

# **Field Notes – Gender Representations and Identity Building: Interior Monologue and Reported Speech in 80s-90s Taiwan Women Writers’ Works**

**田野紀錄——性別再現與認同建構：  
1980-1990 年代台灣女性作家作品的內在獨白與  
間接 / 直接引語**

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## **Background**

Gender representations and feminism in Taiwan women writings have received considerable scholarly attention over the past two decades, with the publication of several anthologies, collective works and monographies published in Taiwan and abroad,<sup>1</sup> and the development of many research centers focused on gender studies and feminism. In addition, scholars have widely discussed Taiwan women writers’ contribution to literary feminism and how their works have been influenced by both Western feminist thinking, the women’s movement in Taiwan, as well as by local critical essays and reflections by Taiwanese scholars and theorists (Ku, 1999).

However, if women writers’ works have so far been scrutinized from many perspectives including gender and symbolism, gender and subjectivity, gender and national identity, or gender and historical memory, these perspectives mostly stem from a thematic rather than linguistic point of view. For example, among the wealth of scholarly articles devoted to Li

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance (Chen, 2010), (Chiu, 2001) or (Sung, 2010), to cite only a few.

Ang's works, only a few touch briefly on the subject of reported speech and interior monologue, only accounting for their presence in the texts without delving into linguistic analysis (Benešová, 2015; Chiu, 2008). A few more detailed accounts show briefly how interior monologue can serve as a narrative strategy allowing the main protagonist to gain agency and express gender views (Chao, 2012), or as narrative patterns that take the reader along self-consciously cyclical lines to link reification of the erotic and materialist culture (Hillenbrand, 2005; Peng, 1995). However, I argue, more detailed analysis is needed to understand fully the whole range of purposes that these narrative techniques can serve in the writings of Taiwanese women writers, and how these practices evolve before and after the lifting of the martial law.

## **Research Interests**

My research project focuses on how narrative techniques such as interior monologue and reported speech are leveraged in 1980s and 1990s Taiwan women writers' works to depict gender relationships, put those relationships under a critical glance, express (more or less veiled) social criticism, and construct identities within the novels. Indeed, those narrative techniques often result in troubled relationships between the narrator(s), character(s), and (implied) author within the novel, and allow writers to engage critically social norms, while keeping their criticism at arms length to be able to dissociate from their characters. In particular, this research project is looking at whether linguistic differences can be observed in those literary narratives written directly before – contrasted to directly after – the lifting of the martial law, and if so, which they are. Furthermore, I aim to take into account a wide diversity of voices, including both well-studied writers and more marginal voices such as aborigine women writers. Situated at the crossroads between literary analysis, discourse analysis, and gender studies, this research project falls under the wider scope of my PhD dissertation.

## **Corpus and Methodological Discussion**

The corpus chosen to study the use of interior monologue and reported speech includes literary texts written in the 80s and 90s by Taiwan women writers who exhibit an intent for challenging traditional gender roles and practices in their writings, taking into account a diversity of identities and voices:

- 1) A woman writer associated with the Taiwanization movement: Li Ang 李昂. Two of her novels have been scrutinised in this study: 《暗夜》 (*Dark Nights*, 1985) and 《迷園》 (*The Lost Garden*, 1991).
- 2) A second-generation mainlander: Chu Tien-wen 朱天文 《炎夏之都》 (*The City of Hot Summer*, 1986) and 《世紀末的華麗》 (*Fin de Siècle Splendour*, 1990).
- 3) Two aborigine women writers: Liglav A-wu (利格拉樂·阿烏) with 《誰來穿我織的美麗衣裳》 (*Who Will Wear the Pretty Clothes I've Woven*, 1996) and 《紅嘴巴的VuVu》 (*VuVu with the Red Mouth*, 1997), and Rimui (里慕伊·阿紀) with 《山野笛聲》 (*Sound of Flute in the Wilderness*, 1995).<sup>2</sup>

This analysis puts to use stylistic tools as well as concepts related to the notion of performativity, from the perspective of gender studies (Butler, 2006) as well as discursive theory (Morison & Macleod, 2013). As a prerequisite for elucidating the “gender arrangements on which narrative depends - and the narratives on which gender arrangements depend” (Lanser, 2015: 23) that are “complex, subtle, and sometimes elusive” (ibid), I envisage interior monologue and free indirect discourse as a dialectic between public and private spaces (Snaith, 2001). Finally, I leverage stylistical and narratological analysis tools (Fludernik, 1993; Shen, 1991), as well as contemporary theories on reported speech.

Careful not to study Taiwanese literature only through Western analysis frameworks (Shih, 2002), I adopt a transnational approach, relying on concepts within gender studies and literary theory developed both in the West and Taiwan. Preliminary findings of this research tend to outline how inner monologue and free indirect discourse can be powerful media for voicing feminist demands, constructing one’s identity and depicting gender relations – and how 80-90s Taiwanese women literature more generally can offer a very fertile ground for this kind of literary experiment.

## Practical Fieldwork

A three-month research stay at National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU) during the second semester (March-June) in 2017 provided an ideal framework for me to gather sources for my research, given that many Chinese language sources are not necessarily readily

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<sup>2</sup> Although aborigine literature started developing in the 1980s, aborigine women writers’ voice long stayed marginal. As such, 《誰來穿我織的美麗衣裳》 in 1996 seemed to be among the first separately-published collection of *sanwen* by an aborigine woman writer.

available in Europe. On top of auditing seminars on Taiwanese literature, which gave me a deeper understanding of Taiwan literature in general, I was able to visit other research institutes, libraries and universities in Taiwan (including the Tainan Museum of Literature, National Central Library, Academia Sinica, etc.). The wealth of resources available there allowed me to continue gathering the necessary information for my doctoral dissertation (including older interviews of authors in literary magazines from the 80s/90s that do not exist yet in electronic format). Interviews with scholars specialized in gender and literature, and authors in Taiwan enabled me in turn to further my literature review and the development of the theoretical framework at the early stages of my research.

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