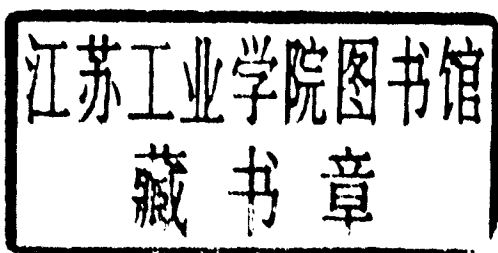


Chinese Women Writers and the Feminist Imagination, 1905-1948

Yan Haiping

Chinese Women Writers and the Feminist Imagination, 1905–1948

Yan Haiping



First published 2006
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2006 Yan Haiping

Typeset in Baskerville by Taylor & Francis Books Ltd
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham, Wiltshire

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Yan, Haiping.

Chinese women writers and the feminist imagination / by Yan Haiping.

p. cm. -- (Asia's transformations)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-415-23288-0 (hardback : alk. paper) 1. Chinese literature--Women authors--History and criticism. 2. Chinese literature--20th century--History and criticism. 3. Feminism in literature. I. Title. II. Series.

PL2278.Y36 2005

895.l'099287'0904--dc22

2005016118

ISBN10: 0-415-23288-0

ISBN13: 978-0-415-23288-3

Chinese Women Writers and the Feminist Imagination, 1905–1948

Chinese Women Writers and the Feminist Imagination, 1905–1948 provides a compelling study of leading women writers in modern China, charting their literary works and life journeys to examine the politics and poetics of Chinese transcultural feminism that exceed the boundaries of bourgeois feminist selfhood.

Unlike recent literary studies that focus on the discursive formation of the modern Chinese nation state and its gendering effects, Yan explores the radical degrees to which Chinese women writers re-invented their lives alongside their writings in distinctly conditioned and fundamentally revolutionary ways.

The book draws on these women's voluminous works and dramatic lives to illuminate the range of Chinese women's literary and artistic achievements and offers vital sources for exploring the history and legacy of twentieth-century Chinese feminist consciousness and its centrality in the Chinese Revolution. It will be of great interest to scholars of gender studies, literary and cultural studies and performance studies.

Yan Haiping is Associate Professor of Critical Studies at the School of Theatre, Film and Television, University of California at Los Angeles; and Zijang Chair Professor of the Arts and Humanistic Studies at East China Normal University in Shanghai.

Asia's Transformations

**Edited by Mark Selden, Binghamton and Cornell
Universities, USA**

The books in this series explore the political, social, economic and cultural consequences of Asia's transformations in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The series emphasizes the tumultuous interplay of local, national, regional and global forces as Asia bids to become the hub of the world economy. While focusing on the contemporary, it also looks back to analyse the antecedents of Asia's contested rise.

This series comprises several strands:

Asia's Transformations aims to address the needs of students and teachers, and the titles will be published in hardback and paperback. Titles include:

Debating Human Rights

Critical essays from the United States
and Asia

Edited by Peter Van Ness

Hong Kong's History

State and society under colonial rule

Edited by Tak-Wing Ngo

Japan's Comfort Women

Sexual slavery and prostitution during
World War II and the US occupation

Yuki Tanaka

Opium, Empire and the Global Political Economy

Carl A Trocki

Chinese Society

Change, conflict and resistance

Edited by Elizabeth J Perry and Mark Selden

Mao's Children in the New China

Voices from the Red Guard generation

Yarong Jiang and David Ashley

Remaking the Chinese State

Strategies, society and security

*Edited by Chien-min Chao and
Bruce J Dickson*

Korean Society

Civil society, democracy and the state

Edited by Charles K Armstrong

The Making of Modern Korea

Adrian Buzo

The Resurgence of East Asia

500, 150 and 50 Year perspectives

*Edited by Giovanni Arrighi,
Takeshi Hamashita and Mark Selden*

Chinese Society, 2nd edition

Change, conflict and resistance

Edited by Elizabeth J Perry and Mark Selden

Ethnicity in Asia

Edited by Colin Mackerras

The Battle for Asia

From decolonization to globalization

Mark T Berger

State and Society in 21st Century China

Edited by Peter Hays Gries and Stanley Rosen

Japan's Quiet Transformation

Social change and civil society in the 21st century

Jeff Kingston

Confronting the Bush Doctrine

Critical views from the Asia-Pacific

Edited by Mel Gurtov and Peter Van Ness

China in War and Revolution, 1895–1949

Peter Zarrow

Asia's Great Cities. Each volume aims to capture the heartbeat of the contemporary city from multiple perspectives emblematic of the authors own deep familiarity with the distinctive faces of the city, its history, society, culture, politics and economics, and its evolving position in national, regional and global frameworks. While most volumes emphasize urban developments since the Second World War, some pay close attention to the legacy of the *longue durée* in shaping the contemporary. Thematic and comparative volumes address such themes as urbanization, economic and financial linkages, architecture and space, wealth and power, gendered relationships, planning and anarchy, and ethnographies in national and regional perspective.

Titles include:

Bangkok

Place, practice and representation

Marc Askew

Beijing in the Modern World

David Strand and Madeline Yue Dong

Shanghai

Global city

Jeff Wasserstrom

Hong Kong

Global city

Stephen Chiu and Tai-Lok Lui

Representing Calcutta

Modernity, nationalism and the colonial uncanny

Swati Chattopadhyay

Singapore

Wealth, power and the culture of control

Carl A. Trocki

Asia.com is a series which focuses on the ways in which new information and communication technologies are influencing politics, society and culture in Asia. Titles include:

Japanese Cybercultures

*Edited by Mark McLelland and
Nanette Gottlieb*

**The Internet in Indonesia's New
Democracy**

David T Hill and Krishna Sen

Asia.com

Asia encounters the Internet
*Edited by K C Ho, Randolph Kluver and
Kenneth C C Yang*

Chinese Cyberspaces

Technological changes and political
effects
Edited by Jens Damm and Simona Thomas

Literature and Society is a series that seeks to demonstrate the ways in which Asian Literature is influenced by the politics, society and culture in which it is produced. Titles include:

**The Body in Postwar Japanese
Fiction**

Edited by Douglas N Slaymaker

**Chinese Women Writers and the
Feminist Imagination, 1905–1948**

Haiping Yan

Routledge Studies in Asia's Transformations is a forum for innovative new research intended for a high-level specialist readership, and the titles will be available in hardback only. Titles include:

**1 The American Occupation of
Japan and Okinawa ***

Literature and memory
Michael Molasky

**5 Chinese Media, Global
Contexts**

Edited by Chin-Chuan Lee

2 Koreans in Japan *

Critical voices from the margin
Edited by Sonia Ryang

**6 Remaking Citizenship in
Hong Kong**

Community, nation and the global city
Edited by Agnes S Ku and Ngai Pun

3 Internationalizing the Pacific

The United States, Japan and the
Institute of Pacific Relations in War
and Peace, 1919–45
Tomoko Akami

**7 Japanese Industrial
Governance**

Protectionism and the licensing state
Yul Sohn

4 Imperialism in South East Asia

'A Fleeting, Passing Phase'
Nicholas Tarling

8 Developmental Dilemmas

Land reform and institutional change
in China
Edited by Peter Ho

9 Genders, Transgenders and Sexualities in Japan

Edited by Mark McLelland and Romit Dasgupta

10 Fertility, Family Planning and Population Control in China

Edited by Dudley L Poston, Che-Fu Lee, Chiung-Fang Chang, Sherry L McKibben and Carol S Walther

*** Now available in paperback**

Critical Asian Scholarship is a series intended to showcase the most important individual contributions to scholarship in Asian Studies. Each of the volumes presents a leading Asian scholar addressing themes that are central to his or her most significant and lasting contribution to Asian studies. The series is committed to the rich variety of research and writing on Asia, and is not restricted to any particular discipline, theoretical approach or geographical expertise.

Southeast Asia

A testament
George McT Kahin

Women and the Family in Chinese History

Patricia Buckley Ebrey

China Unbound

Evolving perspectives on the Chinese past
Paul A Cohen

China's Past, China's Future

Energy, food, environment
Vaclav Smil

The Chinese State in Ming Society

Timothy Brook

Preface

I was working through my old notebooks where passages taken from aleatory readings transcribed there looked like the wreckage of a vanished ship, or a world. Glancing over some pages, I encountered a passage that has become intelligible over the years:

A Klee painting named “Angelus Novus” shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe that keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

(Walter Benjamin, *Illumination*, pp. 257–258)

Then I saw a large question mark, next to this passage, that I myself had drawn. I paused.

YHP, 2006

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	xii
Introduction: On Empowerment	1
1 Unseen Rhythms, Sea Changes	12
2 Qiu Jin and Her Imaginary	33
3 The Stars of Night	69
4 Other Life	100
5 War, Death, and the Art of Existence	135
6 Rhythms of the Unreal (I)	168
7 Rhythms of the Unreal (II)	200
<i>Afterword: Then and Now</i>	241
<i>Notes</i>	243
<i>Index</i>	290

Introduction

On Empowerment

“I am weak and therefore I am strong.”

Bing Xin, 1919¹

This book revisits a Chinese revolutionary feminist legacy through an encounter with a group of seminal twentieth century Chinese women writers at the point of intersection of their print works and life passages. Informed by, but unlike works in recent literary studies that focus on the discursive formation of modern Chinese nation state and its gendering effects,² I am centrally interested in the radical degrees to which Chinese women writers re-invented their lives along with their writings, each in her distinctly conditioned and fundamentally revolutionary way. I trace their literary scenes and lived trajectories as intertwining loci of their innovative struggles to navigate the force fields of a violent history while aspiring to women's empowerment. As my discussion develops, I inquire how such struggles by women in print and in life may invite us to re-think aspects of twentieth century China and the Chinese revolution.

In the Debris of History

Scholars and historians have long discussed how the specter of Chinese revolution had its rise from a time of chaos in the decades following the British Opium War of 1840 and subsequent imperialist incursions. It is indicative that, by 1900, Western powers including czarist Russia and Japan, had established claims on thirteen out of eighteen Chinese provinces. For the Chinese, the imperatives of “becoming modern” emerged out of a state of emergency.³ The 1911 revolution made visible the magnitude of the challenges but produced no viable solutions.⁴ As the land was being physically torn asunder, early twentieth century writers portrayed a traumatized China on the world stage and inscribed it with the bodily image of the defeated, humiliated, and the possibly doomed.⁵ Walter Benjamin's figuration of modern history as “a field of wreckage” and modern humanity as “a pile of debris” can be taken in this context as literally accurate as it is socio-psychically evocative.

It is then not incidental that the bodies of the dying and the dead inhabit the pages of modern Chinese women's writings with a disturbing frequency. They

designate a material condition of Chinese society as much as a horizon of those women's critical imagination. Qiu Jin's evocation of women warriors who died in battle, Lu Yin's delineation of mass refugees drowned in river flood, Xiao Hong's rendition of peasants who starved to death and whose bodies scattered across rural China are only a few most obvious examples. Bing Xin, long standardized by literary historians into a "feminine" author specializing in transcendental "motherly love," brings into her writing a world of premature deaths of children, particularly female children, in the midst of quiet daily trials and tribulations as much as open crossfires of spreading wars. Such fictional figures or journalist scenes are accompanied by remembrances of actual persons that those women knew as personal friends, literary fellow-travelers, political comrades, and life companions.⁶ Ding Ling's "*Songs of Death*" (*Sizhige*), an autobiographical prose work, can be read as figuring a tumultuous world that she and her contemporary women inhabited. After describing in detail her earliest memory that registers the disintegration of the Chinese gentry-household, that of her father's funeral, she concludes: "It was the beginning of my nebulous consciousness about life, where I knew death. How fearful death was! My entire childhood was spent from then on in following my mother and her struggle, each day on the edge of death."

As discussed in the last two chapters of this book, Ding Ling spent not only her childhood but also the subsequent decades "on the edge of death," as did other women gathered in this book, each through her respective passage, literally and figuratively. Many women writers and artists died young in the period studied here. Qiu Jin died in Shaoxing at age thirty-two in the last years of the rule of the Qing court; her poem "*On the Eve of My Death*"⁸ (*Zhi xü xiaoshu jüeming ci*) is an anticipatory mourning of her own demise. Shi Pingmei died in Beiping of encephalitis at age twenty-six and abruptly ended the influential journal that she was editing, *The Wilde Rose* (*Qiangwei zhoukan*). Lu Yin died in labor at the age of thirty-four in the city of Shanghai then under Japanese military attack. *Amid Blood and Fire* (*Xüe yü huo*), her final, major novel about the resistance against the Japanese invasion, was left half done.⁹ And Xiao Hong, after giving birth to a dead baby amid war refugees, managed to go on living for only eighteen more months. While writing *Tales of Hulan River* (*Hulan he zhuan*), a major novella, recalling her birthplace, she died of medical mal-surgery at age thirty-one in British Hong Kong under Japanese military occupation.¹⁰ If social disruption affected those and other women in different ways and to different degrees over the first three decades of the twentieth century, the 1937–1945 Sino-Japanese War ripped each of them from their precarious arrangements of life and rendered them all refugees on Chinese soil. "Time is being wrecked," Zhang Ailing wrote in occupied Shanghai, "wreckages of larger magnitude are coming."¹¹ A cursory look at those women's lives cut-short or displaced repeatedly over the decades, leaving so many stories half-written and book projects unfinished, should caution us to pause and compel us to ponder the defining conditions of their lives and works, or their lifeworks. Only when we situate those lifeworks in their pertinent context – a time and place where death and particularly female death became daily routine – can we even begin to approach their

lifeworlds embodying human struggle for survival in the midst of the debris of history, one of “blood and tears” as Qiu Jin puts it.

The Gender of “the Weak”

An exploration into such terrain is not only cognitively but emotionally challenging, for the explorer must confront barely concealed extreme brutality. This time has another expression frequently found in modern Chinese writings: an age of “*ruorou qiangshi*,” which can be roughly translated as “the weak (*ruo*) become prey (*rou*); the strong (*qiang*) devour the weak (*shi*).”¹² For contemporary feminist scholars in a wide range of literary studies and critical theory, the categories of “the weak” and “the strong” are evocative. Writing from the context of European history, Joan Scott, Margaret Ferguson and Sidonie Smith, for instance, have in their respective ways articulated how, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a newly sexualized female soul gradually displaced the theologically unsexed soul of the Medieval Period and Renaissance.¹³ Anne Fausto-Sterling, Sandra Harding, and Denise Riley among others have delineated how such “theological revision” crowded out the “autonomous soul” while developing a feminized conception of Nature in her place, with which the “lack” of the human cognition or thinking faculty is made out to be “the natural” attribute of “the sexualized female soul.” As embodiment of this “lack,” the female sex is then marked as the bioevidence of “the bottom of a subject,” the “naturally weaker,” against which the male subject is established as the “stronger.”¹⁴ Indeed, “the strong man” in European languages, particularly English, has become since the seventeenth century a frequent designation for one whose physical strength is emblematic of mental and moral faculties, which entitles him to possession of social, political, financial, military, and other institutional powers.¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche’s famous (or infamous) mapping of the inherent rhythms of “the stronger” and “weaker” registers the implied power relations between the male and female sexes so designated, as a “beyond good and evil” inevitability: “Is it virtuous when a cell transforms itself into a function of a stronger cell? It has to do so [*Sie muss es*]. Is it evil when the stronger cell assimilates the weaker? . . . Joy and desire appear together in the stronger that wants to transform something into its function; joy and the wish to be desired appear together in the weaker that wants to become a function.”¹⁶ This characterization of the weaker-stronger binary as the natural condition of the modern subject formation reveals a social structure that is also a biopolitical economy of desire and sexuality. The “stronger” is the force of active masculinity whose “essence” lies in his assimilating others into functions that serve to promote his desired expansion as the subject. The “weaker” is the body of passive femininity whose “nature” lies in her “wish” to be desired and assimilated into functions of the “stronger.”

Such biopolitical ideas were brought into China when the modern European canon was translated into Chinese in a period of compressed time in the early twentieth century.¹⁷ My study pays specific attention to the term “*ruozhe*” (“the

weak”) and the ways in which it appears and recurs with figurative variations in modern Chinese women’s literature while becoming a component of modern Chinese vocabulary. As late as in the year 2000, the inaugural issue of a women’s publication in Beijing entitled *Chinese Women’s Culture* (*Zhongguo nüxing wenhua*) carries a range of articles that tackle the question of “ruozhe” as female-bodied, an indicative phenomenon which I revisit in my Conclusion.¹⁸ Twentieth century scholars in China, the U.S., and around the globe have long been engaged in critically unpacking the “natural binary” between the “weaker” and “stronger” sexes along with its implementation in codes of law, social policies, cultural norms, and organizing principles of institutions in relation to the historical operation of the modern nation state.¹⁹ For some the categories of gender and sexuality are central to a politics that takes the “biology” of the “weaker sex” as “destiny,” while others explore the various dimensions of such “bio-destiny” in ways that at once deploy and exceed the categories of gender and sexuality. Chandra Mohanty, Jacqui Alexander, Lisa Lowe and many more work through the gendered and sexed effects of socially arranged power relations to connect them with other seemingly discrete scenes of human pain across old and new geopolitical and biopolitical boundaries. Their “third-fourth world feminist projects,” so conceived, argue for engagements and confrontations with the conditions of “multiply oppressed women” not only due to their gender and sex but their race, ethnicity, class, and nationality.²⁰

Some theorists have questioned the efficacy of the adjective “feminist” for such projects since they seem to de-center the category of gender and sexuality by enlisting so many problems at once without a coherent analytical perspective and pertinent “feminist” focus.²¹ Others, including a number of leading twentieth century Chinese women writers, have questioned the designation “feminist” itself for the reason that it does not apply to what they consider central to their works and lives, such as anti-colonial struggles or multi-forms of resistance to the perpetuation of global inequality.²² While a mountain of works has been produced in response to such questioning, what has been questioned remains in need of further theoretical reckoning.²³ Such reckonings are beyond the scope of this book, while it is hoped that this book may be of use for them. Suffice it to say here that those “third-fourth world feminist projects” evoke a profound concern that is also an analytical center of gravity, pulling otherwise empirically disparate works and scattered issues into a significant constellation. The concern extends to all forms of human oppression in modern history. When those projects situate “*the question of the weaker sex*” at the intersection of the national, ethnic, racial, class, and colonial questions, they implicitly gesture toward what I call “*the question of the weak*” (*ruozhe*) that is central to the Chinese women’s imaginative writings and their actual lives examined in this book: the lifeworks where the predicaments of the “weaker sex” are so figured that they are not only inextricably linked with but also paradigmatically evocative of the “destiny” assigned to the variously marginalized, exploited, displaced or dispossessed as “prey of the strong” in modern history, regardless of their actual sex. As specified throughout this book, such figurations in their irreducible variations and resilient fecundity

are not simply metaphorizations of the gender-specific problem into what has been called an “unhappy marriage” between feminism and Marxism or the leftist politics of the twentieth century in general.²⁴ Rather, they point to and in effect amount to a revolutionary feminist impetus that moved and motivated the struggles of the “multiply oppressed” in a multiply inscribed semicolonial Chinese context to shift and alter their conditions as imaginative embodiments of potential alternatives for human existence, in print as in life.

Bioethnic Politics and Feminist Empowerment

Those Chinese women aspired to no less than a transformation of their destiny, in a volatile historical conjuncture where the imperial regime was disintegrating while its codes were still operative in society, and the “modern forces” were ascending while their implications were by no means clear or clearly women-friendly. This book probes how, without knowing any methods to open up social spaces for themselves, women at the turn of the century stepped out of the known boundaries of their “natural place” in the geographies of social arrangements. They established, publicly, women’s societies, women’s academies, and women’s newspapers and journals, while traveling in and beyond China, some extensively, in Japan, the U.S., Russia, and Europe.²⁵ As a woman writer observed in 1909: “Since the Wuxu Reform Movement . . . [brave women] have left their parents, crossed the oceans, and traveled through Europe and America, often in groups!”²⁶ Chen Xiefen, the founder of the second earliest Chinese women’s journal, published an article in *Shanghai Women’s Paper* (*Shanghai nüxüebao*) in 1903 where she took such boundary-crossing activity as the passage in the making for “modern Chinese women.” Arguing against “waiting” for social change, Chen writes: “The wonderfully rich Chinese phrase ‘*jīnlǐ*’ [making efforts to the best of one’s ability] is in contrast with the concept of ‘*dēngdài*’ [waiting] . . . and ‘*yongxīn*’ [putting one’s heart into such efforts] is the core of ‘*jīnlǐ*’.”²⁷

With such efforts, those women of mostly gentry backgrounds left their cloistered inner chambers and turned into traveling writers, publishers, activists, agitators, organizers of public events and social movements for women. Qiu Jin, the towering figure of modern Chinese women’s literary and social revolution was among those early women whose boundary-crossing activity formed a female-bodied social matrix for an emergent Chinese feminist imagination. The next two chapters explore those barely discernible patterns of such emergent imagination as forming dynamics and features of writing Chinese women in relation to the Chinese revolution. The other chapters trace such dynamic features in a body of literary scenes and life scenarios by working through their immense variety to converge in a designation of how those women in the first half of the twentieth century made the differential force fields of their given conditions visible in the midst of their crossings of the given social boundaries. More importantly, they not only mapped those force fields that defined their “places” in culture and society but also unmasked the workings of the logic of such definition itself. While Qiu Jin famously pointed out such “places” as that of

“lifelong prisoners” and “slaves on earth,” and aired her anger at the “weakness” of women who seemed to accept such arrangements of their life and humanity without “any sense of being insulted,”²⁸ others probed the often hidden workings of those social forces that coerced women’s “weakness” in a specific way. Zhang Zhujun, another woman activist since the 1910s, for instance, concludes as follows after she detailed “dangers” that “women face under their present condition” in one of her well-known essays on issues about women’s learning and security:

Some have asked whether it is due to their born fate that women are fixed in such a dangerous situation; or is it due to humanly composed forces that they so suffer? My reasoning shows that the latter is more accurate; half of our problems result from those who maintain their power in domination and the other half result from women themselves giving up on making efforts to make changes happen. . . . Not knowing how to learn and how to organize, women remain uninformed about the world and appear to be indifferent to others who share the same dangers, sufferings, and struggles. Our way of moving beyond such ignorance and disconnection [which have been regarded as women’s particular weakness] is to learn and learn to organize ourselves.²⁹

An open call to arms for women’s mobilization at one level, Zhang Zhujun here also touched on a feature of those “humanly composed forces” that involves something more than material oppression. A double operation through which “humanly composed forces” “fixed” women in a social place marked out for the dominated, *and* inscribed them as the “born” inferior cognitively, morally, and socio-politically – in other words, as “the naturally weak.”

Several years later, Lu Yin, a leading woman writer of the May Fourth era, also touched on this double operation when she observes the social workings of Darwinian logic of “natural selection” and the production of “the inferior-superior” or “weak-strong” binary:

Since Darwin’s theory on the origins of the species has appeared in this world, “victory to the superior and defeat to the inferior” (*yousheng liebai*) has come to be claimed as a natural theorem; and “the weak are the prey of the strong” (*ruorou qiangshi*) has come to be regarded as the necessary tendency of history. Competition among human beings has escalated as such theorems and necessities are promoted. The intensity of such promotion seems to say that, if the elimination of the inferior through competitive selection were not achieved, the human species could never be improved. . . . Human lives, from then on, have been made as instrumentalized puppets on stage and passive pieces of a machine!³⁰

In Lu Yin’s rendition, the natural theorem of “victory to the superior and defeat to the inferior” (*yousheng liebai*) or the historical necessity of “the weak are the

prey of the strong” (“*ruorou qiangshi*”) has nothing humanly “natural” or “necessary” about it. What is at work therein is a *retrospective logic, human-made and socially promoted or enforced, that functions to fixate the defeated as the inherently inferior and define the prevailing aggressors as the naturally superior*. Searching into the richness of Chinese women’s written and life stories since the 1890s, this book shows how those women confront, each in her complex ways, such retrospective logic at work in the thick of the arranged human hierarchy as a *deployment of double violence*. In the terms of such deployment, the living bodies that are variably violated, appropriated, or destroyed must bear their second sentence announced with the category of “the weak,” standing as witnesses to the naturalness of their coerced “inherent” identity and imposed “inevitable” destiny. I call such social operation of double violence *bioethnic politics*, a regime of intelligibility that renders lived histories of Chinese women as those of “life-prisoners” and “slaves on earth” into the very evidence of their state of natural being and imminent becoming, a material body and signifying trope of the socially weakened or destroyed as bioethnically destined “weak species.”³¹

The ways in which the category and problem of “the weaker sex-cum-weak species” are figured in those Chinese women’s writings as an unflinching measure of such double sentencing are taken hereby as the focus of this book. So are the ways in which those women writers contest and foil such double violence, which amounts to a register of a feminist empowerment of the “weak species” central to the making of modern Chinese cultural consciousness.³² One of the emblematic examples can be found in Ding Ling’s novella “*New Faith*” (*Xing xinnian*), which is discussed in the last chapter of this book. Suffice to say here that, written in 1939, this novella is about the revolutionary energy and/or anticipatory powerfulness of an old village woman, “Granny,” who was gang-raped by Japanese soldiers. To survive, Granny must dislodge herself and her world of the Chinese villagers from the double violence that inscribes her as the “dirtied-broken-weak” human foil for the modern “strong” to stage their claimed status. She must confront a regime of intelligibility that fixates her as a living sight of horrid shame. Such a dislodging process for survival requires much more than “writing back,” namely, inscribing the “shame” onto the “strong” that proclaim their rape of peoples, countries, continents as humanly natural and historically necessary. She must bring about a transformation of herself to undo her internalization of the logic of bioethnic politics that coerces painful acceptance of the rapist forces as “the strong” and fixates her “wretched body” as a material document of “the weak” even in her own eyes. The disavowed sense of shame about “her misfortune” that is festering and suppurating in those closest to her, namely her sons, families, fellow villagers, really the human fabrics of her lifeworld including herself, indicates the scope and depth of such transformation. My final chapter probes how, in Ding Ling’s novella, Granny brings about this transformation in such a disturbingly powerful way that it far exceeds familiar vocabularies about war-time rape, women as embodiment of victimhood, or figurative trope of catastrophe calling for vengeance or redemption.³³