

# **ACTIVISM OF CHINESE WOMEN WRITERS DURING REFORM AND GLOBALIZATION**

## **Conference Paper**

**Sabaree Mitra**

Associate Professor  
Centre for Chinese & South East Asian Studies  
School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi 110067, INDIA

### **ABSTRACT**

Since the policies of Economic Reform and Opening to the outside world were initiated in China in the late 1970s, more and more Chinese women writers have started to use gender as a relational category to highlight bias against women. So much so, that they have gradually emerged as a social activist group raising issues faced by Chinese women today. This paper is an effort to contextualize the activism of Chinese women writers in the foreground of the larger socio-economic and cultural canvas emerging in China as a result of economic reform and globalization. To this end, works of representative women writers have been studied and perceptions of writers and critics analyzed to underscore the linkage between women's writings and the Chinese women's cause in general, as manifested in any given period of time through 1980s and 1990s.

### **Introduction**

Since the beginning of economic reform in the late 1970s, and globalization in the 1990s, Chinese society has witnessed fundamental changes, having far-reaching implications. Dismantling of collective ethos, giving play to greater individual autonomy, paving the way for socialist market economy, state withdrawal of employment security and welfare provisions are major ones among them. These changes have not only been reflected in the domain of literature, but have been instrumental in breaking well-accepted norms of portrayal and discourse. Chinese women writers, who have rarely used the discourse of gender in the past, have started to use gender as a relational category. By doing so, they have transformed into social activists engaged in revealing gender bias and possibly calling for change in public perception and perspective. With the Chinese women's organizations facing the ground realities and adjusting their policy and position, both in relation to the State and within the contemporary theoretical debates on gender, it is important to acknowledge and understand the new role played by a large number of

Chinese women writers. This paper is an effort to contextualise the activism of Chinese women writers in the foreground of the larger socio-economic and cultural canvas emerging in China as a result of economic reform and globalization.

### **Framework**

The organizing activities of the Chinese women have developed in response to the changing socio-economic backdrop in China. Therefore it can be said that in many ways this is a new phase in the history of Chinese women's movement and it is recognized as such by all across board. In this new period of Chinese history there has emerged a certain amount of flexibility in the functioning of the central structures of power on matters of theoretical formulation and practical implementation. Chinese women's activism today is already taking advantage of this flexibility by creating a fluidity in the spaces from which it negotiates. As has been stated in the Introduction of *Chinese Women Organizing: Cadres, Feminists, Muslims, Queers*: "Sometimes preferring to negotiate in the interstices, the spaces in-between; working from inside, but also influencing the centre from the outside; starting from the positions of weakness and marginality and transforming these into mobility and strength."<sup>1</sup> The term 'organizing' does not refer to fixed structural features of organization, but focuses on the content and process of activities geared to address gender and other related inequalities in Chinese society. In that sense it reflects modes of organizing activities that go beyond the classification of organization. From this point of view the women writers definitely constitute a significant participating group in Chinese women's movement today, in as much as it collectively explores the challenges faced by women using gender as a category of analysis. This is done in spite of the often dismissive attitude displayed by the mainstream of Chinese critics towards discourse based on gender and irrespective of repeated denial of many women writers about their 'feminist' stance.

### **Specific Objective of the Study and Methodology**

This study has endeavored to look at the linkage between the activism of Chinese women writers and the issues raised by the Chinese women's movement. In this specific context it has looked at how far the women writers have been able to articulate the challenges

faced by the Chinese women in the rapidly changing Chinese society. The method employed has been to survey the works of a range of women writers (on the basis of their views on gender, ideological stand and their acceptability to the establishment) and to interact with them on various issues related to gender inequality and discrimination. Of these, four women writers have been chosen, two each from the 1980s and 1990s, i.e., to have gained prominence in 1980s and 1990s, for case study. Their representative works have been analyzed to understand whether they reflected the issues raised and challenges faced by Chinese women during this period. This analysis has been matched / compared with the perspectives gained from women activists, scholars and critics. Some of the questions that I have tried to address are the following:

- 1) Have the Chinese women writers been able to break away from accepted norms of portrayal and discourse?
- 2) Do they have a conscious agenda to explore gender issues or do they have a gender-sensitive style of portrayal or discourse in all the themes they choose?
- 3) How do they perceive their social role/responsibility?
- 4) How are they perceived and evaluated within the domain of literature?

### **Chinese Women Writers in the 1980s**

Research on women's issues has become a very important aspect of Chinese academia since the 1980s. Having the potential of utilizing an inter-disciplinary approach rather successfully, Women's Studies attracted many women, and of course men, intellectuals to study problems related to women or having a bearing on women with a new enthusiasm. Thus research on women's writings certainly became 'hot' in the area of Chinese contemporary literature, criticism and theory, especially following the incorporation of feminist literary criticism and theory from the West. On the other hand, Chinese women writers, like their men colleagues, found this new open environment quite encouraging and started to use new methods, techniques and perspectives to explore women's inner self and consciousness.

The range of issues that the women writers focused on in the 1980s were not only many but there could clearly be seen a certain development of trends through this decade.

While looking in terms of trends lays this quest bare to the possibility of oversimplification, in view of the inter-disciplinary nature of this research, it helps one to locate the course of Chinese women's consciousness along the line of rapidly changing Chinese society and social relations. From this perspective, one could clearly distinguish two distinctive trends: 1) the existential issues of the Chinese women raised in the first few years of 1980s, issues that perceived society as a battleground with sharp gender conflicts and showcased the inner dilemmas felt by women through their struggle, and, 2) the sexual psychological issues and the essential features of Chinese women's lives in the late 1980s, and issues that witnessed a certain degree of weakening of gender conflict leading towards a growing acceptance of mutual necessity and coexistence.

One of the representative women writer of the late 1970s and first half of 1980s is Zhang Jie, whose works such as *Love must not be forgotten*, *The ark*, *Emerald* etc are milestones in the journey of Chinese women writers in the period of Reform and Opening up. What is significant about Zhang Jie's works is that there is a very distinctive style in the way she presents a women's issue or perspective. Moreover, one can discern a clear transformation in her creative perspective as a writer and in her theoretical stand as a woman from *Love must not be forgotten* to *Emerald* to *The ark*. In fact it is this transformation / transition that tells the story of the journey that the women writers have undertaken in this period. While in *Love must not be forgotten* one of the central women characters are constructed in the way men would like to see women, the women protagonists of *The ark* perceive life as a constant battle with the other sex for dignity, rights and other existential matters.

Written in late 1970s, *Love must not be forgotten* is a story of unrequited love between a married yet estranged woman with a child and a married man who pledged himself in the line of duty to the Party and the motherland. Here both the man and woman are 'politically correct' and mutually strengthens each other's resolve to live a righteous life, never ever considering the option of proclaiming their love. Given the historical period in which the flashback of the story is located, this is the way love was conceptualized and a modest woman was visualized ----- soft, loving, giving, understanding, silently

supportive and very significantly, content and fulfilled in giving. More importantly, the somewhat confusing mixture of patriarchal and socialist values expected and approved of these traits in a woman. The daughter, after reading the mother's diary, comes to appreciate the depth of love that these two characters have experienced and decides not to give in to the social expectation by marrying without love the most eligible suitor available.

*The ark* is a tale of three 'free, homeless' women, living together in the same house. These women have chosen to separate from their men to explore their free-self. The price they have to pay, however, is rather steep. First they have to survive the "utterly disgracing, half-dead half-alive" struggle of separation/divorce and then they have to deal with a whole range of reaction from 'society' ----- from gossip and slander, to constant unwanted and unsolicited sexual overtures from men who regarded all unattached women as easily available, to all kinds of sexual discrimination in gender insensitive workplaces and so on. What is more, in their own living space they have to do all that work that are normally shared by men and women in a household. During this process of asserting their right to equal free existence, these women protagonists more often than not are forced to live a de-feminized mechanical life. As Zhang Jie describes one of the protagonists: "What happened to her youth? She had passed it by so quickly; with barely a moment to enjoy its beauties, to love or be loved----Of course, ----- (she) wanted to remain young and beautiful for ever; but how could she find the hours needed - ---- In any case, if she chose to follow a career, then she had to be prepared to sacrifice womanly pleasures, that was an irreconcilable truth."<sup>2</sup> In the final analysis, however, the author conveys a message in the words of one of the protagonists that it is worth leaving a home (marriage) without love and dignity for a space of free dignified existence, even if it means paying this high price: "Nothing is more important than my work and our rights as women. I've had to sacrifice a great deal to gain these rights, and there are still plenty of women who are struggling for them. Women's liberation is not only a matter of economic and political rights, but includes the recognition, by women themselves as well as by all of society, that we have our own value and significance. Women are people, not merely objects of sex, wives and mothers -----"<sup>3</sup>

The journey that is witnessed from *Love must not be forgotten* to *The ark* is more or less the experience of Chinese women during the first phase of Economic Reform. Because of encouragement of individual initiative, on one hand, women (like men) did perceive a choice of action almost nonexistent earlier. It started with choice of not giving in to the expected norm of social behavior. This later broadened into choices in other spheres of life while continuing to explore the ‘inner self’, gradually asserting the ‘individual rights’ while viewing men as opponents, as men themselves emerged out of the uniform ‘forced’ behavioral pattern of gender equality and started to manifest many residual traits of feudal patriarchal values.

In the later period of the 1980s, the women writers tended to focus on the sexual psychological issues and essential features of Chinese women’s life. Representative women writers of this period are no doubt Wang Anyi, Tie Ning etc., who made their mark by exploring sexual love through emotional love and looked the issue of sexual content of love squarely in the face. This trend was very aptly rationalized by Wang Anyi herself: “If one really wants to write about human nature, there is no way to avoid love, when one wants to write about love, one absolutely must touch upon sexual love. Moreover, I feel, that if one writes about human being but not about his/her sex, then one can not express human being in all its totality, and also can not create the core of a human being. If you are truly a serious writer with depth, there is no way to avoid the issue of sex.”<sup>4</sup> It would not be an overstatement to say that a large number of works of Chinese women writers, especially Wang Anyi, Tie Ning etc. precisely expounded this viewpoint.

The four works of Wang Anyi during this period are *Love in Barren Mountain*, *Love in a Small Town*, *Love in the Beautiful Valley* (1986-87), known as “Three Loves” and *Century on a Hill* (1989). Of these works, *Love in Barren Mountain* revolves around two relatively happy households. The wife of one family and the husband of the other suddenly fall in love with each other and experience a strong physical attraction. They are aware of the enormous destructive implication of their love and yet are unable to control themselves, thus hurting other family members. Wang Anyi describes their almost

compulsive attraction in the following words: “The most important reason was very simple -----it was just at that time, in that place, meeting that person fit perfectly with her state of mind then and there.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, Wang portrays sexual attraction as non-utilitarian and impossible to be analyzed.

*Love in a Small Town*, on the other hand, is the story of a very ordinary young woman and man living in a remote small town and working in a small theatre company. They are not good-looking or handsome, and certainly do not have any special theatrical ability. However, it is just between these very ordinary woman and equally ordinary man, there develops the most intense sexual attraction, so much so that they search out places far from the madding crowd to fulfill their impulsive, biological urge. The sexual power relation is completely missing in this case as the alliance is described as a blind natural savage attraction between two equal living creatures. In this particular work, Wang Anyi follows up on the exploration of sexual desire in *Miss Sophia's Diary* written by Ding Ling in May Fourth period. Contrary to the character of Miss Sophie, who knows and acknowledges desire but waits for a man to take initiative, the woman character in *Love in a Small Town* opens new ground by doing away with the stereotype of passive woman. In the process, Wang Anyi rather effectively subverts the notion of male-dominant sexual power relations.

Wang Anyi's last major work of the 1980s, *Century on a Hill*, is the story of a young woman who actively pursues a sexual relationship to have access to material benefits such as work and a transfer to the city. Though the woman knows it to be not only a loveless act but an immoral one, there is no denying the fact that during their sexual interaction they did share ‘a century of enormous joy’. It is a brilliant portrayal of a woman, who just like men, can be active and demanding, can pursue her own sexual gratification. Wang Anyi, thus, very categorically does away with behavioral patterns of the male-dominated society, rejects the sexual taboo imposed on women and claims sexual desire as a means of expression of a normal human existence. As a scholar of women's studies put it: “Sexual desire is not only an undeniable natural human attribute and original impulse, ----- but ----- is a great driving force and beautiful manifestation/

expression of worldly life created by human beings ----- it is the last method/option of seeking empathy and a shelter for getting solace and warmth for more and more lonely human beings in present-day society.”<sup>6</sup>

One rather unsympathetic critic has mentioned: “In “Three Loves” and *Rose Gate*, we not only do not see that pure and pretty style, we also do not see that literary gaze that truthfully describes the emotional strength at the depth of one’s soul, it lies hidden in the aesthetic flavors/overtones of the characters. ---- From a certain perspective, “Three Loves” and *Rose Gate* are products of Wang Anyi and Tie Ning’s temperament that created for the sake of making a breakthrough and being profound.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed this particular critic is speaking from a traditional aesthetic perspective. But analyzing the issue from the progress made by the contemporary Chinese women’s writings in the course of its development, one can see the underlying significance. Women writers of this period, such as Wang Anyi and Tie Ning, have undergone vital changes in three aspects: they have portrayed sexual psychology of women; they have showcased the natural instincts of women’s lives; and, as mentioned earlier, they have reflected the dilution of antagonism between men and women who are gradually moving towards moderation.

### **Chinese Women Writers in the 1990s**

Undoubtedly the most important aspect of Chinese society in the 1990s was the manner in which the deepening reform policies and globalization started to have impact on social relations, to the extent that the very fabric of society began to be transformed. The process of individualization reached a stage where in many cases the individual became more or less detached from the larger socio-cultural frame of reference, and began to exist in a limbo preoccupied with his/her personal/private experiences. This was also reflected in women’s writings, so much so that the 1990s came to be known as the period of “women writing women”. Therefore it can be said that if the 1980s saw the inception of women’s writings, it was the 1990s that saw the emergence of feminist literature in true significance.



In the early years of 1990s the new trend or style in women's writings that made literary headlines had three distinctive features: they were personal experiences of individual women, they explored the deep psychological spaces within women, and they concentrated on expressing the consciousness of women in their closed hidden world. The most representative of this category are certainly Chen Ran and Lin Bai, who in the first few years of 1990s have published landmark works such as *Breakthrough*, *Private Life*, *No place to Bid Farewell* (by Chen Ran), and, *Battle of an Individual*, *Water in the Bottle* (by Lin Bai) etc. Their writings can be called personal writings on the fringe or marginalized personal writings. Writings of this kind (especially Chen Ran's) are often repetitive in themes, preoccupied with some deepest fantasies/obsessions of sexuality, and even described using the same expressions. Their writings are seemingly autobiographical and thus in the narrative style there is an obvious conflation of narrator-author.

Born in 1962, Chen Ran started writing in the mid 1980s around the same time as other experimental writers such as Yu Hua. There are many, wide range of Western references in her writings: from music, film, architecture, and certainly from literature. *Breakthrough*, the work that first brought attention to Chen Ran, is also linked to the rather unusual Western figure of former American president Richard Nixon. Considered the most radical of her works by feminist literary critic Dai Jinhua, *Breakthrough* dwells on two main taboos/fantasies of incest and homosexuality. They are enacted through two dream sequences of equal importance. The first sequence, in which Daier, the female protagonist dreams of her seduction by her father, is a denunciation of all phallic construction. It symbolizes a suffocating need to break away from the 'heterosexual matrix'. The other dream sequence at the end of the work challenges the necessity of typical heterosexual alliances. It liberates female sexuality from social taboos to explore homosexuality as a manifestation of female solidarity. Throughout the text, the interactions between the protagonist Daier and her friend Yunnan are replete with lesbian nuances and at the end of the second dream sequence the spilling of large luminous beads is meant to symbolize feminist lesbian fantasy.

In *Private Life*, Chen Ran has documented the secret experiences of a very lonely young girl and all that she has had to face to survive in a big city. Her experiences include the onset of puberty or the first menstrual period, her grief and pain, her clash and sexual relationship with her teacher, lesbian relation with a widow living in the neighborhood and so on. Nevertheless, fantasizing about a father-lover figure and yet exploring homosexuality remained a continuing theme in this work too. She writes as the narrator-author: “There was only one exception [to both beauty and talent in a man]: former U.S. president Nixon, both handsome and successful. What attracted me to him was, I discovered, that his noble nose, wide shoulders, and benevolent attitude corresponded very much to my model of a father. I would superimpose on my boyfriends this father image ----- this is a fault I have had till now.”<sup>8</sup> For this protagonist, the nature of sexuality is immaterial, as she is only concerned with the expressions of “I” in the endless scenarios of sexuality.

It is undeniable that Chen Ran’s works establish desire and sexuality at the very core of experience and reality; their expression is perhaps reminiscent of certain elements of capitalist (Western) cultural imperialism. However, Chen Ran perceives sexuality and/or desire as a phenomenon de-linked and disconnected from anything and everything. Her women protagonists are modeled as typical examples of this un-rooted consciousness, where they are unmarked and untouched by any social or national identification. Women in Chen Ran’s works are not only marginalized but in a way also symbolize a complete historical disjunction of modern Chinese culture with revolutionary ideology.

In the later part of 1990s, Chinese women writers’ works witnessed further diversity with the entry of very young writers into the literary arena. Some of these writers, such as Wei Hui and Mian Mian, were born after the policies of Reform and Opening up were initiated in China, and thus were not rooted in any serious historical memory. Their only point of reference was “I”. Representative works of Wei Hui and Mian Mian, namely *Shanghai Baby* and *Sweets* respectively, created considerable sensation in Chinese society both for literary and non-literary reasons. Since then Wei Hui and Mian Mian, and some more who were inspired by them, came to be known as ‘Beauty Baby Writers’

and their works were collectively termed as 'Body Writing'. This trend in literary writing, especially Wei Hui's works, created considerable uproar by its completely unheard of kind of dark 'bourgeois' content with no ideological/ spiritual/ philosophical mooring.

Some of the critics, especially those associated with criticism of women's works, felt that works of this kind, such as Wei Hui's and others' should not be considered as women's writing. Because, they felt, these works have completely ignored the spiritual need of women and respect for women's character (?), and, have actually accepted the male gaze and perception, to the extent that these works are mutated expression of morbid male-centric/ male chauvinistic consciousness. On the other hand there are other critics/ academics who felt that these 'body writings' conformed to the requirement of feminist theory. It is possible to argue from the perspective of women's cultural history that works of Wei Hui, MianMian and others like them have made definite progress in that they have broken away from the gender/sexual taboos found throughout the cultural history of women. That is to say that while in traditional culture women were regarded as sexual symbol but could not discuss sex, the women writers like Wei Hui have openly written about sex. This in itself is a proof of changing times, reflection of a rapidly changing socio-cultural milieu of China.

In the later years of the 1990s, because of the market mechanisms and the resulting reconstruction of gender by mass media, popular culture brought along a frivolousness of aesthetic style and loss of linguistic depth in many women's writings. But, there were some excellent women writers, such as Fang Fang, Chi Zijian and others, who continued to write great tales having deep connection with history and fate of the Chinese people. At the same time, there were some other very fine writers, such as Chi Li, Pi Pi, Zhao Ning, Wang Zijun and others, who wrote works that are easily understandable, of high aesthetic standard and attracted attention of the readers. All these writers entered society through the most fragile, quintessential / trivial of everyday life. They portrayed the most delicate and complex emotions of the inner being, they described the rapid transformation of this fast developing contemporary Chinese society. Compared to the male writers, while they were much more adept in writing about the real ordinary Chinese life of today,

these women writers have also become commercially successful and extremely popular to the general readers.

Chi Li can certainly be considered a representative of this trend. Born in Hubei province in 1957, she had graduated from Chinese Language Department of Wuhan University and worked as editorial of a literary magazine called *Fang Cao (Fragrant Grass)*. Since the late 1980s, she has been considered a pioneer of “new realism” and her works have been acclaimed for depicting the myriad shades and hues of ordinary life so much so that the critics have identified her works with Western school of “existentialism”. Certainly, it is this philosophy of ‘ordinariness’ that has endeared her so greatly to the readers that quite a few of her works have been made into highly popular films and television serials. All her works relate to very ordinary experiences of love, marriage, divorce and extramarital flings of contemporary Chinese life; her characters are well-crafted and endowed with very common-place human traits such as ambition, deceit, jealousy, sexual desire and so on, and above all, all her tales are told with an easy narrative style without any stylistic/linguistic/philosophical frills.

Chi Li does not necessarily have a gender-conscious style of portrayal. Yet her women characters are imbued with a sense of trials and tribulations of living in any small Chinese town where society reacts and responds to women with all the characteristics of a traditionally patriarchal presently post-socialist fast-growing market economy. For instance, Ji Ling, the woman protagonist in Chi Li’s award winning novella *Apart from Love*, is a young woman from a less than ordinary background and a disreputable neighborhood and she uses the usual tricks to climb up the social ladder and to ensnare the best possible candidate, Zhuang Jianfei, in marriage. Zhuang Jianfei, on the other hand is portrayed as a complex character with dubious morality and considered his wife a tool of sexual gratification and an uncomplaining housekeeper. Together they lived a life having different but definite expectation from each other and thus emerged the cause serious marital friction, so very typical in today’s urban Chinese society.

## Conclusion

It has been frequently mentioned within and outside China that China's "Open-door Policy" for "modernization" has paved the way for the entry of Western Feminism into and emergence of Women's Studies in China. While academic scholars in the field of Women's Studies have been open to ideas of Western Feminism, the members of All China Women's Federation (ACWF) have been critical to Western Feminism, regarding it as bourgeois individualism. This tension provided possibilities for re-evaluating feminism cross-culturally, which in turn led to the examination of the relationship between women's self-reflection and collective consciousness in the period of economic reform. While there has been a persistent debate on the usefulness of the concept "gender" (*shehui xingbie*), one point of consensus between the scholars and the ACWF, however, has been the need to focus on the women's self and collective consciousness.

It is quite evident that feminist literary criticism in China has emerged in the wake of a new wave of women's fiction in the post-1978 period, which in turn is an effort of the women writers to explore the multiple facets of women's self and collective consciousness. Because, before 1987 there was little indication of a body of knowledge on feminist literary criticism. After 1987, it became more noticeable with writers discussing women's liberation, valuing women's selfworth, and eventually appropriating semiotics, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction as political/methodological techniques for their work.

The survey of writings by Chinese women writers in 1980s and in 1990s reveal that there is a certain degree of shift in the way they perceived the gender difference in Chinese society, or the gaze that they used to unravel/explore the inner self or collective consciousness of women from early 1980s (i.e., first phase of economic reform) through to the late 1990s (i.e., period of deepening reform and globalization). However, rather uncannily, there has also been a certain trend in each phase, owing to the similar factors that existed at a given historical point or the conditioning that the writers have been subjected to through socio-political development of China. Having said that, one must also acknowledge that each of these writers has displayed an unique individual style of

portrayal and narration that is very Zhang Jie or very Wang Anyi or very Zhang Kangkang or very Chen Ran. Yet there is enough in their writings that can be termed as organizing activities or activism aimed at exploration of women's consciousness and exploration of issues facing them. From this point of view the Chinese women writers have indeed played a significant role in the Chinese women's cause, because literature is a strong medium of expression and a mirror of social change. Moreover, that they have been able to use gender as a category in literary creativity, is proof enough that they have been able to break away from the norms of portrayal acceptable in the classical Marxist literary discourse.

Right from the end of 1970s, when women's writings such as Zhang Jie's *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*, started making waves in China's literary circle, the issue of social responsibility has often been thrown by the conservative critics at the pioneering women writers such as Zhang Jie, Wang Anyi and subsequently others. With passage of time, a lot of the women writers persevered in their effort of reflecting gender-related issues either by exploring women's inner self and consciousness in universal themes of love and marriage (such as Wang Anyi) or by selecting women-centric style of portrayal (such as Chen Ran) or by laying bare the gender difference in day to day trivialities of contemporary Chinese life (such as Chi Li). No matter what is the theme, no matter what is the style, in terms of literary worth a whole range of women writers have left their deep imprint, their lasting contribution on the development of contemporary Chinese literature. Because, as has been gradually acknowledged by many literary critics, each of them is a very fine writer irrespective of their natural gender instinct or individualized gendered narration. In fact the debate about if and how the trend of individualized writing in the period of economic reform has helped the cause of gendered personalized account more in case of women writers than men writers centers on the very issue that whether it enhances rather than diminishes a woman writer's standing as a writer.<sup>9</sup>

Contrary to the criticism often received by the women writers about their lack of social responsibility, most of the serious women writers have explored sexuality or gender issues because they feel the need to do so with the changing times. As has already been

pointed out by Wang Anyi, sexuality is very much a part of each individual's existence, and to brush it under the carpet is to make do with incomplete and even incorrect depiction of human existence and social reality. It has been argued by some feminist critics and scholars of feminist literary criticism, such as Liu Siqian and others, that even the trend of 'writing with the body', as exemplified by the 'Beauty Baby Writers', is a method employed to emphasize two points: "one is that women dare to express the experiences of their own body, the other is to construct a kind of mixed innocent non-idealistic expression method that is very own of women. What is more, we often ----- overlook / neglect its more important hidden meaning, this is the very linguistic method that women want to construct."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, this can certainly be viewed as yet another substantial contribution to literary innovation.

It is quite clear from the survey of the literary works of representative women writers, and the review of the relevant debates and criticisms, that the Chinese women writers have been more than able to match their pace with the changing times and all that it meant for the women's cause. Today, they are bold enough to call attention to not only those issues of women that are recognized by the 'official' structures of power, but more importantly, to those that have emerged in the increasingly consumerist, globalized Chinese society where individuals are becoming alienated and commoditized at the same time. They are also reflecting the range of challenges that the Chinese women are facing, from the trivial, everyday rat-race to more profound deep psychological problems. That these issues and themes are food for literary thought and creativity, is clear proof of the consciousness, alertness, and therefore, activism of the women writers. Without waiting for 'instructions', they are proactive in choosing themes, that are capturing their imagination. They are not necessarily beginning with an agenda, yet making sure to dig deep to bring out the very core of Chinese women's existential, psychological and cultural dilemmas. They are painting vivid pictures of the diverse, complex, far from homogenous mass of Chinese women and by doing so, undoubtedly, they are actively espousing the Chinese women's cause, possibly more actively so than can be addressed by uniform, lineal, and sometimes unimaginative policy statements and measures.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Ping-Chun Hsiung, Maria Jaschok and Cecilia Milwertz with Red Chan (eds.), *Chinese Women Organizing: Cadres, Feminists, Muslims, Queers*, New York, Berg, Oxford, 2001, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Zhang Jie, *Love must not be forgotten*, Beijing, Panda Books, 1987, p. 139

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. pp. 211-12.

<sup>4</sup> As quoted in Jiang Hongyan, *Ershi shiji xifang wenxue piping lilun yu zhongguo dangdai wenxue guankui (20<sup>th</sup> Century Western Literary Criticism Theory & Contemporary Chinese Literature Perspective)*, Chengdu, Sichuan University Press, 2006, p. 140. Translation by author.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted from Yue Daiyun, *Bijiao wenxue yu zhongguo (Comparative Literature and China)*, Beijing, Peking University Press, 2004, p. 486.

<sup>6</sup> Liu Huiying, *Zouchu nanquan chuantong de fanli (Walking out of the Restrictions of Male Chauvinist Tradition ----- Critique of Male Consciousness in Literature)*, Sanlian Bookstore 1995, p. 125.

<sup>7</sup> Tang Xiaodan, “Xin shiqi wentan shang de shuangzi xingzuo -----jianlun Wang Anyi he Tie Ning chuanguo liubian qihe xianxiang” (Double Constellation in the New Period Literary World: Discussion on the Mirror Image Phenomenon in the Works of Wang Anyi and Tie Ning), *Dangdai Wentan (Contemporary Literary Arena)*, Issue 5, 1992, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Chen Ran, *Siren shenghuo (Private Life)*, Beijing, Zuojia chubanshe, 1996, p.152.

<sup>9</sup> Many prominent scholars and critics, such as Yu Kexun, Qin Jin and others, feel that women writers have been the greatest beneficiaries of this trend of subjective individualized creativity in Chinese literature during Economic Reform and Globalization. This view also came across quite clearly in personal interactions during my fieldtrips.

<sup>10</sup> Liu Siqian, Guo Li, Yang Jun, *Nuxing shengming chaoxi ----- 20 shiji 90 niandai nuxing sanwen yanjiu (Tide in Women's Life ----- Research on Women's Prose in 90s of 20<sup>th</sup> Century)*, Henan University Press, 2005, p.7.