Performing Filial Piety: The Virtue of Self-Rejection

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Jane Chin Davidson
University of Manchester

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[Figure 1. Patty Chang, *Contortion* (2000) and Zhang Huan, *Water Level* (1997), *w*ebpage, Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, "Somewhere Better Than This Place: Alternative Social Experience in the Spaces of Contemporary Art" 2003.]

In Cincinnati this year (2003), thirty-five international artists inaugurated the grand opening of the new exhibition space designed by Zaha Hadid for the Contemporary Arts Center. To introduce the show with the title *Somewhere Better Than This Place: Alternative Social Experience in the Spaces of Contemporary Art* the CAC's webpage highlighted the body-oriented artworks of two Chinese-American artists. The video still of Patty Chang's *Contortion* (2000) is shown on the left next to the image of Zhang Huan and his collaborators in the performance work *To Raise the Water Level of a Fish Pond* (1997).[1] Both artists were billed as Asian-Americans in a show that aspired to present "established and emerging artists from the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe."[2]

The multiculturalist assumption of compatibility that endorses placing Chang and Zhang on the same page encourages us to believe that the association between the two artworks is easily conceivable. Moreover, since body-oriented art practices deploy the particular agency of the "cultural" body, the subjectivities that are evoked by Chang and Zhang are inextricable from the skin-identification of "race." The juxtaposing of these two images provides a perfect example for the subject of "Chineseness" in terms of migration and raises the question: What informs the subjectivities of artists who are themselves experiencing varying states of relocation, immigration and assimilation?[3] The question leads us further to reconsider what constitutes "culture" in today's terms for cultural identification.

And yet, an understanding of culture within the greater social consciousness remains abstract if left outside of the realm of personal experience. In *Contortion* Patty Chang poses with her body double in the masquerade of a Chinese female acrobat, an entertainer who is generally thought to be from Taiwan, Hong Kong or mainland China. Chang, who was born in the United States, challenges the viewer's conventions of Chineseness – or, more specifically, the Western idea of what is expected from a performance presented by an Asian woman. She leads us to question

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[1] Patty Chang's video *Contortion* was presented as part of her collection "Let Down and Release: Recent Work by Patty Chang, Selections 2000," Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA, May 13 – July 23, 2000. Zhang Huan's performance *To Raise the Water Level of a Fishpond* was presented in Beijing in 1997.

[2] Webpage, "Somewhere Better Than This Place: Alternative Social Experience in the Spaces of Contemporary Art," Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Ohio, May 31 – November 9, 2003, see www.contemporaryartscenter.org/exhibitions/somewhere.html

[3] I am using the word Chineseness to denote the construction of culture as different from the understanding of an "authentic" Chinese identity.

what exists as culturally "Chinese" beneath the racial exterior of the body? Pictured alongside her, Zhang Huan, an artist from Beijing who recently immigrated to the United States, addresses the question through a different context. In Zhang's performance, his collective of disenfrachised factory workers – immersed into the middle of a pond in the outskirts of Beijing – exposes the bodies of those who were affected by the political and social transition in post-Cold War China.[4] In respect to Zhang, an exile from a country undergoing economic reform via Capitalism while still governed by Communist rule, what constitutes Chinese identity for his model of a Chinese-American immigrant today?

The relationship between Chang and Zhang's works is extremely complex, and although their perspectives seem to come from separate worlds, they are connected in important ways. To elucidate the dialogue that exists between them, one must think beyond diaspora as given under the terms of nation-statism and colonialist topology to consider culture itself as an entity under constant fluctuation through migration and immigration. My aim for this paper is to consider what actually migrates in movements of the *arrivant,* in the global nomadism of peoples, as they/we find them/ourselves in the prominent culture of the West.[5]

Whereas Homi K. Bhabha has argued convincingly on behalf of "hybridity" as the unfixed nature of sociocultural synthesis in migration, my inquiry concerns the intransigent nature of the system of beliefs that continues on with the relocation of the citizen.[6] In the case of Chineseness, the transnational dialogue that Chang and Zhang have opened up presents the opportunity to look closely at the particular feminist subject in terms of how desire and power is written into the patriarchal text. Through exploring the subjectivities of Chang and Zhang in several other performative works, the feminist project extends beyond the borders of Western feminism, history and discourse.

During the inaugural events that opened the CAC's new museum to the public, Patty Chang staged a performance in a city-subsidized hotel room across the street from the black-tie dinner

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[4]See Wu Hung, *Transcience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the 20th Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).pp.102-107.

[5]I am borrowing Jacques Derrida's definition for the *arrivant* as the absolute figure of the immigrant. See Jacques Derrida, *Aporias : Dying--Awaiting (One Another at) the "Limits of Truth" (Mourir--S'attendre Aux "Limites De La Vérité")*, trans. Thomas Dutoit, *Meridian : Crossing Aesthetics.* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993). p..33.

[6]Bhahba discusses hybridity at length in his essay, Homi K. Bhabha, "Culture's in-Between," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul DuGay (London: Sage Publications, 1996).

being held for top museum donors.[7] In *Stage Fright III*, Chang, along with her male collaborator, spent the dinner hour bingeing and purging into the toilet while in a room of a building dedicated for the indigent. Curator Thom Collins observed that Chang's public act of staging an eating disorder in a place of residence for the disadvantaged, so close in proximity to the "monumental new home for contemporary art during a celebration of its more privileged patrons," may express something about the "complex relationship between cultural institutions and the diverse audiences they are obligated to serve as public trusts."[8] Chang had physically distanced herself from the business location of art in order to emphasize the concept of "place" in the hierarchy of artists and art history as well as the status of gender, class and economic position. Most important to this discussion, however, is her pointing out the status of the "racial" body in the institutions of Western art. The performing body is used here to evoke a visceral reaction against the sum of acceptable social norms, while at the same time; the body signifies the disorder of the inner conflict within. The personal act of bingeing and purging could be seen as the ultimate rejection of self: an outward display of the inward disorder of the unconscious, manifested as extreme desire and repulsion.

I want to zero in on Chang's portrayal of self-rejection through performing an eating disorder – an artistic premise that she used earlier in her 1997 work entitled *Alter Ergo*.[9] Here, Chang's body art depiction provides an image for the management of the self and the Other as interpreted through Jacques Lacan's theory of the unconscious. My interest here is in how Lacanian analysis relates to the rule-generated construction of the female gender – not as an autonomous product of drives and the unconscious but as an extension of the matrix of values deployed by discourse and history. In the case of the Chinese-American woman, the discursive history that surrounds Chinese immigration into the United States could be included in the social construction of *woman* and Chineseness. The specific exclusion of the female gender during the late-nineteenth century had institutionalized a particular image of the Chinese woman, and thus, instilled the acceptance of her diminished social value. At the same time, the concept of woman's virtue defined by self-sacrifice (which I argue is a form of self-rejection) is fundamental to the continuing "proper" role assigned to females throughout Chinese history. In *Alter Ergo*, the question of the self and the Other can be examined in terms of how "value" in the guise of "virtue" functions to regulate women's bodies. Male desire (with its resultant anxiety) is managed through collusive mastery over the object of desire.

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[7]See Thom Collins, *Somewhere Better Than This Place: Alternative Social Experience in the Spaces of Contemporary Art* (Cincinnati: Contemporary Arts Center, 2003). p.111.
[8]Ibid.
[9] *Alter Ergo* was first seen in New York, Exit Art's 1997 group showcase, "Terra Bomba."

The Chinese system that upholds female devaluation and self-rejection delivers tragic consequences when viewed through Zhang Huan's 1993 performance work entitled *Angel.* Zhang's Beijing exhibition brought attention to the problem of abortion in mainland China under circumstances that revolve around China's one-child policy and women's rights over their own bodies. The value of the biological "female" has been "sacrificed" through the expediency of medical technology, made available (but not accountable) through global capitalism. Whereas Chang raises questions about the internal negotiation of female self-value, Zhang brings to the fore the outward social determination of the worth of the female gender. In brief, this paper will explore the implications of virtue and self-sacrifice as tropes of self-authenticity in the construction of the "Chinese woman" as subject.

Figure 2, Patty Chang, *Alter Ergo*, Exit Art's group showcase, "Terra Bomba," New York, 1997. [frontal view of Chang]

In her New York performance of *Alter Ergo* (figure 2), Chang's subject begins with the self and the ego as understood through psychoanalytic terms for drives and the unconscious. The artist stood for hours without moving, her mouth stuffed full with pink peppermint candies while clamped open with a dental apparatus. A thin stream of saliva drips down her face, rolls down her starched white shirt and grey designer suit, and ends in a tidy pool on the floor by her shoes. Her professional uniform becomes a straight-jacket: a binding rendered literally with the line of thread that stitches her jacket sleeves to its prim bodice and fuses the legs of her pantyhose one to another. Directly across on the adjacent wall hangs a life-size photograph repeating the image of what she is performing. The arrested image evokes a narcissistic tension, a measured reflecting back of what is being presented in the real-time of the person in performance.

And yet, the hours passing for the viewer of her performance amount to something more than theatrical fiction as we comprehend Chang's self-sacrifice in the measured duration of standing and suffering. What we witness is the forced retention of the sweetness and pinkness of assigned femininity which subsequently ends up in the tangible spitting out of the self, the ego, the rejection of self as Other. As interpreted in Lacanian terms for drives and the unconscious, Julia Kristeva spells out in *Powers of Horror*, "to each ego its object, to each superego its abject….it is a brutish suffering that "I" puts up with…for "I" deposits it to the father's account…:I endure it, for I imagine that such is the desire of the other."[10] Kristeva, of course, has given through the

[10] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). p.2.

language of the body and its secretions a definable image of disgust over one's own self. The "I" deposited, given freely to the father's account is an emphasis on the omnipotent paternal authority that compels the fulfilling of the desire of the Other – against the interest of the desire of the conscious self.

I read in Chang's *Alter Ergo* the symbolic enactment of the drive to fulfill desire which is negotiated through the Other. The wordplay of the title, replacing *alter ego* with its inherent "therefore," suggests a contingency in the constituting of the self. In Chang's regurgitation of pink and sweet candy, she performs a type of coping with the object of someone else's desires for her – one who is never replied to directly. Instead, the answer is given to the Other, the speaking to one's self as exemplary of Lacan's enigma of the father's desire. The child seeking to comprehend the subtext of the father's discourse forms the question "he is saying this to me, but what does he want."[11] Since the object of desire is never actually given by the parent, the child forms her own proposed object and that is the fantasy of her loss. *Can my parent lose me?* – is Lacan's diagnosis.[12] The imagining of death becomes compensation in resolve over the disavowal of self to accommodate the Other. Lacan provides the example of anorexia nervosa for the fantasy of death and disappearance, and Chang affixes an image to the eating disorder. The cycle of self-disgust and humiliation over fulfilling the ideals of another ends here with the vanishing act of deprivation.

Is there a particular humiliation in the self-rejection that Chang brings up? In the name of what "father," paternal law, does she relinquish her own desire? Her indirect reply is a response to the paternal figure constructed through social contracts that are inherited from culture, including the ones that continue in some form wherever people migrate to. Thus, as Judith Butler argues, the "culturally enmired subject negotiates its constructions, even when those constructions are the very predicates of its own identity."[13] In Chang's performance, the negotiation of female gender is under the terms of its constructions of Chineseness as well from the discursive history of Western stereotypes and not simply produced from Oedipal hierarchies. Through staging identity with its corporeal image/object, the performing body provides the means to reinterpret the discursive identity ascribed to gender and race.

If we consider the authorizing figure that represents social order and the paternal law in Chang's performance, as well as the social response to that paternal law, the subject could not have been constituted merely through empirical knowledge as an outcome of a life experience.

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[11] Jacques Lacan et al., *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, *Penguin Education* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1979, 1977). p.214.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Judith P. Butler, *Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999). p.143.

Psychoanalysis cannot explain fully the preconditions of self-rejection nor anorexia nervosa because the paternal law itself is produced through foundational tenets. When considering the female experience of Chineseness in the United States, the effects of the paternal law can be attributed to both American and Chinese discourses for the regulation of citizens who are identified as female.

The creation of the Western stereotype of the Chinese woman as being exotic/erotic (an illegitimate object of desire) has a particular history in the United States. In 1875, congressional member Horace Page passed the country's first federal act for restricting immigration by campaigning against the perceived threat of the Chinese female who was universally branded as "prostitute." Exclusion of Chinese women began under the premise that they posed a danger to the moral welfare of American society. In his speech before Congress on February 10, 1875, Page presented evidence in support of restricting Chinese female immigration in order to "place a dividing line between vice and virtue" and the only acceptable remedy was to "send the brazen harlot who openly flaunts her wickedness in the faces of our wives and daughters back to her native country."[14] While it is clear that many women immigrated to be with their laborer husbands, the Page Law succeeded in barring any Chinese woman suspected of entering the United States for "lewd or immoral purposes."[15] Historian George Anthony Peffer compiled the newspaper reports that defamed all Chinese female immigrants who had relocated to California as an outcome of the gold rush (at the time, the largest Chinese population in the United States).[16] Between 1875 and 1882, San Francisco newspapers reported unanimously that Chinese women were of the "lowest and vilest class," a characterization promoted through stories with headlines like "Chinese Chattels," and "The Chinese Houris."[17] Journalism in concert with legislation instantiated the notion that all Chinese women who set foot on American soil should be suspected and characterized as "prostitute."

The racist discourse that proliferated in the journalistic text had broad implications for Chinese women beyond securing her banishment from American society. Homi K. Bhabha's interpretation of the racial stereotype as producing the "effect of probabilistic truth and

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[14] *Appendix to the Congressional Record, 2d Session, 1875.* p.44.
[15] See Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1832-1943* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003). p.24.
[16] George Anthony Peffer, *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here: Chinese Female Immigration before Exclusion* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999). pp.73-86.
[17] Ibid, p.76.

predictibility" is on behalf of acknowledging its "ambivalent mode of knowledge and power."[18] The racist discourse is equal to the "colonial subject in discourse," and Bhahba argues that "the exercise of colonial power through discourse demands an articulation of forms of difference - racial and sexual."[19] Bhahba suggests further that the articulation of racial and sexual difference "becomes crucial if it is held that the body is always simultaneously inscribed in both the economy of pleasure and desire and the economy of discourse, domination and power."[20] The "prostitute" epithet serves as a prime example of condemning the female Chinese body under the regulation of desire in the circuit of white male domination and power. The stereotype becomes a fetish, which provides for the colonizer a simplified "identity" of the Chinese woman, and Bhabha notes that the "arrested, fixated form of representation" is "predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defense."[21] As understood in the terms of sexual propriety that Michel Foucault explains as the "repressive hypothesis," the Page Law at once regulates male desire, controls the anxiety of miscegenation, and leaves the lasting image of the promiscuous Chinese woman.[22] The image becomes fixed in the Western imaginary and is perpetuated by a racial and sexual typology.

The 1875 Page Law instigated by the Californian concern over the sanctity of American society led the way to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act that prohibited all immigration of peoples of Chinese nationality to the United States. Erika Lee argues that this first immigration ban set the precedence for the system of restriction and surveillance of people according to race. The Chinese were not legally allowed into the country until 1943 when the Magnuson Act repealed the 1882 law. The repeal was the reward for China's allied participation against the Japanese in World War II, and the legislation permitted immigration up to the token quota of one hundred five Chinese per year, and those already in the country became eligible for citizenship. Subsequent legislation including the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act and the 1965 Immigration Act replaced quotas with annual caps, and immigration was decided according to countries rather than discriminated by race. However, the 2001 Patriot Act has renewed the exception of "ideological exclusion" under the "subversion clause" in order to resurrect the determination of exclusion by race.[23]

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[18] Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson, et al. (New York and Cambridge: New Museum and MIT Press, 1990). p.71.
[19] Ibid.72.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.80. I am paraphrasing from Bhahba here.
[22] See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).V.1, Introduction.
[23] See Theresa Bradley, "Chinese Visa Applicants Caught between 'Borders and Doors," *Shanghai Star*, 2004, 06, 10. Bradley reports on the difficulty of obtaining visas from China to the U.S. as the outcome of the Patriot Act.

The moral deliberation of Chinese women in U.S. immigration history had ascribed to her the position of shame in the social subconscious. The characterization of the wanton Chinese female bears a particular significance when co-related to the historical ideal of woman's virtue in the Chinese patriarchal order. Through this affiliation with the status of women in mainland China, I am arguing that the enmired Chinese-American subject remains unapproachable without examining the ideals of the society from where Chinese diasporas and dislocations disperse. In terms of a feminist critique, Chinese patriarchal hierarchies remain deeply entrenched in modern thinking. Notwithstanding the dangers and pitfalls of suggesting an essentialist link to culture, my attempt is to understand the foundational premise that circumscribes the female role of Chineseness. The need to uncover this social construction is important if we are to take seriously the specificities of female foreclosure being expressed by artists today. That said, I want to emphasize that Zhang's representation on behalf of the contemporary woman in China can no more represent all Chinese women than Chang can represent all Chinese-American women.

The tropes of the traditional and the modern take precedence when dealing with feminist issues that pertain to Chineseness. Mainland China, with its greater population of rural constituents, continues to be set apart as a traditional culture (extending from the continuous heritage of nation) as distinct from the modernity of metropolitan cities in diaspora (extending from Western scientific progress). During the first decades of the twentieth century, "tradition" was not only conceived as the means to define China by a set of core values but was also used to compare with the condition of modernity that fundamentally reflected the culture of the West. Modern progress was judged according to Western and Chinese distinctions such as the materialistic culture of the West in contrast to the Chinese culture of spirituality. The Western and Chinese difference was seen also in the management of Chinese women's oppression which was a key issue of modern reform. Influenced by Western individualism, the 1919 May Fourth movement supported the education of women and challenged the existing Confucian doctrine that encouraged the subordination of women. In contrast, conservative parties such as the Kuomintang later associated the image of the Westernized Chinese woman with promiscuity.[24] Here, women's virtue represented the sanctity of the nation under the same mode of

[24]I am oversimplifying an extremely complex moment in Chinese modernity. For instance, the Kuomintang went through different political shifts beginning with Sun Yat-sen's founding of the Chinese Natiionalist Party in 1919. At this point the Kuomintang echoed May Fourth ideals for democracy. By 1923, however, Sun retreated from democratic principles toward a Soviet-style dictatorial Socialism. Suggested further reading includes Sun Yat-sen, *Prescriptions for Saving China: Selected Writings of Sun Yat-Sen*, ed. Julie Lee Wei, Ramon H. Myers, and Donald G. Gillin, trans. Julie Lee Wei, E-su Zen, and Linda Chao (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1994). pp. xx-xxi, and, Norma Diamond, "Women under Kuomintang Rule: Variations on the Feminine Mystique," *Modern China* I, no. 1 (1975). pp. 6-7.

characterization that condemned Chinese women as "prostitutes" during the passage of the 1875 U.S. Page Law. Here, it was a wayward "Western modernity" in the image of the promiscuous woman that threatened the morals of society, and the regulation of the female body once again served to control the fear of miscegenation that leads to an impure nation - this time, the nation of China.[25] Nonetheless, conservatives and radicals alike shared in advocating against the oppressive treatment of women under the existing feudal system that still supported footbinding.

In her essay "Of Authenticity and Woman: Personal Narratives of Middle-Class Women in Modern China," Prasenjit Duara suggests that women during the Republican era (primarily 1920 to 1930s) created the "space of authenticity" as the means to remain true to Chineseness while adopting progressive ideals from the West.[26] This "inviolable space" exempted women from external forces so that the "rites of nation, the vanishing festivals of a village, the self-sacrifices of women" could be retained without relinquishing modern reform.[27] Thus, the female virtue of self-sacrifice no longer functioned on behalf of the sanctity of Confucian domesticity but served as the model for the modern woman and the progressive nation.

Whereas the sense of liberation was accomplished through the elimination of degrading feudal practices, the modern ideal of women's virtue disguised in the form of national honor was consistent with the archaic psychology of self-deprecation as a form of self-value. The virtue of self-sacrifice was essentially the regulation of the female body on behalf of fulfilling moral duty. Duara's study revealed that for the modern girl, "learning to read was not true learning unless reading could shape the body and its conduct."[28] Duara considers the twentieth-century discourse on female virtue as "continuous with the cult of chaste widows and virtuous wives of late imperial times."[29] Here, Bhahba's definition of the fetish in which "the body is always simultaneously inscribed in both the economy of pleasure and desire and the economy of discourse, domination and power" resonates on another level that is specific to the anxiety

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[25]Some historians believe that China's process of modernization was hampered by decades of Western imperialism. After the Opium Wars (circa 1840) China became a semi-colonial society with the invasion of foreign capitalism including enterprise that enriched the United States. The relationship between China and Euro-American powers into the twentieth century was understandably tenuous. See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *On Colonialism: Articles from the New York Tribune and Other Writings*, trans. Frederick Engels (New York: International Publishers, 1972). Also Lu Bowei and Wang Guoping, *The Revolution of 1911: Turning Point in Modern Chinese History*, ed. Dong Caishi (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1991). pp.1-22.

[26]Prasenjit Duara, "Of Authenticity and Woman: Personal Narratives of Middle-Class Women in Modern China," in *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond*, ed. Wen Hsin Yeh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[27] Ibid.345.

[28] Ibid. 350.

[29] Ibid.

underlying the Chinese patriarchal system.[30] The fear of Western promiscuity and miscegenation could be controlled by yielding to the ideals of the "proper" that were established by the patriarchal text.

The reconstruction of a traditional order, however, relies on the female acceptance of women's role in the scope of "nation," and this understanding maintains sovereignty over the contemporary woman into the twenty-first century. Literary theorist Wang Ning explains that the influence of the " 'three cardinal guides' (ruler guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife)…have long permeated in women's conscious and subconscious, becoming their guiding principle of thinking and behavior."[31] Wang states that, to this day, if women resist this principle, "they are bound to be punished by the power and feudal ethic code based on the 'male-centric' doctrine." [32] The noticeable absence of the effort to theorize on the unremitting influence of these principles can be attributed to the societal acceptance of the proper roles for women.

The three cardinal guides are not edicts that haunt women through ritualized superstition, rather, they were constructed from a deeply philosophical if not theological ontology. Fear of punishment does not accurately describe the religious fear that promulgates shame when not meeting one's moral responsibilities. The sense of awe-filled respect for the sanctity of the Confucian patriarchal hierarchy is comparable to the order of worship that is found in the Christian trinity.

Rather than ascribing to Confucian ethics an obscure notion of primitive traditionalism, it is important to make an effort at understanding the premise in which kinship roles have been instituted from generation to generation. The patriarchal text is the ideological vehicle, and as Marx once said, men make history "not under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."[33]

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[30] Bhabha, "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism." p.72.
[31] Wang Ning, "Feminist Theory and Contemporary Chinese Female Literature," *Critical Studies* 18, no. Feminism/Femininity in Chinese Literature, eds. Peng-hsiang Chen and Whitney Crothers Dilley, Amsterdam and New York (2002). p. 203.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *Collected Works*, ed. Frederick Engels and Karl Marx (New York: International Publishers, 1979). p.103.

Of the revered and ancient Chinese texts, the *I Ching* (The Classic of Changes) was arguably the most influential of writings that was interpreted by most of the early thinkers including Confucius and Mencius, contributors to what we know now as Confucian thinking. The *I Ching* was originally a divination text. The first rendition, dating to the Xia dynasty (2205-1766 B.C.) was a compilation of a series of three- part diagrams that served to express the elements of phenomenal change in the relationships found in the natural processes of the earth and of the heavens. Concurrent with its theory of life's constant movement and transformation, the text itself was ascribed to a cycle of perpetuating authors spanning thousands of years.

Confucius is considered to be one the authors of the *I Ching*, and he was known also to have incorporated much of his reading of the ancient text into the writing of the Analects which is the primary source of Confucian thought. Confucius extracted from the *I Ching's* autochthonic inscriptions to distill its profundities into a moral book of wisdom. Richard Wilhelm, in his compilation of the *I Ching*, perceives that Confucius expressed the idea of change as no longer fixed on "transitory individual things but on the immutable, eternal law at work in all change."[34] The paradoxical nature of this concept can be seen in the fixed laws that are sustained within life's infinite variability. Throughout history, the general acceptance of this philosophy has effected a particularly static sensibility in culture. With each succeeding epoch and cultural shift, the permanent nature of the *I Ching's* eternal laws function mutually with its theory of knowing the past and the future through movement and change. I would argue that this method of knowing is in part why women's status remains intransigent and bound to what is believed to be an eternal law.

In the *Analects*, Confucius reinstates the *I Ching* commentary Book I:37 which is read from the hexagram representing "The Family":

> If the father is really a father and the son a son, if the elder brother fulfills his position, and the younger fulfills his, if the husband is really a husband the wife a wife, then the family is in order. When the family is in order, all the social relationships of mankind will be in order.[35]

The chain of legitimate power begins with the ruler and the rulership is extended to the kinship succession of fathers to sons. Defining the unit in which each member of the family knows his or her place, the *I Ching* stipulates that "each child must be accustomed to firmly established rules

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[34] Richard Wilhelm, *I Ching*, ed. Richard Wilhelm, trans. Cary F. Baynes, 3rd ed. (London: Arcana, Penguin Books, 1989; reprint, 3rd). p.*lv*.
[35] Ibid., pp. 143-44.

of order…." Pertaining to the wife, she "must always be guided by the will of the master of the house, be he father, husband, or grown son."[36]

It should be emphasized that the conscious self is never considered an independent being but is always understood through the hierarchical order for kinship. Women are men's "subjects" in order to fulfill the ordinance. What the ancient text reveals is a method of signification that contains vital and continuing social meaning. Judith Butler reminds us, however, that "signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects."[37] Butler is referring here to gender as a constructed identity; however, I find her theory useful for emphasizing how the repetitive installment of cultural identity is accomplished through the foundational tenets of Confucian ideology. The performance art of Zhang Huan exposes one aspect of the brutal mechanisms of this installment.

Figure 3. Zhang Huan, *Angel* (1993), outside Beijing National Gallery.

Zhang Huan's 1993 performance with the title *Angel* examines how maternity is a cultural construction through exposing the way in which the regulation of childbearing causes mothers to lose the rights over their own bodies. On the outside steps of the Beijing National Gallery, Zhang stripped off his clothes and poured red paint all over himself and the baby dolls that were the materials for an installation he had intended to exhibit inside the gallery. *Angel* was a work in radical opposition to abortion, a human rights subject that was inflamed by China's controversial one-child policy. Since 1979, the ordinance has been the Party's solution to China's exploding population growth (at a rate of 13 million people per year in 1979). Families continue to be restricted from bearing more than one child with some exceptions in mostly rural situations where two children are permitted. The rural regions, however, are where the childbirth laws are most stringently enforced. Women are under surveillance to ensure that they are not "illegally" pregnant. If they are found to be pregnant without legal proof of permission, the routine punishment is forced abortion, regardless if the fetus is full-term, and the mother is subjected to forced sterilization. Zhang's staging himself in the "maternal" role of holding the newborn – graphically covering himself and the baby doll with what looks like blood – acknowledges the gendered role in the social responsibility of abortion. The question of women's rights over their own bodies is consistent with the embattled question over abortion in the United States.

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[36] Ibid, p.145.
[37] Butler, *Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. p. 145.

The most difficult aspect of the one child-system is that having a girl is considered disastrous since she precludes the possibility of having a son in the family. In the 1990s, the development of the ultrasound market after China's capitalist transition created a phenomenon in the routines of clinical obstetrics. The majority of pregnant women took advantage of the technological advance to discover the sex of their child. The method is of course not perfectly accurate. The large number of abortions that ensued, however, can be attributed to its increasing use within Chinese culture. As statistical analysis revealed for one particular county, 1,006 fetuses were recorded as aborted out of the of 2,316 ultrasound exams administered during a single period.[38] It is clear that ultrasound is used for birth selection and the State's program for population control is complicit in the elimination of female fetuses. Global capitalism's system of profit without accountability is also implicated in the maintenance of privileging the son.

The abortion problem foregrounds the horror of a situation in which women give up their female fetuses for no other reason than to reproduce a biological specimen that could be determinable as a son. As Christopher Smith from the Committee on International Relations expressed at the 2001 hearing before the House of Representatives, "the girl child has become an extinct and an endangered individual in the People's Republic of China."[39] Female infanticide has continued in the decades that followed China's economic expansion. Within the modern Chinese system, progeny is considered either rightly or wrongly sexed when it comes to distinguishing between male and female offspring. Members of the female sex submit to a conscious refusal and rejection of the female sex. Not only is such an act acceptable to society but it is legitimated by the laws of the proper. Functioning under the same ideology prescribed by the ancient paternal order, the authority given to males in the family is assumed as moral for society. If on the conscious level, the renunciation of the propagation of the female sex is appropriately acted out in abortion, what is the result of this value system when considering the implications and assumptions for society?

The shame of being female-identified is tied to the moral law and surreptitiously upheld by state policy. The Chinese philosopher Mencius (390-305 B.C.) discussed how human emotions precede the conscience, and how they are the first indicators of moral behavior. In Mencius's

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[38] See Nicholas D. and Sheryl Wudunn Kristof, *China Wakes* (New York: Times/Random House, 1994). p.231.
[39] "Coercive Population Control in China: New Evidence of Forced Abortion and Forced Sterilization," transcript hearing before the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, 107th Congress, October 17, 2001.p.35. See also, "Forced Abortion and Sterilization in China: The View from the Inside," transcript of hearing before the Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, 105th Congress, June 10, 1998.

teachings, he explained that the "feeling of shame and disgrace is the first sign of Justice."[40] In a separate paragraph he says, "A man cannot be shameless. Shamelessness is the shame of having no sense of shame."[41] Mencius here believes that shame is an emotion inherent in humans and one needs only to recognize and acknowledge shame to understand right and wrong.

Shame is a necessary internal guide for encouraging moral behavior, and in the case of women, shame discerns for them that the "right" and essential gender is male. And as such, subordination of the female gender is just as morally essential. The noble calling for women is to accept their position for the sake of humility as the virtue of self-sacrifice, which is in truth a form of humiliation. This method of assigning shame as a method of proper female response is part of a concise and orderly system that ennobles the conscious rejection of one's own gender identity.

The antiquated understanding of gender status becomes a part of the contemporary condition by way of the social acceptance of a particular self-effacement. Rey Chow calls attention to the notion that the exemplary modern woman in diaspora is known as either a "dissolute woman" or a "female saint." Chow employs these descriptions used initially by the Taiwanese feminist activist Xü Xiaodan whose political proclamation was "I will enter Congress in the image of a dissolute woman; I will love the people with the soul of a female saint."[42] Both terms bring attention to the subordinated female status, and they both suggest that the social acceptance of woman's power, in Taiwanese politics at least, begin with acknowledgment of her self-sacrificial position.

Through Patty Chang's deliberation of *Alter Ergo* – "alter ego," "other, therefore," I pressed the question of how the practices of signification and hence resignification could have shaped the Chinese female identity in migration. Body art's process of engagement compels the viewing of difference, and in most of Chang's performances, the marked body of Chineseness becomes central to the work. In Michel Foucault's analysis of genealogy and cultural inscription, he argues that "the body is the inscribed surface of events," and the task therefore is "to expose a body totally imprinted by history."[43] The body inscribed by "race" constitutes one of the "illimitable process(es) of signification" that Judith Butler brings up when discussing the "I" that

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[40] From Ch.6: 1 in Mencius, *Mencius*, trans. W.A.C.H. Dobson (London: Oxford University Press, 1963). p. 132.
[41] Ibid. Ch.6:37, p.147.
[42] See Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993). p.112. Xü ran and lost as the Labour Party candidate in 1989, 1992, and 1995. See Zheng Zilong, *Campaign Advertisements: Theory, Strategy and Research Cases* (Taibei: Chungcheng, 1995). pp.298-299.
[43] Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977). p.148.

is associated with gender but which is never fully identifiable with gender only.[44] She explains that "*cogito* is never fully *of* the cultural world that it negotiates, no matter the narrowness of the ontological distance that separates that subject from its cultural predicates. The theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and able-boldiedness invariably close with an embarrassed "etc" at the end of the list."[45] In this paper, I have sought to provide the specificity that distinguishes the feminist approach toward the construction of Chineseness in order to elaborate on the issues that Chang and Zhang have raised for me as a viewer. The exhibition of contemporary art under the rubric of "global culture" requires nothing less than to take seriously the subjects of "global" artists - anything less should be considered an artifice of a globalism that relates only to the West.

If the Hegelian model for recognizing the self persists as the subject/object split that is naturalized in Western epistemology, forming the basis for theories of "I" and the "Other," this way of knowing is inevitably assimilated by those who migrate into it. No *pure* foundation exists for the immigrant, and for the succeeding generations that come after her or him, "culture" becomes less distinguishable. Nonetheless, the cultural residue of rule-generated identities and their discursive apparatuses often live on in some space of unconscious negotiation. Once there, the "I" in relationship to the "Other" is obliged to confront the questions of epistemological knowability and agency that constitute what Homi K. Bhabha describes as a life in "culture's in-between." Whereas Bhahba refers to the unfixed norm of cultural hybridity "inscribed *without* a transcendent subject that knows, outside of mimetic social memory," the historical inscription through foundational knowledge bequeaths its undying values and social mores by way of a regulated process of repetition.[46] As Derrida once wrote, the "inheritance from the 'spirits of the past' consists, as always, in borrowing….It passes between a parody and a truth, but one truth as incarnation or living repetition of the other, a regenerating reviviscence of the past…from which one inherits."[47]

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[44] See Butler, *Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. p. 143.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1994). p.125.
[47] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx : The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994). p.152.

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