Femininity in Zhai Yongming's "Lightly Injured People, Gravely Wounded City"

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Zhai Yongming 翟永明is considered one of the most prominent female poets of twentieth-century China. She wrote her very first poems in classical Chinese genres in 1969. She started writing modern poetry in 1980 and began to publish in 1982 with such illustrious poets as Bai Hua 柏桦, Huang Xiang 黄翔, Ouyang Jiangh e欧阳江河, and Zhong Ming 钟鸣 in "underground" (*dixia*) 地下 or "unofficial" (*fei guanfang*) 非官方 poetry publications (van Crevel 673). In 1984, Zhai wrote the poem cycle "Woman" (nüren) 女人 that consists of four sections, each section composed of five separate poems. "Woman" was published in 1986 in the journal *Poetry News* (*Shige Bao*) 诗歌报, accompanied by her essay "Night Consciousness" (*Heiye de yishi*) 黑夜的意识. In this essay, Zhai proposes a triadic mode of women's literature: "feminine, lyrical sentimentality" (*nüziqi de shuqing ganshang)* 女子气的抒情感伤; "unconcealed feminism" (*bu jia yanshi de nüquanzhuyi*) 不加掩饰的女权主义; and "women's literature" (*nüxing de wenxue*) "女性"的文学. Zhai categorizes women's writing according to an order of poetic value. In Zhai's view, true literature manages to convey a universal vision of human life: feminine literature and feminist literature do not share a spiritual affinity for human destiny with true literature, and only women's literature has the literary value to become true literature 在女子气—女权—女性这样三个高低不同的层次中，真正具有文学价值的是后者 (Zhai, "Heiye de yishi," 4). Zhai ranks the three modes of this triad in ascending order according to their distance from true literature. As Zhai asserts, feminine literature is the lowest in the order. The lyrical sentimentality of feminine literature was even depreciated when Zhai lamented about her poems written between 1980 and 1982 in her essay "Reading, Writing, and My Memory" ("Yuedu, xiezuo yu wo de huiyi") 阅读、写作与我的回忆. Zhai states that between 1980 and 1982 she read a lot of books, but mainly wrote failed works since most of her poems

were lyrical and sentimental: 1980年至1982年我读了大量的书，写了不少失败之作，大部分是些风花雪月的胡乱抒情 (Zhai, "Yuedu, xiezuo, yu wode jiyi," 224).

Zhai's negative attitude towards femininity in the essay "Night Consciousness" has been hastily accepted by critics as the premise of the critical concept of "women's poetry" 女性诗歌. "Night Consciousness" and the poem cycle kindled the debate on "women's poetry" among poetry critics. Upon their publication in the 1980s, the poem cycle and the essay immediately drew the attention of Tang Xiaodu 唐晓渡, a leading poetry critic in China since the 1980s. In 1987, Tang published an article in the national journal *Poetry* (*Shikan*) 诗刊titled "Women's Poetry: from Night to Day—On Zhai's poem cycle 'Woman'" 女性诗歌：从黑夜到白昼—读翟永明组诗《女人》. This article has been viewed as the first work of scholarship on "women's poetry" 女性诗歌 and of canonizing the concept of "women's poetry" as a feminist paradigm for the study of contemporary Chinese women's poetry.

Since then, the critical cycle of contemporary poetry has begun sorting out feminine characteristics of the poetry of influential women poets coming before Zhai, including works of Cai Yan蔡琰, Xue Tao 薛涛, Zhu Shuzhen 朱淑真, Li Qingzhao李清照, Qiu Jin 秋瑾, Bing Xin 冰心, and Shu Ting 舒婷. Constructing the characteristics of the feminine poetry as negative and conservative in its anti-patriarchal stance, critics draw a boundary between the feminine tradition and a "new" feminist tradition coined as a tradition of "women's poetry." In Jeanne Hong Zhang's monograph *The Invention of a Discourse: Women's Poetry from Contemporary China*, only two premodern Chinese women poets—Cai Yan 蔡琰and Li Qingzhao 李清照—are included for analysis. The book concludes that the poetics of these two poets fits well with the feminine tradition (29). This conclusion is reached by generally outlining their biographical information and commenting on a tiny number of their poems. Building on this assessment of Cai Yan and Li Qingzhao, Zhang further connects the work of these two pre-modern poets with that of three modern women poets. In her evaluation of Bin Xin 冰心, Zhang reprises Julia Lin's comment that "the accent of Bing's verse is thoroughly feminine, not only in subject matter but also in technique" (31). Zhang's assessment of Shu Ting 舒婷 is that "Shu's tone is akin to a feminine mode of self-expression in

the same vein as Li Qingzhao and Bing Xin" (33). Zhang's treatment of Qiu Jin 秋瑾 is ambivalent but intriguing in a way that supports my proposition that the feminine is understood as negative and the exact opposite of the feminist. Zhang's ambivalence deserves a full quotation and careful examination:

> Qiu Jin was the first influential feminist whose feminist ideas compelled her to write against the restraints of a feminine role. The above quoted song may sound didactic, naïve, and excessively emotional to today's readers. However, according to Yan Chunde, Qiu Jin's works paved the way for the emergence of the "first-generation" women authors during the May Fourth Movement (31).

What is interesting in Zhang's conclusion with respect to Qiu Jin is that Qiu does not accommodate the demands of an exclusively feminine reading. Zhang's reading does not indicate whether Qiu is feminist or not, but that Qiu's feminist ideas are interpreted as the source of artistic inspiration "against the restraints of a feminine mode." In this reading, femininity is something to be curbed, and the feminist is a new poetics that breaks away from that so-called feminine tradition. This interpretation draws a boundary between the feminine tradition and a "new" feminist tradition coined as a tradition of "women's poetry." Chinese women's poetry is thus divided into two traditions, one before the invention of the concept of "women's poetry," and the other after.

Zhang's interpretation echoes previous scholarship on the concept of "women's poetry." In his influential essay on the categorization of "women's poetry," Lü Jin 吕进 submits that Cai Yan, Xue Tao, Zhu Shuzhen, and Qiu Jin are all subservient to the male-centered poetry tradition 蔡琰、薛涛、朱淑真、秋瑾这些晶莹的名字似乎只是中国这个古老诗国的一种点缀，甚至是男性话语中心的古代诗歌的一种附庸 (139). Luo Zhenya 罗振亚, a leading critic on modern Chinese poetry, classifies Chinese women poets preceding Zhai as non-feminist poets due to an absence of female consciousness in their work (124). Luo further claims that the publication of Zhai's poem cycle "Woman" prefaced by the essay "Night Consciousness" marks the beginning of feminist poetics in China 标志着具有鲜明的性别主体性的女性主义诗歌在中国正式诞生 (125). Zhang Qinghua

张清华, an influential scholar on contemporary Chinese literature, reiterates this criticism with particular respect to the Menglong poet Shu Ting: "[the] poems of Shu Ting and others are fundamentally thematized around human destiny, rather than a complete and female independence and subjectivity" 在舒婷等人的诗中，表现最多和最根本的仍是对人对共同命运与权力的思考，而不是一种完整独立的女性立场 (43). Cui Weiping, 崔卫平, one of the very few female poetry critics active during the period when the concept of "women's poetry" was heatedly discussed, compares Shu Ting to the "comrade" of men and labels her as sentimental, while acknowledging Zhai as a "mature woman" (45). The poetry of female poets such as Zhai Yongming, Tang Yaping 唐亚平, Yi Lei 伊蕾, and others emerging since the mid-1980s germinated the concept of "women's poetry" in China. This concept has evolved into a critical approach that situates these women poets in a feminist position in poetry writing. They are considered as different from earlier "feminine" poets based on their conscious exploration of female subjectivity.

However, in an interview with Jeanne Hong Zhang in 2002, Zhai reflects: "When I think about my earlier works from a critical distance, I find some of them unconstrained, emotionally saturated, especially the poem series 'Woman,' though it was lavishly praised" (Zhang 67). Zhai confessed that in order to steer clear of the sentimental elements of femininity, she ended up perpetuating the feminine trait in the poem cycle "Woman" which had earned her the reputation of a feminist poet in the history of Chinese poetry. Later in a critical article on the poetry of traditional women poets—"Female Consciousness, Woman's Opinion, and Female Voice" (Nüxing yishi, furenzhijian, cisheng) 女性意识·妇人之见·雌声—Zhai modified her thoughts on the feminine. She insists that the feminine is a negative trait, which is imposed on women's works by the male critical system and that the feminine nevertheless registers the traces of women poets' resistance against the male voice (Zhai 2014: 77).

This article serves as a critique of the male critical tradition within the problematic of feminine poetry and the inconsistency of the female poet Zhai. Zhai's poetic practices rewrite the trope of femininity, transforming it into an instrument for the poet's recognition of female agency. Revealing Zhai's endeavor to rewrite the past and ponder the

present from a "feminine" perspective in her poem "Lightly Injured People, Gravely Wounded City" (*Qingshang de ren, zhongshang de chengshi*) 轻伤的人，重伤的城市, Zhai's paradoxical intervention speaks not of her rejection of the so-called feminine tradition but of her resistance to oppression. Poetry critics who work on the critical concept of "women's poetry" have built this so-called anti-patriarchal poetics on an insufficient review of the literature of "femininity." The work of three feminist scholars illustrates the nature of this oppression: Wendy Larson, Rey Chow, and Alicia Suskin Ostriker.

In a discussion of *funü* 妇女, Wendy Larson surveys Chinese critical articles about women and literature from 1925 to 1935, the height of the Republican Era. Larson concludes that women critics during that period formulate literature as essentially feminine and challenge the ideology that "good literature" should be theoretically established to devalue the lyrical and emotive.

> In reading essays which establish Chinese literature as feminine, it is easy to hypothesize that should "good literature" be theoretically reconstructed to devalue the lyrical and emotive and then value social knowledge and engagement, the affinity of women with literature would disappear, and along with it this constructed "women's literature" would become a victim of this redefinition (63).

In her reading of Ling Shuhua 凌叔华 (1900-1990) and "a feminine style" (*guixiupai*] 闺秀派of literature, Rey Chow elaborates on how the patriarchal organization of society confines women to domesticity, how women writers attempt artistic representation of such confinement, how subjectivism, domesticity, triviality, and sentimentalism are disparaged as characteristics of a feminine mode of writing, and how this mode of writing fails to match the requirements of "great" literature. Chow argues that the feminine mode of writing bears historical traces of women's oppression and the critical tradition that naturalizes the inferiority of the feminine (92-93).

In *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America*, Alicia Suskin Ostriker asserts that literary criticism has long devalued women poets' articulation of gendered experience and that expression of feminine confinement and constraint should be read as resistance to the authority of the tradition of masculine poetry disguised

as "American poetry." Ostriker underscores the notion that femininity is a shared trait in the history of women's poetry, which indicates that the dominant criticism relentlessly disparages women poets:

> With the advent of modernism, some women began writing more openly of sexual passion, some became leading inventors of avant-garde form, some became social critics, and the general quality of women's poetry rose precipitously. Yet almost all this work continued to register the traces of feminine confinement and constraint; and, not coincidentally, the dominant criticism continued to disparage, neglect, and misread the woman poet (10).

The afore-mentioned critics try to make clear how women writers chronicle a history of women's oppression in a feminine mode of writing. However, contemporary poetry critics divide women poets into feminine and feminist, and conveniently construct a critical concept of "women's poetry" that attributes the failure of most women poets to the limitations of femininity. This critical approach of "women's poetry" helps reinforce the negative qualities of femininity, which are historically determined by the patriarchal literary tradition. As Julia C. Lin and Nicholas Kaldis observe when they reflect on the thoughts of femininity, "what has been associated with or defined as a 'feminine' quality or tradition in Chinese poetry has arisen out of a social and literary discourse thoroughly dominated by patriarchal values," and what is referred to as "the 'traditional feminine mode' in Chinese poetry is largely a male construction" (xviii). By contrast, in Wolfgang Kubin's analysis of Shu Ting's poetry, the use of the words "feminine" and "femininity" corresponds more closely to what has been referred to as "feminist" than to the "feminine tradition" in Chinese poetry.

One of the ways we recognize Zhai's acceptance of femininity as female temperament 女性气质 is the decreasing eschewal on her part of identifying female temperament with traits such as passivity, sentimentality, and vulnerability in her poetry. At the same time, we recognize that Zhai's poetry has taken a liberating jump from the confinement of femininity inscribed in the history that forces femininity to take up its negative connotation and marginalized position. In her article "Lightly Injured People, Gravely Wounded City" (Qingshang de ren, zhongshang de chengshi) 轻伤的人，重伤的城市, Zhai

discloses that the poem of the same title was written in 2000 when she toured Berlin. This poem has been interpreted with her poems written in the mid-2000s, such as "The Eighth Day" (*Diba tian*) 第八天, as Zhai's critique of the apathy of people in contemporary society and her reflection on the development of information technology, modern science, and modern medicine. My reading of the poem shows that the feminine is projected onto the vulnerable body of a city. The poet relies on the passive image of the city to interrogate the masculinity of civilization. The feminine body in this sense becomes a negotiating tool for the poet's artistic creativity and female identity.

The poem is constructed around two scenes: the contrast between a world of war in the past and a city for tourism in the present time. Each stanza of the poem contrasts the observation of an implied tourist at the present time against the war scene of the past. In the first part of each stanza, we are guided by the implied tourist, as becomes gradually clear through the course of the poem, into an imaginary world of war in the past. The end of each stanza switches abruptly into the lives of people in the city at the present time, opposing their carefreeness to the wretchedness of the city.

This pattern of contrasts in diction within the poem, as well as in the frames of reference, historical and contemporary, repeats itself from stanza to stanza. However, the smooth flow of the speaker's vision from things of the past to lives of the present reconciles rather than intensifies the oppositions. It implies that the vision of past things also permeates the here and now. In a sense, the reconciliation of past events and the present reaffirms how the civilized people who came out from the past wounds imagine the past defines who they are. People are in an easy state with their "wounds sewn up better than the war's." However, the "gravely wounded eyes" of the city "illuminate" the cruelty of the civilized. What the civilized people imagine about the past is not consistent with what the body of the city expresses. This episode of incongruity seems to potentially demonstrate the incompatibility of the easiness and the world of modern lives. Underneath the easiness of the individuals are the wretched bodies of the city, which underwent progressive moments of destruction and (re)construction. Such oppression of the city becomes the essential prerequisite for civilization. The goal of civilization is release from the control of nature. The history

of civilization, therefore, is a history of enacting power and control over nature. In this sense, civilization takes on an aura of masculinity and the city becomes the embodiment of the feminized nature.

Here they come,	轻伤的人过来了
the lightly injured	
their gauze as white as their faces	他们的白色纱布像他们的脸
Wounds sewn up	他们的伤痕比战争缝合得好
better than the war's	
Here they come,	轻伤的人过来了
the lightly injured	
Carrying their prized possessions	担着心爱的东西
The parts that have not died	没有断气的部分
They strip off their uniforms	脱掉军服　　洗净全身
they wash themselves clean	
Paying by check and credit card[1]	使用支票和信用卡
(Lingenfelter 135)	(Zhai 248-49)

The poem begins with an octave stanza. Its first three lines form a pattern, which is repeated in the following three lines. The lines following the first three lines function as a transition from the imagined war scene in the past to the scene of a modern life. The simile in the second line helps to prove that the poet's association of the passersby with participants in warfare is not a product of pure imagination. The comparison of people's faces to gauze is intentionally conducted in an awkward way. Instead of saying "their faces look like white gauze," the poet writes that "their gauze is like their faces." Stating that "their gauze" is like "their faces," the poet emphasizes that some quality or trait or action associated with the gauze is directly transferred onto the faces. As the image of gauze symbolizes violent acts and as we are told in the next line with parallel syntax that in gauze are wrapped old war wounds, the poet shows us that these people have a past as participants in war. The boundary between past events and present actions is further blurred as the poet keeps the actions of the people in a continuous present by employing verbs in the present participle form: "*guolaile*" 过来了 in the original Chinese means "is approaching," "*danzhe*" 担着 is "carrying or shouldering," and "*shiyong*" 使用 means "paying." Although they are not indicated as inflected verbs as participles in the present, "strip off" and "wash" are used in the sense of ongoing action

followed by the act of payment. What concerns me here is not primarily the grammatical effect of seeming to extend the action of warfare to the present, although the effect of an extended present echoes the aforementioned conclusion that past acts establish the identity of the modern society. Rather, I argue that the series of active verbs in this stanza reveals that men are not passive participants of war but active players. In this way, modern society established by those who are active in the destructive cause of war assumes an identity as a controller. In addition, as noted above, rather than attributing human traits, traits of their faces, to the non-human world, the non-human gauze, the poet transfers non-human attributes to humans. This inversion of the convention of personification is subversive. It has the effect of making the people depicted in the present time into things, which is a kind of reification. The implication here is that the powerful controller in war is depersonalized and objectified. The irony is that it has always been the oppressed who are depersonalized and objectified. In the context of this poem, the oppressed is the city and the city is projected as a femininized body. In this sense, the powerful controller is relegated to a status of femininity that has long been ascribed to the female. The power relation between masculinity and femininity is reversed. A connection with the next stanza has been established by this subtle message.

The gravely wounded city seethes with energy	一个重伤的城市血气翻涌
Its pulse and temperature rise and fall	脉搏和体温在起落
Faster than war	比战争快
Slower than fear	比恐惧慢
The gravely wounded city	重伤的城市
Casting off its bandages and artificial legs	扔掉了假腿和绷带
It has bled green fluid	现在它已流出绿色分泌物
And offered the unyielding power of stone	它已提供石材的万能之能
One of the lightly injured looks up	一个轻伤的人　仰头
At those monuments to aesthetics	看那些美学上的建筑
(Lingenfelter 135)	(Zhai 248-249)

This stanza introduces a pathetic fallacy: "The gravely wounded city seethes with energy / Its pulse and temperature rise and fall /…/ Casting off its bandages and artificial legs" (Lingenfelter 135). The city is compared to a body. The images chosen are human ones ("blood and breath" 血气, which have been metaphorically translated into "energy" is one; "pulse" 脉搏, "body temperature" 体温, "bandages" 绑带 and "artificial legs" 假腿 are the others). I would recommend that we read "血气翻涌" (seethes with energy) as connoting that the city is hot-blooded, quick to express its emotions: complex mixtures of fearfulness and love. The feeling of love is revealed in the line that it "offered the unyielding power of stone," providing the world after the war with a new shelter. All those human traits are transferred to the city with the use of a metaphor. The city is thus personified. The city is physically wounded, but now "It has bled green fluid." This line is an important shift in perspective. "Green secretion" 绿色分泌物 symbolizes the source of life. It "offered the unyielding power of stone." Synecdoche is adopted in the last line. The city is represented through a specific part of it: "monuments. The city is portrayed as a human and bestowed qualities such as receptiveness and fearfulness ("Slower than fear"). In this sense, the message conveyed in the second stanza stands in sharp contrast with what has been revealed in the first stanza. The civilized are powerful, destructive, and emotionless, while the city is passive and emotive. It is exactly this passive and emotional body, after being subjected to physical torture twice—to be "embodied" after being "disfigured" in the human war that becomes the birthplace of a world of modern lives. The last two lines "One of the lightly injured looks up / At those monuments to aesthetics" indicate a recurrence of treating the city as a passive body. This body not only "gives birth to" a modern society but is also the nurturer of modern taste of "beauty." The city is a body that is always taken advantage of. Such imagery is reminiscent of the female body. The poet's choice of diction--"green secretion"--calls to mind what Simone de Beauvoir argues in *The Second Sex*:

> From birth, the species has taken possession of woman and tends to tighten its grasp … at puberty the species reasserts its claim … this whole occurrence has the aspect of a crisis. Not without resistance does the body of woman permit the species

> to take over; and this struggle is weakening and dangerous … Many of the ovarian secretions function for the benefit of the egg, promoting its maturation and adapting the uterus to its requirements … the woman is adapted to the needs of the egg rather than to her own requirements (29-31).

In de Beauvoir's view, the female body is organized to nurture the species and women's imprisonment in the procreation cycle is part of the project of civilization.

Six thousand bombs come pounding down	六千颗炸弹砸下来
Leaving an arms depot in flames	留下一个燃烧的军械所
Six thousand bomb craters	六千颗弹着点
Like six thousand gravely wounded eyes	像六千只重伤之眼
In a rush they illuminate the faces of	匆忙地映照出
Thousands of married women	那几千个有夫之妇
Married men unmarried men and women	有妇之夫　和未婚男女的脸庞
Bodies covered in sulphur, or asphalt	他们的身上全是硫磺， 或者沥青
And at their feet, twisted metal	他们的脚下是拆掉的钢架
(Lingenfelter 135)	(Zhai 248-49)

However, the poet Zhai takes this one step beyond de Beauvoir. Zhai highlights in the third stanza the fact that the city is an inflicted and vulnerable body that "mirrors" or "reflects" 映照 (which is rendered as "illuminate" in the above translation) the vulnerability of the powerful world of modern lives. The superior-inferior dichotomy is unfixed. Power relationships are turned into a paradox. Here, in this stanza, number seems to be the main point: "Six thousand bombs," "Six thousand bomb craters," and "Thousands of married women / Married men　unmarried men and women" present a stark contrast to the "one" arms depot. There is some sense of power hierarchy displayed in the contrast. The city which has been turned into "an arms depot" is inferior in strength and left virtually defenseless against the attack. However, two metaphors in the stanza help to shed the city's status of subordination. The city is compared to an arms depot. Ironically, the

war does not make the city weaker; rather, the destructive act turns the city into a place where military supplies are stored. The vulnerable body is transferred into the symbol of power. "Six thousand bomb craters / Like six thousand gravely wounded eyes" is another metaphor in which holes made by the explosion of bombs are being compared to the eyes of the wounded body. The force and strength of bombs is being transferred to the wounded and powerless city. The boundary between vulnerability and forcefulness is redrawn by the metaphor. In addition, the further description of these six thousand eyes turns the power relationship between the active players of the war and the passive city into a paradox. These eyes on the body of the city "reflect" the origin of those "Thousands of married women / Married men unmarried men and women." These people have "bodies" in history that were "covered in sulphur or asphalt." The implied message is that the body of the city "mirrors" the nature of modern society which is essentially a vulnerable body itself. Modern society discloses its identity as a vulnerable body, which is also the poetic trope of the last stanza.

The lightly injured now set out	轻伤的人 从此
Heavily wounded maps in hand	拿着一本重伤的地图
They split up to search	他们分头去寻找那些
For the new vessels of tall buildings	新的器皿大楼
Forms thin and light and pointed	薄形，轻形和尖形
The brain of this city	这个城市的脑袋
Extends its spikes	如今尖锐锋利地伸出去
So easily hacked off	既容易被砍掉
But they've frightened away many wounds	也吓退了好些伤口
(Lingenfelter 137)	(Zhai 248-49)

This final stanza utilizes enjambment to connect the first four lines into a single meaning and grammatical structure. Our eyes tend to run over from one line to another. The enjambment creates a strong sense of inclusion. The stanza initiates everyone into the journey with the "lightly injured people" in their search for the new "tall buildings."[2] There is also an implication that people are contained within the map. The enjambment occurring in these lines that causes them to run over to the next is also needed to keep all people at the present time attached to the "Heavily wounded maps." Wherever they go, people are kept

under the control of the map. In addition, the maps are personified. Described as "heavily wounded," the maps are linked back to the city in the past. The former body of the city was dismembered by the war. The city has been remade and is currently the physical body of the modern world in the form of "vessel-like buildings." The message across the first four lines seems to be that people are confined to the map, which is compared to the body of the city. This body is the wounded city in a new shape. In other words, rather than taking over the city, this world of modern lives is ruled under the domination of the city. This message resonates with the imagery in the fourth line: "new vessel-like buildings" 新的器皿大楼. Modified by the noun "containers" or "vessels" 器皿, the definition of the key noun "building" becomes strict. These new buildings are compared to containers, which connotes the notion that the city in the form of buildings contains modern lives. Subjected to physical reconstruction, the city confirms where the modern people belong and thus establishes the identity they search for. The vulnerable city defines what an asserted powerful modern society is.

The second half of the stanza is also configured by enjambment. The subject of the grammatical structure – "The brain of this city" – is in apposition to "the new vessel-like buildings," which is the object of the first part of the stanza. The repetitive use of enjambment and the appositive structure contribute to the carrying-over of the sense of the last enjambment to the next one. I infer from the first half of this stanza that the city is paradoxically empowered the moment it is disempowered by a society that believes the city is weak and passive. The destructive act turns the city into a powerful place for military supplies, whereas the vulnerable body of the city mirrors the nature of modern society. This message overflows into the second half of the stanza. The last two lines "So easily hacked off / But they've frightened away many wounds" recapitulate the paradox. The city has been rebuilt in thin, light, and pointed shapes. The rebuilding process is described as an operation of the body of the city. This operation, on the one hand, subjects the city to the infliction of flesh wounds, and, on the other hand, carves a new figure with a pointed head. The city has been cut into a new body with a sharp brain that is able to protect itself from being wounded ("But they've frightened away many wounds"). In addition, synecdoche is also employed in this last stanza. The "brain" is used as a substitute

for the city. The brain is an organ that controls the body's activities. The brain synecdochically stands for the city body's real power that the history of civilization denies the city by taking advantage of the city's vulnerability.

In sum, this poem begins by accepting what has been defined as feminine and revealing the feminine nature of the powerful. It moves on to disengage the superior-inferior dichotomy and turn the power structure between masculinity and femininity into a paradox. The poem ends with a reaffirmation of the paradoxical inscription of passivity and vulnerability on the feminized body of the city.

In conclusion, this essay elucidates how Zhai's poetic practices rewrite the trope of femininity and how the poet transforms femininity into an instrument for her recognition of female agency in poetry. Zhai's poetry evinces her determined effort to overcome the confinement she identifies with preceding women poets who are negatively defined as feminine within the male value system. Poetry critics hastily accept Zhai's negative judgment of the feminine and construct a critical concept of "women's poetry" that attributes the failure of most women poets to the limitations of femininity. However, Zhai's perspective on femininity has not been thoughtfully or thoroughly examined. The essay "Night Consciousness" reveals that Zhai attempts to eschew the sentimental elements of femininity in her poetic practice, but her poetry ends up perpetuating this trait. My interpretation of the poem "Lightly Injured People, Gravely Wounded City" reveals that rather than renouncing the feminine elements with which the poet as a woman identifies, Zhai not only empowers the feminine but also associates the masculinity with the femininity that the patriarchal system has historically ascribed to women. I hope this study will invite more scholarly reflections on the limitations of the concept of "women's poetry" and on the larger implications of feminist poetics in the Chinese context through the "limitations" of Zhai's prose and the extensiveness of her poetry.

Notes

[1] The translation of the poem "Lightly Injured People, Gravely Wounded City" is by Andrea Lingenfelter.

[2] The fourth line is ambiguous. 新的器皿大楼 could be understood as "new tall buildings where containers are kept" or as "new

tall buildings which are like containers." The noun 器皿functions as an adjective here. What is searched for are the buildings rather than the vessels as indicated in the translation: "the new vessels of tall buildings." I would suggest 新的器皿大楼be translated as "new vessel-like buildings," given the second half of the stanza constitutes a further exploration of this metaphor.

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