

Depression and the Mother-Daughter Relationship in Li Lanni's *Nobody in the Wilderness*

This paper explores the linkage between depression and the mother-daughter relationship in contemporary writer Li Lanni's 李兰妮 (1956-) unstudied *Nobody in the Wilderness: A Mental Health Record of a Patient with Depression* (*Kuangye wu ren: yi ge yiyuzheng huanzhe de jingshen dang'an* 旷野无人:一个抑郁症患者的精神档案, 2008). The first of a number of memoirs that Li has composed to document her fight against the depression that hit her in 2003, after being cured of thyroid cancer, *Nobody in the Wilderness* is a complex narrative made up of diary entries, excerpts from Li's autobiographical literary production, medical reports, Bible citations, accounts of the SARS epidemic, and much more. The stratified narrative lends itself to multiple readings. This paper connects the act of narrating depression to Li's efforts to reconfigure mental illness as a "hereditary" condition that spurs her to reconstruct, throughout the memoir, a family history of depression across four generations of women. Inspired by medical anthropologists and scholars of narrative medicine (Frank; Kleinman; Marini) and studies of women and gender in China (Evans 2007), this paper analyzes the mother-daughter relationship as a motif that overrides the memoir and recasts illness as a condition that is at once personal, hereditary, and collective. Bearing witness to suffering that transcends Li's own suffering, the memoir acquires an ethical dimension that rests on the ambiguous relationship between the personal and the collective, the particular and the universal.

Keywords: depression; modern China; embodiment; mother-daughter relationship; responsibility

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