

The Female Figures in Aesthetic Literature in Early Twentieth-Century China and  
Japan—Yu Dafu and Tanizaki Junichiro as Examples

by

Ruoyi Bian

Critical Asian Humanities  
Duke University

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Carlos Rojas, Advisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Leo Ching

\_\_\_\_\_  
Negar Mottahedeh

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in  
Critical Asian Humanities  
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ABSTRACT

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## **Abstract**

In this thesis, I mainly discussed the commonalities and differences between two representative authors of Chinese and Japanese aesthetic literature in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: Yu Dafu and Tanizaki Junichiro, in terms of the female figures, from the perspective of feminism and interrelations between different genders. Also, I tried to look into the possible reasons for these similarities and differences and how we could understand them within the socio-historical background of East Asia in a shifting period. To achieve a deeper and more comprehensive discussion, I took the combined methods of socio-historical discussion and textual analysis in my thesis. The three chapters were based on the analysis and reference of historical materials, data, journals, original and translated literary texts, and academic research papers. Through the textual analysis of representative literary works of Yu and Tanizaki that engaged in aestheticism and a broad discussion of the women's movements and political environments of Chinese and Japanese society from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to early 20<sup>th</sup> century, I achieved the conclusion that while both revealing an imbalanced male-female relationship as a result of the traditional culture in East Asia, Yu expressed some different ideas on women's status from Tanizaki. Affected by the relatively open and free political environment and the improved participation of women in public affairs, Yu revealed the possibility of the further improvement of women's independence. While Tanizaki was far more devoted to the appreciation of women's body as a fulfillment of male desires.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Inspirations and Reasons for This Project

It is said that the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were the start point of the modern culture in China. It was a time full of innovations and enthusiastic admiration for new and foreign ideologies. Deeply hurt in emotion by previous military failures in the conflicts with western countries and the unequal treaties, which were considered a result of the up-to-date technologies and political system in the western world, social elites and intellectuals were inspired to promote innovation and modernization in Chinese society, in order to improve the overall situation of the nation. Among the varied measures and strategies taken to enlighten Chinese people of modern culture, New Literature played an indispensable role in calling for support to social revolutions. New Literature was advocated in a literature revolution led by Chinese intellectuals to smash the "old literature" as the residue of the old dynastic politics of China. As Chen Duxiu (陈独秀) suggested, the New Literature was supposed to have two types of values, separately as the tools to enlighten the Chinese people and to promote the political innovations, and as literature itself (Zhu, Ding, Zhu, 25).

As many literary critics and scholars agreed, the Chinese New Literature was the joint result of foreign inspirations and Chinese intellectuals' understandings of their own society and culture. There have been a variety of ideological trends imported and localized in the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century China. For example, romanticism, represented by Guo Moruo (郭沫若), and realism, represented by Lu Xun (鲁迅). Among these trends, aestheticism was

also one of the strong influences and inspirations that Chinese intellectuals received from foreign countries and has made large contributions to the promotion of modern cultures in Chinese society. Originated in Britain and later introduced to Japan and China, Aestheticism showed different dispositions in different cultural environments while keeping some common features.

One of the most conspicuous features of Aesthetic literature in East Asia was the popularity of the topics of bodily pleasures and male-female relationships. In fact, the bodily pleasures and the detailed description of physical beauty were not originated in the East Asian aesthetic literature. It could be discovered in the European and British aesthetic works as well. For example, Charles Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil* and Oscar Wilde's *Salome*. But for the French and British aesthetes, the flesh was not only about sensory pleasures but also a way to discover the freedom of soul. In fact, more emphasis has been given to the discussion of the soul in their works. After spreading into Japan, the focus of the Japanese aesthetes quickly moved to the appreciation of the pure sensory pleasure and sexual desire without further discussing the inner world of the characters. Deeply affected and influenced by Japanese aestheticism, some Chinese aesthetic writers also expressed a clear emphasis on bodily pleasures in their works.

However, in the process of spreading and import, the values and cognition of aestheticism in different cultural backgrounds turned out to be very different. Taking historical and social backgrounds into account, we can find many interesting conflicts and conceptual tensions that inspired me to research this project.

The first concept to introduce is the core value of the aestheticism when it first came into shape in Europe and Britain. The European and British aesthetes, in order to resist the repressing bourgeoisie morality promoted by the industrialization of the society, insisted that arts should be appreciated by its beauty of form instead of its practical functions. However, after being introduced into China, largely influenced by the eagerness of the Chinese intellectuals to enlighten Chinese people and to innovate the political system prevalent in Chinese society, it was hard for the Chinese aesthetic writers to completely separate themselves from the influence of utilitarian function of literature, in some way, which created a different expression from the original concept of aestheticism in Europe.

The cultural environment of Chinese society at that time was in a very special and unique situation. Although the dynastic political system was formally overthrown, a considerable proportion of the cultural traditions survived in people's daily life. Despite the fact that more women had access to higher education and gained a great reputation in creative works in various literature schools, there were barely any female writers in the field of aestheticism in either Japan or China. I assume that the clear contrast between the aesthetic school and other literature schools, in terms of the thriving of female intellectuals, was largely caused by the traditional idea of gender relationships in Chinese society.

In addition, as intellectuals who received western ideologies on modernization, which included gender equality as an important part, much earlier than other social members, especially within the background of the uprising women's social status and their improving productive forces in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was interesting to see that both Japanese and Chinese aesthetic literary works revealed a strong will of men to control and

to shape women based on their personal preferences and desires. These contrasts and conflicts related to the political system and gender inequalities in East Asian traditional cultures inspired me to look into aesthetic literature in China and Japan comparatively from the perspective of gender and feminism.

Although aesthetic literature in China and Japan in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century has been discussed through many perspectives, there have been few papers focusing on the female figures and gender issues in these literary works. In this thesis, I would like to look into a certain type of aesthetic literary works in China, represented by Yu Dafu (郁达夫), through the perspective of gender and feminism, to provide another possible point of view to evaluate the roles and dispositions of the aesthetic literature in China under the influence of Japan as the precursor. While inheriting many ideas and literary skills from the Japanese aesthetic writers, the Chinese writers who were engaged in aestheticism also expressed some different understandings on gender-related topics. My thesis will focus on the similarities and differences between the representative works of Yu and the Japanese writer, Tanizaki Junichiro (谷崎潤一郎), who had provided inspirations to Yu in his literary works, to contribute a small piece of the general understandings of the aesthetic literature in East Asia within the background of the region's modernization. Moreover, I want to look into Yu as the representative figure of the Chinese intellectuals of struggling between the influence of tradition and the enlightenment of modern cultures, which was different from their Japanese predecessors in aesthetic literature.

More than just pointing out the phenomenon of the existing differences and noticeable commonalities between the Japanese and Chinese aesthetic writers, I also want to look into the possible reasons that caused these similar or varied expressions. The most probable answer, in my opinion, lies in the different political environments and social backgrounds of the two countries at the time of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Based on this assumption, I spend Chapter One briefly introducing the socio-historical backgrounds of China and Japan from the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century to early 20<sup>th</sup> century, including some major social events that might affect the aesthetic writers, while especially focusing on the women's movements and female-related historical information. With this information as both background and the answer to the phenomenon discussed later, I spend Chapter Two and Chapter Three on specific textual analysis to discuss the differences and commonalities between Yu and Tanizaki's works, as representatives of Chinese and Japanese aesthetic literature. With the combination of two different methods, I am hoping to provide a more comprehensive picture on the topic of different expressions on female figures in East Asian aesthetic literature on more dimensions.

## **1.2 A Brief History**

The trend of aestheticism originated in Europe and thrived in Britain in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many critics and scholars have noticed the European gene of the aesthetic literature in East Asia and made an in-depth analysis of the philosophical ideas of British aestheticism and representative works of this literature school. For example, like Xie Zhixi and Xue Jiabao have introduced in "The Rise and Decline of Chinese Aestheticism Trend in 1920s and 1930s" and in the first chapter of *Aestheticism and Modern Chinese Literature*,

the fundamental slogan of the aesthetic movement in France and Britain was “art for art’s sake”, which was first came up with by French philosopher Victor Cousin in a lecture and later elaborated in Theophile Gautier’s *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (Xue 7). In *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, Gautier demonstrated the basic values of aestheticism: “nothing is really beautiful unless it is useless; everything useful is ugly, for it expresses a need and the needs of man are ignoble and disgusting, like his poor weak nature” (qtd. in Lambourne 10). Introduced into Britain by Algernon Charles Swinburne, the values of aestheticism also corresponded with some existing creation ideologies in Britain. For instance, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Keats both believed that arts, represented by poems, should avoid practical and educational functions while focusing on its pure artistic value. As a joint result of the French inspiration and the local aesthetic tendency, aestheticism quickly thrived in Britain, symbolled by the painters’ group, Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, theorist, Walter Pater, and the writer, Oscar Wilde.

But before further discussing the meanings of the pure beauty pursued by the aesthetic writers and artists in their representative works, it is necessary to look into the background of the origin of aestheticism. The Aesthetic Movement, like Zhao Peng has summarized in “the Transformation of Aestheticism in Modern China”, was based on a strong will of resistance and destruction (从一开始唯美主义就表现出了强烈的反叛性) (Zhao 21). In this sense, the pursuit of pure beauty was both a method and an aim. Then, what is the object of the resistance? The most widely accepted answer, so far, is the “hypocritical, repressive moralizing of Victorian England” (Alex 487). After the development of industrialization in Britain, the newly uprising industrial bourgeois

gradually formed a new utilitarian ethic. And it was generally believed that the aestheticism was a revolt against the rigid and utilitarian Victorian bourgeois morality (Prettejohn 9).

The next question is what was the pure beauty that had nothing to do with morality or educational functions? There were two pathways through which people re-defined beauty to overthrow practical and purposeful art. The first one was to emphasize the beauty of form. In other words, the aesthetes tried to separate the form from its meanings and functions. Their purpose was to emphasize the importance of appreciating an art piece, like a poem or a painting, for its beauty of words or colors, instead of its value orientation. The second way to break the existing aesthetic value was to appreciate the things different from the traditional aesthetics. Since the traditional aesthetic values highly praised ideas that were useful for their governing, like morality and spirituality, the aesthetic artists turned to appreciate totally different things, like immorality and bodily pleasures. In the aesthetes' eyes, the flesh was to cure the soul and the expression of pure beauty was to shake off the restriction of the rigid moral standards. In this way, it was possible for them to achieve the beauty lie in the real humanities, under the cover of the stiff morality.

Symbolled by the arrest of Oscar Wilde, the decline of the Aesthetic Movement came in the late 1890s. But aestheticism did not disappear thusly. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, through a group of young artists and authors who had close contact with western works, aestheticism quickly thrived in Japan. In 1908, “Pan’s Meeting” (パンの会) was established in Tokyo. The members regularly met at western-style restaurants to discuss their creative ideas on paintings and literary works. From 1909 to 1910, the three most important journals of aestheticism, *Subaru* (昴星), *Mitabungaku*(三田文学), and

*Shinshicho*(新思潮) were established in succession. The Pan's Meetings and the journals made great contributions to the communication among the Japanese aesthetes and the promotion of their creative works. Just like the European artists who were disappointed and tired of the hypocritical religious tradition and the purposeful bourgeois morality, many Japanese intellectuals of the time who were eager to gain freedom in both political activities and spiritual development had been disappointed by the highly centralized political system. Having nowhere to promote their political pursuit, the Japanese intellectuals found the aestheticism that emphasized the pure beauty of form and bodily pleasures an ideal place to console themselves. While inheriting some key features of the European aestheticism, like pursuing genuine beauty of humans, the Japanese Aesthetic School has added many unique features in their literary works in the process of localization. Like Wang Xiangyuan has summarized in "the Japanese Aesthetic Literature and the Aestheticism in Modern Chinese Literature", there were a few characteristics of Japanese aesthetic literature that have not been emphasized in European aestheticism. As Wang said in his paper, the European aesthetic group was known for its rebellion disposition while the Japanese writers expressed more of melancholy and dodging (西方唯美主义具有一种我行我素的反叛性格，日本唯美主义却鲜有愤世嫉俗的反抗，而多有凄凄切切的哀伤)(Wang 48). Another notice-worthy point is that the Japanese aesthetes had a different way to express the pure beauty to pursue. Instead of emphasizing the beauty and freedom of spirit through the beauty of the body as a method, the Japanese writers paid way more effort on



discussing bodily pleasures, the sexual relationship between male and female, and the sensory beauty of the flesh.

Because of the communications between countries and regions, aestheticism also spread into China at a slightly later point. In fact, there were mainly two pathways through which aestheticism was introduced into Chinese society: direct import from translations of British or European works and the import of Japanese aestheticism. The most famous British aesthetic writer in China, also the ones that influenced Chinese aestheticism most, was Oscar Wilde. As Xie Zhixi's "Salome's Reincarnation in Modern Chinese Novels" and the joint work of Sun Yixue and Chen Tao, "The Collision and Melting of Beauty: Wilde and China During the Period of the May Fourth Movement" have indicated, the introduction and translations of Oscar Wilde's works, like *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, and *Salome*, formed a crucial part of the direct import of aestheticism to China and inspired many imitations by modern Chinese writers.

Meanwhile, contemporary scholars have noticed the influence of the Japanese aesthetic group in Chinese New Literature as an influential power besides the direct import from Europe and have made many discussions on this linkage. For example, Zeng Zhen's "Bai Wei's Accepting and Transcending Japanese Aestheticism", Zhang Nengquan's "The Impact of Japanese Literature Aestheticism on the Community of Shihou", Guo Yong's "Yu Dafu and the 'Private Novel' and 'Aestheticism' in Japanese Literature", and "On Yu Dafu's Accepting and Transforming Tanizaki Junichiro's Novels—A Comparative Study of *Lost Sheep* and *Naomi*" by Zhang Ping. In these papers, the authors mainly discussed the connections between Chinese and Japanese aesthetic literature through specific writers

and how they accepted and modified the Japanese works. Among the papers on this topic, one of the most frequently mentioned Chinese authors was Yu Dafu.

### **1.3 Objects of Discussion (Why Yu Dafu and Tanizaki Junichiro?)**

Yu Dafu, like many scholars have mentioned in their papers, was very closely related to the Japanese Aesthetic School. Unlike the developing trajectories of aestheticism in Europe and Japan, aestheticism in modern China did not form an independent and clear literature school but appeared as a trend that revealed in many writers' works. One of the reasons for this phenomenon was that the natural development and transitions of different literature schools in the western world and Japan took a long time. For example, the transitions from romanticism to realism and finally to aestheticism took the whole 19<sup>th</sup> century in Britain. However, after the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, Chinese intellectuals quickly absorbed the existing literary and artistic results that accumulated in the past hundreds of years in the foreign world. As a result, there have been many different styles and ideologies reflected simultaneously in modern Chinese literature in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although it was hard to divide the writers up into independent groups and literature schools, different trends and clear personal preferences could be found in their works. And Yu Dafu, in his early time of literature creation, was famous for his aesthetic taste.

Taking Yu Dafu as the object of discussion on the topic of the aesthetic literature in China and Japan was based on his unique transitional position in the importing process of Japanese aestheticism into China. First, it was widely agreed that Yu Dafu, as a Chinese, knew Japanese literature very well. Yu spent 10 years of his most mentally malleable time,

from 17 to 26, studying in Japan. There were many Chinese students who had studied in Japan, but Yu benefited from his especially long-time experience in Japanese society. Moreover, like Ohigashi Kazushige has mentioned in *Yu Dafu and Japanese Literature in the Taisho Period: From the Era of "Self-expression" to the Age of "Self-realization"*, what made Yu distinguished from other Chinese students was his unusually large quantity of reading, which helped him obtain especially deep understanding of the spirits and trends of Japanese literature (Ohigashi 5). Among the Japanese works and authors that he knew, Yu especially preferred the Japanese aesthetic literature and absorbed many elements from the representative writers, like Tanizaki Junichiro (谷崎潤一郎) and Sato Haruo (佐藤春夫). The most noticed features that Yu borrowed from the Japanese writers were the form of "I-novel"(私小説), which based on the ideology of self-exposure of personal opinions and experiences, the decadent disposition of aestheticism, and the emphasis of bodily pleasure and sexual desire in Japanese Aesthetic School. In fact, two of Yu's most famous works, "Sinking"(沉沦) and *Lost Sheep*(迷羊) were largely inspired, even imitating, Sato Haruo's "Melancholy in Country"(田園の憂鬱) and Tanizaki Junichiro's *Naomi* (also called *A Fool's Love*)(痴人の愛) (Suzuki 112-113).

While deeply affected by the Japanese writers in the Taisho Era, Yu's works were also closely related to Chinese literary tradition and the historical environment of Chinese society of the time. According to Hu Jinding's *Research of Yu Dafu*, Yu's novels were mostly based on Chinese society and the dilemma that Chinese youth were facing (Hu 6). Instead of focusing on an individual's personal feelings, Yu's works revealed the varied

melancholy of people triggered by the tragedy of the whole nation. It is believed that Yu's novels not only reflected the social environment that Chinese intellectuals were facing but also expressed the strong attitude of resisting. In this sense, Yu's works were also closely connected to Chinese society and the environment that could inspire different expressions of aestheticism from Japan. Therefore, Yu Dafu is an ideal entry point from which we can take a look at the spreading and transformation of aestheticism in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century China.

In this thesis, I would like to discuss Yu Dafu's *Lost Sheep* and its origin of inspiration, Tanizaki Junichiro's *Naomi*. As I have mentioned, Yu's in-depth knowledge of both Chinese and Japanese literature and society endowed him a unique transitional position and a role of connecting point between the aesthetic literature in Japan and China. On the other hand, Tanizaki Junichiro himself was a representative writer of Japanese aesthetic literature. And the direct inspiration he gave Yu made it meaningful to compare the similarities and the differences between them, and more importantly, the reasons behind these commonalities and diversities. Many papers have discussed the aesthetic literature in China from the perspective of modernity, aesthetics, political functions, and consumerism, etc. For example, Zhou Xiaoyi's "Salome's Kiss: Aestheticism, Consumerism and Enlightening Chinese Modernity" and He Changsheng's "Between Romanticism and Modernism: A New Survey of the Aesthetic/Decadent Trend in Modern Chinese Literature". Some scholars, like Xu Zhongjia in "the Other and Its Narrative Strategy in Sexual Politics: Yu Dafu's Writing on Women", have discussed Yu Dafu's works from the perspective of feminism, sharply critiquing that Yu despised women in his works and showed off men's power over women by insulting the female figures in his novels (Xu 21-

24). However, Xu failed to take the historical-cultural environment and external influences into account. Some of the scholars have noticed the connection between Yu Dafu and the Japanese writers of Taisho Era, like Zhang Ping's "On Yu Dafu's Accepting and Transforming Tanizaki Junichiro's Novels—A Comparative Study of *Lost Sheep* and *Naomi*", but mainly focused on the comparison of novel structures and moral standards behind the plots.

It has been widely noticed that sexual relationships between different genders and bodily pleasures took an important place in the aesthetic literature in Japan and China. But another interesting phenomenon was that there were barely any female writers in this field. We can easily find famous women writers engaged in other literature styles, like romanticism or realism. But hardly any female writers left their traces in the aesthetic literature that discussing bodily pleasures and sex. As a result of this gender imbalance in the aesthetic writers' group, the existing works were largely based on the male writer's consideration and imagination of women. Both were famous for writing about women and relationships between different genders, especially Tanizaki Junichiro, Yu and Tanizaki's works are worth discussing from the perspective of gender and feminism in a comparative way, with historical and social backgrounds taken into account. In this thesis, I hope to provide a new point of view to observe and evaluate the different dispositions and expressions of aestheticism in the modernization of China and Japan.

#### **1.4 A Summary**

Historical traditions and social environment can be very important when discussing the ideologies revealed in a writer's works. It is unfair to evaluate someone almost a

hundred years ago within the cognitive standard we are familiar with nowadays. The mismatches between the object and the evaluation criterion would likely lead to the inaccuracy and bias in the conclusion. Therefore, to better understand Yu and Tanizaki's thoughts, attitudes, and imaginations of women that revealed in the female figures in their works, I am about to first look into the brief history of women's movements in Japan and China from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Chapter One. In this section, I will discuss the change of women's social status, the shift in people's recognition of women's social responsibilities, and the effort of women themselves to positively interfere with public affairs. However, a fact that we cannot afford to ignore was that despite the significant changes and enlightenment of women's independence and equal rights, women in Japan and China have never escaped the control and exploitation of patriarchal politics. The difference was that due to the chaotic environment in China caused by the weakness of patriarchal political systems in a certain period, Chinese women had more space to promote their participation in public and political discussions. Nevertheless, women's emancipation and gender equality quickly got absorbed and overshadowed by the newly developed political parties. And the goal of equal rights for women could only be considered after the success of the national revolution and the re-establishment of a new patriarchal political system.

Within this background, I would like to enter text analysis of the specific works of Yu Dafu and Tanizaki Junichiro in Chapter Two. In this chapter, I want to mainly focus on Yu Dafu's *Lost Sheep* and Tanizaki Junichiro's *Naomi*, while also bringing their other works into the discussion. Although women of the time were playing more and more

important roles in social performance, Yu and Tanizaki's works largely revealed men's desire to further control women in both physical and mental aspects. In some ways, men's unconscious control and exploitation of women in the past had been stimulated by the uprising women's social status and their importance in public affairs and turned into a conscious desire to retrieve the past superiority. In Yu and Tanizaki's works, many male figures, partially represent the incarnation of the male writers, looked for consolations from female figures. But the female figures from whom they required consolations were largely imagined and shaped based on their standard of a "good woman". It is reasonable to conclude from their works that despite the severe changes in the social environment and developing ideologies on gender equality, the desire and the mechanics of women's social construction have never stopped. Meanwhile, the absence of female figures' voice in the novels and the silence of female writers in the field of aesthetic literature revealed that in spite of the uprising importance of women in East Asian society, women's position as silent subalterns had not been fully improved in all aspects. There was still forgotten space where the uprising feminist discourses had not reached.

Nevertheless, there are essential differences between Yu and Tanizaki's works, which I would like to discuss in Chapter Three. Although in *Lost Sheep*, Yu used the plots and character settings in *Naomi* for reference, the endings and many details of the two novels were different from each other. The details of Xie Yueying (谢月英), the female figure in *Lost Sheep*, expressed more independence than Naomi, the female character in *Naomi*. And the ending of *Lost Sheep*, in which Xie Yueying left Wang Jiecheng (王介成),

the male character in the novel, somehow revealed a different possibility of women's relationship with men. Consciously expressing his own opinions on gender issues or unconsciously reflecting the social phenomenon of women's growing independence in economy and self-recognition, Yu showed a possibility of women's escaping the social construction of female gender led by men. The difference between Yu and Tanizaki's works in terms of women and their independence was largely related to the social environment and the varied dispositions of Chinese and Japanese society. These differences were reflected not only in *Lost Sheep* and *Naomi* but also in their other works. But we should not neglect that Xie Yueying's relative independence and her resistance to Wang Jiecheng were imagined by Yu Dafu himself. In other words, the possibility of women escaping male's control was an assumption made from a man's point of view. We still cannot obtain any women's voices in this process.

Of course, there were other types of aesthetic literature in China at that time. For example, Tian Han (田汉), another Chinese writer engaged in aestheticism, emphasized more of the discovery of soul instead of flesh, and the Shihou Community (狮吼社), a group of aesthetic writers based in Shanghai, focused even more on sexual desire and bodily pleasures and even less on the characters' inner world than Yu Dafu. I am not intended to discuss all types of aesthetic literature in China and all the different styles of these writers. Rather, through the works of these two representative writers, it is possible to see a piece of the different atmospheres of Chinese and Japanese literature in the process of modernization and the common gender attitudes they shared.



## **2. Chapter 1**

### **2.1 Introduction**

It is said that isolating specific phenomena and events from their background is like trying to observe the whole forest through a single leaf. It is only when events and figures are examined within their socio-historical background, can we have a better grasp of their values. Like the single leaves on a tree, the female figures in aesthetic literature could be better reviewed only when they are discussed within the larger picture of a whole forest—the socio-historical background of China and Japan. In this chapter, I am to discuss the social environment and the trajectories of feminist movements in China and Japan through the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the early 20<sup>th</sup> century has been a special period for the East Asian region. Interrelated in historical backgrounds in culture and political systems, Japan and China began their modernization under the influence of western culture in similar times. There are many similarities to be recognized in the shifting period of Japanese and Chinese societies. In fact, the two countries are more like two forms of modernization stem from a common cultural background, which is the feudal patriarchal politics. However, differences can be clearly recognized between the two countries.

Starting to imitate the western political system and to positively absorb western culture at a slightly earlier point, Japan appeared to be the predecessor of many social movements and ideologies of China. Among them, the Aesthetic School of literature in China in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially from 1910 to 1940, has clearly received many inspirations and influences from the Japanese Aesthetic School. One of the common features that the aesthetic writers shared in both Japan and China was the preference and

emphasis on bodily pleasures and male-female relationships. To discuss the female figures in the aesthetic literature works and the relationship between them and the male writers, it is necessary to look into the general social background of the time and how people thought of women. As the beginning of the modernization of East Asia, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was also the time that women in East Asia being enlightened with feminist ideas.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the general attitude towards women of Japanese society through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Also, I will look into feminist ideas and activities as a background of the appearance of aesthetic literature. Then, the feminist ideas and movements in China of the same period, together with the political and social environment, which also took an important part in the discussion of Chinese feminist ideologies. Through the analysis of primary and secondary sources, I am trying to argue that although the Japanese society started to absorb western culture at an earlier stage than China, it showed a slower pace in the development of feminism and the liberation of women. There have been more elements of patriarchal politics kept in Japanese society than in China, which left less space for feminist movements and the development of feminism in Japan. Compared to Japan, Chinese society has provided more room and chances for the development of feminism, although a certain degree of deficiency and problems can be discovered for sure. The discussion and comparison of the social environment of the two countries in terms of feminist ideas will be made through the analysis of the political environment, women's education, and social movements.

To analyze the feminist ideas and situations in Japan and China more thoroughly, and to provide a clearer introduction of the analysis of the aesthetic writers and their literary

works, theories of representation politics and social construction of female gender will also be included. The analysis of political representation in Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak" and the idea of the social construction of female gender identity discussed by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* have provided new perspectives to the analysis of the feminism in China and Japan.

## **2.2 Japan**

It is generally believed that the modern history of Japan began with the Meiji Restoration in the 1860s. The Meiji Restoration symbolled the shifting point of Japan in many ways, including the recognition of women's values and the beginning of Japanese feminist movements. Although the reception of western feminist ideas and the imitation of European societies in terms of the equality between male and female seemed to indicate a bright future of Japanese feminism, the strict patriarchal structure supported by the powerful imperial government has largely limited the development of women's liberation in Japan from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the relatively early stage of the Meiji era, the strategy of the government was to broadly absorb western cultures and to imitate the European social structure. There was a group of Japanese intellectuals paying great effort to introduce western ideologies into Japanese society and to construct an open modern state. Among them, the famous educators and social critics, Fukuzawa Yukichi and Mori Arinori, were firm supporters of the equality between male and female and the pursuit of women's rights. Influenced by John Stuart Mill's "The Subjection of Women", Fukuzawa said that "as for education proper, no distinction should be made between girls and boys. They both shall make science the

foundation of their studies and from it they shall advance into the different specialties” (Fukuzawa 222). Meanwhile, Mori strongly supported the equality between the two genders by advocating monogamy instead of the long-lasting polygamy in Japan.

One important strategy of women’s emancipation was the spread of education. Based on the recognition of the strong influence of mothers on their children, the Meiji government realized the necessity of well-educated mothers who would be able to provide better home education to children—the future of the nation. The government set up a large number of elementary schools over the country and encouraged women to attend classes. After the “Fundamental Code of Education” was declared in 1872, more schools for women were established. In this period, the enrollment rate of women constantly increased. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology of Japan, the enrollment rate of women in elementary school surpassed 50 % in 1897 and reached 71.7% in 1900 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan).

It was also in this period when some female activists came into people’s notice. Represented by Fukuda Hideko (福田英子) (Kageyama Hideko before marriage) and Nakajima Toshiko (中島俊子) (Kishida Toshiko before marriage)—the women activists who joined in political discussions actively and devoted themselves to the pursuit of equal rights for women. Strongly influenced by the liberalism introduced from the western world, the women activists participated in the Free and People’s Rights Movement (自由民権運

動). They advocated women's independence and were later considered as the pioneers of Japanese feminist movements.

However, the opening atmosphere of Japanese society and the development of feminist movements did not last long. Feeling threatened by the prevailing Free and People's Rights Movement, the government gradually changed their attitudes towards liberalism in the late Meiji period. To consolidate the reign of the emperor, the government started to oppress the Free and People's Rights Movement and the feminist movements on women's liberation. More importantly, the government turned away from the full imitation of western societies. Instead, the traditional Confucian values on social structure and family were promoted. Through the strengthening of the concept of "household" (家), the Japanese government imposed a stricter control of its citizens and further strengthened the patriarchal political system.

What closely related to the Japanese household system as a governing method of patriarchal politics was the educational principle of women. In 1899, the education minister Kikuchi Dairoku said that the duty of Japanese woman was to "get married and be a good wife and wise mother" (結婚して良妻賢母となる) and the duty of the educational institutions was to make sure that Japanese women fit in their duty (総合女性史研究会, 145). I am not saying that at the beginning of the Meiji era Japanese women were not expected to be a "good wife and wise mother". The difference is how a "good wife and wise mother" was defined in different periods. In the early Meiji era, the models of "good wife and wise mother" were expected to be western women who had relatively equal status

to their husbands and possessed general knowledge of arts and science. This value was directly reflected in the curriculum of schools. But in the later period of the Meiji era, the value of "good wife and wise mother" got closer to the traditional Confucian ideas of women, which focused more on their devotion to their husbands and families. The loyalty of women to their families also played a vital part later in the two wars through which Japan started its military expansion in Asia.

In the Sino-Japanese War in 1894, the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, and later in World War I and World War II, Japanese women took over the burden of the family to show their support not only to their husbands but also to the country. The militarism power, to encourage women to support the family while their husbands were serving the army, emphasized the devotion of a "good wife and wise mother" to her family in many educational essays. For example, In *Shinmin no Michi*(臣民の道) published in 1941, it was said that "a woman marries not only her husband but also the family" (75). It also said that the presumption of marriage was offspring and the extension of the family (75). Through the household system and the traditional value of "good wife and wise mother", the Japanese militarism power has fixed women on the position of subaltern and passive supporters of patriarchal politics.

In fact, the modernization of Japan in the Meiji era was a process of strengthening the patriarchal political frame. Before the Meiji Restoration, Japan was under a loose feudal system. In this political system, the power was grasped not by the emperor but by local leaders of different areas. After the Meiji Restoration and the later construction of the "household" governing system based on traditional values, a powerful imperial system has

been constructed. Either the feudal system or the empire was based on patriarchal politics. Therefore, the upgrade from the loose feudal system to a centralized empire can be understood as a development of patriarchy in Japanese society. Within a strict and consolidated political system, it was even more difficult for the Japanese feminists to develop their pursuit of liberation and equal rights. Like Noriyo Hayakawa said in “Feminism and Nationalism in Japan, 1868-1945”,

The modern state established in Japan was highly centralized. A strong national power, it was based on the sovereignty of the emperor, which was considered to originate in an unbroken male line of descent. The overwhelming forces of nationalism expressed through the sovereignty of the emperor, militarism, and fascism swallowed feminism at a time when feminism was poised to bridge the divide between the public and the private spheres. (Hayakawa 117)

To provide another perspective from which we can have a glimpse of the attitudes of the Japanese society to women in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, I looked up the catalogs of two of the “Four Major Pre-war Women’s Journals” (戦前四大婦人雑誌), *Fujin Koron* (婦人公論) and *Fujin Gaho* (婦人画報) before 1930. The catalog of *Fujin Koron* was divided into three parts, public opinions, hobbies, and knowledge. Generally speaking, in the public opinion section, male authors took a much larger proportion than female authors in discussing the current situation and future direction of women's development. In hobbies, there have been more female authors than in the public opinion section but still fewer than male authors, mainly discussing family life and anecdotes. In the knowledge section, there were only male professionals introducing basic knowledge of medicine and other practical scientific information.

In *Fujin Gaho*, there was a large section called *Readings* (読物). In the first part of this section, there were far more male authors than female authors discussing the strategies of women's development and children's education, while in the second part, more female authors could be found, discussing tips on housework, including cooking, cleaning, and cosmetic skills.

From the representative journal catalogs through the 1910s to 1920s, my observation is that the Japanese patriarchal power was still revealing their intention to maintain its control over women in terms of their future development and their duties to the household and the country in some media, as a channel to exert influence on women's mind. While it is true that more access to education had been provided to women, we should also notice that the education principles and course contents decided by male-centric powers still largely limited the liberation of Japanese women. The emancipation of their labor power to serve the family and the country, especially during wartime, did not necessarily lead to the liberation of their minds. The patriarchal powers had not fully given up their tradition to lead and to control women's minds. And one way to understand the improvement of Japanese women's productivity and their devotion to family is that they were contributing to the construction of militarism and patriarchal politics.

## **2.3 China**

Just across the Sea of Japan, China, where the modernization started decades later, was undergoing some similar situations with Japan. Feminism, as a part of the process of modernization, came into people's notice. Japanese feminism, as I have discussed earlier,



had a great time of development in the Meiji era. Benefited from the close geographic location, Chinese women obtained inspirations and experience from their Japanese predecessors. However, differences between the development trajectories of feminism in China and Japan appeared later in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which I believe should be largely attributed to the different political environments. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, patriarchal politics in China experienced a chaotic time of alteration. The domestic and international crisis, in some way, created a certain degree of space and a chance for women to emphasize their values and to require specific rights. Through the discussion of the feminist ideas in three chronological events, the Hundred Day's Reform (戊戌变法), the 1911 Revolution (辛亥革命) and the New Culture Movement (新文化运动), I argue that although constantly influenced and overshadowed by the patriarchal politics, just like Japanese feminist movements, through the end of the Qing dynasty to the establishment of People's Republic of China, Chinese feminists managed to participate more in political discussions and earn more initiatives in various aspects of women's lives.

It is generally believed that the beginning of the pursuit of women's rights in China started in the late Qing dynasty. Quite similar to Japan, the topic of women's rights was come up with by male intellectuals in China, as a way to enhance the contemporary political system at a time of shifting. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Qing dynasty was largely threatened and weakened by the failure in the Sino-Japanese War and the follow-up reparations. To improve the overall situation and the power of the nation, a group of intellectuals came up with the idea of reformation based on imitation to western cultures,

which was widely known as the Hundred Day's Reform. Among the initiators of the Hundred Day's Reform, Liang Qichao (梁启超) noticed the potential power of Chinese women on social reformation and the importance of women's education as a method to fully develop their abilities. Liang strongly advocated the institution of women's education and explained the benefits of doing so in his essay "Bianfa tongyi" (变法通议) from 1896 to 1897. In this essay, Liang made four points on women's education. First, Liang believed that women's lack of education was the reason for their inferior position, compared to men. Because women did not have professions and therefore could not make economic contributions to the family and society. Second, he intensely attacked the traditional value that only the untalented women were virtuous. According to Liang, women who did not possess knowledge or professions had to rely on others for living, which led to the insufficiency of labor and the heavy burden of Chinese society. Third, Liang explained that well-educated women were able to provide better elementary education to their children, which was valuable to the future of the nation. Fourth, Liang held that physical education could improve Chinese women's bodily conditions and make them healthier and stronger mothers. It was only when the mothers were healthy, could they bear stronger children. As a result, China would have a more reliable military power to protect the nation and to preserve the national culture (Liang).

Liang also made some specific illustrations of his ideas and plans on women's education in the "Proposal for the Building of Women's Schools" and the "Rules of the Newly Established Chinese Women's School in Shanghai". Nevertheless, the reformers

represented by Liang Qichao were not supporting women's rights of education for women's sake. Like Ono Kazuko has discussed in *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950*,

(Liang) understood the emancipation of women entirely in those terms— 'enriching the nation and strengthening the military.' Women's liberation was not something derived from rights women intrinsically possessed as human beings; this itself was not the objective. Rather, the aim lay in raising women's knowledge and improving their physical strength so as to develop their qualities as productive laborers or as child-bearing machines (Ono 28).

With the feminism kept developing, Chinese women managed to play an important role in the preparation of the 1911 Revolution with more self-awareness and clearer purposes. The weakened and loose imperial political system of the late Qing dynasty and the international crisis called for women's contribution to their nation. It also seemed to be a great chance for Chinese women to make their voices in a patriarchal frame which was no longer rigid.

From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, more and more Chinese women had chances travelling to Japan. At the beginning of this trend of studying abroad, most Chinese women went to Japan to keep their families accompanied without a clear purpose of receiving education themselves. Later, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Chinese government started to dispatch female students to Japan for further studies, aiming to save the country. The primary mission of the female students was to learn the most updated and advanced knowledge in Japan and to improve the education in China after finishing their studies. Meanwhile, there were also many Chinese women students, who were inspired by the modern culture of Japan, aimed to save the country by promoting revolutions in China,

which they believe could lead to the independence of the nation. To obtain a better grasp of the importance of Japanese women's education as the predecessor of Chinese feminist movements, Shimoda Utako (下田歌子) and the Jissen Women's Academy (実践女子学校) are worth discussing.

Shimoda was the founder, also the headmaster, of the Jissen Women's Academy, one of the first Japanese schools to accept Chinese female students. Born in a conservative family, Shimoda embraced the values of Japanese household systems and aimed at cultivating aristocratic women who could support their husbands and families. However, as a woman who had traveled to Europe, Shimoda also realized that the general education for women from all social classes, especially women from lower and middle classes, was indispensable for a powerful modern country. Therefore, the curriculum Shimoda designed for the Jissen Women's Academy contained many practical courses, including painting, singing, gymnastics, and handworks (Zhou 53). These practical skills, together with Shimoda's emphasis on the connection between the Jissen Women's Academy and Japanese social elites, largely improved the women students' ability to participate in public affairs and to achieve professional success. Although domestic caring and nursing, as the indispensable skills of a Japanese "good wife and wise mother", took significant proportion in Shimoda's educational philosophy, she guided the Chinese female students to notice their connections with the social environment and the importance of participating social movements. Also benefited from the modern culture and ideologies in Japanese society in

the Meiji era, many Chinese female students were inspired to devote themselves to political activities.

Some of them joined revolutionary organizations established in Japan to contribute to the upcoming social revolution in China. For example, He Xiangning, Qiu Jin and some other students joined the Tongmenghui (同盟会) led by Sun Yat-Sen and worked actively under the principles of “Expel the barbarians, revive China, establish a republic, and equalize land rights” (Ono 61). Moreover, the female students formed their own associations with more emphasis on the promotion of women’s educational rights and their fulfillment of national duties. According to Zhou, there were four associations formed by Chinese female students in Japan by the end of the Qing dynasty, “Gongai Hui”(共爱会)(1903), “Chinese Female Students Association in Japan”(中国留日女学生会) (1906), “Women’s Association of Restoration of Rights”(女子复权会)(1907), and “Female Students Association in Japan”(留日女学生会)(1911) (Zhou 55). Besides the various organizations and associations, the Chinese women students also published journals through which they propagandized the pursuit of equal rights for women and social revolution as the method to achieve national independence. For example, the “Baihua”(白话) published by Qiu Jin in 1904 and the “Journal of New Chinese Women”(中国新女界) produced by Liu Yuxia and Yan Bin in 1907 (Gan & Ye 96, Zhou 56). In fact, most of these female students were studying in the Jissen Women’s Academy under Shimoda’s instruction.

The Chinese female students continued their works on the propaganda of revolution to overthrow the feudal imperial politics of the Qing dynasty after returning to China. In addition, they invested great effort to promote the development of women's education in China. These works formed a vital part of the preparation for the later 1911 Revolution, which successfully overthrew the Qing dynasty and terminated the imperial system that had lasted for thousands of years.

Besides the propaganda of social revolution to overthrow the Qing dynasty and secret preparations and liaison for the 1911 Revolution, Chinese women also contributed to the revolution in another form: women's army. When the first uprising of the 1911 Revolution broke out in Wuchang, a woman named Wu Shuqing, at age 19, made a proposal to the Military Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Revolutionary Army, Li Yuanhong, for the organization of a women's army to add to the revolution (Ono 74). Li rejected the proposal at the beginning but accepted it later. An army consisted of around a hundred women was then set up. This women's army later made significant contributions to the advance of the revolutionary army around Nanjing and Hankou (Ono 75, Edwards & Zhou 493).

Inspired and encouraged by the women's army led by Wu Shuqing, women in other areas also devoted themselves to military practices. For example, in Zhejiang, two students of Qiu Jin, the Yin sisters, Yin Ruizhi and Yin Weijun, formed the "Dare to Die" brigades (敢死队) and later the Women's Recovery Army (女子光复军), which was known for its success with explosives (Edwards & Zhou 493). In Shanghai, there were three well-known women's forces, the Women's Citizen's Army (女子国民军) formed by Lin Zongxue and

Zhang Fuzhen, the Women's Military Training Troop (女子经武练习队) formed by Wu Mulan under the Nuzi Tongmenghui (女子同盟会), and the Northern Expeditionary Dare-to Die Regiment (北伐女子敢死队) led by Shen Jingyin ( Edwards & Zhou 494, Ono 75). Also, there were women's armies formed in many other areas like Tianjin, Guangdong, etc.

In the form of military actions, together with the active preparations for the 1911 Revolution, Chinese women in many areas tried to do their duties as Chinese citizens to save the nation. By doing so, they aimed at proving their abilities and contributions to the country as citizens no weaker than their male counterparts. Nevertheless, although the 1911 Revolution terminated the imperial system represented by the Qing dynasty in China, a powerful central government was not set up after the revolution. The newly established Republican government failed to either stop the international crisis or set up a practical and complete domestic administration system. The failures in the re-creation of a powerful government in China led to the continuously altering political situations with multiple powers co-existing. Such a chaotic but free environment formed conditions for the upcoming New Culture Movement, which worked as a great inspiration in Chinese intellectuals' thinking of social reformations.

The New Culture Movement in China is generally believed to start in 1915, symbolled by the journal, *New Youth* (新青年), which was established by Chen Duxiu. The movement was another attempt of Chinese intellectuals on the reformation of Chinese society and the exploration of a possible direction of development. On the first issue of the journal (called *Youth Magazine* 青年杂志 from 1915-1916, later changed name to *New*

*Youth*), a group of Chinese intellectuals, represented by Chen, published their exhortation to the Chinese youth, which also worked as the declaration of their political attitudes (Chen 13-18). They encouraged the Chinese youth to pursue things that are independent instead of servile, progressive instead of conservative, assertive instead of retiring, cosmopolitan instead of isolationist, utilitarian instead of formalistic, scientific instead of imaginary (Ono 95). More importantly, strongly affected by the humanistic spirit of the Enlightenment in Europe, the Chinese intellectuals emphasized the discovery of human as individuals, instead of as a member of the traditional family system in feudal China. Although the 1911 Revolution smashed the imperial system in China, it did not end the familism which combined Chinese family to the nation as a part of the governing system. According to Ono, people's individual identity had been obliterated in the familism. And "whether as a subject, as a son, or as a wife, *everyone was a slave*" (Ono 95). The breaking of the shackle of family and the discovery of human individuality inspired both men and women to reconsider their relationships with society and the nation. Particularly, women were encouraged to re-think their social responsibilities and their pursuit of rights under the priority of individual freedom. Specifically, impressed by Nora in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, young women started to enthusiastically pursue individuality and freedom in marriage and family. Also, more and more Chinese women worshiped romantic love and freedom in marriage. Refusing to passively be a "plaything" of men, women started to seek equality and independence in marriage.

But the new considerations of Chinese women on their liberation were not limited in private lives. Another significant part of their life was to spontaneously participate in



public affairs. The patriotic May Fourth Movement in 1919 provided another chance for Chinese women to join in the discussion on the future of the nation. In the negotiation of peace treaties in Paris after World War I, Chinese representatives demanded the return of the German leasehold of Shandong Peninsular and the cancelation of the Twenty-One Demands which China had been forced into consent. But the proposal was rejected. As a result, large-scale protests broke out in Beijing and quickly spread into other parts of China. In this patriotic movement, women managed to cooperate with men from a more equal status than before. For example, in Tianjin, where the most violent confrontations of the movement occur, a separated organization for women, the Tianjin Association of Women Patriotic Comrades, was created at the beginning of the movement, because of the traditional sense of differentiation between male and female. Nevertheless, with the development of the movement and the cooperation between the different genders, the sense of differentiation was overcome. As a result, the Tianjin Association of Women Patriotic Comrades was disbanded, and female students joined their male comrades to promote the national salvation movement.

Also, the demands of women's equal rights were come up with again in the movement as an indispensable part of true democracy. In fact, after the May Fourth Movement, Chinese women obtained concrete improvements in rights for education. In January of 1920, Peking University was opened to female students as well as male students. As a result of the women students' urges, by the end of 1921, co-education of male and female students was implemented in secondary schools in places like Hunan, Tianjin, Guangdong, and Beijing, etc. (Yin 45). Later on, benefiting from the improvement of co-

education and the awareness of independence achieved in the New Culture Movement and the patriotic May Fourth Movement of 1919, more women appeared in public spheres of large cities. They created their own journals and worked in various industries as concrete labor forces.

However, beginning in the late 1920s, with the rise of the nationalist and leftist ideologies, the feminist discourses in China were gradually absorbed into the communist plans of development. The communist party claimed that the primary goal of the party was the national revolution. In other words, it was only after the Chinese people being liberated, could Chinese women possibly be emancipated. Therefore, the women were expected to invest their full power into the national revolution and the construction of communist social orders. As a result, there was little room left for the liberalism that once prevailed in the New Culture Movement, which emphasized individual freedom.

One of the largest differences between the development of feminism in China and Japan was the stability of patriarchal politics. In Japan, due to the nature of the Meiji Restoration, the stability of the patriarchal politics had not been seriously damaged. A new political system was quickly set up after the old one being terminated. The development of Japanese feminism was therefore constantly under the control of male-centric politicians and militarism later. Up until the 1940s, Japanese women were largely fixed in the inferior position of passive supporters of the patriarchal regime. But things were quite different in China. Although the Chinese feminism has never been fully independent from the nationalism and the influence of patriarchal politics, there was more room for women to participate in the political discussions and to make voices of pursuing equal rights. Due to

the failure of establishing a centralized government and social order after the 1911 Revolution, there has been a period of chaos with various regimes and ideologies competing with each other. The weakened patriarchal politics, combined with the inspiration of western feminism and humanism, provided a great chance for Chinese women to share the burdens with men in facing national crisis and to demand gender equality. Nevertheless, it is notice worthy that as soon as the patriarchal politics, represented by the nationalist party and the communist party, grew stronger again and achieved a stable power dynamic, the feminist discourses were absorbed into them again. And women's power had to be invested primarily into the larger goals of the national revolution and the creation of a new political system.

The question is why? Why women's political participation could never separate itself from the male-centric politics, no matter in Japan or in China? One possible explanation is that the way in which women had recognized and shaped themselves was defined by men from the first place. Simone de Beauvoir claimed in her book, *The Second Sex*, that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir 283). By this claim, Beauvoir pointed out the construction of feminine values by patriarchal societies. To make it clear, it was always men who were making rules for women and defining the word "feminine". It was not women themselves but men who were deciding what women were and how the female could make themselves proper women. In this sense, women have been constantly represented by men and had little chance to doubt the legitimacy of the values of femininity. And the rules for women were based on the male fantasy of women as a generalized group of subalterns with no individual personalities taken into account.

In fact, Spivak has made a more detailed discussion on the subalterns' dilemma in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In this paper, Spivak discussed two points that were helpful for understanding the situation of Japanese and Chinese feminists in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. First, she discussed that although the western intellectuals had noticed the silence of the subalterns and were trying to alleviate the problem, they tended to speak for the subalterns, instead of letting them speak for themselves. But was it possible for the subalterns to speak? Spivak's answer was no. There were two levels of political representations to be noticed in terms of the subalterns. First, the subalterns were represented by the economic elites who possessed capitals and took control of discourse. The life patterns and labors of the subalterns, even the values with which they recognized the world, were created by the elite class. In this sense, the subalterns had no control over their own lives. Then, when the intellectuals spoke for the subalterns, the subalterns were represented by the western intellectuals. There was no way to ensure that the intellectuals were speaking what the subalterns wanted to speak. Because as long as the subalterns had no sufficient access to resources like education, there was no way for them to come up with their own opinions. If the subalterns themselves did not understand what to speak, it was impossible to prevent them from being represented.

Also, by discussing Ranajit Guha's piece, Spivak reminded people to notice the heterogeneity among the subalterns, instead of treating them as an entirety with homogeneous features. In other words, when thinking of the solutions of the subalterns' silence problem, there might be a tendency for the intellectuals to equalize some features that belonged to a small group of subalterns to the characteristic of all subalterns in their

discussion. The same situation is probably to be found in the development of Chinese and Japanese feminism as well. When men take women as a collective group with homogeneous characteristics, it was very likely that they would ignore the diverse personalities of female individuals and treat women as an empty object of their male fantasies and desires.

As I have discussed earlier in this chapter, through the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was a shifting period for both China and Japan, when the modernization of the two countries took off. With the changes in socio-cultural environments and ideologies, men's fantasy and requirements for women were also shifting. However, the attempt of them to shape women's lives and to utilize women's labor to consolidate the patriarchal system has not been completely changed. During modernizations in various aspects like science, social orders, and industries, men never gave up their representation of women in political discussions and daily lives.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

Although many primary and secondary sources have discussed the early development of Chinese and Japanese feminist movements separately, there have not been many general narrations made on the comparisons and interrelations between them. In this chapter, I took the chance to look into the trajectories of the development of feminism in Japan and China as a background of the discussion of female figures in aesthetic literature to be made in the following chapters of my thesis. As the predecessor of Chinese feminism, Japanese feminism was constantly controlled by the patriarchal politics that managed to strengthen itself after the Meiji Restoration. Therefore, in spite of an earlier beginning,

feminism in Japan did not make much progress in the period from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Also being overshadowed by the patriarchal politicians, Chinese feminists, nevertheless, have achieved better participation in political discussions and social revolutions. It was largely because, in the period from the late Qing dynasty to the 1930s, there was no patriarchal regime managed to establish a strict and complete political order in China. The chaotic situation of warlords and a weak Republican government provided much freedom for Chinese women to make their voices in public spheres. However, when the political situation became stable again with the growth of the communist party, feminist discourse gradually got absorbed into the larger political blueprint of the nationalist revolution. It is possible that the feminists have found the combination of the nationalist revolution and women's emancipation as a practical direction. While it is also reasonable to speculate that it was a strategy to ensure a greater chance for women to have a say in the new government.

## **3. Chapter 2**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The two representative writers of aesthetic literature in China and Japan, Yu Dafu and Tanizaki Junichiro, were famous for their interest in writing about women and the exploration of male-female relationships. But it is not to say that these two writers were interested in all types of relationships between different genders and all kinds of women.

An interesting fact is that some commonalities have been discovered on the female figures under their pens. A conspicuous feature was the jobs of the female figures were mostly set as an opera singer, waitress, maids, geisha, and prostitutes. These jobs, instead of representing a simple exchange of labor and money, were more related to social status and identities, which decided how their behaviors would be assumed and how they would be treated in real life. In most people's eyes, an opera singer in China and a geisha in Japan were stepping on the boundaries between artists and prostitutes. Of course, not all opera singers and geisha were engaged in sexual relationships with their customers. But a part of them who developed a physical relationship with their customers have endowed an imagination of sexual transactions to these professions. Other jobs, like waitress and maids, were also related to a general feeling of female obedience and economic reliance at that time. In other words, the job settings of the aesthetic literary works naturally fixed the female figures on inferior positions in the first place, compared to men. In most cases, we can even say that these jobs have been stigmatized in a certain period in Chinese and Japanese society. As a result, the keynote of the male-female relationships described in

these literary works was unequal and imbalanced, in terms of the powers of different genders.

What caused this phenomenon? Was it simply a coincidence in personal preferences? My assumption is that the male aesthetic writers were trying to achieve some purposes through their descriptions of the imbalanced relationships between males and females. Through the female figures created by them, the writers satisfied some desires of themselves. As I mentioned in the very beginning of my paper, the belief of the aesthetic writers was that art should bring beauty and pleasure to people, although the definition of beauty might vary. Even if the aesthetic literature in Chinese was more or less influenced by the purpose of enlightening people of humanities, which was severely repressed in traditional cultures, the primary principle in literature creation was to display beauty and to arouse joy in the readers. In this sense, the imbalanced gender relationships revealed in the novels not only represent the pleasure of the male writers but also was assumed to bring joy to the readers.

The imbalanced gender relationships displayed a unilateral gaze at women by men. In the male gaze, the writers and the male characters under their pens expressed their imaginations and fantasies of women. Perhaps being disappointed by real life, the writers used their powers to make the male characters, partially the incarnations of themselves in the works, fulfill their (the character's and the writer's) dreams in the novels by cultivating the women characters to become someone they wanted. The most common plots in Yu and Tanizaki's works were the male characters fostering and teaching the female characters as a guide. In other words, a strong will to construct and shape the women can be discovered



in most works of Yu and Tanizaki. The intention to construct women is not only held by Yu and Tanizaki. Instead, it was the epitome of patriarchal societies. In many ways, the aesthetic novels of Yu and Tanizaki revealed the patriarchal values that never died out, even in a time of revolution and enlightenment.

Facing the male fantasy of women and men's strong desire to shape women based on their needs, how did women react? I have to say that reading the women's active participation in social production, public affairs, and even military actions introduced in Chapter One, I expected resistance and retort of women. However, according to the records we have so far, on most occasions, women kept silent and acquiesced the male fantasy and social construction of the female gender. In the literary works, the women characters mostly followed the guidance of the male characters and eventually turned out to be the one to meet the men's desire and imagination without resistance as a result of rational thinking. So did the female writers in real life. They kept silent in the field of aesthetic literature which was famous for physical relationships and sexual desire. I assume that under traditional patriarchal values, these topics were believed to be prohibited for women to write about, which reflected that only men's gaze at women were allowed. And it was intolerable to have women look back at men with requirements and needs.

As I have mentioned in the introduction part of this thesis, the most important value of aestheticism was "art for art's sake". Although the process of spreading has caused many modifications in the expression of aestheticism in Japan and China, the basic value has always been kept in the authors' minds. For writers like Tanizaki and Yu who engaged in aestheticism, one of the most important purposes of their works was to bring pleasure, both

to the readers and themselves. Reading their novels from the perspective of the construction and imagination of women, my feeling is that they were using women's bodies and sexual features to accomplish their own desires of beauty and their expression of aestheticism.

In this chapter, I will center on the will of constructing imagined women and the silence of women to analyze the texts of Yu and Tanizaki's works. While mentioning other novels of the two authors, I will mainly focus on the two interconnected works of them, *Lost Sheep* and *Naomi*.

*Naomi* was written by Tanizaki Junichiro in the second year of him moving to Kobe from Yomokama after the Kanto Earthquake in 1923. The novel was first published on *Osaka Asahi Shimbun*(大阪朝日新聞) in instalments from March 20<sup>th</sup> to June 14<sup>th</sup> in 1924. *Naomi* was a story about a man called Kawai Joji (河合譲治) and a woman called Naomi (ナオミ). Joji was 15 years older than Naomi. When meeting Naomi for the first time at the café where she worked as a waitress, Joji was interested in her western-style name and appearance. As a rich bachelor, Joji decided to adopt Naomi and expected her to be his maid and eventually his wife, under his cultivation. Born in lower class and ignored by her family, Naomi had not been educated well until she met Joji. Joji guided Naomi into a totally different social class and lifestyle. Joji paid for Naomi's luxury clothes and all other tools to make her a charming woman. Tanizaki paid much effort in this novel to describe the beautiful body of Naomi and the sexual contact between her and Joji to emphasize Joji's desire to her. But a beautiful and sexy woman like Naomi was sexually appealing to not only Joji but also other men' as well. Interested in socializing and displaying her charm in

front of men, Naomi quickly got to know other rich men and developed physical relationships with them. Joji accidentally discovered Naomi had been cheating on him and decided to ask her to leave his house. But being too fascinated by Naomi's body, her femininities, and the relationship between them, Joji gave up at last and acquiesced the lifestyle of Naomi, including her physical relationships with other men. At the end of the story, Naomi continued to sleep around and change boyfriends frequently. Joji, on the other hand, decided to keep this situation, because of his love for her.

Inspired by Tanizaki's *Naomi*, Yu created *Lost Sheep* in late 1926, four years after returning to China from Japan and four years after the publication of *Naomi*. This novel was first published in 1928 on *Beixin Fortnightly* (北新半月刊) in instalments from Number 1 to Number 5 of Volume 2. The plots of *Lost Sheep* were very similar to *Naomi*, also telling a story of a man and a woman who was guided by the man into a different lifestyle. Also, the two novels were both narrated in the first person, creating a feeling of real memoirs. The male character of *Lost Sheep* was a young man called Wang Jiecheng. Like Joji, he came from a good family. Although he was not very rich himself, he obtained support in many aspects, including professions and money, from the powerful friends of his father's. Jiecheng met a famous opera singer, Xie Yueying, in an opera house and quickly developed a romantic relationship with her. Eventually, they eloped and started cohabitation. Jiecheng took Yueying to Shanghai for a trip and introduced her to the colorful life in big cities. Fascinated by the luxurious and entertaining life in Shanghai, Yueying had more requests to Jiecheng in clothes and entertainment. Jiecheng paid for Yueying's requests to please her. Worrying that Yueying would eventually get tired of

staying with him and stimulated by the possible contact between Yueying and other men, Jiecheng was more and more crazy about having sex with Yueying to confirm his possession of her. At the end of the story, Yueying escaped from Jiecheng. Jiecheng tried very hard to find her but did not succeed. Suffering from heart disease and spiritual pain, Jiecheng converted to Christianity and confessed his sin as a “lost sheep”.

Comparing the two works from the perspective of the construction and control of women by men, there are many similarities that can be discovered in *Lost Sheep* and *Naomi* on the settings and plots designed by the male authors. In this section, I would like to discuss the similarities between the two works through three aspects which I believe are the most effective and representative methods to control women in real lives: the imbalanced economic roles, the cultivation of the female figures by men in lifestyles and sexual desire, and the reasons behind the strong desire of men to monopolize their female partners.

### **3.2 Economic Reliance**

A common plot in Yu and Tanizaki’s works, not restricted to *Lost Sheep* and *Naomi*, was male characters paying money for the daily lives of the female characters. Different from the occasional gifts, the male characters paid almost everything related to the female characters, which, then, formed a sense of economic reliance of the women on the men.

In *Naomi*, Tanizaki explained Joji’s economic conditions at the very beginning of the novel:

Living alone in a boardinghouse and earning one hundred and fifty yen a month, I had a rather easy life. Though I was the eldest son, I was under no obligation to send money to my parents or siblings. My family engaged in farming on a large

scale; as my father was dead, my elderly mother and a loyal aunt and uncle managed everything for me. I was completely free. This doesn't mean that I led a fast life, though. I was an exemplary office worker: frugal, earnest, conventional to a fault, even colorless, I did my work every day without the slightest complaint or discontent (Tanizaki 5)

The author skimmed over the explanation of Naomi's background with only one sentence, "it'll all come out someday; and even if it doesn't, anyone will be able to guess what sort of family hers was, if he considers that her home was in Sensoku, that she was sent out to be a café hostess at the age of fifteen, and that she didn't want anyone to see where she lived" (14). From this background information, it is not hard to grasp that Joji was in a much better economic situation than Naomi was. And there was every condition for a reliant relationship to form between these two people.

After Joji adopted Naomi, he was in full charge of her living expenses. Besides the most basic cost like house rent and food, Joji had higher expectations on Naomi, as he thought of taking her for his wife at the beginning of their relationship (7). Joji paid for the education of Naomi, letting her take English conversation lessons every other day under the instruction of an American woman named Miss Harrison and music lessons of piano and voice every day (20). Also, Joji was happy to take Naomi for entertainment, like travelling. After Naomi grew up, her desire for luxury kimono and expensive foods gradually strengthened. But she did not make money herself. Joji was the one to pay for all the bills. As the novel explained, although Joji was promoted in his company and earned more money, he had to ask for financial aid from his mother to meet Naomi's needs. Nevertheless, Joji's position as the supporter and provider of Naomi's life has never been shaken.

Similarly, in *Lost Sheep*, Wang Jiecheng was the one to pay for his and Xie Yueying's life after confirming their romantic relationship. But different from the detailed and direct narrations in *Naomi*, Yu took a rather indirect way to reveal the supporter's role of Jiecheng in his relationship with Yueying. Yu first told the readers through Jiecheng's narration that his father had some powerful friends who gave him great support in economics even after his father's death. Therefore, although not very rich, Jiecheng was still able to afford a few months' luxurious life for Yueying and himself.

Yu did not mention too much about the details of money spending, but there were a few traces for the readers to make reasonable assumptions about Jiecheng and Yueying's economic situations. After their elopement, afraid of Yueying being bored of the daily life, Jiecheng bought a gramophone and records to please her. Later when they were in Shanghai, Yueying asked Jiecheng to accompany her to do some shopping. Although Yu used the word "accompany (陪)", he also mentioned that "although the half-day shopping cost me (Jiecheng) over a hundred yuan, I was proud and happy to see her walking in a perky style, while people in the street turning their heads to watch her" (这半天来的购买, 我虽则花去了一百多元钱, 可是看了她很有神气的在步道上答答的走着, 两旁的人都回过头来看她的光景, 我心坎里也感到不少的愉快和得意) (Yu 236). In addition, Yu mentioned later in Chapter 11 that "my (Jiecheng) savings unintentionally made at A and the prepaid salaries of a few months that I received before eloping with Yueying have been used over a half. If we keep this life for another month, we would have problems living the next month" (当我在 A 地与无意中积下来一点贮蓄, 和临行时向 A 省公署里支来的

几个薪水，也用得差不多了，若再这样的过去一月，那第二个月的生活就要发生问题) (243). Only one chapter later, Jiecheng was worried again about the money, "my savings and the prepaid salaries of a few hundred yuan have been spent over a half, if we keep this life, not only I could not meet Yueying's desires but we would have problems on the basic needs like food and accommodation" (我的一点积贮和向 A 省署支来的几百块薪水，算起来，已经用去了一大半以上，若再这样的过去，非但月英的欲望，我不能够使她满足，就是食住，也要发生问题) (245). From these indications, a reasonable assumption to make is that Jiecheng took the burden of their living expenses and Yueying's desires of fashionable clothing and cosmetics. Even when Yueying finally left Jiecheng, she also took 50 yuan from Jiecheng's wallet to pay for her trip.

The economic reliance is the most effective and the deepest way to construct an imbalanced relationship between a man and a woman. It is also a perfect base on which men developed their desire to control and to set up a criterion for women. As Beauvoir has elaborated at the end of *The Second Sex*,

French law no longer includes obedience among a wife's duties, and every woman citizen has become a voter; these civic liberties remain abstract if there is no corresponding economic autonomy; the kept woman—wife or mistress—is not freed from the male just because she has a ballot paper in her hands; while today's customs impose fewer constraints on her than in the past, such negative licenses have not fundamentally changed her situation; she remained a vassal, imprisoned in her condition (Beauvoir 721).

The imbalanced economic relationships were not only to be discovered in *Lost Sheep* and *Naomi* but also in other works of Yu and Tanizaki. Most female characters under their pens were economically relying on men or engaged in professions that based on

obedience and service for men. For example, in “The Vast Night” (茫茫夜) and “Autumn Willow” (秋柳), Yu described the relationship between a young man and a few prostitutes. As many people might agree, the prostitute is the most typical representative of the economic reliance of women on men, in which women trade their femininity and sexual attraction for money. In "She Is A Weak Woman" (她是一个弱女子), Yu displayed the tragic result of a man's failure in supporting his wife economically. As Yu indicated in the story of Zhen Xiuyue (郑秀岳) and Wu Yisu (吴一粟), if a man could not earn enough money to support his wife, the romantic love between the couple would wither up and the woman would seek other men for consolation both in emotion and finance.

In many of Tanizaki's other works, like “Shisei” (刺青) and “Kirin” (麒麟), women were also dependent on men, no matter how high their social status was. For example, in "Shisei", the female character was a young geisha. Needless to say, her professional life will rely on her male customers. In "Kirin", Tanizaki borrowed the Chinese ancient story of Madam Nanzi (南子) and Confucius. Despite Madam Nanzi's power over Confucius and highly respected status, all her powers and charm were based on her husband's support. She herself was a result of the support of patriarchal powers.

### **3.3 Men as Guide and Rule-makers**

Based on the economic superiority of the male characters, there was another common feature in the male-female relationships depicted in Yu and Tanizaki's works, which was the male characters' guiding position in front of the female characters. That is to say, the male characters guided the female characters into some new spaces which



revealed the power of the men to shape women's life as they liked. Also, in most cases, the new spaces where the women entered or the new habits they developed were created and controlled by patriarchal values. As a result, the subsequent behaviors of the women characters were all conducted under the influence of patriarchal values.

In *Naomi*, Joji redefined Naomi's life after adopting her when she was fifteen years old. First, he provided much better educational resources for Naomi in English and Music, which were the base of her social activities in the future. Working as a café waitress, Naomi would never have a chance of entering the social class where Joji was. Joji displayed very different lifestyles to Naomi. He let her know that they could go out for traveling to the beach; they could have meals at various restaurants; and they could live a decent life. More importantly, Joji taught her about the sexual desire of men. Joji had sex with Naomi for the first time when she was sixteen.

The sexual relationship between Joji and Naomi added a new but vital part into the way how they got along with each other. In other words, it greatly affected the strategy that Joji took to treat Naomi. Vice versa. As Joji admitted in Chapter 7,

she'd betrayed my expectation for her mind, but her body now surpassed my ideal. Stupid woman, I thought. Hopeless. Unhappily, the more I thought so, the more I found her beauty alluring. This is very unfortunate for me. Gradually I forgot my innocent notion of 'training' her: I was the one being dragged along, and by the time I realized what was happening, there was nothing I could do about it (49).

after sexual contact has been added to their relationship, Joji was less strict with Naomi when teaching her English and other skills because of the uncontrollable desire for her female body. It is to say that the sex made Joji more vulnerable in his contact with Naomi. And it was impossible for Naomi not to notice this change. The plots of her requiring more

and more money and freedom from Joji have proved that she not only noticed this change but also started to utilize it to satisfy herself. Naomi's cognition of the society was largely constructed by Joji, and her strategy of socializing with men was somehow imitating the model of her relationship with Joji. In some way, Joji enlightened her with a rule that to get along with a man was to get along with his sexual desire.

Very similar plots can be discovered in *Lost Sheep*. Before meeting Wang Jiecheng, Xie Yueying had neither used a gramophone nor experienced the colorful city life in Shanghai. Jiecheng led her into a life full of various entertainments and material enjoyments. In Chapter 10, it has been mentioned that Jiecheng bought a French-style hat, a North European-style coat, a few pairs of stockings, and a pair of high-heeled shoes for Yueying. He also took her to see opera performances. These experiences and the western-style clothes were completely new for Yueying. Although the cultivation relationship between Jiecheng and Yueying was not as deep and complete as the adoption of Naomi by Joji, it was still clear that Jiecheng guided Yueying into a new lifestyle. Yueying's recognition of the world changed completely and her desires for materials were opened up by Jiecheng.

Just like in *Naomi*, the shift of Yueying's life, in some way also her social status, paralleled with the development of the sexual contact between her and Jiecheng. Yu did not mention if Jiecheng was the first man who Yueying had sexual contact with. But he did depict Yueying's life before eloping with Jiecheng as a "dissolute life of an opera singer" (放荡的女优生活) and indicated a possible physical relationship between Yueying and Mr. Chen (陈君) at A city (A城). It is very likely that Yueying's understanding of the

sexual desire was not opened up by Jiecheng, but the change of her life and the broadening of her horizon were based upon her sexual contact with Jiecheng. And the city life she entered and admired was also a space ruled by patriarchal values.

With the development of the plots in *Lost Sheep* and *Naomi*, some people believed that Yueying and Naomi had got rid of the control of Jiecheng and Joji and, therefore, achieved being independent of men. But the truth is that Yueying and Naomi's lives were changed because of these two men and the sexual contacts with them. The combination of the fulfillment of men's sexual desire to women and the beginning of a completely new life has decided that the patriarchal rules would likely to keep influencing the future development of Yueying and Naomi, which would possibly fix them on the position of the provider of fulfillment of male desires, in exchange of the satisfaction of their own needs. Tanizaki has made it clear in *Naomi* that Naomi continued sleeping around under the acquiesce of Joji. And the most reasonable guess is that she would stay in the position of an object of Joji and other men's desire as her strategy to live and her philosophy to recognize the world. As for Yueying, Yu did not make clear explanations of her life after escaping away from Jiecheng. But Yu did indicate a speculation, from Jiecheng's point of view, that she would to return to her life as an opera singer who had sexual contacts with male customers.

### **3.4 Sexual Desire and Vanity**

Another commonality of the two works that I believe note-worthy is the desire of male characters to control the female characters as their private possession and the purposes behind this strong desire. Both *Naomi* and *Lost Sheep* mentioned similar plots of a man

had sex with a woman more than he expected when he felt his monopolization of his woman was threatened. My understanding is that Joji and Jiecheng were trying to confirm their relationship (or possession) with Naomi and Yueying through the sexual contacts. This leads to another question, what made Joji and Jiecheng so crazy about keeping Naomi and Yueying's bodies under their control, as their private property?

Instead of a vague idea of romantic love, I believe the desire was the answer. And the desires of Joji and Jiecheng to Naomi and Yueying was limited on the level of body and was based on a unilateral utilization. At the very beginning of Joji and Naomi's relationship, although the sexual contact had not been a part of the picture, Joji's expectation of Naomi was still focused on her appearance and body.

On the one hand, I was motivated by sympathy for her. On the other, I wanted to introduce some variety into my humdrum, monotonous daily existence. I was weary from years of living in a boardinghouse; I longed for a little color and warmth in my life. Indeed, why not build a house, I thought, even a small one? I'd decorate the rooms, plant flowers, hang out a birdcage on the sunny veranda, and hire a maid to do the cooking and scrubbing. And if Naomi agreed to come, she'd take the place of both the maid and the bird..... (6)

In Joji's mind, Naomi was not a human being like himself. Instead, Naomi was more of a pet without her own mind.

After sexual contact has been added to their relationships, Joji did not change much about his understanding of Naomi. "They (outfits) were no more than containers—a variety of packages into which I'd put her when we were at home, and gaze at her. I suppose it was like trying out a beautiful flower in one vase, then another..... While she was my wife, she was also a rare, precious doll and an ornament" (39). At this point, in Joji's mind, Naomi

was still a figure without her own soul. But, at least, she was "precious" and beautiful for him, for now.

In the later stage of their relationship, after Joji realizing that Naomi had been cheating on him, felt threatened in his monopolizing control to Naomi, Joji admitted that he could not resist his sexual desire to Naomi. "Naomi wasn't a priceless treasure or a cherished idol anymore; she'd become a harlot. Neither lovers' innocence nor conjugal affection survived between us. Such feelings had faded away like an old dream. Why did I still feel anything for this faithless, defiled woman? Because I was being dragged along by her physical attractions" (163-164). In this sense, what Joji could not get rid of was not Naomi but his own sexual desire. Naomi was at most an object to fulfill his desire.

In addition, Naomi's body and sexual attraction are something through which Joji achieved mental satisfaction as a winner of his own kind, by which I mean men. Joji confessed in Chapter 8 that

Being from the country, clumsy at social pleasantries, and awkward in dealing with people, I'd become shy and withdrawn, but, for that very reason, glamorous society had a special allure. I'd married Naomi in the first place because I wanted to make her a beautiful woman, go out with her every day, and have people praise her. 'Your wife is very chic,' I wanted to hear them say in high society. Driven by this ambition, I didn't want to leave her in a 'birdcage' forever (58).

Also, at the end of the book, Joji said that "I've known all along that she's fickle and selfish; if those faults were removed, she would lose her value. The more I think of her as fickle and selfish, the more adorable she becomes, and the more deeply I am ensnared by her. I realize now that I can only lose by getting angry" (237).

The strategy revealed in Joji's confession was clearly related to the vanity of a man. Born in the countryside, Joji suffered from a sense of inferiority. His solution to this problem was marrying a beautiful and charming wife to compensate for his self-abasement with others' jealousy. Possessing a charming wife was similar to owning a successful career or a large property. It was an effective and general method to define a man's success and make him a winner in the competition with other males. Naomi was a perfect tool to achieve Joji's goal. But this strategy was also closely related to a problem of balance. It was meaningless to possess a precious treasure if nobody knew you have it. The point of the pleasure brought by vanity was to let more people know the charm of the woman. That was, I suppose, a possible reason why Joji said that Naomi's value was her being fickle and selfish. If she was a loyal woman who fit in the traditional Japanese definition of a good wife, there would be no pleasure for Joji to discover in her. However, Joji needed to confirm that he was the only owner of Naomi. If not, there would be no place for him to earn pleasure out of her. Therefore, knowing her physical relationships with other men, Joji got terribly angry. Nevertheless, at the end of the book, Joji has achieved a balance that allowing Naomi to display her sexual attractions while keeping the stable marriage between himself and her. As long as Joji was not getting angry or worried about his position as the legal possessor of Naomi, he could devote himself to the enjoyment of vanity and her body.

In *Lost Sheep*, Jiecheng's desire to Yueying was also primarily limited to the sexual attraction and the pleasure came with vanity.

As early as the beginning of the story, Jiecheng explained that many doctors had attributed his brain disease to the dissatisfaction of his sexual desire, which revealed that he had realized his needs for sex. When Jiecheng went out for a trip with Yueying, which was the beginning of the vague romantic feelings between them, he mentioned that Yueying was an opera singer, a woman whose profession was to let others play with her (一个供人玩弄为职业的妇人) (Yu 210). With this clear cognition, Jiecheng started his relationship with Yueying. Although Jiecheng defined his emotion to Yueying as “love” (爱情) in the novel, he primarily discussed his sexual desire to Yueying. Moreover, in the latter part of the story, when Jiecheng was looking for Yueying and thinking of their happy memories, he was thinking of the sexual contacts between them and Yueying's naked body in stockings, which was full of sexual attractions (255). Besides the bodily pleasures and the sex, Jiecheng hardly mentioned anything about Yueying that made him so worried and sad about her disappearance.

But Jiecheng did mention about the pleasure of vanity brought by Yueying. In Chapter 4, after convincing himself of the mutual affection between himself and Yueying, Jiecheng's joy and excitement did not come from Yueying, the person, but a sense of superiority over other males.

I felt Xie Yueying was in my grasp. I wanted to tell Mr. Chen, the toy boy, that I had unintentionally obtained the love of Yueying, which he pursued but failed to get. I wanted, even more, to show off in front of the stage to the superficial young men who cheered and applauded that Xie Yueying has belonged to me. They do not need to bother thinking of her anymore. Thinking of these satisfying scenes, I even forgot that I was in a rickshaw. I forgot the city in the nightfall and my peripatetic life (我觉得谢月英，已经是我的掌中之物了。我想对那一位小白脸的陈君，表示我在无意之中得到了他所想得而得不到的爱的左券。我更想

在戏台前头，对那些拼命叫好的浮滑青年，夸示谢月英的已属于我。请他们不必费心。想到了这种种满足的想头，我竟忘记了身在车上，忘记了日暮的城市，忘记了我自己的同游尘似的未定的生活) (212).

Also, when Yueying went to Shanghai for the first time, Jiecheng bought her many western-style clothes and accessories. Wearing new clothes and high-heeled shoes, Yueying was beautiful enough to catch many people's eyes. And Jiecheng's reaction was satisfied, happy, and a little jealous. The jealousy of Jiecheng was reasonably similar to Joji's feelings, swinging between his vanity and the sense of threatened.

### **3.5 A Unilateral Gaze**

No matter in *Naomi* or *Lost Sheep*, the readers were watching the two female figures through the male characters' eyes. It is partially because of the first-person narrations that Tanizaki and Yu used. But more importantly, what readers have learned from the two stories about Naomi and Yueying were mostly about their sexual attractions and the beauty of their physical bodies. Instead of two complete figures as human beings, Naomi and Yueying were more like objects of male desires and tools with which Joji and Jiecheng achieved their inner balance. That is to say, from the beginning to the end of the story, the readers were watching Naomi and Yueying through the desire of the male characters.

At this point, I cannot help being curious that did Naomi and Yueying ever realized their positions as someone to fulfill desire? Did they try to resist? How did they think of themselves and their male partners? The answer was total silence. Looking through Joji and Jiecheng's eyes, Naomi and Yueying were two beautiful dolls with physical bodies that full of sexual attractions. There was no access to their souls. And it was even reasonable to



assume that women cultivated in an environment controlled by men like Joji did not have their own souls in men's eyes.

Although it is unfair to equalize the male characters to the authors themselves, it is not to be denied that the male characters in Yu and Tanizaki's works reflected quite a bit of their own thoughts. Similar attitudes in terms of women and relationships between different genders have been discovered not only in *Naomi* and *Lost Sheep* but also in many other works of the two. Like Yu Dafu has said six years after the publication of "Sinking" (沉沦), another representative work of him, "it was very true that literary works were all the autobiographies of the authors" (我觉得“文学作品，都是作家的自叙传”这句话，是千真万真的) (Yu 312). It is interesting to see that under the backgrounds of the promotion of improving women's social status and education since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the active participation of women in public affairs in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, intellectuals like Yu and Tanizaki who received western ideologies earlier than other East Asian citizens expressed an attitude so different from the tendency in the outer world.

My readings of the cultivation-style models of male-female relationship depicted in Yu and Tanizaki's works is that it revealed their own attitudes towards women, to a large extent. Deeply affected by the traditional culture in East Asia, in which the male control of women played an important role, Yu and Tanizaki could not completely separate themselves from the old models of how men got along with women. This old model had been so natural that not many people would notice it. Stimulated by the wakening awareness of women's independence from men and equal rights, the old model suddenly

seemed to be conspicuous. In this sense, I would say the expressions of men's strong desire to control and to shape women revealed in Yu and Tanizaki's works was a reaction to the stimulation of the women's movements and the rising feminism in East Asia.

As I have discussed in the early part of this section, the primary value of aesthetic literature was to create literary works as something to bring pleasure and beauty. This function was believed to be true for both the writers and the readers. The writers like Yu and Tanizaki were intellectuals who knew about western cultures. But they were also minorities in their own society, in terms of political revolutions. The promotion of aestheticism in Japan was widely believed to be a direct result of High Treason Incident (大逆事件), which was a symbol of the rigid suppression in the freedom of political ideologies and speech by the Japanese imperialist government. Under the suppression by the authority, the Japanese intellectuals were not allowed to critique politics and express their own political ideals, which led to their choice of seeking consolation in literary works.

Similarly, Yu was one of the Chinese intellectuals who were trying to fight the tradition that entrenched itself in the long history of thousands of years. He was supported by colleagues and comrades. But he was by no means in power. For many Chinese and Japanese authors of that time like Yu and Tanizaki, they had an experience of dissatisfaction and restrictions more or less in the aspects of social reformation and political activities. For some of them, women's bodies and the old models of the relationship between different genders could provide a certain degree of consolation by reminding the male authors of a sense of superiority. Like the male figures under their pens who seek fulfillment from the female figures, the male writers were likely to be consoled by the

female figures and the old models of male-female relationships depicted in their works. And the uprising women's movements in the East Asian region, to some extent, turned men's desire to control women into conscious stress from an unconscious tradition.

As for the readers, it was quite clear that the assumed readers who would appreciate these literary works and the relationship between males and females in these novels were people who were fond of the patriarchal values. It was reasonable to assume that many men at that time would share Yu and Tanizaki's feelings. But how about women? Did women read these novels? Did they like these novels? How did they react? Like the female figures in *Naomi* and *Lost Sheep* and other works of the same type who were deprived of their voice, the female writers in real life did not make much direct reaction. There was little record of female aesthetic writers who wrote about male bodies at that time. Few female writers depicted their appreciation of male sexual attractions, or how they seek fulfillment and consolation for themselves from male bodies. Being gazed as the other, both the female figures and the female writers kept silent and left no traces of gazing back. In the field of aesthetic literature in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Japan and China, women's silence continued as it had been. While men's desire to construct women and keep a patriarchal social system also survived, no matter in a peaceful time or a time full of shifts and conflicts between varied ideologies.

## 4. Chapter 3

### 4.1 Introduction

In the earlier chapter, I mainly discussed the commonalities between Yu and Tanizaki's works, in terms of the influence they received from the traditional patriarchal values in Chinese and Japanese society and the nostalgic model of male-female relationships under their pens. While it was true that the female figures and the male gaze in Yu and Tanizaki's works revealed an evident nostalgia for men's overall control over women, we should not neglect the apparent differences between Yu and Tanizaki's works in some details of the female figures.

Spread from Europe to East Asia, aestheticism displayed itself in coherent but varied forms. The aestheticism in Britain, Japan, and China all expressed different dispositions, because of the different social backgrounds and political environments they had. The most direct way is to look into the dispositions of aesthetic literature through two aspects: the literary works of the authors and their personal experience. In this part, I will continue my discussion on *Lost Sheep* and *Naomi*, but to look into the differences between the two works and the modification that Yu made, based on his personal understandings of women and the different social environments in China and Japan. Yu Dafu, as a Chinese intellectual who was both familiar with the traditional culture and novel ideologies imported from foreign countries, is considered as a representative of a certain type of Chinese intellectuals of his time. Through his works and personal backgrounds, I am aiming to discuss a figure that deeply affected, even limited, by Chinese traditional culture, while keeping sensitivity to the outer world and struggling to enlighten his people with his

pen. Through this figure, we can have a glance of the Chinese-style aesthetic literature as a transitional point and a combination of the old and the new, the pure artistic value and the utilitarian purpose.

## 4.2 Different Earning Abilities

The first and the most fundamental difference between Naomi (the female character in *Naomi*) and Xie Yueying (the female figure in *Lost Sheep*) is the economic condition of the two. Naomi, before Joji adopted her, was a café waitress. But as soon as the story began, she quit the job. Since the intersection of her and Joji's lives, Naomi did not need to work anymore. For Naomi, it was a significant improvement in her living standard, because the time she used to spend on working could be used on her education and entertainment. However, from another perspective, it also meant that Naomi was deprived of the right to support herself since then. She probably could eventually obtain what she wanted, but she had to achieve them through the so-called "masculine mediator between her and the universe" mentioned in Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.

Different from Naomi's situation, Xie Yueying had a much better earning ability. Yu made a clear explanation of Yueying's income in Chapter 5. "Each person had 200-yuan Baoyin per month.....They had a manager who took care of chores. He was the adoptive father of Chen Liankui. He introduced the three girls to the jobs here. Therefore, he took 20% of the Baoyin" (Yu 217). (包银每人每月贰百块。...另外还有一个管杂务等的总管...是陈莲奎的养父。她们三人到此地来,亦系由他一个人介绍交涉的,包银之内他要拿去二成。) Baoyin was the salary of opera singers in China. The number of

Baoyin was usually fixed once decided. In other words, no matter how many people came for the opera show or how many tickets were sold, the money that the opera singers received would not be changed. In this sense, Yueying could receive at least 160 yuan every month, and this was a stable incoming source. To have a better understanding of Yueying's earning ability, we can also take a look at Wang Jiecheng's income. "I had an uncle, who had been my father's best friend, working at A Province as the chief executive, held the full administrative power of the province. After the summer vacation, I took the train from Beijing, heading south, then transferred to steamship to Shanghai. Passing by A city, I went to meet him. Unexpectedly, he asked me to stay at A government to keep him accompanied and gave me a job of advisor in name, which would bring me a 200-yuan salary every month without any labor." (这一次有一位父亲生前最知己的伯父，在 A 省驻节，掌握行政全权。暑假之后，我由京汉车南下，乘长江轮船赴上海，路过 A 城，上岸去一见，他居然留我在署中作伴，并且委了我一个挂名的咨议，每月有不劳而获的二百块钱俸金好领。) In this sense, Jiecheng's earning ability was more substantial but not much more reliable than Yueying.

Jiecheng indeed paid for their living expense and Yueying's accessories. And it did give Jiecheng a certain degree of superiority in front of Yueying. But Yueying's earning ability decided that when she wanted to leave Jiecheng, she could. And she didn't need to find another man to accomplish her separation with Jiecheng. Yueying's money may have been used up on accessories or entertainments. Therefore, she took 50 yuan from Jiecheng's wallet when leaving. But the most important thing for a woman's independence was not

her saving, but her ability to make money to support herself in the future. As long as Yueying had access to work, she could achieve independent choice, to some extent.

As I have mentioned in Chapter Two, and some people might agree that Yueying's profession as an opera singer has been endowed many sexual related imaginations. In many ways, it was still a job that closely related to males and economically relied on males. But the incoming sources of the opera singers were varied. The incoming received from male customers as an exchange of sexual contact or service was indeed vulnerable and largely depended on the relationship between the opera singer and the male customers. Nevertheless, the fixed salaries (Baoyin) of the opera singers were paid by the audience for their professional opera performances. That is to say, the Baoyin, which Yueying received monthly, was earned with her professional skills as an opera singer, instead of her sex service as a woman. Of course, it was possible that many male audiences came to watch the opera performance out of their sexual fantasy to female opera singers like Yueying. But the direct exchange of opera singing skills and money was not to be denied. And this process would become even more apparent in the future, as women's connection with the outer universe became more and more accessible. In conclusion, a relatively strong earning ability and out-standing professional skills gave Yueying much more autonomy in her relationship with Jiecheng than Naomi in her life.

### **4.3 Break-up**

Another difference that Yu arranged in *Lost Sheep* from *Naomi* lies in plots. Both novels mentioned separations between the male and the female characters. The plot settings before and after the separation revealed much information about different situations that

Yueying and Naomi were facing. In *Naomi*, we should notice that Naomi was evicted by Joji from their home. In Chapter 19 of *Naomi*, after discovering her dating with Kumagai, Joji's reaction was

“‘Get ou!’ I shouted again. Driven by hatred, fear, and beauty, I grabbed her wildly by the shoulders and thrust her toward the door. ‘Get out! Go on! Get out, I said!’  
‘Forgive me, Joji! From now on...’ Her expression suddenly changed; her voice shook prayerfully; her eyes filled with tears; and she fell to her knees, looking up at my face imploringly.” (Tanizaki 170)

Although Naomi changed her attitude again after realizing Joji's determination and left their house quickly with her baskets and bundles in a simple style, it is clear that she was passively evicted from the house, rather than leaving on her own will. I doubt Naomi's sincerity when she implored Joji to forgive her. But clever as Naomi was, her decisions and strategies were all based on the principle of "profit and avoid a loss." Taking imploring for forgiveness as her first try meant that Naomi understood that being driven out of the house would cause many disadvantages for her since she had neither work nor money. And the so-called "their house" was, in fact, Joji's house. When he asked her to leave, there were no other choices for her.

The following depictions on Naomi's life after leaving Joji further exposed her vulnerability as a woman who had no economic independence.

According to Joji's investigation, Naomi spent the first night after leaving Joji's house with "five or six men, including a Westerner" and stayed at the Westerner, William McConnell's house, despite that she had not known the man (184). In Joji and Hamada's conversation, we can even know more about Naomi's dilemma after leaving Joji. "What



do you think will become of her?' 'I suppose she will get worse. Kumagai says she won't be able to stay at McConnell's very long. She'll go somewhere else in two or three days; she might even go to his place, he says, because her things are there...' (199). Also, when Naomi came back to Joji's house for the first time to take her things, Joji quickly noticed her clothes as soon as she entered the room because the silk garment had apparently been worn for a few days and "the collar was dirty and the knees protruded" (205). It was evident that losing Joji and his economic support, Naomi lived a volatile and unpredictable life. What clothes she could get and what life she could have largely depended on her next boyfriend. Therefore, when Joji revealed his regret for driving Naomi out of his house, Naomi made careful plans and lured Joji on to beg her to come back to him. Although it seemed like Joji begged Naomi to come back while Naomi simply said "yes" to his requirement, the truth was that Naomi had no better choice than going back to Joji. Without earning ability or direct connections with the society, Naomi's living condition was largely decided by men and their sexual desire to her. Even if it looked like she was smart and charming enough to make plans to manipulate men, the very base for this process was the rules of male-female relationships created by the patriarchal society.

Yueying, on the other hand, had a quite different experience. A very visualized point was that Yueying was the one that voluntarily left the romantic relationship. In other words, she made a choice and had the initiative. Unlike Naomi, whose actions were all reactions to Joji's decision, Yueying took the first step to change the status of her relationship with Jiecheng. In a direct and easy way, she turned the traditional power model between men and women up-side-down, in terms of the initiative in ending a relationship.

Also, the expectation of the female characters' whereabouts after their separation from their partners supported the assumption that different dispositions about women's independence have been revealed in *Naomi* and *Lost Sheep*. After Naomi disappeared from Joji's house, Joji made two speculations on where she would go. The first one was her mother's house, and the other one was looking for another man. After checking Naomi's mother's house, Joji's primary worry was that Naomi would get involved with a second man, and a third (182). On the other hand, Yueying's possible directions were much more diverse. The speculations on Yueying's destination that Jiecheng made after realizing Yueying's running away were her mother's, her former colleagues before eloping with him, her former boyfriend, and other opera houses where she could sing. These varied possibilities revealed that Yueying had more connections with society. As a result, there were much more difficulties for a man to keep a woman like Yueying under control. Compared to Naomi, Yueying had a life status that closer to males in terms of her freedom, her economic independence, and her varied directions of development.

In addition, when we look into the follow-up of the two break-up incidents in the two novels, we can see that the results of them have been quite different. For Naomi, as I have analyzed above, she had no better choice than going back to Joji. Of course, she played tricks to earn more beneficial conditions for herself, but that did not change the result, which was that her separation with Joji had to be a temporary one, and her life with Joji had to continue. But for Yueying, it was a different story. She clearly recognized Jiecheng's effort in looking for her. And I assume that she knew it would be a great chance to negotiate for more money or material, as Naomi did. But her choice was reiterated her

determination to leave Jiecheng by taking all her staff away from the hotel room they stayed in and leaving a short message to eliminate his thoughts of chasing her. As a result, the separation was not a temporary one, but a real period of their intersection.

#### **4.4 Sex**

Another detail of the two novels, through which to see the different dispositions of Naomi and Yueying as women, lie in their attitudes towards sex. Both Naomi and Yueying were aware of their sexual attraction to men, but the strategies they took were very different. There was a common plot of the female characters refusing to have sex with their male partners in both novels. But looking into the details of these two fragments, there were apparent differences to be discovered.

Realizing her sexual attraction, Naomi utilized it purposefully to negotiate for personal profit. More importantly, she had understood that not giving sexual satisfaction to Joji, or giving him later, was much more useful than satisfying him anytime he required. Meanwhile, she managed to maintain Joji's desire to her in order to keep the balance between desire and satisfaction, so that she could maximize her profit. After separating from Joji, Naomi frequently went back to Joji's house, which I assume was a way to remind Joji of her sexual attraction. But instead of having sex with Joji right away, Naomi said that she and Joji should be friends. And she used "friendship" as an excuse to refuse to have physical contact with him. For example, Naomi would ask Joji if he wanted to see her body. Joji said, "if I did, would you show it to me?" At this point, Naomi picked up the shield of "friendship" to refuse Joji. "I couldn't do that. We're just friends, aren't we? Now go away

until I finish changing. She slammed the door as though she were flinging it against my back" (218). Of course, Joji got even more allured by her rejection. A few days after,

Finally, *I* (Joji) began to tempt *her* (emphasis added in original text), but she refused to listen.

"Joji! What are you doing? What about our promise? I didn't expect that," she scolds, looking at me the way a mother looks at a naughty child.

"I didn't care about our promise. I can't..."

"No! We're just friends!"

"Don't say that, Naomi...please..."

"What a pest! I said no! But I'll give you a kiss instead." She gave me her usual puff. "There, all right?" You'll have to be satisfied with that. Even that much might be more than friends ought to do, but since it's you, I'll make a special exception" (220).

Combined with the fact that Naomi eventually returned to Joji's, her refusal was not to be understood as a real rejection, but a strategy to further promote Joji's desire. Eventually, she would have sex with Joji to maintain their exchange of the satisfaction of sexual desire and living support.

Compared to Naomi's strategic refusal, Yueying rejected Jiecheng's requirement more determinedly. It happened the night before Yueying running away from Jiecheng.

In New Year's Eve, she said that she would go to a temple for purification and did not allow me to sleep with her. Before we went to bed, she took some hot water for us to clean our bodies. This night was the first night that we slept separately after we eloped. In the first half of the night, I could not fall asleep. I negotiated with her for a long time. I even tried to lift her quilt with violence. I intended to squeeze into her quilt. But she resisted desperately. I was exhausted and had no choice but to let her sleep alone (年三十的那一天晚上，她说明朝一早，就要上庙里去烧香，不准我和她同睡，并且睡觉之前，她去要了一盆热水来，要我和她一道洗洗干净。这一晚，总算是我们出走以来，第一次的和她分被而卧，前半夜我翻来覆去，怎么也睡不安稳。向她说了半天，甚至用了暴力把她的被头掀起，我想挤进去，挤进她的被里去，但她拼死的抵住，怎么也不答应我，后来弄得我气力耗尽，手脚也软了，才让他一个睡在外床) (246)

Yueying probably refused to have sex with Jiecheng because of some religious rituals. But related to the fact that she ran away the next morning before Jiecheng woke up, simply attributing her refusal to religious belief would be unconvincing. Unlike Naomi, Yueying did not use the chance of having sex to require anything from Jiecheng. Rather, she "desperately" resisted Jiecheng, which revealed that her only purpose was not to have sexual contact with Jiecheng that night. There could be various understandings of her behavior. For example, she was tired of having sex with Jiecheng; she did not love Jiecheng anymore; she wanted Jiecheng to take care of his body, instead of wasting his energy on sex indulgently, etc. Despite the varied and colorful possibilities, I believe it was more important to focus on Yueying's behavior of rejecting Jiecheng here.

In my opinion, Yueying's refusal and her successful resistance have a symbolic meaning. The rules behind the relationship between Naomi and Joji and Yueying and Jiecheng was primarily an exchange of money and sex. From the beginning to the end of the story, we witnessed Joji and Jiecheng's craziness for Naomi and Yueying. Still, it was also obvious that their enthusiasm for the two women never transcended the range of sexual desire. Both novels were written from the perspective of the male characters. From their point of view, all we saw about Naomi and Yueying were their dissoluteness and desire for materials and entertainment. In this sense, it was reasonable to assume that in the male characters' eyes, their relationships with the women were essentially an exchange of sex and money. In such an exchange, or a transaction, the power to make sure the exchange happens as expected was the difference between the economic conditions of the man and the woman. The larger the difference was, the more powerful it would be. To speak more

straightforwardly, in an extreme case, if a man in such a relationship could make sure that his female partner had no other choices of living income than him, he could take full control of her body and require for service anytime. What Yueying did was breaking this transaction and partially denied her completely passive position in her relationship with Jiecheng. And the reason why she could accomplish this decision was the relatively small difference between her earning ability and Jiecheng's.

Speaking of the exchange of money and sex and the superiority of men brought by their economic conditions, it was necessary to look back at Yueying's earning ability, which I discussed a few pages ago. When Yueying had enough earning ability to support herself, even if she left Jiecheng, the transaction with other men would not be a compulsive thing for her. It was true that she received money and other gifts from Jiecheng. But it was more of a voluntary decision for her. She could accept the gifts and have sex with Jiecheng. She also had the right to refuse to do so. When the romantic feelings between the two gradually faded away, the transactional essence came into our sight little by little. Yueying's refusal was a signal for the collapse of the relationship between her and Jiecheng. In addition, there was probably a difference between Yueying's and Jiecheng's understanding of their relationships. From Jiecheng's point of view, it was more like a relationship that fell into the traditional model, which was the transaction model. He did not realize that Yueying's professional skills and her direct connections with society could make things so different from his expectations. For Yueying, the relationship was freer, and she felt that she had the right to refuse and to leave, consciously or unconsciously.

Therefore, the refusal of Yueying on having sex with Jiecheng was a key plot, which, in my eyes, marked the essential difference between the two types of women represented by Yueying and Naomi. Similarly, the endings of the two novels, which I have already briefly referred to in earlier part, created very different feelings for the readers, in terms of the inspirations on women's social status and their independence from men.

#### **4.5 Different Endings**

The ending of *Naomi*, in short, was Joji compromised on Naomi's contact with different boyfriends. In exchange, Naomi stayed at Joji's house to keep being his wife. Apparently, Naomi won the contest between her and Joji and earned freedom for herself. Many people agreed with this opinion and propagandized the book as an example of a backfire and a successful resistance of women to men's control. But it could be a very different story if we look at some speculations on Naomi's future life. It is probably one of the most common reactions of the readers to think about what the characters would be like after the ending of the novel. And these expectations, or imaginations, are based on the given information provided in the novel. For Naomi, I think the most reasonable expectation was that she would be stuck in the sexual desires of different men and tried to achieve as much material profit as she could between the fulfillment of male desire and her strategies to keep or extend their desires. If the outer environment did not change, which was very likely, considering the relatively conservative domestic social environment in Japan of the Taisho era and the uprising imperialist governing system, I did not expect any other lifestyle on Naomi.

But the ending of *Lost Sheep* created a very different feeling for the readers. Yueying did not get back to the life she had with Jiecheng. Nobody knew where Yueying had been exactly, by the end of the story. Jiecheng did have some speculations. But as readers, we knew they were simply his conjectures that Yueying might earn money by having sexual contact with other men. Theoretically speaking, no one knew where Yueying would live or what she would do for living in the future. Yueying's future was full of possibilities. Unlike Naomi, who had been locked up in the imbalanced model of male-female relationships and the patriarchal rules which her whole life was based on, Yueying had more possible lifestyles. It is not to say that Yueying has achieved the ideal status of women, which was entirely equal to men and free. But the feeling created by her undetermined whereabouts and her skills to support herself was much more positive than the ending of Naomi, in terms of a woman's personal development in the society. In other words, the ending of Yueying created a feeling of hope for readers who wanted to see the improvement in women's freedom.

#### **4.6 Authors and Their Works**

Based on a few differences I have discussed above between Yu's *Lost Sheep* and Tanizaki's *Naomi*, I believe that as representatives of Chinese and Japanese aesthetic literature, Yu and Tanizaki expressed very different ideas on the attitude how the society treated women. More importantly, the views revealed in their works were not simply expressions of their own thoughts but would very likely affect other people around. Although sharing a common keynote of the unilateral male gaze on women and the nostalgia for the old model of male-female relationships based on one-sided control, the



critical difference between Yu and Tanizaki was that Yu has noticed and then revealed a possibility of the development of women's independence. The atmosphere that Tanizaki created in *Naomi*, in terms of Naomi's personal growth as a human being and a member of the society, was placid and passive. It was more like a horizontal line with a few fluctuations that did not change the tendency of the line. But what Yu created in *Lost Sheep* was more like a feeling of dense fog. We did not know what was in that fog; what the characters would face. It could be something better. It could be something worse. It was full of challenges and uncertainties. But it also revealed a strong feeling of hope.

It was hard to make changes happen. But it was also uneasy to simply see the possibility of change. Yu's insight into the change of women's status and the whole Chinese society was not only revealed in *Lost Sheep*. In his two other novels, "Late Osmanthus" (迟桂花) and "She Is A Weak Woman" (她是一个弱女子), both published in 1932, a relatively late stage of his writing period, Yu also created two female figures that quite different from the traditional woman's image who took the inferior position in male-female relationships and was vulnerable to any changes happened around her. In "Late Osmanthus," Yu wrote about a young woman, Weng Lian (翁莲), as a figure who was kind, supportive, and capable. Looking from the perspective of the contributions to the family, Weng Lian was the one who re-built the tea frying career of their family and improved the family income. More importantly, before she returned home, her mother and brother lived lifelessly, worrying about his brother's disease all day. It was Lian's arrival that brought the family back to hope and happiness again. In many ways, her support and contributions to

the family were even greater than the male member—her brother. The key point of this novel was that the male character, whose family name was also Yu (郁), gave up his sexual desire towards Lian after clearly recognized it. Because Lian's innocence and kindness moved him. This was another breakthrough in Yu's cognition of the relationship between men and women, compared to *Lost Sheep*. A man clearly recognizing and admitting a woman's advantages and feeling guilty for thinking of occupying her physically as an object of his sexual desire was an innovative idea of the time.

Also, in "She Is A Weak Woman," Yu wrote about three different types of women represented by Zheng Xiuyue (郑秀岳), Feng Shifen (冯世芬), and Li Wenqing (李文卿). Among them, Feng Shifen was a female student that actively devote herself to the communist party and social revolutions. She clearly refused the expensive gifts from her pursuer and gave up the peaceful middle-class life in Hangzhou. Refusing to be a woman depended on man, Shifen displayed many innovative ideas about women. She chose her boyfriend based on shared values and targets of the social revolution. Also, she contributed to the social movements and violent protests as much as her male comrades. We could not say that Shifen was the ideal woman who achieved the final goal of women's emancipation. Still, it was safe to say that Shifen was one of the most innovative and independent female figures under Yu's pen. From an opera singer like Xie Yueying, who still carried many vestiges of the traditional patriarchal cultures in Chinese society, to Weng Lian, who significantly improved her independence and contribution as a family member, and finally to Feng Shifen, who actively participated in social revolutions and violent protests and

made equal contributions to the innovation of the Chinese society to her male comrades, Yu's writings on female figures showed a developing tendency on the possibility of women's independence and gender equality revealed in *Lost Sheep*.

In fact, Yu's writing interests revealed a parallel tendency to his personal development in social revolutions and politics. As Zeng Huapeng (曾华鹏) and Fan Boqun (范伯群) have introduced in their *A Critical Biography of Yu Dafu* (郁达夫评传), Yu was deeply affected and attracted by the ideas of social innovations and improving the living situation of Chinese people since he was a young student (Zeng, Fan 15). In the 1920s and 1930s, his writing interests gradually turned from autobiographical novels, which mainly focused on romantic love and sexual desire of individuals, to novels that more engaged to patriotic feelings and social revolutions. The discovery of the beauty of real humanities were critical values of aestheticism and the opposite ideologies to the traditional Chinese culture. It had been a long-lasting theme in Yu's novels. If we take his early works as the expression of the humanism in individuals, in the form of bodily pleasures, his later works paid much more attention to the general emancipation of Chinese people, including women. Unlike Tanizaki Junichiro, who spent his whole life appreciating the beauty of women's bodies and the model of cultivation in male-female relationships, Yu's interest in social innovation, including gender equality, showed itself in his novels little by little. And this was probably the reason why his works revealed such different dispositions from Tanizaki's, despite their common pursuit of aestheticism and the beauty of bodily pleasures.

However, while recognizing the significant differences between Naomi and Yueying, we should not push the conclusion too far. I do not think that *Lost Sheep* has completely gotten rid of the patriarchal values under which women suffered from a vulnerable and inferior position.

We should remember that *Lost Sheep*, also many other works of Yu, was narrated from the point of view of male characters with an intense color of patriarchal values. The male gaze on women as the object of their sexual desire and their strategies to teach, guide, even manipulate women still took a considerable large proportion of these novels. It was true that Yu revealed the possibility of women's independence in *Lost Sheep*. But we should not ignore that it was not a plot designed from women's viewpoint. Yu paid little effort to think of how women would react in Yueying's position; how would they feel about Yueying's relationship with Jiecheng; what would they expect from Jiecheng, etc. All we saw about Yueying was her attractive body and Jiecheng's desire to her. The female character in this novel does not have to be Yueying. It could be any woman with a beautiful body and was willing to have a relationship with Jiecheng.

The possibility of women's resistance revealed in *Lost Sheep* was a possibility formed from a male's point of view. It could be understood as his subjective pursuit of social innovations. It could also be read as a result of the influence of the social environment. It was possible that Yu was stimulated by the improved women's status and their importance in public affairs and, then, made a speculation in *Lost Sheep* on the future of Chinese women's liberation. Either way, in *Lost Sheep*, we did not hear any voice from

Yueying. There was no justification for any of her behavior. All we saw were speculations from a man's eyes.

Compared to Tanizaki, Yu was largely affected by the political environment of his country and has displayed great differences in the way a male author treated the female figures and the attitudes to women's liberation in real life. While sufficiently recognizing the varied dispositions of certain types of Chinese and Japanese aesthetic literature represented by Yu and Tanizaki, we should always notice the lack of women's voice in these novels that full of women.

## 5. Conclusion

Thriving successively in two crucial regions in the world, Europe and East Asia, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, aestheticism was always closely related to shifts and major changes in social systems. In Europe and Britain, it was born in the drastic changes in society after industrialization. In Japan, it thrived in the conflicts between the upgraded rigid control of political activities by the empire and the modernization process. Later in China, it was a symbol of modern culture and a hope with which the Chinese intellectuals intended to smash the old, backward tradition and build up an innovative social system.

There were two most important contents of aestheticism when it originated in Europe and Britain: to appreciate the value of art itself and the resistance to the prevailing bourgeois morality that separate people from the true beauty, like art and humanities. In the process of spreading into East Asia, these two points interestingly displayed themselves in different expressions, sometimes, even in a form that quite the opposite of the original ones.

After spreading to Japan, the strong color of resistance that aestheticism had in Europe and Britain disappeared, to a large extent. The reason why the Japanese intellectuals turned to aestheticism was not to express their strong will of resistance, like the British aesthetes who revealed their discontent with the hypocritical bourgeois morality and to the phenomenon of ignoring real humanities. For the Japanese intellectuals, they kept their discontent to the rigid control of people's political activities in a passive way. After the High Treason Incident, the Japanese intellectuals who had different ideals in social

reformation gave up active resistance and devoted themselves to the aestheticism as a consolation to their spirit.

Nevertheless, when aestheticism was imported into China, the chaotic political environment provided many chances for the Chinese intellectuals to express their political pursuit and objections to the traditional culture in their literary works. Despite sharing a resisting disposition to existing social moralities, the Chinese intellectuals who engaged with aestheticism had a different understanding of literature from the British aesthetes. As the British aesthetes advocated in many places, art should be appreciated for its artistic value only. In other words, art should not be used as a tool to achieve any goals other than artistic appreciation. However, in the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century China, one expectation to literature, as a form of art, was to utilize it as a tool to call for social innovation and the construction of modern culture. It was precisely influenced by this purpose that the New Literature writers tried to display a new culture that focuses on the beauty of humanities as a contrast to the old tradition in China that ignored the individual's feelings.

Influenced by the Japanese aesthetic literature, a common way to depict an individual's feelings and humanities was to write about bodily pleasures and sexual desire, which were prohibited in traditional literature. Yu Dafu was one of these Chinese writers who engaged in aesthetic values. Through the descriptions of the young male characters' desire and emotions, he expressed his eagerness for the innovation of Chinese society. To a large extent, he blended the emotions and desires of human beings with his ideals of a modern social system.

The reception of foreign culture and the firm intention to reform Chinese society were the results of Yu's good education background. Despite the chaotic social environment in China of the time, Yu accepted full-time education during his childhood. But these educations could also be restrictions for Yu in some ways. Yu spent much effort studying traditional Chinese literature when he was young, especially the traditional-style poems. As a result, Yu was deeply affected by Chinese traditional cultures in many aspects, including his attitudes to women and the relationship between different genders. While brave and innovative enough to depict sexual desire and the sensory pleasures as access to the real humanities, Yu revealed his favor or nostalgia for the old model of male-female relationships under the patriarchal values.

Inspired by Tanizaki Junichiro's *Naomi*, Yu's *Lost Sheep* also revealed many male-centric ideas through plot settings. In Chapter Two, I looked into the commonalities between *Naomi* and *Lost Sheep* in details, including the male characters' superiority brought by their roles of financial supporters, their guidance and cultivation in the formation of new lifestyles for the female characters, and the intentions of the male characters to monopolize the bodies of female characters to meet their own needs. Through these plots and details, it was evident that in the male characters' eyes, their female partners were the mirror to reflect their own desires and needs. This was partly because of the first-person perspective used in the novels. As a result, all we saw about the female characters were the expectation of the male characters and how they met the desires of the men. If regardless of the male fantasy and needs, there was nothing substantial about the female



characters in these two novels. Their names were just labels that provide convenience in narration. Till the end of the story, we still did not know who they were.

It was unfair to completely equalize the male characters and their attitudes on women to the authors. Still, I believe the literary works of the authors revealed much about their own thoughts. Especially when we take the autobiographical form they used into account, together with the fact that similar attitudes were expressed multiple times in different works. Within the background of the uprising feminist movements and the active participation of women in public affairs and productivity, it was believed that the male authors' attitudes revealed in their works was a nostalgia for the unshakable superiority of male in old times. The increasing importance of women has created a feeling of uncertainty and threat to male intellectuals. As a reaction to this stimulation, Tanizaki and Yu revealed a nostalgic emotion to the male's controlling power over women.

But we should also notice the significant difference between Yu and Tanizaki. While Tanizaki was indulged entirely in the cultivation of women and depicting women who acted under patriarchal rules, Yu has noticed the possibility of the further development of women's liberation and gender equality. Through Xie Yueying's professional skills, earning ability, her active choice in her relationship with Wang Jiecheng, and the diverse possibilities of her future development, Yu displayed a possible direction of the development of women's independence. Although deeply influenced or limited by the patriarchal values in traditional Chinese culture, Yu has noticed the shifting outer environment. His creation of relatively independent female figures in *Lost Sheep* and some later novels could be understood as an honest reflection of the trend in Chinese society. It

could also be understood as a part of his political ideal of creating a modern society in China. A more reasonable assumption is that Yu's works were a joint result of all of these complicated, even contrasting, emotions. And the root of this phenomenon, I think, was the political intention of the Chinese New Literature and the close relations between the Chinese intellectuals and the society around them.

On the contrary, Tanizaki, as the representative of Japanese aesthetic literature, took an eluding attitude in terms of the women's liberations and equal rights. In *Naomi*, Tanizaki clearly narrated Joji's intention as cultivating an ideal wife that accorded with his expectations, mostly expectations in fulfillment of his sexual desire. In his other works, Tanizaki also revealed similar interests. It was probably because of the general eluding philosophy of the Japanese aesthetes, not limited in gender-related topics, that they had given up paying close attention to a social phenomenon related to modernization and innovation and would rather choose to stay in the little world of appreciation of beauty. The reason was also likely to be that the women's movements in Japan were still primarily controlled by patriarchal politics and did not make any essential improvements in women's social status. As a result, the women's movements and the participation of women in social production largely became a mere formality. Therefore, the formalistic changes in women's status were not profound enough to change Tanizaki's mind. It was not influential enough to make Tanizaki see the possible development and improvement in women's movements in the future, either.

Because of the varied political environments and social backgrounds, aesthetic literature has displayed itself with different faces in different regions. Although inspired

and deeply affected by Japanese aesthetic literature, the Chinese intellectuals and writers have created their literary works based on their own understandings of the world. As the representative of one type of Chinese aesthetic literature, Yu displayed his struggles between the traditional values and the strong will to enlighten Chinese people with innovative modern culture. From the perspective of feminism and male-female relationships, the similarities and differences between Yu and Tanizaki's works have revealed different attitudes of East Asian intellectuals in the process of modernization of their countries. Of course, there were many other types of aesthetic writers who might have different understandings and values from Yu and Tanizaki of the time. Through my discussions in this thesis, I am providing a small piece of the general observation of the aesthetic literature in East Asia within the background of modernization. In future studies, it would be constructive to look into the correlations between Yu and other Chinese aesthetic writers, the different artistic values and creative concepts of them, and the interrelations between other Japanese and Chinese aesthetic writers.

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