

From Diaspora to Homeward Bound: The Development of Ping Lu's Writing

In the last two decades, postmodernism, feminism, postcolonialism, and cultural studies have reshaped our world view. They have stimulated discussion on the politics of language and gender, racism, nationalism, representation of history, and so on. Despite the differences that have arisen among scholars of these various disciplines and approaches, there seems to have been some agreement on fundamental issues relating to self-understanding, human relationships, and differences of gender, race, and culture. This agreement centers on the acknowledged ability, and even duty to appreciate or sympathize with a person of another status or culture even though one's own perspective may be rooted in a different status or culture. The global support for women in Afghanistan that has arisen in recent years serves as a good example. Given this phenomenon, one can say that the spread of knowledge that globalization is creating marks a stage of great progress in world civilization.

An important issue that globalization has brought to the forefront and, thereby demonstrated the capacity to influence, is the status of women. Take Chinese women, for instance. While the advancement of their well-being is a result of many forces, much research has shown that Western influence on Chinese intellectuals from the second half of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century was an important contributing influence.¹

1 While Western missionaries were not directly involved in political activities, their views on foot-binding and women's education were influential. The first girl's school was established by Miss Aldersay, a British missionary, in 1844, at Ningbo. The first anti-foot-binding organization was formed in 1875 by Rev. John MacGowan. Later, members of the Hundred Day Reform and the Revolutionist Party actively promoted women's education and opposed foot-binding as well. Kang Youwei (1858-1927), leader of the Hundred Day Reform, became a founder of an organization in

Furthermore, in the last three decades, another strong wave of Western influence has glided across the ocean. Feminist theories which began after the Second World War have been introduced to Taiwan since the 1970s, causing significant impact on numerous issues regarding women's well-being. A number of recent publications document the cultural transformation that has taken place because of this influence; for instance, articles by Yenlin Ku and Wang Yage's *Taiwan funu jiefang yundongshi* (The history of the women's emancipation movement in Taiwan).²

With an eye to understanding the artistic creativity, particularly of contemporary women writers, in the age of globalization, this paper explores the writing of Ping Lu, a Chinese female writer from Taiwan. Because economic success has led Taiwan to become a highly internationalized society,³ contemporary Taiwan cultural products, such as art and literature,

Guangdong province against foot-binding. There were also some female members among Revolutionists, such as Mrs. Gao Baishu and Qiu Jin (1875-1907), who stated that refusing to bind one's own feet was only the beginning of women's emancipation, and encouraged women to seek education and, ultimately, equal rights. The rise of the women's emancipation movement at the turn of the twentieth century is viewed nowadays as a development beyond the expectations of political and social reformers of the time. See Lin Weihong, "Qingjide funu buchanzu yundong" (The movement against foot-binding in the Qing Dynasty), *Zhongguo funushi lunji* (Essays on Chinese women's history), vol. 3, ed. Bao Jialin (Taipei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 1993), 201-02, 204; Huang Yanli, "Zhongguo funu jiaoyu zhi jinxi" (The past and the present of Chinese women's education), *Zhongguo funushi lunji* (Essays on the history of Chinese women), vol. 2, ed. Bao Jialin (Taipei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 1991), 269-70; Amy D. Dooling and Kristina M. Torgeson, eds., *Writing Women in Modern China: an Anthology of Women's Literature from the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 5.

2 Gu Yanling (Yenlin Ku), "Taiwan fuyun de kaizhan" (The development of the women's movement in Taiwan), *W.M. Semi-Annual* 1 (February 1989), 264-70; Yenlin Ku, "The Uneasy Marriage between Women's Studies and Feminism in Taiwan," *Guide to Women's Studies in China*, eds. Gail Hershtatter and et al (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1998), 115-34; Wang Yage, *Taiwan funu jiefang yundongshi* (The history of the women emancipation movement in Taiwan) (Taipei: Juliu tushu gongsi, 1999).

3 Oufan Lee reports that sociologist Saskia Sassen lists fifteen cities that she considers the most globalized in the world. Taipei, the capital city of Taiwan, is one of them, — "Quanzhuhua de wenhua zhenglun" ("The cultural debate on globalization"), *Yazhou zhoubkan* (Asian weekly), April 23-29, 10. Robin Cohen, as well, lists Taipei as one of

naturally reflect the global influence of feminism. To a researcher, however, mimicries are usually less interesting. It is the work of artists who fuse imported ideals with native ones that deserves attention. In other words, in this age of globalization it is, still, more meaningful to use imported ideals as catalysts to stimulate the process of cultural introspection in artistic productivity, rather than merely imitating the imported counterparts. Among the many remarkable achievements by contemporary Taiwanese writers, Ping Lu's writing is particularly noteworthy for she has displayed the ability to carry on a dialogue with the global community. This paper will first present the results of a preliminary investigation into the stages of development of her writing, which, in turn, will demonstrate the impact of the global feminist movement on her and her writing. It will then use her historical novel *Xingdao tianya* — *Sun Zhongshan, Song Qingling de geming yu aiqing gushi* (Implementing ideals at the ends of the earth — Sun Zhongshan [Sun Yat-sen] and Song Qingling's revolution and love story) to exemplify this impact.⁴

Ping Lu was born in Taiwan in 1953. She received a bachelor degree in psychology from National Taiwan University in 1975 and pursued graduate studies in statistics in the United States right after graduation. Upon completing her Ph.D., she obtained work as a statistics analyst in the United States. Her interest in writing began in 1982 and she won her first award in 1983 with her third published short story. She continued to write as an amateur, while branching off into many other genres. She finally quit her job as a statistician and moved back to Taiwan to write full-time in 1994. Since then, she has worked at *Zhongguo shibao* (China times) as editor, editor in chief, and columnist.

The development of Ping Lu's writing career can be divided into three periods: 1982-1987, 1987-1994, and post-1994. Stages in this development are demarcated by the years 1987 and 1994. In 1987, the martial law imposed since 1948 was lifted and was accompanied by the re-establishment of freedom of speech. This had a tremendous effect on many writers in Taiwan, including Ping Lu, because it became no longer risky to talk about controversial issues such as cultural identity. Since then Ping Lu has become

the global cities, *Global Diaspora: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 166.

4 Ping Lu, *Xingdao tianya* — *Sun Zhongshan, Song Qingling de geming yu aiqing gushi* (Implementing ideals at the ends of the earth — Sun Zhongshan [Sun Yat-sen] and Song Qingling's revolution and love story) (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe, 1995).

more open in writing on her identification with Taiwan instead of China. The issue of identification later became an important theme in her short story "Zai juxing de niandai li (In the age of superstars)."⁵ As for 1994, this was the year Ping Lu moved back to Taiwan from the United States in order to pursue her writing career full-time. The move had a strong effect on her writing; not only did her productivity increase, but her writing also experienced a qualitative change as she began to concentrate on feminist writing.

The development of Ping Lu's writing is characterized by a deep awareness of being part of a diaspora. It would be helpful to take a look at the concept of diaspora before we discuss Ping Lu's writing. In the opening to *Global Diasporas*, Robin Cohen states that:

The word "diaspora" is derived from the Greek verb *speiro* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over). When applied to humans, the ancient Greeks thought of diaspora as migration and colonization. By contrast, for Jews, Africans, Palestinians and Armenians the expression acquired a more sinister and brutal meaning. Diaspora signified a collective trauma, a banishment, where one dreamed of home but lived in exile.⁶

According to the above quotation, the word "diaspora" does not necessarily denote a negative experience. In his research on five different kinds of diaspora (i.e., classical, victim, labour and imperial, trade, and cultural), Cohen, in fact, claims that not all diasporas come from a catastrophic origin. He lists nine common features of a diaspora, which are the following:

1. dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
2. alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
3. a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements;
4. an idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
5. the development of a return movement that gains collective approbation;

5 Ping Lu, *Zai juxing de niandai li (In the age of superstars)*, *Wu yin fengjian (Five seals)* (Taipei: Yuanshen chubanshe, 1988).

6 Cohen, ix.

6. a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate;
7. a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
8. a sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement; and
9. the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.⁷

This list was originally developed from Safran's ideas, in order to include as many forms of diaspora as possible.⁸ A diaspora, according to Cohen, may not have all the features listed above, but just some. While there is more than one kind of diaspora, it is the victim diasporic experience that conveys a deeper meaning in our use of this term. As Safran observes, the word "diaspora" is nowadays used as a metaphoric designation to describe different peoples, including "expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities *tout court*."⁹

According to Cohen's list, there are a broad selection of groups that can be subsumed under the term "diaspora" if one is allowed to use it metaphorically. One of these groups is women. As many researchers of the recent two decades have shown, women have been considered as being inferior to men and treated as such in many cultures and societies. In response, feminists have lobbied against patriarchy in every aspect of their lives; all sorts of women associations have appeared to provide support to women in need of help. Many female artists have devoted themselves to revealing the traumatic experiences women have endured. A call for returning to female subjectivity has become a main issue in artistic creativity. The collective experiences and behaviors of women clearly bear a number of Cohen's nine common features of a diaspora, especially if one substitutes the notion of homeland with the female subjectivity, and that of hosting countries/state of exile with the patriarchal society.

7 Cohen, 26.

8 W. Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora* 1.1 (1991), 83-84; Cohen, 23.

9 Cohen, 21; Safran, 83.

The understanding of Cohen's description of diasporas, especially the three key notions — collective trauma, banishment/exile, and dreamed home — is particularly important to a discussion of Ping Lu and her writing. Applying these notions in one's reading of Ping Lu's fiction, one can say that it expresses a tri-level diasporic experience: that of a Chinese/Taiwanese immigrant living in the United States, that of a second generation Chinese mainlanders living in Taiwan, and that of a woman living in a patriarchal society.¹⁰ The first of these levels, that of an Asian immigrant to the United States, is clearly expressed in her work, while the other two levels are subtly revealed in a comparison of work from her earliest period with that of her other two periods.

Diaspora I (1982-1987): An Asian Immigrant Living in the United States

Ping Lu began her writing career after she immigrated to the United States. She displayed extraordinary enthusiasm for exploring issues of displacement, cultural identity, and self-analysis. As Cohen states, loneliness and sadness are very common among people of a diaspora.¹¹ Most of Ping Lu's well-known stories written at the beginning of her writing career centered on these themes. *Shier yue ba ri qiang xiang shi* (December 8 when the gun was shot) (1983), her first award winning and most famous story, *Yumitian zhi si* (The Death in the Cornfield) (1983), and *Daxiyang cheng* (Atlantic City) (1984) all examined the psychological problems shared by immigrants, especially those coming from a third-world to a developed country. Like the author herself, the protagonists of these stories are Asian immigrants living in the United States, one Vietnamese and two Chinese — one from Taiwan and the other from Hong Kong. Though they have become immigrants in the United States for different reasons, the overwhelming feelings of alienation, loneliness, and nostalgia caused by detachment from their homelands and native cultures are

10 One thing that should be clarified is that during the first period of her writing Ping Lu did not display an obvious concern for being a second generation mainlanders living in Taiwan. It was not until the second period of her writing, when her relationship with her parents became more significant, that she started to explore her mainland background in depth. In fact, she has had no ambivalence in accepting her identity as a citizen of Taiwan. See a number of articles on her relationship with her father in her *Wupode qiwei tang* (Witch's seven-flavor soup) (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe, 1998), 152-67.

11 Cohen, 1.

the same. Each is like a pathological half-person, as Cohen describes diasporic Jews, who are destined never to realize themselves or to attain completeness, tranquility, or happiness, as long as they were in exile.¹²

The Death in the Cornfield, regarded as representative of Ping Lu's work during this time, is a story about a Taiwanese news reporter's private investigation of the death of a fellow Taiwanese immigrant in the U.S.A. This reporter is an immigrant in the States himself. In the beginning, one may think that his investigation has something to do with his feeling of boredom, but it turns out to be a retrospection of the meaning of his own life. The dead person and the reporter share feelings of self-uselessness and the meaninglessness of the diasporic life in the States. The cornfield in the States depicted in the story, resembles a sugar cane field in Taiwan and provides temporary comfort to the two lonely souls in diaspora. This news reporter's decision to return to Taiwan at the end is not a surprise, but a predictable development.

Diaspora II (1987-1994): A Second Generation Chinese Mainlander Living in Taiwan

In a 1988 interview, Ping Lu was asked about cultural issues that she was concerned with. She replied: All of my works contain a part of me; therefore, there are some similarities. The intertwined relations human beings have with their native land, country, history, and tradition are the major themes in my creative writing. The entrapment of inherited sin from [Chinese] history that is felt by the second generation of [Chinese] mainlanders who grew up in Taiwan is particularly unbearable. They [the second generation of Chinese mainlanders] have always cherished a warmhearted memory of their imagined homeland, which, however, creates an awkward and twisted relation with the land in which they actually live.¹³ This psychological awkwardness experienced by the second generation of mainlanders in Taiwan reflects the issue of cultural identity for a diaspora.

The so-called "second generation mainlanders," including Ping Lu herself, have been raised by parents who, indeed, have lived a life of exile since the Nationalist government retreated from the mainland after their defeat by

12 Ibid., 4.

13 Lin Huifeng, "Fang Ping Lu zhaji Zhan Zhihong de pinglun" (Interview with Ping Lu about Zhan Zhihong's comments), *Live Seals*, by Ping Lu, 15.

the Chinese Communists in 1949 and have believed that they would return to their homeland in China one day, as promised by the Nationalist government. For the second-generation, this homeland has never been seen and exists only in their imagination. Yet, when contemplating the place where they were born and are familiar with, Taiwan, they often wonder where they belong. This is a collective trauma shared by all second generation mainlanders and it has become an important theme in the works of writers with this background, such as Zhu Tianxin's *Xiang wo juncunde xiongdimen* (Missing my brothers in the military family compounds).¹⁴ Ping Lu never dealt with this topic in her early writings, except seemingly in her novel *Zhuang Ge* (1986) in which she portrays a self-sacrificing mainlander, Zhuang Ge.¹⁵ However, this story is actually an expression of Ping Lu's sympathy for people of a lower class, common among many examples of nativist literature in the 1970s. Ping Lu describes a struggle against poverty, not nostalgia for an absent homeland.

What is interesting about Ping Lu's early stories is that Ping Lu never dealt with the issue of one's identity as a second generation mainlander; instead, she uses enormous energy to deal with the issue of one's identity as an Asian immigrant in the United States. The struggle with her identity as a second generation mainlander did not appear until 1988. The explanation for this seems to be that Ping Lu began her writing in the early 1980s. She would have been influenced by nativist literature (*xiangtu wenxue*) popular since the 1970s that is also known as the "nativist literary movement." The nativist literary movement branched into two kinds of nativisms: one identifying with Taiwan; the other with Greater China, including Taiwan, opposed to the economic colonization by American and Japanese international enterprises. Ping Lu identified with the latter. According to Zhan Zhihong, Ping Lu visited Zhan in 1984 when she returned to Taiwan to receive the second award she had won for her writing. During that meeting, Ping Lu showed sincere

14 Zhu Tianxin, "Xiang wo juncunde xiongdimen" (Missing my brothers in the military family compounds), *Zhongguo shibao* (China Times), September 10-11, 1991; contained in a short story collection of hers with the same title, *Xiang wo juncunde xiongdimen* (Missing my brothers in the military family compounds) (Taipei: Maitian chubanshe, 1998), 67-90.

15 Ping Lu, *Zhuang Ge* (Zhuang Ge) (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshe, 1986).

concern for Taiwan's future and writers, including Chen Yingzhen,¹⁶ who is well-known for his promotion of Greater China nativism. As a new immigrant in the United States — having resided there for about eight years — it was only natural that Ping Lu's loyalty would remain with her native culture (Chinese including Taiwanese) and natal land (Taiwan as part of China).

Another reason that Ping Lu did not explore her second-generation mainland identity may have been that she did not intend to pursue immigrant status in the United States in the first place. It could have been her parents' idea, for America was regarded as the "gold mountain" and her parents had never accepted Taiwan as their homeland, although they had lived on the island for over thirty years.¹⁷ In "In the Age of Superstars" (1988), the first-person narrator laments, "They [my parents] cherish the memory of their homeland, but expect me to root abroad."¹⁸ The narrator compares himself to a *xiao shou* (a small animal), a metaphor echoed in a much later piece of autobiographical prose when Ping Lu refers to herself as an animal when describing the uneasy relationship with her father who is nostalgic for the mainland.¹⁹ Finally, it would have been risky to write on the topic of China in relation to Taiwan in those days. Those kind of stories did not appear until the lifting of martial law in 1987. For these reasons, Ping Lu's pre-1987 stories concentrate on her diasporic experience as a Chinese/Taiwanese immigrant in the United States and not on her identity as a second-generation mainlander living in Taiwan.

16 Zhan Zhihong, *Jiu shi yu xin shu — zhaji Ping Lu de xiaoshuo* (Old matters and new books — notes on Ping Lu's fiction), *Five Seals*, by Ping Lu, 5.

17 Zhong Shuzhen, Ping Lu huidao xiaide tudi (Ping Lu returns to her loved land), *Youshi wenyi* (Lion arts) 82.4 (October 1995): 20.

18 Ping Lu, *In the Age of Superstars*, 36.

19 Ping Lu, "Wunide nianshou" (The disobedient animal), *Witch's Seven-Flavor Soup*, 160-63.

Diaspora III (1994-Present): A Woman Living in a Patriarchal Society

The table of contents in the only short story collection Ping Lu published before 1987, *Yumitian zhi si* (The Death in the Cornfield),²⁰ reveals interesting information. This collection consists of seven short stories written between 1982 and 1985. Out of the seven, three are the above mentioned stories on diaspora, three are on women, and one is about jealousy. It seems that Ping Lu was equally concerned about the subjects of diaspora and women. However, when comparing the points of view adopted in these stories, one has the impression that the subject of diaspora was more important in the author's mind and one suspects that the author is male. Two of the three stories on diaspora employ a first-person point of view; one uses a third-person. The protagonists are all male. Of the three stories on women, although the protagonists are female, all are written with a third-person point of view. The psychological distance between the author and these female protagonists seems to be farther than that between the author and the male protagonists.

In earlier times, writing was considered to be a male privilege. If women wanted to write, it was sometimes necessary to hide their sexual identity. For example, some women writers used a man's name. One can find examples of this in both the West and the East. In England, Charlotte Brontë published her and her sisters' stories under the names of Currer Bell, Ellis Bell, and Acton Bell; Mary Anne Evans was known as George Eliot. In Taiwan, a famous example is Shi Shuduan, who uses Li Ang as her pen name. For Ping Lu, whose real name is Lu Ping, her pen name literally means "even road" and gives no indication of her sexual identity. However, is there another reason why Ping Lu may have preferred to explore her identity as a member of a diaspora instead of as a women? Ping Lu was once asked in an interview why most of the protagonists in her stories were men. She replied in a soft tone that being her parents' only child, she is faced with great expectations from her father, and hence, more often than not, she must act like a son, instead of a daughter.²¹ She stated another time that, "[The hero of The Death] is a male; the using of a man's voice from the beginning to the end [of

me an absolute freedom. I can detach from my original identity and enter into another. In that new identity, I feel I am freer than being myself, and happier too... The real world often is full of restrictions..."²²

In reading Ping Lu, one finds that she is a multi-faceted writer. As an author of fiction, she writes stories ranging from mini stories to novels; employs techniques from realism, symbolism, modernism, and postmodernism; and as a columnist, she writes on various topics ranging from politics, through local issues, to international affairs. Critics have even described her as witty and intellectual.²³ However, one facet dominates the collections of columnist articles that she has published: her feminist themes. In addition, given that in the publication of her books she has moved from a collection of short stories, to a novel, and then to a collection of feminist newspaper articles, it seems that Ping Lu's awareness of her female identity has strengthened as her writing developed and that the ultimate response to the issue of identity detected in her earlier writing was that she was in a state of diaspora in her relationship with herself. She was not only experiencing tension in her dual identity as Taiwanese/Chinese versus American and as Chinese versus Taiwanese, but was also aware of her female identity in a patriarchal world. Ping Lu's journey of self searching did not seem to enter the right path until she gave up her immigration status in the United States and completed her novel, *Implementing Ideas at the Ends of the Earth*, in 1995.

Homeward Bound

"Ai yu" (Jade) (1985) is one of the three stories about women collected in Ping Lu's first book.²⁴ This story demonstrates Ping's keen observation of various problems women continue to face in traditional Chinese society. They include traditional women's lack of financial and emotional independence, men's

20 Ping Lu, *Yumitian zhi si* (The death in the cornfield) (Taipei: Lianhe baoshe, 1985). This short story collection uses the title of her first award winning short story published in 1983.

21 Chen Wenfen, "Ping Lu ao wupode qiwei tang" (Ping Lu stews witch's seven-flavor soup), *Zhongguo shibao* (China times), December 1, 1998.

22 Han Weijun, "Xie xiaoshuo shi wo zui tuwude xuanze" (Writing fiction is the most unexpected choice I have ever made), *Taiwan ribao* (Taiwan daily), June 20, 1995.

23 Nanfang Shuo, Cong qiaozhi lun Ping Lu de xiaoxiaoshuo (Use of the concept of wit to discuss Ping Lu's mini stories), *Hongchen wuzhu* (Five commentaries on the mundane world), by Ping Lu (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe, 1998), 183-93; Qi Bangyuan, You Ping Lu de *Wuyin fengqian* kan Taiwan de zhishixing wenxue (Reading intellectual literature from Taiwan through Ping Lu's *Five Seals*), *Wu jianjian san de shibou* (When the fog is dissipating) (Taipei: Jiuge chubanshe, 1998), 341.

24 Ping Lu, "Ai yu" (Jade), *The Death*, 169-75.

extra-marital affairs, and destructive relationships among women themselves. Ping Lu's feminist position is obvious in this story, but we do not see her concern for women developed in the other stories. Before her publication of *Implementing Ideals*, Ping Lu, as a fiction writer, stood out for her patriotism and experimentalism, particularly her meta-fiction, which she cultivated mostly in the second period of her writing career in order to sharpen her writing skills.

She became known as a feminist mainly because of her commentary essays. Ping Lu has published five volumes of commentary selected from essays that she had originally written for newspapers: *Daodi shi shei guazao* (After all, who is talkative) (1988), *Zai shijie li youxi* (Playing games in the world) (1989), *Fei shawen zhuyi* (Not chauvinism) (1992), *Nuren quanli* (Women's power) (1998), and *Aiqing nuren* (Love and women) (1998). Though Ping Lu does not limit herself to writing on feminist issues, her newspaper writings provide her with the opportunity to develop and express her feminist thinking. In her commentaries, she likes to write on local political, social, and cultural issues, but with a global slant. Occasionally, she will also comment on international affairs; for instance, breast implants, discrimination against women shown in the hiring policy of airlines, motherhood, the ban on pornography, first ladies of the world, the Nationalist Party's "white paper" on women's policy, reform of constitutional law, Joyce Carol Oates' book *Black Water* about Ted Kennedy, and so on.

In these essays, Ping Lu reveals herself as widely read, and her bookshelves contain more books in English than in Chinese. Feminism is one theme she reads on and uses to illuminate the roots of difficulties women face nowadays. The views of Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Marguerite Duras, Elaine Showalter, Mary Jacobus, Sandra Gilbert, Rosalind Coward, etc., all have appeared in her essays. Influenced mainly by French feminist theories, in the third period of her writing career she has developed her own feminist thinking on women's writing. She has also become more assertive. It seems that Ping Lu has found a degree of equilibrium in being a female. In "Zhe shi sheide xiangchou?" (Whose nostalgia is this?), Ping Lu says: "... [A]s feminist Cixous has said, a women's nostalgia is exactly the voice she lost and was deprived from her.... 'A female voice comes to me, a voice from the homeland.' The voice from the homeland. What kind of voice is

that? Struggling away from the definition that men have taken for granted, which land does that soft and clear voice intend to lead women to?"²⁵

Ping Lu believes that women's memory has been revised and that women's desire has been twisted. In the demanding cries from culture, women often cannot hear the voice from their own souls. Ping Lu claims that she is having an intimate dialogue with herself when she writes and that she hears better and better her inner voice.²⁶ This interview was published after *Implementing Ideals*, before her next book *Jinshu qishi lu* (The revelation of a banned book) (1997). Therefore, one can reasonably assume that the "intimate dialogue" that she is referring to is her writing in *Implementing Ideals*.

Ping Lu published *Implementing Ideas* in 1995. This novel is about two well respected politicians in the modern history of China: the founder of the Republic of China, Dr. Sun Zhongshan, also known as Sun Yat-sen in the West, and his wife Song Qingling who was a sister of Song Meiling, wife of Chiang Kaishek. *Implementing Ideals*, a historical novel, describes what happened in the last days before Sun's and Song's respective deaths, including their thoughts on Sun's efforts to stabilize China after his overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1911 and the love they experienced in their lives. Ping Lu is interested in historiography and uses this novel to question the authenticity of official histories. To her, official histories often deify a national hero. In order to create an heroic image for a person, there is a need to use the techniques of erasing, selecting, and stressing of facts.²⁷ In the end, the person we read about is no longer the person who has lived in the world. Our novelist claims that she intended to demystify the images of Sun and Song and to represent them as real people. In the preface of *Implementing Ideals*, Ping Lu writes: "Transcend death, I am determined to bring back the immortal souls!"²⁸

25 Ping Lu, "Zhe shi sheide xiangchou?" (Whose nostalgia is this?), *Aiqing nuren* (Love and women), by Ping Lu (Taipei: Lianhe wenxue chubanshe, 1998), 161.

26 Interview given to Huang Lizhen, "Qingting neizaide shengyin, shuxie nurende shijie" (Listening to the inner voice and writing womens world), *Zili zaobao* (Morning independent), December 21, 1996.

27 Christa Wolf, *Patterns of Childhood*, trans. Ursule Molinaro and Hedwig Rappolt (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1980), 359.

28 Ping Lu, *Implementing Ideals*, 4.

Ping Lu has read widely all sorts of postmodernist criticism and literature; it would be naive to think that she means to write a history about Sun and Song. Theoreticians of the postmodernist age have revealed the complexity of the re-presentation process, the problem of memory and its relation with historiography, as well as the process of narrating. As Christa Wolf states: "Ideally the structure of the experience coincides with the structure of the narrative.... But there is no technique that permits translating an incredibly tangled mesh whose threads are interlaced according to the strictest laws, into linear narrative without doing it serious damage. To speak about superimposed layers—'narrative levels'—means shifting into inexact nomenclature and falsifying the real process. 'Life,' the real process, is always steps ahead."²⁹ However, Ping Lu's choice of employing a form of fiction, instead of history, should not be looked at as an attempt to avoid being accused of mis-representation. She is far more ambitious than that.

Linda Hutcheon in *The Politics of Postmodernism* examines a number of contemporary feminist arts. Commenting on the strategy feminist visual artists use, Hutcheon says: "As we have seen, the work of Silvia Kolbowski, Barbara Kruger, and also Alexis Hunter, deploy the postmodern strategy of parodic use and abuse of mass-culture representations of women, subverting them by excess, irony, and fragmented recontextualization — all of which work to disrupt any passive consumption of such images."³⁰ Hutcheon's research shows that contemporary feminist artists borrow the postmodern technique of parody as a method to subvert the patriarchal system. It is through subversion that they can reconstruct their feminine subjectivity.³¹

Ping Lu spent a number of years abroad and traveled to many countries, including China, Russia, the United States, Japan, and Germany,³² to collect data on the lives of Sun and Song. Ping Lu's *Implementing Ideals* can be regarded as parodic, a parody of official histories of Sun and Song. What she intends to

29 Christa Wolf, *Patterns of Childhood*, 272.

30 Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), 152.

31 *Ibid.*, 168.

32 Chen Shuyu, "Chufan jinji yu xidu chonggao — Ping Lu zhu Xingdao tianya de deshì" (Violate the taboo and disrespect the respectable — on the strengths and shortcomings of Ping Lu's *Implementing Ideals at the Ends of the Earth*), *Taiwan xinwen bao* (Taiwan news report), March 9, 1997.

deconstruct is the patriarchal representation of history, and what she aims at reconstructing is women's desire and images. By this deconstruction and reconstruction, Ping Lu finally finds her way home.

Implementing Ideals is a novel that consists of sixty-two sections and adopts multiple points of view. Most of the time, it uses a limited subjective third-person perspective to narrate the story; it reveals only the thoughts of Sun and Song when this type of point of view is being used. However, in some sections at the beginning and end of the story, a character—one of Song's two adopted daughters, named Zhenzhen—is employed as a first-person narrator. The novel begins with the narration of Sun in the first section and switches to that of Zhenzhen in the second section. The alternation between these two types of narration lasts nine sections. Then it continues with narration of Song in section 10, followed by narration of Sun in the next section. The main body of the novel runs in this way until section 51 when it returns to Zhenzhen's narration. From section 51 to the last section, the three types of narration alternate to take the story up to the present.

Judging from this narrative arrangement, Ping Lu uses approximately half of the novel to depict Sun and half for Song. At first glance, it seems that the author has given equal attention to each of her main characters, but this is not true. In terms of the subjects described and the narrative style, Ping Lu has obviously treated the two characters differently. The story line focusing on Sun begins with Sun's last journey to the north with his intention to unify China and to gain support from Japan. The narrative of the sections on Sun center on Sun's political dealings. In the description, the reader can easily detect the author's research; there are many historical facts and details. Nanfang Shuo reports that Ping Lu read four to five hundred volumes of reference material on the subjects she treated in the novel.³³ Appearing to want to be objective, there are times when Ping Lu juxtaposes two or three versions of one historical event, based on different individuals' memories. Sections 13 (Sun's visit to Zhang Zuolin at Tianjin) and 58 (Sun's death) are examples. The detail challenges the authority of representation and the authenticity of official histories. It is a reminder of Derrida's words on the same subject: "[T]he authority of representation constrains us, imposing itself

33 Nanfang Shuo, "Chongsu gemingzhede xierou he xinqing — cong Makuizi *Migong zhongde jiangjun* dao Ping Lu de *Xingdao tianya*" (Reconstructing a revolutionist's flesh and emotion—from Marquéz's *The General in His Labyrinth* to Ping Lu's *Implementing Ideals at the Ends of the Earth*), *Lianbe wenxue* (United daily literature) 11.6 (April 1995): 157.

on our thought through a whole dense, enigmatic, and heavily stratified history. It programs us and precedes us."³⁴ In contrast, Ping Lu also presents Sun's occasional thoughts, such as his personal feelings for individuals whom he had met, and in doing so, Ping Lu creates an image of Sun's private self, a strategy of "restoring" the historical person.

As for the depiction of Song, the focal point shifts from the public domain to the private. Much narrative space is used in accounts of the heroine's recollections of her relationships with people who were once close to her and the description of her feminine sensations and emotions. From time to time, one wonders how Ping Lu could claim knowledge of them. For instance, section 28 is about Song's recollection of her childhood at home, remembering warmly her father's love for her and a frightening experience when she was separated from him in a crowd. In the last paragraph, she thinks of her elopement with Sun against her father's will. Ping Lu writes: "But she could never forget Father's sad eyes.... She had broken his heart. She just loosened her grip without paying any attention; when looking up again, they were all strange faces. Where was her father? She had not grabbed his hand tight enough. Just like that she had loosened her grip. Twisting her wrinkled face she thought; was that the beginning of this difficult life?"³⁵ This recollection expresses Song's profound regret, and could only have been written by a fiction writer, not a historian.

Moreover, the occasion that Ping Lu allows her Muse free reign is when she writes on Song's sensations and sexual desire:

It was all because of S. It was he who gave her a doubtless reason to stay young. S taught her how to coil her hair up on the top of her head, not to wear it continually in a bun behind. That's something she'd never done before! S would even hold her around the waist, tickle her and pull her arms to the back as if he were a naughty boy. Before that, who knows how long it had been; her skin had become wrinkled and loose, but it desired to be touched by somebody.³⁶

34 Jacques Derrida, "Sending: on Representation," trans. Peter and Mary Ann Caws, *Social Research* 49.2 (1982): 304.

35 Ping Lu, *Implementing Ideals*, 139.

36 *Ibid.*, 65.

Soaking in the water, she pondered sadly: up til now, there were only these dried up organs, nothing feminine was left. If that was so, the most precious thing of a life was love after all. But, what was the container of this love? Memory! It happened in her mind. She grinned with delight; she was certain that her love was saved in memory....³⁷

These passages manifest the French feminists' concepts of "feminine writing" and "writing of the body." Feminists believe that writing about a woman's body helps to establish a woman's self-identity or feminine subjectivity. As Linda Hutcheon points out, feminism is a politics, a politics of gender.³⁸ Feminists must first develop feminine subjectivity before they can establish the cultural identity of women. Ping Lu admits, in the description of Song, that there are times when she reveals her notion of love, and there were times, during her writing, when she felt Song and herself become one. She says: "God knows, on the road to the netherworld, the person I wanted to bring back most was she [Song]."³⁹ Ping Lu claims that she has followed her inner voice to write and she can hear it clearer and clearer. Is she describing herself in narrating Song's story? *Implementing Ideals* reveals an intimate relationship between the author and her heroine, and demonstrates a psychological intimacy between the author and the character Song that is comparable to that in Ping Lu's early stories on diasporic experiences.

In Ping Lu's "re-presentation" of the lives of Sun and Song, her contribution to our understanding of these two historical figures is that, while maintaining respect for Sun's self-sacrifice, she reveals that he could lack patience, be indecisive, and be disloyal in love; she is sympathetic to Song, given that, even as one of the most outstanding females of her day, she had to live a long lonely life after Sun's death. Ping Lu does not write in the mode of official history, but fictionally, a feminist fiction. For this reason, the criticism from Chen Shuyu, the author of *Song Qingling Zhuan* (Biography of Song Qingling), is not surprising. He mainly objected to the descriptions of a penitent Sun before death and the sexual desires of Song. In his opinion these descriptions do not tally with the characteristics of great figures like Sun and Song. In addition, he does not believe that a woman at the age between 58 and

37 *Ibid.*, 132.

38 Linda Hutcheon, 141-68.

39 Ping Lu, "Tossing and Turning."

89, like Song in the novel, would have sexual desires.⁴⁰ Seemingly in response to this criticism, Ping Lu offers an explanation of how she incorporated historical facts and creations of her imagination in writing *Implemental Ideals*: “[S]he does not deny that the stream of consciousness in this book contains parts that are fictional. Nevertheless, Ping Lu stresses that she controlled herself not to invent historical fact in support of her imagination.”⁴¹

Through her undermining of historiography and the establishment of feminine subjectivity, Ping Lu makes an important contribution to the history of women’s literature. She is no longer a “pathological half-person” like the protagonists in her early works; she has found her happiness and is a “complete” person.

Conclusion

Ping Lu began her writing career in 1982. In the almost twenty years since, she has gone through stages of change. She has always strived for a writing true to her heart. Her writing career is a diasporic journey of self-discovery beginning in a search for her cultural identity as a Chinese from Taiwan in an American setting. In writing *Implementing Ideals* she has finally found her way “home.” Global cultural movements, such as postmodernism and feminism, have definitely influenced her. In her *Implementing Ideals*, she has borrowed the form of historical fiction to undermine the principles of traditional historiography; at the same time, she has reconstructed woman’s identity by highlighting feminine subjectivity. While the former may be regarded as “offensive” by some traditional historians, she has created a new mode of writing, pointing out a direction for her fellow Chinese women writers. In both the form and content of *Implementing Ideals*, she has successfully provoked the cultural introspection that a true artist feels obliged to do.

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