

Ecofeminist Literary Criticism in Mainland China: A Window into China's Academic Globalization

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Abstract

Ecofeminism emerged in the mid-1970s in the West as a result of the dual challenges faced by women active in both the feminist movement and the environmental movement. It was introduced to China in the late 1980s in the midst of Chinese efforts to reconnect with the international academic world and was quickly embraced by Chinese scholars in the field of literary criticism. Since the 1990s, ecofeminist literary criticism has become an emerging academic field reflecting Chinese intellectuals' concern about environment and gender equality as a result of the country's fast economic development. This study examines the emergence of ecofeminist literary criticism in China and analyzes its characteristics and challenges. More importantly, this study seeks to show that as a discourse, ecofeminist literary criticism is a powerful intellectual force in China that serves as a window into China's academic globalization.

Key words

Ecofeminism, ecofeminist literary criticism, China, academic globalization

Introduction

Ecofeminism combines the theory and practice of feminism and environmentalism, and is believed to be coined by French scholar Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le féminisme ou la mort* (1974). It is a synthesis of feminist and ecological movements that shares their common social and political concerns about capitalist industrialized societies' treatment of women and nature. It goes beyond these two movements (feminism and environmentalism) to advocate using feminist and environmental principles to promote social and green justice and develop a new relationship that would give equality to all—humans and nature alike. Early

ecofeminism mostly stressed the biological similarities of women and the Earth's reproductive capacity and thus provided an essentialist explanation of capitalist industrialized societies' mistreatment of both. By 1990, though, ecofeminism had developed into a sophisticated and diverse intellectual discourse and political movement that promoted women's and environmental rights, social justice, and green consciousness, and social activism in the West and in some developing countries.

However, ecofeminism is a relatively new intellectual discourse in mainland China. It was not introduced to China until the 1980s and 1990s when the nation reopened its door to the outside world as part of its modernization efforts. Moreover, the introduction of ecofeminism was closely associated with the development of the study of foreign literature and literary criticism during the post-1978 reform era in this country.

Before the launch of economic reforms in the late 1970s and early 1980s, literary criticism in the People's Republic of China was required to follow the guidelines of Maoism and the Chinese Communist Party's interpretation of Marxism, which stressed class struggles and revolutionary analysis. Scholars' activities were very much controlled by the party state; political winds determined what research agenda was allowed and what could be said publicly. With the end of the Maoist era and the deepening of economic reforms during the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century, the Chinese academic world saw its own reforms and began opening as well. Especially as the nation's fast economic development brought about increasing ecological and social challenges, ecofeminism, with its intellectual and cultural diversity, critical views of capitalist industrial societies, and pro-social justice nature, has emerged as a fresh and handy new approach for Chinese literary criticism scholars. Ecofeminism has become a serious intellectual discourse in China.

Measured by sheer volume, it is clear that Chinese ecofeminist scholarship has gained a strong presence. An exhaustive search of the China Academic Journals database reveals that between the early 1990s and 2011 over 630 journal articles and nearly 200 Masters theses have been published by Chinese scholars in the field of literary criticism, especially foreign literary criticism. For what reasons has ecofeminist criticism been thus embraced? One possible explanation of this phenomenon is

that many of the Chinese scholars who have specialized in foreign literature have had the language capacity to read and become influenced by ecofeminist publications in the West. Another explanation is that ecofeminist literary criticism has provided a new and relatively politically safe perspective for Chinese scholars because many of the ecofeminist works in the West criticized capitalist industrialization for the destruction of nature and the creation of inequality in human societies. In this paper, I will discuss the emergence of ecofeminism in literary criticism in China, its development, and characteristics. More importantly, I propose that we treat ecofeminist literary criticism as a window for us to probe into China's academic globalization. Although China's economic globalization has been well documented, the same has not been the case for China's intellectual and academic globalization. This study employs ecofeminist literary criticism as an example to illustrate China's efforts at academic globalization. Despite the fact that ecofeminist literary criticism has become a vibrant emerging intellectual discourse in China, Chinese ecofeminism is little understood outside of the People's Republic. In this paper, I will introduce this field and place the study of ecofeminist literary criticism in the context of China's efforts at intellectual and academic globalization and Chinese scholars' efforts to connect the academic global to the Chinese local.

Ecofeminist literary criticism in China has developed out of the rise of ecofeminism and eco-literature and arts studies. When it was first introduced to China, some literature scholars immediately realized that its multi-disciplinary and inclusive nature would provide them with a new perspective and framework to broaden their research and deepen their ability to capture the social realities of the economic-reform era. One of the leading scholarly works on eco-literature and arts studies was Lu Ouyuan's *Eco-literature and Arts Studies*, published in 2000. Though its author aims at introducing eco-literature and arts studies in general, he devotes a chapter to ecofeminism. He notes that ecofeminism offers unique explanations about the relationships among women, men, and nature that can provide new approaches for literary and arts studies; thus, it is important for Chinese scholars in literary criticism to understand the connections between ecofeminism and their field (Lu, 2000). In the same year, another book on contemporary literary criticism in China was published by Chen Houcheng and Wang Ning. The authors

introduce ecofeminism and ecofeminist literary criticism as an important part of contemporary literature criticism in the world and call for Chinese scholars in the field to take note of and actively engage in this emerging scholarly trend (Chen & Wang, 2000). The works of both Lu and Chen and Wang marked the beginning of the rise of ecofeminist literary criticism in China.

Scholarly publications on ecofeminist literary criticism in China can be grouped into at least three areas: the introduction of ecofeminist literary criticism theories and development in the West, re-examination of classical and contemporary Western literary works by using ecofeminist perspectives, and literary criticism on Chinese literary works with an ecofeminist approach. I will introduce the three areas of study below and conclude the paper with a critique of ecofeminist literary criticism in China. Before I turn to the discussion of these four topics, I would like to introduce an interesting connection between Rachel Carson's 1962 book *Silent Spring* and ecofeminist literary criticism in China.

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and Ecofeminist Literature Criticism in China

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* has been credited as one of the first American publications to attract public attention to capitalist industrialization's damage to the environment and raise public awareness about environmental protection. Interestingly, it has also played an unintentional but important role in the introduction of ecofeminist literary criticism to China. When Carson's book was first published in 1962, China was under Mao's rule and there was very little interaction between the Chinese intellectual world and the outside world. Carson's book was unknown to the Chinese until 1979, one year after Deng Xiaoping launched the economic reform in China. In 1979, as a result of China's re-opening its doors to the outside world, intellectually hungry Chinese scholars who had been cut off from their area of specialty, foreign literature in particular, for thirty years, started to translate and study foreign literary works again. The international fame of Carson's *Silent Spring* caught the Chinese scholars' eyes and the book was translated and published in the People's Republic of China in 1979.

The translation of Carson's book probably was one of the first occa-

sions that Chinese scholars encountered the vocabulary and concepts of environment and environmentalism, albeit without fully understanding their meaning and perspective. Very likely, the Chinese translators selected Carson's book because it sharply criticized American capitalist society and capitalist industrialization, not because it was an environmental or ecofeminist book. In the 1979 Chinese translation, the translators stated in their introduction that they aimed to provide a reference book that would help workers, peasants, soldiers, local cadres and people who engaged in research and technological works gain an understanding of environmental sciences (Lu & Li, 1979). Because of the translators' lack of knowledge on environmentalism, the first Chinese edition included some translation errors regarding environmental concepts and terminologies. The translators also omitted some original statements by the author, the acknowledgment, and the references. The condition of the first Chinese edition of *Silent Spring* reflected the state of affairs of environmentalism in China in the late 1970s--a lack of understanding. Nevertheless, the translation of Carson's book helped initiate the intellectual re-engagement between Chinese and international scholars and the Chinese intellectual world and the global intellectual community. Environmentalism was one of the key links in the beginning stages of this process of engagement.

After nearly two decades, 1997 saw the publication of a new Chinese translation of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in China (Lu & Li, 1997). When Carson's book was re-translated this time, almost twenty years of fast-paced economic development and attendant environmental degradation had finally begun to gain public attention, and ecofeminism had become an intellectual discourse recognized by feminist and eco-studies scholars in China. "Green" had also become a fashionable word. The 1997 new translation of Carson's book was published as part of the "green literature" series by the Jilin Publishing House. In the introduction of the second edition, the translators stressed not only the book's value in promoting environmentalism, but also the author's position as a woman. The translators introduced Carson as a woman who bravely fought the very first battle against environmental abuses and envisioned a new future for human societies. Although Carson never classified herself as an ecofeminist, *Silent Spring* was the first publication that helped Chinese scholars to connect women and environment. In China,

therefore, Carson was perceived as one of the early ecofeminists. The 1995 Beijing Women's Forum featured a theme film, *Daughters of the Earth* by Liao Xiaoyi, a Chinese woman environmentalist, in which Carson was portrayed as one of the earliest and leading female environmentalists in the world and the film was highly popular among Chinese who cared about women's and environmental issues.

During the first decade of the 21st century, the Chinese edition of Carson's book was republished in China and the translators again revised their earlier translations. In *Silent Spring's* 2008 version, the translators included a Preface by Liang Congjie, an internationally known Chinese environmentalist and the founder of China's first environmental NGO, Friends of Nature. In the book's Epilogue, the translators further advocated the book's pioneering position in the environmental revolution and the author's contribution as a woman green fighter (Lu & Li, 2008). Ever since, the new Chinese version of *Silent Spring* has remained one of the must-read books in China as rated by users of the search engine *Baidu*, China's Google equivalent. The publication history of Carson's *Silent Spring* in China has showcased the landscape of the introduction and gradual development of environmentalism and ecofeminism in China as well as Chinese scholars' efforts at intellectual globalization.

The Introduction of Ecofeminist Literary Criticism theories to China

Chen Xiaolan, Huang Lin, and Wei Qingqi are recognized as the leading scholars who systematically introduced Western ecofeminist literary criticism theories to China (X. Chen, 2002; Huang, 2007; Wei, 2003). On one hand, they and other Chinese scholars have engaged in efforts to comprehensively introduce Chinese academia to the leading Western ecofeminist scholars' works, for example, those by Greta Gaard and Patrick Murphy (1998), and Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (1996). Simultaneously, though, they have also offered their own commentary on the significance of this new intellectual discourse. In this new discourse, ecofeminist literary criticism is introduced as being diverse, inclusive, multi-disciplinary, and multi-dimensional in nature. It is anti-dogma and anti-uniformity and able to provide various new perspectives to literary criticism in China (X. Chen, 2002; J. Chen, 2007;

M. Chen, 2006; Chen & Xiao, 2007). Thus, ecofeminist literary criticism contrasts sharply with the one-dimensional and class-struggle based literary criticism tradition of the Maoist era and has offered Chinese scholars in the field new concepts and approaches.

Chinese scholars see that ecofeminist approaches, such as ecofeminism's challenge to the idea of dualism while recognizing diversity and its promotion of social justice, not only could help reevaluate literary works in and outside China, but also help human societies reestablish new cultural values to promote harmony between human and nature and equality among all humans. Ecofeminist approaches therefore could broaden Chinese scholars' intellectual horizons and serve as a powerful agent for promoting social justice, especially green justice (Wu, 2008). Green justice is a global concern among ecofeminists; what Chinese scholars write and publish on ecofeminism could contribute to the world-wide green justice movement. Thus, ecofeminist literary criticism could, as Wei Qingqi points out, reconnect Chinese scholars with the global intellectual community and provide them with a platform to engage in scholarly conversation with international scholars (Wei, 2003). However, as I will further discuss later, despite the introduction of ecofeminism to China, Chinese scholars spent much of the 1990s and early 2000s mostly listening to and echoing the voices of Western ecofeminists without actively participating in dialogue, much less enriching of the development of ecofeminism.

Re-examination of Western Literary Works with Ecofeminist Approaches

The introduction of ecofeminist perspectives nevertheless has brought vitality and vigor to the literary criticism field in China in the 21st century. Armed with ecofeminist approaches, Chinese scholars have re-read many classical and contemporary Western literary works with fresh eyes and have discovered new meanings and interpretations they did not see and think of before. For instance, some Chinese scholars have rediscovered that Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is woman-and-nature-centered. In this novel, the main female character has a strong connection with nature and this ecofeminist relationship gives the protagonist strength and wisdom which enable her to overcome adversities she

encounters in life. The Chinese scholars see the rejection of androcentrism (a male-centered perspective) and anthropocentrism (a human-centered perspective) in Bronte's writing and thus, early signs of ecofeminist sprout in the author's creation of the main female character Jane Eyre (W. Wang, 2008; L. Yang, 2009). In Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* and Willa Cather's *O Pioneers*, despite the former's problematic racist undertones, Chinese scholars have discovered a strong mutual dependence between women and nature. They believe that the books reveal the connection of the fate of women and nature under patriarchal society; the heroines, Scarlett and Alexandra, consciously recognize the destruction of nature by the patriarchal society and actively resist its oppression. The heroines' strong relationship with nature—their farms, Plantations, and houses—gives them emotional strength, courage, and resolve; their loving and caring of nature show their authors' ecofeminist leanings (J. Li & L. Li, 2010; Y. Li, 2010).

Chinese scholars also see ecofeminist consciousness in Toni Morrison because Morrison's works touch upon the complicated relationship between human beings and nature, men and women, and different races and cultures (Xiong & Qin, 2009). Thus, Morrison's works embody ecofeminism's appreciation of diversity and inclusion. During the first decade of the 2000s, almost all the well-known Western literary works, from Shakespeare and Thomas Hardy to Hemingway (Sheng, 2009; Z. Liu, 2010; Xia, 2010), as well as Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker had been re-read by Chinese scholars with ecofeminist perspectives and interpretations and their reflections were published in a variety of scholarly journals (Chen & Song, 2010). From 2000 to 2011, over 380 scholarly ecofeminist re-examinations of Western literary works have been published in mainland China.¹ As it is impossible to cover all of them in this paper, I have only selectively mentioned a few of them here.

A few Chinese scholars have also employed ecofeminist perspectives to re-examine Western literary works on the subject of China, especially those that deal with Chinese women. In their studies of Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* and the book-based film, Chinese scholars recognize that

¹ The number of articles on re-reading of Western literary works is based on the counting of such articles listed in the China Academic Journals Full-text database by typing in 生态女性主义 (ecofeminism).

in many places the fate of A Lan, the female protagonist, is intertwined with nature—the land that the Wang family possesses. Although both A Lan and the land provide life for the Wang family, they are voiceless, abused, and owned by the patriarchal males of the family. The Chinese scholars believe that Buck's portrayal of A Lan and her relationship to the Wang family and the land contains an ecofeminist critique of patriarchal society's oppression of nature and women in China (Zhu, 2011; Mao, 2010). Using ecofeminist perspectives, the Chinese scholars thus find new meaning and a deeper understanding of Buck's work that they did not see before. Chinese scholars also eagerly used ecofeminist analysis to re-examine Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Bonesetter's Daughter* and find the dual repression of women and nature in patriarchal Chinese society and Chinese women's struggles against this dual repression, especially in Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (G. Sun, 2010; Cai & Shi, 2010; Song, 2008).

Worthy of notice is that some of the works of ecofeminist literary criticism by Chinese scholars are published in English in China and have become accessible to outside world. One example is Zhang Jie, an English and American Literature scholar, who published in English an article in 2009 called "An Ecofeminist Interpretation of the Birthmark," and then in 2011 another one titled "The Ecofeminist Interpretation of the Scarlet Letter." In her reading *The Scarlet Letter* with ecofeminist perspective, Zhang finds that Hester Prynne, the main character of the book possesses the spirit of "the care ethic" valued by philosophical and ethical ecofeminism. Zhang sees Hester Prynne as a person with a caring and generous heart who is always putting others' pain and suffering in priority to her own. And Zhang noted that Hester Prynne "...with a woman's heart, passionately protects those she loves and gives practical comfort to the poor, the sick, and the afflicted" (J. Zhang, 2009; J. Zhang, 2011, p. 7). In 2010, three other Chinese literary scholars also published articles in English to share their thoughts on the re-reading of Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* (Lin, 2010; Fu & Qiao, 2010).

Publishing scholarly works in China in English is an important step in globalizing Chinese academia in general and literature criticism study in particular. It would not only allow international scholars to become aware of Chinese scholarship, but also enable the Chinese scholars to

stand on an equal platform from which to have intellectual dialogue and cross-fertilization with international scholars. Ecofeminism creates one such platform and opens a window for international scholars to probe into the Chinese intellectual world in literary criticism.

Ecofeminist Reading of Chinese Literary Works

While the majority of the 600-plus ecofeminist scholarly articles found in Chinese Academic Journals examine European and American literary works, a relatively smaller number of them attempt to direct ecofeminist perspectives toward Chinese literary and artistic works. These works cover various interesting topics, including, for example, the study of Jingdezhen female porcelain artists' works. Using an ecofeminist approach, a Chinese literary critic found that during the economic reforms era, a group of Jiangdezhen female porcelain artists have emerged and gained more prominent positions in their industry because of their special female sensitivities and understanding of the beauty of the female body and nature. In their artistic creations, they are able to show and express in their art works the unique appreciation of female beauty and the beauty of nature, and more importantly, the harmonious blending of the beauty of the two (Y. Li, 2011). Although this kind of interpretation has an essentialist tone, it nevertheless promotes the recognition of female porcelain artists and gives these Chinese females' works visibility that was lacking in previous scholarship.

Nushu, a unique women's language created and used by women in Jiangyong County, Hunan Province, has captivated the attention and imagination of Chinese and international scholars for decades. The language has not only inspired scholarly works (Zhao, 2004) but has also become the subject of a national bestseller in the United States, *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, by acclaimed American author Lisa See (See, 2005). Chinese literary criticism scholars find that ecofeminism could help people better understand the origins of *nushu*. Legend said that because Chinese women, especially rural and minority women, were excluded from conventional Confucian Chinese education, the rural women of the Jiangyong area created their own language. The language and its form of expression were deeply inspired by nature, namely Jiangyong women's everyday life environment — beautiful rural landscaping, work-

ing in the field, and embroidering and singing folk songs while working together. The creation and use of the women's language demonstrate Chinese women's wisdom and creativity and the way in which they actively contribute to their own empowerment and the enrichment of Chinese culture. The *nushu* phenomenon, some Chinese scholars believe, confirms ecofeminism's rejection of androcentrism and anthropocentrism and values a harmonious relationship between human and nature in which the marginalized, from rural women to abused elements of nature, could be treated equally and kindly (Shi, 2011).

Using ecofeminist perspectives, Chinese scholars also re-read classical literature such as Pu Songling's *The Stories of Fox Spirits*, a Chinese classical literary work of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). The protagonists in Pu's stories are mostly beautiful female images possessed by fox spirits or ghosts who are victims of patriarchal society's injustices. As a result, while they "live" in the wilderness and are empowered by nature, they also constantly return to the human world to search for love and revenge. In his re-examination of Pu's work, Chinese scholar Qin Junrong shows the similarities of Pu's and ecofeminism's criticism of patriarchal injustice toward women and nature and their promotion of a new relationship between women and men and humans and nature. He notes how Pu's works echoes ecofeminist calls for society to transcend the constraints of social class, ethnicity, and gender as a way for achieving real social justice and harmony (Qin, 2010).

Chinese scholars also find that ecofeminism provides new ways for them to re-examine the works of iconic modern Chinese writers such as Shen Congwen and Zhao Shuli, and contemporary writers like Jia Pingau, Yan Geling and Lin Bai. All of these Chinese writers produced women-centered literary works with intensive narratives of nature that have attracted a large readership. Before the introduction of ecofeminism, narratives about nature in those writers' works were regarded as situational background descriptions, separate from human society and without much meaningful connection to the life and fate of the female protagonists in the books. Re-reading the above authors' works with ecofeminist perspectives, Chinese literary scholars have embraced new approaches to discover new meanings in them. For example, they realize that although these Chinese writers may not be conscious ecofeminists, they express many ecofeminist ideas. For instance, all of them connect

the beauty, strength, and wisdom of the female protagonists in their books to the specific local culture that is created by the natural environment they live in; many of them use the same vivid language and descriptions to praise both female and natural beauty. In addition, all of their works expose and condemn patriarchal society's abuses of women and nature; they champion women's resistance against these abuses as well as their longing for a new and harmonious human relations based on equality between different social classes, gender, races, human beings and nature (She, 2007; W. Liu, 2007; W. Peng, 2008; X. Peng, 2009; Wei, 2009; Du, 2010).

Ecofeminism has also been incorporated into Chinese scholarly film critique. Subjects have included the films of Zhang Yimou, the internationally renowned movie director, as well as some contemporary Chinese television series. Many of Zhang Yimou's films, for example, *Judou*, *Raise the Red Lantern*, *Yellow Earth*, and *the Story of Qiuju*, to name a few, are women-centered, and his works have been well-studied in and outside China. However, ecofeminist interpretations have gone beyond previous works' analysis of Chinese patriarchal society's repression of Chinese women or women's resistance against the repression. Ecofeminist perspectives have allowed Chinese scholars to view the female protagonists' suffering under Chinese patriarchal society and their resistance against it as part of the global ecofeminist rejection of androcentrism and anthropocentrism. Thus female protagonists' suffering and struggles are given a deeper and broader global meaning (F. Wang, 2010; Zhuang, 2008).

Scholars of Chinese literature criticism also assert that the introduction of ecofeminism has influenced the creation of some of the most acclaimed Chinese ecological literary works published in the 21st century, for example, *Wolf Totem* and *Tibetan Mastiff* (Jiang, 2004; Z. Yang, 2005). Both books are animal and nature-centered and use human-wolf and human-Tibetan Mastiff relationships to illustrate the degradation of the environment and the relationship between human beings and nature in Inner-Mongolia and Tibet that has occurred in the process of socialist revolution and industrial modernization in China (Qiao & Li, 2011). *Wolf Totem* has been translated into English and used in classrooms by teachers in the United States. The publication and the success of the books in turn, have attracted more Chinese and world attention

to China's ecological and environmental challenges as well as to Chinese writers' conscious effort in connecting Chinese environmental challenges to the global environmental movement.

Chinese literature scholars have singled out several Chinese literary works as standouts in embodying the influence of ecofeminism. Zhou Tao's "Twenty-four Plowshare," an essay on Chinese military farms' efforts in opening the virgin land in Xinjiang Province to development is one of the most cited. In this essay, when describing the use of machines to cut open agricultural land, Zhou writes "The tractor is as heavy as a tank with a non-negotiable attitude plowing the virgin land. The steel teeth of its track crashing the green grass and wild-flower covered Earth just likes a rough man with strong sex drive biting and leaving marks on an innocent young girl's naked body. ... It severely and meticulously rapes the virgin grass-land without any appreciation and playfulness of its beauty and purity; it destroys the innocent and mutually loyal relationship between Gongnaisi grass-land and the herds-people" (Zhou, 2006). Thus, literary criticism scholars see that Zhou's description of nature is no longer just background setting to introduce human characters, but rather a powerful exposure of the horrible abuse of nature by a male-dominated industrialization process. In this fashion, the author not only demonstrates his literary prowess to provide a vivid narrative to expose men and machine's invasion of nature, but also takes a moral stand and makes a social commentary to use his powerful words to condemn the abuse. Thus, Chinese scholars see an ecofeminist approach as making this kind of social critique possible and endowing the literary work with moral power and a noble cause (Qiao & Li, 2011) – drawing people's attention to green justice.

Chinese literary criticism scholars also find that several Chinese women writers' publications also fall into this category of ecofeminism-influenced works. Bi Shuhua's *Women and Clear Water, Paper, and Trash* is one of the most frequently cited. As Bi's work discusses, some local Chinese folk cultures believe that only women and not men have a special connection to water in the afterlife. Men, no matter what professions they engage in when they are alive, including those that involve wasting a great deal of water, are believed not be held accountable for this waste after death. However, women's lives are believed to be innately connected to water. After their deaths, bodies of water are be-

lieved to become an obstacle for them to reach reincarnation. As a result, women have to employ paper water buffalos to drink all the water in front of them in order to move on to complete the journey to the next life. Literature criticism scholars thus see that Bi demonstrates women and nature's special relationship (Qiao & Li, 2011). Chinese literature scholars see ecofeminism in Zhang Kangkang's essays as well. For example, in one of her essays she stated: "I strongly believe that only in a society where men and women both can obtain happiness can women's liberation be truly achieved." Zhang's ideal world is "an ideal society in which men and women's power should exist equally and be mutually checked." Only then could the two sexes peacefully co-exist in harmony (K. Zhang, 2001). The work of Tie Ning, another acclaimed Chinese woman writer, is also believed to contain ecofeminist ideas. In her story *A Pregnant Woman and Cattle*, a pregnant peasant woman and a pregnant cow accompany, care about and are amused by each other, as they enjoy the beauty and generosity of mother Earth together in a rural location. Their relationship embodies the harmonious relationship between human and nature (Tang, 2005). Ecofeminism enables Chinese scholars to broaden their perspectives and gain deeper understanding of classical and contemporary Chinese literary works. The broadened perspectives, in turn, have enriched the field of literary criticism.

Mainland scholars in the literary criticism field also use ecofeminism to study Taiwanese literary works on women and by women writers. For example, Taiwan female writer Zhu Tianwen's acclaimed urban-themed novel *The End of the Century Gorgeous* is regarded by literary critics as the author's personal milestone of her creative process that demonstrates the maturity in her narrative techniques and rhetorical use of imagery. Using ecofeminist perspectives to re-read Zhu's work, mainland scholars point out that the authors of previous studies failed to see the ecofeminist spirit in Zhu's works. Zhu's literary success, according to the mainland scholars, is largely because of her sensitivity toward women and nature, her concern for human life, and her consciousness about and employment of ecofeminist approaches to describe and understand life in industrial society. In Zhu's work, nature and human societies are all damaged and distorted by industrialization and materialism. Mia, the female protagonist in her book *The End of the Century Gorgeous*, though a fashion model, possesses ecofeminist caring ethics; she has her own

understanding and a close relationship with nature and is profoundly inspired by nature in her sense of fashion. Respecting and loving nature gives Mia beauty, wisdom, and courage to challenge the distorted urban society in her own way (Y. Wang, 2010). When introducing Taiwan ecofeminist literary works, such as those by Zhu Tianwen, the mainland scholars also realize that ecofeminist literature has a longer history and stronger tradition in Taiwan than in the mainland. Therefore they write about Taiwanese ecofeminist literature with admiration and hold Taiwanese works up as examples that the mainland literary world should learn from (Y. Wang, 2010). Ecofeminism thus serves as a shared intellectual idea and discourse that draws the mainland scholars and Taiwan writers together.

Critique of Ecofeminist Literary Criticism in China

Although ecofeminism has made impressive inroads into the literary criticism field in China over the past 30 years, it nevertheless retains its own problems and challenges. First, although a relatively large number of scholarly articles employing ecofeminist literary criticism have been published in Chinese academic journals, most of them simply echo existing Western scholars' voices and use ecofeminist theories and approaches developed by Western scholars as tools to conduct their works. Most of the scholarly articles published in China on ecofeminist literary criticism are on re-reading existing Western classical and contemporary literary works. Relatively few of them try to direct the same critical lens at Chinese literature, and only a handful attempt to engage in theoretical discussion of the development and advancement of ecofeminist theory. Many of the published Chinese articles on ecofeminist literary criticism have the same title of re-reading so and so's work, for example, "Reading Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* from an Ecofeminist Perspective."

Second, Chinese literary criticism scholars' adoption of ecofeminist theories and approaches is in many cases selective. Most of the articles simply select one or more fitting ecofeminist perspectives and apply them to the literary works their research is focused on. In many cases, they either use a piece of Western or Chinese literary work to support one of the ecofeminist theories or apply one of the ecofeminist theories

to analyze a Chinese or Western literary piece. Most of their studies simply employ the rather essentialist approach of noting that women and nature have a special bond because both have the capability to reproduce. This phenomenon reflects some Chinese scholars' lack of a comprehensive understanding of ecofeminism; they have simply used ecofeminism as fashionable scholarly wrapping paper for publication of their works in academic journals. In addition, those Chinese writers who have used ecofeminist approaches to create original literary works are a minority.

Third, the Chinese scholars tend to shy away from discussing controversial, contested, or competing theories or issues in ecofeminism; as a result, the introduction of ecofeminism literary criticism in China has not yet inspired new sparks in this genre in significant ways. As the Chinese scholar Liu Qian has pointed out, in some case the existing Chinese scholarly works on ecofeminist literary criticism are not truly ecofeminist because they tend to focus either on an "eco" or on a "feminist" approach but not both. This shows that many self-claimed ecofeminist scholars in China still lack a full understanding of the principles of the intellectual discourse—the dual connection between ecological and feminist concerns and the diverse approaches to addressing these concerns in tandem (Q. Liu, 2009).

Fourth, an important challenge faced by Chinese ecofeminist scholars in literary criticism is how to indigenize an imported Western intellectual discourse and give it a Chinese life, not simply one that apes Western scholars. If Chinese scholars wish to develop an ecofeminist discourse with local resonance, then it will be crucial for them to strike a balance between ecofeminism's universal principles and Chinese reality. In the process, this would also enrich the theory and practice of ecofeminism globally and promote awareness of gender equality and environmental protection and sustainable development in China and the world.

Conclusion: The State of Affairs of Ecofeminist Literary Criticism in China

Despite the challenges and concerns that continue to exist in Chinese ecofeminist literary criticism, Chinese scholars believe that ecofeminist literary criticism theories have still made contributions to widening their

intellectual horizons, broadening their research agenda, and increasing their scholarly capacity. As two Chinese ecofeminist literary critics summarize, although ecofeminist literary criticism is aimed at liberating nature and women, in effect, the process also liberates literature and the literary criticism fields themselves in China (Luo & Xie, 2004, p. 178).

Chinese scholars recognize that ecofeminism has contributed to Chinese literary criticism in at least three areas. First, because of ecofeminism's diverse theories and approaches, the introduction of ecofeminist literary criticism from the West has helped Chinese literary critics to diversify their research and thus deepen, broaden, and enrich the Chinese literary criticism field. The introduction of the Western ecofeminist literary criticism provides Chinese scholars with new literary critique language, concepts, framework, and methodology for their work. For example, Wei Qingqi, one of the leading Chinese scholars in ecofeminist literary criticism, comments that ecofeminism provides a new direction and a new discourse for Chinese literary criticism and helps some previously less noticed literary works to receive proper recognition under the spotlight. Ecofeminism plays an important role in the re-evaluation and re-appreciation of classical and modern Chinese literatures (Wei, 2006). It aids the expansion of the Chinese literary criticism field and the rise of previously marginalized and peripheral literary works, especially those by women and minorities in China (D. Liu, 2006). Even scholars who are critical of ecofeminist literary criticism in China recognize that it has created a new genre and enriched the Chinese literary criticism field (Q. Liu, 2009).

Second, the introduction of ecofeminism to Chinese literary criticism has helped strengthen feminist literary criticism. As one Chinese scholar has maintained, ecofeminism has helped to shift feminist literary criticism from the margins of the field toward its center and has helped broaden our theoretical understanding of domination and oppression from human to human to include human to nature as well (H. Sun, 2009). In addition to the conventional feminist approach in Chinese literary criticism that stresses the intersection of gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, ecofeminism adds nature and the relationship between humans and nature into the intersectional discourse. To some Chinese ecofeminist scholars, ecofeminism is an earthshaking new philosophy. It aims at changing a world view that was built on patriarchal domination

and provides them with a new philosophy based on the belief of respect, inclusiveness, and diversity that allows them to see the world critically and holistically. Armed with this philosophy, Chinese writers and scholars of literary criticism have been able to use their works to promote better understandings about China's gendered social challenges and environmental problems, and more importantly, help motivate the search for solutions for those problems (H. Sun, 2009; Chen & Xiao, 2007). In these ways, ecofeminist literary criticism has given Chinese scholars and their scholarly works a higher calling and has elevated their scholarly engagement to national and international importance.

Finally, China's current economic reforms and globalization have created a new set of gendered social problems and environmental degradation that neither the Maoist Chinese intellectual legacy nor Deng's neoliberalism could provide adequate explanations and solutions for. While China has globalized its economy over the past thirty years, Chinese scholars have also consciously paid attention to global intellectual trends and have been open to outside intellectual development. More importantly, Chinese scholars have demonstrated that they are willing and capable to connect academic global to Chinese local. Ecofeminism, endowed with the combined power of both feminism and environmentalism, offers a possibility for harmonious relations among self, society, and nature (Birkeland, 2010, p. 18) and provides Chinese scholars with an intellectual alternative to understanding the challenges contemporary China faces. Ecofeminism has not only enriched China's literary criticism field but also has offered a platform for Chinese scholars to have equal intellectual dialogue with international scholars using shared language and concepts, allowing Chinese scholars in literary criticism field to have their voices heard in the global academic world (Wei, 2006). The rise and development of ecofeminist literary criticism in China has thus opened a window for us to peer into the process of China's academic globalization.

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