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Revisiting *Moment in Peking*:

Yin/Yang Principles and Gender Performativity

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Abstract

The ambiguity of Lin Yutang's approach to women has triggered varying interpretations. His novel *Moment in Peking* chronologically coincided with the rise of the women's movement in China at the turn of the twentieth century when West and East cultures clashed in China. As the nationalistic program of modernization proceeded, the Western colonialist hierarchy and binary logic happened to be adopted and internalized by contemporaneous Chinese intellectuals. In its portraying a series of struggles encountered by the central female figure Yao Mulan, the novel delves deeply into the performative nature of gender as well as the Chinese traditional notion of yin and yang complementarity, flowing, and fusion. This article draws on Judith Butler's account of gender performativity to illustrate how Mulan performatively subverts the hegemonic norms through alternating between her yin and yang, which contributes to the destabilization of the colonialist categories of gender binarism and an understanding of gender identity as instable, fluid, and performative. Besides, it highlights the importance to take the geographical, historical and cultural context into consideration when analyzing women's experiences of gender.

Keywords: decolonization; gender fluidity; Judith Butler; *Moment in Peking*; performativity; yang; yin

1. Introduction

Moment in Peking, published in 1939, is a novel originally written in English by Chinese author Lin Yutang. The novel covers the turbulent events in China from 1900 to 1938, including the May Fourth movement. Dorothy Ko [1] claims that gender becomes a relevant category in Chinese history only when the historian writes against the May Fourth and late Qing legacy which formed in China's modernization and Westernization processes during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. This nationalistic program of modernization facilitated the processes of creating a modern nation-state and a new gender ideology simultaneously. In terms of gender, the Western colonialist hierarchy and binary logic were adopted and internalized by those Chinese intellectuals in their encounter with the West. During this process, Confucianism was equated with patriarchy.¹ It was accused of constructing such a women/men relationship which was characterized by oppression and coercion, and the power structure was binary and unilateral with men possessing power and women powerless. Chinese women were thus identified with backwardness and dependency. Besides, with the birth of the modernized and Westernized, semicolloquial language during the 1920s, the term *nüxing* (literally female sex) and *nanxing* (male sex) came into use, which are oppositional terms constructing male and female as bipolar oppositions.² "Woman" thus became the Other of "man", a stereotypical feminine image was constructed which was conceived as the contrary counterpart to the masculine. This new identity was said to be based upon biological attributes, resulting in the fixed and essentialized gender identity and relationship. Colonialist categories of sex binarism were appropriated and established.

In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault [2] warns us of the "repressive hypothesis": imagining an oppressive origin so that we can today fantasize about our modern liberation from power. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty [3] demonstrates, in Western feminist writings there is a cross-cultural singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy and male dominance that leads to the construction of a reductive, homogeneous, stable, and ahistorical structure that oppresses all women in Third World countries. In the process of modernization, the Chinese intellectuals, consciously and unconsciously, adopted this gender ideology which subsequently colonized the constitutive complexities which characterized the actual lives of Chinese women, resulting

in the construction of the a-historical, victimized Chinese Woman image. To correct this simplistic picture of womanhood, Ko [1] claims that the specific periods and locales as well as the different social and class backgrounds of the women should be taken into account.

As is illustrated in the literature review, Lin's involvement with the feminist movement in early twentieth-century China has been interpreted as negative in many studies. However, he has stated in the preface of *Moment in Peking* [4] that the novel

is neither a glorification of the old way of life nor a defense of the new. It is merely a story of how men and women in the contemporary era grow up and learn to live with one another[...]how certain habits of living and ways of thinking are formed, and how, above all, they adjust themselves to the circumstances in this earthly life where men strive but the gods rule.

Lin was writing at a time when East and West cultures collided and coexisted in China, but without an understanding of nineteenth century gender norms, it is difficult to see how he may have a broader view of gender than some critics have assumed. The context of the breaking down of Qing dynasty norms justifies a feminist reinterpretation of the novel. Lin himself never indicates that his female figure Yao Mulan is constituted as the ideal woman who is catered to the patriarchal tastes. In fact, his novel offers no ideological markers. As a result, readers have assumed that the novelist is a supporter of gender norms in the late imperial dynasty because of his neutral description of the contemporary people's lifestyles. Far from supporting nineteenth century norms, Lin sets a trap before the readers. However, feminisms that are based on European notions of gender do not understand the trap. With an understanding of both Chinese and European feminism, this study proposes to dislodge the mistaken, patriarchal reading of Mulan.

This analysis of the female figure will focus on the concept of performativity and seek to highlight the connection between performativity, the Chinese traditional notion of yin and yang complementarity, flowing, and fusion, as well as the subversion of the colonized gender norms by arguing that through alternating between yin and yang, Mulan's presentation of gender manifested a shift away from a normative conception towards one of instable and fluid nature and proposed one possibility to destabilize the internalized colonialist gender politics.

2. Materials and Methods

Some researchers proposed that Lin was an advocate of patriarchal ideology, and most of the female figures in his novels were preferences of the patriarchs. Chen Xiaoling [5] explored the cultural construction of Mulan considering her attitude toward life, love, and marriage. She pointed out that Mulan embodied the uniqueness of the culture by which she was constituted, as a conservative who embraced Taoism and Confucianism. Wang Lan [6] proposed that Mulan pursued gender equality, but at the same time still submissively accomplished her normative gender role, which indicated that there was still a long way to go towards women's liberation. Wang Xiaona [7] concluded that Mulan was constructed in conformity with a man's vision of an ideal woman. She was a subject under patriarchal discourses in certain cultural and historical context. Wang further pointed out that even though the male writer was dedicated in portraying new women images with feminist characteristics, he still could not break free from the deep-rooted patriarchal ideology, preventing him from really putting himself into women's shoes. There are also researchers who analyzed the female figures in this novel, focusing on the awakening of female consciousness under the social environment where East and West cultures clashed and coexisted in China at the turn of the twentieth century. Wang Yanqi [8] pointed out that Mulan was at first a Taoist and Confucianist. Encountering with Western feminist thoughts and some other big revolutions happening in China, she later became a revolutionist with independent personality.

Earlier researchers have given us a good start, it is now well acknowledged that those figures in the novel were all constructed by their specific geographical, cultural and historical context. Many critics claimed that though possessing masculine traits, the central female figure, Mulan, still submitted to her position in the traditional patriarchal system. What happens, though, if we refuse to consider Confucianism as a set of monolithic and static doctrines, and understand the gender binary system as an imported idea that is antagonistic to traditional Confucianism?³ Earlier studies seemed to suggest that Mulan were merely constituted through repeatedly performing according to the external drives, be it the traditional cultures or modern spirits. Most of them failed to notice Mulan's resistance to power. At an age when discourses of different origins were constantly contending and interacting with one another, when Mulan enacted one discourse, she might spontaneously subvert another. Besides, the interacting of those discourses might bring disruptions within each of them, which thus opened a space for alternative practices and perspectives available. These became the bases of Mulan's resistance to power in Lin's novel.

2.1. Gender Performativity

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler [9] stresses that it is vitally important to pay attention to the constitutedness of gender in different historical and cultural contexts. As a theorist of gender performativity, Butler holds that gender neither expresses an essence nor aspires to “an objective ideal”, she argues that there exists no transcendent, prediscursive, coherent, and “natural” categories of gender. The idea of gender is created through various acts without which “there would be no gender at all” [9]. The seemingly natural and essential gender and even sex are actually culturally constructed through performing, the repetition of stylized bodily acts. Gender, therefore, is understood by Butler as an act rather than a fact, and “the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established” [9]. To subvert the hegemonic gender terms, it is necessary to note that one can never be totally liberated from power, especially in relation to the politics of sexuality. On the other hand, we are never completely determined by power. Therefore, the possibility for subversion, as Parisa Shams [10] states, resides in a subject’s deviant repeating process of the dominant discourses. In *Moment in Peking*, Mulan enacted the Chinese traditional notion of yin and yang complementarity, flowing, and fusion. The blending and interchanging of yin and yang in her uncovered the ambiguous aspects of masculinity and femininity, which went against the neo-Confucian notion of the fixed and essentialized gender identity, and destabilized the colonialist categories of gender binarism.

2.2. Disruptions Within the Dominating Discourses

Although the rise of nationalism often tended to elide the multiplicities and contradictions within Confucianism. It is now widely acknowledged that Confucianism should not be viewed as a set of monolithic and static doctrines: it has been continuously reinterpreted, enriched, and extended for more than two thousand years since its formation. Besides, the premodern Chinese culture should not be simply reduced to Confucian culture, considering the highly complex native systems of thoughts and practices descended from the predecessors [11]. Therefore, despite its great importance for and influence on Chinese culture and its status as the dominant, official ideology, as Ko et al. [11] have proposed, Confucianism is “by no means the only ideological and cultural force”. Moreover, the long-term interaction and mutual influence between Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in China have also made the boundary of Confucianism not always clear-cut.

Therefore, the official, orthodox Confucian ideology of female/femininity and male/masculinity can be seen as a “structure” to which the slippages, nonconformity, and flexibility in everyday practices brought incremental changes. The instability of Confucian discourse may contain the seeds of its own disruptions. According to Judith Butler’s performativity theory, the transformative power of Confucian ethics should rely on the process of the subject’s repetition. In another word, it is the very process that contains the subversive potential in itself. As Du Lanlan [12] proposes, there are two ways to look at Butler’s argument about the relationship between discourses and agency. In one understanding, discourses construct subjects and practices, and subjects and practices reproduce discourses; in the other, one looks for the slippages in reproduction, the erosions of long-standing pattern, the moments of disorder and of outright resistance. In conclusion, there is always space left for alternative practices, and these may become the bases of resistance and transformation. While there may be a discourse that is dominant over others and constitutes an ordering, there is always potential of incremental changes, of unsettling alternatives and cracks, and even of subversion caused by transgressions or competing discourses.

The novel *Moment in Peking* was created when the Eastern and Western culture clashed and coexisted in contemporary China. Those contending discourses may produce new possibilities of experiencing gender, elucidating the instability, fluidity and performativity of gender. In this respect, the traditional notion of yin and yang complementarity, flowing, and fusion might be a forceful one with its ambivalence toward some aspects of feminine and masculine roles. As the taiji diagram well illustrates:



When Yin reaches its climax, it recedes in favor of Yang. Then after Yang reaches its climax, it recedes in favor of Yin. This is the eternal cycle. The dots inside the white and black halves indicate that within each is the seed of the other. Yin cannot exist without Yang and vice versa. The ideal state of things in the physical universe, as well as in the world of humans, is a state of harmony represented by the balance of Yin and Yang in body and mind [13].

The symmetrical disposition of the dark yin and the light yang suggests cyclical changes. There is the constant flowing, interacting, interchanging, and fusing of yin and yang. If such processes is happening in both he and she, then the now taken-for-granted modern dualistic notion of man/male and woman/female would to a large extent just render as biology. He is still he as opposed to she, but yin and yang do not fixate on she/woman/female and he/man/male.

In *Moment in Peking*, under the context in which Confucianism, Taoism, and other philosophies have been contending and communicating with one another throughout the history, and growing up as the East and West cultures clashed and coexisted in contemporary China, the central protagonist, Mulan had been a subject of those different discourses which were intertwined with each other. When Mulan performed one discourse, she may spontaneously subverted another. As she acted out the traditional notion of yin and yang complementarity, flowing, and fusion, she spontaneously subverted the official, orthodox version of Confucian discourse. Her presentation of gender thus underwent a shift away from a normative conception towards one of instable, fluid and performative nature, and showcased the differences of Chinese feminism from its Western counterpart based on the former's specific geographical, historical and cultural context.

Focusing on the Chinese traditional notion of yin and yang complementarity, flowing, and fusion, as well as Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, this article seeks to highlight the connection between performativity and the subversion of gender norms by arguing that Mulan, the central female figure in the novel, showcases the notion of gender as a set of performative acts with subversive potential through her enacting the yin/yang principles. Moreover, this article decolonizes the appropriated Western feminism and articulates one facet of Chinese women's specific experiences of gender under certain historical and cultural context.

3. Results

3.1. Non-Gendering Indoctrination

The central figures, Yao Sze-an and his daughter Yao Mulan were devout followers of Taoism. Mr. Yao followed the Taoist philosophy and took a hands-off approach to family affairs. As a

free-thinking Taoist, he was indifferent to the orthodox Confucian tradition. He was ready to accept new things and new ideas. He also put a series of revolutionary thoughts into practice, and used them to teach his daughters. Under his influence, Mulan had an inclusive attitude toward various ideas and practices since her early childhood. However, Mrs. Yao, a follower of Confucianism, scolded Mulan for being unwomanly for whistling, but Mr. Yao saw nothing wrong with it. He also taught his daughter to sing Peking Opera, even though at that time singing was reserved for the lower classes and was a symbol of inferiority and immortality. He also stopped Mrs. Yao from binding her daughter's feet. Therefore, there was no difference between men and women in Mulan's eyes since childhood. Her father's indoctrination had prevented her from being constructed as a stereotypical feminine figure conceived as the contrary counterpart to the masculine by her orthodox Confucianist mother.

To be modeled into a perfect lady, girls of wealthy family in late Qing dynasty were supposed to retreat in their boudoir, which symbolically and literally functioned as a gendered image of confined femininity and kept them from public spheres. Mulan expressed her impulse to break boudoir restriction and to deviate from the prescribed gendering norms. When she was fourteen years old, one day she took her little sister Mochow to wander around the street. Regardless of the fact that they were not supposed to be out in the street unchaperoned. The two girls just couldn't resist the stolen pleasure of wandering about free and alone. All of a sudden, Mulan was slapped on the cheek by her brother Yao Tijen.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"We are on our way home," said Mulan, angrily. "Why do you slap me?"

"Of course I should slap you," replied Tijen. "You girls are going to be 'street-running women.' Once you are let out of the home, you have no sense of decency."

"Why can you go out, and we cannot?"

"You are girls, that's all. If you don't like it, I'll tell mother about it."

"Go ahead and tell mother." Mulan was really angry. "You have no right to slap me. You haven't! Our parents are still living!" To defend herself, Mulan added, "I'll tell father about what you do, too." [4]

This incident set Mulan thinking about the difference between women and men. From then on, she became interested in her father's talking about the "new girl"—with natural feet, equality with men, and a modern education.

Brought up by a free-thinking Taoist, Mulan developed a lifestyle typical of the educated male. She indulged herself in studying bones with ancient inscriptions.⁴ She received modern education, read novels, and involved herself in discussions concerning contemporary literature and arts. Her manner and behavior was a salient example of the female deviation from orthodox norms, which elucidated the instable and fluid nature of gender. Besides, through the portrayal of Mulan, Lin showed the readers that there was a phenomenon of integrating traditionally male activities into the female sphere at the turn of the twentieth century. In this sense, Mulan's non-gendering upbringing was by no means being formed by accident. It is intriguing to notice the multiplicity and complexity of the social, and cultural phenomenon in late Qing dynasty when taking the local context into consideration.

3.2. The Subversion of the Colonialist Gender Binary Logic

In contrast to the free-thinking and unconventional father, Mrs. Yao was a Confucius advocate. Under her influence, the difference in treatment between the sons and the daughters of the Yao family was much more obvious than in other families. Mulan has to bear the mainstay qualities of womanhood in mind, or at least behaves accordingly when necessary: thrift, industry, sobriety, good manners, a yielding temper, obedience, knowledge of household management, and the domestic arts of nursing, cooking, and sewing. Fortunately, these rules could not confine her. She did not mind behaving in conformity to them, since the femininity in her went along with such characteristics. At the same time, she never considered it wrong or unnatural to behave in a differential manner, since the yin/yang complementarity, interaction, and fusion in her permitted her to more possibilities than doctrines had prescribed for her.

She actually turned out to be a quite capable helper to her mother in household affairs. Later when she was married into the Tseng family, she managed her feminine household affairs neatly and gained respect and recognition from the whole family for her capability. She also got along well with the servants because of her talented business ability. Besides, she never wanted the household affairs to be better run than they had been run previously so that she would not incur jealousy from the former "manager".

“...she soon learned and remembered. Ruling a household with twenty or thirty servants was like ruling a school or a country, the essential point being to get the routine going and to maintain justice and respect for authority and an always delicate balance of power among the inferiors with whom one had to work.” [4]

Her mother-in-law was glad to find such a capable helper and gave Mulan more and more power. In accomplishing her socially prescribed feminine works, she embodied her masculine traits. In this manner, yin and yang were blending and interchanging with each other in her body and mind.

The blending of yin and yang in her made her demeanors unclassifiable under the colonialist categories of fixed gender identities. Her endeavor to rescue her brother-in-law Kung Lifu (hereafter Lifu) from jail also exemplified this point (It is important to acknowledge that Mulan had fell in love with Lifu when they were both unmarried). When Lifu was arrested, Mulan and others went to the prison to visit him, she negotiated with and bribed the jailers with three old pearls in exchange of a cellar with sunshine and better bedding for Lifu. Later on, acknowledged that Lifu would be shot at any moment, she decided that she had to visit the prison again regardless of appropriateness and conventions, which elucidated her courage to break through the confinement of dominating discourses. During this meeting, she could not help showing her deep concern and love for Lifu. However, it was obvious that Lifu failed to understand Mulan's true feelings. He thought that it was his pregnant wife, Mochow who had asked Mulan to come. He did not feel the same toward Mulan nor could he respond to her love. Besides, Lifu loved Mochow. Mulan didn't care about that. What she really cared at the moment was that this person she fell deeply in love should not die. Therefore, instead of staying at home to wait for the news of Lifu as a person in her position should do, she resorted to action and would do anything she could to get him out. At this moment, Mulan was the embodiment of qing⁵ (love, feeling, emotion, sentiment), her femininity has reached its full. As her love and concern (her femininity) for Lifu mounted, she resorted to active move (her masculinity) to rescue him. This showcased the eternal cycling of yin and yang: when yin reached its climax, it receded in favor of yang; then after yang reached its climax, it receded in favor of yin. Lin's characterization of Mulan is a quintessential example of gender instability and fluidity. Moreover, it is also a salient manifestation of gender's performative nature.

Shortly after Lifu's being put into prison, it was mentioned in the novel that a professor Kao of Peking university was also arrested. His beautiful young wife went to the Manchurian

commander's office to beg for his life. The Manchurian commander had bad intentions toward the young woman. She refused to comply and Kao was shot. This case gave Mulan a glimmer of hope. Professor Kao's wife had gone to plead for her husband's life; why shouldn't she go to plead for Lifu's? Although she did not consider her thoughts to be wrong, a number of annoying questions concerning appropriateness still went through her mind at this moment.

Yet how was she to report herself? What if Mochow should hear of it? What if Sunya [Mulan's husband] should hear? Above all, how was it going to work out? Yet she was sure of one thing, that Lifu must be released at once, before it was too late. [4]

Nevertheless, when she left the prison, she called a rickshaw and headed directly to the commander's headquarters. This time, she behaved as a rebel. She was unfettered by the conservative notion of appropriateness. Bearing the Taoist doctrine "men strive, but the gods decide" in mind, she would do her best to save the one she loved. She was brave and determined. Moreover, Mulan's endeavor to rescue Lifu also elucidated her belief of gender equality. There are so many stories of heroes saving beauty in history that it has formed a stereotype that women are the ones who are weaker and need to be protected. Mulan's deed best illustrates that there is no difference between man and woman. Because woman is also inherited with such masculine traits as brave, resourceful and capable of protecting people they cherish, which echoes with the yin/yang principles that there is yin and yang in both he and she.

Getting down at the commander's office, Mulan knew that her beauty could be a weapon to bring her to the commander. However, to have Lifu released, beauty was not enough. Her mind revolved quickly. She resorted to flattery, played upon the personal jealousy between the two rival commanders and then claimed that this commander was nobler, more responsible for the people he was in charge, and was more serious about his job. It could not be said that this commander had exactly noble intention in the first place because he ordered the door locked when Mulan came in. However, when Mulan mentioned the other commander's "bad intentions," his own intentions became automatically "good." He had just won the fight for the office and felt quite pleased with himself. After listening to Mulan's flattery, he even assumed a dignified appearance. Now he was willing to hear Mulan's plead. Noticing that, Mulan resourcefully set up a linguistic trap for the commander and made the commander convinced of Lifu's innocence. At last, the commander looked long at her beautiful face with its winning smile and then he cursed and said, "You force me to be a good man," and then he

gave Mulan the release paper.

“You win tonight. And my congratulations to —er—Mr. Kung. I hope you see that I am here to protect the innocent.”

“I shall tell everyone about it,” said Mulan. [4]

With her beauty, courage, and intelligence, she finally got Lifu released from jail. This time, she enacted both her masculinity and femininity to have her goal accomplished. Yin and yang were flowing, interacting and fusing in her, achieving harmony and balance.

As the daughter of a Taoist,⁶ she was actually enacting the traditional yin/yang principles. Sometimes she was a good girl in the neo-Confucian sense, for the rest of the times she was quite rebellious. The ambiguity aspects of masculinity and femininity were manifested in her body and mind: she had a delicate mind but a generous disposition; She was small and tender in body, yet resourceful and brave in mind; she seemed to act submissively, but only on condition that her passivity could brought her the result she expected, for her feminine/passive manner oftentimes was meant to bring her masculine/positive outcomes. In reality, she performed in accordance with the Chinese traditional philosophy which states that the constant flowing, interacting, interchanging, and fusing of yin and yang is happening in both he and she. She was actually the embodiment of the Taiji diagram, and reached a state of perfect harmony represented by the balance of yin and yang in body and mind. Thus she had subverted the official and orthodox Confucius definition of women, and embraced herself as a multi-faceted subject, which disclosed the invalidity of the colonialist gender binary logic.

3.3. Decolonial Feminist Discourses: Context Matters

Mulan’s acceptance of her arranged marriage with Tseng Sunya (hereafter Sunya) has long been considered as her passive obedience to the patriarchal doctrines.⁷ However, Mulan was actually active in thinking and acting, and would never passively receive things she didn’t want. When she was appointed to marry Sunya. She barely refused although she had just realized her falling for Lifu. Growing up with Sunya, she knew it would be easy for her to get along with him, of whom she had no fear. In addition, by all social standards Mulan would be certainly considered well married into the Tseng family. If she hadn’t happened to know Lifu, she would accept it without hesitation, like a Taoist would do, to accept things as it naturally turned out to be. Despite Mulan’s falling for Lifu, the author had never mentioned that Lifu had the same feeling for Mulan in the novel. Instead, Mulan always had a premonition that

Mochow was going to be engaged to him sooner or later [4]. Later, Mulan happened to know that Lifu had a preference for such a woman like her sister Mochow.⁸ She also noticed that Mochow liked Lifu. Therefore, she accepted things as it naturally developed and didn't strive for things not belonging to her. Besides, she was convinced that Sunya would be a good companion, and her life in the Tseng family would be harmonious since they all liked her. It was her own choice to hide her feelings for Lifu. It was the wisdom of a true Taoist. Therefore, her choice by no means could be the evidence of her as a conservative woman. If she did behave passively, that was actually her own choice after contemplation. In this sense, her rational contemplation was more of a manifestation of her masculinity than a symbol of passivity. The Western feminist discourses could not be taken for granted without considering the local, historical and cultural context of Chinese women's construction.

Mulan's manner always exemplified the ambiguous aspects of femininity and masculinity. When she moved to Hangchow with her family, she had adopted an entirely new mode of life. She changed her previous luxurious clothing to cotton gowns, and didn't wear makeup anymore. Whereas Sunya never completely shared her view of life. It was not until she found Sunya falling in love with a curly-haired modern girl named Cao Lihua did she realize that she had carried her new way of life too far. His betrayal did not hurt her feelings that much though, because she didn't love Sunya from the very beginning. She did not think of a divorce, but how to get the family back to its track. To her, it was a question of duty considering her children's future. She was accomplishing her duty the mainstream discourse had assigned to her. Her reaction would be considered as passive under the European feminists' eyes. However, Mulan's choice was meant to bring her the best result. At this moment of her life, what she most needed was a harmonious family and a serene life. In this sense, a divorce would bring her no good. This well illustrated the importance to notice the differences between Chinese and European feminism, and pointed out that feminist concerns and strategies should be geographically, historically, and culturally grounded.

Now Mulan contrived to restore her former peaceful life. She wrote a letter to Lihua, asking to see her privately. She tackled this girl with strategies. At the day of meeting, beautifully dressed, she manipulated her dignified manner and considerate remarks to let the girl know that in this battle the latter could barely win. In the end, Mulan's bearing and behavior even made Lihua think it was Sunya's fault to cheat on his wife, but not that his wife didn't deserve a good man like Sunya. She promised Mulan that she would stop going with Sunya. Realizing that she had already won, Mulan acknowledged Lihua that she would be glad to give the latter

another option. Knowing that Lihua was a modern girl who would not bend for conventions, Mulan declared that Lihua could be the concubine of Sunya if she was so deeply in passion and her love for Sunya was that great.

“But Mulan said, “Are there no things we should discuss? Are you sure it is possible for you to stop, and that your way is all clear?”

“It is quite clear,” replied Lihua curtly.

“I was afraid there might be other questions. I am glad to hear you say that you are not worried. You may think I am not sincere. Let me tell you again that I have known what it is when a girl loves a man and loses him. There are such great loves in this world. You know in ancient times there was another solution. A girl who fell in love with a married man was willing to accept the position of a concubine.

Today there are few whose love is great enough for this. Now you know I am open-minded. Will you be frank enough to tell me whether, if you had your choice, you would rather cut off this affair or come into the family of the man you love?”

[...]

“I only want you to know that you can choose and not do anything desperate. If you do not believe that I am sincere, you can ask my husband if I did not offer him the chance to have a concubine.”

“No, I would rather be free,” said Lihua, proudly.

“And we can still be friends?”

“Gladly,” replied Lihua. [4]

Lihua was surprised by Mulan’s generosity, but she said that she would rather be free, which was not beyond Mulan’s expectations. At this moment Mulan was the good person, she didn’t pressed the question of Lihua’s giving up of Sunya, the girl said that herself. Later when Sunya knew about the two women’s meeting, Mulan could still defend herself by offering the girl another option. She did ask the girl to choose, but only on condition that she knew that the girl would refuse. Even if the girl accepted the position of a concubine, Mulan’s status in family and her children’s fortune would remain unharmed. This time, she made things progress as she wished through performing according to the conventional discourses of what a good woman should be. Mulan further set up a similar trap for her husband and “made” him give up this affair in a mild way. She knew that her husband wouldn’t take the idea of having

a concubine since he was afraid of being called bad names by others at an era when modern and conventional ideas were constantly contending. Thus she would like to show her consideration and generosity as a wife by way of advising her husband to have one.

“Another idea of mine was that you should have a concubine. ”

“You mean you want a concubine for your own companionship?” said Sunya.

[...] Suddenly she added, “You men!”

“We men, what?”

“Nothing. You men don’t tell your wives what you think. ”

“What makes you think so?”

“Well, you said that you approved of my adopting this simple life and simple dress, but you don’t. ”

“If I didn’t tell you what I thought, didn’t I let you have your way? It is always a husband’s duty to yield to his wife’s whims and notions. ”

“You won’t tell me the truth now—for instance, whether you would like to have a concubine. ”

“Honestly I don’t. Do you think I should?”

“That depends on whether you love a girl enough to be willing to take such a step and whether there is a girl who loves you enough to face the humiliation and the social disapproval. ”

“What gave you this eccentric idea now? Why should I fall in love with a girl now?”

“Answer me the question, directly. If I a girl for you, or if you fell in love with a girl, what would you do? Would you take her?”

“You are most impractical. How could I? It is not being done. And modern girls don’t want to be concubines. ”

“Not even if you fell madly in love with her?”

“What would people say? Whit would people say?”

“So, I see, there is really no love great enough for this. You men!” “We men are more practical. What made you think of this tonight?” [4]

Mulan seemed to be a submissive women who embraced the conventions. In reality, it was her endeavor to use her passivity to have thing done as she wished. She realized her own intentions by enacting the patriarchal discourses. Under the perspective of European feminism, her generous compromise would no doubt receive criticism for putting herself in precarious condition. However, under the specific historical and cultural context, it was her acting out the patriarchal discourses that had helped resume her peaceful life. This highlights the vital importance to pay attention to the constitutedness of gender in different historical and cultural contexts.

4. Conclusion

Mulan showed how performative subversion took place within a context of norms and conventions that had already constitute her as a subject. She blurred the boundaries of gender categories as she oscillated between normatively understood masculine and feminine traits. In this way, gender instability, fluidity and performativity was highlighted and the notion of a stable and essentialized gender identity was undermined.

Moreover, by employing Butler's theory of gender performativity and the Chinese traditional notion of yin and yang complementarity, interaction, and fusion to read *Moment in Peking*, this thesis points out the importance to notice Chinese women's actual experiences of gender under their specific historical and cultural context. This article further seeks to offer an alternative framework for the analysis of the central female image Mulan in the context of Lin's novel. Despite the fact that Mulan has incurred accusations of being a conservative woman exalted to a seemingly high position by patriarchs. When we take into consideration the specific context under which Chinese women were experiencing gender, and understand the gender binary system as an imported idea that is antagonistic to traditional Confucianism, the actual image of the Chinese-featured feminism is brought into view. In this sense, this article decolonizes the "Western" feminism, and sheds light on Chinese women's specific journey towards their liberation.

5. Notes

1. For more discussion of Confucianism's reduction to monolithic and static doctrines, see Ko et al. [11].

2. For more detailed analysis of the construction of nūxing, see Tani Barlow [14].
3. The import of the European colonialist hierarchy and binary logic since the rise of nationalism created a neo-Confucian philosophy, which is an evil twin to the earlier benign image of Confucianism. The contradictions and multiplicities within the Confucian tradition were elided; Confucianism became a stand-in for whatever undesirable baggage seemed to impede progress, be it authoritarianism or feudalism. See Ko [11].
4. These bones with ancient inscriptions contain the earliest examples of Chinese writing. They begin to appear from an eroded river bank in Hogan at the site of the old Shang capital around the year of 1900. At that time, only a few collectors took an interest in them. According to Lin's description, Mulan was perhaps the only girl who had heard of these inscribed bones dating back to the eighteenth century, B .C.
5. A Chinese character which means love and passion, and stands for a system of yin-associated values that promoted the feminine and the natural as markers of moral and spiritual authenticity.
6. As the name of book one has suggested. The novel *Moment in Peking* consists of three books, they are *The Daughters of a Taoist*, *Tragedy in The Garden*, and *The Song of Autumn*.
7. In late Qing Dynasty, people still married someone their parents had chosen for them. This deep-rooted convention had not been broken yet.
8. In the novel, Mulan had once asked Lifu which figure he liked best in *Red Chamber Dream*, Lifu thought for a moment, and said he liked the talent of Taiyu and the character of Paotsa, but Taiyu weeped too much and Paotsa was too capable. This indicated that Lifu had a preference for such a woman like Mochow, because Mochow bore the merits Lifu had mentioned.

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