On the Interdisciplinary Poetics of Gender[1]

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I. Poetics and Gender

The poetics means not only the theory on poems but also the general literary theory, which is the basic principles, concepts, or generalizing thinking on literature, which could be developed and utilized to meet all kinds of expectations. Also, it is the regular cognitions restricting the forming of artistic works, but without the interpretation and explanation to particular works. Professor Daiyun Yue, known for her work in establishing the poetics as a valid field for inquiry, summarizes that: “Nowadays, the poetics refers to the theoretical research on literature in the abstract level, which is different from literary criticism and literature history and doesn’t evaluate the specific work. It is the study of the literary text mode and conventions, and how the literary significance of these patterns and program.”[2] The poetics is interdisciplinary, inclusive to different knowledge from different fields. From the beginning of the 20th century, many kinds of new methods and concepts have emerged to broaden the field. There is thus considerable diversity in the development of the poetics.

Literary studies develop with special characters, which is different from other sciences. Poetics or literary studies are dynamic systems which are continuously being updated. It is the embodiment of fresh theory and the new ideological value.
orientation. If we can conceive of natural science as an object of architecture, which is highly targeted towards specific needs and goals, we might conceive of literature and the social sciences as evolving dialogues among a plethora of scholars without the precise direction of the natural sciences. Literature studies refuse to consider all the aspects of the text within itself and literature and societies have an organic constructive relationship.

With the vigorous development of the feminist literature thoughts in the world, Poetics of gender gradually appeared. The construction of poetics of gender reflected the inclusiveness, diversity, and differences of contemporary literary theory. At the end of the 1960s, Barthes, Derrida and Baudrillard studied the literature from the perspective of history, philosophy, political theory, and other methods and gave birth to an era of diversification with a more comprehensive research field of vision. Terry Eagleton also believed that the pure literature theory transferred to a larger contemporary literary theory innovation and the fusion of different horizons generating from the collision among different cultures, and knowledge systems. The poetics of gender is the product of the transformation from literary theory to “big theory”, which is a diversified vision with multifaced characteristics.

In the following paragraphs, I will give definitions for the various constructs discussed in these developing fields.

It is basic to divide sex or gender in the classification of social formation, also the most resistant division during the social change, which reflects human thoughts, social behaviors, and the basic characteristics of artistic practice. Gender is the diversity of potential under experience, which presents the humanity self-perfection. Gender poetics is the new achievements of the humanity of self-perfection. Sex means the biological organisms of many species specialized into male and female varieties, while gender means the social representation as male or female and the social differences and relationships responded to by social institutions.

Then we have more abstract concepts such as the gendered identity. The gender identity determines the social roles of men and women, and frames the thoughts and behaviors of men and women following these societal patterns. These differences and relationships vary with social and cultural forms and develop different gender roles with time passing by. The gender role refers to the actual behaviors of human beings as influenced by these gendered constraints. For example, in a household with strong gendered roles, a boy might help his father with farm work in the field, while his sister helps the mother with the housework. The social gender roles are fixed and
strengthened by the social expectations, which also means that one can only do something and can not do the other. This is referred to as the stereotype of gender roles, which usually is subconscious.

Gender studies, different from traditional women's studies and feminism theory, focus on a field of interdisciplinary study devoted to gender identity and gendered representation as central categories of analysis. It includes all the human being's studies and the study of sexuality and sex, including topics such as "the third gender" in the Native Americans. Beyond this, it emphasizes the analysis of the genders relationship, studies the mechanism and process of gender differences, the roles of group formation, group maintenance and layering, and focus on the historical construction and expression of gender identity. Broadly, the mechanism can be best understood as human beings turning themselves into the outside world by narration, and then reflecting themselves through the external world.

Gender identity is an important subject in literature and its impacts on the readers. Literary works express different destinations by encouraging the identity between characters and readers. This is another value of literature, which relates to the readers' experience and poetically resonates. Literature and art are, however, not self explanatory. Literary theory is the attempt to explain. In After Theory published in 2003, Eagleton announced that "the golden age of culture theory has become a distant past" after concluding the theory of Lacan, Strauss, Althusser, Roland Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, Kristeva, Cixous and Said. He believed that theory made people reflect on themselves more and "the discourse of gender and sexuality" was one of the most important results in cultural theory.

Besides politics, it is very important to discuss human being's fantasy and ambitions, such as sex or sexuality. But there was no discussion on sex in academic activities for several centuries owing to societal mores. Gender/sex however would eventually become the cornerstone of human culture and establish its own status in the academic realm. Eagleton attached great importance to sex or gender and combined Marxism and gender/body politics to develop the Marxist theory of literature and art.

There is no doubt that men and women's gender identity is also a component to social nature, which represents the social existence and social production practice as literature and art. Literature and cultural products show the gender characteristics of the creators or the recipients, and then the gender stipulation reveals the characteristics of art and literature as an important category. It sets up the important philosophical basis and logical starting point to the poetics of gender.
With the development of society and art, the key words of feminism criticism changed from “female” to “gender”. Also, the feminist literary criticism becomes very tolerant, which is not “anti-male” or “feminism solely”. The eclecticism of theory and criticism came from the first-world feminism and the third-world feminism, “power feminism” and “victim feminism”, and “feminist pop culture criticism” and “contemporary feminist academic studies”. So, the poetics of gender calling for surpassing the opposition between men and women was gradually produced and began to develop prosperously in the contemporary theory studies in China.

II. Categorical Interdisciplinary of Gender Poetics

Poetics of gender analyzes the interpretation itself to overcome the deficiencies of the criticism from impression, and tries to link the philosophical aesthetics and the cognitive theory of art together closely. Taking the gender as the social identity, it analyzes the gender factors in literature and art in poetics based on gender values and gender differences, studies the intersection and contradictions of gender role and identity from sex, race, class, times and economy, and develops the special spirit of literary and aesthetic expression between men and women to highlight the literary value of gender and gender equality.

Poetics of gender firstly based on the philosophy position: there is no abstract, autocracism human nature and human being's subjectivity is chaotic and concrete, which is made up of specific physical, mental, or social culture codes with one's gender and characteristics above the normal humanity. The subjectivity of the individual diversity is constructed by three dimensions: “human nature” is the element level for both men and women in common, which is a kind of “abstract stipulation”; the intermediate level is the characteristics of genre formed by the gender differences between men and women, which are much specific; and the top level is the individual “personality”, which is much more specific. Human nature converts to personality by gender development and vice versa. The gender provision is an important variable, which plays a key role in reality. These three levels interact with each other and present different dominant styles in different historical context with their identity, proximity, as well as complementarities. Gender refers to one's biological sex related to the various cultural ties, and a series of relationships from social construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction. It needs to be understood in the wider cultural background. The construction of the poetics of gender embodies the inclusiveness, polysemy and ductility of the literary theory as a discipline.
Poetics of gender includes various disciplines associated with gender experience problems, which can accept the ever-expanding interdisciplinary exploration of a variety of results. It mainly:

1. Explores the gender tendency of literature and art creation, tries to elucidate one's view of gender in different works in different periods, and discusses the creative rules of gender subjects;

2. Investigates the gender in literary and art works to develop a basic framework or model from the perspective of gender;

3. Explores the gender in literary acceptance activities, inspects the influence on gender culture and literary acceptance for people, and explores the gender of the stipulation of subjects; and

4. Discusses all kinds of cultural media besides literature, involving the movie and television, advertising, painting, ads, photography, network, etc., as well as various culture media comments, in order to analyze the audience's attention in the process of culture production and transmission.

Feminist criticism has certain aim and its expressions are much clear, while poetics of gender is exploratory, which needs to be developed gradually, such as the terms of the poetics of gender. Also, poetics of gender is novelty and open, which requires a new way of thinking and a comprehensive, multi-level dynamic investigation, and its theory genre has the flexibility of oriental aesthetics. Based on the above analysis of philosophy, value orientation, and social function, poetics of gender can explore the structure of literature and art, aesthetic characteristics, developing types and so on. The definition of notions breeds the developing opportunity of the poetics of gender, such as gendered subject positions, sex, gender, gender identity, masculinity, men's studies, femininity, engendered, gendered fixes, post-gender, cyborgs, gender shift, speech community, context, gendered narrative discourse, gendered narrative style, fantasy space, and interpretive communities.

At the same time, poetics of gender supplies new opportunities for the development of literary theory and criticism. As literary thought, it appears as the opposite to new criticism, structuralism, deconstruction criticism, formalism poetics, and pure science or language thoughts. Formalism ignores the social and political functions of theory to abandon the physical, mental, and cultural factors, which has a great deal of one-sided ideas. The decay of the narrow sense of deconstruction criticism and the sustainable development of feminist criticism, new historicism and
post-colonial criticism present people’s emphasis on the subject identity. Poetics of gender makes human beings the main object, both parsing as the existence of genre, and as an individual. While exploring the literary creation with people’s physical, psychological, emotional, political and racial factors, the poetics of gender attributes the social gender with keen interest from concrete and complete gender subjectivity. It firstly makes the sex characteristics as the basic category of text and interpretation and a cultural construction in personality and generated aesthetic feeling. Therefore, poetics of gender tends to be constructionist rather than essentialist.

As a subsequent discipline of feminist criticism, poetics of gender will eliminate the artificial barriers and unify other works organically. It discusses the complexity of gender roles, the crossover, and contradiction between gender roles and gender identity caused by race, class, age, and economic factors, as well as the performances of gender pattern in literature and art. The difference between poetics of gender and feminist criticism is that the former is much more inclusive to avoid the unilateralism of some feminist criticism genre, which explores the unique factors of culture and literary for men and women, and also studies the communication from each other and the gender characteristics’ performances in literature.

The construction of gender poetics reflects the interdisciplinary, polysemy and ductility of literary theory as a discipline. The methodology of gender poetics is inclusive, including philosophy, anthropology, sociology, politics, psychology, ecology, biology, art, linguistics, semiotics, communication and so on. Poetics of gender is aesthetic in its essence and tends to focus on the aesthetic paradigm in depth of the aesthetic consciousness. The poetic existence of gender subject relies on the inner experience to maintain, and depends on the individual aesthetic freedom. The theory of Judith Butler, the leading figure of post-feminist criticism, is typically interdisciplinary. In her works, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of Performativity* (1997), *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (2011), she repeatedly argues that there is no real gender identity behind the term—gender, which is merely frequently quoted. Gender identity is constructed by the performativity of the very term. Her gender performance theory breaks the traditional cognitive mode of gender. Butler deconstructs the subject of gender, who is supposed to be harmoniously coexisting with others and developing by the mutual influence. The identity is manifested by the contrast of otherness, so the concept of gender is put in a performance dimension and attached with the characteristics like proceduring, performativity, evolvement, and openness. That is really innovative. Her study is
also interwoven with politics, construction, race, sex and ethnics. The examination of various inequalities is crucial for the understanding of globalization, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, systematism and the complexity of racism. It emphasized interactions of systems, gender, race, religion, homosexuals, and the handicapped. It is the differences of life style in different cultures that manifest the identity. “Butler's theory about sex, queer, feminism, body, political opinions has challenged the views of the scholars worldwide on the topics of subject, power, political thinking and the way of speech; it also changed a countless number of people who lead a depression or violence lives caused by the body, gender and sexual issues.” Her recent work also embodies the characteristics of interdisciplinary. In her autobiography, Memoir of a Debulked Woman: Enduring Ovarian Cancer (2012), she took her own body as the object of observation, practiced “body writing” proposed by the famous French writer Helene Cixous and discussed the relationship between disease, body and death. She claims for centuries men have been described as external, spiritual, while women internal, physical. Women tend to remain silent about constipation, diarrhea, and other side effects of chemotherapy because of cautiousness, shyness, or privacy. They also worry about that the sole description of the effect on the body will be considered just as body without soul. Even, many religions limit the participation of women. In order to truly describe a Woman's body, feminist theorists should combine the interaction and extension of the physical and the mental, physiological reaction and psychoanalysis, history and present, ethics and politics, etc., thus promoting the real maturity of feminist theory. Poetics of gender insists that aesthetic experience and aesthetic emotion rely on human beings’ existence which is hinge, concrete and perceptual, pays much more attention to one's perceptual dimensions, especially the unique gender value from the equality between men and women. It also denies the individual perceptual existence way of alienation of capitalism, abides the freedom of social and man's nature, and refuses to make people materialized. It calls for the new type of men and women in the world with a new relationship, in which everyone is equal with freedom and the aesthetic demand will be disciplined. It not only treats with the perceptual existence of women as aesthetic freedom and human liberation based on Herbert Marcuse's opinion on the combination of aesthetic liberation and gender attributes, but prefers the view of respecting individuality, advocating equality-dialogues, the interdependence between men and women and openness to Marxist feminism, black feminist, ecological feminism, postcolonial feminist and the latest process feminism.
The value orientation of gender poetics lays not the sharply opposite condition of
gender but the equality and mutual respect. The “Complement of Yin and Yang” ,
and the harmony of differences in both gender are the ethical value of gender poetics.
The view on “Complementary Yin and Yang” is very important to poetics of gender.
Both Yin and Yang are different from each other but one can not develop without the
other. Some Chinese classics provide a rich theoretical resources for the construction
of gender poetics, such as Yi Ching and Li Zhi’s opinion. Undoubtedly, more
emphasis on advocating the men is an important part of the poetics of gender, which
is also the important supplement and development of feminism. The development of
feminism, along with the change of gender and the challenge to patriarchy, requires
making the male’s role clear. Since the 1980s, studies on masculinity in the West
have developed rapidly. People began to realize the importance of men and women’s
accomplishments to the construction of a harmonious society. Today, most female
literature studies only emphasizes the patriarchy presented in literature, even treated
patriarchy as the male’s role. Some criticisms ignores the particularity of literary
creation and the complexity of the literary text, so misunderstands the gender value
orientation of the characters of the writer’s. The commitment to the ethical values
does not deeply affect our judgment to literary value and the aesthetic cognition to the
complex relationship among the language form, the creation subject form, and the
form of power.

In new periods, the research achievements in literature and art with the
perspective of gender are very remarkable, especially the female literature studies,
which provide a solid foundation for the construction of gender poetics.

III. Poetics of Gender and the Feminist Literary Criticism

Obviously, poetics of gender is not only a meta-theory, but has some value
orientation and ethical appeals, namely the criticism on the inequality in the field of
gender.

There are many theories in literature and art and each one has its own focus,
which is independent and concerns its own field. Poetics of gender will exist after the
disappearance of feminism movements and strive for equality between men and women
in the political movement and literary criticism in the next century. It seems to be
“the ripple effect” between gender poetics and feminist literary criticism. The
feminist literary criticism in the United States and United Kingdom acted as a big
stone thrown in lake, and then Black feminist criticism, third-world feminist

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criticism, and post-feminism came out as waves of feminism. The most outside ripple is gender poetics.

Poetics of gender has its own special value orientation, research objects, and research ideas, which are interdisciplinary with complex properties. Poetics of gender limits the interpretation methods; meanwhile the feminist literary criticism gives the feedback of practice to the poetics of gender. The difference between the poetics of gender and gender studies is that the former combines gender theory with literary studies as a part of poetics. It not only expands the research field of poetics, but enriches the research object of poetics, as well as develops the boundary of gender studies and provides a new perspective for cultural study.

Now, there are two foci on poetics of gender: one is the tendency of falling to the danger of patriarchal ideology with advocating the politicalization of poetics, and abandoning the critics to patriarchy; the other is the lack of reflection to some male advocates. Additionally, there is another view that feminist criticism should turn into post-feminism in China. Some critics claims that the sudden changes of Western feminist theory give the Chinese feminists a profound lesson. Actually, these criticisms don't conform to the actual situation in China.

Since the foundation of new Chinese government, women's social status has been greatly improved. But so far, women are still the “second sex”, the androcentrism still has a deep influence on many people. The gender discrimination or sexism exists everywhere, even in education and media field, especially when the female graduates are seeking for jobs. For instance, there are only 12 female characters among the total 93 in primary textbooks in China. Feminist literary criticism bitterly attacks the androcentrism and the discrimination against women, which inevitably brings the profound effect to the Chinese material and spiritual civilization construction. Both Western and Eastern, the first world and third world will produce the resistance and understanding of this phenomenon as long as there is inequality between men and women. Feminist literary criticism has been greatly improved and made many achievements in our country. It is very necessary to criticize the male chauvinism in traditional culture with the feminist criticism for a long time. Although literature and art can not change the world directly, they may inspire the inner drive of some innovators to change the world. Emphasizing the female consciousness of self-reliance, which expresses radical feminist consciousness specifically, and developing women's special spirit and the aesthetic expression of the individual will promote contemporary Chinese female literary creation and criticism, generate the diverse
relationship between men and women, and obtain the corresponding cultural connotation and aesthetic appearance to get higher level in the field of culture and deeper equality between men and women. This is also the purpose of gender poetics.

We can not overlook the feminist criticism and the achievements of feminism criticism in half a century because of the emergence of post-feminism. Post-feminism means not the end or giving up of feminism, but the new development with diversified and complicated changes. Some feminism critics, such as Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer, Susan Gubar, Gayatri C. Spivak, Sandra M. Gilbert, and Toril Moi, still insist on the feminist standpoint. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak agreed that feminism criticism "must undo itself as a single issue, but with enough patience and attention to detail": "it will lose itself to become part of the mainstream, yet there will always be a specifically self-identified group of feminisms." [5] Sandra Gilbert expressed: "So much of women’s history tends to involve ‘a sleep and forgetting’ that I fear the same consciousness-raising revolutions may have to happen over and over again before truly definitive changes are implement." [6] No matter what kinds of feminism arise, we have to face the reality of the living conditions for both genders, especially the fact that the majority of women’s lives are inferior to men and the gender discrimination exists seriously. Toril Moi announced that “the premise of this conference is that feminist theory stands in need of a revival” [7] in “Hannah Arendt/ Reiner Schurmann Memorial Symposium: Feminist Investigations: A Manifesto” in April, 2014. Actually, there are a lot of academic achievements on feminism in more than 30 years, but the practical achievements of feminism in mainland China are a little poor. So it is still important to “adhere to the critical perspective of feminism both in academic and the real lives” [8]. Based on the local reality in mainland China, the feminist literary criticism and female literature studies would develop prosperously with its unique characteristics.

The characteristics of cross-gender is very obvious for the poetics of gender. One’s gender and value orientation can not be decided by someone’s physical characteristics. Julia Kristeva believes that both men and women live in the reality through the unique symbol system. If a woman completely dominates the symbol system, she will be strong like a man, while some men will become the outsiders or subversives. It is also the reason for many men comparing to women in the history of China. As Terry Eagleton notes, someone oppressing women may be a woman. As a kind of ideological value and academic interpretation, physiological characteristics aren’t the determining factors. This can be understood by men or women who do some
research in feminist criticism and gender poetics.

Feminist literary criticism is a political stance and values fundamentally. Terry Eagleton always focuses on the development of Western feminist criticism with a high reputation as a Marxist critic, who is also the male critic with gender consciousness in the early West. He studies not only gender/body politics with Marxism and the value of gender equality between men and women, but analyzes some feminism works in detail. The unique gender perspective and the deep comment on feminist literary criticism are beneficial for the development of the construction of gender poetics and feminist criticism, and are good for the development of Marxist literary theory in our country. Therefore, the interdisciplinary of gender poetics includes the reflection to the men, which also exits in the feminist literary criticism and gender poetics in China.

Notes:
[1] This essay is a part of the research under Guizhou Provincial Key Research Project for Talents on Education and Science “The Gender Poetics in the Discourse of Interculture” (No. 05021X001).
[2] Daiyun Yue, The World Poetics Dictionary. Shenyang: Chunfeng Wenyi press, 1993.
[3] Terry Eagleton, After Theory. New York: Penguin Books, 2003, p. 6.
[4] Darin Barney, “In Defense of Judith Butler”, Huffington Post. Retrieved 9 October 2013.
[5] Susan Gubar, Critical Condition, Feminism at the Turn of the Century. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 164.
[6] Ibid., p. 165.
[7] http://events.newschool.edu/event/philosophy_department_hannah_arendtreiner_schurmann_memorial_symposium#.VOwT2yp9Idh.
[8] Shuming Lin, “A Response of the Mainland China to the Western Feminism Literary Criticism”, Nankai Journal, No. 2, 2009.

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