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Abstract

Writing out of Pain: Body and Self-criticism in Yang Mo's Diaries

This essay explores the relation between the body and self-criticism (*jiantao*) in the context of diary writing in modern China. More specifically, it examines articulations of the gendered body in pain and the way they relate to the systematic labor of self-analysis writer Yang Mo (1915-1995) carries out in her diaries (1945-1982). Self-criticism refers to the Communist practice of self-examination that consisted in identifying one's ideological and/or behavioral shortcomings. Yang Mo's diaries figure multiple instances of ideological self-analysis that unmistakably reproduce the widely diffused practice of self-accusation and confession that became popular in the Communist years as a means of indoctrination to mold people's thought. In Yang Mo's diaries, self-criticism emerges as a dominant interpretive mode through which she examines her thoughts, her life experiences, her role as a mother and wife, her literary career, her commitment to the Party, her relation to the world, and, surprisingly, even her own body. The complicated relation between self-criticism and perceptions of the gendered body in Yang Mo's diaries opens up a new window into the fascinating and previously unexplored presence of the body in self-criticism within the specific context of diary writing. Yang Mo's diaries are replete with accounts of physical disabilities and pain. Not only is pain tightly related to her self- and literary creation, but the relation between pain and the fashioning of her identity as a writer mediates and is mediated by Yang's labor of political self-analysis. Intuitively, the mind is the primary object of scrutiny in self-criticism. Yang Mo's articulations of pain throughout the diaries, however, not only expose the presence of the body in self-criticism, but also show how the female body in pain and its representations actively interact with self-criticism, and enable mechanisms of self-fashioning and creation that complicate the deconstructive, mind-oriented nature of *jiantao*.