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Chinese Women Intellectuals, In/Visibility, and Translation

1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the comparative invisibility of contemporary Chinese women intellectuals in translation flows, focusing on the fields of the humanities and social sciences (HSS). It begins by characterizing the position of Chinese women intellectuals in their own original context and in the translation and circulation of Chinese HSS. I will show that Chinese women intellectuals have occupied a marginal position in the intellectual and academic field of mainland China in comparison to their male counterparts, which is reflected in their lesser visibility in translation. Despite this situation, we find some exceptional cases of women intellectuals whose work has been translated and circulated in other languages. I will address what factors and in what conditions the work of contemporary Chinese women intellectuals have been translated into English in recent decades. For that, I will focus on a specific case study: The translation of the works of Dai Jinhua, a contemporary female cultural studies scholar and public intellectual based at Peking University whose works have been regularly translated and published in English. Her case will allow me to identify the conditions and mechanisms that allow or obstruct processes of translation and circulation. More precisely, I will show the value of social networks in enabling processes of translation. In that sense, this chapter does not only address the issue of invisibility but also intends to point to the social and intellectual practices that counter and challenge those same conditions of invisibility.

I take my perspective from the discipline of translation studies and, more precisely, sociological approaches to translation. I will combine, on the one hand, a quantitative analysis of book translations by focusing on the authors' gender and, on the other hand, a qualitative analysis that addresses the conditions and mechanisms that enable translation and circulation.

If the translation and circulation of non-Euro-American works in the fields of humanities and social sciences (HSS) into European languages have been marginal (at least until very recently), this marginality doubles when we include the perspective of gender. This is particularly visible in the case of Chinese women intellectuals, as I will show in my analysis later on. Despite the increasing number of works being translated from Chinese into English following China's increasing geopolitical weight on the global scene, the number of translated works authored by women remains proportionally low. This can be observed from a database I compiled for an earlier research project, which includes translations of humanities and social sciences books

from Chinese into English between 1989 and 2018.¹ This database contains a total of 195 translations. 142 are single-authored books, of which only eleven – that is, a meager 7.75 percent – are by women.² As an additional indicator, it is interesting to look at the different anthologies and collections of translated essays of contemporary Chinese thinkers. Translated anthologies and collections, as a particular cultural product, are often intended to convey an image or an interpretation of the situation in a given (source) context.³ The five translated anthology initiatives that I identified between 1998 and 2020 feature forty-seven different Chinese intellectuals and scholars (including participants in transcribed roundtables), and only 11 of them (23.4 percent) are women.⁴

Of course, the underrepresentation of women in translation is not specific to Chinese authors; it has been also observed in other contexts.⁵ In addition to quantitative differences, gender-informed biases can also be noted in qualitative terms. For instance, works by women authors may be more visible in certain topics and subjects, such as the recent waves of translation of fiction written by female Chinese writers – although publishers tend to present these publications in voyeuristic and othering ways.⁶ With regard to intellectual and academic works by women authors, translations tend to be circumscribed to specific topics or fields of knowledge. For example,

1 Manuel Pavón-Belizón, “The Translation and Circulation of Contemporary Chinese Humanities and Social Sciences in European and North American Contexts (1989–2018)” (PhD diss., Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, 2023). See pp. 15–21 in this reference for compilation criteria.

2 I focus specifically on single-authored publications because, I argue, they reveal a higher level of recognition for the author than being featured in multi-authored publications, given the higher investment in terms of time, editorship, and financing required for a publishing initiative that takes the form of a monograph. With regard to the enduring relevance of the “author” (be it as an individual or as a social function), see Marco Santoro and Gisèle Sapiro, “On the Social Life of Ideas and the Persistence of the Author in the Social and Human Sciences. A Presentation of the Symposium,” *Sociologica. Italian Journal of Sociology on Line* 1 (2017): 1–17.

3 Teresa Seruya, Lieven d’Hulst, Alexandra Rosa and Maria L. Moniz, eds., *Translation in Anthologies and Collections (19th and 20th Centuries)* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2013): vii.

4 The anthologies are, by year of publication: Gloria Davies, ed., *Voicing Concerns: Contemporary Chinese Critical Inquiry* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); Xudong Zhang, ed., *Whither China? Intellectual Politics in Contemporary China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Lau Kin Chi and Huang Ping, eds., “China Reflected,” special issue of *Asian Exchange* 18, no. 2 (2003); Chaohua Wang, ed., *One China, Many Paths* (London: Verso, 2003); Timothy Cheek, David Ownby and Joshua A. Fogel, eds., *Voices from the Chinese Century: Public Intellectual Debate from Contemporary China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

5 Gisèle Sapiro, “What Factors Determine the International Circulation of Scholarly Books? The Example of the Translations Between English and French in the Era of Globalization,” in *The Social and Human Sciences in Global Power Relations. Socio-Historical Studies of the Social and Human Sciences*, ed. Johan Heilbron, Gustavo Sorá and Thibaud Boncourt (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): 59–93.

6 Mengying Jiang, “Female Voices in Translation: An Interrogation of a Dynamic Translation Decade for Contemporary Chinese Women Writers, 1980–1991,” *The Translator* 25, no. 1 (2019): 1–12.

literature studies or gender studies are cases where contributions by women scholars and intellectuals can feature more prominently.

The absence of women intellectuals in general has been noted in the intellectual and academic canons of different disciplines. As an example, Hutchings and Owens analyzed the marked gender and racial bias of the intellectual canon in the discipline of international relations.⁷ While recent decades have seen an increasing interest in the “diversification” and “decolonization” of intellectual canons in a range of disciplines, this endeavor appears to have mostly focused on geographic or cultural diversity, while failing to pay further attention to diversity in terms of gender, at least in the case of certain disciplines. A good example is the rising field of Chinese international relations theory that recently came to prominence precisely to counter the Anglo-American hegemony in international relations. This field is an especially relevant example because international interest in China’s intellectual production revolved around fields such as international relations and world politics, which are closer to the trope of China’s rising profile on the global scene. In their survey of Chinese international relations theory, Blanchard and Lin conducted a survey of the field’s intellectual references and found that, despite its anti-hegemonic impetus, its mainstream approach is mostly based on Chinese traditional (Confucian) ideas, while it fails to engage significantly with the work of female theoreticians and approaches such as feminist theories of international relations.⁸

Translation is one of the main ways to make ideas circulate and to introduce new references that diversify and enrich intellectual canons. It is also a bearer of symbolic capital and an indicator of recognition in a cultural or disciplinary field.⁹ Since the recognition of an author and her or his work in its source domestic context is usually a facilitator for the translation of the work into other languages, the marginal position of Chinese women intellectuals in translation must also lead us to ask about the position of Chinese women intellectuals within China’s intellectual field.¹⁰ In 2021, the website *Reading the China Dream* – which selects and translates into English texts by contemporary Chinese intellectuals – surveyed the contents of the key Chinese online outlet *Aisixiang* (爱思想), which showcases essays by leading Chinese intellectuals.¹¹ At the time the survey was conducted, in March 2021, the website included a total of 642 intellec-

7 Kimberly Hutchings and Patricia Owens, “Women Thinkers and the Canon of International Thought: Recovery, Rejection, and Reconstitution,” *American Political Science Review* 115, no. 2 (2021): 347–59.

8 Eric M. Blanchard and Shuang Lin, “Gender and Non-Western ‘Global’ IR: Where Are the Women in Chinese International Relations Theory?” *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 48–61.

9 Gisèle Sapiro and Mauricio Bustamante, “Translation as a Measure of International Consecration: Mapping the World Distribution of Bourdieu’s Books in Translation,” *Sociologica* 2–3 (2009): 1–45.

10 Gisèle Sapiro, “How Do Literary Works Cross Borders (or Not)?” *Journal of World Literature* 1, no. 1 (2016): 81–96.

11 David Ownby, “Reading the China Dream,” <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/> [accessed 24.03.2024]. Aisixiang 爱思想 [Love for Thought], <https://www.aisixiang.com/> [accessed 24.03.2024].

tuals, of whom only 24 (3.7 percent) were female.¹² This quantitative bias raises questions on the conditions in China's intellectual field and the status of women intellectuals and scholars in it, which may explain such an imbalance in representation.

Section one of this chapter provides a brief theoretical framework on the circulation and translation of knowledge. As I will discuss, circulation and translation are forms of knowledge construction. Both are socially embedded activities and, as such, can be beset by the same biases that exist in any social context – such as gender imbalances, which help explain the absence of women intellectuals in the circulation of translations. At the same time, however, circulation and translation can also be tools to counter those very imbalances, as I will show later.

Section two analyzes the situation of Chinese women intellectuals in their own original context of mainland China. In it, I briefly delve into the emergence of women intellectuals in modern China, their transformation through different historical periods, and their current predicaments to show that, compared to their male counterparts, women intellectuals occupy a comparatively marginal position in the cultural, intellectual and academic fields of mainland China. I point to three forms in which the presence of women intellectuals is marginalized in China. First, the disregard of women as subjects of knowledge, that is, as knowledge producers. Since the beginning of the reform era, mainstream discourse has increasingly featured traditional ideas about women's role in society as preferably ascribed to the "private sphere" of domestic life; so that they are often the target of prejudices that denigrate their capacity for intellectual and scholarly endeavors. Second, the disregard of women and women's issues as objects of knowledge, i.e., the fact that Chinese (male) mainstream intellectuals and intellectual forums tend to neglect gender issues as a constitutive part of social problems. And third, the co-optation of female voices by male interests, whereby textual production by women, even when intended as a way of self-expression and liberation, can end up being appropriated by commercial interests and a sexualized gaze.

Section three deals with the translation and circulation of the works of Chinese women intellectuals in the humanities and social sciences by focusing, as previously mentioned, on the translation into English of the works of Dai Jinhua. To date, four English-language volumes of her scholarly production have appeared. The exceptionality of Dai's case offers compelling insights into the conditions under which the work of a contemporary Chinese woman intellectual can be translated and circulated internationally. I take the perspective of the sociology of translation through the close reading of paratextual materials of her translations, as well as interviews and other sources related to the author and other agents who participated in the publication of her books in English. I pay special attention to the socio-intellectual conditions of circulation, i.e., the

¹² David Ownby and Selena Orly, "Women's Voices: Where are the Women's Voices among Chinese Establishment Intellectuals?" *Reading the China Dream*, <https://www.readingthechinadream.com/womens-voices.html> [accessed 24.03.2024].

interpersonal, political and intellectual affinities between the different agencies implicated in the translations to understand the value of these factors for enabling processes of translation and, ultimately, for the opening up of intellectual canons. Finally, I will briefly address how translation, while giving visibility to hitherto marginal voices, can also give way to new problems related to forms of representation and reception.

2 Circulation and Translation as Construction of Knowledge

The circulation of different forms of knowledge, including academic knowledge in humanities and social sciences disciplines, and the factors and mechanisms that explain those processes of circulation, have become the focus of attention of a growing number of researchers.

One of the central tenets of these discussions is the idea that knowledge and ideas are not immutable. Knowledge is socially produced and reproduced, and it is transformed in the very processes of circulation and interaction with people and institutions. Being socially embedded, knowledge is also implicated in all sorts of social dynamics, including those that reveal imbalances and inequalities. Sarasin, one of the earliest proponents of analyzing circulation in the field of history, also emphasizes that circulation does not proceed without obstacles, and that opportunities for knowledge production are not evenly distributed. This leads to questions about distribution: *Whose work gets to circulate? And why and under what conditions?*¹³

The political underpinnings of any society and the historical legacies of power have much to do with shaping the circulation of knowledge. Scholars acknowledge the existence of centers and peripheries in the production and circulation of knowledge, which reflect a certain division of intellectual labor among different social formations.¹⁴ The legacies of colonial rule had a significant impact on this division, and have been a focus of postcolonial scholarship in recent decades. In addition to imbalances between different socio-political formations, gender gaps have also been determinant in the history of knowledge. For Burke, gender is a key aspect in the history of knowledge.¹⁵ Conditions such as the exclusion of women from European learned societies until the late nineteenth century, or the disregarding of knowledge traditionally accumulated and transmitted by women, speak to the gendered character of knowl-

¹³ Philipp Sarasin, "Was ist Wissensgeschichte?" *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 36, no. 1 (2011): 159–72.

¹⁴ Leandro Rodríguez Medina, *Centers and Peripheries in Knowledge Production* (London: Routledge, 2014).

¹⁵ Peter Burke, *What is the History of Knowledge?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016): 119–22.

edge, and the invisibilization of women in most conventional historical accounts. Women sometimes negotiated their own in/visibility as producers or transmitters of knowledge, but often that negotiation was less a question of personal desire and rather a strategy to avoid derision and social stigmatization.¹⁶

Knowledge is often condensed into written text, and for such texts to circulate between different cultural contexts, translation and translators are indispensable. Translation is omnipresent in history and its key role in the history of knowledge and ideas in many different historical and cultural contexts cannot be overestimated.¹⁷ Throughout history and in the present, translation appears as a form of socially embedded knowledge production. As such, again, translation also does not happen on a level field, but is subject to the unavoidable judgment and the biases of the social agents (translators, publishers, funding institutions) that promote them. As Schögler observes, translation entails, first, a selection of texts to be translated and then a process in which texts and their authors can be rewritten and repositioned in the intellectual field of the reception context.¹⁸ Such rewriting and repositioning of texts via translation often implies that the translated text or author may be introduced into the target context under very specific labels that may or may not be applicable with the same prominence in the source context. Besides, the ideas and propositions contained in texts can go through new interpretations and acquire new potential usages to make them relevant for the target context.

Translation is also one of the most prevalent tools for the formation of canons – but also for their disruption – as it has the capacity to give visibility to new voices among the corpus of knowledge that exists in a specific context. Therefore, what is at stake with the translation of the works of Chinese women intellectuals – as well as women intellectuals from any location – is the opportunity of circulating their ideas and allowing them to be transformed into new knowledge that can be meaningful for the receiving contexts. It is also a way of challenging the existing distribution of intellectual labor by diversifying the flows and the nature of knowledge and ideas that circulate transnationally.

¹⁶ Paola Bertucci, “The In/Visible Woman: Mariangela Ardinghelli and the Circulation of Knowledge between Paris and Naples in the Eighteenth Century,” *Isis* 104, no. 2 (2013): 244.

¹⁷ For different cases, see Peter Burke and R. Po-chia Hsia, eds., *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Rachel Lung, “The Jiangnan Arsenal: A Microcosm of Translation and Ideological Transformation in 19th-Century China,” *Meta* 61 (2016): 37–52; Rebekah Clements, *A Cultural History of Translation in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹⁸ Rafael Y. Schögler, “Translation in the Social Sciences and Humanities: Circulating and Canonizing Knowledge,” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 38 (2018): 62–90.

3 Women Intellectuals and Women Questions in the Intellectual Field of China

3.1 Conditions for Intellectual Activity

The connection between gender and intellectual politics in China has been clear since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This period was marked by a transfer of social and symbolic capital from the scholar-official class of the imperial era to the figure of the modern intellectual. The abolition of the imperial examination system in 1905, the arrival of new forms of technical knowledge and social thought, and the establishment of universities and new educational institutions modeled on European counterparts were central in this transition. In the case of Chinese women, this transition followed a specific path.¹⁹ The traditional confinement of urban or gentry-class women to the private quarters of their homes was put to an end, and they were now prepared to engage in the public life that until then had been an almost exclusively male space. Universities for women were established, and women began to gain access to educational institutions, to write and publish, to be targeted as readers by journals and newspapers, and to travel abroad. Along with these unprecedented transformations, feminism made its first entry into intellectual discourse, and the question of the social position of women became a central element in the discussions about China's modernization in the early twentieth century. Leading male intellectuals of the time devoted part of their writings to discussing this question, most often addressing the issue of women's equal participation in society (especially through access to education) as conducive to the greater goal of China's construction as a modern nation.²⁰ It was in this period and among these discussions that some of the first modern women intellectuals made their voices heard, such as Qiu Jin (秋瑾), Lü Bicheng (吕碧城), and He-Yin Zhen (何殷振). Notwithstanding all this, He-Yin, an anarcho-feminist thinker, was one of the earliest feminists to note that mainstream arguments on women's rights, especially those expressed by male intellectuals, tended to frame the "woman question" as a subsidiary issue to the more central concern of national construction. Instead, she vindicated women's liberation as a goal in itself.²¹

19 Jiang Lijing 姜丽静, *Lishi de beiying: yi dai nüzhishifenzi de jiaoyu jiyi* 历史的背影: 一代女知识分子的教育记忆 [The Back of History: Memories of One Generation of Women Intellectuals] (Beijing: Jiaoyu Kexue Chubanshe 教育科学出版社, 2012).

20 Zhang Suling 张素玲, "Wan Qing zhi Wusi shiqi zhishifenzi de xingbie huayu ji qi shehui wenhua yiyun 晚清至五四时期知识分子的性别话语及其社会文化意蕴 [The Discourse on Gender by Late Qing and May Fourth Intellectuals and its Social Implications]," *Funü Yanju Conglun* 妇女研究丛论 80, no. 3 (2007): 26–32.

21 Lydia H. Liu, Rebecca E. Karl and Dorothy Y. Ko, eds., *The Birth of Chinese Feminism: Essential Texts in Transnational Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013): 1–26.

The articulation of gender-related issues within the intellectual politics of early twentieth-century China would eventually conflict with the concerns of some male intellectuals. Lei underscored how Chinese literati from that period found themselves in the midst of a “twofold crisis of national identity and Chinese manhood,” as their centuries-old ideals of “literary accomplishments, cultural refinement, and genteel mannerisms” were confronted by the aggressive militarism of western powers. In the face of this crisis, Chinese male intellectuals sought to redefine their masculinity by distancing themselves from traditional ideals that were redefined as effeminate and weak under the refraction of modern western discourses of manhood.²² Therefore, disregard began to form among these intellectuals vis-à-vis their perception of women’s participation in the urgent intellectual task of reinforcing China’s position in a world dominated by those manly values.

As China’s social, political and cultural crises aggravated, and with the emergence of the May Fourth and New Culture Movements, progressive intellectuals engaged in unprecedented criticism of the Confucian tradition. Within that criticism, gendered traditional social customs such as arranged marriages and the patrilineal system came under further attack. The Communist Party of China (CPC) was founded in this period, and its growing organizational structure came up with new ideas about the liberation of women as an integral part of the revolution.²³

After the victory of the CPC and the introduction of socialist-oriented policies, the new officialdom prided itself on the advances of women’s rights and even the attainment of women’s full incorporation into social life on a par with their male counterparts, including equal access to education and equal pay as workers.²⁴ On the other hand, paradoxically, the recognition of women’s equality as a state policy meant that it was subsumed into broader questions of class equality and class struggle. Even the ways to conceptualize it were changed, opting for the term “women’s work” instead of the term “feminism,” as the latter was deemed too bourgeois.²⁵

The end of Maoism, the start of the Reform and Opening Up and its subsequent market orientation shifted trends in gender politics. Improvements in income, employment diversification and educational opportunities offered advantages also for women. Some researchers have pointed to the positive effects that certain new policies of the reform period had on gender equality: The one-child policy, for instance, is regarded as a cause for families to invest more in their daughters’ education, as well

22 Jun Lei, *Mastery of Words and Swords: Negotiating Intellectual Masculinities in Modern China, 1890s–1930s* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2022): 7.

23 Harriet Evans, “The Impossibility of Gender in Narratives of China’s Modernity,” *Radical Philosophy* 146 (2007): 29.

24 Wang Zheng, “Feminist Struggles in a Changing China,” in *Feminisms with Chinese Characteristics*, ed. Ping Zhu and Hui Faye Xiao (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2021): 128.

25 Wang Zheng, *Feminist Struggles*: 121.

as increasing and diversifying their career opportunities.²⁶ Despite this, many scholars and critics also pointed out that economic reforms, marketization and consumerist culture have led to setbacks in gender equality and women's status in society. Among the most common criticisms is the fact that, despite increased opportunities, women now have disadvantageous access to certain positions in the labor market and the wage gap has widened.²⁷ These setbacks have sometimes been deterministically justified on the grounds of natural physical capabilities or, at best, regarded as a necessary intermediate step toward greater equality that has been postponed into the future.²⁸ Wang Zheng notes that

The CCP's turn to privatization and marketization was accompanied by a dismantling of socialist institutional mechanisms that safeguarded gender and class equalities for those working in the public sector, such as equal education, equal employment, equal pay, and state-funded health care and childcare. The state's departure from a socialist egalitarian distribution system was also crucially legitimized by the propagation of a neoliberal ideology that harped on social Darwinism, a discursive maneuver that many male intellectuals eagerly adopted.²⁹

In addition to the effect on incomes and labor conditions, there is a widespread concern that economic reforms have also led to a resurgence of traditional ideologies about gendered "separate spheres" in society, which seek to relegate women back into the private sphere of domestic household affairs.³⁰ Besides, negative depictions of women who choose non-family-oriented career paths have also become common currency in mainstream media and even in state rhetoric.³¹ Judging from recent developments, this tendency seems to be set to increase: in a meeting with the top members of the All-China Women's Federation in October 2023, Chinese president Xi Jinping spoke of the need to "actively foster a new type of marriage and childbearing culture" and the push for "supportive birth policies."³² This conservative comeback is

26 Vanessa L. Fong, "China's One-Child Policy and the Empowerment of Urban Daughters," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 4 (2002): 1098–109; Ye Liu, "Women Rising as Half of the Sky? An Empirical Study on Women from the One-Child Generation and their Higher Education Participation in Contemporary China," *Higher Education* 74 (2017): 963–78.

27 Haoming Liu, "Economic Reforms and Gender Inequality in Urban China," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 59, no. 4 (2011): 839–76.

28 Xinyan Jiang, "The Dilemma Faced by Chinese Feminists," *Hypatia* 15, no. 3 (2000): 140–60.

29 Wang Zheng, "Feminist Struggles": 130–31.

30 Shengwei Sun and Feinian Chen, "Reprivatized Womanhood: Changes in Mainstream Media's Framing of Urban Women's Issues in China, 1995–2012," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 77, no. 5 (2015): 1091–107.

31 Arianne M. Gaetano, "The Chinese State, 'Reform and Opening,' and The Regulation of Women in Urbanizing China," *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 47, no. 3–4 (2018): 301–29.

32 Xinhua She 新华社, "Xi Jinping zai tong Quanguo Fu Lian xin yi jie lingdao banzi chengyuan jiti tanhua shi qiangdiao: jiangding bu yizou Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi funü fazhan daolu, zuzhi dongyuan guangda funü wei Zhongguoshi xiandaihua jianshe gongxian jinguo liliang 习近平在同全国妇联

closely related to the reappraisal of tradition as a new source of political legitimacy, and to the emergence of New Confucianism as a legitimate intellectual trend with a certain degree of official support.

The situation of intellectuals and academics in the post-Mao period was also deeply affected by the economic reforms and their accompanying ideologies. The reinscription of the Maoist period exclusively under the labels of radicalism and feudalism led to the erasure of all gendered expression during those years. In the introduction to her anthology of Chinese women's writing between 1936 and 1976, Dooling observed that

it is commonly suggested that the tumultuous mid-century decades all but stifled the nascent gendered expression nurtured by the previous generations and that only with the sweeping political reforms beginning in the late 1970s was such a tradition revived in women's literature. In other words, between the extraordinary bursts of female literary activity in the May Fourth and post-Mao eras is said to lie a long stretch of revolutionary history representing a protracted interlude in the project of writing women in modern China.³³

The drive toward marketization also reached cultural institutions and organs that had heretofore benefitted from state patronage, especially after 1989, and so also affected the material conditions of intellectuals. The withdrawal of state funding confronted many intellectuals with market competition, and they were forced to adapt to market-oriented culture or to turn to entrepreneurship within or outside the intellectual sphere.³⁴ As far as I am aware, there has been no research so far on the effect that the withdrawal of state financial support had specifically upon women intellectuals; nevertheless, considering the previously mentioned conditions of disadvantage for women in the labor market, it is likely that women intellectuals were especially vulnerable to the economic liberalization of cultural and intellectual organizations.

In this situation of disaggregation, an occasion for women intellectuals to develop a collective sense and purpose arose when China for the first time hosted the World Conference on Women, the fourth edition of which took place in September 1995 in Beijing. The conference, organized under the auspices of the United Nations, brought together women intellectuals, scholars and activists from around the world, providing

联新一届领导班子成员集体谈话时强调：坚定不移走中国特色社会主义妇女发展道路 组织动员广大妇女为中国式现代化建设贡献巾帼力量 [Xi Jinping, in a group talk with members of the new leadership of the All-China Women's Federation, emphasized: unwaveringly follow the path of socialist women's development with Chinese characteristics, organizing and mobilizing vast numbers of women to contribute to the construction of Chinese-style modernization with women's strength],” *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Zhongyang Renmin Zhengfu* 中华人民共和国中央人民政府 (Website), 30.10.2023, https://www.gov.cn/yaowen/liebiao/202310/content_6912723.htm [accessed 18.12.2023].

³³ Amy D. Dooling, *Writing Women in Modern China: The Revolutionary Years, 1936–1976* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005): 1.

³⁴ The standard work on the transformation of the intellectual sphere under market conditions is Merle Goldman and Edward Gu, eds., *Chinese Intellectuals Between State and Market* (London: Routledge, 2003).

a space for international exchanges of theoretical tools, practices and experiences. Among Chinese women intellectuals, the conference served as a catalyst to shape and develop a new awareness of their potential, and imbued them with a new kind of internationalism. The participation of world-wide non-governmental organizations had a special impact, as it uncovered forms of grassroots organization beyond officialdom and left an enduring mark on the first generation of post-Mao Chinese feminists.³⁵

Education, especially tertiary education, is the main way to acquire the intellectual and social capital necessary for participating in the intellectual field. Imbalances are especially visible if we look at the numbers for teaching positions and research publications. For instance, an analysis of the number of women appointed as Changjiang scholars (the highest academic award conferred by the Chinese Ministry of Education within a program aimed at promoting domestic world-class scholars at Chinese higher education institutions) in the period 1998–2015 showed that of the total of 1957 award winners during those years, 1835 were men (94 percent), in comparison to only 122 women (6 percent).³⁶ More recently, a 2023 article offered a quantitative analysis of the gender structure of the humanities and social sciences in China. It found that male scholars represent 64.19 percent of all scholars in these academic disciplines, compared to 35.81 percent of female scholars. The same article also showed that female scholars obtain lower numbers in terms of articles published in key journals in the humanities and social sciences, with 30.92 percent of the articles authored by female scholars compared to 69.08 percent authored by male peers.³⁷

However, the numbers of women enrolled in tertiary education in China in more recent years provide a positive outlook, with a parity index of 1.15 in 2022 (the number of female university students having surpassed that of male students since 2008).³⁸ Also, the proportion of Chinese women pursuing a postgraduate career in 2022 was higher than that of men.³⁹ Thus the situation of Chinese women in the academic field could be

35 Tong Xin 佟新, “Xiandangdai zhishi nüxing gongtongti de fazhan 现当代知识女性共同体的发展 [The Development of Modern and Contemporary Intellectual Women Collectives],” *Beijing Daxue Xuebao, zhexue shehui kexue ban* 北京大学学报, 哲学社会科学版 52, no. 5 (2015): 136–42.

36 Zheng Jianhong 郑剑虹, Liang Shuting 梁舒婷 and He Wuming 何吴明, “Changjiang xuezhe tepin jiaoshou qunti chengchang tedian ji yingxiang yinsu yanjiu 长江学者特聘教授群体成长特点及影响因素研究 [Study on the Growth Features and Influencing Factors of the Collective of Changjiang Scholars Distinguished Professors],” *Lingnan Shifan Daxue Xuebao* 岭南师范学院学报 42, no. 2 (2021): 28–36.

37 Lu Wanhui 逯万辉 and Tian Feng 田丰, “Wo guo renwenshehuikexue lingyu xuezhe xingbie jiegou yanjiu 我国人文社会科学领域学者性别结构研究 [Research on the Gender Structure of Scholars in Humanities and Social Sciences in China],” *Jiangsu Daxue Xuebao (Shehuikexue ban)* 江苏大学学报(社会科学版) 5 (2023): 113–24.

38 World Bank, “School Enrollment, Gender Parity Index,” World Bank, 2022, <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/se-enr?education=Tertiary&year=2022> [accessed 20.07.2024].

39 According to official statistics, in 2022 the proportion of female postgraduate students in regular higher education institutions was 54.78 percent. Source: Ministry of Education, People’s Republic of China, “2022 nian jiaoyu tongji shuju 2022 年教育统计数据 [2022 Statistics on Education],” *Zhonghua*

increasingly moving away from the pyramidal shape identified by Huang Yuanxi and Zhao Linjia in previous years, when women were gradually scarcer further up the academic career ladder, even in the passage from graduate to postgraduate.⁴⁰

It is important to note here the social prejudices that women face in academia. For instance, women PhD holders tend to be seen as too “self-centered” and attentive to their own career paths in detriment of their prospects of marrying or starting a family, and they usually fall under the derogatory term *shengnü* (剩女), “leftover women.”⁴¹ Besides, the social pressure to conform to such expectations is at the same time incompatible with an academic career that increasingly follows the Euro-American, productivist “publish or perish” model, and the lack of policies that help to balance work and life forces women academics to choose between their family plans or their career.⁴² In this regard, Chinese academia may appear in line with tendencies in other places of the globalized academic world, where the meritocratic academic system is presented as gender-neutral, and so does not take into consideration women’s specific conditions, and reinforces their precarity in academia. Thus, despite seemingly equal access to education in contemporary China, women appear likely to pay a relatively higher price for access to higher education.⁴³ In sum, the combination of disadvantageous structural conditions and the pressure of social expectations and prejudices may act as inhibitors for women considering a career path as scholars.

3.2 Disregard and Co-Optation

The situation of women within the intellectual field of mainland China can be defined not only by their socio-economic predicaments, but also by their relative absence in comparison to men. I have specifically identified three mechanisms: the claims that women lack the capacity to fully engage in intellectual activities; the erasure of wom-

Renmin Gongheguo Jiaoyubu 中华人民共和国教育部 (Website), http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/moe_560/2022/gedi/202401/t20240110_1099505.html [accessed 20.07.2024].

40 Huang Yuanxi 黄园渐 and Zhao Linjia 赵齐加, “Wo guo nüxing keyan renyuan fazhan xianhuang, tiaozhan ji zhengci yanbian 我国女性科研人员发展现状、挑战及政策演变 [Development Status, Challenges and Policy Evolution of Female Researchers in China],” *Zhongguo Kexue Jijin* 中国科学基金 6 (2018): 622–28.

41 Leta H. Fincher, *Leftover Women: The Resurgence of Gender Inequality in China* (London: Zed Press, 2014).

42 Bingqin Li and Yang Shen, “Publication or Pregnancy? Employment Contracts and Childbearing of Women Academics in China,” *Studies in Higher Education* 47 (2022): 875–87.

43 Mariya Ivancheva, Kathleen Lynch and Kathryn Keating, “Precarity, Gender and Care in the Neoliberal Academy,” *Gender, Work, and Organization* 26, no. 4 (2019): 448–62; Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik and Aleksandra Boron, “Chinese Women in Society: Confucian Past, Ambiguous Emancipation and Access to Higher Education,” *International Journal of Chinese Education* 12, no. 2 (2023): 6.

en's issues as legitimate and important questions for intellectual inquiry; and the co-optation of women's spaces of cultural expression and transgression by male agents.

Disregard for women as producers of knowledge can be found in very different geographical and historical contexts, up to and beyond modernity.⁴⁴ The capabilities of Chinese women intellectuals as knowledge producers are often called into question. Some prominent male intellectuals have gone so far as to consider them ontologically incapable of working in fields such as philosophy. Pang-White recounts an example of this attitude: in a public speech, the renowned male philosopher Zhou Guoping pointed to women's supposed incapacity for logical and rational thought. As is clearly visible in Zhou Guoping's case, these sexist claims are presented in paternalistic terms that allegedly seek to protect women's supposed nature, character and even physical beauty from the roughness of intellectual activity.⁴⁵

A recent study by Horta and Tang on gender equality in Chinese academia interviewed forty tenure-track scholars at different career levels, and uncovered the prevalence of biases and prejudices among academics. For instance, the researchers found that some male academics, while recognizing the existence of gender imbalances, explained such imbalances in terms of social or biological factors. The researchers also mention the case of a female deputy dean who acknowledged her intuitive belief that men were more capable than women.⁴⁶

Women intellectuals also have to face the trope of female "delicacy" and emotional sensitivity, which is seen as inimical to intellectual activity, even when they have already achieved a position as intellectuals, as in the case of Dai Jinhua (on whom I will focus below). In a recent interview, Dai explained that

There are two sorts of criticisms that have accompanied me throughout my life: one which says that I am too feminized (*nüxinghua* 女性化); for instance, they consider my writing too emotional, too sentimental, for instance, they think my rhetoric is too strong and is not academic or rigorous enough. Another sort of criticism says the opposite, that my writing is not feminine enough because it is too rigorous, too logical and theoretical, and even that it lacks femininity.⁴⁷

It is clear from Dai's words that academic and intellectual work is often regarded as a demanding activity that runs counter to the 'feminine' sensitivity with which women allegedly approach scholarly inquiries.

⁴⁴ For European contexts see Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700–1950: A Political History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000): chapter 1.

⁴⁵ Ann A. Pang-White, "Introduction: Asian Traditions, Global Contexts: Philosophy, Women, and Gender in the 21st Century," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 49, no. 1 (2022): 5–8.

⁴⁶ Hugo Horta and Li Tang, "Gender Inequality and Bias in Chinese Universities: Perceptions of Male and Female Academics," *Higher Education Research & Development* 42, no. 8 (2023): 1954–69.

⁴⁷ Xin Jing Bao Shuping Zhoukan 新京报书评周刊, *Kaichang: Nüxing xuezhe fangtan* 开场: 女性学者访谈 [Opening: Interviews with Female Scholars] (Beijing: Xinxing Chubanshe 新星出版社, 2022): 107–8. My translation.

In the post-Mao period, the disregard for women as intellectual actors has also been accompanied by the erasure of women's issues as a legitimate object of intellectual inquiry in reform-era and early twenty-first century China. As previously mentioned, the question of women's position and their plight in society was a central issue in discourses on China's modernization from the late nineteenth and well into the twentieth centuries. Among the issues of concern for key thinkers of the Late Qing and Republican periods, such as Liang Qichao, was the need for women to become a full part of the new Chinese nation-state that was being reconfigured at that time. This preoccupation with the fate of women was kept alive well into China's tumultuous twentieth century. As Hershtatter wrote, "liberating women from oppression was an integral part of liberating the nation from weakness and therefore an important way in which revolutionaries justified their claim to power."⁴⁸

However, after the end of the Maoist period, in the new era of economic reforms and opening up, the question of women was gradually sidelined and disappeared from the forefront of intellectual discourse. Wesoky offers a detailed account of how women's issues lost their visibility in the intellectual politics of the reform era. She described how prominent Chinese intellectuals dropped those questions from their considerations on modernity in China, and how these thinkers "envision the future(s) of Chinese modernity in markedly androcentric terms," while gender issues and gender equality seem to be secondary or trivial questions for many Chinese thinkers, derivative of western political concerns.⁴⁹ Citing as examples two of the most internationally prominent Chinese scholars, Wang Hui (汪晖) and Zhao Tingyang (赵汀阳), she points to the fact that their focus is on macroscopic questions of national construction. Gender imbalances or the quest for gender justice are absent from both Wang's quest for a Chinese modernity as an alternative to western capitalist modernity, and from Zhao's alternative foundation for world politics. This neglect of gender as a social factor has become prevalent precisely in a context where, as I mentioned above, economic reforms had a negative impact on women's status, leading to unequal access to employment and unequal income distribution between men and women. This erasure is even more intriguing as it is being inflicted by thinkers who claim to reassess policies of the socialist period (when the question of women was prominent), even as some women thinkers attempt to recuperate Marxism as a critical tool for the present. Indeed, the sidelining of women's problems during the reform period has not prevented women scholars and intellectuals from developing a range of feminist critiques grounded in their own reality.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Gail Hershtatter, "State of the Field: Women in China's Long Twentieth Century," *Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no. 4 (2004): 1029.

⁴⁹ Sharon R. Wesoky, "Bringing the Jia Back into Guojia: Engendering Chinese Intellectual Politics," *Signs* 40, no. 3 (2015): 655.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading Between West and East* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). For a wide-ranging account, see Hershtatter, "State of the Field."

Finally, it is interesting to note another way in which the absence of Chinese women intellectuals is articulated: The co-optation of spaces of female expression by men. Dai Jinhua explains that the (re)construction of a patriarchal culture in mainland China since the 1980s implied that women were “transcribed as objects of male desires, actions, and values” rather than subjects.⁵¹ It was in the 1990s that Chinese women began to carve out a cultural space of their own by subverting the patriarchal order and expressing their desires, bodies and selves in their writings. This expression of female subjectivity has been especially abundant in the writing of fiction. However, as Dai notes, the increasing commercialization of culture during the same period led male publishers and critics to try to take over and co-opt these female spaces for male voyeuristic consumption.⁵² Perhaps the most obvious example of this was the phenomenon of “body writing” (*shenti xiezu* 身体写作) or “beauty writers” (*meinü zuojia* 美女作家), a form of semi-autobiographical fiction by young Chinese women that erupted in the late 1990s. Praised by some feminist scholars for their gendered exploration of privacy, these writers and their work, however, became a commercial phenomenon in which male publishers and the reactions of male readers were far from these feminist concerns.⁵³ It is also interesting to note that literature seems to have played a more important role in gender consciousness than other forms of cultural production in 1990s and 2000s China, which may raise questions about women’s access to and visibility in other forms of intellectual production.

In the final section below, I will look at the case of Dai Jinhua, a scholar and public intellectual whose work has been the object of comparatively sustained attention in Anglophone contexts. As I explained in the introduction, her exceptional case is useful for observing why and how the absence of women intellectuals can be countered, and for imagining ways to make their work visible in circulation.

4 Translation as a Mode of Visibilization

The absence of Chinese women intellectuals as producers of knowledge, of women’s issues as an object of knowledge, and the co-optation of women’s cultural productions is also reflected in the conditions of the circulation of their work beyond China, visible in the comparative scarcity of works by Chinese women intellectuals translated into English, as I observed in the introduction.

51 Dai Jinhua, “Rewriting Women: Writing Gender and Cultural Space in the 1980s and 1990s,” in *On China’s Cultural Transformation*, ed. Yu Keping (Leiden: Brill, 2016): 242.

52 Dai Jinhua, “Rewriting Women”: 248–49.

53 Hui Wu, “Post-Mao Chinese Literary Women’s Rhetoric Revisited: A Case for an Enlightened Feminist Rhetorical Theory,” *College English* 72, no. 4 (2010): 415–16.

However, we find a rather exceptional case in the fields of the humanities and social sciences in Dai Jinhua (戴锦华), born in Shandong in 1959, a female scholar based at Peking University's School of Comparative Literature and Culture who specializes in cultural studies. Her main focus is cinema studies, to which she applies a feminist perspective. In all these areas – cultural studies, cinema studies, and feminist theory – she is considered a pioneering scholar in mainland China who has published many academic books and articles in China and other Chinese-speaking regions, and who has also translated works of film theory into Chinese. She is an eminent cultural critic and public intellectual in her country, famous for her candid and often playful takes on all kinds of social issues both domestic and international. Videos of her public interventions are frequently published and circulated on Chinese social platforms, where they reach large audiences, especially among young viewers. In 2016, she received the “Charming Chinese” award of *Nanfang Renwu Zhoukan* (南方人物周刊), one of China's most important weekly magazines.⁵⁴ Her works have been translated into English, French, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Catalan, Arabic, Italian, and other languages. English translations of her essays have appeared in a number of academic publications related to cultural and area studies, such as *Boundary 2*, *Positions* or *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*. As a reflection of her standing in the international academic field, she boasts three single-authored English volumes and one volume co-authored with Meng Yue (孟悦), all of them dealing with film critique and feminist and social theory applied to Chinese cultural production.⁵⁵

In this section, I will look at the socio-intellectual dynamics and agencies that drove the translation and circulation of Dai Jinhua's first book in English. It should be noted that translation into English has a special status, as translations into this language tend to act as catalysts for translations into other languages. This was indeed the case with the first translations of Dai's essays into French and Spanish, which were based on earlier English translations published by the journal *Asian Exchange* in 2003.⁵⁶ This case is also indicative of the dominant position of English as a lingua franca in international intellectual and academic circulations, as analyzed in detail by Herrad in her reflection in this volume.

The comparative visibility of Dai Jinhua's work in English translation in contrast to the usual absence of Chinese women scholars and intellectuals raises the question of why her academic production has been the object of such sustained attention for the

⁵⁴ It should be noted that in the case of Dai Jinhua, recognition outside the academic field came many years after her work began to be translated into English.

⁵⁵ Dai Jinhua, *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, ed. Jin Wang and Tani E. Barlow (London: Verso, 2002). Dai Jinhua, *After the Post-Cold War: The Future of Chinese History*, ed. Lisa Rofel (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018). Dai Jinhua, *Chinese Cinema Culture: A Scene in the Fog* (New York: Peter Lang, 2019). Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua, *Emerging from the Horizon of History: Modern Chinese Women's Literature, 1917–1949* (Singapore: Springer, 2023).

⁵⁶ Lau and Huang, “China Reflected.”

Anglophone context since at least the late 1990s. A closer look at the background and intellectual trajectory of Dai Jinhua, as well as of other participants in the translation of her work, may help illuminate this issue. It will also highlight how social factors such as interpersonal, intellectual and ideological affinities play a key role in the transnational visibility and the circulation of the works of intellectuals even when they are originally from a non-hegemonic context or work in the peripheries of the intellectual field.

Dai Jinhua belongs to the first generation that was able to resume higher education at Chinese universities in 1978, after the Cultural Revolution. She graduated at Peking University, and was a professor in film theory at the Beijing Film Academy during the “cultural fever” that swept Beijing and other Chinese cities throughout the 1980s, a period of intellectual and literary ferment that bloomed in reaction to the limitations of the previous decade. That period ended tragically with the June 1989 protests. These events led her to give up an opportunity to pursue a doctorate at a US university, and stay in China instead.⁵⁷ In 1993, she moved back to Peking University as a faculty member of the School of Comparative Literature and Culture, where she is still teaching today.

One of the main vectors of Dai Jinhua’s scholarly work is feminism. She was one of the pioneers in introducing feminism to Chinese academia in the post-Mao era, and one of the first to apply feminist theory to cultural analysis. Dai Jinhua has been especially vocal about the marginalization of women’s issues – and of women intellectuals like herself – in China, reclaiming their voices in the face of male intellectuals who went so far in their self-assurance as to question the legitimacy of female intellectuals to speak on women’s issues. In an interview published in 2018, in which she spoke about the introduction of feminist theories in China during the 1980s, Dai Jinhua recalled that “[a]ll the way until the 1995 UN Women’s Conference [held in Beijing], men said women were not strong enough to do this introduction of theory.”⁵⁸

Another important vector in her work is her strong interest in issues related to socio-economic imbalances. Throughout her career, Dai Jinhua has been interested in and committed to the realities of China’s rural areas and the Global South. She has been invited to scholarly institutions on all continents and is an active member of transnational networks of South-South intellectual exchange.

Dai Jinhua’s attention to women’s rights and her public stance on social and economic asymmetries in the global context and within China have earned her the label of an intellectual of the New Left. She expressed open criticism of mainstream liberal intellectuals for contributing to and supporting the depoliticization of society and culture, and the drive for consumerism. This political positioning made her an object of interest for US scholars in similar political and intellectual coordinates, as I shall explain.

Dai Jinhua’s CV includes a considerable number of residences as an invited or visiting scholar at international universities and institutions in recent decades. When

⁵⁷ Dai Jinhua, *Cinema and Desire*: 264–65.

⁵⁸ Dai Jinhua, *After the Post-Cold War*: 161–62.

Dai began working as a scholar and university professor in the 1980s, international academic exchange was very rare and difficult for mainland Chinese scholars of that generation. It was in 1993 that she participated in a first academic meeting about cultural studies in Hong Kong, which at that time was still under British rule and acted as a hub for intellectual and academic exchanges between mainland China and Euro-American scholars. In that meeting, she encountered Lau Kin Chi from Lingnan University who, like Dai, was also a professor of cultural studies and an active member of activist South-South initiatives, such as the Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives (ARENA). Lau suggested that Dai Jinhua's work should be translated into English and set out to contact Anglophone academic publishers.⁵⁹

In 1995, Dai Jinhua went to the US for the first time as a visiting scholar, where she came into contact with academics working in the field of Chinese studies. One of them was Jing Wang (1950–2021), professor of cultural studies at Duke University (and, after 2001, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology), deeply involved in activism and social justice initiatives, who was the driving force behind the idea of translating and publishing Dai's essays. The project proposal was presented to the publisher Verso, which agreed to publish it, although it took several years for the book finally to appear: The result was *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, jointly edited by Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow and published in 2002. Barlow, a historian and a key figure in the intersection of modern Chinese history and women's studies, who was working at the University of Washington at the time, was brought into the project by Wang. Barlow was also the senior editor of *Positions*, a journal of Asian studies founded in 1993 which advanced ideas that many area studies scholars of the post-Cold War era wanted to promote. They included moving away from regarding Asian contexts as mere objects of study, and instead engaging Asian authors as contemporary interlocutors and highlighting the theoretical implications of their writings, as the journal's Statement of Purpose declared: "In seeking to explore how theoretical practices are linked across national and ethnic divides, we hope to construct other positions from which to imagine political affinities across the many dimensions of our differences."⁶⁰ The members of the editorial board felt that Asia should be shown as a place that produced its own theories and political practices:

East Asia scholarship faced a crisis because collapse of the old Cold War dualism meant it became difficult to ground progressive politics in actually existing state policies or institutions. And this fact needs to be underlined because it helps to explain the mission that the initial *positions* group took so seriously.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Personal interview with Dai Jinhua, Beijing, 23.08.2016.

⁶⁰ Positions Editorial Collective, "Statement of Purpose," *Positions* 1, no. 1 (1993): back cover.

⁶¹ Rebecca Karl, Tom Lamarre, Claudia Pozzana, Alessandro Russo, Naoki Sakai, Jesook Song and Angela Zito, "A Relentlessly Productive Venue: Interview with Senior Editor, Tani Barlow," *Positions* 20, no. 1 (2012): 350.

There was a widespread view among left-leaning area studies scholars that the time had come to seek collaborations with scholars, critics and activists from different places. It was this particular intellectual and political environment that enabled the works of several Asian intellectuals to be translated and published in English in the 1990s. Dai Jinhua was one of the first of this new wave of Asian intellectual voices.

The political and intellectual affinities between Dai and her editors were clear in that first initiative. That ideological underpinning was also visible in the fact that the book was published by Verso, the imprint of *The New Left Review*, one of the leading publications of left-wing intellectual politics in the Anglophone world. When *The New Left Review* was relaunched in the early 2000s and Perry Anderson returned as editor of the journal and its imprint, the project was decisively taken forward. Anderson's arrival meant an increased editorial interest in what non-western intellectuals had to say about the discontents of globalization. *The New Left Review* and Verso seemed especially interested in finding leftist voices in mainland China that were not echoes of Chinese officialdom and that could offer critical views on the economic and social reforms. Again, the subject matter of Dai Jinhua's texts, with her overt critique of consumerism, nationalism, the erasure of social class as an analytical category, and gender disparities offered precisely what the publisher was looking for from China.

As mentioned earlier, translation as a socially embedded practice of knowledge production and circulation entails a set of mechanisms that seek to reposition the translated author or work vis-à-vis the socio-intellectual conditions of the target context, so that the translated work and the ideas it contains can be meaningfully incorporated into it. The first of these mechanisms is the selection of the essays to be included. *Cinema and Desire* has no counterpart in the original Chinese, and the essays were collected specifically for the English edition, including papers that relate cinema to postcolonialism, nationalism, gender, and consumerism.

The subtitle of the book, *Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua*, also implies a clear positioning of the text and the author within the intellectual politics of the target context, intended to appeal to the publisher's intended readership. The labels "Marxist" and "feminist" as applied to the author and her work are also prominent in paratextual materials of the book, such as the introduction:

This brief introduction locates Dai Jinhua's unique, radical position in Marxism, feminism, and cultural studies. Dai aligns herself with the New Left, which, in 1990s China, consists of a small handful of cultural elites who insist on recalling Mao's Cultural Revolution as an abortive utopia produced by a collective vision and not as simply an episode of arbitrary violence attributable to the whims of one dictator. In its search for this lost ideal, the New Left is critical of both the Chinese state and the new mainstream liberal intellectuals, arguing that they collude to intensify the privatization of the Chinese economy and to depoliticize culture.⁶²

62 Jing Wang and Tani E. Barlow, "Introduction," in Dai Jinhua, *Cinema and Desire*: 1.

The use of these kinds of labels often signals the divergences between the intellectual politics of the source and the target contexts, and they can be used to classify and display certain connotations for the target audience.⁶³ When the translated author is alive, labels can be the product of a discussion between the author and the editors or publishers. In the case of this book, the title was the subject of a debate with the editors, as Dai Jinhua recalls:

I remember we had some discussion at the time about the title of the book. Tani Barlow was prone to think that I was a Marxist feminist, but I didn't want to use that term because in China it's very much like official feminism. But she insisted on it, so it ended up being "feminist Marxist." So, it's like there was some discussion about this.⁶⁴

The use of the term "New Left" was also problematic for the author, as its connotations corresponded to very different intellectual politics in each context. Dai Jinhua explains that

[. . .] if I had a choice, I probably wouldn't choose it. For two reasons: one reason is that leftism was a dirty word in China until the beginning of the twenty-first century, a *dirty word* [in English] really, because it was linked to the whole history of contemporary China, so I really didn't like being what the so-called leftists are. Because actually in the 1980s we preferred to be right-wing, but our whole understanding of right-wing at that time was as anti-establishment, anti-official criticism, because at that time we were in a completely closed Chinese context. The other reason why I would not have chosen "New Left" if I had been allowed to do so was because I thought that "New Left" was a European reality of the 1950s. I said, "I want to know, after half a century, what does 'New Left' mean? It's new for whom?"⁶⁵

Finally, the repositioning of Dai Jinhua's work by the editors is also visible in the connections and comparisons they draw between Dai Jinhua and well-known intellectual references of the Anglophone context, such as when they point out that "Dai Jinhua's profile as a public intellectual is similar to that of Susan Sontag, while her commitment to cinema studies corresponds to that of Laura Mulvey and the Marxist feminists who coalesced around the British journal *Cinema*."⁶⁶ Importantly, the editors take care not to present Dai Jinhua's work as merely derivative of Euro-American references, as when they explain that "Dai pays homage to Raymond Williams's pioneering intervention in cultural criticism, and, in our view, displaces the increasingly reified meaning of cultural studies – a marketing category for university presses – current in Western academic life today."⁶⁷ There is, therefore, a willingness to highlight the value of her work as a disruptive intervention on certain well-established

⁶³ Louis Pinto, "(Re)traductions. Phénoménologie et 'philosophie allemande' dans les années 1930," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 5, no. 145 (2002): 21.

⁶⁴ Personal interview with Dai Jinhua.

⁶⁵ Personal interview with Dai Jinhua.

⁶⁶ Wang and Barlow, "Introduction": 4.

⁶⁷ Wang and Barlow, "Introduction": 5.

modes of thinking in the Anglophone context. The potential of translation as a socially embedded practice to act upon well-established corpora of knowledge (with all the weight of their historical legacies) is perhaps most visible in this kind of intervention in which the translated knowledge is explicitly connected to concrete sets of problematics recognizable for the target readership.

5 Concluding Remarks: Translation and Other Forms of In/Visibilization

Chinese women intellectuals and Chinese works written by women in the humanities and social sciences have comparatively low visibility in translation. I have delved into the conditions of women in China's academic and intellectual field and pointed to three aspects that may bear upon their invisibility: The disregard for Chinese women intellectuals as knowledge producers and for women's issues as objects of knowledge, as well as the co-optation of women's writing by (mostly male) commercial interests, as in the case of personal memoirs.

I offered an analysis of a case in which the works of a Chinese female intellectual, Dai Jinhua, acquired effective visibility beyond China despite those conditions. Dai's case illustrates how translation can act as a tool to break away from the conditions of invisibility, and to make previously absent and unavailable knowledge and ideas circulate beyond their contexts of origin. It also illuminates the social nature of knowledge production and circulation, and the importance of social networks of interpersonal, ideological and intellectual affinities in explaining why and how knowledge and ideas circulate. It also offers insights into the strategies that may lead from invisibility to visibility of women intellectuals, and how translation acts as a tool for visibilization and the opening of intellectual canons.

Nevertheless, circulation opens up new layers and, *even after translation*, an author and her or his work can still be subject to other forms of invisibilization or concealment. In the case of non-Euro-American authors, their work may remain circumscribed to a specialist readership, most often within the field of area studies. Considering that translation is usually partial and that translation initiatives entail first and foremost an act of selection, another possibility is that editors or publishers choose to translate a particular section of a work or only a specific part of an author's production. For instance, in the case of women intellectuals, it would be worth noting whether their texts chosen for translation tend to focus on issues of feminism. These subtle forms of what I call "disciplinary and thematic concealment" can unwillingly lead to the reinforcement of the historical divisions of intellectual labor and the perception of these authors as producers of forms of knowledge that are mostly derivative of Euro-American theories

and analyses.⁶⁸ In that regard, the history of knowledge circulation must also be attentive to the new dynamics generated by translation, rather than seeing them as a final destination.⁶⁹

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⁶⁸ Naoki Sakai, "Theory and Asian Humanity: On the Question of *Humanitas* and *Anthropos*," *Postcolonial Studies* 13, no. 4 (2010): 441–64.

⁶⁹ Stefano Arduini and Siri Nergaard, "Introduction. Translation: A New Paradigm," *Translation. A Transdisciplinary Journal*, inaugural issue (2011): 8–17; Edwin Gentzler, *Translation and Rewriting in the Age of Post-Translation Studies* (London: Routledge, 2017).

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