

**ACTA ASIATICA VARSOVIENSIA**  
**NO. 25**

ACTA ASIATICA VARSOVIENSIA

*Editor-in-Chief*

MARIA ROMAN SŁAWIŃSKI

*Subject Editor*

JERZY ZDANOWSKI

*Board of Advisory Editors*

NGUYEN QUANG THUAN

KENNETH OLENIK

ABDULRAHMAN AL-SALIMI

JOLANTA SIERAKOWSKA-DYNDO

BOGDAN SKŁADANEK

LEE MING-HUEI

ZHANG HAIPENG



Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures  
Polish Academy of Sciences

**ACTA ASIATICA VARSOVIENSIA**  
**NO. 25**

ASKON Publishers  
Warsaw 2012

Publication co-financed  
by the State Committee for Scientific Research

*Secretary*  
Agata Wójcik  
Olga Barbasiewicz

*English Text Consultant*  
Stephen Hedrick

© Copyright by Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures,  
Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw 2012

Printed in Poland

This edition prepared, set and published by

Wydawnictwo Naukowe ASKON Sp. z o.o.  
Stawki 3/1, 00–193 Warszawa  
tel./fax: (+48) 22 635 99 37  
[www.askon.waw.pl](http://www.askon.waw.pl)  
[askon@askon.waw.pl](mailto:askon@askon.waw.pl)

PL ISSN 0860–6102  
ISBN 978–83–7452–065–2

ACTA ASIATICA VARSOVIENSIA is abstracted in  
*The Central European Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*

# Contents

ROMAN SŁAWIŃSKI, Social Functions of Contemporary Confucianism; A Comparative Analysis of Philosophical Concepts in Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Mainland China .....	7
MAGDALENA CZECHOŃSKA, Body Linguistic “visibility” and “retrieved bodies” of the 20 <sup>th</sup> and 21 <sup>st</sup> Century in Chinese Women’s Literature and Art .....	21
IZABELLA ŁABĘDZKA, “Taiwanese Trilogy” of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan: in Search of Taiwanese Identity .....	33
BOGDAN ZEMANEK, War on the Empire’s Periphery: Asymmetric Conflict in South-West China .....	57
KARIN TOMALA, China: Neuer Machtfaktor in der Welt. Innenpolitische und außenpolitische Implikationen .....	71
TERUJI SUZUKI, Some Characteristics of Corporate Culture and Governance in Japan .....	89
BEATA KOWALCZYK, ‘Travelling’ between <i>Sakaribas</i> in Contemporary Tokyo .....	107
MICHAŁ MOCH, Memories and Identities of the Lebanese Maronites: The Interdisciplinary Research .....	119
BILAL GÖKKIR, The Role of State Policies in Modern Qur’anic Exegesis in Turkey: Case of Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır (1878–1942) and His Exegesis .....	133
AGNIESZKA AYŞENKAİM, <i>Sema</i> Ceremony – between Ritual and Performance .....	147
HAIFA ALANGARI, British Policy Towards King Hussein of Hijaz after the Arab Revolt .....	157
DOROTA RUDNICKA-KASSEM, The H̄aram Collection and It’s Importance for Studying the History of Jerusalem during the Mamlūk’s Days. <i>H̄aram 102: Study of the Document</i> .....	169
Notes on Contributors .....	183



MAGDALENA CZECHOŃSKA

## Body Linguistic “visibility” and “retrieved bodies” of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Chinese Women’s Literature and Art<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The notion of a body (*shēntǐ*) which is deeply embedded in Chinese culture is a point of departure for an analysis of the female body in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Chinese female authors and artists present a model of identity in which it appears as a means of self-articulation. The selection of works, that can only be partly comprehensive both vertically in terms of chronology and horizontally in terms of cultural breadth, is aimed at showing an enhanced awareness of themselves as women and of their bodies in both public and private spaces. The image of women that emerges from there are women that consciously claim the territory of body and authorship.

The encoding of body for questions concerning relations of thought to culture, culture to language and language to thought is of a great significance for understanding the context in which the notion of body *shēn* (*shēntǐ*) is embedded. Traditional Chinese culture and philosophy<sup>2</sup> marked the body as a hub of worldly interactions, the point of departure for understanding the self and the world, as well as the relations between the self and the other.<sup>3</sup> The *performance* of the body or classical conception of *xiūshēn* (self-cultivation) is a means of self-articulation similarly to the practices of ritual<sup>4</sup> or writing, music and art creation. Thus in classical understanding the place of the body in the process of self-cultivation is of

---

<sup>1</sup> Earlier drafts of this article were presented at the “Body and Person in China” conference held in University of Vilnius in June 2011.

<sup>2</sup> The author is referring here to the pre-Han period within Confucian tradition, and by extension, to Chinese thought in general.

<sup>3</sup> The conflict between body and mind or body and soul never appeared in Chinese thought unlike in European philosophical and religious context.

<sup>4</sup> Ritual *Lǐ* is translated into English as ‘ritual’, ‘ritual propriety’, ‘customs’, ‘etiquette’, and ‘rules of proper behavior’ among other terms. The ritual *lǐ* embodies the entire spectrum of interactions of humans, the state, nature and even material objects within prescribed and intersubjectively verifiable norms. This can be especially said of the time before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As the editors of *Body Subject and Power in China* have explained, “within tangible forms of the language and gestures of *li* subjectifications of people occur as they live and imagine their bodies”, *Body and Subject in China*, Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow (eds.), Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 10.

primordial importance. The body in question is a living body – a mark of the Confucian social self. The social aspect of the living body covers a shared level of discourse, transmitting and sharing the meaning with other participants in the community.<sup>5</sup> As Roger T. Ames remarks this irreducibly social place of a body in the construction of the entire person *rén* allow us to observe “(...) that a human being is a social product, defined not as some essential locus of potential or right claims but in the patterns and roles of social discourse. This stands in contrasts to the liberal and democratic conception of an ‘individual’ most familiar to us in our present historical period. In this later tradition, what is most significant and defining of person is acultural and ahistorical notions such us ‘human rights’ and ‘sexual equality’ that can be asserted as universals”.<sup>6</sup> The encoding of the body within social discourse of classical Chinese thought made it through the ages leaving a trace in language, that the pre-Han Chinese share with contemporary users.

### Chinese linguistic order and body

The examination of the language in which the notion of body – *shēn* is rooted can be traced back to antiquity and oracle bones – *jǐngǔ wén* where character *shēn* appears as a profile pictograph of the human figure with a protuberant stomach. Its literal meaning would be that of a gestation – *rènshēn*, *signifiant* of pregnant women.<sup>7</sup> It also stands for one’s physical being, frequently referring to one’s entire psychosomatic self<sup>8</sup>, one’s living body seen from within.<sup>9</sup> The lexicon of the latter Han (*shì míng*) identifies *shēn* with help of the homophone to stretch (to stretch one’s limbs or one’s body).<sup>10</sup> What provides additional evidence that *shēn* is a psychosomatic entity is mentioned by Roger T. Ames its phonological association with spirit *shén* and correlation between *shēn* and *rén*. The second one, according to its meaning undertones a ‘person’ with a connotation of the ‘other’<sup>11</sup> while the first one denotes a ‘person’ with an implication of the ‘self’.<sup>12</sup> The additional picture of this case may be provided with the pronoun *rénjia* that we can respectively translate as other, he, she, they and I.

<sup>5</sup> Roger T. Ames, “Introduction to Part Three: On Body as Ritual Practice”, in: *Body in Asian Theory and Practice*, Thomas P. Kasulis, Roger T. Ames and Wind Dissanayake (eds.), Alabany: State University of New York Press, 1993, p. 149–151.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.confucianism.com.cn/html/hanyu/11979465.html> (accessed 18.11.2011).

<sup>8</sup> Confucius associated the process of learning with the triple cotidian introspection of self/body *wú rì sān shěng wú shēn*” Verse 4 of *Analects of Confucius* Chapter 1, <http://www.zhuoda.org/suncity/14006.html> (accessed 11.10.2012).

<sup>9</sup> There are separate expressions for the body as ‘corpse’ seen from outside such as one’s physical body (*qū tǐ*), body-flesh (*ròu tǐ*).

<sup>10</sup> Xu Fangmin, *Shě míng yánjiù* (Research on Shiming), Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 1989; *shēn, shēn yě, kě qū shēn yě* <http://lib.jmu.edu.cn/departments2/magazine/philosophyvol/ch29.htm> (accessed 06.06.2011).

<sup>11</sup> The examples of culturally defined relations include husband and wife (*fūfū*), older, younger brother and older, younger sister, (*xiōngdìjiěmèi*), parents (*fùmǔ*) see also: Sun Longji, *Zhōngguó wénhuà de shēncéng jiégòu* (The Deep Structure of Chinese Culture), Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2004, p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> Ames, “The Body in Classical Chinese Philosophy...”, p. 165.

Further etymological associations of the word *shēn* show that we are dealing with the physical body as an important focus of self, “body of mine”.<sup>13</sup> The fact that Chinese thinking is concrete and bodily and that ‘I’ existentially is inseparable from a body-presence in which the belief itself is rooted perspicaciously as explained by Kuang-Ming Wu.<sup>14</sup> The evidence can be found in Chinese language where *shēn* is related to the self (*zìshēn*), oneself (*běnnshēn*), to the person (*gōng*)<sup>15</sup> or to life. The scope of verbs *shēn* relates to life and encompasses different cycles of it. Just to mention a few of them, *ānshēn* translates as to make one’s home, to take shelter, or to settle down. *Shēnshì* means ‘the bodies world’ and one’s life time experience. Others like *chūshēn* translate to birth, filiation, origin, family background, or educational background; *xiànshēn* means to «give the body», devote one’s life to, or sacrifice. *Fānshēn* means to ‘turn over the body’, to emancipate.<sup>16</sup> The body (*shēntǐ*) that emerges from classical thought and permeates Chinese language is processual. It is more than a substance or thought because it is not complete or accomplished but it is to be realized or produced through social life.<sup>17</sup> *Shēn* as a ‘body person’ is a ‘living body’. To some extent, according to semantic value of word *shēnfèn* ‘one’s body allocation’, identity is related to the personal status, to its background, position and seniority and etymologically to the body *shēn*. *Shēnfèn* is what makes entity (*shēn-tǐ*) definable and recognizable. *Shēnfèn* enable human selves conditionally, specific unities (*fèn*). Since the Chinese language itself provides us with an important reason it is justifiable to link the *subjectifications* to body as an area of investigation. They confirm that human beings are produced. The important Chinese body studies research “Body, Subject and Power in China” is accompanied by this argument. In the introduction the editors justify the applied function of subject positionality, which “(...) takes us beyond “roles” that presume a unified, unchanging “self” behind and anchoring the masks of social role playing, once again staging the individual (...) battle for authenticity against society. Subjectification builds conflict, loss, and absence into the very constitution of the person (...). Focusing on subject positionalities instead of “individuals” takes into account that selves are processual and that they change over ones lifetime experience, that one person can simultaneously occupy many subject positions” (woman, female, mother, daughter, wife, reader, consumer); and that these dynamics are constructed within an ensemble of social relations”.<sup>18</sup> Confucian thought encoded the body within its social discourse and imposed the power relations within Chinese language and society. Subject positionality enables us to look at the female body from a historical perspective that a lack of the category of generic

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> Kuang-Ming Wu, *On Chinese Body Thinking. A Cultural Hermeneutic*, Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill, 1994, p. 121.

<sup>15</sup> Semantic root (radical) of this character is body – *shēn*.

<sup>16</sup> The translation in parentheses are literal translations of words, other translations are from the *Chinese English Dictionary*, revised version, Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2001 and *Xiandai Hanyu Cidian*, Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> It links the notion of *shēntǐ* with Euro-American, 20<sup>th</sup> century critical theories that introduces a notion of person/subject as positionality, the acknowledgement’s of one position.

<sup>18</sup> Zito, Barlow (eds.), *Body and Subject...*, p. 9.

women would make impossible.<sup>19</sup> Female writers and visual artists, both modern and contemporary, are making efforts to revise the acquired knowledge within existing power relations. This is happening within (and not outside) society. They propose the perspective of personal experience and subject positionality where the body or more precisely the feminine body holds crucial semiotic function.

### Chinese women's bodies and marking of gender

Tracing its origins back again to the traditional Chinese script of *jiǎgǔwén* and inscriptions on ancient bronze objects *jīnwén* we have on one hand pictographic representation of a body as a human figure with a protuberant stomach, a possible synecdoche of a pregnant women. On another hand we have pictograph of women *nǚ* represented as figures with breasts, kneeling<sup>20</sup> or standing. Both of them evoke the physical presence and 'container' aspect of the depicted figure of women.<sup>21</sup> Chinese tradition perpetuated the objectification of the female body through thousands years of its history. There was no place for women in the project of *xiūshēn*.<sup>22</sup> Confucian techniques of self-cultivation applied only to men. Women were occupied with preserving and reproducing for the family body. Their own bodies were particularly disciplined for predefined goals of procreation. Their families put an effort to hide their daughters and wives' bodies from the eyes of strangers. This is evident in their confinement in their domestic areas,<sup>23</sup> as well as in their clothing. Women's daily techniques of body management included concealment and seclusion of the body in the spirit of propriety and devotion to the family. Chinese female bodies were seen from the outside as carriers of corporeal attributes such as propriety, gentleness, devotion and sartorial ones such as cloths, accessories, and make-up. Both of them were expressing a social and to some extent a moral status. Women, within traditional perspectives, because of a lack of capacity to achieve sagehood, were considered unnecessary in both their ability to reclaim self and body. Women's bodies were the only capital of theirs, or more

---

<sup>19</sup> Tani Barlow's study on the Chinese woman was a cornerstone in understanding different epistemologies in the conceptualization of the female subject. She claims that there is not a category of generic women in Chinese cultural context. The 20<sup>th</sup> century naming for the female subject denote respectively *nǚxìng* – the term coined within May Fourth discourses suggesting the essential feminine woman; *fūnǚ* collectivist women of Maoist ideology; and *nǚrén* – the contemporary post-Mao woman see: Tani E. Barlow, "Theorizing Woman: Funü, Guojia, Jiating" in: *Body and Subject...*, p. 253–291.

<sup>20</sup> Keeling was ancient way of seating for Chinese people see: Mao Zhicheng, "Shitan jiaguwen zhong de nǚ" (An example of reading the pictograph women) <http://school.ggedu.gov.cn/show.aspx?id=6694&cid=6440> (accessed 18.11.2011).

<sup>21</sup> Compare with the pictograph of man *nán* which is a cluster of two characters field (*tián*) and hand, strength (*lì*) indicating a meaning outside the figure, relating to the character of work the man was carrying out and qualities he needed to accomplish it.

<sup>22</sup> Traditional women's education of a selected group of women *guǎxiù* (well cultivated daughters of rich families) consisted of family based education, the study of Commandments for Women and Four Books for Women a relatively limited environment of social display see: Guo Yanli, "An Introduction to Modern Chinese Female Literature", *Sunkyn Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2003, p. 110–111.

<sup>23</sup> One of the classical, formal naming of women is an 'inside-person' (*nèirén*).

specifically of their families, with a precise marked value. One could describe someone’s daughter as a ‘thousand golden coins’ (*qiānjīn*) or one’s own daughter as ‘money losing commodity’ (*péiqiánhuò*). Premature loss of virginity devaluated the goods and was equal to a broken body *pòshēn* that translates as ‘losing one’s body’ or ‘sacrificing one’s body’. Deprecatory terms were widely used and referred to description or reference to women in traditional China’s patriarchal society. These terms were in a broad use and continued throughout the centuries. Just to name a few among others ‘woman’s perspective (which is to say) is narrow’ (*fūrén zhī jiàn*) and ‘woman is virtuous when she is incapable’ (*nǚzǐ wúcai biàn shì dé*) was abolished by Chinese government after 1949.<sup>24</sup>

The Chinese female body appeared in the public sphere within Western style education, work and leisure time organized by the Republic of China in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Along with raising number of literate women, the accessibility of feminist discourses, translations of Western literature, the overall project of women’s emancipation, together with the development of press and the possibility for publication, emergence of popular culture with cinema and advertisement brought forth a new model of femininity and thus new ways of displaying and representing female bodies.<sup>25</sup> New women (*xīnnǚxìng*) claimed their independence and female authors (*nǚ zuòjiā*) publicly voiced their opinions. The appearance of female authors disclosed the problem of representation and overt gender-marking with *nǚ* ‘female’ suffix terms for occupation that have traditionally been male dominated, and thus covertly masked as masculine. The phenomenon of feminine linguistic marker sets it off as another clearing path for generic or the neutral sex masculine form and brings about obvious implications for person-perception.<sup>26</sup>

The revolutionary shift of 1949, in turn, inscribed the female body within the state ideology, shifting it from the realm of family (*jiā*) to that of nation and country (*guójiā*). Originally a kin-inflected category of *fūnǚ* (woman) adhered to the ranks of state categories such as workers, youth or the proletariat (*gōngrén, qīngnián wúchǎnjījī*).<sup>27</sup> The female body under the Maoist vision of “holding up half of the sky” were uniformed in their sartorial expression and deprived of gender differences. Negation of the female self under socialism became another form of self-confinement. Their identities were marked political

---

<sup>24</sup> Cathrine S. Farris, “Gender and Grammar in Chinese. With Implications for Language Universals”, *Modern China*, Vol. 14, No. 3, p. 277–308; Yu-Hwei Shih, “Cong shehui yuyanxue guangdian tantao Zhongwen nannu liangxing yuyan de chayi” (A sociolinguistic study of male-female differences in Chinese), *Jiaoxue yu Yanjiu*, p. 207–229; Marjorie K. M. Chan. “Sound Symbolism and the Chinese Language. Proceedings of the 7<sup>th</sup> North American Conference on Chinese Linguistics (NACCL) and the 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Chinese Linguistics (ICCL)” Tsai Fa Cheng, Yafei Li, and Hongming Zhang (eds.), Los Angeles, CA: GSIL Publications, University of Southern California. Vol. 2, 1996, p. 17–34.

<sup>25</sup> In the latest research on the Chinese body inscribed in the project of Chinese modernity the emphasis is put precisely on body representation which enables to see how they shape live experiences of bodies see: *Embodied Modernities. Corporeality, Representation and Chinese Cultures*, Fran Martin and Larissa Heinrich (eds.), Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Farris, “Gender and...”, p. 283.

<sup>27</sup> *Gender Politics in Modern China: Writing and Feminism*, Tani E. Barlow (ed.), Durham: Duke University Press, 1994, p. 254.

and institutionalized by Fulian (The All-China Women's Federation), that monopolized all inscriptions of womanhood in official discourse.<sup>28</sup>

### Multiplicity of bodies

The dynamic history, of modern and contemporary China, viewed through the eyes of female writers and artists indicates a desire to unfix the meaning that the traditional patriarchy and state have inscribed on the female body. Especially that their contemporary practice provide us with a ubiquity of the body. The body appears as continuous both with the world and self, as a site ('here') across which artists and writers ('I') engage themselves (now) in acts of making meanings similar to what Kuang-Ming Wu explains as the Chinese body concept.<sup>29</sup> The expression of 'performance' of the body understood as a medium for self-articulation or in classical Chinese terms as '*xiūshēn*' is reacted within the literary and artistic creation of women in China. Photographs, sculptures, and text documents are an embodied trace of self as if "body (-ies) was (were) not to be compared to a physical object (-s) but rather to a work (-s) of art" as Merleau-Ponty argued convincingly.<sup>30</sup> They challenge the conventional fetishization of the bodies of women fully leaving them, what makes them the subjects and makes them the objects for the others proving their own their bodies no matter the subject positionality they embody in the particular moment of life. Their self-portraits or their autobiographical texts seem to reaffirm the bodies never ending "thereness", its refusal to disappear, its infinite capacity to render up the self in some incontrovertibly 'real' way.

This is through the body that the problem of representation discloses itself and that the conundrum of representations recalls itself most starkly. To point out this problem, before introducing several analyses of selected texts and work of arts of women authors at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries I would like to draw attention to four writing pieces completed respectively in the year of 1827, 1927, 1974 and 1979.

The story of Li Ruzhen "Flowers in the Mirror" is set in the reign of the Empress Wu Zetian who ruled personally the Empire of China in the turn of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century. The novel written in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is nowadays known for its contribution to the idea of feminism, as it prizes women's talents, acknowledges their social status and breaks the old concept that "women are inferior than men" (*nánzūnnǚbēi*). The hero of the novel Liu Zhiyang travels to many strange lands with "Land of Woman" (*nǚrén guó*) among others.<sup>31</sup> Women in this land are shown as successfully playing the social gender roles of males but what is more stringing is the representation of the main hero cast in the role of a male 'concubine' for the female ruler. According to this role he is forced to submit

---

<sup>28</sup> Lydia H. Liu, "Invention and Intervention: The Making of a Female Tradition in Modern China", in: *From May Fourth to June Forth. Fiction and Film in Twentieth Century China*, Ellen Widmer and David Der-Wei Wang (eds.), Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1993, p. 196.

<sup>29</sup> Kuang-Ming Wu, *On Chinese...*, p. 121.

<sup>30</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Translated by Colin Smith. New York: Routledge, [1945], 1995, p. 174.

<sup>31</sup> Li Ru Zhen, *Jing huā yuán* (Flowers of the Mirror), Beijing: Huaxia Press, p. 168–173; *Anthology of Chinese Literature: From Early Times to the Fourteenth Century*, Cyril Birch (ed.), Vol. 1, New York: Grove Press, 1972, p. 187–189.

himself to a treatment that would render his body feminine. Bathed, dressed in skirts with a powdered face, reddened lips and his foot bound he is waiting for the king/queen to come and see him/her disguised as a woman. This masquerade takes place off-stage which the male become aware of being considered as an sexual object, which renders him very uncomfortable. Li Ruzhen was one of the first to show that the roles assigned by social conventions on the basics of bodily differences and enacted through the protocol specific to the female subject position were, to a large extent, arbitrary. The reversion of real-life roles of the two genders show that women who turned into sex objects were denied both the full social personality and right to dispose of their own bodies. The representation of women, as disclosed by Li Ruzhen, concentrates on a certain discipline of fashion and invasive external treatments such as foot binding or ear piercing.

A hundred years later the reversion of subject/object helps Ding Ling to establish gender differences through discourse. The authors represents the legacy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The female narrator of “Miss Sophia’s Diary”<sup>32</sup> introduces gender differences into a text by taking over the authorial position and by casting the young man Weidi in the role of the reader of her diary.<sup>33</sup> In this short text she focuses on the female and female authors subjectivity. She is rejecting the dominant view in Chinese society and considerations of viewing women as a body. Her body, and the image of the body in the mirror are important points of departure to question the existing power relations in republican society. The explicit revolt against the objectification of the female body and stereotyped male-female relations has resulted in the problematization of writing and reading as a profound gender practice.

The way bodies are represented reveal a key cultural transformation. As mentioned the modern plea for a woman’s independence and recognition of the new woman was further appropriated by the Communist State. The revolutionary body of women, filled with symbolic value became a component in a collective structure represented accordingly in the literature of socialist realism. Seemingly equal gender distribution of the People’s Republic of China blurred all expression of gender differences. The emancipation (*fānshēn*) and liberation (*jiěfàng*) processes were veiled by the idea of total equality as can be seen in the constructions of the female models in so called “revolutionary operas” among other examples. The institutionalization of the female position within the *Fulian* resulted in the post-1978 era, rejection of feminism by women who before 1949 expressed a strong desire to position themselves against male (state) discourse on gender. The communist *fānshēn* and *xiànshēn* (*to sacrifice*) project idealized the female body as a carrier of revolution devoted to the state (*guó-jīā*) body and reproduction of the heroes of revolution. The Confucian vision<sup>34</sup> of the woman’s duty as protecting her body for the sake and prolongation of the family line in the spirit of filiality was “inscribed from now on with the symbolic value of women to give physical birth to this future if it is to exist at all”.<sup>35</sup> Any

---

<sup>32</sup> Ding Ling, “Miss Sophia’s Diary” (Shafei Nūshi Riji), *New Edition of Ding Ling’ Literary Work* (Dingling zuopin xinbian), Beijing: People’s Literature Press, 2010, p. 43–81.

<sup>33</sup> Liu, *Invention and Intervention...*, p. 201.

<sup>34</sup> Along with total negation and rejection of Confucian values.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Elvin, “Tales of Shen and Xin: Body-Person and Heart-Mind in China during the Last 150 Years”, in: *Body in Asian...*, p. 259.

expression of sexuality was replaced by uniform representation of a physically strong and healthy body. As Mark Elvin points out in his analyses of the Hao Ran novel, *The Children of the Sands* the revolutionary body is “a remarkable all-purpose tool and weapon, hardened in training”. Additionally he went on to say that it is “illuminated by Communist and patriotic faith”, while “the female body integrity once endangered does not finish in a suicidal attempt but in the sacrifice of her life in the name of the communist struggle”<sup>36</sup> as is the case of the main heroine of the novel – A Bao who will reproduce her mother’s fate for the sake of the communist revolution.

The new policies introduced in the year of 1979 found female writers in a situation of necessity to renegotiate their positions both in the society and the very *milieu* of authors and artist.<sup>37</sup> By their own choice female writers and artists positioned themselves at the margins of the so called “grand narratives”.<sup>38</sup> This took place while their male counterparts engaged themselves in critically reviewing the Cultural Revolutions past literary currents of ‘scars’ (*shānghén wénxué*) and ‘root-searching’ (*xúngēn wénxué*) literature. Zong Pu is one of the first authors to write about humiliation inflicted on the body, humiliation that pushes her to refuse any subjectivity by asking an excruciating question ‘who am I’. Her novel takes us back to the start of Cultural Revolution. The female character Wei Mi and her husband are horribly beaten by the revolutionaries. Their heads are half shaved and they are forbidden to grow their hair. Brought on by the verges of madness they, one after another, end up committing suicide. The resignation from the self, from life is intermingled with the living experience of her own body inflicted with pain, disgrace and humiliation.<sup>39</sup>

Autobiographical components of female creation is an important axis of their texts and work of arts, yet so is the body. The embodiment of the text, the omnipresence of bodily stages in art are palpable evidences for increasingly fractal Chinese identity. Chinese females contend with society and “the nexus of living meanings”<sup>40</sup> expressed through their bodies which “builds conflict, loss and absence into the very constitution of the person”<sup>41</sup> as they have embarked on the road of self-re-discovery, towards the construction of their erased identity. In the late 80s there is a new literary genre coming out, represented among others by Chen Ran and Lin Bai.

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 283–287.

<sup>37</sup> Zhang Kangkang expressed it plainly yet relatively late in her article “We Need Two Worlds” that challenge the view of the universally accepted truth that only men could be the writers, because they were not simply born writers, see: Zhang Kangkang, “Women xuyao liangge shijie” (We Need Two Worlds), *Wenyi Pinglun*, Vol. 1, No. 57, 1986.

<sup>38</sup> Dong Zhilin, “Nüxing xiezuo yu lishi jingchang. Cong 20 shiji 90 niandai wenxue sichao zhong de ‘shenti xiezuo’ tanqi” (Women’s writing and its historical scene discussed from the perspective of the 20th century 90s ‘Body Writing’ literary trend), in: *Dangdai zhongguo nüxing wenxue wenhua piping xuanze* (Selected Works of Contemporary Women’s Literary and Cultural Criticism in China), Chen Huifen and Ma Yuanxi (eds.), Guilin: Guanxi Normal University Press, 2007, p. 128.

<sup>39</sup> Zong Pu, “Wo shi shei” (Who am I), in: *Zong Pu jingxuan ji* (A selection of Zong Pu Literary Works), Beijing: Yanshen Press, 2006, p. 59–63.

<sup>40</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology...*, p. 175.

<sup>41</sup> Zito, Barlow, *Body and Subject in China...*, p. 9.

### “Female *Shēn-fèn* as Performance”

“Saying that I have a body is thus a way of saying that I can be seen and that I try to be seen as a subject”.<sup>42</sup>

The novel of Chen Ran “Private Life”<sup>43</sup> opens to the reader a private world of sensual experiences, to the former “inner chamber”.<sup>44</sup> The reader is invited to follow the emotional and sexual development of Ni Niuniu in her passage from adolescence to womanhood. The main protagonist’s family name and the given clarify her character and her very position in society. They can be translated respectively as the beginning and end of her family name and rivaling against, disobedience and rebelliousness for her namesake. Intense corporeality, ubiquity of bodies and body parts pervade the whole text. The main protagonist’s body, in the process of maturation, chronicles her inner life. However, contrary to what the chronicle may suggest, the book does not follow a linear path of narration. It is to a large extent fragmented. The first person narration is disturbed by the description of Ni Niuniu’s first heterosexual intercourse experience narrated in the third person. The saccaded rhythm of the text map out the stories from the past, the scenes of introspection reappearing repeatedly in the text. The body of it is interrupted with different ‘material objects’ such as letters, notes, medical history of the illness of the protagonist and traces of ink blot. When looking at the images of the ink blot left by the author on the paper, which shows very intimate relations with the writing itself, or when looking at scenes which resemble pictures, or when lifeless objects become animated by the imagination of the protagonist, the reader is expelled outside the text and is casted in the ‘role’ of the voyeur.

The verbal close-ups of the female body recall what Cixous has proposed to include in female writing.<sup>45</sup> She advocates when writing that, “personally, when I write fiction, I write with my body. My body is active, there is no interruption between the work that my body is performing and what is going to happen on the page. I write very near my body and my pulsions”<sup>46</sup>, has also become an important component of Lin Bai fiction. The monologue of the “One person battle”<sup>47</sup> is conducted in a very autonomous way, with persistence on first person narration. This “I” or “self” which is written introduces “I” or “self” confronted with multiple “selves”, “you”, “him” or “her”. This “I” voyaging into its interior becomes a plural one. The main protagonist is experiencing “I” in the living self/body. The presence is multiplied with its mirrored image. This important device introduces to the text the

<sup>42</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology...*, p. 193.

<sup>43</sup> Chen Ran, *Siren de shenghuo* (Private Life), Beijing: Zuoja Press, [1996], 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Pauline Yu identifies the theme of “inner chamber” as an important element to the song lyrics. The world derives from the translation of “poets of the inner chamber” (*guīgéshìrén*) in: *Voices of the Song Lyric in China*, Pauline Yu (ed.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994; <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft129003tp/> (accessed 24.09.2012).

<sup>45</sup> Hélène Cixous, “Śmiech Meduzy” (The Laugh of Medusa) in: *Ciało i tekst. Feminizm w literaturoznawstwie – antologia szkiców* (Body and Text. Feminism in Literary Theory – an Anthology of Essays), Anna Nasilowska (eds.), Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich, 2001. p. 147–166.

<sup>46</sup> As cited in: Kathryn Robson, *Writing Wounds: The Inscription of Trauma in Post-1968 French Women’s Life-Writing*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004, p. 62.

<sup>47</sup> Lin Bai, *Yi ge ren de zhanzheng* (One Person Battle), Beijing: Zuoja Press, 2009.

corporeal dimension. “I” of the main character is looking on herself, which is described in a very visual, palpable and often narcissistic way. Her look, her glance go through the mirror that accompany the main protagonist from early childhood. It appears and reappears to characterize her life. In front of her body she is not only in it, she is it. The intimate confessions of Lin Bai are very deranging for her critics.<sup>48</sup> Especially when she is describing love between women or when she reveals her passion for her body, its sensations and secrets. The author consequently engages in a kind of personal research which starts with the writing itself which serves to legitimate herself, as a writer and homosexual lover in a world dominated by men and dominated by one socially accepted kind of relation. The character of Lin Bai fiction access the self via visible corporeal form, a form they want to serve a guarantor of the body. The written self bourgeoning on the tip of the pen allows a woman’s voice to be heard and her body to be seen. Instead of being an object, unknowingly and partially exposed for the voyeuristic pleasure of the male gaze, the female persona is now a subject who consciously examines and admires her body. This freedom of writing and freedom of body expressions were captured in a short author’s introduction for another novel of Lin Bai “A Fatal Flight”. She explained the title of the novel in the following way: “to fly is an extraordinary state of being. To write is to fly, to dream is to fly, to enjoy art is to fly, to smoke marijuana is to fly, to make love is to fly, to not respect the rules is to fly, to overcome morality is to fly. All those flights are like gloomy passageways, dark and profoundly silent. To enter it we have to turn sideways, and put the world aside”.<sup>49</sup>

Overtly constructed self-performative texts have their equivalent in contemporary photography consisting of body fragments. A series of a dozen photographs entitled “Twelve Flower Months” (*shí’èr huā yuè*) (1999–2000) mark the first time an artist – Chen Lingyang – has consciously made the issue of women’s identity a primary concern. The work draws upon the resources of traditional Chinese culture as well as Western feminist tradition. The taboo of menstruation blood was first broken by second tradition’s artists such as Judy Chicago and Carolee Schneemann. Whereas still life of flowers evoke Song Dynasty female paintings. Finally, unusual shapes of the photographs resemble windows and doors open in garden partitions introduced by Chinese traditional garden architectural principles. They used to change the angle of perception of garden’s landscapes. On the one hand, the use of the windows move the viewer to the Chinese female secluded spaces mentioned earlier in terms of the “inner chamber”, into very intimacy of private space, and on another hand proposes a different angle of perception of femininity. The juxtaposition of female genitals, menstruation blood and flowers creates a very subtle portrait of a young female artist and her fragmented, not yet defined identity additionally expressed by the need to refer to both Chinese traditional and Western feminist tradition. This young artist manages to break into the tradition of representation as she represents herself by the twelve months cycle of the body. By time’s notion it is seen as linked to a larger cycle of nature. The work conveys the desire of the artist and image to render the body and thereby

---

<sup>48</sup> Referring to the Chinese language Shih notes that a use of profanity and taboo words would lower a woman’s social status, in: Yu-Hwei Shih, “Cong shehui yuyanxue...”, p. 219. The argument of obscenity and literalness of heterosexual and homosexual experiences in Chinese women’s fiction was used by male critics to diminished the status of female authors.

<sup>49</sup> Lin Bai, *Zhiming de feixiang* (The Fatal Flight), Beijing: Taihai Press, 2001, p. 2.

the self in its fullness and truth. It promises an unmediated access to the artist as an origin of the work. This work is both a reflection of the artist’s reticent personality and an artistic treatise on the subject position of a young female and artist, who by posing as an ultimate object is trying to be seen as a subject.

### Monument of the female body

In the recent production of art, body not only was explored in the sheltered, private space of women. In 2001 He Chengyao made a double interruption of her naked body in public space and in the mainstream of male art production when she spontaneously joined in an installation<sup>50</sup> of H.A. Shult presented on the Great Wall of China, which she called the “Opening of the Great Wall” (*kāifàng chángchéng*). The photographs documenting this action show the artist with bare breasts, walking ahead between the columns of German artist’s figures with a deadpan expression and self-confident attitude, keeping the red t-shirt in her right hand, followed by a procession of the others participants. The social context permeates He’s oeuvre. Her approach is particularly bold in a country, where nudity remains a taboo and where the body is culturally intermingled within its social living nexus. In her other performance work “Broadcast Exercise” from the year 2004 the artist interposed the themes of body and identity. In this particular piece she wrapped tightly her naked body in transparent packing tape with its sticky side outside. While performing exercises the audience was not only confronted with the naked female body but also with the ripping sound of the tape painfully suggesting the body being ripped open. The performed exercises resemble collective physical exercises she had carried out in her past as a part of a collective engagement that marked a shared experience of suppression of the individual body and the experience of a female body deprived of its basic gender differences. The body of He Chengyao exposed in multiple performances appear as the body of a female, of a daughter, and of a mother when she speaks openly about difficult, imposing and private aspects of her heritage. In her performance from the year 2002 entitled “Needles” she talks about mental illness that have haunted her family and stigmatized her family. Her grandfather suffered from the illness, as well as her mother who additionally committed a socially deprived act of having a daughter when she was only eighteen years old and not yet married. She performed the “Needles” (*zhēn*) as a homage to her mentally ill mother who was forced to have acupuncture treatment that was supposed to heal her illness. Many times He saw and heard her mother screaming and struggling against her “healers” without ever being cured. This unorthodox method imposed on her mother body was repeated by the artist who stuck 99 needles on her own body and face until she passed out. As the oeuvre of He Chengyao shows the body that does not convey significance but is filled with it. It is not sign of something but it is a sign in of itself.

Particularly interesting is also the rendition of the female body in the art of Xiang Jing.<sup>51</sup> The sculptures of which show the female body in its truth. From the antithesis of traditionally represented consumptional beauty of the female body emerges the laud critique of the condition of females in the Chinese social and cultural context. The analysis of her works

---

<sup>50</sup> The installation consisted on 1,000 life sized figures constructed from recycled consumer waste.

<sup>51</sup> <http://xiangjing.artron.net/main.php?aid=A0006310> (accessed 24.09.2012).

is like journey into the “nation of women” that is about to declare the independence of body that infers from the very existence and experience. There is no space left anymore for these female bodies that have been looked through history by the eye of its viewer and autocratic male creator. Xiang Jing narrates her protagonist’s bodies in the first person bringing to the viewer realistic life-like sculptures ranging from miniature ones to larger than life ones, cast in bronze or polyurethane. She portrays experiences of urban, contemporary women engaged in different social activities and depict them in different cycles of life. They are depicted sometimes as teenagers, pregnant or as elderly women among others. We encounter in her oeuvre women who are both naked and equipped with sartorial attributes which in spite of their synthetic look and mundane innocence bring through expressions of self-confidence interwoven with violence and a certain malaise. Hyperbolisation of the female body is one of the themes of her sculpture from the year 2005 “Your body” (*nǐ de shēntǐ*). The larger than life naked female figure is disconcerting in detailed. On one hand her radiating skin has an artificially pale finish, her shaved head and imposingly heavy body gives her doll-like, motionless presence. On another hand her penetrating and deadpan gaze downward with oppressive force, shows the inadequacy of reception and representation which bring alive the monument of the female body.

The recurrent motif of the self (selves)-reconstruction is apparent from the selection of texts and works of art discussed above. Women hope to redefine their subjects positions reflected by an increased need for a voice and identity in society. Close examination of the female body, as a synecdoche of the self, expresses an urgent issue to fully recognize Chinese females as subjects with distinct selves and bodies. The selection of works above, that can only be partly comprehensive both vertically in terms of chronology and horizontally in terms of cultural breadth, shows distinctively the enhanced awareness of themselves as women and of their bodies in both the public and private sphere. The image of women that emerges from there is the women that consciously claims the territory of body and authorship. The body appears simultaneously in the foreground with its politics in the background. By choosing to read the body from the background to the foreground we can see to which extent the construction of female subjectification is connected to the body in the sense of a ‘person’ and with an implication of ‘self’.

## Notes on Contributors

HAIFA A L A N G A R I, Independent Researcher from Saudi Arabia

AGNIESZKA A Y Ş E N K A I M, Department of South Slavic Philology,  
University of Lodz

MAGDALENA C Z E C H O Ń S K A, Section of the Chinese Literature and  
Culture, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan

BILAL G Ö K K I R, Faculty of Theology, Istanbul University

BEATA K O W A L C Z Y K, Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw

IZABELLA Ł A B Ę D Z K A, Section of the Chinese Literature and Culture,  
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan

MICHAŁ M O C H, Laboratory of Arabic Language and Culture, Kazimierz  
Wielki University, Bydgoszcz

DOROTA R U D N I C K A - K A S S E M, Institute of Regional Studies,  
Jagiellonian University, Cracow

MARIA ROMAN S Ł A W I Ń S K I, Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental  
Cultures of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw

TERUJI S U Z U K I, Department of Constitutional Law, Kozminski University,  
Warsaw

KARIN T O M A L A, Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures of the  
Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw

BOGDAN Z E M A N E K, Institute of Middle and Far Eastern Studies,  
Jagiellonian University, Cracow