

**Gender in Chinese literary thought of the  
Republican period**

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## Abstract

The thesis is about the relationship between gender and Chinese literary thought in the Republican period, focusing on the 1920s and early 1930s. It explores the ways in which gender was described as significant to literature in writings on literature such as literary theory, literary criticism, literary debates, and literary histories. It analyses how critics and literary historians related the gendered concepts "women's literature" (*funü wenxue*) and "women writers" (*nüzuojia*) to ideas of modernity and tradition, and to ideas of truth and authenticity in literature.

Chapters One and Two establish that "women's literature" was often treated as separate or different from men's literature, and investigate the discourses which provided support for this position. Chapter One shows that traditional women's poetry, as well as feminism, formed important contexts for Republican period views on gender in literature. Chapter Two argues that scientific discourse also influenced views on gender and writing.

Chapters Three to Five treat Republican period views on traditional women's literature. Chapters Three and Four describe how the introduction of the genre of literary history transformed the way earlier writings by women were conceptualised, and compare how different ways of applying modern theories to traditional women's literature resulted in different historical narratives of women's literary past. Chapter Five explores the relationship between gender and the concept of "truth" in literature, as it was applied to earlier writings by women.

Chapters Six and Seven discuss uses of the concept "woman writer" applied to modern women writers. Chapter Six focuses on the debates surrounding the 1929 *Zhenmeishan* special issue on women writers and Chapter Seven analyses how women writers were received by socialist critics.

This thesis highlights the complexity and heterogeneity of writings on women's literature and women writers. It shows that although critics sometimes interpreted women's literature in terms of a break with tradition, literary traditions continued to inform writings on gender and literature. Moreover, modern theories inspired a variety of sometimes conflicting perspectives on women and literature.

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## Introduction

This thesis is about the relationship between gender and Chinese literary thought in the Republican period, focusing in particular on the 1920s and early 1930s. It explores different ways in which gender was described as significant to literature in writings on literature such as literary theory, literary criticism, literary debates, and literary histories. The concepts “women’s literature” (*funü wenxue*) and “woman writer” (*nǚzuojia*), are central to the thesis. I analyse how these gendered concepts were employed in writings on literature, and how they were related to ideas of literary modernity and literary traditions, and to ideas of truth and authenticity in literature.

### *Literary thought*

There are a few major studies of Chinese literary thought from the Republican era, although on the whole, literary thought remains much less studied than the literary works of this period. Bonnie S. McDougall (1971) has made a detailed study of the introduction of Western literary theories into China in 1919 to 1925. In his book on Chinese literary debates, Amitendranath Tagore (1967) focuses on leftist writings from between 1928 and 1937. Marian Galik (1980) aims to present a complete picture of the development of Chinese literary criticism from 1917 to 1930, again emphasising leftist theories and debates. An anthology of modern Chinese literary thought edited and with an introduction by Kirk Denton (1996) deals with a particularly wide range of texts, including theoretical, critical and polemical writings from the years between 1893 and 1945. None of these studies is specifically concerned with gender issues.

Since the 1980s, the relationship between gender and 20th century Chinese literature has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Most such

studies are concerned with women writers or with the construction of gender in literary works.<sup>1</sup> Although they make some references to the critical reception women writers met with, and the cultural environment in which they worked, these references are usually not very exact and the analysis of them not quite developed. The thesis complements these studies by focusing entirely on writings about literature, rather than on the literary works themselves.

In this thesis I use the term "literary thought" in its broadest possible sense, to include all kinds of writings on literature: literary theory, literary debates, reviews, other forms of literary criticism, prefaces, literary histories, anthologies of literature, special issues of magazines, and (what appear to be) merely descriptive accounts of literature or authors. In Chapters Two and Six, I discuss not only texts originally written in Chinese, but also translations into Chinese of non-Chinese texts on literature. I do this for two reasons. First, although the texts were not originally written by the Chinese writers and critics, they were selected and rewritten by them, and selection and reworking should, like writing, be viewed as creative acts and as intellectual efforts. What texts were translated, and how, can be as revealing of what the Chinese writers found important and interesting, as original writings can. Second, from the perspective of the readers, these translated texts were available to readers the same way as were original Chinese texts, on the pages of the same magazines. They were part of the same ongoing debate over the status of women, and formed part of the same discourses. The scope of my source material is thus greater than that which is considered by Denton (1996), who by "Chinese literary thought" refers to original Chinese writings on literature which are openly concerned with general or theoretical aspects of literature.

## Sources

It has been my intention to convey as comprehensive an overview as possible of the intersections between discourses on gender and on literature in Republican China. To this end I have searched many of the literary magazines of the era, such as *Haifeng zhoubao* (Seawind weekly), *Wenxue zhoubao* (Literature weekly), *Xiandai* (Les contemporains), *Xiaoshuo yuebao* (Short story monthly), *Xinyue* (Crescent moon), *Yusi* (Threads of words), *Zhenmeishan* (Truth, beauty and goodness) and the various publications of the *Chuangzao she* (Creation society) for articles on gender or women. Conversely, I have searched *Funü zazhi* (The ladies' journal), *Nüzi yuekan* (Women's monthly), *Xin nüzi* (New woman) and other women's magazines for articles on literature.

Histories of women's literature make up another important source to Republican period thinking about women and literature. Five such histories are known. I make comparisons between them and general histories of literature, as well as with histories of women, and with contemporary *shihua* or "remarks on poetry" on the topic of women's poetry. I have also consulted anthologies of women's literature, an essay collection on women and literature (Huiqun 1934), collections of criticism of women's writing, and one book on women and literature which falls in between the genres of anthology, theory and literary history (Tao 1933).

Many of these sources can be found in the SOAS Library, others are in the Shanghai Library in Shanghai.

Among the accounts of gender and literature yielded by this extensive search, how did I select which ones to include in the thesis? In fact, the works cited make up a large portion of my findings. In spite of the prominence of debates over the future direction of literature and over the social roles of



women only a limited number of articles and books discussed the two issues in conjunction. Issues of female authorship and feminine and masculine writing occasionally entered into discussions of literature, and issues of literature entered into discussions of the nature, social roles, and history of women. Unlike in today's China however, feminist literature studies did not constitute an established field of investigation. Most of the writings discussed in the thesis are from women's magazines or from books on the subject of women and literature. This reflects the fact that there are more writings on gender and literature in the women's press and in specialist books than in literary magazines. Gender issues appear to have been perceived as less relevant to literature than literature was to gender issues. The selection of source materials also mirrors the fact that between approximately 1926 and 1933 publication on the subject of women and literature increased as compared to the first half of the 1920s. However, since I have concentrated my research efforts on the 1920s and early 1930s, materials from the 1910s, the late 1930s, and the 1940s are likely to be underrepresented in the thesis.

### *Women and gender*

When I first began the research for this thesis, I asked very fundamental and general questions concerning the relationship between gender and literary thought. To what extent, and in what ways, was gender perceived as relevant to literature? How was the relationship between femininity, masculinity, and writing constructed? What gendered concepts of literature did writers employ, and how did they define such concepts? Very soon, however, I found myself devoting more and more attention to the relationship between the category of "women" and literature. This was not because I was more interested in "women" than in "men", or in masculinity, but because my source materials treated "women" as a gendered category, whereas they did not treat "men" the

same way. The gendered concepts most often employed by the critics and literary historians in the Republican era were "women's literature", and "women writers". These two concepts have therefore become the main focus of the thesis.

This does not mean that this is a thesis about women. It is not primarily concerned with actual, historical women, or with the literature they produced. What interests me is rather how gender differences were constructed, or indeed challenged, in meta-literary discourse, through the use of the category of "women". The Republican writers and critics discussed in the thesis saw themselves as writing about "women", a stable social category and/or a stable biological essence which could be studied in isolation from "men". From the vantage point of gender studies, however, it becomes possible to reread their writings as constructions of gender rather than observations on women. The analytical concept of "gender" offers us the possibility to view masculinity and femininity as contingent cultural constructions instead of ahistorical essences. As the division between natural sex and cultural gender has been called into question since the early 1990s (e.g. Butler 1990), "gender" even allows us to think of "men" and "women" as culturally and historically constructed.

"Gender" also calls to our attention the relational nature of categories such as "women" and "men", which cannot be defined without reference to one another. In this way, writing about "women" is always also writing about "men". Thus critics' definitions of "women's literature" and "women writers" implied that there was such a thing as a "men's" literature which was different from women's literature. In her study of modern Chinese discourse on the family, Susan L. Glosser (2003) has shown how the preoccupation of young educated urban men with the ideal modern wife was part of their pursuit of a modern male identity. In a similar manner, the persona of the woman writer sometimes served as a means of defining the identity of the modern male writer.

Furthermore, certain critics' identification of women's literature with the past forged an association of future literature with masculinity.

A majority of the Republican period writers and critics cited in the thesis are men, although some are women, and the gender of some anonymous critics cannot be determined. Some may find it surprising that I do not recognise a great difference between male and female critics, but treat them as equally significant. Surely, women critics would have had more insightful things than men to say on the topic of "women's literature", being "women writers" themselves?

I recognise that women critics entered debates on gender and literature from a position that was different from men critics'. Different things were at stake for them, as the debates concerned their own future as writers, and different things were expected of them, as they were often supposed to represent their own gender. However, there are no great differences between the theoretical and political positions of, or the language used by, men and women critics. Moreover, the thesis is not about the experience of being a woman writer but about what was written about the relationship between men, women and literature. Privileging women critics above men critics would give the inaccurate impression that I am trying to determine some truth about women writers which was accessible only to women themselves. Furthermore, if I assume that a woman critic is automatically a spokesperson for her gender, then I have myself presupposed a certain category of "women writers". Because my aim is to study the how this and related categories were constructed historically I have avoided such assumptions. The versions of "women" and "women's literature" presented in the thesis all derive from the source materials. I do not attempt to define these concepts outside of the particular place and time that I study, or explain what I think women, and women's literature, ought to be.

In concentrating on "women's literature" and "women writers", I have limited my scope of analysis to issues concerning women as *producers* of literature. There are other possible lines of investigation into the perceived relationship between women and literature. In the Republican period, literature was also seen as relevant to "women" in that it set up models for female behaviour, and discussed women's place in society. This fact has been discussed by for example Elisabeth Eide (1987) and Kwok-kan Tam (1998). Another potentially interesting aspect of the relationship would be that of women as *readers* of literature. In this case, a lack of source materials has deterred me from pursuing the subject.

A number of different terms for "women" are deployed in the thesis. When "Woman" with a capital W is used (except in the phrase New Woman) it is to indicate that the texts under discussion are concerned with "essential" or "eternal" woman. The phrase "famous ladies" is used to translate the Chinese *mingyuan*, which is often used in titles of anthologies of women's verse. For the sake of brevity the Chinese *guixiu*, genteel cloistered woman, or more literally, "flourishing talent of the women's quarters", is rendered as "gentlewoman". Whereas "gentlewoman" should be understood as referring to a cultural ideal, by "gentrywomen" I refer to women of a certain social class. "Palace women", *gongnü* in Chinese, refers to women of the imperial household.

### *Gender and modernity*

Many studies of modern China stress the interdependence of gender and modernity and explore how the differences between male and female, and modernity and tradition, were understood in terms of each other. Modernity was integral to gender issues as they were formulated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Discourses on women's emancipation and family reform were linked

to more general ideas about progress and enlightenment. Nationalism was always a central concern for Chinese feminists, who sought to strengthen Chinese women in order to strengthen China (Croll 1978; Witke 1971). Tani Barlow (2004) argues that evolutionist thinking was at the core of Chinese feminism and that the most powerful arguments for women's liberation were made on the grounds of eugenics. Gender issues were also integral to modernity. A rethinking of gender in scientific terms was central to Chinese modernity according to Frank Dikötter (1995), who argues that biologically defined sex difference came to be seen as fundamental principle of human nature and social organisation. The opposition between modernity and tradition was at times understood in terms of an opposition between male and female where the modern was male and tradition female. By the reform-minded, women were often seen as the most backward and benighted part of the population (Wang 1999) while the more conservative viewed them as carriers of an authentic national essence (Duara 2000). On the other hand, however, femaleness was also turned into a sign of modernity. Fantasies of modernity were projected onto new versions of women such as the New Woman (Chow 1990; Hu 2000). Sexualised female images were associated with consumable goods through advertising campaigns (Lee 1999) and the modern consumer was personified as a woman (Gerth 2003).

These and other studies show that it is impossible to ignore the gendered dimensions of modernity in China, but also that gender and modernity were associated in a number of different, sometimes contradictory ways. This is true also in the context of Republican literary thought. In the writings of Republican writers and critics, women's literature was described as the newest, and the oldest of literatures. Women were perceived as the most modern, but also the most traditional of writers. Some critics explained their use of gendered concepts of literature by reference to a feminism which emphasised what men

and women had in common, whereas others treated women's literature as separate in accordance with scientific theories which held that men and women were essentially different. It is tempting to interpret the diversity in views on gender and literature in terms of differences between an anti-traditionalist "May Fourth" outlook and "alternative" ways of seeing women's (and men's) writing. Such a division, however, is hardly valid. Following Michel Hockx (2003), I refrain from presupposing that a "May Fourth" type of modernity dominated the literary scene of Republican China. Disagreements over the modern meanings of women's literature, I hope to show, did not always run along the dividing lines between iconoclastic modernism and cultural conservatism.

#### *The beginning or the end of women's literature*

Studies of Chinese women's literature tend to approach the Republican period from one of two perspectives: it is portrayed either as the beginning, or as the end, of women's literature in China.

Scholars of modern literature usually depict the Republican era as the period when women's literature was born. In 1975, Yi-tsi Feuerwerker wrote that in becoming a writer, a woman in the Republican period would have to "make her way into an area of activity from which hitherto she had been largely excluded" (1975: 144). Women writers had no place in the great classical literary tradition, she argues. Moreover, the woman writer "not only suffered from the absence of a tradition for her, but from the presence of a tradition heavily loaded against her" (Ibid:146), as prejudice against women was deeply embedded in Chinese literature. Women writers found no independent ways of expressing themselves but ended up imitating male writers imitating women. As a result, the little literature by women that had been preserved conveyed restrictive gender stereotypes. It was the May Fourth movement with its

promotion of women's emancipation and literary revolution which broke the bonds of tradition and made it possible for women to speak for themselves, of their own experiences, according to Feuerwerker. This conception of the creation of Chinese women's literature as a break with tradition is echoed in many subsequent studies of modern women's literature.

In the 1980s, mainland Chinese critics took an increasing interest in women's literature and in feminine writing. Taken together, writings on women and literature in this period may be viewed as an attempt at conceptualising a Chinese women's literature and at discovering a female tradition in modern Chinese literature (Liu 1993). This female tradition was seen as originating in the Republican period. Bing Xin, Ding Ling, Xiao Hong and Zhang Ailing, female writers of the 1920s, 30s and 40s, were depicted as the foremothers of a modern Chinese women's literature which had been repressed during the Maoist years, but resurfaced in the Reform era. The May Fourth movement was more specifically identified as the starting point for a female tradition, the time when "Chinese women writers first appeared as a group upon the cultural scene" (Li Ziyun 1994: 299; see also Yu Qing 1987; Jin Yanyu 1986).

The idea of the Republican period as a time of birth of women's literature is perhaps the most pronounced in Meng Yue's and Dai Jinhua's 1989 feminist study of Republican women writers, *Fuchu lishi dibiao* (Emerging onto the earth-surface of history). Meng and Dai describe premodern China as a place where the patriarchal order dominated not only the institutions of society, but also language itself. In traditional China, discourse was male and only men had the power to become speaking subjects. "Woman" (*nǚxing*), on the other hand, turned into "the unconscious of History" (1989: introduction, 5). Women attempting to speak had to speak as *men*, through the male discourse. They were unable to convey their femaleness by means other than through the rhythms and silences of poetic language. Even though some women did write,

a women's literature was therefore an impossibility in premodern China. With the Republican period, however, came a rejection of the patriarchal order, which opened up new possibilities for women's subjectivity. There was still no female discourse, but a collective female consciousness now managed to "show through the cracks" (Ibid: part II, 28) in the male discourse.

This, according to Meng and Dai is how women's literature was first created in China. They describe the event as a "birth" (Ibid: part II, 25). The image suggested by the title of the book is also symbolic of a "birth". "Woman" violently breaks through the crust of the Earth, underneath which she has previously been buried, and emerges from History's subterranean unconscious onto the open ground of historical consciousness. According to Meng and Dai, May Fourth women's literature represented the first "scene" in the story of modern women's literature (Ibid) and the female consciousness it revealed laid the foundation for later generations of women writers to build upon (Ibid: part II, 28).

Meng and Dai agree with Feuerwerker that a truly female literature became possible only through a rejection of a male-dominated tradition, and that the May Fourth period was the time when the first foundations for such a literature were laid.

Wendy Larson, in her 1998 study of Republican period women's literature, also holds that women's literature was an impossibility in imperial times, an impossibility not because women did not write, but because literature and literary talent were defined in ways that excluded women. There existed, according to Larson, a gendered dichotomy between *cai* (literary talent) and *de* (moral virtue), exemplified in the popular saying "for a woman lack of talent is a virtue" (*Nūzi wu cai bian shi de*). *Cai* was performed in writing and speaking, *de* through abstinence, self-mutilation and suicide. *Cai* was mental, self-promoting, transcendent and male, whereas *de* was physical, self-sacrificing,



restrictive and female. Because *cai* was gendered as male, femaleness became incompatible with writing. Although some women did read and write, there could be no "women's literature" because the categories "women" and "literature" were seen as mutually exclusive. In the Republican period, the situation changed: the categories "women" and "literature" were joined together and the new concept of "women's literature" created. The very existence of such a concept, Larson argues, signalled modernity.

The introduction to a volume of English translations of modern Chinese women's literature by Amy Dooling<sup>1</sup> and Kristina Torgeson (1998) appears to be an exception from the rule. Dooling and Torgeson recognise that women in imperial China were not always silenced, and they trace the beginnings of modern women's literature all the way back to the late Qing. However, they too identify a rejection of patriarchy as the starting point for modern women's literature. Why else would they depict Qiu Jin, the late Qing revolutionary martyr and feminist, as the first modern woman writer? Qiu Jin wrote in the traditional genres of *shi* and *fanci*, and she did not exert a great literary influence upon subsequent generations of writers. In a way Dooling and Torgeson, too, tell the story of a women's literature born out of a break with an oppressive, male-dominated past.

From the perspective of studies devoted to late imperial women's culture, on the other hand, the Republican period becomes an end, rather than a beginning, of women's literature.

Since the 1980s, an increasing amount of scholarly attention has been directed towards writings by women of traditional China. A rising interest in gender studies and in the history of late imperial China has led historians, as well as scholars of literature, to examine Chinese women's literary heritage in a new light. Working from the assumption that not all of the more than 4,000 women writers<sup>2</sup> documented in historical sources can have been mere

exceptions from the rule, scholars such as Kang-I Sun Chang, Grace S. Fong, Dorothy Ko, Susan Mann, Paul S. Ropp, Haun Saussy, and Ellen Widmer challenge the idea that there was no place for women's writing in traditional China. Instead of viewing traditional women's writings as atypical, insignificant and void of true female experience, these scholars treat them as valuable sources to women's history, and argue that the understanding of women's literature is integral to the understanding of traditional literary culture as a whole.

Recent scholarship emphasises that in traditional China, courtesan and gentry women writers were numerous and produced a large amount of poetry. On the basis of research done by Hu Wenkai (1957), Kang-i Sun Chang has estimated the number of anthologies of women's poetry to over three thousand (Chang 1997:147). In the Ming and Qing in particular, an increasing number of women devoted themselves to poetry, and women's literature was enjoyed, collected and promoted by male literati. Dorothy Ko has described how this increase in publications of women's poetry followed upon the boom in the publishing industry which began in the mid-sixteenth century (Ko 1994a:29-67). Women's writing was viewed as a tradition of its own, with its own conventions, and was passed on in separate anthologies or collections. This female tradition ceased to exist in the 20th century.

According to some, the Republican period marked the end of this particular women's literature in more ways than one: not only did women's writing of traditional verse slowly die out, but the *memory* of Ming-Qing women's literary culture was also erased.

Ellen Widmer (2001) and Dorothy Ko (1994) argue that in the Republican era, female cultural traditions were being obscured and discredited by critics, writers and historians. Whereas the scholars of modern literature mentioned above identify the May Fourth movement as the starting point for women's

literature, Ko and Widmer describe the same movement as what condemned women's literature to oblivion. May Fourth critics and writers, according to Ko, depicted traditional women as victims and ignored their participation in literary culture. They created a myth of the silenced and persecuted woman of traditional China, a myth which, Ko argues, still pervaded the sinology of the 1990s. Widmer acknowledges that critics and historians of the Republican period at times did show an interest in traditional women's writing. However, literary historians of a May Fourth persuasion, who according to Widmer represented the mainstream of Republican literary thought, obscured the female tradition even as they drew attention to it. May Fourth style histories of women's literature, she argues, misrepresented the female tradition through an exaggerated emphasis on (among other things) popular literature and the oppression of women, thus contributing to the present day ignorance of the importance of late imperial women's poetry.

Widmer and Ko locate the reason for scholarly neglect of female literary traditions, and the origin of the myth of the oppressed Chinese woman, not in Western sinology or in the cultural policies of Communist China, but in May Fourth modernity. The women's literature with which they are concerned died with the Qing dynasty, and was buried by May Fourth modernisers.

Clearly, whether the Republican period becomes the end or the beginning of women's literature depends on our perspective: on what kind of literature, traditional or modern, interests us, and on what kind of literature, traditional or modern, we choose to interpret as female. What about the perspectives, then, of Republican period critics and scholars of literature? Was women's literature perceived as "new" or "old", "traditional" or "modern" in the Republican period?

Wendy Larson and Ellen Widmer are the only scholars who direct special attention to what Republican period critics and scholars themselves had to say about the relationship between women and writing. Widmer does this in order

to clarify exactly how and why the history of Ming-Qing female poetry, which she studies, was forgotten. Only Wendy Larson views Republican writings on women and literature as creative and original contributions to Chinese literary thought, worthy of study in their own right. In Larson's view, the creation of a new "women's literature" comprised not only the writing of women's literature, but above all the critical effort to conceptualise it.

In the discussion above, I placed Wendy Larson in the "Republic as beginning" camp, which is fair considering her view of literature as male-gendered in imperial China. However, the relationship between women's literature and modernity she describes is complicated, sometimes even contradictory. Larson observes that the conceptualisation of women's literature involved the discovery of an older female tradition in literature. Although "women's literature" was a modern concept completely at odds with traditional views on women and literature, critics and literary historians attempted to locate "women's literature" within past traditions. While the Republic witnessed the birth of women's literature it was also "the end of funü wenxue" (Larson 1994), because when leftist critics appeared on the scene in the second half of the 1920s, women's literature, which until then had been the hallmark of modernity, suddenly turned into the sign of backwardness.

Like Larson, I investigate the complex ways in which the relationships between women, literature, modernity and tradition were understood by critics and literary historians, but unlike Larson, I do not work from the unnecessary presupposition that literature was entirely male-gendered in traditional China. Once this premise is done away with, the contradictions and abrupt changes in the views on women, literature and modernity which Larson observes, become less contradictory and less abrupt. I also do not attempt to tell a story about the development of the view on women and literature over time, but rather to present a spectrum of diverse views on the subject, all of which coexisted in

the Republican period.

### *The chapters*

Chapters One and Two establish that "women's literature" was often treated as separate or different from men's literature, and investigate the discourses which provided support for this position. In Chapter One, "Tradition, emancipation, and the separateness of women's writing" I show that the late imperial female tradition in poetry, as well as the modern discourse of women's emancipation, formed important contexts for Republican period views on gender in literature. Proponents of New Literature, I argue, consciously rejected the female tradition, and constructed "women's literature" as modern by treating it as a result of two kinds of emancipation: the emancipation of women and the emancipation of literature. They defended their use of the gender-specific category of women's literature by referring to the need to communicate authentic female experience. In Chapter Two, "Science, sex, and literature" I argue that feminism was not the only modern discourse relevant to our topic, but that modern scientific ideas also influenced views on gender and writing. Certain critics believed sex difference in the minds of men and women made men's and women's literature essentially different. Others viewed women's literature as a key to their sexual psychology and instinctive urges. Because of this, I maintain, modern theories did not always serve to uphold an idea of women writers as liberated intellectual equals of men, but at times defined them as concrete, bodily creatures.

Chapters Three to Five are all concerned with Republican period views on traditional women's literature. In Chapters Three and Four, which are about the genre of literary history, I evaluate the claim that May Fourth history has obscured Chinese women's cultural history. Chapter Three, "The making of a history of women's literature" describes how the introduction of literary history

transformed the way earlier writings by women were conceptualised. It contains a detailed analysis of the first history of Chinese women's literature, Xie Wuliang's *Zhongguo funü wenxue shi* (History of Chinese women's literature) from 1916. Chapter Four, "'Oppression' in histories of women's literature" investigates the consequences of feminism and literary evolutionism for the canon of traditional women's literature, mainly through a comparison between the works of two literary historians, Tan Zhengbi and Liang Yizhen. I argue that although a tendency to devalue and obscure traditional women's literature existed, this tendency was not dominant.

In Chapter Five, "Women's truth", I explore the relationship between gender and the concept of "truth" in literature in anthologies of traditional women's literature as well as in literary histories from the late 1920s and early 1930s. Here women's literature was linked with truth, sincerity and authenticity in several different ways which were gender-specific.

In Chapters Six and Seven I discuss uses of the concept "woman writer" applied to modern women writers. In particular, I bring up two contrasting views on women writers: that of the editor and contributors to a 1929 *Zhenmeishan* (Truth, beauty and goodness) special issue on women writers, and that of socialist critics. Chapter Six, "The elusive salonière" focuses on the *Truth, beauty and goodness* special issue on women writers, which provided an inclusive definition of "woman writer" and an enthusiastic celebration of femininity, and proposed the ideal of the salon hostess. The special issue provoked considerable debate over how, and by whom, women writers were to be represented, and was criticised for being old-fashioned, obsessed with sex and geared towards profit. In Chapter Seven, "Femininity and revolution", I turn to some of the special issue's critics: socialist critics. I argue, with Wendy Larson, that communist critics Qian Xingcun and He Yubo portrayed the writings by contemporary women writers as backward and deficient, and

equated the feminine with the bourgeois. At the same time, however, I point out that this view was not the dominant view of women's literature in the late 1920s and 1930s, and that even in the context of revolutionary literature, "women's literature" was at times seen as desirable.

## Chapter One: Tradition, emancipation and the separateness of women's writing

### *The separateness of women's literature*

In Republican China, literature by women was to some extent perceived as separate or different from men's literature. Literature by women was dubbed "women's literature" (*funü wenxue* or sometimes *nüxing wenxue*) and the gender of women writers was invariably highlighted by adding the prefix *nü* (female, woman) to the word for their occupation: women were "authoresses", "poetesses" and "women writers" instead of just authors, poets, or writers. The prefix *nan* meaning man or male was, by contrast, not used in a similar manner. Writers became "men writers" (*nanzuo jia*) only when directly compared to "women writers". Thus the term "men writers" occasionally appears in discussions of women's literature and women writers, but not elsewhere. Women's literature was sometimes treated in separate anthologies, histories and special issues of magazines. There was also a certain consensus concerning what a feminine or masculine style was, although the difference was seldom specified or theorised.<sup>1</sup>

These divisions between male and female literature, and male and female writers, were not unproblematic. In practice, the roles of male and female writers were more similar than they had used to be. Although women writers were few, men and women alike could now be professional writers. They often participated in the same literary associations and were published in the same literary magazines. At a time when women's literary activities had moved outside the women's apartments and the brothels, the social segregation of the sexes prescribed by Confucianism could no longer provide a rationale for the separateness of women's literature, and critics had to look elsewhere for



explanations as to what it meant to be a writing woman as opposed to a writing man. A fundamental difference between modern and traditional views of gender and literature was that in the Ming and Qing, the separateness of literature by women was largely taken for granted, whereas in the Republican period the division between male and female literature was being questioned and redefined. There was in other words an insecurity concerning the foundation of gender-based categories of literature. For example, in an article about women writers of fiction, the pseudonymous Yi Zhen admitted that his or her own use of the term "woman writer" may be questioned on the grounds of men's and women's shared humanity, and the universality of literature:

What we call "writers" (*zuojia*) really should not be divided into "men writers" and "women writers". It cannot be said that women are not fit to concern themselves with literature, but neither can it be said that they have more literary talent than others. Literature explores the inner life (*neixin shenghuo*) of the human race as well as the relationship between people (*ren*) and society. Men and women alike live in society, and have their different inner lives. When expressed through literary means, [these things] can all be turned into works of literature. The term "woman writer" does not make sense, because a writer is a writer, regardless of gender. (Yi Zhen 1930: 7).

What reasons remained, then, to treat women's literature as separate from men's? Although few critics specified or analysed their reasons for treating women's literature as separate or different from men's, at least three grounds for considering women's literature separate may be found in their writings.

First, the tradition of women's writing provided one reason to treat women's literature separately. When researching traditional women's literature,

Republican literary historians met with a literature which in part had evolved as a separate, gendered tradition, and been passed on in separate collections and anthologies, with gender-specific labels. They often chose to continue to treat the female tradition as separate rather than to integrate it into the general history of Chinese literature. In this respect, their histories reflected historical practice.

Second, many critics and historians believed that women's literature should be given special attention because it communicated experiences and perspectives unique to women. By reading women's literature readers would learn about the female predicament. This argument depended on the supposition that only a literature based on authentic experience could communicate truths to its readers.

Third, some critics held that women's and men's literature possessed essentially different qualities when it came to style, mood, and intellectual content. They sometimes believed this to be a reflection of essential differences between the male and female minds.

These three rationales for the separateness of women's literature did not represent three disparate positions on the place for women in literature, but two or all of them could be invoked by the same critics. Literary historians exploring female traditions in poetry did so not only because such traditions had previously been treated separately, but also because they wanted to communicate female perspectives on China's history. Magazine editors promoting contemporary women's literature did so not only to provide a forum for female experience, but also because they felt women's literature possessed certain stylistic qualities not found elsewhere, and so on.

When women's writing was discussed in the context of New Literature, the need to communicate authentic female experience was usually given as the reason to direct special attention to women's writing. The existence of a

separate female tradition in the past was, on the other hand, often denied, or deemed irrelevant. In this manner, Yi Zhen described the past as a time when men monopolised writing and scholarship, and talented women were persecuted. He or she defended his/her use of the term "woman writer" without referring to an older tradition, by saying that women's "lives" (*shenghuo*) differed from men's. Their relationship to society was different and so were their "inner lives", their psychology, and as a result they were able to describe things which men could not imagine. (Yi Zhen 1930: 7-8).

In the remainder of this chapter I introduce two discourses of crucial importance to Republican views on the relationship between gender and literature: earlier writings on traditional women's poetry, and the discourse of women's emancipation.

### *"Women had nothing to do with literature"*

Since time immemorial, the Chinese have generally been of the opinion that women have nothing to do with literature. Literature used to be a vehicle for carrying the Way, but "chanting about the wind and the moon" was also a sophisticated pastime of the literati: herein lay two aspects of literature, one honourable and one extremely dangerous. As for women, they were seen as ancillary to men, even by the most open-minded. Their activities were restricted to the inner apartments. There was no need for them to speak on behalf of the sages, and to have them chant about the wind and the moon was even less desirable, since this could be dangerous. "For a woman, lack of talent is a virtue" sums up the opinion of this school of thought. (Zhou 1922: 6).

This is how the writer Zhou Zuoren (1885 -1967) summed up the relationship between women and literature in traditional times in a speech given to the Students' Council of Beijing Women's Normal College in 1922 and later published in *Funü zazhi* (The ladies' journal). Zhou, a younger brother of Lu Xun, studied in Japan between 1906 and 1911. In 1917 he began teaching at

Peking University, where he got involved in the New Culture movement. A pioneering writer of vernacular poetry and one of the founding members of the Literary association (*Wenxue yanjiu hui*), he was a central figure in the movement for New Literature. At this time in his life, Zhou advocated what he referred to as “human” or “humane” literature (*ren de wenxue*), a literature which affirmed the value of the whole of humanity as well as of every individual human being, and which had the power to enlighten its readers (Zhou 1918). In 1922, according to Susan Daruvala (2000: 53-58), Zhou moved away from New Culture radicalism and his earlier belief that literature could be used to improve human beings. His speech on women and literature, however, still expresses faith in the transformative powers of New Literature, and distrust of the literature of the past. Here, Zhou argued that there had been no room for women’s literary activities in Confucian culture, whereas New Literature held out a promise of a true women’s literature.

Wendy Larson (1998) holds that it was 20th century writers such as Zhou Zuoren who first established a conceptual link between femininity and the written word in China. In traditional China, she argues, literature was gendered as male. Larson does not deny that some women of traditional China did read and write, her point is instead that on a conceptual level, “women” and “literature” were never linked together. On the contrary, she argues, “women” and “literature” were perceived as antithetical, as representing a dichotomy between *de* (virtue) and *cai* (literary talent). In Republican times, however, the concept of “women’s literature”, *funü wenxue*, was invented, and critics described women as literary, and literature as feminine. The hitherto unheard of combination of the two categories *woman* and *literature* made women’s literature a “radical modern alternative” and the promotion of women writers a promotion of modernity (Larson 1998:45).

Could not Zhou Zuoren have been right in this respect at least when he

argued that women and literature had nothing to do with each other in the past and that for women, virtue and talent had been seen as mutually exclusive? Could it not have been the case that although actual women wrote and were published, femaleness or at least femininity were considered incompatible with talent and writing, and that women who wrote were looked upon as gender-bending exceptions from the rule of womanly behaviour?

One thing that speaks against this claim is that in the Ming and Qing, women's writing was treated not as individual excursions into a male-dominated field, but as a separate, feminine tradition. Women's poetry was almost always collected in separate anthologies or collections, or else grouped together in separate chapters or volumes of more general anthologies (Chang 1997:149). The idea of a separate poetry tradition for women of course entailed the combination of certain concepts of femaleness with certain concepts of literature or talent, as women writers were called, for example, "talented women" (*cainü*), "female talents" (*nü caizi*) or "poetic ladies" (*shiyuan*), and anthologies given titles like "Collected *shi* poetry by famous ladies" (*Mingyuan huishi*) or "Selected *shi* poetry by gentlewomen" (*Guixiu shixuan*).

Kang-i Sun Chang and Haun Saussy (1999) show that Chinese women poets participated in the creation of a female poetic tradition. Although men and women worked in the same genres of verse, and had access to the same repertoire of images and allusions, the female tradition was distinguished by a preference for certain genres, themes, and allusions, and by references to certain historical models for female talent (Ibid: 6-7). The *ci* song-lyric, for instance, was considered a feminine genre, associated with female entertainers and the female poetic voice (Ibid:4). Women writers drew upon stories about famous women poets of the past. Complaining that talent was of little use to women, they would point to the fate of the talented imperial concubine Ban *jiayu*, who lost the emperor's favour to the beautiful dancer

Zhao Feiyan. They referred to their poetry as "catkin verses" or "snowflake lines" in memory of the girl poet Xie Daoyun's famous improvisation where she likened snow to willow catkins.

In Ming and Qing prefaces, commentaries and debates on women and writing, too, literature by women was treated as a separate category of literature. Judging from the critical essays from the Ming and Qing collected by Chang and Saussy (1999), commentators tended to place women authors within a female literary tradition, comparing them to famous women of the past but much less often to famous men. Critics seem never to have questioned the gender based division of literature into male and female, a division that mirrored the Confucian doctrine of separate spheres for men and women.

#### *A contested literature*

Even if there were concepts which combined ideas of femaleness with ideas of literariness, did these concepts not just serve to brand women's literature as inferior? If we interpret Zhou Zuoren's claim that "women had nothing to do with literature" to mean that women were perceived as having nothing to do with respected, high-quality literature, then was he not right?

Women's literary activities, it must be said, did meet with difficulties. Whereas men needed literary skills to succeed in the official examinations, women were barred from the examinations, and their writing skills had no self-evident use. The proper work of a respectable woman was textile work and household management, duties which could be performed very well without literary training. Because women had to take time off from their real work if they wanted to write, their writing was always suspect. (Mann 1997: 77-78). Even more so was their circulating their writing outside the home. That women's voices be heard outside the inner apartments appeared to many a violation of the principle of gender segregation. In his essay "Fuxue" ("On women's

learning”) from 1797, Zhang Xuecheng criticised the practice of publishing women’s poetry. He maintained that it was unfitting for respectable women to let their literature be read by readers from outside the family. He found the poetry of contemporary women shallow and frivolous, and suspected male champions of women’s poetry of appreciating not the poetry itself, but the beauty of its authors. The main target of his criticism was the poet Yuan Mei, the most flamboyant of the male writers who taught poetry to female students. (Chang and Saussy 1999: 783-789; Mann 1997: 83-94).

Anthologists and commentators of women’s poetry acknowledged that writing was generally not considered a woman’s proper employment. As Zhao Shiyong complained in his preface to Qu Juesheng’s anthology *Nūsao* (Poetic elegies by women): “Ladies in the inner quarters. . . are not supposed to befriend paper, ink, writing brush and ink slab” (Chang and Saussy 1999: 746). Champions of women’s poetry seem to have felt a need to defend their activities. “Some may object to the printing of these poems for fear of licentiousness” wrote Zhong Xing in the preface to *Mingyuan shigui* (Selection of poems by famous ladies) (Ibid:741). Zhi Ruzeng, in the preface to *Nūzhong qi caizi lanke er ji* (Orchid babblings, part two, by seven talented women), acknowledged that many women looked down upon literary talent because they believed the common saying that “in a woman, lack of talent is a virtue” (Ibid:766). Anthologists stressed the difficulty (and thereby the significance) of their projects, expressing their regret that too much of women’s writing had been lost. Women’s poetry, they complained, was misunderstood, never recorded, or if recorded never handed down. As You Tong wrote in the preface to a collection of women’s song-lyrics:

The brocade words of a perfumed boudoir are like the secret books we keep under our pillow - occasionally they may circulate but they are easily lost. If such

writings do not find a sympathetic reader who gathers them far and wide, then, like 'peach blossoms' and 'willow floss', they will be swept away by the sudden wind, a good half of them falling into the current. How pitiful!" (Ibid: 769-770).

### *The virtues and pleasures of feminine writing*

The voices raised in defence of women's literature were many and powerful, however. Many writers sought to prove that women's writing was not immoral at all, but an expression of true morality. They would point to the example of famous virtuous women writers of the past who wrote moral instructions for other women or composed poems to admonish wayward husbands. The classical precedent par excellence was the *Book of songs (Shijing)*. This classic, thought to be compiled by Confucius himself, contained many poems framed in a woman's voice, and many poems traditionally attributed to women authors. The moral character of such a work was beyond doubt, and by referring to it champions of women's literature not only demonstrated the moral power of women's verse, but indirectly compared themselves to the great sage.

Zhong Xing, compiler of *Selection of poems by famous ladies* from the Ming, admired the purity and spontaneity of women's poetry. While male writers were preoccupied with the rules and laws of poetry, and what schools or styles to adhere to, women's poetry came naturally:

The poems of women past and present, however, have always originated from their feelings and are rooted in their own nature; women poets neither imitate models nor know the division of schools; they have neither Nanpi nor Xikun style, but let their sorrow or grace overflow spontaneously. (Chang and Saussy 1999: 739).

The gentlewoman's environment cultivated her poetic sensibilities, according to



Zhong. Her leisured lifestyle and the seclusion, elegance and purity of her dwellings were ideal for writing. It was not a problem that she never got to see the world outside her own apartments. "Men must travel to all the corners of the earth in order to know the world. . . But women never have to do that. They have country villages right on their pillows and mountain passes in their dreams, all because they are so pure" (Ibid: 740). According to Dorothy Ko, Zhong Xing was not alone in finding the seclusion of women conducive to the production of good literature. Wu Guofu and Xu Yejun, two other Ming literati, believed that women's detachment from political and academic affairs made them better writers, more natural, more truthful, untainted by ambition. (Ko 1994a: 52).

Susan Mann has described how in the High Qing era, women's voices, and in particular the voice of the wife or mother, were perceived as invested with moral authority. Even Zhang Xuecheng, who despised the women's poetry of his day, recognised the moral power of female learning and writing. He stressed that women had important ritual functions to perform, which, would extend their moral influence to the public world even though they took place in the home. To fulfil these duties, women must be properly educated in classical learning. (Mann 1997: 85-92). Unlike Zhang, the lady poet Wanyan Yun Zhu thought poetry was a proper way for women to express their moral authority. (Ibid:94-98). In her view, the feminine virtue "womanly speech" (*fuyan*) prescribed by Ban Zhao, actually sanctioned women's poetry. When Yun Zhu compiled an anthology of contemporary women's poetry from all over the empire, she systematically excluded women authors of dubious virtue, and poems that contained erotic images or "sensual images such as rosy clouds" (Chang 1999: 712).

Other critics applauded aesthetic aspects of women's writing. Zhao Shiyong explained that women writers of all walks of life had been included in

*Poetic elegies by women*. What mattered was not the authors' virtue or social status, but her poetry. Some of the poems in the anthology manifested moral integrity and chastity, but others had been chosen for their elegance, emotional expression or clever use of allegory (Ibid:747). While Zhao would perhaps have applied the same criteria to the appraisal of male authors, other writers found special aesthetic merits in women's literature. Wu Qi explained that in song-lyrics, if not in the *shi*, certain feminine characteristics were desirable: "in *shi* poetry we require profound meaning, the expression of a valiant man's feeling of indignation; in song-lyrics we value softness and suppleness, the description of a lovely and enchanting manner" (Chang and Saussy 1999: 772). Dorothy Ko has suggested that as female literacy increased in High Qing Jiangnan, the boundaries between male and female in the context of literature were redefined. If writing had previously been seen as a "male" activity, certain kinds of writing were now seen as more feminine than others. While men busied themselves with research and scholarship, women devoted themselves to poetry. (Ko 1994b: 201;208). Perhaps this can account in part for the passion for women's poetry displayed by Qian Sanxi, compiler of *Zhuang lou zhaiyan* (Selected beauties from the chambers of adornment):

In September of 1832, when I failed the provincial exam, we had bitter rains and icy cold wind. The skies did not clear for several days. Since touring the countryside was out of the question, I turned to wine and poetry and gave vent to my inspiration. As for eight-legged essays, I fear them as I do my teachers and keep them tucked away on a shelf; so, instead, I took up some anthologies of ancient and modern poetry. Among them, poems that startle and please, move me to tears or to song, that are enough to drive away nightmares or serve as snacks for wine number more than can be counted on the fingers. Poems by women particularly stand out; those of our present dynasty even more so. Their

brocade compositions and pearl-laden works dazzle the eyes and enchant the spirit - almost like climbing Jeweled Mountain and entering the mermaid caves. (Chang and Saussy 1999: 800).

For Qian, the mermaid caves, the feminine space of women's poetry, provides a refuge from the cold wind and rain of the disappointing world of officialdom. The *Daguan yuan* or Prospect Garden in Cao Xueqin's famous 18th century novel *Hong lou meng* (A dream of red mansions) is another such feminine, literary space. Inhabited almost exclusively by women and girls, it is a secluded, elegant and most poetic place. To its one male inhabitant, the young Jia Baoyu, life in this feminine garden is immensely preferable to an official career, and so he spends his days engaged in poetry competitions with his girl cousins, avoiding his stern father Jia Zheng who wants him to prepare for the imperial examinations.

In the eyes of some writers, then, the seclusion of women, the detachment of women from the world of officialdom, made them and their poetry a source of morality - selflessness, truthfulness and purity - contrasting with the corruption of public life, or else a source of aesthetic, sensual pleasure, contrasting with the dryness of academic writing.

Although women's poetry was perceived a lesser, marginal tradition, and its very right to exist questioned by certain critics, it is still not fair to say that in the past it was generally agreed that "women and literature had nothing to do with each other" or that the female and the literary were seen as mutually exclusive.

### *Republican critics and the female tradition*

Why, then, did Zhou Zuoren hold that in the past, women had nothing to do with literature? At the time he was writing, a long time had passed since the

Late Ming and High Qing "golden ages" of women's literature described by Mann and Ko. Susan Mann points out that the great events of the Late Qing and early Republican times - recession, foreign imperialism, the Taiping Rebellion - must have changed gender relations again. "We should not be surprised to learn", she writes, "that by the time the collapse of Confucian education shut classical libraries up in camphor, the era we have been exploring [the High Qing] - a juncture in the social relations of the sexes in China that shaped the thinking of its most prestigious elite - had been erased from memory" (Mann 1997:22). Many of the Ming and Qing anthologies of women's poetry must have been lost by the time of May Fourth, and others were no doubt extremely hard to come by. Could it be that the participation of women in traditional literary culture and the promotion of women's literature had been completely forgotten by that time?

There are reasons to believe that this was not the case. Firstly, women's literature in traditional genres and writings on this literature continued to be published in late Qing and Republican times. One bibliographical catalogue lists close to 60 books containing traditional women's literature published between 1890 and 1949 (Qi 1995). Some of these were new compilations. For example, in 1896 Xu Naichang compiled an anthology of women's *ci*-poetry entitled *Xiao tanluan shi guixiu ci* (Xiao tanluan shi's collection of gentlewomen's *ci*) and in 1904 he published a sequel to the anthology containing song-lyrics by no less than 521 women poets (Chang 1997). Others were new editions or versions of earlier anthologies of women's poetry, such as *Bicheng xianguan nü dizi shi* (Poetry by the female disciples of Bicheng xianguan) edited by Chen Wenshu and originally from 1842, which was reissued in 1914, and Yuan Mei's *Suiyuan nü dizi shixuan* (Selected poetry by the female disciples of Suiyuan), originally from 1796, republished in 1935 (Qi 1995). In the early Republic at least, the press also featured women's poetry in

traditional genres, and writings on such poetry. *The ladies' journal*, as we shall see in Chapter Three, ran several series of *shihua* on women's poetry in the years 1915 to 1918.

Secondly, Republican writers discussed earlier women writers and made references to earlier champions of women's literature. The fact that at least four histories of women's literature were published in the years 1916 to 1930 indicates that an interest in women's traditional literature persisted. Xie Wuliang, the author of the earliest of these histories, recognised that he was not the first to promote women's literature. Like so many of his predecessors, he believed that the collecting of women's writing had begun with Confucius' compilation of the *Book of songs*. Of later anthologies he mentioned Zhong Xing's *Selection of poems by famous ladies* from the Ming and Wang Xiqiao's (Wang Shilu's) *The lamp oil collection* from the Qing. These were the only two large collections to survive, Xie complained, but he also, somewhat contradictorily, explained that he had chosen not to include the Qing dynasty in his book because there were comparatively many materials from this period to be found.

Liang Yizhen, who wrote two other histories of women's literature, claimed he had access to several hundreds of materials concerning women's literature in the Qing (Liang 1932 [1927]: 4). Liang's first history contains two prefaces which show awareness of the female tradition in literature and earlier promotion of women's literature. The first preface is by the former editor of *The ladies' journal* Wang Yunzhang, who mentioned not only his ancestor Wang Shilu's collection but several other anthologies of women's literature as well, such as Wanyan Yun Zhu's *Zhengshi ji* (Collection of correct beginnings) from 1831 and Xu Naichang's *Xiao tanluan shi guixiu ci* (*Xiao tanluan shi's* collection of gentlewomen's *ci*). In the second preface Miss Wang Canzhi referred to a number of female literary figures of the past, including several of the historical

literary women commonly referred to in traditional writings on women's literature (Fu Sheng's daughter, Ban Zhao and Xie Daoyun), female anthologists of the Qing (Wanyan Yun Zhu and Wang Duan) and Wang Canzhi's own mother, the legendary writer, feminist and revolutionary martyr Qiu Jin. In so doing, Wang sketched a tradition of women's participation in literary culture stretching from the Han dynasty to the early 20th century.

Not only experts on women's literary history knew something about past efforts to promote women's writing. The poet Xu Zhimo referred to them in a lecture on the subject of women, which he gave in a Suzhou girls' school in 1929 (Xu 1929). Talking about how British 19th century women authors rose to fame in spite of an adverse environment, he made a comparison to the Chinese situation:

Our situation here was actually better than theirs, come to think of it. The eminent literati of the Qing, Wang Yuyang [Wang Shizhen], Yuan Zicai [Yuan Mei], Bi Qiufan and Chen Bicheng, all made great contributions to the promotion of women's literature. (Ibid: 8).

If it had not been for these champions of women's literature, Xu said, Zhang Xuecheng would never have felt a need to criticise women's poetry in the first place.

Although a great number of anthologies of women's writing may have been lost or fallen into obscurity by the time of the May Fourth movement, some were undoubtedly still remembered. Modern histories built upon the efforts of Zhong Xing, Wang Shilu, Wanyan Yun Zhu, and the more recent Xu Naichang. The controversy between Yuan Mei and Zhang Xuecheng on the subject of women's poetry was known. The female literary tradition of the past, as well as the critical efforts to promote this tradition, were the backdrop

against which Republican theories of women and literature were formed.

What, then, are we to make of Zhou Zuoren's denial of traditional women's literature? Do we have to assume that the erudite Zhou was wholly ignorant of past publication and promotion of women's poetry? I think Zhou's generalisation is not a proof of his ignorance, but a strategic device. Zhou was out to promote New Literature. His speech was directed at a female audience - students in a girl's school. The version printed in *The ladies' journal* would have been read by women, and by men specifically interested in the "woman question". It was therefore necessary for him to stress the importance of New Literature to women and girls, to persuade his female audience that they, as women, had a stake in the creation of New Literature. Cutting off women's ties to a literary history, thereby presenting New Literature as the only literature available to them, was one way of accomplishing this. Another way was to depict New Literature as useful to, or even necessary for, women's emancipation. As we shall see, denial or devaluation of the female tradition was often combined with appeals to feminism in attempts to win women over to the cause of New Literature.

Zhou and other proponents of New Literature did not discover women's literature or invent the woman writer, but sought to redefine and reinvent them, in defiance of the older tradition. To these modern writers, the traditional reasons for considering men's and women's literature distinct did not seem tenable anymore, as they were opposed to the Confucian doctrine of separate spheres for men and women. Instead, they usually defined women's literature as a literature characterised by a uniquely female experience. As will be explained below, they more often than not placed women's literature in the context of the discourse of women's emancipation, and equated female experience with the experience of oppression.

### *The discourse of women's emancipation*

The status of women was an issue of crucial importance to Chinese modernisers. From the end of the 19th century onwards, a huge number of texts were written on the significance of women's status to Chinese modernisation. Late 19th century reformists such as Kang Youwei, Tan Sitong and Liang Qichao criticised the conventions of gender segregation and male superiority (Witke 1971:23-39). For models they looked to a powerful West where, it appeared to them, men and women enjoyed equal status and were free to socialise with each other. Around the turn of the century, reform-minded men (and, less often, women) advocated the abolition of footbinding and the improvement of education for girls, and founded anti-footbinding societies and girl schools. After the revolution of 1911, a small but militant suffragette movement rallied for equal political rights for men and women. The interest in raising women's status culminated in the May Fourth era (Wang 1999:3), when the women's press as well as publications associated with the New Culture movement published extensively on the so-called *funü wenti* or *nüzi wenti*, the Chinese translations of the English term "the Woman Question".

It has often been observed that before the May Fourth period, emancipation of women was seen not as an end in itself, but as a means of strengthening and modernising the Chinese nation (see for example Croll 1978: 45; Witke 1971:42-43 ). Well-treated, educated and natural-footed women would make healthy and civilised mothers capable of producing healthy and intelligent sons, who, in turn, would lead China to prosperity and power. The bound-footed and superstitious traditional woman on the other hand, was perceived as a major impediment to modernisation. In the May Fourth debates, nationalistic concerns still figured prominently and women were at times still depicted as the most backward, anti-modern segment of the population (Wang 1999: 80). But the wished-for transformation of women's role in society was



now conceived of as one aspect of *jiefang*, emancipation or liberation (Witke 1971: 77-78). Women were not only to be reformed, but to emancipate themselves entirely from their earlier existence, they were to pass from a state of oppression and dependence to freedom and independence. Motherhood and the education of girls continued to be discussed, but a range of other issues, such as sexual freedom and equal rights now reached unprecedented circulation.

Writers in magazines for youth and for women criticised the fact that in the eyes of the law men and women were still unequal after the revolution. Women had no right to vote or to be elected, men were allowed to take concubines and it was easier for men than for women to obtain divorce (Witke 1971:195). However, the greatest obstacle for female emancipation, it was felt, was not the law but the family. Like youth, women were at the bottom of family hierarchy, and must be liberated from this oppressive, patriarchal institution. Various alternatives to the traditional family system were suggested. Many believed in free marriage based on mutual love, while others wanted to abolish marriage altogether. The old sexual morality was particularly hostile to women according to the May Fourth critics, and must be replaced with a new one which set up the same standards of chastity and fidelity for both sexes. The nature of such a new sexual morality was widely debated throughout the 1920's (Cf. Peng 1995). Even more importantly, May Fourth writers advocated a general reassessment of women's role and identity based on the idea that women were *ren*, persons or human beings, and as such entitled to independence, free will and self-expression (Witke 1971:83-86). Women's individuality and humanity, the argument went, had previously been sacrificed to the Confucian rules of propriety (*lijiao*). Women had not functioned as autonomous human beings, but merely as somebody else's daughter, wife or mother. It was now time to emancipate them from this crippling and inhuman

existence by granting them a “personhood” (*renge*) of their own.

*Emancipation of women, emancipation of literature*

Given the importance of the discourse on women’s liberation, it is not surprising that the idea of female emancipation figures most prominently in writings about women and literature from May Fourth and throughout the twenties. In “*Xin wenxue yu xin nüzi*” (New Literature and New Woman) published in *The ladies’ journal* in the year of the May Fourth movement, Liu Linsheng presented the emancipation of women and the emancipation of literature as interdependent projects (Liu 1919). New Literature, he wrote, will help women reach independence, and New Woman can contribute to the development of New Literature. He defined “New Woman” as the emancipated woman, and more specifically as someone who serves society and lives independently. Before the New Woman could reach absolute independence and emancipation, however, she must first achieve “literary independence”. Liu thought Chinese women’s relationship to literature had been most unsatisfactory in the past. Women had been poorly educated and produced too little literature. Even the rare examples of female talent that there were did not measure up to foreign standards. “How many great writers are there in China who can be compared to England’s George Eliot?” asked Liu (Ibid: 2). Women writers, he claimed, had been the literary dependents of men, because they had always imitated male writers. The way for them to find their own true and authentic voice in literature, he argued, was to join the New Literature movement. New Literature was the only way to literary independence for women, because Old Literature was irretrievably bound up with their oppression. It contributed to oppression by encouraging women to be imitative (dependent), and overly sentimental and melancholic (sickly and weak). It was also symptomatic of oppression. The Old Literature produced by oppressed,

restricted women exhibited the typical evils of Old Literature - sentimentalism, lack of originality, dilettantism, and artifice - to an even larger extent than did Old Literature produced by men.

Although Zhou Zuoren (1922) did not use the word “emancipation” in his “Women and literature”, it is an implicit theme in this article. As we have seen, Zhou started out by painting a bleak picture of the past status of women and of literature. In explaining how this has changed in recent years, he set up a parallel between female and literary “emancipation”:

Now, however, views on women and on literature have changed completely.

Literature is a realisation of one or other form of life, not an auxiliary tool of life, which can be used for didactic or entertainment purposes: its essence is self-expression, its function to move other people, its effect takes the individual as its centre, but humanity as its scope. As for Woman, she is a part of humanity, with an independent personality, and not someone else's dependent. (Zhou 1922 :6)

According to Zhou, women and literature were not seen as possessing intrinsic, autonomous value in the past, but were only the means to an end. In other words, writing was only there to entertain audiences and to carry “the Way” while women were there to entertain men and to carry sons. But now Zhou's humanist philosophy granted them independent value based on the interaction between the individual (*geren*) and the collective of humankind (*renlei*). Woman's value lay in her being an individual with personality or personhood (*renge*), and a part of humanity at the same time. By the same token, the value of literature lay in its double function of self-expression and communication. Like Liu, Zhou believed that literature - the new autonomous literature - could help women find their own true voice, which had been repressed for centuries. It would help them “awaken”, and it would destroy old

prejudices concerning women. "Because women in the past met with all sorts of restrictions", he wrote, "they developed certain defects which made it impossible for other people to understand them and difficult for them to understand other people. Here, the study and creation of literature can be of great use" (Ibid: 8). Women could explain themselves to the world by writing literature, and by reading literature they could learn to understand the world.

Liu and Zhou both thought of the relationship between women and literature in terms of women's emancipation on the one hand, and the creation of New Literature on the other, and they described these projects as to some extent analogous. They agreed that New Literature was of the utmost importance to the new, independent woman.

The opposition between oppression and emancipation continued to provide the framework for many discussions of women and literature throughout the twenties. In the 1926 article "*Qiwang nǚ wénxuéjiā de juéqǐ*" (Hoping for the rise of women authors), also published in *The ladies' journal*, Song Shuzhen bemoaned the fact that there were so few Chinese women writers. The New Literature movement of 1917 marked the beginning of a "dawn" for literature, but an absolute majority of the new writers were male. This was not because women lacked talent. In Europe and America there had been great women authors such as the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, Madame de Staël, George Sand and Harriet Beecher Stowe. But Chinese women lacked this kind of illustrious history. While Song admired the Western authoresses mentioned above, she dismissed "the likes of Ban *jièyú*, Cai Yan, Zhu Shuzhen and Li Qingzhao" as marginal characters in Chinese literary history who wrote a few poems on the wind and the moon but not more. The reason for this deplorable state lay mainly with the oppression of women in China:

If we study the matter carefully, we realise that the unequal status of men and

women is in fact a very important reason! Because men and women have been unequal they have not enjoyed the same rights to education, therefore there has been no way [for women] to acquire knowledge and develop their talents. Of course they could not help becoming stupid and ignorant and fall under the power of the men. . . . In short: since our Chinese women have suffered society's unfair oppression for thousands of years, they naturally have not been able to produce any great authors. (Ibid.: 31-32).

Like Liu and Zhou, Song thought literature - defined as new, modern, cosmopolitan literature - could prove helpful to women in their emancipation. The best way for women to achieve equality, she wrote, is to acquire knowledge in general and literary knowledge in particular.

Narratives of oppression and emancipation also shaped some of the histories of women's literature which appeared in the Republican period. Xie Wuliang's *Zhongguo funü wenxueshi* (History of Chinese women's literature) from 1916 opens with a discussion not of literature but of the status of women (1992:1-3). According to Xie, men and women were equal in antiquity, but in the mediaeval period the status of women became inferior. Only in the modern era had men and women begun to regain their "natural" state of equality. Xie's theory of gender relations shapes his literary history. Since the women of antiquity enjoyed equality with men, their literature was also the equal of men's. But in mediaeval times women were deprived of education, their environment restricted them and their literature declined as a consequence. Xie was therefore mostly interested in early women's literature, such as the women's folk songs he believed make up part of the *Book of songs*. Xie's *History of Chinese women's literature* is given a closer examination in Chapter Three.

Another example is Tan Zhengbi's *Zhongguo funü wenxue shi* (History of Chinese women's literature), originally named *Zhongguo nǚxing de wenxue*

*shenghuo* (The literary life of Chinese women), which was first published in 1930 (1978). Tan consistently placed women's literature in the context of men's oppression of women. Although he was writing a history, Tan showed much more confidence in the future of women's literature than in its past. He ended his first chapter by stating that "In conclusion, Chinese women's literature is right now progressing along a great and glorious road, and it is absolutely not in such a state as it used to be." (Ibid:34). Tan explained this supposed change as a result of the emancipation of women. I will return to Tan Zhengbi and his "narratives of oppression" in Chapter Four.

### *Separate or identical?*

For writers such as Liu, Zhou, Song and Tan, the emancipation of women - and often the "emancipation" of literature as well - were prerequisites for the production of a good women's literature. But to return to the issue of the separateness of women's literature raised at the beginning of this chapter - what was to characterise the new, good women's literature? In particular, what would distinguish it from the men's? "Feminists" explained their use of the concept by pointing to the importance of authenticity and of female experiences of men's oppression. Tan Zhengbi offered one such defence of the separateness of women's literature. In the preface to his history he commented on criticism which had been directed to Zhang Ruogu, the editor of the 1929 *Zhenmeishan* (Truth, beauty and goodness) special issue on women writers, a publication which I discuss in detail in Chapter Six. Zhang was ridiculed, Tan wrote, for not editing a *Men writers* as well as a *Women writers* special issue, so it was only to be expected that Tan himself would be criticised for not having compiled a *History of men's literature*. What such critics failed to understand, argued Tan, was that a women's literary history is part of the history of women's lives (*nüxing shenghuo shi*), and that women's lives have differed

from men's because of men's oppression. Women's literature could therefore be viewed as a separate kind of literature, not on the grounds of literary characteristics, but because it offered unique perspectives on the sufferings of oppressed women. What Tan did not mention was whether women would continue to produce distinctly female literature once men's oppression had ceased to exist.

The two earlier articles by Liu Linsheng and Zhou Zuoren invoked similar reasons for directing special attention to women's literature. Liu and Zhou both called for a women's literature that was authentic, a literature that articulated women's own feelings and experiences. Women's literature, they felt, had been inauthentic in the past. Liu complained that women had imitated men, and failed to develop their own literary specialities. Since men's and women's "old-style" lives had differed, he reasoned, their tones of voice ought to be different too. But instead, women had tried to sound just like the men. Liu thought this would change once women started participating in the creation of new literature. They would then "compete with the men in creating the new literature - and create a Women's New Literature" (ibid:2). Zhou Zuoren thought women in the past had been writing not for their own sake, but for the purpose of flattering men. They had never "written the true Woman" as Zhou called it, with a reference to John Stuart Mill. Women should write about themselves in order to explain their true selves to the rest of humanity. "Women's literature", then, should be a literature that represents women, explains women, and gives expression to skills peculiar to women.

Yet Zhou's and Liu's ideas about a new women's literature are fraught with contradiction. If men's and women's old-style literature ought to have been different because their old-style lives had been different, then what about the new-style lives of men and women? Would the New Woman lead a life sufficiently different from the men's so as to enable her to establish a distinct

literary voice? How would the New Woman go about competing with the men on the one hand and creating a distinctly female literature on the other? Women writers should, according to Liu, pay attention to everyday language, write in a realistic vein and read foreign as well as Chinese literature. Liu's list of requirements, as Wendy Larson accurately points out, probably does not differ greatly from what Liu would ask of male writers (Larson 1998:144). The creation of a Women's New Literature, then, paradoxically involved following a set of rules made up by men, and followed by men and women alike. Zhou did not set up rules, but left the shaping of women's literature to the women themselves. However, he made it clear that the overarching purpose of literature remains the same for men and women: literature was to promote understanding of the whole of humanity, across class, nation and gender divisions. Literature united mankind, it (Zhou quotes Andreyev) "wipes away all boundaries and differences" (Zhou 1922:8). In these two articles on the subject of women and literature, the tension between women's writing as an integrated part of New Literature and women's writing as a specifically female position was never resolved.

### *Conclusion*

Although in the Republican period, men's and women's roles in literary practice began to resemble each other, "women's literature" was still often regarded as, or treated as, separate or different from men's. Contemporary texts explain this difference in terms of historical practice, authentic female experience and/or essentially female qualities of female authored texts.

Proponents of New Literature, such as Zhou Zuoren, attempted to construct 'women's literature' as modern. They described earlier women's literature as either nonexistent or inadequate, while predicting a bright future for women's literature in the era of literary revolution.



We must be wary of accepting such claims at face value. In imperial China, not only did some women read and write literature, but their literature was written about and promoted by influential literati. This fact, moreover, appears to have been widely known by Republican writers, critics and literary historians. Zhou Zuoren's denial of the female tradition in literature should therefore be understood as a strategy for claiming women's literature for the New literature project.

Rejecting the female tradition, Zhou and other New Culturalists explained their treating women's literature as a separate entity by referring to the importance of authentic female experience. They understood women's literature as a result of two kinds of emancipation: the emancipation of literature and the emancipation of women. The female experiences they sought in women's literature were experiences of oppression. Here, they ran into a dilemma, for although they saw women's literature as belonging to the future, they failed to explain its independent existence without reference to the past. Women's literature was "modern", but what made it uniquely female was a female experience shaped by repressive traditions.

In the next chapter, I will turn to another modern discourse which provided new reasons for considering women's literature separate: scientific discourse.

## Chapter Two: Science, sex and literature

### *Modern theories of gender*

Writings on women's emancipation constituted, as we have seen, an important discursive context of writings on women and literature. Were there then no other modern theories of gender apart from that of women's emancipation? In this chapter, I suggest that writings on women and literature were informed not only by feminism, but at times also by modern "scientific" theories stemming from medical science, biology and psychology.

According to Wendy Larson, the theory of women's emancipation dominated all discussion about women's issues in Republican China (1998:1). Whereas discussions of literature were dominated by the modernising theory of the autonomous aesthetic, "For women, the modernizing concept was women's liberation" (Ibid: 7-8). This Western-derived concept was modified, however, by a traditional notion of womanhood based on the concept of *de* or moral virtue. *De*, according to Larson, was a physical, concrete practice involving bodily restriction and self-sacrifice. It was because of the traditional Chinese concept of *de* that "the female body took on a heightened significance and sex, singlehood (refusal to marry) and physical education became widely debated" (Ibid:3). Vestiges of a concrete/physical *de* as the definition of womanhood complicated modern women writers' involvement in the abstract activity of writing. Larson implies that "traditional" womanhood was physical whereas modern theories of gender claimed the abstract and transcendent - freedom, individuality, and literary creation - for women.

However, we must not forget that in Western philosophy, the body-mind dichotomy had since ancient times taken on gendered meanings, often with Woman as body, matter, immanence and passion, and Man as mind, form,

transcendence and reason (Lloyd 1993). Can we rule out the possibility that in early 20th century China both "body" and "mind" took on new gendered meanings derived from Western sources? The emphasis on "physicality" in debates about women need not have originated with "tradition", for modernising discourses did, as we shall see, supply their own versions of the physical, and of physical Woman.

Tani Barlow (1994) has suggested that before it was possible to imagine the emancipation of women in China, Woman as a category had first to be invented. According to Barlow, there was in late imperial China no notion of a stable female essence. Gender was relational, and women were produced through their positions in the kinship structure and their enactment of Confucian "protocol". When early 20th century modernisers tried to conceptualise women outside a kinship structure and a Confucianism that they wanted to reform or destroy, they deployed a Western concept of essential Woman which they translated as *nüxing*, literally "female-sex". This *nüxing* was "one half of the Western, exclusionary, essentialized, male/female binary" which "established a foundational womanhood beyond kin categories"(Ibid: 266). Her essence lay in her biology and her being was suffused with sexuality.

Barlow's account is interesting because it questions the stability of gender categories and of conceptions of the body and the physical. It shows that ways of conceptualising women (and men) underwent fundamental changes in this period and that liberal feminism was not the only modern theory involved in these changes. Most importantly, Barlow points to the existence in Republican China of a Western-derived idea of essential womanhood (and manhood) founded in the biological body. This is, I believe, an accurate observation.

Concrete examples of how essential Man and Woman came into being can be found in Frank Dikötter's (1995) detailed study of sexological discourse in early republican China. Dikötter analyses how sexual identities were

constructed in a wide range of medical writings, including academic and lay texts, writings which were extremely common at this time. In these texts, men and women are represented as biological organisms, self-contained entities cut loose from the Confucian cosmology. Here, gender difference was sex difference: not a question of difference in social roles preordained by Heaven, but of difference in reproductive system, in blood, in brain, in bone structure, in nervous system - in short, in every single part of the body. Medical and biological discourse was extremely influential in China according to Dikötter, who goes so far as to argue that "human biology replaced Confucian philosophy as the epistemological foundation for social order" (1995:9). Biological knowledge of the mechanics of reproduction, for instance, was the key to improvement of population quality. Likewise, biological theories of sex difference could solve the problems surrounding women's status. "The social roles of women and men were thus thought to be firmly grounded in biology: gender hierarchy was now represented as 'natural' and 'progressive'" (Ibid:9).

Dikötter's analysis of gender in scientific discourse provides ample proof that women's emancipation was not the only "modernising discourse" to supply new ways of conceptualising gender. Modern science informed discussions of gender to a very large extent, even outside strictly medical or sexological works. Biology, physiology and medicine, but also psychology and anthropology, were by many considered crucial to the understanding of the true relationship between the sexes.

### *Science and feminism*

Science could potentially provide a theory of gender as modern as, but radically opposed to, liberal feminism. Throughout the 19th century, many Western scientists had tried to prove that men and women were fundamentally

and inherently different in order to provide a rationale for the sexual division of labour. In the view of these scientists, Woman's biological make-up showed that motherhood was her ultimate destiny. (Russett 1989). Similar arguments found their way into China. In 1915 the pioneering New Culture magazine *Xin qingnian* (New Youth) published a translation from Japanese entitled "Woman and science" which explained the relationship between men and women in strictly biological terms. It argued that menstruation and the earlier development of girls was enough to prove that women were destined for motherhood. For them, therefore, reproduction should come before their personal development and their lives as individuals. (Kosakai:1915).

However, the relationship between discourses of science and of women's emancipation was by no means clear-cut. Some Chinese writers tried to combine scientific theories of sex difference with feminism. Since most of the available scientific theories had been created in a rather anti-feminist environment in the West, this enterprise was not without its difficulties. But for May Fourth intellectuals, science and women's emancipation both stood for modernity, for liberation from the shackles of tradition. In their view, science would disprove Confucian "superstitions" concerning women. In an article entitled "The scientific foundation of feminism" the biologist Zhou Jianren (1889 – 1984), brother of Zhou Zuoren and Lu Xun, wrote:

If we do not agree to follow the old rules blindly, but want to investigate thoroughly what the spheres of activities of men and women ought to be, then we must first find out what biological and psychological differences there are between men and women. (Zhou 1923:2).

One expert to whom Chinese writers turned in order to find out about the biological and psychological differences between men and women was the

English sexologist Havelock Ellis (1859 - 1939). His sexology was reworked and adapted to Chinese circumstances, as selections from, and edited versions of, his work appeared in print. For example, in Zhang Weici's abridged version of Ellis on women's intelligence (Zhang Weici 1930) the translator's voice is conflated with the author's, so that Ellis seems to be talking about "our China" and mentions Yang Guifei, Wu Zetian and empress dowager Cixi as examples of famous women. When Fei Yunhe translated parts of *Man and woman*<sup>1</sup>, he selected those parts which dealt with the relative skills and abilities of men and women. Like Zhou Jianren, he believed it necessary find out about these differences between the sexes in order to find solutions to the pressing issues of women's education, women's liberation and women's participation in politics. (Fei 1933). Ellis' ideas of complementarity were used both to support greater equality between men and women, and to caution against radical feminism. Yang Elian's and Zhu Xijun's *Nūzi xinli xue* (English title: Psychology of woman) was put together from Yang's translations of foreign texts, in particular Ellis' *Man and woman* and writings by the Japanese Sasabe. The editors' aim was to modify Sasabe's negative view of women through comparisons with scientific experiments. To them, Ellis represented a progressive view as compared to Sasabe's "Eastern" (*dongfang pai*) ideas of female inferiority. Jiang Qi (1925), on the other hand, referred to Ellis when arguing for separate educational paths for boys and girls. Ellis and other Western scholars had, according to Jiang, refuted the philosophical idea of equality as sameness, and "embraced the scientific idea of equality with difference" (Ibid:3).

Two competing publications of the late twenties were committed to women's liberation as well as to the exploration of sex and biological sex difference: *Xin nūxing* (New woman), which was edited by Zhang Xichen and to which Zhou Jianren contributed, and *Xin wenhua* (New culture), edited by Zhang Jingsheng alias "Doctor Sex" (*Xing Boshi*). In these magazines,

discussions about biological sex, new sexual morality, women's rights, and eugenics appeared side by side, informing each other. Zhang Jingsheng, for instance, believed that better sex would change society and the status of women within it.<sup>2</sup> (Peng 1995).

### *Sex difference and talent*

Scientific theories of sex difference were clearly influential. But did they have anything at all to do with literary discourse? At first glance, it appears as if they did not. Literary magazines did not publish articles about biological sex difference. It was not the case, however, that scientific knowledge was kept completely apart from literary knowledge. Literary figures were often interested in a wide range of subjects in addition to literature. Zhou Zuoren and Shi Zhecun, for example, were both avid readers of Havelock Ellis (Lee 1999:125; Pollard 1973: 128-129; Pollard 1976:335). We also have to consider that most writings about the relationship between gender and writing were not published in strictly literary magazines in the first place, but in books and the women's press.

Science figures prominently in the introductory discussion of women's status in Xie Wuliang's *History of Chinese women's literature*. Xie used scientific arguments to support the emancipation of women. "Modern biologists" had shown, he wrote, that the inferior physical strength of women was caused by the "circumstances, habits and heredity of some thousand years" and not by an unchangeable divine law. The weakness of women was not *xiantian* - preordained by Heaven - but *houtian*, caused by secondary factors. It was the result, not the cause, of concubinage and the sexual division of labour. Once the social situations of men and women had changed, their biological constitution might change too. Xie did not think men's and women's intelligence and talent for literature were ever affected by their unequal status and unequal

physical strength, but he still chose to use biology as a setting for his book. To him biological knowledge proved that the roles of men and women were not fixed once and for all, and this opened up new prospects for writing women. In many other texts however, biology was presented as doing exactly the opposite: fixing a female essence which limited the possibilities of the woman writer.

*The ladies' journal* "was the most influential and had the widest circulation, the most subscribers and the longest life of the mainstream women's magazines that followed the New Culture fad" (Wang 1999:67). It served as a forum for debates over women's place in society, and, between 1921 and 1925 at least, disseminated feminist ideas (Ibid: 67-116). The magazine is of particular interest here because it featured a relatively large number of articles on the relationship between women and literature. Over the years, *The ladies' journal* published a number of articles debating the existence of sex difference in intelligence and other mental faculties. A majority of these were translations from Western languages or Japanese. Although they all agreed that women should not be regarded as inferior to men, they disagreed as to the reason why women, in the past, had been less successful than men in intellectual and artistic pursuits. Some believed this to be a result of the oppression of women, others again of essential sex differences between the male and female psyches. I will refer to the former as the "environmentalist" and the latter as the "essentialist" position.

Writers of the environmentalist and the essentialist persuasion both discussed a number of scientific theories of sex difference. Newer theories of sex difference such as genetics and endocrinology were sometimes mentioned (Zhou 1923; Lecky 1928), but more space was given to 19th century theories such as the "Great Brain" theory, the idea that differentiation equals perfectibility, and the variability hypotheses (for an introduction to these



theories, see Russett 1989). The Great Brain theory, which held that intelligence is proportional to the size of the brain, was refuted by both sides of the argument (Bebel 1924; Lecky 1928). The idea that differentiation is a hallmark of evolution had been a common belief in 19th century Western natural science and social theory - in the animal kingdom, the differentiation of reproductive functions indicated a move on to a higher evolutionary stage, and in society, the division of labour indicated a higher civilisation (Russett 1989: 130-154). In *The ladies' journal*, this view was voiced by the Japanese Fujigawa Yu who believed differences of male and female psychology to be products of an "extreme differentiation" and cautioned against the appearance of a "third sex" - masculinised emancipated women - which he thought might drag humanity back to an earlier evolutionary stage (Fujigawa 1922: 63-64,69).

One of the most pervasive 19th century theories of sex difference in the West was the variability hypothesis, which remained "accepted scientific wisdom" well into the 20th century (Russett 1989:92). This theory held that there is more individual variation among men than among women, and that because of this, there are more freaks, idiots and criminals but also more highly talented individuals among men. The theory is frequently referred to in the articles in *The ladies' journal*. Essentialists such as Fujigawa (1922), Ellis (1924;1931), and Lecky (1928) found in it a very powerful argument, whereas environmentalists such as Starch (1922), Bebel (1924) and Kopald (1925) tried to disprove it or demonstrate its irrelevance.

The *The ladies' journal* articles on sex difference in intelligence focussed on two questions: Firstly, what basic differences, if any, are there between male and female psyches? Secondly, can women be geniuses? According to the environmentalists, all existing differences between male and female minds could be attributed to the influence of the environment. It therefore seemed reasonable to assume, until otherwise proven, that men's and women's minds

were fundamentally similar and that women could indeed be geniuses (Starch 1922; Jian Meng 1923; Bebel 1924; Kopald 1925). To the essentialists, sex difference in the mind and elsewhere was deeply rooted in human biology. Differentiation, indicative, as we have seen, of advanced evolution, entailed that women specialise in reproduction while men were free to engage in a wide range of human activities. Women, in Fujigawa's words, were made to "preserve the species", men to "preserve the individual" (1922: 64).

Consequently, women's minds were specially designed for motherhood. In preparation for their reproductive tasks girls matured more quickly than boys, thereby missing out, was the implication, on the intellectual development which occurred in boys in their late teens. The girls' minds remained practical rather than theoretical, they were to concern themselves with the concrete, not the abstract (Goldenwieser 1925; Hu 1927). According to psychological tests, the associations of the female imagination were limited to things personal and nearby. The presumed greater variability among men pointed to a similar conclusion: women were all meant to be doing the same job, one that required feeling and a certain amount of intelligence, but not genius. Therefore the female intelligence stayed close to the average (Ellis 1924). Men could be geniuses, women were doomed to mediocrity. They did not need, and did not want, to be geniuses (Lecky 1928). As the guardians of generations to come they stood for continuity and conservatism, whereas men stood for progress and change. Men discovered and invented, women assimilated new knowledge and put the men's inventions to use (Goldenwieser 1925; Lecky 1928; Ellis 1931). They were never original. But this did not mean that women were in any way inferior to men. Sex difference was a question of complementarity, and each sex served its particular purpose equally well. Woman's lesser rational powers were balanced by her strong and rich emotions. "Woman is instinctive, emotional and intuitive, Man is intellectual, strong-willed and reflective" wrote

Hu Haizhou (1927:9) and Ellis explained that women's greater emotionality or affectability was the fundamental psychological sex difference (1924: 1696).

The writers' ideas about sex difference and intelligence of course had certain consequences for their views on the relationship between gender and art. Environmentalists thought the lack of famous women artists resulted from a lack of opportunity for women. Essentialists, however, believed it to be a direct consequence of certain innate characteristics of the female mind. Women simply were less creative than men. As we have seen, they were seldom geniuses, they were not original or progressive and they lacked abstract, systematic thinking. They did not even have the urge to express themselves artistically, for as mothers they already created more with their bodies than men could ever hope to create with their minds. Art, according to Havelock Ellis, was Man's compensation for not being able to give birth (Ellis 1931:41). As artists, women were relatively good at the primitive, the imitative and the concrete. According to one writer, women in primitive societies were as artistic as the men. As civilisation evolved, however, art developed onto a level of higher abstraction where creativity and originality mattered more than tradition. When this happened, the women lost out - civilisation evolved, but their artistic talent stayed primitive. (Goldenwieser 1925). In modern society, women excelled only in those arts which demanded little creativity or originality: singing and acting. As for the other arts, they were better at the "concrete" than the "abstract" ones. A curious result of this idea was that since women undoubtedly were relatively good at writing literature, literature must be defined as a concrete rather than an abstract art form. The visual arts were more abstract than literature, sculpture was the most abstract of the visual arts and drama the most abstract kind of literature. Poetry was more abstract than the novel. (Goldenwieser 1925; Ellis 1931). According to the essentialist view, then, women could contribute very little to literature and the arts, as they lacked

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originality and abstract thinking. It follows that if they were to contribute anything at all, it would be that singular asset of theirs: their richness of feeling.

Through *The ladies' journal*, theories about sex difference in intelligence and artistic creativity were translated and presented to Chinese readers. This magazine which played an important role in discussions of the Woman Question, and which published a relatively great number of articles about women and literature, also introduced modern theories which viewed women as concrete rather than abstract, bodily rather than intellectual, and as lacking the transcending powers of creativity and imagination.

#### *A women's literature based on sex difference*

Sex difference could provide a rationale for the separateness and uniqueness of women's literature. The 1931 *The ladies' journal* special issue on women and literature featured an article which based its views of gender and literature directly on scientific theories of sex difference. Here, Zeng Juezhi set out to explore the implications of the "latest findings in comparative psychology" for the understanding of sex difference in literature (1931:15).

Zeng presented his article as a disinterested account. He explained that he did not want to take part in the age-old argument about the relative merits of men's and women's writing. Instead, he sought to dispel all prejudices concerning women and literature and replace these with objective, scientifically proven facts. (Ibid: 15;18). Zeng adhered to the idea of the complementarity of the sexes. The sexes, he claimed, were so different that comparison between them was impossible, and consequently, it was impossible to determine which was the superior sex (Ibid:19).

The essential differences between the sexes had been identified through scientific observation and experiments. Physiology had shown, for instance,

that women's muscular power was two thirds of men's, that their brains were lighter, and that the parts of their brains which governed sensations were more developed than those which governed observations. Experiments had demonstrated that men had a keener sense of smell than women, but that women's perceptions were quicker. (Ibid:18). These differences all stemmed from fundamental differences at a microscopic level. "According to the experts' research", Zeng wrote, sex difference manifested itself in the cells, the building blocks of the human body (Ibid: 20). Since sex difference was present in every tiny cell, it followed naturally that the organism made up of these cells must exhibit sex difference in every aspect of its life.

Psychology had proved that there were great differences between men's and women's psychological developments and intellectual abilities. Girls matured more quickly than boys, but their intellectual development stopped abruptly at the onset of puberty, when they "turned back into themselves" in preparation for motherhood. Women's memory was inferior to men's, and so was their ability for abstract thinking: their associations were contiguous (*linjie xing de*) rather than analogous (*xiangsi xing de*). Their observations were limited to that which was close by and connected to themselves. They were good at memorising facts, but could not create independently. (Ibid: 18). Their one redeeming feature, which made up for all these limitations, was their depth of emotion. Men had intellect, women had feeling. (Ibid:19).

Just as men's and women's psyches were different, so was their literature, according to Zeng:

The reason why men's and women's intellects are different, is simply because of sex difference. That is, women's brains are made up of female cells, and men's brains are made up of male cells. Because of this, men and women are separate, they occupy different spheres. Women have female essence, men

have male essence. As to literature and the arts, there are women poets, women authors, and women artists, and these are all different from male poets, male authors and male artists, while there is no point in [talking about] inferiority or superiority. The difference between men's and women's literary works is most obvious. Try and read any book - if you have got the least discernment, you will be able to decide before having read more than a few pages whether it was written by a woman or not. (Ibid:20).

The difference between men's and women's writing was evident both in their choice of genres and in their styles. Women were active only in a limited number of genres, namely the lyrical genres of *shi*, *ci*, *ge*, *fu* and *tanci*, and, in the West, in poetry, novels and letters. These genres were emotive and subjective, and suited women's emotional, inward-turned character. The more objective and impersonal, abstract and systematic genres of *sanwen*, history, philosophy, literary criticism, and drama were left to the men. Because of the obvious differences between Chinese and Western women's choice of genre, Zeng ran into trouble here. Poetry which, as we have seen, was described as "abstract" by Western writers who considered it a "male" genre, must now be characterised as emotional and personal in order to explain its popularity with Chinese women writers. Zeng failed altogether to account for the ambiguous position of the novel, which was "male" in China but "female" in the West. (Ibid:15-16). Not being creative, women writers had to rely on imitation of set forms and on minute observation of their own immediate environment when producing literature. When it came to style, women wrote with natural elegance in an expressive manner, whereas men's writing was more structured, logical and complex (Ibid:20).

Male and female writing were, according to Zeng, two equally valuable and complementary literary traditions. Nevertheless, he asked the question

whether writing was to be considered a “normal” activity for women? Women, he pointed out, were less in need of literary activities than were men. Like Ellis, he held that women “created” through motherhood and that art was Man's compensation. “Love” was the ultimate goal of all women, and a woman who devoted herself to art would have to sacrifice love. Therefore most women were better off as wives and mothers than as artists or writers. (Ibid: 20-22).

However, Zeng did not rule out the possibility that this situation might change in the future, when women would be less burdened by domestic duties, whereas men more often than before would devote themselves to materialistic pursuits. Modern literary trends, which emphasised feeling and spontaneity at the expense of deep and careful thought, indicated that literature was already becoming feminised.

Although he recognised that literary trends and the social and economic roles of men and women were changing, Zeng believed that men's and women's literature would and should remain essentially different in the future. In this he differed from the proponents of New Literature discussed in Chapter One. Like Liu Linsheng he advised women not to imitate male writers, but unlike Liu he specified which “female” traits were to characterise women's literature. “Men are good at reasoning and abstraction whereas women have rich emotions, each sex has its undisputed talent, and each should develop its particular advantage” (Ibid:23).

Zeng Juezhi based his ideas about men's and women's literature on scientific theories of sex difference. According to him, men's and women's literature were essentially different. The modern theories he adhered to led him to conclude that women's writing was less abstract, intellectual and original than men's.



### *Psychological perspectives*

Whereas Zeng Juezhi used scientific theories in order to throw light upon the nature of literature, others used literature as research material in their pursuit of scientific truths. Two writers, Xie Kang and Pan Guangdan, attempted to use women's literature as a key to female psychology. In Chinese women's literature, they saw sexual and maternal instincts, and sexual abnormalities.

In an article in *Gexin zazhi* (Reconstruction), Xie Kang (1923) argued that traditional Chinese women's poetry contained the information needed in order to map the psyche of Chinese Woman. His findings would, he hoped, be of use to the project of women's emancipation. He sought to draw attention to the need for gender equality by exposing the ill effects of male domination on the female psyche (Ibid:3). By identifying strong and weak points of female psychology he attempted to show which aspects of the female mind should be developed, and which aspects should be kept in check, in the interest of "male-female equality and happiness" (Ibid:4).

At the same time, Xie saw his article as a contribution to a tradition of writing about women's poetry. He referred to earlier anthologies and *shihua* such as Zhong Xing's *Selection of poems by famous ladies*, Zhou Shouchang's *Gonggui wenxuan* (Selected writings from the palace and the inner chambers), Lu Meicha's *Hongshulou xuan* (Red tree mansion anthology), Yun Zhu's *Collection of correct beginnings* and Wang Yunzhang's *Ranzhi yuyun* (More lamp oil rhymes). "When it comes to such a fascinating and important topic," he wrote, "the right thing to do is to carry on the work of older generations, to continue the study of our old ancestors, and bring it to a successful conclusion" (Ibid:2).

Xie identified a number of characteristics of the Chinese female mind, namely sexual instinct, maternal instinct, love, and jealousy, which he treated in his first article, and empathy, sensitivity (*shouganxing*), goodness, beauty

(*youmei*), meticulousness (*xiyi*), quiet dignity and refinement (*jingzhuan*), dependency, weakness, melancholia, timidity, superstition and vanity, which were to be treated in a later instalment of his study (Ibid:1). These traits had all left their mark on Chinese women's literature. Some of them, such as dependency, weakness, timidity, superstition and vanity, Xie argued, were the results of the oppression of women (Ibid:4). Others, such as the sexual and maternal instincts were inborn traits which could be modified, but never eradicated.

According to Sigmund Freud (1856 - 1939) and psychoanalysis, Xie reported, all human beings harboured sexual desire from childhood, and our strongest subconscious wishes all had to do with sexual desire (Ibid:4-5). Sexual desire represented "the meaning of the universe - the completion and continuation of the individual and the race (Ibid:5)". Not only did women have sexual urges, but their sexuality matured earlier than men's. Unfortunately for Chinese women, *lijiao* had restricted their expression of sexual desire. In literature, their sexual instinct was seldom expressed in an uninhibited way. However, using a number of examples of women's writing from ancient times to the Qing, Xie attempted to demonstrate that the sexual instinct was nevertheless always present in women's literature. In very early literature, such as the *Book of songs*, women treated sexual matters in a direct and naive manner. Later, women writers found more roundabout ways of expressing their sexuality. Xie concluded:

Any perceptive person will immediately feel that there is a hidden sexual motive behind this kind of literary work! The authors above include three groups, eminent ladies, talented women of the inner chambers, and courtesans of the blue buildings. Indeed, when it comes to the part played by sexual instinct in women's literature, what is there on the inside will manifest itself on the outside. (Ibid:11).

In Xie's view, then, disparate groups of female writers such as palace women, gentrywomen and courtesans were united by a fundamental sexual instinct which characterised all women, and which inspired their literary endeavours.

The maternal instinct, which was peculiar to women, represented nothing less than the "important purpose for which Nature had prepared women" and the "foundation of the life of the human race" (Ibid:12). The love of one's offspring, furthermore, was characteristic of highly evolved species of animals. On a more negative note, the maternal instinct could sometimes be too strong. Unlike the sexual instinct in women, it was particularly developed in China, where women indulged their maternal instinct too much. (Ibid:15).

Like the sexual instinct, the maternal instinct manifested itself in literary works by women throughout the ages. Xie's examples included the poems ascribed to Cai Yan, the Late Han noblewoman who was kidnapped by the Huns, and when later ransomed, forced to leave her two sons by a Hun chieftain behind, as well as other texts lamenting the death of or separation from children, or expressing a wish of having children. Xie chose to interpret all of these as expressions of the same maternal instinct. A childless wife who wrote a poem commending her husband's taking a concubine, for instance, vented her instinctive desire for offspring rather than showed her lack of jealousy, or acknowledged the importance of carrying on the male line. (12-15).

According to psychologists, Xie wrote, the maternal instinct was partly selfish, because the offspring it strove to preserve was in one sense a continuation of the mother's own body. Xie suggested that the metaphors used by one mother to describe her grief over the separation from her son mirrored this circumstance. When Yan Ji of the Northern Zhou dynasty wrote of "pain in the heart" (*gan chang zhi tong*, literally, "pain in the liver and intestine") and "sorrow binding flesh and bone" (*bei chan ji gu*), her choice of words revealed a sense of a biological continuation between mother and child. (Ibid:14).

Unlike Zeng Juezhi, Xie Kang did not hold that men's and women's literature were completely and utterly different, or that abstraction, rationality and originality were out of bounds for women writers. However, Xie's account did present women's literature as the artistic product of "Essential Woman". According to Xie, the sexual and maternal instincts were inborn characteristics common to all women, and these traits characterised women's literature as well as the women themselves.

Another reinterpretation of female literature in psychological terms was made by Pan Guangdan (1899-1967), better known for his writings on eugenics and related subjects. In 1922, Pan went to the United States where he studied zoology at Dartmouth College and biology, sociology and eugenics at Columbia University. He returned to China in 1926 to work as a university professor and an editor. In the years to come he published extensively on eugenics, population control, "national health", and the status of women. His interests extended to sexology, and he translated and published several works by Havelock Ellis in the 1930s. He was also one of the co-founders of the Xinyue shudian (Crescent Moon book store) in 1927. (Boorman 1970:61-62; Xu 1991:1467-1468)

In 1922, Pan wrote an article which discussed the female poet Feng Xiaoqing from the perspective of psychoanalysis. It was published in *The ladies' journal* in 1924. Pan later reworked it, adding chapters about psychoanalysis and about the language of Qing dynasty women ci-writers, and published it in book form in 1927. Already in the earlier version, Pan revealed an interest in heredity (*yichuan*). He explained that he had originally intended to investigate how Feng Xiaoqing's characteristics were inherited, but that he had had to give up the idea because too little was known about Xiaoqing's family (Pan 1924: 1715). Instead, he used Xiaoqing's poetry and biographies of Xiaoqing to psychoanalyse her. Pan conceded that it was yet to be determined

whether psychoanalysis really adhered to the principles of science, but pointed out that the theory had already influenced psychology, medical science, and literature (Ibid:1717).

Feng Xiaoqing, if she ever existed, was a Ming dynasty concubine. Her husband's first wife was jealous and had Xiaoqing removed to a separate house by the West Lake, where her husband rarely visited her. In her isolation, Xiaoqing wasted away and died at the age of eighteen. Very little of Xiaoqing's poetry survived and its authenticity was debated from the start. Nevertheless, the story of Xiaoqing fascinated writers, readers and theatre goers in the Ming and Qing. The Xiaoqing figure was variously interpreted as a woman devoted to the ideal of *qing* (feeling or passion), the innocent victim of a jealous wife, the quintessential example of a talented, literate girl who dies young, one party of a warm female friendship, and an allegory of misunderstood male genius. (Widmer 1992; Ko 1994: 91-110). In the eighteenth century the famous poet Chen Wenshu, who advocated women's poetry, restored the graves of Xiaoqing and two other legendary female poets of Hangzhou, thus contributing to Xiaoqing's fame as a tragic talented beauty.

To "Xiaoqing's literary legacy" (Widmer 1992) Pan Guangdan added his modern interpretation of Xiaoqing as a psychologically abnormal individual. His version of the Xiaoqing story differed markedly from earlier ones. As a modern writer he was not interested in the jealousy of bad first wives or the mortal dangers of literacy in young girls. Neither did he emphasise the themes of loyalty and fidelity present in interpretations of Xiaoqing as devoted wife or (in an allegorical reading) misunderstood intellectual banished by his ruler. Pan picked up on the themes of passion, friendship and loneliness but turned them into something new. His Xiaoqing was all about sexuality: passion was sexual instinct, loneliness equalled sexual deprivation and female friendship contained lesbian possibilities.

Xiaoqing, Pan argued, suffered from the type of sexual abnormality which psychoanalysts call "narcissism". According to Freud, Pan explained in his book, normal sexuality always developed in stages, as sexual desire was transferred from one object to another. Desire for one's mother changed into love of oneself, then into homosexual love, and finally into "normal" heterosexual desire. Sexual abnormality was caused by stagnating at or regressing to an earlier stage of development. (Pan 1927: 23-34). Xiaoqing's narcissistic sexual desire represented a very early stage of development as it was directed towards herself.

Several details in the Xiaoqing story as recorded by Zhi Ruzeng and Zhang Chao<sup>3</sup> supported Pan's diagnosis. In her home by the lake, Xiaoqing spent a lot of time dressing and making up in front of her mirror, in spite of the fact that she had no male visitors. She was often seen talking to her own reflection in the lake. Although Xiaoqing's only friend, a Madame Yang, prompted her to remarry, Xiaoqing refused. Finally, shortly before she died, Xiaoqing had her portrait painted three times before she was satisfied with the outcome, and she offered a libation to the third portrait. Pan argued that these incidents pointed to an obsession of Xiaoqing with her own image. (Pan 1924:1710-1711). She refused to remarry not because she was loyal and virtuous, but because she was uninterested in marriage, the sole object of her sexual desire being herself (Ibid:1713). The friendship with Madame Yang represented a possibility of transforming Xiaoqing's self-love into lesbian love, homosexuality being the most common way out of narcissism. When Madame Yang moved away, Xiaoqing's narcissism typically got worse. (Ibid: 1714).

Pan explained that psychoanalysts believed all artistic and literary creation stemmed from sexual frustration. Although Pan himself found this theory somewhat exaggerated, he agreed that sexuality was a major source of inspiration for literary creation. Psychoanalysis, he believed, offered fresh

perspectives on literature, and could be of use to literary criticism. (Ibid: 1710). As for Xiaoqing's poetry, Pan understood it as an expression of her sexual abnormality. He pointed out that in one poem, the character *zi* (self), normally avoided by poets, was repeated three times. Lines such as "A slender shadow coming to, and reflected in, spring water's edge:/ You should pity me, as I pity you" (translation by Wai-Yee Li in Chang and Saussy 1999: 619) provided additional proof of Xiaoqing's narcissism. (Pan 1924:1711-1712).

Pan saw Xiaoqing's narcissism as an example of wider problems concerning China's women. The inclusion of a chapter on Qing women *ci*-writers language in his book shows that Pan was concerned not only with the individual Xiaoqing but with traditional Chinese women as a group. Qing women *ci*-writers, he demonstrated, used unusually many "negative words" in their poetry, reflecting a repressed mindset (*jingshen yujie*). One possible explanation for this, Pan suggested, was that the women poets' sex lives had been deficient or unsuitable. (Pan 1927: 119-132). Similarly, Xiaoqing's narcissism was caused by sexual deprivation. Her lack of appropriate sexual stimulation was in turn a result of women's position in society, in particular of the segregation of the sexes. Integration of the sexes, coeducation and sex education, would hopefully cure Chinese women of narcissism. (Pan 1924: 1716-1717).

Xie Kang and Pan Guangdan both reinterpreted traditional women's writings from the point of view of psychology and psychoanalysis. They saw women's literature as a key to women's psyches, a tool which would help analyse Chinese women's minds and diagnose their mental illnesses. Xie and Pan were critical of gender segregation, which they saw as a cause of mental illness and psychological flaws in China's female population. However, they did not primarily interpret women's literature in terms oppression and resistance, but saw it also as an outlet for instinctive urges, in particular for a repressed

sexuality. The modern elements in their interpretations of women's literature provided an idea of women not as transcendent, intellectual beings but as sexual, bodily creatures.

### *Conclusion*

Although feminism dominated much discussion about women in Republican China, it was not the only modern theory about women influential at the time. Modern theories of gender and of sex were also supplied by different sciences such as medical science, biology, physiology, sexology, anthropology, and psychology. Chinese intellectuals often tried to reconcile feminism with scientific theories of sex difference, since to them feminism and science both meant liberation from prejudice and tradition. Much scientific knowledge of sex difference, however, contained anti-feminist elements which were hard to avoid. Here, essential Woman was defined as emotional rather than rational, concrete rather than abstract, conservative rather than progressive, imitative rather than original, mediocre rather than genial, and as creating through the body rather than through the mind.

The suggestion that "modernity" claimed the intellectual, transcendent and literary for women, whereas "tradition" defined womanhood as physical or bodily does not hold up. While one kind of modernity - women's emancipation - emphasised women's connection with intellectual pursuits, another kind of modernity - scientific knowledge - defined femininity as concrete and physical.

Scientific versions of femininity did at times inform discussions of women and literature. Zeng Juezhi argued for a gendered division of literature based directly upon scientific theories of sex difference. He believed that as a result of fundamental differences between male and female biology, there were essential differences between male and female literature. Female writers were



emotional, subjective and spontaneous, and active in only in a limited number of genres, whereas men were rational and objective, able to construct complex literary works, and active in all literary genres.

Xie Kang's and Pan Guangdan's psychologically inspired accounts of women's literature did not define Woman as the more physical and concrete, and the less rational and artistic sex. However, they did not convey an idea of women writers' transcendence through the intellectual activity of writing, either. Instead, they associated women writers with sexuality, instinctive urges, and mental disease.

### Chapter Three: The making of a history of Chinese women's literature

#### *Republican writers on traditional women's literature*

The fact that "*funü wenxue*" or women's literature is a modern concept does not mean that women's literature was thought of in the Republican period as a modern phenomenon. A substantial part of what was written in the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s on the topic of women and literature was concerned with historical rather than contemporary women's writing. The period saw the publication of a considerable number of articles about women writers of imperial times, anthologies of traditional women's poetry, and histories of women's literature. Writings about traditional women's literature played an important part in defining the meaning of the term "women's literature", which referred to the works of earlier writers like Cai Yan, Yu Xuanji and Li Qingzhao as much as to the works of the contemporary Bing Xin, Lu Yin and Ding Ling.

How was traditional literature by women viewed in the Republican period? Recent scholarship provides us with two very different answers to this question. For Wendy Larson (1998), the Republican period was the moment of discovery of traditional women's literature. Larson holds that women and literature were seen as incompatible in traditional China - although women had been writing even in imperial times, writing was considered a male activity, and women's writing did not gain recognition. A female tradition in Chinese literature was therefore first discovered, or invented, in the Republican period, when the concept of "women's literature" was forged, femininity in literature celebrated and a genealogy of female writing unearthed. Although leftist critics who derided feminine writing soon brought on "the end of *funü wenxue*" (Larson 1993), the Republican era contained a short period of glory for gender-sensitive readings and categorisations of literature and for the appreciation of

women's writing old and new.

Not surprisingly, experts on late imperial women's culture disagree with Larson as to how traditional women's literature was perceived in the Republican period. Ellen Widmer (2001) and Dorothy Ko (1994) argue that far from being discovered and celebrated, female cultural traditions were being obscured and devalued. These negative developments, Widmer and Ko imply, resulted from certain intellectual trends which they identify as "May Fourth". "May Fourth" critics, according to the introduction to Ko's *Teachers of the inner chambers*, identified traditional women with backwardness and dependency, and depicted them as passive victims of feudalism and patriarchy. By focusing on the gender system's normative level, Ko argues, they conjured up an image of a universal, monolithic oppression of women, taking note of women's rebelling against, or giving in to, oppression, but ignoring women's strategies for creating a meaningful existence within the gender system. Ko declares that by investigating women's literary culture in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, an aspect of women's history presumably neglected by "May Fourth" writers, she is writing "against the May Fourth legacy". (Ko 1994: 1-5). Widmer (2001) argues that "May Fourth" histories of literature - including histories of women's literature - have misrepresented women's literature from the Ming and Qing dynasties. The works of "May Fourth" historians, she claims, have led the sinological community to hold on to "the May Fourth belief that, with few significant exceptions, women were not writers until the May Fourth era" (Widmer Ibid:193).

Was traditional women's literature discovered in the Republican period, or was it discredited and obscured? In the following two chapters I attempt to answer this question as I discuss various Republican accounts of traditional women's literature: literary histories, anthologies, and articles about women writers of the past. This chapter treats the creation of a history of women's

literature, focusing on the very first history of Chinese women's literature, Xie Wuliang's *History of Chinese women's literature* from 1916 (Xie 1933b).

### *The rise of history*

Of the Republican publications on traditional women's literature at least five can be classified as literary histories. Xie Wuliang's 1916 *History of Chinese women's literature* remained the only work on the topic of women's literary history until the publication of *Qingdai funü wenxue shi* (History of women's literature of the Qing dynasty) by Liang Yizhen in 1927 (Liang 1932). Tan Zhengbi's *Zhongguo nǚxing de wenxue shenghuo* (Literary life of Chinese women) followed in 1930 (Tan 1978).<sup>1</sup> A history of women's *shi* poetry from the Tang, by the woman writer Lu Jingqing, came out in 1931 (Lu 1931), and in 1932 Liang Yizhen published his second book on women's literary history, *Zhongguo funü wenxue shi gang* (Outline of the history of Chinese women's literature) (Liang 1990).

These histories of women's literature were part of a larger trend, namely the introduction of the genre of literary history, which in turn was part of a wider production of national histories, inspired by Western historiography. The Republican era not only witnessed the establishment of the academic discipline of history, but also the spread of a historical mode of writing in other areas of scholarship. It was a time when the history of all things Chinese was to be written: the history of Chinese philosophy, the history of Chinese women, the history of Chinese literary criticism, and so on.

Before the 20th century there existed in China a large body of writings about literature, including bibliographies, literary theory and literary criticism. There was, however, no established genre of writings about literature which can be translated as "literary history". The genre of *wenxueshi* or literary history was imported from abroad in the early 20th century. The first histories

of Chinese literature were written by writers from outside China, and Japanese histories of Chinese literature provided the inspiration for the earliest Chinese literary histories (Chen Fukang 1991: 538-540). Lin Chuanjia's *Zhongguo wenxueshi* (History of Chinese literature), which was written in 1904 and circulated at Peking University before it was published for a wider readership in 1910, and Huang Ren's work of the same title from 1905, are variously considered to be the first Chinese-authored history of Chinese literature (Chen Fukang 1991: 539; Owen 2001:171). The 1910s saw the publication of at least seven more general histories of Chinese literature, many of which were used as textbooks for teaching Chinese literature in schools and universities (Chen Yutang 1986). During the 1920s and 30s, literary histories proliferated. According to Chen Yutang, no less than 346 histories of Chinese literature were published in China between 1910 and 1949, 122 of these being Chinese-authored general histories of Chinese literature (Ibid). By 1928, when Hu Yunyi wrote the preface to his *Zhongguo wenxue gailun* (Introduction to Chinese literature), the need for literary history already appeared entirely self-evident:

China of course has a several thousand year long history of literature, and has produced many great authors and many great works of literature. Both the amount and the quality [of Chinese literature] merit a substantial, clearly thought-out narrative of the "History of Chinese literature". But that is only a wish-dream! To begin with I looked through the old books in search for a "History of Chinese literature", but not only did I fail to find one, I did not even find any works resembling the form of literary history. (Hu 1934: 19-20)

For Hu, the "history of Chinese literature" was an objectively existing reality, ready to be recorded. He could only marvel at the fact that the Chinese had overlooked this reality for so long, and failed to commit it to paper.

As text books, literary histories set out to delineate the new discipline of literature. They claimed for this discipline parts of the national textual heritage, bringing together disparate genres of writing to form one whole. This treatment of Chinese literature as one entity was, if not entirely new, at least unusual, as Qing dynasty accounts of literature had mostly been concerned with specific genres, rather than with literature as a whole (Owen 2001: 176). In the early days of literary historiography, however, there was little agreement as to how literature was to be defined. The histories of the 1900s and 1910s differed considerably as to what genres of writing they included under the heading of "literature". They all included poetry such as *shi* and *ci*. To a varying extent, they also included philosophical and historical writings. (Chen Fukang 1991: 539-542). Some attempted to explain the origin and nature of the Chinese writing system (i.e. Xie 1933a). Drama and fiction were sometimes included, sometimes not. During the 1920s and 1930s, consensus grew among literary historians as to what constituted "literature", as literature came to be defined in aesthetic terms. Literature, according to Zheng Zhenduo and Hu Yunyi, was those writings which were created out of sentiment, and which were beautiful (Hu 1947: 5; Zheng 1952: 7). History and philosophy did not belong to the category of literature unless they possessed "literary qualities" (Zheng 1952: 6), whereas the previously contested genres of fiction and drama were now included.

Literary histories not only selected and criticised works of literature, but also attempted to fit them into a historical narrative, the story about the development of Chinese literature over time. They historicised literature, treating it not as a repository of possible literary models, but as documents of past ages. What parts particular writers or literary works were to play in the story of Chinese literature thus depended not only on their quality, but also on what impact they had had on literary developments, and on how representative

they were of their own time.

The emancipation of literature from other scholarly disciplines, historicism and narrative structure were all typical of the literary history. However, literary histories displayed these characteristics to varying degrees. Many works labelled "*wenxueshi*", in particular earlier ones, more resembled hybrid forms between history and anthology, as they included plenty of examples of literature, but devoted little space to the analysis of historical developments.

Proponents of the New Culture movement gave new direction to the writing of literary history, although exactly how new is a matter of some debate. While Milena Dolezelova-Velingerova (2001) argues that the literary histories of the 1900s and 1910s displayed many modern characteristics which were later claimed by May Fourth writers as *their* own inventions, Chen Pingyuan maintains that the New Culture version of literary history was nothing less than a new paradigm for literary studies. According to Chen, it was Hu Shi who outlined this new paradigm in his *Baihua wenxueshi* (History of vernacular literature) published in 1928. This work is characterised by an emphasis on scientific method, by literary evolutionism, and by the construction of an opposition between classical literature - aristocratic, derivative and "dead" - and vernacular literature - popular, creative and "living". (Chen 2000: 189-240). The literary histories of the 1920s and 1930s increasingly often adhered to the same principles. Literary historians of a New Literature persuasion such as Zheng Zhenduo, Hu Yunyi and Tan Zhengbi aspired to be scientific, in the sense that they claimed to be systematic, critical, and rigorous in their source criticism. They deployed the narrative of evolution, and they placed the popular and the vernacular at the centre of the literary tradition.

The histories of women's literature were part of the growing number of literary histories, but they were also part of another national history which was being written: the history of Chinese women. The earliest history of Chinese

women is Xu Tianxiao's *Shenzhou nüzi xin shi* (New history of women of the divine land) from 1913. A collection of biographies of remarkable women which includes the revolutionary martyr Qiu Jin alongside virtuous women who died for their chastity, it resembles an updated *Lienü zhuan* (Biographies of exemplary women). What made the history "new" was above all its nationalist intent and international contextualisation. In the preface Xu compared Chinese women with Western women. Women had played an important role in Western history according to Xu. Great heroines such as Queen Victoria, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sophia Perovskaya, Joan of Arc and Madame Roland had contributed to society and influenced the evolution of their peoples. At first glance, the Chinese situation appeared to Xu much inferior to the Western one. Most contemporary Chinese women cared only for pretty clothes and small feet, and had failed to wake up to the fact that "the world belongs to both men and women", whereas the few who did seek equality and knowledge were frowned upon. In Chinese history, women were far less visible than in Western history. Dissatisfied with this negative image of Chinese women, Xu had set out to salvage a history of strong Chinese womanhood. After searching the Chinese past for suitable female role models with "lofty aspirations, original thoughts, independent wills and great enterprises", he had arrived at a selection of filial, good, patriotic and learned women who he believed could rival those of the West. (Xu 1913).

A later example of history women is Chen Dongyuan's (1990) 1928 *Zhongguo funü shenghuo shi* (History of the lives of Chinese women) which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

The histories of women's literature had much in common with these histories of women. Like Xu Tianxiao, Xie Wuliang attempted to bring out a history of distinguished Chinese women which could compare with that of Western women, and Tan Zhengbi's *Literary life of Chinese women* owes much



to Chen Dongyuan's ideas about the evolution of oppression.

*The sources to, and canon of, histories of women's literature*

The histories of women's literature did not represent a sudden discovery of the fact that women had been writing in the past. Their authors were aware of the Ming and Qing practice of publishing and commenting upon women's poetry, and of the debates this practice sometimes provoked.

Xie Wuliang acknowledged the anthologists Zhong Xing of the Ming and Wang Shilu of the Qing as his predecessors, and quoted Zhang Xuecheng's *On women's learning* extensively (Xie 1933b: *bian* 1 p 3; *bian* 2 part 3 pp 33-34).

Liang Yizhen (1990) listed a number of Ming and Qing collections of women's poetry as his sources, including, among others, Zhang Zhixiang's *Danguan xinbian* (Vermilion writing-brushes: new compilation), Zheng Wenang's *Mingyuan shihui* (Collection of poetry by famous ladies), Jiang Yuanxi's and Jiang Yuanzuo's *Yutai wenyuan* (Garden of writings from the Jade Terrace), Zhong Xing's *Selection of poems by famous ladies*, Tian Yiheng's *Shi nüshi* (Women poets) and Zhao Shijie's *Gujin nüshi* (Female scribes, ancient and modern) from the Ming dynasty, and Lu Chang's *Lichao mingyuan shici* (Shi and ci poetry by famous ladies of past ages), Ji Xian's *Guixiu ji* (Gentlewomen's collection), Shen Shanbao's *Mingyuan shihua* (Remarks on poetry by famous ladies), Wanyan Yun Zhu's *Collection of correct beginnings*, Yuan Mei's *Selected poetry by the female disciples of Suiyuan* and Xu Naichang's *Xiao tanluan shi's collection of gentlewomen's ci* from the Qing.<sup>2</sup> Liang also acknowledged as sources Republican period collections of women's writing which were closer in style to Ming and Qing collections than were the histories of women's literature, such as Wang Yunzhang's *More lamp oil*

*rhymes*, Qinghuilou zhuren's *Qingdai guixiu shichao* (Transcribed poems of Qing dynasty gentlewomen)<sup>3</sup> and Shi Shuyi's *Qingdai guige shiren zhenglüe* (Anthology of Qing dynasty gentlewomen poets). He thus placed his own work at the end of an unbroken succession of works on Chinese women's literature, extending from the Ming through the Qing and the early Republican period up to the 1930s.

Among Tan Zhengbi's (1978) sources are Zhao Shijie's *Female scribes, ancient and modern*, Lu Chang's *Shi and ci poetry by famous ladies through the ages* and Chen Wenshu's *Xiling guiyong* (The Xiling collection of poetry from the women's apartments). Tan refers to far fewer Ming and Qing collections than Liang does. However, this is hardly because Tan was ignorant of the existence of more Ming and Qing materials on women's writing, but rather because he made a conscious attempt to write against the Ming-Qing tradition. He rejected the emphasis on female virtue found in collections by Ming and Qing gentrywomen anthologists, and he was not interested in Ming and Qing poetry, and consequently, not in Ming and Qing collections of contemporary women's poetry, unless these contained information about women writers of other genres. This does not mean, however, that his selection of earlier lady poets may not have been influenced by Lu Chang and Zhao Shijie, whose anthologies cover periods before the Ming dynasty.

The only historian of women's literature not to acknowledge any debt at all to Ming and Qing anthologists of women's literature was Lu Jingqing. She did not declare which sources she had used for her *Women shi poets of the Tang dynasty*, but according to Tan Zhengbi's critical assessment of this work, its main source was *Quan Tang shi* (Complete Tang poetry) (Tan 1935: 4910).

Before exploring the different ways in which the historians of women's literature chose to reshape the tradition of women's literature, I must point out that there were many similarities between them. A comparison between Xie

Wuliang's, Liang Yizhen's and Tan Zhengbi's histories shows that for certain historical periods, there is a measure of agreement between them as to which writers to include. This may be due to them relying, in part, on the same sources. Xie and Liang both used Zhong Xing's *Selection of poems by famous ladies*, and Liang and Tan both used Zhao Shijie's *Female scribes, ancient and modern*, Lu Chang's *Shi and ci poetry by famous ladies through the ages*, and Wang Yunzhang's *More lamp oil rhymes*. Moreover, Liang and Tan both drew heavily upon Xie's *History of Chinese women's literature*.

Close to 80 women writers are mentioned by all three of them, and 13 Qing women writers are mentioned in both Tan's and at least one of Liang's histories (Xie's history does not cover that dynasty), adding up to a common canon of approximately 90 women writers. Of these 90 women, several stand out as important figures in the historical narratives of all three historians. Ban Zhao, the Han dynasty palace instructress, figures prominently in the three narratives, although the opinions of her *Instructions for women* vary – Xie is uncritical whereas Tan and Liang argue that it has brought Chinese women misery. Cai Yan, the Han dynasty noblewoman who was abducted by the Huns, was admired by all three historians, by Xie on account of her learning, and by Tan and Liang on account of the honesty and directness of her poetry. Although the literary works of the Tang empress Wu Zetian may have been created by ghost-writers, all three historians consider her an important figure in women's literary history, and describe her as an extremely strong-willed, intelligent and capable woman, a skilled writer and a patron of the arts. They all devote considerable space to the Tang dynasty courtesan poet Xue Tao and the Tang Daoist priestesses Li Ye and Yu Xuanji, although Xie is somewhat reluctant to write about such dissolute women. Song dynasty *ci* writer Li Qingzhao is hailed by them all as a great master among women writers, and the second most famous woman *ci* writer of that era, Zhu Shuzhen,

gets a chapter of her own in all three accounts.

The concurrence between the three historians' accounts is the greatest when it comes to the period from the Han dynasty to the Five Dynasties. Although their evaluations of individual women writers differ, and they include different selections of minor writers, they still agree upon a canon of nearly 70 major and minor writers from this period. Xie may consider Huang Chonggu overrated as a poet, but he includes her on account of her being famous, and Tan may think Su Hui's palindrome poem is bad literature, but at least he mentions it.

The greatest disagreements concern pre-Qin literature and literature from the Song dynasty onwards. The differences concerning pre-Qin literature stem from different uses of source criticism. Xie, who largely accepted traditional accounts of ancient history and literature, placed great emphasis on pre-Qin literature. The younger Liang and Tan, on the other hand, aspired to a more critical approach to older literature, and were generally skeptical of traditional attributions of literature to specific writers. Tan treated pre-Qin literature in a short first chapter, and went so far as to exclude the *Book of songs*, previously regarded as a treasury of women's literature, on account of lack of historical evidence for female authorship (Tan 1978: 37-43). As for literature after the Song, the historians' selections differ as to what genres and groups of women they include. Xie included *shi* and *ci* poetry of the Yuan and Ming, with particular emphasis on court poetry. Liang, too, focused on *shi* and *ci* but without paying attention to palace woman poets. Tan, by contrast, concentrated exclusively on Ming and Qing writers of drama, fiction and *tanci*, thereby arriving at a selection of great writers radically different from Xie's and Liang's. Only because certain writers, such as Ye Xiaowan of the Ming and Wang Duan of the Qing, were known to have been active in poetic as well as dramatic or narrative genres was there any overlapping between Tan's

selection of Ming-Qing writers and that of Liang and Xie.

*The place of women's literature in general literary history*

In most of the literary histories of Republican China women's literature played a very small part. With the possible exception of Song dynasty *ci* writer Li Qingzhao, no female writers entered the canon of great Chinese writers. In the 1934 edition of Zeng Yi's 1915 *Zhongguo wenxue shi* (History of Chinese literature) only a small number of women writers are included, and mentioned in connection with their famous male relatives - Ban Zhao apropos her brother Ban Gu, Cai Yan apropos her father Cai Yong, and Xu Shu apropos her husband Qin Jia (Zeng 1934). The names of some twenty women writers are sprinkled about the thousand-odd pages of Zheng Zhenduo's (1952) *Chatuben Zhongguo wenxue shi* (Illustrated history of Chinese literature) from 1932. Most of these writers are treated in only two or three lines. Zheng never fails to identify them as "women writers" (*nǚzuojia* or *nǚliu zuojia*), and implies that they are included in the book as representatives of a marginal and inferior group of writers. About the Tang dynasty Daoist priestess Yu Xuanji, he writes: "Although she could not compare with Wen [Tingyun] or Li [Shangyin], she was outstanding among female (*nǚliu*) poets" (Zheng 1952: 403). The general literary histories did not highlight the fact that the Ming and Qing dynasties saw a great increase in the publication of women's poetry. This was partly due to an emphasis on early history in the earlier literary histories, and a lack of interest in Ming and Qing poetry in the histories of the 1920s and 30s.

Unlike the general histories of Chinese literature, the histories of women's literature by Xie Wuliang, Liang Yizhen, Tan Zhengbi and Lu Jingqing brought hundreds of Chinese women writers to the readers' attention. This does not mean, however, that these histories constituted an attempt to radically alter the canon of Chinese literature through the inclusion of women's writings.

Three of our four historians of women's literature - Xie Wuliang, Tan Zhengbi and Liang Yizhen - wrote other, more general, literary histories as well. In these other histories they did not include particularly many women writers, or show any unusual interest in gendered aspects of literary production. The female tradition and the greater, normative, male tradition were kept apart in their work, in a way reminiscent of Ming and Qing poetry anthologies, where women's verse was marginalised in "general" anthologies but abounded in a great number of specialised collections of women's poetry (Chang 1997:148-149). The histories of women's literature did not aim at a rethinking of the whole of the Chinese literary tradition. For if Xie Wuliang, as Wendy Larson claims, "constructed the Chinese literary tradition as basically feminine" (Larson 1998: 5) in his *History of Chinese women's literature*, then why did he not do so in his bestselling *Zhongguo da wenxue shi* (Great history of Chinese literature), published two years later? With a few exceptions such as Tushan nü and Jiandi of the Xia and Shang dynasties, empress Wu Zetian of the Tang, and Li Qingzhao of the Song, almost all the women writers presented in *History of Chinese women's literature* are absent from *Great history of Chinese literature* (Xie 1933a). Xie clearly did not attempt to give women a central position within the history of Chinese literature.

The fact that women writers are absent from Liang Yizhen's propagandistic wartime work *Zhongguo minzu wenxue shi* (History of Chinese nationalist literature) is perhaps less surprising, considering its theme. Yet it is worth noting that Liang does not even include the female anti-Manchu revolutionary Qiu Jin, whom Liang hailed as a great writer and nationalist heroine in his *History of women's literature of the Qing dynasty*. (Liang 1943).

Even to experts on women's literature, a great master of the female tradition need not be more than a marginal figure in general literary history. In *Literary life of Chinese women*, Tan Zhengbi claimed to be in such awe of Li

Qingzhao, "our greatest woman author since the beginning of history", that he hesitated to write about her as his "clumsy and dull pen" could not do justice to the life or the outstanding talent of this exceptionally great woman writer (Tan 1978: 245). In *Zhongguo wenxue shi dagang* (Great outline of the history of Chinese literature) , however, he had no such qualms as he summed up the work of Li Qingzhao in a single line at the end of the section for Northern Song: "There was also the woman *ci* writer Li Qingzhao, who not only displayed a pure and lofty *ci* style, but also had ingenious theories concerning the understanding of *ci* poetry; her *ci* are few in number, but [of a quality] rarely found among women writers"(Tan 1927: 92).

If the histories of women's literature are not to be read as attempts to radically raise the status of women's writing and to include female writers in the canon of Chinese literature, then how are we to read them?

#### *The first history of Chinese women's literature*

Xie Wuliang, the author *History of Chinese women's literature*, was born in Lezhi, Sichuan in 1884, and was educated first at home by his father and from 1901 at *Nanyang gongxue* (Nanyang Public School) in Shanghai. Not quite the "old-style intellectual" Wendy Larson (1998: 135) makes him out to be, Xie was one of the organisers of a magazine called *Fanyi shijie* (The world of translations) and a contributor to the anti-Manchu publication *Subao* (Jiangsu tribune). After *Jiangsu tribune* was closed down in 1903 and two of its main contributors, Zhang Taiyan and Zou Rong, imprisoned, Xie went to study in Japan and returned the following year. Back in China, he taught in various different cities and engaged in political activities, such as the railway protection movement (*baolu yundong*) in Sichuan in 1911. In 1912 he became an editor at *Zhonghua shuju* in Shanghai. In the years to follow this publishing house

published a considerable number of books by Xie, on Chinese literature, Chinese philosophy, and women. (Xu 1991).

One of these was *History of Chinese women's literature* (Xie 1933b), which is an account of women's writings in the Chinese language, from ancient times up to the end of the Ming dynasty. The greater part of *History of Chinese women's literature* is made up of quotations from earlier literary critics and from sources to biographies of women writers, and of examples of women's literature, whereas Xie's own comments are short and contain a minimum of analysis and interpretation. However, a preface about the status of women and the role of women in literary history, as well as brief introductions to the various epochs covered provide the book with a theoretical and narrative framework. The history proper is organised chronologically, and divided into three parts. The first is about women's literature in Antiquity (*shanggu*), starting from the beginning of time and ending in the Warring States period, and the second about the Middle Ages (*zhonggu*), which lasted from the Han dynasty until the end of the Five Dynasties. The third part is about the Modern Period (*jinshi*), and includes women's literature from the Song dynasty and up to the end of the Ming. The Qing dynasty was left out. Xie explained that there were so many sources to women's literature in the Qing, that he had decided to put them aside for a sequel to *History of Chinese women's literature* (Xie 1933b: 3). It is unclear whether he ever realised this plan: Zeng Pu (Bingfu 1929c) mentions a *Qingdai funü wenxue shi* (History of women's literature of the Qing dynasty) by Xie but I have not found it in any bibliographical sources

Wendy Larson (1998) attaches great importance to Xie Wuliang's history of women's literature, which she sees as an unprecedented attempt to reconcile the hitherto incompatible categories of "woman" and "literature". Xie's construction of a history of women's literature was, according to Larson, an attempt to validate the combination of "woman" and "literature", an attempt to



demonstrate that women could be literary and that literature could be feminine. “Xie Wuliang’s work was pioneering for the way in which it coupled literature and women based on women’s skills and unique conditions. In short, it implied that literature itself had an underlying affinity with femininity”, she writes. (Ibid: 136).

As the first history of Chinese women’s literature, Xie’s book was certainly pioneering. But was the combination of “woman” with “literature” really the most strikingly modern aspect of this work? As I have already shown in Chapter One, it was well known in the early 20th century that China had a long tradition of writing women and of promotion of women’s poetry.

In the 1910s, Xie Wuliang was not alone in writing about literature by women. Around the time of the publication of *History of Chinese women’s literature*, several other writers were combining words for femaleness with words for writing in a variety of ways. *Qing guixiu zhengshi zaixu ji* (Sequel to continued collected correct beginnings of Qing gentlewomen) by Shan Shili (1856-1943), for example, is an anthology of Qing women’s verse published in instalments around 1918. As the wife of the diplomat Qian Xun, Shan Shili travelled to Japan, Russia and Europe and became the first Chinese woman to publish travelogues from abroad (Zhong 1985: 657-679). Her poetry anthology, however, was deeply rooted in the Qing gentlewoman tradition. Its title refers to the famous collection of ladies’ poetry edited by Yun Zhu in the eighteenth century and like Yun Zhu, Shan emphasised the importance of women’s virtue, and included only respectable gentlewomen authors (Widmer 2001: 213-214). *The ladies’ journal* featured several series of writings about women’s writing, which were printed in a section towards the end of the journal called “miscellanea” (*zazu*). They include *More lamp oil rhymes* by Wang Yunzhang, which ran between 1915 and 1917, *Guixiu shihua* (Remarks on poetry by gentlewomen) by Jiang Shanyuan which ran between 1916 and 1918, and *Nü*

*yiwenzhi* (Bibliography of works by women) by Dan Fu from 1917. Like Xie Wuliang's *History of Chinese women's literature*, these series of articles were specifically about female writers and their works.

The first part(s) of *More lamp oil rhymes*, a series of *shihua* or "remarks on poetry" on women's poetry, was published in *The short story magazine* in 1914. Its author Wang Yunzhang was at times editor in chief of both *The ladies' journal* (in 1915 and in 1917-1920) and *The short story magazine* (1910-1912 and 1918-1920). A collection of the poetry remarks was published in book form by the Commercial Press in 1918.

Wang Yunzhang's remarks on poetry and Xie Wuliang's history have many elements in common. Both consist mainly of biographical data of female writers, examples of their literature, and brief critical assessments of the works cited. Yet there are some significant differences between *More lamp oil rhymes* and *History of Chinese women's literature*. First of all, Wang and Xie presented their works in very different ways. Xie's book has the appearance of serious, systematic and authoritative scholarship, and contains an introduction about the status of women, which emphasises the relevance of the work to great social and political issues. Wang's poetry remarks, printed in the "miscellanea" column of a women's magazine, appear to aim only at entertaining its readers. In the introductory remarks to the *Ladies' journal* instalments of the remarks on poetry, Wang posed as a modest amateur critic who had to be cajoled into publishing his little observations concerning ladies' poetry. The earlier *More lamp oil rhymes* published in *The short story magazine*, he wrote, "were presumptuous talks about things which I know little about, only a few odd little studies (*gongke*) [undertaken] while drinking tea or wine". He claimed that he had resumed the undertaking in order not to disappoint those who had sent him suggestions for further selections of women's poetry. (Wang 1915, vol. 1 no 5: 1). This is not to say that *More lamp oil rhymes* only ever served as

entertainment, or that Wang Yunzhang only conceived of it as such, only that he chose to present it in a modest and light-hearted way. In her study of the early years of *The short story magazine*, Denise Gimpel points out that Wang Yunzhang was an active anti-Manchu revolutionary and a member of the progressive Southern Society (*Nanshe*)<sup>4</sup>, and describes him as someone deeply committed to political and social change, including the emancipation of women. She suggests that Wang Yunzhang may well have conceived of his contributions to the press as far more than mere entertainment. (Gimpel 2001: 188-192). It is quite possible that Wang saw his writing about women's poetry as part of the project of improving the status and education of women. However, he did not openly state that this was the case.

Another significant difference between these works is their different ways of treating temporality. Xie Wuliang's history is strictly organised in a temporal sequence, with literature of various epochs and dynasties neatly compartmentalised in different chapters and sections. The book as a whole forms a grand narrative of the changing fortunes of women's literature in China from the dawn of time and up to the beginning of the Qing dynasty. The narrative ends at this particular point in time, separating the past as the object of study from the present as the time of writing. *More oil lamp rhymes*, on the other hand, moves smoothly between the present and the past and back again. Writers are not presented in chronological order. After introducing to us a New Year poem composed by Gu Fan, who was married to Wang's friend Zhao Wansheng, Wang swiftly moves on to talk about the Yuan dynasty female poet Cao Miaoqing who lived by the West Lake. The association of the West Lake then brings Wang to the topic of the three graves of female poets near the West Lake, which were repaired by Chen Wenshu in the eighteenth century. He writes about the three poetesses themselves - Xiaoqing of the Qing, Juxiang of the Song, and Yunyou of the Ming dynasty, and about Chen

Wenshu's concubine, who wrote one of the grave inscriptions. Soon after, Wang again turns to contemporary and near-contemporary poets. (Wang 1915, vol. 1 no 5: 2-4; vol. 1 no 6: 1-2). Often, Wang does not at all indicate when the women writers mentioned lived. As a result, he conveys an image of women's poetry where there is no clear division between a past and a present, and where the time of creation of a particular poem is of little relevance to the reader's assessment of it.

Wang's remarks on poetry contained many ideas which would have been considered modern or progressive at the time, such as anti-footbinding sentiments (Wang 1915, vol. 1, no 5: 4). The form of his writings on women's literature, however, was traditional. He was working within an established genre of remarks on poetry, and he presented himself as continuing a tradition of collecting and commentating on women's poetry. As he explained elsewhere, he had named the remarks in memory of his ancestor Wang Shilu (1626-1673), who compiled an anthology of women's poetry called *Ranzhi ji* or "The lamp oil collection" (Wang 1932:2). Xie Wuliang, while acknowledging Ming and Qing sources, at the same time stressed the difference between his own book and earlier works on women's writing. Of these, only *The lamp oil collection* and Zhong Xing's *Selection of poems by famous ladies* were relatively broad in scope, he complained. He continued:

Other authors record either poetry but not prose, or prose but not poetry. They mix up real and fake [poems], and fail to discard the base and obscene. They are seldom able to synthesise the origin and development (*yuanliu*) [of the literature] or to comprehend its formal characteristics (*tige*). Therefore the reader is not able to view the rise and fall of women's literature. (Xie 1933: 3)

What was new and modern about Xie's history was not its combination of

femininity with literature, which was already present in the works which Xie criticised, but the fact that it was a literary history. As a history, it set out to trace the origin of a certain kind of literature, and describe its development over time, recording its rise and fall. This ambition set Xie Wuliang apart not only from Ming and Qing anthologists but also from his contemporary, Wang Yunzhang.

*An argument for the education of women*

Another strikingly modern aspect of *History of Chinese women's literature* was its commitment to sexual equality. In the introduction Xie wrote that the inferiority of women was no natural law (*ziran zhi fa*), but the result of certain secondary factors. In antiquity, Xie argued, women had been the equals of men in bodily strength as well as in social status, but thousands of years of concubinage and sexual division of labour had made them physically weak and socially inferior. Xie was convinced that this was about to change, and took the rising status of European and American women as proof that men and women were in the process of returning to their "natural" state of equality. Although "environment" and "heredity" had influenced women's body size and social status in a negative way, their inherent intelligence had all along remained equal to that of the men, and so had their talent for literature. The reason why their literature had been inferior to the men's was because of "deficiencies in their environment", in particular, a lack of education. (Xie 1933b: bian 1, pp 1-2).

For Xie, education was the key to the emancipation of women. In 1917 he published a book on the education of women called *Funü xiuyang tan* (On the cultivation of women), where he advised women and girls on how to become educated individuals, good wives and wise mothers. It was divided into three

parts, corresponding to different stages of a woman's life: "The girl's foundation in education (*xiuxue*) and self-establishment (*lishen*)", "The cultivation of wifely virtues" and "The cultivation of motherly virtues". In the introduction, which largely overlapped with the introduction to *History of Chinese women's literature*, Xie explained that since women were as intelligent as men, it was quite possible that with the right training women would become as good as men at scholarly research and in the professions. In Europe and America, education had made women as capable as men in many respects. China, Xie believed, ought to follow the example of the West and start raising women's status through education. (Xie 1917). However, Xie thought there was no need for Chinese women to slavishly imitate Western models, as China had its own tradition of exemplary women, and its own history of gender equality. In the West, unlike in China, women's status had been on the rise since antiquity, the result, Xie argued, of Christianity, mediaeval chivalry, and the theory of human rights (Xie 1917). Xie recognised that the history of gender relations in China had been entirely different, but believed that it too contained examples of equality between the sexes. These were to be found in remote antiquity, in the Zhou dynasty or earlier. In the introductions to *On the cultivation of women* and *History of Chinese women's literature*, Xie quotes several classical texts in proof of early gender equality. Both *On the cultivation of women* and *History of Chinese women's literature* constituted attempts at rescuing a history of strong womanhood in China. *On the cultivation of women* aimed to present the best of the Chinese tradition of women's self-improvement, as Xie wrote in the introduction to this work. *History of Chinese women's literature* presented a history of Chinese women's intellectual achievements. Like Xu Tianxiao's *New history of women of the divine land*, it was an inventory of exemplary Chinese women, seen in an international context.

The gender equality sought by Xie was one of complementarity rather

than similarity. Although he was in favour of women in the professions, he considered the family their primary sphere of action, as evidenced by the emphasis *On the cultivation of women* placed on wifely and motherly virtues. In society as in the family, men and women had different roles to fulfil. Men were active in society, whereas women influenced society "indirectly" by making life easier for their husbands, or "directly" by giving their husbands advice (Xie 1917). In *History of Chinese women's literature*, Xie did not openly challenge the idea of separate spheres for male and female writers. He did not, for instance, criticise the fact that women had been barred from the imperial examinations.

In order to evaluate Larson's claim that Xie's history of women's literature constituted an attempt to validate the combination of "woman" with "literature", it is crucial to understand what Xie meant by "literature". Like most other Chinese literary historians at the time, he used a broad definition of the word *wenxue*. In the introductory chapter of *Great history of Chinese literature* (Xie 1933a), published two years after *History of Chinese women's literature*, Xie Wuliang discussed definitions and classifications of literature. The word *wenxue*, he wrote, was a generic term for all kinds of writing (*wenzhang zhushu*) (Ibid: j.1, p 1). At different times in Chinese history, scholars had emphasised the importance of different aspects of literature: in some eras literature was viewed primarily as a means of conveying meanings, while in other epochs it was seen mainly as an art form (Ibid: j.1, pp 2-3). Westerners, on the other hand, all considered literature an art form comparable to painting, sculpture and music (Ibid: j.1, pp 3-4). Among other Western commentators, Xie referred to De Quincey, who made a distinction between "literature of knowledge" and "literature of emotion",<sup>5</sup> and Pancoast who distinguished between literature in the broad sense, which encompassed all kinds of writings, and literature in the narrow sense, which referred only to writings with artistic

merit and emotional import (Ibid: j. 1, p 4). Xie himself was opposed to making such distinctions:

Ever since European learning came to the East, those writing about literature have distinguished between two kinds of literature, that of feeling and that of knowledge, or used an opposition between creative literature and critical literature (*pinglun wenxue*), or made a comparison between useful literature and beautiful literature. Literature of high quality, however, often emphasises knowledge but has depth of feeling, and is useful but attains beauty. The difference is very slight, and difficult to pin down. (Xie 1933a: j. 1, p 6)

Xie avoided making a division between creative literature and other kinds of writing. He preferred to see the didactic and the aesthetic as two aspects of all kinds of writing, rather than properties adhering to any particular literary genres. The possibility of reserving the word *wenxue* for creative literature only was not even discussed. Xie opted for a classification system for writing (*duwen*) which made a division first between writing which formed clauses and sentences (*youju*) and such writings that did not (*wuju*), the *youju* writings being subdivided into "rhyming" (*youyun*) and "non-rhyming" (*wuyun*) writings, and further into different genres. The rhyming genres consisted of *fusong* (rhapsodies and eulogies), *aili* (elegies), *zhenming* (verses of admonishment or praise), *zhanzhou* (divinatory verse), *shi*, and *ciqu* (including *ci*, all kinds of *qu*, and *tanci*), and the non-rhyming genres consisted of *xueshuo* (theoretical scholarship), *lishi* (historical records), *gongdu* (official documents), *dianzhang* (decrees and regulations), *zawen* (miscellaneous prose) and *xiaoshuo* (fiction).

In *History of Chinese women's literature*, too, Xie used the word *wenxue* in a very broad sense. Although this history's main concern was poetry, it also included letters, official documents, and scholarly writings. By including such



writings Xie was able to celebrate women's erudition, good judgment and virtue, as well as their artistic creativity, poetic feeling and elegant use of language. The less prestigious genres of drama and fiction, although included in *Great history of Chinese history*, were largely left out of *History of Chinese women's literature*.

Xie's book on women's literature did not primarily seek to elevate a link between femininity and writing as a creative art. Rather, it emphasised a link between women and a range of intellectual capacities such as poetic talent, learning, critical discernment, moral courage, and understanding of ritual. The single work of literature to which Xie devoted the most space - Su Hui's palindrome poem (*huiwen shi*) from the fourth century - was an example of another such capacity, verbal skill. The palindrome is an intricate literary puzzle consisting of a square of 29 times 29 characters, which can be read vertically, horizontally and diagonally, in whichever direction, to form different poems. It was dismissed by later commentators as an empty display of skill, lacking in feeling and literary qualities (Tan 1978: 87; Wang 1931: 47). Xie, however, devoted a full 43 pages to the palindrome, and called it "a masterpiece" (1933b: bian 1, part 2, pp 25-68).

The main aim of *History of Chinese women's literature* was to uncover a history of strong Chinese womanhood, in order to make a case for the education and emancipation of girls and women. The fact that Xie chose literature as a means of getting at the history of women does not entail that Xie thought of literature as feminine. For Xie, as a person with a mostly classical Chinese education, "literature" in the broad sense of "the study of writing" was the obvious key to knowledge about women's history, as indeed, it was the key to knowledge about any subject matter. Furthermore, literature was a likely choice of topic for someone who wanted to stress female skill and agency, precisely because this was an area of cultural and political life where Chinese

women had been relatively active.

As a writer of literary history, Xie framed his selection of women writers within a grand narrative about the general state of Chinese women's literature. The story it tells is a story of decline. The fortunes of Chinese women's literature, Xie attempted to demonstrate, were forever bound up with the state of women's education. Women's learning had steadily deteriorated since the Zhou dynasty, he argued, and as women's learning had declined, so had women's literature. In making this argument he was no doubt inspired by Zhang Xuecheng's essay "On women's learning" from 1797, which he quoted extensively in his history of women's literature. In "On women's learning", in itself a brief exposé of the history of women's writing, Zhang Xuecheng complained about negative developments in women's learning and writing. He argued that while women of ancient times had been well-versed in the classics and known the proper rituals, the girls of Zhang's own day mistook frivolous poetry for true learning. (see Zhang in Chang and Saussy 1999 :783-799). Like Zhang, Xie believed that women's writing should be based on a foundation of learning, and that women's learning should encompass more than literary composition.

In the Zhou dynasty, when women's learning was supposed to have been transmitted at the imperial court by female officials such as the Nine Concubines, the Female Libationer and the Female Scribe, women had been better educated and more powerful, Xie claimed (1933b: bian 1, part 1, pp 6-10). In order to support this view, he included all available accounts of writing women in ancient times. He even considered the legendary Queen Mother of the West an actual woman writer, a foreign queen whose poetry had been translated into Chinese (ibid: bian 1, part 1, p 10). Like so many before him, he believed that women had written substantial parts of the *Book of songs*. He was, however, aware that Zhang Xuecheng had criticised this view in *On*

women's learning, saying that the songs in question were not necessarily written by women only because their authors had adopted a female voice. Xie could not present any new proof to refute Zhang's criticism, but resorted to simply listing those songs which had traditionally been attributed to women, and relied entirely on Liu Xiang's *Biographies of exemplary women* for the interpretations of these songs. (Ibid: bian 1, part 1, pp 11-22).

At the end of the Zhou period, the decline in women's literature set in. In the Spring and Autumn period, women's learning had "not yet fallen", but the decline set in already during the Warring states period, and the Zhou system for women's education in the palace was finally abolished in the Qin. With the Han, a new, but inferior, set of official titles for women was invented and the decline in women's learning continued, although with names such as Lady Tangshan, empresses Ma and Deng, Ban *jiayu*, Ban Zhao, Xu Shu and Cai Yan, women's literature of this period nevertheless surpassed that of ages to come. In the Jin, few women were educated in the classics, and the women's literature produced during the Northern and Southern Dynasties was of rather poor quality. In the Tang, Xie conceded, there were many talented women writers inside and outside the imperial court. During the Five Dynasties, however, only a handful of palace women could write, and Xie was not impressed by women poets from outside the palace either. In the Song, the situation deteriorated further. Even fewer palace women could now write, and the most talented of them, empress Yang, was inferior to Lady Huarui of the Five Dynasties. Finally, the little that remained of literature by palace women from the Ming was not of very high quality at all.

Xie's theory of decline was based almost entirely on what he knew about court literature and women's education at court. In Xie's history, palace women's literature ultimately defined the women's literature of each era. Within each part of the book treating a certain time period, women writers were presented

in order of social status, so that each section about a certain era or dynasty began with a chapter or section about the literature of palace women, then moving on to the literature of gentry women, and last, to Daoists and courtesans. Xie's assessment of the general state of women's education and literature relied on the quality of the literature produced by those at the top end of the hierarchy, whereas much of the gentry women's literature included in the history did not at all fit into the story about the decline of women's literature. Xie noted the fact that there was a great proliferation of gentry women's writing in the Ming, and among Xie's favourite writers were several gentry women of the "Modern period" such as Li Qingzhao and Zhu Shuzhen of the Song, and the Korean Xu Jingfan of the Ming. Xie did not attempt to explain how his account of gentry women's literature was to be reconciled with his theory of the decline of women's literature. Had he included the Qing dynasty in his history, the reconciliation would have been even more difficult, as the sheer volume of Qing gentry women's literature belied the theory of decline.

Xie's emphasis on court literature was partly a convention inherited from earlier anthologists. At the same time, however, it served as a strategy to stress women's centrality to Chinese politics and official culture. By focusing on court literature, Xie placed women writers close to the centre of power. Women's involvement in affairs of state interested him, and among the "literature" treated in his book were a number of official documents - petitions, edicts, and memorials - written by women. The great importance he attached to the writings by a woman at the very heart of power - empress Wu Zetian - is a case in point. Although he conceded that empress Wu might have used ghost writers, Xie thought her work "ranked first among women's writing past and present" (Ibid: *bian* 2, part 3, p 22).

Another way in which Xie stressed how significant women had once been to Chinese culture was by arguing that women had invented several literary

forms. The pentasyllabic *shi* (*wuyan shi*) could not have been invented in the Han dynasty by Su Wu and Li Ling as was commonly assumed, Xie argued, because Xiang Yu's favourite concubine Yu Ji composed a pentasyllabic *shi* already during the war preceding the founding of the Han dynasty (Ibid: bian 2, part 1, p 16). Several forms of *yuefu* or Music Bureau poetry, such as the *ziye ge*, were also created by women according to Xie (Ibid: bian 2, part 2, p 20). Finally, Su Hui's palindrome poem was an invention all her own. It is important to remember, however, that Xie did not place the same emphasis on women's literary inventiveness in his *Great history of Chinese literature*.

Xie Wuliang's *History of Chinese women's literature* thus did not discover or celebrate any previously unthought of link between femininity and writing. Can it, then, be said to obscure or devalue a female tradition in literature? At first glance, the answer is no. The book puts women's literature in the spotlight, and treats it as a most valuable contribution to Chinese literary history. There is one problem here, however: the women's literature Xie championed was mostly very early literature. His treatment of the Ming dynasty was relatively brief, and the Qing dynasty was excluded from the narrative. Furthermore, his theory of decline implied that the Ming and Qing ought to have been an all time low for women's literature, when in fact these were the periods when women published the most literature. Xie skirted the issue by setting Qing women's literature aside for a sequel. His grand narrative demanded that he reveal some parts of women's literature but conceal others.

When it comes to its treatment of Ming - Qing literature - if not in other respects - *History of Chinese women's literature* displays some of the shortcomings of modern history on women which Ellen Widmer and Dorothy Ko criticise. However, Widmer's and Ko's criticism is mainly directed towards what they call "May Fourth" histories, and Xie's book can hardly be said to fall into this category. It does not belong to the May Fourth period chronologically as it

was published three years before the May Fourth incident, nor does it embrace a New literature agenda.

### *Conclusion*

Several histories of women's literature were written in the Republican period. These were examples of the new genre of literary history, but may also be interpreted as examples of the history of women. These histories provided very different narratives of the fortunes of women's literature in China, but they also shared many sources, and arrived at a similar canon of women writers for the period from the Han dynasty to the Five dynasties. The historians of women's literature continued to treat women's literature as a separate and marginal tradition, as they did not include very many women in their general histories of literature.

Wendy Larson is right to stress the importance of Xie Wuliang's *History of Chinese women's literature*, as it was the very first history of Chinese women's literature, and greatly influenced later accounts of Chinese women's literature. However, she is wrong to imply that the significance, and the modernity, of this work resides in a discovery of a link between femininity and literature. Xie's linkage of "women" with "literature" was neither new nor so strong that it required a rethinking of the literary canon as a whole. The originality of Xie's approach lies in his use of the new genre of literary history to give shape to his argument about women's status and education. By depicting ancient times as a Golden Age of women's literature he pointed to women's capability for intellectual achievements and, by extension, for participation in the nation's cultural and political life. By representing later eras as times of decline in literature caused by a decline in women's learning, he demonstrated the need for education of women. From its inception, then, the historiography of Chinese

women's literature was an attempt to say something about women by means of literature, rather than the other way around.

*History of Chinese women's literature* stressed the value of women's literature, and its centrality to Chinese history. It cannot be said to have devalued or ignored women's literary traditions. Xie's theory of decline in women's literature, however, led him to overly emphasise the literature of early times.

The next chapter discusses how and to what extent post-May Fourth writings on women's literary history may have obscured or devalued traditional women's writing. It explores the ambivalent roles of feminism and literary modernity in reevaluations of the female tradition hailing from the late 1920s and early 1930s, mainly through a comparison between works by two historians of women's literature, Tan Zhengbi and Liang Yizhen.

## Chapter Four: "Oppression" in histories of women's literature

*Let them stay buried...*

In the 1931 *Ladies' journal* special issue on women and literature, Wang Chuncui raised the question whether it was really worth the effort to write histories and other records of traditional women's literature in China. The previous year, Wang wrote, she had considered writing such a work herself. In the home of her teacher Shan Buan she had encountered a book by Shan's sister Shan Shili, entitled *Qing guixiu yiwen lue* (Brief account of writings by Qing gentlewomen). Impressed by the huge number of women writers listed in this work - over 2,300 - Wang started toying with the idea of compiling a *Zhongguo guixiu yiwen lue* (Brief account of writings by Chinese gentlewomen). If during a mere 300 years China had produced such a wealth of women writers, would not a thorough examination of all of China's history secure a prominent place for women in Chinese literary history? In the end, however, Wang gave up her plan as she became thoroughly disappointed with Chinese women's literature. To compile a record of gentlewomen's literature, she felt, would be a waste of time. Wang held that most famous women writers had been passive victims of men's oppression, or worse even, active proponents of patriarchal gender ideology. Their literature, she complained, failed to express a spirit of resistance against "male-centered society" (*nanxing zhongxin shehui*). For instance, He Shuangqing, a Qing dynasty poetess who was severely maltreated by her husband and mother-in-law, resigned herself to her fate, and used poetry to express melancholy but never anger or sarcasm. The Han dynasty palace instructress Ban Zhao not only accepted the oppression of women but helped consolidate it by writing her *Instructions for women*. For most women writers, writing had been no more than a leisure activity, a game



with which to while away the time left over from their sewing. Su Hui's palindrome poem, so highly regarded by Xie Wuliang, was dismissed by Wang as an empty display of technical skill, lacking in individuality and comparable to the craft of paper cutting rather than to the art of poetry. To Wang Chuncui, such sorrowful laments, moralistic teachings and insipid word games did not seem worth writing about.

Earlier, Wang Chuncui had written in *New woman* that a true "new woman" was not to accept the existing, male, history-writing. "The Great Ancients place their history before her, but what she sees in *his* history is the necessity of establishing a history of her own" (Wang 1926: 835). She was not prepared to accept previous histories of women's literature, and had no desire to imitate Xie Wuliang's *History of Chinese women's literature* or Liang Yizhen's *History of women's literature of the Qing dynasty*. These books, Wang complained, simply "select a few writers, choose a few poems, and then criticise them in a perfunctory manner", a way of writing literary history which fulfilled only an "ornamental function" (Wang 1931:45). A history of women's literature worth writing would have to take a more radical approach. The way forward for the historian of women's literature, Wang argued, was to shift the focus from elite women writers onto previously marginalised groups of women such as courtesans and women of the people. Unlike the "sickly women of the intellectual class" (Ibid:49) these women displayed genuine feelings in their literature, such as sexual desire and dissatisfaction with oppression.

Had Wang tried to write this new kind of history of women's literature, she would have run into a host of problems. First, the authenticity of poems by women of the people would have been hard to prove - how, after all, do you determine the sex of an anonymous writer of folk songs? Secondly, courtesans' writing often constructed femininity as weakness, dramatising the prostitute's dependence on her male client (see Mann 1997: 123-125). Finally, Wang's

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favourite woman writer, Li Qingzhao, “the only great female author in Chinese literary history” (Wang 1931: 52) was neither a woman of the people nor a courtesan but precisely the sort of educated, virtuous elite woman that Wang had branded as “sickly”. Conveniently, perhaps, Wang decided to let the matter rest, and devote her attention to the future, rather than the past, of women’s literature. She concludes her article:

Let the tens of thousands of women writers of the past stay buried in the green mountains for the time being! Let us concentrate our efforts on the future, let us radiate our light in that immense, immeasurable world full of unforeseeable changes and freedoms! In truth, ‘we women may be disappointed with the past and the present, but we have no reason to despair of the future’. I sing its praises, like this:

Oh, future!

Beautiful future!

Great future!

Oh, lovely future! (Ibid: 53)

As much as feminism provided motivation for writing histories of women’s literature, it also provided a reason to want to forget about those aspects of women’s literature which could not be readily interpreted in terms of oppression and resistance. Wang’s preoccupation with oppression, coupled with her conviction that literature should be an original art form rather than a leisure activity, led her to devalue women’s creative efforts, to deny women agency except in cases of rebellion or treason, and ultimately, to abandon the historical project altogether.

### *Histories of enslavement?*

Wang Chuncui’s article on women’s literature could serve as a perfect example

of the "May Fourth" view of women's history as defined by Dorothy Ko (1994: 2-10). However, not everyone writing about women's history in China after 1919 subscribed to this so-called "May Fourth" approach to women's past, and Wang Chuncui's position was by no means the only choice open to those writing about women's literature. For example, in the same issue of *The ladies' journal* where Wang's article was published is an article by Su Xuelin about the Qing dynasty Manchu woman *ci*-writer Gu Taiqing, which discusses various aspects of Gu's life and work without referring to the oppression of women (Xuelin nüshi 1931).

Even works which did emphasise the oppression of women were sometimes far more ambiguous than Ko would lead us to believe. Dorothy Ko's principal example of the "May Fourth" type of women's history is Chen Dongyuan's *History of the lives of Chinese women* from 1928 (Chen 1990). If nationalism was the motivation behind Xu Tianxiao's *A new history of women of the divine land*, Chen Dongyuan's *History of the lives of Chinese women* was motivated by feminism. Chen hoped, he wrote, that his book would serve to encourage women who were set on leading "new lives" and to convert men and women who still believed in "old morality" (Chen 1990:3).

Chen's historical narrative tells of how the oppression of women originated, developed, increased, and, in the very recent past, began to break down. The first human societies, Chen claimed, had been matrilineal (*muxi*), and the oppression of women had begun with the establishment of marriage (Ibid:21-23). Oppression had then increased over time through the creation and dissemination of *lijiao*, which at first was embraced by the ruling classes only, but gradually spread to other strata of society. In the preface Chen provided an evolutionist explanation of these developments: women had kept evolving throughout history, thereby challenging male superiority again and again. As women evolved into increasingly intelligent and ambitious beings,

men resorted to increasingly extreme measures of suppression, until patriarchy finally reached its breaking point and the emancipation of women began (Ibid:2).

Chen's history is a far cry from Xu Tianxiao's collection of role-models. Chen consciously avoided canonising exemplary women. Instead, the subject of his history - Chinese women - is an anonymous collective defined by oppression:

...since the beginning of history, our women have been nothing but destroyed women, and the history of the lives of our women has been nothing but a history of the destruction of women. In my book I will not eulogise any saintly, wise mothers, nor will I honour any empresses or heroines, just to give women satisfaction, for there was no connection between those people and the lives of the majority of women. (Chen 1928: 18-19)

Chen emphasised the ideal norms of patriarchal society, and devoted a lot of space to discussions of major normative, moralistic works on women, such as Liu Xiang's *Biographies of exemplary women* and Ban Zhao's *Instructions for women*. The resulting history of women's lives is less about what women said or did than about what was said of them and done to them.

On the other hand, Chen saw the Chinese gender system as far more dynamic, and less monolithic and eternal, than Ko will have us believe. As I explained in Chapter Three, Chen attempted to chart the development of the Chinese gender system over time, as he believed that the oppression of women had evolved, and extended to new classes of people, throughout history. Chen's emphasis on Confucian gender ideals did not keep him from recognising that there had been discrepancies between these ideal norms and the actual practices of men and women. For instance, he made clear that the

ideals of chastity proposed by Song Neo-Confucianists did not acquire a large following before the end of the Song dynasty (Ibid:141). To Chen, women were victims, but not passive victims. Had women been weak and harmless, there would have been no point in inventing all the oppressive rules, regulations and institutions which had been keeping them in their place through the ages. (Ibid:2).

The few positive images of women which Chen conveyed were of writers. As we have seen, Chen made a point of excluding female icons such as Mencius's wise mother, the woman warrior Mulan and the powerful empress Wu Zetian, and the women in his history are mostly anonymous victims of, or moralistic collaborators with, the oppression of women. One strong woman, however, stands out in his history - the Song dynasty *ci*-writer Li Qingzhao, the best woman writer in history according to Chen. He devoted an entire chapter to her life, describing her as a capable woman of many talents, a brilliant poet and a bold literary critic. (Ibid:161-172). Chen made much of the resistance against female literacy which he claimed gained ground in the Ming and Qing, as families supposedly stopped teaching their daughters how to read and write and scholars like Zhang Xuecheng argued against the publication of women's poetry (Ibid:188-202; 269). Still, he pointed out that in spite of negative attitudes towards female talent, women's literature "flourished" in the Qing dynasty. The saying "in a woman, lack of talent is a virtue", he argued, gained currency as a *reaction to* Qing women's craze for poetry (Ibid:191). Chen included a list of no less than 126 Qing dynasty lady poets (Ibid:257-274).

### *Women's literature and May Fourth history*

While Wang Chuncui chose to give up writing a history of women's literature, others still considered it a worthwhile project. According to Ellen Widmer

(2001), however, those who did write about traditional women's literature did not necessarily do the female tradition justice. "May Fourth" literary historians such as Zheng Zhenduo, Tan Zhengbi and Liang Yizhen obscured certain salient features of female literary traditions. In particular, they neglected women's *shi* and *ci* poetry from the Ming and Qing. Their histories, Widmer argues, were part of a process which ultimately led to the exclusion of Ming-Qing women's poetry from the literary canon. By obscuring Ming-Qing poetry, such histories contributed to creating the May Fourth image of the victimised Chinese woman "anesthetized into complete passivity" (Ibid:197). Widmer identifies several different ways in which the histories in question misrepresented Ming-Qing women's poetry. Firstly, the anti-Manchu feelings these modern writers harboured led them to disregard Manchu writers, or to treat Chinese poetry by Manchus as a separate tradition. Secondly, their feminism led them to overlook the importance of male mentors for women's literature, in an attempt to portray women writers as more independent than they really were. Finally, their modern literary theories contributed to the confusion. Zheng Zhenduo's belief that popular literature and aristocratic literature had mostly been separate traditions had him misleadingly describe women's *tanci* as a purely popular genre. Tan Zhengbi's version of literary evolutionism made him focus on certain genres for certain eras. Writing about the Ming and Qing, he concentrated on drama, fiction and *tanci*, dismissing poetry as irrelevant.

Widmer contrasts her three May Fourth historians with three anthologies of women's poetry which are in "a late Qing style of scholarship" although they were published after the end of the Qing dynasty (Widmer 2001: 212). These are Shan Shili's *Sequel to continued collected correct beginnings of Qing gentlewomen*, most of which was published in instalments before 1918, Hongmeige zhuren's *Transcribed poems of Qing dynasty gentlewomen* from

1922, and Shi Shuyi's *Anthology of Qing dynasty gentlewomen poets* from the same year. These more conservative anthologies continued to celebrate the poetic efforts of cultivated and virtuous ladies, untrammelled by feminist or New Literature beliefs, although in the case of Shi Shuyi's anthology, the selection of poetry was to some extent coloured by anti-Manchu patriotism.

However, Widmer's neat distinction between "May Fourth" literary historians and old-fashioned poetry anthologists becomes problematic in the case of Liang Yizhen, author of the 1927 *History of women's literature of the Qing dynasty* and the 1932 *Outline of the history of women's literature*. Liang's histories of women's literature did not make use of a feminist theoretical framework, and the earliest one, *History of women's literature of the Qing dynasty*, showed little influence from the New Literature movement. Most importantly, Liang's histories devoted a lot of attention to Ming and Qing women's poetry. Yet they were presented as modern literary histories, not Qing-style anthologies. Finally, Widmer concedes that "the integrated, narrative character of Liang's analysis alone would distinguish it from all three of these more conservative anthologies" (Ibid: 215). In the end, she is unable to determine whether Liang should be counted as a "late Qing holdover" or a May Fourth literary historian (Ibid: 215 -216).

Widmer thus tries - and fails - to fit Liang Yizhen's history into the category of May Fourth History, a kind of history which, we may assume, should reflect "the prevailing mood of erasure to which May Fourth imperatives had given rise" (Ibid: 200). The assumption that Republican writings on women's literature must be classified either as "May Fourth" or as "Qing-style" is, I believe, an unnecessary one. It is more rewarding to investigate the differences between these histories, leaving aside the issue of whether they should be properly labelled "Qing" or "May Fourth", allowing for the possibility that there may have existed more than one modern way of interpreting the



female tradition in the 1920s and 1930s. After all, Liang's and Tan's three histories of Chinese women's literature viewed the female tradition from very different perspectives. Here follows a detailed comparison between these works, which charts Liang's and Tan's different views on literature, on women, and on the story of women's literature. I conclude by pointing to the existence of a book which further complicates our division of women's literary history into "May Fourth" and "Qing style": Tan Zhengbi's *Nǚxing cihua* (Remarks on women's ci-poetry)

### *Two historians of women's literature*

Liang Yizhen, according to Ellen Widmer, was born in 1900 (Ibid.: 209). He first studied in Beijing but moved to Shanghai in 1924, where he went to Nanfang University (Liang 1932: 3-4; Huang 1931). After having written the histories of women's literature, Liang published several other books on literature including *Zhongguo wenxue shihua* (A discussion of literary history) and *Yuan Ming sanqu xiaoshi* (Short history of Yuan and Ming *sanqu*), both in 1934, *Huajian ciren yanjiu* (Research on the poets in 'Ci among flowers'), and *History of Chinese nationalist literature* in 1943 (Liang 1943).

Tan Zhengbi, the author of *Literary life of Chinese women* was born in Jiading, Jiangsu in 1901. On several occasions, Tan interrupted his education in order to teach. He began teaching at a very young age, working as an elementary school teacher between 1914 and 1917. After a few years of studies at several different schools in Jiangsu - a higher elementary school, a normal school, a trade school (*shangye xuexiao*) and a middle school - he again became a teacher, this time in a private home. In 1923 he enrolled at the Chinese Department of Shanghai University but soon discontinued his studies. (Xu 1991). He then got a teaching position at the Shenzhou school for girls

(*Shenzhou nǚxiao*), where he got to know Zheng Zhenduo, who was working there at the time. Zheng is said to have greatly influenced Tan's views on literary history (Chen Fukang 1991: 565). He left in 1924 but continued his teaching career, first in a private home, then at the village teachers training section of the Shanghai provincial middle school (*Shengli Shanghai zhongxue xiangcun shifan bu*) and the Shanghai independent middle school for girls (*Shanghai minli nǚzi zhongxue*). In 1934, he became an editor at Beixin shuju. During the war years he stayed in Shanghai, lecturing at various schools and universities. (Xu 1991)

Tan is the author of an impressive number of books on literature and philosophy, many of them textbooks for schools. His works on literary history include *Outline of the history of Chinese literature* from 1927, *Zhongguo wenxue jinhua shi* (History of the evolution of Chinese literature) from 1929, *Zhongguo wenxuejia dacidian* (Great dictionary of Chinese authors) from 1934, *Xinbian Zhongguo wenxueshi* (New compilation of Chinese literary history) and *Zhongguo xiaoshuo fada shi* (History of the development of fiction) from 1935, and *Wenxue yuanliu* (Origins of literature) from 1941. With his *Literary life of Chinese women* Tan appears to have established himself as something of an authority on women's literature. For example, Tan was invited to write about how to study women's literature in the women's magazine *Nǚzi yuekan* (The women's monthly) in 1935 (Tan 1935), and in 1944 he attended a conference on women writers organised by the magazine *Zazhi* (The Magazine) (Ren and Wang 2001: 153). In the preface to the 1984 edition of the book, the 84 year old Tan wrote that his book had been well received by serious scholars such as Chen Yinke as well as by ordinary school girls, who, finding the book's title somewhat cumbersome, would simply ask the book shop assistant for "a Tan Zhengbi" (Tan 1984: 1). Tan published at least two more books on women's literature, a volume of *cihua* or remarks on *ci*-poetry in 1934, and an anthology

of contemporary women's fiction in 1944 (Tan 1934; Tan 1944).

Tan Zhengbi's *Literary life of Chinese women* took a feminist approach to women's literature, and a thoroughly "new literature" approach to literature in general. As the title seems to suggest, it was inspired by Chen Dongyuan's *History of the lives of Chinese women*. The two histories by Liang Yizhen, on the other hand, were not preoccupied with the status of women, and were not feminist in the sense that they recognised a systemic oppression of women. Liang's first history was not concerned with literary modernity, as it was written in an archaic style and employed a traditional concept of literature. His second history of women's literature embraced a more "modern" view of literature, emphasising creative writing, and, in particular, folk literature.

In spite of Liang's protestations to the contrary (Liang 1932:4), *History of women's literature of the Qing dynasty* looks like a sequel to Xie Wuliang's *History of Chinese women's literature*. It begins more or less where Xie's history ends, and although it was published eleven years later, in 1927, its style is close to classical. Only occasionally did Liang allow himself the use of modern vocabulary such as *lian'ai* (love), *sixiang* (thoughts or thinking), or *Huangjin shidai* (Golden Age). As is the case with Xie's book, a substantial portion of Liang's first history consists of examples of women's writing, and direct quotations from earlier secondary sources. The book consists of three prefaces, by Liang himself, Wang Yunzhang and Qiu Jin's daughter Wang Canzhi who was a fellow student at Nanfang University (Huang 1931), and the history proper which is divided into five parts. The first four of these are organised more or less chronologically. Part one is about the "development of women's literature in the Ming-Qing transition", the second and third part about what Liang calls the "heyday of Qing women's literature", roughly covering the period from the late seventeenth century through the mid-nineteenth century, and the fourth part about "the time of decline of Qing women's literature",

approximately corresponding to the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the dynasty. The chronological ordering of women writers is inconsistent, however, as other principles of organisation often override the principle of chronology. In particular, writers who were connected with, or became known through the efforts of a certain male literatus are often grouped together, regardless of when they themselves were writing. Part five includes notes on women writers whose personal histories were unclear, regardless of when in the Qing they had been active. There is no theoretical framework to tie together the various works, events and people mentioned. Liang did not explain why he had chosen to write a history of women's literature, but his preface reflects his enthusiasm for the subject. He recounts how he started doing research on women's literature as a student in Beijing, when for two or three years he spent his spare time in the library, looking through several hundred works which had to do with women's literature and taking lots of notes. His description of how he finished the book in Shanghai in the winter of 1925 is rather romantic:

I finished the draft for this book during the winter holidays in the year *jiazi*. Most of my fellow students had returned to their home towns for the New Year, but I was living alone in Hongkou in a little house owned by someone called Ma. I especially remember that it snowed heavily on New Year's Eve. My hands were so stiff I could not hold my pen, so I bought some wine which I drank eagerly, and in the still of the night, by the light of a flickering lamp, I at last took up my pen and wrote fervently on the rustling paper, oblivious of the fact that the following morning would bring a new year. (Liang 1932: 4)

The passage is reminiscent of Qian Sanqi's preface to *Selected beauties from the chambers of adornment* from 1833 (see Chapter One), in that it presents the image of a lonely scholar who indulges in a cup of wine and elegant poetry

by refined ladies, while taking shelter from the bad weather outdoors. The fact that, this time, the scholar is not a failed imperial examination candidate returned to his family estate, but a university student renting a room in Shanghai, gives the preface an air of nostalgia.

Liang's second history, *Outline of the history of Chinese women's literature* covers the entire period from ancient times up to the end of the Qing dynasty. It aims at presenting a complete history of Chinese women's literature and at giving the impression of serious, modern scholarship, conscientiously providing notes and references at the end of each chapter. Apart from a few short introductory remarks, the book consists of the history proper, with various women writers discussed in mostly chronological order. Its style is archaic, although more modern than that of *History of women's literature of the Qing dynasty*. In both works, Liang presents himself as a passionate collector and conscientious scholar of Chinese women's literature.

Tan Zhengbi's *Literary life of Chinese women*, like Liang's *Outline of the history of Chinese women's literature*, is an ambitious work which attempts to narrate the entire story of women's literature in China in a modern scholarly fashion. It includes a long introductory chapter, where Tan explained his views on women's history and on the relationship between women and literature. This chapter provides a feminist theoretical framework for the remainder of the history, which is organised in accordance with Tan's ideas about literary evolution. Unlike Liang, Tan wrote his history of women's literature in a thoroughly modern vernacular. While Liang's histories are at times elegant, but often dry and repetitive, Tan, it seems, did his best to make his history as entertaining as possible. Arguably irrelevant descriptions of for instance beautiful scenery are added, and the biographies of writers are often rendered in a dramatic fashion. With his modern theories concerning literature and gender, and his easily accessible vernacular prose, Tan projects an image of

himself as a progressive educator.

### *Liang and Tan on literature*

The concept of literature used in Liang Yizhen's *History of women's literature of the Qing dynasty* is not very different from Xie Wuliang's. Although Liang's focus was on *shi* and *ci* poetry, he also included "prose" writings such as the Han scholarship of Wang Zhaoyuan, and Shen Shanbao's and Guo Liufang's remarks on poetry. Lady anthologists such as Wanyan Yun Zhu were included among the women authors, and Liang actually rated these scholarly women above those who wrote only poetry. He claimed that to select poetry is far more difficult than to write it, and although Qing women had been very good at composing pretty verses, women who criticised and anthologised poetry, or wrote works based on careful classical studies, were extremely rare. "It was not hard to find a woman of talent", he wrote, "but it was hard to find a woman of knowledge"(Liang 1932:193). It was on these grounds he considered the literary critic and anthologist Wang Duan the "number one talented woman of the Qing" (*Qingdai di yi caifu*) (Ibid: 204). Like Xie Wuliang, Liang did not take particular interest in women's drama or fiction. He mentioned Wu Zao's play *Qiaoying* (Proud silhouette), but although he wrote about the poetry and scholarship of Liang Desheng and Wang Duan, he did not mention that these women had been writing narrative literature as well.

Tan Zhengbi brought an entirely different conception of literature to the historiography of women's writing. In the preface to the first edition of *Literary life of Chinese women*, he criticised Xie Wuliang and Liang Yizhen for using an old-fashioned, overly narrow definition of literature which excluded novels, drama and *tanci* (1978:1) To Tan, as to so many of his generation, literature meant creative writing: poetry, fiction and drama were literature, whereas moral philosophy, history, letters, and official documents were not.

In addition, Tan attempted to apply the idea of “literary evolution” to the female tradition. In the preface to *Literary life of Chinese women*, Tan stated that he conceived of *Literary life of Chinese women* as a complement to his earlier *History of the evolution of Chinese literature*. In this work, Tan enthusiastically embraced literary evolutionism, a theory of literature which, according to Bonnie S. McDougall, was first introduced to China in 1919, and quickly gained acceptance among different schools and factions within New Literature (McDougall 1971: 227-231; 253-257).

According to Tan's version of literary evolutionism, there was no absolute standard for literary excellence. Literary works were to be judged by different criteria depending on when they were produced. What made a literary work great was not its adherence to eternal aesthetic standards, but the fact that it belonged, at the time of its creation, to a type of literature which was “evolving” rather than “degenerating”. Tan equated evolving literature with “living literature” (*huo wenxue*), a term coined by Hu Shi (see Chen 2000: 196-205): literature which was dynamic and creative, and drew upon the spoken language of its time for inspiration. In time, however, any genre or form of literature would lose touch with colloquial language, stagnate, and become formalistic and derivative, thereby turning into a “dead” or “degenerating” form of literature. In each historical epoch, one or two “evolving” literary genres had reached maturity and flourished, obscuring all other literary forms, only to decline and be supplanted by other genres in the following historical epoch. (Tan 1929: 9-14). The task of the literary historian, therefore, was to document the rise and fall of the great, “living” genre of each particular era. In the Han and Jin dynasties, the important genres were *shi* and *fu*, in the Six Dynasties *yuefu*, in Sui and Tang, *shi* and *chuanqi*, in the Song *ci*, in the Yuan *qu* and in the Ming and Qing *qu*, fiction and *tanci*.

In *Literary life of Chinese women*, Tan did not expound upon the nature of

literary evolution, but this work is clearly organised in accordance with a similar evolutionary model. In the preface, Tan explained that the book was to emphasise “period literature” (*shidai wenxue*) (Ibid:1), a term also used by Hu Shi (Chen Pingyuan 2000: 202) which appears to denote the same thing as “evolving literature”. The chapter division of *Literary life of Chinese women* was entirely based on the evolutionary “period literature” model. Chapter two was about *shi* and *fu* from the Han and Jin, chapter three about *yuefu* from the Six dynasties, chapter four about Tang and Sui *shi* (women, we must assume, did not write *chuanqi*) and chapter five about Song *ci*. Because women apparently had not been writing *qu* in the Yuan, this dynasty did not merit a chapter of its own, but the sixth chapter treated *qu* from the Ming and Qing instead. The seventh and last chapter was about Ming and Qing novels and *tanci*. The opening sections of each chapter treated the early development of the particular genre in question and were called “the origin of *shi* and *fu*”, “the origin of *yuefu*”, and so on.

Liang Yizhen’s second history of women’s literature was much more in line with modern trends in Chinese literary thought than was his first. Firstly, because it was less concerned with non-fictional prose writing, and focused almost exclusively on various forms of poetry. Secondly, because it adopted the concepts “commoners’ literature” (*pingmin wenxue*) and “aristocratic literature” (*guizu wenxue*), which had been the subject of much debate in New Literature circles in the 1920s (see Hockx 1994: 90). Liang sought to emphasise the literature of the common people at the expense of aristocratic literature. “The narrative of this book emphasises commoner (*pingmin*) and anonymous writers and works, whereas aristocratic and court literature are treated in brief”, Liang stated in the introductory remarks (1990:1). His *History of women’s literature of the Qing dynasty* had, with one or two exceptions, been concerned with gentry women writers, but in *Outline of the history of Chinese*



women's literature, Liang revealed an interest in folk literature. The Qing section of *Outline of the history of Chinese women's literature* was still almost exclusively about gentry women, but in the sections on Zhou to Tang literature, Liang devoted an unusually large space to folk songs by anonymous, but presumably female, poets of the people. Finally, compared to *History of women's literature of the Qing dynasty*, *Outline of the history of Chinese women's literature* was organised in a stricter chronological order, and more often discussed larger literary trends such as stylistic influences or the developments of genres.

Thus, changing definitions of the concept of literature led to changes in the definition of women's literature as well. The word *funū wenxue* referred to a different set of writings when it was first used by Xie Wuliang than it did fourteen years later in Tan Zhengbi's history of women's literature. For Xie, it included official documents but not fiction or drama, and its most significant and representative works were examples of court poetry. For Tan it referred to creative literature alone, not bureaucratic or scholarly writing, and the most important and typical women's literature was written by women of the people.

### *Liang and Tan on women*

Liang Yizhen did not use women's emancipation as a framework for his histories. There are no references to the status of women in the introductions to *History of women's literature of the Qing dynasty* or *Outline of the history of Chinese women's literature*. In *History of women's literature of the Qing dynasty*, Liang never used any words for feminism, oppression or emancipation. He did not interpret the lives of his women writers in feminist terms even when the opportunity presented itself. For example, he avoided turning the travelling professional poet Huang Yuanjie into an emancipated woman, or He Shuangqing, who suffered ill-treatment at the hands of her

husband and mother-in-law, into a victim of the patriarchal system. He made it clear that he strongly opposed the practice of widow suicide, but without expanding upon the evils of double standards of sexual morality. When reporting the tragic fates of his woman poets, he used clichés like "rosy cheeks, meagre fate".

Not until almost 200 pages into the book do we find any reflections upon the status of women or the purpose of women's education. Criticising Wanyan Yun Zhu's selection strategies in her poetry anthology *Correct beginnings*, Liang argued that Yun Zhu valued chastity and virtue too much, emphasised gentleness at the expense of talent, and put too much faith in what Liang dubbed the "virarchal system" (*fuquan zhidu*). Yun Zhu was a product of an education which, at best, made women "sincere and gentle" and "good wives and wise mothers", something Liang found insufficient. (Liang 1932: 198-199). In a later section, Liang devoted almost one page to criticism of the negative influence of *lijiao* upon Qing dynasty women. Educated women had not only failed to rebel against *lijiao*, but had been complicit in the propagation of it, he complained. The women's *lijiao*-based education had brought them no happiness. Liang estimated that 60 – 70 % of the women poets included in his history were widowed early or met with a tragic end. These opinions of his, Liang stated, were beyond the scope of his book. He excused his digression by explaining that he had kept these thoughts in his heart for such a long time that he could not suppress them any longer. (Ibid: 208-209). Although concerned about the hard lot of Qing dynasty women of talent, Liang clearly did not consider discussions of women's status to be the proper subject of a history of women's literature.

Liang's *Outline of the history of Chinese women's literature* also contained criticism of *lijiao*. He rejected traditional moralistic interpretations of songs in the *Book of songs*: images of women which *Biographies of exemplary women*

interpreted as obedient, faithful wives or chaste widows, Liang described as serene mythical goddesses or defiant, passionate women who refused to marry without love (Liang 1990: 14; 20-21). He admired the talent of Ban Zhao and Song Ruoxin, but added that their moral instructions for women, *Instructions for women* and *Nü lunyu* (The female analects) had brought Chinese women suffering, and that Ban Zhao's work marked the beginning of a "slave morality" among women. (Liang 1990: 65-73; 217-219). Even so, women's status was not a major concern of Liang's second history.

Liang Yizhen did not explain why he had chosen to write histories of women's literature or why he considered it necessary to treat women's literature as a tradition separate from men's. Tan Zhengbi, on the other hand, explained that women's literature was to be considered a separate tradition because women's lives had been different from men's. He considered his history of women's literature "a part of the history of women's lives". Like Chen Dongyuan, author of *History of the lives of Chinese women*, Tan viewed women's history from an entirely feminist perspective.

In an introductory chapter Tan propounded his theories concerning women's status and women's relation to literature. Like Chen Dongyuan, Tan maintained that the earliest societies had been matrilineal (Tan 1978:4), and that the oppression of women had begun with the institution of marriage (Ibid:5). Again like Chen, he argued that the reason why men felt a need to put restrictions upon women in the first place, was because women were inherently strong and powerful - not least because they exerted sexual power over men (Ibid: 2). Tan thought women were as capable as men by nature, but that the restrictions put upon them by an oppressive morality had kept them from putting their talents to use, and finally led them to forget many of their abilities (Ibid: 14-15). However, women had different ways of coping with the oppression they all faced. According to Tan, they all had to make one decisive

choice, the choice between surrender or resistance to "male-centered society". These diametrically opposed ways of coping were further divided by Tan into "passive surrender" or chastity (*zhen*), "active surrender" or feminine comportment (*rong*), "passive resistance" or licentiousness (*yin*) and "active resistance" or jealousy (*du*)(Ibid: 6-12). To Tan, chastity meant passive acceptance of one's lowly status, feminine comportment active attempts at pleasing the male oppressor, licentiousness an attempt to get even with the men by enjoying whatever they enjoyed, and jealousy a questioning of men's right to polygamy. In this way Tan redefined traditional concepts for classifying women, turning former vices into modern virtues.

#### *The Renaissance of women's literature*

While Xie Wuliang's historical narrative described a steadily downward-spiralling movement, Liang's *Outline of the history of Chinese women's literature* sketched a more complicated, fluctuating curve. According to Liang, Chinese women's literature had had not just one, but several periods of glory. Liang's narrative, like Xie's, began in a remote mythological past. During the time that had passed since the publication of Xie's history, careful source criticism had become necessary for attaining scientific credibility in the modern disciplines of history and literature. Liang aspired to such scientific credibility but, being interested in folk literature, he did not want to condemn fascinating popular traditions about women poets to oblivion, only because there were no proof of their existence. His solution to the problem was to include ancient, possibly mythical, women poets as *myths* rather than as actual women (1990:2). The Queen Mother of the West, Huang'e, Jiandi and Tushan nü were included in the section about ancient literature, while Liang at the same time conceded that these women might never have existed, and pointed out that

several of the poems ascribed to them are undoubtedly fakes.

Liang regarded the *Book of songs* as the earliest relatively reliable source to women's literature, but could not find a way around the questions posed by Zhang Xuecheng any more than Xie could, and he, too, resigned himself to accepting the traditional attribution of certain songs to women poets. He was, however, anxious to get beneath the interpretations heaped upon the *Songs* throughout the ages and make fresh interpretations of his own.

Liang agreed with Xie that women's learning declined at the very end of the Zhou period, yet he described the Han dynasty as an era which produced a particularly high number of women authors. Many of these, the "great author" Cai Yan for one, had been very influential in their own time and remained famous in ages to come (Ibid: 78; 38). Women's literature also played an important, if forgotten, role in the period after the Han. The literature of the Wei, Jin, and the Six Dynasties had been looked down upon by later generations, wrote Liang, but it contained a "buried treasure": love songs, which were often written by women (Ibid: 95). The greatest of all Chinese popular literature was one type of such love songs, the *ziye ge*, a form of *yuefu* poetry thought to have been invented by a woman called Ziyue. This genre became extremely widespread among the people and finally developed into the *wujue shi* in the Tang, Liang explained. In the Liang of the Six Dynasties, women's literature actually surpassed that of men, for while men's literature got increasingly ornate and elaborate, women still wrote with natural feeling. With the Tang, women's verse, like men's, became more regulated and less natural, a trend which continued into the Five Dynasties (Ibid: 191; 250), and although men's literature had flourished in the Song, there were few great women writers at this time (Ibid: 250). In spite of these negative trends, however, Liang appreciated the palace poems by Lady Huarui of the Five Dynasties and greatly admired women's *ci* from the Song.

In sharp contrast to Xie and, as we shall see, Tan, Liang discerned an upswing in women's literature after the Song. With the Yuan and Ming dynasties came a "renaissance of women's literature" (Ibid: 314), and the Qing dynasty saw the rise of an unprecedented number of women writers. In the Qing, Liang wrote, women's learning reached its highest peak and talented ladies appeared one after another, like pearls on a string (Ibid:374). Liang made it clear that the approximately 70 Qing women writers included in *Outline of the history of Chinese women's literature* in fact only made up a small selection of women writers of that era. For a more complete picture of women's literature in the Qing he referred to his *History of women's literature of the Qing dynasty*. This book mentions nearly 300 women writers in the history proper, some 220 of whom are represented with examples of their poetry or quotations from their prose. In addition, over 300 more women writers are listed in an appendix. Considering the number of women represented and Liang's generally positive assessments of the poetry included, *History of women's literature of the Qing dynasty* conveys a positive image of women's literature in the Qing. The greater part of the Qing dynasty was nothing less than "the Golden Age of women's literature" or "the heyday of women's literature" (Ibid: 51). Although women's literature somewhat declined in the late Qing still there was, in Liang's opinion, at least one female literary star in this epoch, the eccentric revolutionary Qiu Jin.

The main reason for the success of women's literature in the Qing, Liang argued, was because a number of male literati actively promoted it. Promoters of women's literature mentioned by Liang included Qian Qianyi, Mao Dake, Wu Meicun, Wang Shizhen, Bi Qiufan, Hang Shijun, Guo Pinqie, Ruan Yuntai, Yuan Mei, Chen Wenshu, Chen Weisong, Zeng Guofan and Yu Quyuan (Ibid:146; 215), and of these he devoted particular attention to Yuan Mei, Chen Wenshu and Wang Shizhen. These famous literati encouraged women to write

poetry by including women's poems in collections and *shihua* and, in some cases, by surrounding themselves with female pupils. Liang's lack of a feminist theoretical framework gave him leeway to describe this phenomenon, as he did not need to assume that women writers were constantly discouraged by a uniform patriarchal oppression hostile to women's artistic endeavours. Liang did not describe women writers as isolated from the literary scene in general. For example, Liang claimed that Yuan Mei's style and theory of poetry exerted a direct influence upon women's poetry, and that women *ci* writers can be placed within the Changzhou and the Zhejiang schools of *ci* writing. Women writers were thus seen as taking part in Qing dynasty literary trends, albeit as influenced by them rather than influencing them.

Liang stressed not only women writers' ties to male promoters of women's literature, but other social contexts of their writing as well. Women's literature was viewed very much as a family affair. Liang recorded how girls learned poetry from their fathers, mothers or aunts, how women taught poetry to daughters and nieces, how female poets exchanged poetry with their husbands or with female relations, and how virtuous wives composed eulogies on their husbands' concubines. Liang also drew attention to another forum for women's literary activities: the all-female poetry club. He devoted separate sections to the Banana Garden poetry clubs, and to the "Suzhou Ten" (*Wuzhong shi zi*). In fact, Liang's women writers were often grouped together on the basis of kinship, friendship, or participation in poetry clubs. In any given section on a particular woman poet, Liang would mention a number of talented sisters and cousins and daughters-in-law, or other literary acquaintances, and often included poetry by those women too. Where the talented relations included a great-grandmother or a great-granddaughter, kinship often overrode chronology as the principle of organisation.

### *The evolution of women's literature*

Tan Zhengbi's narrative of Chinese women's literary history diverges considerably from both Xie Wuliang's and Liang Yizhen's. Tan made a conscious effort to reshape the canon of women's literature in accordance with modern theories of gender and of literature, and saw himself as an iconoclast and an innovator. In the preface to *Great outline of the history of Chinese literature*, he declared that he wanted to "destroy" all existing literary histories. Instead of accepting the canon decided upon by earlier historians, he would bring previously neglected or forgotten works to the light (Tan 1927: 8-10).

Tan Zhengbi's history of women's literature begins in a later period than Xie's and Liang's. Tan declared that as the identity of the authors of the *Book of songs* could not be determined, this book would be excluded from his history. Although he mentioned a few women from the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring states period, his story of women's literature really begins with the Han.

"Period literature" provided the framework of the story. Tan did not elevate any particular period as the golden age of women's literature, but assessed each period on the grounds of women's contributions to the great genre(s) of that era. Writing about the Han and Jin, he concentrated on women's *shi* and *fu*, writing about the Six Dynasties he concentrated on women's *yuefu* poetry, and so on. As a result, he was able to present a wealth of women poets from the Han, the Six Dynasties and the Tang. As for the Song, he conveyed a more positive image of the women's literature of that time than did Xie and Liang. Because to Tan, *ci* was all the literature that counted in this period, he did not see a need to deplore the supposed decline of palace women' literature, or of women's *shi* poetry.

When it came to women's literature after the Song, however, the concept of period literature complicated Tan's history considerably. Already for the



history of men's literature, the period literature model entailed the exclusion of large bodies of writing, such as Ming and Qing poetry. For women's literary history it had even more extreme consequences. The period literature model was after all created for the history of men's literature, and its legitimacy derived from the fact that men had created (supposedly) great works in the genres which (supposedly) defined their eras. Although men's poetry from the Ming and Qing was excluded, a tradition of Ming and Qing fiction could be elevated in its place. This was not always the case with women's literature. In Tan's history, the Yuan dynasty had to be left out altogether because women did not produce any *qu* at the time. Although Tan mentioned late Song - early Yuan poet-painter Guan Daosheng in the section for Song, he skipped over other famous Yuan women such as Zheng Yunduan.

For the Ming and Qing, the periods which had produced the largest number of female writers ever, the consequences of Tan's "period literature" theory were even more problematic. Writing about these dynasties Tan focused exclusively on the few women who were known to have written *qu*, fiction or *tanci*, regardless of whether the writers in question had been famous or influential and regardless of whether their works in these genres were still extant. In the 1931 edition of *Literary life of Chinese women*, these Ming and Qing women writers of fiction, *qu* and *tanci* numbered only sixteen. Some famous women poets were mentioned by Tan on account of them being connected with the sixteen writers. The Banana Garden poetry clubs, for example, were mentioned in connection with club member Lin Yining, whom Tan considered a "great playwright" although her one play did not survive, and Tan was not even acquainted with the plot. Writing about Ye Xiaowan, the only Ming woman writer of *zaju* according to Tan, he included her mother Shen Yixiu and sisters Ye Xiaoluan and Ye Wanwan as well. Even so, Tan's selection of Ming and Qing women's literature made up a tiny canon indeed, considering

that literally thousands of women poets were published in this period.

Obviously, the reason why Tan selected so very few women writers from late imperial times was not because he was ignorant of how much women's poetry there was from this era, but because he was striving to radically reshape the canon of Ming and Qing women's literature. While Liang contented himself with presenting long lists of talented women already celebrated by earlier anthologists, Tan wanted to dig for "buried treasures", to discover lesser known authors and forgotten works of literature. The idea of "period literature" showed him where to start digging. Because fiction and *fanci* had not been as highly regarded as poetry, very little had been written in Ming and Qing times about women's attempts in these genres, and Tan was able to pose as a pioneering researcher of women's narrative literature.

In addition to "period literature", Tan's historical narrative was shaped by his feminist agenda. For the most part, Tan viewed events, personalities and literary works from a feminist perspective. He blamed the fact that so little was preserved of what women wrote on "male-centered society" (1978: 188). It was because of men's selfishness that the male Pan Yue's *Guafu shi* (Poem of the widow) had become so much more well-known than the poem with the same title written by the actual widow Ding Yi's Wife (Ibid: 86). Tan often portrayed unhappy women as victims of men's oppression and out-going, active, unconventional women as proto-feminists. He brought to the fore women who he considered rebels against patriarchy, even when these heroines had left little literature which could be proved to be their own. Consequently, Zhuo Wenjun, the young Han dynasty widow who eloped with Sima Xiangru and later wrote a poem criticising Xiangru's decision to take a concubine, was presented as a champion of free love and a critic of polygamy, and Tan devoted an entire chapter to her romantic life. Although her literary fame hinged mainly on her one remaining poem *Baitou yin* (The song of white hair), the authenticity of

which had been questioned, Tan was anxious to elevate her to the status of "poet". Empress Wu Zetian, too, was given a chapter of her own, in spite of Tan's claim that her contribution to literature was "not significant" (Ibid:157). Tan lauded Wu Zetian as an early feminist rather than a talented writer, saying that her accomplishments were in themselves "a furious vindication of the women who had been subjugated for five thousand years" (Ibid:147). The political agenda of this skilful and ruthless ruler had been nothing less than to raise the status of women (Ibid:151-153).

Tan took every opportunity to extract feminist messages out of the women's literature included in his history. For example, he saw the poetry of Tang dynasty Daoist priestess Yu Xuanji as statements of her opinions. Her poems revealed that she had been in favour of greater sexual freedom for women, and that she bitterly regretted not being able to participate in the imperial examinations. When it came to Ming and Qing literature, Tan was interested in plays and stories about girls disguising themselves as men in order to engage in activities traditionally considered "male", a common motif in women's drama and *tanci* of the time. According to Tan, the motif represented female writers' fantasies about doing things denied to them as women (Ibid:371; 438). Some women writers managed to combine this fantasy with adherence to *lijiao* by letting their heroine return to domesticity at the end of the story. The play *Fanhua meng* (Dreams of glory) by Qing dynasty writer Wang Yun, however, demonstrated that its authoress "hated men" and was a precursor of the women's movement (Ibid:365-366).

The negative image of Ming and Qing women's literature which resulted from the "period literature" model fitted in well with Tan's feminist beliefs. It would not have made sense for the feminist Tan to accept Liang's version of women's literature in the Ming and Qing. Liang argued, as we have seen, that the Ming and, in particular, the Qing were the Golden Age of women's

literature, a time when women's poetry flourished as a result of active encouragement by famous male literati. This image of late imperial women's literature would not have combined easily with Tan's feminist theories. For if men were oppressors, why would they so unselfishly promote women writers? In other words, how could there, in an oppressive, male-dominated society, have been room for women to express themselves artistically? If women had indeed been encouraged to develop their literary talents to the utmost, how was it that their contributions to Chinese literature had not been greater? It could easily be suspected that it was because they lacked talent, and this was a conclusion which Tan wanted to avoid. Finally, if Chinese women's literature had reached an absolute peak already in the Qing, under an extreme oppression of women, what reasons were there to hope that the emancipation of women would be of advantage to literature?

Chen Dongyuan's strategies for avoiding these problems had been to emphasise the reaction against women's writing more than the promotion thereof. The fact that women wrote at all, in spite of lack of education and hostile attitudes towards women's poetry, was an accomplishment in itself, whereas the sentiments expressed in their poetry revealed them to be melancholic and repressed. Their poetry served as proof of their strength, resilience and intelligence as well as a key to their frustrated, yet-to-be-emancipated minds. (Chen 1990: 269-274).

Tan went even further in his emphasis on oppression. His solution was to argue that women writers had been oppressed all along, as male promoters of women's literature acted out of selfishness rather than generosity, and that, as a result, Ming and Qing women's literature had been of generally poor quality. According to Tan, women's contribution to Chinese literature had been minimal, so small that it was downright embarrassing (Ibid: 24). This was no fault of the women themselves, however. Women were at least as talented as

men when it came to writing, and a handful of great women authors such as Cai Yan and Li Qingzhao had succeeded in proving that women, too, are capable of creating great literature (Ibid). What had kept the majority of female talent from producing valuable literature was the injustice of male-centered society (Ibid: 28). Men's oppression confined women to their homes, and the rules of propriety taught them to value household work above art. As a result, they led "narrow" and "dried out" lives void of literary inspiration (Ibid: 26-28). Well-to-do women were the only ones to get an opportunity to develop their literary talents, but the richer a woman was, the more restricted were her movements, and thus, the fewer her opportunities to gather material for her writing (Ibid: 28). Truly great women writers had been leading romantic, eventful or unhappy lives, like the promiscuous Li Ye and Xue Tao, the exiled Cai Yan and Wang Qiang, or the unfortunate Li Qingzhao and Zhu Shuzhen. Materially well-off upper-class women who led uneventful lives, on the other hand, feigned unhappiness in their poetry in order to have something to write about. They wrote for their own amusement or in order to appeal to men:

....although they kept loitering about in the Garden of Art, they were no more than parrots imitating speech or dogs wagging their tails, using [literature] to, on the one hand, kill their leisure time, and, on the other, have artistically interested males kowtow beneath their pomegranate skirts, increasing [the men's] appetite for fooling around with women. (Ibid: 29)

Tan implied that the "artistically interested men", among them Yuan Mei, had ulterior motives for promoting women's literature.

Before the Northern and Southern dynasties women writers had been expressing their own genuine feelings in their poetry, but from the Sui and Tang onwards, women's poetry became geared towards pleasing men (Ibid:

30). This trend culminated in the Ming and Qing:

As for the Ming and Qing dynasties, there were cart-loads of women *shi*-writers and *ci*-writers, but hardly a single one of them did not do it in order to earn the compliment "refined" (*fengya*) from the men. (Ibid: 31)

Tan thus dismissed the numerous lady poets of the Ming and Qing as contrived and dishonest, the inferior quality of their poetry the result of a patriarchal society which deprived them of true experiences of life, and forced them to depend upon men. The fact that so few women were working in the genres which Tan considered important in the Ming and Qing demonstrated how isolated and backward women writers were. As they were shut up in their homes and restricted by propriety, exciting new literary trends reached them last of all, sometimes centuries after the trends had started.

*From narratives of oppression to romantic anecdotes*

It is clear by now that although Liang Yizhen's histories not quite fitted the "May Fourth" or the "Qing style" labels, Tan Zhengbi's history was almost exactly the kind of May Fourth history criticised by Widmer and Ko. Modern in form and authoritative in tone, it presented a grand narrative revolving around the oppression of women and the evolution of genres, which entailed the exclusion of substantial amounts of women's writing, and presented women as victims. It is tempting to assume that *Literary life of Chinese women* represented the conviction of a dominant group of modernisers, whose influence grew throughout the 1920s, and who eventually came to shape our present day distorted view of women's history. At this point however, I must point out that not even the author of *Literary life of Chinese women* himself was

always a proponent of such a view.

Tan Zhengbi's *Remarks on women's ci-poetry* from 1934 is very different from his previous work on women's literature. It presents 59 women ci-writers from the Song to the Qing in 57 short chapters. Each chapter tells a few sad, romantic or amusing anecdotes associated with a woman ci-writer, quotes a few ci and adds a few comments on her style. While *Literary life of Chinese women* is a history, *Remarks on women's ci-poetry* belongs to the older genre of *cihua*. The temporal aspect is downplayed: literary developments are mentioned only in passing, and although the book begins with Song writers and ends with Qing writers, the chronology is fairly loose. Where *Literary life of Chinese women* is serious and political, *Remarks on women's ci-poetry* is lighthearted and romantic. It contains no preface, introduction or afterword, and no declaration of intent, and does not propound any explicit theories or arguments.

In *Remarks on women's ci-poetry* there are few traces of Tan's feminism and literary evolutionism. Women are described as unhappy, but mostly Tan does not attempt to explain their unhappiness as a result of men's oppression. There is an occasional mention of "male-centred society" (Tan 1934: 70), but that is as far as the feminist analysis goes in this work. The period model for literature is also absent. According to this model, the golden age of *ci-poetry* was the Song. Yet of the 59 writers included, only 15 are from the Song and Yuan. The majority of the poets are from the Qing.

*Remarks on women's ci-poetry* did not aspire to be modern in any way. It avoided the historical mode of writing, scientific reasoning, literary evolutionism, theories about the centrality of popular literature, and feminism. Only its language was the modern vernacular. Yet it was written by the author of *Literary life of Chinese women*. This seeming contradiction indicates that there was no dominant perception of traditional women's literature in the 1920s

and 1930s, but that several perspectives on women's past existed at the same time. *Literary life of Chinese women* did not represent the general opinion of May Fourth critics. It was an experiment, an exercise in modernity, which never caused its creator to completely lose sight of more traditional, more self-evident ways of interpreting women's literature.

### *Conclusion*

In the 1920s and 1930s, there certainly existed a tendency to deny or devalue women's past contributions to Chinese culture on the grounds that oppression had rendered women unable to make use of their talents. We have seen how Wang Chuncui dismissed the female literary tradition, and how Chen Dongyuan's evolutionary, emancipatory history emphasised oppression at the expense of female agency. As Ellen Widmer argues, this tendency sometimes even extended to writings which ostensibly set out to endorse traditional women's literature. This was the case with Tan Zhengbi's *Literary life of Chinese women*, in which women's contributions to Chinese literature were further obscured by Tan's literary evolutionism, which entailed the exclusion of Ming-Qing poetry. Like Wang Chuncui, Tan seemed content with letting the great majority of Ming and Qing women poets - that is, the majority of Chinese women writers who had ever reached a readership outside their families - "stay buried in the green mountains". While Tan's commitment to feminism and New Literature opened up new possibilities for research and interpretation, they at the same time blinded him to the more obvious realities of women's culture - and led him to disregard most of what women actually wrote.

The story of women's literary history narrated in *Literary life of Chinese women* was, however, not the only version of the story told in the late 1920s and early 1930s. As we have seen, the histories of women's literature by Liang Yizhen differed radically from that of Tan Zhengbi. Although sympathetic to the



plight of women, Liang did not pose as a feminist in his histories, and did not emphasise the oppression of women. This left him free to take more interest in the immediate environment of the women writers, in the bonds of kinship, friendship and teacher-student relationship that formed the social contexts of their literature. Not subscribing to the period literature model, he included far more women writers from the Ming and Qing than did Tan.

This does not, however, make Liang a “Qing holdover”. Liang’s histories - in particular *History of women’s literature of the Qing dynasty* - may have had much in common with Qing anthologies, but that does not mean that Liang was writing from a Qing dynasty perspective, or from inside some residual bubble of Qing dynastic time. His two histories of women’s literature were packaged as modern historical narratives of “literature” rather than as collections of *shi* or *ci*. In *Outline of the history of Chinese women’s literature* he brought up some New Literature ideas such as emphasis on folk literature, but without letting these obscure Ming-Qing women’s poetry. The case of Liang Yizhen points to the existence of a far greater diversity in the 1920s and 1930s of attitudes towards traditional women’s literature than Dorothy Ko acknowledges when she writes about a “May Fourth legacy” in women’s history.

Not even Tan Zhengbi himself always stuck to his feminist, evolutionistic interpretation of traditional women’s literature. His *Remarks on women’s ci poetry*, written several years after *Literary life of Chinese women*, does not aspire to modernity. This again implies that the “May Fourth” way of imagining traditional women’s literature was not dominant, but that several perspectives on women’s literary past coexisted.

One reason why the Tan Zhengbi of *Literary life of Chinese women* deemed Ming and Qing women’s literature uninteresting was that he found it dishonest, contrived and lacking in authentic experience. In the next chapter, I will further explore the themes of truth, honesty and authenticity in writings

about traditional women's literature.

## Chapter Five: Women's truth

Literary critics [of China]! Please do not judge the literature of women on account of things like formal literary rules, or the "tone and spirit" (*shenyun*) of literature, but please pay attention to their 'truth'! (Liangfu 1933: 4)

In his preface to the 1933 *Zhongguo funü yu wenxue* (Chinese women and literature) by Tao Qiuying, the author's husband (Chen Yutang 1986: 198) Jiang Liangfu proclaimed that "truth" (*zhen*) was the most important aspect of women's literature.

Truth was in fact considered an important aspect of all kinds of literature and had been so for a long time. In what Wilt Idema and Lloyd Haft (1997) call the "central tradition" of Chinese literature (which included history) "literature was supposed to be *true*: to be a correct depiction of the moral situation and the feelings it evoked" (Ibid:52). Truth rather than fictionality was the essence of literature (Ibid:53). In expressive theories of literature, which were more specifically applied to poetry, the poet's sincerity was highly valued, and poetry considered to be the spontaneous overflow of genuine emotion (Liu 1975: 78-87). Proponents of the New Literature movement, in turn, appropriated truth and sincerity for their own purposes. In his study of early new poetry Michel Hockx (1994: 2-3; 77-78) has described how "new" poets constructed "new literature" as sincere and "old literature" as insincere. Like Jiang Liangfu, they contrasted "truth" with "formal literary rules". The spontaneous free verse they themselves attempted to write was to be sincere: the direct outlet for the poet's true feelings, "frank" (*zhenshuai*) and "unaffected" (*zhipu*). Traditional poetry, on the other hand, was too regulated and too full of clichés to be sincere. The adherence to prosodic rules and the use of historical allusions was in their view

superficial ornamentation, which concealed, rather than conveyed, true feelings. The intricate conventions of traditional poetry had turned it into a game which could be undertaken without expressing any true feelings at all, whereas the new poetry could not be attempted without serious intentions, as it would reveal, in its nakedness, the truth of the poet.

What, then, was particular about the relationship between *women* and literary truth? In the late 1920s and early 1930s, critics and scholars of traditional women's literature searched the history of literature for a true female voice, one that was sincere, that represented the truth about women, and that emanated from a genuine historical woman. They linked women writers with truth in several ways which were gender-specific.

First, they thought women were ideally poised to communicate the truth about women to their readers, as they had first-hand knowledge and experience of women's lives. We have seen several examples of this in Chapters Three and Four. In the histories of women's literature by Xie Wuliang and Tan Zhengbi, literature served as a means to discover the truth about the women of the past. Xie's *History of Chinese women's literature* was not only a history of women's creative writing, but also served as a more general history of women's participation in Chinese politics and culture. Tan wrote in *Literary life of Chinese women* that he considered the history of women's literature part of "the history of women's lives" (1978: 2-3). These histories of women's literature doubled as histories of women as their ultimate object of study was not women's literature but the women themselves.

Second, only women were considered able to produce a truly feminine literature, one which expressed female emotions and sensibilities, without any element of impersonation or make-believe. Hu Yunyi's formulation of this belief will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Third, women's sincerity was seen as bound up with their lowly and

marginalised position in society. The oppression of women supposedly shaped women's personalities and determined their opportunities to express themselves through literature, so it was only natural that oppression would, in one way or another, affect their sincerity in literature.

### *Real lives and true feelings*

The issues outlined above - the truth about women, true femininity, and the impact of oppression and marginalisation on sincerity - may appear to be quite disparate, as the first one concerns representation of truths about the world, that is, a correspondence between literary work and the world, and the latter two concern the sincere expression of true feelings, that is, an attitude of the writer. To Republican period commentators on women's literature, however, they were intimately connected. This is hardly surprising considering that traditional Chinese literary theory seldom considered the relationship between work and world in isolation, without also considering the writer as the link between them (Anderson 1990: 12-24; Liu 1975:9).

By "truth" Jiang Liangfu referred both to sincerity of expression and to the communication of truths about the world. His preface moved freely between the subjects of literary truth, the expression of feelings, and the historical realities of women's lives, as if these things were self-evidently interconnected. After presenting a Marxist and feminist interpretation of the status of women in China, he explained that women living in these social circumstances would sometimes commit to paper those of their innermost thoughts and feelings that they wanted, and dared, to express. Such women's writing, according to Jiang, made visible the historical circumstances of women's lives. The voices of women struggling under men's oppression were full of pure feeling, because women "did not have time to learn how to lie like men", and consequently,

women's writing turned into a "true portrayal of women's lives". Like Tan Zhengbi, Jiang believed that women's literature conveyed a "history of women's lives". He contrasted his wife Tao Qiuying's book with traditional anthologies of women's poetry. According to Jiang, the aim of earlier anthologists of "gentlewomen's *shi*" or "gentlewomen's *ci*" had been to display the cultivation and elegance of certain families. They had never realised that the women's literature they collected could be interpreted as histories of women's lives or voices testifying to the oppression of a "male" society. (Ibid: 3-4).

According to Wendy Larson (1998: 176-177), Republican critics writing on traditional women's literature, such as Tao Qiuying, Hu Yunyi and Li Huiqun, constructed literature as feminine by elevating a "tradition of lyricism and emotionality". To them, she writes, "Good literature was not investigation of social problems, but the outpouring of emotions". Such an elevation of lyricism and emotionality, she argues, was at odds with modern literary ideals, and "had undergone unrelenting criticism since the May Fourth movement". When the critics in question tried to combine a progressive political stance with their appreciation of the lyrical, personal and emotional in literature, they inevitably ran into problems and ended up contradicting themselves.

But perhaps there was not such a clear opposition as Larson suggests between a "traditional" appreciation of the emotional, personal and lyrical versus a "modern" valorisation of a literature of social engagement. According to Marston Anderson, "May Fourth intellectuals...never repudiated the notion that literature was above all the articulation of deep human emotions" (1990: 37). Throughout the 1920s, even proponents of new realist fiction frequently emphasised the importance of the writer's expression of sincere feelings (Ibid: 36-51).

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frequently turned into an investigation of the personal feelings of women writers. But, in their own view, commentators on traditional women's literature did not emphasise emotion at the expense of social reality.

Tao Qiuying's *Chinese women and literature* (1933) combined an investigation into women's social status with evaluations of women's literature. The first third of the book treated the Chinese patriarchal system and women's education under Confucianism, painting as bleak a picture of women's position in imperial China as did Chen Dongyuan in *History of the lives of Chinese women* and Tan Zhengbi in *Literary lives of Chinese women*. Tao then attempted to trace the origins of women's literature, relating it to the oppression of women. The remaining, largest, part of the book contains critical evaluations of a number of "representative" writers in the genres of *fu*, letters, *shi* and *ci*, essays and fiction (*tanci* and *xiaoshuo*).

"Literature", according to Tao, were writings which were beautiful and expressed true emotion (Ibid: 134; 137-138; 142; 300). At the same time, the layout of her book represented an attempt to relate women's writing to the social circumstances of women's lives. Tao attempted to explain the various characteristics she perceived in women's literature as the results of the oppression of women. Because of their exclusion from public life, women's literature became a literature of leisure or entertainment (*xiaoqian*), because the restrictions and persecution they met with rendered their psyches frail and delicate, their literature became decadent. Finally, because *lijiao* restricted the language of certain groups of women but not others, there were great differences between their ways of treating topics of a sexual nature (Ibid: 87-92).

Lu Jingqing's *Women shi writers of the Tang dynasty* also related women's literature to social conditions. This book was part of a book series called "the materialist literary history series" (*wuguan wenxueshi congkao*)

which was conceived of by Lu's husband Wang Lixi.

In keeping with the materialist credo, Lu held that "a certain society will necessarily produce a certain group of poets" (Lu 1931: 7) and that a writer's work was shaped by his or her position in society. Women's literature was shaped, first of all, by the oppression of women. Yet the nature of women's literature was determined not only by their gender but also by their "class". In Lu's analysis, Tang women writers belonged to four different classes - palace women (*gongting funü*), family women (*jiating funü*), Daoist priestesses, and courtesans - which had produced four distinct kinds of women's literature.

The realities of Tang dynasty women's lives were reflected in their poetry, according to Lu. "Through their work", she wrote, "we can observe the environment in which they lived, the direction of their thoughts, and how their thoughts were formed. In extension, we can observe the outlines of the social life of Tang dynasty women of various classes". (Ibid: 4). For Lu, poetry preserved the consciousness of women long dead, and showed, indirectly, what social conditions must have been in place in order to produce such a consciousness. The mental states communicated by the poetry naturally included feelings as well as thoughts, but these were also revealing of the conditions of women's lives.

For Lu Jingqing, Tao Qiuying and Jiang Liangfu, women's literature reflected the predicament of women as a group defined by the oppression of women, and as members of different social classes. This it did, for these critics, by expressing the personal experiences of individual women writers. A woman, being oppressed, would experience certain emotions in response to the oppression, and express these emotions through the literary means available to her depending on what social class she belonged to. Her poetry could give latter day readers direct access to the emotions and mind-set of a representative of an era, a class, and the female gender. To these critics there



was no direct opposition between literature which described objective sociohistorical realities and literature which expressed subjective emotions. They would lament the fact that women had been shut out from “society” and therefore suffered from having only a limited range of subject matters to write about. But essentially, they perceived women’s expressions of personal feelings as a key to their historical reality.

### *Hu Yunyi’s extraordinary theory*

In 1928 Hu Yunyi (1934a), a 22 year old graduate of the Normal University of Wuchang, argued not only that the best of women’s poetry measured up to much of the best of men’s poetry, but also that women’s verse was at the very heart of the Chinese literary tradition.

His article “Chinese women and literature” was published in a book called *Nūxing yu wenxue* (Women and literature) edited by Li Huiqun, who was married to the critic and literary historian Liu Dajie. Hu Yunyi and Liu Dajie were both members of the Wuchang based literary society *Yilin she* (World of art society), founded in 1925 (Xu 1991). In addition to Hu Yunyi’s contribution, *Women and literature* contains two articles by Li Huiqun on the relationship between literature and the women’s movement, another by Liu Dajie, previously published in *The Ladies’ journal* (Dajie 1927), on Tolstoy’s views on women, and two articles by Kuriyagawa Hakuson translated by Lūjiao. According to Li’s preface, she saw the book as a commemoration of the friendship between herself, her husband, Hu Yunyi and Lūjiao (Huiqun 1934: 2).<sup>1</sup>

Hu Yunyi wrote in his contribution to the book that he had discovered an interesting fact: women had an inborn talent for literature. Oppressive *lijiao* had managed to stifle most of women’s talents, Hu argued, which was why there had been no prominent female historians or philosophers. However, not even

the toughest oppression had managed to keep women from expressing their artistic sensibilities through literature. This proved, according to Hu, that women's literary talents were particularly strong. (Hu 1934a: 52-54).

Little of women's literature had been preserved, but Hu found it as valuable as it was rare. He held that the best women writers were on a par with the great male masters, and compared Cai Yan's *shi* to those of Cao Zhi and Tao Qian, Xue Tao's and Yu Xuanji's *jueju shi* to Li Bai's and Wang Changling's, and Li Qingzhao's and Zhu Shuzhen's *ci* to Li Yu's, Liu Yong's and Xin Qiji's. (Ibid: 54).

In an attempt to answer why women had this extraordinary talent for literature, Hu explained that there had always been two tendencies within Chinese literature, the *wanyue* - a term often translated as "delicate restraint" (e.g. Lin 1994:26) - and the *haofang* - variously rendered in English as "heroic abandon" (Ibid:24), "swaggering abandon" (Owen 1992: 329), or "heroic-flamboyant" (Fong 1994:108). *Wanyue* literature had been the orthodox tendency, and most Chinese literature was written in this mode, whereas the *haofang* tendency had been more marginal. Hu associated the *wanyue* with femininity and the *haofang* with masculinity. (Ibid: 55).

The terms *wanyue* and *haofang* have a long history in Chinese literary criticism. For example, *haofang* was one of the twenty-four categories or modes of poetry discussed in Sikong Tu's Tang dynasty *Ershisi shipin* (The twenty-four categories of poetry) (Owen 1992: 329-332). The use of the terms in *ci* criticism is of particular importance for our understanding of Hu Yunyi's theory. A dichotomy between *wanyue* and *haofang* was first set up in the Ming dynasty, in the *ci* criticism of Zhang Yan. Later, scholars such as Wang Shizhen (1634-1711) classified *ci* poets as belonging to either the *wanyue* or the *haofang* school of *ci* writing. (Yu 1994:92). Already at that time, *wanyue* and *haofang* were strongly gendered concepts, the *wanyue* associated with

gentle musicality, love poetry and the female poetic persona, and the *haofang* with a patriotic, heroic masculinity (e.g. Fong 1994). Although both *wanyue* and *haofang ci* had their champions, the *ci* associated with the *wanyue* school were more often described as the essence or the orthodoxy of the genre of *ci* (Yu 1994: 87; Fong 1994: 108).

Hu Yunyi, then, took the gendered opposition between *wanyue* and *haofang* which had developed in *ci* criticism and applied it to the entirety of Chinese literature, claiming that *wanyue* had been the dominant mode not just of *ci* but of all Chinese literature. Femininity, which was previously seen as a feature distinguishing the “yin” of *ci* from the “yang” of *shi* (Fong 1994: 109), was in Hu’s eyes central to *shi* and *ci* alike.

Hu Yunyi combined the idea of the centrality of femininity with a strict demand for truthfulness, which hinged upon the continuity between the author’s sexed body and his or her poetic voice. Many men had of course been writing in the dominant, feminine mode, but Hu was not pleased with their performance. These men were not writing in their own voice, but imitated women in an insincere and ridiculous manner. “It came to the point when even seventy or eighty year old men would unashamedly try to assume a coquettish voice when writing poetry, but no matter how they tried, it did not ring true” (Hu 1934a 56). Only women, Hu argued, were capable of creating a feminine literature which was true, because their understanding of female psychology and female experience was necessarily superior to men’s. (Ibid: 56).

Hu’s interpretation of Chinese literary orthodoxy as feminine, coupled with his privileging of autobiographical writing - where the author’s physical body and social role are at one with his or her poetic voice - led to an astonishing conclusion: in spite of its scarcity, women’s literature formed the backbone of the Chinese literary tradition. (Ibid: 55;57).

According to Wendy Larson, Hu Yunyi’s theory was part of the creation of

a conceptual link between women and literature. This construction of women as innately literary and literature as innately feminine is to have taken place in several texts from the 1920s and 1930s. Li Huiqun and Tao Qiuying, author of *Zhongguo funü yu wenxue* (Chinese women and literature)(Tao 1933), as well as Hu Yunyi, are to have believed that “the best as well as the bulk of Chinese literature was innately feminine” (Larson 1998: 179).

However, Hu Yunyi’s theory about the centrality of women’s literature was not quite as radical, nor quite as representative as Larson suggests. Hu did not argue that literature *in general* was innately feminine or that the *best of* Chinese literature was feminine. He only wrote that what had traditionally been considered the mainstream of Chinese literature was feminine, which did not preclude the possibility that literature in the heterodox, masculine, *haofang* mode may have been as good as feminine literature. Also, he did not give any examples of women writers who were better than the great male masters to which they were compared.

Also, it does not seem as if Hu’s theory was widely shared. Li Huiqun and Tao Qiuying, in spite of Larson’s claim, wrote nowhere (at least not in the sources Larson cites) that “the best as well as the bulk of Chinese literature was innately feminine”, or anything of the sort. Li Huiqun’s main concern in her *Women and literature* was with representations of women in literature and feminist uses of literature. Tao Qiuying, in *Chinese women and literature*, constructed women’s literature not as a mainstream, central kind of literature but as a marginal literature of the oppressed and dispossessed. Nevertheless, Hu’s contention did have a certain impact. Tan Zhengbi quoted it in his *Literary life of Chinese women*, seemingly without noticing the contradictions between Hu’s ideas about the centrality of women’s literature and his own representation of it as inferior to men’s. By 1935, Tan had assimilated Hu’s theory into his own repertoire of opinions on women’s literature (Tan 1935:

4907). Zhang Ruogu in the "Women writers special issue" of *Truth, beauty and goodness* made Hu out to be a representative of those who believed women to possess greater literary talent than men, calling Hu's ideas "somewhat extreme" (Zhang 1929: 13). Zhang was probably exaggerating the extremeness of Hu's theory in order to represent his own, less feminist position on women's literature as moderate.

Not unlike the historians of women's literature, who stressed the importance of female writers in their histories of women's literature but left them out of their general histories, Hu did not apply his theory of the centrality of women's literature to his general literary histories. His *New history of Chinese literature*, written in 1931 (Hu 1947) did indeed include some women writers, and a few of them - notably Cai Yan and Li Qingzhao - were represented as important writers in their own right, not only as the best *women* writers. The theory of the centrality of feminine and women's literature in the great literary tradition, however, was not repeated in this history. Neither was it repeated in Hu's *Introduction to Chinese literature*, first published in the same year as "Chinese women and literature" (Hu 1934b). In this work, furthermore, Hu indicated that he valued *haofang* literature at least as highly as *wanyue* literature. Here, he represented the division between the two not as a division between masculine and feminine, but as a division between North and South. In the Six Dynasties, Northern literature had been *haofang* while Southern literature had been *wanyue*. Hu likened *both* literatures to women: "If likened to women, then Northern literature is a healthy and natural Western beauty, whereas Southern literature is a sickly and unnatural Chinese woman" (Ibid: 145-146). Although Hu wrote that he valued both, his choice of words revealed a certain preference for the "healthier" *haofang* literature.

*Historical accuracy and the female poetic voice*

No matter how unusual Hu's theory about the centrality of femininity was, he was not alone in believing that a true female voice in literature must come from someone who was genuinely a woman. Most commentators on women's literature agreed that "women's literature" ought to be woman-authored literature rather than literature in a female voice. But how easy was it to tell the difference?

In the introduction to her 1935 anthology of women's *shi*, *Zhushi lidai nüzi shixuan* (Annotated anthology of women's *shi* through the ages), Li Huiqun presented attention to historical accuracy as something new to the study of women's literature. "In China, there are actually quite a few books in the manner of *Gonggui shixuan* (Selected poetry from the palace and the inner chambers) and *Mingyuan shichao* (Transcribed poetry of famous ladies)," she wrote.<sup>2</sup> "However, these books appear to have a common shortcoming, that is, they are all lacking in historical accuracy (*lishi de zhenshixing*)" (Li 1935: 1). Earlier anthologists, according to Li Huiqun, were more interested in retelling romantic stories than in writing literary history. In their anthologies of women's poetry they therefore included poems which represented the voices of famous women in fiction or plays. Why should we believe, Li asked, that such poems were written by the real Xi Shi, Yang Guifei or Cui Yingying? Li explained that she, on the other hand, used two criteria for selection: she first looked at the authenticity of the poem, and secondly, at its artistic merit. She admitted, however, that the authenticity of female authorship was not always easy to determine.

The authenticity of female authorship posed a problem for those who wrote about women's literature, not only because records of women writers were less complete than records of male writers. The problem was often exacerbated by the critics' attempts to combine several conflicting agendas:

first, they aspired to a high standard of source criticism, second, they sought to rescue the voices of historical women, and demonstrate that women possessed literary talent, and third, they wanted to celebrate literature which they saw as unadorned and straightforward, such as folk and popular literature. They wanted their female voices to be “true” in several ways at once: to be naive, direct and simple, while belonging to genuine historical women. Making women’s literature into a popular tradition without compromising the standard of source criticism was hardly possible, however, because the simple and naive literature these critics most admired was mostly to be found in the eras and in the social classes where authorship was the most difficult to determine. Literature written before the late imperial period was generally speaking considered more sincere and direct than later literature, but many attributions to authors of these periods were highly questionable. Women of humble origins were often hailed as creators of a freer, truer, less artificial literature, but again, there were far fewer reliable records of women writers of peasant or courtesan background, than of gentrywomen writers. It would have been easier to locate the true female voice among the better-documented Ming-Qing gentrywomen, or when studying older literature, to shift the focus from historical women authors onto other female presences in the history of literature, such as mythical women authors, and images of women.

Liang Yizhen, in fact, tried both these approaches in his histories of women’s literature. His *History of women’s literature of the Qing dynasty* (1933) is an obvious example of the first approach. His *Outline of the history of Chinese women’s literature* (1990) also devotes considerable space to the mainstream of Ming-Qing gentrywomen’s poetry. In its treatment of earlier periods, it takes the second approach. As we have seen in Chapter Four, Liang includes a number of legendary women writers of ancient times, while making it clear that these women probably never existed. Liang’s account of women’s

literature from ancient times to the Song sometimes focused more on women as the subject of legends and stories than on women as writers. Long sections were devoted to Wang Qiang, Mulan and Yang Guifei, not because these women had written valuable literature, but because they had inspired literature and myth.

Most other critics, however, avoided both these solutions, and remained torn between the demand for historical accuracy and the celebration of a woman-authored literature which was naive, direct, and popular, as the following examples show.

The most sincere, straightforward and natural poetry was supposedly found in the *Book of songs*. This classic had long been associated with women (see Chapter One). Many songs had been ascribed to ancient noblewomen such as Zhuangjiang of Wei. In the 1920s and 1930s, it became commonplace for literary historians to question traditional attributions and interpretations of the Songs, in order to free them from the moral and political connotations they had acquired over hundreds of years. This reassessment of the *Book of songs* entailed that attributions of songs to famous women were questioned too. Many of those who wrote on women's literature, however, were unshaken in their belief that at least parts of the *Book of Songs* were written by women. It was impossible to find out which songs were written by men and which were written by women, wrote Hu Yunyi, "but there must be some among them that are by women" (Hu 1934a: 57).

Tao Qiuying agreed. "These 305 folk songs naturally include works by women", she confidently declared (Tao 1933: 95). Tao was more optimistic than Hu about locating the female voice within the *Book of songs*. She included in her book 32 songs which had been ascribed to women, or which she believed had been written by women. In her interpretations of these songs, she attempted to discard moralistic interpretations and cast doubts on traditional



attributions, while at the same time preserving the femaleness of said songs. It was not an easy balance to strike. The songs attributed to famous women, she argued, were not necessarily written by these noble ladies, but could have been composed by ordinary women of the people. For the most part, she avoided the issue whether these anonymous authors may have been men, but on two occasions, she doubted whether the songs in question were really woman-authored (Ibid: 102;104). As if to compensate for conceding these two songs to the men, she included ten songs which she herself had discovered to be by women. She had arrived at this conclusion simply by carefully reading and understanding the songs in question (Ibid: 109). In her readings, they depicted scenes from the lives of women, or represented women's responses to events in their lives (Ibid: 109 -117). She did not discuss the possibilities of men composing poetry in a female voice, or of collective authorship. "The examples above", she concluded, "are enough to show us that a great treasury of literature from our country's antiquity - the *Book of songs* - contains the sound of many women's weeping and laughter, contains the traces of their lives" (Ibid: 118).

Another example is the poetry ascribed to Cai Yan, the daughter of the late Han literatus Cai Yong. As a young widow she was abducted by the Huns, and forced to become the concubine of one of their chieftains. Twelve years later she was ransomed by Cao Cao and returned to China, leaving her two sons behind. Three poetic compositions have been attributed to Cai Yan: "Hujia shiba pai" (Eighteen songs of a nomad flute) and two "Beifen shi" (Poems of sorrow and anger). The poems describe Cai Yan's experiences of her abduction, her life among the nomads, and the separation from her children.

In Republican period accounts of women's literature, Cai Yan was usually presented as a major woman writer. She was given a prominent place in the

histories of women's literature by Xie Wuliang, Liang Yizhen, and Tan Zhengbi (see Chapter Three), and her poems were reproduced in anthologies of women's literature. In the 1920s and 1930s, she was appreciated in particular for her poetry's direct expression of fervent emotions and its candid descriptions of personal experiences.

Hu Yunyi included Cai Yan together with Yu Xuanji, Xue Tao, Li Qingzhao and Zhu Shuzhen in his article on "Chinese women and literature" (1934a). Cai Yan's poetry, he believed, proved that women were capable of writing "monumental works" (*juzhi hongpian*) (Ibid: 60). The main reason for the success of the poems was not the outstanding talent of their author, but her drifting, homeless existence (Ibid: 58). Tan Zhengbi agreed with Hu that it was Cai Yan's drifting life rather than her talent which made her verses so outstanding among women's poetry (Tan 1978: 57). According to Tao Qiuying, Cai Yan's "Poems of sorrow and anger" were "a direct outlet for the sorrow and anger [created by] her individual experiences and her environment" (Tao 1933: 153). In the opinion of these critics, what made these poems stand out were their recreations of Cai Yan's real experiences.

The authenticity of Cai Yan's poems, however, was by no means certain. "Eighteen songs of a nomad flute" was not recorded in any texts earlier than the eleventh century (Chang and Saussy 1999: 22), hundreds of years after its supposed creation, and the authenticity of the "Poems of sorrow and anger" had been called into question by Su Shi already in the Song. Hu Shi, in 1925, argued that parts of the "Eighteen songs of a nomad flute" could not have been written before the Tang dynasty (Hu 1988: 355-356).

Hu Yunyi brought up Su Shi's claim only in order to refute it by referring to evidence offered by Cai Kuanfu in his remarks on poetry (Hu 1934a: 58). Tan Zhengbi echoed Hu Yunyi's defence of the authenticity of "Poems of sorrow and anger", but allowed for some doubt as to the attribution of "Eighteen songs

of a nomad flute". This poem "sounded" as if it had been written by Cai Yan rather than Dong Sheng, which had otherwise been suggested, but Tan did not supply evidence in support of this position. (Tan 1978: 53-56). Tao Qiuying was even more doubtful of the authorship of "Eighteen songs of a nomad flute". It was not wholly unlikely, she wrote, that this poem was created by a latter-day writer. Her decision to include it in her book anyway reveals an ambivalence about the meaning of women's literature. She wrote:

Let us leave aside for the moment the question of whether [the attribution to] its author is true or false, for "Eighteen songs of a nomad flute" is really a moving piece of poetry about resentment, and it is well worth reading! Although this appears to be in conflict with my book." (Tao 1933:161).

Tao Qiuying did not explain why the inclusion of "Eighteen songs of a nomad flute" was in conflict with her book. But it is likely that the conflict was one between including all moving and beautiful poetry in a female voice, and including only those works which had been composed by actual, historical women. Tao must have perceived the latter to be the objective of her book.

Li Huiqun mentioned Cai Yan as an example of how difficult it is for an anthologist to take both aesthetic merit and authenticity into account when selecting women's literature. She pointed out that Su Shi had contested the authenticity of "Poems of sorrow and anger". Not knowing what to believe, Li Huiqun included it in her anthology on the grounds of it being "a great work". (Li 1935: 1).

Hu Yunyi, Tan Zhengbi, Tao Qiuying and Li Huiqun all pointed to debates about the authenticity of Cai Yan's poems, and they sometimes expressed doubts about it. But those who doubted "Eighteen songs of a nomad flute" trusted "Poems of sorrow and anger", and conversely, Li Huiqun who doubted

“Poems of sorrow and anger” did not mention “Eighteen songs of a nomad flute”. Because to these critics, the greatness of the Cai Yan poems consisted of their transmission of Cai Yan’s true experiences, to doubt the authenticity of both poems would have led to the exclusion from the history of women’s literature of one of the most compelling female voices in Chinese literature.

A third example of the same dilemma can be found in accounts of the poetry by He Shuangqing, the only famous peasant woman poet of late imperial China. Beautiful and talented, she nevertheless led a life of extreme hardship. Not only was she a poor, hardworking farmer’s wife, she was also maltreated by her brutal, illiterate husband and her mean mother-in-law, and she suffered from malaria to boot. Twenty or thirty *shi* and fourteen *ci* ascribed to her survive (Chang and Saussy 1999: 454).

Paul S. Ropp (2001), Grace Fong (1997) and others have pointed out that all accounts of He Shuangqing ultimately derive from the same source, Shi Zhenlin’s (1693-1779) *Xiqing sanji* (Random records of West-Green) from 1737. According to this work, Shuangqing (who was only mentioned by her given name) was the wife of Shi’s friend’s tenant-farmer. Shi Zhenlin and a small circle of his friends were taken by Shuangqing’s beauty and talent, and collected and copied her poetry, which she wrote on perishable leaves and flower petals. Since none of Shi’s friends ever mentioned Shuangqing in their own writings, Paul S. Ropp argues that it is quite possible that Shuangqing was Shi’s own invention, a female persona in whose voice Shi wrote his best poetry.

Shuangqing’s existence had always been contested, but in the late 18th and the 19th century her story acquired greater credibility as she was given a surname, He, a style name, Qiubi, and a birthplace, Jiangshan in Danyang county, by anthologists of women’s poetry. She was even written into the local history of Danyang. (Ropp 2001: 219-229).

In the 1920s Gu Jiegang and Hu Shi raised questions about the Shuangqing story (Ibid: 234-236). In *Short story monthly* in 1924, Gu Jiegang pointed out the many inconsistencies in different accounts of He Shuangqing and wondered how these could be accounted for (Gu 1924). Hu Shi went further when in 1929 he examined the sources to the Shuangqing story and came to the conclusion that Shuangqing was a purely fictional construct (Hu Shi 1988: 600-603). However, as Ropp points out, when Shuangqing was included in histories and poetry anthologies in the 1920s, the accuracy of older anthologies and histories in which she was included was largely taken for granted, and her objective existence not questioned (Ropp 2001: 232).

Historians and critics of women's literature such as Liang Yizhen, Tao Qiuying and Zeng Naidun, author of the 1935 *Zhongguo nüciren* (Women ci poets of China), refrained from delving into the problems surrounding Shuangqing's reality. This may have been due to practical limits - time constraints and inaccessibility of sources - on their research. Another reason may have been a wish to rescue, rather than call into question, a sincere, authentic female poetic voice. Shuangqing's doubly marginalised position as a woman and a peasant, her intense suffering, and her supreme talent which flourished against all odds, made her unusually suited to be portrayed as a "true" woman poet.

Liang Yizhen and Zeng Naidun both associated He Shuangqing with a "literature of blood and tears". According to Liang, He Shuangqing's poems, together with those of Kan Yu and Lu Xiaogu, were the most moving among Qing dynasty women's poetry, precisely because these women had experienced suffering "beyond the endurance of ordinary people" (Liang 1932: 42). Zeng Naidun included He Shuangqing, together with a rejected wife from the Qing dynasty called Chen Qi, under the heading "Works mixing blood and tears" (Zeng 1935: 175). Of these unhappy poets, Zeng wrote: "The hardships

of the *ci*-writers' situation and the pitifulness of their personal histories are often revealed in their poetry. Reading their verses is like seeing their blood and tears flow together, it makes one's heart ache!" (Ibid: 176). Zeng compared Shuangqing favourably to women of wealthier households who were unable to produce "such moving and sorrowful *ci* steeped in blood and tears" (Ibid: 180). For this interpretation of Shuangqing's poetry as the direct expression of extreme physical and mental suffering, however, Zeng relied not only on the poetry itself, but also on prose accounts of Shuangqing's life which ultimately derived from Shi Zhenlin's *Random records of West-Green*. (Ibid: 177-183).

He Shuangqing was one of only two Qing women poets treated in Tao Qiuying's *Chinese women and literature*. (The other one was Gu Taiqing.) The sadness, gentleness and naivete of her poetry, Tao felt, made Shuangqing one of the most prominent women poets of the Qing dynasty "when women writers were the most numerous" (Tao 1933: 237). In a disclaimer at the beginning of the chapter about He Shuangqing, Tao admitted that it was difficult to find "reliable, detailed accounts" of Shuangqing's life, but denied that this posed a problem for her account of Shuangqing's poetry. " ....what I am writing now is not evidential scholarship, so I cannot pay too much attention [to this problem]. We are only investigating whether or not works by individual authors deserve a place in the literary canon....(Ibid: 230)". Not even Shuangqing's surname could be known for certain, but this was not important for Tao - what mattered was Shuangqing's poetry. Yet in the final analysis, Tao's evaluation of Shuangqing's poetry hinged upon what she had read about Shuangqing's story. As did earlier versions of the Shuangqing story based upon Shi Zhenlin's narrative, Tao related the different poems to different incidents in Shuangqing's life. She interpreted Shuangqing's poems as responses to certain events and situations, such as the time Shuangqing's husband locked her in the kitchen, the time she watched a lone goose in a field, and so on. Although she was not

even certain that Shuangqing had been surnamed He, Tao apparently did not doubt in the least that these minor events had actually taken place.

Tao represented Shuangqing's poetry as the voice of a poor and downtrodden woman, someone who led an "inhuman" existence, but had to put up with it not least because of women's lowly position in society (Ibid: 231). Poetry was her only means of expressing unhappiness: "Whenever she was in great pain, she would use poetry to raise a desolate, helpless, affecting voice" (Ibid: 232).

In Tao's account, He Shuangqing's voice was described as isolated and unmediated. Not only were Shi Zhenlin's *Random records of West-Green*, of which Tao perhaps had no knowledge, not mentioned, but she refrained from addressing the issue of mediation at all. She confidently declared that:

....because she [Shuangqing] was a farmer's wife, no one at the time paid any attention to her. She wrote her *ci* only in order to give vent to her own sorrow and resentment. She never thought of becoming famous, and neither did she care about the preservation of her work. She threw [the *ci*] away as she wrote, and today there are only fourteen of them left altogether...." (Ibid: 233).

Tao did not attempt to explain how it was that these fourteen *ci* had survived.

The questions raised by Gu Jiegang and Hu Shi were not addressed by scholars of women's literature.

### *The sincerity of women*

He Shuangqing's poetry also raised a different problem which was discussed in more detail in accounts of women's literature. Whereas Liang Yizhen, Zeng Naidun and Tao Qiuying saw He Shuangqing's poetry as the naive and direct expression of genuine suffering, others were disappointed with her meekness

and humility. Wang Chuncui (1931) and Tong Renlan (1930) both described Shuangqing as someone who shamefully conformed to patriarchal oppression. In Tong's interpretation, Shuangqing's conformity made her hypocritical. Her poetry could not be sincere, because it expressed deference to and affection for her abusive husband, for whom she could not possibly have felt any true love (ibid: 5-6). The discrepancy between the depictions of Shuangqing as direct and naive, and hypocritical and insincere, respectively, points to another obstacle to the search for a true female voice in China's literary history: the question of whether female sincerity was at all possible under patriarchal oppression.

Were women truthful? There were conflicting answers to this question, and critics often contradicted themselves on the issue. On the one hand, the restrictions of *lijiao* and the economic necessities of the sex market were said to prevent women from expressing their true feelings. On the other hand, women's marginalised position in a male-dominated society made it possible for them to stay true and sincere, because they could not use their literature to gain wealth and fame. The patriarchal order at the same time encumbered women's production of true and sincere literature by indoctrinating and intimidating them, and facilitated it by keeping them out of the rat race.

Some critics saw Chinese women writers as creators of a literature truer than men's. In this respect, they remind us of the Ming and Qing anthologists of women's poetry mentioned in Chapter One, who found women's poetry purer, more spontaneous and more disinterested than men's. In the preface to *Nüxing cixuan* (Anthology of women's *ci*), a small pocket book of 65 pages from 1928 which was the second in a series called "the little book series of *ci* studies" (*cixue xiao congshu*), Hu Yunyi stated his thesis that women's writing was at the heart of *wanyue* literature, and that *wanyue* literature was the orthodoxy of Chinese literature. In addition, he attempted to analyse the specific



characteristics of women's *ci*. Because *lijiao* prohibited the circulation of women's writing, and because women were barred from holding office, women did not deploy their literature in search of wealth and fame, he argued. Women wrote in order to express themselves, or console themselves, without giving thought to the quality of the *ci* they produced. This, to Hu, meant that women's motives for writing were purely "artistic". Unlike men, they did not try to show off their skills, or feign feelings that were not true. As a consequence, their *ci* were free from pedantry, flattery, and bragging. Because women wrote with genuine feeling, their *ci* were exceptionally moving, according to Hu. (Hu 1928: 4-6).

Some critics even went so far as to claim that women's literature surpassed men's literature in quality precisely because it was true and disinterested. Tong Renlan and Sun Peichai, the editors of two anthologies of women's verse, *Nüzuojia shixuan* (Anthology of *shi*-poetry by women writers) and *Nüzuojia cixuan* (Anthology of *ci*-poetry by women writers) from 1930, preferred women's poetry to men's. (Tong 1932; Sun 1932). The 1932 editions of these anthologies were thin, pocket-sized books, the *shi* collection blue with a picture of a farming couple surrounded by flowers and birds, the *ci* collection red with a picture in art deco style of a lady holding a book. As they included lengthy explanations of the basic prosodic rules of *shi* and *ci*, it appears as if these diminutive books were directed to a readership with a limited knowledge of classical poetry.

The value of *shi*, according to Tong Renlan, lay in its naivete (*tianzhen*) and its expression of the poet's innate sensibility (*xingling*) rather than in its display of skill (Tong 1932: 1-3). Only those *shi* which were natural, naive, and expressed the true temperament of its author were valuable, whereas contrived works could never be beautiful (Ibid: 3; 21). For this reason, Tong found it detestable that men had been impersonating the female voice in poetry. Men

and women had different temperaments, and only women could understand, and express, the temperament of women. (Ibid: 11-13).

Tong found some women's *shi* disappointing because they conveyed moralistic messages. Such poems, Tong believed, were always insincere, because *lijiao* morality was at odds with women's true interests. Even so, moralistic, hypocritical women were a small minority among women writers, and even they sometimes expressed their true feelings. Compared to men's poetry, women's poetry was still more true and beautiful. (Ibid: 4-10).

The reason why women's *shi* were better than men's, Tong explained, was because men's poetry was mostly written in pursuit of wealth and fame, and therefore became hypocritical (Ibid: 11). Women were discouraged by *lijiao* from showing off their literary skills, and had no opportunity to use their poetry to attain power or money (Ibid:11; 20). This led to very little of their poetry being preserved and handed down to future generations, but it also had more positive effects. Women wrote solely for the purposes of expressing their feelings and describing their lives, thus expressing their true temperament straight from the heart. (Ibid: 20-21). If on the other hand women had been able to vie for fame and gain, their poetry would have ended up the same as men's. Tong maintained that this had happened in some instances. When Yuan Mei promoted women's literature it became so fashionable for women to write poetry that they started writing insincere poetry of low quality, sometimes even hiring ghost-writers, just in order to become famous! (Ibid: 22-23). For Tong, the reason for the high quality of women's *shi* was the same as the reason for its scarcity, and she thought the scarcity of women's poetry was a price worth paying for its sincerity and beauty. For the anthology Tong had selected *shi* which express women's true temperament and show what women are really like (Ibid: 29-30).

Sun Peichai argued in a similar manner that *ci* written by women were

more valuable and more often attained real beauty than men's *ci* (Sun 1932: 8; 12; 24). There were several reasons for it being so. First, the essence of *ci* lay in its beauty, and women were "beautiful by nature" (Ibid: 12). Second, the bold temperament of men disqualified them from writing in the gentle, tactful and moving style required in *ci* writing (Ibid: 9). Sun thus perceived an essential affinity between women and the genre of *ci*. A third reason, however, was a social one: like Tong Renlan, Sun Peichai held that men wrote in order to seek fame and gain rather than truth, beauty and goodness. Women, unable to make a profit or gain a literary reputation through their writing, instead used *ci* poetry to express their feelings or relieve their sufferings. As a result their *ci* were livelier, more natural, more artistic and more naive. (Ibid: 9-10; 23-24). Again like Tong, Sun argued that men who wrote in a woman's voice never attained true beauty. Men were unable to learn how to write like a woman, just as "Southerners cannot speak Northern dialect and Beijing people cannot learn Suzhou dialect" (Ibid: 9).

#### *The limits of women's sincerity*

Other critics, however, doubted women's ability to express their own true voice in poetry. Lu Jingqing, for example, held that there had been very little truly female literature in the history of Chinese literature. (Lu 1931: 4). Most literature which described women's psychology were artificial constructs by male writers, and therefore "naturally not truthful representations (*biaoxian*)" (Ibid: 5). As if this was not enough, women's own literary creations were lacking in truthfulness. The "restrictions of society and pressure of *lijiao*" had robbed them of the courage needed to express their own true feelings. At the most, they expressed a little of their anger and resentment, in an obscure and roundabout way, in poems about "the wind and the moon". Otherwise, they

would compose literature which was insincere in order to answer to others expectations, "quietly burying their lively and sincere warmth of feeling" (Ibid: 5).

The Tang dynasty was an exception to the rule according to Lu. In this period, too, many women were so tightly bound by *lijiao* that they did not dare to write their true feelings. Other women, however, boldly broke the conventions and expressed themselves with the utmost sincerity. The latter were to be found in the social classes which, according to Lu, were the least affected by *lijiao*: courtesans and Daoist priestesses. Unlike palace women and "family women", these were exempt from the rules of *lijiao* and the restrictions of patriarchy, and were free to act, to think, and to express their thoughts without inhibitions. Judging from Lu's examples of poetry, the thoughts and feelings which courtesans and Daoists were free to commit to paper but which "family women" and palace women had to suppress concerned, above all, sexual love.

In the introduction to her history, Lu Jingqing thus located the truest, most authentic of women's literature in the Tang dynasty and among the Daoist priestesses and the courtesans. However, in a later part of the book about representative poets from different classes, the courtesans' claim to truthfulness seemed less certain. Rather than being free from the restraints of patriarchy, Lu now explained, courtesans were doubly oppressed (Ibid: 59). It was their profession to be subservient to others, and do their best to please them (Ibid: 38). Their poetry was characterised by, on the one hand, a deep sorrow, and on the other, somewhat forced appeals to men's pity (Ibid: 59). While the deep sorrow represented the genuine feelings of these the most unfortunate of women, the sincerity of the appeals to pity could be doubted.

Lu's representative courtesan poet, Xue Tao, had a high opinion of her own poetic talents. Yet she compromised her dignity and her artistic integrity

by writing the *Shili shi* (Poem on ten separations) (Ibid: 60). This poem, possibly written in order to win back the favour of an estranged patron, likens the relationship between courtesan and patron to, among other things, that between a dog and his master, a brush and a hand, a horse and its stable, and a pearl and a palm (see also Chang and Saussy 1999: 59-66). Its style, according to Lu, was vulgar. However, Lu did not believe its vulgarity to be proof of Xue Tao's lack of literary accomplishment. Instead, Xue's use of base animals and inanimate objects as metaphors for herself reflected the lowly, vulnerable position of the courtesan (Lu 1931: 63). By bringing up the problems surrounding the "Poem on ten separations", Lu Jingqing undermined her earlier contention that courtesan poetry was uninhibited and sincere, pointing instead to the dependence of courtesan poetry on male patronage.

In Lu Jingqing's account, then, the only women's literature which was completely sincere, in the sense that it need not answer to the expectations of men, was poetry by Tang dynasty Daoist priestesses. Lu was at pains to distinguish between the Daoists and the courtesans. She argued that women Daoists were not a kind of prostitute, which had otherwise often been suggested, but members of a powerful and respected religion which constituted the only alternative to Confucian *lijiao*. The Daoist temple provided a sanctuary for women, a place where they could obtain sexual freedom without having to sell sex for a living, and where they could write without being restricted by Confucian morality. (Ibid: 37-38). Poetry by Daoist priestesses was bold and uninhibited, and did not shy away from sexual matters (Ibid: 42-48). It also revealed that the female Daoists aspired to equality with men. No self-deprecating poems similar to Xue Tao's "Poem on ten separations" were to be found in the collected works of Yu Xuanji, Lu's representative Daoist writer. Indeed, Yu Xuanji portrayed herself as someone who used men rather than was used by them, and she openly expressed her regret that she as a woman

was not eligible to hold public office (Ibid: 49-50).

The most honest and authentic women's literature was thus to be found in the poetry by Tang Daoist priestesses. However, this group of writers was small. Although Lu Jingqing attached the greatest importance to them, only four - Yu Xuanji, Li Ye, Yuan Ting and Hai Yin - of the 101 women poets discussed in the book were Daoist priestesses. The group of women writers which represented the true female voice in Chinese literary history had shrunk to a mere four writers!

Unlike Lu Jingqing, Tao Qiuying did not differentiate between courtesans and Daoists, but saw the Daoist priestesses as one particular type of courtesan. But she too identified literature by courtesans and Daoists as the most outspoken and honest among women's writings. Tao argued that *lijiao* had prohibited women from employing certain tones of voice and treating certain topics in their poetry, but these rules did not apply to the courtesans, who were exempt from *lijiao* rules. Courtesans had a free will, and were free to think and to "develop their true feelings" (Tao 1933: 91). Therefore, their writings were significant among "true literature" (Ibid: 91). Tao, unlike Lu, did not recognise that the demands and expectations of patrons may have influenced the courtesans' literary choices, but she nevertheless had problems adhering to her interpretation of courtesan poetry as free and independent. Discussing the evils of *lijiao*, she quotes two lines from a poem by courtesan poet Xu Yueying : "I've broken the rules - obedience to father husband, son/ This body? What way, what use, to stick to what proper people do?" (translation in Chang and Saussy 1999: 78 ) as an example of how women's literature was directly influenced by *lijiao*. Writing about Xue Tao, she repeated that courtesan poetry was direct in its expression of moods. Yet she was puzzled by Xue Tao's poetry which, she felt, contained two distinctive styles. It was in part natural and bold, and in part ornate and full of historical references.

Tao Qiuying was unwilling to accept the latter style as Xue Tao's own, and suggested that the mixture of styles had come about when literati men reworked Xue Tao's poems. Xue's own voice was natural and bold, whereas the ornate style was the result of male interference. (Tao 1933: 164). Tao refrained from mentioning Xue Tao's "Poem on ten separations".

In addition to courtesans and Daoists, Tao held that concubines constituted a group of women who produced frank and uninhibited poetry. This, Tao argued, was because concubines, like courtesans, occupied a lowly position within the social hierarchy of patriarchal society, and were less indoctrinated in *lijiao* than the gentlewomen (Ibid: 92). In most other accounts of women's literature of imperial times, concubines were regarded either as gentlewomen or as courtesans who had turned to respectability. By constructing concubines as an independent group, or "class", of women writers, Tao broadened the category of potentially bold and sincere women's literature. For by so doing she was able to represent writers otherwise thought of as "gentlewomen" as belonging to a marginalised, oppressed group of women which was less governed by *lijiao* rules. A large number of the women writers who helped make the Qing the period when women's literature was "the most developed in relative terms" were in fact concubines, she declared, pointing out that many of Yuan Mei's female pupils were concubines (Ibid: 92). The proliferation of women's literature in the Qing, usually seen as a development within elegant elite culture, was reinterpreted by Tao as the result, at least in part, of the literary activities of a low-ranking, less Confucian class of women.

### *Conclusion*

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, critics linked women writers with "truth" in gender-specific ways. First, they held that women were better suited than men

to tell the truth about women's lives. Second, they believed only women, in the sense of real, existing, biologically female persons, were able to combine femininity and sincerity in writing. Third, they argued that the oppression and marginalisation of women in society had affected the truth and sincerity of female writing.

Many critics were markedly optimistic about their attempts to attain the truth about the women of the past by identifying, and listening to, true female voices in the literary tradition. Some, like Tao Qiuying, believed themselves able to recognise the voices of genuine women writers in anonymous poetry written thousands of years ago, and to tell the heartfelt from the insincere simply by reading the poetry. Nevertheless, their search for the true female voice in Chinese literature encountered a number of problems which are apparent in their writings. The ideals of historical accuracy, sincerity and female authorship were hard to reconcile. The sincerity of feminine writing and the reliability of writings about women's lives ultimately depended on the author's being genuinely female, something which was often hard to prove.

Also, even those critics who agreed that traditional women's literature should be read in the context of oppression and marginalisation of women, disagreed as to what impact oppression had had on the sincerity of women's writing. Some, like Hu Yunyi, thought women's marginalised position made them more sincere than men. As writing did not constitute a career path for women their writing was disinterested and purely "artistic". This idea reminds us of the Ming and Qing commentators who found women's poetry unusually pure and spontaneous. Others, like Lu Jingqing and Tao Qiuying, held that patriarchy fostered hypocrisy in women, as women were forced to conform to *lijiao* rules in their writing.

To all of these critics, authenticity - or the lack thereof - was crucial to the understanding of women's literature, and fundamentally affected the quality of



feminine writing. To certain other critics, however, femininity, regardless of its origin, overshadowed “women’s truth”, as we shall see in the following chapter.

## Chapter Six: The elusive salonière

### *The women writers special issue debate*

In the late 1920s and in the 1930s, several publications on the topic “women writers” appeared. These were mainly concerned with modern Chinese writers. Various critical essays on contemporary women writers were collected by Huang Renying in *Dangdai Zhongguo nüzuojia lun* (Writings on contemporary Chinese women writers) (Huang 1933). Works by modern women writers found their way into anthologies devoted exclusively to authors of the female gender, such as Xue Fei’s *Xiandai Zhongguo nüzuojia chuangzao xuan* (Selection of creative writings by modern Chinese women writers) (Xue 1932), a series of anthologies edited by Jun Sheng (1936) devoted to modern Chinese women’s diaries, essays (*sanwen* and *xiaopin*), fiction and plays, respectively, and Wang Dingjiu’s (1937) *Dangdai nüzuojia xiaoshuo* (Contemporary women writers’ fiction) and *Dangdai nüzuojia suibi* (Contemporary women writers’ essays (*suibi*)). The communist critics Qian Xingcun and He Yubo each wrote a book of criticism of a number of contemporary women authors (A Ying 1930; He 1932).

One relatively early and particularly influential such publication was an ambitious special issue of the *Truth, beauty and goodness* magazine published on 2 February 1929. The *Women writers special issue* was published separately from the *Truth, beauty and goodness* series itself, and its editor Zhang Ruogu was specially appointed for the task. Its 650 pages were filled with poems, stories and articles by women writers, as well as articles on literary women written by men. The special issue proved very successful. The first edition comprised 3,000 copies, 7,000 more were printed in late March the same year, and a third edition comprising 3,000 copies came out in May 1931,

according to the publishers. The special issue was also controversial, and sparked a debate over how women writers were to be represented, and who had the right to represent them.

The *Women writers special issue* was severely criticised by a number of publications, including *Literature weekly*, *New woman*, *Seawind weekly*, *Qinghai* (Blue sea), *Dajiang* (Great river), and *Minjian* (Among the people) (Editor 1929). Although some of the criticism was directed towards contributions by women writers, much of it took issue with the attitude and motives of the special issue's editor and publishers. Critics charged Zhang Ruogu and his backers, the Truth, beauty and goodness publishing house, with several offences. Firstly, they were said to be exploiting women's literature for its commercial value; secondly, they were accused of eroticising women writers; and thirdly, they were ridiculed for being old-fashioned.

In a satirical article in *Literature weekly*, which appeared a month before the publication of *Women writers special issue*, the pseudonym Jing Yin (1929a) first made some sarcastic remarks about Zhang Ruogu's rapid career on the Shanghai literary scene, and his attempt to style himself the "leader" of the women writers. Jing Yin then went on to ridicule the very idea of a special issue on women writers. He quoted a "certain gentleman" who, upon reading the advertisement for Zhang's special issue, had said: "Oh, then we are going to publish a special issue on *male* writers". The "male writers special issue", an absurdity at a time when most writers were male anyway, poked fun at gender-based divisions of literature and made "women writers special issue" sound ridiculous too. The reason why Zhang Ruogu and Truth, beauty and goodness had chosen to make such a division, Jing Yin implied, was because it was lucrative. Jing Yin jokingly suggested that the gentleman's decision to publish a "male writers special issue" had made him worried on Zhang Ruogu's behalf. Perhaps the "male writers special issue" would steal the limelight from Zhang

and his project? However, Jing Yin's friend, a Mr Zhou, quickly dismissed this notion:

How can you come up with such a silly idea! The reason why he is publishing this special issue is precisely because of the three large characters *NÜ - ZUO - JIA* (Woman writer). With these three large characters set in gold, who could compete with it? If you don't believe me, then let us bet on which will win out, the "women writers special issue" or the "male writers special issue". You will see that not even a hundred "male writers special issues" could defeat a single "women writers special issue". You may predict a future of great riches for Zhang. (Ibid: 30).

In *New woman*, the pseudonymous Bu Qian developed a detailed criticism of Zhang Ruogu's project solely based on an advertisement for the *Women writers special issue* (Bu Qian 1929a). Like Jing Yin, Bu Qian questioned Zhang's motives, but suggested that sex, not money, was the driving force behind the enterprise. The *Women writers special issue* was, in his or her words, "an outlet for abnormal sexual desires" and an insult to women. The advertisement, he pointed out, described women writers as "the brightest flowers of the literary world" and "the comforting angels sought after by the reading public". Such epithets were utterly unsuitable, Bu Qian argued, because they referred not to the women writers as authors, but to the women writers as women, that is, as eroticised beings. This way of looking at women writers was wrong, Bu Qian explained. A woman writer did not write as a woman, but as a human being. As long as a writer, male or female, produced good literature, it did not matter whether the person in question was a "bright flower" or not. There was no reason to divide "the garden of literature" between male and female: "a male writer is a writer, and a woman writer is also a writer, in exactly the same way". It would seem, then, that Bu Qian wholly rejected the

idea of a separateness of women's literature, but in fact he did believe that it was relevant to discuss differences between men's and women's literatures in several contexts:

There is no harm in specifically studying women writers if it is done from the perspectives of psychology, physiology or sociology. For example, if we want to know about the relative strengths and weaknesses of the male and female imaginations, or about their relative skills of expression, then we may well divide writers into two groups. Furthermore, if we for example want to know about women's lives, and about the depressed psychology of young women suffering under the yokes of capitalism or patriarchy (*zongfa shehui*), we may also make specific use of literary works by women writers! (Ibid:75).

In other words, Bu Qian accepted the two modern ways of defining "woman" which I outlined in Chapters One and Two: scientific ideas of sex difference and feminist interpretations of woman as the victim of a patriarchal society. The special issue's division between male and female writers, by contrast, was according to Bu Qian not based on scientific or political concerns but on an "erotomaniac abnormal sexual urge" (Ibid: 76). Bu Qian warned that the publishers of *Women writers special issue* were "the women's enemies" and urged the literary world to start a war of resistance against their evil influence.

After the publication of *Women writers special issue*, Bu Qian (1929b) returned with more criticism of the "attitude of the editor" of said publication. This time he or she did not mention the editor's alleged sexual abnormality, but concentrated the criticism on Zhang Ruogu's use of a quotation from Li Ruzhen's novel *Jinghua yuan* (Flowers in the mirror), first published in 1828, as a foreword for the special issue. The quotation was taken from Li's rendering of an imperial edict by the Tang empress Wu Zetian where she announces the

institution of imperial examinations for women. Bu Qian interpreted Zhang's choice of quotation as megalomania, as it implied a comparison between Zhang and the supreme ruler of China, but also as a sign of Zhang's lagging behind the times. "I take a look at the calendar on my wall, and it says it is now the eighteenth year of the Republic, or 1929. I don't know whether Mr Zhang's calendar agrees with mine?" (Bu Qian 1929b: 230).

Zhu Xiuxia, writing in the socialist *Seawind weekly*, also criticised the *Women writers special issue* for being behind the times (Zhu 1929). Like Bu Qian, Zhu considered the editor's attitudes old-fashioned. He regarded Zhang's "foreword" with scorn, and disapproved of Zhang's article on modern Chinese women writers. "It is a good thing that Mr Zhang has put so much work into it", he sarcastically remarked, "[providing] the kind of 'index' [filled with things] like 'So-and-so is the wife of Mr So-and-so' - very profound indeed...." (Ibid: 13). Zhang's article was written in modern Chinese, but Zhu rendered the phrase 'So-and-so is the wife of Mr So-and-so' in classical Chinese (*Mou ji mou jun zhi furen ye*), emphasising that he considered such information old-fashioned. According to Zhu, however, not only was the editor of *Women writers special issue* backward-looking, but so were its contributors. The special issue represented a Chinese women's literature which was hopelessly behind the times. Zhu wrote that he had originally received a rather good impression of China's women writers, but that the *Women writers special issue* had destroyed this impression. In Zhu's view, it contained some "old scraps" of Bing Xin's writing, a long poem by Lin Lusi which plagiarised an earlier poem by Bing Xin, some unintelligible private letters by Chen Xuezhao, an uninspired, unstructured story by Lu Yin, and other works which reflected the "decadent world view of the petit-bourgeoisie". Lu Yi's (Su Xuelin's) contribution was "more carefully written", but Bai Wei's short play, which described the evil rule of warlords, was the only piece that Zhu commended.

(Ibid: 13). Zhang Ruogu had set out to promote “the women’s literary movement”, but his special issue had had the opposite effect on Zhu, making him disappointed with the women writers. It had convinced him that “the thinking of China’s women writers is terribly backward. There is not a single one of them who is able to stand at the vanguard of the era. What they write is filled with the thinking of cloistered gentlewomen of patriarchal society (*zongfa shehui*)” (Ibid: 14).

Zhang Ruogu and his allies did not leave the criticism unanswered. Articles in supplements of *Shenbao* (Shanghai News), to which Zhang Ruogu regularly contributed, took issue with Jing Yin’s article in *Literature weekly*. In *Shanghai news’ Kafei zuo* (Café) the pseudonymous “Zhang” - possibly Zhang Ruogu himself - exaggerated the criticism aimed at *Women writers special issue* by suggesting that its critics in *Literature weekly* were Lu Xun and Zheng Zhenduo (Jing Yin 1929 b). Zhang identified Lu Xun as the real person behind both the “certain gentleman” and the “Mr Zhou” mentioned by Jing Yin. This was later denied by Jing Yin in *Literature weekly* (Ibid). In the *Shanghai news* supplement *Yishujie* (Art world), the editor, Zhang Ruogu’s friend Zhu Yingpeng who had designed the cover for *Women writers special issue*, criticised *Literature weekly* for using criticism of *Women writers special issue* as a “business strategy”, a charge which the editor of *Literature weekly* defended himself against by referring to the great number of publications which were critical of *Women writers special issue* (Editor 1929: 238).

Later in the spring of 1929, Zhang Ruogu decided to speak out about the *Women writers special issue* debate in the *Truth, beauty and goodness* magazine (Zhang 1929c). Realising that there is no such thing as bad publicity, he stressed the controversial nature of the special issue and the amount of attention, good and bad, that it had received. It had, according to Zhang, upset not only representatives of the press, but authors, readers, critics, and

educators, as well as religious and political circles (Ibid:1). He listed an impressive number of articles - 31 altogether - which had been written about it. Upon closer inspection, several of these articles turn out not to be specifically about the *Women writers special issue*, but merely touch upon related subjects (e.g., Shiqiu 1929), something which shows that Zhang was eager to exaggerate the impact of the special issue on the publishing world.

Summarising the content of the debate, Zhang attempted to show that much of the criticism the special issue had encountered was irrational, unprofessional, and vindictive, but also that a number of positive reviews of the special issue had been published. These friendly reviews were to be found in *Shanghai news*, for which Zhang himself wrote, *Shihou* (English title: Sphinx), which was published by the Jinwu shudian (La maison d'or bookstore) owned by Zhang's friend Shao Xunmei (Hutt 2001: 124), *Shenghuo* (The life), *Shishi xinbao* (*China times*), *Jindai funü* (Modern women) and *Wenyou* (Literary friend). *Literature weekly*, *New woman*, *Seawind weekly*, *Blue sea* and *Great river*, on the other hand, had been his severest critics. Among the latter, Zhang recognised only the articles in *Blue sea* and *Seawind Weekly* as proper literary criticism, because these turned their attention, at least in part, to the literary works included in the special issue. The bulk of the criticism, Zhang complained, consisted of personal attacks on the editor himself, and had nothing to do with the actual content of the publication. Zhang saw this as symptomatic of China's lack of serious literary criticism.

Those who attacked the attitude of the editor, furthermore, had misunderstood, or chosen to misunderstand, the motives behind the publication of the special issue. Zhang denied being involved in the project for financial or sexual reasons, and protested against being likened to "those pretenders to culture and refinement who idolise actresses and visit brothels", a comparison made by Bu Qian in *New woman* (Ibid: 17; Bu Qian 1929a). The



“true” motivation behind the *Women writers special issue* was a noble one: as Zeng Xubai had explained in an advertisement, it was meant to alert the ignorant Chinese public to the fact that a number of great female writers had emerged on the chaotic Chinese literary scene (Zhang 1929c: 2). It was thus an enlightenment project, meant to educate the reading public, and in extension, to promote and encourage women’s writing. Zhang had his own theories as to why critics such as those in *Literature weekly* and *New woman* accused him of greed and sexual abnormality. Apart from the possibility that their criticism represented a projection of their own subconscious desires (Ibid:17), it had, in Zhang’s opinion, mainly to do with what Zhu Yingpeng had called “business strategy”. This explained why *Literature weekly* and *New woman* had featured criticism of *Women writers special issue* even before it was published - these publications were concerned not primarily with literary criticism or the role of women but with protecting their own interests. *Women writers special issue* infringed upon what they considered their areas of expertise, and so they felt compelled to mark their territory. Zhang found their attitude hypocritical. *New woman* would normally discuss women’s issues and a “new sexual morality” with great gusto, but as soon as someone else advertised a publication about women, *New woman* accused him of exploiting and insulting women. There was, in Zhang’s opinion, very little to distinguish between his and *New woman*’s position on women - their differences derived from *New woman*’s attempt to monopolise discussions of women’s issues. (Ibid: 3-4).

Was the debate over *Women writers special issue* nothing more than a squabble over the right to represent women writers? Or did the different positions taken in the debate represent different ways of looking at, of defining, the woman writer? In order to answer these questions, I will first turn to the context in which the special issue was published, and then to the content and

style of the special issue itself.

### *Zeng Pu's search for a literary woman*

The Zhenmeishan, or "Truth, beauty and goodness" publishing house, which published *Women writers special issue*, was founded in 1927 by the novelist Zeng Pu (1872 - 1935) and his son Zeng Xubai. Zeng Pu had two particular reasons to locate the publishing house in Shanghai: first, the great concentration of writers and journalists in Shanghai attracted him because he wanted to make a lot of literary acquaintances and gather them around himself in a sort of literary salon, and second, the Western cultural influence in Shanghai suited him, for he was deeply interested in European, and especially French, literature (Zeng 1988: 83). Some time after their arrival in Shanghai, Zeng and son moved into a house in Rue Massenet in the French concession, where they started to receive a steady stream of literary guests. One of their regular visitors was Shao Xunmei, poet, playboy and publisher, who had studied in France. Shao was already running his own literary salon, centering on his publishing venture *La maison d'or*, and the Zengs in turn became acquainted with his friends and associates. These included Fu Yanchang, Zhang Ruogu, Xu Weinan and Zhu Yingpeng, a group of friends associated with the publication *Art world*. (Ibid: 93; Fruehauf 1993: 136-142). Heinrich Fruehauf (1993) and Leo Ou-fan Lee (1999: 18-20) have described how the Zeng's, Shao Xunmei, Fu Yanchang, Zhang Ruogu, Zhu Yingpeng and their friends cultivated an exotic atmosphere in their life and work, how they idolised Western civilisation, and how they attempted to recreate the French salon in the French concession. Other guests to Zeng's salon included Yu Dafu, Tian Han, Xu Zhimo and Zhao Jingshen. According to Zeng Xubai's autobiography, the salon was a great success. Writers and artists flocked to the Zeng house

every night, and were dazzled by Zeng Pu's brilliant conversation. (Zeng 1988: 93-96).

Zeng Pu's salon appears to have had much in common with the *Wenyi chahua hui* or Art and literature tea talk meetings described by Michel Hockx (2003: 107-115), which took place in Shanghai a few years later, starting in 1932. The "Tea talk" group, too, had a French connection, as several of its members had studied in France. Not unlike Zeng Pu and his friends, they viewed their meetings as a continuation of both traditional Chinese literary gatherings and of French salons. Their conversations about art and literature were meant to be lighthearted and enjoyable, while at the same time display feeling, learning and good taste, a kind of "sophisticated entertainment". The Tea talk group had many female members, and their presence at the meetings was believed necessary in order to create the right kind of atmosphere. The men tended to emphasise gender difference among members, and "their attitude towards female members was one of lingering superiority, mixed with romantic-style gallantry and defiance of gender-related social conventions" (Hockx 2003: 113).

The artists frequenting Zeng Pu's salon, however, did not include a single female. Zeng Pu perceived this as a deficiency since the typical French salon would have been hosted by some great lady of fashion with a talent for polite conversation and a keen interest in literature and the arts. He planned to remedy the lack by recruiting a salon hostess from among their acquaintances. (Zeng 1988: 96,99).

The first breakthrough in Zeng's search for a literary woman came when he got to know the woman writer and scholar Su Xuelin, as she started contributing to the *Truth, beauty and goodness* magazine. Zeng was impressed by her elegant style and original theories concerning literary history. He particularly admired her old-style poetry which he thought was of unusually

high quality for a modern writer, and he described her in a congratulatory poem, which was later included in the *Women writers special issue*, as a “female Su Shi” and a “Li Bai of the inner chambers” (Ibid: 98; Bingfu 1929b). Having studied in Lyon between 1921 and 1925, Su was also well acquainted with French culture.

But no matter how talented and learned she was, the self-professed “bookworm”<sup>1</sup> Su Xuelin did not quite fit the description of a French-style salon hostess. Such a person, Zeng Xubai later explained, need not necessarily be a writer or artist herself, as long as she has a true appreciation for literature and the arts. “From a shared lover of all the artists (*wenyijia dajia gongtong de airen*) she transforms into a central figure of the art movement” (Zeng 1988: 99). Although Zeng Pu delighted in having “discovered” the talented Su Xuelin, the literary woman he was most anxious to find was not the bookworm or the accomplished poetess, but an erotically charged focal point of the artistic lifestyle, a feminine presence capable of inspiring literature and the arts. The 29-year-old Su, with her scholarly interests and her traditional arranged marriage presumably lacked the necessary glamour and sex appeal.

After Zeng Pu asked his literary friends to keep a look out for potential salon hostesses at least two candidates were suggested to him: Wang Yingxia and Lu Xiaoman (Ibid: 99). Both were famous as the lovers of prominent literary figures. Wang, a twenty-year-old graduate from a normal school for girls, was the second wife of the writer Yu Dafu. Yu Dafu’s diaries were published in August 1928, making their love story a public concern. Lu Xiaoman (1903 - 1965) was a celebrated beauty from a wealthy Beijing family, who created quite a stir by divorcing her first husband in order to marry the poet Xu Zhimo in 1926. However, it turned out that none of the two ladies in question were interested in becoming the “shared lovers of all the artists”. According to Zeng Xubai they limited themselves to lavishing their attentions

on Yu Dafu and Xu Zhimo respectively. In the end Zeng Pu was forced to give up his attempt to find a suitable woman for the job. He admitted that "France and China have different national characters, and it is impossible to coerce Chinese girls into imitating a life-style that can be developed by French women" (Ibid: 99).

### *The romance of Liu Wuxin<sup>2</sup>*

In the summer of 1928 Zeng Pu received an intriguing letter. The writer introduced herself as a young female fan of his, a nineteen-year-old girl called Liu Wuxin, or "Dancing Heart" Liu, who had recently graduated from a Catholic middle school. There, she had studied French under a Frenchwoman by the name of Mlle Lafont, and she was able to read original works of literature in French with the help of a dictionary. Liu professed her great admiration for Zeng Pu, whom she considered one of her three favourite Chinese writers together with Cao Xueqin and Guan Hanqing. She then brought up for discussion one of Zeng Pu's latest projects, his translation of Pierre Louys' *Aphrodite*, under the Chinese title *Rou yu si* (Flesh and death). Liu Wuxin had read *Aphrodite* under the supervision of Mlle Lafont, who considered the book to be about "a real woman - a real human being". Although she was critical of some parts of the book where she felt the author was just showing off his learning, Liu agreed with her teacher that "he [Louys] has seen through the minds of us women, through our innermost heart". Those who read *Aphrodite* as "entertainment" had quite misunderstood it. But why did Zeng Pu choose to translate it, Liu asked? What did he see in it - titillation or pessimism? Finally, Liu asked her idol what he thought of her idea for a short story she was planning to write. It was to be about a woman who falls in love with an author she has never met. She does not want to meet him "because a good writer is

not necessarily a good lover”, but she wants to make her feelings known nevertheless, and she writes him a letter professing her love. The unfeeling writer, however, publishes her letter in his literary magazine, thus ruining her reputation. The woman then withdraws to a Catholic convent. (Liu 1928).

Zeng Pu was delighted to receive this letter. Not only was it from a dedicated fan, but from a young, aspiring woman writer who shared his passion for French literature, very much the kind of person that Zeng was on the lookout for. In addition, Zeng may well have been attracted to the letter’s mixture of innocence and flirtation. Liu was a well-brought up girl who did not “have any girlfriends, not to mention boyfriends” (Ibid: 13), and who modestly used the word “entertainment” (*yule*) as a euphemism for pornography, but who was brave enough to make an erotic novel the central topic of her letter. Her suggested plot for a short story, furthermore, provocatively paralleled her own admiration for, and her writing to, Zeng Pu. Finally, her letter provided confirmation of the worth of *Aphrodite* from a woman’s perspective.

It was, in short, too good to be true. According to Zeng Xubai, Zeng Pu’s delight in the letter was mixed with suspicion from the start (Zeng 1988: 99-100). He was well aware that extremely few Chinese writers were acquainted with the novel *Aphrodite*, and the chances of a middle school student having read it in the original language were very slim indeed. As soon as he got the opportunity, Zeng Pu interrogated the main suspects, Zhang Ruogu and Shao Xunmei, who denied having written the letter. (Ibid: 100). Zeng Pu’s suspicions, however, did not deter him from publishing Liu Wuxin’s letter in the *Truth, beauty and goodness* magazine together with a lengthy answer. Here, he took the opportunity to explain his motives for translating *Aphrodite*: he was attracted neither to its pornographic qualities nor its cynicism, but to its particular beauty, which was the “beauty of dreams” as well as the “beauty of intoxication”. He showed a fatherly concern for the young woman’s literary

ambitions, but also struck up a gallant, somewhat flirtatious tone. He made a point of addressing Liu as *Mlle* Liu, and using the pronoun *nin* which he explained as “a polite term of address in the North, which equals the French *vous*” (Bingfu 1928: 1). His studied politeness did not keep him from making a joke with sexual overtones. Zeng wondered why Mlle Liu seemed so critical of his translating a book which she liked. Was she really trying to discourage him from doing it? Zeng Pu did not think so: “In the West there is a saying which goes ‘when a woman says *non*, she often means *oui*’. Perhaps your attempt to dissuade me from translating is of the same nature?” (Ibid: 4).

Liu Wuxin’s letter provoked much speculation among Zeng Pu’s friends, as everyone tried to figure out who “she” was. Zeng Xubai maintains that his father suspected Shao Xunmei all along, but according to Zeng Pu’s answer to Liu Wuxin’s second letter, Shao was only second on his list of suspects, after Zhang Ruogu. Both Zhang and Shao still denied having anything to do with the letter and finally declared their innocence publicly, Zhang in *Art world* and Shao in *Sphinx*. Xu Weinan was another possible choice, being one of the few people known to own a copy of *Aphrodite*. Many of Zeng’s friends favoured the theory that Zhao Jingshen was behind it all, for, they said, “he has always been a bit feminine”. When asked, Zhao Jingshen neither denied nor confirmed their guess, thus increasing their suspicion. Zeng Pu also thought of a fifth possibility: could Liu Wuxin in fact be an alter ego of his favourite woman writer Su Xuelin, who was known to write under a variety of pseudonyms? (Bingfu 1929: 5-7)

Then, amidst all the speculation, an incident occurred which - seemingly - dispelled all doubt. Liu Wuxin appeared, in flesh and blood, in the Truth, beauty and goodness bookstore and turned out to be a pretty girl of eighteen or nineteen. When told that Zeng Pu was not there, she left a note expressing her regret at not being able to see him, as she was leaving for Suzhou the

following morning. When Zeng Pu got the news, he was both disappointed at having missed her, and thrilled to learn of her actual physical existence. (Zeng 1988: 100).

In December 1928, Zeng Pu received a second letter from Liu Wuxin together with her short story, entitled "*Anwei*" (Consolation), about the unfortunate woman reader who becomes a Catholic nun. Again, Zeng published her letter and his own answer in the *Truth, beauty and goodness* magazine (Liu 1929; Bingfu 1929a). Liu explained her long absence saying that she had been suffering from a mysterious illness, and had gone to Suzhou for a change of climate. It was only upon her return to Shanghai the week before that she learnt of the publication of her letter and Zeng Pu's answer, and that she realised that she had forgotten to leave a return address. Extremely grateful for Zeng Pu's kind advice, she now considered herself his "slave". However, she had decided not to reveal her address this time around either. In his answer, Zeng Pu claimed to be perfectly satisfied with her decision, which he thought revealed "the cunning of a literatus, the intelligence of a woman, the reserve of a poet and the concealment of a novelist" (Bingfu 1929a: 8). He did, however, urge Liu not to play more tricks on a man of his advanced age, but to come visit his salon in rue Massenet.

It was only after Zeng Pu's death in 1935 that Shao Xunmei finally owned up to his prank and confessed to having written Liu Wuxin's letters and her short story. The girl in the book shop was in fact Shao's cousin. (Zeng 1988: 101). It had been a most successful practical joke, but according to Zeng Xubai, it owed its success in no small part to Zeng Pu's willing participation:

Actually, Father had long suspected that Xunmei was behind it all, but to pull the plug on it, unnecessarily putting an end to this beautiful story would have been disappointing, something only a fool would do. Shao Xunmei, who really



understood Father, was helping him to create in his imagination what he most of all wanted, the girl of his ideals. Why would Father want to destroy her? He wrote the two answers and published them in the *Truth, beauty and goodness* magazine in order to show that he believed the story to be true, thus preserving the beauty of the story forever in his imagination, a beauty which like that of *Flesh and death* was "the misty beauty of dreams, the indistinct beauty of intoxication". (Ibid: 101)

In spite of the suspicion surrounding Liu Wuxin, her short story "Consolation", penned by Shao Xunmei, was promptly included in the *Women writers special issue*.

#### *The women writers special issue*

Zeng Pu's search for a literary woman may not have led to the desired outcome, but it most likely contributed to the coming about of *Woman writer special issue*. The first anniversary of the *Truth, beauty and goodness* magazine was to be celebrated through the publication of a special issue of the magazine. Zeng Pu's original plan was to make it a special issue about his mentor Chen Jitong, the former military attaché of China at Paris, but when Zhang Ruogu, who had recently published a translation of Jules Lemaître (1853-1914) entitled "The women poets and prose writers of France" in *Truth, beauty and goodness* (Zhang 1928), suggested a special issue on Chinese women writers instead, Zeng Pu changed his mind, and Zhang was assigned the task of editing the issue (Zhang 1929c: 2). According to Zhang himself, he was busy for two full months soliciting and organising the material. As would be expected, he encountered many problems in the course of his work. Although the response from less well-known women writers was overwhelming, not all established female literary stars obliged, even though Zhang had Su Xuelin

help him approach them. A new work by the most revered of all women writers, Bing Xin, would have lent the special issue great credibility, but unfortunately for Zhang, Bing Xin declared that she was busy teaching and did not have time to write for Zhang or anyone else. Zhang had to settle for a compromise and publish a five year old poem by Bing Xin which had not been included in her earlier poetry collections. Several articles on women writers which he had been promised, such as an article on Mme de Stael by Wu Xuxin and one about Tang dynasty women poets by Zeng Xubai never materialised, and Zhang never found the time to finish his own article about George Sand. When the special issue was ready for publication by the end of December 1928, it turned out to be far too long. According to the agreement with the printers, it was to be less than 20,000 characters; Zhang had amassed more than 30,000 characters. Serious reorganisation and renegotiation was needed, and Zhang decided to remove as many as fifteen items, including six original works by women writers, which he planned to have published later in *Truth, beauty and goodness*. (Zhang 1929a). It was not until February that the special issue was finally published, still comprising over 20,000 characters.

In the special issue, Zhang thanked Zeng Pu and son for giving him the opportunity to edit the issue, Su Xuelin, Zhang Yiping, Zhu Yingpeng, Fu Yanchang, Xu Weinan, Shao Xunmei, Zhao Jingshen and Ye Dingluo for their help, and Zhou Zuoren and Tian Han for their moral support. He also, sarcastically, thanked Lu Xun and Zheng Zhenduo for their indirect moral support: Lu Xun's sarcastic remarks and Zheng Zhenduo's "friendly" advice that a women writers special issue would be a bad idea had only strengthened the resolve of the editor and his friends. (Ibid).

The cover design by Zhu Yingpeng shows a young woman sitting down at her writing (see Figure 3). She is depicted from the waist up, holding a quill in her right hand. She is looking up from her writing with a pensive, almost sad,

expression on her face. She appears to be a Caucasian rather than a Chinese woman, for her hair and eyes are a light colour. Her hair is styled in a typical 1920s bob, but she is dressed in a sort of long-sleeved blouse, hanging in loose folds from her shoulders, which is reminiscent of ancient Greece or mediaeval Europe rather than of modern Shanghai. Here, "the woman writer" is imagined as an international and timeless phenomenon. Zhu's picture, furthermore, gives an impression of seriousness and good taste - there is no intimation of the pornographic qualities which the special issue's severest critics believed would be its greatest selling point.

The issue was illustrated with little decorative drawings by Japanese artists at the beginning of each article, and with photographs of women writers and artists and of oil paintings by women. According to Zhang Ruogu, a great number of women had contributed samples of their calligraphy, ink paintings and embroidery, but he had decided there was only room to print pictures of that most modern of visual art forms, the oil painting. (Zhang 1929a: 5).

The contents of the special issue were collected under the headings of poetry, essays (*xiaopin*), fiction, drama, biography, obituaries, commentaries (*pinglun*), and in a special subcategory of its own, *shi* poetry. The contributions to the categories of poetry, essays, fiction and drama were written by women writers, or, in the case of one of the plays, translated by a woman translator. With the exception of Zeng Pu's poem about Su Xuelin, the *shi* poetry was also by women poets. The biographies, obituaries and commentaries on the other hand, were by male and female writers. Within the sections for poetry, essays, fiction and drama, the women writers were to some extent presented in order of importance, so that Bing Xin headed the poetry section, Su Xuelin the essay section, Lu Yin the fiction section and Bai Wei the drama section. The other women writers represented were Lin Lusi (poetry and fiction), Xiaolu, Zuo Dazhang, and Yu Jimei (essays), Chen Xuezhao, Wu Shutian, Liu Wuxin,



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Qixiao, Langhuan, Guo Jialing, Jin Guangmei and Gu Zhiyun (fiction), and Yuan Changying and Zhao Huishen (drama). Wu Xuxin was included in the drama section as the translator of a play by Florian. The *shi* poets included Lü Bicheng, Hongchu and Guo Changhe, in addition to Su Xuelin and Zeng Pu.

The biographies, obituaries, and *commentaries* were either written by women, or were about literary women. The former group included an article on Maeterlinck by Su Xuelin, one on Comte by Lin Baoquan, and a translation of an article by Yosano Akiko. Fang Yu was represented by her translation of a piece about Mme Recamier by the French critic Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869). The men who contributed to these sections mostly belonged to Zeng Pu's and Zhang Ruogu's literary acquaintance. Shao Xunmei wrote on Sappho, Zeng Pu on Mme de Noaille and on women writers from Yushan, Cui Wanqiu on Kujo Kakeko, Sun Xizhen on Shi Pingmei, and Fu Yanchang on Qiu Xinru. Oddly, a short story by Xu Weinan which had nothing to do with women writers was listed under "obituaries". Perhaps this is an indication that Zhang felt compelled to include contributions from his male friends, even when they did not comply with the requirements for the special issue.

#### *The editor's views on women writers*

How was the concept of "woman writer" defined by *Women writers special issue*? The only contribution which discussed in any detail the theoretical issues surrounding "women writers" and "women's literature" was Zhang Ruogu's "Zhongguo xiandai de nüzuojia" (Modern Chinese women writers) (Zhang 1929b). It was primarily intended as a straight-forward introduction to a number of women writers, but it also contained a preliminary discussion of the role of women's writing. Here, Zhang identified three different positions as the main schools of thought on women's literature.

First, there were those who held that *women were not suited to write literature*. This opinion was based on two kinds of “reasons”: the “inborn” (*xiantian*) and the “acquired” (*houtian*). Zhang did not specify whether he meant reasons that had given rise to the opinion in question, or reasons put forward by those of this opinion, an omission which made for a certain vagueness in Zhang’s argumentation. It was not clear to what extent Zhang considered the reasons to be true and correct. “Inborn” reasons for women’s literary inferiority had to do with their biological make-up, which made women emotional, even hysterical, and lacking in reason and objectivity (Ibid: 6-7). The “acquired” reasons had to do with women’s inferior status in society, which had given rise to opinions such as “in a woman lack of talent is a virtue”. Zhang pointed out that such ideas by no means were unique to China, but that in the past, Western women had often been discouraged from intellectual activities.

The second position on women’s writing was radically opposed to the first, and held that *women were particularly suited to writing literature*. This “school” argued that precisely because of women’s rich emotions, they were unusually good at writing literature, and attributed the lack of female geniuses to an oppressive environment. Zhang implied that whereas the first “school” held men’s literature to be superior, the second “school” preferred women’s writings to men’s. Proponents of this opinion, according to Zhang, included Hu Yunyi and Miss Wenna. However, there is no evidence in Hu’s or Wenna’s writings to suggest that they believed women’s literature to be superior to men’s (see Chapter Five; Wenna *nūshi* 1927). The second position was probably a rhetorical creation of Zhang’s.

Although the first and second school had their strong points, they were both “too extreme” for Zhang’s taste. He instead favoured a third position: *women were equally suited to writing literature*. Men and women possessed literary talent, and both had vital roles to play in literary creation. Vital but

different, for men's and women's literature were to be separate and complementary according to Zhang. Women should not try to write like male authors, but continue to produce a distinctly female literature, one which was based on emotions and expressed the female psychology. Zhang even suggested that women's literature be read and judged in a way different from men's: sympathy and tolerance was called for, strict literary criticism was not. (Zhang 1929b: 12-17).

However, as Zhang attempted to define the differences between these equal and complementary literatures, his seemingly neutral third position turned out to have more in common with the first, than with the second, position. Although women had certain artistic talents, he explained, they suffered from biological defects which men were entirely free from. Obvious such weaknesses included the female reproductive system, the female intelligence, and women's propensity for melancholia and illness. Because of these natural defects women could never surpass men in the field of literature. Their literary abilities were particularly hampered by their exaggerated emotionality and lack of abstract thinking. Zhang quoted Lemaître, the French critic who had inspired him to suggest a women writers special issue to begin with, who believed women's surging emotions constantly threatened their concentration, making it difficult for them to master poetic harmony and meticulous descriptions. According to Lemaître, women excelled only in writing letters, sketches (*biji*) and pedagogical works, whereas poetry, history, criticism, and philosophy were to remain the exclusive domain of the men. Zhang also referred to Stendhal, who observed that women wrote less boldly and with more artifice than men.(Ibid).

There is a certain affinity between Zhang's position on women's literature and scientific theories of sex difference. Zhang's conclusion was not, however, that women ought to sacrifice their (inferior) talents in order to fulfil their

destinies as wives and mothers. What he proposed, instead, was a version of the ideal of the salonière. He encouraged women to take part in literary activities, but without directly competing with male authors. Zhang's solution to the problem of how to create a good environment for women writers is illuminating. He suggested, first, that aspiring women writers marry other writers, or men who were very interested in literature, and second, that they spend their free time socialising in literary salons. (Ibid:18). Women were thus to enter the literary circles either as "the wife of Mr So-and-So" (Zhu 1929) or via literary salons such as those of Zeng Pu and Shao Xunmei. According to Zhang, women had a more important part to play in the salon than in the study. China, he wrote, was in more urgent need of a Mme Recamier than of a George Sand. Women should not be required to work as hard as the men when it came to writing. Their main contribution to literature was an indirect one, the inspiration and encouragement they gave male writers:

The ideal situation would be that you on the one hand became writers, and on the other hand still continued to encourage male writers. For your influence and power over literature is extremely, enormously strong. Your conversation, your hospitality, your company, your friendship, your letters: these are more valuable, more charming, than poems or novels. (Zhang 1929b: 78).

Zhang's article defined "woman writer" in rather broad terms: she could be someone who inspired or facilitated literary production, as well as someone who actually wrote great works of literature. In either case, however, her relationship to literature was always bound up with her strong emotions and her feminine charms.



*Versions of femininity*

Zhang Ruogu's "Modern Chinese women writers" promoted the ideal of the salon hostess. What versions of "woman writer" were represented on the remaining pages of the special issue? And were the *Women writers special issue's* representations of "woman writer" really at odds with the ideals of the special issue's critics?

The contents of the special issue reflected a broad definition of "woman writer". Although the focus was on contemporary Chinese female writers of poetry, essays, fiction and drama, whose contributions made up the bulk of the publication, other parts of the magazine provided more varied images of the "woman writer". There were articles about women writers from France, Japan, ancient Greece and Qing dynasty China. Not all the women writers represented were included as authors of original works in the genres of poetry, essays, drama and fiction. Lin Baoquan, who had received a doctorate in literature in France, was represented by a scholarly article on Comte, and Wu Xuxin and Zhang Xian by translations. The female artists whose oil paintings were shown in the special issue were often introduced to the readers by means of photographs, exactly in the same way as the women writers, establishing an equivalence between woman writer and woman artist. "Woman writer", in the *Truth, beauty and goodness* interpretation, connoted a wide range of cultural practices. This view was not shared by all. Thus Zhu Xiuxia in *Seawind weekly* criticised Zhang Ruogu for including too many women writers in his "Modern Chinese women writers", and for failing to differentiate between "author" and "translator" (Zhu 1929: 14).

Was there anything to the accusation that *Women writers special issue* was insulting women by representing women writers as primarily as "women" rather than as "writers"? Those who, like *New woman's* Bu Qian, expected anything in the way of sexual perversion from *Women writers special issue*

must have been bitterly disappointed. The magazine contained very little racy material, and certainly no pornography. In the eyes of the readers, the most daring contribution was Jin Guangmei's short story "*Bu zhi wei ni sale duoshao yanlei*" (How many tears I have cried over you), which contained some references to kissing and hugging (Zhang 1929c: 13). However, Bu Qian was not entirely off the mark in suspecting Zhang Ruogu of interpreting women writers as sexual, rather than intellectual, beings. The special issue's articles on women writers celebrated feminine charms as often as it did female genius.

This was nowhere more obvious than in Fang Yu's translation of Sainte-Beuve's portrait of the French salon hostess Mme Recamier (1777-1849) (Fang Yu 1929), where the lady in question was described as an ultra-feminine, erotically charged creature. She had been a celebrated beauty, pursued by countless admirers. She was seductive yet virtuous - she enjoyed playing dangerous games, but she ultimately remained faithful to her husband, whom she did not love. By neither encouraging nor refusing the attentions of her admirers, she broke many hearts, but not out of cruelty, for her love of danger was as innocent as the curiosity of a child. She repaid others' passion with kindness, and many of the courtships turned into lasting friendships. Although Mme Recamier did not host a salon until she had reached middle age, it was her feminine charm which held the salon together. Most of her friends had started out as her admirers, and she somehow managed to retain her sexual powers over men even in her twilight years. Several illustrious personages gathered in her home, but she was the "soul" of the salon. Her kindness, charm, and finely honed social skills made everyone feel at home. She humoured and encouraged her guests, and exerted a civilising influence on everyone around her. She was an excellent listener. In this way, she, a woman, was able to promote high culture, or as Sainte-Beuve put it, "Eurydice performed Orpheus's work in her own way" (Ibid: 20). She did not, Sainte-

Beuve pointed out, show off her own intelligence, but she recognised intelligence in others and helped them make the most of it. She wrote very little, but what she wrote was of high quality. This, then, was the kind of “woman writer” that Zhang Ruogu most of all hoped for: not necessarily someone with a significant literary output, but someone whose sexual charisma inspired art, and whose social skills facilitated elegant conversation.

When Zhang Ruogu defended himself against the accusation of “sexual perversion” he never denied taking an interest in sexual aspects of women’s literature. He argued, instead, that his critics in *New woman* were doing exactly the same thing. Their interest in a “new sexual morality” and “the depressed psychology of young women suffering under the yokes of capitalism” were according to Zhang as erotically charged as anything that the Truth, beauty and goodness publishing house would print. There were however subtle differences between the outlook of *New woman* and the versions of “woman writer” provided by the special issue. According to Bu Qian in *New woman*, the exploration of female sexuality in literature or literary production must be grounded in scientific or social theory. Zhang Ruogu, as we have seen, also referred to scientific theories and to the emancipation of women, but these themes were left out of many of the articles about women writers.

The decision to include the short story by Liu Wuxin points to a preoccupation with femininity as romance and mystery, rather than something to be explained in scientific or political terms. There was no particular need to include this story in the first place, as Zhang Ruogu had already received more contributions from women writers than there was room for in the special issue, and Liu had anyway sent “her” story to the regular *Truth, beauty and goodness* magazine, not to the special issue. Liu was an unknown writer, her identity contested, and her short story not especially well written. Its theme did not fit in very well with the objective of the special issue: whereas the special issue was

supposed to promote and encourage the “women’s literary movement”, Liu’s story “Consolation” described how a young woman’s downfall was brought about by her interest in literature. It is likely that it was Zeng Pu’s fascination with the mysterious Liu Wuxin that convinced Zhang Ruogu of her relevance to the special issue.

Whereas most commentators on women’s literature emphasised the authenticity of women’s literature, its genuine expression of the truth about actual, physical women, in *Women writers special issue* there was room for a “woman writer” who was purely a fictional construct, femininity pried loose from any social or biological reality.

#### *The “woman writer” and tradition*

How about the charge made against *Women writers special issue* that it was old-fashioned? The special issue was certainly very different from, say, Qing dynasty collections of women’s poetry. It put the Chinese woman writer in an international perspective, by including accounts of her French, Japanese and Greek counterparts. Its main focus was on the modern genres of poetry, essay, fiction and drama, and it was decorated with fashionable art deco drawings and pictures of modern oil paintings. The inclusion of *shi*-poetry, of course, could be seen as a concession to “old literature”. However, *shi*-poetry was clearly not meant to constitute a category of the same magnitude as poetry, essay, fiction or drama. In the table of contents, the *shi* titles are set in a different, smaller font, the same as used for titles of illustrations. Like the illustrations, the *shi* are not collected in a separate section, but are scattered throughout the magazine, filling up leftover space in between articles or stories.

The objective of the special issue as described by Zeng Xubai was to celebrate and promote the “women’s literary movement”, which he considered

a recent phenomenon and part of the modern literary scene (Zhang 1929c). It also set out to encourage men and women to socialise freely in literary salons, a modern stance considering that the free social interaction between respectable members of both sexes was considered a measure of modernity. In both these respects, however, the special issue could also be seen as continuing time-honoured traditions. The practice of men promoting women writers was certainly not new, as has been explained in Chapter One.

The French-style salon also had its Chinese precedents in literati poetry clubs and similar gatherings, and the *Truth beauty and goodness* group recognised them as such. "...the traditional Chinese custom of literary 'colleagues' gathering at a specified location", Heinrich Fruehauf writes, "was interpreted by the Shanghai exotists as a 'French' feature within their own cultural heritage" (Fruehauf 1993:148). The presence of women at such gatherings had not been unusual in the past, although the women in question would have been courtesans rather than respectable women.

The special issue contained two articles on "old" Chinese women's literature: Fu Yanchang's article about Qiu Xinru's *tanci Bi sheng hua* (Flowers from the brush), and Zeng Pu's introduction to women writers of Yushan. Fu Yanchang argued for the inclusion of Qiu's *tanci* in the canon of serious literature. It was more worth reading than the Four Books and Five Classics, he felt, and ought to be considered one of the treasures of Chinese literature. He pointed out that most of the main characters of the *tanci* were female, and that the plot gave expression to the secret hopes and fantasies that a timid and unfortunate, but ambitious, woman would have had to repress. For these reasons, *Flowers from the brush* was a work which had "women at its centre".

Zeng Pu's (Bingfu 1929c) account of Qing women writers of Yushan was inspired by regional pride. He had originally wanted to write an article about Qing women writers in general, but after having consulted Xie Wuliang's

*Qingdai funü wenxueshi* (History of women's literature of the Qing dynasty)<sup>3</sup>, Hongmeige zhuren's *Transcribed poetry of Qing gentlewomen*, and Chen Yun's *Xiaodaixuan lun shi* (*Xiaodaixuan on shi poetry*), he realised that the topic was too vast for a short article. He therefore limited himself to writing about Qing women writers from his own place of origin, Changshu. Changshu women writers, he claimed, had been of great importance to Qing women's literature. Another reason for his interest in them was the fact that they had often led "romantic" lives, rebelling against the restrictions of *lijiao*. Zeng Pu recounted the life stories of six such women, including the famous courtesan Liu Rushi, three of Yuan Mei's students, and two less well-known women writers who led particularly dramatic lives. He added an appendix containing 33 Qing women writers from the Changshu area. These Qing lady poets and courtesans may appear quite a breed apart from the modern "woman writer", but Zeng Pu did not see it that way. In the home of Liu Rushi and her husband Qian Qianyi, he saw a precursor of the French-style salon. Qian, an eminent scholar and poet, who like Zeng Pu was getting on in years, received visits from many acclaimed scholars who wanted to discuss their writing with him. He would often let his young wife receive the guests, answer their questions, and compose poetry with them. "This sort of atmosphere is very much like that of a French salon. To think that such a thing was practised in our Yushan already by the end of the Ming dynasty, it is really something to be proud of", Zeng commented (*Ibid*: 13).

The *Women writer special issue* aspired to modernity, in its attempts to be fashionable, and in setting out to promote a presumably progressive "women's literary movement". At the same time, the "woman writer" was not represented as an entirely modern invention, but as someone with a history behind her.

### *The market for "women writers"*

Finally, what about the suggestion that the *Women writers special issue* was conceived of with profit in mind? According to Zeng Xubai, profit was never the objective of the Truth beauty and goodness enterprise, which was only meant to promote art and artistic interests (Zeng 1988: 83). Zeng Xubai is of course biased, but it must be said that Zeng Pu and son cannot have expected much money from most of their projects, such as the translation of obscure French novels. However, the *Women writers special issue* appears to have been commercially successful, judging from the number of copies printed. The *Truth beauty and goodness* group must have thought that they had found a niche in the market, for not long after the publication of *Women writers special issue*, an attempt was made to launch a magazine called *Nüzuojia zazhi* (Woman writer magazine), edited by Zhang Ruogu. *Woman writer magazine* was conceived on an even grander scale than *Women writers special issue*. According to an advertisement in *Truth, beauty and goodness* ("Nüzuojia zazhi" 1929), each issue of the magazine was to comprise 50,000 characters, and it was to be richly illustrated with photographs, many of which would be in colour. It was to include original literary works by women writers "Chinese and foreign, famous and unknown" in a great variety of genres, as well as a number of additional columns. Only one issue of the magazine was ever published (Dooling and Torgeson 1998:28). It appears as if there was a market for women's literature packaged as women's literature, but not one big enough to sustain the publication of a specialised journal.

### *Conclusion*

One of the first major publications labelled as being about *nüzuojia* or "women writers", the *Truth, beauty and goodness* special issue *Women writers special*

*issue* provided a broad definition of the concept. Although the majority of the women writers included were contemporary Chinese women who wrote poetry, essays, fiction or drama, the special issue also featured the Qing dynasty courtesan, the Japanese lady of talent, the modern female translator and the female doctor of literature, the French salon hostess, and even - although perhaps without the editor's knowledge - the female alter ego of a male writer. The type of woman writer most enthusiastically promoted by the editor was not the famous author of great genius, but the salon hostess who inspired male writers.

*Women writers special issue* provoked considerable debate, and it was criticised for being made for profit, for being old-fashioned, and for treating women writers as eroticised beings rather than serious writers. The special issue's severest critics were only prepared to accept such accounts of women writers as represented the "woman writer" as a modern, progressive phenomenon, cut loose from tradition, and which viewed sexual aspects of women writers and women's literature as functions either of women's social status or of female biology, scientifically defined.

*Women writers special issue* did indeed celebrate the modernity of women's writing, and did refer to scientific theories of sex difference and to the oppression of women. However, it recognised a tradition of "women writers" and of male promotion of women's writing in China. Also, the editor and his friends were not only interested in actual women writers, representing a physical female reality, biological or social. The story of Liu Wuxin tells us they were equally interested in the mystery and romance that a feminine presence could add to the literary life. Whereas most commentators on women's literature emphasised the authenticity of women's literature, the true expression in women's own words of what it meant to be female, *Women writers special issue* emphasised the importance of femininity to literature, a



femininity which could at times be the product of sheer male fantasy.

When the socialist critic Zhu Xiuxia criticised *Women writers special issue* for being backward, he extended his criticism to contemporary women's literature in general, saying that women writers failed to "stand at the vanguard of the era". In the next chapter, I will look closer at socialist critics' negative reaction to that femininity in literature which the *Women writer special issue* endorsed.

## Chapter Seven: Femininity and revolution

### *"The backwardness of femininity"*

On the cover of the first issue of *Chuangzao jikan* (Creation Quarterly) from 1923, a publication from the Creation society's romantic phase, there is a picture of a naked woman seated, casually, on the floor or ground. Her sensuous body, with its drooping shoulders, fleshy thighs and protruding belly, is at rest. Behind her is a steam ship disappearing across an ocean, and behind the ship, a globe (see Figure 4). The cover of the October issue of *Chuangzao yuekan* (Creation monthly) from 1928, after the Creation society's Marxist reorientation had taken place, features an altogether different image of a human figure (see Figure 5). In front of a large crowd of people packed closely together, "the masses", stands an unmistakably masculine figure: the sculpture of male worker raising a large, heavy hammer on two strong arms, exposing his broad shoulders and muscular back.

Did, as these images appear to suggest, a shift from "May Fourth literature" to "revolutionary literature" entail a re-gendering of literature? Was literature masculinised in the process?

Many scholars have suggested that socialism in China compromised women's interests in a variety of ways. The Communist Party is said to have prioritised class issues above gender issues, and to have appropriated the women's movement, robbing it of independent agency (e.g. Croll 1978; Stacey 1983; Wang 1999). This relationship is furthermore said to have manifested itself in the literature of communist China. Post-1949 literature, according to Meng Yue, deployed the female image as a stand-in for class, the party, and the nation. Although Woman remained central to literature, female sexuality and female subjectivity were somehow done away with, and the female sex became an empty sign. (Meng 1993). Similarly, Lu Tonglin holds that by taking



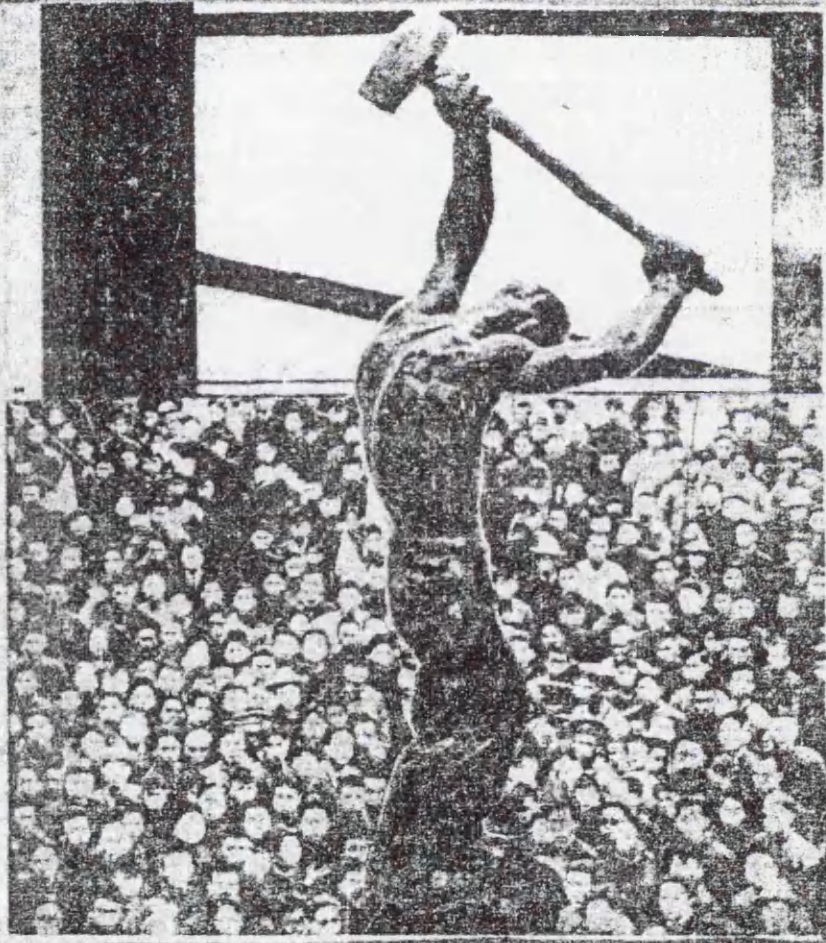
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第一卷 第一號

創造者(詩).....	郭沫若
棠棣之花(戲劇).....	郭沫若
她懷望着祖國的大野(小說).....	張資平
咖啡店之一夜(戲劇).....	田漢
茫茫夜(小說).....	郁達夫
上帝的女兒們(小說).....	張資平
一位流浪人的新年(小說).....	成仿吾
少年維特之煩惱序引.....	郭沫若
藝文私見.....	郁達夫
雅庫特著杜達格來序文.....	達夫譯
海外歸鴻(三封信).....	郭沫若



# 創造凡衆



on the role of sole representative of women's interests, the Communist Party appropriated women's voices and made Woman a symbol of party authority (Lu 1995).

In China in the 1980s it was frequently argued that Communist policies on women had repressed not only the women's independent agency but also femininity itself. Mistaking similarity for equality, Maoism had denied gender difference in style, dress, demeanour, culture and so on, by devaluing femininity and demanding that women adhere to masculine standards. The same was true for literature, where feminine styles, themes and images were suppressed. (Jin Yanyu 1986; Zhao Mei 1986). On a similar note, Li Ziyun argues that female consciousness - in which she appears to include women's awareness of their political interests, women's sexuality, and above all, femininity - was consistently repressed in Chinese socialist literature. This was the case not only in the literature of the People's Republic, but also in the revolutionary literature of the 1930s and 1940s, which Li takes to have been the mainstream of Chinese literature at that time. Images of feminine women, representations of 'love', and the expression of complex, subtle feelings and thoughts, all of which Li views as feminine characteristics of literature, disappeared from the literature of the 1930s. (Li 1994).

Wendy Larson (1998) suggests that something similar happened in meta-literary discourse in the 1930s. Under the influence of socialist critics, femininity in literature was devalued and gender difference in literature became a less debated, less important issue. Larson discerns two trends in the criticism of women's writing in the late 1920s and early 1930s. One trend, she claims, is found in the writings of a number of literary historians and critics, including Hu Yunyi and Tao Qiuying, who constructed Chinese literature as feminine by elevating a female, lyrical tradition within traditional Chinese literature, thus

strengthening the connection between “woman” and “literature”. Another, contrasting, trend consisted in leftist critics’ attacks on contemporary women writers. Leftist critics, Larson writes, criticised women writers for being too pessimistic, emotional and egoistic, and writing too much about their own trivial lives among the educated elite, without touching upon broader social issues. Male writers were accused of the same shortcomings, Larson concedes, but for women they had a different import, because these typical faults of “May Fourth romanticism” were also identified as characteristic of feminine writing. As a result, “socialist theory caused ‘women’s literature’ to become viewed as deficient and undesirable”. (Ibid: 180). The characteristics of women’s literature were reconstructed as negatively conservative (Ibid:181) and feminine writing was associated with backwardness. (Ibid: 177-187). Larson’s interpretation of leftist criticism in the 1920s and 30s as adverse to women’s literature is echoed by Amy Dooling and Kristina Torgeson, who write that through the influence of socialist theory, “the very notion of ‘women’s literature’ came under particularly intense, often hostile, critical scrutiny” (1998: 25).

Larson is not entirely unambiguous on the question of the relationship between her two trends. In an earlier article (Larson 1993) she suggests that they occurred one after the other, and that by constructing a “women’s literature” which was emotive and subjective in a positive sense, the critics responsible for the first trend lay “women’s literature” open to criticism when, later, leftist critics devalued emotionality and subjectivity in literature. Larson revises this view in her 1998 book where she holds that the two trends occurred simultaneously. She still implies, however, that the first trend’s alleged constructions of Chinese literature as feminine indirectly contributed to leftist critics’ devaluation of women’s literature. When leftist critics started to value social engagement in literature above the lyrical and emotive, women’s literature became the “victim of redefinition” (Larson 1998:177-180).

I have already discussed the first of these two “trends” in Chapter Five, and found that Larson exaggerates its importance, and misrepresents its (supposed) proponents. When it comes to the second trend, however, I believe Larson makes an accurate observation. Some leftist critics did indeed associate feminine literature, and women writers, with a bourgeois or feudal outlook, and thus with “backwardness”.

In this chapter I explore the ways in which two communist critics, Qian Xingcun and He Yubo, described contemporary women’s literature as conservative and outdated. However, I also suggest that their way of looking at women’s literature, and the relationship between revolutionary literature and femininity, was not the only trend in discussions of revolutionary literature. In reviews of *Congjun riji* (Army diary) by the woman writer Xie Bingying, I find alternative ways of imagining women’s revolutionary literature.

### *Communist critics and feminine writing*

He Yubo (1906 - 1982), born in Hunan, was a graduate of Beijing Normal University. He joined the Nationalist Party in 1920, the Communist Party in 1927, and founded the Proletarian literature and art society (*Puluo wenyi she*) in 1931. His *Zhongguo xiandai nüzuojia* (China’s modern women writers) came out in 1932. (Xu 1991). Qian Xingcun (1900-1977), born in Wuhu, Anhui was a prolific critic, dramatist, novelist and literary historian. He joined the Communist Party in 1926. In 1927 he went to Wuhan, where he engaged in propaganda work, and in August the same year he came to Shanghai, where he organised the Marxist literary society the Sun Society (*Taiyang she*) together with Jiang Guangci, Yang Cunren, and others. (Liu 1987). In 1928, the Sun Society competed with the Creation Society in promoting “revolutionary literature” (Tagore 1967: 80-118). Qian’s *Xiandai Zhongguo nüzuojia* (Modern Chinese

women writers) (A Ying 1930) was largely based on critical articles on individual women writers which he had published earlier in *Seawind weekly*. It was first published in 1930 under Qian's pen name A Ying, and later reissued under the pseudonym Huang Ying in 1931 and 1934. Parts of Qian's *Modern Chinese women writers* and He's *Zhongguo xiandai nüzuojia* (China's modern women writers) (1932) were included in Huang Renying's anthology of critical essays on women writers. Here Qian Xingcun appeared under the pseudonym Fang Ying.

Qian Xingcun's identification of a feminine way of writing literature is the most pronounced in the following, passage from his article on Chen Hengzhe, also quoted by Feuerwerker (1975: 159), Larson (1998: 185) and Dooling and Torgeson (1998:26). Literature by women, he claimed, usually differed from men's in some significant ways:

In the creative works of most women writers there appear to be certain indelible signs which enable you to determine that the author is a woman as soon as you open the book. The most important reason for this is that they [the women writers] write with the ink of their fervent emotions, and that they base their characters' personalities on their own old-era personalities. Their works are expressive of emotions and autobiographical. Their subject matters never depart from the vicinity of their selves, and emotions outweigh reason. (Qian 1929: 47).

What most of all characterised women's literature, then, was a preoccupation with the self, which manifested itself in an emphasis on subjective feelings and a narrowing down of the range of subject matters. This "self", furthermore, was tied to the past, or the "old-era" (*jiu shidai*). Chen Hengzhe, who was relatively progressive for a woman writer according to Qian, was an exception to the rule. By bringing up a variety of social issues in her work, and by creating stories



using allegories or symbols, thus reaching a higher level of abstraction, she had managed to depart from what Qian called "melancholic, sickly femininity" (*duo chou duo bing de nüxingwei*) (Ibid).

Qian associated feminine writing with certain traits - limited experience of society, individualism and subjectivity, shyness and reserve, and sickliness and pessimism - which were at the same time considered bourgeois or feudal. Feminine writing as defined by Qian became the opposite of the revolutionary literature which communist critics thought was needed. Feminine literature's sickliness, melancholia, and timidity was at odds with the health, optimism and aggression required of revolutionary literature, and its emphasis on self and subjectivity obscured objective truths about society.

However, this conception of women's literature as subjective and emotional need not have been directly influenced by the critics and historians who were rediscovering past traditions of Chinese women's literature - the first "trend" described by Larson. Qian Xingcun and He Yubo mainly treated modern Chinese women's literature in isolation from earlier, pre-May Fourth traditions. They nowhere referred to a tradition of women's poetry or compared the modern women writers to famous women of the past. They did not take issue with the literary historians who wrote about the history of *funü wenxue*, but rather contrasted their own view of modern *nüzuojia* with that of Zhang Ruogu and the *Truth, beauty and goodness* magazine.

#### Women writers special issue *versus* communist critics

The celebration of women writers and femininity in literature put forward by the *Women writers special issue* did, as we have seen, not remain unchallenged. Whereas Zhang Ruogu viewed the fact that women at all participated in literary activities as at the same time progressive and charming, and called for literary critics to be more lenient with women writers than with men, other critics

demanded that women writers live up to the same standards as men writers. The communist critics Qian Xingcun and He Yubo saw no particular value in women's literary activities as long as women did not produce works of an acceptable quality. To these critics, this meant writing in the genres and styles which they considered modern, and treating themes which they believed to be relevant to the needs of the Chinese people.

Qian's *Modern Chinese women writers* and He's *China's modern women writers* convey a predominantly negative impression of the state of modern Chinese women's literature. To begin with, there were too few women writers. According to He Yubo, there were less than 30 women writers in China, and of these only ten or so were any good (He 1932:1). However, even the ten writers He selected for his book because they were "relatively well-known and worth criticising" were for the most part given very negative reviews. The same is true of Qian Xingcun's book. Although Qian has a few positive things to say about individual women writers such as Bai Wei, Ding Ling, Chen Hengzhe and Ling Shuhua, his general impression of modern Chinese women's literature was a negative one.

In his preface, He Yubo distanced himself from *Women writers special issue*. Some people, he wrote, had been using women's literature to gain publicity and make money for themselves. They had collected a number of inferior pieces of literature, and blindly promoted these, praising them using Wu Zetian's edict on examinations for women. Such efforts were not the proper task of the serious literary critic, He argued. Regardless of how rare the modern Chinese women writers were, critics must not give them favourable treatment, but apply fair and unbiased criticism to their work. (He 1932:1).

In addition to being more critical of contemporary women's literature, the books by He and Qian differed from *Women writers special issue* in their use of the term "woman writer". In several ways, they defined modern Chinese

women's literature in a narrower way than did Zhang Ruogu. Unlike Zhang, who in his article "Chinese modern women writers" simply listed as many women authors, critics, translators and scholars as possible, Qian and He selected a limited number of what they considered relatively significant women writers. These were all authors of what would be considered "creative literature" (*chuangzao*), as opposed to translations and scholarly works. Both Qian and He treated Bing Xin, Lu Yin, Chen Hengzhe, Feng Yuanjun, Ling Shuhua, Su Xuelin, Bai Wei, and Ding Ling. In addition, Qian included Yuan Changying and He Yubo included Chen Ying and Chen Xuezhao. The selections made by Qian and He have much in common with those made by Xue Fei in *Selection of works by modern Chinese women writers* and Huang Renying in *Writings on contemporary Chinese women writers*. Xue's selection departed from Qian's in only one respect, the addition of Xie Bingying. Huang Renying included articles on eight women writers (Ding Ling, Xie Bingying, Feng Yuanjun, Su Xuelin, Bing Xin, Lu Yin, Chen Hengzhe, and Ling Shuhua), which were also discussed by Qian Xingcun and He Yubo, again with the one exception of Xie Bingying. The anthologies edited by Jun Sheng and Wang Dingjiu, which were organised in accordance with genre, owed more to *Women writers special issue*. They included a greater range of women writers, and especially, more writings in genres other than fiction and drama. In addition to the women writers mentioned above, these anthologies featured some fifty more names, including Wu Shutian, Lu Jingqing, Shi Pingmei, and Wang Chuncui. Several of the pieces turn out to be "recycled" contributions to the *Women writers special issue*.

Within "creative literature", He and Qian focused on certain styles and genres. Modern women's literature was measured against the ideal of the realistic novel or short story. Fiction occupied centre stage, poetry and drama received a certain amount of attention, but letters, diaries and essays were

largely ignored. Poetry in traditional genres was not considered a proper part of the women writers' oeuvre as modern writers.

Although the temporal sequence was not particularly emphasised, He and Qian to some extent sketched an outline of a development in modern Chinese women's literature through their selection of women writers. Bing Xin, Lu Yin, Chen Hengzhe and Feng Yuanjun represented the literature of the May Fourth period, a literature which had, at best, answered to the demands of the times ten years earlier but which was now obsolete. Ling Shuhua, Su Xuelin and Chen Xuezhao were the contemporary writers who continued to write bourgeois literature in spite of the changing times. Bai Wei and Ding Ling, bourgeois writers too, but with certain revolutionary tendencies which may be developed, represented a hope for a brighter future.

In contrast to Zhang Ruogu's inclusive approach, He and Qian were critical and selective. They reserved the use of the term "woman writer" for modern women writing new-style, "creative" literature, and they limited their selections of writers to a small number of women authors, focusing most of their critical attention on the women's attempts at realist fiction.

Considering how bad Qian and He found modern Chinese women's literature, it is perhaps surprising that they went through the trouble of writing monographs on the subject. Why write whole books about a literature so slim and so inferior? Partly, at least, their efforts must be interpreted as a response to the success enjoyed by *Women writers special issue* and other publications using the concepts "women's literature" and "woman writer". These terms had become part of the vocabulary of literary criticism, and as the "woman writer" already existed as a critical category, it was up to leftist critics whether to ignore her, or redefine her according to their own needs.

One way in which Qian Xingcun used the “woman writer” was to let her personify the young intellectual of the May Fourth era.

Male writers by no means escaped Qian Xingcun’s criticism for being “backward”. In his now famous article “Siqule de A Q shidai” (The bygone age of Ah Q) published in *Taiyang yuekan* (The sun monthly) in 1928, Qian Xingcun (Qian 1996) provocatively argued that Lu Xun’s fiction was already a thing of the past. Qian wrote that because of their pessimism and their depictions of characters no longer representative of the Chinese people, the stories and prose poems by Lu Xun could not even represent the May Fourth movement, but belonged, ideologically, to the late Qing. Qian’s article was part of an attack on the literature of the May Fourth period, launched by the Marxist writers and critics of the Creation and Sun societies in Shanghai in 1928. The Marxist critics portrayed modern Chinese literature as insufficient and outdated, and accused more moderate writers, in particular the members of the *Threads of words* group, of standing in the way of a new, revolutionary literature. (Denton 1996: 257-260; Tagore 1967: 81-118).

In his book on modern women writers, Qian Xingcun described Bing Xin, Lu Yin, Chen Hengzhe and Feng Yuanjun as representatives of bourgeois, idealist youth of the May Fourth period. Bing Xin, he wrote, was a typical intellectual in that she filled her works with “mystical fantasies” (A Ying 1930: 6). Because she wrote about the conflicts and melancholia experienced by young people upon encountering social problems, but without describing a realistic solution to these problems, her works represented the usual attitude of the enlightened youth of the time (Ibid: 37). Lu Yin, like Bing Xin, was a capitalist individualist and an idealist, and as a consequence, her early works reflected her sorrow, pessimism, hesitation, and inability to find “a way out”

(Ibid: 62). Chen Hengzhe's writing expressed a thinking typical of May Fourth youth: a wish to struggle for a better future, but without a clear idea of what to fight for, or an adequate understanding of the political and economic causes of their problems (Haifeng 47). Feng Yuanjun's story collection *Juanshi* (The *juanshi* herb) conveyed the spirit of the bourgeois movement against *lijiao* and feudal thinking, and represented the psychology of young men and women of the May Fourth period (A Ying 1930:114; 123). Rather than describing the women writers of the May Fourth era as a backward-looking group of writers within an otherwise progressive literary movement, Qian described them as typical May Fourth writers. He emphasised what they (supposedly) had in common with their male contemporaries more than what distinguished them as women writers. To Qian, the unrevolutionary feminine characteristics described in his article on Chen Hengzhe were not necessarily innate to women - after all, Chen Hengzhe had overcome some of them (preoccupation with the self, sentimentality) and Lu Xun was subject to some of them (narrowness, pessimism).

This is not to say that there were no gendered aspects to Qian's criticism of May Fourth literature. Also in "The bygone age of Ah Q", Qian let female poets represent a limited, elitist world view, as he likened Lu Xun to female court writers of the past: "Like the narrow world of imperial concubines of the High Tang, he depicts great events of the imperial court and nothing more" (Qian 1996: 279). The faults of feminine writing, as defined by Qian, were similar to the supposed faults of "May Fourth literature". Qian described Bing Xin as a typical May Fourth youth, but he also called her the most typical female (*nüxing de*) writer of the New Literature movement (A Ying 1930: 2). By identifying the same writer(s) as typically female and typically May Fourth, Qian represented May Fourth literature as feminine.

What characterised the leftist attitude towards femininity and literature

was not an attack on, or “backlash” (Dooling and Torgeson 1998:27) against, the women writers. After all, leftist critics such as Qian attacked everyone, male or female, Marxist or conservative, in their attempts to get attention, and propagate their own particular brand of Marxism. What is remarkable is therefore not so much that they criticised women writers for being backward, but that they associated femininity with backwardness. The association between femininity and backwardness - strengthened by presenting a number of typical May Fourth bourgeois writers under the heading “women writers” - not only meant that women writers were less likely to be progressive than men, but also that a literature that did not keep up with its time was feminine.

In his chapter on Su Xuelin, Qian included a quotation from Su where she discussed femininity and masculinity in literature. Su here wrote that women’s writings tend to be meticulous, gentle, serenely beautiful, and melodious, but lacking in boldness. She explained that these were the particular advantages of women’s writing, and that women need not imitate men when writing. However, she also appreciated those rare works by women writers which did not reveal their authors’ gender in their style. Qian took this to mean that Su preferred a masculine style to a feminine one, and commended her for it. Although she was not able to entirely rid herself of femininity in writing, he wrote, she was at least making an effort to develop in a different direction. (A Ying 1930:153). Femininity in literature was, in Qian’s view, something to escape, whereas masculinity was to be aspired to and attained through hard work.

In Su Xuelin’s discussion, gender in literature was a question of style - the gentle versus the bold, a division not unlike the old division between *wanyue* and *haofang ci*. In the context of Qian’s book however, gender was about more things than style. Here, the relationship between femininity and masculinity paralleled the relationship between May Fourth, bourgeois, idealist literature

and the revolutionary literature of the future. Femininity was to be overcome, just as May Fourth literature was to be relinquished.

### *Women's writing as autobiography*

Qian Xingcun and He Yubo criticised women writers for writing too much about themselves. Women writers wrote "autobiographical" works, the subject matter of which "never depart from the vicinity of their selves", as Qian wrote. As we have seen, he considered Chen Hengzhe an exception. She was able, he wrote, "to escape the autobiographical form (*zixu zhuan*)" (A Ying 1930: 91). He Yubo, too, found Chen Hengzhe's writing superior to that of other women writers who "only write about themselves" (He 1932: 242). They both viewed the autobiographical mode as an encumbrance, something which women writers should overcome. He Yubo was also critical of the use of diary and letter forms, which, he complained, made for a loose structure and therefore tedious reading. Another reason for his disliking these forms may have been that they resemble autobiographical writing.

No matter how much Qian and He disliked the autobiographical tendency in women's literature, however, it was in part their own creation. I am not arguing that modern Chinese women writers did not write any autobiographical works or works inspired by their own personal experience. (Whether they did is in fact outside the scope of this particular study). What I mean is that Qian and He consistently chose to interpret women's literature as autobiographical, even in those instances where it was possible to interpret it otherwise.

He Yubo invariably conflated the female authors with their female characters. The protagonist of Bing Xin's "Di yi ci yanhui" (The first dinner party) was in fact Bing Xin herself (He 1932:1), understanding the protagonist of Su Xuelin's "Bailang nüshi" (Miss Bailang) was the same as understanding Su Xuelin (Ibid:123), Feng Yuanjun's female characters were torn between



“old” and “new” thinking because their author was (Ibid:146), and because Chen Ying’s characters were hedonistic, so was Chen Ying herself (Ibid:185), and so on. In his chapter on Bai Wei, He argued that an author’s work always reflects her (or his) personality and life, and that it is possible to infer an author’s personality and life experience from her (or his) works. Conversely, it was possible to better understand the author’s work by considering the author’s personality and life. The circularity of this argument is apparent, especially considering that He Yubo had no knowledge of Bai Wei’s history or character apart from what he had inferred from her plays. (Ibid: 198-210).

Qian Xingcun also viewed women’s literature, and especially the female characters depicted in it, as clues to the author’s personality, and he focused his attention on those works which appeared to mirror the author’s life the most effectively. Qian explained that his main reasons for limiting his discussion of Su Xuelin to her essay collection *Lütian* (Green sky) and the semi-autobiographical novel *Jixin* (The homesick heart) was because these could throw light upon the author’s character and personal life:

On the whole, we cannot tell for certain whether these books are the author’s “autobiography”, but in reality it is expressed very clearly that the thinking, temperament and life of the books’ female protagonists are inseparably connected to her own. Thus when we investigate the author Su Xuelin, we must necessarily focus upon these two works, and identify her thinking, temperament and life in the descriptions included in these two works of creative literature. *The homesick heart* in particular will constitute the focus of this investigation. So let us analyse *The homesick heart* which we consider her most significant work. (A Ying 1930:135)

In other words, Qian chose to criticise these works in particular not only because they were the only works by Su Xuelin to have been published in separate volumes, but because he believed they lent themselves to be interpreted as autobiography.

Qian interpreted the works of fiction by Lu Yin and Feng Yuanjun not as separate pieces of literature but as instalments of a long narrative about the life of a woman, that is, the life of the author, thinly disguised as a series of protagonists. Feng's short story collections *The juanshi herb*, *Chunhen* (Traces of spring) and *Jiehui* (Ashes of disaster) "tell in a very systematic way about the transformations in the life of one woman" (Ibid:110), it was as if they constituted "a woman's autobiographical account of her youth" (Ibid:123). Similarly, Lu Yin's work was about her own life, and her story collections *Haibin guren* (Old friends by the seashore) and *Linghai chaoxi* (Tides of the ocean of the soul), and her novel *Gui yan* (Returning geese), together formed a woman's autobiographical account of certain stages in her life. (Ibid: 53; 82). Towards the end of his chapter on Lu Yin, Qian briefly mentioned that Lu Yin had touched upon other subjects as well, such as the lives of factory workers and the exploitation of farmers, but her attempts in these areas did not interest him as much as did the autobiographical elements of her work (Ibid: 82-83).

Even these Marxist critics, so critical of subjective, individualist writing, directed their attention towards female authors' writing the stories of their lives. They identified author and protagonist, and interpreted women's fiction as narratives about the women themselves. In a subtle way, *they constructed* modern women's literature as autobiography.

Taking for granted that everything women wrote was self-expressive or autobiographical made it possible to discredit and trivialise women authors' vision of reality on the grounds that it was subjective. According to Qian Xingcun, Lu Yin's literature was pessimistic and Bin Xin's optimistic because these writers let their personal moods influence their understanding of the world. Quoting Peng Kang, Qian explained that pessimism such as Lu Yin's derived from the moods of the narrow minds of weak-willed emotional people with an extreme egoistic tendency, and was therefore anti-social, unobjective

and unscientific. (Ibid: 48-52 )To let one's own personal feelings colour one's outlook on life was typical of the idealist and individualist, according to Qian Xingcun (Ibid: 48), and thus typical of the thinking of the bourgeoisie. Again, what was feminine was also bourgeois.

### *Army diary*

There is one curious omission in Qian Xingcun's and He Yubo's books on modern Chinese women writers: neither one of them included Xie Bingying, author of *Army diary*, first published in 1927.

Xie Bingying's *Army diary* received much attention and her work was frequently included in anthologies (e.g. Jun Sheng 1936, Wang Dingjiu 1937, Xue Fei 1932). Huang Renying's anthology of critical essays on modern women writers contained no less than four articles about Xie Bingying. Only Bing Xin, with seven articles, was allotted more space by Huang Renying, and although four articles on Ding Ling were also included, these were much shorter.

Qian's and He's omission of Xie Bingying is remarkable because Qian and He were proponents of revolutionary literature, and Xie Bingying was by many considered a revolutionary writer. In addition, she was an acquaintance of Qian's - he is said to have assisted her in reassuming her studies in Shanghai in 1928 (Fu 1992). Qian and He may of course have omitted her because they considered her literary qualities too insignificant or her output too slim. On the other hand, He and Qian were of the opinion that *most* Chinese women's literature was too slim and of unsatisfactory quality, but this did not keep them from writing books about it. He Yubo wrote that he chose not to include Bingying in his book because she, together with CF nüshi, Wu Shutian and Yuan Changying, belonged to those women who had either stopped publishing, or did not specialise in literature (He 1932: 2). In other words, Xie

did not live up to He's ideal of a professional, serious author. This seems unfair considering that few writers at the time were able to support themselves exclusively on their creative writing, and considering that Xie Bingying published two novels in 1931 (Fu 1992).

Although we may never know the reason why Xie Bingying was not considered in *China's modern women writers* and *Modern Chinese women writers*, it is clear that her *Army diary* did not fit in with the gendered division of literature hinted at by these books. She was not a feminine, shrinking, pessimistic, sickly representative of the May Fourth bourgeois intellectual, but neither did she write a masculine, rational and objective revolutionary literature, as we shall see.

Xie Bingying was born in Xinhua, Hunan, in 1906. In 1926, she entered a military academy established by the forces of the Northern Expedition in Wuhan. In May the following year, she joined the National Revolutionary Army and was sent to the front in Henan as a member of a women's corps. During her one month and four days at the front, Xie Bingying recorded her experiences in letters and diary entries, which she sent to Sun Fuyuan, editor of the *Zhongyang ribao* (Central Daily News) in Wuhan. Her writings were published as *Army diary* in a supplement of Central Daily News. An English translation of the diary, prepared by Lin Yutang, was serialised in the English language version of the paper. When the women's corps was disbanded, Xie had no option but to return to her home where she was forced into marriage by her parents. She immediately left her husband, however, and went to Shanghai. (Fu 1992; Boorman 1968). In 1929, *Army diary* was published as an illustrated book by the *Chunchao shudian* (Spring tide book store). The edition included, apart from the previously published diary, prefaces by Lin Yutang and the editor "Mr K" (K *xiansheng*), and an afterword and a letter by Xie Bingying. These added materials alluded to Xie's present life in poverty and

disillusionment, contrasting with the revolutionary optimism conveyed by the diary as such. (Huang Renying 1933: 79; 82; 87; 97; 106).

The four articles on Xie Bingying in Huang Renying's anthology were apparently written upon the publication of the Spring tide edition of *Army diary*. They placed *Army Diary* in the context of radical intellectuals' disappointment with the Northern Expedition after the breakdown of cooperation between nationalists and communists, and related the diary to the debate over revolutionary literature. In spite of differences in their attitude towards revolutionary literature, the four critics all applauded *Army diary*. Li Li hailed Bingying as the latest female literary star. Li Baiying and Jian Shen saw the diary as an exemplary representation of the revolutionary spirit of that time. Zhang Yiping who, like Sun Fuyuan and Lin Yutang, was associated with the *Threads of words* group, viewed Bingying's diary as a rare example of good "revolutionary literature".

According to Charles A. Laughlin's (2002: 200-205) reading of *Army diary*, this work's emphasis is not on descriptions of war and of the countryside, but on the persona of the narrator. "*Army diary*", Laughlin writes, "differs from later war reportage in that the author is not greatly concerned with depicting the atmosphere of a nation at war; rather, Xie Bingying pioneers the reconstruction of the literary image of the woman as an alternative form of social intervention" (Ibid: 201). *Army diary*, he maintains, was more about constructing the consciousness of the fully engaged, revolutionary woman intellectual, than about reporting on the historical events she had witnessed. In the diary, such a revolutionary consciousness was constructed through display of "emotional extravagance" as well as through attention to the concrete, material aspects of military life. Contemporary readers appear to have understood *Army diary* in a similar way. The critics in *Writings on contemporary Chinese women writers* foregrounded the author's gender, her passionate commitment to the revolution

and her experience of the physical hardships of army life.

The author's gender was highlighted by Li Li, Li Baiying and Jian Shen. Li Li discussed Bingying as a Chinese "woman writer", comparing her to Bing Xin and Ding Ling. Li Li used to love Bing Xin's exquisite, refined style, and was moved to tears by her works. Now, however, it was generally agreed that Bing Xin's time was over, according to Li Li. Bing Xin's range of subject matters - the ocean, mothers, the stars - was considered insufficient, and she had been labelled a "*xiaojie pai*" (young lady) writer. In response, the author herself had withdrawn and stopped writing, and her works were now hard to come by. Ding Ling, admired by Li Li for her literary skill, freedom from prejudice, and daring descriptions of sex and abnormal female psychology, had superseded Bing Xin as the leading woman writer. However, Li Li felt this position might be threatened by Xie Bingying. Although Bing Xin and Ding Ling were technically more accomplished, Bingying's diary embodied a longed-for change of style. After eating too many sweets, Lili explained, people wanted to taste salty or spicy food for a change, and after watching too many romantic movies, it was time for some action films. (Li Li 1933: 80-82). Li Baiying, too, compared Bingying favourably to Ding Ling, who wrote too much about bourgeois consciousness (1933: 100). He further suggested that Bingying was the only modern Chinese writer to create a successful modern female type (*dianxing*) (Ibid:99). Jian Shen believed that Bingying's gender added significance to her work. The fact that the author was a woman had a certain effect on the readership according to Jian Shen, for "We are unable to rid ourselves of certain traditional views on gender hierarchy". Any "weak" young woman who dedicated herself to a revolutionary cause created excitement, and put the supposedly stronger men to shame. The woman Bingying's stubborn belief in the importance of hard work in a time of capitalist decadence was enough to "make us cry from shame". (Jian Shen 1933: 114).

The four critics all classified *Army diary* as “revolutionary literature”. Xie Bingying was a “star of revolutionary literature” according to Li Li (1933: 87). Li Baiying believed that although revolutionary literature had a great future ahead of it, it was still in its infancy at the moment. Few contemporary writers had managed to capture the great revolutionary era in which they were living, and only Bingying had succeeded completely in her creation of “female types” as well as in her representation of the failed revolution of 1927. (Ibid: 99). According to Jian Shen, *Army diary* had earned its rightful place in any future history of revolutionary literature (Jian Shen 1933: 118). Zhang Yiping was less enthusiastic about the future of revolutionary literature. He pointed out that he belonged to a literary group which was usually criticised by those in favour of a revolutionary literature. However, Zhang allowed for the possibility of creating successful revolutionary literature, as long as it was not the only kind of literature allowed, and as long as its authors were real revolutionary heroes, not just intellectuals striking poses. If there was ever a revolutionary literature, then Bingying’s diary was it. (Yiping 1933: 91).

The critics admired the way the diary reflected the author’s actual experiences of a harsh reality. Bingying, Li Li wrote, was no poetess who “chanted about the wind and the moon”, nor a sickly woman of the “young lady” category, but a real soldier who had experienced war (Li Li 1933: 82). The diary, according to Jian Shen, was an account of “what the author had seen with her own eyes”, and had not been written with brush and ink, but with “blood and tears” (1933: 108). Zhang Yiping admired the fact that *Army diary* had been written at the front, and not in some study (1933: 91), something he underscored by quoting the following passage from the diary:

I wrote these letters (and the diary too) in the few minutes I could find to write each day. The ground then served as my chair, and my lap as my desk. Sometimes I

would sit curled up in a haystack in the still of night, and write by the light of the kind of oil lamp, not much bigger than a bean, that ordinary people use. (This was usually after I had been so badly bitten by mosquitoes and bedbugs that I was unable to sleep.) The 20 minute long breaks during marches afforded an even better opportunity for writing. I remember one time, I think it must have been on the way from Puqi to Jiayu (?), when I sat down in the grass as soon as I heard the bugle call for rest, took out my pen and paper, and wrote down a several entries of my diary. (Yiping 1933: 89-90).

Zhang implied that those Shanghai revolutionaries who proposed a new, revolutionary literature were, unlike Bingying, writing comfortably at their desks (Ibid: 90-91).

The diary's style was commended by all. According to Li Li, it was dynamic, realistic, and free of artifice, it was as lively and uninhibited as a mountain waterfall (Li Li 1933: 84-85). Bingying's style, Zhang Yiping argued, was fresh, lively, and courageous in a way that "men of letters specialising in technique and structure" could not accomplish (Yiping 1933:89). Jian Shen and Li Baiying also contrasted the diary's style with the "technical skill" of established writers. Those who found Bingying's writing lacking in technical skill, Li Baiying argued, thought so because they had been brainwashed into liking ingenious and detailed descriptions, and beautiful, ornamental language. Bingying's literary technique was a direct consequence of her situation, her time and her mode of life, and should be respected as such. (Li 1933: 100). Bingying's book was written in an unadorned, unskilled way, Jian Shen noted. It had no particular "structure" or "rhetoric", but Jian Shen assumed that such things had anyway become old-fashioned (1933: 118). Because it was the direct, naked expression of the author's mind, it was more moving than Mao Dun's more "mature" novel about the same era, *Dongyao (Vacillation)*, Jian



Shen argued (Ibid: 109).

Bingying's supposedly subjective point of view and emotional stance was not considered a problem by these critics. He Yubo was, as we have seen, critical of women writers' frequent use of the diary form. Li Baiying, however, approved of Bingying's choice of genre. Because she was an emotional person writing at a tumultuous time, she simply had to use the diary form, which was subjective and at the same time forceful and realistic, he argued (Li 1933: 100). Li Li praised Bingying not only for her revolutionary spirit, but for her compassion, and especially her compassion with other women, as well (Li Li 1933: 83). Jian Shen argued strongly in favour of Bingying's right to be "emotional" as well as "rational". Some writers, whom Jian Shen refrained from naming, had charged Bingying with "female weakness" because of certain inconsistencies in her attitude towards her home. On the one hand, Bingying wrote that she felt like blowing up the whole of her home town because it was part of feudal society, but on the other hand she also expressed longing for her conservative mother. Jian Shen, however, did not consider this attachment a weakness. According to him, the ideal world envisioned by the revolutionary should not be one of rationality alone:

The life of a true revolutionary and a true artist must be multifaceted. In order to set an example for an ideal world one must possess rational powers which are as tough as steel and able to withstand reality, and at the same time have boundless, deep-felt passion, and develop them both in a practical, balanced way. (Jian Shen 1933: 116-117).

Bingying's greatness, he argued, lay in her combination of feeling with reason (Ibid: 118).

Qian Xingcun's and He Yubo's books on modern Chinese women writers depicted modern women's literature as an example of the kind of literature that

China's writers ought to give up for a revolutionary literature. Xie Bingying, however, was not unproblematic as a representative of the latter kind of literature. First, she was brought to fame through the help of members of the *Threads of words* group, the adversaries of the most vocal proponents of revolutionary literature, but was nevertheless received as a writer of revolutionary literature. Second, the revolution which Xie eulogised in *Army diary* - national unification and rural reform under the joint leadership of the communist and nationalist parties - had by the time of the Spring tide edition of the diary turned into an impossibility. This of course made the total effect of the diary less optimistic. When it comes to the issue of gender, Xie Bingying's position was no less ambiguous, as she both transgressed gender boundaries and retained feminine characteristics.

The praise for Bingying's diary may have been partly motivated by "admiration for the unliterary masculine world of the military man" (Larson 1998:186), but it does not follow that it would have been equally successful had it been written by such a military man. Part of its appeal lay in its transgression of gender boundaries, in the persona of the woman warrior. It was this young, "weak" woman who by her example exposed the weakness of the educated young man unable to move beyond a purely intellectual commitment to revolution. If even she could do it, then why not he? was the question it raised.

In the eyes of the critics, Xie Bingying's woman soldier-diarist did not "overcome" all her "feminine" traits, however, but brought her strong emotions and female subjectivity to revolutionary literature. The unnamed critics referred to by Jian Shen may have considered this a female weakness, but the critics in *Writings on contemporary Chinese women writers* appreciated Bingying's human feelings and her use of the personal diary form. The directness, freshness and honesty which these critics valued so highly, and which they believed contributed to its qualities as revolutionary literature, entirely hinged

upon the diary being a personal first-hand report. It was because it represented what the author had “seen with her own eyes” that it was believed to convey a true picture of revolution, and contribute to a change of style from old-fashioned sweetness to the “spice” and “saltiness” of revolutionary literature. The autobiographical narrative and the fragmented diary form which Qian and He distrusted, were seen as integral parts of true revolutionary literature. To these critics, at least, femininity was not entirely at odds with revolutionism.

In Qian Xingcun’s and He Yubo’s books on modern women writers there is an implicit opposition between a feminine, bourgeois literature on the one hand and a masculine, revolutionary one on the other. The enthusiastic reception of Xie Bingying’s *Army diary* by other critics, however, shows that this opposition was not absolute. In the late 1920s, “feminine” traits in literature were sometimes valued even in the context of revolutionary literature.

### *Conclusion*

Is it true that “socialist theory caused women’s literature to be viewed as deficient and undesirable” (Larson 1998: 180)? It is in any case not true that under the influence of socialist theory, “the very notion of ‘women’s literature’ came under particularly intense, often hostile, critical scrutiny” (Dooling and Torgeson 1998: 25). Socialist critics did not attack the notion of women’s literature *per se*. They did demand the same quality, political orientation, and choice of genres of women writers as they did of men writers, which of course indirectly undermined a gendered conception of literature. But they accepted the current gendered terminology and reinforced the notion of women’s literature by labelling writers of the female gender “women writers”.

Larson’s claim (1998: 181) that leftist critics “reconstructed not women’s literature itself, but its past characteristics as negatively conservative” is more relevant. In their books on modern women’s literature in China, communist

critics Qian Xingcun and He Yubo described contemporary women's literature as slim, of low quality and above all, backward. They criticised it for being pessimistic, sentimental and self-centered, traits which they viewed as both feminine and bourgeois. In Qian's view, a preoccupation with the self was central to literary femininity, as well as to bourgeois idealism, and both Qian and He described women's literature as autobiographical in nature. By describing a number of women writers as at the same time typical young intellectuals of the May Fourth period *and* typical women writers, Qian Xingcun gendered "May Fourth literature" as female. Femininity, the narrow self, and the literature of the May Fourth period all had to be given up in favour of a revolutionary literature which by implication would be objective and masculine.

It would, however, be wrong to assume that Qian's and He's views on women writers were symptomatic of a backlash against women's literature, and that this backlash led up to the subsequent (supposed) repression of femininity and gender issues in the literature of Communist China. He Yubo did present his book as a reaction against *Women writers special issue*, but he and Qian Xingcun did not conceive of their books as reactions against attempts to rediscover women's literary traditions in premodern China, indeed they did not criticise, or at all address, such attempts. Furthermore, as Dooling and Torgeson point out, there appears to have been an increase in interest in women's literature in the years around 1930, not the opposite. If Larson's two "trends" occurred simultaneously, as she herself admits they did, then what right have we to assume that the one caused, or at least set the stage, for the other, which subsequently won out?

Furthermore, Qian Xingcun and He Yubo do not represent the only view on gender in the context of revolutionary literature. In reviews of Xie Bingying's *Army diary* critics commended Xie for writing revolutionary literature, but also for her expression of emotion and her use of the subjective diary form. They

read *Army diary* as both revolutionary literature and women's literature.

## Conclusion

Prior to the Republican period, women's writings had mostly been treated as a tradition separate from men's literature. When writing about traditional women's literature, Republican critics and historians were confronted with the choice of whether to integrate it with the general literary history of China or to continue to regard women's literature as separate. They usually opted for the latter choice, and wrote separate histories of women's literature or compiled anthologies of traditional women's verse, without revising their view of women's contribution to general literary history.

The separateness of women's writing, however, was not simply a remnant of traditional literary practice. Zeng Juezhi's contention that essential sex difference in male and female biology directly produced sex difference in male and female literature was inspired by modern science. Another reason often given for devoting special attention to literary works by women was that women's literature, as a reflection of women's "lives", could give readers insights into the female condition in a way that men's literature could not. This idea was usually linked with a feminist agenda. The female experiences conveyed by women's literature were mostly thought to be experiences of oppression and marginalisation.

Central to the idea of a women's literature defined by its communication of female experience was the belief that women are in an ideal position to tell the truth about themselves. The ability of women's literature to speak the truth about women was thought to depend on (at least) two things: that its authors really were women, that is biologically female, physically existing persons, and that these women were sincere, not dishonest. The attempt to identify a "women's literature" within traditional Chinese literature often turned into a

search for authenticity: for authentic works by women authors, and for authentic feelings and thoughts. Critics agreed that women's sincerity, and therefore also the value of women's literature, was affected by the oppression of women, but they disagreed as to how. Whereas some held that marginalisation rendered women's literature purer and more sincere, others maintained that oppression distorted women's true feelings. Feminine literature, or literature in a female voice, which had been created by men, was deemed insincere and therefore less valuable than "real" women's literature.

Identifying true women's literature in the past turned out to be a difficult business. When it came to contemporary literature it could also be problematic. Unlike the literary critics and historians discussed in Chapter Five, the *Truth, beauty and goodness Women writers special issue* did not emphasise the authenticity of women's literature. It included a contribution from a "woman writer" who was a purely fictional construct, the topic of a sophisticated practical joke which one man played upon another. To the creators of *Women writers special issue*, literary femininity was not so much about the sincere voices of real women as it was about romance, mystery and elegance.

In the Introduction, I wrote that the Republican period has been imagined by later scholars as either the beginning or the end of Chinese women's literature. Literature gendered as female is portrayed as belonging either to traditional or to modern literature. Many Republican critics were also quick to interpret the relationship between gender and literature in terms of a dichotomy between modernity and tradition. Some proponents of New Literature and some socialist critics placed "women's literature" and "women writers" in the context of a violent battle between the "old" and the "new". They had different opinions about which point in time formed the dividing line between the new and the old: for Zhou Zuoren and Liu Linsheng it was the New Culture

movement, whereas for Qian Xingcun and He Yubo it was the transition between the May Fourth era and the era of revolution. They also associated maleness and femaleness with different sides of the old/new dichotomy. Proponents of New Literature attempted to construct women's literature as modern, ignoring or rejecting women's writing of imperial times, and regarding women's literature as the result of the emancipation of women and the emancipation of literature. The socialist critics in question, by contrast, viewed contemporary women's literature as insufficiently modern. The feminine characteristics they perceived in women's writing - pessimism, emotionality and a preoccupation with the self - belonged, in their view, to a bygone era. Nevertheless, they all discussed issues of gender and literature within a framework of stark oppositions between "old" and "new".

Other writers, critics and literary historians had different approaches to the relationship between gender, literature and modernity which were more complex. The *Zhenmeishan* group cultivated an urban, cosmopolitan style of modernity which was not predicated upon a rejection of the past but could accommodate traditional features of Chinese as well as Western culture. Their *Women writers special issue* did not stress an opposition between "new" and "old". It associated the "woman writer" with literatures and literary practices which were both traditional and modern. While it presented contemporary women's literature as a modern "movement", it also celebrated women writers in Western and Chinese literary history. The literary salon, which the editor Zhang Ruogu identified as the most suitable environment for future women writers, was described as having Chinese as well as French antecedents.

Republican writers' preoccupation with history further complicates the picture of their approach to the modernity and tradition of women's literature. Historiography serves the double function of banishing its subject to the "past" and restoring it to memory. The many publications treating traditional women's



literature did not describe women's literature as a modern phenomenon, but acknowledged the existence of earlier traditions of women's writing. They show that an interest in traditional women's literature persisted. At the same time, literary historians treated the female tradition as a thing belonging to historical time rather than to the present moment. They reconceptualised female literary traditions in modern ways, by rewriting them into the genre of (national) literary history, and by applying feminist theories and modern literary theories to them. This project at times resulted in entirely new narratives of women's literary past, and new canons of women's literature, such as in Tan Zhengbi's *Literary life of Chinese women*. However, it would be a simplification to view Republican period histories of women's literature simply as distortions of women's literary traditions.

The picture of modernity which emerges from Republican period writings on gender and literature is in itself contradictory. The modern theories which were applied to women's literature were often in conflict with each other. Feminism provided an influential, modern way of imagining women and their literature. Feminists stressed women's intellectual and artistic abilities and held out the promise that in the future women would be able to achieve whatever men had achieved. Scientifically inspired accounts of women's talent and women's literature were equally modern. These, however, emphasised women's physicality, emotionality and sexuality rather than their intellect, and, in some instances, set up new limitations for what kind, and what quality, of literature women were to write.

In Chapter Five, I described the problems which literary historians and anthologists ran into when they attempted to combine several modern agendas. Their feminist intention to rescue a female voice in traditional Chinese literature proved hard to reconcile with rising demands on source criticism and historical accuracy on the one hand, and with the New Literature

preference for the “living” literature of the common people on the other.

In the literary thought of the 1910s, 1920s and early 1930s there were some common approaches to issues of gender and literature. Above all, these issues were formulated as questions about “women’s literature” or “women writers”, while the relationship between men and writing was never problematised as such. Yet the precise relationship between women and literature was open to debate. Critics and historians treated this relationship in a host of imaginative ways, but never agreed on a common approach. While women’s writing was often – though not always – explicitly articulated with questions of modernity, this was done in multiple and even self-contradictory ways. Rather than suppress these contradictions by giving the false impression that there was a single dominant view, I have instead sought to recapture some of the diversity and complexity that characterised debates on gender and writing in the period.

## Notes

### *Notes to Introduction*

1. One exception is Ravni Thakur's (1997) *Rewriting gender: reading contemporary Chinese women*, which analyses post-Mao writings on women's literature.

2. More than 4,300 women writers are listed in Hu Wenkai's *Lidai funū zhuzuo kao* (Research on Chinese women's writings through the ages), a bibliography of traditional women's writing first published in 1957 and republished in 1985 (Hu 1957),

### *Notes to Chapter One*

1. One example: In her old age, the woman writer Chen Xuezhao recollected how, in 1929, she adopted a masculine writing style as well as new pseudonyms in order to escape the persecution of Nationalist Party censors who knew her to be a woman (Li Yangyang 1995:248).

### *Notes to Chapter Two*

1. One edition of this book was published in 1926 (Dikötter 1995: 190).

2. According to Zhang, a new sexual morality would lead to a better society where the women would be in charge, and the female orgasm had a direct,

positive impact on the quality of the ovum and thereby on the quality of the population at large. (Peng 1995).

3. Zhi Ruzeng's biography was in existence in 1626, Zhang Chao's version was prefaced 1700 (Widmer 1992: 115; 119).

### *Notes to Chapter Three*

1. For the third edition in 1934 Tan's book was renamed *Zhongguo nüxing wenxue shi* (History of Chinese female/women's literature). I use a 1978 Hong Kong edition of this book called *Zhongguo funü wenxue shi* (History of Chinese women's literature), which is otherwise identical to the second edition of *Literary life of Chinese women*. To avoid confusion with Xie Wuliang's history, I will refer to Tan's history throughout as *Literary life of Chinese women*.

2. In Liang's bibliography, Zhao Shijie's *Gujin nüshi* is listed as Zhao Shijie: *Lidai nüzi shiji* (Collection of women's shi poetry of past ages) and *Lidai nüzi wenji* (Collection of women's prose writings of past ages), Lu Chang's *Lichao mingyuan shici* is listed as Lu Quan: *Lidai mingyuan shici*, and Ji Xian's *Guixiu ji* as *Guige ji*.

3. The first part of this collection was compiled by Hongmeilou zhuren (Hu Wenkai 1957: 2/81).

4. Xie Wuliang, Xu Tianxiao and Huang Ren were also members of the Southern Society (Liu 1940).

5. De Quincey originally made a distinction between "literature of knowledge"

and “literature of power”. De Quincey’s distinction was reformulated as “literature of knowledge” versus “literature of emotion” by C.T. Winchester in his *Principles of literary criticism*. (McDougall 1971: 57-62; 89).

#### *Notes to Chapter Five*

1. Several pen name dictionaries give Lǚjiao or Xia Lǚjiao as a pen name for Liu Dajie. According to Li Huiqun’s preface to *Women and literature*, however, Lǚjiao was a different person. Li writes: “I do not need to mention the relationship between Dajie and me. As for Lǚjiao and Yunyi, they are both good friends of Dajie and me. I would like this little book to be a souvenir of the four of us” (Huiqun 1934: 2).

2. It is not clear whether Li had two specific works by these titles in mind, or whether she merely used *Gonggui shixuan* and *Mingyuan shichao* as examples of the kinds of titles commonly used for traditional collections of women’s poetry.

#### *Notes to Chapter Six*

1. Su Xuelin published a collection of essays on literary history under the title *Duyu shenghuo* (Bookworm life) (Su 1929).

2. Zeng Pu’s literary “romance” with the mysterious young Liu Wuxin has already been recounted in brief by Jonathan Hutt (2001), but as I believe it to be of consequence for the context of the publication of *Women writers special issue*, I include a more detailed account of it here.

3. Zeng Pu's statement appears to indicate that Xie Wuliang did indeed finish his planned history of Qing women's literature (see chapter 2). However, the possibility that Zeng mistakenly attributed Liang Yizhen's *History of women's literature of the Qing dynasty* to Xie cannot be entirely ruled out.

## Glossary

ailai	哀詠
Bai Wei	白薇
<i>Baihua wenxueshi</i>	白話文學史
<i>Baitou yin</i>	白頭吟
“Bailang nüshi”	白朗女士
Ban Gu	班固
Ban <i>ji</i> yu	班捷妤
Ban Zhao	班昭
baolu yundong	保路運動
beichan ji gu	悲纏肌骨
“Beifen shi”	悲憤詩
Beixin shuju	北新書局
Bi Qiufan	畢秋帆
biaoxian	表現
<i>Bicheng xianguan nü dizi shi</i>	碧城仙館女弟子詩
biji	筆記
Bing Xin	冰心
<i>Bishenghua</i>	筆生花
“Bu zhi wei ni sale duoshao yanlei”	不知爲你灑了多少眼淚
CF nüshi	C F 女士
cai	才
cainü	才女
Cai Kuanfu	蔡寬夫
Cai Yan	蔡琰
Cai Yong	蔡邕
Cao Cao	曹操
Cao Miaoqing	曹妙清
Cao Xueqin	曹雪芹
Cao Zhi	曹植
Chen Bicheng	陳碧城
Chen Hengzhe	陳衡哲
Chen Jitong	陳季同
Chen Qi	陳契
Chen Weisong	陳維崧

Chen Wenshu	陳文述
Chen Xuezhao	陳雪昭
Chen Ying	沉櫻
Chen Yinke	陳寅恪
Chen Yun	陳芸
<i>Chuangzao jikan</i>	創造季刊
<i>Chuangzao yuekan</i>	創造月刊
chuanqi	傳奇
Chunchao shudian	春潮書店
<i>Chunhen</i>	春痕
ci	詞
cihua	詞話
ciqu	詞曲
<i>Cixue xiao congshu</i>	詞學小叢書
Cui Wanqiu	崔萬秋
Cui Yingying	崔鶯鶯
Daguan yuan	大觀園
<i>Dajiang</i>	大江
<i>Danguan xinbian</i>	丹管新編
de	德
Deng	鄧
"Di yi ci yanhui"	第一次宴會
dianxing	典型
dianzhang	典章
Ding Ling	丁玲
Ding Yi	丁廩
Dong Sheng	董生
dongfang pai	東方派
<i>Dongyao</i>	動搖
du	妒
duo chou duo bing de nüxing wei	多愁多病的女性味
duwen	讀文
Ershisi shipin	二十四詩品
Fang Ying	方英
<i>Fanhua meng</i>	繁華夢
<i>Fanyi shijie</i>	翻譯世界
Feng Yuanjun	馮沅君



fengya	風雅
fu	賦
Fu Sheng	伏生(勝)
funü wenti	婦女問題
funü wenxue	婦女文學
<i>Funü zazhi</i>	婦女雜誌
fuquan zhidu	夫權制度
fusong	賦頌
<i>Fuxue</i>	婦學
fuyan	婦言
ganchang zhi tong	肝腸之痛
geren	個人
gongdu	公牘
<i>Gonggui shixuan</i>	宮閨詩選
<i>Gonggui wenxuan</i>	宮閨文選
gongke	功課
gongting funü	宮廷婦女
Gu Fan	顧繁
Gu Taiqing	顧太清
Gu Zhiyun	顧志筠
Guafu shi	寡婦詩
Guan Daosheng	管道昇
Guan Hanqing	關漢卿
<i>Gui yan</i>	歸雁
<i>Guige ji</i>	閨閣集
guixiu	閨秀
<i>Guixiu ji</i>	閨秀集
<i>Guixiu shixuan</i>	閨秀詩選
<i>Guixiu zhengshi ji</i>	閨秀正始集
guizu wenxue	貴族文學
<i>Gujin nüshi</i>	古今女史
Guo Changhe	郭昌鶴
Guo Jialing	郭佳玲
Guo Liufang	郭六芳
Guo Pinjie	郭頻伽
<i>Haibin guren</i>	海濱故人
Hai Yin	海印

Han Lanying	韓蘭英
Hang Shijun	杭世駿
haofang	豪放
He Shuangqing	賀雙卿
<i>Hong lou meng</i>	紅樓夢
Hongmeige zhuren	紅梅閣主人
<i>Hongshulou xuan</i>	紅樹樓選
houtian	後天
Hu Shi	胡適
<i>Huajian ciren yanjiu</i>	花間詞人研究
Huang Chonggu	黃崇嘏
Huang Ren	黃人
Huang Yuanjie	黃媛介
Huang'e	皇娥
Huangjin shidai	黃金時代
Huarui	花蕊
huiwen shi	迴文詩
"Hujia shiba pai"	胡笳十八拍
Hongchu	紅雛
huo wenxue	活文學
Ji Xian	季嫻
Jia Baoyu	賈寶玉
jiating funü	家庭婦女
Jia Zheng	賈政
Jiandi	簡狄
Jiang Guangci	蔣光慈
Jiang Yuanxi	江元禧
Jiang Yuanzuo	江元祚
Jiaoyuan qi zi	蕉園七子
Jiaoyuan wu zi	蕉園五子
jiefang	解放
<i>Jiehui</i>	劫灰
Jin Guangmei	金光楣
<i>Jindai funü</i>	近代婦女
<i>Jinghua yuan</i>	鏡花緣
jingshen yujie	精神鬱結
jingzhuan	靜姸

jinsi	近時
Jinwu shudian	金屋書店
jiu shidai	舊時代
<i>Jixin</i>	棘心
<i>Juan shi</i>	卷施
Juxiang	菊香
juzhi hongpian	鉅製鴻篇
K xiansheng	K先生
<i>Kafei zuo</i>	咖啡座
Kan Yu	闕玉
Kang Youwei	康有爲
Langhuan	娘孃
Li Bai	李白
Li Ling	李陵
Li Qingzhao	李清照
Li Ruzhen	李汝珍
Li Shangyin	李商隱
Li Ye	李冶
Li Yu	李煜
lian'ai	戀愛
Liang Desheng	梁德繩
Liang Qichao	梁啓超
<i>Lichao mingyuan shici</i>	歷朝名媛詩詞
<i>Lidai mingyuan shici</i>	歷代名媛詩詞
<i>Lidai nüzi shiji</i>	歷代女子詩集
<i>Lidai nüzi wenji</i>	歷代女子文集
<i>Lienü zhuan</i>	列女傳
lijiao	禮教
Lin Baoquan	林寶權
Lin Chuanjia	林傳甲
Lin Lusi	林露絲
Lin Yining	林以寧
Lin Yutang	林語堂
Ling Shuhua	凌叔華
<i>Linghai chaoxi</i>	靈海潮汐
linjie xing de	鄰接性的
lishen	立身

lishi	歷史
lishi de zhenshixing	歷史的真實性
Liu Rushi	柳如是
Liu Xiang	劉向
Liu Yong	柳永
Lu Chang	陸昶
Lu Meicha	陸梅垞
Lu Xiaogu	陸小姑
Lu Xiaoman	陸小曼
Lu Xun	魯迅
Lu Yi	綠漪
Lu Yin	盧隱
Lü Bicheng	呂碧城
Lūjiao	綠蕉
<i>Lütian</i>	綠天
Ma	馬
Mao Dake	毛大可
<i>Mingyuan huishi</i>	名媛匯詩
<i>Mingyuan shichao</i>	名媛詩鈔
<i>Mingyuan shigui</i>	名媛詩歸
<i>Mingyuan shihua</i>	名媛詩話
<i>Mingyuan shihui</i>	名媛詩彙
<i>Minjian</i>	民間
Mou ji mou jun zhi furen ye	某即某君之夫人也
Mulan	木蘭
muxi	母系
Nanfang	南方
Nanshe	南社
nanxing zhongxin shehui	男性中心社會
Nanyang gongxue	南洋公學
neixin shenghuo	內心生活
nin	您
nü	女
nü caizi	女才子
<i>Nü lunyu</i>	女論語
nüliu	女流
nüliu zuojia	女流作家

<i>Nūsao</i>	女騷
nüxing	女性
nüxing de	女性的
nüxing shenghuo shi	女性生活史
nüxing wenxue	女性文學
<i>Nüzhong qi caizi lanke er ji</i>	女中七才子蘭咳二集
nüzi de wenxue	女子的文學
nüzi wenti	女子問題
nüzi wu cai bian shi de	女子無才便是德
<i>Nüzi yuekan</i>	女子月刊
nüzuojia	女作家
Pan Yue	潘岳
Peng Kang	彭康
pinglun	評論
pingmin wenxue	平民文學
Puluo wenyi she	普羅文藝社
Qian Qianyi	錢謙益
Qian Sanxi	錢三錫
Qian Xun	錢恂
<i>Qiaoying</i>	喬影
Qin Jia	秦嘉
qing	情
<i>Qing guixiu yiwen lüe</i>	清閨秀藝文略
<i>Qing guixiu zhengshi zaixu ji</i>	清閨秀正始再續集
Qingdai di yi caifu	清代第一才婦
<i>Qingdai guige shiren zhenglüe</i>	清代閨閣詩人徵略
<i>Qingdai guixiu shichao</i>	清代閨秀詩鈔
<i>Qinghai</i>	清海
Qinghuilou zhuren	清暉樓主人
Qiu Jin	秋瑾
Qiu Xinru	邱心如
Qiubi	秋碧
Qixiao	綺瀟
qu	曲
Qu Juesheng	蘧覺生
<i>Quan Tang shi</i>	全唐詩
<i>Ranzhi ji</i>	然脂集

ren	人
ren de wenxue	人的文學
reng	人格
renlei	人類
rong	容
Ruan Yuntai (Yuan)	阮芸臺 (元)
<i>Rou yu si</i>	肉與死
sanwen	散文
Sasabe	雀部
Shan Buan	單不庵
Shan Shili	單士釐
Shanghai minli nüzi zhongxue shifan bu	上海民立女子中學師範部
shanggu	上古
Shen Shanbao	沈善寶
Shen Yixiu	沈宜修
<i>Shenbao</i>	申報
<i>Shenghuo</i>	生活
shenghuo	生活
Shengli Shanghai zhongxue xiangcun shifan bu	省立上海中學鄉村師範部
Shenzhou nüxiao	神州女校
shenyun	神韻
shi	詩
<i>Shi nüshi</i>	詩女史
Shi Pingmei	石評梅
Shi Shuyi	施淑儀
Shi Zhenlin	史震林
shidai wenxue	時代文學
shihua	詩話
<i>Shihou</i>	獅吼
<i>Shishi xinbao</i>	時事新報
shiyuan	詩媛
<i>Shijing</i>	詩經
"Shili shi"	十離詩
shouganxing	受感性
Sikong Tu	司空圖
Sima Xiangru	司馬相如
sixiang	思想

Song Ruoxin	宋若莘
Su Hui	蘇蕙
Su Shi	蘇軾
Su Wu	蘇武
<i>Subao</i>	蘇報
suibi	隨筆
<i>Suiyuan nü dizi shixuan</i>	隨園女弟子詩選
Sun Fuyuan	孫伏園
Sun Xizhen	孫席珍
Taiyang she	太陽社
<i>Taiyang yuekan</i>	太陽月刊
Tan Sitong	譚嗣同
tanci	彈詞
Tangshan	唐山
Tao Qian	陶潛
Tian Han	田漢
Tian Yiheng	田藝蘅
tianzhen	天真
tige	體格
Tushan nü	塗山女
Wang Changling	王昌齡
Wang Duan	王端
Wang Qiang	王嬙
Wang Shilu (Xiqiao)	王士祿 (西樵)
Wang Shizhen (Yuyang)	王士禎 (漁洋)
Wang Yingxia	王映霞
Wang Yun	王筠
Wang Zhaoyuan	王照圓
Wanyan Yun Zhu	完顏憚珠
wanyue	婉約
Wei	衛
Wen Tingyun	溫庭筠
wen yi zai dao	文以載道
wenxue	文學
<i>Wenxue yanjiu hui</i>	文學研究會
<i>Wenxue yuanliu</i>	文學源流
wenxueshi	文學史

wenyijia dajia gongtong de airen	文藝家大家共同的愛人
Wenyou	文友
wenzhang zhushu	文章著述
Wu Guofu	吳國輔
Wu Meicun	吳梅村
Wu Qi	吳綺
Wu Xiao	吳綃
Wu Shutian	吳曙天
Wu Xuxin	吳續新
Wu Zao	吳藻
Wu Zetian	武則天
Wuguan wenxueshi congkao	物觀文學史叢稿
wuju	無句
wujue shi	五絕詩
wuyan shi	五言詩
wuyun	無韻
Wuzhong shi zi	吳中十子
Xi Shi	西施
Xia Lujiao	夏綠蕉
xiangsi xing de	相似性的
xiantian	先天
Xiao tanluan shi guixiu ci	小檀樂室閨秀詞
xiaoqian	消遣
Xiaoqing	小青
xiaoshuo	小說
Xiaodaixuan	小黛軒
Xiaodaixuan lun shi	小黛軒論詩
xiaojie pai	小姐派
Xiaolu	小璐
xiaopin	小品
Xie Daoyun	謝道韞
Xiling guiyong	西泠閨詠
Xin Qiji	辛棄疾
Xin qingnian	新青年
Xin wenhua	新文化
Xinbian Zhongguo wenxueshi	新編中國文學史
Xing Boshi	性博士



xingling	性靈
<i>Xinyue shudian</i>	新月書店
<i>Xiqing sanji</i>	西青散記
xiuxue	修學
xiyi	細意
Xu Jingfan	許景樊
Xu Naichang	徐乃昌
Xu Shu	徐淑
Xu Weinan	徐蔚南
Xu Yejun	徐野君
Xue Tao	薛濤
xueshuo	學說
Yan Ji	閻姬
Yang	楊
Yang Cunren	楊村人
Yang Guifei	楊貴妃
Ye Dingluo	葉鼎洛
Ye Wanwan	葉紈紈
Ye Xiaoluan	葉小鸞
Ye Xiaowan	葉小紈
yin	淫
yichuan	遺傳
Yilin she	藝林社
<i>Yishujie</i>	藝術界
You Tong	尤侗
youju	有句
youmei	優美
yoyun	有韻
Yu Dafu	郁達夫
Yu Jimei	余季美
Yu Quyuan (Yue)	俞曲園(樾)
Yu Xuanji	魚玄機
Yuan Changying	袁昌英
Yuan Mei (Zicai)	袁枚(子才)
<i>Yuan Ming sanqu xiaoshi</i>	元明散曲小史
Yuan Ting	元濤
yuanliu	源流

yuefu	樂府
yule	娛樂
Yunyou	雲友
Yusi	語絲
Yutai wenyuan	玉臺文苑
zaju	雜劇
zawen	雜文
Zazhi	雜誌
zazu	雜俎
Zeng Guofan	曾國藩
Zhang	璋
Zhang Chao	張潮
Zhang Jingsheng	張競生
Zhang Taiyan	章太炎
Zhang Xian	張嫻
Zhang Xichen	章錫琛
Zhang Xuecheng	章學誠
Zhang Yan	張紘
Zhang Yiping	章衣萍
Zhang Zhixiang	張之象
zhanzhou	占繇
Zhao Feiyan	趙飛燕
Zhao Huishen	趙慧深
Zhao Jingshen	趙景深
Zhao Shijie	趙世杰
Zhao Shiyong	趙時用
Zhao Wansheng	趙浣生
zhen (chastity)	貞
zhen (truth)	真
Zheng Wenang	鄭文昂
Zheng Yunduan	鄭允端
Zhengshi ji	正始集
Zhenmeishan	真美善
zhenming	箴銘
zhenshuai	真率
Zhi Ruzeng	支如璿
zhipu	質樸

Zhong Xing	鍾惺
zhonggu	中古
<i>Zhongguo nüxing de wenxue shenghuo</i>	中國女性的文學生活
<i>Zhongguo nüxing wenxueshi</i>	中國女性文學史
<i>Zhongguo wenxue shihua</i>	中國文學史話
<i>Zhongguo wenxuejia dacidian</i>	中國文學家大辭典
<i>Zhongguo wenxueshi</i>	中國文學史
<i>Zhongguo xiaoshuo fada shi</i>	中國小說發達史
Zhonghua shuju	中華書局
<i>Zhongyang ribao</i>	中央日報
Zhou	周
Zhu Shuzhen	朱淑真
Zhu Yingpeng	朱應鵬
Zhuangjiang	莊姜
<i>Zhuanglou zhaiyan</i>	妝樓摘豔
Zhuo Wenjun	卓文君
zi	自
ziran zhi fa	自然之法
ziwo	自我
zixu zhuan	自序傳
Ziye	子夜
ziye ge	子夜歌
zongfa shehui	宗法社會
Zou Rong	鄒容
Zuo Fen	左芬
Zuo Dazhang	左大璋
zuojia	作家

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