

# **Constructing Women's Identities in Self-Writing and Online Diaries in Taiwan**

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy



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## **Statement of Candidate**

I certify that the work in this thesis, entitled “Constructing Women’s Identities in Self-Writing and Online Diaries in Taiwan”, has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

**Yu-ling Chou**  
June, 2014

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## Abstract

This thesis examines online self-writing as *social action* that provides a means for women to find their own 'space'. The emergence of virtual spaces has transformed practices of self-representation and associated constructions of identity. It has also changed the nature of personal expression and the substance of social narratives. In this regard, the personal blog (a shortening of the term 'weblog'), represents one of the most important forms of online presence, facilitating the building and communication of identity for women in new media, particularly in Taiwan. The workings of women's diaristic blogs, as on-going autobiographies, and as centres of online communities, are presented as integral to new media self-expression, and filtered through the relationship between the diary and its 'writing self', the narrative identity. This research speaks to an absence in critical work on women's blog-based negotiations of everyday activities, pressures and identity-based dilemmas, arguing that women write to work through experiences and to forge connections with other women. Where women's life writing has been linked historically to feminist struggles against repression under patriarchy, the assertion here is that personal writing is especially important for women's self-awareness, and that writing online is vital to the assertion of female subjectivity in public space. This research connects the historical significance of the diary for women with the evolution of the diary's function as it has moved to online platforms. The relationship between the online diary and identity formation for writers and readers is investigated in 'cyber ethnographies' of two popular female bloggers in Taiwan, Wealthy Lady Nana and Indoors Woman Showon, as they create their own media networks and communities through blogging. These two case studies build on the critical framing of the diary as a 'feminine' genre, wrought through personal narratives of identity, and on constructions of blogging as a form of 'empowering exhibitionism'. This thesis navigates the discursive and genealogical aspects of women's online writing in Taiwan, and gendered 'web-ethnography' more broadly, concluding that in its mediation of women's self-awareness and social contexts, the very act of women's diary writing constitutes an act of feminist practice.

# Introduction

## 0.1 Leftover Women

A female legislator proposed in 2012 that the Taiwanese Government ought to subsidise single women who ‘should’ have got married but ‘failed’ to be chosen as wives by men. In Taiwan it has become a phenomenon that a man can pay money to bring a wife from China or areas of South-East Asia such as Indonesia and the Philippines, where such women are mostly from poorer families seeking to improve their financial situation through procuring employment or taking a husband in Taiwan. This phenomenon of marrying foreign women is the result of several social factors, one of which is that since Taiwanese women now possess higher standards of education and income than they previously had, independence predicates their personal requirements for marriage and expectations of a life partner. In addition, Taiwanese women are comparatively less eager to marry than their male counterparts, whereas Taiwanese men can generally find women from other countries who are willing to be their wives. The legislator, Xiao-Feng Chang, emphasised that her proposal for the subsidisation of single Taiwanese women was for the advancement of Taiwanese women’s rights. She argued that since these “foreign spouses” were subsidised by our government, Taiwanese women should also be subsidised for their “unemployment” in the “market” of marriage. Traditionally, the 30 year mark is considered an age by which women should be married to a man and having children. Chang used the term “leftover women”<sup>1</sup> to describe these unmarried Taiwanese women and, suggested Taiwanese men were to be blamed for not marrying them. She was immediately condemned by many women’s groups. Chang defended her stance, saying that she blamed Taiwan’s men for *wanting* to marry women from foreign countries rather than women in Taiwan, saying that she found it “strange” that as she “blamed the men”, she received “objections all from women.” Chang not only revealed her ignorance of the feminist awareness in Taiwan, but also simplified a complex social phenomenon in Taiwan. Wang Ping, the president of Gender/Sexuality Rights Association Taiwan, argued in response that “there is not only one vision of marriage. Any type of sexual orientation, regardless of man–man or woman–woman, should have the right of marriage” (Shi, 2012). Besides, most women in contemporary Taiwan do not rely on men; particularly with respect to careers and financial autonomy. Many women no longer consider marriage the most important event in their lives. Chang’s blaming of the phenomenon of “leftover women” on

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<sup>1</sup> The original Chinese is pronounced “sheng-nu”, meaning single, childless women in their 30s. This term was coined in China and circulated in Taiwan.

the increasing number of female foreign spouses actually exposed her own limited social perspective. In 2009 Taiwan had the lowest birth rate in the world, with just one baby born per woman. In 2010, 37% of women in Taiwan aged 30–34 were single, as were 21% of 35–39-year-olds. In 2011, the average birth rate continued to decline and was approximately 0.895 children per woman. The decline of both marriage rate and birth rate reflects a fact—a considerable number of Taiwanese women opt to be single and childless.<sup>2</sup>

The term “leftover women”, because of its disrespectful connotations, underwent significant revisions in its meaning and uses in Taiwan over time, according to the pronunciation “sheng-nu” in Mandarin, and consequently developed more positive connotations, such as “prosperous women” or “triumphant women”. Many women have since created different titles for themselves to describe their single status. For example, female blogger Wealthy Lady Nana calls herself a ‘mid-woman’ because she believes that a woman in her 30s is actually in the *middle* of the journey of her life. Because of the commonly held perception that a “biological clock is ticking”, women like her are frequently pressured to make ‘final’ decisions about the shape of their lives; either choose to marry or to be single, to have children or to have a career. Nana in her blog *Wealthy Lady Nana’s Diary* demonstrates women can find the balance between having relationships and maintaining lifestyles shaped by their own choices and preferences. She talked of how she has “cultivated” her boy friend to be the way she wants him to be, saying “I have a 10-year plan, like that in the Japanese fiction *Genji Monogatari*, in which the male protagonist brought up his beloved wife since she was a child. I have been cultivating Little Boyfriend to be the one I want him to be, including appearance, habits, and life style. Now he is getting close to being the perfect man by my standard” (Zhu, 2008). This kind of triumphant tone seems to reveal so-called “female empowerment” in Taiwanese popular culture and media, which often lays stress on women’s success in taming their husbands or boyfriends. Nevertheless, it should be noted here that what Wealthy Lady Nana regards as an accomplishment is not about taming or manipulating, but an ability and power to select a preferable partner and maintain a sustainable relationship. Also, it should not be overlooked that she has been making a constant effort in communicating and negotiating with her partner. Instead of complaining about the pressures imposed on women, by using the term “mid-woman” she proclaimed that modern women now can make decisions for themselves and decide the direction of their own lives.

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<sup>2</sup> These statistics are from the statistical yearbook on the website of Department of Statistics, Ministry of the Interior, Taiwan, <http://sowf.moi.gov.tw/stat/year/list.htm>.

The title of the blog *Wealthy Lady Nana's Diary* is my translation. The phrase “Wealthy Lady” is exactly translated from the Chinese term “kuei-fu”, which often refers to a woman of upper class who is either from a wealthy family or has a rich husband. Being a “kuei-fu” (the wealthy lady) is Nana’s self-expectation which she believes someday she will be able to live a life like a “kuei-fu”. In contrast to this self-motivated title, another female blogger Showon calls herself an “Indoorsy Woman”, highlighting that she is a single woman who always stays at home, as she has been not dating for some years. The name “Showon” is translated by herself from her Chinese name “Xiao-hong” when it is pronounced in Holo, the Taiwanese dialect. Showon can be seen as representative of certain Taiwanese women aged in their 30s, who paradoxically resist entering marriage, whilst simultaneously longing for a family. In her blog, Showon writes of the conflicts, anxieties, and pressures she experiences as a Taiwanese woman in her late 30s. Whilst these two female bloggers display vastly different attitudes as they voice themselves on the Internet, they have one thing in common: they need to justify the lifestyles they have chosen,, and in doing so seek to present themselves as prosperous and triumphant women, who are never pitiable “leftovers”. Similarly, they both name their blogs “diaries”—*Wealthy Lady Nana's Diary* and *Indoorsy Woman Showon's Diary*.

I followed these two blogs for more than one year before organizing my observations of case study for this thesis. I selected these two female bloggers to be my case study of feminist practice because I found they demonstrate how a simple act of diary writing can both empower the writer and the readers. I have been interested in feminism since I was a college student. After I met my husband, we had many enjoyable discussions on the issue regarding why we need feminism in Taiwan. However, when I expressed my interest in choosing feminism as a research topic, he became uncomfortable with my decision and tried to encourage me to pick another topic instead. His opposing reaction did not change my decision; on the contrary, it further stimulated my strong feeling of wanting to do so. It was an interesting discovery that it seemed that the word “feminism” could be discussed as a theory between us peacefully, but it was just like a forbidden fruit symbolizing the knowledge that it should not be obtained or it will incur an irremendable outcome in a marriage. I decided to eat the forbidden fruit and invited my husband to eat it too.

Theoretically, I believe myself to be a feminist because I believed there are still too many injustice and inequalities to be solved by paying effort in all kinds of feminist movement. Practically, I did not see myself as a consistent feminist because I still made a lot of compromises and sacrifices in my marriage. In doing this study, what I really want to find out is that how could a feminist find balance in her belief and her life. I was first fascinated with

Wealthy Lady Nana's blog partially because of the similarities I shared with her in the year of 2008. We were born in the same year, 34 years old but still single, and having a part-time lecturing job in universities in Taipei. I followed her blog post everyday and read her online diary as if it was mine. In reading her diary I witnessed how a woman could be a feminist in a tender gesture with a firm attitude, which was inspiring. Then I found Indoorsy Showon's blog and found that the use of wit was engaging and a positive counteractive to media representation of feminists as humourless. I therefore decided to use these two bloggers' online diary writing and blogging experiences to voice for me in this thesis.

Following the traditional form of the diary, these two female bloggers write about personal issues within their own immediate environments, whilst male writers more commonly treat the blog as a place for information exchange, without necessarily focussing extensively on personal matters. So why do such women in particular feel the need to publicly write about their personal lives? What are the significances for women like Nana and Showon of keeping diaries in personal blogs? These questions form the basis of my own interest in women's diaries and women's blogs. I therefore regard these two female bloggers' online diaries as the major sites of my fieldwork research through long-term observation and participation. Concerned primarily with women's expression and their mobility, my investigation begins with negotiating the development of women's movements and feminist awareness in Taiwan. I then explore the genealogy of the diary and its intimate connection with women and consequently develop two ways of looking at women's online diaries—diary writing as a *self-technology*, deployed within the construction of a new media identity, and diary writing as a form of *social action*, undertaken through the representation of a collective identity. These two perspectives, moving from a micro observation of identity 'shaping', to a macro observation of identity 'performing', are discussed in two cases that, although separate, but interrelated.

Before expanding on the contents, and the statements underpinning this thesis, I will canvass key ideas around which the thesis is arranged: feminism, femininity and marriage; women's diary writing; the emergence of the blog; identity and performance.

## **0.2 Feminism, Femininity, and Marriage**

Many women in contemporary Taiwan exhibit an awareness of feminism, and believe they are living in a society where there is much more freedom and less discrimination or oppression than at previous points in Taiwanese history. This position might be considered

naïve, even a delusion, that might once again catch women in another trap constructed not only by patriarchy but also the feminist movement itself. In her book, *Who Stole Feminism: How Women Have Betrayed Women*, Christina Hoff Sommers (1994) argued that American feminism has historically been controlled by a group of women who have disregarded social and political realities without consideration to “the accepted feminine value” of women generally (1994). Sommer’s extensive criticism of radical feminism was made eighteen years ago, and since then the post-feminist emphasis on personal diversity has become central to feminist discourse. Nonetheless, Sommer’s work serves as a reminder of the potential pitfalls for either feminist researchers or activists.

For feminist discourse historically, there are two key interpretations of femininity based on essentialism. One contends that it is a yoke that restrains women in a male-oriented society, so women’s liberation requires the removal of stereotypical, restrictive feminine features. In one of the earliest works of feminist philosophy, “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects” (1796), British feminist Mary Wollstonecraft argued that the conception of femininity is but a false consciousness, which constructs a romantic illusion and hinders women from rational thinking and acting. Thus, femininity should be discarded as an old belief (Andermahr, 1997, p. 75). Laura Kipnis (2005), being a professor “armed with feminist theory”, pointed toward a contradiction between feminism and femininity:

Femininity is a system that tries to secure advantages for women, primarily by enhancing their sexual attractiveness to men. It also shores up masculinity through displays of feminine helplessness or deference.

...

Feminism, on the other hand, is dedicated to abolishing the myth of female inadequacy. It strives to smash beauty norms, it demands female equality in all spheres, it rejects sexual market value as the measure of female worth.

However, many women still feel the need to live up to the ideals of femininity and feminine beauty. Kipnis lamented that “heterosexuality always was the Achilles heel of feminism” (2005). The other discourse approves of femininity and thoroughly rejects the idea of following the ‘male development model’, so women’s liberation lies in embracing and enhancing femininity, which excels over the violent and individualist male culture (Ding, 1995). For example, Betty Friedan (1963) asserted that “the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their own femininity”. Femininity, according to *Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, refers to the qualities or condition of being feminine, which may be associated with various socially constructed perceptions—in a good sense, modest, graceful, affectionate, confiding; or in a bad sense, weak, nerveless, timid,

pleasure-loving, effeminate. One definition on the *Urban Dictionary* offers a less prescriptive interpretation, as “feminine means ‘What pertains to a woman’. There are no qualifications. Whatever a woman does is feminine, because they are women and they are doing something that pertains to them”.<sup>3</sup> Whilst definitions of femininity differ in emphasis and scope, the term femininity is limited in its capacities to account for female difference, and the specific experiences of, and between women. As we can see, there is considerable confusion about the concept of the femininity. While some feminists stress that femininity is a set of characteristics that, like gender, are both culturally and relationally defined, I hold that femininity cannot be conditioned out of us because it is part of our nature. Feminism that excludes femininity is a threat to women’s identity because it strips women off the right to enjoy their natural femininity. What the worse is that it can hinder women from getting to appreciate the significance of feminism. As my viewpoint is that feminists can be feminine, the two case study of female bloggers are discussed in the thesis as feminine role models in terms of the way they represent and express themselves in their blogs.

Feminism and the women’s movement have focussed historically on the project of female autonomy and women’s self- awareness, with the effect of improving the condition of women in many parts of the world. However, have women in the contemporary, ‘developed’ world been able to find a balance between feminist practice and being a woman in a (heterosexual) relationship or a marriage? For these women, can feminism be practical and sustainable within the contexts of everyday life? How does a feminism that excludes the possibility of marriage work for them? Su Chien-ling, the former chairperson of Taiwan Gender Equity Education Association, replies in an interview saying how marriage is so tough in its requirements on women: “even I would use the word ‘predicament’ to describe my effort and struggle in it” (Hu 2005). While being asked, “Is there a feminist marriage?”, she answered without hesitation: “In the face of marriage a woman is defeated without fighting. If she chooses to fight the battle, she shall expect nothing great will really achieve after giving the best effort in her marriage” (Hu 2005). However, no one choice is easier or harder than another. Every decision requires certain condition and courage to make, either choosing to go into a marriage and keep staying inside, or choosing to leave, or even choosing not to enter a marriage at all. Choosing to stay inside a marriage and struggle to survive is one of the choice for women to continue their feminist practice, which can be considered a sort of “local resistance” in the marriage.

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<sup>3</sup> Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary available at <http://machaut.uchicago.edu/websters/>; Urban Dictionary available at <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=feminine>.

Wealthy Lady Nana and Indoorsy Woman Shown are two examples of such a local resistance. Nana started her online diary by writing about Little Boyfriend and this diary ends up lasting for 10 years before she decided to marry him in 2009. Nana does not stop blogging about her life after her Little Boyfriend has become her husband. In fact, they do not have a wedding ceremony, and nor do they get their marriage registration done. She just announced themselves husband and wife in her blog one day and that's it. Nothing really changes after that announcement, at least not in her blog. For her, she is just a woman trying to maintain a healthy relationship with a man and trying hard to keep the long-term relationship interesting. Wealthy Lady Nana decided to dispense with formalities because she does not want to limit her relationship with a man to the traditional definition of marriage. In this sense, her persistence in online diary writing and blogging that sufficiently records her continuous effort and determination to be a happy woman can be regarded as a manifestation of feminist practice. In contrast to Wealthy Lady Nana, Indoorsy Woman Shown chooses to write about the unhappy and ridiculous part of her experience with men. She got married in 2012 and continues to reveal her observation of all sorts of absurdity and insoluble problems in marriage. Similar to Nana, Showon can also be viewed as a feminist who chooses to stay in her marriage and carries out a local resistance, which is also made manifest in the online diary of her blog.

Women's subjectivity is made manifest in the routines of everyday life, by way of reflecting upon daily experiences, making decisions within various everyday situations, and taking action to facilitate the development of their own self-awareness. With this in mind, the online diary can be considered a feasible means of channelling processes of self-reflection and self-examination, though dialogues with oneself and dialogues with others. Feminist scholar Carol Hanisch's (1970) famous remark, "personal is political", is one of the simplest and most meaningful of the feminist slogans.<sup>4</sup> In other words, even the smallest and most private aspects of individual behaviours, attitudes, and lifestyles should be seen as forms of political struggle. In this way, feminist scholarship, such as that of Helene Cixous (1975), has challenged women to validate their personal experiences through the realisation that they are in essence political. By writing about herself in public, a woman represents not only her own personal life and individual experience, but also communal concerns shared by other women.

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<sup>4</sup> For the details of this paper, see her website: <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>.

### 0.3 Women's Diary Writing: Online and On Paper

Charlotte Linde (1993) examined the role of diaries and journals as forms of “life stories” for women. She noted that diaries are suited to women’s writing because they are democratized; anyone can write their diaries and they do not need popular or mainstream publication. She proposed that diaries are an “exemplary women’s genre” because the diary is so suited for recording everyday types of events and emotions, which are important to women (Linde, 1993, p. 43). The order and structure of diaries and journals are similar to women’s lives because there is no regular, ordered sequence of events, so both women’s diaries and lives are frequently “fragmented, formless and interrupted” (1993, p. 43). Cynthia Gannett (1992) also observed, in *Gender and the Journal*, writing is important for women because their lives are filled with tasks of impermanence. Therefore, “they have found ways to inscribe themselves, to make their own modest, but unique and lasting imprint, on texts” (p. 136).

Diary writing is a traditional form of women’s writing because it represents the way in which women were first able to write the narratives of their experiences. Penelope Franklin (1986) observes that the diary can be a “safe space” for the self to voice the struggle that cannot be spoken of anywhere else. “This has been especially important to women who are often isolated physically by the conditions of their lives, or psychologically by restraints put on expression of their feelings.” (pp. xix-xx). Rebecca Hogan (1991) has further explored this idea of the diary as a feminine form of life position the diary as feminine, and the autobiography as “somehow masculine”, Hogan compared the letter with the diary, borrowing Jane Gallop’s distinction “Women write letters”—personal, intimate, in relation to men who write books—universal, public, in general circulation. To this end, Hogan suggested: “substitute diaries for letters and autobiographies for books and [Gallop] has captured perfectly the relative places and valuations of the two types of life-writing in contemporary criticism” (p. 95).

Bloom (1996) stressed, in the title of her essay, “I Write for Myself and Strangers”, the point that many diaries in the past are written simultaneously oneself and for public audiences. Steinitz Rebecca (1997) also argued that the diary has not always been a private document, because throughout history diaries have been passed to family, friends, or selected others (p. 47). Rebecca Hogan (1991) provided two perspectives to help frame the understanding of diaries. If we consider the diary from the point of view of the writer, we can see its ability to entertain multiple purposes and intentions. If we think about the diary in terms of the reader,

we can see that it has a wide range of audiences on a continuum from a confidante for the private self, to the wider audience of a published diary (Hogan, 1991, p. 97). The practices of diary writing continue to speak to the silencing of women throughout history. The style and content of women's storytelling in this way has often been ignored in traditional research, particularly when they move outside and beyond extant paradigms and generic expectations. The Internet provides a location or setting for women's voices because it is potentially more open and democratic. As growing numbers of women create their blogs, they take advantage of the Internet in order to write and to share that writing with diverse audiences. Sutton (1999) cites Lakoff's observation of blogging's desirability and importance to women, noting that women are able to "make one's 'story' coherent again—to give oneself a meaningful history by making everything fit together for the first time" (Lakoff, 1990, p. 63, cited in Sutton, 1999, p. 167). Diary-style blogs are particularly valuable to women because telling stories, as early feminists have recognised, is often the beginning of a larger feminist process of engaging collectively to pursue social reform.

What is useful about blogs in particular, as opposed to more traditional media, is that these expressions are automatically documented and archived. This feature makes it easy to refer back to one's own narratives in one's own words. The form and structure of the diary is similar to the blog in that there are daily entries in chronological order, but they are read in the reverse order, starting with the most recent and moving backwards through time. However, the order of diary entries does not hinder readers' preferences for selecting certain diary entries to read first. On the Internet, readers may open or access diary entries in a variety of ways by clicking through the links of their choice. Users have multiple options for reading their entries, and readers may read the entries according to the date written, the topic, or a keyword. In her article, "Blogs: A History and Perspective", Rebecca Blood (2002) stated that the blog provides an opportunity for "an outbreak of self-expression" (2002). "These fragments, pieced together over months, can provide an unexpectedly intimate view of what it is to be a particular individual in a particular place at a particular time" (2002, p. 13).

The tension between popular perceptions of personal privacy and the public sharing of private information is not an entirely new issue in the realm of computer-mediated communication. Blogs allow for a redefinition of the public and private 'self'. For bloggers, privacy is an elastic concept, dependent on the viewer's positioning. Serfaty (2004) found in an ethnographic study, that as "diarists feel protected by the size of the Internet", bloggers often reveal a considerable amount of personal information about themselves in their blogs (p. 13). In "Teaching an Old Genre New Tricks: The Diary on the Internet", literary scholar

Laurie McNeill wrote typically about her experience of reading diary blogs while preparing her article (2003, p. 24):

After several hours of reading these journals, I often feel sick, as if I've watched too many tell-all talk shows on daytime television. I've learned too much I didn't need to know about too many people's everyday lives—lives without anything particularly extraordinary to recommend them, except the diarists' own sense of importance and relevance. Some journals make me feel guilty, as if I have been looking at texts I should not be reading, that are too personal and not intended for me to see.

The seemingly private diary, publicly available on the web, is a paradox. The authors of diary weblogs, being intentional exhibitionists, share their daily life, thoughts, and feelings with unknown readers, and readers hence become “escapist voyeurs in a culture of mediated voyeurism” (Karlsson, 2007, p. 138). The diary blog typically features the following traits: it is deeply personal, emotion-laden, and thrives on readers' attachment—readers are invited to enter into, and identify with, the thoughts and feelings of others; it runs and runs in instalments with no end in sight, as with the feminine genre *par excellence*, the TV soap (Karlsson, 2007, p. 139). While not all women who create blogs are concerned with whether or not anyone is reading them, wider readership can open up a new public space that might lead to more meaningful interactions and recreate the notion that the personal is political.

Diary writing also reveals and shapes the writer's identity (Wiener & Rosenwald, 1993). A noted scholar of autobiography, Lejeune (2000), one of the first scholars to discuss diary weblogs, regards the weblog diary a tool for the author's fulfilment in gaining “access to an alter ego, a synthesis between the diary and the letter”, that is well suited to the Internet (Rak, 2005, p. 167). Lejeune's expression of the alter ego can be interpreted as an acceptance of the diary's transition from one form to another—paper diaries to online diaries. In the process of writing about oneself, a diarist can gain a better sense of themselves through the process of writing about their experiences. In addition, diary writers also return to their writings to read about themselves, strengthening and shaping their self-identity. In the same way, blog writers may gain insights regarding themselves through their writing. They engage in the same practices as diary writers, which is a daily examination of their lives. The blog audience, too, perceives the ongoing construction of the blogger's identity through the day-to-day writings. In this sense, the blog, representing “the words and thoughts of an individual who is solely responsible for their expression”, highlights not only the development of the writer's thoughts, ideas and stories but also “the subsequent formation of the writer's identity” (Sutton, p. 165).

## 0.4 The Emergence of Blogs

The dependence on technology in contemporary life is evidenced especially in the close connection between daily activities and the Internet, and the concomitant changes in the way people deal with information and communicate with others. The Internet as a popular communication medium has transformed the history of mass media through both interactivity and the popularity of public participation. Lewis (2008, p. 379) noted that newer forms of communication technology provide “a resource for the development of ‘postmodern’ conceptions of the human culture”. The postmodern formation and construction of subjectivity is produced through the ever-changing ways of communication in cyberspace. Free access to space for establishing a personal blog on the Internet, which is user-friendly and designed to promptly attract large numbers of visitors, provides a platform/stage for users to present themselves in cyberspace. Blog theorist Biz Stone (2004, p. 36) notes that blogs have become popular because they provide an easy, flexible way for people to communicate, and Laura Gurak (2001, p. 44) asserted that one of the larger prospects of cyberspace is the potential to provide a two-way street in a world where the dominant medium has been unidirectional. A personal weblog, as researchers have suggested, is a kind of self-made medium that subverts the traditional identification of a writer, a journalist, or an editor.

Exploring the development of the weblog, “Weblog: The Emergence of a New Form and Content”,<sup>5</sup> is generally acknowledged as the first article (entry) to appear in the Chinese blogosphere. This entry was written in 2000 by Blog Worker<sup>6</sup> who described the then brand-new kind of writing activity in the personal blog as “Internet protogenic content”, because its content, forms, and technological background were all originally generated from the Internet. Blogging increased in popularity since then and reached its ‘peak’ in 2006, when many people in Taiwan had their own personal blogs. With regard to communication and interaction with others, it is commonly considered that, among many other social networking sites over the last 10 years, Facebook has been the most popular. However, whilst Facebook is expanding the social network and allowing people to instantly interact with each other, I consider in this thesis that the personal blog still remains an important expressive and communicative channel, which allows people to account for themselves, relate observations and personal opinions in depth, and express their reflections upon everyday life within appropriately structured sections of prose.

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<sup>5</sup> My translation of this entry’s Chinese title: <http://worker.bluecircus.net/archives/2007/07/bubootwitter.html>.

<sup>6</sup> *Blog Worker* is an English title of a personal blog, which is hosted by the blog owner who names himself “Blog Worker” (工頭堅). Blog Worker is a well-known blogger regarded as one of bloggers who have started to observe and investigate the Internet culture in Taiwan since 1997.

## 0.5 Subjectivity in Cyberspace

As stated previously, new communication technology provides “a resource for the development of ‘postmodern’ conceptions of the human culture” (Lewis, 2008, p. 379). The “human condition” has been greatly changed with the overwhelming power of technology that dominates everyday life in ‘developed’ countries. These changes have required the re-location of individual subject positions and a re-thinking of our identities, in both the real world and in cyberspace. In 1964 Marshall McLuhan proposed the well-known concept of the “global village”, foreseeing the impact of widespread use of “television-mediated communication” which has gradually connected the world through the overwhelming power of globalization. In the early years of the 21st century, a similar situation emerges by way of “computer-mediated communication”, when the Internet becomes commonplace and the boundaries between cyberspace and the real world blurred beyond distinction. The Internet user no longer requires the appearance of a ‘stable’ subject position, because the “virtual geography” of cyberspace releases him or her from a fixed constructions of identity; free to move between spaces and identities within their “online status”. This phenomenon has been described by Jeff Lewis’ (2008, p. 401) as a process in which the “‘electronic geography’ of the Internet produces a belonging and an identity position which only last as long as the user’s connection to the Net”. Our subjectivities can be constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed as we like, and our senses of belonging are multiple and fluid inside or even outside this cyber-reality.

In order to discuss the subjectivity of women in cyberspace, it is necessary to discuss the way of seeing, including how women are seen from both male and female perspectives, and the positioning of female spectators. Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey’s (1975) concept of “to-be-looked-at-ness”, argues for a relationship between the male spectator as the active, viewing subject, and the woman on the screen as the passive object of the male gaze. In her essay, “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ inspired by King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun* (1946)”, Mulvey focused on the ‘masculinisation’ of spectators (who might be men or women). For her, it is a matter of identifying point of view, and spectator positions. As the mass media have constructed the symbol of the woman as “other” or the one to be looked at, women, assumedly framed and controlled by patriarchal society, consequently identify with the concept, and ultimately lose their feminist/feminine awareness to become masculine spectators themselves. In this scenario, women are both the subjects of the gaze,

and the objects to be looked at.<sup>7</sup> Living within this conflicted position, women have been struggling to retain their subjectivity while at the same time sustaining their “to-be-looked-at-ness. David Harris analysed Mulvey’s discourse of femininity, noting that female spectators might “experience a reawakening of a fantasy of activity, normally repressed by correct femininity” (Harris, n.d.). These dilemmas of the female spectators relate to the dilemmas of women in the cyberspace—both display and “oscillation...a sense of the difficulty of sexual difference” (Mulvey, 1999, p. 123). While some may argue that this dilemma ultimately manifests and reinforces the predicates of male-dominant representations and social realities, others hold that a woman can take advantage of her paradoxical position to claim her subject position by rewriting herself in the age of the Internet.

## 0.6 Identity and Performance

As a form of autobiographical performance, diary writing serves as a conduit to reveal and shape the writer’s identity (Wiener, 1993). Identities are therefore constructed by the practices inherent in discursively produced subject positions. As Stuart Hall (1996) argued, “identities are constituted within, not outside representation and the ‘narrativization’ of the self plays an essential role in the identification process”. In this sense, self and identity are not separate in one’s representation, and identity cannot be separated from self-care, representation, and performance. Accordingly, we can understand identity as something “invented rather than discovered” (Bauman, 2004, p. 15). In her book, *Autobiography and Performance*, Deidre Heddon (2008) observed that all creative production is inevitably “infused with the personal”. Heddon maintained the belief that “the personal is political” by stressing that “the work of autobiographical performance is to explore ... the relationship between the personal and the political, engaging with and theorizing the discursive construction of selves and experience” (p. 162). Emergence of new virtual spaces through omnipresent computing, and new forms of technologies have changed the way of self-representation and the performance of identity. In new media culture, the conception of identity has changed to become more “fluid”, and technology accelerates change, creating a “liquefaction” process to identity and the self (Bauman, 2004, p. 51).

Technology has also changed personal expression and social narrative. In light of this, the blog can be viewed as a “performative space and practice where what Foucault terms as the

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<sup>7</sup> Mulvey talks explicitly about this ‘transvestite’/schizophrenic positionality in her essay on the film, *Duel in the Sun* (1946). This essay is also available online at <http://afc-theliterature.blogspot.com.au/2007/07/afterthoughts-on-visual-pleasure-and.html>.

ethics of life is being developed and tested” (Zylinska, 2009, p. 80). Foucault associates the practice of self-writing precisely with an “ethos of life”, referring to “practice, embodiment, and a style of life” (Zylinska, 2009, p. 88). Writing serves as a platform for the search for identity and self-knowledge, which eventually projects self-care. In this regard, personal blogs, as electronic forms of diaries and a social media network, are a modern performative space for the care of the self. Foucault considered writing a technique that creates life, describing technologies of the self as:

Techniques that permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power. (Foucault, 1988, p.18)

Foucault identified characteristics that for the cultivation of the self and writing, and associates writing with the “constitution of the self” (McLaren, 2002, p. 148). He described “technologies of the self” as the means for searching and purifying the self through writing in a process of life”:

The idea of keeping individual notebooks and memory books focusing on the recollection of the past is ... quite explicitly oriented by the concern for the self towards objectives defined as: withdrawing into oneself, getting in touch with oneself, relying on oneself, benefiting, and enjoying from oneself. (Zylinska, 2009, p. 74).

Zylinska (2009) explained that what Foucault’s practice of *self-writing* is “produces” a body and as such suggests that Foucault’s emphasis on the power of writing as a “transforming matter into tissue and blood” (p. 88). In other words, identities are presented through different forms in different social contexts through our attempts to understand ourselves through writing. Accordingly, writing as a technology of the self relates oneself to one’s own identity and culture (Foucault, 1986, p. 95).

## **0.7 Statement of Thesis**

The personal blog has become one of the most important forms for the constitution of online presence, which allows women to take on a *new media identity*. I propose that a blog serves not only as a space for personal diary writing, but also simultaneously as a centre of self-made media networks and online communities. In light of this, this project examines contemporary women’s self-writing via a new media channel for self-expression, to explore the relationship between the diary and its “writing self”, the “narrative identity”. My assertion is that personal writing is especially important for women to increase self-awareness. I assume that women’s online writing, by displaying and fitting the private self in the public sphere, is an integral part of women’s personal and social lives. Besides, when this writing

takes place in the form of a diary on personal blogs, there is an opportunity for others to serve as a sounding board for one's feelings.

Women's life writing has routinely been associated with feminist attempts to fight against females' individual repression under the historical and cultural domination of patriarchy. There are two main reasons that this thesis focuses specifically on women's diaries. The first is that, since the 1970s, gender has come to be seen as an important category of historical analysis, and women and women's personal records have been recognised as a legitimate area of study (Lensink, 1987; Huff, 1989). The second reason is that women's diaries have been particularly neglected within critical and scholarly contexts in the past, partly because they are created by women, and partly because diaries have often been viewed as a 'feminine' genre of record (Hogan, 1991; Bunkers 1990). Following Judy Nolte Lensink's (1987) argument of "the diary as female autobiography", this thesis looks at women's diaries as an alternative form of autobiography through which one may form a new expressive self within a female narrative.

Within a predominantly androcentric cultural context, women's self-writings, especially diaries, often remain as murmuring, or sometimes pure 'gossip' among women. Within the project of filling the gaps in extant knowledge, the questions persist: What concerns do women articulate in their writing that so often resonate with other women? What is the significance of diary writing for women? Why are the experiences in women's everyday lives worth writing about and reading in spite of their limited visibility in critical analysis? To answer these questions, I begin my research with an investigation of women's diaries, including a discussion of how the diary has evolved into a genre especially apposite for women's self-expression. In this regard, this project, in part, responds to assertions by scholars in the fields of women's studies that validate the study of women's diaries as an imperative academic and cultural endeavour.

Every article written on personal blogs can be regarded as a form of discourse generated by its author. Seeing that a woman can (re)identify herself and shape a new, expressive self through blogging, this research also foregrounds the motivations and reasoning behind women's writing on blogs and the ways they negotiate their identities through their online diaries. Blogs allow people to disclose inner voices online because the multiple layers of interactivity create a "protected space" where bloggers tend to feel more comfortable to reveal intimate information that is not easily expressed in person. Michelle Gumbrecht (2004) suggested that blogging is the preferred mode of interaction for some people because it allows the writer to have more control over the communication. Bloggers decide on the content of

their blogs, and lead the conversation whereas the blog readers only have the option of reacting, by choosing to comment or not to comment. In this sense, blogs are not only discussed as genre of autobiography because the personal writing in blogs can be an effective means of public communication, which is often feminist.

That diary writing including blog is feminist practice should be considered as one of my main argument throughout the thesis. Therefore, I investigate two female bloggers' writing and argue that their blogging are feminist actions in terms of their consistent effort in writing about their personal encounters and reflections. These two bloggers post daily pieces of their lives, and their blog posts focus on the living past or even the very present. Wealthy Lady Nana uses her blog to record and demonstrate an ideal life style she is pursuing and advocating, whereas Indoorsy Woman Showon creates a safe space where she can freely release her complaints as an ordinary person who is helpless with injustice and absurdity in her everyday life. What these two bloggers apply blogging to their lives are seemingly different, but they actually share something in common—their online diaries reveal their independence and original in thinking, doing and writing. This is also one of the reasons why their blogs and Facebook both attract large number of readers and followers.

The next generation of feminists will indisputably be virtual, and blogs as a publication medium seem to offer a format they need to make the next wave of feminism digital. I believe that by using blogs, feminism as a theory, a practice, or movement, will be thriving in the digital age. Hence, women's online diary writing should be taken as a fundamental act and personal effort of feminist practice. In short, by exploring the phenomena and the influence of women's writing on the Internet, this thesis aims to examine how women's diaristic blogs work as on-going autobiographies as well as self-made forms of media at the same time.

## **0.8 Methodology and Approach**

In early studies, computer-mediated communication has been conceptualised primarily "using spatial metaphors, which position the 'online' realm as a separate 'cyberspace' or 'sphere' (Marwick, 2010). While some ethnographies focus on single online spaces, Internet researchers have since recognised the necessity of an anthropology of the Internet that breaks down the divisions between "virtual" and real, or online or offline (Baym, 2009; Boellstorff, 2008; Garcia, 2009; Orgad, 2008). This study is methodologically informed by ethnographic studies of women's diaries and the new media form of the online blog. In this way, the thesis demonstrates the discursive and genealogical aspects of women's online writing in Taiwan and 'web-ethnography' more broadly. Katie J. Wards (1999) defined cyber-ethnography as a "study of life as it is lived and experienced in a virtual world." Classical ethnographies,

employing participant observation, are accounts of intensive and long-term observation of social actors in their social contexts. These qualitative and interpretive methods are used to provide a view that tries to give a detailed account of all “relevant aspects of a culture’s material existence and meaning systems” by means of a description of the “contextual significance of actions for their performers” (Lindlof, 2002, p. 16). I consider that my investigation of two women’s diaristic blogs and their online performance within them, moves away from the anthropological sense of ethnography, while retaining the naturalistic and interpretive elements of the qualitative approach. Katie Wards (1999, p. 100) argued that cyber-ethnography involves a degree of observation, where the researchers “observe the interaction on a particular website in order to gain a fuller understanding of Internet culture” by foregrounding the “meanings of the participants’ place in the social system”. Following Ward’s (1999) notion of “cyber-ethnography”, I retain the qualitative and interpretive approaches of ethnographic research. I see my project as an interdisciplinary work in which I examine the development of the short or personal writing that takes place in diaries within a new medium, the weblog. During a time in which so many mechanisms allow for communication in writing, the personal blog has become the most important form of personal expression online. Beyond ethnography and textual analysis, my research method also includes genealogical analysis and discourse analysis, wherein I deploy a reflective approach to women’s writing and the human-technology relationship.

Extant scholarly literature and theoretical frameworks concerning both the development of the Internet and women’s self-writing are extensively reviewed in the first three chapters. Subsequently this is followed by the considered, observation of two selected female bloggers, conducted over a contained period of time. Concurrently, textual analysis of online texts composed by blog writers and their readers is undertaken in order to better understand the relationship between them. I collate and present data from my online field research, which allows me to observe and document the personal development of these two bloggers and their interactions with readers. Accordingly, my research method presents a form of “new ethnography” within a research “field” itself located in cyberspace.

Online observation is the major method of data collection utilised for the discourse analysis of blogging practice in the thesis. For the case studies, I conducted long-term observation of two female bloggers in Taiwan from 2010 until 2014 (though previously I had been a regular reader of one of these two blogs since 2008). I observe these two bloggers, Wealthy Lady Nana and Indoorsy Woman Showon, in their online environments and foreground their voices in order to contextualise the significance of their own engagement

with the blogs. The online texts composed by author and readers on these two blogs form the basis of the observation and critical analysis. Part of the significance of this survey is that it identifies and utilises the theoretically productive nature of information that is publicly available on these sites. My online fieldwork includes observation of the reader comments section, and thus includes writers' responses and interactions with their audience as an important part of their online diary. Drawing on Ward's (1999) assertion that "the cyber-ethnographic method, even though all data is mediated, allows the online aggregation to move towards 'speaking for itself'" (1999), my case study reconfigures traditional qualitative and ethnographic methodologies within new and distinctive spaces of inquiry.

This thesis aims to explore, that in addition to providing a channel for women to voice themselves, online self-writing as social action provides a means for women to find 'a space of one's own', where women develop the capacity for self-actualisation through the independence of their own decision making. In short, this research project is an attempt to understand how women who keep online diaries and express themselves in blogs can be empowered by a relatively 'simple' act of writing. In view of this, I look at how each blogger utilises their personal blogs to narrate their stories, express their voices, construct identities, and eventually find empowerment in their online 'exhibitions'. I offer a discourse analysis of women's diaries in the online context, in order to draw connections between blog texts as women's self-representation and as a form of social communication. My case studies focuses specifically on two weblogs as "text-based", which does not preclude them from having photographs, videos, sound, or hyperlinks as part of their substance, but implies that their character is overwhelmingly textual, in appearance and content.

Wealthy Lady Nana and Indoorsy Woman Showon, well-known by their blog names, are two typical representatives of female bloggers in Taiwan. They are not celebrities per se, but two ordinary women who became well known through their Internet writing and have since attracted numerous on-line readers. They are both in their late 30s. The number 30 is sensitive to most women in Taiwan because it is usually seen as a threshold in the course of women's life. These two bloggers both remained unmarried until they were 35, so before that they suffered the same pressure from the expectation of Taiwanese society. They both live and work in Taipei. Regarding their occupations, Wealthy Lady Nana recently announced in her blog and Facebook that she has a 3 in 1 identity—house wife, blogger, and psychological counsellor—and her daily routine and work schedule is generally divided into this three parts. Indoorsy Women Showon is also a house wife and blogger now. What makes the difference is her job as a 9 to 5 office lady. Regardless of their different life style and attitude, they both

represent an image of “petty bourgeoisie lady”. Petty bourgeoisie lady is a term that used in Taiwan since recent years to describe a woman (normally single) whose income is sufficient for her to sustain a quality life and pursue personal interests; however, these petty bourgeoisie ladies’ social class and financial status are still far from real bourgeoisie. Accordingly, in this thesis the discussions of constructing women’s identities focus on these women who pursue satisfaction of material life as well as fulfillment of spiritual life.

As a multi-sited ethnography, I examine the first blog within the larger, *micro* context, and the second within a more tacit, macro context. In looking at these two blogs from different perspectives, this investigation discusses personal representation and social action respectively whilst maintaining that these two topics are inextricably intertwined within every blogging practice. In view of this, the first case study of *Wealthy Lady Nana’s Diary* explicitly examines the blog as a tool for personal expression and identity shaping in blogging. In comparison, the second case study of *Indoors Woman Showon’s Diary* is more concerned with the larger social context of blogging, to better understand how women’s blogging relates to community building and social action.

These two female bloggers’ online diaries, as forms of publishing communication, are both influenced significantly by the presence of the audience. They write personally, but they also communicate with their readers. Intuitively, there exists a tension between orienting writing to the self and to the audience. When they express their personal emotions and thoughts, they both bear in mind that they also write to communicate and interact with readers. Informing and entertaining readers hence become important elements in their diary writing. Gradually, meaningful relationships are taking place between these two online diary writers and their readers—each online celebrity has her exclusively target group of readers. Wealthy Lady Nana has announced more than once that she expects herself to be an exemplifier of happiness. In her blog she is like a teacher who is good at giving systematic guidance and teaches with patience and skills. The role Indoorsy Woman Showon plays in her online audience community is quite opposite. In her online identity, Showon represents an ordinary person who lives in an ordinary life with an ordinary monthly-salary job and shares common problems and worries with readers. Accordingly, while Nana stands for a role model of an ideal life style for many women, Showon can be seen as a spokesperson of the proletarian women in Taiwanese society.

In the first case, I analyse Nana’s self-narration and the ways she represents her everyday life in her blogs, to understand how she uses the online diary: to *display* her personal

subjectivity; to *construct* an online identity; and to *integrate* her online identities with her offline identities. In the second case, I use Showon's writing style and content to argue that the online diary serves not only a *conduit* for self-expression of a new media identity, but also a *platform* of empowering exhibition as a social action. As stated, I investigate these two cases through a combination of discourse analysis and ethnographical method, and in doing so I use these two female bloggers' own personal expressions and narratives to represent their identities and discourses in their writing. However, I also deploy two key critical key ideas as I analyse these two cases, Foucault's *technologies of the self* (1988), and Clay Calvert's *mediated voyeurism* (2000). The use of these two different conceptual frameworks allows me to specifically address the process of writing on particular blogs and their different approaches to maintaining their blogs, to advance an understanding of the blogger's place in the context of Taiwan society, and of the relationship between blogger and audience.

## 0.9 Chapter Summaries

In this Chapter, I have provided an introduction to this project, including a discussion of the importance of personal writing for women, the relationship between diaries and blogs, a discussion on feminism, femininity and marriage, the emergence of blogs and cyber subjectivity, and the issue of the performance of identity in diaries and blogs. Finally this chapter has offered a statement outlining the aims of the thesis and a description of my methodology. In Chapter 1, I examine the notion of 'women's values' in Taiwanese society and history as necessary to the developing projects of social cohesion and national unity. The development of public feminist awareness is staged against the progress of women's movements in Taiwan. In addition, I examine the mobility of Taiwanese women in terms of self-expression—through public participation and in literary publication. Further to this I offer a contextual background to the development of both women's writing and feminist discourse in Taiwan.

Chapter 2 stresses the value of women's diaries by offering a genealogy of diaries as public documents, and of the continuing close relationship between diaries and women. I investigate the historical role of the diary/autobiographical writings and review the significance of diary writing for women. Traditional diary scholarship, as Laurie McNeil (2003) pointed out, assumes that diaries are private documents. To provide a foundation for my discussion of blogs, a genealogy of women's diaries is filtered through the argument that this form of personal writing that is arguably the most private and most honest. Online diaries are seen to challenge the boundaries of the genre, redefining it in ways that are contrary to

common-sense expectations. The chapter is in large part a discussion of the diary as a (feminine) genre and how the practice of diary writing is related to feminist practice. In the last section of this chapter, I examine *nüshu*, an exclusively women's written document in China, in order to discuss the functions of expression, communication, and performance in women's writing practice in early Chinese society. I argue that writing practice of *nüshu* can be seen as an earlier form of blogging.

Chapter 3 offers a conceptual framework for my research in two case studies in Chapters 4 and 5. First, the chapter includes a detailed history of the blog's development as a media form. The specific features of blogs are placed in a relationship with traditional diaries. I am particularly interested in Laurie McNeill's (2003, p. 25) question: "What does the Internet bring to the diary genre, and the diary genre to the Internet, that has made this paring of form and media so felicitous?". I discuss how on the Internet the diary has changed, either in terms of function or with regard to purpose. I identify the features of personal blogs that distinguish them from traditional diaries and the ways these features are used by bloggers to express themselves. Further, I investigate how new media characteristics of immediacy and interactivity enhance and extend the public form of the diary, and the processes of self-construction that occur on these women's blogs. Because the emphasis of this thesis is on women who keep diaries online, I offer an account of issues related to the formation women's subjectivity in the online environment. To discuss the identity and performance in women's online diaries and analyse the feminist discourse in their representation of everyday lives, I introduce two concepts to look at women's online diary writing. First, I look at the construct of identity through Foucault's (1988) discussion of the subject and his concept of "technologies of the self". Then, I introduce Miller and Shepherd's analysis of genre as social action to argue that blogging is not only a means of self-expression and communication, but also has meaningful pragmatic actions in itself.

Chapter 4 is a case study of the blog, *Wealthy Lady Nana's Diary*. This chapter looks at the blogger Wealthy Lady Nana's discourse of blogging and identity, and her writing practice as a technology of the self. I explore the concept of technologies of the self and how the term can be applied to Nana's blogging practice and I discuss the relationship between diary and identity formation in Nana's online diary within this context. Looking at women's 'self-narrative' of identity, this chapter analyses how Foucault's discussion of subject formation can be applied to women's writing in blogs. I further extend Foucault's idea of "the technologies of the self" to look at women's diary writing as "care of the self", by way of blogging as a new media technology for personal representation. I follow this with an examination of the audience,

specifically the role and impact of an audience in relation to online diaries. I address the way that Nana crafts her writing texts with an awareness of her audience. These issues highlight the ways in which the audience has itself redefined the diary as a form. In her blog, *Wealthy Lady Nana* reflects extensively on how the audience has fundamentally shaped her experience of writing online.

This chapter includes extensive material from many entries in *Wealthy Lady Nana's Diary*. I use *Wealthy Lady Nana* to exemplify micro-celebrity practice by examining how the performance of identity operates within the blog. Micro-celebrity can be understood as “either a status people achieve or a scribed position people are assigned” (Marwick, 2010, p. 57). I describe *Wealthy Lady Nana* as a celebrity and discuss the experience and consequences of being a micro-celebrity. I use Nana’s personal narration to show how she is scrutinised and her actions and expressions are placed under surveillance. Creating and promoting identity through blogging in turn becomes the key to financial success. Self-branding is therefore considered as one of the techniques that encourages the creation and presentation of an ‘edited self’. I therefore discuss the concept of affective labour /emotional labour to elucidate the processes that goes through in order to create and promote the ‘self’ on her blog; establishing relationships with audiences, revealing personal information, and maintaining the role of regular diarist/writer.

Chapter 5 is a case study of the blog, *Indoorsy Woman Showon's Diary*. This chapter explores the construction and consumption of recognizable female ‘selves’. I draw upon Carolyn Miller’s (1984) explanation of “genre as social action” to discuss the functions that diaries serve for those who write them. I examine Showon’s writing in her blog to see how her narratives reflect the collective identity of women in Taiwan. The question I seek to answer is: How does merging media shape the way women portray their identities in writing? I examine the identities and values that are shared by Showon and her readers, and the issues surrounding the female bloggers’ online performance of their everyday lives, to explore the associated implications for, and understandings of, privacy, surveillance, and common experience. Also, I discuss the blog as one form of Internet-mediated communication that provides a space within which “the common voyeurs—looking for safe ways to gaze—can meet the willing exhibitionist to engage in a mutually beneficial relationship of revealing and peeking” (Dholakia, 2001). Drawing on Clay Calvert’s (2000) mediated voyeurism, I argue that through mediated exhibition women can be collectively empowered in the process of online diary reading and writing. This chapter is designed to extend and consolidate the discussion in the previous chapter, to comprehend how women’s blogging can be considered

as a form of ‘empowering exhibition’, by which a woman represents the version of the self that is collectively recognised and echoed back to her by a specific group of women.

In the concluding chapter, I summarise and synthesise the overall narrative and analysis of the thesis. I return to earlier discussions of the technological and social features of new media in order to demonstrate the need for a flexible notion of identity, in order to better understand the complex engagements evident in the blogs and writings of two female bloggers in Taiwan. Finally, I argue that blogs offer women an unprecedented ability to construct a new media identity and to be empowered by social action. I conclude the dissertation by summarising the major research contribution of this thesis and suggesting some future directions for research into the phenomenon of women’s online diaries.

# Chapter 1

## Women's Mobility and Self-expression in Taiwan

This chapter examines women's mobility and self-expression by looking at women's movements in social space, and women's narratives in literary space. The purpose is to discuss the embodied and imaginative mobility of women, and the limiting of women's self-expression in Taiwan at the same time. Firstly I canvass changes in women's social mobility, charting the development of the women's movement. To provide a historical framework for changes in women's social conditions, the progress of women's public participation in the shifting social context of Taiwan is examined by moving from the forced participation of women in the governmental policy, to women's active engagement in pursuit of women's rights. The time frame of this inspection primarily covers the past 112 years, including the 50 years in which Taiwan was under Japanese colonisation, and the 67 years in which the Republic of China colonised Taiwan, up until the first decades of the 21st century. I examine the progress of women's mobility within the larger social context through three different political stages, in order to illuminate the ways Taiwanese women, as physically and psychically restricted, could claim social equity and public visibility. After giving an account of the social context in Taiwan, I examine women's writing as found in literary works, particularly the expression of thoughts, feelings, and ideas, by looking at the formation of their 'self-awareness' through the narratives they construct. As the purpose of this chapter is to investigate women's self-expression and how female subjectivity is both expressed and/or suppressed, I use the discussion of women's autobiographical writing to analyse how their lives have been narrated as part of history, expressed through traditional forms of publication.

### 1.1 Brief Overview of the Political History of Taiwan

Since the 17th century, Taiwan has experienced several regime changes, each associated with particular colonising forces, including the Dutch occupation of southern Taiwan (1624–1662), the Spanish occupation of northern Taiwan (1626–1642), the Koxinga's governance (1642–1683),<sup>8</sup> the domination of the Qing imperial government (1683–1945), and Japanese rule (1895–1945). In each of their 38 years of colonisation, the Dutch and the Spanish only occupied parts of coastal cities in Taiwan as their trading posts. Settlement did not occur to

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<sup>8</sup> Following the fall of the Ming dynasty, Koxinga (Zheng Chenggong), a self-styled Ming loyalist, arrived in Taiwan and captured Fort Zeelandia in 1662, expelling the Dutch government and military from the island. Koxinga established the Kingdom of Tungning (1662–1683), with his capital at Tainan, a city located in the southern coast of Taiwan.

any great extent in Taiwan as it was considered more of a trading resource for these European colonisers.

Taiwan's population is composed of the indigenous peoples and the Han Chinese. "The indigenous peoples in Taiwan comprise the inhabitants who had been living on the islands before major Han Chinese immigration began in the 17th century. Culturally and linguistically, they belong to the Austronesian group" (Taiwan Indigenous Peoples, n.d.). According to the Department of Statistics, Ministry of Interiors of Taiwan, the indigenous people account for only 2 per cent of the total population, while the rest (98 per cent) is Han Chinese.<sup>9</sup> The waves of immigration of Han Chinese came consistently and settled in the coastal cities of China during Koxinga's governance and the dominance of the Qing dynasty. Accordingly, the culture and tradition of Confucianism was inherited from those Han Chinese on the mainland, a culture in which women's social status and personal identities were subordinate to men. The well-known old code of Chinese society, 'three obediences and four virtues',<sup>10</sup> was the best demonstration of the Confucian philosophy in Taiwanese society. The *three obediences* refer to a woman who: 1) obeys her father before marriage, 2) obeys her husband during married life, and 3) obeys her son in her widowhood. The *four virtues* refer to a woman's morality/fidelity, propriety in speech, physical charm, and efficiency in 'women's' work. The spirit of patriarchal society literally manifested in these three obediences, and even contemporary Taiwanese women are yet to be completely freed from the ancient 'spell' of the four virtues. To this end I argue in the latter part of this chapter that women in Taiwan society as a whole are still subject to these moral codes.

In 1895, Taiwan was ceded to Japan according to the Treaty of Shimonoseki,<sup>11</sup> which was signed by the Chinese Qing Dynasty who lost the First Sino-Japanese War and sued for peace. Since then, Taiwan experienced fifty years of Japanese rule, during which the colonial government devoted its full efforts to the 'Kominka movement'<sup>12</sup> aimed at Japanising Taiwanese society. The Taiwanese were to be fully assimilated as members of Japanese

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<sup>9</sup> The statistics of the population is from Survey Data Service in the webpage of Department of Statistics, Ministry of Interior, <http://statis.moi.gov.tw/micst/stmain.jsp?sys=100>, retrieved on 10 July 2012.

<sup>10</sup> "Three obediences and four virtues" is my translation of the Chinese proverb, "三從四德." The term, three obediences, was first seen in *Yili*, literally *Etiquette and Rites*, a classic text about Zhou dynasty rituals. Four virtues primitively appeared in *Nujie*, literally, *Admonition for Women*, a work by the Han dynasty female intellectual Ban Zhao.

<sup>11</sup> The First Sino-Japanese War (1 August 1894 – 17 April 1895) was fought between Qing dynasty of China and the Meiji of Japan, primarily over control of Korea. The Treaty of Shimonoseki was signed on 17 April 1895. China recognised the total independence of Korea and ceded the Liaodong Peninsula (in the south of the present day Liaoning Province), Taiwan and the Penghu Islands to Japan "in perpetuity".

<sup>12</sup> *Kominka* (皇民化), or Tennoisation, is referred as Japanisation during the imperial period (1868–1945).

society, so the promotion and practice of Japanese education throughout the island was regarded as an important part of colonisation. This was the beginning of the modern education system in Taiwan. Women in Taiwan began to have the chance to be educated in primary schools, and some could even pursue higher education if family conditions permitted. The influence of Western culture by way of this modernising of education, saw social awareness, through the ideals of freedom, equality, and individualism, become more visible in Taiwanese society. However, the increased awareness of partially educated women did not immediately transform the social structure or women's social status, because women were still expected to play auxiliary roles within social dictates of the Han Chinese's Confucianism and the Japanese Empire's Imperialism—both shaped by extremely patriarchal doctrines. Notably, Taiwanese people have had ambivalence toward Japan after the 50 years of Japanese Rule—one of animosity and nostalgia. The longing for the past was comprehensible, especially after the KMT<sup>13</sup> government arrived in Taiwan and used political oppression to take control, and Taiwanese people who grew up with a Japanese education were forced to adapt to another regime and to learn another language (Mandarin) all over again.

Japan surrendered at the end of World War Two, so Taiwan was accordingly returned to the Republic of China in 1945. In 1949 the nationalist KMT was defeated by the Communist CPC, so the KMT government and soldiers led by Chiang Kai-shek were forced to evacuate to Taiwan's provinces. Following the relocation of the KMT government, a significant portion of Han Chinese immigrated from mainland China during this period. They were called *Wai-Shen-Ren* by other Han Chinese who resided in Taiwan before them, referring to a person from outside of the Taiwan province. There was resistance and tension between the locals and the KMT government at that time. In order to take control of the local Taiwanese immediately, Chiang Kai-shek imposed martial law and persecuted people critical of his rule in a period known as the 'White Terror'. During the 'White Terror', 140,000 people were imprisoned or executed for being perceived as anti-KMT or pro-Communist (C. Yu, 1988). Martial law was used as a way to suppress any political opposition in the intervening years, and was not repealed until 1987.

On 15 July 1987, the KMT government announced the abolishment of martial law, so for the first time Taiwanese people had obtained freedom of assembly and association. The

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<sup>13</sup> The Kuomintang of China (KMT), translated as the Chinese National Party, is a founding and ruling political party of the Republic of China (ROC). After being defeated in 1949 by the Communist Party of China during the Chinese Civil War, the KMT retreated the 'national government' to Taiwan and controlled the government under a single-party state until the reforms starting in the 1980s.

abolition of martial law was a significant turning point for democracy, and the development of culture and society in Taiwan. Another significant event was the presidential election in 2000, which was won by the opposition. Taiwan successfully and smoothly transitioned from political power of the KMT, which signified the end of one-party dominance in Taiwan.

## **1.2 Development of Women's Mobility and Social Engagement**

According to the archive in the National Museum of Taiwan History, the emergence of women's movements coincides with three major political changes. The first stage was during Japanese rule (1895–1945), the second stage started when the KMT government came to power in Taiwan after Japan surrendered in World War Two (1945–1987), and the third was after the abolishment of martial law (1987–present). The term 'women's movement' adopted by the National Museum of Taiwan History should not be understood as referring to the feminist movements that actively worked for women's rights. Instead they were movements in which women participated or were promoted by women's groups, especially before the 1970s. Nevertheless, as I consider the gathering of a group of women with the same purpose or agenda as a potential form of early Taiwanese feminism, I necessarily draw on this understanding of women's movements to examine the development of women's social engagement, and the significant events or issues during each stage.

Many researchers agree that Lu Hsiu-lien's 'New Feminism' was the first grassroots women's movement, which can be viewed as a milestone in the history of women's movements in Taiwan. Ku (Liang & Ku, 1995) argued that it was not until New Feminism lifted the first wave in the early 1970s, that women's movements started to attract a great deal of attention and concern in Taiwanese society. She divided women's movements in Taiwan into two general periods: the first wave, Lu Hsiu-lien's pioneering stage, and the second wave, Li Yuanzhen's 'Awakening' stage. This division has been adopted and revised by many subsequent researchers (Chou & Jiang, 1989; Fang, 1990; Chou, 1990; Wung, 1992), and is replicated and expanded upon here in order to structure a review of the women's movement in contemporary Taiwan. Accordingly, as stated previously, an overview of the transformation and development of women's movements will be staged with respect to the three phases of: Taiwan under Japanese rule, followed by Taiwan under martial law, including the emergence of 'New Feminism' and *Awakening*, and then Taiwan after the repeal of martial law.

### ***1.2.1 Taiwan under Japanese Rule (1895–1945)***

Between 1895 and 1945, Taiwan was a colony of the Empire of Japan. During Japanese dominance, there were three major events/policies that greatly influenced women's lives, including banning the practice of foot binding,<sup>14</sup> the widespread establishment of primary schools, and the mobilisation of women with respect to participation in the infrastructure. These policies, developed in the service of Japanese colonisation, have profoundly influenced the experiences, both positively and negatively, of Taiwanese women.

#### ***Comfort Women***

The Japanese government assisted Taiwanese women and Japanese women in Taiwan to set up the very first women's organisation in modern Taiwan, named the Patriotic Women Association<sup>15</sup> in 1904. The Patriotic Women Association established three branches in Taipei, Taichung, and Tainan, and mainly engaged in promoting activities regarding women's education and social welfare (Taiwan Women, 2010). At the same time, its autonomy was subject to the policies of Japanese government, as the intention was to cultivate royal women of the Japanese Empire for the mobilisation of women's labour, including the use of women's bodies. During WWII, Japanese troops forced women in the colonies into sexual slavery—they become known as the 'comfort women'.<sup>16</sup> According to historian Yoshiyaki Yoshimi,<sup>17</sup> these comfort women, aged from 14 to 30 or above, were drafted by the military during 1938–1945 from Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, Philippines, Indonesia, and Holland. There were at least 300,000 victims in Asia, including about 2,000–3,000 women from Taiwan (Yoshimi, 2000). The comfort women, who survived unspeakable misfortunes, carry the burden of trauma with them throughout their lives. Some of them have bravely come out publicly to ask for an apology and compensation from the Japanese government, while many others have kept their experiences as comfort women a secret so as to live normal lives. These stories of comfort women are pages taken from a miserable history of women's engagement with larger social contexts. Whilst men's struggle on their battlefield was 'kill or to be killed', the battlefield for women was the control of their own bodies, which could hardly be determined by their own will, but rather by the government, the family, and the men.

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<sup>14</sup> Foot binding is a centuries old practice of applying painfully tight binding to the feet of young girls to prevent further growth. It became popular as a means of displaying status—women who did not need to work could afford to have their feet bound.

<sup>15</sup> Patriotic Women Association (愛國婦女會).

<sup>16</sup> The translation from the Chinese term, 慰安婦.

<sup>17</sup> Yoshiyaki Yoshimi (吉見義明), a professor of Japanese modern history at Chuo University in Tokyo, Japan, is a founding member of the Center for Research and Documentation on Japan's war responsibility. He is mostly noted for his work regarding the comfort women.

## ***Bound Feet***

Prior to Japanese rule, Presbyterian missionaries in Taiwan had started to persuade women to stop foot binding and begin their schooling. Although the initial purpose was to facilitate mission work, the establishment of girls' schools was a contribution to the situation of women in Taiwan because they offered chances to change the future for Taiwanese girls. In 1884, Tamsui Girls' School, the first-ever girl school in Taiwan, was established by Canadian Presbyterian missionary Dr George Leslie Mackay and his Taiwanese wife Madam Chang Chong-ming. In 1879, Reverend Hugh Ritchie, the first missionary from England's Presbyterian Church to live in Taiwan, proposed the construction of a girls' school in Taiwan and donated funding for its construction. In 1885, Xinlou Girls' School, the earliest female school in Taiwan's south, was officially opened (C. Yu, 2000). Their efforts in asserting the rights of women, whilst enlightening women in Taiwan, had a very limited effect during that time because the Han Chinese still held the belief that girls should not go outdoors. In any case, girls with bound feet could not walk too far from the home.

In a short time, the Japanese government completed the unfinished works initiated by missionaries. The Chinese foot-binding custom (for women), along with the Manchu's *queue*<sup>18</sup> (for men) and opium, were regarded three majorly undesirable traditions during Japanese rule. In 1915, the Japanese colonial government announced bans to the Taiwanese; men were prohibited to have the queue and women were prohibited from binding their feet. In order to assimilate and modernise people in Taiwan, the Japanese colonial government cooperated with people possessing higher social status or from higher classes. Meanwhile, many branches of the 'Natural Feet Society'<sup>19</sup> were established, one after another, in many places in Taiwan to encourage women to abandon the old custom. After years of promotion, having 'natural' feet had become a trend, and in addition to the Japanese government's strict ban, the centuries-long custom of foot-binding custom gradually disappeared in Taiwan (Miao, 2011).

## ***Japanese Education***

The Japanese government was very concerned about primary education in its colony; it was the first regime that introduced a modern education system to Taiwan. In 1896, the

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<sup>18</sup> The queue was a specific male hairstyle worn by the Manchus and later imposed on the Han Chinese during the Qing dynasty. The hairstyle consisted of the hair on the front of the head being shaved off above the temples and the rest of the hair braided into a long ponytail.

<sup>19</sup> In 1895, the Natural Feet Society was founded by a group of Western women in Shanghai, and condemned Chinese foot binding as a cruel and injurious practice.

second year into Japanese rule, primary schools were established in many places and girls' education was included for the first time in the formal educational system in Taiwan. At the end of Japanese rule, girls' attendance rates at primary school had reached 60 per cent (Taiwan Women, 2010). With the formalisation of female education, women started to take up various occupations and to noticeably participate in social activities, although the purpose of female education was still subject to Japanese colonial policies aimed at the cultivation of royal women for family life and the Empire of Japan.

From the moment Taiwan became a part of the Japanese Empire, Japanese was the official language in Taiwan. Consequently, Japanese literacy was considered an advantage for Taiwanese wanting to procure a better occupation or to elevate their social status. Chien-he, Yang (1921–2011)<sup>20</sup> was the first Taiwanese woman to work as a journalist in 1941 for the *Taiwan Daily News*, the biggest newspaper at that time:

Working as a journalist in a newspaper office run by Japanese was a challenge to me, but I wanted to prove that a Taiwanese who did not speak Japanese at home could also write good articles that were no lesser than what a Japanese does. (The First Female Journalist in Taiwan, 2000)

In a newspaper filled with Japanese viewpoints and masculine perspectives, Yang's writings, which had refreshed and energised the women's column of Literary Taiwan,<sup>21</sup> provided feminine *and* Taiwanese observations and descriptions of everyday life and cultural practices in Taiwan.

Mastering Japanese, however, was less advantageous after the conversion of political power from Japan to the KMT government, when Mandarin became the official language and Chinese the legitimate language for publication. Alongside Yang Chien-he, there was another remarkable woman whose writing gained in prominence due to her fluency in Japanese—Xiu-xi Chen,<sup>22</sup> who was the first female poet. She had begun to write poetry and Haiku in Japanese when she was fifteen and published a book of Japanese poetry called *A Little Room*.<sup>23</sup> Since Japanese was no longer the dominant language in Taiwan, she made up her mind to learn to read and write in Chinese at the age of 36. Chen said, "I would rather write one Chinese poem that can be read by the next generation than a thousand Japanese poems." (The First Female Poet, 2000). Her devout attitude and persistence in learning the language eventually helped

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<sup>20</sup> Yang, Chien-he (楊千鶴). Although she only worked as a journalist for ten months, Yang's daring energy and accomplishment should be stressed in the history of women's expression in Taiwan. She stopped writing because the official language changed from Japanese to Chinese.

<sup>21</sup> Literary Taiwan (文藝台灣) was a publication in the Taiwan Daily News.

<sup>22</sup> Xiu-xi Chen (陳秀喜).

<sup>23</sup> *A Little Room* was my translation from the original book title in Chinese, "斗室".

her to write beautiful poems in Chinese, and she became the director of Li Poetry Society<sup>24</sup> for twenty years from 1971 to 1991 (Dai, 2002).

Not many women were fortunate enough to have the ability to write in both Japanese and Chinese, as Chen did. When the Japanese government surrendered after WWII and went back to Japan, some comfort women who survived their misfortune encountered another dangerous predicament. Huang A-Man<sup>25</sup> recalled, “Several sisters and I were captured by aboriginal people and tied up there in their territory.” The aboriginal people thought these women were Japanese and were going to kill them with bamboo spears because they “did not speak the Taiwanese dialect well at that time, and spoke Japanese” (Wu, 2011).

During Japanese colonisation, many aspects of society, including the politics, economics, environment, and culture had made obvious progress in Taiwan. After fifty years of Japanese education, the Taiwanese had accepted the fact that Taiwan belonged to Japan. Therefore, when Taiwan was given to the KMT government, many Taiwanese felt a strong antipathy toward their authoritarian regime, and there was certain degree of nostalgia for the past among the older generation of Taiwanese people. This attitude, to a considerable extent, affected Taiwanese ideology in regards to national identity, ethnic consciousness, and even Taiwan’s independent movement. Former Taiwanese President Li Deng-Huei was born in 1923 and received completely a Japanese education before he was 22 years old.<sup>26</sup> He once gave a speech in Japan titled, “Japanese Education and Taiwan: My Experience and Reflection on the Whole Journey.” In the speech Li (2008) spoke of the positive influence of Japanese education, which partially explains the ambivalence in the Taiwanese attitude to Japanese colonisation:

Governing a colony by starting with education was a world first. It was also because the Japanese introduced the new education system into Taiwan, ... and then having absorbed the new knowledge and thoughts of the world, the Taiwanese therefore have the civil consciousness of modern times. ... Then, Taipei Imperial University was founded in 1928, so the Taiwanese had the opportunity to receive higher education. The so-called Taipei Imperial University, my alma mater, was the predecessor of the current National Taiwan University ... Before the birth of Taipei Imperial University, Taiwan had many medical schools, agricultural schools, vocational schools of commerce and industry, et cetera, which helped to rapidly increase the number of Taiwanese elites, and greatly accelerated social changes in Taiwan. Through the introduction of the modern

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<sup>24</sup> Li Poetry Society (笠詩社) was an organisation of modern poetry. It was established in June 1964, by a group of intellectuals who cared about Taiwan society.

<sup>25</sup> Huang A-Man (1921–2011) (黃阿滿) was the first victim that stood out publically in Taiwan to accuse the Japanese government of enforcing the violent policy of the comfort women. Till September 2011, there were only 10 former comfort women remaining. All of them were over 80 years old and the oldest was 94.

<sup>26</sup> Li Deng-hui (李登輝) . After WWII, he received the four-years university education in Taiwan and then four years of further study in the United States where he completed his PhD in Agricultural Economy at Cornell University.

concepts, the Taiwanese began to learn the how to be punctual and law-abiding, and gradually established the concepts of finance, currency, hygiene, and new business ideas. Accordingly, the new Taiwanese have begun to emerge.

### ***First Women's Organisation***

A well-known temple was the place, commonly, at which crowds would gather, so it was often a place where women could appear in an unrestricted space outside the house. Normally within a reasonable walking distance from their homes, a temple was often considered the acceptable public place for women to gather, not only for religious activities but also for personal meetings. Therefore, the first grassroots women's group organised by Taiwanese was at the Tien-Kung Temple, the very popular temple in Changhua.

Founded in 1925, the establishment of Changhua Women's Mutual Support Association<sup>27</sup> was facilitated by the ever-increasing atmosphere of social reform. After the Taiwanese Cultural Association<sup>28</sup> was founded in 1921, all kinds of social movements gradually arose. "The related movement of women's liberation was one of the three great movements of colonial liberation, linked with the national and class movements of liberation" (Yang, 1993). Encouraged by the success of the Chinese Revolution<sup>29</sup> and the rising awareness of self-determination after WWI, as well as the impact of national consciousness and liberalism from Japan in those years, since the 1920s local gentry and intellectuals gathered together in different places in Taiwan to promote a movement of cultural enlightenment, which was known as the Taiwan New Culture Movement (Wu, 2008). Representatives comprised two independent and local women's groups in Changhua and Chiayi, both in the middle of Taiwan. While Changhua Women's Mutual Support Association regularly held literacy workshops to expand women's knowledge and vision, Zhuluo Women's Assistance and Advancement Association<sup>30</sup> marks the initiation of systematisation of Taiwanese women's groups, because it was the first one with regulations for the association. In its first chapter of the regulations, it points out that the objective of the association was to "reform the family, pull down the bad customs, promote the education, cultivate the morality, and elevate women's status." (Yang, 1992). These two women's associations regularly held speeches to provide chances for women to speak publicly, and women in the association were encouraged to stand on the stage and express their opinions.

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<sup>27</sup> "Changhua Women's Mutual Support Association" (彰化婦女共勵會).

<sup>28</sup> Taiwanese Cultural Association (臺灣文化協會).

<sup>29</sup> The Chinese Revolution overthrew China's last imperial dynasty, the Qing dynasty, and established the Republic of China in 1911.

<sup>30</sup> "Zhuluo Women's Assistance and Advancement Association" (諸羅婦女協進會) was founded in 1926.

Although it was small step for an individual woman to take the stage, it marked a huge step forward for the liberation of women's mobility in Taiwan. Researchers analysed the editorial content of the *Taiwanese People's Newspaper*<sup>31</sup> and found that these women's organisations discussed quite a few women's issues, including freedom within marriage, educational equality, economic independence, suffrage, and other rights. Although the women's movements were not able to take much action at that time, their later influence should not be understated (Yang, 1993).

### ***Women's Mobility***

Released from the bound feet, women were eventually able to walk further and faster. Women started to go to school for primary education and some of them had opportunities to pursue higher education. The ability to read and write opened women's eyes, and with a broader worldview they had capacity to succeed in personal pursuits. Occupying and communicating in public space represented another milestone for the women's movement in Taiwan. By the end of Japanese rule, Taiwanese women seemed to have regained basic human rights, denied them by socially constructed norms around visibility, walking, writing and talking. And even with such advances, the problems that followed were no less difficult than before.

## ***1.2.2 Taiwan under Martial Law (1949–1987)***

### ***Women's Organisations at the Service of the Government***

During the martial law era, there were two official women's groups established by government: National Women's League of R.O.C.<sup>32</sup> and Kuomintang Women's Work Association.<sup>33</sup> The members of these two governmental associations were mainly elite women with political or financial power from China, and their communal leader was Madame Chiang Sung Mei-Ling, wife of Chiang Kai-shek. These two women's organisations worked mainly in the service of the government, actioning new policy, including the dissemination of propaganda. Aside from promoting the improvement of established/common practices in Taiwanese society, one of their major tasks was to provide support to troops and their family, such as sewing clothes for soldiers, assisting soldiers and their families with daily necessities, and holding activities to entertain the troops and boost morale.

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<sup>31</sup> Tai Wan Min Bao (臺灣民報), the Taiwanese People's Newspaper.

<sup>32</sup> National Women's League of R.O.C. (愛國婦女會).

<sup>33</sup> Kuomintang Women's Work Association (國民黨婦女工作會).

Before the establishment of these two governmental organisations, there was a women's grassroots organisation, the Taiwan Women's Association.<sup>34</sup> It was the first provincial women's organisation, run by a number of progressive women, and founded by Hsieh Er<sup>35</sup> in 1946. Taiwan Women's Association advocated many radical views regarding the liberation of women, such as women's participation in politics and abolishment of licensed prostitution. Although at times they were concerned about women's welfare, including domestic violence and prostitution, under official dominance did not possess the power of social movements to change the conservative traditions of the patriarchal system (C. Yu, 2000). Four years after the establishment of the Taiwan Women's Association, the Kuomintang Women's Work Association incorporated the Taiwan Women's Association owing to its huge membership and influence, in order to consolidate all the women's organisations in Taiwan and strengthen their political mobilisation. The Taiwan Women's Association thus became subordinate to the KMT government.

### ***Women and Employment***

The first women's publication was issued by the Taiwan Women's Association in 1946, and was regarded as one of the rare women's publications articulating women's concerns during the years of martial law. Wu (2001) noticed that the concerns of women's employment and women's financial independence had repeatedly appeared in the *Taiwan Woman Monthly*:

Women should fight themselves for proper ways, to build up women's independent personality... from a proper occupation to get reward/payment, to maintain a life with independent economy. (*Taiwan Woman Monthly*, Issue 87, p. 365)

A woman as both a housewife and a mother is very important to a family. If finance permits, she is not encouraged to have a job outside the home. (*Taiwan Woman Monthly*, Issue 87, p. 380)

Career and family are not an incompatible choice. When you realise how to arrange childcare, take good use of time, and eliminate the sense of guilt, you can still have family and career at the same time. (*Taiwan Woman Monthly*, Issue 260, p. 381)

After the KMT government took over Taiwan, the establishment of infrastructure and the development of the national economy were two key policy areas. Additionally, financial independence was regarded as a means of women's liberation from oppression and restriction. Many women entered the workforce, and the increasing population of female employees became the focus of public discussion. Yu (2011) pointed out that the *Taiwan Woman Monthly* tended to encourage the housewife to take on other 'house work' to increase the family income ( p. 86). For example, in the article, "How to promote the movement of a

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<sup>34</sup> Taiwan Women's Association (台灣省婦女會)

<sup>35</sup> Hsieh Er (謝娥), a female doctor and member of the National Party of China played important roles in a variety of political and cultural organisations.

living room as a factory”, housewives are encouraged to do some work at home so that they can take care of the family and improve the domestic economy at the same time (p. 127). However, the multiple roles had trapped women in a more complicated predicament. The *Taiwan Women Monthly* offered two opinions with regard to a woman’s choice between family and career. One was *for the housewife*; it claimed that when the family was the priority for a woman, she could also work from home by engaging sideline activities. The other was *for the professional woman*; it suggested that a woman should cultivate a sufficient profession for employment and then become a professional woman that takes up household and financial responsibility at the same time (C. Yu, 2011, p.86). These possible solutions for women and their careers seem confused because a woman was supposed to just choose between working from home or being a professional woman. In all scenarios family was always the primary concern for a woman, as it was regarded as a woman’s calling.

### ***Emergence of New Feminism***

In 1971, 27-year-old Lu Hsiu-lien gave a public speech titled, “Is it Time for the End of Male-centred Society?”,<sup>36</sup> in the Law School of the National Taiwan University, challenging patriarchal society and official women’s groups. The spirit of women’s rights at that time had no real expression until early 1970 when Lu returned from her studies in United States and spoke out on women’s issues, against inequality and injustice. She advocated a new feminism saying “to be a human first, and then to be a man or woman” and “holding a spatula in the left hand and a pen in the right” (Lu, 1974). This speech attracted unprecedented attention and stirred public debate. In 1974, she published *New Feminism* and again provoked larger discussion in Taiwanese society. The book outlines Lu’s basic arguments:

- (1) Make the most of ‘women’s ability’; do not scramble for ‘women’s rights’— to make the best possible use of a person.
- (2) Acknowledgement of women’s ‘role’ and ‘calling’—to be what you are.
- (3) Ask for equality not protection—to be a person, then a man or woman.
- (4) Draw a distinct line between western feminism and non-western feminism (Lu, 2011).

She further pointed out that,

... to be a person first actually implies that a woman should learn to be a man in order to fit into the norms of behaviour and standards of achievement established for a person with a male body so as to participate in activities in the public sphere of the patriarchal society.

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<sup>36</sup> It is my translation of the title. This speech was in Chinese, titled “男性為主的社會該結束了吧？”

Lu's new feminism, in contrast to radical feminism, does not advocate subverting the existing ideologies of gender or power. Her own particular feminist ideology could better gain popularity and recognition through advocating a mild revolution *within* the system.

Two events in the 1970s struck a social chord, and encouraged women's movements to fight for their rights to social resources. One was that the United Committee for the Entrance Exam of Universities was considering limiting the number of female students allowed in universities, since female students' performances were causing anxiety amongst men. The other was that a PhD student, Zhong Zhao-man,<sup>37</sup> studying in the United States, killed his wife out of rage because of her disloyalty. Public opinion leaned heavily toward sympathy and had pity for this excellent student, whose promising future was ruined by his unfaithful wife. The unfairness and discrimination of patriarchal society associated with the case had nonetheless sparked anger and discontent. Taken together, these two injustices motivated many women to voice their opposition to against the one-dimensional social paradigm. Social movements at this time were impeded by restrictions on freedom of speech and gathering during the practice of martial law.

Knowing how to take advantage of the media to circulate and communicate her opinions, Lu was active in promoting women's self-awareness. In 1976, she established Pioneer Publisher, considered the first publisher associated with women's movements in Asia. In addition, she frequently wrote articles for newspapers or magazines, gave speeches at all kinds of institutions, and held various oral training courses and marriage lectures. In an attempt to change the archetypes underpinning gender roles, she held thought-provoking activities such as a "Men's Cooking Competition" or a "Tea Time Outside the Kitchen" on every March 8, International Women's Day, and invited famous people to participate in these activities as a means to attract TV broadcasters (Ku, 2008).

With support from social elites across various fields, both Lu and her New Feminism rapidly gained in popularity in Taiwan. However, due to a combination of the bad reputation of Western feminist movements, as well as considerable opposition from many males and conservatives, Lu's New Feminism encountered a lot of criticism and fierce antagonism, including smear campaigns and pressure from the Kuomintang government. In the 1979 "Formosa Incident", Lu was arrested and sent to jail for five years in the name of treason. Though New Feminism consequently lost its voice and the women's movement

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<sup>37</sup> Zhong Zhao-man (鍾肇滿).

concomitantly experienced a major setback, Lu's pioneering actions had considered an idea of the so-called "first wave" of women's movement in Taiwan.

### *Awakening*<sup>38</sup>

In 1982, along with a group of women, Li Yuan-Chen established *Awakening* to carry on advocating for women's rights by keeping a low profile. *Awakening* was registered as a magazine because restrictions during the period of martial law did not allow the content of publications associated with sensitive and political issues. The unfortunate outcome of Lu Hsiu-lien's *New Feminism* was depressing for the women's movement. By using a less threatening publication, *Awakening* intentionally kept a distance from politics and political parties so as to maintain its pure and fresh image, while it secretly conveyed feminism and women's rights in various ways (M. Liu, 2006).

In a speech regarding the Taiwan experience of the women's movement, Yen-ling Ku (2008) emphasised that while Lu Hsiu-lien was regarded as the pioneer of the women's movement, *Awakening* was the first feminist group ever in Taiwan. Ku pointed out that Lu was a new woman, but not a feminist because Lu in her book, *New Feminism*, had many criticisms of the Western feminist movement and she did not agree with feminism. Thus, the beginning of feminism and the feminist discourse in Taiwan was seen to have actually come after *Awakening*.

On 10 January 1987, *Awakening*, in cooperation with the Rainbow Project, Taiwan Human Rights Association and Indigenous groups, started a "Protest Human Trafficking: Caring for Young Prostitutes" parade in Hua-Xi Street. This was the first time that the women's movement had taken a protest onto a public street. This movement was considered as an important milestone for the women's movement in Taiwan as this it successfully aroused a collective passion for women's rights. The success of this movement was connected to the association the problem of young prostitutes in Taiwan with the selling of children and human rights—more a matter of political correctness than feminism, so it could easily get a sympathetic response from the majority of Taiwanese people. After this parade/movement, women's organisations gained positive recognition from Taiwanese people, attained more productive interactions with mass media, and more people were able to hear different voices from a variety of women's organisations.

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<sup>38</sup> *Awakening*, or *Awakening Magazine*, which in Chinese is 婦女新知 (The Chinese Title means "Women's New Knowledge").

### 1.2.3 *After the Repeal of Martial Law (1987–present)*

After more than a decade of efforts, the contemporary women's movements in Taiwan accumulated sufficient power and energy to continuously challenge the social structures. With the prevalence of women's education and economic independence, women have not only increased the public awareness of women's concerns, but also built up confidence in practicing and fighting for associated rights. Since the 1990s, feminists in Taiwan have made claims for their participation in policy making. Many women's groups, which have long engaged in the promotion of women's awareness and the revolution of the system, gradually shifted their focus to politics and law, in the hope that women's rights and the situation of women can be literally elevated through politics, law and education.

On 15 July 1987, the Kuomintang government announced the abolishment of martial law, so for the first time people in Taiwan enjoyed freedom of assembly and association after more than 300 years of being denied this liberty. In November of the same year, the magazine publishing company of *Awakening* was instantly restructured and called the "Awakening Foundation", and started to promote women's movements on a grand scale. Many committees, and members of *Awakening Magazines* respectively, established various groups for women according to their personal interests and concerns soon after in 1988 and 1989: The Warm Life Association Taipei, that primarily cares about and serves divorced women, and The Garden of Hope Foundation, that aims to help disadvantaged girls and young women, and protect them from sexual abuse and family violence. The Modern Women's Foundation established the first "Sexual Violence Crisis Centre" to promote the recognition of issues related to women's safety. Conversely, the Taiwan Grassroots Women Workers' Centre advocates mainly for the rights of women in the workforce, and the major concerns of groups such as the Homemaker Union and Foundation focus on environmental issues and school children. There were more women's groups established successfully throughout the 90s and launching a variety of activities concerning women's rights and welfare, more than at any other time.

Generally, in the 90s women's groups continuously made efforts in the promotion of feminist awareness; meanwhile, some of these groups played important roles in supervising and pushing the government to modify or alter existing laws and regulations that constituted discrimination against women. Their concerns were mainly women's political participation and policy making, re-examination of the conventional marriage system, the autonomy of a woman's body, women's rights in workplaces, and the differences between women,

especially those who are not recognised by the mainstream, such as sex workers, Indigenous women, Philipino maids, and homosexuals.

With these attempts and efforts, Taiwanese people have gradually developed a common sense understanding of women's rights, and a feminist awareness was identifiable in the consciousness of ordinary women. The term "new good men" was coined in the 90s to draw men's attention to the notion of caring for women. The origin of this term was reflective of the idea fact in the past caring for women did not seem to be incorporated into understandings of what it meant to be a man. Now that women were becoming collectively more self-aware reassessing relations between men and women was seemingly unavoidable. This term was popularly used by many people including men and women to praise a man who is responsible with respect to his family and demonstrates that he cares about women. The popularity of the term is evidenced by its subsequent inclusion in the Chinese dictionary of the Ministry of Education, Taiwan. According to the definition, a new good man is one:

with a sense of humour, who can make people feel comfortable, reliable, and has a sincere, serious, attitude to life, insisting on morality and rationality, and having moral integrity and is promising to respect their life, and care for women.<sup>39</sup>

The term "new good men" originally emerged from its usage in popular, not political, expression, and the dictionary also included the term "new good women" to be a companion to the "new good men". According to the dictionary, a new good woman is one "treating the family as the focus of her life, loving her husband, taking care of the children, and trying hard to maintain a happy and harmonious married life". This definition prompted a storm of protests from various women's rights groups. Many have condemned this definition as a regression of women's rights after so many years of effort in promoting gender equality and feminist awareness, which suggests that continuous effort is required to facilitate and maintain the social awareness of women's rights. At the same time, I suggest that a 'genuine' feminist movement should come from within women's own self-awareness, the result of ongoing reflection upon herself in developing knowledge of her own character, feelings, motives, and desires. I argue that through the process of writing about herself, a woman gains greater self-awareness. In this regard, I extend the survey of women's movements and collective self-awareness into an exploration of personal self-awareness through a discussion of women's narrative in autobiographical writings.

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<sup>39</sup> This definition is from the online version of Chinese Dictionary compiled by Ministry of Education, available at <http://dict.revised.moe.edu.tw/>

### 1.3 Women's Narrative in Autobiographical Writings

An observation of contemporary female biography highlights significant events in the development of social change and feminist consciousness. During the time under martial law, from 1950, the Kuomintang's authoritarian rule began with the suspension of the constitution, which included a ban on the free press. After the ban was lifted in 1987, various kinds of biography appeared as evidence of a particular publishing trend. Furthermore, scholars started to pay attention to the construction of women's history via oral biographies that attempt to recover the lost history of women who did not have the chance to write out their stories due to illiteracy or social restraints. Biographical writing thus became an outlet for trauma, and both the quantity and quality of women's biographies are closely related to social development. Although women cannot ignore the realities of traditional social restraints and oppressions, many women's biographies prove that they were at least reflecting on their own situations, and managing to find some kind of balance in their lives and experiences.

Feminist scholarship and theorisation of autobiography is a relatively recent undertaking, dating from the mid-1980s. In 1980, Estelle Jelinek, in her introduction to *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, emphasised the difference between women's autobiography and that of men's. The female autobiographer has always felt herself to be "different from, other than, or outside the male world, the boundary line between narrative construction and memory, representation and reality, fact and fiction has never been clearly delineated" (Jelinek, 1986, p. 187). Jelinek argued that the worth of autobiographical study lies in the study of women's life, and that a complete self can be collected and reshaped from scattered fragments of memories and lived experiences, in the same way a novelist creates her protagonist. Through the narrative of a woman's autobiography, "the value of a woman's life can thereby be recognised and legitimised" (Chu, 2000, p. para. 8).

#### 1.3.1 *Semi-Autobiographical Novel—A Sky of One's Own (1980)*

The reality or 'truth' of an autobiography has been the primary concern of critics of autobiography. Some critics such as James Olney (1972) shift the focus to self-presentation. Today autobiography is perceived as "a process, through 'it' the author constructs one (or several) identity for her self" (Chu, 2000, p. para. 3). Because the subject of an autobiography is revealed through the author's self-presentation, many contemporary critics have pointed out that such a "self" is actually fictitious. Chu (2000, para. 27) compares autobiographical writing to confession, in which both presuppose a listener, like God or a judge in a court. As a result, when an autobiography is written, the listener is replaced by its readers, and

autobiographical writing becomes the so-called talking cure in psychoanalysis. Here I use a semi-autobiographical novel, *A Sky of One's Own*, to examine how the female author constructs a fictional self through storytelling and how she performs her identity as a married woman both in her novel and real life.

*A Sky of One's Own* is a prizewinning work of *United Daily News* in 1980. As a significant newspaper in Taiwan, *United Daily News* is generally acknowledged as having played a crucial role in the renaissance of Taiwanese female fiction-writing. In this sense, most female writers rose from its literary awards in the 80's and 90's, and Yuan Qiong-qiong (1980), the author of *A Sky of One's Own*, can be viewed as one of the representative writers whose works reflect women's predicaments and the aspirations of women in her time. This story constructs the image of a female protagonist fleeing from her hardened family and finding a space of her own. That women must have their own space is not a new topic. Virginia Woolf's (1882–1941) *A Room of One's Own* (1929) is a pioneering feminist novel and concept from the early 20th century. This room, as Woolf has suggested, not only refers to a space for creative writing, but also focuses attention on women's economic independence. Similarly, *A Sky of One's Own*, either in its title or through its content, is suffused with issues that correspond to Virginia Woolf's concept of the room.

The story begins with Liang-san's extramarital affair with a call girl who becomes pregnant. Because Liang-san controls everything in the marriage, including financial and physical control over his wife, he does not bother with the issue of divorce. His plan is to let his wife, Jin-min, temporarily move out of the current house to another rental place, so that the pregnant call girl can move in to live with him and settle in the house prior to her baby comes into the world. It is an invasion of space in her marriage and her life. In 7 years of marriage, Jin-min has never had a job or children, she has never been a mother. If she had a child, meeting the requirement for a woman according to conventional standards, she could have a say in her marriage for the sake of any children. In only being Liang-san's wife, she has no professional experience to help her gain employment. If she is 'just' a wife to Liang-san, how is she to achieve independence and awaken her own sense of self?

The turning point in Jin-min's awakening processes comes when she goes to the restroom to wash her face as she has burst into tears after hearing Liang-san wants her to move out of their house. After sorting her appearance, Jin-min raises her head and looks at herself in the mirror. To her surprise, the reflection of her face helps her realise that she is not as in love with Liang-san as she thought. This is the first internal change suggesting Jin-min's

developing self-awareness. With this in mind, she exits the restroom and walks back to Liang-san. "I don't want a separation. Let's get divorced." (Yuan, 1980, p. 139) She found the strength to leave the marriage.

Through the writing Yuan Qiong-qiong creatively depicts both a woman's depression and her expectations. At the end of her novel, she portrays a promising picture of Jin-min: "Now she is different. She is an independent and confident woman." Walking out of a marriage, Jin-min starts a life that is totally different from what she had before; she finds the freedom of a sky of her own. When she looks at the woman beside her ex-husband, she seems to see herself in the past. "It is just like that woman has been substituted for Jin-min to live with Liang-san." (Yuan, 1980, p. 151) Jin-min is aware of the changes in herself and becomes her own master. From a feminist perspective, it is an exciting self-awareness, yet this process of awakening is still subject to cultural and social constraints. Living within a restrictive context for so long, it is hard for a woman to identify what she really wants. The inciting incident that propels Jin-min toward becoming an independent woman is her husband's extramarital affair. It is this event that has intervenes in Jin-min's unexceptional life, and forces her to reflect upon her own status within the marriage. Jin-min has become an independent woman; however, but it is the ultimate desire of a successful woman that comes into question. Four years later, Jin-min meets another man, and "she decides that she wants him" (p. 147). In the end, Jin-min ironically "decides" to be in an extramarital affair with another man.

Many critics have discussed the question: Does this woman portrayed by Yuan Qiong-qiong have a sky of her own anyway?:

Originally Jin-min was a weak woman who has no personal character, and after a failed marriage she became a strong woman. Her change is ludicrous and pathetic. Did she really become a strong woman? I am afraid she is not. It was the environment that forced her to be strong; she could not help but become the way she was. In the end, her personal character is still invisible. She is still a woman of no character. She is not happy. She seems to have found her space in a relationship, but she is only an affair outside marriage ... (Wang, 1990, p. 168)

Zhan Hongzhi (1981, p. 25) also pointed out that if Jin-min could have developed further, this novel would not only be a prizewinning work, but a piece of feminist literature. On the contrary, Jin-min's "sky of one's own becomes an irony". The paradox is that when Jin-min has finally achieved "the fulfilment of her own desire", she becomes the third person in another marriage. Therefore, Hao Yu-Xiang (2000, p. 59) argued that "she is struggling between 'a breakthrough of fate' and 'a destiny of women' ". In this sense, it is still a question of whether she has truly become an autonomous woman, or actually she is ignorant of the fact

that she is still acting within the logic of patriarchy. In this regard, *A Sky of One's Own* seems to be:

... conceding the concept of 'progressive' and 'liberal' Western capitalist mode of extramarital relationship, and unconsciously falls into the 'concept of femininity' defined by men. (Chang, 2001, p. 58)

After her own divorce, in order to make a living Yuan wrote screenplays instead of novels. Since 2007, 27 years after *A Sky of One's Own*, she began publishing an epistolary novel, *Lonely Love Letters*, on the Internet after she finished a long relationship. In these "letters", Yuan Qiong-qiong disclosed details of this 20-year relationship with a man, who betrayed her for an extramarital affair. In her narratives of these four books, Yuan herself became the protagonist of an online version of *A Sky of One's Own*, as if in a continuation of the plot in the novel. Yuan took steps to reveal her relationship, and to have a "public trial" online, "to cut off her emotional trauma by way of the wider and faster media effect on the Internet" (W. Su, 2010, p. 159). In this way, the destiny of the female character in the narrative and that of the author are consequently connected. In an interview, Yuan Qiong-qiong conveyed her reflections that "people change. Only through change can one be grown up" (p. 159). She explained that the divorce offered her character Jin-min an opportunity to grow up. In another interview, Yuan recalled that in the beginning she only intended to write about the burnout in the marriage. She told feminist researcher Jian Ying-ying that she had a positive attitude toward the divorce, saying "it is of great help to my self-awareness" (Jian, 1990).

### **1.3.2 Oral History of Taiwanese Women—Grandma's Stories (1995)**

A woman's diary "is something like a family history, a souvenir meant to be shared like a Bible, handed down through generations, to be viewed not as an individual's story but as the history of a family's growth" (Schlissel, 1982, p.10). In her book, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, Lillian Schlissel (1982) studies the nineteenth-century diary and argues that whilst the men of the frontier have become a central part of American's migration history, the 'Western experiences' of these American women provide a more 'realistic' picture of what life was like on the frontier. As women were normally constrained by the domestic sphere and had more contact with illness and death, Schlissel suggested that western migration was likely "anti-mythic" for women, while it was heroic for men. In Taiwan, feminist scholar Jian Ying-ying (1999) has argued, "narratives or discourses based on women's subjective memory or history has been generally depressed or neglected, which become a history 'locked in the kitchen' " (Jian, 1990, p. 410). In 1994, Jiang Wen-yu took on the chairman of Taipei Association for the Promotion of Women's Rights. During her term,

Jiang successively edited and published a series of books, including *Grandma's Stories*, *Disappearing Taiwanese Grandmas*, and *Mom's Stories*. It was the first time in Taiwan that women's life history was systematically written and published. In *Grandma's Stories*, published in 1995, most stories in the book were selected from solicited articles. In doing so, the concept of constructing an oral history with grandma's stories was first introduced to Taiwanese society, which is the most significant part of this series of publications.

Everyone writes their own history with their lives; however, only a few people's version of history can be seen while most people's stories are gradually forgotten with time. In 1997, Shen Xiu-hua collected stories told by women whose husbands were killed in the 228 Massacre<sup>40</sup> and published a book called, *Women's 228*. In these women's narratives, Shen (1997) lets women speak for themselves as victims of political persecution, and reveals the absurdity of politics from women's point of view. In the same year, Choutsaisi Laiwo, an aboriginal grandmother of the Atayal tribe published her life story, *Profound Feelings, Deep Mountains*. In her life, Choutsaisi had three names (an Atayal name, a Japanese name, and a Chinese name), three husbands (an Atayal, a Japanese soldier, and a Chinese soldier), had three children by different husbands, and had learned to speak four languages (Atayal, Japanese, Chinese, Taiwanese). Her life history can be "viewed as an aspect and an epitome of historical experience and identity politics Taiwanese aborigines are going through" (Yang, 2009, p. 147). Choutsaisi rarely spoke of national identity and politics so political events related to her Japanese husband such as the 228 incident were absent in her narratives. Yang (2010) explained that this absence appositely displays the collective memory of most ordinary women and also "manifests the particular interwoven picture" of women's life story and historical events.

In consideration of the depreciation of women's experience and their voices, Hsiao Jau-jiun, the former chairwoman of Taiwan Gender Equity Education Association, encouraged her students in her course to interview their mothers or grandmothers and conduct in-depth studies in honour of these women from their own everyday worlds. Her intention was that students would acquire deeper understandings of women's lives, and thus "open their eyes to see through the structural oppression of women in the patriarchal society and to think through how they can transform such new understandings for social justice" (Hsiao, 2007, p. 202). In her paper, " 'What's So Great About Writing Your Mother's Life Stories': An Action

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<sup>40</sup> The 228 Massacre, also called the 228 Incident, was an anti-government uprising that began on February 27, 1947 which was suppressed by the KMT-led government and resulted in the massacre of numerous people in Taiwan on February 28, 1947.

Research on Knowledge Production About Women”, she presented a candid account of the obstacles encountered in the process of teaching students to produce knowledge about women. The first obstacle was from one student’s observation about writing women’s stories, saying “I respect my mother very much, but she is so ordinary and seems to not to have made any special contributions to the society” (p. 210). Hsiao stated:

This male student challenged me: “Why does it have to be a woman’s story? I want to write about my father.” ... then I asked him to think: What makes people think that there is not a woman worth writing? ... Are we taking everything for granted so that we are ignorant of these women’s contribution to us and the society? ... Or, we have been accustomed to insulate women from greatness? (2007, pp. 209–210)

In addition to student’s resistance, Hsiao observed two other obstacles in the process. One came from interviewees’ husbands or other men. Hsiao found, “They don’t think there is any importance to this investigation, or question that a woman’s life experience deserves to be viewed as knowledge” (p. 211). The other obstacle was the resistance from female interviewees: “What’s so important about my story? Go interview your father. His story is much more wonderful.” (p. 213). Many ordinary women felt too ashamed to talk about their history because they thought they had nothing to say about their life experience and that it was not worth writing about. Some women did not comprehend this focus on the significance of their existence in the world. Hsiao’s report on this “knowledge production of women” shows the actions taken to overcome these obstacles and facilitate the transformation of both interviewers and interviewees. Hsiao conveyed a basic concept—history can also be viewed through a personal story, and women’s stories are of the same importance as men’s. They not only deserve to be told and recorded but also to be valued and studied continuously, given that they have largely been silenced for centuries.

### ***1.3.3 Confession as Anti-attack—Confession of Romance (2002)***

An important point of origin for the construction of Western autobiography is the confession. Zhu (2000) in her discussion of the criticism of women’s autobiography suggested:

...no matter in the face of the creator of the universe or general audience, a confessor must resolve one problem first, ‘What is the truth?’ And this problem is closely related to autobiographical narrator’s gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. If one wants to be regarded as an authority of “truth” making, she must first make herself become the subject of a confession in order to have a position in this cultural production. (2000, para. 22)

In this sense, autobiography is a form in which the self is authorised by its writer. Although the autobiography itself may not initially be a form of self-empowerment, from a feminist point of view, autobiographical writing should be regarded as an empowering act for women.

The act of autobiography writing therefore “involves both creativity and interpretation, which is not to tell the ‘truth’ ” (Chu, 2000, para. 3). Today, many writers are no longer limited to writing one particular form of autobiography. Autobiographical authors often freely adopt any form or genre to write about themselves.

Chu Mei-feng is well-known for her active participation in politics and media since her time as a journalist in 1992. Because she was blunt and direct in speech, and ‘sweet’ looking, she earned the epithet of “hot chilli fen”. Chu was elected as a councillor in Taipei City with the highest vote in 1994 when she was 28 years old, and in 1998 she took up the position of head of Cultural Affairs Bureau of Hsinchu City.

In 2001 Chu had an affair with a married man and was set up by a close friend, Kuo Yuling, who put cameras in her office and her house, and recorded a candid disc in which Chu was having sex with the man. On 17 December 2001, Chu’s sex scandal was the cover story of the magazine *Exclusive Report*, which came with a complementary candid disc, a 40-minute long video record of the sexual encounter. As a result, this shocking news and the disc were circulated across Taiwan within a very short time. People on this small island became suspicious and cautious of potential hidden cameras around them. At the same time numerous people watched the video out of curiosity, whilst Kuo was sentenced to four years and eight months in jail, and the publisher of *Exclusive Report* was sentenced to two years in jail. However, the victim, the heroine of the candid disc, was sentenced to social death with the voyeurism and public criticism her case attracted. Chu was a 35-year-old single woman at that time and she did not realise she was seeing a married man. Most of the criticism and negativity was levelled against Chu instead of the lying man.

Two months after this event, out of desperation Chu decided to engage with the public. She wrote the book, *Confession of Romance*, published in February 2002 in which she comprehensively gives details all of her romantic experiences including relationships with six former boyfriends and previous love affairs with eight men. In the beginning of this book, she wrote:

If you have read my diary  
If you have browsed my body  
Now  
I only pray that  
You use a trace of compassion  
To try to read my mind.

With this “confession”, Chu hoped to clarify causes and effects through narratives of her romances and reflections upon these experiences. In this way, she created another battlefield through her ‘confession’, and regained her subject position in the interpretation of her self through a discursive production of identity. In her book, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-representation*, Leigh Gilmore (1994) coined the term “autogynographics”. Her ultimate concern was “the constrained real” and the “instability of identity” in women’s autobiographical writing. Gilmore considered women’s autobiography as discursive fact, which provides a field for all sorts of power discourses, such as class, race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. It is obvious that “women are at a disadvantaged position in this process of cultural production of autobiography” (Zhu, 2000, para. 3). It is inevitable that when readers “consume” the autobiography, the identity and ‘truth’ constructed by the author will encounter various interruptions, including publishers’ or editors’ opinions, criticism from the public, moral depreciation, or confrontation with the dominant/male discourses. However, Chu’s decision to write a “confession” echoes Helene Cixous (1982, p. 347) argument in her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa”:

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies ... Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement.

Cixous proposed women express their female experience via writing. With writing practices, women could have the chance to transgress the limit imposed by the patriarchal system, so as to perform/display the diversity and possibilities of being women.

### ***1.3.4 Women’s Diary as Alternative Room, History, and Confession***

The diary, as one form of autobiographical writing, is similar to autobiography in its self-narrative form, even as it is characterised by its private nature. Diaries of ordinary women are being studied because they make the thoughts of women apparent, which in the in turn broaden and enrich mainstream histories. Women’s diaries tell the researcher much about women, including how a woman leaves a record, tells a story and makes sense of her life. Diary research has been recognised by scholars as more than merely getting information from a writer’s life, or taking a diarist’s words as historical accounts. As women’s diaries have gradually become recognised by academics, the value and significance of a diary has expanded from possessing first-hand materials of history to being an important and priceless resource for learning about women. Diaries are designed to capture the “little experiences of everyday life that fill most of our working time and occupy the vast majority of our conscious attention” (Wheeler & Reis, 1991, p. 340). What we should investigate is not only what can

be learned from the text of the diary, but also what can be learned from the diarist's work of recounting her life on a continuous/daily basis. For researchers, women's diaries are valuable because they can reveal how women think of themselves, of others, and of the world, as well as manifest the various ways women adapt to survive. For women, their lives can be preserved in diaries both for themselves and potential readers, so that their stories and voices will be heard and these voices together will reveal a hidden history of women's lives. In all, I suggest a way of looking at women's diaries as an alternative form of room, history, and confession; within this space women are able to autonomously voice themselves to claim their subjectivity, and create their histories and identities, by virtue of confession as both a tool and the power for self-defence and self-justification.

## Chapter 2

# Diary Writing as Feminist Practice

For Woolf, as for us, the diary form is enigmatic, enigmatic because the connections it fosters are mysterious, not the conscious molding of art or of criticism, the shutting-out of possibilities in the effort to discern the easily recognizable patterns of meaning. The diary can by its very nature encompass anything; and in its ability to bring together so many diverse and seemingly disparate objects, it illuminates these and our vision of them. (Huff, 1989, p. 7)

The diary has been long considered a private space for its author, where a diarist can let out personal feelings and opinions freely. However, this emphasis on the privacy of the diary is not necessarily its original feature. Many studies on diaries have demonstrated that diary writing served a similar function of personal record for varied uses, and that the content of a diary was not usually intended to be private and secretive. While some diaries that record personal feelings and reflection were written to be secret, not to be read by anyone else, other diaries may have been written with the knowledge that one day they would be read by others. Some diaries were even intentionally written for publication. Some scholars considered that a diary was originally considered to be a book for its use in keeping a personal record of daily events, experiences, observation, appointments, or as the personal, economical, emotional and spiritual account of its author (Delafield, 2009; Paperno, 2004). There is no general agreement on the definition of a diary since it has been put to different uses owing to its capacity as a form of writing to include diverse materials and functions. In this chapter, I will examine the history of the diary as a form of writing and look at scholars' increasing interests in studying women's diaries. Being a private account and a public document at the same time, some diary writings challenge the dichotomy of public and private. Thus, this chapter investigates the nature of diary writing with regard with content, function, and diarists' intentions to understand the genealogy of diaries. As this chapter focuses on women's diaries intentionally written to be read, the intended audience is an indispensable concern for the author/editor of diaries. This analysis will focus on examples of four posthumously published diaries to discuss how the editing process determines what a diary is. To understand how women's diaries can be read in multiple contexts, I then explore how diary researchers consider diaries as 'genre' and how the practice of diary writing is related to feminist practice. Finally, I use the *nūshu* writing of Jiangyong, China to exemplify how women's self-referential writing

reflects women's mutual experiences and life stories, and in the meantime becomes the most comforting means to express themselves. To conclude, I use four characteristics of *nūshu* writing to discuss the contemporary form of diary writing on the Internet.

## 2.1 Genealogy of Diaries as a Public Document

The practice of diary writing began to flourish in the late Renaissance when humanism began to pay attention to the importance of the individual. Since then, diaries have been used by historians not only for the picture of the daily life of their writers, but also for its immense importance for the recording of social and political history. As such, the diary can significantly complement the official and public record, by providing a personal point of view on historical events. For instance, the diary of Samuel Pepys, the most notable diary of the English language, gives a detailed account of the Coronation of Charles II in 1661, the Great Plague in 1665 and the Great Fire of London in 1666 (A Real Companion and Friend, 2002). In addition to a growing awareness stimulated by the individualism in the European societies from the Renaissance period, another reason for the growth of diary writing is related to a gradual increase in literacy among the population (McKay, 2001). The appearance and spread of diaries in the 17th century had encouraged people to keep a personal account of one's life. In 1656 John Beadle, an Essex minister, wrote about the variety of types of diaries written in the 17th century:

Tradesmen keep their shop books. Merchants their account books. Lawyers have their books of pre[c]edents. Physicians have their experiments. Some wary husbands have kept a diary of daily disbursements. Travellers a journal of all that they have seen and hath befallen them in their way. A Christian that would be more exact hath more need and may reap much more good by such a journal as this. (Knight 178)

As this passage suggests, a diary was a common form of writing during the 17th century that covered a variety of different functions, and most of them functioned as reminders for their users. While the reason for Christians to keep a diary in the seventeenth century might be observing providence and mediating regularly on personal failings, the content in these diaries could be regarded as a type of written confession that was, though supposed to be personal, still not to be thoroughly concealed from others.

*The diary of Samuel Pepys* (1970) is one of the most important diaries in history that demonstrates the paradox of diary keeping—Pepys's initial intention was to keep his diary private but the way he compiled and preserved his diaries showed his desire to be read by others. In the form of a diary, Pepys chronicled the events happening in his life and work, including the eyewitness accounts of historical events, the personal revelations, and the

smallest details such as the placement of his bathroom at home (Pepys, 1970). Spanning from January 1660 to May 1669, his diary, first published in the nineteenth century, is recognised by historians and archivists as one of the most important primary sources of historical research for the English Restoration period (Keyte & Brown, n.d.).<sup>41</sup> It is generally believed that Pepys's diary was written as a purely personal record and not for publication. He once expressed regret in his diary, saying it was "not being necessary, nor maybe convenient, to have it known", for having mentioned his diary to Sir William Coventry, who he considered "the only man I ever told it to". However, if Samuel Pepys thought it was not necessary to have his diary known or read by others, why did he preserve the bound manuscripts of his diaries and catalogue them in his personal library with all of his other books? A reasonable answer may be that he found himself unusual or remarkable, so he was "likely to have suspected that eventually someone would find them interesting" (Keyte & Brown, n.d.). It is difficult to imagine a woman's diary being preserved in the same manner as Pepys's before the 19th century. "Since women were not for the most part climbing mountains or running for office, no one had considered their personal diaries particularly interesting" (Franklin, 1986, p. xiv).

In the 18th century, diaries and journals were often travel oriented, presented as a pure description of nature or as evidence of tours and expeditions (Hogan, 1991; Delafield, 2009). Diarists' accounts of their travels were expected to be shared with those who remained at home. Many 18th and 19th century diaries, especially those kept by men in particular, were semi-public documents intended to be read by an audience. For women who did not have a chance to travel in the same way that many men did, their diaries were normally written as family documents for the use of family members. Catherine Delafield (2009) identified four general traditions of diary writing that emerged by the early 19th century: the accounts of a household or business, the spiritual improvement or book of reflections, the family record or chronicle, and the travel diary. She concluded, in the nineteenth century, diaries were being kept "as economic records and domestic memoirs, or as both spiritual and secular autobiography" (Delafield, 2009, p. 9). As records and memoirs, diaries were intentionally written in consideration of a potential audience. As an autobiography, regardless of its original intention for spiritual reflection or secular revelation, it is still meant to be read, if not by any descendants, at least by the diarist's further self.

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<sup>41</sup> On 1 January 2003, Pepys's diaries were revived on the site *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, publishing one entry a day on the Internet until May 2012. In this way, readers could discuss events in each entry each day as if the diary entry was just written and posted daily by the diarist, Pepys. Transcending the limit of time and space, Pepys's diaries finds their readers/audience on the Internet 334 years after they were written.

Before the 19th century, there were few published women's diaries. If any, they were often diaries written by the wife or sister of a famous man. For instance, Mary Shelley's journals were kept for and about her famous husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley; Dorothy Wordsworth's journals record more about her brother William Wordsworth's activities and feelings than her own (Gannett, 1992, p. 132). As Harriet Blodgett (1988) pointed out, "Mary Shelley's diaries were considered valuable only because they shed light on her husband" (pp. 1–2). Penelope Franklin in *Private Pages: Diaries of American Women 1830s-1970* recalled her search for women's diaries:

What I found amazed me. The vast majority of published journals were those of men. The thousands of unpublished women's diaries were in archives across the country—thousands more, I realized, were in attics like mine. I noticed that the men's diaries published were often tales of exploration, war, politics, or adventure; or were those of famous literary or historical figures. (Franklin, 1986, xiv)

Why did most American women's diaries, according to Franklin's research, end up in attics while many male's diaries were published? It is indubitable that women have been less literate than men due to their lack of literary education before the twentieth century. Besides, there might not be many women who considered their personal lives particularly interesting to be written or recorded in diaries. Lacking the elements required for classification as "socially recognized achievements", women's diaries were customarily considered petty records of everyday life that might not be considered interesting or informative, and have little possibility of publication.

In her article, "I Wrote for Myself and Strangers: Private Diaries as Public Documents", Lynn Z. Bloom (1996) inspected American women's diaries spanning from the 1850s to 1950s, and makes a strong case for the difference between truly private diaries and those intended for an audience. She argued that truly private diaries are "those bare-bones works written primarily to keep records of receipts and expenditures, the weather, visits to and from neighbors, or public occurrences of both the institutional and the sensational sort", while "private diaries as public documents" are written with potential readers in mind, and their diary entries tend to be more episodic, with narrative forms of fiction (1996, p. 25). Many seemingly private diaries, according to Bloom, often have features that reveal writers' awareness of potential readers, who may be a descendent, their future selves, or some unknown someone in the future. Rebecca Hogan explained the reasons for calling attention to the potential readers of diaries:

If we consider the diary from the point of view of the writer, we can see its ability to entertain multiple purposes and intentions, often contradictory. If we think about the diary in terms of the

reader, we can see that it has a wide range of audiences on a continuum from a confidante for the private self to the wider audience of a published diary (Hogan, 1991, p. 97).

Regardless of whom the diarist's potential readers would be, once a diary is published as a book, it has literally become a public document for readers unforeseen by its author. Accordingly, the question, "who is the diarist's potential audience", has evolved into another question—"who is the diary's intended audience?" And the intended audience becomes a central concern for the editors of diaries. Accordingly, in the next paragraphs, I use four posthumously published diaries as examples to discuss the role of the editor of a diary.

## 2.2 The Publication of Diaries

Virginia Woolf kept a diary for 26 years from 1915 until four days before her death in 1941. She kept writing in her diary as "a method of practicing or trying out the art of writing" (Woolf, 1953, pp. ii). More than a means of self-exploration, she viewed the diary as an essential tool for honing a writing style. The diary is also an autobiographical tool for Virginia Woolf as she often wrote about how she intended to use materials in them for the memoirs she meant to write. Unfortunately Woolf's intention to publish an autobiography was curtailed by her death. For this reason, Woolf is regarded as an autobiographer who never published an autobiography. Podnieks believed that Virginia Woolf must have thought of her diary as a book, for by the time she began her own journal, the diary in its published form had been "elevated to literary status, a fact of which she was well aware" (Podnieks, 2000, p. 108). Regardless of her intention, Woolf's diaries ended up being edited and published not by herself. First published in 1953, *A Writer's Diary* is a collection of extracts from 26 volumes of Virginia Woolf's diaries, selected by her husband Leonard Woolf. In the Preface, Leonard Woolf expressed his reservations about the edited diary and his role as its editor:

It is, I think, nearly always a mistake to publish extracts from diaries or letters, particularly if the omissions have to be made in order to protect the feelings or reputations of the living. The omissions almost always distort or conceal the true character of the diarist or letter-writer and produce spiritually what an Academy picture does materially, smoothing out the wrinkles, warts, frowns, and asperities. (Woolf, 2003, p. vii)

Leonard Woolf realised it was too personal and controversial to be published during the lifetime of many people referred to in it, so he withheld the bulk of the diary and published *A Writer's Diary* in 1953. The title of this book explicitly signifies that it is a writer's diary, which keeps everything referring to Virginia Woolf's literary works. With the publication, Woolf re-established Virginia Woolf's status as a particular and noteworthy writer. Twenty four years after *A Writer's Diary* was published, the complete diaries of Virginia Woolf were edited by Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie into five volumes and successively

published between 1977 and 1981. Since then, scholars have had opportunity to inspect Woolf's diaries in a less censored and less abridged form.

Using the case of Virginia Woolf's diaries in her article, "Whose diary is it, anyway? Issue of Agency, Authority, Ownership", Susan Bunker (2002) asks several questions about the published editions of the previously unpublished diary: "Does it then become the historical society's diary?", "And once an edition of a diary has been printed, does it become the publisher's diary?", "Or, once it is accessible in edited, printed form, does it become the reading public's diary?" (p. 12). Bunkers argued that any diary that has been edited for publication carries "the unmistakable marks of the editors", no matter if the editor is a family member, an academic editor, a mass market publisher (p. 15). In that, a diarist as her own publication's editors seems to bear less 'mark' than any other editors.

In cases where a diarist is aware of its future publication and her intended readers apparently become the reading public, does an edited diary tell the same story as it was originally told and written by its author/diarist? The publication history of the diaries of Anne Frank and Mary Chesnut stand as two prominent cases concerning the editors and editions of a manuscript diary. *The Diary of a Young Girl* is one of the most famous and widely translated diaries and one of the major works of Holocaust literature. This diary was written by Anne Frank while she was in hiding during the German occupation of Amsterdam from 1942 to 1944. Anne Frank's diary is important to the world, not only because it tells stories from someone who lived that history, but for the reason that Anne Frank as an ordinary girl openly disclosed her feelings and dreams in her diary. It gave the world insight into the Frank family's predicament under Nazi terror, and showed the unbearable lives of those living in fear of the fascist regime. Mary Chesnut's diary, considered one of the best available primary sources about the American Civil War, should also be viewed with the same respect. Daughter of one senator from South Carolina and wife of another, she was in an ideal position to observe and record the Confederate government and the society she lived in. On top of its intrinsic value as a source of information about the wartime South, the worth of Mary Chesnut's diaries is also in the vivid narrative of women's life during the 1860s, which at the same time mirrors her personality.

These two diarists realised that what they were experiencing was historic and were aware of the historical importance of what they witnessed. Although their diaries were both published posthumously, Anne Frank and Mary Chesnut had actually edited their own diaries for future publication. Anne Frank wrote several times that she would never allow anyone to

read her diary; however, after she heard a speech on the radio and was inspired to have her diary published after war, Anne started to re-draft her diary with future readers in mind. Unfortunately she did not have time to rewrite the entire diary before her arrest on August 4 1944. The first transcription of Anne Frank's diary was made by her father Otto Frank, who later submitted the diary to the publisher in Amsterdam so *The Diary of a Young Girl – The Definitive Edition* (in Dutch) was published in 1947. In this edition, entries or descriptions regarding Anne's openness about her emerging sexuality were deleted out of concern for conservative society. The English edition of Anne's diary by Barbara Mooyaart-Doubleday was published in 1952, and in this edition the previously deleted passages were included. In 1989 *The Diary of Anne Frank: The Revised Critical Edition* eventually includes three versions of Anne's diary—Anne's original diary, her own edited version, and the version edited by her father and first published.

Like Anne, Mary Chesnut's autobiographical book known as her 'diary' was actually written by Mary Chesnut twenty years after the war. American historian (Chesnut, 1981). noted that the observations recorded in Mary's diary during the years 1861–1865 were edited and revised based on her previous diary. Mary had been working toward a final form of her book from 1881 to 1884. She gave this 'book of a diary' to her closest friend in 1886 before her death and urged her to have it published. This edited diary was first published after her death in 1905, and later a new version was published with the title *A Diary from Dixie* in an edition by novelist Ben Ames Williams in 1945. In 1981, Vann Woodward's edition entitled *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, incorporating Mary's actual diary during the war with her retrospective writings twenty years later, combines the two forms of autobiography, the diary and the memoir. The original and highly personal diary, which was not meant for publication, was actually not available until the publication of *The Private Mary Chesnut* edited by Vann Woodward and Elisabeth Muhlenfeld in 1984.

The nature of diary writing fuses the narrator and the protagonist into one voice, and unlike many other forms of narrative, a diary does not necessarily need to have a plot. However, some publishers expect that diaries are plot driven like fictional narrative in order to have literary merit (Bunker, 2002, p. 20). For example, Virginia Woolf's *Writer's diary* (1953), edited by Leonard Woolf, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* (1981), edited by Vann Woodward, as well as diaries such as *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard Based on Her Diary, 1781-1812* edited by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. With these titles, these diaries are obviously edited according to editors' careful selection with specific intentions and targets. Unlike Anne Frank's diary or Mary Chesnut's diaries, Martha Ballard's diary was absolutely personal and

cryptic. Bloom (1996) identified Martha Ballard's diaries as the representative truly private diaries: "Her diary entries are short, seldom more than a hundred words, her observations are elliptical and usually uninterpreted. She doesn't identify people or places or analyse events." While it is considered an unparalleled document in early American history, the significance of the Martha diary lies in not that anything unusual or exceptional happened in her life, but its ordinariness. Therefore, the filtering and editing of her diary appears to be more complex and subject to editor's choices. Bunker (2002) concluded, "Although the diarist writes the diary, the editor or editors determine which diary entries (all, some, a few) will be included in the edited text of the manuscript diary" (p. 15). It should be noted that no excerpt from a diarist's work, with its inevitable inclusion and exclusion of passages, is intended to represent her entire life, because any possible rephrasing or rewriting will change the content, meaning, and the substance of the diary.

So far I have discussed that the diary as a form of writing has not been merely a personal record, nor has it been limited to private uses. However, since the diary has been typified historically as a privately written document that records personal experiences, observations and reflections, it is worth asking, when the impression developed that the diary is about recording a secretive existence? Suzanne Bunkers (1990) studied over one hundred and fifty unpublished manuscript diaries and journals in 19th century America, and throughout her research, she did not find any that had a lock and key. Some strategies employed in many diaries, such as abbreviation, code, etc., imply that a diarist should have had a specific audience in mind while writing a diary (Bunkers, 1990, p. 124). Her study has also uncovered that some of women's diaries or journals were created as a shared text:

Sometimes it was written as a collaborative text, with two or more individuals making entries in it. Sometimes one woman did all the writing, but with the intention of having others read what she wrote. Other times a diary or journal was initiated with the stated intention of its serving as a family record to which future generation would have access. ... the small, hard-bound diary with lock and key is a distinctly twentieth-century phenomenon. (p. 17)

Bunkers examined "women's perceptions of themselves as diarists" and suggested that their construction of text is both 'public' and 'private' writing, stressing that a woman's diary was not meant to be a highly secretive, carefully guarded text. She proposed that we should reconsider the value of women's diaries as social history and as a form of autobiography because current re-examinations of women's autobiographical writings should challenge "the dichotomy between public and private" (p. 17). According to Bunkers, the diary as a private space of inner life should be regarded as a modern idea that emerged in the 20th century. The transformation of style should be attributed to women's engagement in the practice of diary

writing, along with the changing ideas of the self in the course of the 19th century, which consequently changed the content and function of the diary.

Historically, women used diaries to keep records of their families' economic transactions, important events or the processes of their lives. These records became more personal during the 19th century. Two simple reasons to explain why diary keeping has been practiced so extensively by women are, as Blodgett observed, that the diary as a genre is comparatively accessible for women, and that the process of diary writing is gratifying to women (1988, p. 5). Women started to write about their own feelings, opinions, and aspirations in their diaries. Gradually the diary became a form of writing predominantly practiced by women writers. Margo Culley examined the diary literature of American women writers and clearly points out that "the emergence of the self as the subject of the diary" is an important part of the answer to why diary literature became the province of American women writers (Culley, 1985, p. 3). From the daily record of things to self-examination and self-revelation, the transformation of diary writing makes the diary the preferred form for many women. Eventually, the form of diary became less manageable to American men, who were "unused to probing and expressing this inner life"; while women turned to the diary as a place they were permitted to indulge full "self-centeredness" (p. 4). Virginia Woolf once wrote that "diary writing does not really count as writing" in her diary entry on 20 January 1919. As one of the greatest writers of the 20th century, Woolf's notion that her diary writing did not count as writing was not true. However, what about other ordinary women who recorded their daily lives in the diaries? How should we read their diaries as a form of literary writing? While diary writing has often been viewed as an informal genre that lacks integral unity, it is necessary to examine how the diary as a genre can help us to read and understand women's diaries.

### **2.3 Diaries as Genre and Feminist Practice**

Diaries as a literary form had been previously undervalued because the critical work stresses an emphasis on autonomous, self-contained, formal, and deliberately artful forms of writing, while the diary is comparatively fragmented, informal, and lacking in structure and coherence (Gannett, 1992). Literary criticism in the middle decades of the 20th century inevitably resulted in a phenomenon where scholars tended to discount the value and contribution of women's diaries. Judy Nolte Lensink (1987) in her essay "Expanding the boundaries of criticism: The Diary as Female Autobiography", questioned the critical phenomenon that scholars who "once expanded the critical boundaries of history and literature to encompass autobiography" chose to ignore many American diaries. She pointed

out scholars are “trained to see stories within ordinary people’s diaries as less interesting than those told by Henry James, Henry Thoreau, or Henry Adams” (p. 40). It is understandable that one of the reasons is that the critical tools have not yet been well established to make the form of the diary accessible. However, Lensink argued that diaries have been largely ignored and resisted by scholars because they come “closest to a female version of autobiography” in both form and content (p. 40). The language of ordinary women’s diaries is considered tedious because it is often literal and repetitive. She argued, “If the public literary language of metaphor is indeed a male tongue, as Helene Cixous argues, then the private, plain-speaking voice within a woman’s diary may be close to her true tongue” (p. 41). According to Lensink:

A study of diaries may reformulate our ideas of how ordinary women spoke, thought, and perceived their worlds. Once diaries are considered texts (no longer subtexts), we can use them to read women’s culture — no longer seen as a subculture. (p. 44)

Seeing the diary as a female version of autobiography, Lensink proposed to look anew at the diary’s characteristics: language, content, and narrative structure, in order to reassess its positioning and value within literary definitions.

Diary as a genre that is associated with women has become a central idea of many recent diary researchers. A number of scholars in the fields of women’s studies have suggested that the diary is somehow feminine (Lensink, 1987; Huff, 1989; Hogan, 1991). Rebecca Hogan (1991) claimed that the diary is a preferred form of autobiography for women. Asking the question “Is the diary feminine?” in her essay, “Engendered Autobiographies: The Diary as a Feminine Form”, Hogan explored “the particular congeniality of diary writing as a preferred form of auto-biography for many women” and examined “the historical ‘feminization’ of the diary” (1991, p. 11). Hogan argued that the problem of discussing the diary as a genre and defining its boundaries lies in its capaciousness as a form. She observed that the diary is often seen as fragmented and trivial, lacking of logical connections and structures, while the autobiography is in contrast “finished, polished, carefully structured, providing a shaped image of existence” (p. 143). She then proposed “the particular congeniality of diary writing as a preferred form of auto-biography for many women”. The diary is an engendered autobiography because it “valorizes the detail in both the realms of ornament and everyday” (p. 96). In order to study women’s diaries, scholars tend to legitimate the diary’s literary value by comparing it with autobiography. However, Leigh Gilmore (1994) once wrote that in genre study there may be a discrimination against autobiography:

In a hierarchy of generic distinctions, autobiography carves out a niche within categories that are already divided (nonfiction/fiction, poetry/prose, books/letter, memoirs, diaries); thus its status as

a border discourse can easily be put in the service of discrediting a text “only an autobiography”.  
(p. 35)

While Hogan regarded diary as an engendered autobiography, Blodgett (1988) claimed literary status for the diary as distinct from the autobiography in terms of its form and substance. Blodgett asserted that the genre has merely worked well for women and enabled them to maintain a sense of self because women’s characteristics and life experiences make the diary genre especially available and suitable (p. 5). She asserted that while men did keep diaries, women really established the form, as “male diarists do offer some scraps of precedents, but female ones offer more than scraps” (p. 30).

With regard to the motivation of women for diary writing, Cynthia Huff (1989) proposed it is because diaries allow us to “try on different experiences, to meld the inner with the outer, to envision the mysterious within the common” (p. 9). Like feminist criticism, the keeping of a diary can be seen as an act of transgressing boundaries by this “trying-on and living-through of various modes of experiences” (p. 9). Therefore, Huff proposed that the act of diary writing is a feminist practice. Considering diaries as women’s traditional literature, as they were seemingly the only form women were allowed to practice, she argued that diaries became excluded from the literary cannon for two reasons: “they are composed by the inferior sex, women; and they are only written if their creator is prevented from achieving the exemplary status of author (pp. 9–10). She therefore placed diary writing within a feminist framework:

Like feminist criticism, the diary, in its diversity of approach and focus, its melding of various disciplines, its tendency to mesh the inner with the outer, has been accused of looseness and a lack of rigor, the very antithesis of much canonical literature and literary criticism. (p. 6)

Diary as a literary form, according to Huff, is the “very antithesis” of officially recognised literature. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the transformation of the diary resulted from women’s participation in diary writing, which led to the feminisation of the diary. Women’s diaries emerged as personal writing in the twentieth century and this made a critical change in the function and content of the diary. As diaries and journals have, for many women, been the only autobiographical records left behind, reading women’s diaries as a form of autobiography is an essential way to look into women’s inner lives. With the substantial texture of ‘everyday life’ as a shared characteristic, diaries written by women, in addition to being important adjuncts to historical events, require more attention and emphasis in terms of their significance for personal and cultural analysis. As Australian sociologist David Chaney observed in *Cultural Change and Everyday Life* (2002), everyday life is a creative project “because although it has the predictability of mundane expectation, it is simultaneously being worked at both in the doing and in retrospective reconsideration” (Van Dijck, 2007, p. 52).

Accordingly, diary writing, as a daily act through which one can articulate herself, should be viewed as a cultural practice peculiar to the writing individual.

Living historically in a predominantly patriarchal society, women have had to actively make a space for themselves both in the public sphere and in the literary world. Over time, the diary consequently becomes a refuge for women, a space of their own, where they can render an account of ordinary tasks or everyday life and express their feelings. The way a diary can advantage or empower women is sometimes beyond the diarist's anticipation and original intention. Jose Van Dijck (2004) explained how diary keeping gives meaning and structure to one's life:

In the case of Anne Frank, writing a journal created a zone of silence and refuge in a small space, densely crowded and heavily trafficked by human interaction. Her daily ritual was an act of self-protection as much as self-expression. By carving out a discursive space, she was able to articulate her private thoughts and define her position in relation to others and the world at large. (p. 19)

Within the 'discursive space' carved out, a woman is 'literally' living out her 'genuine' self and expresses the most private thought in the diary. A woman's diary, as a tool to strengthen her own position in the world and her relationships with others, should therefore be seriously considered as a vital text for the study of ordinary women and women's culture.

Diaries of ordinary women should be foregrounded also because they make apparent the invisible thoughts that otherwise are buried deep inside women's hearts. In contrast to the considerable numbers of books and anthologies of American women's diaries, which add to our understanding of the lives, contributions, and innermost thoughts of women, Taiwanese women's diaries, however, are rarely found. Because of the scarcity of women's diaries, there is not much research about Taiwanese women's diaries either. The main reason might be because of women's lower rate of literacy and fewer opportunities in education before the twentieth century in Taiwan. In America, women's academies and preparatory education expanded greatly from the late 18th century to the early 19th century (Hobbs, 1995, p. 13). The rising literacy education facilitated a corresponding increase in women's literacy, which promoted the middle-class women to read and write. Although women's writing was still sparse before the 20th century, women's diaries have told researchers much about women, including how a woman leaves a record, narrates a story and makes sense of her life. While the white American women of the middle class had extensively educated with certain level of literacy in the 19th century, common schools were not yet available to all women in Taiwan until the early 20th century. In Taiwan, as stated in the previous chapter, not until the

common schools started to establish in 1896 did women have chances to receive formal education, and then women's literacy started to improve.

In Academia Sinica,<sup>42</sup> there are only three women's diaries collected by The Archives of Institute of Taiwan History, including The Diary of Yang Shui-hsin, The Diary of Chen Ling, and The Diary of Kao Tsi-mei.<sup>43</sup> These diaries are original copies and remain unpublished archives in the Institute of Taiwan History. Yang Shui-hsin and Chen Ling were both married to the Lin's family in Wufung, which was one of the five great historic Taiwanese families. These two diaries centre on households and the everyday activities of family members, and were regarded as valuable materials to understand the lives of women in a big family during the Japanese colonial period of the early twentieth century. The diary of Kao Tsi-mei was different from the previous two women's diaries in function, style and language. She has four books of diaries, mainly written in Japanese between 15 and 18 years of age (1929–1932). The first two and a half diaries record her student life in a Japanese female college in Taiwan, and the last one and a half records her life after she entered a music school in Tokyo, Japan. These three existing women's diaries, though considered important historical documents, do not reveal much about the diarists' personal reflections or their subjective opinions. Instead, things written in such diaries during the early 20th century reveal what happened to the authors, what they did, and details such as time, food, price, expenditure, etc. As an Australian diarist scholar Katie Holmes (1995) found in her study of Australian women's diaries of the 1920s and 1930s, it is difficult to find the 'secret' one presumes can be uncovered in women's diaries:

I did not find what I had expected. Many women gave no space at all to their emotional lives, and disclosed no secrets about their private thoughts or actions. Rather, they filled their pages with insistent domestic detail—washing, ironing, cooking, cleaning, childcare—devoid, it seemed to me then, of metaphor or meaning. What I confronted was a tension between what I thought a diary was, and what my writers thought it was. I did not find their 'private' worlds waiting for me to analyse.

Therefore, in order to look at the women's diary as a genre, Holmes suggested to "listen to the silences in their writing, to the rhythms and patterns of their writers' daily lives, and all that they revealed through the structure of their words". Our everyday life is full of texture. Because of women's diaries' attention to the texture of the everyday, "the social history of all

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<sup>42</sup> The Academia Sinica, literally "Central Research Academy", is the national academy of Taiwan. As the nation's premier research institution, it has very close collaboration with the top research universities in Taiwan and supports research activities in a wide variety of disciplines.

<sup>43</sup> Relevant information of these three diaries can be found at the following websites. The Diary of Chen Ling: [http://ndaip.sinica.edu.tw/content.jsp?option\\_id=2841&index\\_info\\_id=5744](http://ndaip.sinica.edu.tw/content.jsp?option_id=2841&index_info_id=5744); The Diary of Yang Shui-hsin: [http://digiarch.sinica.edu.tw/content.jsp?option\\_id=2841&index\\_info\\_id=5644](http://digiarch.sinica.edu.tw/content.jsp?option_id=2841&index_info_id=5644); The Diary of Kao Tsi-mei: [http://digiarch.sinica.edu.tw/content.jsp?option\\_id=2841&index\\_info\\_id=5704](http://digiarch.sinica.edu.tw/content.jsp?option_id=2841&index_info_id=5704).

people is more detailed than it would otherwise be” (Mallon, 1984, p. 19). Through the texture of ordinary situations of everyday life recorded/described in women’s diaries, we may discover or uncover something concealed behind the seemingly ‘petty’ details of women’s lives. Containing “the private, the everyday, the intriguing, the sordid, the sublime, the boring – in short, a chronicle of everything” (p. 1), the writings of women’s diaries not only offer accounts of the historical experiences of women, but also help to see a distinct representation of daily life and particular perceptions of everyday existence. Accordingly, detailed accounts of everyday life, that were once regarded insignificant and negligible, have been reassessed by scholars. Women’s diaries offer a rich source of material for historical research. In diaries, a woman’s life is preserved both for herself and future generations to come, so that her story will be known and her voice be heard, and taken together these stories can shape women’s history.

Diaries offer a ‘safe’ place in which diarists become the subject in their own right. They can thereby find ways of shaping their own stories and each can find a voice to express her own experiences. Within diaries, women search and ‘try out’ their own voice in ways of writing seemingly free from restraint. At the same time, the act of diary writing is still largely limited to literary women and the middle class. Looking at diary writing as a feminine genre or female autobiography, the writing systems used in women’s diaries, however, are still the same language. In the next section, I explore a unique language used exclusively by women in writing their own lives, stories, and autobiographies.

### ***2.3.1 A Space for Her and Her Female Friends—Nüshu as Women’s Unique Language for Writing***

Diary writing, I like to think, is a little like weaving: the warp is the daily happening of our lives, the weft the words chosen to tell the story, the shuttle the pen or voice which brings the pattern, the web, into being. Just as feminist critics have recognized the importance of weaving and tapestry as a form of women’s speech and storytelling, an activity suitably feminine but one through which they might reveal what otherwise remains silent, so diary writing has begun to be recognized as an important form of writing for women. (Holmes, 1995)

Australian scholar Katie Holmes studied women’s diaries and compared diary writing with weaving and tapestry because they resemble each other in the form of women’s speech and storytelling. In this sense, I continue my investigation by asking the question that if there is any writing system in the world, other than English or Chinese, literally applied in women’s writing? In 1982, a Chinese scholar, Gong Zhebing, found a piece of blue cloth, covered with an unfamiliar calligraphy, used only by women in Jiangyong County, Hunan Province (F. Liu, 2012). Generally denied access to an education in a formally written language, local women

in Jiangyong, maneuvered within social/linguistic constraints and created this *women's script*. This women's script was referred to by the local people as *nüshu*, which literally means 'female writing' in Chinese. *Nüshu* is a special method of writing used exclusively by females. Through a set of unique matriarchal scripts, women could voice their objections to the inequities and pain of their lives and they shared their innermost feelings with female friends. As an exclusively female language *nüshu* has aroused keen interest both in China and abroad since the 1990s (Liu & Hu, 1994a, p. 308). After the publication of Gong Zhebing's (1986) report on *nüshu* and some joint research done by Gong and Zhao Li-ming (1990; 1991), *nüshu* has attracted significant scholarly attention in such fields as linguistics and ethnic minority studies. In the following paragraphs, I apply *nüshu*, the female language, as a critical framework, to examine the nature of women's writing. Further, the discussion will focus on the comparison of the shared characteristics between *nüshu* and online diaries to explore similarities that fundamentally cross the boundaries of time and space.

*Nüshu*, known as a kind of mysterious writing unique to women in Jiangyong, has been passed quietly from woman to woman for unknown centuries. However, its date of origin is indeterminable and its true origin still remains a mystery. It certainly was practiced before there was any kind of formal education for women, and generally thought to be created after the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) and before Liberation (1912–1949). To overcome illiteracy due to the lack of education, these women in Jiangyong developed their own style of writing and employed a unique script (Cahalane, 2012). There are several reasons that make *nüshu* manuscripts extremely rare, which consequently makes research into the origin of *nüshu* very difficult. Few *nüshu* documents have survived because "most were burned at gravesites for metaphysical and practical reasons" (See, 2010). In accordance with local custom, *nüshu* manuscripts that were very dear to women were to be burnt, or buried with the dead for company. Before women had the right to receive an education and take part in social activities, they used *nüshu*, to write letters, poems, invitation cards, and scripts for singing, authentically recording both the beauty and ugliness of their lives. After Chinese communism established its political sovereignty in China in 1949, women were recruited into the workplace and into education for the development of the country. Consequently *nüshu* ceased to be taught, so the practice of *nüshu* eventually came to an end as it was rendered redundant (Chiang, 1995). Moreover, during the Cultural Revolution the Red Guard burned even more texts as *nüshu* was suspected as being spy code or lesbian writing. Since *nüshu* was denounced as evil characters, and a vehicle of espionage, and the women who knew *nüshu* were seen as

enchantresses, no one dared to learn, sing, or even mention *nüshu* any longer after the Cultural Revolution in China. (Gong, 1990, p. 22).

*Nüshu* is believed to have been practiced by the local women for hundreds of years, but it remained unknown to the world outside Jiangyong until the 1980s, by which time it had almost become extinct as the women who used it disappeared. However, the existence of this enigmatic women's script was not meant to be secretive. On the contrary, it had been widely used by local women as a means of personal expression and interpersonal communication at public occasions. *Nüshu* script is long, slim, and frail, so many people have described it as resembling mosquito legs. A set of written symbols forged by women to represent the words in their local dialect, *nüshu* is an oral phonetic transcription that has been passed down from generation to generation by women. One *nüshu* character represents every spoken word with the same sound, so "one symbol would cover 'new', 'knew', and 'gnu'; context makes meaning plain" (Silber, 1995, p. 14). Local men could actually understand *nüshu* if they heard it read aloud. The fact that *nüshu* was not unknown to men reflects a fact that: "coveted by women, they disregarded it as the folly of the weaker sex" (Cahalane, 2012). *Nüshu* as a text unfamiliar to local men is an evidence of its marginalised attribute, which further intensifies the unfortunate situation of women. The rediscovery of *nüshu* works suggests the indiscernibility of *nüshu* resulted from the women being ignored by local men who were closed to the women's expression.

Although *nüshu* is not really a secret language, there is still some sense of secrecy in the use and transmission of *nüshu* writing—it is not a common communication medium for all women in the Jiangyong areas. *Nüshu* writings are made of set phrases, as they are actually intended not just for reading but singing out. Not all women learned how to write *nüshu*, but almost every one could sing *nüshu*. Those women who could not write *nüshu* would ask a skilled *nüshu* writer to write autobiographies for them. As a group of women did needlework with non-kin sisters, they enjoyed reciting *nüshu* together, which was a common way they taught and learned *nüshu*. Writings in *nüshu* are found on papers and fans, or embroidered on handkerchiefs and cloth. Genres of *nüshu* manuscripts are diverse, including correspondences with friends, biographies and autobiographies, accounts of historical events, prayers, translation of folksongs, and wedding messages. With *nüshu*, women developed a tradition of storytelling in chant, in embroidery, and in written form, which "had produced abundant records of their stories in the form of either a biography or an autobiography, which shows a valid representation of their genealogy" (Y. Lo, 2003, p. 385).

As *nüshu* works are communal, even autobiographies or letters were all meant to be sung for everyone to listen to, or to sing along together (Peng, 2010). A distinctive characteristic of *nüshu* is that literary works in *nüshu* are written in narrative verses. Most *nüshu* letters are written in a stylised five-word verse, and a few in seven-word verse. The versified *nüshu* was also applied to the recital of autobiographies to express the hardships experienced in women's lives (Liu & Hu, 1994b). A verse embroidered on a handkerchief pours out the miserable provenance of *nüshu*:

Chinese women read *nüshu*, neither for an official job nor for fame.

Women have suffered enough, so we resort to *nüshu* to air grievance.<sup>[44]</sup> (Yien, 2005)

### 2.3.2 *Nüshu and its Significance as a Feminist Practice*

A great deal of *nüshu* works centred on women's oppression and the suffering they experienced in the patriarchal society of traditional China. Telling something miserable is the main function of *nüshu*, so it might be considered a 'literature of grievance' (F. Liu, 2012). Liu in her research in Jiangyong, asked local women: "what is *nüshu*?" The answers she received from those women were all the same: "narrating pathetic lives" (F. Liu, 2012). The content women often narrated was largely concerned with losing their husband, children, or their family. Marie also described the traditional *nüshu* verse as often being melancholic. She used a verse translated by Julia T. Broussard, a UN Women's Country Program Manager, as an example:

Holding my brush to write this letter, two streams of tears flow.

Of the thousand hardships I've suffered, nobody knows.

It is because nobody knew of those hardships suffered by these women who had no choice, that they eventually found *nüshu* as a channel to express hidden feelings and emotions. With *nüshu*, these women actually used writing as an action against the injustice in their lives, literally and spiritually. In the following section, I discuss four characteristics featuring in *nüshu* works that aptly reflect the significant concerns of feminist practice in diary writing.

### 2.3.3 *Women's Script Beyond Male Dominance—Female Form of Communication*

What makes *nüshu* exceptional is that Jiangyong women, as a socially marginalised group, invented their own form of communication. *Nüshu* women used their own writing system, to express painful suffering from oppression and exploitation in words, and then sing them out

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<sup>44</sup> Original text in Chinese: "中華女子讀女書 不為當官不為名 只為女人受盡苦 要憑女書訴苦情".

loud in public. For women who have long since been bound by social norms and traditional customs, this was an extraordinarily evolutionary act. The precious point of *nüshu* is that it breaks away from the restraints of traditional and androcentric/logocentric communication, and attempts to genuinely reflect the inner voice of local women. “Write out women’s articles to spread them everywhere”,<sup>45</sup> *nüshu* elders explicitly revealed their motivation of *nüshu* writing—they were not willing to remain silent and be swallowed up quietly by the world (Peng, 2010). With women’s scripts and their female audience, they had both the power and the freedom to write the truths of their own lives and articulate their innermost thoughts and feelings.

It is also important to note that *nüshu* as a women’s script is distinct from Chinese character script as it does not fall “within the confines of a language and literary genres constructed by men”,

Unlearned women clearly had a ‘technology of the word’ or line of oral transmission (in the influential notion of Walter Ong) which allowed them to create, transmit and preserve in written form a gender-specific tradition which diverged significantly from elite culture generally, including the culture of elite women.” (McLaren, 1998)

In other words, as *nüshu* writings were composed by women who did not know Han Chinese, they did not conform to the dominant literary conventions. Therefore, *nüshu* gives us insight concerning a socially marginalised group in the history of women’s writings.

Still, nothing they wrote would revise the dominant textual tradition for the reason that these women, though very expressive in *nüshu*, were not writing in men’s words. Their expression of feelings and emotions remained circulating and resonating among women only. Though it was not intended to form a collective force against the male dominant society, in *nüshu* women eventually found a space to articulate and construct a record of their lived experiences. Canadian poet Margaret Atwood (2009) in her meta-fictional novel, *Blind Assassin*, articulated that writing is a recording activity, which can be passed on from generations to generations, as an announcement of a once living being:

Why is it we want so badly to memorialize ourselves? Even while we’re still alive. We wish to assert our existence, like dogs peeing on fire hydrants. We put on display our framed photographs, our parchment diplomas, our silver-plated cups; we monogram our linen, we carve our names on trees, we scrawl them on washroom walls. It’s all the same impulse. What do we hope from it? Applause, envy, respect? Or simply attention, of any kind we can get? At the very least we want a witness. We can’t stand the idea of our own voices falling silent finally, like a radio running down. (p. 95)

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<sup>45</sup> My translation. The original text in Chinese is “寫出女文傳四方”.

The passage candidly reveals a personal aspiration for a display of self in writing with a belief that one would live eternally in a written text. Meanwhile, such a desire can be considered in reference of the reason why Jiangyong women want to write about their selves—“writing as a form of immortality ... it is the way by which she can resolve her anxiety of disappearing.” (Hsieh, 2005, p. 2). With *nüshu* writing and chanting, women enhance the possibilities of finding potential witness to secrets or the hidden selves in their inner lives.

### 2.3.4 *Utterance of Women’s Language*

*Nüshu* works, as peculiar forms of women’s literature, not only genuinely documented women’s destiny and their resistance, but also sincerely preserved the loving and caring feelings among sisters. In a conservative way, women made their invisible distress and torment visible, put their sentiment and viewpoints into words, and provided us an insight into women in their innermost soul. Their writings and chants not only help us to appreciate women’s particular attitudes and viewpoints at a specific point in time, but they might also reverse some stereotypes regarding certain myths about Chinese women. For example, while Jiangyong local chronicles record and honour the inflexible virtue of Jiangyong women’s chastity, in *nüshu* what we see are woman’s torture through the experience of being a widow, or their predicament of having no male offspring (F. Liu, 2012). In this regard, *nüshu* works deliberately to maintain a sense of resistance that may be considered implicitly feminist. In Marie’s words, “NüShu was a respite, a hobby, something to build relationships around, to communicate feelings and to indulge in traditions that perhaps shrouded reality by moderate distraction.” (Cahalane, 2012).

Language, as “operative agency” for women’s liberation, was literally transformed in *nüshu* by means of a moderate distraction. Through a set of written codes exclusive to women, the utterance of women’s language in *nüshu*, which has been practice for hundreds of years, aptly echoes Luce Irigaray’s remark:

The fact that women’s ‘liberation’ requires transforming the economic realm, and thus necessarily transforming culture and its operative agency, language. Without such an interpretation of a general grammar of culture, the feminine will never take place in history, except as a reservoir of matter and of speculation. (Irigaray, 1985, p. 155)

With the utterance in a distinct language, a woman was trying to “practice that difference” (Irigaray, 1985, p. 159). As a woman’s lived experienced is not the same as that of a man’s, the history she produced was never the same. So she uttered, in writing, by chanting.

### 2.3.5 *Social Networks of Emotional Support*

There were two types of relationships developing with *nüshu*. One was called *jiebai zimei* (sworn sisters) and the other was called *laotong* (old same).<sup>46</sup> Sworn sisterhoods ranged in number of girls from two up to seven ideally (Silber, 1995, p. 18). When all seven-year-old girls in a village were having their feet bound, their mothers helped them form a sworn sisterhood. They would learn *nüshu* together and exchange letters in *nüshu* to share their joy and sorrow. However, the sworn sisterhood dissolved once all the girls had married, at around the age of seventeen. The *laotong* relationship established another line in women's networks. A *laotong* was a girl who could match eight characteristics with another girl from another village selected by a matchmaker. The eight characteristics might include the same birth order, having the same size foot, matching birth dates, and the like. If a prospect could be found, these two girls would be brought together to sign a contract for life as a pair of old-sames. For the rest of their lives, *laotongs* continue to keep in contact with each other through their writing and occasional meetings.

The communicative characteristic of *nüshu* enables Jiangyong women to go across the boundaries of villages and to establish a social network outside the “three obediences” (F. Liu, 2013). “From the age of seven until their deaths, these women lived as virtual prisoners—hobbled by their bound feet and illiterate in men's writing” (See, 2010). Through writing *nüshu*, women extended their world spiritually and physically, and *nüshu* works accordingly and allows us an important insight into the minds of women in a feudal society. Throughout their lives, women had been longing to express themselves and find consolation from other women in identical circumstances. *Nüshu* was therefore used by women to write letters, stories and poems as a means of recording the forging of lifelong friendships among sworn sisters and between old-sames. They served as a means to help women cope, stay in touch with their female friends and discuss their feelings.

As the commitment of is lifelong and intimate, old-same represents a more rigid and committed non-kin sister relationship than the sworn sister. American novelist Lisa See's well-known book, *The Snowflower and the Secret Fan*, was based on this intriguing relationship between two women. She described such ritual sisterhood as “a type of emotional marriage—at a time and in a culture when emotions didn't enter into marriages between men and women.” (See, 2010) Through a script incomprehensible to men, these women's speaking

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<sup>46</sup> The original text in Chinese is *Jiebai zimei* (結拜姐妹) and *laotong* (老同).

objects were never men. Women chose to pour out their hearts to their sisters, whose friendship, love and support would last a lifetime.

### 2.3.6 *Transcendence in Exhibition/Performance*

When a Jiangyong woman got married, a *sanzhaoshu* written in *nüshu* was received from other sisters on the third day after her wedding. The purpose is to offer support and hope by writing about their feelings about the married sister and what would happen after marriage. Among *nüshu* works, *sanzhaoshu* (third-day letters) has been given the most attention by researchers and scholars since it is the only genre in *nüshu* that is associated with mainstream culture and rites. Also, because *sanzhaoshu* is a wedding gift, it would normally be kept carefully and even passed on to the next generations. An old lady named Tang Bao-zhen, born around 1912, once described the performing of the *sanzhaoshu*. She said, on the third day after a wedding, the wedding gifts for the “third day celebration” would be sent by the bride’s family to her husband’s house. The husband’s family would send people to shout along the street in the village: “It’s time to watch *sanzhaoshu*.” Afterwards, female relatives and neighbours would gather in a room to witness/ behold wedding gifts from the bride’s family. Meanwhile, they would observe and appreciate women’s work such as handicraft, needle work, and shoes made by bride. If there was a *sanzhaoshu*, a learned woman would take it up to sing out the verses, and would interpret the content in plain language again. If more than one woman can read *nüshu*, they would sing together because “*nüshu* need to be read together so as to expose its taste.” Audiences were engaged in the reading/singing too, and “some aunties, if they hear something pitiable, would impulsively burst into tears” (F. Liu, 2013).

A wedding is a happy social gathering, so why would Jiangyong women want to air grievances in *sanzhaoshu*? Liu (2013) explained that the answer lies in the performance of *sanzhaoshu*. The unfortunate encounters presented in *sanzhaoshu* were oftentimes common/mutual sufferings shared by all women. On the surface, the content of *sanzhaoshu* apparently pours out women’s sorrow and misery. It is actually an exhibition/manifestation of women’s tenacity and resilience when they face wretchedness or hardships.

In a place where women’s lives were confined to the “three rules of obedience” of the same Confucian patriarchy that prevailed throughout China at the time (as a daughter, a woman had to obey her father, as a wife her husband, and as a widow her son), Jiangyong women were writing and living within a tradition where the maintenance of the home and devotion to the family were matters of morality and devoted duty. By way of *nüshu* writing

and reading, these women actually found a place to exhibit their honourable virtues, although most of time the things described in *nüshu* work were women's aspects of miserable lives and wretched experiences.

## 2.4 *Nüshu* Works and Online Diaries as Feminist Practice

In terms of female forms of communication, online diaries perform similar functions as *nüshu*—sharing their lives with one another through writing. Online diaries in personal blogs, though not as a form of writing exclusive to women, have considerably larger numbers of female writers. The diary as a literary form, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is less manageable for men because they are not used to expressing their inner life, while women turned to diaries as a place they were permitted to pour out everything regardless. In a digital age, the tricky and subtle existence of the online diary, as a privately-owned public space, evolved and became enhanced with the assistance of various technological devices. It is the reason why the diary as a form of writing is especially appealing to women—to continue performing a life or second self within the hidden public space of her diary. In contrast to the implicit devices used in traditional diaries, diaries posted on the weblog, and presented as “private diaries as public documents”, usually announce themselves explicitly on the front page to orient their readers. Many online diary writers identify self-expression as a primary reason for writing on their personal blogs, recognising that it “serves the intrinsic self-disclosure functions of both self-clarification and self-validation, enhancing self-awareness and confirming already held beliefs” (Shepherd, 2004). Feminist scholar Carolyn Heilbrun observed the importance of women sharing their lives with one another through writing:

Women, I believe, search for fellow beings who have faced similar struggles, conveyed them in ways a reader can transform into her own life, confirmed desires the reader had hardly acknowledged—desires that now seem possible. Women catch courage from the women whose lives and writing they read, and women call the bearers of that courage friends. (Heilbrun, 1989)

The personalised nature of diary writing encourages women to write frankly about their inner states by giving a certain degree of privacy to the writer. However, the curious nature of diary-keeping is paradoxical—the diary is written with aspirations to be understood, and at the same time it is required to be secret, to be kept by either the diarist or the potential readers. The reason why the diary is appealing to women is attributed to its paradoxical features. What the seemingly private diary entries convey may not be secret and meant to be unknown to others, but those things that are not suitable or allowed to be spoken of in public. In this regard, online diaries to a degree fulfil the paradoxical desire of being read and being secret. *Nüshu* writing, like traditional diary writing, has a nature of both elasticity and tolerance as a

genre which allows women to freely ‘pour out’ everything. However, while traditional diaries appear to be not so open and accessible to others, *nüshu* are explicitly inviting. *Nüshu* owners, like online diarists, are unquestionably aware of their readers. In other words, *nüshu* has the feature of interactive communication, as online diaries do. Therefore, in the name of the diary as a private document, a woman can claim that it is her private space to express herself unreservedly by uttering her mutual experience, sharing her life story, and singing out loudly her feelings. The way *nüshu* owners offer support and comfort in return to each other is by continuing to read each other’s writing, which is still the major function and motivation of blogging as a contemporary diary writing practice in this Internet age.

To discuss the language of women’s diary writing, the term *écriture féminine* was developed by French theorists such as Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, and by which there is a productive framework for the description of diaries or women’s autobiographies (Hogan, 1991). Rebecca Hogan (1991) argued that *écriture féminine* is seen as “potentially subversive of the structure, logic, and syntax of masculine language.” A list of “key words: open, non-linear, unfinished, fluid, exploded, fragmented, polysemic ...” are used to characterise the “new feminine writing”. These terms seem also to rightly exemplify both the diary form and *nüshu* writing. Like Nancy Chodorow’s description of “permeable ego boundaries”, female ego is fluid (Hogan, 1991, p. 93). *Nüshu* writing crosses the boundaries between author and reader, and even self and others, because *nüshu* writers both create and read the text. According to Hogan, diary writing can perhaps be seen as a “potentially subversive form of writing because it tends to cross and blur boundaries between things traditionally kept separate” (Hogan, 1991). Taiwan *nüshu* expert Cheng Chi-hui in the preamble of *Nüshu—The World’s Only Women’s Script* has two insightful passages:

The illiterate Jiangyong women created an unprecedented women’s script to communicate secretly; the most intelligent French feminists pursued women’s writing. Would there be some kind of consonance going beyond time and space between these two?  
...  
Should it be that we are reading *nüshu*, or that *nüshu* is reflecting us? While still thinking of this question, actually the time tunnel between us and *nüshu* has been gone. (p. 3)

Knowing that *nüshu* writing has been practiced by Jiangyong women for centuries before the emergence of the feminist movement, we again recognise the utterance of women’s language is of critical significance no matter that it is across a range of different geographies, cultures and histories. While in the past women worked through their feelings, emotions and aspiration in the form of diary writing, the online diary as a personal digital record on the Web is a contemporary and preferred form of personal documentation. By connecting to the

Internet, women can record their lives and express their feelings by writing their diaries, whilst themselves reading and responding to others' dairies.

In women's diaries, relationships with men, with women, and with family, have been the most prominent feature reflected in the writing. As the writing in women's diaries is focused and particular, Katie Holmes (1995) suggested that diaries remind us of the importance of things which have been left out of history books—relationships in daily life. She argued that historians have remained unaware of “the significance of the emotional work of building and sustaining relationships as crucial to the health and well-being of a nation” (Holmes). For instance, the survival of many women's marriages was made possible through the emotional support and sustenance of their female friends. The existence and continuous practice of *nüshu* writing serves as a clear evidence of this assumption. As one writer for the feminist journal *The Dawn* observed in 1904, “one might think better of marriage if one's married friends would not confide in one so much. Men are the spice of life but a steady diet of spice is undesirable” (Holmes, 1995).

In the process of *nüshu* learning, Jiangyong girls start to build relationships with other girls in the same village. While these girls were growing up to be women, they continued to develop relationships and exchange their inner thoughts and feelings with a *laotong* from another village and sworn sisters in the same village. By chanting *nüshu* together, they find relief, express their emotions and shed their tears. In these relationships, they form the backdrop of their daily lives and the framework within which decisions are made. However, the communication and relationship developed within *nüshu* are still geographically restrained. Blogs on the Internet, which is frequently characterised as socially interactive and community-like in nature, have transcended the geographical restraint, by its characteristics of timeless and spaceless connection. By means of diary writing on a personal weblog, a woman not only tells her own stories in her diary, but also gets feedback from her readers. In the form of comments, readers' responses to one certain diary entry are incorporated into a part of that diary. The readers of a blog are not limited to familiar friends in her life, but also those unknown visitors who happen to see the diary and are interested in it. A personal blog becomes a meeting place for writers and readers to communicate with each other and a starting point to develop further discussions.

The act of a diary being read allows a story “to be both validated by dailiness and shown in public”, and in this sense that diary is “performing to strangers” within an “authorized domestic framework” (Delafield, 2009, p. 6). In this sense, *nüshu* as a literary writing reflects

the same characteristics of the diary—self-projection, and thus performativity as the key to the genre (p. 96). *Nüshu*, as a form of writing practice, just like the diary, allows a woman to act within that space to perform a life, which was previously supposed to remain private. “Coded as a private and domestic document”, the diary as Delafield suggested, is thus “a suitable form for limited self-expression” for women (Delafield, 2009, p. 16). Today, while the dichotomy of public space and private has been blurred and deconstructed within the cyberspace, a personal diary written on the Web can be subtly displayed in the disguise of a private and domestic document. The open yet indistinct space of the Internet, as another “suitable form for limited self-expression” for women in the 21st century, bridges a gap between the public and the private. Such a space, enhancing women’s mobility and enabling women’s self-expression, is an upgraded version of “private, culturally sanctioned forms of life writing” (Anderson, 1996, p 28), needed by women universally.

## 2.5 Conclusion

In the first part of this chapter, I have investigated the provenance of diaries, finding that, historically, diaries were not intended to be highly secretive. The genealogy of diaries in terms of its feminising progress has also been analysed to support the understanding of diaries as a genre for women’s voices. Throughout this chapter, I foreground the value of women’s diaries and the significance of women’s writing by outlining the intimate relationship between women and diaries. I have examined the diary as an engendered genre that is of assistance in women’s public communication and connection with others, and how women’s practice of diary writing itself constitutes forms of feminist practice. The diaries of Virginia Woolf, Anne Frank, Mary Chesnut, and Martha Ballard were used to discuss the important role of editors, who determine the audience of a diary, and what aspects of a diary would be presented whilst being published. The final section of this chapter examined *nüshu* writing as an exclusive women’s text in Jiangyong, China, to discuss how women’s self-referential writing reflects women’s mutual experiences and life stories. Seeing the invention of *nüshu* script and the practice of *nüshu* work as a potent example of women’s writing as a feminist practice, I proposed that *nüshu* has to some extent demonstrated the need of women’s voices to be heard and recognised by others. In a less formal form of writing recognised by dominant literary criticism, *nüshu* speaks to the common form of conventional diary writing. As the modern idea of a diary as a “secret” record of an inner life evolved, the inner life became an important aspect of the private sphere, and women continued to turn to diaries as a place of personal reflection and emotion. It may be that a diary as a space for a second self to perform can also be considered a space for the ‘truth’ of the diarist’s life story. Diaries for women are therefore

spaces for their second selves to be let out, to be accepted and understood. Moreover, online diaries on personal blogs, like a contemporary form of *nūshu*, are not only a means of self-expression but also rebellion. For women, “secrecy was simply a way of life” (Showalter 1982, p. 158), and by publishing personal diaries on the Internet, women found a more efficient and appropriate way to tell their ‘secrets’.

## Chapter 3

### Blogging as Art of the Self

Unlike a novel, the writer of a diary doesn't always know what's happening in [his] head. The reader has to pick up clues and figure it out. It's like a real life serial being played out before your eyes with the author making it up as he goes along. Was this ever even possible before the Internet? Are we talking about this being a new artform altogether? (Schalchlin, 1996)

Seeing the diary as a genre notably favoured and practised by women to voice themselves through expressing inner thoughts and giving accounts of subjective experiences of everyday life, I have investigated the historical role of the diary and argued the significance of writing for women in Chapter 2. I analysed the Chinese women's writing, *nüshu*, and suggested that *nüshu* women's writing practice is an earlier form of blogging. Through writing and reading *nüshu*, these women created a space exclusively for women. They wrote about themselves, told their life stories, exchanged their writing, and read each other's writing alone or together. In this sense, they literally achieved several functions of blogging, including self-expression, identity formation, and community building, however, in a smaller scale within a limited space in a village. Therefore, in this chapter, I intend to answer the following questions: How has the practice of diary writing changed with time and space? What does the Internet bring to the diary genre and the diary genre to the Internet? I explore the integrating process of diaries into the space of a personal blog to further investigate how the online diary is an "old genre with new tricks". I argue that the diary in its online form functions not only as a medium of personal expression but also a space for social actions. In this, I consider that the blog brings the practice of women's diary writing to a new level, which enables women to voice themselves through new media technology in a familiar/feminine genre. Accordingly, drawing on Miller's argument of "blogging as social action", I propose that online diary writing is a social action that empowers women through a process of mediated exhibition. Because my interest is to see how a woman can enhance her self-awareness through writing about the self in a diary, and my assumption is that diary writing can be viewed as a process of feminist practice, I also discuss the question, "what is feminist writing?" I use the example of "I may not be feminist enough: a narrative construction of feminist identity and practice", to discuss the common response to feminism shared by many women in Taiwan. Many women in Taiwan have received education about gender and identity so to a certain degree

they all have a feminist consciousness. However, Yu Chen-yi (2011) discovered that many women, who recognised themselves feminists, have a common sense of guilt of “not being feminist enough” (p. 101). What are the reasons that make women think that they should be sorry and guilty for their lack of feminist action? “Is it only a blatant text which is waving an anti-patriarchal banner that can achieve the desired result?” (Chu, 1997). Taiwanese feminist researcher Chu Chungyi (1997) asked this question to argue that “Who can deny that as soon as women started an autobiography, it is already a transgressive move; they must endure others’ judgement, and always defend their actions?” I agree with Chu’s argument and therefore I argue that the act of a woman’s diary writing should be regarded as a feminist practice, as long as the writing woman is aware of the social oppression or any injustice in her life. Lastly, I review Donna Haraway’s cyborg metaphor to further discuss the relationship between the use of technology and women’s subjectivity.

### **3.1 Pre-Blog Computer Mediated Communication**

When it comes to the development of computer-mediated communication in Taiwan, it is inevitable to mention the TANet BBS (Taiwan Academic Net Bulletin Board System). The BBS is computer software that allows users to connect to and log into the system using a terminal program. As the use of the Internet became more widespread in the mid to late 1990s, the traditional BBS rapidly faded in popularity. Although in most parts of the world the BBS survives only for niche hobbies, it is still an extremely popular form of communication for Taiwanese youth. As the first and biggest online community in Taiwan, TANet BBS still retains its significant place as the original and local Internet platform in Taiwan, even as Facebook takes up the biggest share of the Internet market globally. Besides BBS, *My Paper*, as the first personal news station available online and technically supported by *Tomorrow Times*, also has its historical significance in the development of Internet-mediated communication. I consider the TANet BBS and *My Paper* as two predecessors of the personal blog in the history of the Taiwanese Internet; therefore, I would like to briefly review and discuss these two spaces’ significance and their association with women’s online communication and self-expression.

#### **3.1.1 BBS: The Meeting Place of Taiwanese Youth**

The first BBS was Chinese-formatted by a professor at the National Sun Yat-sen University, Nian-Shing Che, in 1992 at Kaohsiung Information Technology Exhibitions, and since then TANet BBS has become the principal space for university students to exchange

information and ideas. Two years after this first TANet BBS was successfully established in Taiwan, the number of the BBS websites increased to about 120. TANet BBS was regarded as the biggest, most popular and most influential service on TANet.

Taiwanese BBS culture is unique in the world. The BBS was developed for the campus, serving as an alternative blackboard for classrooms, a noticeboard for various university clubs, an after-school gossip corner and more. In spite of the fact that it was basically a telnet-based platform composed of many forums with plain text so users needed to memorise many combinations of key functions, the BBS still remains pre-eminent due to the high number of users from many universities in Taiwan. After late 1990, the widespread uptake use of the Internet forced BBS to transform. Some top bulletin board systems merged with each other to become a bigger bulletin board called PTT,<sup>47</sup> that was accessible via an Internet browser. Founded in 1995, PTT.cc has more than a million registered members and is currently the largest BBS in Taiwan. Due to the growth of membership, PTT2 was established in 2000, mainly for individuals to run their personal bulletin boards in various categories including interests or locations. In 2004, PTT3 was established in Washington DC, especially for overseas students in the United States. PTT as an improved version of bulletin board system, provides more functions, including email, online chat, games, and some other services. It also offers Web BBS Systems for users to view messages on BBS websites if they do not have telnet BBS systems.

To a certain degree, university students were enlightened by the BBS in various fields, including subjectivity, gender, and media. Some forums on TANet BBS sites, including *Ladytalk*, *Feminism*, and *Motss (members of the same sex)*, broke away from their original sites and established their own independent BBS sites—*A Room of One's Own* in 1995 for women and *Rainbow Night Club* in 1997 for both female and male homosexual communities. This was an announcement by the *Feminist BBS Site: A Room of One's Own*.<sup>48</sup>

The origin of the site '*A Room of One's Own*' was inspired by Virginia Woolf's renown work *A Room of One's Own*. Before marriage a woman belongs to her father's house, and then a married daughter is just like water that has been poured—she moves into a totally strange environment. The whole life of a woman is in a relocating process for others. In her father's house or husband's house, a room of one's own is a kitchen, or a place to produce or reproduce, or that small vanity in the bedroom of husband and wife ... If a woman wants to live for herself, the first thing is to have an independent space. (Huang, 1997)

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<sup>47</sup> PTT (Professional Technology Temple abbreviation) was originally an account name of the founder of PTT, Yi-jing Tu. Information on the development of PTT is at: <http://www.awoo.com.tw/blog/2010/04/web-ptt-plurk/>.

<sup>48</sup> Feminism BBS site—*A Room of One's Own*, <http://bbs.gucas.ac.cn/bbsanc.php?path=%2Fgroups%2Fsci.faq%2FTaiwan%2FN7%2FN71%2Fbbs%2FM.1128828496.70>.

Before the establishment of the *Room*, dialogues regarding gender issues in *Ladytalk* and *Feminism* were frequently attacked and criticised by certain sexists. Hui-Ying Huang was one of the six system operators for the *Room*. As a researcher as well as a participant, she described the background of the *Room* and the *Rainbow* and points out three main reasons for their establishment and fast growth: the higher proportion of males to females in Taiwan, the popularity of TANet BBS, and the expressions and discourses that deprecate homosexuality and discriminate against women scattered over the TANet BBS sites (Huang, 1997). She also noted that there was a cyberfeminist trend on the World Wide Web in North America in 1994; however, users needed to pay membership fees to join most of these cyberfeminist websites. TANet BBS is an academic net system supported by the Taiwanese government, so its BBS sites are free for all users. BBS sites become the most popular space for Taiwanese youths to exchange information and discuss various ideas. Accordingly, these BBS sites were commonly considered to be the birthplace of the online discussion/movement on gender, sexuality, and sex on campus.

### **3.1.2 *My Paper: An Experiment in Public Journalism***

*My Paper*, an online news station, generally regarded as the predecessor of the blog in Taiwan, was a platform for online publication of personal writing that had always attracted numerous Internet users. At one time this personal news station had a record of 15,000 station owners and 120,000 articles (Jedi, 2004). Founded in 2000, *Tomorrow Times* was the first digitised online newspaper. In 2001, *Tomorrow Times* added a space called *My Paper*. The concept of *My Paper* was that every user/author was a news-station owner/amateur journalist who could publish articles on his/her personal news station, and readers could submit their papers and receive messages. Before publishing online, every article uploaded through *My Paper* was supervised by professional editors of *Tomorrow Times*, so articles uploaded by users did not directly appear on users' personal news stations. Although users had limited control of their articles and posts, the ease of operation for beginners was the main reason for the flourishing development of *My Paper*. However, this experiment in public journalism in a digital newspaper did not last as long as it was expected because of the prompt emergence of weblogs. As a result of its failure to offer the same freedom for editing and interaction as other blogs, *Tomorrow Times* ceased operation in February 2002. Due to financial and operational difficulties, the downfall of *Tomorrow Times* was inevitable. To save their online space, many news-station owners of *My Paper* gathered online and offline to form a support group for the first time in Taiwanese Internet history. These amateur journalists continued to make an appeal to *Tomorrow Times* by signing a petition to retain the website for *My Paper*,

and at the same time sought help from the public and other Internet companies. With their effort, *My Paper* was ultimately saved and incorporated into PChome Online Inc. as one of their online services (Bloggers' road to China and the first milestone, 2005).

From *Tomorrow Times* to PChome, *My Paper*, as a space for many Internet forerunners and professional writers to express and present themselves, has assembled many excellent writers and become an important milestone in the development of blogs in Taiwan. As one senior blogger described in an entry called "In Memory of My Paper", it had been a place without advertisements, with mainly words, no photo albums.<sup>49</sup> At *My Paper*, the professionalism of the articles, the literariness of the prose, and the solidarity of online communities, showed conclusively that the abundance and depth of articles posted on *My Paper* were considered phenomenal and irreplaceable.

### 3.2 The Development of the Weblog

The word 'blog' originated from 'weblog', the combination of web and log, which was proposed by Jorn Barger on 17 December 1997 (After 10 Years of Blogs, the Future is Brighter Than Ever, 2007). In 1999, Peter Merholz playfully broke the word weblog into the phrase 'we blog,' and shortly after that the new term 'blog' was widely adopted and used as both a verb and a noun (Merholz, 1999). Literally, a blog refers to a personal online journal, which includes personalised content records and cumulative knowledge management (Lindahl, 2003). Where the traditional journal requires chronological order, and deals with private concerns or secret affairs, blogs are "social by nature" (It's the link, 2006).

In terms of form, a blog is actually an integrated production of many existing applications on the Internet, including bulletin boards, online forums, personal news stations, photo albums, message boards, and instant messages. Due to convenience and practicality, the blog rapidly replaced many Internet applications to become a popular platform for Internet users to communicate and interact with others. During 2004, it was observed that blogs "have become hugely popular and some have started to influence mainstream media." ('Blog' was picked as word of the year, 2004). The term 'blog' was picked as the word of the year by the Merriam-Webster online dictionary in 2004 as "'blog' was the word that people have asked to be defined or explained most often over the last 12 months." ('Blog' was picked as word of the year, 2004).

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<sup>49</sup> Information on the history of *My Paper* can be found at: <http://www.wretch.cc/blog/flyme412/10937103>.

It is generally agreed that the history of Taiwanese blogs starts from Elixus, one of the pioneering online communities in Taiwan. In October 2002, Elixus established a Traditional Chinese Blog Information Centre (<http://blog.elixus.org>) and started to promote the use of blogs.<sup>50</sup> ‘Blog casual gatherings’ initiated by Jedi, an earlier promoter of blogs in Taiwan, became important gatherings in the blogosphere, which included many blog service providers discussing the future of Taiwanese blogs (DearJohn, 2006). In 2003, the establishment of Wretch marked another milestone in the history of Taiwanese blogs. Wretch originated from BBS, famous for its convenience and enormous capacity for online photo albums and large number of loyal users. After Wretch added weblog functions to its service, the number of blog users in Taiwan started to increase rapidly and involvement in blogging became a significant trend. In 2004, when the number of blogs grew rapidly, several blog service providers emerged in succession, including Sina in May, MSN Space in July, and Roodo in December (DearJohn, 2006). In 2005, Yahoo finally provided a beta version of blogs, and suddenly almost every website started to offer blog services, such as Hinet, Xuite, China Times, UDN, ETToday, PCHome Blog, Yam’s Sky Blog, So-net, etc. In 2005, the first Chinese Blog Award was hosted by the China Times in Taiwan and attracted 3931 participants, which were not limited to bloggers in Taiwan.<sup>51</sup> The success of this event signified a climax of Chinese blogs in regard to the quantity as well as the quality.

After Twitter was created in July 2006, it rapidly gained worldwide popularity and microblogs soon appeared to be the new toy on the Internet. Due to its English-only interface, Twitter has never been popular in Taiwan. Yet Plurk, a Taiwanese-born microblog started a similar service to Twitter in 2008, which along with the overwhelming force of Facebook, has unquestionably resulted in a reduction in blogging fever. Senior blogger, BlogWorker, has an entry in 2007 reviewing the phenomena of microblogs. He argued that the emergence of Twitter absolutely represents an evolution of blogs in a broad sense by anticipating that “those conventional blogs (bloggers) will lose a certain degree of agility at will; instead, various ‘expert bloggers’ and ‘commoner bloggers’ will arise” and with weight and influence they will be expected to perform more significant social or economical tasks (BlogWorker, 2007).

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<sup>50</sup> Jedi has a detailed description of the development of blogs in Taiwan. See his article, “Blogs that you need to know—what the hell is the blog?” at <http://jedi.org/blog/archives/003856.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Website of the Chinese Blog Award: <http://blogaward.chinatimes.com/2005/news.htm>.

### 3.2.1 *Naming and Timing*

Blogs are generally named either by simply the word's literal translation, web journals, or its Chinese translation by pronunciation,<sup>52</sup> *bu-luo-ge* in Taiwanese. When Elixus started to promote blogging in Taiwan, they adopted the translation *bu-luo-ge*, which combines a phrase, *bu-luo* referring to tribal units, with a word *ge* referring to a square or a section. Soon after coining this term, the Chinese translation, *bu-luo-ge*, became commonly used in Taiwan. As *bu-luo* is a term largely used for indigenous communities, the popular use of the term *bu-luo-ge* is literally associated with the idea that online communities are just like the diverse tribal units in Taiwan. Although Elixus did not particularly stress tribes, I consider the briskly widespread adoption of this term reflects the trend of grassroots movements and concerns for minority groups in contemporary Taiwan.

Aboriginal movements in Taiwan took place since the 1980s, following a wave of Taiwanese democratisation and localisation movements. In 1994, the term Native Taiwanese was officially used in the presidential address to replace the original term, 'mountain peoples' (Parod, 2008). In 2000, 'A New Partnership Between the Indigenous Peoples and the Government of Taiwan' was a slogan of the Democratic Progressive Party's presidential campaign, when only nine aboriginal tribes were recognised (as mountain indigenous people) by the KMT government. After years of the Name Rectification Movement of indigenous people, five more aboriginal tribes were officially recognised as Taiwanese indigenous tribes by 2008. Though many indigenous Taiwanese have relocated to cities for work and life, basically indigenous communities divided by different tribes in the mountains (and one tribe by the sea) still remain in their own hometowns. Currently, there are 14 indigenous tribes recognised by government, while there are still more than 10 other indigenous tribes fighting for recognition of their identities and cultures (Parod, 2008).

Indigenous people do not wish to be simplified by one unifying name—Taiwan indigenous people—because they have different cultures and traditions; they have different languages and stories; and they have their own names for their tribes. By means of the Name Rectification Movement, indigenous tribes have endeavoured to be recognised and considered by the government and the public. Blogs, with an inclination for individual expression and communal interaction, are aptly called *bu-luo* (tribes) as they are also a place for individuals or groups of people who want to be seen and heard.

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<sup>52</sup> In China, the term 'blog' has a different translation, *buo-Ke* (博客), which contains two Chinese characters including *Buo* standing for wide and extensive and *ke* for guests. In China, blogs and bloggers are both called *Buo-Ke*. This translation is different from the one in Taiwan due to the different social contexts.

### 3.3 New media, Old politics

The appearance of new media forms really has changed the way humans communicate. According to Marshall McLuhan's "the medium is the message", the medium not only carries a message, it decides the message and, in return the message will become the medium. Because all media need users, the messages are thus decided by its users. For example, if the telephone is the medium, anyone who uses a telephone to talk should be viewed as creating a message for that telephone. Bolter and Grusin (1999) extend McLuhan's perspective to an analysis of communicative technology, arguing that there is no so-called new media at all. There is only "remediation" because contemporary media including the Internet, computer games, digital photography, etc., are all related to past media forms. Therefore, the purpose of studying the various forms of media operation is to understand the processes of media configuration and configured human behaviours.

In terms of computer language, users go through a process of 'configuration' when they reply on new media to communicate with the world. The process often begins with a succession of actions—turning on the mobile, the computer, the Internet, and so on. It seems that only after these devices are switched on can a person be 'powered on' to start a new day, in the same way that we would not forget to open windows to see what the weather outside is today. Only by realising how humans are being involuntarily configured and formatted, could we possibly be free of media control in our everyday lives. So this idea brings us to another proposition foregrounded by McLuhan: "the user is the message." At the beginning of *Understanding Media*, he tells us that a medium is "any extension of ourselves". In other words, the medium is an extension of the user, so the user within that medium as a carrier of messages also becomes the medium itself. Since media form is an extension of human beings, McLuhan's concern is more about human beings than media, more about the user than the message itself. Shih condensed this concept into one sentence: "media is the user, and the user is the message" (Shih, 2007). As the Taiwanese blogger and observer, Jedi (2004), stressed the importance of the users of blogs:

What the term blog refers to is neither any particular set of software, nor a specific system or service; rather it is a life attitude with a stress on absorbing and sharing information. Symbolising the values and beliefs of its author, a blog is a communicative medium centring on the author.

With regard to the diary, as it is written by women from the details of 'everyday life', which includes daily routine and essence of daily ordinariness, the 'dailiness' itself becomes the medium. In view of that, I study women and women's culture through studying women's online diaries in blogs, holding that as the diary is the medium, the dailiness is the message.

Thus, my investigation extends to the following: Why and how this dailiness constitutes the content/message of women's diaries? What should be further discussed following on from my suggestion in the previous chapter to regard diaries written by women as an act of feminist practice? With regard to these questions, I will provide a discussion with two case studies in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Here I focus the discussion on the notion that the blog as a new medium has its feminist undertakings, that I call old politics, dating back to the very basic feminist concerns—women's expression and mobility in the public space. With respect to a space for women's expression, Virginia Woolf has argued 85 years ago that in order to express themselves in writing, women need space. In 1929, in her book *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf proposed the essential condition for women to write—a space for enjoying solitude, without disturbance, and economic independence. In the 1930s, very rarely did a woman have her own space at home where she could feel free to shut the door and escape from being a housewife. She famously said, “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is going to write fiction”. For a long time, women have been living in spaces owned by others and been swallowed up in the myth of being a good wife and a good mother. Many potential ‘sisters of Shakespeare’, who might have various capabilities, could therefore play the same role, do the same chores, and eventually bury their gifts among firewood, rice, oil, salt, sauce, vinegar and tea,<sup>53</sup> and sometimes even bottles and nappies, the endless housework of everyday life.

Today, while making money and possessing a room of one's own have become comparatively reachable for women, being a writer is no longer an unreachable (or unachievable) target for those who want to write fiction, or non-fiction. Avocado Sushi is a well-known female blogger in Taiwan. In her entry titled ‘Shakespeare's Sister’, she reflected upon her affection for, and ambivalent feelings about, writing.

Novelist Virginia Woolf believes that if a woman wants to write, she must have money, as well as a room of one's own. This English aunt, who advocated women should strengthen themselves, has another famous expression like this, “If Shakespeare's sisters had had a room of their own, then they could have become Shakespeare too.” ... but if putting me in the place of the main characters of that sentence, with or without a room doesn't matter to me at all. I can even squat by the street to write. But can I carelessly write whatever subjects/themes as I wish and say anything I want to say? It is the key to a frank and joyful writing. ...even if she has a monthly income of hundreds of thousands, and a luxury 50-Ping<sup>54</sup> room quipped with soundproof and airtight windows, Shakespeare's sister might not be able to become Shakespeare. What Shakespeare's sister really

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<sup>53</sup> “Firewood, rice, oil, salt, sauce, vinegar and tea” is a Chinese phrase referring to seven necessities of a day, often used to stress the repeating and trivial household.

<sup>54</sup> A *ping* is equivalent to 3.3057 square meters. Since Taiwan was once a colony under Japanese rule before today's Republic of China, the *ping* is still commonly used despite the fact that the standard measurement of area was changed to square metres in 1945.

needs, is a very thick-skinned face, a super strong heart, and courage to pour out all that she wishes to say. (Avocado Sushi, 3 June 2007)

Her comment on what a female writer really needs in the Internet age reveals several circumstances of women's online writing in contemporary Taiwan. Though it is her personal consideration, this statement reflects many bloggers' concern. Why does "frank and joyful writing" become a challenge to a blog? The "thick-skinned face" and a "super strong heart" are necessities for female writers, so to avoid being easily offended or hurt by other people's criticism or insults to their writings. At the same time, she considers that female writers also need enough "courage" to pour out all that they wish to say if they decide to continue their blog writing and remain true to themselves. When a diary goes online, the basic aspiration of being genuine to oneself inescapably becomes a substantial issue to confront. However, why do some women like Avocado Sushi choose to keep their diaries in public by posting them in their personal blogs? Since using the Internet connection has become a part of many women's everyday lives, self-expression in public or personal writing online has accordingly become a matter of personal preference. It involves decisions about one's existence in cyberspace, which are as simple as they are perplexing. For those who choose to be bloggers/online writers, the question is that after having 'a room of one's own', what are they going to present in their space, and in what ways will they present it? The challenges to women who want to write have become more complex, more democratic, yet no less challenging.

In terms of space, Virginia Woolf's idea of having one's own room still speaks to the changes occurring in 'living' spaces as well as in cyberspace. After 80 years of 'room-pursuing' led by Woolf, women have worked hard to gain more space for themselves in both the public and private spheres. By using the Internet, a woman is empowered with seemingly unlimited mobility to freely 'enter' other spaces. In the meantime, by keeping a personal blog, a woman also provides a portal for others to enter her own particular space. Further, it seems that a blog as an open space offers possibilities for women to have their own space and independence at the same time. While stressing the necessity to have a space of one's own to enjoy solitude without disturbance, Woolf did not overlook the importance of women's financial independence. She added that a woman would still rely on her husband to bring in the "five-hundred pounds" in order to sustain a quality of life (Woolf, 1945, p. 18). If so, what exactly does a room of one's own look like for Shakespeare's sisters today? With regard to this point, I will have a further discussion in the next two chapters by examining two famous female bloggers' blogging practice, which involves self-branding and community-building that make blogs potential tools to increase a woman's income by way of writing about her self.

The widespread use of the Internet has given people quick and easy access to information, and also changed traditional habits of reading and writing. An old Chinese saying goes: “A scholar needs not to go out to know everything in the universe.” This exaggeration of the importance and usefulness of extensive reading is a veritable truth today—one does not need to step outside to know what’s happening daily with various technologies, including television, newspaper, radio, phones, and the Internet. Through blogging, women may communicate and interact with others by way of an unprecedented contact that is both far away in one sense, yet so close in another. Many feelings that are not easy to express in front of others may be more easily and spontaneously conveyed through writing. People may enter each other’s inner worlds through blogging in online personal diaries. While women’s self-expression, in many aspects, is still restricted to the spaces they have and their mobility in those spaces, a blog can be a space for a woman to broaden her space, by not only searching from within but also with supports from outside. In a blog, a woman can narrate her story through personal diary writing to claim the autonomy of her identity. Furthermore, by posting self-narratives she can reconstruct her identity that has often been involuntarily defined by others.

### **3.4 Old Genre, New Trick**

Paper diaries and digital diaries share essential characteristics. Having similar structures, stylistic features, personal content, and an intended audience, diaries and blogs are both used by ordinary people to document their day-to-day activities, experiences, and thoughts. As with diaries, blog writers update their periodic writing at regular intervals with dated entries. In addition to processing personal thoughts, emotions, and experiences, blogs help individual writers to assert a form of control over their circumstances through writing, just as paper diaries do. Therefore in her article, “Teaching New Genre Old Tricks”, Laurie McNeil (2003) argued that the narratives of many online diaries are just like the stereotypical diary, which follows the generic convention of fragmented narratives, going disconnectedly from topic to topic, recording trivially the diarist’s daily life. She contemplated:

Are Internet diaries, and their generic relations, the Weblogs, a different form from diaries in traditional print media? Or have Internet users simply adopted the traditional diary genre and adapted it to the public realm of cyberspace? ... its practitioners in many ways reproduce the traditional diary, upholding instead of resisting the genre both in form and content. As Lejeune observes this latest evolution of the already elastic diary genre ... (p. 29)

While online diaries may not be a “new art form” as Schalchlin (1996) suggested, they do bring to the genre new possibilities that change or expand the functions they can perform. For instance, online diarists can add photographs, audio or video files to their text, along with the

use of hyperlinks on their front page as a directory of the blog, or in each of their diary entries as further references. Besides, as the blog resembles the diary in many aspects, blogs change the traditional experience of diary writing because the medium is public, although as we know diaries/journals have become public. Many popular media have attempted to explain the appearance of online diaries as the phenomenon of weblogs, defining the blog as a “chronological diary” (McKinnon, 2001, p. 67), a “kind of spontaneous online public journal” (Taylor, 2002, p. 68), or as a “sort of hybrid diary/bio/community/bulletin board” (Webb, 2002, p. 22).

Since the diary is a personal text recording of life as it is lived, the immediateness of blogging enhances this feature with its ease and convenience of publishing online diaries simply by clicking the Enter key. Online diarists give the practice of diary writing a public purpose, presuming that others will want to read these records, and even comment on them. Scholars have also noted that the presence of an audience influences the online diarist significantly (McNeill, 2003; Kitzmann, 2003; and Sorapure, 2003). In a blog, the diary is no longer a monologic writing to oneself or imagined others, but has actual readers who respond and interact with the writer. In view of this, the blog can be read as a genre particularly suitable for contemporary diarists to perform social actions, since online participation in this genre allows writers to develop diary conversations with their readers.

### **3.4.1 *Blogging as Social Action***

Blogs are classified into two types by Rebecca Blood (Blood, 2000): the ‘filter style’ offering links to information, and the ‘personal style’ emphasising self-expression by the author. Herring et al. confirm Blood’s claim that the personal style blog is more common than the filter type (Herring, 2004). Serving as a tool to record the subjective experience of authors’ daily lives, the personal perspective of the diary builds the most recognisable ancestral genres of the personal blog (Miller & Shepherd, 2004). Blogging is still a relatively new field in terms of genre. The characteristics of weblogs, according to Miller’s genre analysis, are typified acts of communication based on their form and substance. In an earlier essay, “Genre as Social Action: Catherine Miller (1984) claimed that “genre can be said to represent typified rhetorical action”. She therefore argued that a sound definition of genre should be based on “the action it is used to accomplish” (p. 151), that is to say, the way to look at a genre is not what a text looks like, nor what it is about, but what it does. In this way, genre is pragmatic and could be viewed as an aspect of social action, which connects intention and effect (p. 153). In a paper published in 2004, Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd attempt

to define the blog as a new genre by examining the “*kairos* of the blog”, the particular social context in which the blogs emerged. Seeing blogging as “a new rhetorical opportunity made possible by technology”, they offer an analysis of the basic features of the blog as a genre by discussions of their semantic content and formal features (Miller & Shepherd, 2004). Further, they provide an account of the purpose of the blog, its function and pragmatic value, as social action performed by blogs.

Blogs emerged as a particular cultural movement in its social context. Since the 1990s, people’s desire to peek at the private sides of others has been facilitated by the widespread use of media in everyone’s everyday lives. Calvert characterised such an effect of media saturation as “mediated voyeurism”. Mediated voyeurism became a phenomenon in the 1990s, while the popularity of reality television and the disclosure of celebrities’ private lives in tabloids are two examples of this significant cultural trend. Calvert defined mediated voyeurism as “the consumption of revealing images of, and information about, others’ apparently revealed and unguarded lives, often yet not always for purposes of entertainment ... through the means of mass media and the Internet” (Calvert, 2000, p. 2). The widespread use of the Internet has given people access to information to an extent never experienced before. Citing Calvert’s “mediated voyeurism”, Miller and Shepherd pointed out that blogging emerges as a product of its time and reflects the cultural changes of the late 1990s.

This overflow of mediated information gradually resulted in audiences’ distrust and dissatisfaction with the mediated journalism, which led to their pursuit of a less mediated and more authentic reality via new media. According to Miller and Shepherd (2004), there are three contemporary social forces that promote mediated voyeurism via the Internet: the pursuit of “truth”, the desire for excitement, and the need for involvement. Blogging, including writing about oneself in a personal blog and reading about others in their blogs, is a form of mediated voyeurism that is to some extent interactive and reciprocal, as it is not only an implicit way of communication by self-expression, but also a channel to get alternative information that is more personal.

As a social networking tool, the blog has become a common preoccupation of our time, facilitating self-disclosure. The self-disclosure of bloggers apparently supports mediated voyeurism as its counterpart—“mediated exhibitionism.” Voyeurism, as Miller and Shepherd (2004) put it, “could not have become such a common preoccupation of our times without willing subjects”. Many bloggers are conscious of the fact that their blogs are open to the

public, and therefore consciously write for their potential readers to some degree. In addition to self-disclosure in personal blog entries, interacting with readers by having dialogue in the comments under each post as a matter of course gradually establishes a network community centred on the blog owner. Consequently, self-expression and community development are commonly recognised by many bloggers as two major motivations for blogging. These two motifs constitute two pragmatic actions of blogging, which can be extended to contain four purposes of mediated exhibition: self-clarification, social validation, relationship development and social control (Miller, 2004). The personal form of the blog has a particularly evolutionary value because it seems to both motivate and satisfy readers and writers of blogs when the “objectified social need” that motivates bloggers is related to the self and the relations between selves (Miller, 2004).

### **3.5 The Personal Can Be Political or Diary Writing as Feminist Action**

Traditional diary writing is generally considered as a genre favoured by women. Online diary writing continues to carry similar characteristics and also attracts more female bloggers than usual. Therefore, a considerable amount of female bloggers contribute a lot to the development of this new genre. Regularly posting diaries by simply pressing the Enter button, the ease and immediacy of the blog makes writing and publishing personal feelings and opinions available to everyone who has a computer and access to the Internet. Women’s active participation in blogging reflects their desire to have their voices heard in a world made by men and for men. However, can every woman’s personal writing be related to feminism?

With regard to understandings of feminist writing, there is a consensus that women’s writing, or women-centred writing, is not equivalent to feminist writing.<sup>55</sup> Taking women’s novels as examples, it is generally considered that the action of the female protagonist is the key to assessing whether a novel is feminist writing. In “What is Feminist Writing?”, Chen Ya-shu (2003) used a Chinese novel, *Heroic Women Sketch*, to exemplify that “action” is one of the most important aspects in considering whether women’s writing is feminist. She suggested that if a female protagonist of a literary work takes any action in response to her situation or encounter, and this action helps her to obtain a new identity or to change her destiny, such writing can be seen as feminist (pp. 165–166). In her article, “This Novel Changes Lives: Are Women’s Novels Feminist Novels”, Rosaline Coward (1980) argued that women-centred writings do not have any necessary relationship to feminism. She examined

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<sup>55</sup> See Mary Eaglton, “Towards Definitions of Feminist Writing”, in *Feminist Literary Theory* □ *A Reader*, ed. Mary Eaglton. Cambridge, Mass. : Basil Blackwell, 1986, 211.

several English novels and stressed that it is misguided to “mark a book of interest to feminism because of the centrality it attributes to women’s experiences” (p. 58). Questioning whether many so-called feminist novels are feminist, Coward argued it is important to see if there is a political interest in the writing with regard to feminist consciousness-raising. As the political movement of feminism is always related to particular political aims and objectives, feminism should refer to a set of people acting together “unified by its political interest, not its common experiences” (p. 63).

While the diarist is the protagonist of her diary, a woman’s practice of personal writing can be seen as an action in response to her situation. As I have discussed in Chapter 2, a woman’s diary as personal writing is itself a feminist practice. Examining personal blogs written by women opens discussion about the genre of personal writing—blogging as genre for social action as previously discussed. Blogging, as a social action for self-expression and communication, captures women’s experiences, observations, and emotions, which might remain otherwise private, lost, or unexplored. Carol Hanisch’s short essay, “The Personal is Political”, reviewed the Second Wave movement and consciousness-raising groups, and noted that “one of the first things we discover in these groups is that personal problems are political problems” (Hanisch, 1969, p. 204). As the feminist slogan constantly reminds us, the everyday lives, experiences and feelings of women are political concerns.

### **3.5.1     *The Feminist Denial***

In this sense, the practice of online diary writing should convey strong associations with feminism. However, it should also be noted that there is a large number of female writers who do not claim themselves feminists even though they do have feminist awareness, write about feminist issues and take feminist actions. Most female bloggers prefer to identify themselves with ordinary women. It is now common to hear women declare themselves ‘not feminists’, whereas in the 1970s it was taken as given that any thinking woman would be proud to announce that they were feminists. Australian author, Monica Dux, tells that when she was researching her book, *The Great Feminist Denial* (Simic, Dux & Simic, 2008), she was struck by the number of women who were reluctant to call themselves feminists because they thought they were unqualified:

Many women who did not have access to gender studies educations are wary and scared off by dogmatic, highly theorised feminism. Even women who do study feminism are often turned off by what seems like gate-keeping and dogmatism. One of the problems here is a prevalent assumption that feminism is prescriptive, and that it’s something we have to constantly live up to, like being in a cult or going to gender boot-camp (Bastow, 2008).

A similar phenomenon and reaction can be observed in Taiwan. In her paper, “ ‘Maybe I’m not a Qualified Feminist’: Narrative Construction of Feminism Identity and Practice”, Yu Chen-Yi (2011) interviewed feminists who have become media workers after receiving a feminist education in university, and found that these women tend to reveal an anxiety—“maybe I’m not a qualified feminist” while narrating their feminist practice in the workplace. In Yu’s words, “when these anxieties gather together, they become a public issue” (p.102).

In addition to unavoidable discrimination from society and inevitable pressure from both male and female friends, the media makes a big impact on how feminism is perceived. For example, the Taiwanese Feminist Scholars Association was established in 1993. The next year the Association held a street demonstration, calling for an end to sexual harassment. In order to attract attention, Professor Josephine Ho used the slogan “I want orgasm. No sexual harassment” and this slogan became the headline of the next day’s newspapers. Originally they were a group of people who gathered together and they simply wanted to fight for women’s right. Through media, they were described as extremists who hate men, a group of radical feminists who are against women to be housewife or feminine. Because of the power of media and its sensational exaggeration, this “Josephine Ho event” soon became one of the most representative feminist movements in Taiwan. Radical feminists in Taiwan are relatively few in number. Its influence lies in many Taiwanese people’s first impression on feminism. Eventually, this very first impression of feminist movement has deeply embedded in many Taiwanese people’s mind. In addition, as radical feminism emphasizes the animal fact of being female and ignore the human quality of being attractive, some women who choose to retain and enjoy their natural femininity would rather announce that they are not feminists to avoid criticisms. In this sense, the reason why many women in Taiwan instinctly dodge feminism is that they do not want to be classified as furious women who are against men and femininity.

Blogs provide space where feminism is fortunately being given all kinds of voices with unprecedented autonomy in public expression, under different forms of surveillance though. The danger is that they can still frighten away women who did not receive any education in gender studies. There is also a possibility that blogs become a place where groups of like-minded women simply re-affirm their pre-existing system of belief. We should be aware that women live with their feminist politics in many and varied ways, and we should all respect that. In this regard, female bloggers who confidently justify their choices for their lifestyles and daringly address their rights in their online diary writing, though avoiding the label of feminist, can be reasonably understood within the contexts of feminist writings.

### **3.5.2     *Feminist Narratives as Social Engagement***

Seeing that the feminist blogosphere is a promising alternative to much of the mainstream media, personal writing in a blog can be an effective means of public communication, carrying varieties of feminist narratives. The narratives in women's diaries are not only self-reflections, but also represent a reproduction of culture frameworks in which personal narratives interact with a larger cultural structure, going beyond personal troubles to public issues. To quote Michael Albert in his article "The Personal is Political", "in each instance we uncovered that 'the personal is political,' i.e., the experiences, feelings, and possibilities of our personal lives were not just a matter of personal preferences and choices but were limited, moulded, and defined by the broader political and social setting" (Albert, 1997). Seemingly individual circumstances can actually be connected by social institutions and closely related to each other. In other words, personal outcomes are largely a product of systemic relation and structure because "our personal lives are in considerable part politically delimited and determined" (Albert, 1997). Tracy L. M. Kennedy (2007) considered a personal blog as "both an intimate and communal political practice", where one can vent opinions on current events or social issues, and even reveal a political standpoint. In this sense, blogging about personal experiences can be a way to situate personal preferences and choices within a determined political relation and delimited social structure.

On the whole, if a narration intends to have a potential to change the world, it is necessary to connect a particular personal experience with cultural, political and material aspects of the world. Only when the narrative of subjective experience is embedded into a larger social relation/context, the shared experience or collective identities could be in this manner simultaneously unfolded by personal revelation in narration (Ewick & Silbey, 1995, pp. 219, 221). In other words, through reading personal narratives in blogs, we not only see a concrete description of a blogger's life, but also notice how their behaviour and expression are curbed and controlled by social forces. The accumulated personal choices of individuals represented in the blog would therefore reflect various political phenomena in broader sociocultural contexts. In consequence, the study of women's online diaries not only places emphasis on the investigation of what and how a woman relates to her everyday life in the blog, but also a process of understanding how a woman's identity has been constructed by the environment she lives in. In the course of self-narration, it could also change how an individual constructs her personal identity and the way to communicate with others and the world (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992, p. 2).

Finally, it is also important that feminists are mindful of how they talk of other feminists, and to other women. We need to hear from all women, not just those who are eloquent and confident. Accordingly, an act of narration, including choosing what to say and how to tell, is an achievement itself that measures the accountability of an individual's life experience. When feminism goes digital, blogs seem to offer a format that truly supports the diversity of feminist expression. Blogs can become an effective way to prompt an examination of how personal writing has been consistently devalued and expose the challenge that many women writers face in having their voices heard. In this regard, the blog can therefore be a "vibrant platform for feminist activism" while serving as a virtual consciousness-raising tool (Kennedy, 2007, p. 3). Blogs as platforms can speak against the absent or negative representations of women and feminists in other media. By using blogs or any other Web-based component, feminism thrives in the digital age, as a movement, a theory, or a practice.

### **3.6 Representation of the Self and Online Identity**

With the development of Internet technology and probably also environmental concerns to some degree, contemporary writers have gone through a different writing condition in cyberspace. The evolution of common website tools, with more accessibility and practicality for less technically savvy users has made the publishing process possible and achievable for the wider population. More women have started to have their own blogs, either to seek knowledge and information from others or to express personal opinions and feelings. Those who want to have their words read, no longer need to be literary writers who in the past were supposed to be reviewed and evaluated by critics and then approved and supported by book publishers. Instead, a woman writer can also be the editor, publisher, or even reader and critic, of her own writings.

Marshall McLuhan (1964) wrote of how the presentation of information changed with the medium, through the shift from a literate culture to one mediated by television (McLuhan, 1964). Presentation includes the way the user or originator of the information is represented. This concern is also applicable to the Internet and computer-mediated communication. Since a sense of self or authorship is conveyed differently, the interactive and creative potential of the Web has aroused considerable concerns of personal identity and self-representation.

In general, early digital scholars regarded online spaces, such as MUDs,<sup>56</sup> bulletin boards, and chat-rooms, as sites where users could play with their identities which are generally viewed as fixed in the real world. Users can be free from physical restraints and represent themselves online by choosing their preferred gender/sex or creating an alternative identity. This idea has attracted scholars' attention and many have devoted their research to this liberated online identity. For example, in her influential work, *Life on the Screen* (1995), Sherry Turkle investigated the issue of gender-switching in MUDs, interviewing users who adopt a different gender online. Turkle (1995) used the windows metaphor to argue that the self is no longer playing different roles in different settings because real life "can be just one more window". She explained:

On-line personae are objects-to-think-with for thinking about identity as multiple and decentered rather than unitary. ... What I am saying is that the many manifestations of multiplicity in our culture, including the adoption of on-line personae, are contributing to a general reconsideration of traditional, unitary notions of identity. On-line experiences with "parallel lives" are part of the significant cultural context that supports new theorisations about multiple selves.

This ability to change performative identities at will represents a breakdown in the humanist concept of self. Online identity can be consciously performed in a flexible way. Ultimately, the identity on the computer becomes "the sum of your distributed presence" (Turkle, 1995). This idea breaks down the traditional humanist subject as one identity grounded in a single physical body. In this way, cyberspace becomes a site where fixed categories of identity can be deconstructed.

While theorists like Sherry Turkle have moved away from a stable, static notion of self as a response to digital media, some theories of identity still locate it within the context of bodily experience, such as Donna Haraway's part-human, part-machine cyborg, and Katherine Hayles' emphasis on the embodiment of a posthuman subject. With respect to the breakdown of categories, Donna Haraway's cyborg metaphor offers a new way of looking at identity (Haraway, 1985). The concept of the cyborg, as an outcome of the combination of technology and identity, also leads to a discussion on the posthuman condition. As the fast-growing constitution and development of communication technology have seen phenomenal changes in the formation and recognition of personal identities, the "human condition" has also been greatly changed with the overwhelming power of technology dominant in our everyday lives. In order to re-locate ourselves and others in both the real world and cyberspace, we need to discuss the connection between technology and subjectivity.

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<sup>56</sup> MUDs is an abbreviation which stands for either Multiple User Dungeons, Multiple User Dimension, or Multiple User Domains, referring to multiplayer real-time virtual worlds.

### 3.6.1 *Being Cyborg*

When it comes to the connection of subjectivity and technology, it is inevitable that we deal with the idea of the cyborg, since the identity of humanity is in general “always at stake in the consideration of technology” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 149). A cyborg is someone enhanced by technological mechanisms. For instance, if you have an artificial limb or a hearing aid, if you use a computer or telephone, you are a cyborg, a cybernetic organism extended by electronic and communication devices. Jeff Lewis (2008), though seeing Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* as a utopian fiction, agreed that her cyborg “transcends the limits of human biology and social inscriptions of modernism”, and he further asserted that Haraway has constructed a new liberated subjectivity which forms the basis of her conception of technological body (Lewis, 2008, p. 405). Lewis expounded that Haraway’s manifesto “quite seriously seeks a politics” in which the social relation can be transformed because the hybrid subjectivity of a cyborg is “transgender and ageless” (p. 405).

Nowadays, it is very hard to imagine life without the intervention of technology. For example, those who suffer from a hearing impairment may wear transplanted electronic ears to stimulate their hearing nerve. As they are physically connected with mechanical or electric devices in order to sustain some basic functions of human body, they are literally cyborgs. The intervention of technology can even start as early as from the conception of a foetus, by ultrasound screening, amniocentesis, prenatal diagnosis of genetic disease, or in-vitro fertilisation, which are all designed to predict and remedy, for the benefit of unborn babies and their families. In the 21st century, human existence largely relies on various technologies, and to a certain extent we have already emotionally and practically attached ourselves to many artificial, mechanical or electronic devices. In this regard, the existence of the cyborg is not merely a metaphor or imagination, but a factual/real reflection of the current human condition.

To discuss the concept of the hybrid of human biology and digital technology, Haraway’s imagination of a future dominated by cyborgs is a productive starting point. The juxtaposition of simians, cyborgs, and women in the book, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, vividly indicates an interesting parallel and connection between these three creatures. Breaking down the traditional distinctions between animal, human and machine, Haraway challenges conventional dependence on the essential humanity. Besides, she used the metaphor of cyborg to offer a political strategy that challenges the old dualism of Western ideology and proposes a possible perspective to replace accepted ideologies. Her attempt has

“sparked an explosion of debate in areas as diverse as primatology, philosophy, and developmental biology” (Kunzru, 1997, p. 1).

Haraway also criticised traditional notions of feminism in order to construct a postmodern feminism, arguing that feminists should ground their coalitions on “affinity” rather than “identity”, since a cyborg does not require a stable identity. Such cyborg feminism suggests a new ground that contains more possibilities and flexibility than the feminism of earlier times. One of the fundamental aims of Haraway’s work, in her words, is to bring about “the break-up of versions of Euro-American feminist humanisms in their devastating assumptions of master narratives deeply indebted to racism and colonialism” (Haraway, 1991, p. 1). It is often argued that technology and its partner, civilisation (which is a highly arguable concept in itself) are ways of placing nature under the control of human will. However, in Haraway’s paradigm, the borders between nature and culture become indiscriminate. The combination of nature and civilization/technology brings us the cyborg. The cyborg, as a hybrid of nature and culture, stands for a kind of unfettered self, not limited by traditional binary and dualist paradigms. Haraway declared “the cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics” (Haraway, 1991, p. 150). As Jeff Lewis (2008) indicated, posthumanism for Haraway offers “the possibility of an evolutionary leap” in which the new cyborgian identity is not fixed and the body of the cyborg is liberated from the limited forms of gender, age, ethnicity or sexuality (p. 431). Consequently, the cyborg “straddles the boundary of human and technology, and disrupts many taken-for-granted distinctions between natural and artificial” (Graham, 2002, p. 200). In his article “Why Read Haraway? Recommendations”, Schneider (2005) interpreted Haraway’s claim that “nothing comes without its world” indeed implies that things are always linked to other entities and the vision of connection is presented in many of Haraway’s works. In this way, “we are challenged to see and imagine worlds that are considerably more permeable and characterised by flows and in distinction, rather than by clear boundaries” (p. 160).

Six years after the publication of her *Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway expressed the need to redefine cyborg subjectivity as human subjectivity is not centred and wholly inside the corporeal body and mind of a single human being (Schneider, 2005, p. 160). Cyborg subjectivity is one of many specific forms that challenges modern paradigms of subjectivity (Gabilondo, 1995, p. 430; quoted in (Hall, 2004, p. 124). She hopes the cyborg imagery can “suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves” (Schneider, 2005, p. 181). Nick Mansfield (2000) remarked that the success of Haraway’s argument, grounded in postmodern political history, is “that she sees

how these different domains—the mechanical, the biological, the conceptual and the political—interconnect with one another, where technology as a material reality and as cultural fiction are not separable” (p. 161). *Cyborg Manifesto* forces readers to reconsider their identities and situation in different ways as posthumans in the postmodern condition. As Haraway (1991) pointed out, the image of the cyborg is “a rhetorical strategy and political method” (p. 151). In this sense, female bloggers as cyborgs that empowered with such a rhetorical strategy can voice themselves with less restraint from their physical environment and social condition. Blogging therefore can be viewed as a political method to argue against the male/female binary as the organizing force of society. From this perspective, I consider that a large variety of blogging women are demonstrations of postmodern feminism that blurs boundaries and accepts multiple realities rather than search for a singular truth.

### **3.6.2 *Posthuman Being***

Like Haraway, Hayles also proposed the stability and fixity of the boundaries of liberal humanist subject has been challenged by the emergence of the posthuman within the context of developing technology. “The posthuman subject is an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction” (Hayles, 1999, p. 3). As Katherine Hayles (1999) stated, posthumanism is not a choice to be taken or rejected. The digital media itself already implies a virtualisation of the body in the interface between viewer and machine (Broglio 128). We are already posthuman, thus the stress should be put on how subjectivity is being constructed so as “to keep disembodiment from being rewritten, once again, into prevailing concepts of subjectivity” (Hayles, 1999, p. 5). In other words, posthumanism is a new kind of subjectivity that “privileges informational pattern-play over embodiment” (Davis, 1999). Uniting consciousness and the body, like Merleau-Ponty’s ‘body subject’, Katherine Hayles took Haraway’s cyborg consciousness to a new level. Hayles’ concern is more about the embodiment and disembodiment of technology-dependent bodies and their representation in literature. Through research on the historical development of cybernetics, Hayles attempted to examine how we are being constituted in discourse and in practice as posthuman subjects in an age of ‘informatics’.

Internet technology has changed the way we communicate and provided various channels for interactions with others. In Lewis’s words, “as a decentralised and egalitarian space, this Internet consciousness necessarily implicates a democratic and liberational subject position” (Lewis, 2008, p. 401). While the liberal human subject used to be bounded by physical

embodiment through domination and control, the posthuman condition dissolves boundaries of embodiment and challenges the concept of human subjectivity by reducing human consciousness to patterns of information.

In her book *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies, Literature, and Informatics*, Hayles regarded posthumanism as a welcome to the possibilities of information technology (1999, p. 291). However, she is critical that “embodiment” has been overlooked in the cybernetic construction of the posthuman as “information had lost its body” (p. 4). She argued that although the liberal humanist subject in cybernetics has been deconstructed, the idea that the human being is a set of informational processes still adheres to the perspective of “mind-oriented” human subjects. In consequence, the “flesh continues to be erased in contemporary discussions about cybernetic subject” with regard to human subjectivity (p. 5). Hayles therefore proposed that the “disembodied” information cannot fundamentally replace the human body because information technology can only be incorporated into human life practices. In other words, one must rely on his/her own sensual body to perceive the external environment, in order to maintain a consciously-thinking subject. Drawing a distinction between body and embodiment, Hayles explained that while “body” is an abstract idealised form, “embodiment” is always contextual. How information came to be seen as an abstract is one of Hayles’ central concerns. Although she agreed that the “disembodiment of Internet users liberates them from bodily and cultural condition/restriction” (Hayles, 1999, p. 95), she stressed that “just because information has lost its body, it does not mean that humans and the world lost theirs” (p. 7). As posthumanism refers to “a liberal humanist view of the self”, the posthuman situation should be liberated from the problematic mind-body dualism (pp. 2, 5). Against the Cartesian dualism, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of “body-subject” and carnal thought can be applied to emphasise that it is through the “lived body” that we are able to perceive of others and communicate with others (Xu, 2005, pp. 69–88). The existence of the cyborg, as a new way of being that eliminates boundaries, relies on a “technological body” to become a communicative “body-subject” which can perceive, express, and interact in the live world. (Xu, 2005, pp. 69–88).

From the cybernetic interaction, cyborgs like us begin to construct narrative histories of selfhood. Hayles made the criticism that contemporary beliefs and linguistic constructions destroy the role of embodiment in real life. Treating scientific and literary narratives as interpenetrating, Hayles tended to view the process of scientific experiment as a kind of literary narrative. According to Hayles, scientists elaborate their scientific theories by way of various narratives, which function as passageways for scientific ideas to enter into wider

recognition and circulation. Without the support of narrative, scientific experiments and assumptions would not be able to be comprehended by readers/others. In other words, the myth/hypothesis that the “human body would eventually be replaced by information technology”, ironically, needs to be narrated by these scientists who stand for the embodiment of disembodied information. That is, the posthuman body, which seems to be disembodied via information technology, is again materialised and thus re-embodied.

### **3.6.3 *Cyborg Body as an Interface***

Human technologies, such as language, writing, physics, chemistry, mathematics, the mechanical body, and unknown future technology, are all parts of the entity of human beings, shaping our identities and subjectivities (Hsu, 2008). For instance, language distinguishes human beings from all other living things in several ways. In Beniger’s words, “language must be considered at least in part a technology, since it is an artefact that we can modify somewhat through our own innovation, but it also appears to reflect—and to be constrained by—processing capabilities innate to the human brain” (Beniger, 1996, p. 85). If we consider language as a form of technology, we may find that humans have been a human–technology mixture, the cyborg in a broad sense. For that reason, the cyborg should be viewed as an inevitable outcome in the history of human evolution.

Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* was written on the computer in 1985 before the coming of the Internet age. Her metaphor of the cyborg provided an unconventional perspective to be used in various fields including science studies, feminist theory and performing arts. The idea that machines can contribute to human liberation continues to contribute to the discussion of the relationship between cyber-culture and the human condition in this high-tech information age. Haraway’s cyborg imagery means, “both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, spaces, stories” (1995, p. 13). She called these fractal subjectivities the split self: “The split and contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings that change history” (p. 193). Seeing splitting as a privileged position, this metaphor can well be applied to the context of the Internet, where a new concept of identities has been challenging our perception of categories, relationships, spaces, and even stories.

Katherine Hayles (1999) described the relationship of body and embodiment as the connective tissue between embodiment or lived experience, and the body or cultural perceptions. I view this relationship as an influential structuring principle of representations

of female identity in the blog. Through blogging, women's lived experiences are embodied in their writing, and identities are constructed by their representation of their bodily experiences. The body is a crossing point between subjectivity and an immersive environment. As Carolyn Guertin (2002) suggested, "the body is not a flat construct, but an interface with its own environment". In this sense, embodied subjectivity as a networked interface is constantly redefining itself within power relations, so it follows that an embodied materialism is a manifestation of the *technology of the self*.

### **3.6.4 Technologies of the Self in the Age of Internet**

Foucault focused his attention on what he called "practices of the self" in his later works (Storzier, 2002). He defined practice as "an exercise of self upon self, by which one tries to work out, to transform oneself and to attain a certain mode of being" (Foucault, 1987, p. 2). Foucault (1988) described the practices of the self as "technologies of the self" and traces the genealogy of these technologies throughout the history of Western civilisation up to early Christianity (Bakardjieva, 2011). In the 3rd century BC, a new technology, writing, became a common tool employed in this practice: "By the Hellenistic age, writing prevailed ... Taking care of oneself became linked to constant writing activity. The self is something to write about, a theme or object (subject) of writing activity" (Foucault, 1988, p. 27). Through writing about oneself, a person is examined and contemplated for the purpose of self-care, because "they are you—what you thought, what you felt" (p. 29).

The practice of diary writing makes private and lived experience public and representable. With descriptions of ordinary life and reflections on certain events, online diary writing provides what Lejeune and Bogaert (2006) called a way of practising life for its practitioners. In blogs, online diarists adopt introspection and self-writing as techniques for producing knowledge about the self and enabling its transformation. Users deploy ordinary life as the ground for the establishment and development of selfhood (Seigel, 2005; Taylor, 1989). Diarists in their blogs could enact certain identities through the practice of online writing as a technology of the self. Drawing on Michel Foucault's theories of subjectivity, I conceptualise online diary writing as technologies of the self, and I will apply this idea to the discussion of my case studies in the following two chapters. It is argued that an analysis of technologies of the self requires the mutual shaping of artefacts and practices of the self. The goal of this application is not to examine Foucauldian theory, or even to attempt to apply it consistently to the analysis of the technologies and practices with relation to blogging. My objective is to employ the evocative concept of "technologies of the self" as an object to think about the

relationship between a woman's online writing practice and the construction and performance of her identity. Thus, I will experiment with the proposition of seeing blogging, specifically women's diary writing blogs, as technologies of the self in the sense implied by Foucault, but without strict allegiance to the nuances of his philosophical analysis, seeking to extend the Foucauldian notion by considering how materiality partly shapes the process of identity formation for online diarists.

## Chapter 4

### ***Wealthy Lady Nana's Diary: Caring, Showing, Performing, and Producing of the Self***

The practice of diary writing helps a woman find alternative narratives for her life experience and personal stories. Through keeping a diary on a blog, a woman can demonstrate and prove the value of the ordinary tasks and experiences that characterise her life and constitute her multiple identities. Writing is important in the culture of taking care of oneself, and as such the diary is a cultural form of self-expression and an act of communication (with the diarist and its potential readers). When this self-writing practice transcends from paper diaries to the online diary, changes in cultural form need to be examined in conjunction with the technologies. To this end, Foucault (1988) investigated the relationship between the subjectivity and the self in his later work. He described technologies by which individuals may “transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). Foucault observed that these technologies include activities such as letter writing or journal keeping, though varying in different contexts. Margaret McLaren (2002) suggested that there are relevant applications of Foucault’s ideas to contemporary feminist practices (2002, p. 145). She applied Foucault’s notion of practices of the self to contemporary feminist practices, such as consciousness raising and autobiography. She categorised autobiographical or self-reflective writing as a technology of the self, through which one can carry out an emancipatory process for one’s identity. McLaren found that:

Discussing topics often seen as trivial or “silly female stuff”, such as housework, childbirth, child rearing, orgasm, fear of aging, and beauty, women discovered some commonalities in their experiences. Even more important, sharing their experiences enabled women to see their problems not as individual pathology, but as social and political issues. (2002, p. 156)

Drawing on this understanding of autobiographical and self-reflective writing as a technology of the self, I examine the online diary of a blogger known as Wealthy Lady Nana in this chapter and consider that her diary-style blog is an artefact in the processes of self-formation on the Internet. I consider that Wealthy Lady Nana exemplifies many female bloggers in Taiwan who keep diaries through their blogs in order to take care of themselves. I argue that online diary writing is a practice for women not only to take care of themselves, and show themselves with the assistance of media technology, but also is an approach to perform and produce their identities. Therefore, I discuss Wealthy Lady Nana’s online diary

to examine how she considers her blog as a space to represent the process of self-development and self-production. I accordingly conceptualise Wealthy Lady Nana's online diary writings as technologies of the self. According to Foucault, the technologies of the self would include three types of technology as an integral part: technologies of sign systems, technologies of power, and technologies of production. To analyse how this case reflects these technologies, I first explore the idea of care of the self as the foundation of Foucauldian technologies of the self, and then examine the technologies of the self in terms of sign systems, power, and production in order to identify the way they exist within the blog, *Wealthy Lady Nana's Diary*.

#### **4.1 From Diary to Blog: Writing as Constant Care of the Self**

Wealthy Lady Nana was not a celebrity per se before blogging, but is now well-known in Taiwan for her diary-style blog about her personal life. Whilst most bloggers choose to set themes or topics, and some bloggers write about sensational topics to attract readers, Wealthy Lady Nana became popular for simply writing about her own 'ordinary' life. Wealthy Lady Nana writes about herself through the daily narration of her own personal life and finds that such reflection is of value to her relationships with family and friends. She emphasised this value in an early entry on her blog dated 5 December 2005, as she explored the idea that many parents have tried endlessly to understand their children's inner worlds but still they do not have a clue. Peeking at diaries to gain insight would only infuriate the children; opening letters would also face accusations of dishonesty by from them. Such behaviours are not befitting her parental role (attached as it is to dignity and status). For these reasons, Wealthy Lady Nana said that her parents were fortunate/privileged to have a daughter like her who writes her diary online:

This November, under my instructions, Mum and Dad finally got a desktop computer and applied for broadband Internet. They eventually enter into the age of the Internet. ... My Dad and Mum start to get online to look at my writing and photos in my blog, including readers' comments. ... From my blog, they can openly see my everyday life, know my relationships, and understand my emotions and feelings. (5 December 2005)

In 2008, Wealthy Lady Nana participated in an online competition, "Million-Dollar Blogger", designed to discover any outstanding bloggers. This competition was not restricted to any particular type of blog, so its participants varied stylistically. However, most bloggers set one particular theme for their blogs so that they could target specific online readers and efficiently attract more readers. Wealthy Lady Nana's blog was a rare example. With the title, "Wealthy Lady Nana's Plump Diary", her blog is literally just a personal diary. It was probably her open attitude to displaying her private life with detailed descriptions, and sometimes with illustrations or photos, which attracted readers. Over nine months, Wealthy

Lady Nana accumulated the most votes from the online group Net Friends, and she won the first prize. On this basis the style of her blog has been described as “a blog that becomes famous without a united theme.” She expressed her gratitude to her mother in one entry:

Mum kept her own diaries and also wrote a diary for me. I inherit the lifeblood of writing from her so I can continue to witness my life with writing. (3 April 2008)

The diary functions as both a private and public text: private in the sense that it was ostensibly not intended for publication, and public in the sense that it was shared among members of the family (Bunker, 1990, p. 20). Keeping a record of everyday life for future eyes, Wealthy Lady Nana’s mother was described by her as “a blogger of an ancient time”. Wealthy Lady Nana said that her mother kept a diary for her since she was born and continued recording her details of her life every day until she was two years old, as she was her first daughter. Wealthy Lady Nana attributed her writing habit to her mother, who demonstrated the power of diary writing through her own practice. Equally as important is that she preserved Wealthy Lady Nana’s early years through the diligent recording of activities that shaped her everyday life.

A woman’s diary “is something like a family history, a souvenir meant to be shared like a Bible, handed down through generations, to be viewed not as an individual’s story but as the history of a family’s growth” (Schlissel, 1989, p. 10). Because women have traditionally been the ones who preserve the memories of families, life stories in women’s diaries are especially important and informative records (Beattie, 2007, p. 123). Twenty years ago, when Wealthy Lady Nana was herself twenty years old, she revealed that she found a diary in her mother’s wardrobe, and the first page of the diary holds the title: “Xiao-Duan’s Diary—mom writes on your behalf”. In the diary she read:

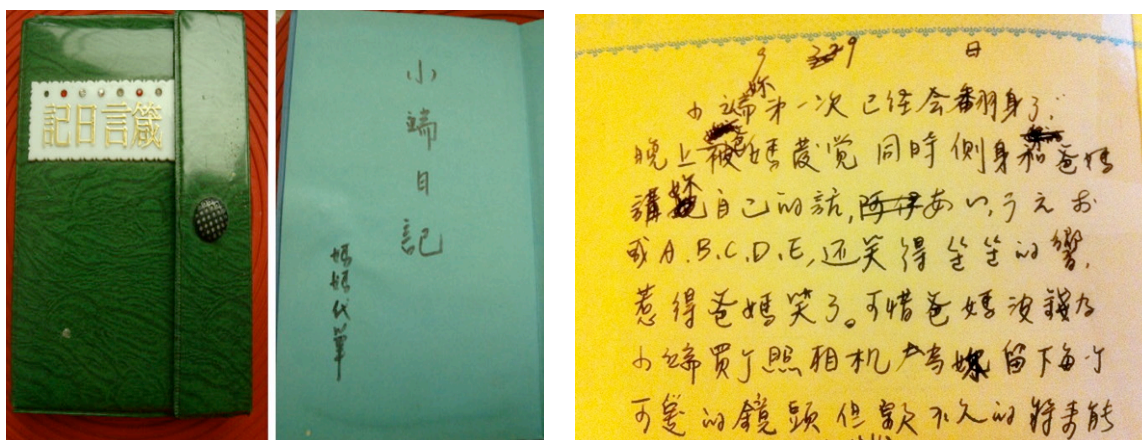
When Xiao-Duan was just born, the first thing the nurse said was that she had beautiful big eyes and white skin. But then I found her nose and lips were more beautiful, like her father. I hope she will always be as beautiful. (C. Su, 2013, p. 15)<sup>57</sup>

The revelation that her mother kept a diary for her since the first day she was born astonished her. Before the age of twenty, she had been troublesome for her parents—stubborn and rebellious, and never a typical student who achieved good grades. Because she had never been supported and praised by her mother (at least in her own memory), she had doubts that her mother was biologically related to her. This suspicion added to the already fraught nature of her relationship with her parents, shaped as it was by strict discipline and harsh criticism. The diary, however, records something completely different from her own experiences and

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<sup>57</sup> Su Chen-Duan is the real name of Wealthy Lady Nana.

recollections. She stated, “I had never thought that Mum could have such a tender tone.” Wealthy Lady Nana explained that she felt the people and things revealed in that diary were like something from another world.



(Cover and content of “Xiao-Duan’s Diary”—written by her mother)<sup>58</sup>

Although it had been a secret to Wealthy Lady Nana, her mother’s diary was obviously written for her with an explicit purpose. Her mother’s original intention was to record her daughter’s childhood before the little girl had a clear memory and the ability to write a diary of her own. Her mother did not anticipate that the appearance of this diary would become a turning point in her relationship with her daughter. It was a starting point for Wealthy Lady Nana to make changes to the way she treated her mother. In her autobiography, Wealthy Lady Nana talks about the significance of this diary, which unveils the unknown part of her life and offers a means of understanding years past:

In my memory, Mum and Dad’s strict rejection, severe restriction, harsh sarcasm, and cruel punishment ... all these feelings of resentment and grievance have been undone by this diary. My past rash behaviour to prove myself and ask for love appears so redundant and stupid in the light of this diary. (C. Su, 2013, pp. 26–27)

Regarding that diary as a collection of the lost memories of her unknown self, Wealthy Lady Nana took the diary away from her mother and kept it with her as a reminder of her early life. She has expressed her gratitude to have the diary, which is filled with love and has since enabled her to realise a sense of her own significance:

This diary recurrently reminds me that my birth is the most joyful present to Mum and Dad, and I am a child being loved and respected. It gives me sufficient self-respect to let me learn to value myself and realise the significance of my existence lies not in social status or achievement, but simply the fact that I am their daughter. (3 April 2008)

<sup>58</sup> Images are cited from Wealthy Lady Nana’s Diary in her entry dated 9 May 2011 title “I love mom; Mom loves me.” <http://abig99.pixnet.net/blog/post/35290433>

The diary, with its emotive prose, pride and praise, dramatically changed her life. She made up her mind to change and resolve the issues in her relationship with her parents. As a result, she decided to spend more time learning about herself and caring for herself by means of writing a diary. In one entry titled, “Back to the Past”, Wealthy Lady Nana reasserted the importance of the diary to her:

Since 2001, I started to write on my blog and record many big events or little things in the last twelve years. My family all have the habit of diary writing. After watching *Nine: Nine Times Travel*, I reaffirm my determination to continue keeping [a] diary hereafter because I want to read it twenty years later. (31 May 2013)

Writing serves as a platform for her search for identity and self-knowledge, and which eventually projects a sense of self-care. Wealthy Lady Nana’s practice and persistence in diary writing corresponds with what Foucault particularly described as the care of the self to be “driven into their existence, and which is a principle of restlessness and movement, of continuous concern throughout life” (Zylinska, 2009, p. 76).

While blogs can play the same role in bloggers’ lives that paper-based diaries once filled before, they also possess characteristics that allow them to fill some different needs which cannot be fulfilled in paper-based diaries. In a conventional diary, life stories are recorded, interpreted, and responded to by the author. Even when writing for potential readers, authors actually live in their ‘virtual’ world as they imagine future readers within the process. In contrast, online diary writing brings diarists out of the personal world of imagination and places them within a world of connection. Writing as way of caring for the self, assisted by digital technologies, results in a way of seeing one ‘self’ as distinct from other aspects of one’s self or subjectivity. In her autobiography Lady Nana reflects on the ways she came to consider communication and interaction with others among the most important purposes of personal expression:

Through talking to myself I organise myself. Asking and answering myself is the best way to understand myself. Only to face yourself can you hear the genuine voice coming from the depth of your heart. ... However, I realise one thing: I can live very well all by myself, but if I don’t open myself to others, no one can come into my world to participate in my life. (C. Su, 2013, p. 136)

For Lady Nana, her blog is an important space, in which her family and friends are inextricably connected to her. In addition to communication and interaction, the blog helps her to see herself from different perspectives; something only made possible through reflections drawn from readers’ responses. Ultimately the practice of online diary writing extends concepts of self-knowledge into understandings of multiple realities, constructed by and within the Internet.

## 4.2 Show Thyself to Know Thyself: Representation of the Self as a Symbol

Technologies of the self, as Maria Bakardjieva and Georgia Gaden (2011) argue are “tightly intertwined with technologies of sign systems such as the mass communication media, the cultural industries and the multisensory discourses they propagate” (p. 406). If the self is ultimately expressed in terms of the semiotic systems of popular culture, such as film, music, fashion, among other things. To this end the interfaces of social networking sites like Facebook invoke the associated symbols of such cultural phenomena through displays of the individual user’s favourite band, film, book, or song. Christine Rosen (2007, p. 16) asked in *The New Atlantis*:

Does this technology, with its constant demands to collect (friends and status), and perform (by marketing ourselves), in some ways undermine our ability to attain what it promises—a surer sense of who we are and where we belong? The Delphic oracle’s guidance was *know thyself*. Today, in the world of online social networks, the oracle’s advice might be *show thyself*.

A focus on the older directive/capacity to “know thyself” and Foucault’s ethics of “care for thyself” help in understanding social networks as a “tekhne” or art of life (Zylinska, 2009, p. viii). As Abbas Yasmine and Fred Dervin (2009) state in *Digital Technologies of the Self*, in the Foucauldian sense that “more and more people are taking care of themselves with the web 2.0 and 3.0 technologies affordances” (p. 2). In contrast to many social networking tools, blogging can be seen to productively engage with Foucauldian understandings of “the care of the self”, as Foucault has linked the act of writing to the “constitution of the self”, individualization and subjectivity (McLaren, 2002, p. 148). A blog, as a tool for expression and communication, helps to recognise complex individual “selves” through “practices of the self” (Faubion, 2001, p. 127). Diary writing in a personal blog, as a practice for the cultivation of the self in (and of) writing, reinforces the means by which “writing aids self-examination and reflection on one’s actions, whether writing for oneself or to another” (McLaren, 2002, p. 150).

Unlike the highly structured profiles in social networking sites like Facebook, a blog appears, by comparison, to be a space that promotes freedom in the presentation of a personal profile and the deployment of the blog layout. Accordingly, in the following section I offer a brief account of the thinking behind the title of Wealthy Lady Nana’s blog, I explore the front page display of her blog, and attend to aspects of her writing in which she “shows herself” through her own *practices of the self*.

### 4.2.1 *Symbol System in the Blog*

In the article “A name is a lifelong symbol”, Wealthy Lady Nana tells the story of naming her blog. The process began in 1994 when she encountered a group of males discussing women in an online forum on the NTU BBS<sup>59</sup> and she found herself wanting to join the debate in defence of women, as a female voice in a male dominated arena. In order to gain attention from the male readers, she chose an account name she knew they would consider sensational—abig99. When pronounced, nine-nine is a homonym of breast in Chinese, so her account name purposely implied “a big breast”, and this provocative name successfully attracted attention in the forum. In 2005 after she relocated all her online work from PChome to Wretch,<sup>60</sup> she officially started to regularly post her writings in the blog called “Wealthy Lady Nana’s Fu-Tai Diary.”<sup>61</sup>

Beyond the title, readers’ first impressions of the blogger are frequently formed based on the layout of the front page. At the top of Lady Nana’s page is a masthead with a picture, which is the same one used on the cover of her recently published book, *The More You Want, The Happier You Are* (2013).



(Book cover image)

<sup>59</sup> NTU BBS (BBS of National Taiwan University) was the most popular of all the BBS sites in Taiwan. For further information about BBS, please refer to the discussion on its development in Chapter Three.

<sup>60</sup> Wretch was originally one of the BBS, and had been one of the most popular platforms for blogs and net albums in Taiwan. It was then taken over by Yahoo Taiwan in 2006, and the blog does not exist anymore after 2013.

<sup>61</sup> “Wealthy Lady Nana’s Fu-Tai Diary” is my translation from the Chinese title of the blog. Wealthy Lady Nana refers to *Qui-Fu Nana*. *Qui-Fu* in Chinese refers to a woman from a rich family or who is married to a wealthy husband, so she does not need to work to sustain her living expenses by herself. *Fu-Tai* in Chinese is an adjective used to describe a person who looks a little bit fat because of living and eating well. With this title, Lady Nana expresses her wish to be a happy woman without worldly worries.

In this picture, she is barefoot, in a casual dress, sitting with her legs crossed on a glossy timber floor surrounded by random piles of books. The expression in her eyes and her welcoming smile convey the idea that she is relaxed, and ready to talk with anyone who comes into this place, her blog, a room of her own that is open to all. The choice of this image offers the reader an essence of her personality, or at least of the style and tone of her blog. As a licenced clinical counsellor, Wealthy Lady Nana writes frequently about mental health and relationships between men and women, though she presents herself not as a listening professional, but an experienced and empathetic friend. She reveals her own problems in relationships and confesses her vulnerability, whilst maintaining an attitude that is positive and carefree. The piles of books in the central photograph imply that she is an intellectual, whilst her soft and feminine clothing reminds us that she is a woman – someone most female readers can identify with. As she stated in one of her entries, “even just a pose or a gesture that you do before a camera discloses how you want to be looked upon by others” (4 March 2009). Wealthy Lady Nana is very careful about the presentation of her blog because she believes that messages contained in one’s blog shape the blogger’s personal identity for herself and for others. She therefore concluded:

You think it is highly anonymous, and you think you can hide your identity as long as you don’t show your face in the blog. Actually a blog displays many things, even if there is no photo or profile, you can still easily reveal aspects of a person. ... her taste is also obvious at first sight ... look at the icons and colour combination of a blog ... because every choice reveals her values. (4 March 2009)

In addition to the blog’s main heading, ‘Wealthy Lady Nana’s Fu-Tai Diary’, there are three key pieces of information contained in the masthead. Firstly, she introduces her books by listing titles of four books followed by a bracketed note—“Click to purchase.” Second, she lists ways to interact with her, including her email address and the two other social networking sites that she is using—Plurk and Facebook. Plurk functions like Twitter. It was used as a substitute Twitter in Taiwan for its Chinese language interface. However, it has gradually lost its popularity since Facebook has become the most common social networking site in Taiwan. For that reason, Wealthy Lady Nana’s last login on Plurk is June 2013. The third part comprises links to a selection of her diary entries. Within this section readers can easily access the most popular articles.

From the information provided and the design of this masthead, it is obvious for newcomers that Wealthy Lady Nana is a famous blogger, and she has thoughtfully organised some orientation for new comers to see the best part of her. On the right side of the page are sidebars, including a badge for her Facebook page followed by a cluster of advertisements.

She does not provide a detailed description about herself in the profile of her blog. Readers need to click and link through to her Facebook page to get further information. She uses three simple sentences to introduce herself:

At present, I am a psychological counsellor and a writer.

In the future, I want to be a personal trainer and a chef.

In the past, I had been a lecturer at a university and a television employee.

Apparently, she purposely ignores the formulaic criteria and categories set by the design of Facebook. Instead, she offers concise factual information and a brief glimpse into her own aspirations. In this way, she avoids the routine judgements associated with the standard selection of one's favourite films or songs, which, being subjective for most people, can be reductive and even misleading. Besides the basic features, including the list of article categories, recent articles, and readers' comments, there is a counter that indicates the popularity of the blog. A box is constantly updating currently online readers. On 1 May 2014, Wealthy Lady Nana's cumulated popularity had reached 68,369,413 hits. The number of visits/ hits that day was 7,636 at 1:28pm Taiwan time, with 124 online readers simultaneously viewing this blog.

From the side bar, readers can easily see the categories of articles classified by the blogger. She carefully categorises her posts, with headings including: diary, home, food, travel, beauty, family, friends, works, fashion, music, TV, films, psychology, and love. Each topic is further qualified by several words/descriptors that give readers basic ideas about the content. For example, "Cook—housewife Nana does her duty", "Gossip— Nana's opinions on looks", "Fashion—Clothing study club", and "Love—Introducing my Little Boyfriend."<sup>62</sup> Some categories were added after she became famous and published the first book in 2004, such as publications, charity, events, and commercial projects. From the categories, descriptions, and title of each entry, readers can access substantial information and knowledge about the blogger, and this knowledge shapes readers' understandings of Wealthy Lady Nana's persona and identity. In other words, her identity is materialised by the symbol systems displayed on the webpage of the blog. While the blog is often compared to its handwritten/ printed predecessor as a newer form of diary, its designs for media communication are inherent and apparent. It is evident from the topic of each entry that these technologically shaped

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<sup>62</sup> 'Little Boyfriend' is what Wealthy Lady Nana calls her boyfriend in the early entries of her blog because when they first met each other, she was a 24-year-old teaching assistant in a university and he was just an 18-year-old high school student.

communications foreground an essential difference between the conventional diary and the online diary in blogs.

In all, the front page of a blog like this, with information symbolised in the blog title, a condensed personal profile, categories of articles, or topics (with associated 'slogans'), indicates the already familiar message—that the blog is designed to encourage you to 'broadcast', and by association 'market' yourself. Wealthy Lady Nana said "I enjoy the pleasure of deciding a topic for my writing. In doing so, I imagine I am writing slogans for newspapers or products" (4 March 2009). It is undeniable that blogs are complicit within the larger discourses of consumer society, which "is a market society; we are all in and on the market, simultaneously customers and commodities" (Bauman, 2004, p. 96). Wealthy Lady Nana's writings about relationships, using personal stories about her boyfriend to share her experience and opinions, garnered the attention of 'the market', as journalists sought interviews and she was invited to give lectures on the topic. However, in one entry she expressed her displeasure at being defined by this aspect of the blog:

Since I started writing my blog, I became an expert on relationships. They always focus on the man-woman relationship, of a mature woman who is so professional in hunting young men. In fact, there are still many other issues I can discuss. (22 July 2008)

Although it is true that as a psychological counsellor Lady Nana's professional opinions on personal relationships are usually most welcomed and valued by her readers, she expressed her disappointment at being stereotypically positioned. Readers' responses as consumers' preferences reflect what the name Lady Nana refers to, and in this way Lady Nana therefore realised how readers/consumers have formed the idea of her online identity. "What can I sell?" becomes a question to every blogger who wants to locate themselves in the commercialised blogosphere and find a 'market value' for themselves in cyberspace. Besides, she was also disappointed with the outcome of interviews when they were written as articles in newspapers or magazines. She complained:

In those interview articles, most of them are infused with journalists' subjective descriptions and metaphors. After reading them, I cannot but sigh, "I'd rather write the articles by myself." Since I am not an illiterate person, my words and tones must be more precise and correspond with what I want to express. (22 July 2008)

The interviewers, like readers, may have had preconceived ideas of Lady Nana shaped by their reading experience of her diary. As a social platform, one of the major functions of the blog is to communicate with others. The right of interpretation rests on every individual reader as a different interpreter. Since the blog also plays the role of a performative space to display one's self-knowledge, Wealthy Lady Nana prefers to write about herself on her own

terms to avoid misleading descriptions resulting from others' misreading and misinterpretation. While most social networking sites feature in their interactive and communicative features, the blog, as a social networking site itself, is distinctive for its expressive and narrative nature. Bloggers have chances to tell their stories and interpret them in their own ways.

In doing so, readers' knowledge and understanding of Wealthy Lady Nana as a woman and a blogger comes from the content of her online dairy entries as well as the way she expresses herself and narrates her stories. Although the term 'online diaries' is clearly connected to the traditions of the written diary and the generic rules and expectations that come with them, the expression 'blogs' invites a reading of these writings as a new art form—one without the cultural baggage of an existing genre (McNeill, 2003, p. 29). Using diary writing as a constitution of the self, she negotiates the semiotic systems, which are shaped by these new media technologies, whilst embracing the benefit and profit from such technologies as part of the media and cultural industries. In other words, she deliberately shapes her blog identity in the process of diary writing, which can be considered as what Foucault (1988) elaborated, the labour of the self on itself, by means of diary writing. Although she accentuates the genuine/authentic nature of writing about herself, Wealthy Lady Nana realises that limitations and challenges still exist:

The art of writing and reading is associated with the knowledge of hermeneutics and phenomenology. Hermeneutics refers to the way you interpret the language used by the other party. Phenomenology lies in what you see subjectively. Taking a journalist's description of my laughter for example, originally I laughed to mock myself for that "I cannot but accept the truth, or what can I do?" However, it was written as a "careless giggle." To me, the previous one is that I am consciously choosing to accept something, and the latter one becomes that I am only naïvely influenced by others. (22 July 2008)

In writing about herself, Lady Nana insists in generating personal discourses on her identity in her blog, in which she can still have chance to defend for herself if there are any misunderstandings in readers' interpretation. She prefers to take the responsibility for any writing about her, particularly that which was written by herself. However, Wealthy Lady Nana also conceded that she cannot blame other people for misinterpreting her expression and emotions. In the blog, as a space for new media constructions of personal and gendered stories, identities and values are formed through self-expression and narrative. For Wealthy Lady Nana, "showing yourself" through blogging narrative, is therefore paradoxically engaged with both a benefitting process of her online and offline identity, and a negotiating process with sign systems which construct and decide the representation of her self through digital technology.

### 4.2.2 *Femininity and Negotiated Identity*

To examine Wealthy Lady Nana's blogged personal identity as 'a woman', I attend to the discursive construction of femininity in her diary entries. I examine how she negotiates herself within the broader structures of patriarchal society. Among the various topics in her blog, beauty has been a major concern for Wealthy Lady Nana since she started to blog in 2001. For instance, she records her experience with, and feelings about, fighting pimples in detail with photos spanning from late 2004 to mid-2005. She shares her experience of wearing braces on her teeth for one year from 2011 to 2012, again with vivid photography documenting the progress. In 2013, she decides to engage in fast walking and body training every day to keep fit and healthy. At the age of 39, she revealed in an entry that she plans to have her first baby, and after daily exercise for one year she proudly announced that she has regained the "young physical body of a 25 year old". Long-term observation may suggest that Wealthy Lady Nana is a person who admires and advocates natural beauty. Accordingly, readers can tell from her early entries that whether or not to wear make-up had been a struggle for her. After she becomes famous, in her frequent media promotions, and she is always confident and pretty in her appearance. It seems by this time that femininity is no longer a 'question' or 'decision' for Wealthy Lady Nana. Rather it has become an internalised and recognised quality in her, attached to her performances as a competent and competitive woman at work and in relationships.

As the stories are told and entries written in the blog create a gendered identity, the specific words and phrases deployed by Lady Nana can be used to offer a discursive analysis of femininity, as her entry on cosmetics, as a selected topic, demonstrates. Wealthy Lady Nana has said she had a "mask addict syndrome" when she was a university student. She did not dare go to school without makeup, because only with the assistance of cosmetics could she face people confidently. "My skills in making-up even amazed my brother. I could transform myself from a sloppy woman in only thirty minutes." (10 December 2004). After she met her boyfriend and they lived together, she would not have private time and a secret space to "do the magic", so she gradually took off her mask. "I admit that I am fraudster who is a completely different person before and after makeup." (10 December 2004). In the early entries in her blog, Wealthy Lady Nana usually indicates that she was not confident with her appearance, so she spent various efforts only to make herself look prettier. She relates this insecurity in how she was treated at university:

I have never thought plastic surgery can save a woman's life. However, by saying so, I have to admit that although appearance is not everything for women, it is indeed a very useful weapon.

I have been treated rudely quite often. ... then I continue to examine myself and find a reason. Maybe it is because of my ugly look.

Although she wrote this entry to vent her feelings, she did not continue a narrative of self-criticism. Instead, she found the condition to be socially endemic and that more broadly “it only proves that this is a sensual world. ... whether you can get attention and time from others or not; it entirely relies on a good-looking appearance” (Wealthy Lady Nana, 2002). She used popular television to support this, asking whether people would “shed tears” if “the lead character of *One Litre of Tears* was not a pretty young girl”, concluding that “life is cruel, and feelings are real.”

To this end Wealthy Lady Nana is open about the perceived political incorrectness of her views. She often quotes news stories and comments on them, seemingly unafraid to offer potentially contentious responses. She does not wish to identify herself as a feminist and sometimes expresses disagreement with government actions, regardless of the prevailing socially ‘acceptable’ attitude. A particularly controversial article has the title, “Improving the image of the city begins with women’s make-up” (2 February 2006):

As I write this, I know I will definitely be condemned to death by some radical feminists, because I have heard they take issue with some of the topics like, “whether women should wax their armpit hair” or “who should take the initiative in bed.” Let alone blaming the image of the city on women. Moreover, I may also irritate some male friends who insist “natural is beautiful.”

As justification, she related the success of a nation to ‘aesthetic’ citizens, and compared women in Taiwan and Japan:

When a country has citizens with aesthetics and self-respect without regulation of laws, it symbolizes a level of a developed country, because all the citizens realise they carry the responsibility of a country’s rise and fall, and they are willing to make some effort to it. ... oh, it’s so touching only by thinking of it like this ... Japanese girls have been aware of it, and they also win our praises in Taiwan. Being called “Japanese chic” sounds much better than “Taiwanese chic” because those Japanese girls’ sense of beauty and emphasis on appearance has surpassed us. (2 February 2002)

Because we are fundamentally social beings and an essential part of our development involves finding our place in the social and cultural context in which we live, feedback from that social world plays a significant role in the evolution of our self-identities. For that reason, Nana accepts and promotes the idea that women should make an effort to look good in other’s eyes. However, she is constantly in conflict with her own inner voice, her sense of justice, in that she has not completely yielded to strictures of a male-controlled society. One day she read a newspaper report regarding a famous female entrepreneur, Chen Ming-xuin, who had been betrayed by her boyfriend and was forced to end their relationship. She lamented for Chen and her misfortune, and wrote an article to express her feelings (7 December 2004):

At last, even Chen Ming-xuin couldn't escape from the same destiny. In their ten-year relationship, the man had been loyal and self-disciplined. In order to avoid any possible affairs, he rarely engaged in social activities or business dinner parties and preferred to stay home. ... However, such a perfect guy eventually lost his passion for her, just because of the 'masculine' traits associated with her work.

In a male dominated world, Chen needs to battle for power, leadership, business competition, politics, as well as deal with many other things attached to women such as make-up, clothing, styling, and so on.

These audiences who support the male dominant world are always cruel to women's appearances. Furthermore, they have unreasonable expectations—besides feminine glamor, they expect women to have baby soft skin. In addition, she needs to have time to study fashion trends, and look gorgeous at every social occasion.

"Simply because women need to wear one more item of clothing (bra), we have already lost to men ..." I complained to Little Boyfriend as I was reading the newspaper.

When a woman is doing men's work, she needs to spend more time on women's work; it is completely unfair in terms of time.

There are still many other entries in which she discusses her struggles with these issues.

However, from her diary it can be drawn that she gradually accepts the 'truth' as she sees it and finds a way to justify her own constant pursuit of beauty. She eventually came to realise that her acceptance of the beauty standard of dominant culture should not necessarily be against her feminist politics. After all, femininity and feminism should not be in opposing positions. In view of this, she no longer feels guilty of admitting her desire to be feminine, to be praised, and to be looked at. In her entry titled, "The Secret of a Pretty Super Woman", she expresses her appreciation of a teacher whose feminine image she admired. The teacher she described was a perfect combination of tenderness and toughness, beauty and wisdom. She recalled how she got to know the "secret" of her beauty at a dinner party before her graduation ceremony (24 February 2006):

I worked up the nerve to ask her: "Ms. Xie, you do the research in the office every day, so when do you have time to make up your hair and do the manicure?"

...

Her secret is that she wakes up at five o'clock in the morning, heats up the hair curler, takes a shower and washes her hair, and then starts to curl her hair and begins the manicure. After breakfast, she gracefully walks to the university.

After I went to graduate school, I added one more super woman in my idol list—my supervisor Ms. Wu, who always walks into the classroom with a sweet smell and gorgeous outfit. I later discovered that she also wakes up at five o'clock in the morning, swims, works out, has breakfast, and then walks to the campus elegantly.

Success and beauty of these two women assuaged Wealthy Lady Nana's sceptical thinking regarding efforts to sustain the appearance of feminine beauty. She ultimately reconciled her long-term uncertainties with her attitude toward making-up:

I had been seriously contemplating that if I do not have to put on makeup and dress up for 50 years, I will have two extra years to sleep, to read, to ponder upon many important things in my life. However, a life without makeup will not be more successful. Many researchers in the United

States have pointed out that attractiveness of appearance and one's yearly income are in direct proportion. Women with makeup earn one fourth more income than women without makeup. I deeply believe in research reports like this.

To me, makeup is no longer a matter of courtesy. It is a responsible attitude to one's own destiny.

Through reflecting and narrating, Wealthy Lady Nana negotiates her gender identity by putting her experience into words on her blog. Eventually she settles her own, seemingly contradictory and contentious, view on women's femininity through self-validation and self-justification.

### **4.3 Way of Seeing the Self: Surveillance and Performance**

As Foucault (1999) argued, the technologies of the self have always contained an element of power. Power often comes from an authoritative other whose advice and judgment has presided over the workings of the self. As power can have different sources and forms, it could stem from the moral authority of an individual master or spiritual advisor, with whom one engages in a nurturing dialogue. In the case of an online social network, the rigid profile structure encourages the user to present oneself in a way that is partly constructed by the application. As discussed earlier in this chapter, social networking sites like Facebook limit identity presentation to a singular, fixed profile. While a user's self-presentation of identity is confined to profile construction, blogging allows a user to express themselves and narrate personal stories at length in one private yet open space without unexpected interruption from other users' activities. Technology of the self in this space is still inevitably engaged in the technology of power. In Section 4.2 Show Yourself to Know Yourself, I have discussed the idea of seeing the self in the diary writing in a blog. The blog is a privately public space, in which one should bear in mind that one's practice of writing as practice of the self is subjected to surveillance, deriving both from the self and the others. In this sense, it powers as a complex discursive formation, offering guidance in the care for the self. In view of this, I argue surveillance is a way of seeing the self. As the artist Jill Magid (2004) put it:

Self-surveillance is a way of seeing myself, via technology, in a way I could not otherwise. In self-surveillance I use a system or a technology as my mirror. The type of reflection I face is specific to the tool I am using.

#### **4.3.1 Blogging as Self-Performance**

After Wealthy Lady Nana became aware of her growing popularity as a blogger, she started to feel a strong sense of responsibility. She recalled her first reaction when someone asked her how to manage a blog:

Since last year, I started to be aware that I have been given a role as a “blogger”. Before that if someone asked me about “how to manage a blog”, I would draw a dividing line and say that my blog ... is for myself, family, and friends. I never thought of the issue of management. Such an answer is just like that I made a Japanese dish or my homemade curry pot, and Little Boyfriend asks after eating: “Are you intending to manage a homemade dish restaurant?” And I replied: “I just want to cook for you.” (11 June 2007)

However, since more and more people have visited her blog and told her how important her blog is to them, she has realised that she could no longer relocate or close her blog at will, out of consideration for the feelings of her readers and their attachment to her blog. She offered her reflections on maintaining a blog in one entry titled, “The Beauty and Sorrow of Bloggers”, expressing her realisation that when more and more readers visited *Wealthy Lady Nana’s Diary* and told her how important her blog was to them, she could never egoistically say: “This is my home. It is none of your business to criticise how often I clean up my room.” She compared her blog with a restaurant:

Last Friday, the night when the typhoon storm was just coming, A-Wii and his wife found many restaurants were still open, including the one we love best. ... It was very windy. My umbrella was broken by a gust of wind the moment I stepped out of my house. ... I told the owner of that restaurant, “Boss, you really run your restaurant rain or shine/in all weather.” He replied, “Sure, there is a social responsibility to run a restaurant. If customers saw that my restaurant is not open, they would be very disappointed.” (11 June 2007)

She then realised that since the restaurant was open to the public, it was no longer a personal kitchen, because with that opening comes visible and invisible social responsibilities. A restaurant owner cannot violate the opening hours; it should reasonably maintain the same level of service, for its own image, the service of its patrons, and so that it would not embarrass patrons when they recommend it. She recognised that she could not move her blog or shut it down at her pleasure because she believes that being responsible for her own blog was just like a “goodhearted shop owner’s non-obligatory code of professional ethics”. Wealthy Lady Nana concluded in her reflection that once she had seriously decided to manage a blog and be a full-hearted blogger, her blog was no longer just a space for personal mementos—sharing with others would be more important. In another entry titled, “Altruism is also self-interested contentment”, she added:

Opening a blog is not different from running a restaurant. Once it is open to the public, it has been endowed with a social responsibility. Everyone is watching. Everyone is expecting. You can’t serve a dish without concern. You can’t lose your manners either. (19 August 2009)

As an ‘ordinary’ woman *and* as a professional blogger, Wealthy Lady Nana presents her identity through her writing in an ongoing and evolving performance within her frequently updated blog. She understands that she is writing in a public medium and works to examine this identity:

Since I have determined to seriously “run a blog” and completely be a blogger, everything in my blog is not only for personal record, but is also to share with everyone. Some people ate some good food but they may not be able to describe it in words. ... Some people could not feel by themselves what is so special or funny in their everyday life. So all these require the “blogger’s interpretation”. (11 June 2007)

After years of blogging, Wealthy Lady Nana has blended her personal identity with her blogging identity. Viviane Sefarty used the word “accumulation” to discuss this phenomenon, arguing that “accumulation of information through the use of different media is also an attempt at creating a rounded character ... as opposed to the flat bi-dimensionality and rigid order imposed by print on a blank page. Diaries thus endeavour to produce a complex, multifaceted fictional self or *persona*” (2004, p. 460). What this means for an online diary writer is that blogging becomes something closer to performance art, a theatrical encounter. In one reply to a reader’s question regarding how she might achieve her goals in her life, she compared life to a play:

Have you ever read *A Girl with a Thousand Faces*?<sup>63</sup> Just imagine you’re the protagonist. Life is just a play. ... If you want it to be spectacular, you must practice very hard. If not, what can you present? ... I realise that even if I am satisfied with my performance, I cannot expect to have everyone’s applause every time. ... I am my own fan, who never leaves or gives up. I examine myself from a fan’s point of view ... I am my own coach, my own director, too. (7 March 2012)

Wealthy Lady Nana recognises the similarity between performance and blogging. In a paper diary, a diarist creates self-identity through her writing process, but that identity is one intended (initially in most cases) only for her, not for the public. Writing and interacting online require a blogger to construct an identity more consciously than face-to-face interaction does. As with paper-based diarists, Lady Nana creates an online public identity in a process that speaks to the discursive nature of the diary itself. Because there is no censorship or editorial control over a blogger’s identities, bloggers are granted more power in the creation of on-screen identity. In this regard, Viviane Sefarty (2004) rendered all online diaries at least partly fictional: “The selves which emerge in diaries come into being through the writing process itself and hence do not necessarily reflect the writer’s actual experience. Diaries thus construct a fiction of self” (p. 462). In Wealthy Lady Nana’s blog, she frequently relates to her family and friends and usually with very detailed descriptions. One reader notices that she excludes some friends such as high-school classmates, and suggests that her blogging is not consistent with the personal identity she presents. Wealthy Lady Nana explained that she has been on the Internet for 16 years, including 11 years in the blogosphere, so “it is natural that my social circles are on the Internet”. She expressed in her blog the way social networking media has changed her life and her personal frames of reference:

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<sup>63</sup> It is one of Wealthy Lady Nana’s favourite comic books, which she refers to many times in her blog.

Contemporary social circles have been free of traditional modes, which one can only acquire from the neighbourhood, campus, and workplace. Friends in these places are passively determined because you were born there (you have no choices), because your boss decides who your colleagues are (you don't have right to employ someone; no choices too). Social circles in circumstance like this are passive and limited. (4 March 2009)

It is undeniable that networked media have become part of daily activities for most people, and they have impacted social structures and communities. For Wealthy Lady Nana it is a positive transformation that life has shifted from being passively determined to allowing for the initiative in choosing social circles. Her blog is a form of self-disclosure; those who want to know about her can simply go to her blog to see her life on display, her stories, and a detailed account of the world as she experiences it. Such performance and self-representation is reciprocal because she can take action to decide whether she would like to "befriend" someone on the Internet.

On the other hand, although blogging technology allows written diary entries to be edited and re-published, the performative aspect of Lady Nana's blog makes the revision of her narration/narrative nearly impossible. When readers have been following her blog, Lady Nana cannot go back and change the narration and discourses which have been written, because like performance art, the audience was there. When Internet users read blogs and communicate with others online, they give themselves to whom they are interacting. Accordingly, when audiences engage in a blogger's diary, they do not just give their time; they invest confidence in the reality of the person through empathetic relations. Although readers' and writers' acceptance of presented personas online will be necessary for the form to flourish, bloggers' focus on authenticity as an extension of the issues of trust and truthfulness. Lady Nana, though constantly stressing the consistency of her online and offline identity, keeps in mind that blogging is a performance and characters in this performance are personae, whom she selects from her real life, and explores to varying effects in her blog. In the following announcement, Lady Nana reminded her audiences that her life on the screen is real but deliberately arranged and represented because she sets the tone of her performance:

My life world is also like a television show, in which there are varieties of personas. The personas who often appear in my blog are only a few friends of mine. But never forget you are the hero of your life. You are the screenwriter and you are the director as well. You decide the characters and plots in your play. I've decided that the type of my play is warm and magnificent. It is a romantic comedy without a bad guy. (27 June 2012)

#### **4.3.2 *Nonstop Online Diary Writing as Self-Surveillance***

On 1 February 2012, Wealthy Lady Nana posted an entry to announce her decision to keep her online diary updated every day for one year:

This morning I made a decision on an impulse. No stimulating events. No influential matters. Not prepared at all. The decision was done. In order to strengthen my resolve, I invited a partner to do it with me.

Me: “Abby, let’s do a challenge for 365 days, writing a diary every day.”

Abby: “Why not? Starts from today?”

Me: “Yes, today. At least 250 words. Blog is not Plurk or a micro-blog, so we must surpass 140 words.”

Wealthy Lady Nana’s announcement struck a chord with her friends and readers. Many people also announced they would follow this 365 day writing exercise. Ten days after her announcement, she expressed her surprise at these reactions and effects:

Only ten days from beginning, this 365 movement, starting from a promise between two people, has burned the whole blogosphere (exaggeration). Many blog owners have gone back to clean up their blogs that were covered with spider webs. It is virtually a blog version of “a bunch of flowers”. (The story of a bunch of flowers is: One day a lazy guy gets a bunch of flowers from a friend. In order to find a vase and space for the flowers in his dirty and messy house, he cleans up a table, then the living room, and gradually his house.)

The resulting readers’ comments supporting this 365 movement, and the blogging practices that have followed suit suggest the expansive and significant effect of Nana’s influence. It is a ‘butterfly’ effect, where Wealthy Lady Nana flutters her wings and hundreds of bloggers start to fly. For instance, one blogger commented:

I thank Nana for this “365 Non-stop Diary Movement”, which makes me start to reflect upon what I do every day. Seeing that so many friends have joined this writing movement, I have more faith in myself to update my blog every day. Let’s write together to carry out this wonderful project. (#26 FANG, 11 February 2012)

Some readers confess that they wanted to follow but did not know what to write and lacked confidence in having ideas for writing every day. Wealthy Lady Nana’s reply in the following interaction corresponds to Foucault’s (1988, p.27) notion that writing has been used throughout the centuries to reflect on the self, as “taking care of oneself became linked to a constant writing activity. The self is something to write about, a theme or object (subject) of writing activity”:

Nana also stimulates me to want to write one entry a day, though I don’t really have something to say about myself, and my life is monotonous. (#17 TAMACAT, 11 February 2012)

A pure record is already the most important treasure. Besides, even though every day is the same, we can use our thinking to make it different. Some people say that blogs have become out of date, but I consider the blog is the only place that can retain/preserve your thoughts. How can it fall into disuse? Let’s hang on (Wealthy Lady Nana, 11 February 2012)

The blog offers women a safe place in which they become the subject of their own lives, so that they are able to tell their stories and test their voices in the practice of writing. As Flannery O’connor (1970) said, “I write because I don’t know what I think until I read what I

say.” One reader left a message in a comment telling that she will try to write about herself even if there is no reader:

Nana, please go on writing so I can hang on with you. ... I don't know if there will be anyone reading my blog, but I decided to start 365 with you because I want to read what I will have written after 365 days. (#44 c3475476, 7 August 2012)

Meaningful relationships are taking place between Lady Nana, other online diary writers, and her readers. By examining online diaries, Laurie McNeill (2003) found that self-presentation and other personal uses and gratifications are important, but the presence of the audience influences the online diarist significantly. Online diarists write personally, but they also communicate with an audience of readers. Intuitively, there exists a tension between orienting writing to the self and to the audience. In writing to the self, the writer expresses personal emotions and thought. When an audience is engaged in this writing, the writer should communicate and interact with readers, writing to entertain or inform readers. Serfaty (2004) argued that structural elements of the online diary influence its production. The interactivity and the immediacy of online diaries enhance the aspect of diary writing concerned with communication and community.

There are various, relatively straightforward, ways to engage in self-documentation with the assistance of technologies—photos, videos, or voice recording. The act of writing a diary online is comparatively conventional yet complicated. On the 142nd day of the 365 nonstop diary movement, Wealthy Lady Nana posted an announcement to ask for help from her audience with a title: “Rescue 365: Please ask me questions”. She expressed that she may have written enough about herself, but she wanted to know what others think about Wealthy Lady Nana and what other things people want to know about her. In the entry posted on 21 June 2012, she wrote:

I've been interviewed for too many times so I don't want to be interviewed anymore ... because it's hard to meet someone who can completely and genuinely represent my words in their articles. ... but in fact, I love to answer questions, love to tell my stories. ... So this time, I want to invite everyone to be journalists. Please leave messages in the comments to ask me any straightforward or even shallow questions. Then I will answer them seriously in my blog.

The timeless and spaceless features of a blog, and the mixture of privacy and public, have changed the way diarists look at their diaries. If traditional diary writing is a way of seeing oneself in the self-reflection, online diary writing seeks to perceive more reflections from different mirrors—readers' responses. In the book form of the diary, the diarist's use of dates to frame and organise information (usually sequentially and chronologically) reveals an intrinsic function in chronicling daily activities, while the online diary in a blog is usually thematic with a specific title for every entry, as Nana's blog demonstrates. Fothergill (1974)

defined the online diary as a ‘non-linear book of the self’, a record which tends to be valued according to the *time of discovery* rather than the *time of writing* (p.2).

Wealthy Lady Nana is usually reader focused and offers her audience links, memes, and lots of images and graphics. With this focus in mind, she has posted an image to motivate her readers:



(Image from *Wealthy Lady Nana's Diary*)<sup>64</sup>

It is a meme image that has been circulated widely and used on Facebook for some time. Whilst anyone can create a “what people think I do / what I really do” image, Wealthy Lady Nana created one for herself to make fun of her professional identity as a psychological counsellor:

My parents really believe that I am a psychologist. They always ask me some questions like: “What does this behaviour mean? Why does he act like that?” And clients seem to think that I am a fortuneteller: “What kind of a person am I? What will happen to me in the future?” What I want to say is: “It is not easy at all to help people.”

From this six-grid image, Wealthy Lady Nana conveys her understanding of herself from different perspectives including how she looks at herself as a psychological counsellor. She conveys the idea that this is also a way of understanding oneself by looking at oneself from others’ points of view because, “till the end, truth completely deconstructs the myth of stereotypes” (5 March 2012). Self-projection, and thus performativity, was seen by Fothergill (1974) as the key to the genre: “the diary ... creates its own reader as a projection of the

<sup>64</sup> I translated the original Chinese text into English.

impulse to write” (p. 96). Through the fragments of narrative in blog entries, and over time, readers develop a sense of who the writer is: simultaneously Wealthy Lady Nana the blogger and Su Chen-Duan, the psychological counsellor. Wealthy Lady Nana’s blog identity can also be constructed through the interaction between the blogger and her audience because her blogger identity is also shaped by the readers’ feedback and their interaction with Wealthy Lady Nana. On a blog, interaction is achieved by way of the comments feature, which allows readers to respond to posts, ask questions, and criticise or praise the work. In one year, there are 49 entries out of the 365 Diary that are titled “Q&A”. In answering readers’ questions about Lady Nana, she constructs her identity by “lots of little pieces” she expects to arrange together, and the blog becomes “a field of representations performed to emerge as your own ontological self” (Bauman, 2004, p. 48). In this way, *Wealthy Lady Nana’s Diary* could be successfully shaped as a collaborative form of autobiography. The audiences as individuals and en-masse help to collectively construct Lady Nana.

#### **4.4 Blogging as Process of Self-production**

Networks, as Manuel Castells (1996) has argued in *The Rise of The Network Society*, constitute production as the infrastructure of contemporary Western societies. The labour of the self on itself, paradoxically, becomes part of the “free labour”, “pleasurably embraced” and often “shamelessly exploited”, on which the digital economy heavily relies (Terranova, 2004, p. 78). Maria Bakardjieva and Georgia Gaden (2011) proposed to apply the idea of free labour in the network society to analyse the relationship between technologies of the self and technologies of production seeing that the digital economy is a field of experimentation with cultural and affective labour. In view of this, I argue that women’s online diary writing as a continuing labour of self on self, with reciprocal interaction and emotional support between writers and readers, can be viewed as a collaborative labour of self-production. As Kelly Fuery (2009) has suggested with regard to the relationship between subject-formation and new media, “interwoven in this relationship is the formation of identity through the ‘attachment’ to new media” (p.138). Fuery argued new media “provide a mechanism whereby the individual can self-celebritize; by forming celebrity version of themselves on the net” (p. 140). I accordingly propose that the concept of identity has been reformed in Lady Nana’s blogging practice in which subject-formation has gradually turned into a self-production process as a micro-celebrity.

Blogging produces a form of life through photographs and narratives about the self as subjective materials. The (re)writing of the self in the forms of blogs is part of the

materialization of such subjectivities. It is an attempt of self-fashioning through written productions of self-knowledge. Alice E. Marwick (2010) defined those people who position themselves as something to be watched as micro-celebrities:

Micro-celebrity is an emerging online practice that involves creating a persona, sharing personal information about oneself with others, performing intimate connections to create the illusion of friendship or closeness, acknowledging an audience and viewing them as fans, and using strategic reveal of information to increase or maintain this audience. (p. 13)

Marwick (2010) argued that micro-celebrities assume they have a fan base so they work strategically to entertain and increase their audience, as the ability to position oneself successfully in a competitive attention economy has become a marker of reputation (p. 12). Fuery (2009) has also noted that this status of celebrity “has retained its elitist qualities”, stressing that “this is the transformation of celebrity as singular to a celebrity of pluralism (p. 138). In this respect, I explore the way Wealthy Lady Nana gradually forms a branded self through a process of self-production in her constant labour on diary writing.

It was 1998, before the emergence of the blog. Wealthy Lady Nana ‘published’ her diary in her own way and shared it with her friends. Just like her mother who wrote a diary as a record for her, Wealthy Lady Nana also had a diary recording her story with her partner, Little Boyfriend. In order to express her irrepressible happiness and the desire to express her feelings, she diarised every detail of her life with Little Boyfriend. After this aspect of her life was discovered, many people were curious about how they got together. Hence she revised her diary and added descriptions to make it become a complete story with a clear beginning and subsequent plot development. She printed out the diary, cut and pasted the text on a fine notebook, and drew illustrations to complement the text. She explained her intention:

I don’t have to tell the story all over again from the start whenever someone asks me about it. Besides, every retelling will lessen the story, according to the law of diminishing marginal utility.

In addition to publishing her diary as a hard copy book, she also posted her story on NTU BBS in a forum for stories. With the title “Encounter with My Little Boyfriend”, her story promptly gained the attention of many readers, and they forwarded it on to net-friends and pasted it on bulletin boards in other universities. After five or six of her articles were posted on the forum she received invitations from publishers. In one entry she writes about her appreciation of good storytellers:

I admire people who are good at storytelling. In this day, those who can tell stories are the winners. Same for films, television shows, advertising, and writing. Not everyone is endowed with this ability. It requires one’s keen observation of life and phenomena. Besides, you need to remember what happens around you, and then you also need to have eloquence to write it out. (13 May 2012)

Wealthy Lady Nana reveals her private life in her blog and writes her diary as if she is telling stories. Readers enjoy the pleasure of reading stories; at the same time, they know that they are reading Wealthy Lady Nana's life. The online diary in her blog is just like an ongoing autobiography in progress and she narrates her life and puts it into the blog immediately as it is lived.

Contemporary life is filled with the telling of life stories, to the point that some suggest we inhabit an "auto/biographical" society (Plummer, 2000) or an "interview society" (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997). In the form of "the interview society", accounts of experience and the revelation of a private emotional life are expected of anyone accorded the status of celebrity. The popularity of life-story telling means that the sorts of individual accounts and narratives are "promoted as conveying a special significance" (Atkinson, 2005). While the telling of life stories has existed throughout history, it seems that with the growing emphasis on the self as something to be created and reflected upon there is a contemporary compulsion to storing the self (Plummer, 2000, p. 11). The growing interest in narratives and storytelling in contemporary social life has corresponded with a growing theoretical interest in what Plummer called "documents of life" (2000, p. 12). As comparatively recent additions to Internet culture, blogs are both the symptom and cause of this trend. The blog as a document of life offers a means for accessing one's life stories, and thus is expected to provide insight into the lived experience. In reading Wealthy Lady Nana's blog, while she is documenting her life, readers are experiencing a second life. In Wealthy Lady Nana's diaries, she seems to be the protagonist in her stories, and readers occupy supporting roles as they participate in the stories by adding comments. However, it is through the reading Wealthy Lady Nana's diary that readers project themselves into her stories and can become the central characters in the stories and their lives:

In this regard, Wealthy Lady Nana's stories and writings colour and enrich our lives. The swap of roles does not lessen confidence and integrity of Wealthy Lady Nana. This is a high self-respect experience in which author and reader develop inter-protagonist and inter-subjective relationship". (Chang, 2008)

Chang's points out an essential feature of blogging. Blogs with interactive and inter-reflective features in cyberspace, in addition to self-representation, communication, and interaction, provide an unprecedented space for constructing a 'better' self or a 'preferable' identity, with the assistance of new media technologies.

The ease of making the self into a celebrity gives rise to other commercially driven effects, especially within the contexts of endorsement and consumer. For some products, the use of

celebrity endorsement has been transferred to bloggers' endorsement in terms of associations with lower costs and better quality and standards. The micro-celebrity quality can be more persuasive to consumers as most bloggers like Lady Nana would not only write a review for trying a new product, but they also update their opinions about the products they are using in their blogs with detailed description along with photographs. The phenomenon of the co-existence of personal diaries and commercial advertisements in blogs is therefore one outcome of blog-specific self-production. The by-products of self-production can be visibly seen as tangible products associated with a blogger's lifestyle. In Lady Nana's case, because of her constant concerns about beauty and health and ongoing articulation of daily activities, the name Wealthy Lady Nana becomes a form of quality assurance for products like sportswear, skin care products, kitchen utensils and appliances. In addition, her professional reputation as a psychological counsellor opens up further opportunities for cross-promotion through public speeches, book reviews, and her own book publications.

"My blog is my resume", said Wealthy Lady Nana (S. Lo, 2007). In her blog, the personal narratives of her everyday life, her professional discussions on psychological issues, or her reflections on films and television programs, have all become stepping-stones for career development. How does she increase her income simply by blogging about herself? She has said that being liked by net-friends is the key. She mentions that two difficult times in her life happened to coincide with her sudden fame. The first time was while her boyfriend was not faithful to her; she furiously posted a story named, "Disney Incest Events", and which starred cartoon dolls including The Little Mermaid, Tarzan, and other dolls she collected. She took a series of pictures, added dialogues to those pictures, and then posted them on her blog. This story was then forwarded crazily by net-friends, and for the first time she gained notoriety on the Internet. Those photos circulated quickly across the web and suddenly the name Wealthy Lady Nana had become famous on the Internet. The second time was because she had a fight with her boyfriend; she posted a lot of her boyfriend's photos in her online album, and again added ironic captions and dialogue to those photos. Her blog once again attracted thousands of visits. To her surprise, posts on her blog (including reflection on a Korean television program) caught the eye of TV producers and she was consequently given the opportunity to write screenplays for television. The case of Wealthy Lady Nana illustrates how the blog can indeed become a résumé. She compares maintaining a blog to the conventional job hunting, stressing that the blog is a space to actively express personal opinions and display one's interests and specialities. Instead of passively waiting for employers' replies to hundreds of résumés that one sends out, the blog takes the initiative by showcasing one's abilities, often in

more than one profession. As Wealthy Lady Nana always expresses in her blog: “The blog is your stage”.

The demonstration of multiple capabilities evidenced in the writing of her personal blogs ultimately attracts more opportunities and possibilities than the popular blogger expects. This signifies not only the potential outcomes of blogging, but attests also to the patterns of self-surveillance and the visibility/scrutiny of blogging practices. Comparing the blog to a stage, Lady Nana observed that surveillance (from within and without) is constant, continuous, and everywhere. This awareness prompted her to state:

Regardless of the facts that there are laws and regulations for blogging, bloggers should be self-disciplined and self-supervised. I will look at myself with a higher standard and will be self-restraint in my future writings. (7 March 2010)

The creation of an online identity and concomitantly a version of the self as celebrity, together suggest that surveillance mechanisms are produced and productive in equal measure. As Fuery (2009) has observed, “new media has introduced a different order of panopticism,<sup>[65]</sup> ... we are forced to self-watch for fear of being caught, and so in turn stop ourselves from transgressing” (p. 141). The blog as the space of self-expression is in a constant dialogue with the constrictive form of subjectivity suggested by self-policing.

Wealthy Lady Nana has been writing diaries in her blog for 12 years, and many readers have an in-depth knowledge of her world. She noted that readers remember things she has written but can no longer recall, joking, “the ones who nurture me are my parents. The ones who know me best are freaks” (Wealthy Lady Nana, 2012). In order to continue living ‘a life worth watching’, she periodically sets herself new tasks/assignments:

I turn my life into an entertainment business, and I am my own fan. Every year I find a challenge for myself. In the process of playing a new role/identity, I renew my life too. In these ten years, I have played with a new education and new identities. The year before last I played being on a lecture tour. Last year I played dressing up (tired of playing with Barbie so I played myself). This year I challenged myself to update my diary for 365 days. There are many ways to change myself. To my surprise, changing the shape of my body is the fastest one in all of the challenges. (7 September 2012)

Rebecca Blood (2000) wrote of “the power of weblogs to transform both writers and readers from ‘audience’ to ‘public’ and from ‘consumer’ to ‘creator’”. In changing and

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<sup>65</sup> Panopticon was a prison design proposed by the philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, in 1787. His design comprised a ring of prison cells surrounding a tower, from which all prisoners were observed by the authorities continually. Michel Foucault used Bentham’s model to illustrate how disciplinary technologies affect the behaviour of individuals through self-surveillance. The panopticon helped to articulate Foucault’s ideas on technique of power. For details, see Kelli Fuery’s discussion on surveillance and new media technology in her book *New Media: Culture and Images*.

updating herself, Lady Nana's online diary becomes the demonstration of her self-(re)producing processes. However, the value of her production of the self still lies in the process of self-branding in her blogging. As Ulrich Beck (2000) stated:

The ethic of individual self-fulfillment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern society. The choosing, deciding, shaping human being who aspires to be the author of his or her own life, the creator of individual identity, is the central character of our time. (p. 22)

The reflexive project of the self "consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives" (Giddens, 1991, p. 5). Wealthy Lady Nana proves that the blog is a "performative space and practice where what Foucault terms as the ethics of life is being developed and tested" (Zylinska, 2009, p. 80). In an interview with *United Daily News* in 2008, Wealthy Lady Nana talked about her plan to be a 'happiness demonstrator' as a next step:

Everyone is happy, so I am happy. Even a message with only two words saying "ha ha" makes me happy for a while, simply because I made you laugh. These are my personal feelings and reflections regarding writing my blog. A good article in a blog includes not only words I write, but also your responses and feelings. Only in this way we can interweave a piece of copious writing. (11 June 2007)

Blogs respond to the needs and interests of both writer and reader, making the online diary totally interactive and reciprocal. As an online diarist, Lady Nana is acutely aware of her readers, whose "desires, expectations, and reading practices shape the texts that the bloggers produce" (McNeil, 2003, p. 32).

## Chapter 5

### *Indoorsy Woman Showon's Diary: Blogging as Social Action*

In the previous chapter, I examined Lady Nana's online (blog) diary writing in order to effectively stage her use of the blog within constructions of both her own personal identity and her blogger identity by means of *digital technologies of the self*. In this chapter, I interrogate the workings of the blog of Indoorsy Woman Showon, to see how she uses her online diary to represent the collective identity of middle-class women in their late 30s, and at the same time how she fashions an online community through her blog. While both Lady Nana and Indoorsy Woman Showon use their blogs as instruments to express themselves and communicate with others, both the means and ends of their blogging practice are distinct from each other. Lady Nana's major concern is to encourage female self-awareness; keeping a diary so as to achieve personal change and self-improvement. While Lady Nana writes of the ways a woman can 'improve' and 'cultivate' herself in order to live a happier life, Showon focusses on women's 'communal wretchedness' by revealing women's unhappiness, and expressing perspectives on unfair treatment, and uncomfortable experiences in her own life.

Indoorsy Woman Showon, a popular female blogger in Taiwan, is a phenomenon within contemporary new media technology. Her blog attracts about 80,000 views per day on average and has accumulated 62,400,000 hits, as of early 2014. Her writing is light, concise, entertaining, and readily consumable. Showon attracts the attention of readers and publishers without being burdened by the traditional expectation that writers should strive to transmit deeper and more complex forms of knowledge and information. An indication of her unconventional approach can be gleaned from the following introduction:

Maybe you do not know me. Or maybe you have read my articles in *Liberty Time Weekly* for a long time. But in order to celebrate the new layout of my rubbish column, let us get to know each other again.

I am 35 years old and my eggs have not been fertilised yet. In this life I am destined to be a pregnant woman of advanced maternal age.

I was originally an ordinary OL.<sup>66</sup> In 2007 I was fooled by destiny and dumped by my boyfriend. Since that time I have been staying at home with nothing to do, no date to go out with, sleepless at night for suffering from insomnia. I could only write on the blog at home every day. Then, I was asked to write a column for the *Weekly*. At that moment, my door to writing was opened.

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<sup>66</sup> OL is an abbreviation of an office lady, which is commonly used in Taiwan to refer to a female office worker.

On 22 March 2008, with lanterns and bright banners, everyone is full of joy, because my first column appeared in the newspaper (spinning around).<sup>67</sup> ... August 8, 2009 was my big day. My rubbish words were collected together and published as a book—*Indoorsy Woman Showon's Between-Two-Legs Diary* (2009). Formally I became a published writer from a tabloid columnist. (21 February 2011)

Showon started writing her blog in 2007 after she was betrayed and dumped by her boyfriend. She turns her grief and indignation into strength through writing, and transforms her disheartening experience into a humorous story in her blog. This first book is a collection of diary entries from her blog. The title, *Indoorsy Woman Showon's Between-Two-Legs Diary*, indicates that the book is largely concerned with women's bodies, and belies a contradiction between boldness on the one hand, and a lack of self confidence on the other. Asked if she felt embarrassed writing about the body in this way, she replied "your genitals are just bodily organs, just like a kidney. At birth we bring nothing; at death we take away nothing" (Huang, 2009). However, when asked about being a popular blogger, she answered, "I don't think I am a good writer, and actually I feel embarrassed because I write a lot of messy little things." Even though Showon has gained high popularity as a blogger, a columnist, and has published a book, she still self-deprecatingly reminds readers that what she writes is 'rubbish'. Showon's two divergent attitudes nonetheless reflect the paradoxical condition of women situation in contemporary society. She has the freedom to express herself, yet she realises she has to maintain a low profile in order to keep this freedom.

Online diaries shaped by both women's expression and everyday experiences, function generically as purposive forms of social engagement. The genre of the online diary, like its written, paper-based predecessor, tends to attract a noticeably larger contingent of female users, who express their innermost thoughts in their blogs. In her ground-breaking essay, Carolyn Miller (1984, p. 151) proposed that "a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be cantered not on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish". That is to say, what a text looks like in its form should not define or restrict a genre because it is what it does that matters. In this way, genre, being rhetorical and pragmatic, becomes "a point of connection between intention and effect, and aspect of social action" (Miller, 1984, p. 153). In the paper "Blogging as Social Action: A Genre Analysis of the Weblog", Miller and Shepherd (2004) argued that a Darwinian perspective should be used in studying genre because genres are evolving phenomena. Besides, since genres are rooted in

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<sup>67</sup> Showon frequently uses parentheses like this to indicate her emotion in saying her words. In this sentence, she uses "spinning around" in a parenthesis to show readers an image of Showon spinning around. "Spinning around", referring to a person who is dancing and spinning around for happiness, is a term commonly used on the Internet by users in Taiwan. The popular use of images as a way of communicating body language in written language is an outcome of the great influence of Japanese manga in Taiwan.

social practices, to understand what makes a rhetorical action ‘fitting’ within its cultural environment, we must “see genre in relation to *kairos*, or socially perceived space-time” (Miller & Shepherd, 2004). Accordingly, as Miller and Shepherd suggested, the blog is an evolutionary production arising from a cultural moment, which utilises “the opportunities available for innovation, the available social roles and relationships, and the possibilities for social action” (2004).

Seeing the weblog phenomenon as raising a number of rhetorical issues, Miller and Shepherd (2004) proposed that we could read the blog as a type of communicative action that offers a new rhetorical opportunity to serve rhetorical need. By extension McNeill also suggested “we can read the blog as simply another kind or function of the diary genre, one particularly well-suited to perform the social actions desired by contemporary diarists” (2003, p. 29). Active participation in blogging by women evidences and manifests the extensive need of women’s self-expression in public. In this chapter, I draw on Miller and Shepherd’s (2004) discussion on the rhetorical quality of the blog as a genre, to examine how the blogging practices of women embody the pragmatic value of blogging as social action. I focus in particular on Indoorsy Woman Showon, whose blog is popular for her attention to women’s issues and her unique writing style, as it creates “new rhetorical possibility”. In order to discuss bloggers’ resistance and acceptance of mediated voyeurism through their personal blogs, I first briefly discuss the blogger Avocado Sushi’s account of her original intention of creating a blog, and then compare it with Showon.

Firstly, I discuss the construction and representation of collective identity, as it is represented in Showon’s blog. I argue that as an advocate for single women in their late 30s, Showon’s online diary attracts readers through *mediated voyeurism*, through constructions that arouse and ‘echo’ in the minds of her audience. I then analyse Showon’s writing style and argue that the double-sided representation of ‘ambiversion’, typifies a particularly modern feminine writing style. In the final sections of the chapter I propose that Showon’s writing in her blog diary is an exhibition of empowerment, which I consider as social action toward a feminist practice.

## 5.1 Collective Identity in Mediated Voyeurism

Bloggers whose writing had attracted readers before they became popular also experience the problematic aspects of becoming Internet celebrities. Avocado Sushi<sup>68</sup> for example, who is

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<sup>68</sup> The blogger Avocado Sushi was referred to earlier in Chapter One in the discussion of women’s writing space.

probably one of the most well-known female bloggers to Taiwanese readers, has frequently expressed her feelings about freedom of speech, which has been restricted and monitored since she became a well-known blogger. In one entry titled, “Some random thoughts on the blog, Plurk, Twitter, and Facebook”, she wrote:

Every time I hear someone who reminds the blogger “don’t forget your original intention”, I can’t help grumbling in my heart: “it’d better if you really knew my original intention”. I started my blog only because I wanted to dig a hole in a deserted place to vent my feelings, shouting, “king has donkey ears”. So I named it “a diary”, and didn’t tell my family and friends. I wrote whatever came to my mind, and blamed anyone in whatever way I pleased. (Of course, those who were blamed were anonymous.) (Sushi, 25 March 2010)

She used a world story originating from the Greek myth, “King Midas and the Donkey Ears” to describe her blog, so it is useful to know what the story is about in order to understand her metaphor. Once upon a time, there was a mighty king named Midas. The king had an unknown secret—he had a pair of donkey’s ears! To keep his secret from his people, he wore a tall hat all year long to cover his ears. The king’s barber was threatened not to tell the secret. The barber kept his word, but keeping such a huge secret to himself was driving him crazy. Finally, the barber went out into a field, dug a hole in the dirt, and whispered into the earth itself, “King Midas has donkey’s ears.” He returned home, sure that he had kept his word. Time passed, and reeds grew up over the place where the barber had dug a hole and told the secret. When the wind blew through them, everyone could hear them singing these words: “King Midas has donkey’s ears ... King Midas has donkey’s ears ...”

Remembering her original intention, Avocado Sushi stresses the reason she named her blog *Avocado Sushi’s Diary*. Like the barber, she thought no one would hear or respond to what she said within the diary, as she viewed her blog on the Internet as a “deserted place”. This was potentially true in 2003 when she created her blog, and since blogging was not especially popular in Taiwan prior to 2005. With the rapid development of the Internet, the deserted place has become a tourist destination, visited by thousands of people every day. Growing users and readers are like reeds growing up over the hole Avocado Sushi dug to whisper her secrets, echoing her secrets in the cyberspace. Whilst she does not forget the original intention, she can no longer express herself in the same way. She has lamented her inability to express herself freely in her online diary, yet she knows she has no choice but to appear socially responsible in order to survive on the Internet:

Even now I still miss the simple state of mind I had in the very beginning of writing the blog. I could rant about life and work, with no need to care about readers’ responses and “a blogger’s social responsibility”. But now the little hole in that wild and desolate place has become a city jungle, where only a random utterance can draw pedestrians’ attention and judgments. An

improper remark may get me into trouble with the law. Spiderman's uncle's last words, "With great power comes great responsibility", are not said in jest. (Sushi, 25 March 2010)

Avocado Sushi never reveals her real name, nor does she ever post photos with her face in them. Readers know about everything she does, and what she represents through her online diary. Taking the Spiderman connection even further, the name Avocado Sushi can be equated with Spiderman's outfit. Like Spiderman, Avocado Sushi is held to certain expectations and is criticised by an audience on the basis of her performance. Unlike, Spiderman, her stage is not a comic world of crime or an imagined cityscape, but her personal blog, where she is physically invisible and anonymous to the public. As Avocado Sushi's physical self is disembodied on the Internet in what Mark Giese (1998) termed as a "textual self without body", her expressions and narratives, exposed to the public in cyberspace, again embody the subject, Avocado Sushi. The name Avocado Sushi becomes an expressive subject as a textual body, which is embodied and represented in the narration of her thoughts, feelings, and life experience.

In contrast to Avocado Sushi's understanding of a blogger's social responsibility, Showon's perceptions are comparatively playful and carefree:

A friend told me seriously that bloggers like us, who take from society, should give back to society. Information such as the relocation restaurants must be updated regularly. This is our social responsibility! So today, on this blog, I tell thousands of my audience: Dao-Xiang Yuan has relocated from Tai-yuan Road to No. 1, Lane 199, Cheng-tung Road, and it is not open until 11am. Please do not be so ignorant like me who went there only to find the restaurant not there anymore. (Showon, 1 October 2012)

Showon's obvious intention to visibly expose her stories to others on the blog demonstrates that her diary is not considered private, or only for herself. Showon appeared on the Internet in 2007, when the blog had reached a relative level of maturity. The purpose for bloggers like her who emerged at this time is clearly different from the early bloggers' who saw the practice as creating a personal space for them to vent. On the contrary, the purposes of blogging had now become: to expose, to broadcast, and to create a centre for discussion. These aspects can be seen in one of her entries written in an effort to comfort readers who had defended her from a series of criticisms:

Please do not care so much about it. Being criticised will not cause me to lose any of my flesh (It would be great if it would ...) If criticising me adds the slightest pleasure to their ordinary lives, it is a sort of merit that I bring to society.

I am actually more curious about criticisms from those anonymous people because they do not really go away after criticising me. What exactly do they want? They usually come back to see how I will reply to them. (I'm imaging a picture in which a furious person is anxiously walking

back and forth before the computer and pressing the F5 button.)][<sup>69</sup>] Here I want to remind friends who want to criticise me: If you want to get my instant feedback, please leave your message during lunch time so you won't too angry and anxious for waiting too long with no responses from me. (21 May 2009)

“It is when bloggers discuss the purpose of the blog, its function and value as social action involving rhetors and audiences, that the nature of the generic blog becomes problematic” (Miller & Shepherd, 2004). In the above remarks, Showon asserts that her blog is a public space, and that everyone is welcome to leave messages. Her comments address a large social set, and her attitude and interactions with readers constructs diary writing in terms of social action rather than personal exchanges. To better understand the representation and development of a ‘collective identity’ in Showon’s entries, I examine her blog in three aspects: the slogan (the particular caption associated with the blog) of her blog, the title of her blog, and the mask she wears.

### 5.1.1 *The Slogan: Rubbish Mountain as Communal Therapy*



(Image on the front page of Indoorsy Woman Showon’s blog)

At the top of her blog’s front page, Showon’s frames and labels her blog using the caption: “Everyone has a Garbage Mountain in mind”. With this slogan, Showon borrowed and revised a Taiwanese director, Ang Lee’s famous remarks, “Everyone has a Brokeback Mountain in mind”. Brokeback Mountain is a 2005 American film directed by Ang Lee, who won Golden Globe director’s award in Los Angeles for this this film in 2006. With this catchphrase, or slogan, she asserts from the outset that the purpose and main theme of her blog is its arrangement as a space to pour out emotional waste from her life. This is the description of herself that she offers in the profile of the blog:

<sup>69</sup> F5 is one of the 12 function keys on the keyboard. Pressing the keys “Ctrl” and “F5” will force the browser to retrieve the webpage from the server instead of loading it from the cache, so the user can see changes to the blog as soon as they are uploaded.

A woman, who is going to be an elderly primigravida if she is not impregnated soon.<sup>[70]</sup> Not speaking garbage for more than one day will cause my sudden death. Except for insisting on me to eat super spicy hot pot, I'm open-minded to other things. Don't tell people that I am a stay at home kind of girl with nothing to do every day. Please don't ...

Showon expresses genuine feelings on her blog, exhaustively recounting how she was cheated and dumped by her two-timing boyfriend. She is also outspoken in her discussions of issues relating to women's bodies and female reproduction. For example, she relays the specifics of her own Pap smear test as a means of advocating women's health. Her post titled, "Starting to care for yourself by caring for your genitals", aroused considerable attention on the Internet and has been forwarded extensively by Net-friends. At the same time, her equally detailed descriptions of her life and work experience as an office lady (OL) resonate profoundly with her primarily female readership. In this way, Showon is the 'sensible' observer of the absurdity that prevails in her everyday life, to the extent that her diary reads like one woman's reportage of the bizarreness that surrounds her. With her straightforward tone, Showon knowingly positions her blog as 'garbage'—through not in the context of nonsense but a place where readers come every day to lessen the burden of their own garbage, by reading her diary and pour out their emotional *rubbish* in commenting on her blog. She says:

What Net friends consider funny are actually miserable things in my life. ... I think my articles help a lot of frustrated people to find some resonance, with everyone watching, laughing, and then realising that those unhappy things actually happen to everyone. So, together everyone finds a release from their own pressure. (Womany, 2011)

Showon attracts popularity through this shared sense of experience with her readers and unique capacity to be able to always see the ridiculous side of life. She is funny because she looks at things with a different perspective so she can always find pleasure amidst suffering.

Thus, Showon has no need for high-resolution photos of gourmet food or tourist spots, as she is popular precisely because of the emotion, intelligence and wit that shape her responses to criticism. For example, in response to a very long message complaining that her blog was "tedious and senseless, a 'misfortune' for Taiwanese people", Showon's replied, "If you really don't want to come again and read my diary, I can't force you to. But before you leave, could you help me by clicking on the advertisement tabs on the side???" Showon readily transforms misfortunes into amusement in a way that is accepted and comprehended by the public. Showon demonstrates that no matter how stressful life is, how agonising relationships are, and how unbearable work is, she can still live her life regardless. Her diary, as a daily

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<sup>70</sup> An 'elderly primigravida' is a woman who gets pregnant for the first time and is over 35.

mediation on the experiences of a woman in her late 30s manages to maintain a sense of lightness.

Showon's blog shares life experience, feelings, emotions, and opinions, in line with perception that ordinary things are actually the most important things to everyone. Her experiences resonate deeply with her female readers because she voices the innermost thoughts of a number of women, who previously regarded many of her topics as taboo. This is evident in her explicit concerns about her age:

2009 is a very special year to me. In August, I published a book. From a columnist I grew into a (not so) popular female writer. ... It is not too much to say 2009 is a milestone of my life. Why? Because according to the Department of Health's advocacy, pregnant women who are over 34 are classified as a mature primigravida. ... That is to say, after 2009, I will never have a chance to be a pregnant woman in my prime. Only 12 days left from now. Should I indomitably resist my destiny to accomplish the mission of fertilization and implantation? (Background music: *Mission Impossible*. Please get a match to light the fuse.) Forget it. Better still obediently lower my head to the destiny. At worst, when I am pregnant, I will only have amniocentesis done, and they stick into my belly like a straw to withdraw pearl milk tea... (shivering). (21 December 2009)

Writing may be thought of as a form of self-preservation in a therapeutic sense. Showon's expression in her blog demonstrates that through writing she is able to give voice to parts of herself that she would otherwise keep silent. Writing online provides the added benefit of a sympathetic community of people who will serve as a sounding board for her thoughts and feelings. Blogging provides a way of processing the pain or confusion of certain circumstances. She uses writing to work through difficult experiences encountered in her daily life. Therefore, writing for her is an important part of the journey to emotional, psychological or spiritual well-being. She makes fun of herself as a part of this process to also help heal all the garbage in the lives of members of her Net friends' community.

### **5.1.2 The Name: Indoorsy Woman Showon as Collective Identity**

Showon embodies the image and lifestyle of a 'stay-at-home' girl. In one entry, she describes her single life and explains how come she often says only three words in a day when she is on leave from work:

In the middle of the night I am still awake. Let me share my feelings with you. ←Talking as if I'm a super star~ (feeling shame)

... around seven or eight o'clock last night, I reviewed my sorrowful life: all day yesterday I said only these three words, "biscuits eggs / two / mm~". ("two" means pan-fried buns, "mm" is because the boss knows me, so when he saw me he asked me right away: "a large hot milk?" which reduced my chance of speaking.) How sad ~ In order to confirm whether I might have lost my ability to talk after being silent for such a long time, I tried to pronounce some vowels. I found my tongue was dumb already. What a life?! (hanging myself) What kind of life?! How unexpected that a nice OL would descend to a level like this ... Even going to work is sweeter. Why can't I go to work every day?

A diary like this, in a plaintive yet humorous tone, invokes the *otaku* and especially female *otaku*'s qualities of 'nerdiness' and obsession (frequently tied to anime fandom) The name, Indoorsy Woman Showon, clearly indicates that she is a single woman who always stays at home. She does not go shopping or out for afternoon tea. She is not interested in clothes or skin care products, but home appliances and electronic devices. The name Indoorsy Woman not only reflects her character but her life as the owner of a studio apartment for herself, as she works hard to pay the mortgage.

The title 'Indoorsy Woman' is therefore an expression of her belief that a woman should have her own property, and a studio apartment, as opposed to a larger house:

I have always believed that the girls should have their own studio apartments.

At this moment, one student is raising her hand to ask: "Master, if I can buy a bigger house, why should I buy a studio apartment? Don't you know that those financial experts always say that studios have no future benefit?"

In this regard, I tell you that those financial specialists only see things from an investing perspective. Unlike your master, I, am analysing this from the perspective of girls' lives. I contend that a studio apartment is an ideal choice for a single woman. Please continue to see my explanation ... (10 April 2011)

Besides, she also writes about: the 'small circle complex' in her office, anxiety of being a woman in her late 30s, and her constant concern about her body shape. She emphasises, "What I write tends to be diary oriented. As a matter of fact, I'm writing in accordance with my life progress" (Eslite, 2012). At the end of 2012, Showon got married, so her anxiety associated with being single is replaced with anxieties from marriage life, which have since provided her with more things to write about. Among the most common musings in recent entries on the blog include: "What is marriage? This is marriage, ah~". Two years after her marriage, she published her third book, *A Good Daughter-in-Law* (2014), which is also a collection of her diary writing on the blog. This book is all about her experiences of, and reflections on, being a wife and a daughter-in-law in her husband's family. Although the book is titled *A Good Daughter-in-Law*, which might at first seem to be instructive, suggests a different perspective:

The relationship between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law is the toughest problem in the world. But I think all these problems should be solved by husbands. So, husbands, please an effort. Hang in there. Our happiness is in your hands ah~ (patting you on the back). (6 May 2014)

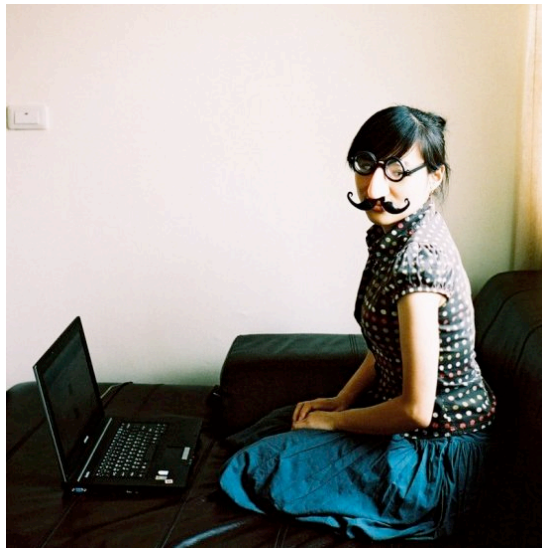
When Showon was asked if she possesses the zany humour of her entries she was not Showon in the blog, she replied, "I am not zany. Zany humour means something intentionally arranged to make people laugh." Showon does not deliberately present herself as humorous. She sees herself as honestly expressing her feelings and perceptions, describing things as they

happen to her. In Showon's blog, writing is not in itself a means to convey 'truth', as the reality is usually in between the lines. This thesis argues that the diary is the genre that can specifically articulate and represent women's thoughts and feelings. As Ken Plummer (2001, p.197) noted in *Live Stories and the Narrative Turn*:

New modes of writing fracture into difference and multiplicity. There may no longer be a coherent, unified, gendered, stable presence behind the story and its text. ... Dominant genres cease, realist reading end, and multiplicity of ironic, parodic, pastiche, self-conscious (and hence often intelligible) voices start to be heard.

As Plummer suggested, since examples of variants of this new writing are growing, feminist researchers should sense the need for new assumptions in such writing, as in 'gynocritics', which "begin at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture" (Showalter, 1985, p. 131).

### 5.1.3 *The Mask: An Expressive Woman in Disguise*



(One of the public images of Indoorsy Woman Showon)<sup>71</sup>

Although Showon is the published author of three books, she still retains her mask, and she does not remove it in publicly available images of herself. She says she initially wore the mask because her writing in the blog was too bold, and she was afraid of "losing face".

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<sup>71</sup> Image retrieved from <http://vd37551.pixnet.net/blog/post/50245179-%E5%AE%85%E5%A5%B3%E5%B0%8F%E7%B4%85>

Paradoxically, though her family and friends have since seen her identity through the writing, she cannot find a reason to take off her mask. The boldness of her unique narrative style is an important aspect of Showon's popularity. However, in one reply to a reader's comment, Showon states, "Yes, I am a conservative." (21 November 2013). Showon is an 'ordinary' woman like many other office ladies. Therefore, I consider Showon's mask as the taking of a position that enables her to comment and to satirise, in the process of constructing monologues that resonate with her readership. To this end the function of her mask bears a resemblance to the 'clown' mask in the ancient Greek theatre. Only with her mask can she mock the world without care or regard for the social consequences, and say the words that she dare not speak showing her own face. Showon's mask with nose and glasses possess a specific symbolism and by wearing the mask, Showon herself becomes a symbol too. She speaks of the aspirations and the distresses of many women, who are restrained by societal norms or public opinion, and are afraid to express their inner voices. When Showon boldly expresses her thoughts and feelings in her blog, readers find their own voices echoed, and long-buried grievances finally find a space where they can be vented. Delafield suggested that women's lives may be constrained by domestic duties, but diaries can be used as a means of self-expression, and even rebellion (Le-Guilcher, 2012, p. 247). Delafield argued further that diaries are spaces for our second selves to be let out, and who knows where this may lead (p. 249). In this regard, Showon's mask represents the second self not only of her own self, but also of that of her readers.

After she writes an article in her blog, she will announce it on her Facebook page and provide a link to her blog. If she thinks the content may potentially offend someone, she posts a brief disclaimer to be read before anyone clicks through to her blog. For example, at one point she criticises the appearances of some female artists', as she expresses her admiration for an actress of mixed blood—comments she knew she would annoy some serious readers. Thus, on her Facebook update she wrote: "Hello, I am Indoorsy Woman Showon. (giving out a business card) My hobby is offending people." (24 November 2013)

In addition to this she has expressed her worry about not receiving enough money at her wedding party. The Chinese wedding tradition is to give money in a 'red envelope' as a gift. Her worry was that the gift money might not cover the wedding expenses if guests didn't put not enough money in their red envelopes. So on her Facebook update (9 May 2014) she wrote, "In fact, every time I write about my fear of losing money at a wedding party, some Net friends will definitely come out to condemn me. (But I'm still writing.) (Walking against the wind.)"

As journalist Suzanne Stefanac (2007) stated, “At their best, diaries teach us about ourselves, each other, and the world. They teach us about our own boundaries as well as the comfort zones of those around us” (p. 46). Showon’s expression and narration in her blog break the conventions and typical form of diary writing. She is conservative and simultaneously subversive. With her mask, she is empowered to speak out, to test the boundaries and challenge the comfort zones of those who read her entries.

We live in a society where “we expect to be watched, and concomitantly, we expect to be able to watch others” (Calvert, 2000, p. 94). Calvert observed the erosion of privacy as a distinct characteristic of the late 20th century. In this regard, we can consider the phenomenon of online diaristic blogging as a cultural practice of contemporary life, and online diarists as exhibitionists exposing details of their lives. In *Voyeur Nation: Media, Privacy, and Peering in Modern Culture*, Calvert defined mediated voyeurism as “the consumption of revealing images of and information about others’ apparently revealed and unguarded lives, often yet not always for purposes of entertainment” (2000, p. 2).

It is worth noting that although Showon writes about her body within and alongside trivial events in her everyday life, what she reveals most is her thoughts, her inner voice, and her ‘off-screen’ monologues, rather than intimate and detailed descriptions of her personal life or relationships. Nonetheless, reading her blog still brings readers a kind of peeking pleasure. Calvert cited a number of contemporary social forces that promote mediated voyeurism, and points out that dissatisfaction with the increasingly mediated nature of journalism leads to an interest in information that seems to provide a less mediated and thus more authentic reality. Showon’s popularity speaks to Calvert’s argument for the “pursuit of truth” in an increasingly media-saturated world (2000).

In addition to ‘truth’, Miller and Shepherd (2004) observed that the “desire for excitement” and the “need for involvement” are two other factors that promote the mediated voyeurism of blogging. As Calvert stated, “part of the appeal of logging on to these sites... was that it fulfilled an innate human desire for shared experiences” (2000, p. 102). Such involvement in Showon’s blog not only invites readers to engage with her life, but also includes readers and Showon herself participating in the lives of other readers’. For example, one reader left a message in the comment area to complain that his mobile cannot read other readers’ comments under Showon’s blog entries:

Mobile version is crap. I have to shift the reading mode on my mobile to computer version to see comments. But computer version is too small ~ Why has no one in Roodo noticed this in all these years? (Happy Life, 19 July 2013)

Showon replied to Happy Life:

True. My blog is well-known for its comments because they are more brilliant than the main text (Shoot). How can these comments be left out? (Showon, 19 July 2013)

And following these two comments, another reader left a message to second the previous comment:

True. My motivation to work in the office is logging in here to see readers' messages. Too marvellous! The aggregation of Net friends' messages should be sufficient enough for Showon to publish one more book. (Lucky Wife, 20 July 2013)

In these comments and replies, both Showon and her readers agree that the essence of her blog lies in readers' comments. Showon explained, "sometimes when I don't really have something to write, I would start a topic by writing a few sentences in my blog so that Net friends can chat with each other in the comments of that entry." Showon's diary in this way serves as a spur to induce readers to come forward to share their experience or contribute their ideas. One feature in Showon's blog is that most readers leave their comments anonymously by using pseudo names (nicknames). In many other blogs, readers are usually eager to be known by blog authors so they leave their messages with personal information such as account number, email address, or even links to their own blogs. In Showon's blog, some readers use one consistent nickname to let Showon and other readers recognise that she or he visits the blog again. Some readers change their nicknames to respond to the topics in different entries, so these nicknames also simultaneously reflect readers' opinions or feelings to the topics. In writer's mask and readers' nicknames, Showon's blog becomes a venue for masquerade where everyone discloses to each other without worrying about moral judgement. Because Showon's blog allows comments on her entries, as well as comments on comments, her public life becomes intertwined with the public lives of others. The "need for involvement" is accordingly fulfilled in readers' reciprocal responses and feedback. As for the "desire for excitement", Miller and Shepherd use reality TV to indicate that it is a desire to "see others face a moment of reckoning" in which "we may vicariously experience challenges that give meaning to life" (2004). In Showon's blog, the "moment of reckoning" is largely represented in her frequent self-mockery, her acerbic descriptions of the body and explicit satire of artists, all challenging the ambivalence toward vulgar and tedious things in everyday life. It is this unique writing style that brings a sense of excitement to the reading experience in Showon's blog. The following section navigates the ways that Showon's expression and narration specifically connect with readers, constructing moments offering both meaning and significance for her audience.

## 5.2 Double-sided Representation of Women's Ambiversion

The linguistic and stylistic characteristics of Showon's prose lie in the intertexture of the Chinese and Taiwanese languages in her writing, reflective of the speech patterns of most people in Taiwan. Many people who can speak Holo (the dominant dialect in Taiwan) agree that in some moments Mandarin is not precise and powerful enough to express some subtle emotions. Showon often plays with words and subverts conventional use of Chinese language, using Mandarin-pronounced words to simulate homophonic words in Holo, which not only creates humour, but also reflects the reality of real-life conversation. With regard to the use of spoken language in writing, the dialogues in sites, applications or programs such as Skype messenger or Twitter suggest that computer-mediated communication reduces the time lag between textual interactions. The use of technologies has made it possible to considerably reduce the delay in the communication by written words to "one that is comparable to the kinds of communication delays normally found only in face-to-face communication" (Giese, 1998). In this way, people do not write on the Internet, they *talk*, because written communication becomes more like spoken communication. Simon Kuper (2013) wrote an online article in the *Financial Times Weekend Magazine* that social media has done wonders for writing. He pointed out that writing that reads like conversation is a very modern phenomenon:

Day by day, prose is becoming blessedly more like speech. Social media, blogs and emails have hugely improved the way we write. ... As the Columbia linguist John McWhorter points out, pedants have been lamenting the decline of language since at least AD63. But texts, blogs, emails and Facebook posts are infecting other kinds of writing, and mostly for good. They are making journalism, books and business communications more conversational.

Kuper's point is that the conversational writing style improves people's chance of being heard and understood. He cited George Orwell's from 1944, arguing that "spoken English is full of slang, it is abbreviated wherever possible, and people of all social classes treat its grammar and syntax in a slovenly way", to exalt the transformation of writing. "Orwell's ideal was writing that sounded like speech", he wrote, finding that "we are getting there at last." (Kuper, 2013)

While attention has been paid to the conversational writing style in social networking sites, Showon brings this feature into her blog, and furthermore, she creates a written oral diary. Written language has been appropriated and put to new uses within the newer social environments of cyberspace. Through Showon, we observe that traditional writing systems have undergone modifications that make them more suitable to the new environments. While Showon's writing partly reveals the characteristics of new media communication, I argue that

Showon's writing also spontaneously reflects the nature of women's writing through the unconstrained stream of consciousness that permeates her diaristic blog. Her representation of different states of consciousness that drift from emotional self to rational self, and her texts which flood with feelings, make her narrative feminine. Her use of unconventional representation of a written language becomes a productive means to voice the female consciousness. Whilst Showon does not explicitly suggest her written language is strategic, when asked about how she developed her writing style, Showon answered playfully:

Actually I was surprised too. At the beginning, I did not deliberately intend to write like that. A bit by bit, I went astray. Now I finally understand why some actresses would dress less and less.

...

I've never been a person who is good at writing. I can only write out what is currently in my mind. And I happen to be a person who has psychological drama in my heart, so that's how I can have endless words of garbage. (Kuo, 2011)

As Huang observed, in Showon there exists a contradictory impact which can catch both scholars' and laymen's eyes (Huang, 2012). Showon breaks with traditional writing style in her blog; she seems to be chatting like a friend (she directly speaks to the readers), but at the same time, it is as if she is talking to herself (extensive use of off-screen voices and asides). This writing style allows readers to experience a sense of intimacy with Showon, whilst the muttering quality of her written language offers pleasure that is voyeuristic. After all, her blog is open to the public, so readers understand well that Showon is engaging in self-disclosure. The combination of intimacy in such 'women's talk' and the excitement taken from voyeurism together constitute the double-sided/ambivalent nature of her writing. To discuss distinctive manifestations of these characteristics, I analyse two major features of Showon's diary writing in her blog: the representation of emotion and body language, and the application of off-screen voice.

Many researchers argue that computer-mediated writing has resulted in the impoverishment of communication. Michael Heim (1993) wrote of how a deeply ingrained sense of body is affected by the transference of the communication sphere into cyberspace:

Our bodily existence stands at the forefront of personal identity and individuality. Both law and morality recognize the physical body as something of a fence, an absolute boundary, establishing and protecting our privacy. Now, the computer network simply brackets the physical presence of the participants, either by omitting or by simulating corporeal immediacy. (p. 74)

Mark Giese (1998) in his online article, "Self without Body: Textual Self-representation in an Electronic Community", also argued the point that computer-mediated communication is impoverished owing to its absence of visual and audio expressions in textual interactions:

These include facial expressions that indicate sincerity, amusement, trust or dislike. Cues like blushing, yawning, rapid breathing or blinking; body language that indicates shyness, distrust or

nervousness; gestures like hand motions or nods and headshakes that indicate simple agreement or dissent are all normal parts of the face-to-face communication equation. These are absent in computer-mediated communication.

Indeed, the absence of physical communication, including a person's facial expressions and gestures, colours and styles of a person's clothes, and the atmosphere of environment, can be influential factors that impoverish the communication. However, these problems seem to have had a solution in Showon's writing. Using written language to express body language is frequently and explicitly featured in Showon's writing. I use two diary entries she posts on her blog as examples. The first example is the way she announced the pre-order sale of her second book:

Yes, after nearly two years, finally I have the chance to sell my book.

This *Showon's Empty Ideas of Life Wisdom* is a masterpiece indicating my transformation from a queen of crotch to a master of life wisdom. The content is just like my last book, frankly speaking, still some rubbish that cannot even be recycled. So, I will not say too much about the content. ~~As the author of this book, I am actually afraid that everyone would complain that it is crap.~~ [The deletion line was the author's own device/syntax.]

As usual, this book has a photo that makes my scalp tingle ... because it is placed on the pre-order page!! (Crashed) I was horrified to see that photo. I thought the photographer should have retouched it. Who knows ... (Give me wine)

Lastly, I remind you again to pre-order my book as soon as possible because the profiteers Huangjun Long forced me to buy the remaining complementary toilet paper ...

I beg everybody ... please buy them up ~ ~ (Kneeling down) (22 April 2011)

We can see Showon extensively uses brackets to describe a body language/actions, which clarify or highlight her emotions and responses to the observations described in her text. With two exclamation marks and the bracketed word 'crashed', readers seem to see a scene in which Showon is holding her head and screaming in despair. By using 'give me wine' (literally, that she needs a drink), she expresses her hopeless and helpless feeling for what has been done, and perhaps cannot be undone. In the end, in order for readers to feel her need for everyone to buy her book, she uses 'kneeling' to make a sincere plea. These bracketed words do not only outline body movements and facial expressions, but also imply Showon's psychological responses/state. As a result, all these bracketed words create a picture/scene in readers' minds, so we are not only reading her words but also watching Showon perform actions. Besides adding physical actions in brackets, she uses other techniques to mark words or phrases which might be considered inappropriate. The sentence, "~~As the author of this book, I am actually afraid that everyone would complain that it is crap~~", discloses Showon's concern about readers' evaluation of her book. By drawing a line through the middle of selected sentence, she also intended to inform readers that she knew these words should not come out of the mouth of a book author. The other one is the shrunk word, "profiteer". By

using smaller font, Showon creates an illusion of whispering in her readers' ears. For readers who are familiar with Showon's writing style, she was just making fun of her publisher by calling him a profiteer. Another example is Showon's narration of her awakening consciousness of becoming a woman:

Looking back, it happened when I was 23 or 24 years old (Eyes looking into the distance). That was an important watershed of my life because before that I had been living like a man in women's clothes.

...

Once a woman lost her feminine consciousness, her whole life started sinking down. I went out in my father's large T-shirt. I nearly started to pee standing up and to take my brother's place in the military service. I was almost growing a cock on my body...

Fortunately, I met Jiang-jie, who taught me how to use mascara. And then I discovered once a human's eyelashes fly up, the femininity deep inside would appear automatically! Plus my Auntie comes every month, and I have to spend money on sanitary pads. All these signs show that I am a female, I am a female ah~ (If it were in a Taiwanese soap opera, no matter what you have in your hands, out of the blue these things would drop with a bang.)

Afterwards, my dressing style gradually went from that of a man to a realm of femininity—returning Dad's clothes and starting to try on some dresses and shoes with high heels, remembering to go out with a bra instead of a man's tank top. ←Kidding. Do you take this seriously?

In the beginning I felt very troublesome, but after a while I found that it was not bad to be a female. When you need to carry heavy things, there is always someone to help you. ... (In the past, if I dared to play innocent with men, they would probably feed me bricks and then give me one hundred dollars to buy psycho medicine.)

[Pushing open the door of laboratory]

This experiment proves: As long as you are determined, everyone can be a sissy girl ah ah ah~.  
(Showon, 2009)

Showon's narration offers a detailed account in words of the process of her transformation, from a 'man' to a woman. By mocking herself, she amusingly points out the distinction between men and women was only the makeup, the mascara. It was a ludicrous yet ironic account of women's self-awareness. As mentioned previously, Showon uses parenthesis to delineate the scene as if she was on the stage and readers were watching her perform theatrical actions that compliment her observations. Another technique she often uses is an arrow. In the above example, she uses "←Kidding" to remind readers that she is exaggerating in order to entertain. The use of an arrow is like an aside in a play, another voice from outside to remind audiences of certain details and foreground the absurdity of real life situations. In the end of the narration, Showon brackets the words "pushing open the door of laboratory" to highlight that she had gone through the transformation and walked out as a 'real' woman. It is also a parody of television advertisements in Taiwan, which often use scientific experiments as a mode of persuasion. The use of parenthesis does not only refer to feelings or opinions that Showon thinks may not be appropriate for a decent woman to express, but also discloses

the stream of consciousness in the process of her writing. In the following example she used parentheses as an ‘off-screen voice’ to articulate her inner thoughts:

Although we are taught by parents to improve ourselves because abilities are the most important things in life, I have always covertly thought that only a beautiful appearance is the biggest advantage to survive in this society. Although no one can take away your wisdom while beauty can be replaced easily (Time and tide wait for no woman ah~ I say.) (On the other hand, I feel that time and tides prefer not to wait for beautiful women. Maybe everyone expects too much, so they get disappointed easily? People do not expect anything for women like us, so it does not matter how old or how many wrinkles?) (So is it a good thing?) (Hey you have too many O.S.<sup>72</sup> in your mind. Let’s go back to our theme.) (One jump))

Anyway, it is undeniable that those who look handsome or beautiful normally give a better first impression. I guess those who want us to improve our professional abilities use these words only to encourage and comfort people like us who cannot succeed with our faces ... (Yes, I have personality defect. Kids please do not learn from me.) (13 March 2013)

In this entry Showon represents the action/sounds of muttering to herself in her writing. In this instance, she uses five parentheses to present the various changes in her thoughts. In the beginning, she speaks in the first person, and then she starts to talk to herself. She brackets some sentences to indicate to readers that her thinking has flowed with her stream of consciousness. After three bracketed sentences, she suddenly jumps out of that meditation and the second person voice is used. Therefore, “one jump” is another technique she uses when she realises that she has sunk into one particular meditation for too long. It is this very contemporary expression of everyday language that distinguishes Showon’s writing from many other bloggers. In an interview playwright Jien Li-ying talked about her first impression of Showon’s writing:

To be honest, after reading her book, my first response was “Hey, you tell me it is a book?” However, this response has two different meanings. On the one hand, Showon’s work is a kind of prose, unlike those literary works we are familiar with. On the other hand, she accurately captures the context of our daily language, which actually can better represent the true state of contemporary life. (Jiang, 2012)

Feminist scholars have argued that the diary is a form of feminine autobiography or “... the ‘real’ voice of their writers” (Wink, 2001, p. 129). Showon precisely manifests the feminine quality of using the off-screen voice in women’s minds. In her off-screen voice, Showon and readers both find feelings of release and pleasure. As Helene Cixous stated in her manifesto for *l’écriture féminine*, “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1975):

... her writing can only keep going, without ever inscribing or discerning contours ... she lets the other language speak—the language of 1,000 tongues which knows neither enclosure nor death ... her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible. (p. 375)

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<sup>72</sup> O.S. refers to off-screen voice. Off Screen (O.S.) indicates that the character speaking is present at the location, but not immediately where the scene is taking place. For example, a character speaking from the next room or outside the kitchen window might be labelled O.S.

For Cixous, feminine writing is “the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural standards” (p. 337).

### 5.3 Diary Writing as Empowering Exhibition

Indoorsy Woman Showon’s Diary was adapted into a theatrical play named, *Showon APP*, by playwright Li-ying Jien, and performed by the Shakespeare’s Wild Sisters Group in 2012. Director Baboo explained that “App stands for an application. So *Showon APP* means applying Showon’s point of view to reveal the truth of real life and disclose the logic of how this world is working” (Jiang, 2012). Baboo explained that what Showon represents is not only the contexts of contemporary women, but also sarcasm and parody directed at the pretentiousness of cosmopolitan life. In this sense, Showon is no longer Showon herself, but the collective identity of office ladies, of single women in their late 30s, of middle-class women searching for a space to voice themselves. Therefore, I propose that diaristic blogging such as Showon’s Diary can be interpreted as a form of *empowering exhibitionism*. The term empowering exhibitionism was first coined by Hille Koskela (2004) who introduced the concept to describe the *practice* of revealing a personal life. Through the exhibition of their life, one can “reclaim the copyright of their own lives” (p. 206) as they engage in the construction of their own identity. In other words, exhibition or disclosure becomes “a tool of power that can be used to rebel against the shame associated with not being private about certain things” (Albrechtslund, 2008).

Cultures of mediated exhibitionism and mediated voyeurism have evolved during the last few decades through computer-mediated communication that facilitates the trend toward exposure, and has provoked “a countermovement against its alienating and exploitative features that aims to turn exhibitionism into a more\_authentic, empowering force” (De Laat, 2008, p. 62). Analysing visual representations characteristic of reality shows, mobile phones, and Internet webcams, Koskela (2004) argued that subjectivity can be reaffirmed if people choose to play a more active role in the production of certain images or identities by “choosing when and how they are recorded by surveillance camera” (p. 205). Following Koskela, I would argue that this term can be applied to the empowering potential of diary-style blogs. Showon is not ashamed of exposing her thoughts and feelings to the public, but she also stresses, “I do not have a ruler in my heart. The things I talk about always relate to myself, so I do no harm to others if I voice them.” (21 September 2012). She even proudly announces in her blog:

I left my (sense of shame) heart in the Aegean Sea (I have never been there though). I'm glad that I have once again broken through the boundary of shame. Break through your sense of shame, then you become unbeatable. (21 September 2012)

In the process of writing, Showon turns potential shame into to a rebellious force. The empowering exhibition is presented in her performance through words. The following are two examples of Showon's reflections on being a "new good woman" and "a good daughter-in-law".

### ***A New Good Woman (7 June 2012)***

Before the Ministry of Education set up that bullshit definition of a new good man and a good woman, I went to record a radio program which was just talking about this topic. I was asked to give my opinion on the definition of a good woman and if I think I am a new woman. I didn't answer the question directly. First, things like definition are too hard to answer. A yokel like me couldn't answer this well. Secondly, I thought that society is unfair. Generally, as long as a man take up a little bit of feminine household chores, such as washing dishes or doing the laundry after work, or sharing the responsibility to look after children, the world would say that "he is really a new good man, and you are married to the right one ah~" On the contrary, many women go to work too. After work, we cook, wash the dishes, and do all the housework. But no one would say we are good women. At most, they feel that we have done our duty, which is only to be labelled as "competent for the job". If you think carefully, it is entirely groundless. Isn't the standard too high for women in the society?

Then, after a few days, the definition of a new good man and a good woman came out: A new good man is one "with a sense of humour, who can make people feel comfortable, reliable, and has a sincere, serious, attitude to life, insisting on morality and rationality, and having moral integrity and is promising, respectful to life, caring for women." A new good woman is one "treating the family as the focus of her life, loving her husband, taking care of the children, and trying hard to maintain a happy and harmonious married life." You don't feel it is particularly harsh on women because by looking at the definition, the men's one is obviously longer. It seems that they are required to do more, but if you carefully think of it you will realise those requirements are all illusion. Making life comfortable, having a sincere attitude, and promising ... these things simply are very difficult to assess, aren't they? So it is actually a mystery if this man is good or not, who knows? In contrast, look at the definition of a new good woman; it seems that if a family is not happy enough, children do not behave well, or the marriage is not happy, these faults are entirely of the woman because she does not do her job.

Besides, there are people like me, who do not have a husband to love, no children to take care of. So then we do not deserve to be called good women? (Left hand's back patting on right hand palm). The more I think, the more I get angry, to the degree that my mouth's gums are swollen and haemorrhoids have come out (Like if I suddenly stand up from a chair, you will see a pool of blood.) The pressure from society that is given to women is so high ah~ (Crashed and crying) (the fact is that my aunt (M.C.) is coming ...).

In this long statement, Showon explains her developing understanding of the definition of "new good woman". It is one of the rare cases that Showon expresses her personal opinions seriously, yet she does go back to mocking herself in the end. While saying that society has placed too much pressure on women, she paints a picture of a woman who is simultaneously mad at inequality and annoyed at the biological difference of women's bodies. Showon usually does not criticise anyone or anything harshly. Her way is to tell the story, depict the situation, and describe the personal experience, and in these ways reveal the absurdity of life

for women. After five years of blogging as a single woman, Showon married in December 2012, and started to write about her marriage. The relationship between a woman and her husband's mother has been a sticking point in Chinese society. Traditionally, a woman's virtue was in being obedient to her husband and doing whatever she was told by her husband's parents. Now women are not subordinate to men so the conventional virtue of "obedience" is no longer applied to the relationship between husband and wife. However, when it comes to the relationship with the husband's family, it is a different story. Generally, most women in Taiwan are still deeply influenced by the traditional norms of being a good daughter-in-law. Women grow up with cautions from their mothers who constantly teach their daughters not to violate the rules of being an obedient and hardworking woman in her husband's family. These teachings of 'women's virtues' have been internalised by many women since they were young girls. Although many women have been educated with a level of feminist awareness, they still care about how their mothers and mothers-in-law look at them, and these internalised norms dictate how they should behave. Showon writes about these conflicts and dilemmas in her blogs. As usual, she represents and makes fun of real life experiences without too much direct criticism. As indicated earlier in this chapter, one frequently repeated question/answer in her blog is: "What is a marriage? This is the marriage." In 2014, the diary entries in her blog were again collected and published as a book, *A Good Daughter-in Law*. To promote her book, she wrote an entry titled "Who should buy *A Good Daughter-in Law*".

***Who should buy "A Good Daughter-in-Law"? (11 April 2014)***<sup>73</sup>

Many girls have excessive longing for marriage, mistakenly believing marriage is like the prince and princess lived happily ever after.

Wrong! Unless you are Vivian, normal marriage is not what you think. After marriage, you will find that there is no big deal to be Constantine.



He only occasionally visits hell and you are so amazing. I'm living in hell everyday ah~

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<sup>73</sup> The image in this post is reproduced here, as it occurred on the blog.

To avoid depression arising from marriage, which makes you feel you're dropping from heaven to hell. Unmarried women please do not stay out of it and say it's none of your business. In fact, you guys should be the ones to buy my book. In so doing, you will understand the behaviour codes to be a good daughter-in-law.

What I have done right, you can learn; where I've slipped up, you do not make the same mistake. By doing so, you can be a victor by getting a head start.

With this photo from the film, *Constantine* (Lawrence, 2005), Showon compared marriage with the hell. The photo depicts what she usually describes in her blog—women are struggling between so many requirements and forces within society, which are like those ghosts pulling Constantine down.

### **5.3.1 *Laugh Hard, if You Can't Beat it***

In her blog, Showon creates a space for repressed office ladies to laugh out loud, and opportunities for self-liberation. Showon stated in an interview:

I don't like to be full of remorse and pity for myself. I always feel that there are so many more miserable things happening in this world. Is it necessary to cry out loud only because of a few obstacles? That is so useless/hopeless! So my way to encourage everyone is to tell you various cases of wretchedness. I let you know you are not alone walking on the road of bad luck. (Let's put our hands on each other's shoulders and waggle) Anyway, if you can't beat it, then face it with laughter. (Eslite, 2012)

Women gather together whilst reading Showon's blog, and readers add comments, laughing at themselves and the world. As in Cixous' description of "the laugh of Medusa" (1975), she finds that women should be proud, unruly, like the Gorgon Medusa. What the perpetual off-screen voices and laughter of modern women produce in this context is just such a power of liberation, carried out in a blog space. Journalist Tung-hao Lee (2012) offered the following perspective on Showon:

She is a 'revenge female writer who gossips about [her] ex-boyfriend'. The saddest thing needs to be narrated in the funniest tone. A fishwife shouting on the street, as long as her words are funny and humorous, will not be seen as a wild woman. ... The one who masters the laughter gains the justice in Net-friends' hearts. We do not want to understand the ups and downs, right or wrong in a relationship. It's too difficult to spend a lifetime to know a person. However, I can spend a second to press 'like' and share the post to help her, simply because she is too funny. Everything worth arguing or discussing is all forgotten in laughter.

Showon's way of dealing with the odds is to go easy with herself. She believes that she does not need to live up to anyone's expectations. She tells women there is no need to overreact to a problem because there are always strategies to deal with something without damaging yourself:

Wearing a sad face can't help you solve problems. Remember this philosophy: there's always a mountain lower than this one.<sup>[74]</sup> You are not the only victim. Thinking in this way, don't you feel more broad-minded? (Yes, I think so.)

From Showon's point of view, she reveals the 'truth' of real life by unveiling the logic of how the world works. She said, "there is not an absolute standard for everyone. Don't believe in everything they tell you, including me." This kind of attitude also manifests in the title of her third book: *102 Meanings of Life; doesn't matter if you don't know them* (2011). This kind of life attitude should not be regarded as pessimist. Showon, with her mask, in her off-screen voices, and her murmuring writing style, shows that the process of pursuing a second life is actually a self-searching process.

### 5.3.2 *Self-Mockery as Resistance*

The context of Showon's writing represents a great deal of detailed description of ordinary people's everyday lives. From the body, to the relationship between women's bodies, to other things, including the workplace, relationships, sex, and even politics, Showon's perspectives and narratives foreground the absurdity of taken-for-granted behaviours and conversations. Although Showon does not write antagonistically against society, in her unpretentious representation, she challenges the way most people look at the world. In her practices of writing, Showon's blog becomes a battle field where she carries out ideological combat between her own body and society, and between her own internal conflicts.

Playwright Li-ying Jien observed that Showon shows us a new kind of feminism for the 21st century. She considered that Showon represents modern women who do not need to claim their identity as victims, and these women know what they need. They seem to have found the motivation in their lives by focussing their efforts on seemingly trivial practices. At the same time, however, women can improve themselves, discuss their bodies in public, and mock society by laughing at themselves; however, they cannot escape from social control:

In the beginning, I was glad that women no longer need to get attention by burning bras. Then I feel a sense of sadness: what exactly do we have now? If we cannot change big things, we can only look at trivial things. Middle-class women in Taiwan are actually living in a sense of vanity and emptiness pervading everywhere. (Jien, 2012)

On the one hand, she is depressed after being dumped by her boyfriend. On the other hand, she eliminates the tragic role of the pathetic woman, calmly analyses herself and mercilessly mocks herself. This kind of feminist standpoint is ironic. She apparently identifies with

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<sup>74</sup> Showon makes a parody by revising the Chinese slang, "there's always a mountain higher than this one", which is a metaphor for saying that "there is always someone better than you".

feminist movement while at the same time she still tries to alienate herself from the feminist label. She shows concern for women's issues, whilst making fun of women like her in a playful way. *Showon* is a collective portrayal of contemporary postmodern women. In the past, women's writing focused on breaking through the restrictions of patriarchy, and fought against larger political structures. In *Showon*, we observe a contemporary woman coping with her life in a very different way. In the 1960s, women wanted to burn their bras, but now women not only reserve the right to wear their bra, they may use a variety of ways to enhance their breasts. Because women have been conscious of how society sees them, they take advantage of what they have to in order to transform the sense of powerless into a kind of feminist strength.

## Conclusion

Much has been written about women and technology, but women's online diaries and their associations with personal identity and social action have frequently been overlooked in the fields of women's studies, cultural studies and communications. There has been to date no sustained scholarly research on the relationship between women's blogging practices and personal politics in Taiwan. In accentuating the significance of diary writing as a genre for women, this thesis has traced histories of women's expression both in the social and literary contexts, and staged an analysis of women's writing practice in conventional and online diaries that builds on extant literature on female written expression in Taiwan, and scholarly histories of blogging. The textual and technological characteristics of women's diary-like blogs, feminist writing practice, have been foregrounded in the discussion of online diary blogging as a means of women's self-expression for personal identification and social action. I have investigated ways online diarists engage with these characteristics as spaces for subject formation and community building. The bulk of existing scholarly work on women's online diaries focuses on the characteristics of the new media form and content. Whilst the intimate relationship between diaries and women, and the functions and technologies of diaries and blogs have been attended to, this study has sought to broaden and deepen the understandings of women's online diary and blogging practice in Taiwan by conducting a study of two female bloggers. In doing so, this thesis has adapted ethnographic research methodologies to the new media setting, engaging in what Ward (1999) has termed "cyber-ethnography". This approach retains the qualitative and interpretive modes of traditional ethnographic approaches but rethinks the implementation of these methods within unique online settings. In this way, the analysis of these two blogs, *Wealthy Lady Nana* and *Indoorsy Woman Showon*, furthers research into 'the diary as feminine', as a genre wrought through personal narratives and identity, and the exhibitionistic aspects of blogging as performances of personal empowerment and social action.

### Review of the Thesis

Chapter 1 of this thesis placed the changing conditions for women in Taiwan within larger cultural and historical contexts, examining women's mobility and self-expression by looking at women's movements in social space, and women's self-expression in the literary space. Taking the values and histories of women in Taiwanese society as necessary for social cohesion and national unity, the development of feminist awareness was filtered through the

progress of women's movements in Taiwan. Examining women's participation in social activities and engagement with public or political events in the social context of Taiwan, highlighted the suppression of female subjectivity throughout historical changes in politics, economics and social structure. Given the limited access to public space and repressive social environment for women, writing has been always a productive way of getting their voices heard. Focussing on feminist discourse in women's self-writing, it was proposed that women write about their lives as their own life stories, as well as writing their stories as a part of women's history.

In Chapter 2 I foregrounded the value of women's diaries, the significance of women's self-writing, and the intimacy between women and diaries. The provenance of diaries is connected to the notion that historically diaries were not written as expressly private documents. The 'feminising' process of the diary was taken to support an argument that the diary is a genre for women to give voice to themselves and to others. In this, I have proposed that the diary, as an engendered genre, aids women's self-expression, communication, and connection with others. Women's engagement with diary writing was therefore viewed as an act of feminist practice, which emphasises women's self-awareness and reflections on their own social context. The process of my researching women's autobiographical writing, uncovered *nüshu* writing as an exemplary demonstration of the idea that early women's writing can be considered as a form of early feminist practice in Chinese society. In a less formal form of writing recognised by dominant literary criticism, *nüshu* resembles the common form of conventional diary writing. As the modern idea of a diary as a 'secret' *record of an inner life* evolved, the inner life in turn became an important part of the private sphere, and women continued to turn to diaries as one place where they were allowed to explore their lives through personal reflection and emotion. It may be that a diary as a space for a second self to perform can also be considered a space for the 'truth' of the diarist's life story. *Nüshu* has to some extent demonstrated the need for women's voices to be heard and recognised by others. Comparing 'nüshu women' with female bloggers of today, I have argued that online diaries on personal blogs, like a contemporary form of *nüshu*, are not only a means of self-expression but also rebellion.

I have broadly investigated the historical role of diaries in women's writing culture and argued that the diary has been a preferred genre for women, in which they reveal their inner worlds to potential audiences. In Chapter 3, the history of the blog's development as a form provided the backdrop to a discussion of the integrating process of social media technology into the space of personal blogs. The online diary as an 'old genre with new tricks', is seen to

have turned the diary into a personal medium of public communication and an individual site for social networking. While online diaries are still favoured by women, blogs, characterised by their convenience of publishing diaries with photos, video, and hyperlinks, have changed the genre in many aspects. The general technological characteristics of women's blogs, their immediacy and interactivity, enhance and extend the public form of diary.

In this regard, blogs, as new media forms of diaries, are shown to have reconfigured writers' and readers' engagement with the writing and reading experience. On the other hand, it is argued that blogs as new media carry issues related to the existing and historical politics of everyday life. The question of what constitutes feminist writing, is ultimately connected to a woman becoming aware of social oppression or injustice and subsequently writing about those experiences in her diary. The associated discussion of the formation women's subjectivity in the online environment, incorporated Donna Haraway's (1985) cyborg metaphor and Katherine Hayles's (1999) analysis of posthumanism to characterise relationships with the use of technology. I argued that when women are writing about themselves online, they sustain a new kind of subjectivity as "a rhetorical strategy and political method" (Haraway, 1985, p. 151). This chapter also serves as an overview of the conceptual framework for my research and discussion of the two case studies. Miller and Shepherd's (1984) analysis of genre as social action was canvassed in support of my argument that blogging is not only a means of self-expression and communication, but also has meaningful pragmatic actions in itself. This led to the application of Foucault's (1988) "the technologies of the self" to the discussion of identity and performance in women's online diaries.

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 comprise my case studies of women's online diaries in two selected blogs—both studies traversing the cultural contexts of these women's online diaries. In Chapter 4, Wealthy Lady Nana's discursive construction of blogging and identity (re)produces her online diary writing is a new media *technology of the self*. I discussed the relationship between the diary and identity formation in the course of Lady Nana's online diary writing practice. The importance of diary writing to Lady Nana is found to reflect her position that diary writing is a way to preserve her self and observe the self from a different perspective. The 'technology of sign', 'technology of power', and 'technology of production', which according to Foucault (1988) are correlated and intertwined with the process of "the technologies of the self", were applied to Lady Nana's blogging practice. The subsequent discussion examined the role and impact of the audience with respect to online diaries, addressing the way Nana crafts her writing texts with an awareness of her audience. Through

writing, Lady Nana shapes the presentation of self, and finds ways of fitting reality to her perceptions or impressions. Lady Nana's online diary writing was connected to her status as an online celebrity and analysed in terms of how the production and performance of a female blogger as a celebrity is shaped through the practice of continuous diary writing on her blog.

Where Chapter 4 focused on online diary writing as a way to enact the "care of the self" through new media technologies of self-production, Chapter 5 shifted the focus of the discussion of women's diaries from the tacit, micro context to the larger macro context; from the personal to the social. Exploring the construction and consumption of recognisable female 'selves', Carolyn Miller's (1984) theory of "genre as social action" was subsequently deployed to interrogate the functions that diaries serve for those who write them.

An analysis of Showon's blog illuminated the ways her narratives reflect women's recognition of a 'group' identity. The identities and values represented on her blog are shared by Showon and her readers and the phenomenon of Showon's online performance is used to explore notions of privacy, self-disclosure, and the pleasure of voyeurism. Showon's unique writing style, characterised by oral language and discursive femininity, is considered central to the popularity of her blog. Drawing on Calvert's (2000) 'mediated voyeurism', I argued that through mediated exhibition women can be collectively empowered in the process of online diary reading and writing, concluding that a woman's blog, as a space for writing practice of online diary like Showon's, can be considered as a form of *empowering exhibitionism*, through which a woman represents the version of the self that is collectively recognised, taken up and echoed back to her by a specific community of women.

### **Blog as Theatre of Intimacy**

As film and mass media theorists have identified constructions of women as "other" or *to be looked at*, women in blogs, as a space for the performance of identity, are both the subjects and objects of the gaze. While some may insist that this dilemma ultimately manifests and reinforces the predicates of male-dominant representations and social realities, I argue that a woman can take advantage of her paradoxical position to persistently and publicly claim subjectivity through the representation of her life experience, and 'voicing' herself in the blog. Technology changes both personal expression and social narrative, and in the two case studies of woman's diaristic blogs, I have deployed two ways of looking at women's online diaries that mirror these personal and public interactions—diary writing as a *self-technology*, and diary writing as a form of *social action*. Within these two perspectives, this thesis has

presented an observation of the micro processes of identity ‘shaping’, alongside observation of the macro processes of identity ‘performing’. The two case studies used online diaries to explore the ways two different women make sense of their lives; the ways they incorporate and live out—or, in some cases, resist—social prescriptions for their life and work. According to Katie Holmes (1996, p. xiii), the diary embodies knowledge that is “situated”:

The diary is situated at the intersection between women’s personal lives and public discourses. It is an expression of their agency and provides us with an insight into the ways women felt, acted, and understood their world. (p. xiii)

The diary functions as both a private and public text, and the blog offers a unique narrative form, or template, for the tracking of the self in time. Women’s online writing, by displaying and fitting the private self in the public sphere, is an integral part of women’s personal and social lives.

While women’s diaries concern everyday life and the people related to them, individuals’ diaries reveal personal politics that have the potential to affect the actions and reactions. Within the contexts of ever-changing and developing technologies, women have more choices and more possibilities for public expression, and for women especially, cyberspace overcomes the limits of time and space. The act of a diary being read allows a personal story to be *shown* in public, and in this sense that diary is performing for strangers. The blog can be viewed as a performative space and practice that creates a space, or a theatre, of intimacy.

Similar to the Intimate Theatre,<sup>75</sup> online diary writing in a blog can be viewed as a theatre of intimacy, which relies on tight spaces and unconventional stages to collapse the distance between performer and viewer. Theatregoers possess a certain level of anonymity, hidden in the darkness, part of a crowd. They are free to fidget, yawn, even tune out; the actors won’t always know. Readers of a blog are also hidden, even more so, behind the screen, whereas the actor’s/blogger’s performance can still be influenced or altered through interaction with the audience. Blogs offer women an unprecedented ability to construct a new media identity and to be empowered by online performance. Through blogging as an online performance, women order their experiences and exert control over their lives with witnesses and audiences acting as both companions and as sounding boards. As performance artist Sarah Jane Norman said, “Theatre *is* therapy,” and profoundly healing, whether for a huge crowd or an intimate audience, of one. (Grant, 2012)

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<sup>75</sup> The Intimate Theatre was a repertory theatre in Palmers Green, London from 1937 to 1987, and is the name commonly used for St. Monica’s Church Hall;  
<http://www.theguardian.com/culture/charlottehigginsblog/2011/aug/09/edinburghfestival-edinburgh>.

## **Blogging as Intimate Contact in a Solitary Space**

Recent research trends have focussed explicitly on social networking site Facebook, and its ubiquitous and extensive use in updating an individual's personal 'status' and daily activities, interacting with friends, expressing opinions, and circulating information and images. With the function of the timeline, Facebook even allows users to use the Life Event option to add experiences from different parts of their lives. The timeline is a section of a Facebook user's account that shows the story of the user's life in reverse chronological order. Users tell their stories through photos, friendships, jobs, and personal milestones like graduating or travelling to new places. However, as Turkle (2011, p. 18), argued on social networks, "people are reduced to their profiles", expressing both solitude and intimacy, an indication of the ways internet technologies have changed the way people connect with each other, and have reshaped the landscape of our emotional lives:

We go from curiosity to a search for communion. In the company of the robotic, people are alone, yet feel connected: *in solitude, new intimacies*. ... We don't ask the open ended "How are you?" Instead, we ask the more limited "Where are you?" and "What's up?" These are good questions for getting someone's location and making a simple plan. They are not so good for opening a dialogue about complexity of feeling. We are increasingly connected to each other but oddly more alone: *in intimacy, new solitudes*. (p. 18-19)

While many researchers discuss how new media technology such as social networking sites has taken us to a new level of human connection and interaction, Turkle (2011, p. 295) reminds us to think about technology, which "brings us back to questions about what really matters".

While social networking technologies have shown us the "new solitudes" in newer forms of connection with others, personal blogs retain their irreplaceable function as a platform for a deeper and consistent self-expression. In a public speech in 1943, Winston Churchill said, "We shape our buildings and then they shape us." In *Alone Together*, Turkle (2011) argued that "we make our technologies, and they, in turn, shape us" (p. 19). Consequently, as Turkle suggested, we must question whether every new technology serves human purposes. This thesis has advanced the proposition that online diaries, as a new media form of their printed predecessors, can still serve the purpose of paper diaries, and at the same time offer new possibilities, for self-validation, community building and access to social power.

## **The blog as a Space for the Revelation of Women's Subjectivity**

Personal blogs offer women a space to 'voice' themselves by way of self-expressive narrative within new media technology, transforming the traditional experience of diary

writing through the public visibility and availability of the medium. With blogs, women are making the private public. This is the power of the medium. In my investigation of these two female bloggers' online diaries, both are found to reject the label 'feminist', keeping a safe distance from the word 'feminism'. For many women in Taiwan, feminism and marriage/heterosexual relationships are parallel pathways and one can generally only choose one way to go. Yet, can there be a feminist (heterosexual) marriage? Su Chien-ling, Vice Chairwoman of the women's rights group the Awakening Foundation, spoke publicly on the relationship between feminists and marriages. Being married and having two daughters, she said that "choosing to stay in a marriage and survive, like so-called 'local resistance', is not necessarily a no-through road" (Hu, 2005). For her, feminists have spent time and effort re-thinking marriage and have vigorously deconstructed power and control in marriage. Feminists have studied marriage, and urged women not to enter into marriages hastily. In light of feminist attention to traditional marriage, she asked if, "after knocking down the old evil, can we also give the 'awakening' woman prospects, with which she can live on well and be nourished? If not, individual's solitude and suffering will still go on" (Hu, 2005). This thesis has echoed Su's position that feminism should not exclude, but reconsider the possibilities of marriage and heterosexual relationships.

As stated in the Introduction to the thesis, a significant and challenging aspect of feminist action for women is in living within the heterosexual marriage and retaining feminist awareness at the same time. For these women, can feminism be practical and sustainable within the contexts of everyday life? I propose that what Su Chien-Ling called as "a local resistance within a marriage" can be facilitated and empowered by blogging as a kind of feminist practice. Taking that into consideration, I suggest that the online diary writing, through dialogues with oneself and dialogues with others, is a practicable means of self-reflection and self-examination by a way of an interactive communication and empowering performance, undertaken in order to maintain balance between marriage and feminism, to achieve her roles as a wife or a mother and her identity as a feminist.

### **Fulfilment of Women's Femininity**

Lady Nana's online diary writings relate mostly to her personal opinions and her experiences of building and maintaining harmonious relationships with men. Bloggers like Lady Nana, though extremely popular and well-received by considerable numbers of females, are sometimes criticised by feminist readers. This kind of criticism can be traced back to long-standing debates on the relationship between feminism and femininity. Whilst Lady Nana

advocates women's self-assurance and self-determination, she nonetheless embraces commercialised feminine beauty. There are two opposing perspectives with regard to the position of femininity in feminist discourse. One contends that it is a yoke that restrains women from freely developing in a male-oriented society, so the role of women's liberation is to eliminate overtly feminine aspects from constructions of female identity. The other frames femininity positively and whilst rejecting the patriarchal model, sees women's liberation in embracing and enhancing femininity which exceeds the violent and individualist male culture (Ding, 1995).

In Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), the central message warns women against the blandishments of consumer capitalism and its temptations to embrace shallow constructions of happiness. The conflation of femininity with weakness is deemed unnecessary, as is the negative framing of 'feminine' virtues such as self-giving and tenderness, in favour of processes of masculinisation. If the ultimate aim of feminism is about overcoming natural impulses in favour of something other than fulfilment, then feminism eventually becomes another civilising force for the discipline of women. For Friedan, women have a fundamental "need to grow and fulfill their potentialities as human beings" by engaging in socially meaningful work (quoted in Coontz, 2010). In theory, a woman in the workplace, can show as much or as little strength, independence, intelligence and wisdom, *as well as* femininity, as she chooses. Friedan was deeply opposed to "equating feminism with lesbianism", and told college audiences in 1970, "Don't get into the bra-burning, anti-man, politics-of-orgasm school" (quoted in Italie, 2006). She suggested that there are other ways for women, instead of becoming men, to reflect on the problems of the formation of gendered subjectivities and the construction of female subjectivity in particular. A woman has the right to determine her identities, either as wife, mother, or a 'self-reliant' woman independently of these roles. Just because both Wealthy Lady Nana and Indoorsy Woman Showon are archetypal girly women and enjoy typically feminine things like wearing dresses and doing makeup does not mean that they are not feminists. In the case of Wealthy Lady Nana, she can be analysed as an example of popular feminism especially in her practice of self-production. In the representation and performance on the blog, she displays her female power in remaking herself through body-shaping, her work identity as psychological counsellor, and her ability and taste in consumption. In the case of Indoorsy Woman Showon, I suggest post-feminism should best describe her feminist practice through blogging.

Feminism means seeking equality, not just for women, not just for heterosexual or homosexual, but for everyone. Some people do not identify themselves with feminism

because they find the word feminism to be anti-man or indicate that it was not right to do things that traditionally considered to be women's places like staying home and raise kids. In the Introduction I described the problem of excluding marriage and femininity from the discussion of feminism. I suggest that "just treatment" is of critical importance for the discussion of feminism, and is also the solution to the "feminist denial"<sup>76</sup>. I argue that feminism means respect for every woman's choice. It includes her right to be traditionally feminine and her right to reject feminine ideals. It should also include her right to identify as a feminist, or not. As two case studies in the thesis demonstrate multiple, dialogic, medium specific negotiations of femininity, what these two blogger represent in their blogging practice is a kind of 'negotiating feminism'.

Reading women's online diaries/blogs should be a way of understanding how individuals/bloggers form identities by integrating their life experiences within an internalised and evolving story of the self; or, in the guidance of women negotiating their identities in the contemporary world. I acknowledged that this study would only produce a limited definition of feminism, not reflective of feminists who cannot or do not access the Web. For instance, bloggers and their audiences are privileged in being literate in technologies of the self and production. While definitions of feminism vary, blogs as platforms from which feminist voices can raise awareness and speak against the absent or negative representations of women and feminists in other media.

### **Women's Online Diary Writing as Quiet Revolution**

The proliferation of celebrity news reports in the media has seen '*kuei-fu*' become a 'dream occupation', or an ultimate goal for many young girls. Literally, the title *kuei-fu* in Chinese, refers to a woman who leads a relaxing and satisfactory life and never worries about money, as she has a wealthy family or husband to support her. In the pursuit of this social position many women deploy and maintain strict beauty regimes, as they fantasise that one day they will be 'picked up' by a rich man and will marry into a rich and powerful family. Using the title Wealthy Lady, Nana does make lots of effort to live a life she wishes to have, and gradually she literally becomes a '*kuei-fu*' after she has been known as a famous blogger in Taiwan for several years. There are some great changes of her life style after she became famous in 2008, and the change becomes even bigger after she lost her weight in 2012. She appears to have a great taste in fashion/clothing and frequently shows her self-photos with decent dresses in various locations. She was also invited to join Louis Vuitton party several

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<sup>76</sup> For the discussion of the "feminist denial" please refer to Chapter 3.5.1.

times. The self-presentation of Wealthy Lady Nana in blogs and Facebook is predominantly endowed with the image of a middle-class life-style. The blog also reveals that she and her husband rented a big and pretty apartment in Taipei. Wealthy Lady Nana in a way conveys an image of Taiwanese modern woman who desires to have a quality life. In this sense, her diary writing in the blog is like a real-life documentary of a woman's endeavour to fulfil an ideal dream. This also explains why her blog is attractive to female readers and her writing resonates with so many women.

Although a *kuei-fu* is celebrated by Taiwanese society, traditional expectations for women to be faithful and uncomplaining remain. The immense popularity of a pop song called *Home Back*, sung by a Taiwanese female singer, is a clear example of this. "Home Back," implying 'wife', is a written translation from Taiwanese language<sup>77</sup> of two Chinese words, and according to the implied meaning, a wife is supposed to be the 'backing'/supporter of a home/family. The lyrics sing of the typical state of traditional women:

I gave my youth away to your whole family ...  
Is there anyone who is more important than you? ...  
I gave my whole life to your whole family. ...  
It's all because I am your wife.

Given the lyrics, the resonance of the song with people of all ages and both sexes in Taiwan could be considered anomalous. The success of the song implies the traditional image of a good woman has never fallen from favour, as attested to in the series of consistently compelling representations in various media. Being expressive and straightforward in her blog, Indoosy Woman Showon is apparently silent and submissive in her husband's family, especially in front of her mother-in-law. She wrote a diary revealing the difficulty of maintaining the image of a 'good woman' in front of her mother-in-law; however, with the title: "To mother-in-law (of someone else's, not mine; my mother-in-law is nice) (Wouldn't this title be too long?)" (Showon, 25 April 2014). This title is reflective of an inner conflict experienced by many married women in Taiwan. She also writes of various problems regarding getting along with her husband. Her blog, as described, becomes a 'contact book' between her and her husband, where she communicates with her husband through revealing their daily life to the reading public, in whom she finds support and empowerment through mediated disclosure/exhibition.

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<sup>77</sup> Taiwan is a multilingual society. There are four basic ethnic groups: indigenous people (1.7% of Taiwan's population), Hakka (12%), Holo (73.3%), and mainlanders (13%). Because Taiwanese Holo is the largest linguistic group in Taiwan, 'Taiwanese' generally refers to the English name for the language spoken by the Holo in Taiwan.

Researching women's voices in diaries and blogs, Simpson McKnight (2009) held that the majority of women, the ordinary diarists, write with an acceptance of their daily and social realities. This thesis supports the notion that through diary writing, many women are creating a record of their lives, and of their own 'selves'. They write about personal experiences and opinions of everyday encounters, without necessarily intending to be subversive or to push for social change. However, I consider through blogging, women either quietly or openly challenge societal norms through the act of continuously/routinely expressing their voice in a public sphere. Harriet Blodgett (1991) offers the following explanation to explicate the reason why she believed so many women, over time, have kept diaries:

I suggest that diary keeping has been practiced so extensively by women because it has been possible for them and gratifying to them. The diary, by its nature as a genre of personal record, by the opportunity it offers the diarist to record what is important to her, and by the daily time that it claims for itself, counters the patriarchal attack on female identity and self-worth. A diary is an act of language that, by speaking of one's self, sustains one's sense of being a self, with an autonomous and significant identity. (p. 5)

Noting that a "related reality is that most of the women are conventional in their assumptions about womanhood and hence in their aspirations", Blodgett (1991, p. 4) suggested that women "also write against a background of centuries of female disparagement". The blog, as the diary in its online form, is of particular significance for women because it provides a space for them to build and (re)affirm autonomous identities, and to create a community with other women in the process. Reflecting upon daily experiences, making decisions within the context of various daily situations, and taking action to facilitate the development of their own self-awareness, women's subjectivity is made manifest in and through the routines of everyday life. Therefore, I consider women's online diary writing an alternative form of feminist practice which can carry out quiet revolutions through the act of blogging continuously. A woman, by means of the simple practice of diary writing, has already become involved in the potential change of her own 'self', of others, and of the world that surrounds her.

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