STRATEGIES OF
MODERN CHINESE WOMEN WRITERS’
AUTOBIOGRAPHY

DISSERTATION

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By

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* * * * *

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of twentieth-century Chinese women writers’ autobiographies as they were written and received both in China and in the West. This dissertation fills a significant gap in modern Chinese literature and in the global study of autobiography by providing a full-length discussion of the autobiographical texts written by Su Xuelin, Lu Yin, Xie Bingying, Yang Buwei, and Chen Hengzhe.

In this dissertation I place their autobiographies in the historical and cultural contexts of their writing / translation while engaging in critical analysis and close reading. I treat their texts theoretically as autobiography. Therefore I question their previous use by critics as biographical material in interpreting the authors’ fictions. Through tracing where their autobiographies are continuous with and where divergent from traditional Chinese life writings, this study at once brings out the embeddedness of these texts in the historical circumstances of twentieth-century China and their intricate connections with autobiographical conventions in the West. I also discuss the presence of Western autobiographical discourse in the formation of these texts in order to highlight that these texts are cross-cultural products. By engaging with both autobiographies written for Chinese audiences and those written / translated for Western audiences, this dissertation addresses issues that are relevant to literary studies, women's studies, gender studies as well as autobiography criticism and theorizing.
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INTRODUCTION

HISTORICIZING MODERN CHINESE WOMEN WRITERS’ AUTOBIOGRAPHY

This dissertation discusses the neglected tradition of autobiographies written by modern Chinese female writers for both Chinese and Western audiences. The texts that I examine include My Life (Wo de shenghuo, 1967) and Ninety-Four Years of a Floating Life (Fu sheng jiu si, 1991) by Su Xuelin (1897-), An Autobiography of Lu Yin (Lu Yin zizhuan, 1934) by Lu Yin (1898-1934), Girl Rebel: The Autobiography of Hsieh Pingying (Nü bing zizhuan, 1936) by Xie Bingying (1906-), Autobiography of a Chinese Woman (Yi ge nü ren de zizhuan, 1947) by Yang Buwei (1889-1981), and Autobiography of a Chinese Young Girl by Chen Hengzhe (1893-1976).\(^1\) This general introduction consists of two parts. In the first part, I situate modern Chinese female writers’ autobiographies in their historical and cultural contexts. I first address the neglect of women’s autobiographies, and autobiographies in general, in China. Secondly, I discuss the absence of Chinese women’s autobiographies in the criticism of autobiography in a global context.

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\(^1\) Of the texts treated in this dissertation, the autobiographies of Su Xuelin are not available in English. A small part of Lu Yin’s autobiography has been rendered into English by Kristina Torgeson. See Ng 1996: 95-119. The autobiographies of Xie and Yang were translated into English, and Chen’s exists only in English.
context. Then, I examine the connection of the texts under discussion with traditional Chinese and Western autobiographical traditions. Finally, I propose modern Chinese women's autobiographies as a counter tradition in and of itself.

1. The Neglect of Chinese Women Writers’ Autobiographies in China and in the West

To say that autobiography in China has been suppressed might meet with refutation. One can certainly find evidence for attention to it. For example, in early post-Mao era, memoirs of the Cultural Revolution were written and read—if only as a cathartic relief of the collective memory of a past trauma. Two well-known texts serve as examples, one being Random Thoughts (Suixiang Lu, 1980) by Ba Jin, the other The Road I Traveled (Wo zou guo de daolu, 1981) by Mao Dun. These texts were published when China engaged in a heated political discussion called The yardstick of truth is practice (Shijian shi jianyan zhenli de biaozhun). The government launched this movement in 1978 when it started economic reforms after the official end of the Cultural Revolution. This nationwide political campaign attempted to legitimize the Deng regime by denouncing the former government as feudal and fascist. In such a cultural and political milieu, memories of the Cultural Revolution served a political function. Among other things, they help justify and validate the new age of modernity, science and technology, and democratic freedom of speech. Under such circumstances, both reading and writing of autobiographies became acts of political correctness in their cathartic telling of truth.
However, this trend did not lead to an academic study of autobiography. The self-written lives of modern female writers in question remain largely neglected.\(^2\) Interestingly, there is a tendency in modern Chinese literary criticism to read female writers’ works of fiction autobiographically. Yet their actual autobiographies are often dismissed, used at best as footnotes to their fiction, or appropriated to promote various political discourses, most typically May Fourth iconoclasm, nationalism, and gender issues. For example, Shao Xunmei (1906-1968) says of Lu Yin’s writings in “The Story of Lu Yin” as the preface to her autobiography: “Why should she bother to write an autobiography? She has already made her confessions in her [fictional] works.”\(^3\)

In “On Lu Yin” (Lu Yin lun),\(^4\) Mao Dun subsumes Lu Yin’s writings under the rubric of May Fourth iconoclasm. He calls her “a product of the May Fourth movement” and “an awakened woman.” He praises her works as full of “the May Fourth spirit” and her characters as representing the “development of the self.” But he also criticizes her characters as “vulnerable” and “easily discouraged.” He validates only those of her works


\(^{3}\) Shao 1934, in Lu: Preface, 8.

\(^{4}\) This essay was first published in the name of Wei Ming in *Wenxue* (Literature), 3:1 (1934).
that are more socially and politically engaged while devaluing the autobiographical tendency in her fictions as irrelevant and “narrow.” As for her autobiography, he totally disregards it.\(^6\)

Mao Dun’s attitude continues to influence critics in China even in the 1980s. For instance, in her foreword to *A Collection Beyond the Collection of Lu Yin (Lu Yin ji wai ji, 1985)*, Qian Hong aligns herself closely with Mao’s position. Although she adds a feminist dimension to the interpretation of Lu Yin’s fiction, affirming the embodiment of the private world of the author as a sign of maturing literary skills, she legitimizes Lu Yin’s treatment of her private life only through the discourse of nationalism. Qian insists that the suffering and sadness in many of Lu Yin’s short stories “are the suffering and sadness of the Chinese nation.”\(^7\) Qian sets up the national as the condition of articulation of the personal.

While Xiao Feng’s *The Biography of Lu Yin (Lu Yin zhuang, 1982)* absorbs most of Lu Yin’s autobiography, the focus of Xiao’s work completely changes Lu Yin’s own story of trauma and healing.\(^8\) Xiao dwells on Lu Yin’s love relationships and praises her three iconoclastic acts – renouncing her self-chosen engagement, marrying a man bonded by an arranged marriage, and later marrying someone about ten years her junior. Xiao’s emphasis on Lu Yin’s revolutionary acts is heavily embedded in the May Fourth


\(^6\) *An Autobiography of Lu Yin* was published on June 15, 1934. Mao Dun’s essay came out on July 1, 1934.

\(^7\) Qian 1989: 1-23.

\(^8\) See the chapter on Lu Yin for detailed examination of her autobiography.
discourse of free love as a form of resistance against traditional patriarchal suppression of the individual through arranged marriage. She represents Lu Yin as a modern educated family woman, a representation that appeals to the gender ideology of the “good wife and devoted mother” that still prevails in contemporary Chinese society.

_Emerging From the Surface of History_ (Fu chu lishi di biao, 1989), by Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua, the first critical history of modern Chinese women’s writings from a feminist perspective, contributes much to the recovery of women’s literary tradition in early twentieth-century China. In their chapter on Lu Yin, Meng and Dai interpret Lu Yin’s writings as engaging closely with gender issues of the day. They look to the “suspended stage” on which Lu Yin’s female characters act out their life’s drama and see this “stage” as a gap between “two doors.” One leads back to the traditional Chinese law of the Father, from which these characters are trying to break away in disillusionment. The other, the avenue to free love, is also disillusioning because the traditional roles of wife and mother in marriage promise nothing but the law of the Husband.9 In this study, Meng and Dai read Lu Yin’s writings as expressions of collective gender issues of women, but neglect personal voice of autobiography.

While many theorists argue that fiction is a form of autobiography,10 reading women’s fiction as autobiography may have derogatory implications. Just as Donna C.

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Stanton points out about the criticism of Western female autobiography, the term "autobiographical" "had negative connotations when imposed on women’s texts. It had been used ... to affirm that women could not transcend, but only record, the concerns of the private self; thus it had effectively served to devalue their writing."\textsuperscript{11}

The critical neglect of Chinese women’s autobiographies in China reflects the general neglect of autobiography in Chinese historical and literary traditions. Although historiography and literature were considered as mutually inclusive in traditional China, autobiography was not recognized as a genre, possibly because of the relative absence of autobiography criticism in the Chinese literary tradition. Such an absence presumably stemmed from the fact that autobiography was long held in thrall by biography, which in turn eeked out an existence in subordination to historiography. Biography has been a long established genre since Sima Qian first employed it as an important technique in his \textit{Records of the Grand Historian} (\textit{Shiji}). His style and format provided models for later historians in writing the standard histories of each dynasty. According to Pei-yi Wu, biography (\textit{zhuan}), as a main form of historiography in traditional China, connotes moral instruction, which is not true of biography in the Western tradition. The didactic role of biography in China can be seen more clearly in the verbal form of the word \textit{zhuan}, which means "to transmit." As it shoulders the responsibility of passing moral virtue onto

\textsuperscript{11} Stanton 1984, reprinted in Smith and Watson 1998: 132. Professor Dai Jinhua of Beijing University, during her graduate seminar on contemporary Chinese female writing offered in the summer of 1999 at the
posterity, a biography in Chinese does not focus on representation of a person's life and was not considered literature.\textsuperscript{12} It was an exemplary tale For the same reason, Chinese biography was almost always laudatory, impersonal, dry, and therefore "lacking" in plausibility and psychological depth.\textsuperscript{13}

Similarly, one name for autobiography in Chinese is \textit{zizhuan}, \textit{zi} meaning "self" and \textit{zhuan} "biography." Thus, lexically, an autobiography is simply a self-written biography. The close affiliation with biography, and consequently with historiography, not only renders autobiography indistinguishable as a genre but also imposes on it the constraints of historiography, such as "impersonality of tone," "suppression of an individual voice," "opacity as to the yearnings of heart or the inward workings of mind."\textsuperscript{14} In the exact prescription of Zhang Xuecheng (1738-1801), "The proper thing for the historian to do is to recount, not to originate."\textsuperscript{15}

Ohio State University, made similar observations about the ways in which contemporary Chinese female writings are often interpreted.

\textsuperscript{12} Wu 1990: 4. I have reservations about such a view, because early Chinese historiography and literature were not distinctly separated.


\textsuperscript{14} Wu 1990: 6.

\textsuperscript{15} Quoted from Wu 1990: 6.
As a vehicle of didacticism, a biography in traditional times mostly serves to commemorate the subject’s public deeds and morally virtuous conduct. Because of autobiography’s subservience to the generically laudatory biography, the autobiographer experiences enormous psychological difficulty in writing his/her life. In his book, Pei-yi Wu lists two major difficulties. One is “the lack of a suitable literary form,” and the other “the inhibition” or “taboo” in premodern China “against self-disclosure and self-presentation without a religious context.”16 Wu cites the telling example of Tang historian Liu Zhiji’s (661-721) censure of exaggerating the accomplishments of one’s forebears and of oneself in autobiography. Liu criticizes the inclusion of genealogy in writing one’s own autobiographical account, reprimands self-eulogy, and recommends reticence over candor in any autobiographical practice. In Wu’s opinion, Liu’s deprecation might have contributed to the silencing of autobiographical voices for some eight centuries.17

If the cultural milieu in traditional China was not conducive to autobiography in general, the writing of women’s autobiographies encountered greater difficulty. Although a few women in premodern China engaged in writing and even wrote their autobiographies,18 conventionally women were subjects of male-written biographies rather than writers of their own lives. Images of women in the extensive body of

16 Wu 1990: 3, 25.
17 Wu 1990: 50-60.
biographies written by male historians and writers put into relief, through contrast, the ways in which modern Chinese female writers carve out their own self-images. Therefore, I will now turn to a brief discussion of discuss traditional women’s biographies.

Like men’s biographies, women’s biographies can also be divided into the public and the private. Han Confucian scholar Liu Xiang’s (77 BC-6 BC) The Biographies of Women (Lie nü zhuan) contains the earliest public biographies of women. He treats various types of women: exemplary mothers, daughters, and wives, as well as women who deviate from the norms of his time. He gives seven categories of women, as the chapter titles indicate: Biographies Illustrating the Correct Deportment of Mothers, Biographies of the Virtuous and Wise, Biographies of the Benign and Wise, Biographies of the Chaste and Obedient, Biographies of the Chaste and Righteous, Biographies of Those Able in Reasoning and Understanding, and Biographies of the Pernicious and Depraved.

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18 Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China (1994) by Dorothy Ko offers an interesting account of Chinese women writers and artists in the late Ming and Early Qing dynasties. Writing Women in Late Imperial China (1997) edited by Ellen Widmer and Kang-I Sun Chang includes current scholarship on writing women in the late Qing.

19 Public biography refers to the life accounts included in the liezhuan sections in the standard histories, and such sections for women were called lie nü zhuan. While male subjects were extolled for their moral virtues and public achievements, most female subjects were praised for such virtues as filial piety and chastity, especially in the histories of Yuan and Ming dynasties. Private biographies were written by individual writers about their relatives and friends, often in the forms of birthday celebrations and funerary inscriptions.

20 A complete translation of the biographies included in Lie Xiang’s compilation is found in Albert R. O’Hara’s The Position of Woman in Early China According to the Lieh nü chuan “The Biographies of Chinese Women” (1971).
Following Liu’s example, all the official histories contain a section called “Biographies of Exemplary Women.” Of all the moral norms, chastity is the dominant theme running through women’s biographies throughout the ages. But standard by which chastity was measured kept changing. The histories represent women as taking increasingly violent actions against themselves, such as disfiguring and cutting off body parts as evidence of their firm will, to become paragons of chastity. The most notable change is found in The History of the Yuan Dynasty (Yuan shi) and The History of the Ming Dynasty (Ming shi). In former histories, such as The History of the Jin Dynasty (Jin shi), The History of the Northern Dynasty (Bei shi), and The History of the Southern Dynasty (Nan shi), virtues such as filial piety, female chastity, reasonableness, courage, and, occasionally, capability in leadership are accepted. These histories commend women for chastity if the women stay widowed or commit suicide after their husbands’ death. After The History of the Yuan Dynasty, however, female chastity becomes almost the exclusive concern of historians writing women’s autobiographies. The standard for female chastity reaches its peak in The History of the Ming Dynasty, in which nothing short of gory self-immolation will win women an entry in the biographical histories of virtue.²¹

²¹ The laudatory accounts of women’s lives in these histories served public functions. In “The Social Uses of Female Virtue in Late Ming Editions of Lienü Zhuan,” in Late Imperial China 12.2 (1991): 117-48, and “Desire, Danger, and the Body: Stories of Women's Virtue in Late Ming China,” in Gilmartin, et al. eds. Engendering China: Women Culture, and the State (1994), Katherine Carlitz discusses the interactions between morality and entertainment in the stories of women hurting their own bodies and taking their own lives to preserve sexual chastity for their husbands or betrothed. Tien Ju-k'ang, in Male Anxiety and Female Chastity: A Comparative Study of Chinese Ethical Values in Ming-Ch'ing Times (1988), examines the ways in which female chastity was employed for the construction of male identity and the moral identity of communities in Ming and Qing dynasties.
Private biographies of women also focus on women’s traditional virtues. Several funerary inscriptions, written by men of letters of the Ming and Qing dynasties for their mothers, exemplify the private biographies of women. Since some modern autobiographers, such as Hu Shi (1891-1962) and Su Xuelin, tend to dwell on the virtues of their mothers, much in the fashion of those premodern writers, I will summarize a few funerary inscriptions. In “The Epitaph of Fang Mu Zhang Ruren,” Gui Youguang (1507-1571) praises his mother’s virtues as a widow. For sixteen years after her husband’s death, she endures every hardship and focuses on the education of her son. When the son does not do well in an exam, she makes him kneel for a long time. Every night, mother and son work under the same light; she weaves cloth while he studies. Gui creates a sympathetic picture of his widowed mother’s hard but devoted life with her son.

Wu Weiye’s (1609-1672) wrote “The epitaph of Wang Mu Zhou Taianren” for the mother of a good friend at her funeral. Zhou Taianren’s husband gives her a lavish funeral, because she was a most wonderful wife and mother. But, while writing about this woman’s hardship, the author evokes sentimental feelings for his own mother, who endures similar hardships. His mother’s filial devotion to her parents-in-law, education of her children, and industry, he states, can be compared to those of Zhou Taianren. The author feels guilty for his lack of filiality to his mother and his less generous funeral.

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The author exclaims: "There was not a devoted mother since ancient times who did not wish for the wealth and honor of her husband and sons, yet it was very difficult to obtain wealth and power without owing a debt of conscience to someone."

Zhang Xuecheng wrote "Epitaph of Pei Mu Cha Yiren"24 for his mother. Among her many virtues, the most extraordinary is the selflessness and calm she displays in crises. Once during a flood in the area where her husband serves as an official, people come to rescue her family. But she tells them to first save the families of other people, saying that if the official’s family is evacuated first, people will fall into panic and confusion. She and her family stay upstairs in their house until the next day when everyone else is out of danger.

Although more and more women writers appeared in premodern China, the images of women found in the extensive body of women’s biographies written by male historians and writers remained prevalent. The representations of women in the official histories and private autobiographies indicate the expectations and perceptions of women in traditional China. They will also serve for me as a foil to the terms in which modern Chinese women writers have carved out their own images and have made their counter-tradition of “talking back.”

Twentieth-century Chinese critical tendency to degrade autobiography may be attributed to the changing attitude toward individualism in China. As Ian Watt correctly suggests, individualism is “a vast complex of interdependent factors.”25 To define it in

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any fixed terms is not possible and tracing its development is a task too forbidding for any single study. But for the sake of the present inquiry, it is helpful to grasp some basics about individualism and its reception by Chinese intellectuals in modern times. In Western philosophies such as René Descartes and Immanuel Kant propose, the ego is separated through rational consciousness from both the external world of objects and the physical existence of human beings. This model of individualism is a notion of self defined by its essential interior and intrinsic value independent of social, historical, and economic circumstances.26 But the human and social sciences have characterized individualism by its emphasis on the individuality of the person. But more recent scholarship of comparative cultural analysis has relativized this stress on human individuality. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz observes that the traditional Western view of the

person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action, organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively to other such wholes and against a social and natural background, is ... a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world’s cultures.27

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The historical contingency of both the individual and the ideology congruent to
the individual’s point of view was signaled by the proclaimed death of “the bourgeois
subject,” which originates in Friedrich Nietzsche’s assertion that the subject, sometimes a
synonym for the individual, is not a given but an invention. As Nietzsche puts it, “The
’subject’ is the fiction that many similar states in us are the effect of one substratum: but
it is we who first created the ‘similarity’ of these states; our adjusting them and making
them similar is the fact, not their similarity (-which ought rather to be denied).”²⁸

Jaroslav Prušek singles out “subjectivism and individualism” as “the most
characteristic qualities of Chinese literature from May Fourth Movement of 1919 to the
outbreak of war with Japan.”²⁹ Moving beyond the “kindred spirit” and “moods” that
Prušek remarks between early modern Chinese literature and European Romanticism,
Lydia Liu’s analysis of individualism within the parameters of Chinese literary modernity
revises this model and serves as a good starting point for situating this study of modern
Chinese women writers’ autobiography. She examines the neologisms in Chinese, such
as ziwo, geren, geren zhuyi (self, individual, individualism), that were deployed in the
diverse contexts of Chinese modernity. Resisting any essential core of stable meaning,
she gives an account of the rise and fall of individualism in the complex political and
cultural realities of twentieth-century China.

In the early Republican period, according to Liu, geren or the individual was a
more important site of reform than politics, the economy, or the educational system.

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²⁸ Nietzsche 1967: 267, 269.
²⁹ Prušek 1980: 3.
In the New Culture movement, a radical polarization occurred that set the discourses of individualism and Confucianism in opposition to each other. In 1916, Li Dazhao published an article called “Creating a Youthful China” (Qingchun Zhongghua zhi chuangzao), in which he argues that the creation of a new culture in China depends on the iconoclastic deconstruction of tradition through the authority of ziwo (self). Hu Shi, in “Some Modest Proposals for the Reform of Literature” (Wenxue gailiang chuyi, 1917) and “Toward a Constructive Theory of Literary Revolution” (Jianshe de wenxue geming lun, 1918), calls for sincerity in writing and breaking away from the classical canon written in wenyan, or classical Chinese. In June, 1918, New Youth (Xin qingnian) brought out a “Special Issue on Ibsen,” which carries a full translation of Ibsen’s A Doll’s House, rendered in collaboration between Hu Shi and Luo Jialun, as well as Public Enemy translated by Tao Lugong. Hu Shi followed up with his essay “Ibsenism” (Yibusheng zhuyi) in New Youth (1918), in which he declares a commitment to individualism, which he defines in term of Ibsen’s concept of egocentrism that emphasized one’s own individual needs above all else. In the meantime, Zhou Zuoren, in “Humane Literature” (Ren de wenxue) adds a twist of ren or humanism to individualism that promised to liberate the individual from the shackles of Confucian tradition.

However, Lydia Liu challenges Prušek’s assertion that subjectivism and individualism characterize May Fourth literature. She argues that “the discourse of

30 See Denton’s translation in Denton 1996: 123-139.


32 Liu 1995: 79-9, 94.
individualism” in May Fourth China helped in “the process of inventing *geren*
[individual] for the goals of liberation and national revolution” and states that “despite its apparent clash with the nation-state, the discourse of individualism finds itself in complicity with nationalism.”33 Thus, we can see that individualism began to gradually acquire a negative status. The May Fourth concepts of the individual and nationhood find expression in Hu Shi’s *xiaowo* as the individual “I” and *dawo* as an extension and only possible renewal of “I” in society. Liu posits that Hu Shi’s subordination of the individual to society does not indicate “a retreat from individualism” but “a logical expression of the theory of modernity,” the point of which is “to constitute them [individuals] as citizens of the nation-state and members of a modern society.”34 When leftist and Marxist writers and intellectuals joined the debate, they reinvented and criticized individualism as a manifestation of bourgeois ideology.35

Kirk Denton’s account also reveals much about the complex, tensioned, ambiguous, and constantly shifting relation between individualism and other prevalent political discourses at various times in China. Denton identifies two basic conceptions of the self that later scholars constructed from the Confucian philosophical tradition, one of which he calls “the determined self” and the other “the transcendent self.” The former view of self is intricately connected with “the Confucian political system of kingship and imperial authority” and “familial authoritarianism,” whereas, in the latter view, the


34 Quoted from Liu 1995: 95.

connection of the self with the divine potentially enables it to achieve sagehood through conscientious self-cultivation. However, rather than argue for a mechanical distinction between these two notions, Denton focuses on the holistic union between the internal self and the external world. He points out that even the transcendent consciousness “was also grounded in a cosmology that assumed the unity of the individual mind with other minds through the divine.”

The theme of interconnectedness runs through Denton’s subsequent analysis of the tension between individualism and nation-building in the late Qing period (1840-1911), between romantic individualism, tradition, and nationalism in the May Fourth period (1919-1926), and between the intellectual self and revolutionary collectivism and the masses throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Underneath the varying forms of individualism and their interplay with the diverse discourses in their sociopolitical circumstances, Denton unveils a traditional unity between the self and the external world that discursively enables the self to play a role in historical transformation.

The intense intellectual involvement with individualism led to a proliferation of autobiographical writings by modern Chinese writers. Leo Ou-fan Lee observes the popularity of the autobiographical mode of writing on the Chinese literary market in the 1920s that appealed to an “autobiographical mania of the Chinese audience.” However, anti-traditionalism, anti-imperialism, nationalism, and revolutionary collectivism

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remained the predominant critical categories in the study of literature. Women writers' self-representations do not fit neatly into these critical categories, and therefore become an anomaly oddly incongruent with these discourses. As acts of self-assertion, women's autobiographies remain in oblivion in China until the present.

Modern Chinese women's autobiographies have yet to be incorporated into global criticism and theorizing of women's autobiography. Definitions of autobiography in the West have been contested and negotiated ever since the genre was established as a field of study in the first half of the twentieth century. In "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," Georg Gusdorf defines autobiography as an exclusively Western male enterprise. To him, it "expresses a concern peculiar to Western man." He also insists that "autobiography is not possible in a cultural landscape where consciousness of self does not exist," such as that of Asian nations.39 Roy Pascal also argues that autobiography is "a distinctive product of Western, post-Romantic civilization, and only in modern times has it spread to other civilizations."40 These claims implicate autobiography in a notion of selfhood that is male, rational, privileged, and universal in its essential humanness.

The myth of autobiography as a linear narrative on the development of Western white male subjectivity, however, began to be debunked by feminist and revisionist theorists of women's autobiographies starting in the late 1970s. By 1995, growth of the field led Paul John Eakin to declare: "[T]he serious and sustained study of women's autobiography ... is the single most important achievement of autobiography studies in


the last decade.” Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s 1998 anthology, *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, provides a valuable guide to the theorizing of women’s autobiography as it evolved in the West. As this dissertation cannot do justice to the extensive body of scholarship on women’s autobiography, I will offer an overview of Smith and Watson’s introduction, as it relates to my study of modern Chinese women writers’ autobiographies.

The criticism of women’s autobiography as an academic field came into being around 1980 with the experiential model that focuses on the formation of female subject based on women’s experience. Feminist theorists point out that a patriarchal view of autobiography makes women’s self-narratives invisible. Some posit a relational model of female autobiographical writing. Susan Stanford Friedman is one of the first critics to take issue with the conventional Western definition of autobiography: “From both an ideological and psychological perspective … individualistic paradigms of the self ignore the role of collective and relational identities in the individuation process of women and minorities.” Based on this critique, she observes that women’s autobiographies, typically relational, exhibit “an awareness of group identity as it intersects with individual identity.”


42 The first representative work of this model is *Journeys: Autobiographical Writings by Women* (1979), edited by Mary G. Mason and Carol Hurd Green, which includes excerpts from British and American women’s autobiographies. In this collection, Mason argues for the establishment of female identity as relational. Even more influential was the first anthology of essays in the field, *Women’s Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (1980), edited by Estelle C. Jelinek. Jelinek characterizes women’s autobiographies as personal, domestic, fragmentary, and discontinuous.

...the self-discovery of female identity seems to acknowledge the real presence and recognition of another consciousness, and the disclosure of female self is linked to the identification of some 'other.' This recognition of another consciousness ... this grounding of identity through relation to the chosen other, seems ... to enable women to write openly about themselves.\textsuperscript{44}

The idea that autobiographies of women and minorities are predicated on a sense of relatedness to and the awareness of others contributes much to the revision of patriarchal definitions of autobiography as delineated by Gusdorf and Pascal. As a pioneer attempt to theorize women's autobiography, the relational model essentializes women through neglecting specificities of class, ethnicity, and geographic locations.

By late 1980, none of the definitional parameters of the early feminist critics remained uncontested. In different ways, feminist critics critique the essentialism of first-stage criticism and put into relief the multiple differences of the female autobiographical subject.\textsuperscript{45} An important debate among critics of this period concerns whether or not to broaden the definition of autobiography to include letters, diaries, journals, oral histories, and other personal narratives of women.\textsuperscript{46} The same period saw a breakthrough in the study of women's autobiography in several ways. Moving beyond a simply gendered

\textsuperscript{44} Mason 1980, in Smith and Watson 1998: 321-324.

\textsuperscript{45} Much in the fashion of French feminism, Nancy K. Miller and Donna C. Stanton, respectively in "Toward a Dialectics of Difference" and "Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?", laid important groundwork for revising gender essentialism. As a marker of women's autobiography as a distinct genre, a new nomenclature was proposed by Donna C. Stanton "autogynography".

identity, scholars in the field attended to women’s textuality and the history of women’s cultural production, put globalize women’s autobiography in global perspective, and opened up to other textual forms and representations of diverse sexualities. The introduction of the relational model that focuses on women’s fluid boundaries and the confessional model certainly widened the scope of the field. These brought a significant change to the field of women’s autobiography.

Between the late 1980s and mid 1990s, materialist and difference theorists began to emphasize the importance of historical and geographical locatedness. Scholars and publishers rediscovered a multiplicity of Western women’s autobiographical writings from the past and reclaimed African American autobiographies and immigration

47 In this respect, Sidonie Smith’s A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-representation (1987) and Françoise Lionnet’s Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture (1989) were major contributions.

48 For example, see Life/Lines: Theorizing Women’s Autobiography (1988) edited by Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck.

49 See The Private Self (1988) edited by Shari Benstock. Two of the essays included were most influential: Susan S. Friedman’s “Women’s Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice” and Shari Benstock’s “Authorizing the Autobiographical.”

50 This model is represented by Rita Felski’s Beyond Feminist Aesthetics (1989), in which she examined several European women’s confessional narratives in their social contexts and critiqued the existing gender essentialism.

51 Inclusionary, nontheoretical, and focused on women’s lives rather than texts, Carolyn Heilbrun’s Writing a Woman’s Life (1988) did much to publicize women’s autobiographies as a field of study.

52 Felicity Nussbaum’s The Autobiographical Subject (1989) brings to light much eighteenth-century women’s writing; Regenia Gagnier’s Subjectivities (1991) examines neglected texts by nineteenth-century British working-class women writers; Mary Jean Corbett’s Representing Femininity: Middle-Class Subjectivity and Victorian and Edwardian Women’s Autobiography (1992) contains analyses of Victorian women’s autobiographies.

narratives, such as Asian American women’s writing. These all began to constitute a part of the general interest in autobiography.\textsuperscript{54} The work of reclaiming ethnic women’s autobiographical practices contributed much to the broadening of the canon and the theorizing of women’s autobiography. Theories of interpenetration of history and fictional invention as did memoir problematizing the relation of autobiographical texts and autobiography offered alternative ways of reading.\textsuperscript{55} At the same time, postcolonial and postmodern theories penetrated the study of women’s autobiography. Postcolonial theories made it possible for women’s multiply colonized status in many parts of the world to be examined and concepts of women’s subjectivity to be related to the social and economic specificities of their circumstances.\textsuperscript{56} Postmodernism, combined with


\textsuperscript{55} Of the studies of ethnic women’s autobiographies, much scholarship has been focused on Maxine Hong Kingston’s The Woman Warrior. For example, in Fiction in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention (1985), Paul John Eakin regards Kingston’s work as a form of self-invention. Sidonie Smith, in A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-representation, considers it to be self-representation. Both critics acknowledge that Kingston’s work deliberately confuses the boundary of fact and fiction.

feminism, opened up new discursive avenues to theorize women’s autobiographical practice in its subversive relation to “autobiography” and to speculate about the role of autobiography in the embodiment of women’s subjectivity.

Although the field of autobiography criticism and theories has grown rapidly in the recent years, Chinese women’s autobiographies, written in Chinese and in English remain largely invisible. The already existing body of scholarship on Asian American texts in general and Chinese American women’s texts in particular only addresses the concerns in immigration narratives in American social and cultural settings. They examine “narratives of immigration” and theorize “specific national identities, hybridity, and generationally distinct histories.” Therefore, although the canon of women’s autobiography has been broadened, it needs to be further opened to include autobiographical texts by Chinese women writers.

2. The Anxiety of Early Chinese Autobiography

In discussing modern Chinese women’s autobiographies, a critic encounters problems of definition and genre, for almost all the cases in question are rooted in one way or another in both Western and Chinese traditions of autobiography. Since any


58 A significant book on this topic is Sidonie Smith’s Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body (1993), in which she discusses how women in their autobiographies negotiate their subjectivity through embodiment as opposed to disembodied male subjectivity.

definition in specific terms could not fully embrace the complexity of modern Chinese women’s autobiographies, I will give a profile of women writers’ autobiographies in modern China by demonstrating how they engage the conventions of Chinese and Western autobiography and situate the texts in the historical and cultural contexts from which they emerged. I will first discuss Chinese traditional forms of autobiography and the shadow they cast over modern texts. Then I will examine the practice of Western models of autobiography in modern Chinese women writers’ self-representational texts by looking at how women writers engaged in autobiographical practices as Western literature was introduced to China during the New Culture Movement.


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authorial self-accounts and prefaces (zixu). However, since my study is not an overview of the early Chinese autobiographical writings, I will briefly introduce autobiographical practices and strategies that continue to be employed by modern Chinese women writers.

One of the earliest forms of Chinese autobiography is the self-written preface and postface, in which the authors of literary and historical texts paint their self-portraits. “The Self-Account of the Grand Historian” (Tai shi gong zixu) (145-85 B.C.) as the postface in Sima Qian’s Records of the Grand Historian (Shi ji) is a good example. As a self-conscious historian, Sima Qian refers to himself as the Grand Historian instead of using the first person pronoun. The first part of this self-account is a rather lengthy genealogy, in which he traces his family history back to antiquity. When he talks about himself, he gives more a self-vindication than an account of his life. It is well-known that Sima Qian completed Records of the Grand Historian in prison. When General Li Ling was captured by the Xiongnu, enemy of the Han, Sima Qian praised his great deeds in defending Han. However, when Li’s treason was revealed, Sima Qian was sentenced to death for the crime of deceiving the emperor. But Sima Qian chose castration and imprisonment in order to complete his project. He represents his misfortune as a blessing in disguise, because it motivated him to finish his great work. Like Sima Qian and many other ancient writers, modern Chinese female writers, and male writers for that matter, often write a preface as a way to justify their autobiographical act, as I will discuss shortly.

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62 Using a section separate from the main body of the text as a way of inserting authorial self-account was practiced in the West as well. See Misch 1951, Vol. 1: 307-25.
The other side of the coin is the strong self-assertion in an ancient piece called
“Self-Record” (Ziji), the last chapter in Wang Chong’s (27-91) On the Balance of Things
(Lun heng). Unlike Sima Qian, Wang denigrates his ancestors and glorifies himself.
Referring to himself as Chong in the third person, he mentions his careful choice of
compny, uprightness in office, and conscientious self-examination. Most importantly,
he dwells on his precocious talent for learning in his childhood and names the classics
that he studied. Pei-yi Wu highly commends Wang’s “freedom from historiography,”
“independence of mind,” and “contentious iconoclasm,” and recognizes Wang’s work as
“the first untrammelled autobiographical expression in China.”\textsuperscript{63} Breaking the pattern of
ancestral eulogy, Wang’s work serves as an example of self-assertion in ancient China.
But it can also be taken as an indication of the suppression of self.

However, self-narration in first person did not occur until Cao Pei’s substantial
autobiographical preface to his prose work Tianlun. He makes no mention of his book,
includes no genealogy, and focuses exclusively on self-eulogy: his excellence in a variety
of activities, such as horsemanship, archery, swordsmanship, and even parlor games. His
self-reference as “I” is the most notable innovation in early Chinese autobiographical
writings.

These examples suggest inhibition against and desire for autobiography coexisted
in traditional China, both of which manifested themselves in women’s autobiographical
writings. While a culturally induced humility as a virtue made it difficult for both men
and women to write their lives, its constraint on women was doubled by the gendered

\textsuperscript{63} Wu 1990: 45-6.
requirement of reticence. Thus, it is not surprising that women’s autobiographical accounts were few in ancient times. The first existing autobiography written by a woman is Han scholar Ban Zhao’s (32-102 A.D.) “Preface to Admonitions to Women” (Nü Jie Xu). This piece represents traditional gender norms that were mostly avoided by women writers of the May Fourth generation. Ban Zhao makes three points in her self-account: She apologizes for her worthlessness and obtuseness; she speaks of the humility and piety with which she serves her husband’s family; she states her purpose for writing Admonitions for Women – to prepare her untrained daughters for married life. The self-image projected here fits neatly with the three roles of a woman as filial daughter, obedient daughter-in-law, and mother shouldering the responsibility of instilling gendered role behavior into her daughters.

It may be an exaggeration to claim, as Pei-yi Wu does, that Song poet Li Qingzhao’s (1084-1151) “The Postscript of A Catalogue of Bronze and Stone Inscriptions” (Jin shi lu hou xu) “is the only autobiography written by a Chinese woman until fairly recently,” but in fact autobiographies written by women were rare in ancient China. Almost all the modern female writers’ texts exhibit intense involvement with art and literature, as depicted in Li’s piece, but not her idyllic picture of family life. Li Qingzhao and her husband Zhao Mingcheng (1081-1129) were both literary scholars. They collected books, paintings, and antiques with great enthusiasm and particularly enjoyed making rubbings of ancient stone or bronze inscriptions. The 1126 invasion of Kaifeng by the Jurchens from the north disrupted their life. The manuscript of A

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64 Wu 1990: 64.
Catalogue of Bronze and Stone Inscriptions, a collaborative work of husband and wife, was among the few things that survived the turmoil. Writing the postscript to commemorate their conjugal happiness, their shared passion for art and books, and their work, Li had enough justification to write about her life. In the piece, she starts with her marriage and briefly introduces her own and her husband family’s financial status without making it a genealogy. Her focus is on the vivid, and occasionally sensuous, details of life with her husband, such as perusing art works and munching the fruit he brought home. She also describes a game they played of giving the exact textual locations of literary allusions. Because of her excellent memory, Li states she often won these games. Li shows little, if any, interest in the virtues expected of her gender. She economized only to buy books, and indeed, she portrays herself as different from other women in that she liked simple clothing and avoided jewelry and decorations. Pei-yi Wu points out, “When she draws parallels between her life and those of historical figures, the allusions are all to men, not to good wives and virtuous widows.” 65 Wu thinks that, being a woman and a writer of ci (a genre which is more permissive of representing emotions) it might have enabled her to reveal her private life. Yet at the same time, Wu is aware that Li’s autobiography is surreptitious, concealed in a postscript and an account of her husband’s work in making the anthology, which testifies to the strong hold of historiography on autobiographers. 66

Almost all the modern Chinese female autobiographers treated here use the prefaces and display varying degrees of inhibition against self-writing. They often use a rhetoric of self-deprecation and self-justification. For instance, although Lu Yin’s autobiography is unique in not including a self-written preface, writing her own life did not come easily. She reveals in her autobiography that her self-representational attempt starts with *A Brief Biography of a Girl Named Yin (Yin niang xiao zhuan)*, a work she wrote in 1919 while at college, but later burned. This piece reminds one of Tao Qian’s (365-427) *Biography of Master Five Willows (Wu liu xiansheng zhuan)*, which Pei-yi Wu calls “self-written biography” or “pseudobiography,” because it “allows the autobiographer to hide behind both a mock generic form and an elusive persona …” This effort to hide the personal voice is clearly present in Lu Yin’s writing of *A Brief Biography of a Girl Named Yin*, as she recalls in her autobiography:

But this kind of experimental work should be kept as quiet as possible. Otherwise, if it came out bad, I would be a laughing stock. Therefore I stayed away from everybody everyday, hiding in a corner of the library and writing secretly. A few days later I read over my writing and found it disorganized and unsystematic. Discouraged, I put it away in the bottom of my suitcase. This unfinished draft was never completed. Two years ago I burned it. It is nothing now but a trace of memory in my writing life.

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67 Yet we should also bear in mind that she died a few months before her autobiography came out.


69 Wu 1990: 60.

70 Lu 1934: 80.
The secrecy and shame involved in the process may well be a result of the prohibition against coming to voice. Her textual self-mutilation may also be connected to a guilt about transgressing gender norms, as well as cultural norms, by taking up the pen and launching an “immodest” project of self-commemoration. Even when she imagines writing another autobiography at the age of sixty, she sees herself as worthy of it only if she had enough literary accomplishment.71

Su Xuelin’s writings demonstrate a similar uneasiness. Although Love for My Mother (Ji xin, 1929)72 is based strictly on her personal experience, she does not admit that it is an autobiography. She writes in the preface to My Life: “This book [Love for My Mother] is mainly concerned with the exaltation of my virtuous mother, and self-narration is of secondary importance. Furthermore, I wrote the book in the third person as fiction. It certainly cannot be taken as autobiography.”73 The ritual of modesty can be more clearly seen in her professed autobiographies. In the preface to My Life, Su apologizes for her autobiographical act: “It is too early yet for me to write my autobiography.” She justifies her act by invoking both Chinese and Western authorities – Hu Shi and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). I focus on Hu Shi here. According to her account,

71 Lu 1934: 88.

72 Written from the narrative point of view of female protagonist Xingqiu, this work contains stories of her education in France, her Christian conversion, her marriage, which are closely intertwined with the narrator’s nostalgic portrayal of her mother. In A History of Modern Chinese Fiction, C. T. Hsia renders this title as Bitter Heart. In her doctoral dissertation, Lingzhen Wang translates it as A Pricked Heart. My translation is based on the semantic explanation of Chinese scholar Shen Hui: “‘ji xin’ was taken from a line in The Book of Poetry. ‘Ji’ was a tree that survived very rarely. When ‘ji’ was young, it was called ‘ji xin.’ People sometimes compare themselves to a tender tree in need of the nurturance of a loving mother in order to grow. Therefore, love for one’s mother was called ‘ji xin.’” This new translation befits the theme of the novel, which is focused on the protagonist’s love for her mother. See Shen 1991: 12-3.

Hu Shi’s call for life-writing in China was the first factor that motivated her to write her own life: “When Mr. Hu Shi was alive, he advocated biographical literature.” She looks up to Hu Shi’s *Self-Narration at Forty* (*Si shi zishu*, 1933) as an exemplary autobiographical text. Indeed, *My Life* exhibits much similarity to Hu Shi’s work in structure, both texts consisting of six previously published autobiographical essays. In *Ninety-Four Years*, Su again attributes her autobiographical act to outside circumstances, holding the editors and publishers accountable and hiding behind them. She would always decline their invitation in the following way, “I have *Love for My Mother* … and *My Life* … Aren’t they enough? Besides, only a person of historical value deserves to write an autobiography. I am a lowly and unaccomplished person. If I do the same, wouldn’t I be ridiculed? Let’s just forget it.” Therefore, she declares the writing *Ninety-Four Years* was “compelled by circumstances.”

In Xie Bingying’s case, her foreword in the 1936 edition of *The Autobiography of a Female Soldier* (*Yige nü bing de zizhuan*) reveals that the appearance of her autobiography was also a difficult process. Although she had completed the narration of her life in the elementary and middle school by 1930, she would not have thought of publishing an autobiography but for the urging of Liangyou Book Publishing Company. At the end of the foreword, she reiterates her concern that the Chinese public might frown

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on her autobiographical act, because the cultural environment in China was not the same as in Europe and America. However, she decided to defy society and published her autobiography.76

Chen Hengzhe’s autobiography, *Autobiography of a Chinese Young Girl* was written in English and published in 1936 in the United States under the name of Chen Nan-hua. The concealment of her real identity may be partly explained by the motivation behind her autobiographical act:

I have been one of those who not only have lived through that whirlpool of cultural and social conflicts which became acute just before and after China was made a republic, but have also attempted to shape their own lives from that whirling current. For this reason, my early life might be taken as a kind of specimen, revealing both the heartaches and joys of a life that has struggled in that perilous current of water.77

Here individual history merges with China’s modernization process, and the individual uses her story as an example of the struggle of the young women and men of her generation. Chen clearly explains the reason why she chose not to use her real name in writing her autobiography:

... [M]y motive in writing this autobiography is not for an exhibition of the ego. It is true that the ego is pre-eminently there, but I have used it only as a mirror from which are to be reflected the society and the generation to which this ego belongs, but from whose mortifying grip it has struggled to escape.78

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76 Xie 1936: foreword, 1-5.

77 Chen 1935: Foreword, vi.

These are some of the examples of modern Chinese women writers’ dilemma in writing their autobiographies. This dilemma could be cultural embarrassment as demonstrated in ancient and modern writers of both sexes. But the fact that women in traditional times were most often objects of male representation adds a gender dimension, in addition to its cultural dimension, to the autobiographical reserve on the part of modern Chinese women writers.

3. The Influence of Modern Chinese and Western Autobiography

The social, political, and intellectual contexts in which modern Chinese female writers lived and wrote were complex. China underwent multiple changes in the process of modernization. The emancipation of women related most closely to the lives of women writers of the May Fourth generation. Women began to have access to modern education, which differed from the Confucian education for elite women. Public schools opened and adopted Western-style textbooks in place of the Confucian classics. Christian missionary girls’ schools were established in the late nineteenth century, first in southern provinces and then in northern cities such as Beijing, to be followed in the twentieth century by secular Chinese girls schools and co-educational schools. These changes liberated girls from the walled domain of the Confucian home. Many May Fourth women writers benefited from such changes as described in their autobiographies.

The May Fourth movement also had an important impact on many writers and intellectuals. In 1919, Shandong province was conceded to Japan at the Versailles peace conference, the result of secret wartime agreements between Japan and Britain, France,
and Italy in 1917, and of a similar secret deal by Japan with the Anfu Government in Beiping in 1918. Such news triggered nationwide patriotic movements in all walks of life. Student demonstrations, merchant closures and boycotts, and labor-union strikes took place in cities all over the country. The student movement became steadily more organized, patriotic, and active. The Beiping warlords’ jailing of 1,150 students raised the tension even further. When the warlords released them because of widespread public pressure, nationalism came to at a high point.

The 1917 Literary Revolution and the New Literature Movement inspired May Fourth female writers even more. In 1915, Chen Duxiu published in Shanghai a journal called New Youth that promoted an intellectual revolution that condemned Confucianism and acclaimed Western thought. In 1917, Hu Shi published his famous essay “Some Modest Proposals for the Reform of Literature” in the first issue of New Youth and formally launched a literary revolution. The eight guidelines of writing laid down in his essay include: (1) Writing should have substance, (2) Do not imitate the ancients, (3) Emphasize the technique of writing, (4) Do not moan without an illness, (5) Eliminate hackneyed and formal language, (6) Do not use allusions, (7) Do not use parallelism, (8) Do not avoid vulgar diction. Hu Shi’s effort formally established vernacular language (baihua), as opposed to classical language (wenyan), as the major form of literary expression. Pushing beyond Hu Shi’s ideas of reform, the more radical Chen Duxiu
hoists the banner of the “Army of the Literary Revolution.” He unreservedly advocates for “a plain and lyrical nationalist literature,” “a fresh and sincere realist literature,” and “a clear and common social literature.”

In response to the call for literary revolution, May Fourth writers sponsored new literary magazines and literary societies. In the early 1920s, New Youth abandoned its leadership in New Literature and took a political turn. In 1921, Mao Dun assumed editorship of Short Story Monthly (Xiaoshuo yuebao) and turned it into a major instrument in the promotion of New Literature. The Association for Literary Studies (Wenxue yanjiu hui) was founded in January 1921 and published its manifesto of New Literature in the first issue of this renovated journal (Volume 12, Number 1). This literary organization was known for the social orientation of its members and their art-for-life attitude toward literature. The writers who founded the Creation Society (Chuang zao she) believed in “art for art” more than anything else. However, Leo Ou-fan Lee describes their difference as “a humanistic matrix of self and society.” This humanistic ethos tends to take the form of social engagement with the Associationists and individualism with the Creationists.

In this climate of radicalism and iconoclasm, modern Chinese writers preoccupied themselves with expression of the self. Lee calls it “an obsession with self.”

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80 Chen Duxiu 1917, in Denton 1996: 140-145.
81 Lee 1986: 475.
82 Lee 1986: 452.
terms of Jaroslav Prušek, this undivided interest in self-expression mounts to a “modern mental complex” of “subjectivism and individualism.” 83 This new literature written in the vernacular language gives rein to the expression of individual personality, resulting in an intense interest in the writing of biography, letter, diary, and first-person fiction, and autobiography. However, we note that this trend of subjectivism co-existed with the construction of various forms of collective identities, the most important of which is nationalism.

Of all the social and cultural changes of the time, perhaps the adoption of the vernacular as the means of writing had the most direct impact on women’s writing by enabling them to write autobiographies, as well as fiction. Lu Yin is one of the writers who put explicit emphasis in her autobiography on this impact: “The year I entered college, Mr. Hu Shi was actively promoting the vernacular. ... I first conceived the idea of writing a novel. But what should I write about? ... I decided that I should write my own life.” 84

In the foreword of the English translation of Yang Buwei’s autobiography, Zhao Yuanren, the author’s husband and translator of her book, also mentions the decisive influence of the vernacular on Yang’s writing of her life. Zhao says that his wife started her autobiography in 1913. But she did not get very far because the archaic literary

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83 Prušek 1980: 3.
84 Lu 1934: 79-80.
language was not a suitable medium for telling her story. It was not until after the 1917 literary revolution made writing in the vernacular respectable that Yang took courage in writing and came forth with her story.\textsuperscript{85}

At the same time, Hu Shi’s enthusiastic promotion of (auto)biographical writing played a important role in women’s autobiographical writing. Su Xuelin, at the very opening of the preface to \textit{My Life}, invokes Hu Shi’s call for autobiographical writings. She makes special mention of Hu Shi’s \textit{Self-Narration} and greatly regrets the fact that he did not live to write his life at fifty, sixty, and seventy.\textsuperscript{86} Hu Shi devotes the first chapter of \textit{Self-Narration} to the representation of his mother. In \textit{Ninety-Four Years}, Su similarly writes herself through representation of her mother, a topic that is treated in the next chapter.

In “How I Came to Write My Autobiography,” Yang Buwei also attributes her autobiography to Hu Shi’s passion for autobiographical literature. According to the essay, Hu Shi urged Zhao Yuanren to write his autobiography while they were both teaching at Harvard University in 1925. Zhao recommended that his wife write her autobiography since she had good memories of her rich experiences in both in China and in the U.S.. Hu Shi warmly supported this idea. Living outside China, Yang appealed to the authority of a famous male literary figure, Hu Shi, and that of her husband in order to write her autobiography, such was the hold of the Chinese idea on her that only people of

\textsuperscript{85} Yang 1947: vii.

\textsuperscript{86} Su 1967a: Preface, 1-2.
fame deserve to write their lives. In the foreword to Yang’s autobiography, Zhao
Yuanren also recognizes Hu Shi’s “Biography of Li Chao” (Li Chao zhuan)\(^{87}\) and Self-
Narration as inspirations for Yang’s autobiographical writing.

Translation of Western literary works into Chinese also influenced the make-up
and writing of Chinese women’s autobiographies of this period. In 1918, through Hu
Shi’s translation of Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, the heroine Nora became an
immensely popular image because of her courage to walk out of her husband’s house in
defiance of society’s expectations of her as a good wife. This moment of self-assertion in
the play inspired many women and justified their iconoclastic acts of breaking free of the
control of their family in a search for the freedom to choose their own marriage partners
and to pursue an education.

Introduction of foreign literature to China through translation impacted the writing
of autobiography in China. One of the most notable figures in translation is Lin Shu, a
late Qing scholar with no knowledge of any foreign language, who translated into
Chinese some 200 titles during the last 13 years of the Qing and the first quarter of the
twentieth century. Most well received were his renditions of the novels of Charles
Dickens, Walter Scott, Washington Irving, Rider Haggard, and Dumas. Lin’s
contemporary Su Manshu (1884-1918) also contributed to the translation of Western
literature. The authors and poets that he made available to May Fourth writers include
Byron, Shelley, Keats, Goethe, Romain Rolland, Tolstoy, Ibsen, Hugo. The translations

\(^{87}\) Published in 1919, this biography of Li Chao was written to argue for women’s rights to education and
inheritance of property. According to this biography, Li Chao was a young woman who died from sickness
and depression at Beijing Female Normal College at the age of 24, for her family not only pressured her to
quit school and marry but also disowned her financially.
of Lin and Su exerted tremendous influence on the entire May Fourth generation. In *Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, Leo Ou-fan Lee notes "how the paraphernalia of New Culture made inroads into the personal lives of young Chinese intellectuals in the May Fourth period" and how "the exhilaration of iconoclasm and Westernism affect their life-styles, fashion their personalities, and condition their general outlooks."³⁸

I perceive two ways in which Western literature influenced Chinese autobiography. First, stories about the development, adventures, and life experience of individuals in some of the works might inspire Chinese writers of the time to tell their own stories of self-fulfillment and rebellion against familial and social oppression. Then, the individual subjectivity expressed in Western literature lent itself well to May Fourth writers’ effort to emancipate themselves from the Confucian value system. Western particularly had an impact on women writers, because a majority of them had just began to enjoy the freedom of self-expression in writing. For example, Lu Yin mentions burying herself in reading all the translated literary works by Lin Shu as a way of avoiding the issue of marriage with her family,³⁹ although she more directly ascribes her first autobiographical attempt to the influence of Hu Shi and the vernacular. In such a historical and cultural context, it was something of a trend for many May Fourth writers to write their autobiographies.

³⁸ Lee 1973: viii.

³⁹ Lu 1934: 41.
Translation of Western autobiography provides role models for Chinese writers. Xie Bingying claims two sources of influence on her autobiography: Isadora Duncan’s *My Life* and Agnes Smedley’s *A Daughter of the Earth*. In the preface of *My Life*, as a way of justifying her own autobiographical act, Su writes about the prevalence of autobiography in the early twentieth-century China in imitation of Western practice: “At that time, a French saying spread to China that the most beautiful literature in the world is autobiography. A part of Rousseau’s *Confessions* was translated into Chinese. Under such influence, many writers started writing autobiographies or confessions. Urged by the trend of the time, I also took this path.” This invocation of the authorities of the two forerunners of autobiography in China, Hu Shi and Rousseau, not only legitimizes her autobiographical act but also positions her self-narration at the intersection of Chinese and Western autobiographical traditions, compelling us to rethink categories of East and West in the field of autobiography criticism. Lu Yin, Xie Bingying, and Su Xuelin are among writers who openly admit the influence of Western literature and autobiography on their works.

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90 Isadora Duncan (1877-1927) was an English dancer who played a major role not only in revolutionizing the art of ballet but also in liberating women from the constraints of traditional dress. Her autobiography, first published in English in 1927 after she died in a car accident, was initially introduced to the Chinese reading public through the review of Lin Yutang who highly praised both the book and its author. The book was translated, complete and unabridged, into Chinese by Yu Xijian and was published in Shanghai in 1934.

91 Agnes Smedley (1892-1950) was an American journalist who reported and wrote extensively on the growth of Chinese communism in the 1930s and 1940s. *A Daughter of the Earth*, written as an aid to her psychoanalysis, first came out in 1929. The earliest translation of this work, rendered as *Da dì de nüér*, was done by Lin Yisheng. It was published by Shanghai Hufeng shuju in November 1932.

The first translator of Rousseau’s *Confessions* into Chinese is Zhang Jingsheng (1888-1969), who rendered it as *Chanhui lu*. Zhang has been rediscovered in recent years as one of the forerunners of the New Culture Movement in the May Fourth period. He went to study in France in 1912 and was among the first government sponsored students to have earned a doctoral degree from a Western country. His approach to modernize China was through sexual liberation and family planning.\(^9^7\) The first translation of *Confessions*, published in May 1928 by Shanghai Beauty Bookstore (*Shanghai mei de shudian*), was completed in China after Zhang returned from France. But the translation is incomplete, consisting of only 90 pages in length.\(^9^4\) Later he went to France a second time, set up an editorial board in Paris, and tried to coordinate the translation of some two hundred books of world art, literature, sociology, and science. Rousseau’s *Confessions* was among them. But for lack of funding, the project largely failed. But he managed to finish the translation of *Confessions*.\(^9^5\) The result was a more complete translation was published by *Shanghai shijie shuju* in September 1929 and was reprinted in February 1931.

The above discussion attempts to cover the following points: the neglect of Chinese women’s autobiographies and the possible reasons behind it; the burden of

\(^{9^7}\) For a detailed account, see Yang Qun’s *Biography of Zhang Jingsheng* (*Zhang Jingsheng zhuan*, 1999).

\(^{9^4}\) Almost simultaneously, Zhang Du translated the first part of *Confessions*, which was published in March 1929 by *Shangwu yinshuguan*.

\(^{9^5}\) Yang 1999: 204, 237, 386.
Chinese traditional autobiographical writings; the cultural and literary contexts of China during the May Fourth period; and the influence of both modern Chinese and Western autobiographies.


Almost all the modern Chinese women writers treated in this dissertation deal with important gender issues. These issues include, among others, education, freedom in marriage and divorce, financial independence, chastity, and women’s liberation in general. However, most relevant to these writers, as can be seen either in their autobiographies or in their prefaces, was the issue of writing as a part of their conception of modern womanhood. Prior to their generation, with the exception of a small number of elite women in certain geographical regions, women did not write for a living. As an example of the disconnection of women’s writing from the practical world, although he admits women’s literary ability, Zhang Xusencheng holds that women’s writing existed in a vacuum and did not count in the real world:

In my opinion, wherever official honors are proffered, the wise and the talented will vie for them. In that sense, the scholar pursues learning for the same reason that the farmer tills his fields, and there is nothing at all unusual about it. But a woman’s writing is not her vocation, and so when a woman happens to excel as a result of her own natural endowment, she need not compete over style, nor be stirred by the promise of fame and reputation.

96 There are many essays covering these issues during the May Fourth period which are included in Selected Essays on Women’s Issues in the May Fourth Period compiled by the Research Studio on the History of Women’s Movement under the National Federation of Women 1981.

97 Quoted from Susan Mann 1992: 44-45.
Recent scholarship shows that the so-called purity and freedom from worldliness hardly describe all of women’s literary and other artistic activities, in Zhang’s own days or earlier. For instance, Dorothy Ko’s study shows that, as more and more women became literate and began to participate in reading and writing during the Ming dynasty, a new womanhood making talent and virtue compatible emerged, especially in the Jiangnan area.\textsuperscript{98} The dictum “A woman of no talent is a woman of virtue” gained currency as an antidote against women’s education and women’s participation in the literary world. Ko argues that this dictum “did not signify heightened subjugation of women in the Ming-Qing times but, rather, anxieties over the erosion of social and gender boundaries” in the Jiangnan area\textsuperscript{99} brought about by the emergence of women as readers and writers.

Ko also studies the concern in the early Qing over women’s position at home and in society with the appearance of female professional artists and female teachers, referred to as “guishu shi” (teachers of the inner chambers). These women supported their families either by selling their paintings and poetry or by teaching the skill of painting and poetry writing to daughters and concubines of wealthy men. Working outside the boundary of their own homes and having their less employable husbands follow them or stay at home, these women expanded their old domestic boundaries to new limits. On account of anxiety over the traditional gender order, women’s talent was valorized and glorified, so that late Qing saw the publication of women’s poetry anthologies, stories,

\textsuperscript{98} Ko 1994: 143-176.

\textsuperscript{99} Ko 1994: 160.
and dramas. Under such circumstances, a woman's artistic and literary achievement became an economic asset for her family.\textsuperscript{100} Ko's argument, however, only applies to the Jiangnan area, where commercial print culture in seventeenth-century provided an outlet for women's literary talent and enabled its translation into capital both for publishers and for their families. At the same time, the gentry women in Ko's study pursued literary talent for the purpose of a happy marriage.\textsuperscript{101} The status of professional female writers and artists did not detract from their traditional roles of mother and wife.\textsuperscript{102} As Ko straightforwardly admits:

\begin{quote}
The rise of the woman reader-writer ... was a sign largely of the strength of the Confucian gender system, not its demise. The educated woman brought her new cultural resources to the service of her supposed natural duties of motherhood and moral guardianship. With the support of the new woman as erudite mother and teacher, the underpinnings of the gender system became even more solid than before.\textsuperscript{103}
\end{quote}

Therefore, taking up writing as a profession and a means of livelihood was an unprecedented phenomenon during the May Fourth time. Autobiographical practices were among the most salient features of their literary activities.

Wendy Larson's scholarship proposes a background against which modern Chinese women writers' self-representations transpire. Larson aptly remarks that feminine virtue (de) was constructed in premodern China, especially in the Ming and

\textsuperscript{100} For an account of itinerant female teachers and artists, see Dorothy Ko, 1994, pp. 115-142.

\textsuperscript{101} Ko 1994: 183-5.

\textsuperscript{102} Ko 1994: 29-67, 125-42.

\textsuperscript{103} Ko 1994: 67.
Qing periods, through such physical practices as chastity, confinement, foot-binding, self-mutilation, and widow suicide, whereas literary talent (cai), poetically, intellectually, and analytically inscribed, was defined as more masculine than feminine. She writes,

[Even though both men and women were known for virtue and literary talent, many more women than men were canonized for their virtue and many more men than women were acclaimed for their literary talent. Thus, de and cai were, to some extent, exclusive and gendered concepts and social forms that implied a different ontological status for women and men.]

If feminine virtue in traditional times had little to do with the “unwomanly” work of writing, for modern female writers, writing for publication became an important way of defining their womanhood. In terms of gender differences, Larson argues that male writers of the May Fourth generation tend, in their self-narrations, to register textual work negatively and aspire to more socially and politically significant activities of soldiers and workers. However, the significance of writing for female writers is more reminiscent of the ways in which some Western feminist critics of autobiography resist the postmodern skepticism about self, authorizing, and referentiality. As Nancy K. Miller says, “the postmodern decision that the Author is Dead and the subject along with him does not ... necessarily hold for women, and prematurely forecloses the question of agency for them.” Miller’s position was quickly echoed by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, working on African American women’s narratives, and Doris Sommer, working on Latin

106 Miller 1988: 106.
American women’s testimonios. These critics find that the death of the author and the subject are irrelevant for emerging women writers. By the same token, we cannot view modern Chinese women writers’ practice of writing negatively as a tradition of women’s autobiographical writings is yet to emerge from its premodern existence largely as a hidden and subordinated form.

But how is such a tradition constituted? What other writers and works, apart from those covered in separate chapters below, are part of this tradition but remain unrecognized? Without attempting to give a comprehensive overview of all the existing autobiographies by Chinese women writers in the twentieth century, I would like to draw attention to some short autobiographies written by Chinese women writers of the May Fourth period. These narratives were collected in Selected Autobiographies by Female Writers (Nǔ zuojia zizhuan xuanji) in 1945. The volume includes Zi Gang’s (1914-1988) “Self-Shame and Self-Encouragement” (Zi kuī yu zi mian), An E’s (1905-1976) “How I Left My Mother” (Wo zenyang likai de muqin), Bai Wei’s (1894-1987) “The Story of My Escape” (Tiao guan jì), Lin Beili’s (?-?) “A Journey of Twenty Seven Years” (Er shi qi nian de lüchēng), Peng Hui’s (1909-?) “A Brief Autobiography” (Jian dan de zizhuan), Ye Zhongyin’s (?-?) “My Autobiography” (Wo de zizhuan), Chu Wenjuan’s (?-?) “Imprints of Life” (Shengming de yinhen), Zhao Qingge’s (1914-) “This Is Also An Autobiography” (Ye suan zizhuan), and, last but not least, Xie Bingying’s “The First Half of My Ordinary Life” (Pingfan de ban sheng). Some of these authors are forgotten, and the better-known ones, such as Bai Wei, Zi Gang, An E, and Xie Bingying, are

remembered for writings other than their autobiographical pieces included in this collection. Therefore, I will briefly introduce them\textsuperscript{108} to show their contribution to the women writer’s common treatment of writing as a self-defining device and a form of resistance to the oppression of the traditional family system.

Zi Gang’s “Self-Shame and Self-Encouragement: the Self-Narration of a Journalist” has much in common with Xie Bingying’s \textit{Girl Rebel} in that Zi’s work also portrays her wartime experiences and participation in China’s nationalist efforts. Zi Gang was a journalist and one of the leftist writers whose writing career started at the outset of the War of Resistance against Japan and continued into the 1950s.\textsuperscript{109} As the author clearly indicates, she wrote this short piece mainly for female readers of the 1930s and 1940s who needed role models. It deals with both professional and gender issues. A journalist reporting on the fighting against Japan first in Wuhan and then in Chongqing areas, the author reflects on her effort to represent the oppressed class, such as the wounded soldiers, their families, and the female workers, and questions her own ability to speak for them. She is aware of her privileged position as a reporter, indeed of the very \textit{qipao} dress that she wears, that might put a barrier between her and the people who depend on her to voice their concerns. She also calls attention to the evils and corruption of high society that a journalist sees but has no power to expose thoroughly.

Like Su Xuelin and Lu Yin, and to a lesser extent the three other writers treated in this dissertation, Zi Gang’s piece deals with issues of gender, writing, and the conflict for

\textsuperscript{108} Xie Bingying’s “The First Half of My Ordinary Life” is not discussed here, because it is basically a much shorter version of \textit{Girl Rebel} which is examined in Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{109} For a short biographical and critical account of her life and works, see Sheng 1995: 426-432.
between career and family for women. On the one hand, the image of the female journalist epitomizes an important change in women's professional choices at the time. She takes pride in her work and continually strives to improve herself. On the other hand, however, she feels inadequate as a journalist. Perhaps uneasy about assuming the position of an autobiographer, loses her self-confidence. She states in the beginning that she became a journalist only accidentally. In the end she declares that her story only serves the purpose of encouraging herself, not providing a role model for other women. When she recalls how she became a journalist after doing odd jobs for a magazine, she calls her rite of passage “zheng ming,” a term often used in traditional times to refer to a woman’s change of status from concubine to wife. She exhibits a sense of inferiority in relation to male journalists and openly states that her female colleagues are not equally qualified for the job both professionally and physically. At this juncture in the narration, she raises the issue of gender inequality where family responsibility is concerned. She calls family and kitchen “fetters for female journalists” that confine them to work where their families live. Her narration predicts the problem of women’s double burden.

Set in early twentieth-century Beijing, An E's “How I Left My Mother” focuses on a mother-daughter relationship and generational differences in their beliefs about gender role behavior. It presents details of unspoken conflicts between herself and her mother caused by their difference in value, a difference found in the spectrum of mother-daughter relationships represented in the female writers' autobiographical texts. An E, a contemporary of Zi Gang, was a leftist writer of lyrics, poetry, drama, and reportage
literature during the War of Resistance against Japan and the Civil War. In the narration, she is a college student actively involved in the May Fourth Movement. One day she is shocked to find that her mother has come to school to take her home. The silent fight between mother and daughter begins here. Out of pride, in public they act courteously to each other as though nothing is wrong. The daughter feels compelled to get into a rickshaw her mother hires for her. She hides her tears of anger and humiliation to keep up an appearance of defiance. She can only think of one thing: “I am a human being,” as a private act of resistance.

When they reach home, she totally loses her freedom. She calls her friends at school, but she dares only to ask them to send her things to her at home. Her mother keeps close watch of her and tries to console her with the wealthy and comfortable life that the family will provide for her if only she is willing to stay at home. But all the daughter wants is to lead a new life completely different from that of her mother. Mother and daughter never confront each other, each knowing the other’s mind exactly. They possess equally strong wills, so neither gives in to the other. In this mental wrestling, their love for each other becomes mingled with hatred. The mother feels that she would rather her daughter die than have her live a life of impropriety according to traditional standards of virtue. The daughter expresses her perception of her mother’s thoughts in the following way:

When my mother was angry, she would rather see her daughter dead. Then she could cry out her pain and bury her daughter with a decent ceremony. That

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110 For a short biographical and critical account of her life and works, see Sheng 1995: 385-394.
would feel better than the current situation. She was reluctant to see her daughter take a path of life that she as mother opposed. Especially, she could not imagine what she would do if her daughter was imprisoned or beheaded.\footnote{An E 1945, in Xie 1945: 13.}

In this way, they continue their consuming but unvoiced rivalry for days, until the mother decides to go to Baoding, where one of her sons lives, to attend the birthday party he will hold for her. As soon as the mother turns her back, the daughter takes leave of her little sister and escapes from home forever. It hurts her to have to do this to her mother and to pursue her own life in such a stealthy way, but she does see any other way out.

This vivid representation of differences between mother and daughter fully demonstrates the complexity of the time in terms of gender norms and the dilemma of women in encountering such changes. The author draws a clear picture of her mother as a woman suffering from the circumstances of her life and times. The mother can not understand and accept her daughter’s pursuits of education and revolution, being a traditional woman who has placed all her high hopes on an idealized family life. However, the reality of her life is far from the ideal: the fact that her husband has moved out with a concubine, her sons have established themselves away from home, and her daughters are growing up to lead a life of independence. She seems to be torn between old family traditions represented by her absent husband and the new way of life embodied in her daughter.

An E’s piece raises the question of how a woman should orient herself in a time of drastic change. The daughter definitely does not want to live a life like her mother’s. Her
mother becomes a symbol of oppression, mixed with motherly love that is difficult to challenge. The author recalls how she, out of agony, considers marriage as a means of escape from the control of her mother. Her mother also thinks of marrying her daughter off as a way of reforming her. The escape of the daughter at the end of the narration signifies the triumph of women of the May Fourth generation.

Bai Wei is known mostly as a playwright. She was born Huang Zhang, and she named herself Bai Wei ("bai" means "futile" and "wei" "unimportant") out of extreme pessimism while studying in Japan. Forced into marriage at the age of sixteen, she was severely abused by her mother-in-law. Unable to bear it any more, she managed to escape; she became a student at Hengyang Third Female Normal School and later transferred to Wuhan First Female Normal School in Changsha.\(^{112}\) Bai Wei’s “Jumping through the Hoops” is one of the most vividly told stories of escape. It depicts the oppression of women at home and their social dilemmas in early twentieth-century China. In the story, Bai Wei and her two sisters, Xian and Yao, all study at Hunan First Female Normal School in Changsha. Their father is a wealthy and influential man in his hometown on the border of Hunan and Guangdong. Bai Wei loves and respects her father but hates and fears him as well. He is expecting, upon their graduation, to marry off the two younger girls as gifts to his local connections and to force Bai Wei back to her husband’s house. Of the three sisters, Bai Wei is the rebel. Instead of returning home after graduation, she is determined to fight what she calls the homicidal Confucian tradition to the end. She makes plans to run away to Changsha, Hankou, Tokyo, and

\(^{112}\) For a short biographical and critical account of her life and works, see Sheng 1995: 147-159
eventually to Paris. However, her father has bribed the teachers and school authorities, so that they watch her closely. Bai Wei manages to make arrangements to catch a boat to Changsha and wants to take Xian with her. But being too afraid to do so, Xian discusses it with Yao, who leaks the news to the school authorities. Bai Wei is summoned to the president's office. When he advises her to accept fate and be a filial daughter, she tells him the severe physical abuse she endured at her husband's home, which moves the president and her classmates. In the end, Xian and some other girls realize how earnestly Bai Wei desires to break out of feudal oppression epitomized by her father and the school authorities, and they help her get away from a usually locked back door in an old bathroom, which they call their Arch of Triumph. This Parisian reference indicates the role of the West for women's liberation in these young female students' mind.

In the latter half of the narration, Bai discusses how she takes a boat to Hankou, and eventually gets to Tokyo by way of Shanghai. She regrets that her sister Xian has not escaped with her and laments Xian's life after marriage. Xian is forced into marriage in severe illness, becomes a battered wife, suffers miscarriages, and gives birth to stillborn infants repeatedly. However, Bai demonstrates much resentment about her life after escape. While in Japan, she again falls out with her father in their angry correspondence with each other over the issue of her marriage. Completely cut off from her family, she leads a lonely and miserable life. At the end, she speaks out about her dilemmas and the general predicament of women in general in Chinese society:
I dared to jump through the hoops and escape, but how do I do after twenty years? ... I tried to make it in society, but I cannot find a niche, much less express myself...

I jumped through hoop after hoop, but what did I get out of all this?

In this society, except the privileged, most women live in a world like fish in a tank or a pool, unlike men who could be compared to fish swimming freely in vast waters.

Fish in the tank or pool, if you are discontented about the constraints, you can jump out! But once you are out in the world, you will wind up on dry land, hard shores, dried grass, or even thorns. There could even be cats and beavers waiting to swallow you.

But jump if you wish. Jump out of that tank, jump out of the confining pool! Jump into the rivers and oceans and swim at your will like men... Otherwise, how is it possible to end the tragedy between the two sexes? How is it possible to wipe out old ideas and feudal shackles? How could it be possible to promote the progress and glory of the nation?

Jump! For progress and glory, jump, girls! A thousand hurdles lie in front of you, but just jump!  

Her story of abuse and escape bears some resemblance to Lu Yin’s narrative of trauma and healing. But Bai’s text ends with feminist protests against society that exceed Lu Yin’s largely personal story of abuse and healing through writing. Her outspoken feminist thought distinguishes Bai’s autobiography from many of her contemporary writings.

Ambivalent toward writing, and more ambivalent toward writing her personal story, Lin Beili’s “A Journey of Twenty Seven Years” shows the need to justify its own existence as autobiography. She declares at the very outset that when she was invited by the editor to write up her story to be included in A Collection of Female Writers’ Autobiographies, her first response was: “I must decline it! How can I write an autobiography? I have not written much. Wouldn’t it be ridiculous for me to be included
as a writer?"114 Finding it hard to disappoint the editor, she decided to accept the invitation but write “a story of a twenty-seven-year-old woman,” as if writing about someone else. In so doing, she meant to take an objective stand and tell her life experience as it was instead of focusing on her achievements as in most of the autobiographies she had read.

Much of Lin’s autobiographical piece describes her parents. Born and raised in a traditional extended family, her father had a good education in the Chinese classics and was later educated in Japan. The mother, Xu Yunhua, is a unique mother figure who has a socially active career in contrast to other mothers in the autobiographical writings examined in this dissertation. Lin recounts her mother’s experience of being a young lady in the boudoir of a conventional household, becoming a revolutionary woman fighting by the side of Qiu Jin in the Revolutionary Alliance led by Sun Zhongshan, and eventually devoting her life to women’s education.

Lin also dwells on her mother’s hardship as a wife, a mother, a widow, and a career woman. Involved in political work against Yuan Shikai’s government and forced to go into hiding, Lin’s father earns too little money to feed his family. Lin’s mother supports their elder daughter and is pregnant with a second child (Lin Beili). Because her husband died when Lin Beili was only seventeen days old, as the widowed mother of two girls, Xu Yunhua leads a hard life both financially and emotionally. On top of all this, her elder daughter died of illness while Xu was preoccupied with the construction of a new campus for the women’s normal school in Chongde, where she was the principal. She

113 Bai 1945, in Xie 1945: 91-92.
feels tremendous guilt. The inner conflicts Lin’s mother experiences anticipated the predicament of women torn between career and family that would persist for generations to come.

Although her father died when Lin was born, Lin does suffer the mistreatment the Lu Yin did for the death in her family on the day of her birth. Lin calls herself an unfortunate child because, her mother did not believe that her birth she could inauspiciously cause her father’s sudden death, in spite of other people’s talk. Her bereaved mother in her postnatal condition has no energy to care for the infant and places her in the care of her maternal grandmother. Subsequently, the girl has had two wet nurses, and the second nurse is abusive. During this time, her mother returns to school teaching and pays little attention to her second daughter until she finds out about the abuse. Afterwards Lin begins to live with her mother and sister on campus.

In sharp contrast to other women writers’ representations of their mothers as negative role models, Lin willingly admits her mother’s enormous positive influence. She goes to the primary school attached to the women’s normal school where her mother teaches and serves as principal. But her rebellious nature convinces her mother to send her away to a missionary school to receive a Western-style education until she goes to middle school. She majors in economics in college, but her college education is interrupted by the Resistance War against Japan. Throughout her education, she inherits her mother’s legacy of independence and self-reliance.

114 Lin 1945, in Xie 1945: 94.
However, Lin does not idealize the mother-daughter relationship; nor does she portray her mother as a one-dimensional character. Lin does not agree with her mother on the issue of love: “Whatever my mother says about love, I always think that there is some truth in it for her generation. But why does she tell me about it? What does it all have to do with me?” Her mother interferes with her choice of marriage partner and actually succeeds in separating Lin and her first lover. Lin met this young man, named Yin, through her mother when Lin was only thirteen years old. The two developed a close friendship through their study together over the course of several years when Lin was home from school on winter and summer vacations from school. When Lin is about eighteen years old, her mother begins to disapprove of their friendship lest Lin should marry the financially distressed Yin. According to Lin, her mother has a long talk with Yin to persuade him to leave Chongde for good. Her mother has planned in vain for Lin to marry a distant cousin, because they do not love each other. He was raised in a wealthy family and needs a devoted wife, but Lin is too interested in social engagement to fulfil that role. Lin falls in love with the gifted writer Lin Gebai, a divorced man with six children, and marries him without seeking her mother’s consent.

The Japanese invasion of China in 1937 greatly affects the next few years of her life. She feels disillusioned because she could not realize her patriotic ideals of serving her country. She and her husband relocate from Shanghai to Hong Kong. But as soon as they get there, she is severely wounded and her husband dies during a bombing by the Japanese. By that time, they has had already had two children and she is pregnant with a

\[115\] Lin 1945, in Xie 1945: 134.
third. She does not get back to the mainland until 1941. It is through the help of other
people, not the least of whom is her mother’s emotional financial assistance, that she
survives such devastation. Mother and daughter reconcile, but Lin still cannot accept her
mother’s position on political involvement: “Every time I think of my mother’ deep
concern for me, her solitary life, and her great motherly love, I am resolved to become a
good daughter for China, even though I could not be a filial daughter looking after my
mother everyday.”¹¹⁶ Because her mother has been disappointed in the Nationalist
Revolution, she later turns to education. She opposes her daughter’s political
involvement in society. But it is clear from the narration that Lin has chosen her own
life’s path independent of her mother. Lin’s is one of the few portrayals of a mother as a
career woman, and therefore a role model for her daughter, by May Fourth women
writers.

Peng Hui’s “A Brief Autobiography” raises the issue of women’s right of
inheritance. It chronicles her life, from being an unloved orphan to becoming an aspired
writer and translator. She was born in 1909 to a literati family in Anhui, though she grew
up in Changsha. When she is only four years old, her father dies, leaving her and her
three sisters in the care of their widowed mother. Her father’s family divides up her
father’s property and gives the four sisters each a share for their dowries. They divide the
rest equally between her uncle and her mother, but her mother’s share is to be transferred
to any son the uncle may have by birth or adoption, because neither the mother nor the

¹¹⁶ Lin 1945, in Xie 1945: 56.
girls are entitled to inherit the property. Under such circumstances, the only childhood happiness Peng recalls is her mother telling them stories at night.

When her mother dies, Peng is eleven. The four sisters struggle to survive in their maternal grandmother’s house. Because of the discrimination her mother suffered for not having male children and the discrimination the girls suffer for being female, Peng always dreams of being a boy. In one such dream, she becomes a boy, and “his” mother proudly pats “him” on the head, her only “son.” When she wakes up to the reality, she cries so hard that she soaks her pillow. But following her mother’s practice and because they have their share of the dowry money, she and her three sisters have the opportunity to go to school. When she studies in Female Normal School in Changsha, she reads progressive magazines such as New Youth, New Tide (Xin chao), and New China (Xin Zhongguo). Inspired by the literary revolution led by Hu Shi and others, she begins to write and publish stories in the vernacular. She and her husband devote their energy to translating foreign literature, such as the works of Tolstoy and Cherhov, into Chinese. She laments the negative impact of household chores and childbearing / childrearing on a woman’s literary productivity. Toward the end of the narration, she recalls her writing work during the War of Resistance against Japan and looks forward to a peaceful life when she can resume literary creation and translation.

Ye Zhongyin’s “My Autobiography” begins with a brief account of her family and her childhood. She prides herself on her father’s literary ability and her mother’s feminine virtue. Her childhood is not a happy one because of her father’s hot temper. When she is five, her father hires a private teacher for Ye and her sister. Ye’s
autobiography reveals how much she hates studying, unlike many of the female writers of her time who emphasize their passion for books and learning. While her dislike for book learning continues in school, she excels in acting. Therefore, she pursues a career in spoken drama after graduation from college. In her autobiography, she dwells mostly on her experience and growth as an actress. She starts out in Nanjing with the National School of Drama and works with various theatrical troupes, including the Experimental Theatrical Company. Her career runs through the War of Resistance against Japan, and she relocates with her troupes from Nanjing to Hankou, and later to Chongqing as Japanese occupation pushes further and further west. Along the way, she performs both Chinese and foreign dramas, such as *Put Down Your Whip* (*Fang xia ni de bianzi*), *Final Victory* (*Zuihou de shengji*), *Sunrise* (*Richu*), *The Merchant of Venice*, and so forth. Ye’s autobiography ends abruptly on a note of disappointment in her pursuit of a career on dramatic performance.

In Chu Wenjuan’s “Imprints of Life,” she was born the seventh daughter in a late Qing official’s family in the northeast of Zhejiang. Slighted and misunderstood, she is depressed as a child and finds comfort in poetry and history. When she is in her late teens, her parents die within three months of each other. To resist the marriage arranged by her relatives, she runs off to Beijing and begins to use books as a source of comfort, such as the poetry of Shelley and Keats and the fiction of Thomas Hardy.

The rest of her autobiography covers her adult life from the May Fourth Movement to 1943, including her life as a teacher, a literary editor, a writer, and a mother. The May Fourth Movement awakens her sense of social responsibility, and she
leaves Beijing for Shanxi to teach school. At the same time she is exposed to new ideas and starts her writing career. She falls in love, gets married, and plays the role of a housewife and mother for three years, which causes her much discontent due to the conflict between her familial roles and her aspiration to social engagement. She goes to Wuhan to do her bit in the war through teaching and writing, but her depression as a result of separation from her husband and their child makes it impossible for her to participate in public work the way she wanted. Because it becomes increasingly difficult for her husband to make money writing for leftist newspapers, she goes to Shanghai to support the family. After he leaves for France, she supports herself and their five-year-old child through writing until he returns four years later and reclaims the child, which again pushes her to the edge of a nervous breakdown. In order to survive separation from her child, she goes to Hankou to teach school and buries herself in work. Later, she is recruited into the army to run a magazine in Nanchang and after an entire year's hard work wins the respect of the sexist male officers. Shortly after she resumes writing on her own, her husband writes to her from Hong Kong asking to put the child in her care, to which she readily agrees. At the end of her autobiography, she returns to the theme of writing. She regrets not having been more productive and looks forward to some peaceful years of writing ahead of her.

Zhao Qingge's "This Is Also An Autobiography" is short but unique in that she does not directly discuss her family situation or the larger social context of her time.\footnote{For an account of Zhao's life and works, see Sheng 1995: 394-402.} She begins with nostalgic memories of northern China where she grew up. As a child,
she is of a melancholy personality. From a conversation between her and her
grandmother, we learn that she is unloved by her father and her stepmother. When she is
not in the company of her grandmother, she is always musing alone. Thus, she falls in
love with the songs of crickets. When the pet cricket that her grandmother gave her dies,
she places it in a match box, buries it under an osmanthus tree she plants with her own
hands, and offers chrysanthemums at its grave. At seventeen, she graduates from high
school, and she works in the same school after graduation while preparing for college
entrance examinations. She makes friends with a young boy on the staff name Xiao
Mahu who shares her love for crickets. Writing her autobiography in 1931, she laments
the loss of her homeland at the hands of Japanese invaders and retains loving memories
of her grandmother and Xiao Maohu when both of them are nowhere to be found. Thus,
through reminiscences of the two people who have touched her life, she reveals to the
readers her family circumstances and the historical context of her time.

These short pieces help demonstrate the scope and features of modern Chinese
women writers’ autobiographies. They also reveal the change of gender roles in the
social upheavals of the first few decades in twentieth-century China as well as the
personal concerns of the writers. The following chapters specifically discuss full-length
autobiographies of Su Xuelin, Lu Yin, Xie Bingying, Yang Buwei, and Chen Hengzhe.
The publications of their autobiographies occurred during a span of over fifty years from
An Autobiography of Lu Yin in the 1930s to Su Xuelin's Ninety-Four Years of a Floating
Life in the early 1990s. However, my approach is more thematic and geopolitical than chronological, dealing first with women’s autobiographies written in Chinese for Chinese audiences and then texts translated into or written in English for Western audiences.

The first two chapters discuss the autobiographies of Su Xue Lin and Lu Yin respectively, which were written in Chinese. Chapter 1 focuses on Su’s My Life and Ninety-Four Years. Although her autobiographies did not come out until 1967 and 1991 respectively, Su is one of the first women writers who started her writing career around the May Fourth time. Her texts also more comprehensively reveals of the diverse issues of her time, such as the collective trauma of traditional Chinese women and the politics of canonization in her autobiographical reconstruction her life and career. In this chapter, I examine how Su Xue Lin defines herself through representations of other people and how she inserts her name into a forbidding literary canon. On the level of gender identity, My Life deals with the submission of other women to traditional Chinese gender imperatives and the exploitation and persecution of their bodies. She defines herself as a writer, however, and largely erases her life as a married woman. In Ninety-Four Years, she uses a similar strategy. Its first chapter covers her family genealogy, and a big portion portrays her mother as a paragon of traditional feminine virtues. Glorification of her mother serves to mark the author herself as a modern woman whose main virtue is talent in writing. In her self-defining process, she discovers literary motherhood through engaging in literary (re)production. In both texts, she attempts to inscribe her name in the modern
Chinese literary canon through associating with established male writers. She reveres Lin Shu (1852-1924) as her first literary mentor, dubs Hu Shi (1891-1962) a modern sage, and attacks Lu Xun (1881-1936) as her literary and political enemy.

Lu Yin and Su Xuelin belong to the same generation of May Fourth female writers. If Su Xuelin’s texts kept abreast of larger issues of gender and canon, Lu Yin’s autobiography, the concern of Chapter 2, treats the healing of a personal trauma. This trauma results from the superstitious attribution of her maternal grandmother’s death to Lu Yin’s birth and from Lu Yin’s failure as a little girl to study the classical Chinese texts for women. With her story of personal trauma as the starting point, Lu Yin’s autobiography opens up to religious domination at the missionary school, her resistance to gender oppression in Chinese secular school through same-sex friendships, and the process of becoming a writer. Much in the fashion of Su’s autobiographies, Lu Yin’s autobiography also omits her private life. This tendency demonstrates a common self-defining strategy of the authors in this study to create their self-image exclusively as writers.

I devote Chapter 3 to a discussion of the ways in which the autobiographies of Xie Bingying, Yang Buwei, and Chen Hengzhe relate to Orientalist discourse on China. I first deal with Xie Bingying’s Girl Rebel, as it can serve as a bridge between women’s autobiographies in Chinese for Chinese audiences and those translated or written in English for Western audiences. Girl Rebel presents the author’s experience in China and was never intended for audiences outside China. However, it was translated into English and was published in the U.S. during World War II to show readers in the Western world
what was happening in China at that time. In this sense, Girl Rebel became a text that speaks to a multiple audiences in their different geopolitical and cultural contexts. It was read in the West as an Orientalist text. In my discussion of Girl Rebel, I address such issues as the intended use of the translation as an Orientalist portrayal of China and the reception of the text in the U.S., while examining the subject position of the author through a close reading of the text.

Yang Buwei’s Autobiography of a Chinese Woman participates in Orientalism more directly. Conceived and written in the U.S., it is the collaboration of several parties, which include Chinese advocate of autobiography Hu Shi, its American publisher, the author, and her husband as the translator. Intended for Western readers and meant to be translated, the book’s translator was chosen at the moment of its conception. Therefore its English translation preceded the published Chinese version by two decades. The author makes clear that she wrote the book for Western readers, hence the title Autobiography of a Chinese Woman and the anecdotes about various aspects of traditional Chinese culture.

Meanwhile, the Chinese version of Yang’s autobiography, after dwelling on her experience growing up as a “boy” and pursuit of education and career, concludes at the point where she got married. She discusses her life as a wife and mother in a different book entitled Miscellaneous Accounts of the Zhaos (Za ji Zhao jia, 1972). The English translation, however, combines the two parts of her life all in one. In my discussion of her autobiographical writing, I focus on her Orientalist depiction of Chinese culture.
through a personal story, the multiple subjectivities in her text, and its reflection of the politics of women's autobiography in China and in the West during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Lastly, Chen Hengzhe's *Autobiography of a Chinese Young Girl* is another kind of representation of China for a Western audience, Chinese women, and their struggle to gain the rights to education and independence. Responding to Western portrayals of China, answering the call for Chinese to write about Chinese for Western readers, and written in English in the U.S., Chen's can be read as a case of what Lydia Liu calls Orientalist “co-authorship”\(^{118}\) between Western and Chinese intellectuals. The exclusive focus of her narration on her journey to pursue Western style school education in China (as opposed to traditional Chinese education), the total absence of discussion of her experience in the U.S., and the abrupt ending of her autobiography when she departs for the U.S. all contribute to her Orientalist position. However, much like many May Fourth intellectuals, Chen also actively appropriates Western culture for the regeneration of Chinese culture.

Why do I put these three writer's autobiographies in one chapter? Their texts embody the complexity of cross-cultural representation of China and Chinese women. In my discussion, I explore the position of each text in Orientalist representation of China; I address the politics of translation and the presence of multiple subjectivities of authors, translators, and publishers in the formation of these texts; I examine the collaboration between Chinese and Western intellectuals in the production of Orientalist discourses on

\(^{118}\) See Chapter 3.
China. From the two different versions of Yang’s autobiography, in Chinese and in English, I attempt to reveal some politics of women’s autobiographical writing in China and in the West. I argue that Yang’s curtailing of the portrayal of her life as a housewife in the Chinese version is in keeping with the tendency on the part of the female writers to erase the private side of their lives in their autobiographies. However, the strategic inclusion of her family life in the English version of her autobiography helps to perhaps characterize how women’s autobiography was conceived and read in the West at that time. This appeals to the historical context of changing gender roles and the practice in the U. S. of positioning women within the private sphere of the home after the two world wars. I suggest that the story of Yang’s experience as wife and mother gratified a need on the part of Western readers to come to terms with the gendered expectations in their own culture. It thus follows that the translation, publication, and reception of Chinese women’s stories in the West can be understood as a process of the ongoing construction of identity by Western readers. Therefore, these personal stories circulating in the West are as much about the West and Western readers as they are about the authors, as is the case with the popular Chinese Cultural Revolution memoirs in the Western world in more recent years contribute to the West’s understanding of itself. But the present project cannot cover that part of the picture.

Xie, Yang, and Chen focus on their own self-representations. Xie chiefly tells of her experience of escaping from family oppression in the forms of footbinding, physical imprisonment, and arranged marriage and distinguishing herself as a revolutionary warrior during the years when China was in the throes of revolution. Yang’s writing of
her life covers a span of some five decades and three continents, moving from her childhood in a traditional and yet liberal family in Nanjing, to her pursuit of education both in China and Japan, to her experience of running her own hospital in Beiping, to her marriage with Zhao Yuanren, and to her role as wife and mother. Solely concerned with her journey to modern western-style education, which culminates in her trip to America, Chen undertakes the task of representing Chinese women’s struggle for emancipation through her personal experience. Yet, in spite of these authors’ difference in focus, their stories are set in China, and their texts played a common role in serving as windows for the Western world to glimpse at Chinese culture and Chinese women.
CHAPTER 1

THE POLITICS OF BODY AND FAME:
SU XUELIN'S *MY LIFE* AND
NINETY-FOUR YEARS OF A FLOATING LIFE

Su Xuelin is not only a most prolific autobiographer but also one of the first May Fourth writers to actively promote the writing of autobiography. In her two full-length self-portraits, *My Life* and *Ninety-Four Years*, she achieves self-definition as a writer through representing a plethora of other people, which constitutes a part of the tradition of women’s autobiographies in twentieth-century China. She disidentifies herself from other women and affiliates with such canonized male literary figures as Lin Shu, Hu Shi, and Lu Xun, in an effort to install her position in modern Chinese literature. Her autobiographies conceptualize literary motherhood as a new gender role for women in place of the traditional roles of wife and mother. Intertwined with the narration of her personal experience, her texts reveal complex relations between writing, gender, politics, and canon.

In the introduction, I mention the diverse conceptions of autobiography in the West: autobiography as a linear narrative of male individual development, female autobiography as relational construction of female identity, autobiography as a means of cultural survival, and autobiography as autoethnography and autogynography. Chinese
female writers' autobiographies produced in the twentieth century speak to these critical paradigms to a certain degree as their narratives involve issues of individual growth in the contexts of nationalism, Western imperialism, and women's newly defined roles in society and at home. But their autobiographical writings cannot be sufficiently and fruitfully read using any of these Western critical frameworks. In reading Su's *My Life and Nine-Four Years of a Floating Life*, I borrow from and reassess the relational model proposed by early feminist autobiography critics such as Susan S. Friedman and Mary Mason. Their paradigm examines the way in which female identity is often defined in terms of her relations to other people in many Western female autobiographies. I develop the concept of "selective relationality" which identifies the complex ways in which Su constructs her own identity in relation to other women and men in her autobiography. There are two dimensions to the concept of "selective relationality." One is "negative relationality," which refers to the way in which the autobiographical author in Su's text seeks to define herself against and away from other women living under extreme oppression. Her self-definition depends on a rhetorical disconnection from the female community around her. It is this hallmark of self-definition against other women that I try to capture in my concept of "negative relationality." The other dimension is what I would call "affiliative relationality," which highlights the narrative strategy of affiliating with canonized male literary figures. Unlike the construction of female identities in relational terms in some Western women's autobiographies, the autobiographical "I" in Su's texts is only selectively related with other people. This critical paradigm is also useful in reading many other Chinese female autobiographical texts.
Su Xuelin was born Su Xiaomei on March 26, 1897, in Ruian, Zhejiang into a literati family. At school age, she studied at home for about two years with a private tutor. Then she taught herself to read classical Chinese novels and Western novels translated into Chinese. In 1913, she entered Peiyuan Girls’ School, a missionary institution. In the following year, she was admitted to Anhui Province Female College. In 1919 she became a student at Beijing Female Normal College and was classmates with Lu Yin and Feng Yuanjun. In 1921, she enrolled at the Université à Outre-Mer de Lyon, where she remained for four years and devoted herself to the study of French literature and fine arts. During her stay in France, she declined the love of a fellow student because she was promised in marriage to another man. Pressured by her family to get married, she tried in vain to improve her relationship with her fiancé through writing letters. During this period, one of her brothers died, to be followed not long after by her mother’s severe illness. But Su resisted her family’s call to go back to China to avoid getting married. Sick, depressed, and heartbroken, she converted to Christianity find love and comfort in God. In 1925, to satisfy her mother’s deathbed wish, she returned to China to consummate her marriage. From 1928 until 1930, she taught Chinese language and literature at Dongwu University in Suzhou, Hujiang University in Shanghai, and Anhui Provincial University. Starting from 1931, she taught at Wuhan University for 18 years. In 1949, she went to Hong Kong to take up a position at Catholic Truth Society (Zhenli xuehui). In 1952, she moved to Taiwan to teach at Tainan Chenggong University.

Su published under various pseudonyms, such as Lü Yi, Xue Ling, Du Ruo, Du Fang, Ling Fen, Tian Ying, Lao Mei, Ye Juan, Mu Feng, Song San, Mei Yu, and Chun
Hui before she settled for Xuelin. Sharing equal fame with Feng Yuanjun, Lu Yin, and Bing Xin, Su Xuelin was among the first generation of modern Chinese female writers who began their writing career in the early 1920s. Her well-known fictional works mainly include Green Sky (Lù tian, 1927) and Love for My Mother (Jì xīn, 1929). She wrote two autobiographies, My Life (Wo de shenghuo, 1967)\(^1\) and Ninety-Four Years (Fu sheng jiusi, 1991).\(^2\) She committed much of her life to literary research and devoted

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\(^1\) She repeatedly emphasizes in the preface that My Life is not “a linear narrative” that “covers my [her] life from childhood until old age in chronological order,” that “the pieces … are arranged thematically, not in time sequence, because it is not a chronology,” and that it is “a transverse autobiography.” The text consists of sixteen chapters: 1. Early Memories; 2. Childhood Reminiscences (including four subsections respectively titled “Toys and Animals,” “The Stories of Mute Uncle,” “My Earliest Artistic Impulse,” and “Portraits of Female Servants in Lanxi County Magistrate’s House”; 3. The Religious Environment When I Was a Child; 4. The “I” Before and After the Xinhai Revolution; 5. My First Mentor of Mandarin; 6. My Student Days; 7. Looking Back on the Past on Teachers’ Day; 8. My Teaching Career; 9. Little Profiles of My Life Toward the End of the Anti-Japanese War; 10. Reflections on Thirty Years of Writing; 11. My Writing Habits; 12. Traditional Poetry and I; 13. Chinese Painting and I; 14. My Life of Newspaper Cutting; 15. The Story of My Study of Qu Yuan; 16. About My Honor and Dishonor. The thematic arrangement of the text is closely related to the fact that each piece was written for various journals at different times and is thus a separate entity. The time span in which these pieces were first composed covers some five decades. “My First Mentor of Mandarin” was written in the late 1920s, “My Student Days” in 1942, “My Earliest Artistic Impulse”, originally called “I Regret Not Having Became a Painter,” around 1951. Three chapters, “Early Memories,” “Portraits of Female Servants in Lanxi County Magistrate’s House,” and “My Teaching Career” were first published respectively in 1962, 1966, 1967 in Zhuanyi wenxue (Biographical Literature), a journal established in 1962 in Taiwan mostly devoted to biographical accounts of statesmen, artists, and literary figures. In 1967, these separate pieces were put in one collection titled My Life.

\(^2\) This is her second autobiography published in 1991 when the author was 94 years old. Similar to the format of My Life, Nine-Four Years also consists of chapters on the author’s life arranged on a thematic basis. The chapters are titled as follows: 1. My Family Genealogy and My Mother; 2. Studying in My Family Private School and Self-Teaching; 3. Enrolling at The First Female Normal School of Yicheng; 4. Enrolling at Beijing Female Normal College; 5. Going to School in France; 6. Convalescence in Toulon and Moving to Lyon; 7. Conversion to the Roman Catholic Church; 8. Returning to China; 9. Teaching in Suzhou and Returning to Shanghai; 10. Teaching at National Wuhan University; 11. Retreating to Sichuan with School; 12. Embarking on Research on Qu Yuan; 13. Victory in the resistance war against Japan; 14. Accepting a Position with the Catholic Truth Society in Hong Kong; 15. Going to France again; 16. Returning to Taiwan to Teaching at Taiwan Provincial Normal College; 17. Taking a Teaching Position at Chenguang University in Taiwan; 18. My Writing Occasioned by the Passing of Mr. Hu Shi; 19. Going to Singapore to Teach at Nanyang University; 20. Resumption with Research on Qu Yuan at Chenguang University; 21. The Passing of My Elder Sister and My Retirement.

Nine-Four Years shares in its title an intertextuality with early nineteenth-century writer Shen Fu’s (1763-1808) autobiography Six Records of a Floating Life (Fusheng liji). Shen’s is an atypical autobiography in that, unlike the self-narrations before him, he does not outline his public career. Instead, he opens his life account with the love and passion shared between his wife Yun and himself. As he mentions in the beginning, he consciously decides to follow the example of The Book of Songs (Shi jing) in
thirty years to the study of Qu Yuan’s poetry. She produced such scholarship as A Literary History of China (Zhongguo wenxue shi, 1970), Critiques on Qu Yuan (Qu Yuan luncong, 1980), and The Mystery of Yu Xi’s Poetry (Yu Xi shi mi, 1988).³

Su occupies a conspicuous position among female writers of the May Fourth period. She has long been recognized as one of the leading female figures of New Literature in China. Along with Lu Yin, Feng Yuanjun, and Bing Xin, Su Xuelin was respected as one of the “the four diamonds” (si dajin gang) of modern Chinese female writers between the 1920s and 1930s.⁴ C. T. Hsia recognizes Su as one of the female writers who “made some impression” in her time, and he credits her for achieving “a more solid reputation for her criticism and research in Chinese literature” than in fiction.⁵ Her essay “Green Beans” (Biandou) was included in a Chinese junior high school textbook in the 1930s.⁶ However, Su was gradually obliterated from the literary scene in the People’s Republic of China because of her opposition to the left wing literature in the 1930s and her continued attacks on Chinese communism and on Lu Xun.⁷ Since critics rediscovered Su in the PRC in the late 1980s,⁸ they largely focus on her early writings,

beginning with a poem on consummated love. According to Shen, he was neither rewarded for his literary ability nor hassled by any utilitarian strife. Having been denied opportunities in public service, he simply enjoyed, a life of sensuous love, poetry and wine.

³ For a full list of Su Xuelin’s works, see Lu 1992: 335-8.


⁵ Hsia i 1971: 77.


⁷ See my discussion on how Su tried to redeem her literary fame through her relentless condemnation of Lu Xun later in this chapter.

⁸ Shen Hui’s Selected Works of Su Xuelin (Su Xuelin xuanjin) in 1989 and Sheng Ying’s A History of Twentieth-Century Chinese Women’s Literature in 1995.
most enthusiastically on Love for My Mother, Green Sky, and her essays. Love for My Mother is usually taken as “an autobiographical novel” in spite of Su Xuelin’s insistence in the preface of My Life that she does not think of it as autobiography. Discussion of Love for My Mother hinges upon the relevance of the female character Xing Qiu’s initial rebellion against arranged marriage to the May Fourth discourse of freedom of love. Critics also focus on the so-called conservative turn in her eventual submission to her mother’s authority over her marriage, criticizing her for confusing love for her mother with subordination to Confucian ethical codes. Even though Su Xuelin states in the preface for Ninety-Four Years that Green Sky is but a “beautiful lie,” critics persistently read it as a fantasy of domestic bliss. These views do not credit Su’s other literary accomplishments.

In Taiwan, Su enjoys a solid literary reputation. Her emphasis on the traditional Chinese ideals of filial piety and female virtue, her opposition against leftist writers such as Lu Xun, Guo Moruo, and Yu Dafu, and her conversion to Christianity all became evidence of her sense of justice. She has been compared favorably to Bing Xin, steeped as she is in classical learning and capable of the heroic as well as the “boudoir” style of writing. April 1991, on her ninety-fifth birthday, the Chinese Department of National

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Chenggong University held a conference devoted to a discussion of her life and works. The papers presented on that occasion were put together in a collection, which comprehensively covers Su Xuelin’s fiction, academic writings, cultural theory, and political thought.

Critics both in China and in Taiwan neglect Su’s autobiographical practices. They define *Love for My Mother* as her self-representation and see the choices of the character Du Xingqiu as the author’s alignment first with the May Fourth iconoclastic spirit and then with traditional filialness toward one’s parents. The female protagonist Du Xingqiu was born and raised in a traditional Chinese family and is promised in marriage at a young age to a man. She is educated and exposed to modern thoughts during the May Fourth. In order to do her bit in transforming the backward Chinese culture, she decides against the will and without the knowledge of her mother to go to France to further her education. Not long after her arrival in France, a fellow student Qin Feng falls in love with her and proposes to her. She experiences romantic love for the first time but feels extremely conflicted because of the marriage her family has arranged for her. She almost decides to disobey her parents, disappoint her fiancé’s family, and face the ridicule of her native people, but the thought of her mother being upset and shamed by her choice makes her hesitate. Out of a filial heart, she turns down Qin. Subsequently, she is saddened by a series of events. She tries in vain to befriend her fiancé, who is studying in America. Her beloved elder brother dies. In despair, she turns to Christianity for spiritual comfort. Meanwhile, frequent fighting between the warlords at the time causes much turmoil in her hometown. Her mother is confined to bed after
being wounded by bandits in a riot. Family and national circumstances made it impossible for her to study in peace. She hurries to China to see her dying mother and to consummate her marriage as a token of her filiality.

When critics insist that *Love for My Mother* is an autobiography and remain oblivious to the author’s self-professed autobiographies, what seems to lie at the bottom is the question of authority, i.e., who decides what is autobiography. *Love for My Mother*, in terms of the story itself, bears a recognizable resemblance to the author’s experience, although the story is told in the third person. In *My Life*, and later in *Nine-Four Years of a Floating Life*, the author becomes the first-person autobiographical subject. I only treat the latter two works as Su Xuelin’s autobiographies, not because I think they are more truthful representations of her life but because they demonstrate a reclaimed female subjectivity and reconstruction of the author’s self-image as a writer.

1.1 Writing Herself against Other Women

Autobiography critic and theorist Sidonie Smith insightfully critiques the persistent rationality, ahistoricity, and autonomy of the traditional autobiographical male self. She contrasts the male self, typically represented as unencumbered by the body, with the ways in which Western women writers, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Harriet Jacobs, Gertrude Stein, Nora Neale Hurston, Annie Dillard, Cherrié Moraga, and Jo Spence, take up the body in negotiating their gender, cultural, and racial identities. Smith holds that their writings introduce embodied female identities that subvert the traditional Western autobiography in two ways. First, they revise the “unique, unitary,
unencumbered” patriarchal selfhood that “escapes all forms of embodiment” by bringing onto the autobiographical scenario divergent female selves closely connected with and defined through the body. Secondly, the self-embodiment in these writers’ autobiographical storytelling challenges the body politics through which female identity is essentialized as procreator and nurturer. In their writings, self-embodiment is a means by which these female writers tell the stories of their lives as women and search for and refashion their identities in their contextual surroundings.

The way in which Su Xuelin engages with the female body in the Chinese cultural environment of her time speaks to and yet differs from the celebration of femaleness in Smith’s analysis. Su begins with the body only to deny it. In the early part of My Life, she describes sensuous details of childhood such as attachment to her mother’s presence and her breasts as an infant, whetting apricot kernels into whistles, making bamboo weapons, drilling like soldiers and playing war games, and cat whiskers sticking into nostrils to make her sneeze. She recalls painting human and animal figures on paper and on walls and making horse figures on her grandmother’s back and knees when massaging her: “A few fist beats tapped out a horse head, a few more beats tapped out a horse tail, and still more beats tapped out the four hooves.”

However, this enjoyment of physical activities ends with her first moment of self-consciousness, as described in the following scene:

I remember that when I was five and a half, my elders sewed me a dark purple cotton shirt and allowed me to wear it on festive occasions. [Someone] parted my hair in the middle, made a bun on each side, put

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flowers in each, and applied powder and rouge on my cheeks. ... I saw
myself in the mirror and felt that [I was] extremely beautiful. Children of
that age could not normally sit still, but that day I sat in front of the mirror
for half a day, appreciating my own beauty, being fascinated by my own
beauty, quite unable to tear myself away. ... Unlike other women, I never
pay much attention to my looks. Nor do I know what is “falling in love
with oneself when looking at one’s own shadow.” If for once in my life I
“fell in love with myself when looking at my own shadow,” it happened
when I was at the age of five and a half. When I reached the age of eight
or nine, on every festive occasion when my elders tried to make me
change into new clothes, I always made a great fuss about wanting to wear
that purple shirt. When I finally dug it out from the bottom of a suitcase, I
found regretfully that there was no way I could even bind it around my
body. 16

In this passage, the young girl is fascinated with her own body. When she grows older,
she becomes obsessed with the purple shirt, silent about her physical being. The way in
which the older girl hangs unto the purple shirt and stays away from new clothes may
have to do with the gender restrictions that began to apply to the girl’s life. As the author
recalls in the chapter “Childhood Reminiscences,” at about the age of ten she begins her
confined life in the boudoir, with the garden in the back of the house being her entire
world. In the chapter “Traditional Poetry and I,” she mentions that, while she still had
the freedom of studying classical Chinese poetry with a male teacher, her elder sister was
confined to the main rooms (shangfang) since she was already an older girl. 17 Perhaps
because of the happy memory of wearing that purple shirt, she states that she loves the
color purple the rest of her life. The purple shirt that she grew out of reminds one of the
confinement and restraint imposed on the female body.

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The younger girl transfixed in front of the mirror by her own charms immediately invokes Jacques Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage. According to Lacan, the genesis of the self takes place when an infant sees and identifies with its own mirror image that it imagines to be unified and whole. It desires itself in the image of a more perfect other. This moment of mis/recognition is also the moment when the subject is split. Thus, Lacan proposes that the coherent, autonomous self is a construct, a fiction made of language. Entry into this symbolic realm of language enables the establishment of the self as subject. Similarly, the younger girl in Su’s text remains in perfect bliss about her own body reflected in the mirror. What she gains is the initial self-knowledge as a visually pleasing object in the eyes of a contemplating subject which is also herself.

The deep regret with which the author talks about having to give up the purple shirt expresses anxiety over her growing body. Because the beauty of the body turns out to be a mis/recognition at a later age, the younger girl’s love for her own looks gets transferred onto the shirt. As she learns to be silent about her body, transferring it onto the symbolism of the shirt, she acquires language and what Lacan calls the Law of the Father. In the Chinese context, the Law of the Father is the Confucian gender system, which demanded the confinement of the female body. The terms of confinement are specified in the binary division of inner and outer quarters in the earliest Confucian classic The Book of Changes (Yi ching), which thus ordained: “Her place is within (second line), while that of the husband is without (fifth line). It is in accord with the great laws of nature that husband and wife take their proper places.”18 In Su’s narrative,

the eight-/nine-year-old “I” diverts her attention from her body to the shirt, a metonymic replacement of the younger body. She becomes fixated on the purple shirt and on that state of pristine beauty. The new clothes can be seen as symbolic of the loss of her perfect physical beauty and of gender constraints that begin to restrict her life.

The self-admiration and fixation on the purple shirt also invite a Freudian explanation of narcissism.¹⁹ According to Freud, narcissism denotes “the attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated…”²⁰ The author’s self-love is somewhat symptomatic of what Freud calls the “primary” narcissism or “ego libido,” which refers to the phenomenon of a child’s libidinal energy being directed toward himself. When the child’s libidinal drive is transferred to external things and people other than himself, “ego libido” gives way to “object libido.” If the little girl at first directs her libidinal interest centripetally in her self-fascination, then, the external transference of the same interest is accomplished in her obsessive love for the purple shirt. She becomes fixated in that obsessive love, so much so that she declares, “I have had a fondness for the color purple my entire life.”²¹ Later in the text, this fondness finds gratification in purple flowers which replace the purple shirt and sublimates libidinal drive into artistic creativity:

Morning glory, commonly found in Taiwan, has a perfect purple, not too light, not too dark, either… Right in front of a window at my residence, there was a bamboo rack with such flowers spreading all over it. From a

¹⁹ “Narcissus” was a known myth to the author, and she mentions the myth and admits to her own narcissism in Ninety-Four Years.

²⁰ Freud 1957: 73.

distance, they looked like a thousand purple stars or like a gorgeous
screen, which [i] found more pleasing to the eye than anything else.
Whenever I wanted to write, I would walk to this beautiful screen to
admire it for a while. Or I would pluck a few flowers with leaves and put
them in a small vase on my desk. Although the flowers withered in a few
hours, my [literary] inspiration rushed [to me] endlessly like spring
water.  

Here the color purple acquires a symbolic meaning different from bodily beauty. The life
span of her new love object, the morning glories in the vase, is extremely short due to the
fact that the author removes them from their life source to serve a literary purpose. The
physical transience of the flowers forms a contrast with the author’s literary energy that
becomes immortal in literary texts. Thus, the body that the older girl disavows gets
acknowledged and reinvented in literature through the inspiration of the purple morning
glories. This self-invention is realized through flowers, a conventional symbol for
feminine beauty, as a source of literary creativity. Yet flowers here are not used to
signify feminine beauty but to invigorate the literary energy of the female writer. The
picture of the writing desk, the vase with flowers in it, and the morning glories outside
the author’s window is one of the rare descriptions in modern Chinese literature of a
woman’s writing space.

Representation of other women’s bodily ordeals constitutes another aspect of the
construction of the self in My Life. It is here that negative relationality begins to show,
marking the author away as differentiated and enabling her to write her way out of the
material realities of women’s lives at that time. She presents two sets of female images

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as negative role models against which she constructs her identity. The first set consists of religious representations of tortured female bodies, as set forth in the following passage:

I remember that an elder distant relative once took me and several of my playmates to yue miao.\textsuperscript{23} ... In every hall, there were figures of sinners being tortured, and the methods of torture were varied, such as mountain of knives, tree of swords, vessel of frying oil, skinning, disemboweling, tongue extracting, and what not. ... That elder relative explained to us that those sinners committed certain crimes during their lifetime, and after their bodies died, their souls were punished in the underworld. Strange to say, most of the people I saw being tortured were women. More strangely, giving birth was also considered sinful. It was said that the blood was offensive to the various gods, and if not mediated with prayers, the souls [of women who gave birth] would fall into the lake of blood after death and would stay there afloat forever, with no hope of salvation. Or it was said that if a woman died of childbirth without their family members inviting a monk to perform ‘a Blood Bowl Sutra’ (xue pen jing) to save her soul from suffering, her soul would also fall into the lake of blood. I do not remember now which way it went.\textsuperscript{24}

These ordeals resemble a story Patricia B. Ebrey employs to illustrate the Buddhist belief that pregnancy was so contaminating that it prevented the mother’s rebirth. In the story Ebrey cites, a woman dies of childbirth with the baby still in her womb. Her husband cuts open her belly and removes the fetus to give her a chance to get out of purgatory and be reborn.\textsuperscript{25} Ebrey uses the “Blood Bowl Sutra” to speculate on how the notion of the pollution of pregnancy and childbirth originated:

\textsuperscript{23} Yue miao refers to temples in the mountains in general. In the account on Fenshui, Shanxi in Commentary on the Waterways Classic (Shui jing zhu), Li Daoyuan (?-527) mentions a yue miao, which is “so efficacious that birds never rested [on its roof], and the tigers in the surrounding forest kept themselves in their dens” (The Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Chinese Language, vol. 3, Taipei, Chinese Cultural University, 1985, 4463).

\textsuperscript{24} Su 1967a: 8.

\textsuperscript{25} Ebrey 1995: 175.
An apocryphal Buddhist sutra (that is, one written in China), the Blood Bowl Sutra, describes the bloody bowl hell... Only women were in this hell, and... they were there for such offenses as contaminating the ground spirits with the blood of childbirth or washing blood-stained garments in rivers with the result that those downstream inadvertently offered tea to gods brewed from contaminated water.  

The author in *My Life* sees childbirth as a double edged-sword: “Who would expect that women risking their lives to continue the family line and reproduce offspring for humankind would be considered a serious offense and punished with such severity?” In Confucian society, a woman is expected to fulfill her most important duty of continuing her husband’s lineage. But because the blood of childbirth is viewed as contaminating and mythically constructing a blood lake, which threatens to drown women who give birth, childbirth becomes both the reason and the means of punishing the female body.

The author’s perception of the female body as a liability also originates from the various misogynous beliefs and practices in the daily life that she knew as a child:

According to Chinese popular folk belief, women were naturally sinful. They were born not only mean and lowly, but also filthy. Not only was their birth blood inauspicious, but their hands were also prohibited from touching men’s things. My grandmother... never dared to lay a hand on my grandfather’s official hat and garments. When she occasionally sat on the edge of his bed, she would always carefully lift the bedding first, lest [she] would spoil his career fortune. ... I think that my grandmother’s worst tyranny was ‘differentiation between the upper and the lower,’ the upper referring to the part of the body from the waist up and the lower from the waist down. ... Washing a woman’s upper garment and lower garment in the same tub was absolutely forbidden. If [a woman’s lower garment is] washed in the same tub with a man’s upper garment, that

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26 Ebrey 1993: 175.

would be even worse. There was no other way of mending the situation than throw away the man's garment.\textsuperscript{28}

Her grandmother's strict distinction between the upper and the lower parts of the female body symbolizes the social organization of gender, with the male world separated from the female world. The order of the male world depends on the construction of the female world as disorderly and hence threatening. Therefore, the female body has to be controlled, devalued, and exorcised. The gender segregation implemented by the author's grandmother is another and perhaps more practical version of the gender rules spelled out in \textit{The Book of Rites (Li ji)}\textsuperscript{29}:

There are rules specifying the respective duties and status of a married couple. The husband takes charge of wider and more important business while the wife's place is in the home. Each of them, so to speak, has his or her own living quarters within the marital home. The wife must not flout this rule by leaving her own belongings in her husband's section nor must she use any of her husband's personal belongings. When the husband goes out, it is the wife's duty to tidy up his quarters. It is only right that the junior serves the senior and the lesser serves the superior. The matrimonial proprieties are to be observed by the wife until she reaches the age of seventy. By then, the segregation, as it were, is said to have been spent.\textsuperscript{30}

The separation of the upper and lower in the gender system of the author's grandmother

\textsuperscript{28} Su 1967a: 8-9.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{The Book of Rites} is not a book on gender education \textit{per se}, but is frequently quoted for its teachings on the subject.

\textsuperscript{30} Quoted from Wong Yin Lee's "Women's Education in Traditional and Modern China," \textit{Women's History Review}, 4.3 (1995): 352.
corresponds well with the gender hierarchy demanded in *Li ji*. The popular belief about female pollution and female blood supports the ideal gender norm that confined women to the inner sphere.

Francesca Bray challenges, with good reason, the binary idea of the inner and outer space in the context of imperial Chinese households and argues for a highly fluid boundary between them. She suggests that home in imperial China was hardly an inner space because of its close connection with public life by virtue of the contributions women made to the social order beyond the walls of the inner chambers.\(^{31}\) She points out that gender segregation applied to men as well as women. Men were ordained to be away from the house and occupy themselves in the public world during the day; lingering around the inner space without a good reason was considered shameful and wrong.\(^{32}\) Bray interrogates binary thinking as a dominant critical paradigm. However, Su’s text draws a picture from the inventory of her personal knowledge and experience that women did in fact live a more restricted life than men, and the majority of women were denied the opportunity to move beyond the space of the walled house.

What the author learns about the pollution of childbirth also agrees with the study of late imperial women’s lives by Bray. According to Bray, although married women were expected to produce heirs for the male family, birth was perceived as a disruptive event. Bray writes:

> Birth was popularly considered both a dangerous and a polluting event. In modern times birth pollution was considered if anything as strong as the


\(^{32}\) Bray 1997: 129.
pollution of death... A dying person was taken from his usual bed and set by the shrine to die, but procreation and parturition were kept strictly separate from the shrine... Medical texts indicate that probably as late as the Tang dynasty parturient mothers were moved outside the main house to give birth and remained outside for a month until the pollution had dispersed. In early China women did not give birth in bed, but squatted on a straw mat that absorbed the blood and afterward was burned, dispelling pollution as well as dirt. By late imperial times women no longer gave birth outside the house, and pollution was contained within the mother's room.33

Bray also mentions the research of Charlotte Furth (1986) on the medical theories of late imperial China about "fetal poison," in which Furth addresses the medical representations of popular beliefs about how a woman's polluting powers affected her newborn child.34

Bray discusses religious beliefs that agree with the sex discrimination that Su was exposed to as a child. For example, Buddhist scriptures represent childbirth as a karmic sin, a form of cosmic pollution. This notion is clearly stated in a Buddhist scripture: "By giving birth to children she besouls heaven and earth, and offends the river god by washing bloody skirts."35 The same scripture also includes such remarks about women: "After they are married she necessarily suffers the pains of childbirth, and cannot avoid the sin of offending the sun, moon, and stars with a flow of blood." The scripture goes on to list the details of suffering which women had to go through in childbirth and the pains and dangers of pregnancy.36

33 Bray 1997: 119.
34 Bray 1997: 121, 69n.
In some societies, if people fear something as a disruptive force to the status quo, they will treat it as pollution. This phenomenon has drawn attention from Western critics as well. Anthropologist Mary Douglas' use the rules of purity as a route to understanding primitive society can shed some light on the degradation of the female body as pollution in the stories told by Su. Douglas holds that “pollution ideas work in the life of society at two levels, one largely instrumental, one expressive.” At the instrumental level, the ideal order of society is maintained with dangers that threaten to befall transgressors. At the expressive level, pollution beliefs are symbolic of the general view of social order in a given society. For example, there are beliefs that each sex is a danger to the other or that only one sex is endangered by contact with the other, usually males from females, but sometimes the reverse. Douglas' observation stresses that many ideas about sexual dangers can be “interpreted as symbols of the relation between parts of society, as mirroring designs of hierarchy or symmetry which apply in the larger social system.”

Su’s narration articulates both the expressive and instrumental functions of the female body as contamination. The social order expressed through the control and condemnation of woman’s body reflects a world constructed on the basis of polarizations: upper and lower, order and disorder, purity and impurity, and cleanliness and filth. The latter in each pair is usually associated with female and is kept in subservient position in relation to the former. The qualities assigned to be female are used to construct the identity and maintain the stability of the former. But Chinese society in Su’s narration cannot dispense with the female blood of childbirth. As Douglas remarks,

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37 Douglas 1978: 3-4.
Granted that disorder spoils pattern; it also provides the materials of pattern. Order implies restriction; from all possible materials, a limited selection has been made and from all possible relations a limited set has been used. So disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realized in it, but its potential for patterning is indefinite. This is why, though we seek to create order, we do not simply condemn disorder. We recognize that it is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has potentiality. It symbolizes both danger and power.  

In Su Xuelin’s representation of her familiar gendered world, women’s bodies are used as a site where penalty for human sins in general can be wreaked. In her own family, the grandmother tries her best to stay clear of her husband’s things so as not to bring him bad luck in his public career. Thus, in order for society to operate in the desired way, women’s bodies, although indispensable, should be duly regulated and punished. Society interprets female blood as jeopardizing the world of men, and therefore purges it. But because the chaos and pollution projected onto the female body helps maintain the organization and purity of the social order, society readily prescribes a remedy, such as performing the Blood Bowl Sutra and the creation of opposites.

Representations of shrews in traditional Chinese historical and literary texts also reflect anxiety about the potential disruption of social order by women. According to Yenna Wu, such representation dates as far back as The Book of Historical Documents (Shu jing) and History of the Warring States (Zhan guo ce). In both of these Chinese classical works, jealous, cruel, garrulous women abound. Shrewish wives persecuting their henpecked husbands also appear in folk songs, jokes, anecdotes, plays, and novels.

38 Douglas 1978: 94.
produced in the late sixth century and throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties.\textsuperscript{39} Keith McMahon, another critic who has written on the subject of shrew and taming the shrew in traditional Chinese vernacular fiction,\textsuperscript{40} points out the perception of jealous and domineering women as a subversive force to male power and domination in Chinese society. He begins with an anatomy of the word \textit{"pofu"} (shrew), literally translating it as \textit{“a scattering woman,”} or a woman who \textit{“spills”} or \textit{“splashes.”} McMahon goes on to discuss the representation in Qing fiction of the ways in which a shrew frightens her husband into submission, overpowers her female rivals in the household, and opposes the attainment of concubines for her husband even though she does not produce any sons. McMahon observes that such representations portray the shrew \textit{“symbolically as both a polluting force and a castrating one.”}\textsuperscript{41} The symbolism of pollution in his analysis derives from his interpretation of \textit{“po”} in the word \textit{“pofu”} as the scattering of \textit{“either literal (or figurative) body fluids or else pollution metaphorically expressed as rage or jealousy.”}\textsuperscript{41} Castration in the fiction discussed by McMahon takes the displaced forms of physical attacks and occasional attempted amputation of the penis.

The accounts of Bray, Ebrey, Douglass, Wu, and McMahon all correspond with the gender order and gender persecution in Su Xuelin’s autobiographies. Femaleness and female blood are held accountable for a wide variety of social and gender disorders, and the subversion of male power and denial of male privilege are among the most important.

\textsuperscript{39} Wu 1986: 107-143; Wu 1995.

\textsuperscript{40} McMahon 1995: 55-81. In another essay, \textit{“Ernü Yingxiang Zhuan as Antidote to Honglou Meng,”} he also discusses the disavowal of female pollution and its transformation into healthy influence on men and life-nourishing milk for babies. See McMahon 1995: 265-82.

\textsuperscript{41} McMahon 1995: 55.
In Su’s autobiographies, the author starts out with the young subject’s incipient consciousness of her body but soon diverts the narration to religious representations of tortured female bodies and popular beliefs about female contamination. This latter act accomplishes a disidentification of author from other women who suffer from their bodily encumbrance.

Then Su turns to a second group of women that she knew in real life in her early years. In the chapter “Portraits of Female Servants in Lanxi County Magistrate’s House,” she tells the stories of five female servants at her grandfather’s mansion in Lanxi County, Anhui Province - Mother Li, Sister Pan, Xiao Zhang, Sister Lianzhu, and Wife of Teacher Wang. The stories about these women are threaded together by a common theme - destruction of the female body. Two of these stories tie in particularly well with the author’s concern with the female body. The first one is the life of Sister Lianzhu. She is a servant at the Su house and is impregnated by a male servant, a fact she kept secret from everyone around her, including Mother Fang, a female servant with whom she share a room. When Sister Lianzhu’s growing belly reveals the secret, the man leaves Lanxi county for his native village to avoid trouble. Sister Lianzhu alone must deal with people’s ridicule for her sexual transgression. When labor draws near, she stays in bed, pretending to be sick. The following is the author’s version of what Mother Fang witnesses and later recounts to the subject:

That night, she [Sister Lianzhu] half filled her night pot with water and prepared toilet paper and such. When contractions started, she bore the pain in silence. When the baby was ready to be delivered, she sat on the night pot … her face turned ghastly. It was in the dead of winter, but
beads of sweat the size of soybeans oozed out from her forehead. Her face muscles twitched violently so that her face became quite deformed. In about half a meal’s time, [Mother Fang] saw her laboring continually. Then [Mother Fang] heard a thump, as if a heavy thing fell into the water. After a little while, it sounded as if there was liquid falling in torrents. Sister Lianzhu dried herself with toilet paper, and she used up several piles. Then she struggled back to bed to go to sleep.\footnote{Su 1967a: 37.}

It is not until the next day, when Sister Lianzhu has gone to work, that Mother Fang shows her the infant drowned in blood and water.

It is believed, according to the narration, that a woman giving birth in someone else’s house brings bad luck to the host family and that a child born out of wedlock is even more of an ill omen. For these reasons, Sister Lianzhu has to give up her job at the Su house to return to her hometown. Upon leaving, she gives the author’s grandmother a personal apology and asks pardon for the offence. The author makes special mention that after she returned to her hometown Sister Lianzhu “lacked nutrition and care after she gave birth,” “caught a cold and coughed chronically,” and “died of depression not long after.”\footnote{Su 1967a: 38.} The bodily ailments and psychological affliction are the author’s main points of emphasis.

The sight of the drowned infant and Sister Lianzhu’s subsequent death might well serve as an admonition: if not kept under proper control, female sexuality can endanger a woman’s life. Because the sexual act and infant were not legitimized through marriage, Sister Lianzhu must go through the pregnancy and childbirth under extraordinarily harrowing circumstances. The graphic description of the entire event reinforces the sense
of the female body as an object of male sexual desire and a liability for a woman. It is a story of female sexuality penetrated, appropriated, and penalized. Although the story shows that male sexuality unendorsed through marriage was also a target of moral castigation, which explains why the man who impregnated Sister Lianzhu flees, the female body receives the punishment in the story.

The other story centers on the wife of Teacher Wang (Su’s private tutor) whose life is completely ruined by her bound feet. She was born and raised in a prominent family, and her feet are bound so small that “when walking, she swayed and would stagger if exposed to any wind. Sometimes she has to lean on a wall to move about at all.”44 Too mutilated to cook and do other household chores, she is looked down upon by her husband and his mother. When she has to leave the Su house where Teacher Wang taught, to live with her mother-in-law, the Su family send along a female servant, Mother Fang, to take care of her. The mother-in-law denies her food. Mother Fang tries repeatedly to bring the case to the attention of the county prefect. But no one wants to intervene, thinking that a mother-in-law has a right to do whatever she wants to her daughter-in-law. In desperation, Wife of Teacher Wang commits suicide. The author’s point in telling this story is to criticize the “base custom” of footbinding that would “physically disable a human being.”45

Starting from mid-nineteenth century, people began to see footbinding as one of the evils of traditional China. The condemnation of this practice first came from Western

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44 Su 1967a: 38.

45 Su 1967a: 43.
Christian missionaries.\textsuperscript{46} Reformist thinkers Kang Youwei (1858-1927) and Liang Qichao (1873-1929) were among the earliest Chinese reformers to oppose foot-binding. Kang criticized foot-binding as a cause for China’s weakness in the international scene, because weak-bodied women with bound feet could not produce healthy children. He proposed turning Chinese temples into schools.\textsuperscript{47} Liang also called for abolition of foot-binding and establishment of girls’ schools to raise the standard of motherhood.\textsuperscript{48}

In recent years critics such as Patricia B. Ebrey and Dorothy Ko have suggested alternative ways of looking at foot-binding. Ebrey proposes that we set aside our modern, Western readings of the symbolism of foot-binding and try to understand the custom from the perspective of the Chinese people of the past. She uses various examples to argue that foot-binding in Song China was a symbol of feminine beauty and social status rather than of subjugation.\textsuperscript{49} Ko’s research, like Ebrey’s, presents an interpretation of foot-binding that moves away from the discourse of woman’s oppression in observing that a pair of bound feet in seventeenth-century China symbolized class status and upbringing. Ko supports her argument by finding evidence in the work of a female poet that bound feet could be a source of happiness. Nor does she think that bound feet necessarily hampered women’s physical mobility. She shifts the focus on


\textsuperscript{47} Kang 1898a: 219-222; 1898b: 242-244.


\textsuperscript{49} Ebrey 1993: 37-8.
women and argues that "the impetus for the spread of foot-binding was rooted in larger concerns of defining nationhood and gender values and was not directed against women per se." \(^{50}\)

However, Su writes about the victimization of the Wife of Teacher Wang through foot-binding from a different viewpoint from that of Ebrey and Ko. Su herself has bound feet, \(^{51}\) and it is hard to imagine that Su could have viewed foot-binding in the ways in which Ebrey and Ko interpret it. The wife of Teacher Wang comes from a family of high status, but nowhere in the story does Su discuss her bound feet in terms of family status; still less does she appreciate the "beauty" of her crippled small feet. Teacher Wang is severely abused by her mother-in-law because of her crippled feet prevent her from performing filial duty. Her eventual self-destruction happens out of despair and humiliation caused by the total inability to function physically as a woman.

In these biographical sketches, wrecked bodies constitute the material realities of being female. What do these suffering bodies have to do with the author’s self-representation? I argue that she constructs her identity based on her perception of other women’s lives. In other words, other women’s experiences provide a negative model against which she narrates her own life as a writing woman who exercises the power of representation and self-representation. The tragedies of Sister Lianzhu, Teacher Wang’s wife, and other women symbolize a historical trauma that needs to be healed through the narrative act. Here, I draw on “the trauma / dissociation model” developed

\(^{50}\) Ko 1994: 148, 171, 279.

\(^{51}\) In *Ninety-Four Years*, the author reveals that her own feet were bound at the age of four, which made her “physically disabled” and “unable to be a dignified human being.” Su 1991: 7.
by Judith Herman in her classic analysis of the post-traumatic stress disorder and recovery of memory for people who suffer severe traumas, especially sexually abused women. According to this model, an individual splits off traumatic experiences from consciousness in order to survive them, but the human mind has the capacity to preserve the representation of past events so that memory can become accessible with the assistance of a therapist in the process of healing. Janet Haakan assesses and problematizes this model: “In constructing memory as a literal representation of past events, the commingling of disturbing events and their fantasy elaborations is closed off.” Haakan also adds that “the trauma/disassociation model may be used defensively to ward off the disturbing and conflictual aspects of feminine experience,” such as conflicts with other women, the manipulation of the therapist, and the suppression of political differences within feminism. However, for all its limitations, Herman’s model provides an angle for an interpretation of the portrayals of the devastated female bodies in My Life. These portrayals can then be read as historical and cultural narratives of female trauma preserved in the memory of the author. Although not a personal trauma, it represents a history of violence and atrocities committed to the female body. This history of violence also includes the encouragement of widow suicide and rape suicide, the gory details of which are fully described in the official histories, particularly those for the

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52 Herman 1992: 42-7, 133-95.
Yuan and Ming dynasties. As part of the cultural memory, the historical and collective traumas told in these narratives get re-enacted through Su’s act of autobiography that helps to shape her individual identity.

Su uses a similar narrative strategy in a chapter of Ninety-Four Years, “My Mother.” The story Su tells of her mother hinges on a Chinese gender imperative “A woman of no talent is a woman of virtue” (Nü zi wu cai bian shi de). According to the author’s account, her mother’s maiden name is “Du Duoni” (“duo” means “to hide.”). She was given this name because her mother, when pregnant with her, went into hiding lest a female child get killed by her mother-in-law. When Duoni grows up and becomes the wife of an official, her husband gives her a more elegant name, “Su Du Huanqing,” after a song lyric writer. She is very pleased and has a whole box of name cards made to celebrate her newly acquired name. But her mother-in-law insisted on keeping the word "duo" in her name and referred to her as “Duoxiang.” The author explains that many married women in Anhui province had the word “xiang” (minister) in their names to emphasize the fact that they would serve their husbands in the same way that a minister would serve the emperor.

Su’s narration commemorates her mother as a woman of both virtue and talent. Spending her entire life waiting upon her own mother-in-law, she dies at the age of fifty-four, while her mother-in-law lives to be eighty-five. She even breast feeds her mother-in-law’s little son at the expense of her own son. She was diligent, thrifty, and was

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54 “Biographies of Exemplary Women” (Lienü zhuan), in History of Yuan Dynasty (Yuan shi), 1976; “Biographies of Exemplary Women” (Lienü zhuan), in History of Ming Dynasty (Ming shi), 1974.

55 In Chinese, one of the meanings of “duo” is to “to hide.”
generous to her relatives in their moments of need. It is clear that the author tries to portray her mother as an exemplary Confucian woman. Serving her mother-in-law, not the least of which was constant massaging, consumes Su’s mother. But Su also portrays her mother as a woman of talent, able to successfully manage the financial and household affairs of a large family and run the household in a way that all the family members lived in peace and harmony.

Su’s portrayal of her mother overlaps with traditional biographical writings on women, which tends to be not so much their life stories but catalogues of a female subject’s various historically defined virtues, such as filial piety, ability to maintain good family relations, household management, and female chastity. This resemblance to traditional women’s biography may have to do with the author’s education while she studied at Anhui First Women’s Normal School. The readings in her Chinese class consisted, among other things, of biographies of chaste women and filial men. The author recalls: "I composed biographies in classical Chinese style for several chaste women in my hometown, and got highly praised by my teacher."\(^{56}\) Her compositions were so well written that the teacher showed them as models to the whole class. One of his colleagues was so impressed that he went home and gave his own son a good beating for his inferior work.

Although the subject respects her mother’s virtues, she also exhibits a fear that is best described by Adrienne Rich’s term “matrophobia,” i.e., the fear of becoming one’s mother. The story of the mother serves as a narrative device for the subject to distinguish

\(^{56}\) Su 1991: 29.
herself as a modern woman whose identity cannot be defined within the same parameters of traditional female virtue and talent. She shows respect for her mother's virtues but is wary of the pitfall of gender roles, preferring to make literary talent, traditionally a male endeavor, a primary defining principle in the construction of her identity. In her own words: "I can write, but I am no good at all at household affairs. Although I admire my mother's virtue and ability, her virtuous conduct did not pass onto me, nor did her ability."57 Although she portrays herself as not having any of her mother's virtue and talent, the author does not feel in the least inferior to her mother. Instead, she uses the story of her mother to put into relief her own identity as a writer. She chooses to be remembered not as daughter, wife, and mother, but as writer and literary researcher. As if to signify a further break from her mother, Su does not begin her own life story until her mother's death, implying that closure of her mother's life marks the beginning of her own.

In *My Life*, Su also explores alternative narratives about women's lives, as exemplified in the portrait of the gender ambiguous Storyteller Mute Uncle, whom the author remembers from childhood. A distant relative of the Su family, Mute Uncle comes to the Su house as a servant after her husband dies. She is named Mute because she could not talk as a child for two or three years as the result of an illness. When she later regains speech, people are so used to referring to her as Mute that it does not occur to anyone to adopt her another name. The children in the Su family call her Mute Uncle, instead of Mute Aunt, because they love and admire her for her story-telling skills. As

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the author recalls, whenever the children become too rowdy, Mute Uncle will tell them a
story. The author fondly reminiscences: “We would all sit down around her as stars
surround the moon and listen to her stories intently, faces looking up. [That way] we
behaved ourselves even if we did not want to behave.”\textsuperscript{58} In this manner, Mute Uncle
would tell stories to the children while making hemp yarn for the master’s family.

Mute Uncle gets rewarded in two ways for her entertaining skills and diligence as
a servant. First, because of her excellence in storytelling, the Su family decide to honor
her as a man, and she rather enjoys being an “uncle,” saying: “I deeply regret not having
cultivated enough virtues in my former life and being born a woman as a consequence.
Now you refer to me this way, well, perhaps I should count on your blessing and hope to
be reborn as a man in my next life.”\textsuperscript{59} The other reward comes in the form of material
benefit. Master Su decides with the important clan members in her native village to grant
her some land, get her a son through adoption, and send her back to her native village to
enjoy life in retirement.

If we read the story of Mute Uncle against the depictions of other women’s
sufferings, it is not difficult to understand why the author emphasizes Mute Uncle’s
gratification in being regarded as male. Loss of speech signifies a disconnection with
gender norms represented in the symbolic order of language; regaining speech epitomizes
an alternative discourse that makes possible an alternative life, a life foreclosed to most
women. Indeed, Mute Uncle is the only woman in the narration whose life can be called
happy. She is described as existing outside conventional human relationships that

\textsuperscript{58} Su 1967a: 23.

\textsuperscript{59} Su 1967a: 20.
defined other women’s lives. The narration of her life begins with her husband’s death, and the only part of her life that gets told is the period during which she enjoys love and respect at the Su house as a storyteller and as a servant. She is depicted exclusively as a working woman without immediate family connections, outside the marriage system, free from childbirth, and away from her native village. At the same time, nothing more is said of her after she went back to her native village to her land and adopted son.

Mute Uncle’s motherhood, without being a wife and biological mother, serves as a good parallel to Su’s self-image as a literary mother. In the story about Mute Uncle, storytelling was an activity of the body and stories came from the body: “Mute Uncle’s belly was full of stories, and she could never run out of them.”\(^{60}\) But this physical act was not a liability, unlike the pregnancy of Sister Lianzhu, for it did not incur the dangers and pollution of childbirth. If her bellyfuls of stories can be understood as a metaphoric pregnancy, she was pregnant only with words, so that there was no labor and blood involved at delivery. What is more, she was free to “deliver” her stories at any chosen time and place without being punished.

The representation of Mute Uncle as pregnant with stories foretells the sexually non-reproductive but textually prolific woman in the author’s self-representation and provides a prototype of a woman honored for literary (oral) activity, free from

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\(^{60}\) Su 1967a: 23.
childbearing and torture. This individual case provides a counter example of what usually happened in traditional China, i.e., a woman’s wellbeing in old age largely depended upon her ability to produce at least one male heir for the male family line.\textsuperscript{61}

Su addresses the connection between the story of Mute Uncle and her own growth as a writer. In her own words, the stories told by Mute Uncle “…captured my imagination and cultivated my interest in folklore. Furthermore, I did not expect then that some of stories she told me would be of use in my subsequent academic research.”\textsuperscript{62} She also notes that she put together two of the stories told by Mute Uncle and had them published in a book for children. However, Su’s gets public recognition, whereas Mute Uncle does not. The only reward for Mute Uncle is land and an adopted son, which symbolically return her to normal womanhood. According to the author, Mute Uncle is forgotten after she returns to her native place, “… we never mentioned her again. Perhaps her life was nothing more than making hemp yarns for others and telling stories to entertain children.”\textsuperscript{63} Although Mute Uncle’s stories live on in the memory of the children she entertained, the story of her life is short-lived.

\textsuperscript{61} This said, I am aware that a more nuanced picture is presented by Francesca Bray. She argues that “Fertility, far from determining the fate of every woman in ‘traditional China,’ must be understood in the context of a wider ideology of ‘nature’ versus ‘culture’ that defined male as well as female ideals and expressed differences in class even more clearly than it did those in sex” (Bray 1997: 6). She draws a line between elite and popular ideals of femininity and goes on to declare: “In poor households that could not afford the luxury of polygamy, all the burden of wifely role fell on a single woman, whose performance was likely to be judged by her natural fertility. For many elite women, however, social motherhood was more important than giving birth, since they were legally entitled to appropriate any children fathered by their husband on concubines or maids” (Bray 1997:6). However, she also observes that “it was expected of married women in imperial China that they would produce children, and in particular that they would give birth to sons who would be heirs for the lineage” (Bray 1997: 283).

\textsuperscript{62} Su 1967a: 19.

\textsuperscript{63} Su 1967a: 25.
1.2 Self-Redemption through Affiliation with Canonized Writers

In both autobiographies, Su regrets her relation with Lu Xun and repeatedly talks about how, throughout her writing career, she took it as her mission to oppose Lu Xun and Chinese communism, which precluded any possibility for Su Xuelin to enter the modern literary canon in the PRC. Lu Xun, the most canonized writer in modern Chinese literature and leader of the League of Left-Wing Writers (Zuolian), was honored by Mao Zedong as “the greatest and bravest banner bearer” of the new cultural force, “the main fighter of the Chinese cultural revolution,” “a great literary master,” “a great thinker,” “a great revolutionary,” and “a modern sage.” The extent to which critics in the P. R. C. have ignored Su can be seen in the fact that in most of the collections of literary debates among the writers and intellectuals of the time, Su is scarcely mentioned, in spite of her numerous biting attacks on Lu Xun. Literary historian Sheng Ying, in A History of Female Literature in Twentieth-Century China (Ershi shiji zhongguo nixing wenxue shi), briefly mentions Su Xuelin’s opposition of Lu Xun and sees it as a reason for the neglect of Su Xuelin in modern Chinese studies. The exclusion of Su from the Chinese literary scene in China caused much resentment on Su’s part.

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64 See Mao 1964: 52-3.

65 Of these collections, there are Li Fugen’s Old Scores: Selected Writings of Lu Xun and His Rivals in Dispute (Enyuan lu Lu Xun he ta de lun di wenxuan, 1996), Chen Shayu’s Not One Forgiven: Lu Xun and His Opponents in Debate (Yige dou bu kuanshu: Lu Xun he ta de lundi, 1996), and Sun Yu’s The Profaned Lu Xun (Bei xiedu de Lu Xun, 1994). Only Sun includes in his collection Su’s On the Life of Lu Xun and her respective letters to Hu Shi and Cai Jiemin, in all of which she scathingly criticized Lu Xun. Sun defends Lu Xun in the preface of his collection and accuses Su’s criticism as “brutal, unscientific, and void of academic value.” See Sun 1996: 31. In Lu Xun yanjiu ziliang suoyin several titles of Su Xuelin’s essays appear.


Banished from the literature and culture of twentieth-century China, Su redeems herself through claiming not only mentors but also enemies of male writers such as Lin Shu, Hu Shi, and Lu Xun. In both *My Life* and *Ninety-Four Years*, she engages in self-rectification through textual affiliations with established male literary figures. In *My Life*, for example, she emulates Lin Shu as a literary role model. In a biographical sketch in the chapter “My Very First Literature Teacher,” Su pays homage to Lin for his literary achievements, moral character, and devotion to traditional Chinese culture. She does not touch upon any aspect of Lin’s life in this biographical portrayal. In fact, she disclaims that she was not personally acquainted with Lin in any fashion, and therefore, “if someone asks me to write a biography of sorts for him, it goes without saying that [I] lack the credentials.”

Yet this lack of personal knowledge does not disqualify her to write about him, Su sees a connection between Lin Shu and herself:

> But I have a deep textual bonding with Mr. Lin. Reading his writings, I learned about his family history and came to understand his disposition, thoughts, and interests, and his entire personality. Reading his writings, I [acquired the skill of] reading and began to write. He was the man of letters whom I admired most as a child. He was also my first teacher of the Chinese national language.

Thus, whatever “personal” acquaintance she had with Lin Shu was acquired impersonally — through reading his works. “Personal” knowledge of him is beside the

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68 Su 1967a: 73.

69 1967a: 73.
point, for her concern was Lin Shu as a literary image, her purely textual relation with him, and the role Lin’s writings played in her initial self-cultivation as a writer. Their bond is forged through the written word.

Su’s portrait of Lin presents a sharp contrast with the stories about the women represented in Su’s autobiography. Lin is seen as a literary figure who scarcely exists as a physical entity, as the following visual image shows:

In the eighth year of the Republican Era [I] was admitted to Beijing Female Normal College. Mr. Lin’s house was in Rongxian Hutong not far from my school. One day, as I was walking past his house gate, I saw an elderly person with gray beard and gray hair... His features vividly resemble the way [he was described] in “A Little Profile of Wei Lu at the Age of Sixty,” [which is] included in The Collected Works of Wei Lu. I knew this was the very teacher of Chinese that I privately studied with for years. ... [I] wanted very much to follow [him] inside to talk with him and to express my admiration and gratitude in person. But I was too young and timid then after all. [I was] also afraid that he would not receive me without someone to introduce me. Therefore, I just walked away despondently. Although I often passed by Mr. Lin’s gate afterwards, I never caught another glimpse of him.70

The author tries to portray Lin as a real person, but clearly she regards “A Little Profile of Wei Lu at the Age of Sixty,” written by Lin himself, as the source of authority. After all, she does not authorize herself to actually compose a biography for Lin, since what she knew was based on his own account any way. Referring her readers to Lin’s self-description makes Lin Shu an indisputable authority and an unapproachable literary absence. Because his literary achievement is the focus of Su’s narration, his physical appearance is simply not mentioned, as Su it only exists in his self-narrative. Thus, the

70 Su 1967a: 74.
so-called description of him only serves as another layer of text that further mystifies and sanctifies Lin’s image. What he looked like physically and the material circumstances of his life are simply not an issue for Su. Like the sketches of women, the portrayal of Lin promotes the author’s identity and offers an alternative way of existence in the writing body. Claiming Lin as a literary mentor marks the beginning of the author’s self-canonization.

If we take into consideration Su’s indignation for the slight she suffered as a writer in China, which I will address shortly, this affiliation with Lin can be regarded as a gesture to inscribe herself in the literary canon. A Confucian literatus steeped in classical learning, Lin is recognized as one of the most important figures to introduce Western literature to China, having translated some 180 works into Chinese. As he advocated the abolition of foot-binding and the education of women, among other things, Lin was considered progressive in the context of his own time. However, in the context of May Fourth iconoclasm, he was considered an arch-conservative because he staunchly opposed the 1917 Literary Revolution that promoted the vernacular language as the means of written discourse.\(^{71}\) Identifying with Lin thus reveals Su’s self-positioning in the literary and cultural revolution of her time. Although both of Su’s autobiographies speak very clearly about her support for women’s education and condemnation of the victimization of women, she did not show much interest in the cultural and literary reforms of the May Fourth. Well-versed in Chinese classics, Su developed a writing style

\(^{71}\) Lee 1973: 41-57.
that is distinctively classical and thus more elitist than many of her contemporary female writers who could not have become writers but for the legitimization of the vernacular.

Such self-inscription on the part of Su extends beyond the establishment of Lin as a role model in *My Life*. Her effort continued a quarter of a century later in *Ninety-Four Years*. In two separate chapters, “Entering Beiping Female Normal College” and “The Passing of Mr. Hu Shi and My Memorial Essays,” she expresses her admiration, or “worship” in her own words, of Hu Shi as a paragon of learning, literary excellence, moral virtue, and modern thinking. When Hu Shi was teaching at Beiping Female Normal College, he wrote “The Biography of Li Chao” to commemorate Li Chao, a female student from a wealthy family, who died in sickness and poverty because her family refused to support her financially for her education and she was denied the right to inherit her father’s properties. Su ranks this essay higher than the biographies in *Record of the Grand Historian* because of its influence on women’s constitutional right of inheritance. She also names Hu as a “modern sage”\(^\text{72}\) on equal footing with Confucius. She argues: “Because Chinese people overly consecrate sagehood, only Confucius is honored as a sage… Mr. Hu Shi is well known for his integrity, moral virtue, and unsurpassed contribution to [Chinese] culture, why can we not call him a sage?”\(^\text{73}\)

The latter chapter, which is a memorial essay, begins with Hu Shi’s death. While reinforcing Hu Shi’s status as a modern sage, Su also strikes a note of personal connection with Hu Shi by fully describing her deep grief at his death, her trip to pay

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72 Mao Zedong once dubbed Lu Xun as “a modern sage.” This is discussed in the following section on Su’s representation of Lu Xun.

respects to his remains, and her condolence visit to Hu’s wife. Su further establishes herself as the best authority to speak on Hu Shi’s life by quoting a letter from a newspaper editor soliciting memorial essays from her: “We know that ... you have always admired Mr. Hu Shi. ... It would be nice if you could write something that you found most touching and impressive during your interaction with him for over ten years as his student.” Thus authorized, she dwells on the essays, written by herself and by other people at the time of his death in 1962, that she put together in a collection called *Sea of Tears* (*Yanlei de hai*, 1967). Another collection titled *The Kiss of Juda* (*Youda zhi wen*) includes Su’s essays that refute the attacks made on Hu Shi by his former student Tang Degang, especially the accusation that Hu Shi earned his doctoral degree from Columbia University through bribery. Moreover, Su states that she had also funded, out of her own pocket, Hu Shi’s bronze bust.⁷⁴

These endeavors to associate with Hu Shi empower Su to insert herself in the literary canon, which happens at three different levels. First, the act of pronouncing Hu Shi a “modern sage” and elevating his position to that of Confucius further canonizes Hu Shi, which presupposes a position higher than his. Secondly, she claims for herself a personal bond with Hu Shi and his wife as a former student. In the process, she inherits the mantle of Hu Shi and canonizes herself. Finally, by funding the bronze bust of Hu Shi, she forges her own name together with that of Hu Shi in a material as well as a textual fashion.

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In both of her autobiographies, Su also tries to inscribe herself in the literary canon through commemorating her writings that continually made Lu Xun her political and literary enemy. Although she respected Lu Xun as a writer when she first read his *The Story of Ah Q* (*Ah Q zhengzhuan*), she fell out with him on account of political differences. She continually made accusations against his character and his motivation for turning left in the early 1930s. She viewed his criticism of the Chinese national character as a betrayal of Chinese culture and a symptom of severe mental illness. She invoked the example of the annihilating force of Hitler in Europe to illustrate what seemed to her to be Lu Xun’s dangerous domination of the modern Chinese literary circle.

The amount of energy Su committed to bashing Lu Xun is nowhere better evidenced than in *My Writings on Lu Xun* (*Wo lun Lu Xun*, 1967) after the 30th anniversary of Lu Xun’s death that was commemorated in China. This collection gathers together most of Su’s writings against Lu Xun over the decades in response to the consolidation of Lu Xun’s canonized position in China. The two most important essays are “On Lu Xun” (*Lun Lu Xun*), written in 1956 on the 20th anniversary of Lu Xun’s death, and “On the Life of Lu Xun” (*Lu Xun zhuan lun*), newly composed for the collection. In the former essay, Su deprecates Lu Xun’s creative writings and scholarship and accuses him of deception in his alliance with communism. According to Su, Lu

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76 Su 1948: Preface, VII.

77 “On Lu Xun” appears in *My Writings on Lun Xun* with a changed title, “Lu Xun and the Communists Bandits in Mutual Use” (*Yu gongfei huxiang liyong de Lu Xun*).
Xun’s only belief was nihilism, which made it impossible for him to believe in communism. She holds that the communists used Lu Xun’s influence to propagate their political ideology and Lu Xun took advantage of this opportunity to secure his political and cultural position.

“On the Life of Lu Xun” (*Lu Xun zhuan lun*), which also ran serially in *Biographical Literature* (*Zhuangji wenxue*), is the major piece in the book. In it Su condemns Lu Xun as mean in personality, vicious in conduct, and despicable in character and claims objective truthfulness of her own position. As Lu Xun’s personal and political enemy, she empowers herself by re-writing Lu Xun’s life. In part one, “A Biography of Lu Xun,” she mainly borrows from Lu Xun’s autobiographical piece. But very soon, her recounting of Lu Xun’s self-narration blends with her views. She holds that Lu Xun was paranoid because of his family situation in his childhood and that his turning left was opportunist behavior. Her full-scale attack on Lu Xun is more fully revealed in part two, “Lu Xun’s Personality and Thoughts.” She accuses him of being “calculating, exacting, intolerant, suspicious, vengeful,” and of having “a strong desire for leadership.” She again expresses her doubt toward Lu Xun’s participation in the leftist, proletarian cause on account of the pervasive pessimism in his writing. Part three further engages with Su’s judgement of Lu Xun’s character and conduct. She strategically enlists the authority of Chen Yuan, who wrote a letter to Xu Zhimo accusing

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78 This short autobiographical account was first published in *Yu Si* on June 15, 1925 as an appendix to “Ewen yiheen A Q zhengzhuan xu ji zhuzhe zixu zhuanglue” (The Preface to *The Story of Ah Q* in Russian Translation and the Author’s Brief Autobiography). It was initiated by B. A. Vassiliev, whose translation of the story came out in 1929. The piece is included in *The Complete Works of Lu Xun*, Vol. 7, 81-87.

Lu Xun of mudslinging and fabrication in dealing with people. Su builds her attack by elaborating on Chen’s initial charge. In part four, Su subverts the commonly known story of how leftist writers won over Lu Xun with her belief that Lu Xun’s eventual shift of ground was nothing but political opportunism. Part five dwells upon what Su calls the “evil-doings” of Lu Xun during his “dominance” in the literary circle for the last ten years of his life. Su alleges that Lu Xun used his power to eliminate writers with dissident voices by making it impossible for them be publish. Contributing the influence of leftist literature in the 1930s to Lu Xun’s successful “suffocation” of ideological others, she calls him a “hooligan” and a “bandit.” Appropriating Lu Xun’s own term, Su condemns Lu Xun as a “madman” who could destroy the world.80

Su clearly articulates in the preface the manifold purpose of publishing her collection as follows: (1) Outlining what she did exactly for over thirty years to oppose Lu Xun; (2) giving closure to her political cause against communism; (3) warning the critical circle in Taiwan of Lu Xun’s detrimental influence. Deeply resenting the slight she suffered trying to engage in a political dialog with leftist writers,81 she now monumentalizes herself by anthologizing her writings on the subject:

I assume that everybody knows that I opposed Lu Xun. ‘Opposing Lu Xun’ became a cause to which I committed almost half of my life. But people may not know exactly why and how I did it. Now I publish my writings of over three decades in this collection to offer readers a general

80 Su 1967b: 1-49.

81 Toward the end of “On the Life of Lu Xun,” Su says that she had published her correspondence with Cai Yuanpei and Hu Shi criticizing Lu Xun, with the intention to provoke leftist writers such as Mao Dun, Tian Han, Zheng Zhenduo, Ding Ling, and Hu Feng, to engage in some debate with her. She was ready to answer them. However, to her great disappointment, none of the influential figures responded. See Su 1967b: 46-8.
idea of my work. Because this collection represents my personal ‘observation,’ ‘reflection,’ and ‘evaluation’ of Lu Xun, I call it ‘My Writings on Lu Xun.’

Su Xuelin claims a position for herself by evaluating and judging these three male writers, all of whom were all recognized for their important contribution to modern Chinese literature and culture. The publication of the 1967 collection also created an environment in which she could participate in dialogue with renowned cultural figures like Chen Yuan, Cai Yuanpei, and Hu Shi about Lu Xun. She is trying to build for herself a higher literary profile through affiliating with these big names. A good example is that, although she admired Hu Shi to the extent of worship and included Hu Shi’s letter to her about Lu Xun in her collection, Hu Shi’s assessment of Lu Xun made no impression on her position. Therefore, her persistent discussion of her writing about Lu Xun in her autobiographies serves as self-reinvention and self-inscription in modern Chinese literature.

1.3 Engendering Literary Maternity as a New Role

Having delineated herself from women’s socially-assigned roles of physical reproduction and redeemed her fame through associating with male literary authorities, Su attempts to invent a new gender role for herself – literary motherhood. This process begins with her description of the struggle for the right to formal education, a description

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83 Hu Shi’s letter to her was written in 1936. In the letter, he disapproves of the way in which she attacked Lu Xun’s personal conduct. He recommended a more balanced view that takes into consideration both positive and negative sides and praised Lu Xun’s early works and his scholarly study of the history of Chinese fiction. See Su 1967b: 66-7.
that continually invokes imagery of the body and physicality. She likens her desire for education as “a burgeoning tree sprout,” “a hidden spring bursting out of the earth with an unstoppable force,” “a moth flying toward fire, insisting on extinguishing the fire by burning its own bones and body.” The mixture of life and death enhances the sense that Su’s craving for education is a bodily urgency. She recalls that she “would rather die if she did not have freedom” to go to school and that nothing less than her threat of suicide helped her win her parents’ permission. Such tension was almost inevitable because, according to the narration, “Parents were caught between two positions. They still believed that ‘A woman of no talent is a woman of virtue,’ but they also thought it was all right for women to learn to read and write.” Susan Mann has argued that this dictum “A woman of no talent was a woman of virtue” was already “out of fashion by the eighteenth century.” But Su’s text shows that its influence still exerted itself in early twentieth-century China. Su states in My Life that school education turned her “into a social woman from a family woman,” introducing an altogether different ideal of

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86 According to Chen Dongyuan, this dictum did not appear until the seventeenth century, although its origin has often been traced to the Song. See Chen 1981: 188-93.
87 Su 1967a: 79.
88 Mann 1992: 54.
89 Su 1967: 110.
womanhood that finds resonance only in the May Fourth intellectuals’ continued effort to argue for the education of women both for the Chinese nationalist cause and for the rebellion against the Confucian gender system.\textsuperscript{90}

Translating her body into a writing subject giving birth to literary works, the author as a social woman adopts an alternative criterion for self-definition. She erases her private life in both of her autobiographies. She insists in the preface of \textit{My Life} that she has discussed her marriage in \textit{Love for My Mother} and shuns the subject subsequently. Minimizing the story of her marriage expresses a negative attitude toward marriage and sexuality where the female body is exploited and punished, a trauma she had suffered vicariously through other women. This link helps to explain her subsequent portrayal of the self as body erotically engaged in/with writing, which is an alternative way of being a woman and a mother that steers clear of sex and childbirth.

Su enhances her newly invented gender role of literary motherhood with the description in both autobiographies of literary reproduction as a bodily activity that verges on the sexual. The physical sensuousness that characterizes her earlier narration is carried over to her reflections on writing in the latter part of \textit{My Life}. Like her need for education, she conceptualizes the desire to write as a physical need that originates within the body:

I have carefully examined my motivation to write ... Creation is one of the basic human desires, ... desires are built upon human life force, and life force frequently needs to expand itself. It is like new roots of trees

struggling to burst out of the earth into the sun and air to grow strong. It also resembles an infant carried to terms that has to be delivered. The moment we engage in [literary] creation, our life force comes into free play. The more fully we give it rein, the more joy [we] feel of creation. Deprived of the freedom to create, [our] life force will be frustrated and repressed, and [it will] wither. Then it will turn into a depression to gnaw at your heart, to demand your attention and to urge you for opportunities to develop. When this happens, the pain we feel is very acute, even as a heart being fried and tormented in boiling oil.91

In this passage, the image of the growing tree that she uses earlier to characterize her need for education reappears in order to convey the sense of urgency she feels for writing. If it is natural for the tree to seek sun and air to grow, it is natural, too, for the author to express and reproduce herself through the act of writing. But Su moves beyond the metaphor of the tree and discusses the activity of writing in obviously sexual and reproductive terms. She states that that writing is a desire, a life force.92 She recognizes this desire as the desire for creation, which at once invokes the stories of childbirth that she is concerned with in the earlier part of the text. However, creation as a metaphor for writing redefines the author’s identity as a woman (re)producing texts of and from her

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91 Su 1967a: 142.

92 Su’s concept of “the life force” refers to sexuality. In “Reminiscences on Lu Yin” (Guanyu Lu Yin de huiyi), Su laments the death of her contemporary writer Lu Yin of childbirth. Su is very unambiguous in her opinion that had Lu Yin controlled her sexuality and refrained from remarrying, she would have avoided childbearing and death from childbirth. Seeking support from nineteenth-century English dramatist Bernard Shaw’s idea of “the life force,” Su proclaims: “Bernard Shaw says in Man and Superman that love affairs between men and women are due to the drive of “the life force.” You cannot escape it no matter how extraordinary a hero you are. We might have accomplished grand and spectacular deeds in society. But for the control of “the life force,” many ambitious people turn into mediocre underachievers. Take Lu Yin for instance, it can be said that she is already well established and could support herself financially. There was no need for her to remarry, but nothing could keep her from it. Isn’t that the work of “the life force?” See Su 1934, in Xiao Feng 1982, 120-6.
body. The infant symbolizes the literary life force in the author. Su celebrates this
desire of creation and gives it full rein. Sexual desire has transformed into an equally
physical desire for literary creation.

To return to the author’s childhood admiration of her image in the mirror, her
narcissism has special significance for the construction of her new identity. In the
original Greek mythology, the beautiful youth, Narcissus, dies of obsessive love for his
self-image. But because Su’s physical desire becomes an unstoppable drive to give birth
to literary texts, her self-obsession results in self-extension rather than self-extinction.
She replaces her childhood desire, with her own body as object, with a desire to write that
has literary texts as its object.

Later in My Life, the author again uses the metaphor of the human infant to refer
to literary texts. For Su an infant is already developed into human form before it is born, but

literary inspiration in an author’s brain remains lumps of blood and flesh until the moment of birth. Then the author, by means of stimulation from all bodily movements or numerous efforts to find the right wording on paper, labors busily and diligently [to deliver it]. It is only then that the newborn baby can take form with clear-cut eyes and brows and four limbs. Then it comes into the world. 94

The imagery of blood and flesh make of the text a human baby, and the process of
writing resembles giving birth in a literary sense.

93 Smith and Watson 1998.

It is interesting that her literary motherhood is constantly changing and shifting in gender roles:

A Western writer once said that art is a most jealous wife. [One] cannot secure her favor unless [one] waits on her whole-heartedly ... My own literary inspiration is not only a jealous wife but also a spoiled princess. When she sometimes chooses to be difficult, you simply do not know how to please her ... If a man's wife is a great beauty, even torture from her is willingly tolerated. My wife of literature and art is rather common in her looks, and yet she puts on such airs and has such an impossible temper. [I] was seeking a gentle wife but ended up with this hag. [I] think this is fate. What else can I say! Darn it!95

Su treats her literary inspiration as is a willful mistress, willing to do whatever it takes to please her. Although Su minimizes her role as wife in the text, she forms a relationship with her literary Muse as seen in the above passage. This imaginary relationship in a way revises the conventional pattern of heterosexual romance, because both partners are female and the fruit of their partnership is literary texts. However, this relationship is also deeply implicated in heterosexual relationship in the sense that it is conceptualized in terms of marriage. The author conveniently assumes the power position and she genders her literary Muse as female and herself as male.

A glimpse of the author's family life in Ninety-Four Years allows us to see how she represents her physical desire as sublimating into literary energy. As indicated in the book, she delays marriage through her pursuit of education. Her admission to Beiping Female Normal College and Université à Outre-Mer de Lyon are two crucial moments in her life and career. On both occasions her parents and parents-in-law pressure her to get

95 Su 1967a: 148-149.
married only to meet with her adamant refusal. It is not until her bed-ridden mother is
dying that she agrees, persuaded by her sister, to return to China to see her mother for the
last time. She totally attributes her submission to marriage to family pressure, especially
her mother’s last wish that she honors out of filiality. ⁹⁶

However, the text suggests that she turns her nominal marriage into an asset,
enabling herself to pursue a career of writing and teaching shielded by matrimony from
family and social pressure. Having appeased the discontent of the two families, she
engages in writing throughout her life. Thus, it is not surprising that her married life is
continually interrupted by her work. She lives intermittently with her husband only for
four years out of their thirty-six-year marriage. According to her own narration, she does
not know about her husband’s death until his family sends her word about it some time
after the event.

Su also reveals the sublimation of sexual desire into artistic passion in her
explanation why she maintains her nominal marriage: “I had certain moral constraints
and could not get a divorce. Besides, I have jie pi (extreme cleanliness) and feel that
divorce is bad reputation.” ⁹⁷ But she leaves unaccounted for the connection between
extreme cleanliness and not getting a divorce, possibly employing the idea of compulsive
cleaning to refer to sexual morality. Her association of compulsive cleaning with her
negative attitude toward sexuality in another text, “Comments on Two Pornographic
Novels: State Power and Beautiful Women (Jiang shan mei ren) and Heart Lock (Xin
suo),” may help to explain how compulsive cleaning prevented her from ending her

⁹⁶ Su 1991: 34, 69, 74-75, 81.
marriage. In this article, Su bitingly criticizes the graphic descriptions of sex in *Heart Lock* by a Taiwan female writer named Guo Lianghui: “Although I have extreme cleanliness and find it repulsive to write on this kind of fiction, I feel obliged to discuss it. I cannot bear the thought that the world is contaminated and corrupted by such work.”  

Therefore, by “extreme cleanliness,” she may mean sexual propriety.

Indeed Su regards textual work as her life’s mission, so much so that she uses it not only to justify her refusal to play the role of wife but also rationalize her failure to get a divorce. Another reason for staying married is: “I felt that I should devote myself to the mission of academic research and literary writing. Why should I waste my time and energy fussing over that kind of petty thing? So I just ignored it!”  

Elevating writing to the status of a mission and reducing personal life to a trifle, she uses writing as a substitute for what she gave up in life, so that the written word became a sort of fetish. Su is deeply aware that the absence of family life in a way served as a source of her passion for writing: “As an unexpected reward, I transformed and sublimated love into a drive for literary creation and academic research. I think I owe my limited achievement in literature and art to my unhappy marriage.” In the same context, she also admits: “If I had had a happy marriage, a loving husband, and children, I would have been contented and become a devoted mother and good wife. Then how could I have achieved what I have achieved today?”  

In fact, she explicitly admits that her case was a sublimation of

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100 Su 1991: 198.
physical instinct to artistic inspiration in the Freudian sense. From the revelation of her marriage in *Ninety-Four Years*, we can see how Su reclaims the story of her marriage, treated in *Love for My Mother*, as part of her autobiography. We can also see how she in a sense rewrites her life as represented in *My Life*, in which she does not utter a word about her private life.

It is clear from *My Life and Ninety-Four Years* that Su’s self-representation goes through several stages. She draws pictures of other women to construct her own identity as a modern woman; she narrates the story of a gender ambiguous storyteller, Mute Uncle, as her own prototype; she forms textual affiliations with male literary figures such as Lin Shu, Hu Shi, and Lu Xun to rectify her own name; she ultimately returns on a literary level to the ideal of motherhood, thus completing her life story as a modern literary woman. Especially worth noting is her use of famous male writers to redeem herself in the history of modern Chinese literature. Since Lin Shu, Hu Shi, Lu Xun can be said to occupy opposite poles of Chinese literary modernity, her reverence for Lin Shu and Hu Shi and attack on Lu Xun engrave her name in both traditional literature and modern literature. On the other hand, as Hu Shi can be said to represent the liberal end and Lu Xun the leftist end of modern Chinese literature, deifying Hu Shi and demonizing Lu Xun are both ways of claiming a power of conferring honor and passing judgment.

The process of Su Xuelin writing her own life began in the 1920s, and both of her autobiographies are reconstructions of earlier periods of her life and career. She is also one of the first Chinese female writers to be consciously concerned with the practice of

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101 Su 1991: 123.
autobiography. Meanwhile, her autobiographies address a wide span of issues related to self-representation, gender, and canon particular to her time. Complementing Su’s texts in many ways, Lu Yin’s autobiography can be read as a narrative of personal trauma and healing through the act of writing.
CHAPTER 2

HEALING PERSONAL TRAUMA:
AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF LU YIN

As the earliest published autobiography of the texts discussed in this dissertation, An Autobiography of Lu Yin greatly enriches the tradition of modern Chinese women writers’ autobiographies. It is unique because it is the first self-representation of a woman writer that is an unequivocally admitted autobiography. It does not observe the time-honored convention of writing a preface to apologize for one’s autobiographical act, a feature that distinguishes Lu Yin from other women writers. Nor does it include her family genealogy, a common practice of other autobiographers. Whatever it reveals about her family, it is directly related to the author’s personal story of abuse and healing, which is the focus of her text. In place of the sense of filialness in other women writers toward their mothers, Lu Yin’s text subversively addresses the mental and physical abuse she suffers at the hands of her mother. Lu Yin’s autobiography shares much with Su Xuelin’s autobiographies in treating writing as a means of self-identification and as a form of self-deliverance. Virtually eliminating her personal and family life from the
text argues for a new type of narrative that points to a different relation between women and literature in which the modern female writer, independent of the patronage of the father or the brother, is conceived.

Lu Yin was born Huang Ying in Beijing. “Lu Yin” is the penname she adopted when she began to publish, and she later passed for Lu Yin in the literary realm and in her social circles. Lexically, “Lu” is the same character as in Mount Lu, and “Yin” means “to live in obscurity” or “to hide.” Why did Lu Yin choose such a penname? In 1934, after Lu Yin’s death, her students wrote memorial essays to commemorate her. One of the essays “Lu Yin My Teacher” (Wu shi Lu Yin) written by Zhao Xingjuan reveals Lu Yin’s own explanation: “She told us that her name was Lu Yin, because it was her wish to withdraw from society to Mount Lu and live as an unfettered and carefree person of letters.”¹ Lu Yin’s autobiography plays up the same theme: “I liked to read Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi, and my heart was filled with otherworldly thoughts of leaving society.”² What was the society that she wanted so much to avoid? Her autobiography offers a good explanation, which I will come to shortly.

Lu Yin is one of the first female writers in modern China to publish in the new vernacular fiction that had acquired importance at the turn of the century. As many of her contemporary female writers, she drew for material for her fiction from her own experience. Seven of her stories appeared in Short Story Monthly (Xiaoshuo yuebao) in

¹ Zhao 1934, in Qian 1989: 567.
² Lu 1934: 63.
1921, three in 1922, and three more in 1923. Her collections of short stories and essays include *Old Companions on the Seashore* (*Haibin guren*, 1923), *Man Li* (*Man Li*, 1928), *Tide of the Soul* (*Linghai chaoxi*, 1931), and *The Thorns of Roses* (*Meigui ã¢ â‘ ci*, 1933). She also wrote novels such as *Returning Swan* (*Gui yan*, 1931), *Women's Heart* (*Nüren de xin*, 1933), and *Ivory Ring* (*Xiangya jiezhi*, 1934). In 1931, she and Li Weijian published their love letters in a collection called *The Collection of Love Letters between Cloud and Gull* (*Yun Ou qingshu ji*).³ Her posthumous publications are her autobiography *An Autobiography of Lu Yin* (*Lu Yin zizhuan*, 1934), a novel entitled *Fire* (*Huoyan*, 1935), and a collection called *Miscellanies of Tokyo* (*Dongjing xiaopin*, 1935).⁴

In this chapter, I examine *An Autobiography of Lu Yin* as scriptotherapy, that is, as a narrative in which the author attempts to revisit and recover from her past trauma both in the private space of the home and the public space of school. I also discuss how she writes her way out of oppression and how she resists the public use of her as a symbol of free love during the May Fourth period through transforming sexual reproduction into literary passion, similar to what Su Xuelin does in her autobiographies.

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³ As an epitome of the romantic ethos and subjectivist tendency of the May Fourth writers, publication of love letters in the 1920s became a trend, such as *Love Letters to May* by Xu Zhimo, *Love Letters of Yu Dafu*, and *A Batch of Love Letters* by Zhang Yiping. *Letters between Two Lands* came out in the 1930s. For an account of the historical circumstances of this phenomenon, see Leo Ou-fan Lee 1973: 1-78, 262-263. In the introduction of the 1986 edition of the English version of Xie Bingying's *Autobiography of a Chinese Girl* rendered by Cui Zhi, Elizabeth Croll calls the romantic love and courtship through the writing and receiving of love letters "an essential 'rite de passage' in joining the ranks of the modern young" for the youth of the May Fourth period. See Xie 1986: Introduction, 14.

2.1 *An Autobiography of Lu Yin*: a Trauma Narrative

Although Lu Yin’s autobiography does not demonstrate the same degree of inhibition against self-representation as other writers’ texts do by including an apologetic preface, her personal story first appears in her fiction before it gets written as autobiography. Her short story “Old Companions on the Seashore” can be read as her autobiography. In this story, one of the five female characters, Lu Sha shares the unhappy childhood told in Lu Yin’s autobiography. At one point, Lu Sha tells her female companions of her miserable life as a child, but the floor is soon taken by another character named Bao Ying, who claims to know more about Lu Sha’s history than Lu Sha herself. While Bao narrates Lu Sha’s life, Lu Sha, the “autobiographical subject,” recedes into the background and simply listens in silence.

*An Autobiography of Lu Yin* was published in October 1934, about five months after the author’s death. It consists of eight chapters, the first four of which, “Childhood Days,” “Middle School Days,” “Life as a Teacher for the First Time,” and “College Days,” focus on the author’s life from childhood until her twenties. These chapters follow a basically chronological order. In the last four chapters, “My Writing Life,” “Change in World View,” “Social Experience,” and “Other,” temporal sequence gives way to thematic arrangement and attention is shifted to the author’s writing career and publications.
To try to better conceptualize Lu Yin’s autobiography as a trauma narrative, I introduce Suzette A. Henke’s theory of autobiography as scriptotherapy. Henke defines scriptotherapy as “the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment.” She first developed this theory in 1985 and later argues that

the authorial effort to reconstruct a story of psychological debilitation could offer potential for mental healing and begin to alleviate persistent symptoms of numbing, dysphoria, and uncontrollable flashbacks. Autobiography could so effectively mimic the scene of psychoanalysis that life writing might provide a therapeutic alternative for victims of severe anxiety, and more seriously, of post-traumatic stress disorder. At that time, Henke’s theory was considered more psychoanalytic than literary.

In *Shattered Subjects* (1988), Henke establishes her theory of autobiography as a paradigm of literary studies:

What I would like to suggest … is that autobiography is, or at least has the potential to be, a powerful form of scriptotherapy — and that, as such, it lends itself particularly well to the evolution of twentieth-century women’s life-writing. Autobiography has always offered the tantalizing possibility of reinventing the self and reconstructing the subject ideologically inflected by language, history, and social imbrication. As a genre, life-writing encourages the author/narrator to reassess the past and to reinterpret the intertextual codes inscribed on personal consciousness by society and culture. Because the author can instantiate the alienated or marginal self into the pliable body of a protean text, the newly revised subject, emerging as the semifictic protagonist of an enabling

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counternarrative, is free to rebel against the values and practices of a
dominant culture and to assume an empowered position of political agency
in the world.\(^7\)

I treat Lu Yin’s as such a counternarrative, a trauma story of experiencing
physical, verbal, and emotional abuses, and her survival through writing. Through
autobiography she reenact and reexperiences her otherwise unspeakable trauma. The
autobiography opens with the author’s regret over her unhappy childhood: “Childhood
usually arouses nostalgia! Normally, a person’s happiest days are childhood, free of duty
and anxiety. But … when I remember mine, all I feel is embarrassment and regret!”
Such an opening sets the tone for the narration as a means of healing through revisiting
childhood traumas. She soon plunges into her history: “Before I was born, my mother
had already given birth to three boys. So my arrival should have been a happy event,
because my parents were looking forward to having a daughter at that time.” But her
parents are expecting a daughter only as a complement to their male children. The
author is quick to disclose the truth about this unwanted female child: “Because my
maternal grandmother died on the day I was born, my mother thought I was an
inauspicious creature. She was too upset to nurse me and hired a wet nurse to get me out
of her sight.”\(^8\) After this first story of rejection, Lu Yin skims over the first two years of
her life, merely mentioning how her sickliness, skin ulcer, and unappeasable crying
incurred the loathing of her entire family.

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\(^7\) Henke 1998: Introduction, xv-xvi.

\(^8\) Lu 1934: 2.
Shortly afterwards, her sympathetic wet nurse removed the sickly girl to her country home. “If she gets well,” says the wet nurse to the girl’s mother, “she will be returned to you. If she dies, that will be that.” 9 It turns out that the little girl gets well in her care and thrives, in the company of the wet nurse’s daughter and in the wholesome country air, but these happy days are absent in the narrative. The author keeps her focus on the pains of repeated dislocation. As promised, the wet nurse returns her to her parents when she is three, upon her father’s promotion as county prefect of Changsha, Hunan. The author remembers how she misses her wet nurse and her little daughter:

On our way to Changsha by boat, [I] gazed at the surface of the sea and wailed, not knowing from what wound my young heart was hurting. [No matter] how my brother coaxed me and how my mother threatened me, I just could not stop crying. At that point, my father … was extremely annoyed with my crying. He walked over to me and grabbed me to throw [me] into the waves. Unexpectedly, [he] bumped right into a messenger. The messenger hastened to take me and carried me away. 10

Here, she describes homecoming as another experience of rejection and dislocation.

As clearly stated in her autobiography, the author does not remember any of these events. So where did her early history come from? It was from her family members that she later acquired this knowledge. The stories her elders put together for her provides an access to the forgotten history of her experienced trauma. By putting this history in the form of an autobiographical narrative, Lu Yin attempts to revisit, re-enact, re-experience,
and recover from her traumatic past. Autobiography here becomes a textual space, a safe environment controlled by the author in which she can cathartically express herself in a way she has never been allowed before. She laments her childhood by writing out and writing through her stories.

Lu Yin’s narrative contains verbal, emotional, and physical abuses. After her father dies on his post in Changsha when she is six years old, her mother takes all the children back to Beijing where her maternal family live. It is time for the young girl to learn to read and write, but because she is a female child, she is not allowed to study with her male siblings who are taught by a tutor hired by the family as is the practice of the time. She has to accept instruction from her aunt who could read The Four Books for Women (Nü si shu),

11 a collection of writings on Confucian gender codes for women that remained influential until the end of the imperial era (1644-1911). As the author tells the story of her learning experience, she first calls studying “a punishment.” The following passage describes how the young girl was forced to study the assigned texts: “Everyday, after she finished teaching one lesson, my aunt would lock the door from the outside, leaving me to read it on my own. Looking around, I found that there was

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11 Nü si shu, put together by Wang Xiang in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), includes four works on the proper education of women. In chronological order, they are Commandments for Women (Nü jie) by Ban Zhao (50-112 A.D.), The Analects for Women (Nü lun yu) by Song Ruo Zhao (785-805 A.D.), Instructions of the Interior (Nei xun) by Ming Wen Huang, the empress née Xu of Emperor Zhengzi (1403-1424), and A Concise Account of Basic Regulation for Women (Nü fan jie lu) by Wang Jiefu, mother of Wang Xiang.
nothing but a table and two chairs in the room."

The young girl could only partake in life outside vicariously through watching her brothers engaged in their activities:

So I would stand up to peep out through the crack between the door and its frame. Sometimes I heard my brothers singing or playing hide-and-seek in the courtyard, and my heart would become even more unsettled. I would waste no time to put the book aside and jump with agility onto the table. I would wet the window paper with my saliva, poke a hole, and put one eye to it to see what was going on outside. When I saw them laugh, I laughed with them. When I saw them play hard, my heart beat faster for them. Thus, I would while away an entire morning.

She watches, listens, feels with an intensity that matched the excitement of her brothers enjoying themselves in the open space. Yet that her only connection to the outside world was the small hole she poked in the window paper testifies to her desire to participate in the freedom that her brothers enjoyed. Again, the description reveals that her family strictly imposes physical and emotional containment.

Lu Yin also tries to write through the physical and emotional abuse she suffers as a result of vicariously sharing her brothers’ excitement through the little hole poked in the window paper and failing to learn her lessons. She describes what happened on one such occasion: “My mother … grabbed a feather duster from behind the door, bent me over the edge of the bed, and started hitting me with all her might.” One day, too bored to study, she took apart the wristwatch that her aunt had accidentally left in the

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12 Lu 1934: 8, 9.

13 Lu 1934: 9.

14 Lu 1934: 11.
room. When she put it back together, the watch stopped. Upon being discovered, she
was beaten and then thrown into a dark, damp and smelly storage room, without food
and drink, to cry herself to sleep.

Her family also insulted her verbally. The author quotes her aunt’s words: “You
are such a shameless child. Look at your elder brothers and younger sister, who is not
doing better than you? If you continue to be negligent in your studies tomorrow, you
will not be allowed to eat.”\(^{15}\) The message the little girl gathers from her family was that
she was “disgusting and stupid.”\(^{16}\) Disobedience on her part also entails exile on the
psychological level and causes her parents to exclude her on family occasions.
Whenever they have guests over, her mother will lock her up in another courtyard and
will not let her see anyone, lest her “shamelessness” and “stupidity” embarrass the whole
family.

Such treatment reflects Chinese conventional teachings on gender education. For
instance, *The Analects for Women* (*Nü lun yu*),\(^{17}\) one of the four moral books for women
outline fine details of female discipline to prepare girls for the family roles they would
be expected to play in the confined space of home:

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\(^{15}\) Lu 1934: 10.

\(^{16}\) Lu 1934: 14.

\(^{17}\) Scholars don’t not agree on the authorship of *Nü lun yu*. In “Women’s Literature,” included in *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, Sharon Shih-juan Hou has it that *Nü lun yu* was written by Song Ruohua. But according to Chen Dongyuan’s *Zhongguo jianu shenghuo shi*, the work was co-authored by Song Ruoqian and Song Ruozhao.
Keep your daughter indoors as a rule and only rarely should you allow her out: she ought to be under your total command. You should scold her roundly if she is not quick to obey, remind her often of self-discipline and household duties. Ensure that she shows due deference towards guests and that she retires quietly once tea has been served. Do not spoil your daughter for fear of her becoming unruly.\footnote{Quoted from Wong Yin Lee’s “Women’s Education in Traditional and Modern China,” in Women’s History Review, 4.3 (1995):345-367.}

Lu Yin describes the segregation and punishment consistent with the Confucian gender prescriptions as specified in The Analects for Women.

The early educational experience of Lu Yin challenges some of the current scholarship on the empowered status of women in premodern China. In Teachers of the Inner Chambers (1994), for example, Dorothy Ko takes issue with the representation of women as constricted and victimized in traditional China. Using Jiangnan gentry women’s participation in the production and consumption of literature in seventeenth-century print culture, she argues for women’s role in manipulating and changing the apparently seamless Confucian gender system. She uses examples of women who wrote with and for each other, women who were in both kinship and nonkinship relations and who lived across regions in the Jiangnan area. These women were privy to what Ko calls women’s culture, a culture that enabled elite women to construct their own “discourse of life, sex, and beauty in the context of everyday boudoir life”\footnote{Ko 1994: 14.} despite physical circumscription. Through describing literate women’s interaction with society at large, Ko critiques the prevalent binary as a tool of gender analysis. Although Ko
recognizes the ambivalence that existed in the creation of the women’s cultural community in seventeenth-century Jiangnan and the ways in which women’s writings actually entrenched the Confucian gender system while questioning it,²⁰ she means to portray the rich world of women’s culture behind the walls. Ko’s class-, locale, and age-specific methodology shifts from the monolithic view of women as victims, but her tool of analysis also constitutes its own limitation if used to generalize about the experience of women outside the geographical location and historical period examined by Ko.

Francesca Bray also challenges the totalistic picture of women’s seclusion and victimization in traditional China. Bray observes that women’s close connection with the maintenance of social order in late imperial China “did not translate into what we would consider power and freedom---on the contrary, it often made women particularly vulnerable to rigid control in the name of public morality.”²¹ But her main argument is that women exerted power on and were involved in the outside world, since “a woman’s work as wife and mother tied her into the world beyond the inner quarters” and that the walled family compound where women were in charge of socializing their children was directly related to “the roots of civic virtue.”²² Although the scholarship of Ko and Bray

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²¹ Bray 1997:95.

²² Bray 1997: 95.
contributes much to the interrogation of the modern monolithic image of women’s victimization in traditional China, it does not change the social and historical circumstances that induced oppression of women.

Another part of Lu Yin’s story reveals the colonization of the female body by missionary forces from the West. At the age of nine, she was sent to Mary Gamewell Christian Girls’ School in Beijing. Since the landed gentry did not trust missionary education for their daughters, Western missionaries targeted girls from poor families at first. In mission schools students could get free food, lodging as well as education. Even travel fare to and from home during the summer vacation was reimbursed. 23 Coming from a well-to-do family, the young Lu Yin falls into another category - unwanted girls. She mentions in the narrative that her aunt lies to the schoolmistress about Lu Yin’s age and coerces the girl herself to comply.

Jane Hunter cites Lu Yin as an example to illustrate her point that Christianity “could offer a positive alternative to unwanted daughters.” 24 Kwok Pui-lan dwells upon the young Lu Yin’s “emotional exhaustion because of the oppressive circumstances” at home and “the warm and friendly attitudes of their missionary teachers.” Kwok also stresses the way in which Christianity provided Lu Yin with “consolation and encouragement during distress” and awakened her “to a search for the meaning of life

23 Kwok 1992: 8, 14, 16.
and to live in hope.”25 Hunter agrees that “Huang’s [Lu Yin] conversion marked the beginning of a new life for her.”26 In her acknowledgement of the emotional comfort and therapeutic effect of her belief in God, Lu Yin’s story confirms this view: “How empty my young heart was at that time! My mother did not love me, my brothers and sisters detested me, and my disease tortured me. I cried bitterly because of these. My empty heart accepted God at that time.” Her temporary conversion helped her “relieve a lot of the pain in the heart.”27

Although missionary movement did play a role in stopping the practice of foot-binding and arranged marriage,28 Hunter overemphasizes its impact on Chinese women’s emancipation. Lu Yin’s text presents a picture of oppression based upon her experience at Mary Gamewell. She first critiques Western religious colonization of the Chinese people:

The only purpose of the school authority was to get these innocent children to believe in God. Determined to disseminate their religion, they admitted these students who agreed to attend [missionary schools] for material gains… Meanwhile they trained slavish followers, who would in turn go to local churches to spread Christianity in the same fashion. Thus followers of imperialists would increase in number everyday.29

26 Hunter 1984: 239.
29 Lu 1934: 23.
Then Lu Yin discloses the confinement and colonization of the female body at Mary Gamewell. She quotes verbatim the words of the schoolmistress to her aunt:

“If you want her to study here, it has to be on our terms. She must believe in God, abide by the rules, visit at home only in summer, and she will not be allowed to leave school at any other time.... Furthermore her future marriage will also be arranged by us.”

It is clear from these rules that the missionary school promised the same physical confinement and control of her body that most young women would be subjected to in and prior to Lu Yin’s time. Revealingly enough, her aunt agrees to every item but reserves the right to discuss the issue of marriage with the girl’s mother. Lu Yin recounts the entire conversation between her aunt and the schoolmistress without revealing her own thoughts, reinforcing the sense that she had no say on this issue. The experience of Lu Yin as a young girl clearly illustrates the strategy of the missionaries to Christianize China through domination of women’s bodies and sexuality.

The missionary forces used colonization of women’s bodies as a strategy to Christianize China. Griffith John thinks that it is critical to win over Chinese women in order to Christianize China: “Give us the mothers and daughters of China, and China must soon become Christ’s; without them we shall never tell that an impression has been made on the nation.”

Indeed, mid-nineteenth-century missionary ideology holds conversion of mothers as a key to converting the whole nation, assuming that converted

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30 Lu 1934: 18.

women would give Biblical instructions to their children, families, and neighbors. Kwok points out that liberal arts education in Christian girls’ schools in China aimed to prepare “students to be better wives and mothers who could set up Christian homes to influence their neighborhoods.” As she further explains: “Missionaries in the nineteenth century demanded that parents give up the right to arrange marriages for schoolgirls, hoping that they would not be married into non-Christian families after studying for a number of years.” Therefore, although the physical boundary of the school differed from Confucian confinement, the ideological purposes were similar. In this context, the notion of “educated motherhood” became popularized, which emphasized the key role of mothers in properly educating their children. Women’s life space within the home did not change in spite of this modern notion that promoted women’s education.

The colonialist ideal of “educated motherhood” also finds expression in Ida Belle Lewis’ 1919 study of the curriculum of missionary schools in China. Focusing on the students’ future role as mothers, she prescribes “training in household science” and “a closer relation of the curriculum to immediate home and community life,” and “socialization of the curriculum.” In Lewis’ view, missionary schools did not

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32 Hill 1985: 5.
33 Kwok 1992: 16.
36 Lewis 1919: 81-2.
sufficiently emphasize traditional Chinese female education. In order to help acclimate the students to the reality of home life, she stresses a stronger domestic orientation for the school curriculum. As Kwok critiques, “The training provided in the schools neither challenged the traditional roles of women nor threatened the established Chinese ideal of womanhood.”\textsuperscript{37} In spite of its role in freeing women from the institutions of foot-binding, arranged marriage, concubinage, and illiteracy,\textsuperscript{38} the missionary movement worked in complicity with Confucianism in trying to lock women in the roles of wives and mothers. Therefore, Lu Yin represents Christianity as another form of domination, demystifying liberation from the oppression and confinement at home.

2.2  \textit{An Autobiography of Lu Yin}: A Narrative of Healing

Lu Yin’s autobiography displays a power of healing through the act of writing. Indeed, the unspeakable emotions of the young girl become legitimate through the act of writing and in the space of autobiography. The author tells the trauma of the past and verbalizes feelings that the young girl could only express through crying. After sharing her brothers’ games through the hole in the window paper, she fears the aftermath: “After eleven o’clock, when I heard my aunt’s footstep, my heart would fall into a whirlpool of fear and sorrow. I would sit submissively next to the table, like a mouse that ran into a cat.” The young girl hates studying in confinement and is afraid of being

\textsuperscript{37} Kwok 1992: 104.

beaten up, but only Lu Yin can speak on her behalf in the form of autobiography:

"Sometimes I wanted to turn over a new leaf. But every time I walked into that prison of a room, I would be so fed up that I would rather peel all the white paint from the walls than read that short-lived book." The author also speaks cathartically for the young girl about the injustice of the severe beatings she suffered: "I, too small and powerless to resist, could only endure." The damage of the abuses, too, can only be articulated by the grown up "I" as author: "I felt like a scared mouse, running away whenever I saw people around," and sought the company of "birds in the trees and bugs in the mud." She expresses inner emotions powerfully in the following way:

Under such abusive circumstances, I could not think of any way out except crying. At the same time, I was getting tired of life. Although I was too young to have a clear idea about suicide, I vaguely felt that I would be happier dead than alive. I hated everyone in the family, and I even hated my little sister. Sometimes she would hang onto my mother crying for mercy for me when my mother was beating me, but she would also tell on me to my mother. I lost freedom in everything I did... I slept in a dirty room with the female servants at night and hid in the garden during the day. At that time, there was no love, no hope in my heart. There was only resentment. 39

The author's path to recovery begins with the story of the letter she composed to her mother complaining about the food at Mary Gamewell. Because of her mother's habitual neglect, Lu Yin expresses fascination with the efficacy of the letter: "To my surprise ... the letter actually produced an effect... Out of pity or curiosity, they came to see me on the following Saturday." This letter moved her mother to pay for better food.

39 Lu 1934: 9, 11, 14-5.
Lu Yin reinforces restorative power of writing through self-congratulation on coming to literacy: “At first, my mother wondered, how come this stupid child can write a letter after only half a year in school? She thought someone else did it for me. But seeing the shapeless characters, she thought they did look like my writing.”

Writing also enables her to get out of Mary Gamewell and to enroll in a Chinese secular school. The author recalls with enthusiasm how she secretly sought help from her elder brother on the basic principles of essay writing and passed the entrance examination for the senior class in a primary school. She also recalls her diligence at school, “I spared no effort to study and made rapid progress. My mother and my relatives were very surprised that I had become a completely new person. I, the stupid duckling, was now known for my brains.” Later she passed the exam, under a false name for fear of ridicule in case of failure, for a preparatory class for a female normal school. She thus describes her taste of success: “I was so excited, as if I were in a dream. My family thought I was lying. It was not until after I moved to school that they exclaimed, ‘[We] never thought that child could distinguish herself in this way.’” Her success stories reveal her ability to make things happen with words. Writing about these successes reinforces her self-confidence about her literary ability and empowers her to revise a past self-image of intellectual inferiority. She fully recognizes the contrast

40 Lu 1934: 24.

41 Lu 1934: 31, 32.
between the imprisonment she suffered studying the Confucian texts and the liberating power of this newly developed positive use of writing: "Thanks to the result of my literary endeavors, I finally broke out of the bad luck of my childhood."

In time, her growth as a writer becomes the focus of her narration. She recalls writing her first short story at college and waiting for a professor’s evaluation as she would wait for a sentence: "Of course, my heart was beating nervously. I was so afraid that he might conclude that I had no talent for literary creation, in that case all my hopes would come to an end. That would virtually be a death sentence." When he bluntly tells her, without even reading her work, that she should not even try to do something as difficult as novel writing, she tears the work to pieces. This incident indicates the vital importance of writing to her sense of self and her vulnerability in the process of becoming a writer.

But what brought about the change in the author’s attitude towards reading and writing? She mentions at one point the promotion of vernacular by Hu Shi as the means of written discourse. At the same time, the educational environment in the public space of school, Christian and secular, offers her a different setting than the oppression and isolation at home. Another aspect of the curriculum at missionary schools may also help explain her initiation in writing. Although Lu Yin’s text does not discuss it,

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42 Lu 1934: 80.

43 For an account of the historical circumstances in which Lu Yin and many of her contemporary female writers came to literacy through vernacular, see Introduction.

44 Hunter 1984: 244.
other sources show that students in missionary schools at the time had a chance to study various subjects and thus developed a broader vision of the outside world. *Christian Education in China*, compiled by the China Educational Commission of 1921-1922, reports that the curriculum in the missionary schools in mid nineteenth century already resembled that in schools in the West at that time. Ida Belle Lewis’ more thorough analysis, *The Education of Girls in China* (1919), systematically investigates the curriculum of girls’ schools all over China, mostly missionary schools. Her work lists the major course offerings all the way from lower primary, higher primary, middle school, normal school preparatory, and normal school. These include Chinese Reading, Arithmetic, Singing, Bible, English, Geography, Writing, Moral Training, Physical Education, Composition, Grammar, Drawing, Hand-Work, Botany, English Writing, History, Music, Stories.  

Lu Yin may have been exposed to these subjects.

Lu Yin’s linear narrative of personal trauma stops half way in her autobiography. Description of recovery begins in the fifth chapter, “My Writing Life,” where the author writes her way further out of the trauma and oppression she has experienced. She does this through representing herself as androgynous. She tries on the textual level to divest herself of socially defined femininity: “I have a distorted personality and a personality full of male traits as well. Since I was a child, I have never liked things other girls liked.”

She dwells on two transgendering acts at school. One is the formation of a

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45 Lewis 1919: 67-79.

46 Lu 1934: 120.
group called the "six gentlemen" (liu junzi)\(^{47}\) composed of the author and five female friends in middle school. The following is her story of how they became the "six gentlemen":

One day in our history class, the teacher mentioned the "six gentlemen." We got all excited. After class we got together in a quiet corner on campus to discuss it. We put our names in the order of birth dates, and from that moment on we named ourselves "six gentlemen." At first our classmates called us by that title in ridicule, but they came to accept it and, to our surprise, we became the renowned "six gentlemen." We were not just the "six gentlemen" of the class but of the whole school.\(^ {48}\)

The "six gentlemen" form their group under very oppressive circumstances in Beijing Female Normal School where Lu Yin was studying. The group comes into being as a collective effort to challenge the school authorities and their strict surveillance of student activities. Lu Yin describes the intense pleasure they get out of breaking school rules, which she interprets as the only way "to express their individuality and experience the joy of freedom."\(^ {49}\) These girls, as pseudo boys, "brought vibrancy to the lifeless school."\(^ {50}\) Their boisterous fun was certainly a challenge to the gender norms taught by the Chinese classics, as for instance, in The Analects for Women: "Do not look over your

\(^{47}\) There were two groups of people known as "six gentlemen" in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). One group includes Yang Lian, Zuo Guangdou, Wei Dazhong, Zhou Chaorui, Yuan Huazhong, Gu Dazhang. They died in prison, falsely incriminated in the courtly power struggle in 1625. The other group refers to Zhou Qiyuan, Mou Changqi, Huang Zunsu, Zhou Shunchang, Li Yingbian, Zhou Zongjian. They were thrown into prison in 1626 and tortured to death.

\(^{48}\) Lu 1934: 36-37.

\(^{49}\) Lu 1934: 36.

\(^{50}\) Lu 1934: 37.
shoulder while walking; do not move your lips much while speaking; do not sway your legs while sitting; do not lift your skirt while standing; do not burst into laughter when feeling happy; do not shout when feeling angry." Thus, confinement of women was ordained on the emotional as well as physical level. The historical male personae of the six female students signifies removal in time from these girls' immediate social environment and creates a limbo in which they found self-empowerment in history and a new identity in their collective gender ambiguity.

The author also remembers another other transgenerating behavior—"the four lords" (si gongzi), a collective name Lu Yin and three of her female college friends claim for themselves. Here is how she recounts the circumstances under which she and her three female companions decide to claim this title:

One day the four of us were secretly writing each other little notes in class, and somehow the conversation turned to "the four lords" of the Warring States period. One of us suggested that, as a group of four, we call ourselves "the four lords" from then on... After that, we made a written announcement to the class signed by "the four lords." As a consequence, our nickname soon spread throughout the whole school. Later, whenever our classmates mentioned us, they always referred to us as "the four lords."

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52 "The four lords" refers to the following people of the Warring States period (475 B.C. - 221 B.C.): Lord Meng Chang of Qi, Lord Ping Yuan of Zhao, Lord Chun Shen of Chu, and Lord Xin Ling of Wei. They were known for their wisdom, loyalty, generosity, benevolence, and respect for the virtuous and the learned.

53 Lu 1934: 67.
This group is obviously more mature and better organized than the previous one. By means of written communication among themselves, they create an alternative space from the class. Through their written announcement, they assert themselves more powerfully than the previous oral declaration. "The four lords" share their experiences and support each other in stressful times.

The female groups represented in Lu Yin’s text invite a reading of potential same-sex relationship, such as Wendy Larson observes of characters in Lu Yin’s fiction:

Lu Yin experimented with writing about female-female relationships as a utopian means of doing away with the implicit hierarchy of heterosexuality. Her stories recognized and investigated a principal means by which women could mediate their environment: questioning marriage and establishing formal and informal female-female relationships not based on the hierarchical heterosexual model.54

Larson’s observation points to an alternative bonding put forward by Lu Yin outside traditional Chinese human relationships. Larson’s discussion focuses on the one-on-one, same-sex love between two women represented in Lu Yin’s story “The Diary of Lishi” (Lishi de riji, 1923), in which the two female characters declare their emotional connection with each other as “same-sex love” (tongxing de lian’ai) and dream about “a life together in the future.” Larson also examines the female friendship between five female students in “Old Companions on the Seashore.” She notes that since same-sex love proves to be socially unfeasible, most of the heroines in both stories eventually conform to the norms of conventional heterosexual family life.

Larson’s paradigm of female bonding, although useful for reading Lu Yin’s fiction, proves to be inadequate when confronted with the nuanced picture of the “six gentlemen” and the “four lords” in Lu Yin’s autobiography. We cannot neatly categorize these groups within the parameter of female-female relationship because of their gender transgression. Unlike the female bonding noted by Larson in Lu Yin’s fictional stories, Lu Yin represents the gender ambiguity of the groups more as androgynous and egalitarian than as same-sex relationships, because they all claim to be historical male figures within a collective identity.

The transgenering acts of the female students described by the author resonates with the phenomenon of gender inversion in Chinese history, a good example of which is Han female scholar Ban Zhao. When her brother Ban Gu died before he completed the Han History, the court called on Ban Zhao to carry on his work. Thus, she attained literary fame and respectability as surrogate son and brother. A second example is Lady Song, appointed by the Qin ruler to assist in the recovery of the Rites of Zhou. The emperor bestowed upon her the title “Master of Illustrious Culture.” Susan Mann recognizes Ban Zhao and Lady Song as “cases in which women ‘played the role of men’ in teaching and transmitting the classics.”\(^{55}\) According to Dorothy Ko, female scholar and poet Wang Duanshu (1621-1701) of the Ming dynasty gained respect as an honorary

\(^{55}\) Mann. 1992: 46.
man because of her literary talent. Ko also cites examples of gifted girls who were raised as boys or self-fashioned as boys.\textsuperscript{56}

However, in these premodern cross-gender experiences women would always readily resume their female identity and feminine roles. Their niche in the public sphere did not detract from their traditional duties as mothers and wives. Rather, their effort to emulate men only strengthened the traditional division of gender roles and gender work. In contrast, Lu Yin resists any work that was traditionally defined as woman’s work. For example, in discussing her attitudes toward teaching assignments as a middle school teacher, Lu Yin portrays herself as being more comfortable teaching physical culture, an activity conventionally not open to women, than teaching family relationships and gardening.\textsuperscript{57} Furthermore, she tries to write her way out of gender restriction by representing herself exclusively as a writer and erasing her experiences as wife and mother, as shown in the discussion that follows.

2.3 Substituting Textual Production for Sexual Reproduction

In \textit{Women and Writing in Modern China} (1998), Wendy Larson points out that Lu Yin and her contemporaries never created female protagonists as writers in their fiction and that they used the mediated form of letters and diaries if their female

\textsuperscript{56} Ko 1994: 132, 140-41.

\textsuperscript{57} Lu 1934: 46-7. For an account of how physical education became a matter of importance in Chinese education system, see Fan 1997: 17-41.
protagonists write at all.\textsuperscript{58} However, in Lu Yin’s autobiography, the author defines herself almost exclusively as a writer of fiction. She celebrates her literary ability, the lack of which was a major source of oppression for her as a young girl. She minimizes the representation of her roles as wife and mother, replacing it with a story of textual achievements. The three scandals of her life – renouncing her engagement, marrying a man bound in an arranged marriage, and later becoming wife of someone about ten years her junior – are erased with representation of her growth as a writer. As a result, she often describes her romantic relationships as product of literature. Of the two daughters from her two marriages, she makes no mention at all.

In order to better understand Lu Yin’s autobiographical revision of her scandalous love life into one of textual achievements, it is helpful to look at some contemporary criticism on her moral transgression. Such criticism focuses largely on the love between Lu Yin and her second husband Li Weijian. Xie Bingying recollects in “Huang Lu Yin” that Lu Yin and Li “started out being friends, soon became lovers, then lived together without the bond of matrimony.” Xie’s reminiscence also reveals the public reaction: “In the eighteenth or nineteenth year of Republican China, Lu Yin and her young lover caused a sensation in the press circle in Beiping. It stirred even more excitement in the world of letters.”\textsuperscript{59} Su Xuelin unambiguously states her opinion as well as her friends’ in “Reminiscences on Lu Yin” (\textit{Guanyu Lu Yin de huiyi}):

\textsuperscript{58} Larson 1998: 147.

\textsuperscript{59} Xie 1948, in Xiao 1982: 127.
The two criticized in unison that she was too romantic. They said that Lu Yin’s marriage with Mr. Guo who had a wife was already a big mistake and that she really shouldn’t have gotten involved with Mr. Li with so much difference in age. … I, too, thought that Lu Yin went too far.  

Su also laments that if Lu Yin had controlled her sexuality and refrained from remarrying, she would have avoided childbearing and death from childbirth. Borrowing nineteenth-century English dramatist Bernard Shaw’s idea of “the life force,” Su proclaims:

Bernard Shaw says in *Man and Superman* that love affairs between men and women are due to the drive of “the life force.” You cannot escape it no matter what kind of extraordinary hero you are. We might have accomplished grand and spectacular deeds in society. But for the control of “the life force,” many ambitious people turn into mediocre underachievers. Take Lu Yin for instance, it can be said that she is already well established and could support herself financially. There was no need for her to remarry, but nothing could keep her from it. Isn’t that the work of “the life force”?  

By contrast, Lu Yin projects a different image of herself in her autobiography. As a young girl, she already shows distaste for marriage. She thinks marriage is

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62 Lu Yin’s negative feelings about marriage must be examined in the Chinese historical context where life for women after marriage was typically characterized by absolute obedience to the husband and the mother-in-law. A woman’s life was burdened with child-bearing, complicated family relationships, and drudgery of household chores. However, there could be another source of influence. Both Ida Belle Lewis and Jane Hunter commented on the reluctance of girls to get married, following the role model of single female missionaries. For detailed accounts, see Lewis 1919, 81; Hunter 1984: 249-251.
“unfortunate” and “dangerous,” clearly revealing her dread for family life. She says: “I felt hatred and fear for marriage, and I really wanted to remain single for life.” In this light, it is not surprising that literary attraction pervades her representations of her love relationships. Her engagement with the emotionally and financially distressed Lin Hongjun, which happened when she was a student in a female normal school, resulted from literary attraction:

At that time I read so many novels. I certainly read the famous Chinese novels. I even read the three hundred or so foreign novels translated into Chinese by Lin Shu. Later I even read all the tanci works, such as Bi Flowers Coming Out of the Pen [sheng hua] and The Fortune of Next Life [Lai sheng fu]. Consequently I got the nickname ‘novel fan.’

Here the author uses reading as a prelude for the romantic story between herself and Lin, putting a literary touch on this relationship by intermingling the sexual and the textual.

According to Lu Yin, Lia approaches her with the novel Jade Pear Spirit (Yu li hun).

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63 Lu 1934: 38, 40, 43.

64 Tanci is a popular form of story-telling in Southern China. It is also a genre in which many female writers demonstrated their literary talent. See Zheng 1957: 348-83; Tan 1984: 386-468. Flowers Coming Out of the Pen is a story about a woman’s accomplishments disguised as a man with an emphatic note on female chastity. For information on the author Qiu Xinru (?-?) and a summary of the story, see Zheng, 1959, 376-78; Tan, 1984, 408-20. No information is found about The Fortune of Next Life.

65 Lu 1934: 41.

66 The chaos created by the warlords after the short victory of the 1911 Revolution led to the immense of popularity of Mandarin Duck and Butterfly fiction, which was related to commercial necessity and the need to entertain. First published in 1912, Jade Pear Spirit became the representative of Mandarin Duck and Butterfly love stories and earned its author, Xu Zhenya (1889-1937), the title “master of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School.” Jade Pear Spirit is a tragic love story involving three parties: the hero He Mengxia, the heroine Bai Liying, and her younger sister-in-law Cui Yunqian. The twenty-one-year-old Mengxia, after graduating from a normal school, goes to teach in a village school near Wuxi. While paying a visit to Old Mr. Cui, a distant relative in that village, he is persuaded to stay at his home to teach the eight-year-old grandson, Penglang, in exchange for room and board. The twenty-seven-year-old Liying, the boy's
Upon learning how deeply the story touches the girl, he writes her a letter about his father’s sudden death and the subsequent termination of his study in Japan. They become friends, and he asks for her hand shortly afterwards. Failing to gain the consent of the girl’s mother for the lack of a college education, he once again resorts to the pen and composes a heartrending letter to the girl, which moves the girl to announce their engagement despite the opposition of her family. Significantly, the written word could actually occasion an emotional commitment.

The girl’s attraction to Lin as a result of her love for literature bears much resemblance to the shared passion for poetry between the male and female protagonists in *Jade Pear Spirit*. In *Jade Pear Spirit*, exchanging writings constitutes the only contact between the lovers. Their love exists but textually. The hero’s attempt to consummate their passion in the form of marriage ushers in the beginning of the end. In Lu Yin’s case, she also breaks up with her fiancé on the point of marriage. Both Lu Yin’s initial decision and later reversal suggest that she is more in love with the man’s letters than with the man himself. Lin graduates from college and tries to make arrangements for marriage, upon which she calls off the engagement. Her alleged reason is that they have fundamental differences about the role of a wife, since he wants a good housewife and she wishes to engage in the social and political activities of the time, such

widowed mother, and Mengxia fall in love because of their spiritual and poetic affinity and regularly exchange poems and letters with Penglang as messenger. When Mengxia expresses the wish to marry the widow, her sense of duty as claustral widow and mother does not permit her to accept his proposal. She tries in vain to bring together Mengxia and her beloved sister-in-law. In the end all three all die heart-broken. For detailed accounts of Mandarin Duck and Butterfly fictions, see Link 1981; Rey Chow 1986.
as the May Fourth Movement, besides wanting to become a writer. In line with her earlier attitude toward marriage, she remarks that marriage would destroy everything in her life.\(^{67}\)

Lu Yin plays up the theme of literary attraction in the representation of her marriage with Guo. When she first mentions Guo, Lu Yin introduces him as Mr. Guo, never revealing his full name throughout the text. She falls in love with him because: “He ... was well-versed in traditional literature. He published many essays in journals and frequently sent them to me so I could read them. Thus, we became closer on the emotional level.”\(^{68}\) Lu Yin forefronts the causal relation between reading Guo’s writings and getting emotionally attached to him. The narrative absence of physical attraction between the lovers renders the relationship more textual than sexual.

Interestingly enough, Lu Yin mentions their marriage late in the autobiography, in the chapter “My Writing Life,” when she well establishes her identity as a writer. She uses the textual accomplishments as the time frame in which to disclose her marriage, as shown clearly in the following citation:

> After the publication of my first work *Old Companions on the Seashore*, a change took place in my life. I have mixed feelings about this change. On the one hand, I was satisfied – that is, I got married to Mr. Guo in spite of all the obstacles. On the other hand, I was disappointed – that is, my imagined married life and my real married life were completely different. In this mood, plus trivial details of family life, I quit writing for almost

\(^{67}\) Lu 1934: 68.

\(^{68}\) Lu 1934: 70.
half a year. Half a year later, I resumed my literary efforts. My works
during to Go?” [He chu shi gui], “Father” [Fuqin], and “The Failure of
Professor Qin” [Qin jiaoshou de shibai].

Lu Yin perceives marriage in a rather negative light. She does not address her radical
acts as Xiao does in The Biography of Lu Yin to propagate May Fourth iconoclastic
ideology. Xiao makes a big deal of the obstacles hinted by Lu Yin in order to establish
Lu Yin as an emblem of free love. However, Lu Yin represents marriage as taking a toll
on her writing. At the end of the passage cited above, Lu Yin returns to the topic of
writing and counts her publications during that period of time. In so doing, she
successfully situates her marriage in a literary context, so that her family life filters in an
inconspicuous way through her textual products.

The story of the author’s marriage takes little space in this autobiography and
soon ends with the announcement of Guo’s death in the paragraph immediately
following the above quotation:

Another half a year later, Mr. Guo unexpectedly died of sickness. During
this period of time, I was filled with despair and sadness... But I soon
became relaxed and leisurely, and I resumed writing. The short pieces that
I wrote then, such as “To a Lonely Goose at the End of the World” [Ji
tianya yi guhong], “Autumn Wind, Autumn Rain” [Qiufeng qiuyu], and
“To sister Mei” [Linghai chaoxi zhi mei zi], came out in a collection called
“Tide of the Soul” [Linghai chaoxi]. Altogether about six hundred
thousand or seven hundred thousand words, the collection was published
by Kaiming Publishing House.

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69 Lu 1934: 83.

70 Lu 1934: 83-84.
Lu Yin emphasizes the effect that Guo’s death has on her literary productivity. Without addressing the cause and circumstances of Guo’s death and quickly dismissing her grief, she turns to the inner peace she soon gained and the positive effect it had on her writing. She acknowledges the memory of her husband, but congratulates herself on the number of literary works she produces following his death. She totally exorcises their daughter from the text.

I suggest that autobiography provided a relatively free space for self-expression. Such space does not exist in “An Account of Conduct for Mr. Guo Mengliang” (*Guo Jun Mengliang xingzhuang*, 1925), which Lu Yin wrote in honor of her husband. The first half of the brief biography focuses on the integrity of Guo’s character and personality. The latter half becomes autobiographical; Lu Yin portrays herself as a bereaved widow determined to fulfill her filial duty toward his parents and motherly duty toward “his” daughter. This double duty serves as an important reason for her to go on living. Both of these gestures are in line with traditional Chinese expectations of a widowed woman.

However, Lu Yin also portrays herself as playing a new role as a wife: to edit and publish his writings and translations. She expresses an obligation to carry on his cause: “I understand your heart, and how can I bear the thought of disappointing your expectations? Although I cannot articulate all of your ideas, it is my duty to at least

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71 In contrast to the biography (*liezhuang*) in the official dynastic histories, the account of conduct (*xingzhuang*) is a form of private biography that usually praises the subject for his virtues. Other important forms of private biography include tomb inscriptions (*mu zhi ming*), sacred path stone tablet (*shen dao bei*), sacrificial eulogies (*ji wen*), and elegies (*wan shi*). See Lao 1993. Lu Yin’s piece was originally published in *The Lamp of Learning (Xue deng)*, a supplement of *Shishi xin bao* on December 7, 1925.
collect what you have already written. This is why I dare not die with you." Lu Yin claims the role of biographer for her husband, an endeavor hardly conceivable for a woman in most situations in traditional times. She thus reverses the conventional situation where a male writer or historian would write biographical portrayals of a virtuous woman. She also depicts herself as a wife whose role entails textual service to her late husband. Therefore, her self-image as a good wife forms a sharp contrast with the minimized depiction of marriage and exclusive emphasis on textual achievements in her autobiography.

In Lu Yin’s autobiography, she also represents her second marriage as more of a literary passion than a marriage. Without yet mentioning her relationship and marriage with Li Weijian, she first introduces the publication of their love letters in a collection called *A Collection of Love Letters between Cloud and Gull (Yun ou qingshu ji)*, which came out in Shanghai in 1931. This collection contains 68 letters exchanged between the two. She explains the reason for publishing their private correspondence:

> Its publication was not planned, because the dozens of letters included in it are all our correspondence over the past year or so. Once we casually talked about these letters and reread them. We felt that they were beautifully written. Unlike other people’s love letters, they contain our real attitude toward social conduct, real passion, and imagination. Therefore we decided to make them known to the public.  

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72 Qian 1989: 524.

73 Lu 1934: 85-86.
Here sexual desire fades away and sublimate into textual accomplishment: “This was a book of real love letters. Not a single piece, nor a sentence, nor a word was fabricated. When we wrote them, we really did an anatomy of ourselves.”

The introduction of Li Weijian bears much resemblance to the introduction of Guo Mengliang earlier in the text. Literary achievements once again serve as the contextual framework that surrounds his introduction into the text. She first puts into relief the character of Li, describing him as “a person of the time,” a person “free of the residuals of feudal value,” “a person of strong passion and vivid imagination,” and “a person who overcomes all obstacles and advances toward his goals.”

According to Lu Yin, Li’s biggest impact on her is that he helped her overcome her inhibition against their relationship.

It is not until much later, in a chapter titled “Change in My World View,” that Lu Yin reveals their actual marriage. Of all the iconoclastic acts of the author, her love and marriage with Li Weijian, her junior by about ten years, met with the most ridicule and moral censure. But Lu Yin glosses over the ridicule and moral censure of society and gets right to the marriage between two brave individuals: “I wanted to rebuild my life... and all the Confucian ethical codes and all of society’s ridicules were all smashed in my hands. Leaving Beiping without hesitation, we announced our union based on real love and rode on clouds in the fairyland of Penglai.”

Again Lu Yin erases family life,

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74 Lu 1934: 97.
75 Lu 1934: 96.
76 Lu 1934: 97.
exactly as she does with her other daughter, she omits the daughter from her second marriage from the text.

But unlike the first marriage, which inhibits her literary productivity, Lu Yin portrays the union with Li as having a positive impact on her writing:

After this big change, I got out of depression. When I write now, I seldom think of myself anymore. In other words, my viewpoint changed. Instead of focusing on my own well-being, I begin to notice people around me. In my recent work, “A Woman’s Heart” [Nüren de xin], I bravely speak out about breaking down constraints, opposing feudal forces, and I even more bravely argue against one-sided chastity. ⁷⁷

She here clearly speaks the May Fourth public discourse of rebellion against the Confucian moral order and gender norms, which stood in the way of her pursuit of freedom in love. Defined outside the norms of marriage, this relationship promotes her growth as a writer.

This third relationship, however, acquires a strong sexual overtone. Lu Yin treats it as a consummation, with the lovers riding high on “the clouds in the fairyland of Penglai.” But this sexual passion almost immediately transcends its physicality and transforms into a literary passion, as shown in my discussion above. Repeating the act of banishing her children from the autobiography, the narration seems to transform sexual energy into literary energy, so that textual production eventually replaces sexual reproduction in the narration. The entire process of portraying romantic involvements in

⁷⁷ Lu 1934: 98.
terms of their relation to the author’s growth as a writer serves as a way of healing the earlier physical and emotional wounds of the little girl for her inadequacy in reading and writing.

Lu Yin’s autobiography differs from and yet demonstrates similarities with the autobiographies by Su Xuelin and other female writers. I read Lu Yin’s autobiography as a personal story of abuse and a means of therapy. It gradually opens out to larger issues of gender, sexuality, and writing that were relevant to other women of her time. It also exhibits the tendency shared by most other female writers’ self-representational texts of trying to erase the author’s private life and maximize her public literary role. In the next chapter, I analyze texts written in or translated into English in a cross-cultural context and the ways in which they add to the complexity of the tradition of Chinese women’s autobiographies.
CHAPTER 3

CHINESE WOMEN WRITERS’ AUTOBIOGRAPHIES IN THE WEST: XIE BINGYING, YANG BUWEI, CHEN HENZHE

Chinese women’s life stories emerged in the West in the 1930s and 1940s through collaborations among writers, translators, and publishers. The important writers include Xie Bingying, Yang Buwei, and Chen Hengzhe. Xie’s Yige nü bing de zizhuan was rendered into English in 1940 by Adet and Anor Lin as Girl Rebel: The Autobiography of Hsieh Pingying.1 Yang took Hu Shi’s challenge in writing Yige nü ren de zizhuan, translated into English as Autobiography of a Chinese Woman by her husband Zhao Yuanren in 1947. Authors and translators cooperated in their endeavor to portray China

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1 When it was first published 1936, Xie’s autobiography was titled The Autobiography of a Female Soldier (I ge nü bing de zizhuan) and 3000 copies were printed, to be followed by another 1000 copies in 1937. The 1936 edition and its 1937 reprint both end at the point where Bingying arrives in Shanghai after successfully escaping from home. A new edition titled The Self-Narration of a Woman (Yi ge nüxing de zishu) was published under the pseudonym Luo Sha in Hong Kong in 1954 without an introduction or preface. This edition covers Bingying’s life after she escapes to Shanghai, including a brief description her life as a mother, reconciliation with her own mother, and her mother’s death. Another edition came out in Taiwan in 1980, and the title was changed to Autobiography of a Female Soldier (Nü bing zizhuan). This edition includes most of the contents in the 1954 edition, as well as three appendices on Bingying’s life as a youth, a soldier, and a college student. The only noticeable omission in the 1980 edition is the episode on Bingying’s experience of “lesbian” love relationships that is found in all the other editions. Due to its popularity, the book was translated into English, Japanese, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and other languages. Two English translations exist. One is the work of Adet and Anor Lin, Girl Rebel: The Autobiography of Hsieh Pingying. It was first published by John Day Company in New York in 1940 and was reprinted in 1975. The other was rendered by Tsui Chi. It was first published in the Great Britain by George Allen & Unwin LTD and was reprinted in 19986 with a new introduction by Elizabeth Scroll.
to the West through individual women’s life stories. Chen took it upon herself to represent Chinese to the West in *Autobiography of a Chinese Young Girl* in 1935. Among these three writers, Chen and Xie are established writers, while Yang is little known due to the neglect of autobiography in China. In this study, I assign Yang equal footing with Chen and Xie and award her long-due recognition as a writer.

The autobiographies of Xie, Yang, and Chen exist between worlds—they were written or translated into English but have gained little recognition as Chinese literature or Chinese American literature. With the neglect of autobiography in modern Chinese literary studies, these texts have remained in oblivion in China. In the global context, they have also been ignored in the theorizing and criticism of women’s autobiography in the last two decades. In the rapidly growing field of Chinese American literature, none of these three writers has received much critical attention. Amy Ling mentions Xie’s autobiography in *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* (1990), but only in the context of discussing the writings of the Adet and Anor Lin, who translated Xie’s book into English.\(^2\) In recent years, Asian English-language literature has become a field of study, but this rubric includes mostly South East Asian writers.\(^3\) A study of these three Chinese women authors’ autobiographies will hopefully serve to widen the boundaries of Asian American literature and contribute to Asian English-language literature, as well as to literature in English generally.

\(^2\) Ling 1990: 59-60.

\(^3\) Lim 1994.
Although the recognition of translation as a metaphor for cross-cultural exchange is quite recent,\textsuperscript{4} such practice has long existed, as in the introduction of the autobiographies of Xie, Yang, and Chen to the West. Since they engage directly or indirectly in explicating China to the West, discussion of their texts inevitably involves cross-cultural translation in a broad sense. Reuben A. Brower points out that in translation, as in all writing, thinking, and experiencing, “we translate the less familiar by putting the more familiar in its place…”\textsuperscript{5} It is impossible to “just translate,”\textsuperscript{6} as the mother advises the daughter in The Woman Warrior. “Just translating,” in the sense of “only translating” and “translating justly,” is the very issue that Karen Kai-Yuan Su explores in her study of the negotiation of cultural authority and the politics of Asian assimilation to American culture in Chinese American women’s writing.\textsuperscript{7} She says, “Western cultures ‘translated’ (and ‘translate’) non-Western cultures into Western categories to be able to come to an understanding of them and, therefore, to come to terms with them.”\textsuperscript{8} In her discussion of the politics of translation, Spivak also views translation as an act of “reading.”\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{5} Brower 1959: 3.
\textsuperscript{6} Kingston 1976: 170.
\textsuperscript{7} Su 1998: 1-9. In her dissertation Su gives a useful historical survey of cross-cultural translation and an account of the current picture of the field. I do not go into this since it is only tangentially related to my chapter.
\textsuperscript{8} Lefevere 1999, in Bassnett and Trivedi 1999: 77.
\textsuperscript{9} Spivak 1993: 180-194.
The emergence of Chinese women's autobiographies in the West through cross-cultural translation did not result from "just translation." It needs to be situated in the context of East-West power relations, particularly of orientalism. Edward W. Said defines Orientalism as an academic study and epistemological imagining of the West about the East, but also as

the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.\(^{10}\)

This authority is predicated on what Said calls "exteriority," on the fact that "the Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact." Such authority positioned outside makes possible representation by virtue of "its having excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such real thing as 'the Orient."\(^{11}\)

In Said's account, America did not play a conspicuous role in Orientalism in the global context until after World War II.\(^{12}\) However, American missionaries had began to invest much religious interest in China in the mid-nineteenth century. The missionary discourse then produced constituted part of the Orientalist representation of China toward the end of nineteenth century. For example, aided by and collaborating with nineteenth-
century European theory of national character, a large number of missionary representations of Chinese national character were produced, of which Author Smith’s *Chinese Characteristics* (1894) became one of the best-known, as Lydia Liu has discussed. In his introduction, Smith tells us that the essays were first published serially in *North China Daily News* of Shanghai in 1889, without intending for wider circulation. The popularity they enjoyed in China and internationally caused these writings to come out in book form in 1890. A second edition occurred in 1894. Smith proposes 26 categories, with a chapter devoted to each, in his analysis of the Chinese character: face, economy, industry, politeness, a disregard for time, a talent for misunderstanding, a talent for indirection, flexible inflexibility, intellectual turbidity, an absence of nerves, contempt for foreigners, an absence of public spirit, conservatism, indifference to comfort and convenience, physical vitality, patience and perseverance, contentment and cheerfulness, filial piety, benevolence, an absence of sympathy, social typhoons, mutual responsibility and respect for law, mutual suspicion, an absence of sincerity, polytheism-pantheism-atheism.

Lin Yutang’s (1895-1976) *My Country and My People* (1935) is another portrayal of Chinese character to the West. It contains the following chapters: the Chinese People, the Chinese Character, the Chinese Mind, Ideals of Life, Woman’s Life, Social and Political Life, Literary Life, the Artistic Life, and the Art of Living. When it appeared in 1935 in the United States, Pearl S. Buck wrote an introduction and praised it as a “purely

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13 It originates in the nationalist discourse of German Romanticism, which emphasized essential differences between peoples based on racial identity. See Herder’s *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man.*
Chinese” work “permeated with the essential spirit” of the Chinese people, far superior to other books on China that were “untrue,” “bombastic,” “too fervent in defense of that which was too great to need defense,” and “written to impress the foreigner.”

Thus, Lin’s unabashed confession was seen as the most truthful portrayal of the Chinese character in his argument about Chinese patience, indifference, old roguery, conservatism, and cowardice that worked against progress, reform, idealism, action, and science.

Lin’s book was well received in the United States. Book Review Digest of 1935 acclaimed the book as the ultimate authority on China. In the eyes of Fanny Butcher, the book is “the clearest and most interesting dissection and synthesis of China past and present.”

John Chamberlain claims: “No one who wants to know either old or new China need go beyond the covers of My Country and My People.”

To R. E. Kennedy, “No one but a Chinese could have given such an honest, faithful, unprejudiced account of the people.”

Thus, at the hands of the author and the reviewers, Chinese people are reduced to a type, an object of Western scientific study. Their psychological makeup and mental traits were subjected to the scrutiny of the author, because he had “a wide

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14 Liu 1995: 45-60.


17 Chicago Daily Tribune p14 S 21 '35 230w.

18 Cleveland Open Shelf p18 O '35.

19 New York Times p1 D 8 '35 1300w.
knowledge of Western culture and wrote in English,”20 “has not only ‘learned’ Western culture but understands it,” and yet he was not without the “the mellowness, the wisdom, and the humor of his race.”21 In the 1940s and 1950s, Lin was dubbed “critic of the Chinese and American ways of life,” “critic of life and interpreter of ancient wisdom,” “interpreter of the Chinese to the West” by critics such as Chan Wing-tsit and William Dubois.22 In their comprehensive survey of Asian American literature, Sau-ling C. Wong and Jeffery J. Santa Ana call Lin’s book one of the earliest “gendered representations of assimilation to Euro-American culture” written by an Asian American writer.23 Only a few critics, one of whom is Chan, criticized Lin for his representation of the Chinese people as submissive while thousands of them were laying down their lives for national liberation. For this reason, Chan criticized Lin’s work as “Mai Country and Mai People”—“mai” meaning “selling” and “betraying” in Chinese.24

Scholars such as Lydia Liu and Xiaomei Chen have problematized Said’s notion of Orientalism by pointing out the appropriation of Orientalism on the part of Chinese intellectuals in negotiating Chinese subjectivity. According to Liu, Smith’s representation of Chinese national character does not simply reduce China to an object of Western orientalist gaze, as Said revealingly described in a different context. Smith’s

20 *Booklist* 32:61 N ’35.

21 *Saturday Review of Literature* 12:7 S 21 ’35 1200w.


work was made especially influential in China through what Liu calls “coauthorship” with Chinese May Fourth intellectuals who translated, freely adapted from, and drew on Smith’s book in other forms in their search for “self-knowledge under the heavy burden of modernity.” 25 Liu’s point is that missionary discourse of Chinese national character should not be dismissed as merely false. It contributed to shaping May Fourth representations of reality when it was introduced to Chinese audience through translation and translingual practice, blurring the boundary between the gazer and the gazed in contemporary East-West cultural criticism. 26

Chen goes further in arguing about “Chinese Occidentalism” in the political and literary expression of Dengist China as a counter-discourse to Orientalism. She delineates two ways in which China utilized Western theories and practices, official Occidentalism and anti-official Occidentalism. Official Occidentalism refers to the ways in which “the Chinese government uses the essentialization of the West as a means for supporting a nationalism that effects the internal suppression of its own people.” Anti-official Occidentalism explores how intellectuals in China resist the government’s tight political control: by employing “a powerful anti-official discourse using the Western Other as a metaphor for a political liberation against ideological oppression within a totalitarian society.” 27 In this sense, although Chinese Occidentalism is a product of Orientalist representation of China, it helped the Chinese government support the status

27 Chen 1995: 5, 8.
quo; it also helped dissenters find an alliance in their rebellion against official ideology. But both functions are characterized by Chinese use of the West in domestic cultural politics.

The circumstances of the writing, translation, and reception of each autobiography discussed in this dissertation also challenge the stereotype of East-West relations in which the East is dominated. As I demonstrate in this chapter, the autobiographies of Xie, Yang, and Chen differently addresses Orientalist representation of China to the West. The translation of Xie’s autobiography can be read as an appropriation of a Chinese text as Orientalist representation of China. Yang’s text participates in Orientalist discourse on China since it was written to be translated for a Western audience. Written in English as a response to Western portrayals of Chinese people, Chen’s story resists Orientalism and redirects it for emancipation of Chinese women, while contributing in its own way to Orientalist discourse. At the same time, the three writers actively appropriated Western interest in China by publishing their personal stories in the West.

3.1 From Footbinding Strips to A Soldier’s Puttees: Girl Rebel: The Autobiography of Hsieh Pingying

Xie Bingying’s autobiography was used in the West as an Orientalist portrayal of China through translation. At the moment it was being translated into English by the Lin sisters, China was engaged in the War of Resistance against Japan. The two young translators were eager to do something for China, as Lin Yutang says in his introduction.
Making Xie’s book available to English-speaking audience was their effort to help China in its time of crisis. Xie’s book was received in the United States mostly as a story of China, not as the story of Bingying. One reviewer writes: “Girl Rebel’ gives a unique and touching picture of a woman soldier and propagandist and of the young China she represents.” Another reviewer remarks: “Girl Rebel’ is valuable for giving a feeling of what is happening in China in its essence.” These observations present Bingying as “a symbol of her nation’s new power and purpose.” Lin Yutang also holds that Xie’s narration is “the story of young China in the convulsions of an age of social upheaval.” The young Chinese women in the book exercise sexual and exotic appeal for Western readers. They are rebels who have just liberated themselves from the traditional family; their feet have been newly unbound; they have been transformed into female soldiers in uniforms, with their legs in puttees and their waist strapped by the belt.

The “difference” between these women fighters and the privileged translators is clearly present in the translators’ consciousness. In Lin Yutang’s introduction, Anor Lin, vividly describes the contrast between her comfort, “in a cool wood where translation was

28 Their translation was widely acclaimed. Both the New York Times (p10 Jl 28 '40 850w) and The New Yorker (16:66 Jl 13 '40 70w) carried this comment: “This book is written with a beautiful straightforwardness, and so it is translated. Adet Lin is 16 years old and Anor is 13; the individual flavor of their young minds is known from their delightful 'Our Family,' published a year ago. Here, in their deeply serious prefatory notes, as also in their maturity of their translation, they show the new young China, this side of the gulf the girl rebels crossed, in their fervor of a common patriotism.” Florence Ayscough called the translation “fresh, sincere, and vital,” in Saturday Review of Literature 22:10 Jl 13 '40 600w.

29 Boston Transcript p11 Jl 11 '40 600w.

30 New Republican 103:391 S 16 '40 420w.

a pleasure” and the ticking sound of the typewriter which sounded “delightful,” and the real hardship experienced by Xie. As the “thunder and lightning,” the splashing rain, and “doors flung open” were “the most thrilling” things that had ever happened to Anor Lin, she finds that she has a hard time trying to express what Xie meant. In her own explanation, “After all, I ... never had the experience of escaping from my mother, and I would never want to.” She even calls herself “a little bit of a ‘Girl Soldier’ for foregoing a dip in the pool for the sake of translation.” Adet Lin, the older sister, also marvels on “the difference between translating it and going through it” and concludes that it is “impossible” for her to experience what Bingying does. Adet Lin also daydreams about the real “adventures” of Miss Xie, the real fighting and killing, longs for the “real” meaning of life in “suffering for a common cause,” and yet she wakes up from her fantasy glad that she is actually in the “tranquility and peacefulness” of “the Vermont woods.”

Xie Bingying was born Xie Minggang, styled Fengbao, in 1903 in Xinhua county, Hunan province. Her father, a Confucian scholar open to modern ideas, taught her Poems of Girl Poets at Suiyuan and Three Hundred Tang Poems. Her mother, a traditional woman with bound feet who safeguarded Confucian values and gender norms more jealously than her own life, taught her to read Girls’ Classics. Xie escaped from home

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32 Lin’s introduction in Adet and Anor Lin trans. 1940: XIV.
33 Xie 1940: Introduction, xvi.
34 Xie 1940: Introduction, xvii-xviii.
35 Girls’ Classics are also called The Four Books for Women, the texts that Lu Yin was forced to study as a little girl.
and devoted herself to revolution during heated fightings against the Chinese warlords and later against the Japanese invaders. In 1926, she enrolled in a twelve-month course in propaganda studies at the Wuchang Central Political and Military School, after which she joined the Northern Expedition army and became a propagandist. Her experience at the front became material for her first publication, *War Diary* (1928). After the Northern Expedition, she returned home to be subjected to arranged marriage. However, she eventually ran away from home to study Chinese literature at Shanghai Art University, where she studied for two years before she was forced to withdraw for political reasons. When the Nationalist government began to purge communists on a large scale, Xie was imprisoned. Upon release, she took up school teaching and did various odd jobs, including selling her writings, to make a living. Early in the 1930s, Xie went to Japan to further her education but she soon felt compelled to return to China to do her share in defending her country against Japan. Upon completion of *Girl Rebel* (1936), she joined the army again to fight in the war of resistance against Japan, the experience of which was commemorated in *New War Diary* (1937). In 1939, she enrolled in Beijing Female Normal College. In 1949, she moved to Taiwan, where she continued her career of teaching and writing at the Teachers’ College (later Taiwan Normal University). She retired in 1971 and moved to San Francisco.

The May Fourth Movement and the literary reform of 1917 presented Xie with unprecedented opportunities to gain independence and engage in writing. What Xie

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36 For information about the enthusiasm of young girls for joining the army during the nationalist revolution, see Fan: 1997: 96.
experienced and witnessed in the army put her in a unique position to construct images of Chinese women as revolutionary fighters, which made her stand out among her contemporary female writers who tended to focus exclusively on education, family, and emotional issues. In *A History of Twentieth-Century Chinese Female Literature*, Sheng Ying claims Xie as the first female writer in China to respond to the campaign of revolutionary literature launched by the Chinese Communist Party in 1926. In Sheng’s canon, Xie’s writing is classified as “female soldier literature.”

Xie did not intend to write her autobiography for a Western audience. Rather, it is her personal story of liberation and revolution. She writes about her experiences at different stages of her life: as Phoenix at home, Minggang in school, and Bingying in the army. She tells the liberation of herself and the other female soldiers from their family prisons and their entrapment in another oppressive system. Throughout the text, the female body is a site which power is contested. In the beginning, Phoenix cries in the arms of her grandmother after being severely beaten by her mother for her disobedience. The grandmother tries to console the child by convincing her of her mother’s love—how hard her mother had labored in giving birth to her and how she had walked miles to pray to the Buddha when the girl got sick. Control over Phoenix’s physical activity lies behind all the disciplining the mother imposes on the daughter. In order to keep Phoenix from playing outside all day, her mother makes Phoenix pick tea leaves with older, engaged girls. Thus, Phoenix learns about these young women’s distress living in their mother-in-

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law's house. She is also taught to spin and weave to prepare trunks of cloth as her trousseau. Crippling Phoenix's sister for life by binding her feet too early, her mother hesitates to do it to Phoenix. Yet, since the size of a girl's feet is a symbol of good breeding that is the responsibility of the mother, the neighbors will ask Phoenix whether her mother is dead when they see her unbound feet at the age of ten. So her mother eventually decides to fulfill her motherly duty and bind Phoenix's feet with a standard three-inch-wide strip of blue cloth. Xie describes vividly Phoenix's begging, kicking, snatching, crying, and roaring in helpless protest. She feels "like a criminal being dragged to the execution ground." But the mother professes love for her daughter because it is meant to help her secure a good marriage. Ironically enough, an aunt offers to carry Phoenix on her back after the binding to see a monkey show, while all the neighbors gather around to watch the "show," as the author calls it, of binding Phoenix's feet.

When she is in school, she opens her eyes for the first time in her life to the possibility of unbinding her feet and acts on it immediately. Phoenix's gesture of taking control of her own body by freeing her feet is certainly a challenge to her mother's undisputed power. It so irritates her mother that Phoenix has to beg very hard to continue


40 In "Foot-binding in Neo-Confucian China and the Appropriation of Female Labor," C. Fred Blake elaborates on a mother's painful and painstaking effort to make the binding of her daughter's feet become "voluntary" on the girl's part, because the girl's future depended on the will power and the discipline in making this sacrifice. There is involved in the ordeal of binding an exchange of love (teng) between mother and daughter. See Blake 1994: 685.
her education. In middle school, she experiences further physical freedom, such as taking off “the little vest” that bind her breasts tight, and emotional freedom, such as uncensored mail. But not until she wears an army uniform as a soldier does she feel liberated from the feudal family system.

Xie’s depiction of her life in the army reveals that the erasure of female gender already existed in China in the 1920s, a challenge to current scholarship. Tani Barlow’s, for instance, suggests that the category of women in China was transformed from traditional “kin-reflected” gender categories to the essentialist sexual binarism of “women” (nüxing) in Republican China, and then to the state category of “woman” (funü) in the People’s Republic of China.41 Lydia Liu also observes the construction of the discourse of gender difference in the early twentieth century, marked by the creation of a Chinese character of the feminine third person pronoun.42 Mayfair Yang also points out the deployment of the category of nüxing in the nationalist concerns of state building. But she largely agrees that gender erasure was a by-product of state feminism in the Maoist era, state feminism being the elevation of Chinese women’s social and legal status through the Marriage Law (1950), the Chinese Constitution (1954), and the invention of the National Women’s Federation.43 It is generally believed that the erasure of the female gender through the social division of labor and through dress code is a typical feature of

41 Barlow 1994: 266-270.
the Maoist era. As many propaganda art works indicate, the so-called “iron girls” engage in such work as oil drilling, coal mining, and suspension from high-tension electric wires, and the whole country is dressed in green army uniforms and blue and gray suits.

Gender erasure is visible in Xie’s text in the degendering function of the soldier’s uniform. The author recalls how dumbfounded she is, on her first day as a cadet, to see a female officer “clad in uniform and puttees exactly like a man.”44 Her first shock is hardly over when each new soldier is given “a gray jacket and pants, a hat, rubber shoes, a pair of straw sandals, two pairs of black cloth stockings, gray leggings, and a leather belt,” and is ordered to “wash away the powder and rouge” from their faces.45 Their once-bound feet will now wear rubber shoes and straw sandals; the strip of footbinding cloth will be replaced by leggings; and their waist will be bound by a leather belt. The effect is instantaneous, as the author describes it: “‘Soldier!’ What a powerful word! It was hard to realize that Chinese women, suppressed by conventional laws for thousands of years, could now become soldiers. … In my brain there was an endless procession of hopes, like countless stars dancing before me.”46 The new apparel symbolically delivers the female soldiers from the feudal family system.

Yet the new apparel also claims the soldiers’ bodies and minds for the revolutionary cause. As Xie’s narrative suggests, the process of degendering in the army is also a process of desexualization. Although saved by revolution from family and

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44 Xie 1975: 68.
45 Xie 1975: 69.
46 Xie 1975: 71-72.
marriage, her sexuality is claimed by war. As a soldier, she must forget all private affairs, most importantly romantic love, and devote herself fully to revolution. Contrary to the May Fourth exaltation of love as the most forceful way to resist feudal oppression, love in Xie’s work is represented negatively as a trivial game:

One would think that girls who had suffered under the oppression of the family system and who were now like birds out of a cage, would need very much the solace of love and romance. On the contrary, they did not regard love as something extraordinary or important. Their only immediate desire was the revolution. They had staked all their happiness and their future on a revolutionary career. Everybody realized that unless the old family system was overthrown, there would never be a day when girls would be free. Man must create a permanent happiness, the happiness of the entire society; love is only a personal affair, certainly not as important as eating rice. To those who are willing to devote their lives to the people and who have a firm faith in their social mission, love is only a little game for the rich sons and daughters of the leisure class. Such were our ideas and our attitude toward love.

Driven by such clearly defined goals, upon receiving a blood-stained love letter from her first love, Bingying is only concerned with whether he will join the revolution. If not, she will break up with him. The narrator declares: “In such times, those who agree with us in thought are our friends and those who differ from us are our enemies.”47 There is a clear sense of political alignment on Bingying’s part.

For Bingying and her fellow soldiers, the significance of such personal sacrifice lies in the new identity as revolutionaries that they acquire in the army. The author recalls her unspoken pride in being a female soldier on horseback who amazes women with

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47 Xie 1975: 76.
bound feet, to whom Bingying seemed to be “a short-haired, big-footed, uniformed female devil.”\textsuperscript{48} What distinguishes Bingying from those traditional women is not the ways in which they are dressed \textit{per se}, but the identity she embodies. In Anne Hollander’s words, clothes are “inseparable from the self”\textsuperscript{49} and clothes are indicators of a person’s “respect for the order of things.”\textsuperscript{50} In the story of Bingying, the order of things is of crucial importance during the time of drastic change that affected Chinese gender norms more than ever in China’s history. In the eyes of those who uphold the traditional social order, women like Bingying who cut their hair short, unbind their feet, and wear military uniforms, are undoubtedly deviating from the conventional order that demands women play their roles within the family. Bingying and her fellow female soldiers depend on their uniforms for their identity as rebels against old gender norms. Normal civilian clothes and bound feet define limits for the correct gender organization and mark a perceptual ordering of Chinese society. The uniform Bingying wears offers a rich vocabulary for identifying her as a modern woman and a fighter against conventional society and its gender imperative. Therefore, in the context of Bingying’s life as a prisoner of the traditional family system, the liberating power of the soldier’s uniform must be acknowledged.

Yet the uniform and its accessories also signal a new norm. As vividly described in Xie’s autobiography, though without the same degree of pain as footbinding, wearing a

\textsuperscript{48} Xie 1975: 92.
\textsuperscript{49} Holander 1980: 451.
\textsuperscript{50} Holander 1980: 362.
uniform and its accompanying accessories is also a form of repression. But once the normalization process is completed, wearing the uniform is as natural as breathing. Not until their troop has to be disbanded and they are compelled to take off their “liberating” uniform do they realize how attached they have become to it and how their very identity as female soldiers rested on it. The narrator describes the moment when they had to change back into feminine clothes:

Nobody wanted to take off that gray uniform nor that beautiful, shiny, well-worn belt. I remembered that when we first put it on we all thought it a nuisance. It was as hard and uncomfortable as a piece of cardboard, and the first thing we did after the drills was to take off our belts and free our waists. Sometimes we rushed out to drill forgetting our belt, and for this we were scolded by the sergeant and made to stand at attention as a penalty. Later we grew used to it and never took it off for a moment except at night. I always regarded this belt and my gun as my dearest companions. In winter the belt held my dress close to the body and kept me warm, and as for the gun, it was more precious than my life. We needed it to destroy the old conventions, to build the new society. And now, everything was gone. We could not even keep our belts, not to mention the guns.  

The emancipatory rhetoric conceals a new power relation that can be revealed through Foucault’s analysis of the normalizing, disciplinary nature of punishment in Europe since the nineteenth century. In Foucault’s account, legal punishment in Europe prior to the nineteenth century involved subjecting a criminal to various degrees of physical ordeal in public. The industrial society, however, needed a labor force that necessitated the “corrective” function of law. Thus, in criminal cases, physical pain and public shame

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were displaced by work on the soul, aided by psychiatrists, psychologists, doctors, and educationalists in their "scientific" prescription of possible means of rehabilitation. Yet this apparent slackening of the hold on the body does not signify for Foucault that the power of the law over criminals has been relinquished. Rather, a new power structure is formed in the sense that the new political technology of the body, in the humanization of the penal system, makes those who defy the law objects of scientific knowledge.\textsuperscript{52}

Bingying's case bears strong resemblance to Foucault's revelation of the nature of modern punishment. When she was very young, she could go out to have fun. By the time she reaches the age of ten, she loses that freedom, and her feet have to be bound. She is also forced by her mother to pick tea leaves or weave at home instead of going out, practices that are not exactly imprisonment, but a strict policing of Bingying's physical activity. After she leaves the army, her family literally locks her up; her physical being is again taken over by the family, with her mother at its head.

Yet life in the army also has means of punishing and disciplining. Bingying and most of the female soldiers devote themselves entirely to revolution and willingly deny themselves love and romance as trivial and superfluous. But one female soldier named Yungtseng trespasses the sexual norm of the revolutionary army by wearing powder and rouge and going on a date with her boyfriend. As a result, she is locked up in a dark cell for an entire week as a form of punishment for her disobedience and refusal to admit her mistake. The punishment is not strictly physical, but it affects her body. For example,

\textsuperscript{52} Foucault 1977: 3-24.
she is forced to lie “on a hard board with only a gray blanket, and a commode in the room.” Her food is rationed in a different way than others, and she is given only “some water and two bowls of rice without anything to go with it.” When she complains and argues with the Sergeant about her living conditions, she gets two more days of imprisonment. Upon release, “her face was deadly pale and she was no more the lively girl she had been before.” The punishment serves as a reminder of what happens to those who disobey orders, for they are told from the first day in the army to regard “military orders as like a mountain, and party discipline as like iron.”53

Ideological disciplining of the mind, like that of the body, constitutes an aspect of Bingying’s life as a soldier. Soldiers not only have to behave but also to think as revolutionaries. They are made to stand at attention for minor offences, such as returning late from a day on leave or laughing during meals or drills. As for Bingying, her liking for pretty things such as “little ducks, kittens, dolls, little drums and gongs” is considered distracting to her attention to revolution. Therefore, she has to put them away. Her love for literature, too, is criticized as being “too free” for a good revolutionary. She stores away her novels and leaves the shelf only books on “agrarian revolution, history of the world war, economics, political science and military science, especially the Drill Manual…”54 In this way, Bingying gradually conforms to the norms in the army.

Punishment in the revolutionary army is different from the punishment Bingying receives in the family. In Foucault’s terms,

53 Xie 1975: 78-79.
The body now serves as an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it or imprisons it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right and as property. The body, according to his penalty, is caught up in a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions. Physical pain, the pain of the body itself, is no longer the constituent element of the penalty. From being an art of unbearable sensations punishment has become an economy of suspended rights.55

The complexity and subtlety of army disciplining described in the narration is further revealed by Foucault’s elucidation of all disciplinary systems, in their punishment of “non-observance” of rules, as a mechanism which “compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes.”56 The female soldiers are normalized by wearing their uniforms, departure from army norms is corrected through punishment, and people holding different positions toward the revolution become enemies, as in the case of Bingying’s lover. The entire experience reconstructs women in body and in mind. For Bingying, it is not difficult to conform to the requirements of army life, because her identity as a soldier has saved her from the ordinary fate of women. The practical significance of the newly acquired identity becomes clearer than ever when she has to go home after the revolution to submit to an arranged marriage.

Xie’s identity changes as her life changes. As Phoenix, she loves to study and is her parents’ treasured but controlled little daughter. As Minggang, she is a young woman

54 Xie 1975: 80.
55 Foucault 1977: 11.
56 Foucault 1977: 177-182.
determined to pursue her freedom from the oppressions of the old society and from the institution of arranged marriage. As Bingying the revolutionary, her identity becomes increasingly defined by her connection with the social and political concerns of revolutionary time. When she is no longer a part of the revolution, however, this identity vanishes, and its disappearance produces a crisis. This is clear in the description of her inner thoughts when she returns home after four years, during a moment of unspoken love between the long-estranged mother and daughter. The mother is pained by her daughter’s emaciated face and weary body, and the daughter repents the suffering she has caused her mother by seeking personal freedom. In intervening four years, Bingying experiences self-chosen love and has given birth to a daughter, Little Soldier, out of wedlock. She does not feel, however, that her emotional involvement and her child are fulfillment, since she holds that romantic love does not contribute to the general advance of society. She says silently to her mother: “I had left the ancient way of marriage only to be entangled in romance.”

Obviously, free love is not her life’s goal, and she portrays it as hindrance to her identity as a woman fighting for the freedom of the women and men of her country.

*Girl Rebel* is unique among the autobiographies of Xie’s contemporaries in its portrayal of Chinese women’s struggle to gain independence and freedom through the path of revolution and transgenerated identity. It is also revealing of the ways in which Chinese women were liberated from the conventional family but become constrained by a

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57 Xie 1975: 223.
new ideology in the revolutionary army. Intended for Chinese readers, Xie’s text in English translation was read as a representation of China during World War II, a reading that situates it within Orientalist discourse. While such a reading was not only an appropriation, for it also allowed the personal story of Xie to be published in the West.

3.2 “A Chinese Woman in Oil Painting:” Autobiography of a Chinese Woman


What is the motivation for writing a “Chinese” autobiography to be translated into English for Western readers? Given the Chinese notion that only heroes and famous people are entitled to write autobiographies, was it culturally easier for the author to write her story for translation? The making of her autobiography involved not only Chinese literary authorities educated in the West, such as Hu Shi and Zhao Yuanren, but also Western authorities and publishing agents, who provided monetary support for this autobiographical project. According to the foreword coauthored by Yang and Zhao, the
book was first conceived as a business deal among the writer, the translator, and the publisher. When Pearl Buck and Richard J. Walsh of the John Day Company suggested that Yang write a book, Yang immediately agreed to write her autobiography. However, Buck and Walsh immediately realized that John Day Company lacked Chinese type to print it. They then turned to Zhao Yuanren and decided that he should act as translator.\footnote{Yang 1947: Foreword, ix.}

Thus, if writing the book in Chinese was endorsed by Hu Shi and Zhao Yuanren, the English translation was authorized by its American publisher who not only had the money to print it but also the power to appoint the translator.

Writing outside of China under such circumstances for an audience culturally and linguistically not her own, Yang reveals her Orientalist position in her foreword through her awareness of her audience,

The present book is not one of those ‘as told to so-and-so’ stories, since I had it down in writing. Nor is it quite an English translation of a Chinese book. When I do publish the Chinese, it will not be the same book, either. For, to a Chinese reader, there would be no point in describing weddings and funerals in China, while, on the other hand, it would take much explaining before a Chinese reader understands that a ‘ticket’ from a traffic officer is not a policeman’s invitation to go to the theater. So, although this book was written in Chinese, it was written for readers of English.\footnote{Yang 1947: Foreword, ix.}

Yang is conscious that her self-portrait will become an object of Western gaze. In the foreword, she describes her work as “a portrait of a Chinese woman in oil painting,” with these comments: “An oil painting looks inescapably foreign to a Chinese eye. But
if I have to be done in oil on canvas, I think this picture is about as near a likeness of me as I can get—next to the original colors on Chinese silk." Yang is conscious of being seen as an exotic woman, and she directs her self-representation to the taste of the intended audience. Through Western means of representation, Yang "translates" herself into an image for a Western gaze. This image is not the same as the one she would present to a Chinese audience, yet it is not exactly false, as it is created in her likeness.

Yang's narrative opens with the claim that she is a "typical Chinese woman": she grows up in a traditional extended family, gets married, and has children. She positions herself depreciatingly as an individual whose life is not worth writing about. According to Yang in "How I Came to Write My Autobiography," the publisher recommended that she use a more appealing title, but she insisted on calling it *Autobiography of A Chinese Woman* for the following reasons:

I am an ordinary typical Chinese woman. I have not done any great service to my country and society. Incidentally I was marginally related to some important world events over the past few decades, and I have witnessed it all. Therefore I wrote this book for people to entertain themselves with in their spare time.\(^61\)

Therefore, she tends to reveal Chinese family traditions and customs that both cater to and challenge Western imagination of China and Chinese women. At each stage, her personal story is interwoven with local customs, cultures, and history. For instance, she

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\(^59\) Yang 1947: Foreword, x.

\(^60\) Yang & Chao, Foreword, xi.

\(^61\) Yang 1966: 2.
entertains her audience with a description of her great-grandmother’s funeral. Because she dies at the happy old age of ninety-eight, she presents the funeral as a festive occasion: the family sets up an alter in front of the coffin in the central hall; all day and all night Buddhist monks pray in chorus every seven days, and relatives kowtow in front of the altar. Most entertainingly, she includes details of scheduling women three shifts to perform the required crying whenever guests arrive. One aunt is eating lunch when it is her turn to cry. She rushes over from another courtyard in her fluttering white gown and starts crying with a morsel of rice in her mouth. When “Little Master Three,” the author as a little girl, rushes over to remind her to swallow her food first, this aunt bursts into laughter.\(^{62}\) The author also describes a wedding ritual that requires a bride to perform crying duties. As the bride gets into a sedan chair, she is supposed to start crying aloud all the way. Right before she enters her husband’s house, someone goes to inform her to stop crying and helps her out of the sedan chair. Then, the whirlwind of ceremonies begins, which consists mostly of the newly-weds kowtowing to the altar, to their elders, and to other relatives in the reception line.\(^{63}\) These episodes are all entertaining reading material for Western readers unfamiliar with traditional Chinese customs.

Yang’s awareness of audience produced the intended result. Her autobiography was read as an intriguing story of China that enhanced Western imagination of Chinese and Asian culture. Because the first part of her self-representation does not fit with the Western picture of the monolithically oppressed and victimized Chinese woman,

\(^{62}\) Yang 1947: 43-44.
reviewers emphasize that Yang was "an upper-class, wealthy Chinese woman," "not a typical Chinese woman" as she says." The book is praised as "the Chinese version of The Egg and I" for its ability to entertain and educate "the American reader who too often pictures Asiatic life as wholly exotic and seldom free of ceremonials." Such comments indicate how the book is appropriated and typecast as a representation of the East to the West. The reviewers also read Yang's text as "a better rounded picture of the new Chinese," or as a diplomatic gesture that "brings China as close as the next-door radio" that "does far more to build international friendliness than some ambassadors have done." They read it as anything but Yang's autobiography.

Yet mixed in with Orientalist representation of Chinese culture, is Yang's autobiography, within the tradition of Chinese women's autobiographical writing. Yang Buwei (1890-1981) is known as Buwei Yang Chao in the West. In her autobiography,

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63 Yang 1947: 56-57.
64 Booklist 43:240 Ap 1 '47.
65 Library J 72: 384 Mr 1 '47 140w.
66 The Egg and I is a breezy family autobiography written by Betty MacDonald and published in 1945. According to the review of Rosemary Taylor included in Book Review Digest 1945, the story consists of "reminiscences of life in several western mining regions and on a chicken ranch in the Olympic mountains in the state of Washington. Betty MacDonald had been brought up to believe that a woman was supposed to follow her husband in his life work, and she made a valiant but humorously protesting job of it. Married at eighteen she was unprepared for the life of a remote, run-down chicken farm, her nearest neighbors a Dickensian collection of plain speaking, uninhibited individuals. Then there were the Indians, the chickens, a stove which refused to burn, a baby, and her pet hate—the pressure cooker." The book was widely acclaimed for its hilarious humor and youthful gumption. For more reviews, see Book Review Digest 1945, 449-450.
67 Chicago Sun Book Week p2 Mr 30 '47 330w.
68 Kirkus 15:25 Ja 1 '47 250w.
69 N Y Herald Tribune Wkly Bk R p14 Mr 16 '47 550w.
she is her parents’ ninth child. Her mother calls her Lansien, which means “orchid fairy.” She is adopted by a childless uncle and renamed Chuan’er, a name literally meaning “to pass on a son.” It embodies the adopted parents’ expectation that she will bring good luck for them in having a male child. Although her family is wealthy and relatively liberal, she is engaged before she is born. When her grandfather persuades the governor of Jiangsu province to establish a girl’s middle school in Nanjing in 1905, she becomes one of the first students in this modern school and receives a new name Yunch’ing, meaning “person with rhyme.” In 1908, she goes to McTyeire, a Christian missionary school in Shanghai, where she breaks the engagement with her cousin. Because she grows up to be a young woman of ambition and capability, a friend gives her the name “Buwei,” meaning “to advance in great strides.” Also on account of her talent in leadership, Buwei is chosen to be the principle of Ch’ungshih School.70 In 1913, she goes to Japan to study medicine and returns to Beiping in 1919 to run her own hospital. During this period she marries Zhao Yuanren and becomes a housewife, who organizes her life around her husband going in China, the United States, and Europe until the end of World War II.

*Autobiography of a Chinese Woman* consists of the following six parts: “Boyhood,” Girlhood, The Young Woman, And the Young Man, “Peaceful” Years, and War Years. The short chapters in each part form a linear narrative of the life experience of the author at different stages of her life: Chuan’er as a “boy,” Yunch’ing as a girl, and
Buwei as a new woman of modern China. As she portrays herself in her autobiography, Yang is neither an ordinary nor a typical Chinese woman. On the contrary, her story adds another dimension to Chinese women's autobiography, which tends to represent women as victims of traditional gender imperatives, sex discrimination, and even abuse. Yang's story foregrounds the power of women in successfully resisting victimization. For example, by the order of her paternal grandmother, "no man in the family was allowed to marry a concubine, not even for the all-important reason of continuity of male lineage. If anyone had no son, he could adopt from a different branch of the family." In such a household, Yang is permitted to dress and behave as a boy in her childhood. Because she is the third daughter and ninth child of her birth parents, and because she likes to play rough as a wild boy, she is called "Little Master Three," because children were sometimes numbered according to sex. Not until 1901, when her father decides that a twelve-year-old girl is too big to stay in the same school with the boys and suggests did she start to dress like a woman, that she develops an awareness of being female. At her brother's

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70 According to the narration, Ch'ungshih [Real Things First] was a vocational finishing school established for girls when the Northern Expedition Army was disbanded. See Yang 1947: 110.

71 Each of these names has a story behind it. Lansten, literally meaning in Chinese "Orchid Fairy," originated from a dream her mother had before her birth of an orchid branch that two flowers on it. The girl's grandmother renamed her Chuan'er, to pray for her adopted mother to be blessed with a son soon. Buwei is the name a female friend found for her in the early Republican years in the atmosphere of reform and equality between the sexes. This is how her friend explained this name: "I know you will become a great woman, so you must have the word wei [greatness] in it. And you will start making great strides towards greatness now. So you must have bu [stride] in it." Hence "Buwei."

72 Yang 1947: 11.
engagement ceremony, “Little Master Three” puts on her first dress and becomes “Little Miss Three.” Thus, to puberty, her story is not about the miserable life of an unwanted, adopted girl, but about her experience of the privilege and socialization within her family.

As an example of the free life she leads as a child, she tells of her coming of age as “Little Master Three” in the context of going pleasure-boating on the Qinhua River inside Nanjing city, with some elder males of the family. They engage singsong girls, one to each gentleman. According to the author, although it is not proper to stay with the singsong girls overnight, sending for the same girls for company in a restaurant or a houseboat is perfectly acceptable. The girls sit behind their patrons to drink, talk, and entertain, to be dismissed in a couple of hours with a few dollars. “Little Master Three” feels “very proud to be old enough to go bad by having a twelve-year-old singsong girl (older than I [she] was) to sit with me [her] and eat melon seeds at the bow of the boat” while the men “drank noisily inside with older girls.”

Yang calls into question the stereotypical perception of women in traditional China as victims of foot-binding. In Yang’s story, “Little Master Three” has natural feet, not improper in the local culture of Nanjing and in the family culture of the Yangs. The family does not feel compelled to bind the feet of “Little Master Three,” thanks to the more relaxed attitude in the Nanjing area where women are required to work in ankle-deep water in the rice fields. Too, in this family environment, it is very uncommon for a

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73 There is a picture included of her wearing a dress for the first time on the occasion of becoming “Little Miss Three.”

74 Yang 1947: 34-35.
prominent family not to observe the foot-binding custom; but Yang’s grandfather is a liberal-minded man who has acquired modern notions from England, and her father feels that he has adopted a “son” anyway.

A more significant event marks a symbolic coming of age of “Little Miss Three” – the gradual breaking of her engagement. As Yang recalls, “Little Miss Three” grows up without any awareness of a boundary between herself and others:

Stirring events there had been, both emotional and physical, … but they had all seemed to be part of the events of the family, rather than inside myself. Even after I began to think that I was thinking about myself, my thoughts about me continued to consist largely of echoes of words of Mother, Father, Grandfather, Big Uncle, Auntie, sisters and brothers, Huang Ma, etc., etc., talking about “Lansien,” “ch’uanti,” or “Little Master Three.” When I thought about myself, there was little “I” or “me” about it.75

She does not have any sense of “me” until conflicts arise within the family over issues that concern her. The first conflict revolves around an argument about whether or not they should bind her feet. Only her prospective mother-in-law, Aunt Cheng, insists on the binding and angrily expresses the opinion that a pair of big feet would make her future daughter-in-law look like a slave girl. Hearing this, “Little Miss Three” for the first time asserts herself: “That made me hate her and started my thoughts of getting out of the whole arrangement.”76 On another occasion, “Little Miss Three” is very sick with a prolonged fever and internal hemorrhage, and the doctor is going to prescribe sulphur and

75 Yang 1947: 45.
76 Yang 1947: 33.
concentrate of animal glue,\textsuperscript{77} desperate remedies that may make the patient bad-tempered. Her future mother-in-law is against it on that account. However, "Little Miss Three’s" father falls out with his sister and decides to put the child’s life before a sweet temper. When "Little Miss Three" recovers and learns about this, she is sure that she will never become her aunt’s daughter-in-law. That occurs in 1901, a decade before Sun Yat-sen’s nationalist revolution and nearly two decades before the May Fourth Movement.

Her grandfather acquires ideas of gender equality and women’s education from his service as Councillor in the then newly established Chinese Legation in London. Her father is exposed to the same ideas while he served as attaché. Having seen women teachers in England, they return to China and foresee a career in teaching for "Little Miss Three," predicting that the times will soon advance enough in China for women to teach school. At McTyeire, "Little Miss Three" eventually writes a letter to her fiancé and terminates the engagement with him. The author ends the chapter "Writing to My Fiancé from McTyeire School" on this celebratory note: "For the first time in my life, my self was my own."\textsuperscript{78} This can be seen as her coming of age as a young woman of nineteen.

Yang’s story of growing up in many ways departs from self-representations by Chinese female writers in the early twentieth century. The autobiographical writings of the other writers discussed in this chapter are more involved with the intellectual and political changes of their time and tend to overtly politicize personal stories with the

\textsuperscript{77} According to the narration, sulphur drug was a Chinese typhoid specific, and concentrate of animal glue was supposed to help coagulation of blood.

\textsuperscript{78} Yang 1947: 81.
contemporary rhetoric of rebellion, women’s education, emancipation, and career.

Yang’s narration, however, has a tendency to downplay the larger issues and the historical events of the time and foreground the personal. When Yang’s autobiography was first published, one reviewer criticizes it because of its “vague and uninteresting” treatment of the Nationalist Revolution.79 However, if read as a personal narrative, the 1911 nationalist revolution appears in the narration only as it affects the Yang family. Yang describes “a lot of soldiers nailing queueless heads by the ears to a wall, the heads of executed revolutionists.”80 The family has to face the serious problem of how to save the lives of its young men who had cut off their pigtails. Through a family connection, the young men and the women of the Yang household all dress up as nuns and get onto a train to Shanghai. The narrator vividly presents the scene in which fighting breaks out between the Republican troops and the anti-revolutionary troops. In the midst of confusion, whistling and whamming of bullets, and bloodshed, they board the train bound for Shanghai to stay in the foreign concessions. Yang describes the foreign concessions as “safe haven for both revolutionists against bad governments and plotters against good governments, but, for us, just safe haven.”81 She also describes her delight that Nanjing will fall imminently to the Republican army and her worry that anti-revolutionary soldiers are looting the city. After they have spent twelve days in Shanghai expecting news, the

79 Library J 72:384 Mr 1 ’47 140w.
80 Yang 1947: 95-96.
revolution succeeds. She returns to Nanjing, happy to find her family under a Republican flag. Therefore, Yang’s concern with history is organized around historical events around her personal narrative.

The May Fourth Movement, which looms large in other female autobiographies, appears in the Yang’s story as a time of personal memories. At the time, she is taking a seminar on heart disease in Japan, and she returns to China to open her own hospital. After she sets up her own hospital, the narration focuses on romantic love between Yang and Zhao and Yang’s career. In contrast to the contemporary autobiographical practice of eliminating private life, Yang dwells upon her marriage and their revolutionary act of having “no wedding.” She gives a brief explanation as to why the couple want to break away from a traditional-style wedding:

Now that Yuenren and I had both broken our engagements, we were ready to get married. But who should marry us? How should we be married? Who was to give me away? Or should we have a wedding? Yuenren had been staying in the same house with Bertrand Russell and Dora Black. Like them, he wanted to put every tradition and institution under critical doubt. He hated the current tendencies toward what he called “meaningless manners and foolish flummery.” I knew what correct manners were, but did not care to observe them; he did not even bother to know them. So we agreed to take the law in our own hands and planned to be married without a wedding.\(^{82}\)

The day after their marriage was announced, \textit{Ch’en Pao} comes out with a headline, “New-Style Wedding of New-Style People.” Bertrand Russell calls it “radical enough.”\(^{83}\)

\(^{82}\) Yang 1947: 191.

\(^{83}\) Yang 1947: 193.
Zhao Yuenren mailed a copy of their marriage announcement to an American professor in Yerkes Observatory, Williamsbay, Wisconsin, the professor posted it on their bulletin board to show his colleagues what had happened. As described in the autobiography, the announcement informed our friends and relatives that, on receipt of the announcement, our wedding would already have taken place at 3 p.m., Mean Solar 120° E Standard Time, June 1, 1921, Occidental Chronology. Absolutely no gifts would be accepted except in the form of letters, literary or musical compositions, or contributions to the Science Society of China. ... our wedding announcement ended with a notice of change of address.  

Yang foregrounds this radical style marriage that dispenses with the traditional rituals such as "Little Master Three" has witnessed.

As another unique feature of Yang's autobiography, the translator's voice is continually present in the text. As a collaboration between wife / author and husband / translator, the text is peppered with exchanges between writer and translator. There are moments when the author pauses from writing and draws attention to the act of narration. In the chapter "Chasing Ghosts and Supervising Executions," for instance, Yang avoids gory details of execution by turning away from the story she is trying to tell: "Yuenren, pour me a glass of—er—sherry, before I go on writing."  

A typical example of the overlapping time of narrated past, narrating present, and translation occurs toward the end of the book, when Yang tells us that Chao translated the

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84 Yang 1947: 192.

85 Yang 1947: 120.
book while vacationing in Greensboro, Vermont, at a friend’s house in August 1945. The passage merits full citation:

Between bathing in the Caspian lake and eating raw peas, fresh from the vine, he thought he could put my autobiography into English in one month. No, he didn’t write the way I did, leaning on my elbow on the lawn, or lounging more comfortably in the big sitting room. He would coo himself up in the smallest bedroom in the house, with thick-throwing pines shading the sun from his windows. He was making good progress at the rate of two years a day, and I had a hard time trying to maintain a lead of twenty or thirty years with my writing in Chinese.

One morning, I heard him start typing earlier than usual.

“Have you reached the 1911 Revolution, Yuenren?” I called from the kitchen.

“I have reached August 5, 1945! Let’s congratulate ourselves that we are still alive, Yunch’ing!”

He had just heard the first news of the atomic bomb over the radio and was typing feverishly a letter to The New York Times. 86

Discussing the circumstances of translation in the translated work, this passage merges the times of writing and translating. This raises the issue of the role of the translator in the creation of the book. Is he just translating? Or is he participating in the writing process? Is “just translating” possible? The translator seems to have a double identity that grants him what Joseph S. M. Lau calls the “author-translator’s prerogative” that allows him to translate and interpret freely. 87 In Yang’s text, her subjectivity intersects with that of the translator.

Here, the politics of gender and power in the translation of Yang’s autobiography become obvious in the relation between the translating party and the translated party. The

86 Yang 1947: 315-316.
author can only present herself directly to her audience through the intervention of the translator. She is to a large extent filtered through the English translation to that imagined audience. How the translator renders the specifics of the original writing into idiomatic English is a matter over which Yang does not have much control. However, Yang addresses this issue in the foreword:

But my husband has not always been a well-behaved translator. While he tried to render my simple Chinese into Basic English, he constantly lapses into his academic style of involved qualifications. ... And he likes to indulge in verbal paradoxes. ... I have tried to catch him doing these things and registered my protests in the form of footnotes, but I won't guarantee that I have not let some slip by. My general reflections are few and direct. If some may seem deep and abstract, then he is making more of a philosopher of me than I really am.  

While he justifies his translation on the basis of fictional technique, she insists that “this is no fiction.”

Yang also uses footnotes as a space in which she negotiates her subjectivity. For example, a message miscommunicated by servants is compared by the translator to a sound “passing through another audio-stage of amplification when it passed the input-output channels of the maidservants.” Yang voices her concern in the footnote: “Not

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88 Yang & Chao, Foreword, x.
89 Yang & Chao, Foreword, x.
responsible for forced analogies added by the translator!—B.Y.C. 90 She makes such humorously protests every now and then throughout the text. But even such “protests” have to be communicated to the readers through the mediation of the husband / translator.

Yang Buwei has not yet been recognized as a writer in modern Chinese literary history. In its mixture of autobiography, history, travel narrative across cultures, and collaborative life story, *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman* is among the most interesting life writings by modern Chinese women in the West. As a self-drawn picture of “a Chinese woman in oil painting,” it departs from most autobiographies written by her contemporaries by participating in the Orientalist discourse on China. Yet, it challenges the same discourse with her unique experience. It is worthy of critical attention in the study of women’s autobiographies, particularly in a cross-cultural context.

3.3 “From Cultured Lady of the Home to World Citizen”:91

*Autobiography of a Chinese Young Girl*

Chen Hengzhe’s Autobiography has been little known because of the general neglect of autobiography in China and because it was written in English and has never been translated into Chinese. Chen (1893-1976) was born into a Qing literati family in Wujin, Jiangsu province. She received her early education from her aunt and uncle and her high school education in Shanghai. She entered Qinghua University in 1914 and later that year secured a Qinghua scholarship to study in the United States. She entered Vassar

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91 This paraphrases Chen’s essay titled “The Chinese Woman in a Modern World.” See Chen 1934: 19.
College, from which she graduated in 1919. She later studied at the University of Chicago on scholarship, obtaining a Master’s degree in Western history in 1920. Returning to China in the same year, she became chair of Western History Department at Beijing University and the first woman professor in China. She was also China’s first modern woman poet.\(^2\) She published in English mostly under the pseudonym Sophie Chen. As one of the writers who supported Hu Shi’s advocacy of writing in the vernacular, Chen published her first short story, “One Day,” in 1917, which describes the life a female graduate student abroad, at least one critic regards this text as the first new-style work of fiction in modern Chinese literature.\(^3\)

Chen also relates to and participates in Orientalism in a complex way. In her essay, “Outstanding Cultural Assets of the Chinese People,” she elaborates on the “national psychology” or “representative qualities” of Chinese people by cataloguing, in the manner of Arthur Smith and Lin Yutang, a series of characteristics and values understood to be typically Chinese. Among these are “reconciliation with nature” (including ability to persevere and endure great sufferings with patience, and economy, in

\(^2\) The poem for which she acquired this title is called “People Say I’m Crazy” (Renjia shuo wo fa le chi). It is the speaker’s representation of the story that a woman tells about how she was locked up as a crazy person.

\(^3\) In the summary of Michel Hockx, “This story is an account of a day in the life of students at an American girls’ college, structured around a number of dialogues and relatively little narration. The main characters are all American girls, but there is also a minor character called Miss Zhang who patiently responds to the other girls’ questions and comments about her country and her people, such as “Is it true that you all eat dead rats?” or “Do Chinese houses have tables?” or “I know a boy whose name is also Zhang. He must be your brother.” Michel Hockx notes that Chen’s “One Day” has been neglected in modern Chinese literary history and restores it as the first modern Chinese short story written in the vernacular. Published in The Chinese Students’ Quarterly in 1917, it precedes Lu Xun’s “Diary of a Madman” which came out in New Youth in May 1918. See Raoul D. Findeisen and Robert H. Gassman, ed. 1998: 309-311.
the sense of not wanting more than what nature provided), "desire to have harmony with their fellowmen" (including tolerance of all religions, magnanimity, peace-lovingness), conception of happiness as an internal, leisurely life, and inclination for practical wisdom instead of metaphysical philosophy. Chen critiques Chinese culture as having fallen "into a state of self-complacence and indifference to the sufferings that nature and man have inflicted upon his fellow-beings" and into "a clogged mentality" in terms of intellectual quest. This is rather similar to derogatory representation of Chinese characteristics by Orientalists such as Smith and Lin.

Instead of only criticizing Chinese culture, however, Chen seeks to find a remedy through "the study of science and scientific methods of Western civilization," a goal characteristic of May Fourth intellectuals in their search for modernity in the forms of Western science, democracy, and individual freedom. In Autobiography of a Chinese Young Girl, Chen uses the story of her education to illustrate her belief that the study of Western culture is China’s path to modernisation. In her impassioned way, Chen clearly defines one of her two purposes in writing her autobiography:

In the first place, so much interest in [sic] being taken recently by the English-reading public in the Chinese life and Chinese culture and so many books have been written on these topics, that many of my good friends in America and Europe have expressed the wish that we Chinese might also write something about our own country and our own people …

94 Chen 1927, in Chen 1934: 74, 75, 64-73, 76.
Written in response to a call for Chinese to speak about Chinese to the West, Chen’s text can be read as a story of resistance to Orientalist construction of Chinese culture, part of which may be related to Lin Yutang’s *My Country and My People*. In this book, Lin nostalgically writes of the traditional Chinese family structure, old Chinese ideals of womanhood, concubinage, chaste widowhood, and footbinding, which he claims was loved and accepted by Chinese women. Lin uses the example of the Empress Dowager and women’s rule at home to support his argument that the suppression of women in China is a Western construct due to a lack of knowledge about life in China. But he goes on to argue that men were the real sufferers, torn between their concubines, and that women, such as mothers-in-law, were the ones who oppressed women. He openly advocates “helpful wife” and “wise mother” as the proper roles for women and takes modern women to task for their pursuit of sexual equality, independence, and self-expression. Lin blames Western influence for the loss of traditional Chinese gender ideals.\(^{95}\) Chen’s position on the issue of Western influence is quite contrary to Lin’s. She believes in the positive and wholesome influence of Western culture on Chinese women in terms of abolishing foot-binding, promoting freedom in marriage and remarriage, and incalculating the spirit of independence.\(^{96}\)

Lin’s exaltation and propagation of the traditional Chinese family system and conventional Chinese gender norms may be part of what Chen terms the backsliding of

\(^{95}\) Lin 1935: 137-171.

\(^{96}\) Chen 1932, in Chen 1934: 23-42. Chen also affirmed the positive influence of Christianity on the Chinese women. See Chen 1932, in Chen 1934: 29; Chen 1933, in Chen 1934: 48, 59.
Chinese women’s liberation. She describes the heavy price Chinese women had to pay in order to gain the right to have natural feet, choose their marriage partners, and be educated, and explains why she opposes any regression:

It is only natural that a person, who has both paid a big portion of the above-mentioned prices in her own girlhood and has seen enough of the sacrifices that the old institutions and beliefs had imposed upon her elder or more submissive relatives, should regard any backward movement with great fear and apprehension: to her, the fact that the struggles, either in her own early life or in the lives of others whom she had known, should now be repeated in the lives of the younger generation is little short of homicide, especially as such struggles could now be avoided more easily and more efficiently than in her own generation... It is therefore painfully amusing to her who has taken an actual part in the burial ritual of many decaying institutions and beliefs to witness these half-buried things attempting to rise up from their graves again; but what is more painful is the fact that some of the influential leaders both of China and of the civilized world at large are giving their sympathy and moral support to these rising ghosts.

Chen explains, therefore, that she does not use her real name in her autobiography, because she does not mean to write about her individual ego for its own sake. Rather, her purpose is to enhance Chinese women’s emancipation in the face of the back slash.

As a demonstration of Chen’s view that China can only modernize by learning from Western culture, her autobiography focuses on a centrifugal journey toward modernity – from family to school, to big coastal areas such as Guangdong and Shanghai,

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97 Professor Kirk Denton speculates that it may also be related to the New Life Movement, promoted by the Guomindang government, which encouraged women to play their conventionally assigned roles of wife and mother.

98 Chen 1935: Foreword iii – vi.

and finally to the United States. On both the real and symbolic levels, this journey transports her from being tied to the home to the freedom of individuality in the public space of school, from tradition to modernity, and from East to West. In the first chapter, she represents her journey as a parable in which the Yangzi River and the Grand Canal hold a dialogue at the point of their confluence. The Grand Canal asks about the origin of the Yangtze River and ridicules its will to shape its own life. The Yangtze River eloquently tells its story of piercing through the mountains in Sichuan, strengthening itself through its struggle with those mountains, and defining the destiny and the meaning of its own life. Parting with the Grand Canal, the Yangtze River joins the East Sea, proudly singing the following song:

Sweet is the consolation,
Joyous is the suffering;
From the burning flames of a volcano
The real meaning of life is found.

Tears are sour, blood is red,
When the struggle of life is ultimate;
And life is beautiful only,
When its struggle has been ultimate.100

Chen’s journey, motivated by a strong desire for education, begins in the second chapter. She opens the chapter with an account of the female literary heritage in her family originated with her poetically gifted great-grandmother. She tells us that “almost every woman, born in or married into the Chen family, has been more or less artistic or literary

100 Chen 1935: 4.
or both, either by natural inclination or by force of environment.\textsuperscript{101} Her grandmother is an artist, her mother a painter, and her aunts, on both sides, are painters, poets, or calligraphers. Chen describes such a cultural background as not unusual in Zhejiang and Jiangsu areas.\textsuperscript{102} The birth of the autobiographical subject is narrated against this backdrop of female culture.

However, this female culture proves to be part of the norm required of refined ladies of their family status. To give her proper training, Chen’s elders taught her at an early age to behave like a lady and not to take part in boyish games. The women in the house, including a maidservant, work together to bind her feet. Yet the young girl staunchly rebels against this restrictive gendering process and successfully avoids foot-binding. She shows no sense of regret in spite of being teased and embarrassed about her natural feet. When her elders wish she were a boy for her adventurous and ambitious nature, she welcomes that as a compliment. However, she defines her ambition, not as that of a stereotypical boy seeking high official position, nor as that of a stereotypical girl dressed prettily, but as an intellectual distinction. Thus, she works hard learning to read and write. This deviation from the norm sets the tone for the entire narration.

Chen represents herself as preciously talented in learning and quick to question traditional gender expectations, such as virgin widowhood. As officialdom is not open to a girl, her family decides that she will make a good medical doctor and gives her medical

\textsuperscript{101} Chen 1935: 5.

\textsuperscript{102} For readers interested in this cultural phenomenon, see Ko 1994.
classics to memorize. However, she rebels and chooses her own path of life. At the age of thirteen, as the author notes,

    I discovered myself, so to speak, and started on a journey of my own choice. It was found out later that this journey was full of dangerous rapids, of inaccessible mountain paths, and of a thousand and one perils; yet it was a journey of my own choice, and through thick and thin, through sunshine or rain, I have stuck to it, with a conscious mind and a willing heart even till this day.  

Her spirit of pressing forward on her journey is exactly that of the Yangtze River in piercing through all obstacles and joining the East Sea. She decides to set out for Canton to study western medicine. The girl is heartbroken at leaving her family, but Chen clearly remembers how the girl convinced herself of her choice:

    Was I not the very person that was responsible for my present state? Had I not already started the climbing of the ladder which was to take me to the heaven of my heart’s desire? Certainly no one forced this upon me, so why should I not feel happy at my own triumph? Why should I not enjoy the freedom which had been so hard in winning?

Failing to enter the medical school for her age, she studies with her aunt and uncle in their home in Guangdong. Her next step is going to Shanghai to pursue a formal education, and she enrolls in “The Anglo-Chinese Medical School for Girls,” not out of her own will, but by force of circumstances. She thinks of it “as a kind of symbol of what I had been seeking.”  

Her father demands three years later that she come to Chengdu, where

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103 Chen 1935: 47.

104 Chen 1935: 118.
her parents live, to consider getting married. Now seventeen, she has three important reasons for refusing marriage:

First, I wish to keep my freedom for the sake of realizing my intellectual ambition, and none of the married women I knew seemed to possess much freedom of her own. Second, I had seen too much of the abnormal phase of maternity\(^{105}\) to wish to encounter it myself. And third, I could not bear the idea of getting married to a stranger; and yet all the influences from my early training and environment made it impossible for me to think of selecting my own husband without losing my self-respect.\(^{106}\)

Chen clearly articulates the conflict between a woman’s individual development and the demands of family life. The prospect of either marrying a stranger or choosing one’s own husband presents her with a dilemma that she cannot resolve, which is an indication of her deep attachment to traditional rules of proper behavior. After spending a year at home, she sets out for Shanghai again, at the age of eighteen. This trip, she regards as a greater adventure, because “[I] was leaving my family more and more definitely behind me, both in the physical and emotional sense.”\(^{107}\)

Chen’s entire quest for identity as a modern, westernized, educated intellectual ends with her journey West. Behind her family’s back, she successfully passes the required examinations and earned a Tsinghua scholarship to study in the U.S. in 1914. She treats this journey as an ultimate solution to her/China’s problems. Thoughts of

\(^{105}\)There is narration of witnessing women in labor and dead infants at the medical school in Shanghai. See pp. 115-116.

\(^{106}\) Chen 1935: 135.

\(^{107}\) Chen 1935: 140.
winning the scholarship stirs her imagination to a brighter future than China could offer: “Would not then all the world open before me, like the dawn after darkness?”108 When boards the ship, the S.S. “China,” she is the only one without her family seeing her off, which she has deliberately arranged. This symbolizes her new identity as an individual free of family relations and parental will.

Writing her autobiography in English outside China grants Chen a vantage position to speak from on China. She is an insider who looks in from the outside. As I mention earlier, she acknowledges that her text is the story of a generation of Chinese women’s struggle for basic human rights. Given this purpose, her life experience in the U.S. is totally absent. This focus on showing China to the West easily makes readers think of Chen’s text as Orientalist. Given the May Fourth historical context in which her autobiography was written, Orientalism was hardly avoidable in any literary expression. However, Chen’s aim is to use Western ideas for the advancement of Chinese culture and Chinese women’s liberation. Like most May Fourth intellectuals, Chen believes that China could only modernize through adopting Western ideas. But she differs from those who believe only in borrowing Western science and democracy, because her position is that cultural contact with the West is the ultimate remedy for changing Chinese national character. Chen’s own system of thought on Chinese women and modernity sheds more light on this point. In “The Chinese Woman in a Modern World,” she defines the modernity in Chinese women as “a combination of the old virtues of China with the new

culture of the modern western world” which “will be a harmonious product of elements which are fundamentally congenial to each other.”¹⁰⁹ To Chen, the traditional four arts and four virtues¹¹⁰ of Chinese ladies as best exemplified in Song female poet Li Qingzhao indicate the great potential of Chinese women. She also recognizes Chinese women’s accomplishments in practical affairs, such as “moral strength” and “heroic spirit.”¹¹¹ But in order to modernize, the “sunshine” and “nourishment” of Western cultural influence are absolutely necessary, because Chinese culture “was one-sided, since it gave her no training along vocational or professional lines, and her practical ability was confined to the small circle of the family.”¹¹² Thus, her trip to America completes her process of “transforming from the cultured lady of the home to a world citizen.”

3.4 Politics of Autobiography in China and in the West

Of these three Chinese women writers’ autobiographies in English, Yang Buwei’s best embodies a cross-cultural politics of autobiography, that reflects the shifting gender ideology in the U. S. and the radical change in China in the first half of the twentieth century. Yang’s autobiography has two different versions, one in Chinese, the other in English. The Chinese version is a narrative of the author’s life up to her marriage. At the

¹⁰⁹ Chen 1930, in Chen 1934: 15.

¹¹⁰ These four arts include music, chess, calligraphy, and painting. The four virtues include female speech, female work, female looks, and female conduct.

¹¹¹ Chen 1930, in Chen 1934: 2-8.

¹¹² Chen 1930, in Chen 1934: 16-17.
end of the Chinese version, she explains: “I call it quits here in writing this *Autobiography of a Chinese Woman*. If I continued, it would be miscellaneous accounts of the Zhaos.”¹¹³ Indeed, her married life is recounted in Chinese in a family history called *Miscellaneous Accounts of the Zhaos*, which did not appear until 1972. In the short preface to this book, Yang comments on the omission of her life as wife and mother in the Chinese version of her autobiography, “I think, instead of centering on myself, I should organize the narration around the family after I got married, especially after I had children.”¹¹⁴ Cutting out her family life is typical of most Chinese female writers’ autobiographies in the twentieth century. However, this does not characterize the English version of Yang’s autobiography, which continues in the second half to narrate her family life. The image of the young career woman is replaced by that of that wife and mother who organizes her life around her husband’s job and four daughters in China, the United States, and Europe. The two versions of her autobiography serve to tease out discourses on the position of women in the family and society in China and in the United States. In China, the May Fourth discourse of iconoclasm encourages women to break out of the home, whereas a shifting gender ideology in the U. S. continues to urge women to resume their familial roles.

Since the turn of the century, Chinese women have fought to win the right to natural feet, education, and freedom in marriage and social engagement, as the


autobiographies of the writers discussed here indicate. A general tendency of these autobiographies is to focus on the authors' intellectual growth, textual achievement, and life as an individual outside the traditional home, as exemplified in the texts of Su Xuelin, Lu Yin, Xie Bingying, and Chen Hengzhe. For these female writers, the primary concern of their texts is representing their childhood and development as socially-engaged women, free from the confinement of traditional familial roles as wives and mothers. This is a new image of Chinese women that necessitates minimizing their private lives in the extreme. Writing their lives as wives and mothers would jeopardize these constructed as modern women and would repeat the patterns of traditional biographical representation of women by men. Playing up the public side of a woman's life challenges these traditional representations and redefines women as professional writers, teachers, researchers, soldiers, and doctors. It is thus not difficult to understand why Yang would include her life only up to her marriage when the book came out in Chinese.

It also stands to reason that the English translation would continue and cover her experience as wife and mother. In *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (1978), Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English offer a revealing account of the changes in gender ideology in America that can partly explain Yang's decision to represent herself as a happy housewife. They trace a history of the shifting relations between American women, capitalism, and consumerism from the industrial revolution to World War II. The industrial revolution in the West shattered patriarchy, the organizing principle of Western society for centuries, created the inner sphere of the family and the
outer sphere of work, and made “woman” an anomaly, a question, a social issue to be solved. In the midst of the debate on whether women should be accepted into the labor market or stay home, a new order was gradually established that rested on sexual romanticism, i.e., the idyllic conception of home as a place for women to find refuge from the world of competition. To fend off the gender neutrality of ideas of rights, liberty, and individualism, sexual romanticism found legitimacy through the authority of objective and unprejudiced science. Male experts and doctors hunted down witches and female healers, and exorcised midwives. Thus, around the turn of the century, when many Chinese women, inspired by Western ideas of individual freedom and the emancipation of women, struggled to liberate themselves from the shackles of family, many American women, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, found themselves imprisoned in sexual-economic marriages. They were sometimes forced to receive a rest cure and even surgery to tame their uterus and ovaries, the sources of their “hysterical” or “feminine” disease.

During the early decades of the twentieth century, when America developed trade relations with the rest of the world, there appeared a new spirit of activism in contrast to the lethargy of the fin de siècle. American women looked for a more democratic version of the romantic ideal. Experts made homemaking a full-time professional job, a science. Thus, “home economics” came into being as a profession; domestic science became “a way of justifying higher education for women.”¹¹⁵ In other words, domestic work was made into a system of scientific management that was nothing less than “an endless

¹¹⁵ Ehrenreich and English 1978: 149.
adventure, a quest for knowledge.”

The experts created a near-frenzy for home efficiency and promoted a “full managerial revolution in the home.” As a result, “the scientific housekeeper now saw herself ... as a manager operating on principles of industrial efficiency.” Finishing a certain job within the shortest possible time, the most scientific method of housecleaning, efficiently scheduling and organizing one’s time, all of these very much resembled assembly line procedures. One domestic scientist, Margaret Reid, puts housework into two categories: (1) Management, which includes “choice making,” “task, time, and energy apportionment,” “planning,” and “supervision”; (2) Performance, which includes “housework.” Ehrenreich and English list the new work created by the effective managerial skills by the 1930s: “analyzing one’s chores in detail, planning, record keeping,” “maintaining a family filing system of household accounts, financial records, medical records, “house-hints,” birthdays of friends, relatives, and a special file for ‘Jokes, Quotations, etc.,’ not to mention recipe files, and an inventory file giving the location and condition of each item of clothing possessed by the family.”

By studying domestic science, women could successfully fill up whatever free time they gained.

The clashes between traditional human values and the realities of industrial capitalism found compromise in “the child,” who was made the focus of family life. This focus on the child could happily reconcile a number of oppositions, as spelled out by Ehrenreich and English:

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Thus the turn-of-the century exaltation of the child was both romantic and rationalist, conservative and progressive. The child was “primitive” but this meant it was also malleable, hence really more “modern” than anyone else. The child was the reason to seek reforms, and also a reason to defer them. The child was the “founder of the family,” the foundation of the home; it was also the only member of the family truly prepared (by virtue of its very inexperience) for the technological turmoil of the outside world. Only the figure of the child held the key to a future which could contain both behemoth factories and nurturing hearth sides, the cold logic of Wall Street and the sentimental warmth of Christmas.118

Concentration on the child answered the “Woman Question,” assigning motherhood the utmost importance. But this did not simply earn women respectability, for the line was thin between good mothering and bad, making motherhood a risky as well as noble profession.119 Swedish writer Ellen Key’s bestseller, The Century of the Child (1907), urges women to realize that “the transformation of society begins with the unborn child,” which required “an entirely new conception of the vocation of mother, a tremendous effort of will, continuous inspiration.”120 However, industrial society’s standard made women no longer able to raise the child “naturally,” because they lacked experience of the outside world of work. In the same way that domestic work was transformed into a

118 Ehrenreich and English 1978: 170.
120 Key 1909: 100-101.
science, so was child raising. Male experts, or experimental laboratory psychologists, lent their expertise on child raising. Expert opinions created mothers who could love the child into the permissiveness required by industrial production.

The inclusion of Yang’s private life in the English translation of her autobiography dovetails perfectly with the return of American women to the home after World War II. Home economics had been exalted as a profession since the founding in 1909 of the American Home Economics Association, and women’s colleges began to offer courses on marriage and family. But the American domestic ideology that highlighted the utopian vision of comfortable homes, replenished families with male providers, and female housewives who would raise perfect children was put on hold after the Great Depression. When the United States was forced to become involved in World War II, this dream was further put off as thousands of men were called to war, quitting their roles as breadwinners and leaving women to fend for themselves. This offered an avenue for the emancipation of women and created unprecedented employment opportunities in almost all professional fields. With the ending of the war and the return of veterans, however, women’s roles changed to meet the needs of men. During this time, women were urged to return home. Employment opportunities for women lessened, and the increase in college enrollment for women could not hide the fact that women represented a decreased percentage of the college student population. At the same time,

\[121\] For a difference between the philosophical tendency of the late nineteenth-century psychology and the biological turn of psychology in the twentieth century, see Ehrenreich and English 1978: 178.

the average age of marriage fell and birth rate soared. In order to reorient women toward domestic life, home economics courses and programs in institutions of higher education proliferated. In women’s colleges academic education was given less weight to make room for home economics and nursing in the curriculum. Some post-war educators argued strongly for women’s role in fostering the intellectual, emotional, and material (meals) life of their families and communities.123 President Hoover openly stated that women’s patriotic duty was “not on the factory front, but on the home front.”124 Under such circumstances, Yang Buwei’s happy return to the home, as her autobiography narrates it, must have offered comfort as well as entertainment to American female readers.

The autobiographies in English of Xie, Yang, and Chen emerged under global historical and political circumstances that served to explicate China to the West in the first half of the twentieth century. Publishing their texts in English furnished these writers an opportunity to address an international audience about their lives and their autobiographical subjectivity. However, subjectivity in translation had to be somewhat compromised to cater to Western imagination of China or to comply with Western tastes in reading and storytelling. To read these female autobiographical texts is to investigate the complex processes in which they responded to, participated in, and appropriated Orientalist discourse on China.


CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I take as my subject of academic study some twentieth-century Chinese women writers’ autobiographies. This study fills a gap in both literary studies in China and theorizing and criticism of autobiography in the West. Without engaging in genre definition, which is a forbidding task, I limit my study to women’s texts that are openly declared by their authors as self-representations. For texts that exist only in Chinese, I include Su Xuelin’s My Life and Ninety-Four Years of a Floating Life as well as Lu Yin’s An Autobiography of Lu Yin. For texts that speak cross-culturally to both Chinese and non-Chinese readers through translation, I examine Xie Bingying’s Girl Rebel: Autobiography of Xie Bingying, Yang Buwei’s Autobiography of a Chinese Woman, and Chen Hengzhe’s Autobiography of a Chinese Young Girl. Also mentioned but not treated in individual chapters are short autobiographical pieces by women writers that were anthologized in China in 1945 in Selected Autobiographies of Women Writers.

The Introduction establishes the complex cultural and historical circumstances that informed the cases in discussion and their ignored status. First, I explore the status of women’s autobiography in the People’ Republic of China and investigated the possible connection between the status of individualism in a Chinese context, especially in the
P.R.C., and the tendency to suppress confessedly self-representational texts. Secondly, I situate the texts I discuss in ancient Chinese autobiographical conventions that has existed since Sima Qian of the Han dynasty and recognize the continuity therein. Then, I investigate the breaking away of these texts from traditional autobiographical norms through examining how Western autobiographies were translated into Chinese and the promotion of autobiographical writing in China by male writers, such as Hu Shi, that went into the making of these women writers’ texts. Lastly, I proclaim a tradition of Chinese women’s autobiographies in the twentieth century.

With Su Xuelin’s more macroscopic view of the various issues of gender, politics, and canon in both Republican China and the People’s Republic, Chapter 1 is devoted to Su Xuelin’s two autobiographies. My reading of her texts concentrates on the processes of her self-portrayal as a writer. The construction of her self-image as a writer is first realized in the texts through contrasting the physical and sexual ordeals of women of an older generation. Since she was severely marginalized in the P. R. C., her other important means of self-inscription is through forming alliances with canonized male writers, such as Lin Shu and Hu Shi, and through making political enemies, such as Lu Xun. Eventually, she reinvents a new gender role of literary motherhood that characterizes both the writer and the woman in her.

Chapter 2 is a discussion of An Autobiography of Lu Yin as this text embodies the personal trauma and healing that were characteristic of the author’s time. I interpret her
autobiography as scriptotherapy, a means by which the author writes through the abuses she suffered for her defiance as a child against Confucian classical education for women. Like Su Xuelin, she places great emphasis on the role of writing in her life and uses her literary achievements as a way of reinventing herself from a negative childhood self-image and from the public's focus on the sexual aspect of her life as an adult.

Chapter 3 shifts to the autobiographies of Xie Bingying, Yang Buwei, and Chen Hengzhe. Translated into or written in English in the years before, during, and after World War II, these texts exist between worlds as well as across worlds in their mission to translate China to the West and perhaps into the West. This homogeneity integrates these texts, warranting their treatment in one rather than three separate chapters although each text is a unique personal story in its own way. The main point of this chapter is the participation and complicity of these texts in Orientalizing China and the personal stories of their subjects.

In retrospect, I find that the way in which I conceptualize the texts here as modern Chinese women writers' autobiographies needs to be problematized. In the first place, the binary opposition of modern and traditional life writing in China calls for some modification. These texts are connected with conventional Chinese autobiographical practices and rhetorical positions, such as writing a preface as a disclaimer, self-justification, self-vindication, and self-assertion, which exhibit the inhibition against and desire for autobiography. Then, the "Chineseness" of these autobiographies also needs to be further questioned and interrogated. As I have shown in the introduction, most of
these writers claim some sort of literary influence from the West, particularly through the translations by Lin Shu. Su Xuelin clearly articulates the impact of Rousseau’s *Confessions* in China in the first decades of the twentieth century, and Xie Bingying claims to follow the examples of Agnes Smedley and Isadora Duncan in writing of *Girl Rebel*.

The rendering into Chinese of these Western texts adds a new dimension to cross-cultural translations between China and the West that continued from past centuries by engaging practices of Chinese reading, interpretation, and appropriation of Western texts. In the case of Rousseau’s *Confessions*, the controversies over this text in Europe were overshadowed in the context of China’s quest for personal freedom by its reception as a harbinger of individual liberation and its author as paragon of candid self-exposure. It was even honored as the ideological origin of republicanism in the world as well as in China. The texts of Smedley and Duncan also served this function in providing representations of the West that at least partly existed in the imagination of Chinese readers. When these texts were claimed as role models of women’s autobiographical writing by Xie Bingying, clearly the gender oppression in Smedley’s life story and the psychological impediments experienced by Duncan in writing her narrative did not change her impression of the West as a land freer than China. Xie stated her reservations about her own life in the cultural and historical specificity of China and relied on these Western authors for encouragement and inspiration. Obviously, as a young woman
rebelling against Chinese Confucian traditions, she was reading for the ideological support that she found in the texts of Smedley and Duncan. Would Chinese appropriation of Western texts, then, be an arguable case of Occidentalist transaction?

Another observable feature of this transaction is what I call a cross-cultural trading of female images. Both Chinese translations of Western texts and English translations of Chinese texts were either accomplished by male translators or directly sponsored by male figures. The Lin sisters’ rendering of *Girl Rebel* was conducted under their father Lin Yutang’s supervision. Zhao Yuenren, the translator of Yang Buwei’s autobiography, was appointed by its prospective American male publisher before the text was actually written. In the Chinese setting, Zhang Jingsheng, Lin Yisheng, and Yu Xijian, the respective translators of Rousseau’s *Confessions*, Smedley’s *A Daughter of the Earth*, and Duncan’s *My Life*, were all May Fourth male intellectuals who engaged in introducing Western literary and cultural texts to China in the early decades of the twentieth century. Translators and publishers profited from such exchange of women’s images.

It is perplexing that Chinese women’s autobiographies have not yet received critical attention, while their fictional works continue to be read as the authors’ life stories. At the same time, autobiographical writings that focus on personal experiences, such as those of the Cultural Revolution, continue to be written and read. Especially in the West in recent years, many women’s autobiographical texts produced about the
political turmoil in the P. R. C. during the Maoist era have become immensely popular, with Zhang Rong’s *Wild Swan* and Cheng Nien’s *Life and Death in Shanghai* among the best-known. What I argue and claim here is a tradition of Chinese women’s autobiography established by the first generation of Chinese women writers and the impact of these foremothers for later generations of life writers.
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