

Taiwanese Communist Feminist, Xie Xuehong: Li Ang's Literary Portrait of Xie Xuehong's Pre-1949 Feminist Activism in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

In 2000, Li Ang simultaneously published both *Zizhuan no xiaoshuo* (*Autobiography: A Novel*) and *Piaoliu zhi lu* (*A Drifting Journey*). Li Ang defined her literary story about Xie Xuehong's life experience in three ways: first, a biographical story of Xie Xuehong's life; second, a fiction about Xie Xuehong's romantic love; third, a record of history. According to recent research, the first wave of Taiwanese feminist movements started in the Japanese colonial era and the second wave was the feminist activism that Nationalists' anti-communist political forces enhanced in Taiwan. This phenomenon seems to match the repetitive patterns that East Asian feminism's rise occurred under the supervision of male social activists and political-cultural reformers. Seldom, however, do researchers stress Xie Xuehong as the unique feminist part of both waves of Taiwanese feminist activism. This article aims to emphasize Li Ang's literary and artistic efforts to add Xie Xuehong's feminist stories to the first two waves of Taiwanese feminist activism.

INTRODUCTION

In 2000, Li Ang simultaneously published both *Zizhuan no xiaoshuo* (*Autobiography: A Novel*) and *Piaoliu zhi lu* (*A Drifting Journey*; companion travelogue). The former is a literary biographical fiction about Xie Xuehong's life. The later is a companion travelogue. Li Ang documented how she followed Xie Xuehong's footsteps to Japan, Russia and Shanghai.¹ This article aims to emphasize Li Ang's literary and artistic efforts to add Xie Xuehong's feminist stories to Taiwan's pre-1949 feminist activism.

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¹ Berry, Michael. *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, p. 234.

According to recent research, the first wave of Taiwanese feminist movements started in the Japanese colonial era and the second wave was the feminist activism that Nationalists' anti-communist political forces enhanced in Taiwan. This phenomenon seems to match the repetitive patterns that "East Asian feminism's rise occurred under the supervision of male social activists and political-cultural reformers."² Seldom, however, do researchers stress Xie Xuehong as the unique feminist part of both waves of Taiwanese feminist activism. This article, therefore, aims to remedy the above-mentioned oversight and emphasize Li Ang's literary and artistic efforts to add Xie Xuehong's feminist stories to the first two waves of Taiwanese feminist activism. So far Li Ang's literary works have not been the only artistic portraits of Xie Xuehong. In addition to Li Ang's fictions, there were several on-stage shows and even possible plans for movies about Xie Xuehong. For example: in 1994, Tian Qiyuan (Tien, Chi-yuan) directed his on-stage drama show entitled "Xieshi A Nü—yincang zai lishi beihou de Taiwan nūran" (The Girl with the Surname Xie—The Taiwanese Woman Hidden behind the History). What motivated Li Ang to write about Xie Xuehong was Chen Fang-ming's historical publication, and Li Ang also honestly acknowledged this in her book about Xie Xuehong.

OLD FEMINIST ACTIVIST RECORDS

Generally speaking, current records about Xie Xuehong's feminist activism seem to be still more limited than those of her political activism. Following is a brief list of some published information about Xie Xuehong's feminist activism in Taiwan and Mainland China. In March 1991, the Association to Enhance Peace after the February 28 Incident³ included Xie Congmin's (Hsieh, Tsung-min) interview with Xie E (Hsieh, E), and mentioned that Xie Xuehong's administrative title never reached the top in these feminist activist organizations. The interview implied Xie Xuehong's complexity in romantic relations, yet Yang Kehuang's *My Memory* indicated Chen Bingji's (Chen; Ping-chi) threat about Xie Xuehong's communist status.⁴ Politically speaking, Xie Xuehong was truly a political icon in her time because some news reports and comments mentioned that she was the "first female leading character" and the "first female revolutionary" of the February Incident.⁵

In 1992, a publication about the February 28 Incident recorded Xie Xuehong's Taiwanese feminist title during that period: Chief of the

² Chen, Ya-chen. *The Many Dimensions of Chinese Feminism*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011, p. 141.

³ This association was advocated and established by Zheng Nanrong (Cheng, Nan-jung; 1947-1989) in 1987. The president of this association is Chen Yongxing (Chen, Yung-hsing). The annual conference of this association is February 28. Members of this association meet to pursue the political rectification of injustice for people who suffered from the hurt related to the February 28th Incident. In 1996, Taipei City government and the Executive Yuan started the policy about the February 28th Memorial Day for Peace. After that, there are more and more news reports, public attention, memorial halls and press conferences related to the truth of the February 28th Incident.

⁴ Yang, Kehuang (Yang, Ke-huang). *Wo de huiyi (My Memoir)*. Taipei: Yang Cuihua, 2005, pp. 268-269.

⁵ Li, Dawei (Li, Tai-wei). "Ere r ba diyi nūzhujiao: Taigong Xie Xuehong" (The First Female Leading Role of the February 28th Incident: Taiwanese Communist Xie Xuehong). *Epoch Times*, February 27, 2007.

Taiwanese Women's Team Directly Under the Central Government (Wang, Shiqing, 7-10; Chen, Cuilian, 76-77).⁶

FEMINIST ACTIVISM, GENDER THEORIES, AND LI ANG'S LITERARY WORKS ABOUT XIE XUEHONG'S CHILD-BRIDE ERA

Before the age of 18, Xie Xuehong was too young, illiterate, poor, and resourceless to participate in collective teams or activities of feminist activism—except for escaping from her fate as a mistreated child-bride married to Hong Xinhua (Hung, Hsin-hu). In terms of anthropological gender theories, Xie Xuehong's escape from her status as a child-bride reminds readers of Rubin S. Gale (b. 1949), who published an academic article entitled "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex."⁷ Xie Xuehong might not have foreseen Rubin S. Gale's theoretical discourse; however, she happened to echo Rubin Gale when she recalled in *My Half-Life Records* that she was "sold" like a "desired product" at the price of 160 Taiwanese dollars. Li Ang even went out of her way to mention the Han Dynasty's international policy to exchange or "trade" Princess Wencheng and Wang Zhaojun with foreign kings for the "price" of warless peace.⁸

In addition to Rubin S. Gale, socio-biologists and other anthropologists adopted the Taiwanese-dialect phrase *simpua* (child-bride) and developed the theory that childhood familiarity would result in sexual disinterest, such as the unhappy marriage in cases of child-brides or cousin marriage. Edvard Alexander Westermarck, the theorist about *simpua*, argued that the experience of human beings or animals living closely together in the first few years of their lives minimize mutual sexual attraction. The research outcome of Arthur P. Wolf, Robin Fox, Joseph Shepher, and Anne Pusey shares Westermarck's belief.⁹ Xie Xuehong and Hong Xinhua's arranged marriage

6 Fulian zhìwèi (Executive Committee Member of the All Women's Association) was Xie Xuehong's feminist activist title after 1949.

7 Gale, Rubin, "The Traffick in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex." *Toward an Anthropology of Women*. Rayna Reiter ed. *Monthly Review Press*, 1975. This article also appears in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004, pp. 770-794.

8 Li, Ang. *Zizhuan no xiaoshuo* (Autobiography: A Novel). Taipei: Huangguan (Royal Crown), 2000. <http://author.crown.com.tw/lion/> (online data retrieved in July 2011), pp. 159-161.

9 Pusey, Anne. "Inbreeding Avoidance in Primates." *Inbreeding, Incest, and the Incest Taboo: The State of Knowledge at the Turn of the Century*. Anne Pusey and S. H. Durham ed. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005, pp. 61-75.

Spain, David H. "The Westermarck-Freud Incest-Theory Debate: An Evaluation and Reformation." *Current Anthropology* 5.28 (1987): 623-635, 643-645.

Also consult Arthur P. Wolf and Chieh-shuan Huang's *Marriage and Adoption in China*; Arthur P. Wolf's *Sexual Attraction and Childhood Association: A Chinese Brief for Edvard Westermarck*; Robin Fox's *The Red Lamp of Incest and Kinship and Marriage*; Edvard A. Westermarck's *The History of Human Marriage*, and *Marriage Ceremonies in Morocco*; Julian Huxley's *Multiple Origins: Edvard Westermarck in Search of Mankind*; Joseph Shepher's *Incest: A Biosocial View*, etc. With reference to journal articles or book chapters, see Carol McC. Fastner's "The Westermarck Hypothesis and First Cousin Marriage"; Barbara S. Kislitsky, Sylvia M. J. Hains, Lee Kang, Xie Xing, Huang Hefeng, Ye Hai Hui, Zhang Ke, and Wang Zengping's "Effects of Experience on Fetal Voice of Recognition"; David Spain's "The Westermarck-Freud Incest-Theory Debate"; Robert A. Paul's "Psychoanalysis and Propinquity Theory of Incest Avoidance"; Klaus Immelmann's "Sexual and Other Long-Term Aspects of Sexual Imprinting in Birds and Other Species"; Pierre L. van den Berghe's "Human Inbreeding Avoidance: Culture in Nature"; Arthur P. Wolf's "Childhood Association, Sexual Attraction and the Incest Taboo: A Chinese Case" and "Adopt a Daughter-in-law, Marry a Sister: A Chinese Solution to the Problem of the Incest Taboo"; Alex Walter and Steven Buyske's "The Westermarck Effect and Early Childhood Socialization: Sex Differences in Inbreeding Avoidance."

seemed to match the above-mentioned researchers' scholarly belief. Compared with Zhang Shumin, Lin Mushun, or Yang Kehuang, Hong Xinhui won far less romantic love from Xie Xuehong.

LI ANG'S ADDITIONAL LITERARY WORK ON XIE XUEHONG'S FEMINIST ACTIVISM

At the age of 18, Xie Xuehong traveled to Japan with Zhang Shumin (Chang, Shu-min) in 1919, learned Japanese, did business and lived in the Chinatown of Kobe, Japan, for a while. Although the young age and illiteracy might be bottlenecks of Xie Xuehong's participation in collective feminist activism during this particular period, Li Ang's fiction highlights at least two sorts of Xie Xuehong's unique feminist leadership: first, capacities to (re)name/(re)define herself; second, feminist empowerment in the erotic game of writing.

Capacities to (Re)Name / (Re)Define Herself

Li Ang's *Autobiography: A Novel* and *A Drifting Journey* both reverberated how Xie Xuehong (re)named herself: Jianü (Fake Female), A Nü (Female), Sulan, Yamane Toshiko, Xie Feiyang, Kurahoba, and Wu Bijiu.¹⁰

The capacities to (re)name or (re)define herself and act out herself as the active subject, instead of the passive object, represent the creation of her selfhood and the gender performativity of her own gynocentric genealogy. The highlight of Xie Xuehong's capacities to (re)name/(re)define herself happened to echo feminist theories related to Judith Butler's belief in gender performativity,¹¹ Michel Foucault's theoretical dialogues with Nietzsche about genealogy¹² and history, and so forth.

Feminist Empowerment in the Erotic Game of Writing

When Zhang Shumin replaced a pen with his penis to write on Xie Xuehong's body, Xie Xuehong was actually the true leader or instructor to strategize and direct the erotic *jouissance* (Luce Irigaray's feminist theoretical term refers to sexual ecstasy). The entire seductive game was actually Xie Xuehong's own *feminine écriture* (Hélène Cixou and Luce Irigaray's French feminist theoretical term to refer to feminine writing). Within the erotic game, Xie Xuehong was the guide while Zhang Shumin was Xie Xuehong's adherent.

The erotic writing game all over Xie Xuehong's body signified the multiplicity of Xie Xuehong's enjoyment of sexual pleasure and became the strongest feminist voice to talk back to patriarchal highlights of the singular focus on the male sexual organ. This writing strategy happened to echo several French feminist theories, such as Luce Irigaray's beliefs in the multiplicity of women's sexual pleasure against the single-ness of men's penises, *parle femme* (women's speaking as women), and so on. While Luce Irigaray argued with male psychologies that women's two (virginal) lips and diverse sexual

¹⁰ Yang, Kehuang (Yang, Ke-huang). *Wo de banshengji (My Half-Life Records)*, Xie Xuehong's verbal autobiography. Taipei: Published by Yang Cuihua, 2004, pp. 22-24 & 227.

¹¹ Stone, Alison. "Towards a Genealogical Feminism: A Reading of Judith Butler's Political Thought." *Contemporary Political Theory* 4.1 (2005): 4-24.

¹² "Genealogy demands consideration of the means by which 'dispersed, heteromorphous, localised procedures of power are adapted, reinforced, and transformed by these global strategies'" (Lyot, 443). Also consult theoretical publications by Michel Foucault and Kathy E. Ferguson.

zones defeat the "one-ness" or "single-ness" of men's penises,¹³ Li Ang's literary writing strategy awarded Xie Xuehong this feminist prestige to act out Luce Irigaray's above-mentioned feminist theoretical philosophy.

Citing legends about Fan Lihua and the Senior Goddess-Mother's incantation, Li Ang happened to "sinicize" Luce Irigaray's theoretical term "two lips": "We never forgot the mystic incantation. As long as the *two lips* were opened and the voice came out with vocabulary, everything could be involved—including life and death."¹⁴ This magic incantation of "two lips" was strengthened by Li Ang's strategic over-reading of the sexual infication: "As easy as the password about sesame, it opens the door toward the stone cave full of valuable deposits."¹⁵ Furthermore, Li Ang's literary portrait combined both male and female sexual organs in the sections about *santanari*. On the one hand, this echoed the feminist theoretical concept of androgyny.¹⁶ On the other hand, this paved the way toward Xie Xuehong's masturbation or auto-eroticism.¹⁷

In *A Drifting Journey*, Li Ang's literary metaphor about the Japanese harbor of Kobe and the Japanese-style dress, *kimono*, free from the hindrance of panties or bra to easily and care-freely access the sexual *jouissance* happened to match the feminist theoretical argument related to the multiplicity of women's erotic enjoyment and omnidirectional ecstasy.¹⁸ When Hélène Cixou highlighted women's seductive strategies, *feminine écriture*, and Medusa's power to "laugh away"¹⁹ the patriarchal naivety (such as the male-centeredness), Li Ang's literary writing strategy offered Xie Xuehong this feminist advancement to put Hélène Cixou's above-mentioned theories into practice at her own romantic boudoir.

Li Ang's literary adoption of mythological legends, *shelangjun* (a serpent transforms into a handsome young man and marries a beautiful lady) and *hulijing* (fox-spirit; a fox transforms into an attractive lady and seduces men), happened to reverberate the patriarchal focus on the powerful penetration of penis²⁰ during sexual intercourse and the feminist seductive strategies to counter-construct the dominating and male-centered power of sexuality.²¹ Simultaneously, Li Ang skillfully adopted the Chinese idiom *hongyan huoshui*

13 Consult Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which Is Not One*, *Luce Irigaray: Key Writings*, etc. Luce Irigaray also co-authored with Sylvère Lotringer and Mary Green. Ingeborg Ovesen also published a monograph about Luce Irigaray.

14 Li, Ang, *Zichuan no xiaoshuo* (*Autobiography: A Novel*). Taipei: Huangguan (Royal Crown), 2000: <http://author.crown.com.tw/llon> (online data retrieved in July 2011), pp. 177-178.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 190-191.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 225-230 & 236-241.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 225.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

19 "The Laugh of Medusa" is one of the most stereotypical representatives of Cixou's feminist articles. For more information about Cixou's, also consult the following official website: <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/helene-cixou/biography> (online data retrieved in June 2011).

20 Jian Qiru (Chlen, Chi-ru), for example, highlighted the ritual and sexual procedure of becoming a wife when comparatively decoding the Cantonese-Taiwanese comparative texts of Chinese legends about *shelangjun*. Actually, the *shelangjun* symbolizes the male sexual organ. For details, consult her journal article entitled "Cong 'chengqi' de guoduxing yishi jiedu zhongguo shelangjun gushi—ji yuetai yiwen bijiao wei zhuxian" (Decoding the Chinese Legends about *Shelangjun* in viewpoints of the Transitional Rituals of "Becoming A Wife"—Main Focus on Cantonese-Taiwanese Comparative Readings).

21 Li, Ang, *Zichuan no xiaoshuo* (*Autobiography: A Novel*). Taipei: Huangguan (Royal Crown), 2000: <http://author.crown.com.tw/llon> (online data retrieved in July 2011), pp. 50-53 & 275-277.

(pretty women with rosy cheeks as sources of disasters) to point out patriarchal tricks to turn the fox-spirit and women into a scapegoat for immoral sexuality.²² Even Li Ang's strategic over-reading of Xie Xuehong's sexual ecstasy or *jouissance* happened to reflect the Bakhtinian-style²³ celebratory spree of carnivalesque joys.²⁴

AFTER XIE XUEHONG'S LITERACY: LI ANG'S FURTHER WORK ON XIE XUEHONG'S PRE-1949 FEMINIST ACTIVISM

Women's Literacy

The proportion of most East Asian women's literacy was in doubt during Xie Xuehong's lifetime. There was no lack of well-known talented ladies with marvelous educational trainings even before the modern republics were established. However, the ratio of illiterate or uneducated women without outstanding family backgrounds was incredible. Xie Xuehong was only one of the convincing examples.²⁵

Financial Independence in A Room of the Career Woman's Own

After returning from Japan, Xie Xuehong became a career woman: both a tailor and a saleswoman of sewing machines (Yang, *My Half-Life Records*, 135-143). This financial independence echoed Virginia Woolf's "room of [women's] own."²⁶ With the luxurious delight of financial self-help that only the rarely seen top percentage of Taiwanese women could bravely afford, Xie Xuehong initiated, maintained and escaped from different romantic relations.

Glass Ceiling

Li Ang's graduate-level training in drama might remind feminist readers of Virginia Woolf's well-known theory about patriarchal social obstacles to hinder Shakespeare's sister's career. The globally renowned term "glass ceiling" will certainly join feminist readers' recall of the above-mentioned aspects related to Xie Xuehong's career and financial independence. On the job market, male communist peers' better accessibility to positions of power than women, such as Xie Xuehong, also indirectly echoed the feminist theory of "glass ceiling."²⁷

First Female Bicycle-Rider: Feminist and Sexual Metaphors

In *Autobiography: A Novel*, Li Ang mentioned that Xie Xuehong was reported in local newspapers as the first female biker in Taichung (Tai-chung)

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 275-277.

23 Consult Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*.

24 Clark, Katerina and Michael Holquist. *Mikhail Bakhtin*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984, pp. 297-299.

25 Outside of Chinese-speaking areas, even educated women were not taught to understand *kanji* (Chinese characters) or *hanwen* (Chinese characters) in Japan and Korea in the past; therefore, they were barred from access to influential documents, such as contracts, treaties, legal data, national policies, military orders, etc, at that time. Also consult Li Ang's *Zi-huan no xiaoshuo (Autobiography: A Novel)*. Taipei: Huangguan (Royal Crown), 2000; <http://author.crown.com.tw/lion> (online data retrieved in July 2011), p. 157.

26 Consult Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

27 Also consult *The Glass Ceiling Effect* and Federal Glass Ceiling Commission's *Solid Investment*.

Qingling in terms of Xie Xuehong's insistence on the same political ideal regardless of her lack of luxuriance that Soong Qingling enjoyed.

The Merger of Li Ang, Xie Xuehong, and Women

In addition to various pairs of comparison and contrasts between Xie Xuehong and many women, Li Ang established mutual connections with Xie Xuehong and even merged a part of herself with Xie Xuehong in both *Autobiography: A Novel* and *A Drifting Journey*. For example, Li Ang confessed that she was like turning herself into Xie Xuehong. She overlapped her footprints with Xie Xuehong's footprints, her eyes replaced Xie Xuehong's eyes, her thoughts turned into Xie Xuehong's thoughts, and her feeling became Xie Xuehong's feeling.³³

The experience in using sewing machines of "Singer" brand also linked Li Ang and Xie Xuehong.³⁴ Li Ang even moved forward to portray the crimson color that Xie Xuehong identified herself with.³⁵ Li Ang confessed,

Xie Xuehong, I still cannot choose to stop standing by your side. . . I see myself from you. We, you and I, to some extent, are doomed to be everlasting opponents or counterforce. . . For so many years, I have written my fiction according to your life stories. You lived in my creative writing and my life. You breathed my breath. Sometimes, I even felt that we were in chorus. Yes, in chorus, it is good that we were simply in chorus, not exactly united to be the same. But I am deeply afraid that you would enter my life and merge with me. I fear that I would see you again in your grave and imagine that your ghost, which is reluctant to leave, would stick to me. . . I realize how intensively you are involved in my life.³⁶

At the end of *A Drifting Journey*, Zhou Qing advised Li Ang that the permission for Li Ang to visit Xie Xuehong at the cemetery required Li Ang's kinship with Xie Xuehong. So Li Ang mentioned that Xie Xuehong was born and brought up in her hometown and was her remote relative. Li Ang said that they were cousins.³⁷ Li Ang stated, "I am no longer just a writer having you as the central figure in my novel. At that moment, you and I had blood relationship that endlessly connected us. . . You would forever have me. I am your cousin."³⁸ Furthermore, Li Ang remarked that she fused not only herself with Xie Xuehong but all the Taiwanese women in the past 100 years. For instance, in *A Drifting Journey*, Li Ang mentioned that one of the connecting points is women's yearning for the freedom and joys resulted from exoticism.³⁹

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-94.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 144-145.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 137-140 & 229.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 170-171 & 222.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 222-225.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 225-227 & 233-234 & 236.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 93-97.

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We greatly appreciate Professor Ya-chen Chen and *American Journal of Chinese Studies* granting us the permission to post Professor Chen's newly published article on famous Taiwanese writer Li Ang's work, "Taiwanese Communist Feminist, Xie Xuehong: Li Ang's Literary Portrait of Xie Xuehong's Pre-1949 Feminist Activism in Taiwan."