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From Larva to Butterfly: Sophia in Ding Ling's Miss Sophia's Diary and Coco in Wei Hui's Shanghai Baby

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Abstract

Sophia and Coco are two characters in Ding Ling's *Miss Sophia's Diary* (1928/1995) and Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby* (1999), respectively. Like a larva, Sophia, who enters society in the early twentieth century, is weak and immobile. Coco, who lives at the end of the twentieth century, is like a butterfly leading an outlandish lifestyle. The differences between Sophia and Coco reflect the achievement of official feminism, which liberated Chinese women from traditional patriarchal control in the social sense.

However, gender issues for women remain unresolved. To fight against traditional patriarchy and especially challenge gender oppression in official feminism, both Sophia and Coco boldly acknowledge and pursue sexual desire. Their feminist discourses are both commendable and controversial, given their situations and the times in which they live.

Keywords

Modern Chinese women; official feminism; feminist discourse; "body writing"; female sexuality; male gaze

Introduction

Different from its counterpart in the West and some other countries, Chinese feminism has never been a solely women's movement. Championed by the nationalists in the early twentieth century and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) later, Chinese feminism was co-opted by national politics. As a result, Chinese women are in a different situation of feminist development. On the one hand, under the patronage of liberal Chinese intellectuals and the Chinese Communist Party, women entered the public sphere fast and enjoyed relatively high social and legal status considering its relatively short history. On the other hand, being subsumed by the revolution and other grand social issues, Chinese feminism has been deficient in addressing gender issues. Conspicuously, gender difference, which was a major focus of interest in the second wave of the western feminist movement and is faulted as being essentialist now, conversely becomes a "new" and heated issue in contemporary Chinese feminism. In this paper, using the cases of two unconventional modern Chinese women characters in books by two women authors, I analyze the complexity of feminist discourse regarding female sexuality in the struggle with Chinese patriarchy in the twentieth century.

Ding Ling's *Miss Sophia's Diary* (1928/1995) and Wei Hui's novel, *Shanghai Baby* (1999), are two pioneering works, published in the early and late twentieth century respectively. Both were controversial in their times. *Miss Sophia's Diary*, a novella published in 1928, depicts the inner struggle of a "new woman" in her pursuit of love and sexual desire. Upon its publication it was said to be like "a bombshell thrown into the deadly quiet literary scene" (Yi, 1982: 107). Seventy-one years later, a contemporary woman writer, Wei Hui, with her novel, *Shanghai Baby*, bombed the Chinese literary field again with her even bolder writing on an urban woman's love and sexual life. The sensation the two works created was mainly due to the portrayal of the two female characters, Sophia in Ding Ling's *Miss Sophia's Diary* and Coco in Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby*.

Sophia and Coco share remarkable similarities. Both are unconventional modern women. Both have noticeably foreign names and obstinate characters and are involved in triangular relationships with two men. Both are rebellious individuals who boldly reveal or pursue their sexual desires, which create big controversies. Both write of their sexual experiences, which comprise their feminist discourses in their fight against traditional and modern patriarchy in China. Undeniably, due to the different times in which they are set, their lives also vary greatly from each other. Thus, the similarities and differences between these two conspicuous female characters provide two distinctive cases for studying Chinese feminism in the backdrop of the twentieth century.

Comparative Study of *Miss Sophia's Diary* and *Shanghai Baby*

With the fame or notoriety that these books garnered, Ding Ling's *Miss Sophia's Diary* and Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby* have both been widely studied in and outside China. However, the comparison between the two characters only constitutes a small portion of the scholarship. In my research, I discovered seven short essays, published in China, focusing on a comparison of the two portrayals.¹ These essays address the similarities and differences in the narrative styles of the two works, the themes of desire and sexuality, the contradiction between soul and body, and feminist consciousness portrayed in the characters of Sophia and Coco. Interestingly, the studies arrive at

similar conclusions; that is, Sophia is viewed as progressive and a feminist, whereas Coco is seen as commercialized, degenerate, and a "pseudo-feminist."

In English, no monograph has been published on a comparison of the two works or the two characters. Xueping Zhong (2007) makes a keen perception in her essay, "Who is a Feminist? Understanding the Ambivalence towards Shanghai Baby, 'Body Writing' and Feminism in Post-Women's Liberation in China." She says, "If we remember Ding Ling's Sophia 's Diary, Ni Ke's [Coco's Chinese name] voice can be recognized as a late twentieth-century echo of Sophia's as yet another cultural challenge from a woman writer confronting the public with a woman's sexual desire and conflicted feelings about that desire" (Zhong, 2007: 224). Anbin Shi (2003) also mentions Ding Ling's *Miss Sophia's Diary* and Sophia several times when he analyzes Wei Hui's "body writing" in his book, *A Comparative Approach to Redefining Chinese-ness in the Era of Globalization*. However, both Zhong and Shi concentrate on Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby* and only use Ding Ling's *Miss Sophia's Diary* as a reference.

Responding to the insufficient study of these two characters, both in English and Chinese, I analyze the connection between Sophia and Coco in both a diachronic and synchronic manner. Diachronically, I compare the lives of Sophia and Coco to delineate the general development of modern Chinese women. Synchronically, I place them side by side to examine their struggles and compromises in their feminist fight against patriarchy in their respective periods. Broadly, with this case study on these two female characters and their affinities, I do a critical overview of Chinese feminism, especially official feminism and the feminist discourse embodied in it, over more than 50 years in the twentieth century.

Official Feminism

Chinese feminism was initiated by male Chinese liberal intellectuals. With a view to enhance national salvation and modernization and to elevate their own social status, these intellectuals initiated the cause in the late nineteenth century up to the May Fourth period. Therefore, the issue of women in modern China was included as a national concern rather than as an issue by itself. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) followed it by incorporating the issue into its class-based theory. Attributing private ownership and exploitative political power as the causes of social inequality, including that of women, the Party enlisted women in the proletarian revolution and socialist state as a means to help them achieve liberation. In particular, women's economic independence, i.e., women's participation in productive activities outside their homes, was emphasized as a "fundamental condition for women's liberation" (Zhang, 1996: 69). This unique characteristic of Chinese feminism is labeled by Lydia Liu as "official feminism" and termed as "state feminism" by Mayfair Mei-hui Yang (Liu, 1991: 23; Yang, 1999: 37).

Official or state feminism is always allied with the "wider social revolution" in China (Croll, 1978: 2-3; Zhang, 1996: 125). Specifically, it was closely associated with the nationalist discourse before 1949 and was part of the state discourse associated with the CCP after 1949. With state power fighting against women's oppression, socially and ideologically, Chinese women's entrance into the public sphere was expedited; at the same time, they received considerable legal rights to protect their participation in production and other social involvements. As Anbin Shi rightly points out, "One cannot deny, however, the truism that it is in the Maoist era that Chinese women were

generally granted equal access to political activity, employment, education, and literary careers" (2003: 141). This was one of the greatest contributions that official feminism made for Chinese women.

However, while helping Chinese women fight the oppressive traditional patriarchy in social and political aspects, official feminism left the cultural, psychological, and physiological oppression of Chinese women virtually untouched. As Davin remarks, "this analysis [locating women's oppression in the class system], failed to explain or even to recognize, major elements of that oppression" (Zhang, 1996: 97-98). Naihua Zhang names these major "elements" as family, reproduction, sexuality, personal relations between men and women, socialization of children, etc. The result is that the Chinese women's liberation movement left the gender issues pertaining to women unacknowledged. A climax was reached during the Cultural Revolution when women's gender specificity was diminished to the point of gender erasure. In the name of gender equality, the Party promoted the slogan of "what men can do can be done by women as well" and the image of "iron girl," who concealed her female features as much as possible. As a result of such political suppression, "gender became an unmarked and neutralized category" (Yang, 1999: 41). However, what was sacrificed was not men's gender but that of women because the male gender became the standard for women to measure themselves with. The propaganda of eliminating gender difference did not result in women's equality as it claimed but instead cancelled women's gender.

Without gender specificity, female sexuality lost its legitimacy. Naihua Zhang cites Shelah Leader, who states that "In the area of sexuality, the topic of female sexuality had been avoided as a taboo" (Zhang, 1996: 100). Anbin Shi summarizes that the typical heroine image during the Mao era was a single or widowed woman dressed in blue or gray. He explains that she was "single because she has been preoccupied with revolutionary passion in lieu of sexual desire, widowed because she must retain chastity to her late husband, often a revolutionary martyr and incarnation of the all-powerful Partystate. Female sexuality and gender identity, as ardently articulated in May-Fourth literature, are dismissed or even decried as 'bourgeois' by Maoist new women" (2003: 141-142). Meng Yue and Daijin Hua observe that "the gender imagery of Maoist 'revolutionary model operas' was predicated on the father-daughter relationship rather than a man-woman relationship so that the sexual interest and desire between man and woman are suppressed" (Yang, 1999: 61). These arguments boil down to the fact that the gender equality advocated by official feminism in China expunged women's gender rather than recognize it. In other words, in the name of equality, Chinese women were no longer recognized as women. Within this context, I propose that Sophia and Coco's acknowledgement and pursuit of female sexual desire form feminist discourses and thus counteract the official feminism while fighting against traditional Chinese patriarchy.

Sophia and Coco: Larva and Butterfly

I use two metaphors, larva and butterfly, to describe Sophia, Ding Ling's heroine in *Miss Sophia's Diary* and Coco in Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby*. The primary reason to employ these metaphors is to illustrate the general changes Chinese women underwent in the twentieth century. Being a "modern, new woman" in the early twentieth century, Sophia has recently come out of her traditional family and entered society. As Rey Chow acutely observes, "we find Sophie referring to herself as being 'wrapped up in my quilt.' This is a condition she wants to leave but to which she repeatedly returns in the course of the story" (Chow, 1991: 164). I think Chow's observation

captures Sophia's resemblance to larva in an excellent way. In contrast, born and growing up in the late twentieth century, Coco is not physically or socially constrained like Sophia and acts freely and ostentatiously in society. In this regard, I use larva to illustrate Sophia's considerable immobility and seclusion and butterfly to depict Coco's mobility to the point of being unstable and exhibitionist. The metaphors also reflect the colors each of their lives represent; Sophia's is mainly black and white whereas Coco's is dazzlingly colorful. In fact, the two writers indicate such implications too. Ding Ling included *Miss Sophia's Diary* into her first novella collection, *In the Darkness*, to point to the tough exploration by modern Chinese women during this period. Wei Hui entitled her first novella collection, *Shrieks of a Butterfly*, to depict the outlandish and unconventional lifestyle of women like herself and Coco. While the larva may not be rich in its metaphoric meaning, the butterfly is known for its love and erotic connotation in both Chinese and western cultures. This cultural connotation, together with the English phrase, "social butterfly," is an appropriate analogy for Coco's life. Nevertheless, it is also undeniable that it is insufficient to use animals as metaphors to analyze two human beings. Hence, while the metaphors facilitate my discussion, my analysis is not limited by them.

I propose that Sophia lives the life of a larva. In the novella, which is in the form of a diary, she chronicles the six months of her life when she contracts tuberculosis. Confined to her apartment most of the time, Sophia spends a winter of ennui except when she is visited by Yufang and Yulin, a nice couple, and Yun Di, a young man who loves Sophia, but for whom Sophia does not have reciprocal feelings. Following an introduction made by Yulin, Sophia gets to know Ling Jishi, which throws Sophia into emotional turmoil. Deeply attracted to Ling, Sophia desires him sexually. However, morally, she thinks he is merely a playboy who takes advantage of women in his vulgar life. With her passion and reason contradicting each other, but neither one prevailing over the other, Sophia is plunged into great confusion and anxiety. Finally, she seeks to move away to escape.

Sophia's life represents that of a modern Chinese woman who has recently entered society. Following the trend of modern women of her time, Sophia leaves her traditional home and seeks freedom and her dreams in an urban city. Nevertheless, while sharing the general feature of "modern, new" Chinese women, by breaking away from the direct yoke of the traditional family and entering the public sphere, Sophia has her particular situation; she is consumptive. Because of her illness, she cannot do a job. She is surrounded by a coterie of friends, who form her small social circle. Sophia's public space as well as her social activity is limited. Most of the time she is secluded in her tiny apartment. The confinement of her living place is a pressure on her body and mind. She writes, "Particularly inside the four whitewashed walls that stare blankly back at me no matter where I sit. If I try to escape by lying on the bed, I'm crushed by the ceiling, just as oppressively white" (Barlow and Bjorge, 1989: 51). The cramped space not only inhibits Sophia's movement but also depresses her. Like a larva, she is not mobile or free. She still needs to be protected and taken care of.

Fundamentally, as a larva appears still and unmoving but undergoes a metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly, Sophia is inactive physically but in mental turmoil. She experiences her greatest anxiety and agony when dealing with love and sexual desire. Sophia is in a triangular relationship with two men, Wei Di and Ling Jishi. The former cares for Sophia but does not know how to show his love properly. Sophia does not feel for him and only treats him like a younger

brother. Ling Jishi, however, is a tall and handsome Singaporean with a western educational background. His physical appearance and foreignness makes Sophia fall in love with him and she desires him crazily. However, when Ling Jishi approaches her, she rejects him because she thinks he is a playboy and is materialistic and sensual.

These two intense forces, sexual desire and social morality, contradict each other and cause fierce conflict in Sophia's mind. She is infatuated with and sexually attracted to ling Jishi. In her diary she expresses her desire for ling Jingshi without restraint. In the entry for January 4 in her diary, she writes, "I was possessed with a desire to mark every part of his body with my lips" (Barlow and Bjorge, 1989: 57). On March 21, she imagines that "had he dared to embrace me, had he kissed me passionately, I'd have fallen into his arms and cried, 'love you! God! I love you!'" (Barlow and Bjorge, 1989: 71), and on March 24 she confesses that "When he's here alone with me, I suffer scouring torment as I stare into his face and listen to the musical sound of his voice. Why don't I crush his mouth with kisses, his temples, his ... his whole body. The words 'My lord and master! Grant me one kiss!' rise to my lips" (Barlow and Bjorge, 1989: 75). Burning expressions like these permeate Sophia's diary in which she is unrestrained in expressing herself. Her explicit and bold attitude towards sex is the first of its kind for modern Chinese women characters. Unlike traditional Chinese women or even the majority of modern Chinese women of her time who hid their sexuality and denied it, Sophia acknowledges it. She even publicizes it by writing about it. By acknowledging sexual desire in love, Sophia not only reclaims women's body back from patriarchal control and also proclaims women's active position in the heterosexual relationship. Her attitude and actions clearly demonstrate the subjective position of women and the disturbing power of the female body. In this way, Sophia fights against Chinese patriarchy, in both traditional and modern forms, that treats women and their bodies as inhuman objects.

While boldly revealing her sexual desire, Sophia does not take a positive attitude towards it. She acknowledges it, but at the same time, she denounces and condemns it. In her diary entry of January 17, she describes her mood using words such as, "crazy," "drink," "blood," "death." In another entry, on March 14, she even writes about whether she has the boldness for "killing a person in order to protect my romantic illusion" (Barlow and Bjorge, 1989: 69). How can a relationship be so destructive? The answer lies in the other side of Sophia's mind and character - the social morality that denies the validity of her desire.

Despite Sophia's frantic expression of desire, her reason, regulated by social morality, inhibits her. This social morality, which primarily comes from the feudalistic and Confucian ideology that dominated Chinese society for thousands of years with its rigorous prescriptions regarding the conduct of people, especially women, proves hard to uproot. In the case of Sophia, the rules given by social ethics lie deep in her mind. Although she poses a defiant attitude to her surroundings, her mind is not free of such social norms. As a result, while consciously recognizing her sexual desire, unconsciously Sophia feels it is wrong and repudiates it. This can be seen in her condemnation of Ling Jishi and self-criticism and torment.

Sophia uses harsh words to accuse ling Jishi as a morally degraded man who plays games with women. When ling Jishi comes to see her, Sophia writes,

I felt my self-respect revive finally as I listened to the disgusting pledges sworn out of the depths of Ling Jishi's depravity. . . . But when he tried it on me, he drove me off by the very force of all those words. Stupid, pathetic man! . . . Wretched, wretched man! He still had no inkling of the disdainful pity the woman seated before him felt at his stooping to such a ridiculous affectation . . . (Barlow and Bjorge, 1989: 79-80).

Sophia's denunciation of Ling Jishi is ferocious. In her book, *The Heart of Revolution*, Haiyan Lee states that Sophia's accusation is too strong. By quoting the strong language used by Sophia, such as "depths of . . . depravity": a "wretched," "contemptible," "revolting," "pathetic man," "one of the vilest beasts," Lee questions Sophia, "What kind of man is Ling that he deserves all these demeaning and vituperative epithets? What is the nature of his depravity?" (Lee, 2007: 124). Lee attributes the reason for this strong reaction to Sophia, or rather, Ding Ling's disgust with bourgeois ideology and its notion of family life. However, I would think that social morality mainly accounts for such feelings. Compared to her friends, Yufang and others, Sophia can be seen as a more rebellious "new woman." However, her rebellion is mostly portrayed in thought than action. Although she is courageous enough to acknowledge her sexual desire, she dare not gratify it. In this scenario, it starts with Ling Jishi's desire for Sophia, which she reciprocates; however, rather than delighting her, it frightens her. She writes, "When he - when Ling Jishi - came in at ten and began stammering about his desire to have me, I felt my heart throbbing in my breast. The lust in his eyes scared me. . . . Oh stop it! Get out of here! You'll find the kind of pleasure you like at Weijia brothel!" (Barlow and Bjorge, 1989: 79). What we see here is that it is alright for Sophia to desire Ling Jishi secretly in her mind but it is wrong for him to desire her and turn it into action. It shows that Sophia's defiance is gestural rather than substantial. She still cannot come to full terms with her sexual desire and thus thinks it is wrong.

While it appears quite legitimate to blame Ling Jishi as the wrong sort of person to desire, Sophia's self-criticism and self-denial reveals that the cause is not Ling Jishi but social ethics. As per the same morality, Sophia does not think herself a good woman. In the beginning of her diary on January 4, she writes: "Should I go look for him? A woman that uninhibited would risk having everything blow up in her face. I still want people to respect me" (Barlow and Bjorge, 1989: 57). At the end of this entry, Sophia finishes with the line, "A woman, . . . won't have a good end. . . . I'm decided now. I'm so full of regrets! I regret all the wrong things I did today, things a decent woman would never do" (Barlow and Bjorge, 1989: 58). With these two distinct words, 'good' and 'decent,' we can clearly see that social morality exerts its force on Sophia. She thinks herself a bad woman to have sexual desire and then denies herself and conforms to the moral standard, which also explains why she only confides her thoughts in her diary.

In public, Sophia never admits her infatuation with Ling Jishi. Instead, she pretends to dislike him. She disguises herself so well that even the couple, Yufang and Yunlin, who take good care of Sophia and introduce Ling Jishi to her, think that she wants to shun Ling Jishi. Regarding Sophia's contradictory behavior, Rey Chow makes a convincing analysis, "The attempt to conform to sexual propriety leads Sophie to the opposite extreme of her desire. Instead of playing it out, Sophie acts in an 'awkward and humorless' way until her friends, mistaking it to mean her dislike for Ling Jishi, take him away" (Chow, 1991: 165). This contradiction between her public and private selves shows the tension between the patriarchal other and her feminist self.

At the end of the diary, unable to solve the problem, Sophia secludes herself by moving to an isolated place. Thus, like a larva in a cocoon, Sophia fails to come out of her covering. Whatever pain she experiences, she feels tortured by her desire and never takes the initiative to kiss or hug Ling. Instead, she waits anxiously in a desperate state for Ling to approach her. Yet, when Ling really comes close to her, she repels him. Behind all these scenes of hesitation, conflict, and struggle is the power of patriarchal control, which petrifies Sophia, leading her to act in a repressed way, and makes her an irresolute woman after she takes the initial step of coming out of the feudal family.

Sophia is commendable in her courage to acknowledge her sexual desire. Her diary becomes one of the first feminist discourses on female sexuality. It targets not only the feudalistic patriarchy but also the modern one imposed by the nationalists. While the former vilifies female sexuality, the latter suppresses it by deliberately neglecting it in their women's liberation program. Together they reinforce the prohibition of women's sexuality. Living under oppression, Sophia does not take things submissively as do other women, but subverts them with her rebellious utterances. Ding Ling, the author, makes such a comment on her character,

She [Sophia] is a rebellious woman. She has the stubbornness of rebellious women . . . she is lonely. She thinks that no one is reliable in society. Can she live like this? She must live and has to live. What can she do then? In the end, she says, live silently. However, her spirit and her mind won't give in. Therefore, she is depressed. She cries: I will die, I will die! However, she does not intend to die. It is only a way of rebellion. . . . All she can see is darkness. She really does not like society. Nor does she like the people in society. She is discontented. . . . She wants to pursue light, but she cannot find an ideal thing and an ideal person. She targets all her dissatisfaction towards society (Chen, 1995: 2, my translation).

Despite the fact that Sophia is spontaneous rather than deliberate in thought and she acts personally and covertly rather than socially and forthrightly, her non-conformity with the dark patriarchal society, and especially her bold outcry, mark her as a feminist.

However, like a larva groping in the dark, Sophia's feminist discourse, in the form of a diary, is publicized and privatized simultaneously, in the same way as she acknowledges sexual desire burning in her body but fails to express and use it. Sophia is rebellious mostly in private. In public, she behaves a little willfully and sometimes is childish, which shows her immaturity. She is unable to take full responsibility for her own life. She mocks the puritanism of Yufang and Yunling and looks down at some of her female friends; however, she herself is only bold in thought but weak in action. Sophia's case shows both her progress and weakness as a "new woman" and the strong force of patriarchy in its traditional and modern forms. She is courageous in her defiant attitude; however, she cannot match the power of patriarchy. As a result, she lives in obscurity, literally and otherwise.

Seventy years later, Wei Hui's semi-autobiographical novel, *Shanghai Baby*, published in 1999, created an even bigger sensation than Ding Ling's *Miss Sophia's Diary*. In fact, a year after its release, *Shanghai Baby* was banned on grounds of being "decadent, debauched and a slave of foreign culture" by the state media (Smith, 2000). In a span of more than half a century, Chinese society had undergone tremendous changes. Women's status as well as social attitudes towards

female sexual desire were certainly not the same as they were in Sophia's time. Nevertheless, the fact that by writing about female sexuality a young woman caused a similar stir or even stronger reaction in society, compared to what happened seventy years ago, provides us with a reference to the changes in Chinese feminism, patriarchy, and other related issues.

Shanghai Baby describes the life of Coco, a Chinese woman living in a metropolitan city in the latter half of the twentieth century. To a certain extent, Coco takes on life where Sophia leaves off. Coco immerses herself completely in society. She makes a good living for herself and lives a trendy life. Similar to Sophia, Coco is also in a triangular relationship with two men. However, her relationship is real. Thus, with the changes in time, the two modern Chinese women lead quite different lifestyles. While Sophia feels more restricted and seldom steps out of her confined and small territory, Coco is free to act out her thoughts in her large, unconstrained physical space and even deliberately deviates from social conventions, showing off her differences with pride. If Sophia's life is one of a larva inside a cocoon, then Coco's is that of a butterfly.

In a physical sense Coco enjoys vast space and great mobility. Coco lives with her boyfriend, who rents a large two-bedroom apartment. Sometimes she goes back to her parents for short visits. After getting to know Mark, her lover, Coco also goes to his place to spend time with him. These three places make up the central living space of Coco. Nevertheless, her activities extend to bars, museums, cafeterias, fancy restaurants, her other friends' places in Shanghai, other cities, and even foreign countries. Like a butterfly, Coco is not constrained by her physical space. She is constantly on the move and refuses to settle down.

Coco has an active social life. None of her friends are ordinary Chinese. In fact, Coco and her social group strive hard to break the conventions of ordinary life to make them different. The incongruity and disparity with the rest of the society earns them the label, Ungici, the other generation or the other group, a label to which they express no objection, accepting it happily and even flaunting it. To be the "other" makes this group a minority as opposed to the majority of Chinese people who live their day-to-day lives following their routines and social conventions. However, being in a minority by no means implies that they are underprivileged and hard-up. On the contrary, most of them are well-educated and well-off, which allows them to afford their expensive bohemian lifestyle. As they do not have a clear value system and clear idea about life, they deliberately deviate from mainstream values to make themselves seen and heard.

As a butterfly, Coco's life is fashionable. She likes the metropolitan life of Shanghai and enthusiastically pursues things such as famous brand names, especially those from the West. At the same time, she defies what she deems normal and regular as the ordinary Chinese. Her career choice is a good example. Coco's first job is as a magazine journalist, which is considered a well-paid and well-respected job in China. Yet, Coco has no intention of merely meeting people's envious eyes. She works on it for only three months and resigns. After that, she becomes a cafeteria waitress. To the common Chinese, a waitress differs greatly from a journalist in status and is hard to link them together with the same person. However, Coco takes the change naturally as an indication of her indifference to class and status; at the same time she also implies in this way that she is pretty as a waitress is supposed to be and intelligent as she has been a journalist too. Eventually, Coco quits her waitressing job and becomes a writer. This time again she challenges the stereotype with which Chinese generally associate writers, i.e., a lonely, serious, and morally

edifying career, into one that she links with youth, attention, money, and erotic response from readers but nothing about education or morality in the traditional sense. When she becomes a full-time writer, Coco even declares that she will change writing into the most fashionable and coolest job in the world. Thus, rather than being defined by the stereotypes of careers and following their beaten tracks, Coco redefines her choice of life and blazes her own trails.

In love and sex, Coco is equally unconventional. At her prestigious university, she chooses a boyfriend who is not only bad looking but also eccentric. Nevertheless, she falls for him because he can recite famous Shakespearean works in Oxford English and talk about Jesus Christ for three days without stopping. Later, it turns out that the man is not only a religious fanatic but also a sex maniac. Even after they break up, he still stalks her. By having such a boyfriend Coco displays unusual taste, but she also admits later that she made a mistake in her choice. Nevertheless, she never regrets having a triangular relationship with two men later in her life. Accordingly, unlike Sophia, Coco does not go through mental anxiety but happily enjoys and tries hard to reach a balance between the two men in the relationship.

Coco has a boyfriend, Tian Tian, who is a spiritual, sensitive, and gentle Chinese man. They love each other. Ideal as he is, he is impotent. Coco then takes Mark, a tall, handsome German man as her secret lover. Like a butterfly flitting from one flower to the other, Coco gives her soul to Tian Tian and her body to Mark and shuffles between the two. However, the split lifestyle makes Coco soon realize that it is impossible to merely have sex without committing her emotions to Mark and not feeling guilty in front of the pure and innocent love of Tian Tian. Coco ends up with an uneasy conscience. Nevertheless, unlike Sophia, she does not go through conflict in her mind, nor does she choose to leave people and relationships and seclude herself in a faraway place. Instead, she is left with an empty world on the death of Tian Tian and the departure of Mark. In other words, Coco has no intention of giving up her lifestyle. At the very end of the novel, she receives emails and an invitation letter from her German woman friend, who has an ambiguous homosexual relationship with her and invites her to visit Germany. Like a butterfly, Coco will flit her wings to start her new round of flight, which is again full of pleasure-seeking, adventure, and even indulgence.

As two modern Chinese women living in the early and late twentieth century, it is not hard to find the kinship and commonalities between Sophia and Coco. Neither one is constrained by their families. While Coco dearly states that she has a generation gap with her parents and does not see them except on occasional visits, Sophia lives in a city that is away from her family. Thus, both of them have come out of the private spheres that had traditionally confined Chinese women and have their own space. In terms of love and sex, both Sophia and Coco demonstrate courage by pursuing their true love and acknowledging their female sexuality. Controversial as their behaviors are, they nevertheless show that they are no longer sexual properties and bodiless symbols that are manipulated by men. Furthermore, as both writings are narrated in the first person and are written in the forms of diary and semi-autobiography, they prominently demonstrate women's voices and subjectivities, which are significant in each of their times.

However, being at two phases of the modern Chinese period, Coco and Sophia also have considerable differences. First of all, as the two authors deliberately named Sophia and Coco after their idols, they modeled their characters after the heroines they admired. Sophia was named after

Sophia Perovskaya and Sophia Zhang, both of whom were revolutionaries and feminists; therefore, she is both revolutionary and idealistic. Coco, named after Coco Chanel, the French business tycoon, worships western bourgeois life. She is realistic and epicurean. Their differences, to a certain extent, represent the differences of their times, which consequently impact their interactions with the patriarchy of each period.

Like a larva inside a cocoon, Sophia, a modern Chinese woman in the early twentieth century, is weak, laid-back, immobile, and most of all, does not have sufficient power to stand on her own and acquire a life of her own. Therefore, her configuration is vague and her activities are limited except for her intense inner struggle. In contrast, Coco, a contemporary woman in the late twentieth century, seems to have everything in her hands: mobility, decision-making, money, beauty, career, love, sex, etc. By defying convention in her life, she is outlandish in both her appearance and thinking. She is fashionable, pleasure-seeking, narcissistic, and rebellious. Coco resembles a butterfly in the great freedom and mobility she enjoys, especially in her "other" way of life that deviates from the stable and regular life style of the majority of Chinese people. In a metaphoric form, the progress made by modern Chinese women represented by Sophia and Coco can be seen as analogous to the metamorphosis undergone from larva to butterfly. That is, from a weak and semi-independent creature like a larva inside a cocoon, Sophia grows into Coco, an independent and fully developed form like a butterfly.

There is no doubt that the progress made by Coco over Sophia is tremendous. Where Sophia is prostrate, Coco stands and even flies; where Sophia is passive, Coco is active; where Sophia struggles painfully, Coco enjoys happily. These changes can roughly represent the changes made by Chinese women in the span of the twentieth century. The problems Chinese women faced in the early twentieth century, namely, breaking away from the control of traditional families, entering society, and finding love of their own choice are basically no longer problems for Chinese women at the end of the twentieth century. In other words, Chinese women have gained tremendous autonomy after a century's struggle with feudalistic patriarchy.

The big difference between Sophia and Coco, according to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), reflects the achievements of Chinese women's liberation over the century. From being fettered by feudalistic patriarchy physically (bound feet) and mentally ("women without literacy is virtuous" and other constraining beliefs) in their private sphere to becoming free beings, working and living equally with men in modern society. In other words, the official feminism that was sponsored by Chinese nationalists and the CCP contributed largely to the changes in modern Chinese women, epitomized in the metamorphic change from Sophia to Coco. However, the progress is not lineal. It is not necessarily true that Coco enjoys more freedom in every respect and is at a higher stage of feminism than Sophia. Rather, while benefiting from official feminism, both of them find that their gender issues remain unresolved or even aggravated at a certain time, thanks to patriarchy in both modern and traditional forms.

Feminist Endeavor

By fighting patriarchal control and especially by challenging gender suppression in official feminism, Chinese women asserted their gender identity in a new wave of Chinese feminism that became prominent in the reform era after the Cultural Revolution. Because this feminism stresses

female gender differences and especially femininity, a point where western feminism started, it is attacked by some western feminists as going backwards and is considered problematic. However, what they miss is the specific situation of China and especially a historical point of view regarding the development of feminism in China. Some researchers make strong arguments regarding this issue. Mayfair Mei-hui Yang states, "In socialist state feminism, which does not emphasize the male-female binary, it has been difficult for women to assert independence from a male state machinery, since the very category of 'woman' in opposition to men is no longer salient" (1999: 40). Dai Jinghua and Meng Yue remark, "For her [Chinese woman], 'equality of men and women' was once a mythical trap, and 'equal pay for equal work' was all but forced upon her. Gender difference is not a concept to be discarded or abandoned, but a necessary path through which she must pass" (Meng and Dai, 2004: 254; Yang, 2007: 35). Therefore, although it is insufficient or deficient in a theoretical sense, women fighting for their gender differences in modern China has feminist significance.

The distinction in Sophia and Coco is that they are unusual modern Chinese women characters who openly acknowledge or pursue their female sexual experiences against suppression. In Miss Sophia's Diary and Shangyi Baby, Sophia and Coco both assume the roles of writers describing their bodily experiences. Sophia expresses her burning sexual desire in her diary and Coco writes a book on her sexual relationships. In this sense, both of them can be said to be practicing "body writing." Although the term "corporeal writing" was not familiar to Chinese scholars until the 1990s, what Sophia and Coco do, fits well within the view that "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" (Cixous, 2009: 416). The effect they create, to borrow the title of Hélène Cixous's classical essay on women's writing, is that Sophia and Coco utter "Medusa's laugh" that shakes the Chinese patriarchal world.

In Sophia's case, she is the first one among all modern Chinese women characters in Chinese literature to articulate female sexual desire in a strong voice. By revealing her personal experiences, she makes the act political. She breaks through the taboo of chastity imposed by Chinese feudalistic patriarchy on women for thousands of years. At the same time, she also challenges the deficiency of the women's movement sponsored by Chinese liberal intellectuals who liberated women from their traditional families, releasing them into society at the expense of women's gender.

Sophia not only recognizes herself as a woman but also places herself in a subjective position in her heterosexual relationship. The entry of January 10 in her diary is a good example:

I understand myself completely. I am a thoroughly female woman, and women concentrate everything on the man they've got in their sights. I want to possess him. I want unconditional surrender of his heart. I want him kneeling down in front of me, begging me to kiss him. I am delirious. I go over and over the steps I must take to implement my scheme (Barlow and Borge, 1989: 59).

In this paragraph, almost every sentence starts with an 'I'. The 'I' here is not in a weak position but is assertive and powerful. It represents Sophia's subjectivity in both her discourse and her relationship. Actually, Sophia subverts men's discourse by replicating their words. In Chinese

feudalistic patriarchy, in which the gender hierarchy is dearly demarcated, men "possessed" women and made women "surrender," "kneel down," and "beg" to them. However, in Sophia's female discourse, the direction is reversed; the same words embodying a power relationship are used by Sophia for the man, Ling Jishi. Undeniably, her enunciation is not the right solution for feminism, as conquering and being conquered will inevitably lead to endless wars between men and women. Nevertheless, given the fact that Sophia is a "new, modern" woman who just emerges in society from a thousand-yearlong feudalistic control and comes to her feet under the patronage of male liberal intellectuals, she is admirable in assuming feminist consciousness to assert her subjective position. It is a strong feminist gesture compared to her fragile physique and her weak situation in society.

With her subjectivity, Sophia turns the man she likes into the object of her female gaze. She writes, "I raised my eyes. I look at his soft, red, moist, deeply inset lips, and let out my breath slightly. How could I admit to anyone that I gazed at those provocative lips like a small hungry child eyeing sweets?" (Barlow and Bjorge, 1989: 55). Lydia Liu makes a cogent comment on this paragraph. She writes, "the narrator not only objectifies the man's 'lips' as if they were pieces of candy, but she ignores the phallus and feminizes male sexuality by associating it with lips. She is empowered by writing that gives full play to her subversive desires and constitutes her as a subject" (Liu, 1991: 28). In this way, Sophia's female gaze reverses the male discourse and subverts the traditional role of male gender in the domination of the heterosexual relationship.

In Sophia's time, although western feminism was translated and introduced into China, a feminist discourse on women's gender was hardly formed in China yet. Thus, Sophia's feminist discourse is spontaneous and commendable. However, what makes her even more admirable is that she assumes her feminist position at a time when she herself cannot even function well in society yet. In other words, as a "new woman" who is being freshly liberated from traditional patriarchy, Sophia has already acquired the feminist awareness to liberate herself from the male discourse.

Owing to its different time and situation, Coco's feminist discourse is not the same as that of Sophia. Generally speaking, Coco has an open and unreserved attitude towards female sexuality and thus is considered bold and even controversial by Chinese critics. This is best illustrated by the genres they adopt in their discourses. In Sophia's case, writing a diary about her sexual desire is both a way to release it and keep it secret; however, to Coco, writing a book on her love and sexuality for publication is not about hiding but mostly about highlighting.

Coco has a narcissistic appreciation of her body. She depicts her physical features favorably (especially in the eyes of others) and emphasizes her feminine beauty by writing about making up her face, going shopping for beautiful clothing, and looking at herself in the mirror. As a writer, Coco admits that she likes to be naked when she writes. In this way, she can perform two tasks: exploring her body and her writing at the same time. She also thinks that her writing style fluctuates with her physical condition. She observes, "When my body shape is relatively full, every sentence I write is pithy and poignant, whereas when I am thinner, my writing is full of overlong sentences like dense dumps of silky-soft seaweed" (Wei, 1999: 167-168). Here, Coco demonstrates the bond between body and writing, which is much dearer, denser, and stronger than that of Sophia. Also, corresponding to the metaphors of larva and butterfly, it can be seen that Sophia's female body is vague and inert in configuration, compared to the attractive and even alluring female body of Coco.

In both her life experience and writing about sexuality, Coco is bolder than Sophia. Coco easily solves the problem that torments Sophia, i.e., the contradiction between love and sexual desire. She separates the two and enjoys both in different ways. Consequently, compared to Sophia's sole heterosexual sexual desire (it has never developed into a real heterosexual relationship) and a vague homosocial relationship with Sister Yun, Coco's sexuality is diverse. She not only has a heterosexual relationship with Mark and an asexual relationship with Tian Tian, but also has homosexual affinity with Madonna and a German woman director. In this way, Coco achieves what Luce Irigaray (1985) identifies as "this sex which is not one" and Judith Butler's (1990) theory that gender reality is performative. Most importantly, Coco rarely struggles as Sophia does with her sexual desire. Rather, she enjoys her sexual relationships. Although she cannot avoid being pricked by her conscience in feeling guilty about Tian Tian, Coco has no intention of giving up her pleasure merely for the sake of morality. In fact, she writes about all her relationships in her book, which parallels and indeed implies *Shanghai Baby* itself, for publication. Her unreserved attitude towards sexuality and especially the audacious description of sexual scenes became one of the greatest controversies at the time. It also represents one of the biggest differences between Sophia and Coco. Coco's life and writing both point to the progress she makes over Sophia and also the complexity of both regarding their fight against patriarchy.

Complexity in the Struggle with Patriarchy

Neither Sophia nor Coco is free from patriarchal control. However, due to their different times, patriarchal forces take different forms and have different effects. In Sophia's case, it manifests itself in the strong social morality that controls Sophia. Although she seldom steps out of her tiny room or exposes herself to the real outside world, she never evades the ubiquitous and forceful patriarchal gaze of social morality. It not only watches over her behavior and that of her friends, but also regulates her thinking. Under its keen and forbidding surveillance, Sophia always feels guilty about her desire. She is so tortured by it that she eventually complies by denying her sexual desire and secluding herself from society. To borrow Lin Bai's book title, "One Person's War," what Sophia goes through from the beginning to the end is her own war. Her reason, which reflects her internalized Chinese patriarchal ethics, opposes her passion as a woman. Although the fight continues for about half a year and during that time her passion runs high and at certain times even pushes her to take actions to approach the man she loves, eventually it is defeated by the severe ethical rule deeply rooted in and internalized by her. Sophia's withdrawal symbolizes the victory of patriarchal ethics over her feminist consciousness.

Belonging to the generation of the 70s and indulging in xiaozi (petty bourgeois) lifestyle, Coco is consumed by capitalism, commercialism, mass media, globalization, and especially westernization. One of the most distinctive patriarchal manifestations in Coco's life is the male gaze that is entangled in all of the above phenomena. Although Coco poses as a social rebel and openly claims herself a feminist, her deep involvement with materialism makes her cater to, rather than shunning male gaze. In particular, this is enmeshed with her career as a writer. Coco thinks that being a writer distinguishes her from brainless beauties and aligns herself with feminists. However, she is also conscious that males comprise a large portion of her readership and that they are all gazing at her. In the beginning of the book, she writes, "Anyway, I am just twenty-five, and a year ago I published a collection of short stories that didn't make any money but got me attention (Male readers sent me letters enclosing erotic photos)" (Wei, 1999: 1-2). Although Coco does not

expose her body here, by stating her age as "twenty-five" alongside her male readers' response, she already suggests that she has a youthful face and body, attractive to men. This consciousness of the male gaze, invisible and visible, accompanies Coco all along.

Coco's ex-boyfriend at university stalks her after they break up. In the end, she has to call the police to chase him away. Thus, psychologically speaking, that pair of male eyes is always there. After she gets her book published, from one pair of men's eyes, they turn into multiple ones and from being threatening they turn into alluring and seducing ones too. Also, with her role changing from an innocent college female student to a beautiful woman writer and a secret lover of a western man, Coco changes her reaction from merely being conscious of the male gaze to accepting and even enjoying it. Eventually, in her relationship with Mark, Coco internalizes the male gaze. After she has sex with Mark before he leaves, Coco writes, "From start to finish he went to every length to wait hand and foot on the oriental princess of his dreams - his gifted girlfriend with waist-length black hair and sad, sensitive eyes" (Wei, 1999: 237). This paragraph is not uttered from the mouth of Mark, the western man, but by Coco, the Chinese woman herself. She uses his eyes to look at herself. What is more, she implicitly replicates the stereotype in all these power relations between men and women, West and East, and the first world and the third world. In other words, it is Coco who applies Orientalism onto herself. Although in the first sentence she uses the word "wait on" to imply that he serves her, her next sentence, which talks about her hair and eyes, reveals that she is only an object for him. Her affectionate description of her physical feature only heightens her own beauty and desirability as an object. Furthermore, by undertaking a third-person position, which she adopts as a neutral depiction, she objectifies herself in a double sense. Thus, unlike Sophia, who radically reverses men's power with her female gaze and subjectivity, Coco never escapes from her dilemma of being watched and being objectified. Instead, she is reconciled to it. She is aware of the male gaze and appeals to it. In this sense, Coco's self-conscious beauty, her pursuit of materialism, her petit bourgeois lifestyle, as well as her outlandish rebellious acts enhance and flaunt her attractiveness in the male world. Thus, ironically, Coco's "other" way of life as a butterfly does not defy patriarchy so much as it draws the attention of men's eyes.

Conclusion

From Sophia to Coco, it takes more than half a century for Chinese women to break away from the direct fetters of feudal families to become independent social beings who work side by side with men. In terms of the autonomy that contemporary Chinese women enjoy in society, in comparison with their early modern Chinese counterparts, the progress they have made can be linked to the metamorphosis made by a passive and prostrate larva in a cocoon, turning into an active and flying butterfly. To a large extent, contemporary modern Chinese women have fulfilled what early modern Chinese women had difficulty obtaining in issues of love, education, career, and freedom in society. Nevertheless, this progress was made "topdown" rather than "bottom-up." In other words, the Chinese women's movement was sponsored by the nationalists and the state at the expense of women's gender.

Chinese women were not passive or idle in the movement. Apart from participating in it, they have also tried hard to utter a feminist discourse that is not recognized or even suppressed by official feminism. Sophia is representative in this context. Although as a "new woman," she is still finding her way in society, nevertheless, she confronts the deficiency of the nationalists' official feminism

by revealing both her sexual desire and also the difficulty of coming to terms with it. If Sophia utters her first desperate modern woman's voice in the early twentieth century, then, Coco, a representative in the late twentieth century, echoes Sophia's utterance. Although it appears that Coco goes even further and undertakes even bolder rebellions as a modern woman, the social environment, in which she is controversially embroiled, renders her feminist efforts into a complicated situation.

Despite their achievements, neither Sophia nor Coco is free from patriarchal control. Rather, both are objects of such control in different forms. In the case of Sophia, this is manifested in the form of traditional morality that suppresses her sexual desire and consequently denies her body and alienates her. For Coco, it is the male gaze, which becomes the voyeur's eyes that turns her into a sexual object. Coco's freedom and boldness in revealing her body and fulfilling her sexual desire in both her writing and in practice, conversely, makes her cater to rather than resisting the gaze. Furthermore, in both Sophia and Coco's lives, they internalize patriarchal control and live their lives according to its scrutiny and supervision. Consequently, the freedom they have won is compromised by their conscious and unconscious yielding to this new form of power. As two representatives of modern Chinese women in the early and late twentieth century respectively, Sophia and Coco illustrate with their lives and struggles that Chinese feminists still have a long way to go.

Notes

1. These six essays include Chen Chunmei's (2007) "The Narration from Awakening to Loss: The Comparison of the Female Images in Miss Sophia's Diary and Shanghai Baby," Wu Geng's (2009) "The Subject of Love and Sex: The Historical Evolution from the May Fourth to the Contemporary," Zhu Xianyun's (2005) "Two Kinds of Texts of 'Body Writing,'" Song Van's (2008) "Differences Underneath Superficial Similarities," Sheng Xiaoling's (2006) "The Breakthrough and Sinking of Desire," He Mingqing's (2008) "Awakening and Sinking: The Feminist Consciousness in Ding Ling's (1928/1995) Miss Sophia's Diary and Wei Hui's (1999) Shanghai Baby," and Lei Haidong's (2007) "The Struggle between Soul and Body."

2. Anbin Shi thinks that *xinxin renlei* (newly new humanity), which generally refers to the generation born after 1975 compared to the "new humanity" born after 1965 in mainland China, "encapsulates a group of people in their twenties who take the lead in the urban vogue and indulge themselves in a sensual, carnivalistic lifestyle" (Shi, 2003: 134). In the preface to *Pink Expressions and Sentimental Blue Tones*, which is an anthology of the writings of ten female writers born after 1970, Ge Hongbing, the editor, comments, "The spiritual essence of our era is becoming more and more *xiaozi*. The materialist glory of *xiaozi* culture presents concretely a spiritual void that is close to 'nothingness' (*wu*) and that has a façade of everydayness" (Kuoshu, 2005: 92).

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