, John and Alex: *The Tiger Killers*, Part Two of *The Marshes of Mount Liang: A New Translation of the Shuihu zhuan or Water Margin of Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong*, p. 22.

In ancient Chinese culture, women should follow the “three obediences and four virtues”. The three obediences are as follows: unmarried women should obey their fathers, married women should obey their husbands and finally, when the women grow old, they should be submissive to their sons.

⁶⁰According to Dorothy Ko, “the age-old Confucian Four Virtues are womanly speech, womanly virtue, womanly deportment, and womanly work”. Ko, Dorothy: *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*, p. 143.

⁶¹Lynall, Leonard (trans.): *Mencius*, p.86.

he were an evil man who enjoyed torturing his wife, Pan Jinlian's underlying motive for the murder of her gentle and affectionate husband is to marry her much richer lover, Ximen Qing. Her disrespect for her husband and her sexual immorality earned her the reputation of being a famous whore in Chinese literary history. Not only does *Shuihu zhuan* contain a negative account of Pan Jinlian but another novel, *Jin ping mei*, also uses Pan Jinlian as the main protagonist with similar promiscuous and mercenary attributes.

Jin ping mei is a Chinese novel composed in the vernacular (*baihua*) during the late Ming Dynasty, which is attributed to Lanling Xiaoxiao Sheng (a pseudonym). The novel describes in detail the downfall of the Ximen household during the Southern Song Dynasty (1111–1127). The story centres around Ximen Qing, a lazy and lustful merchant whose wealth buys him a plethora of wives and concubines. In the early part of the novel, there is a key episode (the seduction of the lascivious and adulterous Pan Jinlian) that is taken from an episode of *Shuihu zhuan*. After secretly murdering the husband of Pan Jinlian, Ximen Qing marries her.⁶² The story then proceeds to record the domestic sexual struggles of the women within his household as they clamour for prestige and influence, ultimately leading to the decline of the Ximen clan and the death of Ximen Qing.

Compared with *Shuihu zhuan*, *Jin ping mei* is highly controversial in Chinese literature tradition, as it has been banned in China due to its 'pornographic narrative' by successive governments, starting with the Kangxi Emperor in 1687.⁶³ Nonetheless, *Jin ping mei* has a very important literary value in Chinese literary tradition.

According to Naifei Ding, *Jin ping mei* "signifies an entire range of meanings, from a

⁶² Refer to the first nine chapters of *Jin ping mei cihua*.

⁶³ Melvin, Sheila: "Dancing through the Censors: 1500s Erotica", *New York Times*, 23 March 2011. < <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/24/arts/24iht-dance24.html?pagewanted=all& r=0>>

scholarly first realist narrative of its kind in China, if not the world” and “signify a moral and psychophysiological obsession with, and concomitant fear and ever hatred of, particular women and female sexuality (*nüse*, or woman-sex...Pan Jinlian, the licentious woman or *yifu*, as a nymphomaniac”.⁶⁴ Based on this comment, on the one hand, the derogative name ‘*yifu*’ for Pan Jinlian shows the misogynistic nature present in the ancient patriarchal China. Using a traditional patriarchal sense to interpret Pan Jinlian, she would undoubtedly be categorised as an evil woman in every sense, as she craves sex with many men and murders her husband to acquire a richer spouse. The vivid descriptions of Pan Jinlian’s sexual behaviour make her even more despicable than in *Shuihu zhuan*. This is because *Jin ping mei* represents “sexual desire as something uncontainable and intractable, and depict intercourse as illicit and madly driven by lust”,⁶⁵ and it could be seen as a book on “women and female sexuality”, which was totally not acceptable in the Ming period when “women [were] still only legitimate and symbolically valued as reproductive rather than sexual subjects”.⁶⁶

On the other hand, when using a feminist perspective or even a postfeminist perspective to analyse this character, Pan, indeed, contains feminist and postfeminist qualities. This is because she challenges the patriarchal norms by showing her sexual desire explicitly and using her beauty to seduce men so that she can pursue living a better life. Living under a polygamous household, the wives and concubines constantly needed to compete for the husband’s attention in order to secure the position in the family. The most effective way to earn the husband’s favouritism is to be obedient to the husband and be meek. Nonetheless, Pan Jinlian is an exception of being a meek ‘wife’, yet she succeeds in gaining Ximen Qing’s favour. Pan Jinlian

⁶⁴ Ding, Naifei: *Obscene Things: Sexual Politics in Jin Ping Mei*, pp. xxi-xiii.

⁶⁵ McMahon, Keith: *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth Century Chinese Fiction*, p. 29.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. xiii.

has been portrayed as a “shrew and lascivious woman”, as she cannot “abuse the man [Ximen Qing] as he does her, but she has her forms of abuse, such as throwing tantrums, speaking insolently or plotting secretly to harm her rivals for his favour”.⁶⁷ Her bad-tempered character makes her an unconventional woman (concubine) in the Chinese patriarchal sense. Nonetheless, she uses sexual paraphernalia and aphrodisiacs that have been introduced by Ximen Qing in order to secure his favouritism.⁶⁸ This could be seen as form of ‘girl power’—using her beauty or charm to get what she wants.

In the light of the historical novels briefly described above, Li Bihua’s *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* is a retelling of the story of the notorious fictional character, Pan Jinlian. Nonetheless, Li’s version of Pan Jinlian was not the first rewritten version of her tale. Two early modern plays, *Pan Jinlian* (1928) by Ouyang Yuqian (1889–1962) and *Dachu youling ta* (*Fight out of the Ghost Tower*, 1928) by Bai Wei (1894–1987), have portrayed a very different image of Pan Jinlian from the traditional one.⁶⁹ David Wang states that “instead of viewing Pan Jinlian as a licentious shrew and bloodthirsty villainess, Ouyang Yuqian casts her as the archetype of the free-spirited Chinese woman sacrificed to a rigid male-centred social system”.⁷⁰ This provides a new perspective of Pan Jinlian in Chinese literary history, and Li’s version, to a certain extent, follows this trend.

In *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus*, the story begins with an image of Pan Jinlian refusing to drink the ‘bitter soup’ in hell, which will cause her to forget all of the memories of her past life. Instead of going through the normal process of

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.50.

⁶⁸ In particular in Chapter 72 and 73 of *Jin pin mei*.

⁶⁹ Wang, Der-wei: *The Monster That is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-century China*, p.55.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*.

reincarnation, she is determined to seek revenge on Wu Song, her brother-in-law and murderer. In the present life, Pan Jinlian becomes Shan Yulian, an orphan in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution. When she is sixteen, she is raped by the ballet school principal (Master Zhang) and is forced by the Communist Party to undergo 're-education' by becoming a worker in a shoe factory. There she meets Wu Long (Wu Song), and even though they are attracted to each other, free love was forbidden during the Cultural Revolution. Shan is criticised for showing her interest in Wu Long and is exiled to Huizhou. In Huizhou, Shan meets Wu Ruda (Wu Dalang) and marries him before they move to Hong Kong together. However, the story follows the tragic element of the original version of Pan Jinlian, and it does not end happily ever after because Shan commits adultery with Simon (Ximen Qing) in Hong Kong. Although the story is similar in its plot to *Shuihu zhuan* and *Jin ping mei*, the end of the story differs because Shan Yulian does not kill her husband and she survives.

The second of Li Bihua's novels under consideration here, *Kawashima Yoshiko*, is a story based on the life of the late Qing princess, Aisin Gioro Xianyu (better known under her Japanese name of Kawashima Yoshiko). The book's general plot is faithful to the original biography; however, Li adds some fictional elements, such as her rape by Kawashima Naniwa, Xianyu's foster father. Another obvious difference between Li's story and the original memoir is that the real Xianyu is sentenced to death and executed. According to Dan Shao, a historian researching the life of Aisin Gioro Xianyu, 'Xianyu was sentenced to death by the Supreme Court of Hebei on 3 March 1948 and on 25 March, she was executed in Beiping (now Beijing)'.⁷¹ The plot of *Kawashima Yoshiko*, however, is that Aisin Gioro Xianyu is

⁷¹ Shao, Dan: 'Princess, Traitor, Soldier, Spy: Aisin Gioro Xianyu and the Dilemma of Manchu Identity', in Mariko Asano Tamanoi (ed.): *Crossed Histories: Manchuria in the Age of Empire*, p. 87.

sent to Japan at the age of seven by her father, at the time of the collapse of the Manchu regime, in order to prepare for the re-establishment of the Qing dynasty. As a result of this, she never received Chinese nationality, an issue that led to her eventual execution as a traitor by the Chinese authorities, which was extremely controversial under international law. Because she is fluent in Japanese, she is appointed as the first Japanese female military commander in China. Even though she seems to be successful in gaining trust and power from the Japanese military, in the eyes of the Japanese government, she is merely a tool for conquering China. In the end, she is persecuted by both the Japanese and Chinese governments, yet her death remains a mystery.

In order for Li Bihua to produce a new version of the well-known stories of Pan Jinlian and Kawashima Yoshiko, she has brought this old subject matter into the contemporary era by incorporating postfeminist features into the characterisations and plot of the story. When she wrote these novels in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the postfeminist movement had already established itself, particularly in the media, and this modern element is apparent in her project as she rewrites historical figures. Because one of the connotations of postfeminism relates to the media's promotion of 'girl power', it is worthwhile to examine the postfeminist icons that were fostered by the media at the time, especially in television and films. Given the fact that Madonna was the iconic female figure in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a comparison can be made between Li Bihua's female creations and Madonna's popular image of the 'modern' woman during this period. In both of Li Bihua's works, there is evidence to show that Shan Yulian (Pan Jinlian) and Kawashima Yoshiko have been 'Madonna-ised'.

There are women who dislike Madonna despite the fact that she has been regarded as “the most successful solo pop performer ever” in the West.⁷² In a survey carried out by Laurie Schulze, Anne Barton White and Jane D. Brown about “Madonna-haters”, most of the negativity surrounding Madonna centres on her uses of sexuality and gender: there are women who consider her image to be grotesque because she lacks respect for the patriarchal society and uses her sexuality to attract and seduce men into submission, which puts her at the lowest level of ‘proper’ female behavioural standards.⁷³ Similarly, it is possible to draw parallels between Pan Jinlian and Kawashima Yoshiko, who were both recognised as beautiful women in Chinese history. However, they were categorised as evil because they chose not to follow the Confucian social doctrine imposed on women. In both *Shuihu zhuan* and *Jin ping mei*, Pan Jinlian has been portrayed as a promiscuous woman because she commits adultery with Ximen Qing, despite the fact that she had an arranged marriage with Wu Dalang and does not love him at all. On the other hand, Kawashima Yoshiko has been regarded as an evil woman because she accrued military power by helping the Japanese kill many Chinese people during the Sino-Japanese conflict in the Second World War. With regard to their actions, Pan Jinlian and Kawashima Yoshiko are considered bad women because they have fallen severely below the Confucian standards and have chosen to ignore the *fudao* expected of woman.⁷⁴

From a postfeminist perspective, the actions of Pan Jinlian and Yoshiko Kawashima can be considered as deviant behaviour that challenged the patriarchal norm. Li’s new version of the two female protagonists generally follows the original

⁷² Schulze, Laurie, Anne Barton White and Jane D. Brown: ‘A Sacred Monster in Her Prime: Audience Construction of Madonna as Low-Other’, in Cathy Schwichtenberg (ed.): *The Madonna Connection: Representational Politics, Subcultural Identities, and Cultural Theory*, p15.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 17.

⁷⁴ See previous footnote 50 about *fudao*.

story of the two women but additionally provides a ‘modernized Madonna image’ of them to embellish these two old stories with contemporary relevance. In one of Madonna’s songs, ‘Material Girl’ (1985), there are two particular lines that reflect the female attitudes towards the materialistic realities of relationships in the 1980s: “The boy with the cold, hard cash is always Mr Right/ Cause we are living in a material world, and I am a material girl”. By applying this ‘material girl’ attitude to analyse *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus*, it is possible to appreciate Shan Yulian’s transformation after her marriage to Wu Ruda. After the marriage, Wu Ruda becomes Shan’s financial source, and she can satisfy her materialistic desires and package herself to become more ‘feminine’. When she first arrives in Hong Kong, Shan Yulian is intimidated by the girls living in Hong Kong because she feels old-fashioned. However, after attending some courses on applying make-up and buying new clothes, her physical figure is transformed and she begins to understand the lure of materialism:

She looks in the mirror and tilts her head, looking at her beautiful shadow from the edge of her eyes. She believes that she is becoming prettier. Then she changes to another angle and another pose, using her hand to hold up her chin, emanating her femininity, her eye-brows are full of seduction and starts to talk to herself: ‘one cannot be poor. Once there is money, your love life becomes stable’.⁷⁵

In Li Bihua’s portrayal of Kawashima Yoshiko, Yoshiko shares a similar quality to Madonna, who has the ability to exercise power and independence through her various guises, which challenge the foundations of identity. As Ann Kaplan remarks, the multiple masquerades that Madonna uses engage with the assumption that there is

⁷⁵ Li, Bihua: *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus*, p. 77.

only one type of ‘self’ and one perspective of femininity. Madonna’s actions show that feminine identity is a product of cultural construction, and her many images allow her to manipulate the patriarchal norms derived from the Freudian idea of phallic primacy. Furthermore, the masks appeal to the male forms of fantasy, which rely on deception. For young women, Madonna’s images are a symbol of female strength and inspire them to reject the passive perception of females in the patriarchal hegemony.⁷⁶ Like Madonna, the chameleon qualities of Kawashima Yoshiko can be seen from the following description of her: “She speaks fluent Chinese and Japanese, going back and forth between China and Japan. Sometimes she wears western suits, sometimes she wears the kimono, sometimes she wears the *qipao*, sometimes she wears an elegant evening dress”; also “sometimes she is a woman, sometimes she is a ‘little boy’”.⁷⁷ It is therefore apparent that Kawashima Yoshiko also engages in the frequent use of masquerades, specifically by cross-dressing as a man. The issue of cross-dressing will be discussed in greater depth with reference to Judith Butler’s ‘gender as performativity’ in the third section of this chapter.⁷⁸

The Emphasis of ‘Beauty’ as a Kind of ‘Girl Power’ in Hong Ying’s *Lord of Shanghai* and *Death in Shanghai* and Li Bihua’s *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* and *Kawashima Yoshiko*

⁷⁶ Kaplan, Ann: ‘Madonna Politics: Perversion, Repression or Subversion? Or Masks under/ as Mastery’, in Cathy Schwichtenberg (ed.): *The Madonna Connection: Representational Politics, Subcultural Identities, and Cultural Theory*, p, 160.

⁷⁷ Li, Bihua: *Kawashima Yoshiko*, p.139.

⁷⁸ Li Bihua’s *Farewell my Concubine* is the most representative text for the discussion of cross-dressing and theatre as the novella itself is about this issue. Nonetheless, I choose not to include this text in the discussion in this thesis, as it has been received a lot of scholarly attention; instead, I would like to focus on the cross-dressing issue in *Kawashima Yoishiko*, as there is hardly any scholarship on this. For the discussions on the cross-dressing issues in *Farewell my Concubine*, please see Helen Hok-Sze Leung’s *Farwell my Concubine: A Queer Film Classic* and Bonnie McDougall’s *Fictional Authors, Imaginary Audiences: Modern Chinese Literature in the Twentieth Century*.

Unlike other Chinese historical female figures, the main protagonists in the novels by Hong Ying and Li Bihua all possess ‘girl power’. The novels’ female characters are no longer portrayed as men’s subordinates; rather, the men are their subordinates and have to submit to them. In the four novels that I have chosen, all of the female protagonists are described as mesmerising to men, and their beauty is used as a tool to attract men and obtain power. In the light of this, I would argue that the four protagonists in the selected works are postfeminist figures because they all utilise their beauty as a kind of girl power. According to Charlotte Brunson,

[A postfeminist] is neither trapped in femininity (pre-feminist), nor rejecting of it (feminist). She can use it. However, although this may mean apparently inhabiting a very similar terrain to pre-feminist woman, who manipulates her appearance to get her man, the postfeminist woman also has ideas about her life and being in control which clearly come from feminism. She may manipulate her appearance, but she doesn’t just do it to get a man on the old terms. She wants it all.⁷⁹

Brunson’s comment suggests that postfeminists would use their appearance to attract men; however, unlike ‘traditional women’, they would not use their appearance or their body just to gain financial and social security from men. Instead, they would use their beauty in order to ‘manipulate’ men into doing their bidding and thus become the controllers of their own lives and destinies. According to the pre-feminist perspective, it was believed that women are totally dependent on men and that they are the object of the male gaze; therefore, women need to be pretty because they have

⁷⁹ Brunson, Charlotte: *Screen Tastes: Soap Opera to Satellite Dishes*, p. 86.

to satisfy men's voyeurism.⁸⁰ In contrast, a postfeminist would argue that the beauty of a woman is not for the male gaze, but rather, the attractiveness of a woman is a means to help her manipulate the relationship with her sexual counterpart. In the light of this, a postfeminist would accept that beautiful women are not *femmes fatales* and that pretty women can use their beauty as a kind of 'girl power'.

In Hong Ying's *Lord of Shanghai* and *Death in Shanghai*, both Xiao Yuegui and Yu Jin are described as extraordinarily beautiful. In *Lord of Shanghai*, only Huang Peiyu was attracted to Xiao Yuegui specifically because of her beauty. The other two lovers, Chang Lixiong and Yu Qiyang, were attracted to her even when she was still just a maid at the brothel. After a series of unfortunate incidents, Xiao Yuegui realises that she will only succeed in life if she can make the most powerful man in Shanghai love her so that she can make use of him. Therefore, she decides to use her beauty to seduce Huang Peiyu, the controlling power in Shanghai at the time. Even though Huang Peiyu had met Xiao Yuegui when she was Chang Lixiong's mistress, he had not shown any interest in her. However, when Chang is dead and Huang becomes the real head of Hongmen, Xiao is determined to make herself attractive to Huang in order to seduce him. From the description of the way she looks on their first date, Xiao's ambition is obviously revealed: "She wears a creamy yellow *qipao* which is such a tight fit that it shows her perfect body, just like her second layer of skin. Her beauty is ample, vivacious, but gentle—she can never go wrong on how to dress for different occasions".⁸¹ Also, Huang's response directly shows the beauty of Xiao's appearance: "It seems that Huang Peiyu had never met such a stunning

⁸⁰ The references to the male gaze are borrowed from Laura Mulvey's book: *Visual and Other Pleasures*.

⁸¹ Hong, Ying: *Lord of Shanghai*, p. 122.

woman before, he cannot find any words to describe the boldness of Xiao's dress".⁸² These two particular examples show Xiao Yuegui's ability to use her beauty to attract Huang Peiyu at her desire. She then realises her dream when she asks Huang to support her financially to set up her own theatre and becomes a wealthy woman. The reader also discovers that Xiao Yuegui's financial dependence on Huang is only temporary. Xiao Yuegui knows how to manipulate Huang into providing her with financial support, yet she cleverly uses the money for investments under her own name so that after Huang dies, the whole Huang family becomes bankrupt and she becomes the wealthiest woman in Shanghai.

In *Death in Shanghai*, Yu Jin's attractive appearance is the secret behind her success as a stage performer. Her beauty earns her an invitation from Tan Na, a famous stage director, to become the lead actress in *Foxtrot in Shanghai*. She accepts the invitation, which gives her a reason for travelling back to Shanghai from Hong Kong. In fact, she actually uses the invitation as a cover to return to Shanghai in order to spy and collect information about Japanese activities for the American government. Even Luo Jialing, the sponsor of *Foxtrot in Shanghai* and the widow of a real-estate tycoon in Shanghai, admires the beauty of Yu Jin and requests that she is given the leading female role in the play. Luo Jialing's comments encapsulate Yu Jin's stunning appearance: "When she wears a black velour *qipao*, she is perfect as she just looks like a black peony".⁸³ Luo recognises the positive impact that Yu Jin's beauty will have on the audience, which will ensure that the play is a success. In addition, the example illustrates Yu Jin's ability to use her appeal on the stage as a source of power, which enables her to fulfil her 'real' missions as a spy for the American government.

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 124.

⁸³ Hong, Ying: *Death in Shanghai*, p.36.

The beauty of Yu Jin is not only a useful means of maintaining her cover as an actress but also as a weapon to achieve her objectives as a spy. On one occasion, she uses her beauty to seduce a Japanese official, Saburo Huruya, in order to gather information on a Japanese government plan. Once introduced to Yu Jin, Saburo Huruya is entirely captivated by her looks: “after seeing Yu Jin’s performance in the Lyceum Theatre, it was a real shock for him. He has never actually met such a beautiful woman in his life. He is totally attracted to Yu Jin’s every action, whether she is frowning or flashing her eyes”.⁸⁴ Because of his fascination with Yu Jin, he is particularly vulnerable and becomes an easy target for Yu Jin to drug him and elicit information about the Japanese government’s plots against the Americans. Again, this is an example that demonstrates Yu Jin’s power of attraction, which she uses to achieve her objectives. Yu Jin’s use of her beauty to manipulate men is a fundamental aspect of postfeminist women.

Just like Yu Jin, Kawashima Yoshiko uses her beauty as a means to obtain political power. She is described as a woman who has political ambitions under the patriarchal system, but at the time, it was very difficult for a woman to gain authority in political circles. Thus, she uses her good looks to seduce men in order to climb the social ladder and attain power. One particular example is when she uses her beauty and body to attract Uno Shunkichi, a Japanese military commander and the head of the Japanese spies in China, in order to achieve political protection and amass military power from him. Although she acknowledges that Shunkichi is an evil man, she also knows that “he is smart and powerful—these are all she fancies, she wants men’s power to be her fertilizer”.⁸⁵ Because she does not love Uno Shunkichi, the motive

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p.225.

⁸⁵ Li, Bihua: *Kawashima Yoshiko*, p. 93.

behind her ‘glamorous’ look is purely to seduce him in order to obtain military power. This example reveals Yoshiko’s postfeminist behaviour, as she knows how to use her femininity to acquire power within the male-dominated arena. Traditionally, women are objectified because they are considered as the object of the ‘male gaze’. In the case of Kawashima Yoshiko, however, she is willing to objectify herself for the male gaze voluntarily with the ultimate goal of obtaining power from Uno Shunkichi. The use of her appearance and body is merely a means for her to achieve her goal. In the end, she succeeds in meeting her objective—to accrue military power from the Japanese government.

In *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus*, the emphasis on beauty as a kind of ‘girl power’ is more apparent than in the other novels. Even though Shan Yulian is portrayed as a character of beauty, she does not possess the outward intelligence of the other main protagonists, Xiao Yuegui, Yu Jin and Kawashima Yoshiko. Shan Yulian therefore relies predominantly on her beauty as her means of attracting men. It is Shan’s beauty that makes Wu Ruda marry her and listen to her. When he first sees her, he is attracted to her stunning beauty: “he cannot tear his eyes away from her and he will say yes to all her requests”.⁸⁶ Because of Shan’s beauty, Wu Ruda is prepared to provide her with everything she wants and be submissive to her. Even though the members of Wu’s family, especially Wu’s great-grandmother, dislike Shan because of her extraordinary beauty, Wu does not listen to their demands that he abandon her. On the contrary, he moves out with Shan to protect her from his family’s prejudices. Because the filial piety (*xiao*) is the most important element of Confucian teaching, Wu’s actions are a sign of his fundamental disloyalty. Furthermore, Wu’s family lives in a traditional village in the New Territories, Hong Kong. This is a place where

⁸⁶ Li, Bihua: *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus*, p. 48.

patrilineal clan members stay together and adhere strictly to the practice of Confucian living, which exacerbates the disgrace caused by Wu's disobedience towards the elderly members of his family.⁸⁷ From the analysis given above, it is evident that the two authors depict beautiful female characters who use their physical attractiveness to manipulate the male characters in the novels as a form of 'girl power'.

From Victim Feminism to Power Feminism: A Postfeminist Strategy

Although the four female protagonists in these selected novels have the ability to use their beauty in order to obtain power by manipulating their men, they are all described as victims at the beginning of the novels. According to Naomi Wolf, "victim feminism is when a woman seeks power through an identity of powerless", and it "includes the acts of fearing rape, and confronting the real scars that rape inflicts".⁸⁸ Wolf's comment provides a definition of victim feminism that can be used to discuss the lives of the four main characters in Hong Ying's and Li Bihua's texts. Despite the fact that not all of the four characters were raped—only Pan Jinlian and Kawashima Yoshiko were assaulted sexually—Xiao Yuegui and Yu Jin were forced into having sexual relations with men whom they did not like. I wish to deal with the 'rape issue' of Shan Yulian and Kawashima Yoshiko in greater depth, as there are direct references in the novels that illustrate the characteristics of victim feminism.

Although Li Bihua follows the story of Pan Jinlian as written in *Jin ping mei*, her new version also contains the incident of the rape of Pan by Master Zhang.⁸⁹ At the beginning of *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus*, Principal Zhang is so attracted

⁸⁷Leung, Alicia, S.M.: 'Feminism in Transition: Chinese Culture, Ideology and the Development of the Women's Movement in China', in: *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 20.3, pp. 359–374.

⁸⁸Wolf, Naomi: *Fire with Fire. The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century*, p. 147–148.

⁸⁹Li Bihua has clearly stated that her story is inspired and based on *Jin ping mei* in the Ming Dynasty.

to Shan's beauty that he cannot control himself and rapes Shan: "Shan Yulian uses all her force to resist, but she is still raped. Her hair is in a total mess and she becomes hysterical, then she takes a sharp object from the desk and uses it to pinch Principal Zhang's sexual organs".⁹⁰ Ironically, when Zhang's wife discovers that Shan has been raped, she does not blame her husband; instead, she claims that Shan is a licentious woman who seduced her husband. From this scene, the double victimisation (by a dominant man and by a submissive woman) of Shan is apparent.

Likewise, Kawashima Yoshiko is portrayed as a rape victim. She is raped by her foster father, Kawashima Naiwa, who sees Yoshiko as a means of political power; she is of royal blood and has no control over her own life. She is destined to marry a Mongolian prince in order to fulfil her father's ambition for the re-establishment of Manchuria as an independent nation. Furthermore, when Naiwa finds that Yoshiko is concerned about her chastity, he rapes her. Naiwa confesses his own ambition when he rapes Yoshiko: "You are royalty, I am a warrior—however, royalty alone cannot enforce their ruling power over a country—but to only rely on warriors is also doomed to fail. According to eugenics, if we reproduce, our next generation will be geniuses".⁹¹ Naiwa's confession reveals his true nature to covet the controlling power of Manchuria, and he views Yoshiko as a tool to help him achieve his goal. In this sense, Kawashima Yoshiko is the weaker party in the power relations between her foster father and herself and is therefore a 'powerless' woman who is subject to victimisation.

Even though Hong Ying's female protagonists in the selected texts are not rape victims, they are reluctantly involved in sexual relationships with men at some

⁹⁰ Li, Bihua: *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus*, p. 25

⁹¹ Li, Bihua, *Kawashima Yoshiko*, p. 50.

point in their lives. Nonetheless, their ‘victimisation’ stems from their poor family background, as both Xiao Yuegui and Yu Jin were orphans and did not have any choice over their lives during their childhood. At the beginning of *Lord of Shanghai*, Xiao Yuegui is portrayed as an orphan who is sold by her uncle and aunt to a brothel for money. It is only towards the end of the story that Xiao discovers the shocking truth: her uncle and aunt had murdered her parents and embezzled their property, turning Xiao into a penniless orphan. Without knowing the truth, Xiao initially thinks that she has no other alternative and that she must rely on her uncle and aunt, as they are her only blood relatives. She naively suffers hard times in poverty, but when the truth is revealed that she was deprived of her parents and their money by her aunt and uncle, Xiao instantly becomes a victim in the story.

Just like Xiao Yuegui, Yu Jin was orphaned when she was five. Yet Yu was luckier than Xiao, as she was saved by Xiu Bote (Hubert) (an American), who became her foster father. Although Xiu had given Yu a good upbringing by sending her to receive the best education in Shanghai, Yu is unable to forget the circumstances in which her parents were murdered, and she is unable to clear her mind of the violent images:

She sees her father fight with the scoundrels with bare hands; he uses his body to impede the knife attacks in the doorway between the living room and the kitchen ... a lot of blood flows from his body, yet he still grabs the doorframe to prevent them from coming in. The scoundrels use their knives to penetrate her father’s heart and bowel creating punctures on his body ... Her mother is in the kitchen when her father is attacked, and when she hears the noise, she rushes out but cannot

see her husband. She therefore holds up Yu Jin and rushes into a quiet alley.⁹²

This vivid account of the attack of Yu Jin's father provides strong evidence for understanding that Yu Jin has been victimised. No matter what the quality of life given to her by Xiu after her adoption is, Yu Jin is unable to repress the thoughts of her biological parents. She is scarred by witnessing her father's homicide and by the subsequent death of her mother. Because of this tragedy, she will always be haunted by unhappy memories. Yu Jin feels that she is indebted to Xiu in every sense, and therefore, when Xiu asks her to work for the American government, despite the fact that she is a Chinese, she agrees because she thinks that she owes her life to Xiu.

From a feminist perspective, the examples discussed above affirm the fact that the four main female protagonists in the chosen texts have all been victimised to varying degrees. In their earlier lives, they were unable to choose the direction of their existence and encountered different types of unfortunate events. However, unlike the stereotypes of the 'victimised women' that have been coined by traditional feminists, these particular female characters did not dwell in self-pity or continue to be the puppets of men. Instead, they turned their victimisation into the motivation to transform themselves into 'power' feminists and to take control of their own lives. The four women do not submit to their depressing memories; rather, they focus on obtaining 'power' through the manipulation of the men who surround them: Xiao Yuegui makes use of Chang Xiongli, Huang Peiyu and Yu Qiyang; Yu Jin makes use of Tan Na and Saburo Huruya; Shan Yulian makes use of Wu Ruda; and Kawashima Yoshiko makes use of Uno Shunkichi. The actions by the four protagonists are

⁹² Hong, Ying: *Death in Shanghai*, p. 98.

consistent with Toril Moi's comment on contemporary feminism; it is "about transforming the existing power structures—and, in the process, transforming the concept of power itself" and rejecting the notion of "victimisation".⁹³ Moi's argument explains the change from 'victim feminism' to 'power feminism' in the minds of the four female protagonists as they turn their negative life experiences into sources of inspiration. Moreover, they also break the stereotypes of female victims, as they do not become caught in "the prison of their own minds".⁹⁴ This is because, despite the fact that these female protagonists have gone through traumas in their lives, not only do they refuse to acknowledge themselves as victims but they also successfully break off the shackles of the past and move onto a new stage to live better lives, in which they transform themselves from victims to independent women.

Gender as Performance: The Ambiguity of the Gender Issue in Hong Ying's *Death in Shanghai* and Li Bihua's *Kawashima Yoshiko*

When you meet a human being, the first distinction you make is 'male or female' and you are accustomed to make the distinction with unhesitating certainty.⁹⁵

This statement by Sigmund Freud makes the observation that sexuality and gender are key elements in categorising the human species. However, challenging questions arise when the issue of gender identity is examined in greater detail. The definition of what is 'male' and what is 'female' may be the result of a social construct, rather than a

⁹³ Moi, Toril: *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Theory*, p. 148.

⁹⁴ I have borrowed this expression from Betty Friedan. She used this expression to talk about the prisoners who had been detained in Nazi concentration camps; she writes that "the prisoners become their own worst enemies". Friedan, Betty: *The Feminine Mystique*, p. 295.

⁹⁵ Strachey, James and Anna Freud (trans.): *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXII (1932–1936): New Introductory Lectures of Psycho-Analysis and Other Works*. p. 113.

biological constraint, and post-structuralist feminists, such as Judith Butler, seek to explore this topic more closely.

Judith Butler's influential writings about sexuality were incorporated into her work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, which has now been used by many queer theorists. Building upon Foucault's social theories in the areas of gender and human attraction, Butler finds that gender identity is discursively produced through models of social norms. Gender is therefore the result of a performative effect, which functions as an individual experience, rather than a physical constraint. If gender within a sexed body is determined by cultural factors, Butler argues that gender does not originate inherently from the sexuality of a being. Developing from this line of thought, there is a disjuncture between sexual identity that is derived from physical attributes and gender identity that is a product of culture. Even if we were to classify sexual bodies as male or female, it does not follow that the social construction of 'men' and 'women' will correspond to 'male' and 'female' bodies, respectively. Butler claims that:

When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one.⁹⁶

Thus, Butler argues that gender identity is not necessarily dependent on biological sexual identity. Instead, she suggests that gender is a product of culture and is constructed by social norms.

⁹⁶ Butler, Judith: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*, p. 9.

As a consequence, heterosexuality (a desire towards the opposite gender) is also not an essentially stable factor and may be independent of one's sex. She states that "there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; ... identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results".⁹⁷ In this section of the thesis, I shall use Judith Butler's postfeminist idea, 'gender as performativity', to analyse the gender issues in Hong Ying's *Death in Shanghai* and Li Bihua's *Kawashima Yoshiko*.

The Bisexuality Issue in *Death in Shanghai*

Freud's insight into the issue of bisexuality is a suitable starting point for discussion. For Freud, bisexuality, as "the innately bisexual constitution of human beings", or what he most commonly refers to as the bisexual disposition, accounted for internal conflict and consequent neurosis. Concomitant to this argument, he considers homosexuality to be a kind of bisexuality.⁹⁸ Based on Freud's description of the nature of bisexuality, Judith Butler comments that Freud acknowledges that our innate bisexuality acts as a complicating factor in the formation of our 'masculinity' or 'femininity'. Although Freud postulates that humans are born with a bisexual set of sexual tendencies, he implicitly rejects the initial sexual love of the son towards his father, even though there is no reason to do so. He does note, however, that a boy develops a primary affection for the mother, which is demonstrated in his attempts to seduce the mother; his bisexuality is exhibited as a form of masculine and feminine behaviour.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 25.

⁹⁸ Cited in Marjorie Garber's *Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*, p. 10.

Butler further elaborates on Freud's observations by stating that heterosexuality is a result of the gradual repression of bisexuality and homosexuality, which, in psychoanalysis, are inherent libidinal dispositions. The construction of both bisexuality and homosexuality is therefore subverted in psychoanalytic literature to the point that it merely exists innately. Bisexuality is commonly referred to as being 'outside' of the realms of culture; however, this is not actually the case because bisexuality exists within the social discourse. Instead of characterising bisexuality as 'unthinkable' and 'unsayable', the behaviour should be recognised as a possibility fully within the culture but is either refused or denied by the dominant culture. For those people who practise their bisexuality or homosexuality, they are marginalised and must deal with the loss of social identity caused by not being a heterosexual. To subvert bisexuality or homosexuality to a pre-cultural status is to effectively forbid the subversion, which couches itself within the provisions of the constitutive discourse.⁹⁹ In addition, if one assumes bisexuality as feminine and masculine temperaments displaying heterosexual aims, then Judith Butler suggests that "for Freud, bisexuality is the coincidence of two heterosexual desires within a single psyche".¹⁰⁰

The female character Bai Yunshang, in *Death in Shanghai*, is a good illustration of what Judith Butler suggests as an 'unstable identity'. Butler places gender as the focus of her analysis of sexuality and develops Foucault's idea that sexuality and gender relations are social assumptions that are open to challenge. She believes that stability in a subject can nevertheless be achieved through the

⁹⁹ Butler, Judith: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*, p.105.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 82.

performative effect, derived from the inner body, which develops a natural identity confronting the outer boundaries of heterosexuality and gender norms.

Therefore, in the case of Bai Yunshang, Hong Ying portrays her as bisexual in order to test the socially constructed norms of heterosexuality as well as ‘male’ and ‘female’ gender roles.

In *Death in Shanghai*, Bai Yunshang is the mistress of Yu Jin’s husband and is therefore competing with Yu Jin for her husband’s affection. However, she also shows an interest in Yu Jin. Even though there is no direct account from Bai that she is attracted to Yu Jin, Yu Jin’s comment reveals Bai’s probable attraction to her:

Bai Yunchang stayed over here last night. She looks at herself, yes, that’s me, but she has a very weird feeling. She recalls that what she did with another woman last night was not a dream, her pyjamas had a string to tie them up and she did tie it up last night, yet she found herself nude when she woke up.¹⁰¹

From the above description, there is no explicit reference that Bai and Yu had engaged in a sexual encounter, but the bisexuality of Bai Yunchang is suggested because Hong Ying provides the reader with a further description of the events that occurred between Bai and Yu in the hotel room. Because Yu Jin suspects that Bai is a spy for the Japanese government, she quickly checks the hotel room to ascertain whether it has been searched by Bai. However, she is unable to forget the ‘abnormal’ behaviour by Bai the night before, “even if Bai had searched the whole hotel room thoroughly, just like she examined every part of Yu Jin’s body, she would not find

¹⁰¹ Hong, Ying: *Death in Shanghai*, p. 168.

any evidence—this is the basic training of a spy’.¹⁰² The explanation offered by Yu Jin indicates that there was close physical intimacy. The fact that Yu Jin is unclear about the nature of the incident between Bai and her is consistent with psychoanalytical observations that because “the subject, at the level of the unconscious, is bisexual, then a great variety and range of identifications are possible, even and above all across gender boundaries”.¹⁰³

Gender as Performativity: The Cross-dressing of Kawashima Yoshiko

Judith Butler is best known for conceptualising the subject of gender in terms of ‘performativity’. She states in the first chapter of her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* that “gender proves to be performative—that is constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed”.¹⁰⁴ The notion of performativity, whilst not Foucauldian itself, relies on a Foucauldian appreciation of the interrelationship between power, knowledge and subjects. As Butler remarked in an interview in 1998, discourse has the power to produce and destabilise subjects, but it is in performativity that production is entrenched; the repetition and recitation of discourse at a performative level leads to the ontological formation of self-identity.¹⁰⁵

Expanding this argument, Butler suggests that “identities are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means”.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Penley, Constance: ‘Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture’, in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paul Trenchler (eds): *Cultural Studies*, p. 489.

¹⁰⁴ Butler, Judith: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁵ Meijer, Irene Costera and Baujke Prins: “How Bodies Come to Matter: An Interview with Judith Butler”, in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society*, 23.2, p. 275.

¹⁰⁶ Butler, Judith: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*, p. 136.

In other words, our identities are created by the societal perceptions of our appearance and normative behaviour. For Butler, recognising that the gendered (or raced) body is performative, “suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality”.¹⁰⁷ Applying this concept to reading Li Bihua’s *Kawashima Yoshiko*, the idea of ‘gender as performativity’ is evident. Li’s version of Kawashima Yoshiko depicts a woman who likes to dress up as a man, and as the first Japanese female military commander in China, she has a similar level of military power as her male counterparts.

The act of cross-dressing occurs frequently on the dramatic stage, especially in Chinese opera and Takarazuka Revue in Japan.¹⁰⁸ According to Marjorie Garber, this type of individual behaviour can be interpreted in two very different ways: first, as a reflection of the changing gender identity and second, as a sign of masculine security.¹⁰⁹ While the concept of cross-dressing has existed for a long time in the Chinese dramatic arts, it has not been analysed from a gender perspective. Instead, it is socially accepted as a popular way to perform Chinese opera, as people believed that it was normal for a woman to dress up as a man because men represented power in the patriarchal system. This can be supported by Garber’s observation that the term ‘cross-dressing’ usually describes a male’s actions because there is no perceived peculiarity in a woman who dresses in what is considered to be male attire.¹¹⁰ In this light, it is not unusual for female actresses to dress up as a male character on the stage. During the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), which is considered as the golden age of

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ According to Jennifer Robertson, “the all-female Takarazuka Revue (Takarazuka Kagekidan) was founded in 1913” and the female players have to cross-dress in order to play the male roles on the stage. Robertson, Jennifer: *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ Garber, Marjorie: *Vested Interest: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, p. 9.

¹¹⁰ Cited in Bonnie McDougall’s *Fictional Authors, Imaginary Audiences*. McDougall, Bonnie. S: *Fictional Authors, Imaginary Audiences: Modern Chinese Literature in the Twentieth Century*, p. 123.

Chinese theatre, female actresses often performed the leading roles and therefore engaged in cross-dressing to play the male characters. By the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) Dynasties, cross-dressing was widespread not only in private theatrical groups that were run by the gentry but also in public theatres.¹¹¹

Although cross-dressing by females in drama forms a distinct category on its own, there are important issues that arise involving the (self-) representation of women in feminine writing. The plays, written by women aspiring to become men via the imagery of the cross-dressed heroine, largely resulted in perpetuating the existing male-dominated power hierarchy. Dorothy Ko rightly argues that “instead of challenging the ideology of separate spheres by mixing and redefining gender roles, these heroines encouraged their female readers to aspire to be more like men”.¹¹² We can interpret from this statement that the gender attitude during this period in China was one that rested on the existence of a single ideal sex—the male—which women, as the perceived secondary sex, aspire to and wish to become. This kind of textual representation only served to uphold the patriarchal gender system. However, in the context of attempting to contain and subvert ‘femininity’, such male authoritarian attitudes are probably better understood from the logical standpoint of negotiating social relations. Ko is quick to point out that woman writers through their “temporary transgressions of gender boundaries ... had begun to blur the centuries old boundary between inner and outer and between the male and female spheres”.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Among all the Chinese cross-dressed stage performances, Hua Mulan is the most famous and popular character. Li, Siu Leung: *Cross-dressing in Chinese Opera*, p. 2.

¹¹² Ko, Dorothy: *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*, p.140.

¹¹³ Cited in Li Siu Leung’s *Cross-dressing in Chinese Opera*, pp. 4-5.

Similarly in Japan, “sexual and gender transformation formations became a subject of popular and legal fascination” from the Edo period.¹¹⁴ Therefore, it is not surprising that the biography of Aisin Gioro Xianyu contains descriptions of her desire to dress in male attire. In Dan Shao’s historical account about Kawashima Yoshiko, he provides a picture of Kawashima Yoshiko in military uniform, which can be considered a very masculine form of clothing.¹¹⁵ Li’s *Kawashima Yoshiko* is faithful to the original historical events, and there are several occasions in which Yoshiko is described in the novel as having a masculine appearance or being dressed in male attire. The very first such scene appears at the beginning of the book, after she has been raped by her foster father. She then decides to rid herself of ‘femininity’ and substitute it with a masculine masquerade. She asks a hair dresser to cut her hair short because she believes that long hair represents femininity:

Thank you, please cut it [her hair] all off. I have to say good-bye to ‘femininity’ ... she does not care any more, seeing the person in the mirror, the hair is getting shorter and shorter, shorter and shorter ... in the end, her hairstyle becomes a masculine one. Her young girl image has disappeared already, she has now become another person.¹¹⁶

One possible reason for Yoshiko’s determination to acquire a masculine appearance is that the rape by her foster father had led her to believe that her ‘feminine appearance’ caused her to be a victim of men. Alternatively, one may argue that her sudden change in gender appearance is an attempt to place her in a better position to realise her ambition of re-establishing Manchuria. Because men were the ruling power, it

¹¹⁴ Edo period: 1603-1867. Robertson, Jennifer: *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan*, p. 51.

¹¹⁵ Shao, Dan: ‘Princess, Traitor, Soldier, Spy: Aisin Gioro Xianyu and the Dilemma of Manchu Identity’, in *Mariko Asano Tamenoi: Crossed Histories: Manchuria in the Age of Empire*, p. 90.

¹¹⁶ Li, Bihua: *Kawashima Yoshiko*, p. 52.

was perceived that to become a leader in society, one must possess masculine qualities—which were in binary opposition to feminine attributes. Hence, in order to rid herself of the ‘weak’ image of being female, Kawashima Yoshiko decides to engage in a more masculine appearance, which will make it easier for her to obtain power.

Seeing that the historical Kawashima Yoshiko regularly wore military attire, Li’s version of her still preserves this tradition, and it further elaborates on her transformation from a Chinese princess to a Japanese military commander in China, known as Jin Bihui:

Yoshiko wears a velour jacket, riding pants and leather boots; on top of her head, she wears a military cap. There is an extravagant knife and a golden knife belt on her waist. There are also two guns: a Number 2 Musket and an Automatic Colt Pistol ... Kawashima Yoshiko will be the commander of ‘the An Guo Jun’ in Manchuria and her name changed to Commander Jin Bihui.¹¹⁷

This detailed description of Kawashima Yoshiko’s military attire reveals her empowerment. As a female commander, she has to put up a ‘male commander’ masquerade in order to persuade her subordinates that she has the same ability as a man in the same position: if she dresses like a man and behaves in a masculine way, she can perform the task perfectly.

In other parts of the novel, Kawashima Yoshiko is depicted as a feminine figure. For example, Yoshiko dresses up in a very feminine way when she attends the ball that is organised by the Japanese cooperation in Shanghai: “Yoshiko dresses up

¹¹⁷ Li, Bihua: *Kawashima Yoshiko*, pp. 131-132.

as a sexy lady when she attends these types of glamorous functions; her colourful evening dress and her excellent dancing skills catch the attention of the crowd”.¹¹⁸ Also, in order to impress Uno Shunkichi, Yoshiko presents herself as a ‘Chinese woman’ during their long meetings, a style that is very different from her Western image that she used when he first met her: “she wore a Western dress yesterday, but she wears a Chinese *qipao* today, it is two different styles—her gentle Chinese woman quality is fully revealed underneath that thin fabric”.¹¹⁹ Therefore, the gender of Yoshiko is performative: whenever she needs to act like a man, she puts up the male masquerade, but when she is required to behave like a woman, she is able to present her femininity through her demeanour. The impact of these masquerades is identified by Marjorie Garber’s comment: the act of cross-dressing raises questions as to the binarity of the ‘female’ and ‘male’ categories. It challenges the societal assumption that gender is strictly defined and constructed on a biological or cultural basis as either ‘female’ and ‘male’ but not a combination of both.¹²⁰ In the light of this, the cross-dressing of Kawashima Yoshiko puts into question the social norm about gender and sexuality and illustrates that the cultural assumption of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ is not an absolute matter.

The Use of ‘Disappearing Women and Men’ Approach in Hong Ying’s and Li Bihua’s Novels

In addition to Judith Butler’s postfeminist ideas, another postfeminist approach, ‘the disappearing women and men’, will be used in this chapter in order to better understand the postfeminist ideas in Hong Ying and Li Bihua’s works. As will be

¹¹⁸ Li, Bihua: *Kawashima Yoshiko*, p. 88.

¹¹⁹ Li, Bihua: *Kawashima Yoshiko*, p. 90.

¹²⁰ Garber, Marjorie: *Vested Interest: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, p. 10.

illustrated below, the reasoning behind their intention to make the main characters disappear differs somewhat from that of the 1920s and 1930s literati, who commonly employed this technique in their writings. By applying this methodology to read the selected works, the ‘girl power’ achieved by the female protagonists is recognised and emphasised.

The Disappearance of the Male Characters in *Lord of Shanghai* and *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* Highlights the ‘Girl Power’ of the Female Protagonists

In Bonnie McDougall’s article, ‘Disappearing Women and Disappearing Men in May Fourth Narrative: A Post-feminist Survey of Short Stories by Mao Dun (1896–1981), Bing Xin (1900–1999), Ling Shuhua (1900–1990) and Shen Congwen (1902–1988)’, she uses the idea of ‘disappearing women and disappearing men’ as a postfeminist means of interpreting the feminist ideas contained in novels from the 1920s and 1930s. First, I would like to emphasise the concept of ‘disappearing men’ in Hong Ying’s *Lord of Shanghai*, as she intentionally makes her male protagonist vanish at the end of the novel. Bonnie McDougall writes:

Extending the methodology to include disappearing male characters and the disappearance (or not) of either men or women in the stories by female authors confirms the disappearance of characters in a story is at the author’s choice (following the author’s agenda) rather than a depiction of the social reality.¹²¹

With reference to McDougall’s comment on the methodology of ‘disappearing men’,

¹²¹ McDougall, Bonnie. S: *Fictional Authors, Imaginary Audiences: Modern Chinese Literature in the Twentieth Century*, p. 160.

Hong Ying's and Li Bihua's techniques of making their male characters disappear portray their postfeminist thoughts in their works. This is because by causing the male characters to be absent, the female characters immediately become the centre of the novels and the notion of 'girl power' is fully revealed.

The application of this technique is particularly prevalent in *Lord of Shanghai* because in the story, Hong Ying makes the three male protagonists—Chang Lixiong, Huang Peiyu and Yu Qiyang—disappear gradually as the plot develops. Because the three men are Xiao Yuegui's lovers, they play an important role in helping Xiao Yuegui become the 'real controlling power of Shanghai', and their disappearance reflects her ability to adjust to the changing circumstances in order to attain power. Chang Lixiong is Xiao Yuegui's first benefactor because he transforms her life from a maid in the brothel to 'his gentry wife'; no longer does Xiao serve other people, but instead, she is served by others. The flipside of this, however, is that Xiao Yuegui's life is controlled by Chang, as he is her master; Xiao Yuegui does not have 'freedom' in her life and is totally dependent on him. Chang's death therefore changes Xiao Yuegui's situation, and although she suffers from poverty, she now has the freedom to leave the brothel where she was once a maid.

As mentioned before, the disappearance of Huang Peiyu is significant because it shows Xiao Yuegui's girl power—she risks her own life to seek revenge for Chang by murdering Huang. However, this is not the only consequence of his disappearance. As with Chang Lixiong's death, the disappearance of Huang allows Xiao Yuegui to free herself from his control and from her financial dependence on him. As his mistress, Xiao Yuegui must be totally submissive to Huang, and she has to do everything to please him, especially not lose her temper in front of him. This is particularly difficult because Xiao despises Huang and only loves Yu Qiyang, but she

cannot show her true emotions, as Huang is now the controlling power in Shanghai after Chang's death. Furthermore, in order to take Huang's power and free herself from his control, she must murder him. Hence, the disappearance of Huang is crucial because it takes Xiao Yuegui one step closer to taking over as the ruling power in Shanghai.

By the end of the novel, Xiao Yuegui arguably has control over the situation in Shanghai. Nonetheless, she is unable to fully exercise her power because men still dominate the Shanghai triad. Even though Yu Qiyang admits that Xiao Yuegui is, in fact, the real leader of the Hongmen triad, he is still officially the head and has to disappear in order to fulfil Xiao Yuegui's complete empowerment. It was well known that Xiao Yuegui was the richest woman in Shanghai, but her power is nevertheless limited in a patriarchal city that is governed by underworld figures. As long as Yu Qiyang is the official head of the triad gang, he still has the final say in the decision-making process. Even though Xiao and Yu love one another, Xiao does not want to commit to another relationship, which implies that she does not intend to depend on a man for a sense of security, as she enjoys her hard-won independence. When the plots develop, once Yu Qiyang leaves Shanghai for America, Xiao Yuegui then becomes the real 'Lord of Shanghai'.

Similarly, the disappearance of Wu Long in *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* is crucial, as it allows Shan Yulian (Pan Jinlian in her former life) to fulfil her intention for revenge after her reincarnation. In her past life, Pan Jinlian fancied Wu Song, but he murdered her, so it is not surprising to see that she wishes to kill Wu Long (Wu Song's reincarnation) in revenge in the present life. In the end, she succeeds in killing him, yet she regrets her actions. This is because Li Bihua surprises her readers with a twist that even if Shan remembers her past life's memories, she

does not want Wu Long to die now because she finds out that he is deeply in love with her. Unfortunately, this happens too late for anything to change. The death of Wu Long makes the ending a tragic love story. However, from a postfeminist point of view, the death of Wu Long is crucial. Without the death of Wu Long, Pan Jinlian's wish to exact revenge will remain unfulfilled. Hence, the disappearance of Wu Long in the story is necessary to achieve Pan Jinlian's ultimate goal, thereby transforming Shan's status from a victim in her former life as Pan Jinlian, to a woman who is free from the shackles of the past and has the power to enjoy her reincarnated life.

The Disappearance of the Female Protagonists in *Death in Shanghai* and *Kawashima Yoshiko* Allows the Female Characters to Live in 'Another Way'

It has been argued that male Chinese writers of the 1920s and 1930s adopted the writing technique of 'disappearing women' by making the female characters in their novels die or suffer terribly after their disappearance; a male figure is usually involved in a woman's disappearance and is also implicated in her death or suffering.¹²² However, the use of this technique can also enhance the postfeminist themes in the texts by emphasising the importance of the female character and evoking mystery, curiosity and emotional attachment from the audience. In Hong Ying's *Death in Shanghai*, the main female protagonist, Yu Jin, dies in the novel. Whilst the reader is prepared for the possibility that a spy would be captured and put to death, Yu Jin's loyalty to her country is the admirable quality that is fully realised by her death. Her 'girl power' is revealed through her 'patriotism', and her 'heroic'

¹²² McDougall, Bonnie: *Fictional Authors, Imaginary Audiences: Modern Chinese Literature in the Twentieth Century*, p.133.

disappearance glorifies the life leading to her death. From the public response to Yu Jin's death, her heroic image is wholly revealed:

Tonight's audience is very different from other nights ... the shocking news about the death of Yu Jin spreads and the crowd desperately wishes to learn more. 'It's rumour!' shout the people who deny her death; the atmosphere in the theatre is so intense. More and more people rush into the theatre, blocking the street and holding up the traffic; the number of people inside is far more than the usual capacity of the theatre ... They are not there to watch a play, but rather, they all want to know whether Yu Jin is really dead.¹²³

The pandemonium created and the passionate response evoked from the theatre audience as shown in the extract above reveal the high respect paid towards Yu Jin by the people in Shanghai. Yu Jin's death made her a national heroine.

Likewise, Chinese historical records show that Kawashima Yoshiko was accused of being a Japanese spy and sentenced to death in China. However, in Li Bihua's version of Kawashima Yoshiko, her death at the end of the novel becomes a mystery, as one of her ex-lovers tries to save her by replacing her with another woman during the execution. Li denies her death because at the end of her novel, she depicts 'someone' who looks like Kawashima Yoshiko in Japan at the age of eighty. Readers are given the opportunity to decide for themselves as to whether Yoshiko is still alive. The following is a short extract from *Kawashima Yoshiko* describing an old lady with a remarkable resemblance to Kawashima Yoshiko: "There is a shadow of an old lady. She wears a kimono that is made of white silk, and there is a cute little

¹²³ Hong, Ying: *Death in Shanghai*, p. 12.

monkey on her shoulder”.¹²⁴ Given the fact that Kawashima Yoshiko kept a monkey as her pet before her apparent execution, the image of the monkey on the old lady’s shoulder conveys to the reader the strong possibility that she is Kawashima Yoshiko. Even though there is no direct reference confirming that the old lady is indeed Kawashima Yoshiko, the monkey acts as the clue to suggest that she is the princess who ‘disappeared’. By creating this sense of mystery at the end of the novel, Li Bihua blurs the supposed death of Kawashima Yoshiko, which allows her to escape the past and have the freedom to start a ‘new life’ under a new identity.

In conclusion, postfeminism provides a new perspective to interpret the status of women and tries to recreate a new image of women in the past, especially in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This new image of women is not centred on gender inequality but, instead, results from the deconstruction of gendered identities and sexuality using post-structuralism. In contrast to second-wave feminism, postfeminist theory is considered in the wider contexts of racial, economic, and other forms of social marginalisation. ‘Girl power’ is a product of this modern representation of women, which attempts to create an identity through femininity, rather than place ‘men’ as the centre of women’s bitterness. Whilst the elements that constitute ‘girl power’ are varied, the term is often used to describe girls who are beautiful, intelligent, daring or even violent. Furthermore, instead of dwelling on the fact that they are victims of the patriarchal society (‘victim feminism’), these modern postfeminist women are inspired as a result of their victimisation and use their girl power in order to control their destiny (‘power feminism’).

As presented in traditional Chinese literature and historical records, Chinese women have in the past suffered as victims of the Confucian-influenced patriarchal

¹²⁴ Li, Bihua: *Kawashima Yoshiko*, p. 312.

society. They did not have the right to make major decisions about their lives, and they were placed into a subordinate position compared to men. An examination of the works of Hong Ying and Li Bihua shows a postfeminist exploration of gender issues amidst socially accepted heterosexual male norms. The authors' postfeminist treatment of fictional and non-fictional female characters in Chinese history challenges the stereotypes of 'inferior' women and encourage women to exercise their 'girl power' by using their feminine qualities to manipulate men.

In Hong Ying's works, her attempt to provide a new image of Shanghai courtesans encourages women to use their 'girl power' to achieve their goals. Both *Lord of Shanghai* and *Death in Shanghai* contain a number of examples that illustrate the application of girl power—in particular, the two works provide descriptions of the beauty and bravery of the female protagonists, despite their victimisation in the past. In addition, the sexual encounters in the stories expose the vulnerability of males to manipulation by the lure of feminine attraction and the male fear of castration that is underpinned by their fetish with Freudian phallic primacy.

Likewise, Li Bihua's new images of Pan Jinlian and Kawashima Yoshiko provide a postfeminist context to their traditional negative image. The use of beauty to manipulate men by the main protagonists is once again a key element in Li Bihua's works. Furthermore, the use of a variety of physical appearances by Kawashima Yoshiko can be likened to Madonna's use of multiple masquerades in front of the media. The consequences of these many representations are that they challenge the existing notion of gender identity and emphasise the power of women to manipulate men into achieving their (women's) aims.

In the works of both Hong Ying and Li Bihua, the issue of gender identity is prevalent because it is fundamental to the understanding of 'femininity'. The lesbian

encounter of Yu Jin and the cross-dressing of Kawashima Yoshiko in the works of Hong Ying and Li Bihua, respectively, bring into question our conceptualisation of gender, which is a social construct, rather than a biological one. The two authors also engage in the technique of making particular male and female characters disappear from the stories. The purpose of making these characters vanish is to allow the female protagonist to exhibit 'girl power' towards the attainment of a goal or to emphasise the bravery of their acts during their lifetime by their real or supposed death. The two authors have created new postfeminist characterisations of the female protagonists, which have historically been treated in a patriarchal light. Their works explore significant issues in postfeminism and inspire female readers to use their own 'girl power' to transform themselves from victims to powerful women.

Chapter 3. The Differences between the Original Works and the Adaptations of Li Bihua's and Hong Ying's Works

Is there, we ask, some secret language which we feel and see, but never speak, and if so, could this be made visible to the eye?¹

The above question was posed by Virginia Woolf on the topic of cinema. She had been an early commentator on the transformation of literary writings into film but was skeptical that such adaptations would further the feminist cause.² This was because she believed that film was embedded with patriarchal language and codes in which the camera could not truly present the thoughts that were portrayed in female writings. It is not surprising for Woolf to make such a critical comment as most of the film directors during her period were men, therefore, they would use a male perspective to present any adaptation of literary texts written by women, or not even choose female writings at all for their scripts. The rise of feminist film theory, in particular female cinematic authorship,³ as well as the emergence of female directors and film critics who use a feminist perspective to critique films, have challenged this thinking. Hence, should film still be seen as a tool of the patriarchy?

Despite Virginia Woolf's striking commentary on film adaptations, it cannot be denied that film has an inseparable relationship with literature – many famous

¹ Woolf, Virginia: "The Cinema", in Andrew McNeillie (ed.): *The Essays of Virginia Woolf – Volume IV: 1924-1928*, p. 351.

² Ouditt, Sharon: "Orlando: Coming across the divide", in Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (eds.): *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, p. 146.

³ I have borrowed this term from Lingzhen Wang. She first used this term in the Introduction of her anthology of Chinese Women's cinema. Wang, Lingzhen: "Introduction", in Lingzhen Wang (ed.): *Chinese Women's Cinema: Transnational Contexts*, p. 3.

films originated from classic novels.⁴ Conversely, there are a number of successful films that have been reduced to text in order to attract a new audience of readers.⁵ One wonders whether the cinematic interpretations of the same characters, themes and plots would differ substantially from the textual representation and *vice versa*.

On his eightieth birthday 1908, Leo Tolstoy made a comment on the influence of film on literary creativity. He said:

You will see that the little clicking contraption with the revolving handle will make a revolution in our life – in the life of writers. It is a direct attack on the old methods of literary art. We shall have to adapt ourselves to the shadowy screen and to the cold machine. A new form of writing will be necessary. I have thought of that and I can feel what is coming.⁶

Tolstoy's vivid observation is an acknowledgement that the invention of film would crucially influence the literary creations of writers on both a conscious and a subconscious level. In other words, literature and film are somehow interdependent. As a matter of fact, Tolstoy's comment gave a hint to the writers who followed him that they would be living in an era that would be dominated by a visual culture. In this light, it is not surprising to see that some novels could be easily adapted into films as their style of writing is very like a script or screenplay format. One prominent example is James Joyce's *Ulysses* as he wrote chapter 15 of that book in a form of a script.

The Relationship between Literature and Film

⁴ Some famous western literary classics, such as Shakespeare's plays and the novels of Charles Dickens and Jane Austen, that were made into films have become classic movies. Examples would be *Hamlet*, *Oliver Twist* and *Pride and Prejudice* respectively.

⁵ One obvious example is Jane Campion's *The Piano*.

⁶ This quote has been cited in Cecile Starr's book. Starr, Cecile: *Discovering the Movies*, p. 32.

Whenever literature-based films are mentioned, the immediate assumption is that the film would not be as good as the book. This comment somehow shows that films that are based on literature have been placed in a subordinate position, as they do not have their own intact individual aesthetic value. One possible reason for that is that when readers read between the lines of a novel, they create their own visualised images in their minds, therefore, when they see images in the film adaptations that do not match their own perceptual images, they feel disappointed and develop a bias against literature-based films. Another possible reason is that when novel-based films ‘deviate’ from the original pieces of writings, this makes the films look too different. The probable response to this is that an audience judges the success of literature-based films according to the issue of ‘fidelity’ – whether the films are close to the original works. All these perceptions are unfair to the film adaptations because they have always been put into second place compared with the original piece of literature and their individual aesthetic value has been stripped away. George Bluestone’s claim about the relationship between literature and film is crucial in helping to define the status of literature-based film:

Novel and film are both organic—in the sense that aesthetic judgments are based on total ensembles which include both formal and thematic conventions – we may expect to find that differences in form and theme are inseparable from differences in media.⁷

This comment suggests that novel and film are interrelated yet they are different. Furthermore, if film adaptation is seen as a type of translation – “we shall come to see that the filmmakers are moving the language of literature – made up of words – into

⁷ Bluestone, George: *Novels into Film: The Metamorphosis of Fiction into Cinema*, p. 2.

the language of film”,⁸ and like other pieces of translations, the film directors can have their own interpretations of the original piece of literature. In this light, film directors who adapt films can be seen as literary translators. They have to interpret and utilise the source text in order to produce their personalised productions. Ton Naaijken has commented that the work of the literary translator is not only a version of the source text, but also a work of art in its own right because during the process of translation, the voice of the translator (including his personality, his own experience, his language and style) is incorporated in the final product.⁹ When famous directors, in particular those who have been regarded as *auteurs*, have filmed literature-based films, it is to be expected that the films would carry their personal trade marks that might make the film version very different from the original piece of writing.¹⁰ One prominent recent example of this is Ang Lee’s radical adaptation of Eileen Chang’s short story *Lust/Caution*.

The Dominance of Film Culture in Hong Kong

Hong Kong is a good example to show the close connection between film and literary works because many blockbuster martial art movies were adapted from Jin Yong’s novels. This is particularly due to the popularity of Jin’s novels and the fact that these novels contain a great deal of cinematic description, especially in relation to the fighting scenes. These scenes have since provided an attractive source for filmmakers and allow them to make film adaptations from novels with greater ease. In the

⁸ Cahir, Linda Costanzo: *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches*, p. 14.

⁹ Solmó, Ágnes: “The Role of Literary Translators in the Mediation of Ideas and Literature Across Culture”, in Ton Naaijken (ed.): *Event or Incident: On the Role of Translations in the Dynamics of Cultural Exchange*. p. 125.

¹⁰ According to Brian Michael Goss, the most simplified version of the definition of ‘auteur theory’ is that “the director is often the single most important figure in the production of a film. Moreover, directors of distinction often exhibit patterns in their films that bear their names”. Goss, Brian Michael: *Global Auteurs: Politics in the Films of Almodóvar, von Trier and Winterbottom*, p. 41.

1980s, Hong Kong was often regarded as the ‘Oriental Hollywood’. The film industry in Hong Kong played an important part in the cultural development of the Chinese community, even though it was probably not as influential as Hollywood. In this light, the Hong Kong film industry was a reflection of the popular culture in Hong Kong, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s and it is worthwhile investigating Hong Kong cinema in order to examine the social changes that took place during this time.¹¹ As previously discussed, popular culture is an effective channel to spread feminist thought, so investigating the image of women in Hong Kong cinema would be a good starting point to understanding the development of feminist critical thinking in Hong Kong. Li Bihua played a crucial role in the Hong Kong film industry because many of her famous novels have been made into films and a number of the films which she scripted have achieved blockbuster status.¹² Hence, as most of her works contain feminist ideologies, a close examination of Li Bihua’s works provides some significant indicators of the social status of women in both traditional Chinese and Hong Kong society. In the first section of this chapter, I shall compare and contrast the representations of women in the original literary works with those in their subsequent adaptations of Li Bihua’s *Rouge*, *Green Snake*, *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus*, *Temptation of a Monk*, *Terracotta Warrior* and *Kawashima Yoshiko*. Then I shall compare and contrast the different forms of representations of women in Hong Ying’s *Lord of Shanghai* and *Death in Shanghai* and their subsequent television adaptations in the second section of this chapter. Before I start my close filmic

¹¹ Law, Kar: *Hong Kong films in the Eighties: A Comparative Study with Western Cinema*. Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1999.

¹² Li’s *Rouge*, *Green Snake*, *Farewell My Concubine* and *Dumplings* have been made into films. She was also the scriptwriter of *Terracotta Warrior*, *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* and *Kawashima Yoshiko*.

analysis in this first section, I shall begin with a brief introduction of the two waves in the contemporary Hong Kong film industry.

The New Waves in Hong Kong Cinema

Tracing back to the early stage of the Chinese film industry, many film companies were initially set up in Shanghai and made Shanghai a film capital of the time.¹³ However, after the outbreak of the civil war, many mainland Chinese immigrants, especially those from Shanghai, fled to Hong Kong. These immigrants brought not only their capital from China, but also their skills in different disciplines to Hong Kong. In this way, the influx of mainland immigrants played a crucial part in developing (or even changing) the Hong Kong film industry as they brought their filmic skills to Hong Kong. It is not surprising to see how the Hong Kong film industry in the 1950s to 60s was dominated by Mandarin-speaking productions with a strong Shanghaiese influence, for example, Tu Guangqi's *Half Way down (Ban xialiu shehui)* in 1955.¹⁴ However, the situation underwent a dramatic change in the late 1960s and early 1970s because of the establishment of the wireless commercial television station, Television Broadcast Limited (TVB). With the widespread free broadcasting of Cantonese-speaking television programmes and the 'baby-boom' issue of the 1950s in Hong Kong, the young generation which was born and brought up there started to grasp their 'Hong Kong identity' – Cantonese is their mother tongue. In the light of this, it is not surprising to see that a group of young Hong Kong directors who had returned from overseas film schools and had no incentives to make

¹³ According to Zhen Zhang, there were 175 film companies (small and large) registered in China in 1925 out of which 141 were in Shanghai. Zhang, Zhen: "Teahouse, Shadowplay, Bricolage: Laborer's Love and the Question of Early Chinese Cinema", in Yingjin Zhang (ed.): *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943*, p. 30.

¹⁴ Zhang, Yingjin: "Transregional Imagination in Hong Kong Cinema: Questions of Culture, Identity and Industry", in David C. Lam *Institute for East-West Studies (LEWI)*, p. 5.

Mandarin-speaking films, gradually succeeded in bringing about the reappearance of Cantonese-language movies.¹⁵ This is described by Stephen Teo:

In 1973, when the crisis affecting Mandarin cinema was already evident, Hong Kong reacted by a return to the populist value of Cantonese cinema and the use of the native dialect. In a sense, Cantonese cinema had not really declined; it had just gone into hiding.¹⁶

This comment is crucial as it shows that Hong Kong cinema had become more localised in the 1970s and it proves that Hong Kong's television programmes had catalysed the revival of the Cantonese-speaking cinema. This also led directly to the emergence of Hong Kong's new wave of directors, all of whom originally worked at different local television stations before they started directing.

1978 was a critical year in the Hong Kong film industry because New Wave cinema emerged in this year.¹⁷ The term 'The New Wave' derived from France. In 1959, the critics of a film magazine, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut made their first films: *400 Blows (Le Quatre Cents Coups)* and *Breathless (A Bout de Souffle)* and these two films have been regarded as the beginning of the French New Wave.¹⁸ Hong Kong New Wave directors involved in

¹⁵ Teo, Stephen: "1970s: Movement and Transition" in PoShek Fu and David Desser (eds.): *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts and Identity*, p. 94.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Pak Tong Cheuk stated that *Da Texie* published an article entitled "A New Wave in Hong Kong Cinema – Revolutions Which Challenge Traditions" by Yi Jing in 1978 to comment on the new film, *The Extra*, made by Yim Ho, Dennis Yu and Ronnie Yu in the same year. Cheuk, Pak Tong: *Hong Kong New Wave Cinema (1978-2000)*, p. 10. However, most film scholars such as Law Kar, Lingzhen Wang and Hector Rodriguez have claimed that 1979 was the beginning of 'New Wave Cinema' in Hong Kong. One prominent piece of evidence cited by Hector Rodriguez is that Law Wai-ming, who was the editor of *Film Biweekly*, coined the term when he commented that Tsui Hark, Ronnie Yu, Alex Cheung, Ann Hui and Patrick Tam had brought "the beginning of a new era" in local cinema in October 1979. Rodriguez, Hector: "The Emergence of Hong Kong New Wave", in Ching-mei Esther Yau (ed.): *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*, p. 53. In my discussion, I follow Pak Tong Cheuk's comment as he has evidence showing that the term 'New Wave Cinema' first appeared in 1978.

¹⁸ Cheuk, Pak Tong: *Hong Kong New Wave Cinema (1978-2000)*, p. 9.

this movement included Tsui Hark, Ann Hui, Alex Cheung, Allen Fong, Yim Ho and Patrick Tam. These directors all share a similar background as most of them had studied film studies in the West (except Alex Cheung) and all started their careers in the television industry in 1976-78, a period that has been regarded as a ‘golden age’ of Hong Kong television.¹⁹ As Jenny Lau notes that the distinctive feature of Hong Kong New Wave directors was their particular interest in modern special effects, therefore, the works of these directors “were more sophisticated with mise-en-scène and visual effects”.²⁰ Examples are Tsui Hark’s *Butterfly Murder* (1979) and *Zu: The Warrior of the Magic Mountain* (1981) and Patrick Tam’s *The Sword* (1980). Another idiosyncratic feature of new wave cinema is the revelation of social realism – focusing on the issues of real-life experiences and how to engage with them. One prominent example of this kind of film is Ann Hui’s *The Secret* (1979).²¹

However, most new wave films “were absorbed into the commercial studio system” after the mid-1980s and this allowed the rise of the second wave.²² Some film scholars such as Stephen Teo claimed that the second wave was actually “a delayed part of the first new wave”.²³ Teo’s claim is fundamental to understanding the impact of the new wave on the second wave. This is because some second wave directors such as Stanley Kwan, Eddie Fong, Ching Siu-tung and Wong Kar-wai had worked as assistants or writers to Ann Hui, Tsui Hark and Patrick Tam and those close bonds can reflect the direct influence of the new wave on the second wave. In addition to the aforementioned second wave directors, Fruit Chan, Evans Chan, Clara Law and Mabel Cheung are also representative second wave directors. Generally speaking, the

¹⁹ Teo, Stephen: *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*, p. 146.

²⁰ Lau, Jenny Kwok Wah: “Besides Fists and Blood: Michael Hui and Cantonese Comedy”, in Poshek Fu and David Desser (eds.): *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts and Identity*, p. 159.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, p. 160.

²³ Teo, Stephen: *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*, p. 184.

filmic techniques of these second wave directors are similar to those of their veteran teachers in terms of technological issues and engaging with social sensitivities, yet the second wave directors endeavoured to take Hong Kong cinema to a wider global audience as their films won many overseas film awards at different film festivals such as the Cannes Film Festival, the Berlin International Film Festival and the Chicago Film Festival.²⁴

Understanding the historical background of the emergence and the development of new wave cinema is crucial as it shows how local Hong Kong cinema played an important part in shaping Hong Kong culture in the late twentieth century.

From Text to Screen: Women Behind the Lines become Alive

The four novellas *Rouge* (1985), *Green Snake* (1986), *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* (1989) and *Temptation of a Monk* (1993) were adapted into films by three famous directors, Stanley Kwan in 1988, Clara Law and Tsui Hark in 1989 and 1993 respectively. Set in 1930s Hong Kong, *Rouge* is a love story about a prostitute, Ruhua (Yu Fa), who commits suicide with her lover Chen Zhenbang (Twelfth Master) in the 1930s. After fifty-three years of waiting for Chen in the underworld, Ruhua tries to find him in the 1980s. Coming back up to the human world gives Ruhua an opportunity to meet Yuan Yongding, with whose help Ruhua manages to find Twelfth Master and gets the answer that she wants in the end.

The second novella is *Green Snake*, which is an adaptation of the famous Chinese legend, “The Legend of the White Snake”. It is a story about two snakes,

²⁴ To name a few awards: Stanley Kwan’s *Centre Stage* (1992) and *Hold You Tight* (1996) won the Silver Bear Award for Best Actress at the 42nd Berlin International Film Festival and the Teddy Award in the 45th Berlin International Film Awards; Wong Kar-wai’s *Happy Together* (1997) won him the Best Director Award at the Cannes Film Festival, Clara Law’s *They Say the Moon Is Fuller Here* (1985) won the Silver Plaque Award at the Chicago Film Festival.

White Snake (Bai Suzhen) and Green Snake (Xiao Qing), which assume human form and fall in love with a young scholar, Xu Xian.²⁵ Because humans and spirits were unable to get married, neither of them could be together with Xu Xian in the end. Unlike the original legend, Li uses the second female protagonist, Green Snake, as the narrator of the novel and the story is retold from her perspective. Not only does Li use the Green Snake to retell the legend in the first person, she creates new lives for the ‘two snakes’ by placing these events during the period of the Cultural Revolution. This provides a new insight for viewing these famous two Chinese snake characters as Li empowers them to live in a ‘modern period’. The third novella is *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* and I have provided the synopsis of this in the previous chapter.

The final novella that I shall discuss in this section is *Temptation of a Monk*. This is a period novel which is set in the Tang dynasty and is based on the famous historical incident of ‘the mutiny of the Xuanwu gate’ which is associated with Emperor Tang Taizong (559-649, r. 626-649) seizing imperial power.²⁶ Li Bihua retold the incident of the Xuanwu gate through Shi Yanshen’s (a fictional character) personal journey from being a general to becoming a monk and learning how to resist his human desires, especially his personal desire for the nineteenth Princess Hong’e (Scarlet) in the first half of the story and the assassin Qing Shou (Violet), who looked exceedingly like Hong’e, in the second half of the story. Shi was once a general and served under Crown Prince Jiancheng. However, after the assassination of the crown prince, the second prince Li Shimin ordered his general Huo Da to kill Shi in order to

²⁵ The earliest attempt to fictionalize the story was “Madame White Snake Jailed for ever in the Leifeng Pagoda” in *Jing Shi Tong Yan* by Feng Menglong during the Ming Dynasty.

²⁶ The incident of the Xuanwu gate refers to a palace coup which took place in the Tang dynasty. The second son of the first Tang emperor Li Yuan (566-635) was Li Shimin, who assassinated his brothers the crown prince, Li Jiancheng, and Li Yuanji in order to inherit the throne.

prevent him from taking revenge for his master's murder. After the death of Hong'e, Huo Da sent Qing Shou to murder Shi, using her similarity in appearance to Hong'e to trap him into a disadvantageous situation. In the end, Shi Yanshen was saved by an old monk and began to discover the meaning of Buddhism.

Li Bihua has always been regarded as an icon in popular fiction. It is not surprising to see that her works have been well accepted by the public readership,²⁷ and have attracted famous Hong Kong New Wave cinema directors, in particular Tsui Hark and Stanley Kwan, to turn her works into films. According to Ackbar Abbas,

It is both a popular cinema and a cinema of auteurs, with directors like Ann Hui, Tsui Hark, Allen Fong, John Woo, Stanley Kwan and Wong Kar Wai gaining not only local acclaim but a certain measure of international recognition.²⁸

Given the fact that Stanley Kwan and Tsui Hark are auteurs, it is only to be expected that they have their unique filming styles and creative expression, and in this light, the representations of women in these directors' films might not have been presented in the same way as the original authors had intended in the novels. On the other hand, Clara Law is a famous Hong Kong female director who belongs to the second new wave and who specialises in filming topics concerning the Chinese diaspora.

Including Clara Law's versions of *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* and *Temptation of a Monk* in this survey is essential as they provide a different picture of how a female director deals with the image of women from the existing female author's writing through her camera. In the following section, I shall closely examine the

²⁷ Li, Zhuoxiong: "The Story of Names – The Textual Analysis of Li Bihua's *Rouge*", in Chen Bingliang (ed.): *Xianggang wen xue tan shang*, p. 286.

²⁸ Abbas, Ackbar: *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, p. 16.

differences in the portrayals of Li Bihua's female protagonists in her literary works and in directors' subsequent interpretations of those characters in successive film adaptations.

***Rouge*: as seen by Li Bihua and Stanley Kwan**

When Stanley Kwan directed *Rouge*, an adaptation of Li Bihua's original work first published in 1984, he invited Li Bihua to be the scriptwriter and she played an important role in the making of the film.²⁹ In this way, Kwan had wanted the film to be 'faithful' to the original text and the result is that most of the major elements relating to the plot were included and that the characterisations in the film followed Li's version.

Many critics have adopted a post-colonial perspective to read the novel and have commented on the political themes that arise in *Rouge*.³⁰ This is because Li Bihua's novel contained explicit and implicit expressions of Hong Kong's political situation such as "being unchanged for fifty years" and "1997", which are all easily recognised references to the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997. Based on these references, it is understandable that many literary critics of Hong Kong literature would focus on the political facets of the novel. However, the political elements in Li Bihua's works are not the main focus of this study. Seeing that Stanley Kwan has been regarded as a "women's director",³¹ as he is famous for making films related to women's issues such as *Women* (1985) and *Centre Stage* (1992), and that there are concrete examples to illustrate feminist ideologies in Li Bihua's original

²⁹ Lin, Chaoyong: "I Have Nothing to do with Ruhua – The *Rouge* and Anita Mui", in Film Biweekly Editorial Board (eds.): *Film Biweekly*, p. 14.

³⁰ Scholars such as Fujii Shozo and Chen Lifan have commented on the political implications of Li Bihua's work. See Chen, Guoqiu (ed.): *Wenxue Xianggangyu Li Bihua*. Taipei: Maitianchuban, 2000.

³¹ Deppman, Hsiu Chuang: *Adapted For The Screen: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Fiction and Film*, p. 64.

novel, I would like to explore the feminist (and postfeminist) aspects of the representation of the characters, especially the main protagonist, Ruhua, in both the novel and the film.

Even though Stanley Kwan attempted to make the film version of *Rouge* ‘faithful’ to the original novel, there are nonetheless major differences that are immediately noticeable when comparing the novel with the film. Despite the fact that Li Bihua was the scriptwriter and helped to select actors portraying the main characters of the film,³² she still had to seek approval from Stanley Kwan who possessed the ‘ultimate authority’ in making the film, and therefore it cannot be denied that there are differences between the two versions. The reasons for these differences lie in the nature of the film, the sequence of the plots and the narrative style of the director. In Li Bihua’s *Rouge*, the story takes place in the 1980s and Ruhua, a prostitute who lived in the 1930s, has become a ghost from hell who has entered into the human world to find her lover, Twelfth Master. On her first day in the mortal realm, Ruhua has an encounter with Yuan Yongding, a newspaper editor who subsequently helps Ruhua to search for Twelfth Master in the human world. So Yuan plays a crucial role in the novel and he is the one that Ruhua needs to rely on during her stay in the human world that is alien to her. This arrangement makes Yuan another key character in the novel, whose narration runs simultaneously with Ruhua’s narration of her previous life. I would argue that this has the effect of lessening the potency of Ruhua’s feminine voice and presents Ruhua as a dependant right at the beginning of the novel. Furthermore, this implies that Ruhua does not have the ability to find Twelfth Master on her own and has to rely on another man.

³² Anita Mui, a famous pop singer in the 1980s, was cast in the role of Ruhua. Lam, Chiu Wing: “I Have Nothing to do with Ruhua – The *Rouge* and Anita Mui”, in Film Biweekly Editorial Board (eds.): *Film Biweekly*, p. 14.

In Stanley Kwan's version, however, the film begins with a scene of Ruhua putting on her make-up before she meets a client. The technique of using close-up camera angles creates a clear and vivid image of the stereotypical prostitute in the 1930s, the effect of which is to visually make the audience aware that the story is related to the past. Then the camera immediately turns to show the brothel setting where Ruhua used to stay – again this technique seeks to conjure up a feeling of historical awareness in the audience by reminding them of the differences between the past and modern times. By changing the sequence of the story, Kwan provides a stronger image of the 'past' compared with Li's version because he puts the emphasis on the relationship between Ruhua and Twelfth Master instead of the relationship between Ruhua and Yuan Yongding. The possible reason behind this may be the commercial prospects of the film. Seeing that Twelfth Master was played by a famous pop singer in Hong Kong during the 1980s, Leslie Cheung, it was important for the marketing of the film to give more weight to the role of Twelfth Master in the film than in the original novel. This can be supported by Stephen Sze's comment on the film culture in Hong Kong: "the conglomeration of the entertainment business of pop songs, TV soap operas, and comedies with film production whereby no film can sell well without a big cast".³³ As Anita Mui and Leslie Cheung, the two top stars in Hong Kong pop culture, were the selling points of the movie, their interaction on screen would be the main focus and this could be the main reason for Stanley Kwan's and Li Bihua's decision to change the plot. This also reveals that Hong Kong new wave

³³ Sze, Stephen M.Z.: "Cultural Life in Hong Kong", in Joseph Y.S. Cheung and Paul C.K. Kwong (eds.): *The Other Hong Kong Report 1992*, p. 456.

cinema has strong commercial connotation which includes those films produced by auteurs.³⁴

In addition, the changes to the sequence of the plot made by Kwan allow Ruhua to have a stronger ‘female voice’ in the film than in the novel. Because the film, unlike the novel, does not begin in the 1980s, Yuan does not make an appearance until Ruhua takes the form of a ghost. In view of this, the emphasis of the film is firmly centered on Ruhua as she narrates her story in the first person at the beginning of the film, when she was still ‘living’ in the 1930s. Her story is unfolded by herself as opposed to having Yuan Yongding as ‘the investigator’ who asks her questions about her relationship with Twelfth Master. Also, the consecutive close-ups of Ruhua putting on make-up at the opening of the film also make her the leading character in the whole film as the make-up shots are shown in great detail which draws the audience’s focus onto Ruhua.

Kwan’s use of the 1930s setting in this way has resulted in high recognition for the film in the nostalgic genre because of its cinematic representation of the past. This can be demonstrated by Natalia Chan Sui Hung’s comment that “The nostalgia cinema of Hong Kong that began in 1987 when Stanley Kwan’s *Rouge (Yanzhikou)* was released provides a way of seeing the change”.³⁵ The character of Ruhua embodies a stronger representation of the past in the film version because Kwan intentionally uses Chujuan, the second female protagonist who represents a figure of modern times, as Ruhua’s foil. In the movie, the images of Ruhua and Chujuan stand opposed by their appearance and their behaviour. Being a woman of the past, the audience expects Ruhua to represent herself as the ‘submissive’ type because women

³⁴ Unlike Taiwanese auteur, Tsai Ming-liang chose Lee Kang-sheng, an ordinary Taiwanese actor, to star in all his feature films.

³⁵ Chan, Natalia Sui Hung: “Rewriting History: Hong Kong Nostalgia Cinema and Its Social Practice”, in David Desser and Poshek Fu (eds.): *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts and Identity*, p. 255.

during her generation were victims of patriarchal rules. They had been placed in the subordinate position.

Ironically, this is not the case in the film. After Ruhua commits suicide in the pursuit of uninhibited love with Twelfth Master, she does not give up when she is unable to find him after her death. Her persistence continues and becomes her motivation to return to the human world in search of Twelfth Master. In this sense, her willingness to make such a sacrifice for love could be seen as bravery. In contrast, Chujuan, the ‘contemporary’ woman, does not have the courage possessed by Ruhua as Chujuan admits that she is not brave enough to kill herself for love. When Yongding asks her whether she would commit suicide because of him, she replies, “I will not”. As the film goes on, the audience understands that Chujuan would not die for Yongding not because of the irrationality of committing suicide, but rather, she does not dare to. The comparison between Chujuan and Ruhua, visually and by their actions, blurs the audience’s perceptions of what they visualize as contemporary and in the past, and the attributes they associate with women in these different periods of time. In this light, the use of Chujuan as the foil of Ruhua strongly highlights the postfeminist image of Ruhua and enhances the feminist aspects of the story more than the novel does.

Apart from the different cinematic representations of the female protagonists, Kwan’s *Rouge* portrays Ruhua with postfeminist qualities as opposed to maintaining the feminist image of Ruhua presented in the novel. The most obvious illustration of Kwan’s postfeminist treatment of the film is in its ending. The textual version ends without any explicit confirmation that Ruhua has finally met up with Twelfth Master as she disappears from the human world. In the film version however, not only does Ruhua manage to find Twelfth Master and discover that he had failed to keep his

promise to die together, she returns the rouge to him, the symbol of their love, and tells him that she will not wait for him any longer. This alternative ending provides a stronger ‘postfeminist’ image of Ruhua as she is not portrayed as an abandoned woman. Instead, Ruhua is the one who chooses to end the relationship at the close of the film. Kwan’s ending echoes the postfeminist idea of ‘girl power’ because Ruhua’s decision to reincarnate in order to pursue a new life changes her image from a victim (being abandoned) to a woman with empowerment. Although Stanley Kwan is a male director, he was able to present Li Bihua’s original work with stronger postfeminist ideals by empowering Ruhua, the story’s main female character. Critics such as Luo Feng have commented positively on Kwan’s ability to convey femininity in his films through his awareness of sensitivities and subtle emotions as well as his appreciation for narrative details.³⁶ Kwan’s *Rouge* is an example of a film that challenges the preconception that movies made by male directors are dominated by patriarchal references with little room for feminine voices to be heard. The arrangement of the scenes in the film *Rouge* actually enables Ruhua’s feminine voice to be heard with greater clarity than in Li Bihua’s novel.

Li Bihua’s *Green Snake* versus Tsui Hark’s *Green Snake*

Unlike *Rouge*, which is set in the twentieth century, *Green Snake* takes the audience back to the Ming period. Films of this type are classified as *gu zhuang bai shi pian* (‘classical costumed tales of anecdotal history’) in the Hong Kong film industry.³⁷ In Hong Kong cinema, *gu zhuang pian* is commonly associated with *wuxia pian* (movies

³⁶ Luo, Feng: “Memory, Female and History: On the Female Sensibilities in Stanley Kwan’s Films”, in: *Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival Catalogue*, pp. 146-149.

³⁷ I have borrowed the term from Dai Jinhua. Dai, Jinhua, “Order/Anti-Order: Representations of Identity in Hong Kong Action Movies”, in Meghan Morris, Li Siu Leung and Stephen Chan Ching-kiu (eds.): *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema*, p. 82.

about Chinese chivalry) which involves characters with special talents and fantastic powers such as kung fu skills. Martial arts and fighting elements were therefore fundamental to *gu zhuang pian*. This type of kung fu film became the dominant genre in the Hong Kong commercial film industry starting from the 1960s and women did not play a crucial part in these films. The men were typically the main protagonists and the function of the female characters was to accentuate the hero status of the male characters.³⁸ As Ng Ho has pointed out, kung fu films are considered to be the most patriarchal genre in Hong Kong cinema because women were portrayed as a negative distraction to a male fighter's success and skill.³⁹ In this light, women in these kung fu films were portrayed either as possessions of men or as *femmes fatales*.

Although *Green Snake* was based on Li Bihua's original text and she was the co-writer of the film adaptation, Tsui Hark's contribution as the other co-writer of the film script is evident. The film version deviates at certain parts from Li's original text and the inclusion of the patriarchal elements from the 'kung fu film' genre are obvious. The textual version of *Green Snake* carries strong feminist ideologies as the novel retells the legend from a female perspective – Xiao Qing is the main persona. In contrast, Tsui Hark's adaptation of *Green Snake* reduces the feminine characteristics of the original text to a significant extent. As a famous director of kung fu films, Tsui Hark employed the traditional male perspective to film *Green Snake*. One prominent example is the change of the main persona from Xiao Qing to one of the male protagonists, Fa Hai (The Monk). Also, in the original work, the story starts with the meeting between Bai Suzhen and Xiao Qing but in the film, Tsui begins by showing

³⁸ In the 1960s, the movies of Chang Cheh, who has been regarded as the 'Godfather of Hong Kong Cinema', had made a big impact, especially *One-Armed Swordsman*. Starting from the 1970s, Jackie Chan became the icon of Kung Fu movies. Also, during the 1990s, Tsui Hark's series *Once Upon a Time in China* was a blockbuster movie in Hong Kong.

³⁹ Ng, Ho: "On Kung Fu Comedies", in: Film Bi-Weekly Editorial Board (ed.): *Film Bi-Weekly*, p.17.

Fa Hai defeating different types of evil spirit and sparing Bai Suzhen's and Xiao Qing's lives. This shift of focus not only places Fa Hai as the centre of the film but also minimises Xiao Qing's 'feminine voice'. Consistent with Ng Ho's comment about action cinema, it is not surprising to see Tsui's attempt to place the male character as the action hero and centre of attention.

Another main difference between the film and the novel is Tsui Hark's deletion of the section describing the lives of the two snake women in the Cultural Revolution period. This attempt clearly shows the emphases of the characteristics of the *quzhuang baishi pian* genre and the kung fu elements. Seeing that action movies were the dominant film type in Hong Kong in the late 1980s and 1990s,⁴⁰ it is not surprising to see Tsui intentionally avoid the Cultural Revolution element as that has nothing to do with the fight scenes. Also, another reason one might perceive for Tsui's deletion of the Cultural Revolution section is the complexity of the political background in Hong Kong in the 1980s and 90s. Seeing that the '1997 hand-over' to Mainland China was approaching during that particular period, a sensitive political issue such as criticism of the Cultural Revolution might not have been seen as appropriate. Alan Stanbrook made a comment on the censorship issue of Hong Kong cinema in the 1980s related to the political context:

Censorship has now been placed on a more formal basis in Hong Kong but the inevitable effect of such a policy was to force film-makers either to disguise political comment or to concentrate on form rather than content.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Dai, Jinhua, "Order/Anti-Order: Representations of Identity in Hong Kong Action Movies", in Meghan Morris, Li Siu Leung and Stephen Chan Ching-kiu (eds.): *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema*, p. 82.

⁴¹ Stanbrook, Alan: "Under Western Eyes: An Occidental View of Hongkong Cinema", in *Hong Kong Cinema in the Eighties*, p. 51.

Although Stanbrook's comment mainly focuses on the 1980s, it is still applicable to understand Tsui's motives for deleting the Cultural Revolution part from the original novel in the movie and focusing on the *gu zhuang pian* genre. *Green Snake* was filmed in 1993, only four years away from the '1997 hand-over', and in this light, the deletion made it possible to avoid an issue with political sensitivity during that period.

Although Tsui's *Green Snake* diminishes the feminist aspects of Li's story, it should still be considered as a feminist film. The main protagonist is Green Snake, as the film's title suggests. Apart from this, the fighting scenes between the female protagonists are another illustration of the feminist elements of the film. Roger Garcia has noted that:

Women in kung fu films are seen mostly in scenes where there is no fighting. When women appear in domestic settings, they are depicted as mere sexual objects and treated as such by men who affirm their heroism by dominating them.⁴²

With this in mind, Tsui Hark's *Green Snake* challenges this notion by keeping the movie faithful to the novel's fight scenes between the female protagonists: the fighting between Bai Suzhen and Xiao Qing, and the fighting scenes between Fa Hai, Bai Suzhen and Xiao Qing. These scenes are ground-breaking because they demolish the 'traditional' stereotype of women in kung fu movies and preserve Li's 'warrior image' of the two female protagonists.⁴³ One may challenge the human-ness of the two female protagonists as they are snakes, therefore, it is possible for them to 'fight

⁴² Garcia, Roger: "The Threat of Women in Wu Xia Pian", in Film Bi-Weekly Editorial Board (ed.): *Film Bi-Weekly*, pp. 29-31.

⁴³ Tsui Hark was not the first director to portray women warriors in kung fu movies. Acclaimed kung fu film master, King Hu (Hu Jianquan) had filmed many movies based on the concept of women warriors in the 1960s and 1970s. Among all the films about heroines, Hu's *A Touch of the Zen* (1970) is regarded as the classic.

in a fantasised way' because they possess supernatural powers. Nonetheless, the main reason for all the fighting scenes is based on Bai Suzhen's love for Xu Xian. In this way, Bai could no longer be perceived as a 'snake'; she already possesses human emotions. In addition, Tsui Hark challenges his audience about the notion of 'a real woman' by showing a couple of medium close-ups of Bai Suzhen giving birth to a son at the end of the film. These shots are crucial as it echoes the opening scene of a village woman (a human) giving birth to a child in which hinting that Bai Suzhen has transformed into a real woman as she has the ability to give birth. These corresponding scenes have highlighted the femininity of Bai Suzhen and convinced the audience that she is indeed a real woman.

The Male Gazes in *Green Snake*

Compared with Stanley Kwan's *Rouge*, the feminist qualities in Tsui Hark's *Green Snake* are not as prominent. A noticeable feature of Tsui's film is the camera work, which effectively utilises the concept of the 'male gaze'. Before defining what 'male gaze' is, one has to understand that the concept of 'spectator' is crucial because it is "constructed by the machinery of cinema through the architecture of gaze".⁴⁴ Judith Mayne suggested that spectatorship does not simply mean that an audience watches a film, but also that the audience takes pleasure in the experience of watching, in other words, watching movies for an audience becomes a passion, or a leisure-time activity like any other.⁴⁵ Also, the psychoanalytic film critic Christian Metz tried to define spectatorship through the perspective of 'apparatus theory'⁴⁶:

⁴⁴ Bainbridge, Caroline: *A Feminine Cinematics: Luce Irigaray, Women and Film*, p. 33.

⁴⁵ Mayne, Judith: *Cinema and Spectatorship*, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Caroline Bainbridge has stated that apparatus theory "examined the cinematic institution as an ideological apparatus and was informed by the psychoanalytic work of both Sigmund Freud and

[T]he institution of cinema requires a silent motionless spectator, a vacant spectator, constantly in a sub-motor and hyper-perceptive state, a spectator at once alienated and happy, acrobatically hooked up to himself by the invisible thread to sight, a spectator who only catches up with himself at the last minute, by paradoxical identification with his own self, a self filtered out into pure vision. We are not referring here to the spectator's identification with characters in the film (which is secondary), but to his preliminary identification with the (invisible) seeing agency of the film itself as discourse, as the agency which puts forward the story and shows it to us.⁴⁷

Metz's comment on the definition of 'spectator' lays a very important foundation for the idea of the 'male gaze'. First, he speaks a purely masculine perspective that validates the term 'male gaze' and second, the spectators (the male audience in this case) might be influenced by a particular visual image they perceive at a specific moment in time without associating the characters (the female characters in this case) with the whole context of the film.

The ideas of 'male gaze' and 'voyeurism' were commonly used by film critics to review films from a feminist perspective. This was in part due to the influence of Laura Mulvey's essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", first published in 1975.⁴⁸ Following Christian Metz's argument, one can identify the 'male gaze' element easily in Tsui Hark's *Green Snake*. In order to make *Green Snake* popular with Hong Kong audiences, Tsui added exotic elements, such as the Indian snake dance scene, to the movie. Tsui arranged for a group of Indian female dancers to perform the Indian Snake dance to introduce Bai Suzhen and Xiao Qing. This not

Jacques Lacan as well as that of Louis Althusser on ideological effect". Bainbridge, Caroline: *A Feminine Cinematics: Luce Irigaray, Women and Film*, p. 33

⁴⁷ Metz, Christian: *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, p. 96.

⁴⁸ Mulvey, Laura: *Visual and Other Pleasures*, pp. 14-26.

only visualised the ‘snakeness’ of the two female protagonists, but also cast the women as objects of male desire. In this scene, the camera simultaneously pans from the naked snake women to the sexy Indian dancers in order to satisfy the ‘male gaze’.

Furthermore, Tsui Hark increased the ‘male gaze’ factor in the movie by filming from the perspective of Xu Xian in some of the scenes. When Xu Xian first meets Bai Suzhen on a boat, Bai attempts to seduce Xu and Xu’s attention is immediately drawn to Bai’s body. The scene is then shot from Xu’s position and the camera immediately zooms onto Bai’s body which reveals her seductiveness and once again plays upon the idea of ‘the male gaze’. The idea of ‘voyeurism’ is also clearly seen in this film as Tsui portrays Xu Xian as the ‘voyeur’. This interpretation is made in the light of Mary Ann Doane’s comment:

Spectatorial desire, in contemporary film theory, is generally delineated as either voyeurism or fetishism, as precisely a pleasure in seeing what is prohibited in relation to the female body. The image orchestrates a gaze, a limit and its pleasurable transgression. The women’s beauty, her very desirability, becomes a function of certain practices of imaging – framing, lighting, camera movement, angle.⁴⁹

Given the fact that Bai Suzhen and Xiao Qing are non-human, they have to lie to Xu Xian in order to be with him and must hide their ‘true form’ from Xu. The mysterious background of Bai Suzhen and Xiao Qing arouses Xu’s curiosity about the two women and in order to obtain the truth, he shows voyeuristic characteristics by ‘peeping’. Apart from its function of allowing Xu to discover the truth, the purpose of this voyeurism is also to enhance male viewing pleasure. Not only does the camera

⁴⁹ Doane, Mary Ann: “Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator”, in Amelia Jones (ed.): *The Feminism and the Visual Cultural Reader*, p. 62.

represent Xu Xian's eyes, it also represents male spectators' case when it pans on the female actresses' bodies. In one particular example, Xu is spying on Bai Suzhen and Xiao Qing while they are taking a shower. In this scenario, the two women become the 'sexualized object' of Xu. This is because the action of voyeurism diminishes the 'female subjectivity' of the two female protagonists as they have been portrayed as 'the other' through Xu's eyes (camera/perspective).

On the basis of the above examples, it can be observed that Tsui's cinematic version of Li's work contains strong patriarchal elements that are not in the original text, such as the features of 'male gaze' and 'voyeurism', which is consistent with the patriarchal characteristics of the kung fu films at the time. In contrast to Stanley Kwan's cinematic treatment of *Rouge*, which further promotes the feminine voice, the examples from Tsui Hark's *Green Snake* illustrate a more masculine approach in handling the issues in the film. To a certain extent, Tsui Hark's cinematic style echoes Virginia Woolf's comments on the patriarchal allusions embedded in films directed by male directors.

Retelling Chinese History from a Female Director's Perspective – Clara Law's *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus and Temptation of a Monk*

In this section, I propose to analyse Clara Law's two film adaptations of Li Bihua's novellas in order to compare and contrast the different portrayals of female characters on screen from the perspectives of male and female directors. I shall begin my discussion by quoting Vivian Forrester's comment on women's vision from a feminist viewpoint:

Women's vision is what you don't see, it is withdrawn, concealed, the images, the pictures, the frames, the movements, the rhythms, the abrupt new shots of

which we have been deprived, these are the prisoners of women's vision, of a confined vision. They will have to see, to look, to look at themselves unaffectedly, with a natural gaze that is so difficult to maintain; they will have to dare to see not only their fantasms, but also, instead of an old catalogue, fresh new images of a weary world.⁵⁰

Forrester's comments are crucial in understanding the confinement and essence of women's cinema. This is because, first, her viewpoints agree with Virginia Woolf's opinions – mainstream cinema is a patriarchal tool. Female directors therefore have many limitations when they create films under the patriarchal hegemony. Secondly, they have to eliminate the 'gender-bias' perspective when they make films – they have to take off the 'female director' label in order to compete with male directors. Applying Forrester's arguments to scrutinise Clara Law's *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* and *Temptation of a Monk* can help to understand the cinematic style of the two films.

The Myth of Golden Lotus in Literature and Film

Clara Law had made two films *They Say the Moon is Fuller There* (1985) and *The Other Half & Other Half* (1988) before she filmed *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* (1989). It is a story based on Li Bihua's novella and Li herself was the screenwriter. Before Li Bihua recreated the story of Pan Jinlian, this legendary character had been made into television series and films for more than half a century. It is therefore not surprising to see that Clara Law's filmic rendition of Golden Lotus was not only grafted onto Li Bihua's original novella and the two well-known classic novels, *Jing ping mei* and *Shuihu zhuan*, but also drew ideas from other Hong Kong cinematic

⁵⁰ Forrester, Viviane: "What Women's Eyes See: New French Feminisms", in Mary Eagleton (ed.): *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (3rd edition), p. 51.

adaptations of Golden Lotus. Shaw Brothers had produced several adaptations of the story of Golden Lotus, including a *huangmei diao* film, *The Amorous Lotus Pan* by Zhou Shilu in 1963 and *The Golden Lotus* by Li Han-hsiang (Li Hanxiang) in 1974.⁵¹ This can explain why the film is generally faithful to the original piece of work as the plot development and characterization are very close to the novella, yet the images of ‘Golden Lotus’ are presented differently in the book and in the film.

Despite the fact that the beginning of the film follows strictly the opening of the book, the change of the ending in the film presents a different sense of feminist perspective from the original story. At the end of the novella, Shan Yulian and Wu Long have a car accident; Wu is killed and Shan loses her memory even though she manages to survive. Before she loses consciousness, a series of images of her past and present lives flash back in her mind. All these images accelerate her pain of losing Wu Long as she regrets her determination to take revenge on Wu Long (who had killed her in the previous life). In addition, in order to highlight the bitterness of Shan’s sufferings and her burden of carrying the ‘stereotypical label’ from her previous life, Li Bihua intentionally added a scene of pages and pages of *Jin ping mei* tumbling inside the car to show the strong link between the past and the present lives. These pages mostly contain descriptions of Pan Jinlian in *Jin ping mei* such as “a foxy lady who always seduces men” and “shameless” and these symbolise Shan’s ‘haunting past’.⁵²

However, unlike the traditional tragic ending of Pan Jinlian, Shan refuses to follow the predestined fate of Pan. Her blunt exclamation during the car accident: “I don’t want to remember anything!” vividly shows her attempt to escape from the

⁵¹ Lam, Shue-fung: “(Un)Making Chineseness: Gender and Cultural Politics in Clara Law’s Films” [MPhil Thesis], p. 53.

⁵² Li, Bihua: *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus*, p. 228.

haunting historical past. She does not want to dwell in the shadow of her previous life – a life that has been predetermined by men as Pan Jinlian is a fictional character created by male writers in Chinese literary history. Shan’s powerful proclamation makes her a feminist heroine as she does not live the way she is expected to, instead, she wants to erase all the ‘men-created’ history of her and have her own new life. In this light, it is crucial for Li Bihua to arrange for Shan Yulian to lose her memory at the end of the story as she could never live happily unless she could forget the trauma she experienced in the past. This is because Shan is the only character who has memories of the previous life which are not shared by a single male character; therefore, the haunting past can be perceived as representing patriarchal hegemony.

On the other hand, Shan can not only escape from the past through memory loss, the story also has a happy ending in part due to the fact that Wu Rudai does not die (unlike Wu Dalang in *Jin ping mei* and *Shuihu zhuan*) and the couple go on to have a blissful married life. This can be seen in the explicit descriptions in the last few lines of the story, “Shan Yulian always kept a pure and an innocent smile on her face”, “She is happy”, “Wu Rudai is happy” and “Finally, this is everlasting!”⁵³ This ending adds a strong postfeminist connotation to Shan’s character. This is because, unlike the traditional second-wave feminist ideology, marriage is not a confinement for women. Women can obtain happiness in the postfeminist point of view. According to Alison Dahl Crossley:

[The] renewed appreciation for tradition attributed to postfeminism has been dominated by discussions of heterosexual marriage ... the postfeminist movement allows women to guiltlessly adopt traditional rituals such as marriage and weddings that reproduce conventional gender roles, but it may be done now

⁵³ Li, Bihua: *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus*. p. 234.

with relief that we no longer have to worry about the judgment that feminists may have imposed.⁵⁴

Unlike second-wave feminists, women do not need to remain single in order to escape from the confinement of the institution of marriage, women, in the postfeminist sense, can still maintain their female subjectivities even though they are married. This is because they do not need to face the option of ‘all or nothing’ (a second-wave feminist perspective) – being single so as to enjoy the freedom of searching their own subjectivities or being married under the patriarchal confinements, instead, they can choose the option of ‘have it all’ (a goal of postfeminism).⁵⁵ Looking from a postfeminist perspective, therefore, Shan Yulian does not need to remain single after her memory loss; being reunited with Wu Rudai provides a new start for her.

In contrast, the film has a different ending as Shan Yulian dies in a car explosion together with Wu Long at the end, but Wu Rudai manages to survive. Despite the fact that the last few shots in the film follow the original novella closely, in particular, pages and pages of *Jin ping mei* are tumbling inside the car, the visual representation of the tension between Shan Yulian and Wu Long is very dissimilar from the story. In the film, Shan is portrayed as a pitiful lover who bewails the loss of her love as she holds the dead Wu Long tightly when she is driving. At the end, she decides to let go of the steering wheel, which symbolises her determination to kill herself for Wu Long. Even though her death can be seen as an ‘escape’ from the

⁵⁴ Crossley, Alison Dahl: “Young Women’s Feminist Identities: The Impact of Feminist Stereotypes and Heterosexual Relationships”, in Marcia Texler Segal (ed.): *Interactions and Intersections of Gendered Bodies at Work, at Home and at Play*, p. 345.

⁵⁵ According to Alexis Carreiro, “Today, we live in the age of the ‘superwoman’, the post-feminist, pop culture concept that attempts to explain how empowered, contemporary women can ‘have it all’ ... Superwomen have successful careers and beautiful babies, lean boyfriends and fat bank accounts, good friends and bad attitudes. They do not need to choose between these categories because they can ‘have it all’ (or at least, that is the goal).” Carreiro, Alexis, “Rollergirls: Superhero Rhetoric in Post-feminism Television”, in Barry Brummett (ed.): *Sporting Rhetoric: Performance, Games and Politics*, p. 123.

patriarchal world, especially ‘the label of a woman who does not follow *fudao*’ and her haunting past, she has to sacrifice herself for Wu Long (the man who had destroyed her in her previous life). Stephen Teo argues that the film’s “reincarnation theme allows for an allegorical tale of betrayal and fate, transporting characters on a journey through a psychic realism where the past determines the future”.⁵⁶ So no matter how hard Shan Yulian tries to take revenge and escape from the past, she has been clearly presented as a victim – being jeopardised by the patriarchal hegemony, her fate has been determined by different men.

Apart from the twist in the ending, the choice of the main female protagonist also changes the image of Pan Jinlian/Shan Yulian. In an interview, Eddie Fong, the executive producer of *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus*, explicitly claimed that it is a commercial film,⁵⁷ therefore, it is not surprising to see that the goal of making the film profitable affected the choice of the cast; Joey Wang starred as Pan Jinlian/Shan Yulian in the film. Wang is a famous Chinese actress who gained huge fame from the film *A Chinese Ghost Story* in 1987. Since she had made a deep impression on audiences in that film in the character of Nie Xiaoqian,⁵⁸ an ancient beautiful ghost, this produced many opportunities for her to play similar roles such as a thousand-year-old princess in *Kung Fu Vs Acrobatic* (1990) and *Demoness from a Thousand Years Ago* (1990). However, Joey Wang was also famous for playing the role of ‘innocent’ and ‘weak’ women in 1990s films, such as the examples cited above, so having Wang as Pan Jinlian lessened the promiscuousness of the character, instead, she adds a strong hint of pitifulness to Pan’s character that makes her more a victim

⁵⁶ Teo, Stephen: *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*, p. 223.

⁵⁷ Betty, “Bu Lun Gu Jin, ‘Pan Jianlian’ Dou Yao Xisheng – Fang Lingzheng” (“Pan Jinlian Has to Be Sacrificed in both Past and Present Lives: An Interview with Eddie Fong”), in: *Da Yinghua* (Movie), p. 27.

⁵⁸ A character taken from Pu Songling’s *Liaozai Zhiyi*.

than a ‘bad woman’ (in the patriarchal perspective). This can be supported by Steve Fore’s comments on Joey Wang’s representation of Golden Lotus:

Clara Law’s framing and lighting of [Wong] Wang (emphasizing soft focus, back-lit, consistently flattering angles that are often associated with the point of view of specific male characters) are to a considerable extent typical of the style of Hong Kong (and Hollywood) glamour cinematography most closely associated with rendering the female body as spectacle. Law complicates matters narratively, however, by showing us how uncomfortable Lotus feels under the oppressive weight of the masculinized gaze, which is frequently associated with explicitly sadistic, violent behavior by men in the film.⁵⁹

He then goes on to criticize that Clara Law’s *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* does not shed new light on the image of women in Hong Kong cinema since it merely follows the stereotypes, “Golden Lotus ultimately does not deconstruct the notion of the female fatale, opting instead for a more conventionally melodramatic resolution to the story”.⁶⁰ Fore’s observations highlight the ‘masculine elements’ in Clara Law’s version as it contains male gaze scenes just like *Green Snake* does. I would therefore claim that Law’s *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* fits the description of Forrester’s first comment – female directors may not be able to escape from the male-dominated film circle and have to make their films according to the mainstream standard, in this case a commercialised Hong Kong film. Comparatively speaking, the original novella contains a more explicit postfeminist connotation than the film.

Clara Law’s Postmodern version of *Temptation of a Monk*

⁵⁹ Fore, Steve: “Tales of Recombinant Femininity: *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus*, *The Chin P’ing Mei*, And the Politics of Melodrama in Hong Kong”, in: *Journal of Film and Video*, 45.4, pp. 64-65.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 68.

Clara Law made another film, *Temptation of a Monk*, which is totally different from *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus* and can be considered an art house movie.⁶¹ Even though the plots in the film follow strictly the plots of the novella, the whole film paints a very picture from the original story. This is because, unlike the traditional costume drama, Law presented a very postmodern and unique film, one prominent example being the make-up of the characters. In the film, all the characters carry very heavy make-up and the basic tones on their faces are white and bronze, in particular, the make-up on Shi Yanshen (the male protagonist) is all bronze, which had never before happened in Chinese cinema.

Stephen Holden suggested that Clara Law's *Temptation of a Monk* is an "Asian answer" to *Fellini Satyricon*; he stated that "Like the 1969 Fellini film, *Temptation of a Monk* wants to re-imagine a distant time using imagery that looks and feels as far away from the present as the film maker's imagination can allow".⁶² One obvious example of the impact of Fellini on Law's film is the brothel scene. The monks and the prostitutes join together to have a wild party just like the party scene in *Fellini Satyricon*. Most of the prostitutes in the brothel are half-naked and they have unusual hair decorations (styled to look like candy floss) which are very rare to see in *qu zhuan pian* in Hong Kong Cinema. Hence, Holden's comment provides strong proof that Clara Law wants to challenge the tradition of Chinese costume drama. Her desire for innovation makes her create a new way of presenting 'costume drama', in particular Tang costume drama, to the audience. And this makes *Temptation of a*

⁶¹ The film was shown at the Venice Film Festival and won several awards at the Australian Cinematographers Society and Taiwanese Golden Horse Festival.

⁶² Holden, Stephen: "Film Review of *Temptation of a Monk*: Battles of Orgies, Observed by a Zen Eye". *The New York Times*. 16 December 1994.
<<http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9C0DE6D71438F935A25751C1A962958260>>

Monk fit into Forrester's comment – “they will have to dare to see not only their fantasies, but also, instead of an old catalogue, fresh new images of a weary world.”⁶³

Regardless of the fact that Li Bihua's *Temptation of a Monk* is a male-dominated novella and the female characters, principally Hong'e and Qing Shou, are only supporting characters, there are still traces of feminist ideologies in both the novella and the film as their appearance reveals the 'the core problem' of Shi Yanshen – his lust towards women (which is echoed in the title of *Temptation of a Monk*). After the murder of the crown prince, Li Jiancheng, Shi Yanshen hid himself in a monastery and became a monk in order to escape from assassination by Li Shimin: the future Emperor Tang Taizong. However, Shi does not genuinely have faith in Buddhism; he only became a monk for reasons of personal safety. So when Princess Hong'e seduces him, he completely ignores his monastic identity and visits a brothel with other monks (also ex-soldiers who share the same motivation as Shi for becoming monks) and eats meat, both of which are activities that are totally forbidden for a monk. Later on, when Hong'e has died, the general Huo Da sent an assassin, Qing Shou, who resembled Hong'e very much which makes Shi Yanshen fall for her and become a victim of an assassination trap. The two women are portrayed as culprits responsible for Shi's downfall as they seduce him by their beauty and bodies. From a second-wave feminist perspective, I would argue that these women have been 'victimised' or even misjudged. This is because the novella depicted the two female protagonists as temptresses for tantalising Shi instead of blaming Shi Yanshen for losing his self-control and General Huo Da for his manipulation of Qing Shou. To a certain extent, the two women do cause the degradation of Shi's morality because of their enticement of him, but they should not be solely blamed, as Shi also should be

⁶³ See footnote 50 in this chapter.

responsible for controlling himself. This situation is quite similar to the temptation of Xu Xian and Fa Hai in *Green Snake*, as the two snakes have been blamed for luring a scholar and a highly respectable monk. These examples totally reflect the bias against women who use their beauty to allure men under the patriarchal hegemony without considering that the men are guilty too.

In the film, Clara Law invited Joan Chen, a very famous Hollywood Chinese actress who had played the last empress in the Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*, to play the role of Hong'e, which makes her a more prominent character in the film. Comparatively speaking, Hong'e is portrayed as a very aggressive princess who tries to pursue Shi Yansheng and uses many ways to attract his attention. One particular example is when Hong'e bewitches Shi into visiting the brothel and dresses as a flamboyant prostitute to enthrall him. Shi is mesmerized by her beauty and body and completely forgets his religious identity. Later on, towards the end of the movie, Clara Law inserted a sex scene between Shi Yansheng and Qing Shou (who is also played by Joan Chen) which does not appear in the original novella. The vivid cinematic portrayals of Qing's seduction reveal her power over him – she uses her body to manipulate him. I would argue that these scenes do connote postfeminist idea 'girl power', as Hong'e and Qing Shou use their 'beauty' to lead on Shi Yansheng even though they are both dead by the end of the film.

From Screen to Text: The Visualized Woman becomes the Woman of

Imagination

In the previous section, I have illustrated how Li Bihua gained substantial recognition in the popular culture arena which led to many of her novels being adapted into films. But she is also well-known as a screen writer in her own right and has played an

important part in shaping the film industry's representation of popular culture. Caroline Bainbridge stated that "the cinematic text is, arguably, a version of a (writer's) screenplay that is transposed to the screen by the use of images, camera-work and sound and the manipulation of conventional notions of time and space".⁶⁴ When creating an original screenplay, scriptwriters have to visualise their own characters, the background of the film, the plot and sub-plots and the general presentation style. In other words, the scriptwriters have to create prototypes for the characters before they put everything on paper.

In the following section, I shall focus on Li Bihua's three films *Terracotta Warrior*, *Kawashima Yoshiko* and *Dumplings* and their subsequent novella adaptations in order to pinpoint the differences in the portrayals of the female characters. *Terracotta Warrior* is a 1989 film directed by Cheng Xiaodong (Ching Siu-tung). The male protagonist, Terracotta Warrior (Meng Tianfeng), was played by Zhang Yimou and the female protagonist, Dong'er/ Lily Chu, by Gong Li. *Kawashima Yoshiko* was directed by Fang Lingzheng in 1990. Anita Mui starred as the main female protagonist and Andy Lau played the role of the main male character. Despite the fact that Li Bihua was the scriptwriter for both films, *Terracotta Warrior* is a film that does not display explicit feminist ideas as the story is about the encounters of a male terracotta warrior in the Qin Dynasty. In contrast, *Kawashima Yoshiko* is a feminist film in which Li attempted to use a postfeminist perspective to rewrite a controversial woman in Chinese history. Apart from the difference in subject matter, the filming styles of the directors also played a crucial role in determining the ultimate presentation of the films.

⁶⁴ Bainbridge, Caroline: *A Feminine Cinematics: Luce Irigaray, Women and Film*, p. 33

The film *Terracotta Warrior* deals with the forbidden love between a soldier, Meng Tianfeng, and a lady of the court, Dong'er, in the Qin dynasty. Dong'er has been chosen as one of the 'delegates' (virgin boys and girls) to search for an elixir of eternal life for the First Emperor of Qin. However, she falls in love with Meng and decides to run away from the Emperor's troops, but this attempt to escape leads to her death. Just before her suicide, she succeeds in finding the elixir of eternal life and in order to save Meng's life, she secretly passes the elixir to him rather than giving it to the First Emperor of Qin. After her death, Meng turns himself into a terracotta warrior as he is so heartbroken. The story then moves forward into the future where Meng accidentally meets Dong'er (who is Lily Chu now) in the 1930s. Lily cannot remember anything of the relationship between herself and Meng. However, after a series of events, Lily finally discovers that the love of her past life is Meng. She then dies at the end of the story and is reincarnated as a Japanese student in the 1980s who encounters Meng once again.

Like Tsui Hark, Cheng Xiaodong is famous for filming *gu zhuang bai shi pian* and *wuxia pian* (which contain heavy kung fu elements). His well-known works include the series of *A Chinese Ghost Story* (1987, 1990 and 1991) and the *Swordsman* series (1990, 1992 and 1993). So it is understandable that Cheng would try to apply the masculine features of the *wuxia pian* genre to Li's *Terracotta Warrior*, including many action scenes and kung fu elements which would constitute the main selling point of the movie. In the film, there are many wide camera shots of the fighting scenes between Meng Tianfeng and the villains who attempt to break into the grave of the First Emperor of Qin.

Consistent with the genre of the movie, the main female character, Dong'er/Lily Chu, plays a minor role in comparison with her male counterpart, and is

portrayed as an object of male desire. Meng Tianfeng is immortal because he has swallowed the special elixir given to him by Dong'er. Therefore, he is the only character in the novella who has a memory of the past. Lily cannot remember anything between her (in her past life as Dong'er) and Meng but Meng still remembers his love for Dong'er after two thousand years. This arrangement of the characters makes Dong'er the central object of desire for Meng and the story develops around Meng's search for Dong'er through the time continuum. The presence of Dong'er emphasises the loyalty of Meng and highlights the determination of Meng's search for lost love.

In contrast, the book version of *Terracotta Warrior* provides more descriptive space for Li to develop the characterization of Dong'er. Even though in the novel she is still considered as 'the victim' and the possession of Meng, Li is able to describe her in greater detail and gives her a sense of individual identity. One particular example is the scene in which Meng mistakes Lily for Dong'er, the first time they meet after three thousand years. In the movie, Lily only says, "I am not Dong'er", while in the novel, she angrily proclaims, "I am not Dong'er ... I am Lily Chu, please do not make a mistake. Listen carefully, it's an English name, LILY!"⁶⁵ The answer given by Lily in the textual version clearly shows that Lily does not want to accept the identity of 'Dong'er' given to her by Meng; rather, she explicitly states that she has her own identity, 'Lily Chu'. This response shows Lily's rejection of being Meng's possession or a mere object of affection. Despite the fact that Dong'er/Lily Chu's role is secondary to Meng, this example demonstrates Li Bihua's ability to give her female protagonist a voice in the novella that she is unable to fully develop in the film.

⁶⁵ Li, Bihua: *Terracotta Warrior*, p. 114.

Anita Mui as Kawashima Yoshiko

In contrast with *Green Snake* and *Terracotta Warrior*, *Kawashima Yoshiko* is a biographical account that retells the story of a late Qing Princess. Therefore, the film does not contain the high-level kung fu action scenes that are associated with the *wuxia pian* genre. According to the director, Feng Langzheng, Li Bihua originally wanted to write a comparison between Li Xianlan (Yamaguchi Yoshiko), a Japanese actor in China and Kawashima Yoshiko, a Manchu princess who has been considered as a Japanese spy. However, another famous film director by the name of Ou Dingping had intended to shoot a movie about Li Xianglan (*Au Revoir Mon Amour*). Therefore, Li gave up this idea and wrote a film script solely about Kawashima Yoshiko.⁶⁶

In an interview with W.K. Chiu, Feng admitted that he had decided to cast Anita Mui in the role Kawashima Yoshiko because of her ‘wild’ image and chameleon-like quality.⁶⁷ This shows that Feng’s interpretation of Kawashima Yoshiko contains many of the characteristics that he saw in Anita Mui. In addition, as Stanley Kwan’s *Rouge* became a huge success, Anita Mui received great recognition by the Hong Kong film industry for playing ‘women with nostalgic style’. Her stardom allowed her to win the audience’s acceptance of the characters she played. In 1988, she received the Golden Horse Best Actress Award and the Hong Kong Film Best Actress Award and her famous ever-changing image earned her the name ‘Madonna of Hong Kong’. It is therefore not surprising that Feng Langzheng would invite her to play the role of Kawashima Yoshiko.

⁶⁶ Chiu, W.K.: “*Special Favour of betrayer: Fang Lingzhen’s Third Movie: Kawashima Yoshiko*”, in W.K. Chiu (ed.): *Film Biweekly*, 294, p. 14.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

In terms of the adaptation, the text of *Kawashima Yoshiko* is faithful to the original motion picture, as most of the plot is preserved. However, while the general plot of the novel follows the original film, the novel provides a stronger feminist image of Kawashima Yoshiko. This is supported by Ken Gelder's comment on adaptations from films to novels, that "the novel of the film in fact answered some of the film's overhanging enigmas and resolved some of its ambiguities."⁶⁸ Films usually have more limitations than novels because filmmakers need to recreate solid visual images whereas text requires imagination and is open to multiple interpretations. In this sense, many details in a novel are lost when visualised in film.

Readers, on the other hand, have the ability to create their 'own visual image' by using their imagination. Therefore, based on Gelder's logic, it is understandable why Li changed the ending of the novel form of *Kawashima Yoshiko* to an open one, unlike the ending in the film. At the end of the film, Kawashima Yoshiko is clearly shown as being placed in the dock in China, which strongly implies that she will be convicted and sentenced to death. In the novel, however, there is no such scene and therefore no suggestion that the Qing Princess is dead. Instead, Li Bihua ends the novel by describing the appearance of an old woman who has a little monkey on her shoulder (a unique image of Kawashima Yoshiko in the novel) and poses the question "Who is she?" to her readers. By rewriting the ending, Li creates a stronger feminist, or I should say a postfeminist image of Kawashima Yoshiko in which she should not be seen as 'the victim' under the patriarchy.

Dumplings: A Postfeminist film

⁶⁸ Gelder, Ken: "Jane Campion and the Limits of Literary Cinema", in Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (eds): *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, p. 157.

Of the three movies under discussion here, *Dumplings* is the most recent and contains most postfeminist ideologies as the idea of ‘girl power’ is so prominent. *Dumplings* was first published under the title “Auntie Mei’s Dumplings” in Li Bihua’s short story collection, *An Antidote of Meteor Shower* [*Liu xing yu jie du pian*] (2000), then the story was made into a film in 2004 by Fruit Chan, and after the success of the film, a longer version – the novella, also named *Dumplings* – was released right after the launch of the film. The story is about a former middle-aged Hong Kong actress, Ai Qingqing (Mrs Li), who purchases dumplings from an old woman called Huang Yuemei (Auntie Mei), a sixty-year-old woman who looks like a thirty-year-old because of the effect of eating human embryo dumplings in order to restore her youth and recapture the heart of her disloyal husband. She is very scared at the beginning when she tries to eat the embryo dumplings, but when she realises that her husband is having an affair with a twenty-year-old girl, she cannot help but persists to ask Auntie Mei to look for a five-month-old embryo, which is regarded as ‘potent stuff’, even though she knows that it is illegal. The more she wants to rejuvenate her youth, the closer she moves towards being an addict to embryo eating. In the end, Auntie Mei is wanted by the police for carrying out an illegal abortion on a fifteen-year-old girl, and realising that Auntie Mei can no longer act as her supplier of dumplings, Mrs Li decides to make them herself. Thus she buys the illegitimate son of the woman who is having an affair with her husband.

The original short story, the film and the later novel version generally share similar plots, however, there are slight differences in the endings of the short story and the two adaptations. The original story ends with Qingqing finding herself smelling ‘fishy’ after eating the ‘potent stuff’ (the embryo of a baby created by an act of incest), while both the film and the novel end with flashback scenes of Qingqing’s

wedding day. The movie version was directed by Fruit Chan and the screen writer was still Li Bihua, which explains why the film shares general plot-lines with the original short story but developed a more complicated narrative, including the later part of Mr Li's (Qingqing's husband) affair with Auntie Mei and the part when Qingqing makes dumplings with the embryo of her husband's son. These additional parts very clearly increase the dramatic effect of the film. Since Auntie Mei is a sixty-year-old woman but only looks like thirty-something in the movie, by adding the scene of the extra-marital affair between Mr Li and Auntie Mei, her attractiveness is strongly highlighted and the rejuvenating effect of the embryo dumplings is stressed to the audience.

Compared with the original short story, the film and the novel carry a stronger postfeminist connotation as Li Bihua intentionally creates the character of Auntie Mei as a foil for Ai Qingqing. Seeing that the novel came after the film, as with *Terracotta Warrior* and *Kawashima Yoshiko*, the novel itself is generally faithful to the film, yet it contains more details that help to explain the complicated story developments which are left out in the film. Auntie Mei is an immigrant from China who used to be a medical doctor in Shenzhen, but after being dumped by her fiancé who was her first lover, she decided to move to Hong Kong to make a living by marrying a grass-root man from Hong Kong in order to get permanent residence there. Despite the fact that Auntie Mei has been a 'victim' as she was dumped by her fiancé, she did not play the role of a 'traditional woman' – being submissive to her 'tragic fate', but instead, she used her 'talent' and 'beauty' to change her life completely, and in *Dumplings*, Li depicts her as a woman who knows how to manipulate her beauty:

A few years later, Huang Yuemei tries to set up different connections and makes use of all the possible ways to obtain her purpose – reporting

her age a few years younger to the immigration department and dressing up to make herself look glamorous – in order to find a Hong Kong man that helps her to settle in Hong Kong.⁶⁹

Given with the fact that Huang Yuemei is from Mainland China, at that time generally regarded as poor and backward, she sees fashion as a tool to increase her attractiveness towards men. She uses her wit, body, looks, and sexuality to seduce men, marry them, live off their money, and control them.⁷⁰ Not only does this example shows that Auntie Mei possesses ‘girl power’, which is the crucial element of being a postfeminist, as she knows how to manipulate her beauty to get what she wants from men, but it also reveals the change of attitude towards fashion during the post-socialist period in China. According to Li Xiaoping, changing fashion and adorning the body in post-Mao China provides a new perspective to interpret the standard of beauty and a new form of femininity that Chinese women would follow. She continues arguing that the emergence of fashion consciousness in post-Mao China reflects important changes in China’s aspirations and a great sense of connection with the international community.⁷¹ In other words, the change of attitude towards fashion in the post-socialist China implies the impact of globalising economy and the awareness of consumption power.

In contrast, because Ai Qingqing has a beautiful appearance and that allowed her to marry Li Shijie, she does not see her beauty as her own possession but as something which belongs to her husband. This is because the main reason for her to want to restore her youth is to recapture Li’s heart after he has cheated on her, and in

⁶⁹ Li, Bihua: *Dumplings*, p. 100.

⁷⁰ This comment is inspired by Sheldon Lu’s article “Popular Culture and Body Politics: Beauty Writers in Contemporary China”, p.177.

⁷¹ Li, Xiaoping: “Fashioning the Body in Post-Mao China”, in Anne Brydon and Sandra Niessen (eds.): *Consuming Body, Adorning the Transnational Body*, p.71.

this light, she represents the traditional women who live under the patriarchy: they think that they are possessions of men and occupy a subordinate position. This theory can be supported by Jia Pingwa's statement:

From the perspective of men, women are born to this world to contribute beauty...Men exist to conquer the world; women exist to conquer men...One must understand that the world belongs to men; women should understand that the beauty is the limit of women's function [set by men]. Clever women, in order to be valued by men and be loved by their husbands...should always try to keep their sense of freshness and attractiveness, allowing beauty to be permanently effective.⁷²

The extreme difference in the interpretation of beauty draws a big contrast between Auntie Mei and Ai Qingqing, one prominent example of which in both the film and the novel is Auntie Mei's comment on their different attitudes towards life: "You rely on a man in your life; me, I have to rely on myself. You are fortunate and I am free."⁷³ The word 'free' from this quotation could be interpreted as free from the confinement of being men's subordinate. This comment immediately highlights Auntie Mei's postfeminist quality that Ai Qingqing lacks. This is because Auntie Mei does not use her beauty to please men; instead she uses her beauty to manipulate men in order to get what she wants. As noted in the above example, she wants to use her beauty to 'allure' a Hong Kong man to marry her so that she could be able to live there and enjoy a better quality of life. On the other hand, Ai Qingqing is still trapped in the old Chinese belief that "a woman adorns herself for one [men] who is pleased

⁷² Quoted in Kay Schaffer and Xianlin Song's book, *Women Writers in Postsocialist China*, p.80.

⁷³ Li, Bihua: *Dumplings*, p. 125.

with her” (nü wei yue ji zhe rong)⁷⁴ as she pursues beauty for the sake of keeping her husband. The technique of using the foil helps to reveal the characterization in a more concrete and obvious way.

Nonetheless, Li Bihua not only intended to portray the contrast between the two female characters, she also wanted to make the message clearer – that women can only rely on themselves – by turning Ai Qingqing into another ‘Auntie Mei’ at the end of the story. Given that Huang Yuemei escapes to Shenzhen at the end because she has practised an illegal abortion in Hong Kong, it is obvious that there is no-one to help Qingqing to find the ‘potent stuff’ and make the embryo dumplings. In order to pursue her dream of being young forever, she decides to make embryo dumplings herself. In the end, she realises that Auntie Mei is right: women should rely on themselves since men are totally unreliable, and in the light of this, preserving her own beauty will provide her with better chances in the future as she could manipulate men by her youth and beauty, in this case including her husband as well. Owing to this dramatic change in Ai Qingqing, I would argue that both Auntie Mei’s and Ai Qingqing’s characters contain postfeminist features.

Apart from a postfeminist point of view, *Dumplings* could also be scrutinised through the theme of “cannibalism”. Compared with the three short stories “The Woman who Loves Brined Goose”, “Eating Husbands” and “Blue Spider” that I have discussed in Chapter 1, the idea of “cannibalism” in *Dumplings* is the most explicit, as it directly describes the consumption of human embryo. In one blog entry, “The Feeling of Eating Embryo” on Sina.com, Li Bihua implicitly states that eating human embryo does exist in mainland China. Even though she refuses to disclose the source

⁷⁴ It first appeared in “Zhao ce” in *Records of the Warring States*. Bonsall, B.S (trans.): *Records of Warring States*, p.128. < <https://lib.hku.hk/bonsall/zhanguoce/index1.html> >

of information, through her interview with a Chinese herbal doctor, readers would be able to realise that there are Chinese doctors who sell fresh placenta. Li also gives a hint that people may eat human embryo in China.⁷⁵ Inserting this real life experience into her fictional work, on one hand, Li Bihua tries to disclose the shocking facts to her readers and on the other, she uses popular media (both literature and film) to raise moral awareness about “cannibalism” in Chinese culture.

The Inter-relationships between of the Novels and the Films

Having discussed the differences between the original texts and their film adaptations in respect of the selected works, I shall now turn to the impact of such films on the original novels, particularly in relation to the ‘visual’ elements in the novels. As mentioned previously, Li Bihua is a famous popular writer of literature in Hong Kong. Therefore, many of her novellas, especially those which have been adapted into films or were derived from the film version, have been reprinted several times. One particular feature of these reprinted versions is that they usually contain stills from the films as illustrations, especially on the front covers of the books. The use of images from the film to promote the text version of the work creates an inter-relationship between the written works and the motion pictures.

In her commentary about successful adaptations of novels into films, Linda Seger suggested that ‘commercial value’ is crucial if the producers want to make the film popular and profitable:

Films and television shows need to satisfy the masses to make profit.

Novels and plays have a more select audience, so they can cater to a more

⁷⁵ Li Bihua’s blog: <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_475afdce010004eg.html>

elite market ... but the transition to film requires that the material be accessible to the general public.⁷⁶

This comment suggests that it is important to appreciate that films must appeal to a wider audience than novels and therefore the producer must include commercially valuable elements into a film that may not be necessary in a book. The films that have been created by Li Bihua or adapted from her novels satisfy Seger's formula for success because of the commercial elements in them. The most obvious example is the use of Chinese pop stars in all her movies: Anita Mui and Leslie Cheung starred in *Rouge*, Maggie Cheung and Joey Wang starred in *Green Snake*; Gong Li and Zhang Yimou starred in *Terracotta Warrior*; and Anita Mui and Andy Lau starred in *Kawashima Yoshiko*. These actors and actresses were all popular celebrities in Hong Kong cinema during the 1980s and 1990s. The popularity of these famous people has undoubtedly contributed to the success of Li Bihua's films. Li Bihua's personal fame as an author and script-writer has increased with the wider audience that film attracts, and she has established herself as a well-recognised figure in Hong Kong pop culture.

Regardless of whether Li Bihua's works are from text to screen or from screen to text, all the recent reprinted versions of those works contain pictures from the films as illustrations. I would argue that these illustrations have the effect of manipulating the imagination of the audience. This is because readers are likely to readily associate the characters in the books with the characteristics of the pop stars from the film illustrations contained in the books even if the readers have not watched the movie before reading the book. The example that best illustrates this point is Li Bihua's *Rouge*. Because of the outstanding performance of Anita Mui as Ruhua (she received the Best Actress Award at the Hong Kong Film Festival in 1988), whenever people

⁷⁶ Seger, Linda: *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into film*, p.5.

mention this film, they inevitably make a connection between the female protagonist and Anita Mui: Ruhua equals Anita Mui.⁷⁷ This inseparable association between fictional and real-life identities creates a cultural phenomenon that gave rise to the appearance of ‘picture-books’ (novels with stills from the films).⁷⁸ My opinion is that the appearance of the ‘picture-book’ draws upon the close relationship between the novella and the film and together they create an appealing product that incorporates a new visualisation into an existing literary work. This can be demonstrated by Roland Barthes’s comment on “The Photographic Message”:

Each of those messages [drawings, paintings, cinema, theatre and photographs] develops in an immediate and obvious way a supplementary message, in addition to the analogical content (scene, object, landscape), which is what is commonly called the style of reproduction ... whose signifier is a certain ‘treatment’ of image (result of the action of the creator) and whose signified, whether aesthetic or ideological, refers to a certain ‘culture’ of the society receiving the message.⁷⁹

On the basis of this comment, not only do the ‘picture books’ affect readers’ perceptions of interpreting the characters in the film-based novels, including the pictures in the reprinted versions of Li Bihua’s novellas, but they also help the readers to recall memories of the films and thus become the ‘signifiers’ of the characters. In this sense, they have shaped the ideologies conveyed in the novels and create a particular type of ‘culture’ for the readers/audience.

⁷⁷ Jia, Ying Li: “XinNuxingzhuyi di gaoyang – ping Li Bihua yanqing xiaoshuo”, in *Shijie huawen wenxue luntan* 1, p. 67.

⁷⁸ The term first appeared in John Orr’s article “Introduction: Proust, the Movie”, in John Orr and Colin Nicholson (eds.): *Cinema and Fiction: New Modes of Adapting 1950-1990*, p. 1. He suggested the term ‘picture-book’ to replace the more common nomenclature, ‘literary film adaptation’.

⁷⁹ Sontag, Susan (ed.): *A Barthes Reader*, p. 196.

A New Form of Representation: New Images of Hong Ying's Female Characters in Television Adaptations

After discussing the differences between Li Bihua's original works and their adaptations, I shall next compare and contrast Hong Ying's two original novels, *Lord of Shanghai* and *Death in Shanghai*, with their television adaptations which came out in 2008.⁸⁰ I have given the plot summaries of the two novels in Chapter 2. Despite the fact that the television adaptations were based on Hong Ying's novels, Hong Ying was not the screenwriter for either television series, so it is not surprising to see that the two television adaptations are quite different from the original novels. This is especially true of *Death in Shanghai* as the main story line has been largely rewritten in order to fit into the spy genre set during the Second World War. Since Hong Ying's novels are always highly controversial, in particular the sexual context, in mainland China, there are always certain requirements that mainland Chinese dramas have to follow in order to pass the central censorship and be accepted by the general public; in this light, a close examination of the different representations of the female characters in Hong Ying's novels and their television adaptations can highlight the discrepancy in the presentations of feminist ideologies in literature and in the mass media.

The Rise of 'The Theme of Shanghai' in Contemporary Chinese Media

In recent years, there has been a blossoming of the device of using 'Republican Shanghai' as the historical background for many mainland Chinese television dramas, big hits such as *Shanghai Tan* and *Shanghai Fengyun* are prominent examples to

⁸⁰ The television adaptation, *King of Shanghai* was firstly boardcasted on Shanghai dong fang wei shi on 26 May 2008 and the television adaptation, *The Shadow Fox* was first boardcast on Hunan jing shi on 4 June 2008.

show the popularity of this technique. One possible reason for this phenomenon is the rapid development of Shanghai since the 1990s and the enormous changes in the appearance of the city. This made mainland Chinese, especially the local Shanghaiese, start to have a feeling of ‘nostalgia’ and provided fruitful subject matter for television producers and directors. This can be seen from Zhang Xudong’s comment on the topic of ‘Shanghai Nostalgia’ in the literary productions in the 1990s:

Nostalgia as a fashion in the Chinese cultural market in the 1990s sought to revisit and reactivate the sublime of Shanghai by leaping back into the past by re-creating the material-cultural atmosphere, thus overcoming loss in a virtual world of images and simulacra.⁸¹

This is because China had entered a new phrase of economy—“socialist market economy” in 1992 became “the official label for the new organization of social resources and various policies were instructed to extend market reforms to new areas of economy”.⁸² In other words, market economy plays a significant role in determining the subject matter of cultural productions. This can be supported by Yin Hong’s comments on the preference for a particular genre dominating the mainland Chinese television market: “if we can conclude that historical dramas embody the strategies of various social forces, then the appearance of genres can be viewed as the result of drama’s commercialization.”⁸³ Seeing that “the theme of Shanghai” is the recent trend

⁸¹ Zhang, Xudong: “Shanghai Nostalgia: Postrevolutionary Allergories in Wang Anyi’s Literary Production in the 1990s”, in: *positions: East Asia and Culture Critique*, 8.2, p. 368.

⁸² With reference to Jason McGrath, 1992 serves an important turning point in shaping cultural production and “the ‘socialist market economy’ became the official label for the new organization of social resources, and various policies were instituted to extend market reforms to new areas of the economy” during the Fourteenth Party Congress in 1992. McGrath, Jason: *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age*, p. 3.

⁸³ Hong, Yin: “Meaning, Production, Consumption: the History and Reality of Television Drama in China”, in Donald, Stephanie Hemelryk, Michael Keane and Yin Hong (eds.): *Media in China: Consumption, Content and Crisis*, p. 35.

in television drama productions and Hong Ying's trilogy of works based on the *Haishanghua liezhuan* is set in this period of time, therefore, it is not surprising that her first two novels, *Lord of Shanghai* and *Death in Shanghai*, were picked by television producers to make into television series.

***The Lord of Shanghai versus The King of Shanghai*⁸⁴**

As previously mentioned, Hong Ying's works have always raised controversy in the literary field in mainland China as most of her novels are famous for their eroticism.⁸⁵

So turning her works into television series would be a great challenge for television producers as the deletion of sex scenes involving female nudity is mandatory.

Therefore, some parts of the story had to be rewritten in order for it to be broadcast throughout the whole nation. In the original novel *The Lord of Shanghai*, it is very obvious that Xiao Yuegui is the ultimate 'Lord of Shanghai' as she knows how to manipulate men to get what she needs by using her extraordinary beauty, in particular with the second triad leader, Huang Puiyu. However, in the television series *The King of Shanghai*, Huang Puiyu was portrayed a power-thirsty eunuch and the only reason that he wants Xiao Yuegui to be his lover is because she was the woman of the last triad leader, Chang Xiongli, and he is determined to take away all Chang's possessions, including Xiao. In this context, Xiao Yuegui's 'girl power' does not appeal to Huang in the television version.

⁸⁴ The title of the television drama, *The King of Shanghai* is just a direct translation of the Chinese title, *Shanghai wang*.

⁸⁵ One obvious example is *K: The Art of Love*. Despite *K: The Art of Love* had aroused great controversy in China due to the "graphic sexual details" yet the main reason for the ban of the book is Hong Ying was being sued for libel by Ling Shuhau's daughter as she claims that K (the main female protagonist in the novel) implies Ling Shuhau and this brought huge insult to the family. Toolis, Kevin: "China's Lady Chatterley Stirs Passions over Censorship: Daughter of Woman who Inspired Erotic Novel Sues to Defend Mother's Reputation", in: *The Guardian*, 16 June 2002. <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/jun/16/books.arts>>

In addition, the television adaptation focuses more on the theme of brotherhood and the conflicts within the triad, therefore, unlike the original novel, the second gang leader, Huang Puiyu, is killed by the third master, Yu Qiyang, instead of by Xiao Yuegui. This rearrangement of the plot demonstrates the macho power inside the triad – men are the main leaders. Despite the fact that Xiao Yuegui kills Yu Qiyang at the end of the story and takes over the ruling of gang, the key figures of the gang, Third Master and Fifth Master, still do not treat her as a woman but as ‘a man’. In the twenty-ninth episode, Fifth Master explicitly claims that, “We treat you as our brother, Xiao Yuegui” when he persuades her to kill Yu Qiyang for his misbehavior. From this scenario, the ‘sworn brotherhood’ in the triad society could be clearly seen. With reference to Barend J. ter Haar, “the sworn brotherhood has been quite common throughout Chinese history, practised by people from all social and educational backgrounds and both sexes”.⁸⁶ Therefore one might argue that the members of Hongmen accept Xiao Yuegui as their member and see her as their ‘brother’. Nonetheless, applying a feminist approach to read this incident, Xiao Yuegui’s femininity has been extirpated, not to mention her postfeminist quality. This idea of a ‘degendered women’ can be traced back to the Maoist view of women. Despite the fact that the status of women had been changed drastically and liberated during the Mao period (Mao’s well-known comment “women hold up half of the sky” has been seen as a huge step in improving the status of women in contemporary Chinese history), women lost their ‘female subjectivity’ under Mao’s regime. According to Shumei Shi, “if traditional patriarchy valorized and fetishized bound feet and dainty hands, Maoist patriarchy fetishized masculine women whose feminine features were erased”, and “under traditional patriarchy women can only be feminine; under Mao,

⁸⁶ ter Haar, Barend J.: *Ritual & Mythology of Chinese Triads: Creating an identity*, p.459.

women must suppress their femininity”.⁸⁷ Shi’s comments show that women during and after the Mao period were not regarded as women with femininity but only as ‘degendered individuals’ who could serve the country like every other member of society; in other words, men are still the dominant group in the society, while ‘women’ should transform themselves to be more like men in order to fit into the Maoist patriarchal society. If the member of Hongmen could still call her ‘sister’ yet regard her as the member of their society, the element of ‘degendered women’ would be eliminated.

Even though there are many changes in the television version of *Shanghai Wang* and the postfeminist ideologies are not as strong as in the original version, there are still certain traces of Hong Ying’s (post)feminist thoughts. One concrete example is the use of a foil to highlight Xiao Yuegui’s postfeminist qualities. As the main storylines for most Chinese television dramas are about the spiritual growth of the main protagonists, it is inevitable that the main characters will suffer in the name of plot development. So in order to create a more dramatic effect in *The King of Shanghai*, a new character, Xin Yun, was added in the television version in order to make Xiao Yuegui’s life ‘tougher’. Like most stories, another female character was needed as she is the foil of the main female protagonist; in this case, Xin Yun is no exception. Given that Xin Yun is the most famous courtesan in the brothel where Xiao Yuegui works as a servant girl, it is expected that Xin Yun has supreme power over Xiao, which makes Xiao Yuegui the ‘underdog’ at the beginning of the story. Also, as Xin Yun had a strong affection for Yu Qiyang when she was very young, she starts to have a hostile attitude towards Xiao Yuegui after realising that Yu loves Xiao but not her. Throughout Xin Yun’s whole life, her only goal is to marry Yu Qiyang

⁸⁷ Shi, Shumei: *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific*, p. 72.

and defeat Xiao Yuegui, but Xiao has a greater ambition in her life as she makes use of every opportunity to earn a better living even though she has been put into many difficult situations by others. In the twenty-third episode, Xin Yun finally realises that she can never ever beat Xiao Yuegui as she would totally lose her freedom to choose what she wants to do: “women should have another style of living – just like Xiao Yuegui’s living style. I have never used my own power to live”. Her comment powerfully reveals Xiao Yuegui’s ‘girl power’ as she uses her own power to strive for a life that she wants.

Death in Shanghai versus The Shadow Fox

Unlike *The King of Shanghai*, *The Shadow Fox* is not faithful to the original novel, *Death of Shanghai*; the story-line has been hugely altered. Previously, Yu Jin was the main character and she was the soul of the whole story, but in *The Shadow Fox*, Tan Na seems to play a more crucial role than Yu Jin; one explanation for this is that Tan Na is played by a famous Hong Kong stage actor, Xie Junhao. In *Death in Shanghai*, Tan Na is the secret admirer of Yu Jin and he does not involve her in any spy activities, but in *The Shadow Fox*, not only was Tan Na a former lover of Yu Jin, but he also acts as a crucial spy for the Chinese government. Comparatively speaking, Yu Jin is consistently depicted as more stupid than him in the television adaptation as he is always the one who saves her from various dangerous situations. So Yu Jin’s postfeminist quality has been totally stripped away despite the fact that she is extremely influential in the plot development of the story. One prominent example can be found in episode 6: Yu Jin is on her way to deliver an important secret report to the British government, but she is kidnapped by the head of the Shanghai Business Council as he wants to rape her; luckily, she is eventually saved by Tan Na even

though they are ‘enemies’ as they work for different governments. As the television plot develops, the ambiguity of Tan Na and Ju Yin’s relationship is further revealed: they are always situated in a love-hate relationship and that makes Yu Jin become the ‘lower hand’ as she can never hide her affection for Tan Na when she needs to execute her mission to get rid of him.

Apart from the twisting plot following Tan Na and Yu Jin’s relationship, particular attention should also be given to the relationship between Bai Yunchang and Yu Jin in the television drama. Unlike the original novel, Bai Yunchang (who is the mistress of Yu Jin’s husband in *Death in Shanghai*) and Yu Jin are depicted as rivals as they both love Tan Na. In the drama, Bai Yunchang is constantly competing with Yu Jin as she thinks that Yu has deprived her of her lover and her chance of playing the protagonist in the play *Foxtrot in Shanghai*, a play which is directed by Tan Na at the Lyceum theatre and it is supposedly Bai Yunchang playing the main female role in the play but it was switched to Yu Jin in the end. In Hong Ying’s version, however, there are explicit descriptions of Bai Yunchang’s affection for Yu Jin. This altered arrangement of the plot could reveal the rejection of homosexuality in Chinese culture.⁸⁸ Despite the fact that there is “unbroken documented history of homosexuality” for three thousand years in Chinese history and the earliest sources could be even dating back to early Zhou dynasty⁸⁹, open discussion of homosexuality is at present largely taboo in Chinese culture.⁹⁰ This is because it is believed that homosexuality shakens the foundation of the core values of the family structure (in

⁸⁸ According to Peter Aggleton, Chinese culture has a long history of believing that “homosexuality harked back to some form of bad cultural heritage”. Aggleton, Peter: *Bisexualities and Aids: International Perspectives*, p. 179.

⁸⁹ Neill, James: *The Origin and Role of Same-sex Relations in Human Societies*, p. 234. However, there were no written records about lesbianism in ancient Chinese history. Ng, Vivien: “China”, in Bonnie Zimmerman (ed.): *Lesbian Histories and Cultures*, p.161.

⁹⁰ Cui, Shuqin: *Women Through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cinema*, p.159.

particular the Confucian family system) in Chinese culture. This could be supported by Bret Hinsch's comment: "to most Chinese homosexuality seems evil because it disrupts the accepted life cycle. They see the self-identified homosexual, who forgoes heterosexual marriage and the raising of children, as a grave enemy of the family structure".⁹¹ Seeing that media during the post-socialist era of China has very little tolerance of homosexuality, it is not surprising to see that Bai only sees Yu as her competitor rather than her 'lover'. Despite the fact that they cooperate with each other at the end of the television drama in order to fight against the Japanese invasion, neither Bai Yunchang nor Yu Jin see one another as 'friends' or 'sisters' as they still both fight for Tan Na's attention.

Another important adjustment in the plot of the television drama is the nationality of Yu Jin's foster father Xiu Bote (Hubert) who becomes a retired Chinese-British Colonel, but who was an American spy in Hong Ying's original novel. In order to present Xiu Bote and Yu Jin as having a more objective political position between the American and Japanese governments, the scriptwriters changed their nationalities to British so that they were not directly involved in the final secret report about the Japanese invasion of Pearl Harbour, and this makes the whole story less controversial. Seeing that the story took place during the Second World War, despite the fact that Xiu Bote's nationality has changed in the drama, no matter he is an American or a British, he is the opponent of the Japanese. This is because during the Second World War, American troops and British troops were allies⁹². In the final episode, the scriptwriters' intention in modifying Xiu Bote's nationality and ethnicity becomes very clear as they want him to act as Yu Jin's 'foil'. As Xiu Bote knows that

⁹¹ Hinsch, Bret: *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Homosexual Tradition in China*, p.171.

⁹² Ellis, Sylvia: *Historical Dictionary of Anglo-American Relations*, p.14.

Yu Jin would not agree with his arrangement to let Japanese troops attack the American troops in Pearl Harbour, he writes a letter to her before he commits suicide. In the letter, he explicitly claims that even though Yu Jin is British by nationality, she still believes that she is a Chinese in her heart, and because of this Xiu knows that she will help Tan Na (who represents the Chinese government) and would therefore become his own enemy. Since Xiu Bote is faithful to the British government and his ultimate goal is to protect the British during the Second War World, the contrasting attitude between Yu Jin and and Xiu Bote highlights Yu Jin's Chinese patriotism and this definitely can achieve the propaganda function of the mass media.

Despite the fact Yu Jin shares the leading role with Tan Na in *The Shadow Fox*, the death of Tan Na at the end of the series helps to accentuate Yu Jin's intelligence. Because both Tan Na and Yu Jin receive the top secret 'Kabuki' report (the code-name for the Japanese intention to invade Pearl Harbour), they are both kidnapped and held by the Japanese colonel, Saburo Huruya, and in order to let Yu Jin deliver the secret to the British and the Chinese governments, Tan Na sacrifices himself. In this light, from a postfeminist perspective, the death of Tan Na is important as the focus shifts to Yu Jin immediately after his disappearance. The final climax comes when Yu Jin delivers the secret information by Morse code while she is performing a fox trot on the stage. This forms the finale of the television series. In the comment of Saburo Huruya, "She's a very smart woman. I have to admit that I cannot defeat this woman", Yu Jin's 'girl power' is finally revealed. In this context, the death of Tan Na is crucial for the finale of the television adaptation to allow Yu Jin to become a patriotic heroine in the end. Even though the ending was changed in the television series, as Yu Jin commits suicide in the original story, there are still traces of postfeminist qualities in Yu Jin's character. By comparing the differences between

the original novels and their television adaptations, the postfeminist ideologies in Hong Ying's primary versions are more obviously shown as the adaptations still have to comply with the traditions of the patriarchy as the productions have to satisfy the commercial market.

To sum up, literature and film indeed have an inseparable relationship as they have become sources of inspiration for each other. Popular literature, movies and drama series are highly localised products as different areas have their unique characteristics of presentation style and choice of subject matter. Therefore, comparing the different forms of representation of the same story will highlight the author/director's personal style.

In Chapter 3, I have analysed four films that are based on Li Bihua's novellas and four of Li's novellas that are based on film scripts that she wrote. On the basis of Virginia Woolf's comment at the beginning of this chapter, it is to be expected that male directors tend to objectify women as filmic language is embedded with patriarchal codes, and therefore the presentation of the image of women comes through men's interpretation. Nonetheless, even though Stanley Kwan is a male director, his presentation of feminist and postfeminist ideologies in *Rouge* is much more obvious than in Clara Law's *The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus*. In addition, Fruit Chan's (a male director also) *Dumplings* also contains a great deal of feminist and postfeminist thinking, and in this sense, the representation of women on screen might be not altered simply because of the 'gender' of the director. Female directors, in my case Clara Law, can make films that reinforce the patriarchal hegemony; women are the victims under men's suppression. Given the fact that Li Bihua is an icon in Hong Kong popular culture, her novellas and film scripts have highly influenced the development of the local culture, and in the light of this, those of her

works that contain feminist and postfeminist ideologies help to raise the awareness of female consciousness in Hong Kong culture.

In contrast, the television adaptations of Hong Ying's novels do not fully reveal the original feminist thoughts due to the special political and social factors in mainland China. By comparing and contrasting the original novels and the adapted versions, it is possible to notice how the images of the same characters can be presented differently on paper and on screen even though some of the characteristics remain the same, for example, the postfeminist quality of Yu Jin is distinctive in *Death in Shanghai* and *The Shadow Fox*.

Chapter 4. Discussion of Web Literature: Postfeminist Ideas on Hong Ying's and Li Bihua's Blogs

There is no race. There are no genders. There are no infirmities.
Only minds. Utopia? No. The Internet.¹

With the blooming of the Internet across the world, not only does this information highway shorten the distance between people by facilitating communication between individuals, it also provides a brand new channel for women to express their thoughts and start their creative writings. This is because the Internet not only provides a fast access to information from across the world, but some of the information, in particular when it derives from a foreign country, might challenge the existing norms of a particular society in a way that changes the mindset of people. Fereshteh Nourai-Simone has clearly pointed out that the Internet has provided a 'new world' in which people can abandon their own identities, in particular women 'netizens':

Internet technology affords writer and reader the freedom and safety of anonymity. This anonymity removes from online interaction any predominated notions, based on physical, gendered presence. It also liberates women to freely articulate repressed identity or forbidden subjects.²

¹ This is a slogan from a MCI commercial promoting their latest networking software. Quoted by Kristine Blair and Pamela Takayoshi in the introduction to their book on cyberfeminism. "Introduction: Mapping the Terrain of Feminist Cyberscapes", in Kristine Blair and Pamela Takayoshi (eds.): *Feminist Cyberscapes: Mapping Gendered Academic Spaces*, p.1.

² Nourai-Simone, Fereshteh: *On Shifting Ground: Muslim Women in the Global Era*, p. xvii.

Seeing that there is no absolute proof of one's identity – nationality, sexuality, age or profession – in the cyber world, Internet surfers can always abandon their existing 'identities' and create a new one when they surf the Internet.³ In the light of this, the gender boundary has become blurred as gender can be seen as only one kind of 'performativity' in cyberspace. Along this line of reasoning, Judith Butler's post-structuralist feminist argument that "identities are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" can be verified.⁴ Cyberspace indeed provides a new 'space' for women to reconstruct their gender identities that have been forced upon them in reality. I would argue that, from a postfeminist and a cyberfeminist point of view,⁵ the virtual world provides a great platform for women to fight against the patriarchal confinements that have been imposed on them in reality. Given the fact that both Hong Ying and Li Bihua maintain a weblog on Sina.com, I would like in this final chapter to use their blogs as examples to illustrate how weblogs have provided women writers with an innovative way to create their own discourse and communicate with their readers simultaneously.

The Emergence of a New Type of Feminism – Cyberfeminism

³ It is possible to challenge this comment by stating that printed publications can serve this function too as writers can use pseudonyms to publish their works; they do not need to reveal their real identities. However, I would argue that there are always more restrictions with printed materials, and writers' identities are much easier to identify than on the Internet. In order to publish literary work in printed form, a publisher is a must and it is impossible to hide one's identity completely as certain personal information has to be revealed to the publisher for legal reasons. In contrast, writers can publish their writings on-line freely whenever there is a site for them to upload their writings, and they can easily hide their identities as there is not much personal contact.

⁴ Butler, Judith: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p.136.

⁵ According to Alex Galloway, cyberfeminists emerged from Adelaide, Australia, in the early nineties. They were a group of artists and activists calling themselves VNS Matrix, and they published the first Cyberfeminist Manifesto. "From this early rant, the cyberfeminist movement began to grow and shift. It began to coalesce around Europe. And on September 20, 1997 in Kassel, Germany, the First Cyberfeminist International met at Documenta X, an international exhibition of contemporary art". Galloway, Alex: "A Report on Cyberfeminism: Sadie Plant Relative to VNS Matrix", in *Switch: Electronic Gender: Art at the Interstice*, p. 1. <<http://switch.sju.edu.web/v4nl/alex.html>>

The emergence of cyberfeminism could be seen as a predictable outcome when traditional feminist thought engages with the virtual world. Claudia Reiche and Verena Kuni, the editors of *Cyberfeminism. Next Protocols*, have argued that cyberfeminism brings feminism into a new era and helps feminist ideologies to synchronise with the post-modern technological era:

Cyberfeminism is not simply an evolution of historical feminism created as a more adequate answer to meet the changed conditions of the Information Age. Cyberfeminism can perhaps best be described as a feminist intervention into these new conditions, and an exploration of how they challenge the political and social conditions of feminism.⁶

As cultural and societal developments are ever changing in human history, it is to be expected that philosophical theories that describe anthropology need to be constantly modified and reformed, so when feminism converges with cyber space, it needs to be adjusted in order to portray the complexity of women's issues on the web.

Different cyberfeminists have their own definitions of the term when they try to comment on this heated topic in cyberworld. Radhika Gajjala and Annapurna Mamidipudi simply defined the term as referring “to women using Internet technology for something other than shopping via the Internet or browsing the world-wide web” and regard it as a type of feminism that is in relation to ‘cyberspace’.⁷ Sharing similar thoughts with Gajjala and Mamidipudi, well-known cyberfeminists Faith Wilding and CJ Rower also agreed that cyberfeminism is open, fluid and not yet defined by those who are engaged in its development as a new feminist theory.

⁶ Reiche, Claudia and Verena Kuni: “Call for contributions”, in Claudia Reiche and Verena Kuni (eds.): *Cyberfeminism. Next Protocols*, p. 2.

⁷ Gajjala, Radhika and Annapurna Mamidipudi: “Cyberfeminism, Technology, and International Development”, in: *Gender and Development*, 7.2, p. 8.

However, Rower narrowed the definition down by making it focus on the gender and technology issue, claiming that “cyberfeminism looks at technologies and explores the intersection between gender, culture, the body and technology”.⁸

Taking Rower’s comment further, another cyberfeminist, Kira Hall, defined cyberfeminism in a post-structuralist way and put forward the belief that the virtual world can deconstruct the gender boundaries. She claimed that:

[Cyberfeminism is] influenced by postmodern discussion on gender fluidity by feminist and queer theorists, imagines the computer as a liberating utopia that does not recognize the social dichotomies of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual. Because of its similarity to what is often referred to as “liberal feminism” in the non-virtual world, I identify this perspective as liberal “cyberfeminism”.⁹

Despite the fact that her definition of cyberfeminism is very broad, I shall use Kira Hall’s definition of cyberfeminism to analyse Hong Ying and Li Bihua’s blogs. This is because it highlights the features of post-structuralist feminist ideologies and that would strengthen my analysis of showing how the two authors’ blogs illustrate the theme of deconstructing the ‘social dichotomies’ of the gender boundaries.

Women Internet Users in China

Internet usage in China has undergone dramatic growth since the mid-1990s. China has become the second-largest Internet nation (the United States takes the first place)

⁸ Rower, C.J: “Cyberfeminism in action: Claiming women’s space in cyberspace”, in: Sandra Grey and Marian Sawyer (eds.): *Women’s Movements: Flourishing or in Abeyance*, p. 129.

⁹ Hall, Kira: “Cyberfeminism” in Susan C. Herring (ed.): *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social and Cross Cultural Perspectives*, p. 148.

since 2002.¹⁰ According to CNNIC's report in January 2011, the total number of China's Internet users had reached 457 million, up 19% compared with 2009.¹¹

Among all the Internet activities in China, blogging is the most popular. In "A Brief History of Weblog", Jill Walker Rettberg cited the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of a weblog (normally shortened simply to 'blog'):

A frequently updated Web site consisting of personal observations, excerpts from other sources etc., typically run by a single person and usually with hyperlinks to other sites; an online journal or diary.¹²

The first weblogs began in mid-1990s in the United States and did not appear in China until 2002, with the introduction of blogchina.com in the August of that year.¹³ This did not arouse public interest until the appearance of Muzimei's sex diary on Blogcn.com in 2003 and this created 'The Muzimei phenomenon'. According to the Sydney Morning Herald,

The country's most popular Internet site, Sina.com, credits with her attracting 10 million daily visitors. Another site, Sohu.com, says Mu Zimei [Muzimei] is the name most often typed into its Internet search engine surpassing one occasional runner-up, Mao Zedong.¹⁴

¹⁰ Haiqing Yu's article "Blogging Everyday Life in Chinese Internet Culture" stated that China was the second largest Internet nation in 2002. *Chinadaily* claimed that China was the second largest Internet nation in 2002. < http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2006-01/09/content_510623.htm >

¹¹ CNNIC's Report in January 2011 < <http://www.chinainternetwatch.com/whitepaper/china-internet-statistics/> >

¹² Rettberg, Jill Walker: *Blogging*, p. 22.

¹³ Lange, Stephanie: *Blogs – The New books?*, p.3 and Yu, Haiqing: "Blogging Everyday Life in Chinese Internet Culture", in: *Asian Studies Review*, 31, p. 425.

¹⁴ "Net Sex Writers Stir Emotions", in: Sydney Morning Herald, 2 December 2003 < <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/12/01/1070127357698.html> >

By the end of 2005, the number of Chinese bloggers had reached 16 million, while the total number of Internet users had reached 111 million.¹⁵ And 2005 has been claimed as a ground-breaking year in the short history in blogging in China.¹⁶ Due to the popularity of Muzimei, many female bloggers followed her example in order to gain popularity via their weblogs. One significant example was ‘Sister Hibiscus’ (Furong Jiejie), a normal woman who kept posting pictures of herself claiming to be a super beauty based on her excessive self confidence.¹⁷ As blogging developed in China, it is not surprising to see that blogs came to play a significant part in many women’s lives. There are some metaphoric descriptions of Chinese women and their blogs: “A woman is a fish and the blog is water, women can be set free in the blog world”, “A woman is a cook and the blog is a restaurant, only with a good cook can the restaurant be welcomed”, “A woman is a director who can make good movies”, and “A woman is a model and the blog is a runway women show their different styles on a runway”.¹⁸

Celebrities Go Blogging!

Seeing how easily members of the general public could obtain fame in the blogosphere overnight, weblogs came to be seen as a good platform for gaining publicity. Because of the Chinese government’s censorship, however, only certain Internet search companies are allowed to operate in China.¹⁹ Sina.com is one of the biggest Chinese websites that provides on-line information and news content for local Chinese and overseas Chinese. This can be seen by the research conducted by Kuah-

¹⁵ *Xinhuanet*, <http://news.xinhuanet.com/newmedia/2006-02/14/content_4174072.html>

¹⁶ Yu, Haiqing: “Blogging Everyday Life in Chinese Internet Culture”, in: *Asian Studies Review*, 31, p. 425.

¹⁷ Washburn, Dan: “China’s Online Celebrities: From Mu Zimei to Furong Jiejie”, 11 August 2005 <http://shanghaiist.com/2005/08/11/chinas_online_c.php>

¹⁸ In her article, “The blogs: Chinese Women Carve out Niche in Cyberworld”, Lu Yaokun cited these comments from an on-line writer. Lu Yaokun: “Chinese Women Carve out Niche in Cyberworld”, in: *Women*, 7, p. 42.

¹⁹ I shall discuss the Internet censorship issue more fully in the final section of this chapter.

Pearce Khun Eng on the issue of Chinese women's cyberactivity in both Hong Kong and Shanghai. Eng claimed that:

It is most common for Chinese women to tap into several common China-based websites such as sina.com rather than those from outside of China. This could be attributed to the ease of access of these websites, but also to the fact that some of the foreign-based websites are blocked by the State and Mainland Chinese have no access to them.²⁰

As a direct result of this, government policy could be seen as one of the important contributing factors to making Sina.com one of the biggest and the most popular Chinese websites in China.

On the other hand, the marketing strategy of Sina.com also plays a crucial part in making the website successful. With the aim of making its website popular, in 2005, Sina.com started inviting entertainment celebrities such as the famous mainland Chinese actress Xu Jinglei and the Taiwanese actress Yi Nengjing to put their blogs on the website.²¹ Following this tendency, prolific writers such as Hong Ying and Li Bihua also started their blogs on Sina.com. Hong Ying started her first entry on Sina.com on 21 October 2005 and Li Bihua started her first entry on 30 November 2005.²² Despite the fact that Li Bihua does not update her blog personally as she only

²⁰ Eng, Kuah-Pearce Khun, "Internet as Social Capital and social network: Cyberactivity of Hong Kong and Shanghai Women" in Khun Eng Kuah Pearce (ed.): *Chinese Women and the Cyberspace*, p. 36.

²¹ In 2006, Xu Jinglei's blog ranked first at sina.com, reached 36 million readers, much higher than any men bloggers. Lu, Yaokun: "Chinese Women Carve out Niche in Cyberworld", in: *Women*, 7, p. 43.

²² Li Bihua's blog has a Hong Kong version on sina.com.hk. The contents of the blog are exactly the same as the mainland Chinese version, but there are three main differences which can be noticed: the general layout is different, the blog and the readers' comments are written in traditional Chinese, and the original comments in simplified Chinese can not be seen and *vice versa*. Since Hong Ying's blog only has a mainland Chinese version, I shall only focus on Li Bihua's mainland Chinese version in order to provide a more balanced discussion.

provides the content and asks the editorial board of Sina.com in Beijing to help her upload it, she still uses her blog to interact with her readers.²³ By blogging on Sina.com, both authors created a new platform to interact with their readers which allows their readers to get to know them better beyond reading their published literary works. This action formed a network of connection between the two authors and their readers and catalysed the spread of feminist ideologies on the Internet. Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein have stated that connectivity is at the heart of feminism,²⁴ so the blogs of Hong Ying and Li Bihua help to connect the authors and specifically their female readers together so that they can engage in dialogue.

Scope of Data Collection in my Research

Because both writers are still blogging on Sina.com, in order to limit the scope of my research, my data collection of the blog entries only includes those from the first entry on the blog to the last entry at the end of 2009. Apart from celebrity blogs, Sina.com also introduced Sina Weibo (a type of microblog, the Chinese equivalent of Twitter) in 2005. According to Macmillan's Dictionary, "microblogging (weibo) means putting short updates such as brief texts, photos etc on a personal blog, especially by using a mobile phone or instant messaging software".²⁵ Despite the fact that weibo is a type of blogging and has become very popular in recent years (there were in total 249 million active users on weibo in China) and Hong Ying has a weibo account,²⁶ I

²³ In the entry on 21 January 2011, Li uses this entry to reveal her anger and clarify the fact that a Beijing reporter fabricated an interview with her, posting her own interview, the original post is: <<http://libihua.mysinablog.com/index.php?op=ViewArticle&articleId=2850772>>, she states that she only provides the content information and the editorial board helps her to type the content on-line.

²⁴ Hawthorne, Susan and Renate Klein: *CyberFeminism: Connectivity, Critique and Creativity*, p. 5.

²⁵ "Definition of Microblog", MacMillian Dictionary.

<<http://www.macmillandictionary.com/buzzword/entries/microblogging.html>>

²⁶ "2011: 249 Million Active China Social Media Weibo Users", in Resonance China.

<<http://www.resonancechina.com/2012/04/11/2011-249-million-active-china-social-media-weibo-users/>>

have not included any discussion of weibo in my analysis as I have to limit the range of data collection. However, I shall briefly talk about a huge incident on weibo that took place in March 2012 in the final section of this chapter.

Hong Ying's blog *versus* Li Bihua's blog

As noted by Deborah Bowen, women writers can freely create a homepage when they starting writing on the web. They can choose their own layout for their web pages as there are no guidelines, parameters or restrictions; they can write themselves in any colour of ink they choose. There is no structure to their art; there is no instruction to their design. They are free to “subvert the Symbolic Order without fear of penalty or reprisal”.²⁷ In other words, cyberspace provides women writers with a new space to start their own literary creations without having the confinements of traditional publishing restricting them. Even though the format of the blogs provided by Sina.com has become somewhat set, the two authors are still free to choose their own presentation styles for their blogs. They can choose their own background pictures, the colour themes, the type size and the font types, so they can personalise their blogs. In this light, reading the blogs of Hong Ying and Li Bihua can reveal the personal preferences of the two female writers.

As discussed in the previous chapters, Hong Ying is a more provocative feminist writer and she has a very close relationship with the media circle, therefore, it is not surprising to see there are more photographs of her and explicit comments about herself on her weblog. Since Hong Ying is quite open about her personal life as she always accepts interviews on different media channels, it could be expected that

²⁷ Bowen, Deborah Silverman: “E-critique Feminine: Women’s Online Diaries and the New Female Discourse”, in Kristine Blair, Radhika Gajjala and Christine Tulley (eds.): *Webbing Cyberfeminist Practice: Communities, Pedagogies, and Social Action*, p. 314.

the content of her blogs would be quite open too. One prominent example can be found in one of the entries in 2009 where she posted the wedding photographs of her second marriage on the blog so that she could share her happiness with her readers.²⁸ Although the divorce rate is getting higher and higher in China in past ten years,²⁹ divorce has been a taboo in Chinese society until recent decades. This is because, for women in particular, marriage is expected to be life-long, as described in the old saying ‘if a woman marries a chicken, she should stick with the chicken; if she marries a dog, she should stick with the dog’. Hence, divorce has been considered as a shameful event.³⁰ Given that the unhappy ending of Hong Ying’s first marriage became known to readers through her recent autobiographical novel, *Good Children of the Flowers* [*Hao'er nühua*],³¹ prior to this entry in 2009, her open attitude towards divorce and remarriage not only allows her readers to get to know more about her personal life, but also helps to deconstruct the myth of divorce as a calamity and promotes a new idea that women could find happiness in their remarriage.

²⁸ The entry was on 28 December 2009. < http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_46e98efa0100gaxi.html >

²⁹ According to the Beijing Times, officials from the Ministry of Civil Affairs released the information that in the last three quarters of 2011, 1,466,000 couples were registered for divorce in the whole country, and that the number had increased by 11.9% compared with the same period of 2010. Up to 2011, the divorce rate had already shown a trend of increasing progressively for eight years in succession. Among the divorced couples, those from Sichuan, Shandong and Jiangsu ranked as the first three. < <http://www.articlesbase.com/divorce-articles/divorce-rate-has-increased-progressively-in-china-5764711.html> >

³⁰ Fan, Cindy C.: “Divorce”, in Edward Lawrence Davis (ed.): *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture*, p. 213.

³¹ I shall talk more about this novel in the section – “ Blogging as a Tool of Promotion”.



Hong Ying posted her wedding photo in Italy on her personal blog at Sina.com

At the end of this entry, Hong Ying also attached a link to her wedding videos in order to let her readers obtain more information about her wedding. This openness allows her readers to get to know her personal life better and breaks down the ‘veil’ that exists between authors and readers. Without the help of the on-line diaries, readers can only ‘communicate’ with Hong Ying through reading her literary work or acquiring news about her from newspapers or television programmes. The communication would be an indirect one. However, by uploading personal photos and writing personal events on her own blogs, Hong Ying creates a ‘friendlier’ image to her readers that encourages her readers to interact with her as she is willing to present herself as a very approachable person. In addition, by posting personal photos and videos of her daily life, Hong Ying has marketed herself as a ‘product’ on the Internet and the visual media on her blog serves the function of a promotional tool in order to attract more readers to visit her blog.

In contrast, Li Bihua is a relatively low-profile female writer, she maintains her blog in a very subtle way – there are no photographs at all on her blog. Blog readers who are not familiar with her writings might not recognize who she is, hence, only her fan readers and those who have read her work would realise that the blog is maintained by the famous Hong Kong author, Li Bihua. In some of the readers’ comments, there are quite a number of messages that ask whether this blog actually belongs to Li Bihua. In the entry on 24 September 2009, Li wrote an article about ‘How to let little beggars in China have direct benefits’ which aroused great controversy among the netizens as Li used some regional markers such as ‘*guo nei*’ (inside mainland China) and ‘*Xiang Gang*’ (Hong Kong) when she talked about the begging situation in China, in which suggests that the author of the blog might not be a mainland Chinese resident and it also hints that living conditions in the mainland are still quite backward. Owing to the low-profile nature of Li’s blog, netizens who are not familiar with Li’s writing style would question the ‘authenticity’ of Li’s identity; one example can be found in the same entry when a netizen whose name is Chen Xiangqi posts a question: “Are you really Li Bihua? The ‘Li Bihua’ who wrote *Farewell My Concubine*?” The original post has the following attachment:

陈祥奇 2009-09-24 19:13:23 [举报]

真是李碧华吗，霸王别姬的李碧华吗，



This example shows that identity can be fabricated in the cyber world as there is no concrete proof to show that the host of Li Bihua’s blog is really the famous Hong

Kong female writer herself. However, for those netizens and readers who are familiar with Li's writings, the contents of her blogs are more like her column writings in one of the Hong Kong entertainment magazines – *Next Magazine*. One could have confidence in believing that this blog is written by Li Bihua if one is familiar with Li's writing style. Like her column writings, Li only talks about current affairs and her personal viewpoint; she seldom talks about her personal life or provides information about her family and the schedules of her daily life. There is always a 'veil' in between Li herself and her readers. Her comments allow her readers to have a glimpse of her personal thoughts but there is always a distance.

The example that I quoted above can also reveal Li's awareness of current affairs as the issue of child beggars has been a problem in mainland China for the last three decades. In response to a news-story from the city of Changzhou in Jiangsu Province, Li dedicated this entry to praising the act of a sales girl who bought a McDonald's meal to give to a beggar girl on the streets. The entry has served as a platform to provide a solution to the problem of child beggars in China, especially for the readers who agree with Li's comments.³² Through making such criticisms of current issues, Li's personal thoughts can be perceived. Yet she is still quite private as she does not reveal her personal details to her readers, and this makes her more 'mysterious' compared with Hong Ying.

Blogging As a Tool of Promotion

Despite the fact that the layouts of Hong Ying's and Li Bihua's blogs are very different – Hong Ying's blog is more like a personal diary, while Li Bihua's blog is

³² Li Bihua's blog entry on 24 September 2009:
http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_475afdce0100evwy.html#comment1

more like a collection of short essays – one common factor that can easily be identified is that both authors use their blog as a means of promoting their latest publications. For Hong Ying, her blog has been the best way to promote her new books as she always writes personal accounts there, hence it is very natural for her to mention her recent publications as part of her personal activities. Her latest autobiographical novel, *Good Children of the Flowers*, came out in 2009 and she dedicated ten entries to talking about this new book continuously between 19 October and 22 December 2009. From these blog writings, Hong Ying reveals the content of this latest autobiographical story to her readers bit by bit and this helps to arouse the readers' curiosity towards the book. This is because this new autobiographical novel covers some sensitive issues such as the reason for her first broken marriage. In her entry on 22 December 2009, she talked subtly about her ex-husband's affair in order to create some suspense for her readers to make them want to read on. Because Hong Ying uses her blog as a means to share her intimate thoughts with her readers, she can write whatever she wants as the blog can be read as her 'diary', also, as she is the host of the blog, she has the ultimate right to decide the content, so she can get rid of the confinement that she might have experienced in traditional publishing culture.

As Hong Ying is a famous writer and celebrity in mainland China, she has been invited to be the guest on many talk shows on Phoenix Television, whereby she initiates gossip topics on her blog so as to attract her readers' curiosity. This type of connectivity reveals the feminist nature of Hong Ying's blog since 'connectivity' is the fundamental argument of second-wave feminist ideologies. Connectivity here implies the image of network and the term itself originally refers to "a fabric made of netted threads, later woven or 'webbed', its female-identified techniques both tactile

and social”.³³ Taking on a cyberfeminist point of view, Manuel Castells provides a new insight for term ‘network’ in a social media sense as he claims that the term has feminist connotation: “the rapid diffusion of ideas in a globalized culture, and in an interrelated world, where people and experience travel and mingle, quickly weaving a hyperquit of women’s voices throughout most of the planet.”³⁴ In this way, therefore, Hong Ying is trying on her blog to break down the traditional confinement that Chinese women endure, where they cannot speak out in public about their own points of view. This can be justified by Michael Keren’s comment:

What can be more liberating than millions of women who formerly lacked a public voice, asserting new identities, blurring the private/public divide that kept women’s issues away from the public sphere, and educating each other, and the world at large, of updated norms and values.³⁵

It is apparent that not only does Hong Ying create a platform for her readers on which she can express her opinions, she also participates in the discussion with the deliberate intention of getting female voices connected. This can be supported by Sadie Plant’s comment: “the computer emerges out of the history of weaving, the process so often said to be quintessence of women’s work...It is about weaving women and cybernetics, and is also weaving women and cybernetics together.”³⁶ It may seem that she uses Sina.com to promote herself, but on the contrary, one can perceive Hong Ying’s blog as a platform to exchange thoughts with the agenda of

³³ Thornham, Sue: *Women, Feminism and Media*, p. 124.

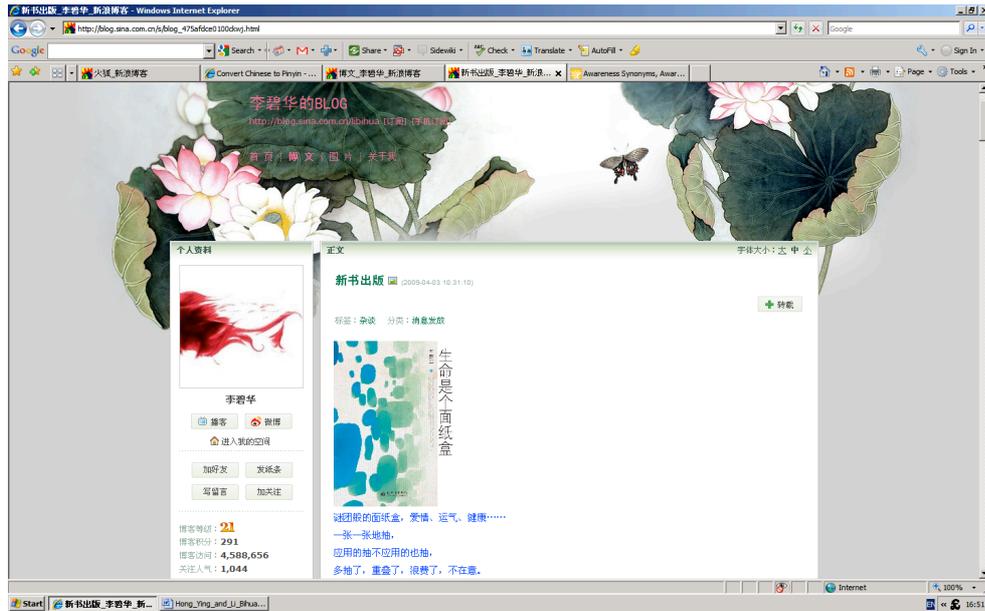
³⁴ Quoted in Sue Thornham’s *Women, Feminism and Media. Ibid.*

³⁵ Keren, Michael: *The New Political Arena*, p. 37.

³⁶ Plant, Sadie: “The Future Looms: Weaving Women and Cybernetics”, in Mike Featherstone, Roger Burrows (eds.): *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, p. 46.

promoting female consciousness. I shall discuss more about the feminist ideologies of the authors' blogs in the following section.

On the other hand, even though Li Bihua does not talk about her private life on her blog, applying Deborah Bowen's comment that "female writers have absolute right over their blogs" to reading Li's blogging entries, it is noticeable that Li has conquered the constraints that she might encounter in conventional paper publications. This is because she can choose what to post on her blog and the presentation layout of the blog without worrying about sales in the market as she is a popular literature writer in Hong Kong where sales determines the popularity of an author. Given the fact that all Li Bihua's fictional works have to be first published by the Hong Kong Cosmo Publishing Corporation in Hong Kong under a legal commitment, it is very hard for mainland Chinese readers to have access to these publications as printed materials with traditional Chinese characters are restricted by the mainland Chinese government. The simplified versions are expected to come out after censorship, and in the light of this, Li's blog on Sina.com becomes a handy tool for her to promote the simplified Chinese versions of her latest publications as the blog mainly targets mainland Chinese readers. Through reading Li's blogs, the latest information about her publications can be obtained easily and directly. In the entry on 3 April 2009, Li promoted her three new simplified Chinese publications – *Life is a Box of Tissues*, *Seven Drops of Sweet Water* and *Natural Indigo*.



The first description of *Life is a Box of Tissues* [Shengming shi ge mianzhi he]: Life is like a mysterious box of tissues, it contains love, fortune and health; you just take them out one by one no matter whether you really need them or not; you might take too many, you overlap or even waste the tissue papers, but you never care. You think there are still some left, but you suddenly realise that there is only one tissue left in the box.



The description of the *Seven Drops of Sweet Water* [Qi di tian shui]: I prefer you in the past – this is because I prefer the old ‘me’. There are seven drops of sweet water in each person’s heart, yet they will be drunk by ghosts drop by drop ... the most precious thing in our human lives, how many can you keep and how many did you lose?



The description of *Natural Indigo* [Qing dai]: It is so small and light that it is like dust; it is mysterious yet beautiful; it used to be a type of plant but is now turning into a type of medicine. It sacrifices itself to cure people.

The three descriptions given above are abstruse as they do not portray the contents of the three books yet they are somewhat related to them. By using this enigmatic style to promote her new books, Li creates an appetite through suspense that arouses her readers' interest to purchase the books. Based on the examples on Hong Ying's and Li Bihua's blogs, I would argue that Hong Ying uses her blog to communicate with her readers by posting more about her personal activities and intimate thoughts. On the other hand, Li Bihua primarily uses her blog as a tool to promote her writing.

The Feminist Ideologies in Hong Ying's and Li Bihua's Blog

Apart from using their blogs to promote new publications, another similar theme that can be seen in the two authors' blogs is the expression of feminist thoughts. Since Hong Ying is a provocative feminist, it is to be expected that her views on feminism and feminist ideologies would be much more obvious than Li Bihua's. In the entry on 22 December 2009, when Hong Ying talked about her ex-husband's extra-marital affair, she quoted her view on feminism when she was interviewed by *Wuhan Wanbao*. In the interview, Hong Ying explicitly portray herself as a 'postfeminist' and stated that her writings should not be categorised as feminist writings but as 'gender-neutral writing'. This was because she intends to deconstruct the gender boundaries in her work and believes that she possesses an 'androgynous mind'.³⁷ Not only this, when the reporter asked Hong Ying about the marginalised status of her

³⁷ The term comes from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

female protagonists in her novels, Hong Ying declared that all her protagonists, like her mother, represent the subaltern women who do not have the right to speak. Being an author and the creator, Hong Ying empowers them to speak and allows them to air their grievances against patriarchal confinement.³⁸ In this light, her female protagonists are not willing to be placed in a subordinate position to men as they now possess feminist consciousness and I will use the main female character in *K: The Art of Love* as an example to illustrate this feminist viewpoint.³⁹

On 23 May 2006, Hong Ying had posted an article about a contemporary Chinese critic's view of feminism and feminist thoughts. She stated that the female protagonist, Lin, is a feminist as she does not play the role of a submissive woman or even a victim like most female characters in Chinese literature. She is aggressive and knows how to seduce her Western lover, Julian Bell, using every means in order to satisfy herself.⁴⁰ This is not the only time that Hong Ying has written about a sexual relation between a Western man and a Chinese women. I have commented on on Western-Chinese couple: Mark (an American man) and Linda (a Chinese woman) in "The Woman Who Disappeared from the Forked Road" in Chapter One. Unlike the previous story, *K: The Art of Love* provides a complete different image of "Chinese woman" from the stereotypical description of "Western men and Chinese women". In order to highlight the contrast between 'the East' and 'the West', Edward Said's *Orientalism* would be a starting point to illustrate the deep-rooted stereotypes of Chinese women in Western literature. Orientalism is a perspective on world relations in which the West produces a particular version of the Orient, which then serves to

³⁸ The original interview can be found in Hong Ying's blog entry: http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_46e98efa0100g86h.html

³⁹ Hong Ying's *K: The Art of Love* was finished in 1999 and then published in 2001. However, it had been banned in 2002 in China due to a libel case.

⁴⁰ The blog of Hong Ying: http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_46e98efa010002xw.html

justify its subjugation as cultural, morally and politically inferior to the West.⁴¹ In other words, Orient has been metaphorically feminised.⁴² Asian men and women are portrayed to be in a position of inferiority compared to the powerful masculine West.⁴³ Tracing along this route of logic, it is not surprising to see that Western novels such as *The World of Suzie Wong* has ‘orientalised’ Chinese women. According to to Lucille Lok-Suk Ngan and Chan Kwok-bun:

Western representations of women frequently focus on their exotic and sexual characteristics, yet other stereotypes portray Chinese women as passive submissive and docile-attributes of the oppressed subject of traditional Chinese patriarchal practices.⁴⁴

In mainstream Western literary work, Chinese women have been objectified as an exotic object in the Western men’s eyes. Nonetheless, Hong Ying does not follow the ‘tradition’ when she describes relationships between Chinese women and Western men. Instead, she employs an ‘occidental’ approach to portray her female protagonists in particular in *K: The Art of Love*.⁴⁵ “‘Occidentalism’ is bound to gain recognition for engaging and challenging Orientalism’s tendency to depict the oppositional intellectual traditions of ‘East and West’ as static.”⁴⁶

So what is the definition of Occidentalism? According to Xiaomei Chen, “‘Occidentalism’ can actually have a politically and ideologically liberating effect on

⁴¹ Grice, Helena: *Negotiating Identities: An Introduction to Asian American Women’s Writing*, p.111.

⁴² Louie, Kam: *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*, p. 5.

⁴³ Ngan, Lucille Lok-sun and Chan Kwok-bun: *The Chinese Face in Australia: Multi-generational Ethnicity among Australian-born Chinese*, p. 157.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Another example would be Linda Lin in “The Woman who Disappeared from the Forked Road” and I have analysed this character in chapter one.

⁴⁶ Dai, Jinhua: “Foreward”, in Xiaomei Chen: *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China*, p. x.

contemporary non-Western culture” and “it illustrates how the position of Third World native cultures can create subversive intellectual inquiries in the theoretical development of American academia and English-language scholarship”.⁴⁷ Using Fredric Jameson’s “national allegory” to read *K: The Art of Love*, the main female protagonists, Lin (also known as K) could be perceived as the East and Julian Bell (the nephew of Virginia Woolf) as the West. Through their intense love affair, unlike other Chinese women in Western literature who have been portrayed as sex symbols and dainty playthings for Caucasian man,⁴⁸ Lin is portrayed as an aggressive woman as she uses her Western lover to satisfy her sexual needs.⁴⁹ In this respect, Hong Ying not only uses her blog to promote her works, but also to clarify the intention of her literary creation. By inserting her own comments in interpreting her writings, Hong Ying delivers her feminist viewpoints inside and outside her textual writings. I would argue that not only does Hong Ying make herself a postfeminist, but also a cyberfeminist as she uses the cyber world to deconstruct gender boundaries as she emphasises the aspiration of ‘gender-neutral writing’ – where women can freely express themselves on the web without paying attention to gender identities.

Compared with Hong Ying, Li Bihua does not claim to be a feminist, yet there are traces of feminist thoughts in her blog entries. One example can be seen in the entry commenting on the life of the Hong Kong actress Lydia Shum (Shen Dianxia). In 2008, the most shocking news in the Hong Kong entertainment circle was the death of the famous actress Lydia Shum who passed away at the age of 60 on 25 February. Owing to her ‘positive and humorous’ image on television, Lydia Shum was extremely popular in China and among Chinese overseas. On the same day, Li Bihua

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Sue, Stanley and Nathaniel Wagner: *Asian-Americans: Psychological Perspectives*, p.77.

⁴⁹ The blog of Hong Ying: <http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_46e98efa010002xw.html>

devoted an entry to talking about Lydia Shum. On the one hand, Li used this entry to commemorate Lydia, and on the other, to show her up-to-date awareness of current issues.

In this particular entry, Li stated that the major event in Lydia's life that drew great attention from her fans and audience was her divorce from the famous Hong Kong actor, Adam Cheng (Zheng Shaoqiu). In Li's entry, she used 'The biggest question in Lydia Shum's life?!' as the headline in order to attract her readers' attention. By commenting on Lydia's divorce, Li tried to reveal her feminist thoughts to her readers by stating that Lydia had been unhappy for much of the second half of her life because of the break from Adam Cheng. The question that Lydia wanted to ask the most was whether Adam loved her or not. Li claimed that Lydia could not overcome the major barrier in most women's lives – walking out from the shadow of a broken marriage, and that her ex-husband was the main cause of her depression and sufferings. This comment implies the feminist idea that 'woman is the ultimate victim when she fails in romance' as women in that position cannot escape from their male partners' dominance. The original post appeared as follows:



The translation of the original passage:

On the 15th day of the Lunar New Year, there are a lot of responses to Lydia Shum's special programme to commemorate the death of the super-star in Hong Kong. People in Hong Kong really miss Lydia's idiosyncratic nature: her talents, her professionalism, her excellent skills in communicating with people, her caring motherhood ... She is a comedian who cannot be replaced, however, she had to face a big challenge in life – having a broken marriage with her ex-husband was something that made her life an unhappy one. Being a host of the programme 'After the Applause', she interviewed her ex-husband, Adam Cheng and this interview has been replayed so many times during Chinese Valentine's day (15th Lunar Chinese New Year). There was a question that she wants to ask a million times when she offers a bowl of almond pear soup to Adam, "I wanted to ask you for a long time, did you ever fall in love with me?" Adam was so shocked and replied immediately, "Yes, I really liked you..." then followed his reply with a flow of unclear words, "you treated me so well ..."

When Lydia heard this, she laughed out loud immediately and tried to interrupt him, "ha ha ... that's enough, you don't need to say any more".

Did he ever love me? Is this the answer I want? Is this the truth? Does it really matter? Because of fate, people get together. Had fate? That's enough. If the conversation continues, it would only be full of explanations, comfort words, excuses, guilt and self defence ... so there is no

need to say any more. We have no power to control any change or unpredictable things in our life. Even though we know that the truth in romance is that there is no right or wrong in romance, it's about timing and we cannot force things to happen, we still want to hear that our partners have loved us.

As mentioned above, even though Lydia and Adam had separated, the ultimate thing that Lydia wanted to confirm was whether Adam had been in love with her. From this example, Li delivers the message that no matter how successful a woman is, she is still willing to be controlled emotionally by the man she loves. This portrayal of Lydia has made her a victim of love as she really fulfills the traditional role of Chinese women – being the subordinates of men. They are always the inferior and the possessions of men: once their husbands abandon them, they believe that they have lost their ‘value’ and live in agony for the rest of their lives. From this example, one can argue that Lydia was still emotionally attached to Adam as she became very ‘happy’ when she heard Adam say that he did like her. Li uses this example and indirectly tells her readers that no matter how successful a woman is, she cannot escape the ‘fate’ of being a woman as long as women see themselves as the ‘other’ of men. Fate has been a crucial theme in Chinese love stories in particular the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly school.⁵⁰ According to Perry Link, young lovers in the Chinese love stories during 1910 period are always hindered by social customs and the hand of fate (the agent of of cosmic nature).⁵¹ He continues: “the danger of falling in love lies in ch’ing [qing] itself, which is the agent of fate. When fate is evil, it is evil at a

⁵⁰In *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities*, Perry Link postulates six stages in terms of “The Romantic Route” in the love stories in the 1910s: (1) Extraordinary Inborn Gifts, (2) Supersensitivity, (3) Falling in Love, (4) Cruel Fate, (5) Worry and Disease, and (6) Destruction. These stages are the summaries of the plot development in the love stories with sad endings. Link, Perry: *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities*, p. 65.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 67.

higher order than anything else”.⁵² Lydia Shum’s story to certain extent coincides with Perry Link’s concept of “cruel fate”—Adam Cheng abandoned her for another woman and she had to admit this fact.

On the other hand, looking at this incident from a feminist perspective, Lydia Shum could be perceived as Adam Cheng’s subordinate as her emotions to certain extent still got controlled by Cheng. This accords with bell hooks’s comment:

Romantic love as most people understand it in patriarchal culture makes one unaware, renders one powerless and out of control. Feminist thinkers call attention to the way this notion of love served the interests of patriarchal men and women ... Love in patriarchal culture was linked to the notions of possession, to a paradigm of domination and submission wherein it was assumed one person would give and another person receive it. Within patriarchal heterosexists bonds were form on the basis that women being the gender in touch with caring emotions would give men love, and in return men, being in touch with power and aggression, would provide and protect. From the start heterosexual women came to women’s liberation to stop the heartache – to break the bonds of love.⁵³

In other words, from a second-wave feminist point of view, love is a hindrance for women as they cannot avoid the pain caused by men when they are emotionally chained to patriarchal heterosexual love. If they still feel attached to men after break-ups, they still live under the dominance of men. Hence, using hook’s argument to read Lydia Shum’s case, Shum immediately fits into the image of ‘victimised woman’ as she cannot break away from the patriarchal constriction (she was still emotionally

⁵² *Ibid*, p.73.

⁵³ hooks, bell: *Feminism is For Everybody: Passionate Politics*, pp. 101-102.

attached to Adam Cheng). The critique of bell hook reinforces the gender dichotomies – women are passive and men are active. However, applying a postfeminist perspective to read this blog, I would argue that it does not mean that women should not fall in love with men in order “to break the bonds of love”, instead, they should not dwell in the pain after break-ups but should try to regain their female subjectivity as they are not men’s accessories; in other words, they can actively seek their own selves — finding their self values.

Even though Li Bihua did not write about the ‘gossip’ that is linked to her, she brought up celebrities’ gossip on her blog and thus provided a network of connectivity, like Hong Ying does. This is because readers can participate in the discussions as topics such as this arouse mass interest because most people are curious about celebrities’ lives. The definitions of gossip provided by Myra MacDonald are useful in terms of illustrating the cohesiveness of gossip among female readers:

‘Gossip’ has two meanings. It can be used to signify talk about everyday matters, or it can refer to voyeuristic prying, sometimes maliciously, in other people’s lives. In both senses, it is seen as a trait of female rather than male discourse.⁵⁴

Despite the fact that Li Bihua did not intend to raise gossip about Lydia’s personal life with her readers, as she just wanted to share her thoughts with her readers, the weblog itself became a great means to let her readers leave comments on her post, and therefore, the ‘gossip’ indirectly connects Li and her readers together. In addition, although ‘gossip’ carries characteristics of female discourse, there is no concrete proof to show that the readers who left comments on this entry are all women;

⁵⁴ MacDonald, Myra: *Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media*, p. 54.

transsexuals and men who are effeminate might also join in the ‘gossip’, and in this sense, the gender boundaries can be blurred on weblogs due to the anonymity they offer.

The Emphasis on Motherhood

Given the fact that motherhood is another key element in psychoanalytic feminist ideologies, coincidentally, the two authors pay special attention to the theme of motherhood, and this common emphasis highlights the feminist nature of their blogs.⁵⁵ In her weblog, Hong Ying dedicated a couple of the entries exclusively to her mother. She wrote articles to commemorate the memories of the time that she spent with her mother and her feelings towards her mother after her mother’s death.⁵⁶ Also, seeing that Hong Ying’s recent autobiography *Good Children of the Flowers* is a memoir of herself and her mother, the recent entries about this book on her blog can automatically be classified under the category of motherhood.⁵⁷

On 25 October 2007, Hong Ying used the title “The Person that I Like the Most” to commemorate her mother who had passed away a year earlier. At the top of the page, she posted a picture of her kneeling down in front of a picture of her mother; this showed her total respect for her mother. Then she started her blog by talking about her own little daughter Sybil and how Sybil reminds her of her mother. This not only allowed Hong Ying to reveal her own maternal relationship with her daughter, but it also showed the connection she has with her mother. The emphasis on motherhood makes men invisible; Hong Ying intended to connect with her female

⁵⁵ The theme of motherhood is one of the main similarities in the two authors’ writings. Despite the fact that I have dedicated a whole section in Chapter 1 to discuss this feminist issue, I would also like to focus on this theme in their blog writings.

⁵⁶ Entries on 3 May 2006 and 24 November 2006.

⁵⁷ Hong Ying’s latest book, *The Little Girl* (published in 2011), is a collection of short stories about her own childhood. It largely focuses on the theme of motherhood.

readers as she believes that only women can understand motherhood as it is an exclusive gift to women. At the end of the entry, Hong Ying wrote the conclusion, “Mother, the person that I love the most, I have been apart from you for a year and only you will know how lonely I am without having you around”. This both shows the powerful relationship between Hong Ying and her mother and conveys the message that only a woman can understand women. This can be summarized by Lorraine Bodger’s witty comment:

There are things only women understand. We can’t help it – we were raised that way. It just goes with the territory. If you’re a woman, you would know exactly what I mean. If you are not ... well, only women understand these things.⁵⁸

Applying Bodger’s comment to analyse a comment made on this entry, it could be assumed that the respondent is female when she shows her sympathy to Hong Ying as there is so much emotion between them:

- 飞花飘茵 2007-10-25 21:20:16 [举报]

母亲永远是女儿的精神堡垒，无论在世或者离去。

当我们忧伤的时候，

在另一个世界一定还有母亲对我们的牵挂。

⁵⁸Even though this quotation is from a non-academic book, it belongs to popular reading and on the basis that popular literature is an effective way to promote feminist ideologies, I have therefore included this quotation in my analysis. Bodger, Lorraine: *511 things Only Women Understand*, p.1.

[*Translation*: No matter whether mothers are alive or have passed away, they are always the spiritual fortress for their daughters. Whenever we are upset, our mothers will be there missing us in the other world].

This reply shows a strong belief that only women can understand the essence of motherhood. This is because having a mother/daughter relationship is an innate ability in women — it is a biological bonding rather than a conceptual bonding (just like the difference between the terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’) whereby only women can understand the feeling of being mothers. This echoes with Hélène Cixous’s idea – “écriture féminine”.⁵⁹ By focusing on mother/daughter relationships, Hong Ying makes her blog a tool to connect women together.

On the other hand, although Li Bihua does not have any entry talking about her own mother, she emphasises the theme of motherhood by using her blog as a platform for her readers to express their perspectives towards their mothers. On 24 April 2006, she posted an entry on her blog to invite readers to enter a competition entitled “Short Messages for Mothers”. This competition required participants to post their messages on her blog. In this post, she clearly stated that she wanted to use her blog as a platform for her readers to express their feelings towards their mothers. This is the original advertisement from the web:

[*Translation*: I always wanted to launch this function. Owing to inconvenience and different types of difficulty, even though I had contacted various newspapers, magazines and publishers in Hong Kong, I had to give up the plan. Coincidentally, I started blogging on Sina.com and I grasped this opportunity to hold this event on my blog. Do you have difficulties in expressing your love? Do you have things to say to your mum? Put what you want to say into words, share it with others and express yourself on my blog. I have attached the original advertisement for reference.

⁵⁹ See footnote 1 in Chapter 1.

Although we do not need to celebrate mother's love only on Mother's Day, we can make every day Mother's Day. Yet it's now May [Mother's Day in most Asian countries], so I welcome all to join.

- Participants: No limitation, from 1-100.
- No plagiarism and fabrications. They must be true stories.
- Deadline: 31 May 2006.
- Prize: The Best Ten Winners will be awarded new books *Yellow Mole Crab* and *Foehn a Blue* (Hong Kong version)
- Result Announcement: 18 June 2006 (Father's Day)
- Please attached your email address for contact purpose (it will not be disclosed).

Owing to the success of this event, Li published all the participants' messages in a conventional book entitled *Short Messages for Mothers* after the event. This shows that a weblog is a good way to promote and launch events, and if the responses are well-written, they can be published as a book.

The organization of the 'Short Messages for Mothers' event on Li Bihua's blog can be considered as an excellent example of this ideology. On her blog, Li clearly stated that there was no restriction at all for the participants to join, and that everyone was welcome. Hence, no matter whether you are a male or a female, you were eligible to join and your work would not be judged on the basis of your gender. Ironically, Li Bihua did not require participants to provide their personal information, she only needed the participants' email addresses for contact purpose, therefore, the only way to identify the participants was through the email address and that did not contain traces of the real gender of the participants. This implies that the contestants could use a fabricated identity to enter the competition. Gender is no longer the crucial indicator of one's identity in the virtual world. In the light of this, through blogging, a great many people, especially the subaltern female voices, could be heard

because of the ‘ambiguous’ representation of identity on the Internet. Women who are afraid to use their ‘real’ identity to speak can use a pseudonym to express their own opinions anonymously.

One prominent example can be used to show the ‘ambiguity’ of the gender issue on Li’s blog. In one of the responses to the ‘Short messages to Mothers’ event, an anonymous participant wrote, “Mother, I am a homosexual’. From this statement, without a proper indication of any personal information, it is impossible to tell whether this participant was a male or a female, and the definition of gender seems to be useless under this circumstance as there is no way for other readers to define the gender of this person. The cyberfeminist idea suggested by Kira Hall can be clearly seen through this example, as the “social dichotomies of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual” have been deconstructed. The examples described above in the two authors’ weblogs reveal the ideology of cyberfeminism in the Chinese blogosphere as the issue of gender identities is not clear in the cases that have been cited. It could even be claimed that on-line gender identity could be perceived as a masquerade.

Redefining Femininity in Both Hong Ying’s and Li Bihua’s Blogs

Using a postfeminist viewpoint to examine Hong Ying and Li Bihua’s blogs, it can be realised that the strong connotation of the postfeminist idea ‘I want it all’ can be easily obtained in the two blogs as both Hong Ying and Li Bihua on the one hand play along the feminine images on their blogs, yet on the other, they redefine ‘what is femininity’ through their blogs. Traditionally, according to the social doctrine of gender dichotomies, men should portray their masculinity (toughness, role to lead), while women should portray their femininity (softness, role to submit) in social

settings. It is expected to see women as the inferior opponents of men. This is the idea that most second-wave feminists are fighting against in their agendas. With the emergence of postfeminism, postfeminists try to redefine femininity through reinforcing the idea of domesticity – women can be happy housewives and reveal their idiosyncratic characteristic of femininity without being suppressed by the patriarchal hegemony. According to Stéphanie Genz,

I suggest that we ‘unsettle’ femininity by pushing it over the postfeminist edge and I put forward the term postfemininity to highlight the challenges and paradoxes of a postfeminist femininity/domesticity that can no longer be conceptualized along a sharp split between feminism and housewifery, agency and victimization, work and family life. This is to acknowledge that femininity is changeable and can operate in a variety of ways, acquiring a range of different meanings that have come to the fore in our postfeminist present. Post-ing femininity (like post-ing feminism) thus involves a certain amount of rethinking, not a reversal of well-established dualisms, but a process of resignification that threatens to reinscribe what it also transposes.⁶⁰

Genz’s new definition of femininity shows that women can be tough (masculine) and soft (feminine) at the same time. The emphasis on femininity does not reinforce the gender dichotomies as femininity is not a negative thing which makes women inferior to men, instead, it is a quality that can only be possessed by women.

In Hong Ying’s case, she has a more outspoken agenda in launching this campaign as she portrays herself as a feminine icon in order to show her readers that being a postfeminist does not mean losing the essential feminine-ness of a woman. An obvious example is that Hong Ying emphasises herself as a gentle female cook and

⁶⁰ Genz, Stéphanie: “‘I AM Not a Housewife, but...’ Postfeminism and the Revival of Domesticity”, in Stacy Gillis and Joanne Hollows (eds.): *Feminism, Domesticity and Popular Culture*, p.54.

wrote a book titled *I Am a Gentle Cook* [*Wo shi wenrou di chuniang*]; in one of the entries on 2 December 2008, she talked about the criteria of being a gentle cook and demonstrated her cooking skills.



At the end of this entry, she posted a recommendation from the editor of the book *I Am a Gentle Cook*:

Hong Ying, who is the first in the top ten Chinese female writers in China, shares the secrets of her cooking and how to taste good food on CCTV. She's also one of the top ten food tasters in China and had visited different countries to taste the local cuisine. She is a harsh food taster, yet she's also a heroine to all Chinese women. She's a gentle female cook, but she's also an extreme feminist. As she endured famine when she was young, she was 'a daughter of starvation', therefore she has a natural instinct towards food. She is a writer and a cook; she writes about her unhappy past and she

cooks whatever she wants. Even though she is Hong Ying, this is the only time she is not the writer, Hong Ying.⁶¹

Hong Ying posted this comment on her blog in order to present an image to her readers that she can be a tough woman like a hard-core feminist on the one hand, yet on the other she can be a very gentle female cook who has a lot of feminine charisma. It is believed that Hong Ying intends to share with her readers that she enjoys being a 'housewife'. Her emphasis on domestic femininity reveals her postfeminist quality that has been discussed above. This can be justified by Stéphanie Genz's further comments: "The postfeminist housewife is no longer easily categorized as an emblem of female oppression but she renegotiates and resignifies her domestic/feminine position, deliberately choosing to 'go home'."⁶² This entry shows that Hong Ying wants to portray herself as a 'postfeminist': she is a woman with both masculinity (toughness) and femininity (softness). This is because Hong Ying always presents herself as a strong controversial woman who will not be defeated. In 2006, she was sued by a Chinese woman over the issue of liability over her book *K: The Art of Love*; Hong Ying lost the lawsuit, but she did not admit she that she had been defeated, on the contrary, she still claimed that she had written the novel on a basis of truth.⁶³ And at times, she explicitly declares herself a feminist and that makes Hong Ying an

⁶¹ The original quote is listed as follows:

编辑推荐中国十大女作家之首虹影，CCTV 传授美食精神和秘诀

中国十大美食家之一虹影，旅行世界尝遍人间美食经

一个脂粉阵里的英雄，一位刁钻苛刻的美食家，

一个中国最具争议的先锋作家，一位文字与食物的魔术师

一个极端的女权主义者，一位温柔的美厨娘

只因她曾是“饥饿的女儿”，对美食天然成性；只因她写作也做菜，写遥远沧桑的记忆，做随性想象的美食；只因她是虹影，只是这一次她是不写作的虹影。

http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_46e98efa0100b7fh.html

⁶² Genz, Stéphanie: " 'I AM Not a Housewife, but ...': Postfeminism and the Revival of Domesticity", in Stacy Gillis and Joanne Hollows (eds): *Feminism, Domesticity and Popular Culture*, p.50.

⁶³ See the appendix in Hong Ying's *K: The Art of Love*.

aggressive woman, therefore, in general public's eyes, Hong Ying is a muscular feminist.

Nonetheless, this is not the image that she wants her readers or even the general public to perceive; she wants her feminine side to be revealed too, which is why she always dresses femininely and the photographs on her blog are the proof of this. I would argue that Hong Ying does not want to be a typical second-wave feminist who hides her femininity, but on the other hand, she wants to redefine 'femininity' and to be a postfeminist to her readers. She claims that a tough woman can also have her soft feminine side; women in this contemporary era can be multifaceted and, most importantly, they can be the person in charge of their own lives. In the same entry, Hong Ying's achievement can be clearly seen, as one of her fan readers wrote this reply:

[灵猫神韵](#) 2009-03-25 14:11:54 [\[举报\]](#)

女作家也是女人，虹影做到了女人的极致！

[*Translation*: "A female writer is also a woman; Hong Ying, you have become the model of being a woman."]

From this comment, Hong Ying's aim to present herself as an androgynous woman – a woman who has both masculine and feminine qualities – has succeeded as her fan reader recognized the effort she put in making herself a postfeminist in public.

Compared with Hong Ying, Li Bihua uses another way to redefine femininity through her knowledge of cooking. In the traditional patriarchal Chinese culture, women were only responsible for the household duties as men were responsible for raising the family and women are responsible for taking care of the family, hence,

women were assumed to know how to cook. As Chinese food culture incorporates the ancient Chinese philosophy ‘*yin/yang*’ concept, the combination of the ingredients of a dish is very detailed as the dishes have to maintain the balance of yin and yang. Because most women in the past were illiterate, they had no knowledge of the science behind the food as most of them were not allowed to be educated; they could not read and could only make a dish based on oral transmission – from mothers to daughters. Being a female writer, Li Bihua not only demonstrates her femininity through her knowledge of cooking, but also shows her ability to understand the Chinese food philosophy. An example can be seen in the entry on 9 November 2007, when she wrote an essay on how to cook ‘turtle shell soup’ to show her comprehension of Chinese herbal medicine.



Turtle shell is a type of precious Chinese medicine that helps to get rid of toxins from the human body, and even though it is inhumane to kill turtles simply to get their

shells, Chinese people still eat them for health purposes. In this entry, Li Bihua did not just talk about the benefits of turtle shell, she has listed all the ingredients for making turtle shell soup that can cure eczema. She did not post a random recipe for her readers, she consulted professionals and checked on behalf of her readers before she wrote the comment, so in this respect, Li Bihua has doubly demonstrated her feminine role – she has demonstrated her excellence at cooking on the one hand, and she has also portrayed herself as an intellectual women on the other. This makes her a female writer with a postfeminist quality – a feminine woman with brains.

Unlike some second-wave feminists, neither Hong Ying nor Li Bihua reject the traditional feminine roles that are imposed on women, instead, they redefine femininity by playing along with the role yet adding their own insights of being a woman. They also demonstrate ‘girl power’ in their blogs as they have presented themselves as feminine writers with intellectual minds – so they are all-round women. So conducting analyses of both writers’ blogs show that postfeminist and cyberfeminist ideologies do exist in Chinese women’s blogosphere.

A New Platform for Author/Reader Correspondence

Not only do women’s weblogs improve women’s right to speak out, they also help in forming a new type of author/reader relationship. In the traditional print culture, if readers want to comment on an author’s work, they can either write letters to the publisher or directly to the author and, to some extent, some readers might even become literary critics to criticise the works from an academic perspective.⁶⁴

However, all these involve time: letters need time to be sent and articles need time to

⁶⁴ See Michel Hockx’s *Questions of Style: Literary Societies and Literary Journals in Modern China, 1911-1937*, Chapter 3.

be published. With the help of blogging, authors who want to receive instant responses from their readers can simply use their blogs as a communication tool. Barbara Kaye has stated that blogs are combination of website, bulletin board and e-mail, hence, they can be used as both one-way and two-way forms of communication. Blog users will read the bloggers' post, click on the links that the bloggers provide or even send the bloggers their viewpoints and analyses, and in this way the blog users and the bloggers are engaged in a dialogue. Seeing that "blogs are one- and two-way methods of communicating where users choose their level of participation, they may gratify entirely different needs from those met by than other Internet resources."⁶⁵

In Hong Ying's case, because she often updates her blog and is willing to respond to her readers' comments, she manages to create an interactive platform for herself and her readers to communicate. One obvious example is the following exchange:



• [一边种地一边读书](#) 2010-04-10 08:23:41 [\[举报\]](#)⁶⁶



向当代中国最优秀的女作家虹影姐姐致敬!

[*Translation:* Reader 'I am farming when I am reading books' wrote on 10 April 2010: "I would like to show my greatest respect to the best contemporary female writer, Hong Ying."]

⁶⁵ Kaye, Barbara K.: "Blog Use Motivation: An Exploratory Study", in Mark Tremayne (ed.): *Blogging, Citizenship, and the Future Media*, pp. 129-130.

⁶⁶ Hong Ying's blog: < http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/profile_1189711610.html >

On the same day, Hong Ying replied, “Thank you! I really want to give you my new book as a present and would like to seek your advice on my writings”.



[火狐](#) 回复 [一边种地一边读书](#): 2010-04-10 23:32:09 [\[举报\]](#)⁶⁷

谢谢你。很想将书送给你指教。

Another example is reader ‘Shu San Mao’ who wrote to Hong Ying on 8 November 2009 to ask where she (?) could get a copy of *Good Children of Flowers*. Hong Ying replied that the book can be ordered through a Chinese website, Dang Dang Wang.

[鼠三猫](#) 2009-11-08 21:23:35 [\[举报\]](#)

《饥饿的女儿》是我读过的中文小说中最好的几本之一，那种钝刀滑过内心的感觉，至今难忘。可惜暂时看不到《好儿女花》。

博主回复: 2009-11-12 20:38:03

当当网就可买到《好儿女花》⁶⁸

These two examples show the instant public communication between the author and readers. Not only can the reader ask questions and obtain information, other readers can also enjoy the benefits of the exchange when they read the posts. The later example also shows that instead of just commenting on readers’ responses, Hong Ying also uses the blog to promote her books as I have discussed this issue in the

⁶⁷ < http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/profile_1189711610.html >

⁶⁸ < http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_46e98efa0100flqu.html >

section of ‘Blogging As a Tool of Promotion’. Furthermore, I interviewed Hong Ying in Beijing on 20th May 2008, and she explicitly stated that she uses her blog to communicate with her readers and she wants to create a ‘platform’ for them to express themselves. I would argue that the use of the weblogs has played an important part in providing an instant communication between the author and the reader.

In contrast, Li Bihua does not often reply to her readers’ comments directly like Hong Ying, but the existence of Li’s weblog is crucial because it provides a channel for her readers to respond to her writings. In the entry on 30 March 2006, Li wrote a post titled “Granny Yuan has gone”; this post was a follow-up to her biographical work, *The Red String*.⁶⁹ Unlike the situation with traditional printing culture, Li could use her blog to provide extra information about her work to her readers and allow them to share their immediate thoughts; this created an interaction that printed materials will never provide. On the same day, there were 27 feedbacks for this post and there are two comments that I would like to pay particular attention to. This is because the first comment shows the direct relationship between Li Bihua’s blog and the reader’s comment on her work *The Red String*. The original post was:

子菁 2006-03-30 22:35:23 [\[举报\]](#)⁷⁰

看过《烟花三月》，心情很复杂，袁婆婆也在这个烟花三月离开了，惟愿袁婆婆一路走好。

[*Translation*: Ziqing wrote, “I have read *The Red String* and my feelings are very complicated. Granny Yuan also left this world in the period of the March blossom, I just hope Granny Yuan rests in peace”.]⁷¹

⁶⁹ I have discussed the feminist ideologies in *The Red String* in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

⁷⁰ < http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_475afdce010002tm.html >

⁷¹ Since the Chinese title of *The Red String* is *Yanhua Sanyue* (*The March Blossom*), the reader also includes the Chinese title in her comment.

This post shows the exclusiveness which exists between Li Bihua and those readers who have read her work. Since Li does not mention who Granny Yuan is in the whole blog entry, only people who have read *The Red String* will know who she is and what happens to her. So this comment can reveal the close communication between the author and the reader.

Another comment that is given below shows how blogs help to shorten the distance between authors and readers:

左左 2006-03-30 23:08:02 [\[举报\]](#)
有些激动，一直仰慕的作家感觉原来离自己很近，我第一次感谢网络。

[*Translation*: Zuozuo wrote, “I am excited as I reckon that the author whom I admire is not too far away from me, this is my first time to thank the Internet”.]⁷²

Zuozuo’s comment has vividly highlighted the importance of the Internet (in this case the weblog) in contributing to the interaction between authors and readers in modern times. In addition, Li Bihua raised a question in this post – “should I let Old Mr. Liu (Yuan Zhulin’s ex-husband) know the news of Granny Yuan’s death?” and some readers did comment by stating they thought that he should not be told. Then, on the following day, 31 March 2006, Li posted a longer post explaining the reason for not telling Mr. Liu the news. This is a concrete proof showing her two-way communication with her readers.

Furthermore, when Li Bihua announced the ‘Short Messages for Mothers’ competition on her blog on 26 April 2006, many responses came in from her readers on the same day. Readers started posting their messages under the same entry. Two

⁷² < http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_475afdce010002tm.html >

days later, Li Bihua updated her readers about the progress of the competition through her blog. Even though the response from Li was not immediate, she still managed to use her blog to keep her readers updated about the progress through the Internet without any geographical boundaries. This immediacy is the subject of Mary F. Rogers's comment:

... feminist notions about community often do not address the matter of where we are to build the communities we need and want for ourselves. But in today's cybernetic world, location is less an issue than it once had to be.⁷³

Another example is the entry on turtle shell soup that I have quoted above. Because of the active responses from her readers, Li Bihua dedicated the very next (19 November 2007) to answering the inquiries posted by her readers. She started off by explaining the difference between the two turtle shells – the live ones and the dead ones – and how to get them. She also suggested other ingredients for making turtle shell soup without any medicinal purpose. So Li allowed interaction between herself and her readers to communicate through the above examples, and this interaction cannot be achieved via the traditional print culture. Because of the blooming of Internet blogging, the distance between authors and readers has been greatly reduced.

Limitations on the Chinese Blogosphere

Ideally, the Internet should be “an unstoppable force for freedom of speech, regardless the political factors involved”,⁷⁴ yet this is definitely not the case in China. According to Haiqing Yu:

⁷³ Rogers, Mary F.: *Contemporary Feminist Theory: A Text/Reader*, p. 337.

People in the West are frequently told about the suppression of freedom of speech by the Chinese government, constraints on politically sensitive websites, arrests of cyber activists, and global Internet search companies (such as Google, Yahoo and MSN) giving in to the Chinese government by imposing stricter censorship to control the flow of Internet Information.⁷⁵

Not only can foreign search engines not be easily accessed in China, local microblogging services had codes of conduct imposed in order to restrict the posting of opinions on Sina Weibo (the Chinese equivalent of Twitter) on 27 May 2012.⁷⁶ This new policy to control microblogging was due to the spreading of rumours about the mainland Chinese political leaders on Weibo in March 2012. On 15 March, the Communist Party announced that Bo Xilai has been removed from his post as Chongqing's Chief due to the 'Wang Lijun incident'.⁷⁷ Because of the high position and popularity of Bo Xilai, netizens had posted many comments on different forums and blogs (including Weibo) about the Bo Xilai incident. Peter Simpson wrote about the on-line rumors about the 'military coup' resulting from the Bo Xilai incident in the UK *Daily Mail* newspaper on 22 March 2012:

⁷⁴ This was a comment by Brad Fitzpatrick and quoted in Karina Alexanyan and Olessia Koltsova's article's "Blogging in Russia is not Russian Blogging", in Adrienne Russell and Nabil Echchaibi (eds.): *International Blogging: Identity, Politics and Networked Publics*, p. 77.

⁷⁵ Yu, Haiqing: "Blogging Everyday Life in Chinese Internet Culture", in: *Asian Studies Review*, 31, p. 423.

⁷⁶ BBC news, "China's Weibo Microblog Introduces Users' Contract", 27 May 2012. <<http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-18208446>>

⁷⁷ The source of the news is a BBC news article "Bo Xilai Scandal: Timeline", 25 April 2012. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-17673505>>.

The Wang Lijun Incident: Wang Lijun used to be Bo Xilai's subordinate, he was the police chief in Chongqing, however, on 6 February 2012, Wang Lijun fled to the United States Embassy to seek asylum: it is believed that he had found that Bo Xilai's wife, Gu Kailai, was involved in the homicide case of a British businessman, Neil Heywood, in Chengdu.

Online reports of tanks on the streets of the capital Beijing and shots fired within the secure leaders' compound – which is located next door to the top tourist attraction, the Forbidden City – are being closely monitored by the international intelligence communities, including the US and the UK. Popular Chinese microblogging sites Sina Weibo, QQ Weibo and the bulletin board of the search engine Baidu, all reported ‘abnormalities’ in Beijing on the night of March 19.⁷⁸

On 31 March 2012, the Chinese government closed down sixteen websites and arrested six bloggers for posting comments that “had maliciously attacked the state leaders” after the outbreak of the Bo Xilai controversy.⁷⁹ All the episodes cited above are crucial as they provide concrete facts to prove that the Chinese blogosphere is not totally free. Chinese netizens can enjoy the freedom to voice their comments as long as they do not judge the Communist Party or make any comments that would shake the ‘stability of the Communist Party’s rule’. In this sense, a controversial topic such as ‘June Fourth’ is still taboo in China and mainland Chinese are not permitted to discuss this issue in public. This could explain why Hong Ying’s *Summer of Betrayal* and Li Bihua’s *The Old and New Ghosts from Tiananamen Square* are still banned in China and they could only be accessed outside the mainland Chinese community.

In “Understanding Men’s and Women’s Political Interests: Evidence from a Study of Gendered Political Attitudes”, Rosie Campbell and Kristi Winters wrote:

We argued that socialization processes are likely to have a complex impact upon men’s and women’s political interest. We claim that the

⁷⁸ Simpson, Peter: “Tanks in the streets of Beijing: Chinese Leaders Order Whitewash Amid Rumours of Attempted Military Coup”, *Daily Mail*, 22 March 2012.
<<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2118773/Chinese-leaders-order-internet-whitewash-amid-rumours-attempted-military-coup.html>>

⁷⁹ According to BBC news, “Bo Xilai has been stripped of his position in the Communist party’s politburo because of his connection with the suspected murder of British businessman Neil Heywood”. See footnote 76.

socialisation of girls leads them to focus upon the needs of their family and is likely to increase their interest in social welfare.⁸⁰

Campbell and Winters made their comments on the basis of Kristi Anderson's argument written in 1975 on the distinction between the political socialisation of men and of women. Anderson proved that it had been widely argued and demonstrated empirically that women generally have less concern towards politics compared with men, in particular in the distinction of their (women's) daily concerns and political events.⁸¹ Even though the Chinese blogosphere is still under the control of the government in China, it does provide a new platform for women to speak. This is because based on Anderson's argument written in 1975, Campbell and Winters commented that women generally had less interest in politics than men, and in this light, Chinese women still have 'freedom' to speak their opinions as long as they do not include political comments. From the examples of Hong Ying's and Li Bihua's blogs, they do prove that women are mainly concerned about domestic and social welfare issues instead of making critical comments about the existing government. This is because, unlike their novels or short essays, the main functions of their blogs are to provide a platform to share more personal thoughts on random issues in daily lives and to promote their new works, therefore, they might not have political agendas when they write their blogs.

To summarise, even though Hong Ying and Li Bihua have very different attitudes towards maintaining their weblogs, both authors have created a new space for themselves to perform literary creations that are not possible in traditional printed

⁸⁰ Campbell, Rosie and Kristi Winters: "Understanding Men's and Women's Political Interests: Evidence from a Study of Gendered Political Attitudes", in: *Journal of Elections, Public Opinions and Parties*, 18.1, p. 53.

⁸¹ Quoted in "Understanding Men's and Women's Political Interests: Evidence from a Study of Gendered Political Attitudes". *Ibid.*

culture. They are free to talk about any topics they want, and more importantly, they create a connectivity between themselves and their readers that reveals the feminist characteristic of their blogs. Furthermore, their focus on topics about motherhood attracts female readers' attention to read their blogs as motherhood is exclusive to women. The two authors deliver feminist thoughts and enable readers to absorb ideas about women's rights.

In addition, Hong Ying and Li Bihua are famous authors and are both extremely popular in mainland China, so it would be inappropriate for them to 'gossip' in public, such as on television or in any printed materials. However, the blogs on Sina.com provide them with a space to voice out their own opinions about controversial issues as people might assume that the blogs are more like their personal on-line diaries rather than formal announcements. Also, as they are the host of their blogs, they have relatively greater freedom to promote their new works on their weblogs without creating debates, as the blogs are categorised as personal.

Apart from creating a new space for them to speak, Hong Ying and Li Bihua also created a new platform for their readers to voice out their thoughts without carrying any gendered labels. Chinese women have many restrictions in public as the mainland society is still a patriarchal one. With the help of the Internet, however, Chinese women can express themselves under a pseudonym that does not reveal much about their identity. Hence, they do not need to worry about social criticism and the inferiority of being a woman. Even though Chinese women (and indeed men) are not allowed to criticise the Communist party and comment on political issues related to the stability of China, I still would argue that Internet blogging, to certain extent, helps women to be liberated from the traditional print culture as it deconstructs the gender dichotomies.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that feminist ideologies originated in the West, they were able to merge with idiosyncratic Chinese culture when they were imported into China, which led to the agglomeration of Chinese feminist thoughts. Employing a feminist and postfeminist perspective to analyse Hong Ying's and Li Bihua's different forms of writings can, on the one hand, reflect the transnational feminist features in Chinese female writings, and on the other, reveal how Chinese female writers contribute to the formation of female subjectivity in the Chinese literary tradition. Given that Hong Ying was once a Chinese diasporic writer and Li Bihua has always been living in Hong Kong, their works provide important insights into the forbidden voices of Chinese women as they have more 'freedom' to express their thoughts. Even though their novels have been banned in China because of sensitive issues such as the 'June Fourth Incident', their works could still be easily accessed outside mainland China. Their works have provided a broader perspective of the transnational sense of Chinese feminist thought as it is not only limited to mainland China but also includes Chinese female writers who live in different geographical locations who have been able to share the concerns of Chinese women.

When Western feminist ideas were initially imported into China in the late nineteenth century, it aroused many writers' awareness of female subjectivity. Since then, many contemporary feminist critics began using French feminist theories, in particular the Psychoanalytic feminist approach to analysing Chinese literature, and especially for Chinese women's writings. Following this trend, I also employed second-wave feminist ideologies to examine Hong Ying's and Li Bihua's short stories and biographical writings in the first chapter of this thesis. There are indeed traces of second-wave feminist ideologies such as *l'Écriture féminine*, the emphasis of the

mother-daughter relationship, 'men-as-women's-enemies', the victimisation of women, and the vengeance of women. The indications of second-wave feminist thinking in the works of these two authors verify that Chinese female writers came to realise their rights as women and also their need to find their own subjectivities – they are not the subordinates of men and they have a right to speak. In addition, I also include certain Chinese literary themes such as the supernatural and eating/cannibalism in my analyses to show that both writers incorporate both Western and Chinese thoughts in their writings.

With the increasing attention of postfeminist theories in Gender studies/Women's Studies, applying postfeminist ideologies to interpret Chinese female writers would be beneficial for understanding Chinese feminist thoughts through a transnational framework. Since postfeminism is still a controversial term as it is in the process of developing, different feminist scholars hold different views of this newly created school of thinking; even so, I still chose to apply some postfeminist ideologies such as Michèle Barrett's definitions of postfeminism—'girl power' and 'deconstruction of gender boundary'—to analyse some of the works of Hong Ying and Li Bihua as they highlight the new Chinese female subjectivity under the impact of globalised culture. In the second chapter, I discussed how the two authors' novels and novellas have demonstrated the developing postfeminist attitude among Chinese female writings. Their works stand in contrast with the mainstream of Chinese female writings, which reflect the feminist perspective of the subaltern image of Chinese women that is traditionally associated with these types of writing. This is because the two authors have created new postfeminist characterisations of their female protagonists, which have historically been mistreated under the patriarchal hegemony. Their works also explore significant issues in postfeminism in literature and film such

as allowing their female protagonists to possess ‘girl power’, in particular rewriting women in different periods of Chinese history to transform them from victims into powerful women. This is because postfeminists believe that women can manipulate men through ‘girl power’ (an exclusive power that relies on females’ femininity) and disregard the notion that men are the enemies of women. These texts help to raise readers’ consciousness of their status as women as the protagonists reject the role of ‘victims of the patriarchal society’ (‘victim feminism’) and become women who control their own destiny (‘power feminism’). I argue that my discussion of the postfeminist issues in the chosen texts discussed in Chapter 2 helps to illustrate another Chinese translation of feminism – ‘*nüxing zhuyi*’ – that focuses mainly on the issue of femininity.

Furthermore, applying Judith Butler’s ‘gender as performance’ argument to scrutinize the gender issues in the two authors’ work is beneficial as Butler’s comment challenges the existing notion of gender identity and helps to deconstruct stereotypical gender dichotomies. The bisexual issue in *Death in Shanghai* and the cross-dressing of the principal character in *Kawashima Yoshiko* challenge our conceptualisation of gender, which is a social construct rather than a biological one. Postfeminism is a relatively new concept and there is only very rarely scholarly assessment of the influence of postfeminist ideologies in Chinese literature. Seeing that there are only very little English-language scholarships on the study of Hong Ying’s and Li Bihua’s works, my thesis has provided some significant insights for future research in English on these two authors. I believe strongly that my analyses of Hong Ying’s and Li Bihua’s works using a postfeminist interpretation sheds new light on an important development in Chinese literature, in particular the postfeminist Chinese studies.

After discussing the feminist and postfeminist ideas in literature in Chapters 1 and 2, I moved on to a discussion of the differences between the two by using Hong Kong films and mainland Chinese television series as examples. Since films and drama series are highly localised products as they have strong correlations with local popular culture, the presentations of feminist and postfeminist ideologies in Hong Kong films and mainland television series are therefore very different, as they have been affected by different political and societal factors. In the analyses of the film adaptations of Li Bihua's novellas and textual adaptations of Li's screenplays, I have shown the differences between male and female directors' perspectives on feminist ideologies. Even though there is considerable evidence of the impact of Western feminist thinking, the demonstrations of this thinking are highly localised as they have been incorporated into the filmic techniques of the various directors and the traditions of Hong Kong's film history.

On the other hand, television adaptations of two of Hong Ying's novels have largely reduced the feminist voices in the original stories. This is because Hong Ying's novels always arouse controversial comments in mainland China owing to the sensitive topics in her work, so in order to ensure that the television adaptations can pass the central censorship and be accepted by the public, many alterations need to be made. A close examination of the differences between the original novels and their television adaptations can pinpoint the discrepancies in the presentations of feminist ideologies in literature and in the mass media in China. Even though there is more Chinese language scholarship comparing Li Bihua's literary texts and their film adaptations and a small number of English-language articles on either the novellas or the films that she had scripted, there has not yet been a thorough study of the two in English. Therefore, the comparative study that I have conducted on Li Bihua's

novellas and their film adaptations has offered a more comprehensive picture of the different representations of the themes and the characters in both genres. Furthermore, my analyses of Hong Ying's novels and their subsequent television adaptations represent a pioneering study in the field as there is hardly any secondary literature involving a comparison of the two.

Given the fact that the Internet has provided a new channel through which women can speak, it is crucial to consider the impact of the Internet on the development of feminism. In the final chapter of my thesis, I have employed cyberfeminism to analyse Hong Ying's and Li Bihua's blogs. Not only do the two authors' blogs provide a new representation of 'postfemininities', they also provide a new perspective on interpreting the exchange of feminist thoughts and the direct author-reader relationship that is available online. Even though Chinese people are not permitted to talk about political issues on the web in China, especially after the Bo Xilai incident, comparatively speaking, Chinese netizens tend to have a 'wider' space to speak on the web, and in particular women netizens, as they are not welcome to express their views in public. The inclusion of the study of the two authors' blogs has shown the significance of the role of the Internet in the development process of contemporary Chinese literature. In addition, despite the fact that cyberfeminist ideologies are still developing in the West, my introduction of using cyberfeminist thoughts to analyse Chinese women's blogs has provide a new insight in the study of the spread of feminist ideologies in the Chinese virtual world.

Due to limitations on the scope of my research, I have only been able to focus on the writings of two Chinese female writers, so it could be argued that the discussions are quite limited as they can hardly be claimed to represent all Chinese female writers writing today. Even so, in this thesis I have tried to provide a starting

point for portraying the unique features of Chinese female subjectivity in literature, film, and popular culture in a way that has been inspired by second-wave and third-wave feminist ideologies. By comparing Hong Ying's and Li Bihua's works, the development of feminism in Chinese female authors' writing can be revealed on a wider scale and could be considered the product of global feminism. My thesis has endeavoured to show the impact of the transnational features of Chinese feminism and the changing of Chinese female subjectivities since the second half of the twentieth century.

Future Research

Under the impact of globalisation, it is to be expected that the circulation of information will easily travel around the world. Hence, different elements of Western philosophical thinking could spread in China via the Internet (with no obvious political implication due to the Chinese government censorship), and in this context, any new feminist ideologies developed in the West would also be easily exported to China. In addition, with the blooming of financial developments in China in recent years, consumerism has become a huge issue on the mainland. Not only do men have greatly increased purchasing power, women also have strong access to consumerism. Since consumer power is one of the key features of postfeminism, it could be predicted that there will be more literary writings and films centred on this changing social phenomenon. Therefore, employing a postfeminist perspective would provide a wider scope in future discussions on the feminist issues in China, in particular, in literature, film, and popular culture.

Moreover, given the fact that the Internet has developed rapidly since the early 2000s, it is to be expected that there will be more scholarly discussions on the impact

of the Internet in China as China has the second highest number of Internet users (after the US). These changes in the mode of communication help to open up spaces for women's voices and promote feminist ideologies in China, and in light of this, we can expect that cyberfeminism will be a dominant field in Chinese feminism in terms of popular culture in the future.

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