
Grievance of the Gendered Self: Traces of Chinese *Gui-yuan* Elements in Carolyn Kizer's Poems

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Abstract

Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry usually employs either a female or a pseudo-female persona to express grievance about war, departure from friends, political failure, personal loneliness etc. Carolyn Kizer (1925-) is noted for her accepted influence of ancient Chinese poetics. This article argues that Carolyn Kizer's poetic creation largely lies upon her acceptance of Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetics by applying with Chinese-flavoured allusions and images. By doing so, Carolyn Kizer achieves the grief poetic tone to express the melancholy of the gendered self for women, which evidences the traces of Chinese *Gui-yuan* elements in her poems.

Key Words: Carolyn Kizer, Chinese *Gui-yuan* Poetics, Grievance, Gendered Self, Melancholy, Allusion, Image

1. Grievance — salient element in Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry

Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry does have several English translations, which reveal different interpretations of *Gui-yuan* elements. Some scholars have translated it as Chinese Poems of Grievance¹ with emphasis of the emotion. It can also be translated as Chinese Boudoir Poems with emphasis of the boudoir scenario.² Actually, translation of this type of Chinese poetry should combine the two translations together. *Gui* is the inner chamber, where ancient Chinese maidens live. In Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry, *Gui* metaphorically refers to ancient Chinese women's sex segregation. *Yuan* is the emotion of sullen grievance, which indicates the poetic tone of this poetry. Thus these two versions of translation deliver only this or that aspect of the poetry but not the comprehensive one. For the sake of accuracy, Chinese *Gui-yuan* Poetry sacrifices the clarity of English pronunciation and expression, which emphasizes the psychical

¹ Translation as "Chinese Poems of Grievance", See in Pang Hai-yin, "Discuss on the Beauty of Grievance in the Poems of Grievance" etc.

² Translation as "Chinese Boudoir Poems", See in LI Ai-min, "Literary Exposition of the Moon Imagery in Boudoir Sorrow of the Tang Poetry"; LIU Jie, "One Aesthetics of Hidden Bitterness in the Tang Poetry of Palace and Boudoir Repinings"; etc.

state of persona from metaphorical segregation. The salient element of *Gui-yuan* poetry is the mechanism of melancholia, which is achieved through the literary device of grief poetic tone.

The poetic tone of grievance has a long history of undercurrent in Chinese ancient poetry. It could be traced into the *Book of Songs*. Confucius once states that “poetry can vent resentment.” Grievance is the long-lasting traditional theme in ancient Chinese poems. *Gui-yuan* poetry underflows in Han Dynasty and then reaches its peak in Tang Dynasty. From a “female” persona, this poetry originally serves as an expression of grievance for those ladies who have been restricted physically within the domain of Boudoir. The poems are their expression of sullen feeling about their abandonment or sex segregation. The poetry overflows with longing, lamenting and contemplating. Later on this form of poetry has been employed by male writers to express their frustration with political failure, sympathetic apprehension of common people’s suffering from the wars, or their heartbreaking departures etc. The poetic tone of grievance is still salient under these poets’ hands.

2. Carolyn Kizer’s acceptance of Chinese *Gui-yuan* elements

Carolyn Kizer’s literary attribution largely lies in her acceptance and transformation of Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetics. Her Pulitzer’s Prize awarded poem collection *Yin* (1985) is entitled with *Yin*, Chinese meaning of *Qi* (气) for femaleness, the opposite side for *Yang*, the maleness. Kizer expresses bluntly her indebtedness to Chinese poems: “I was interested in Chinese poetry of course long before Chinese Translation period”, “My mother read Arthur Waley aloud to me when I was a child” (Rigsbee 145). Kizer’s exposure to Chinese poems not only is got through the reading of Arthur Waley’s translation, but also is gained from her own personal confrontation. She herself has travelled China twice and imitates Chinese ancient poems in English. Dominic Cheung (1978, 77-84) has noted about Carolyn Kizer’s Chinese imitations in two poems: “Tzu-yeh Songs” 子夜歌 and “Mo-ch’ou Songs” 莫愁乐. He contends (78) that, “Carolyn Kizer has effectively captured the subtlest nuances of the Chinese works while often bringing latent connotations to full and precise imagistic expression.” The subtle nuances of Chinese poems include thematical subject and poetic tone.

Carolyn Kizer’s acceptance of Chinese *Gui-yuan* elements includes her transplantation of thematic treatment of friendship especially the occasions of parting from friends. In her interview with David Rigsbee in March, 1988, Kizer directly expressed her learning from Chinese poems as poetic models especially the theme: “—using a whole poem and doing a kind of variation on it, on a theme” (133).³ In her imitations of Chinese poetry, Kizer finds out that “the affinity, as far as China is concerned, has to do with the dominant theme of Chinese poetry, which is friendship” (Rigsbee 145). Based on this understanding, Kizer writes groups of poems dedicated to friendships. Name a few friends with dedicated poems as examples: Herbert Norman (*The Death of a Public Servant*38), Rutheven Todd (*Love Song* 65), Theodore Roethke

³ David Rigsbee and Steven Ford Brown. “Not Their History but Our Myth: An Interview with Carolyn Kizer”. Page to Page: Retrospectives of Writers from the Seattle Review. Ed. Colleen J. McElroy. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006.

(*A Poet's Household* 68), Morris Graves (*From an Artist's House* 69), Donald Keene (*Linked Verses* 71), Robert Creeley (*Amusing Our Daughters* 88) etc. Friendship with other poets and her peers turns out to be the recurrent theme in Kizer's poetic cannon, in which departure with heartbreaking feelings is always the subject matter.

More than employment of friendship as her poetic theme, Kizer tries to transform Chinese aesthetics of mourning into her poetic creation, which is the salient element of Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry. By expressing in grief poetic tone, she reveals the melancholy of the gendered self for the twentieth century women in U.S. A. which echoes with Chinese women one thousand years ago. It could be argued that this is the most obvious traces of *Gui-yuan* elements in Carolyn Kizer's poems.

3. Grievance of the gendered self

Carolyn Kizer's poetic tone has similarities with Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry in which grievance with different objects. After all, poetry as a work of art is the expression of emotions, its effect, may be formed out of one emotion, or may be a combination of several; and various feelings, inhering for the writer in particular words or phrases or images, may be added to compose the final result. (T.S. Eliot18)

The emotions in Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry are sadness, loneliness and grievance, regardless of male or female persona. The touching grievance transcends the time and contributes to the immortality of the poetry. The poets often borrow the point-of-view of the confined lady in the inner chambers to express their grievance about their personal, professional or political loss. However women writers usually use this type of poetry to express Chinese women's spiritual suffering from fossilized gender norms and rigid moral instructions. The inner chamber is a "female space". To some women writers, the inner chambers turn to be their own place, where they can contemplate, lament and communicate inwardly. Thus grievance becomes one prominent characteristic for ancient Chinese women's definition of femininity. Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry does not only reveal the maidens' everyday life but ritualize the images of abandoned and sullen women in the restricted chambers. This kind of defamiliarization enchants the poetry to those segregated males in public space.

The emotion of grievance in Chinese *Gui-yuan* Poetry is slightly different in causes from Carolyn Kizer's poems. The emotion of *Gui-Yuan* poetry derives from the physical and psychological restriction upon the ancient Chinese women. They are assigned to the inner, domestic sphere by Confucian social and gender norms. The inner chambers were not only a physically and socially bounded space within which women were supposed to live, but also a discursive site for the construction of femininity in both ideological and literary discourses. The term *Gui* embraces a nexus of meanings: the material frame of the women's chambers; a defining social boundary of women's roles and place; and a conventional topos evoking feminine beauty and pathos in literary imagination. The boudoir is a distinctive textual territory encodes with the women's subjective perspectives and experiences. Robertson observes the

“boudoir” scenario undergoes the most remarkable changes in the hands of Chinese *Gui-yuan* Poetry (200):

In the literati versions of the boudoir, women are alone and sad, or they are entertaining or dreaming of men. Women writers reclaim the boudoir as their own domestic space; they sometimes write of their loneliness within the household and of the absence of the men they love.

Thus it could be alluded that the Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry employs the boudoir scenario to express the women’s longing for love, freedom and subjectivity. They are melancholic because they are tagged as “woman”, the inferior gender identity in the society. The gendered self of woman is doomed with melancholy.

The poetic tone of grievance in Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry mainly stems from women’s physically and spiritual suffocation. The consignment of women to the *gui*/ inner chambers originated from the ideal of physically and socially separating the sexes. The recognized, earliest source of this idea is the Confucian ritual and ethical classic, the *Liji* (Book of Rites), which notes: “While men live in the outer, women live in the inner sphere.” In addition, the “*Nei Ze*” section of the *Li Ji* goes further to elaborate the behaviour codes of the sex segregation. These principles among others have been repeatedly quoted verbatim or rephrased in moral instructions in later ages. The *Nv Lun Yu* of the Tang, (Song, 70: 3291) for example, rephrases the idea stated in the “*Nei Ze*”: “inner and outer each has their place. Males and females gather separately. Women do not peek outside the walls, nor step into the outer courtyard. If they go out, they must cover their faces. If they do peek, they conceal their forms.” The idea of gender segregation is supposed to be not only materialized with physical boundaries, but also to be extended to labor division in terms of social, economic and ritual responsibilities. Men are supposed to be in charge of social and public affairs whereas women are called to mind domestic business. Presuming the separate spheres between males and females, the Han classic, Ban Zhao’s *Nv Jie* (Precepts for Women), provides specific codes for women to conduct themselves in the domestic sphere.

These moral instructions, among others, are recognized orthodox sources on gender division in ancient Chinese society. Despite different emphases and temporal periods, these moral classics clearly set for the separate spheres— male: outside/female: inner. The ideology of the separate sphere, in the feminist historian Joan Scott’s words (1067), “typically take[s] the form of a fixed binary opposition, categorically and unequivocally asserting the meaning of male and female, masculine and femininize.” The physical location of inner chambers turns to be not only gender norms for femininity but also the moral instructions for maidenhood. The women’s sphere is located within the inner quarters. Enclosed and nurtured within the wall-surrounded houses, Chinese women learn their proper places and roles within society. As Francesca Bray points out, the Chinese house is not merely a shelter made of materials, but also “a cultural template” (55): it is a learning device, a space imprinted with ritual, political and social messages.

Therefore the *Gui*, inner chambers for confined Chinese ancient women has transcend the physical and psychological restriction. It turns to be a symbolic domain for spiritual suffocation. Poets and poetesses use the scenario to express the emotions of sullen grievance and the longing for attention, understanding, care and love. The grievance for *Gui-yuan* poetry is thus the expression for the women's construction of femininity with association with metaphorical gender norms and moral restrictions.

While for Carolyn Kizer's modern women in U.S.A. they do not restrict physically within inner chambers but by the gender norms to construct femininity. Thus in the construction of gendered self, American women share with Chinese ancient women's melancholy of gendered self, which is the trace of Carolyn Kizer's employment of *Gui-yuan* elements. Woman, "what we take to be 'real,' what we invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality" (Judith Butler, 2006: xxiv). Gendered self is the effect of the iteration and reiteration of gender norms in the corporeal body. There is no pre-existing self, no true-self. Self is constituted by "stylized" repetition of acts, which is of performativity. The "stylized" gender acts within the compulsory hetero-sexuality matrixes endorses the gender performativity. Thus the essence of man/woman, male/female, and masculinity/femininity are of performativity. Gender performativity refers firstly, "revolves around this metalepsis, the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself"; "secondly, performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (Butler, 2006:xv). The incorporation "denotes a magical resolution of loss, characterizes melancholy", it "belongs more properly to melancholy, the state of disavowed or suspended grief in which the object is magically sustained 'in the body' in some way", which "is not only a failure to name or avow the loss, but erodes the condition of metaphorical signification itself" (Butler, 2006:92). Thus the melancholia is doomed with woman's construction of gendered self.

Under this consideration, the grievance in the *Gui-yuan* Poetry stems from the melancholy of gendered self. To acquire a gendered self, the ancient Chinese women have to obey the moral instructions assigned by traditional Confucian doctrines. As one of the most important gender norms, the dualism between male/female, public/private confines women into the separated inner chambers. The confined women not only lost the freedom of social communication but the subjectivity of her self. "Subjectivity is discursively produced and that this does not involve the notion of a pre-existing subject on whom power and discourses act, but rather that subjects are formed through their discursively constituted identity" (Gill Jagger, 2008: 3). By the discursively constitution of the gendered self, Chinese women feel the loss of their subjectivity. The loss of self autonomy and reflexivity cause the psychological grievance. That's the same psychological trauma for American modern women. Having been treated as the "Other" in the symbolic paternal law according to the western tradition, women in U.S.A. share the grievance of the gendered self, which provide the ground for Carolyn Kizer's transplantation of Chinese *Gui-yuan* elements. Kizer borrows the scenario of confined and sullen women to express American women's melancholy of gendered self.

4. Traces of *Gui-yuan* elements in Carolyn Kizer's poems

Through the application of the emotional and psychological immurement expressed in her lyrics, Carolyn Kizer illuminates how the image of the female persona confined in the conventional space of the boudoir. She has transformed it into a subjective voice which is expressive and reflective of the confinement and isolation of the feminine space. Through this portrayal, she tries to express female persona's grievance of the gendered self. Women in Carolyn Kizer's poems bear with the doomed melancholy and gloominess as Chinese "women" with long history. Their melancholy however stem from the restriction not physically but psychologically especially in the inscription of gender norms to construct gender identity. The grievance, the melancholy for the contemporary American women in Kizer's poems is derived from gender melancholia, which is an ongoing, largely unconscious process of acting out. This links up with Butler's model of performativity, which supposes that "materialization is never quite complete" (1993:2). Kizer employs the literary device of allusion and image to achieve the poetic tone of grievance.

4.1 Allusion

Allusion is a common poetic device in Chinese poetics. According to James Liu (136), "There may be practical reasons for using allusions, such as when a clandestine love affair is involved or when political or personal satire is intended. Under such circumstances allusions afford an obvious way of avoiding scandal or prosecution." In Carolyn Kizer's case, her allusions are of Chinese flavor. Some of the allusions are just borrowed from Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry. Kizer's borrowing of these allusions is to achieve the grief poetic tone.

Plucking the eyebrows is one of Kizer's indebtedness from *Gui-yuan* poetry. It is thought to be the flirtation between husband and wife in the inner chambers in ancient China. *Shen Fu* in Qing Dynasty once wrote an article "*Wedded Bliss*" to contend the bliss for the wedded couples.⁴ The following anecdote from *Quan Tang Shi Hua* contains this plot:

Last night in the nuptial chamber when the red candle had burned out,
After finishing my makeup, I asked my new husband in a low voice:
"Have I penciled my eyebrow too light? Too dark? Do I look fashionable?"⁵

This eyebrows' plucking or penciling indicates the intimacy between the spouses. Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry uses this scene to lament the intimacy with husband and lover. However, Kizer's plucking eyebrows is of erotic inference, which highlights the absence of the male partner:

No use. I put on your long dressing-gown!
The united sash trails over the dusty floor.

⁴ See in Lin Yutang's translation, *Six Chapters of Floating Life*.

⁵ 洞房昨夜停红烛，待晓堂前拜舅姑。妆罢低声问夫婿，画眉深浅入时无。English translation done by Victor Mair, "Scroll Presentation", 56.

I kneel by the window, prop up your shaving mirror
And pluck my eyebrows.

(Kizer, *Summer near the River* 11)

In this poem, Kizer still tries to express the female persona's loneliness and bitterness of missing her lover or husband who is not present. She uses this allusion but does not only transplant it simply into the American ground. She puts it together with the male's shaving mirror, which indicates the absent presence of the male power. Thus the allusion of eyebrow plucking has stepped out the domain of inner chambers' bliss. It bears with the elusiveness of the gaze under the paternal power. Plucking eyebrows is the internalization of gender norms according to the male expectations. Thus to be a woman is to comply with the gender norms prescribed by the patriarchal society with subordination and inferiority. The touching scenario of plucking eye-brows is the same but the reason for melancholy is different. Chinese female persona is yearning for love, while American women laments for the melancholic incorporation.

Same-heart knot is another example for Kizer's traces of *Gui-yuan* elements to express the psychological state of the subject, who is performed by regulatory norms and discourses:

Two hearts; two blades of grass I braid together.

He is gone who knew the music of my soul.

Autumn in the heart, as the links are broken.

Now he is gone, I break my lute.

But Spring hums everywhere: the nesting birds

Are stammering out their sympathy for me.

("Weaving Love Knots", Kizer *Cool Calm & Collected* 390)

The first line of the poem: "two hearts, two blades of grass I braid together" is the love knot of the Chinese tradition. Xue Tao (AD 768-831)⁶ in "*Spring Gazing 2*" once uses this plot: I pull a blade of grass and tie a heart-shape knot/ to send to the one who understands my music./Spring sorrow is at the breaking point./Again spring birds murmur sad songs. The melancholy is shared by these two poetesses together with the allusion of the heart-shape knot. Kizer also does a word play for Chinese character "愁", as "autumn in the heart", which is very artful. Thus the heart-shape knot, which indicates the mutual love, the grief in autumn and the melancholy of the gendered self are in harmony with each other. Xue Tao's poem expresses the female persona's heartbreaking feeling about the lover's departure. The outer world's touching sceneries echoed with the melancholy in the inner heart, which is the sublime beauty in Chinese poetics. Carolyn Kizer's melancholia is caused by the lack of mutual understanding. "He" is the person, who knew the music of my soul. Thus his disappearance is not only the lover's

⁶ 薛涛,《春望词》之二: 揽草结同心, 将以遗知音。春愁正断绝, 春鸟复哀吟。 To see more translations by to see Tony Barnstone and Chou Ping, *The Anchor Book of Chinese Poetry: From Ancient to Contemporary, the Full 3000-year Tradition*, 2005.

departure but also the symbolic breaking of the lute to express my soul's music. Kizer inherits the plot but gives it more richful meanings rather than merely expression of loneliness.

Loosened sash is another allusion Kizer inherits from Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetics: "The sash of my dress wraps twice around my waist/ I wish it bound the two of us together" (*Hiding Our Love*, 89). Kizer's loosened sash alludes with Liu Yong's *Feng Qi Wu*: My sash grows loose—never minds/I'm pale and worn—she's worth it!⁷ Kizer borrows the plot as the indicator of entrapped absorption of the lover. However, Kizer changes the persona and laments binding the pair of lovers together. Her usage only remains the loosened sash and the devotion to love but changes the cultural connotation completely. The physical closeness with the binding of sashes symbolizes the need for spiritual understanding. Moreover, the sash binding could indicate the sexuality liberation the female persona desires. Liu's poem emphasizes the unregretful mourning and missing for the lover, but Kizer emphasizes the action of "binding together". The ego restricted within the corporeal body, thus the woman wants to relieve the soul from the materialization of the body. "In Kizer's poem, we learn of a waning interest on the man's part and the woman's suspicion of his infidelity later in the poem" (Dominic 81). Carolyn Kizer once utters the problematical existence of gender-based inequality: "So I go on, tediously on and on.../ We are separated, finally, not by death but by life" (*Kizer Winter Song*, 14). By this means, the melancholy of gendered self through this allusion is achieved.

4.2 Imagery

Imagery is another important device Carolyn Kizer exploits to express the melancholy of gendered self in her poetic canon. It is popularly employed by Chinese ancient poetesses to express their sullen feelings indirectly through certain images and metaphors such as moon, river, autumn etc. Li Qing-zhao's *Zui Hua Yin*⁸ combines the touching scenery in Mid-autumn with her inner heart's loneliness and sullenness by various images: mist, cloud, pillow, dawn, dusk etc. Breeze is one of the most recurring images in Kizer's poetic cannon, which is a very popular element in Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetics. In *Chun Si* by Li Bai,⁹ he tries to combine the visional reality and imaginary mood, feeling together. The dominant image is just the spring breeze, personalized to express the persona's flirting complaint. The same scenario could be found in Kizer's poem:

I have carried my pillow to the windowsill
And try to sleep, with my damp arms crossed upon it,
But no breeze stirs the tepid morning.
Only I stir... Come, tease me a little!
With such cold passion, so little teasing play,
How long can we endure our life together?

⁷ 柳永,《凤栖梧》:衣带渐宽终不悔,为伊消得人憔悴。

⁸ 李清照,《醉花荫》:薄雾浓云愁永昼,瑞脑消金兽。/佳节又重阳,玉枕纱橱,半夜凉初透。/东篱把酒黄昏后,有暗香盈袖。/莫道不消魂,帘卷西风,人比黄花瘦。

⁹ 李白,《春思》:燕草如碧丝,秦桑低绿枝。/当君怀归日,是妾断肠时。/春风不相识,何事入罗帏。

...

No use, I put on your long dressing-gown;
The untied sash trails over the dusty floor.
I kneel by the window, prop up your shaving mirror
And pluck my eyebrows.
I don't care if the robe slides open
Revealing a crescent of belly, a tan thigh,
I can accuse that nonexistent breeze...

("Summer Near the River", Kizer *Cool, Calm & Collected* 91)

Different from Li Bai's flirting complaint of the breeze's uninvited visit of the inner chambers, Kizer welcomes the breeze. In Kizer's poem, the breeze turns to be an erotic object relative to the dreamed lover. The image of breeze in this poem is an absent presence, which indicates the female persona's desperate need for love and compassion. American women, though are not restricted in the inner chambers, but all the same suffocated by fossilized gender norms. To be a woman is to construct a gendered self, a "melancholic structure, it makes sense to choose 'incorporation' as the manner by which that identification is accomplished" (Butler, 2006:93). Ancient Chinese women suffer from the rigid separation between public sphere and the private one. After the women's liberation movement, women in U.S.A. move far in the road of gender equality. However, the gender norms are still there. The gender-based inequality still exists. By using the image "breeze", Carolyn Kizer portrays the women's submission and subversion as well.

Images are usually perceived as the tactfully expression of feelings. Eliot observes, "out of all that we have heard, seen, felt, in a lifetime, do certain images recur, charged with emotion, rather than others?... Such memories may have symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell for they come to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer" (148). The melancholy of the gendered self as a woman can never be easily grasped by those who with strong western aesthetics of directness. However, it is noted that Carolyn Kizer herself calls her own poetry "the world's best-kept secret: Merely the private lives of one-half of humanity" (*Mermaids*, 44). By keen observation about women's inner world and psychological suffering from the restriction of the compulsory hetero-sexuality matrixes, Carolyn Kizer borrows the elements from Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry to reveal women's spiritual sufferings. She illustrates her poetic creation as "creating a ground for a resuscitation for what used to be called 'public poetry'" (Rigsbee, 141) and her poetry "is speaking to an audience that isn't listening", but she assumes that "somebody is listening" (Rigsbee, 142). Women do not have their voice in public. It is not because of their inability to speak but because of the unwillingness to hear by the gender-biased audience. Thus, Carolyn Kizer takes the forceful images to speak.

As Dominic Cheung has observed, "Carolyn Kizer has effectively captured the subtlest nuances of the Chinese works while often bringing latent connotations to full and precise imagistic expression" (78). There are still other images Carolyn Kizer has employed from Chinese

poetics to achieve her perception. "I am as monogamous as the North Star, /But I don't want you to know it. You'd only take advantage. /While you are as fickle as spring sunlight. (Kizer, *Mermaids* 59). North Star has symbolic meaning of loyalty for love (see as John Donne's "Valediction"). But Kizer endorses with feminist standpoint, the female persona wouldn't let the lover know she fall deep in love with him for fear of being taken advantage of. So Kizer makes the North Star represent the women's inferior situation in the love relationship. Therefore the woman must conceal her love and loyalty:

Do you know that we both conceal our love
Because of prior sorrow, superstitious fear?
We are two citizens of a savage era
Schooled in disguises and in self-command,
Hiding our aromatic, vulnerable love. (Kizer, *Mermaids* 56)

The disguise is the incorporation with gender norms to preserve the "true" self, which pre-exists in Julia Kristeva's "Chora". The "savage sea" alludes for the paternal symbolic order, which threatens to erase the existence of the women as speaking subject. Arthur Waley's translation of Chinese ancient poems, which is the major sources of Carolyn Kizer's information about Chinese poetics, has such a concealment of love:

Who says
That it's by my desire,
This separation, this living so far from you?
My dress still smells of the lavender you gave:
My hand still holds the letter that you sent.
Round my waist I wear a double sash:
I dream that it binds us both with a same-heart knot.
Did you know that people hide their love,
Like the flower that seems too precious to be picked?
(Waley, *People Hide Their Love* 136.)

To subvert the symbolic meaning of the North Star's loyalty and conceal the love in order to reserve one's self-respect, Kizer show her own particular concern for the women. Her poetry concerns the particular difficulties and possibilities of being a woman in the process construction of the female self. "She finally voices in her own poems is no longer the solitary cry of the oriental woman, but that which belongs neither to the east nor to the west and is not confined in terms of either space or time" (Dominic 78). Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry expresses Chinese women's confinement in terms of space, however, Kizer's expression of the confinement has transcended the terms of space and time, which is of no ontological frame.

In the Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry, women are alone and sad, or they are entertaining or dreaming of love. Poets use it as expressions of their emotions about their political or career loss. Women writers reclaim the boudoir as their own domestic space; although they sometimes write about their loneliness within the household and of the absence of the men they love, they use the

boudoir scenario as the expression of their spiritual loss. The melancholy stems from the gendered self are the inheritance Carolyn Kizer borrows from the Chinese *Gui-yuan* Poetics. When discussing how the psychoanalyst can “locate the truth” of the unconscious, Lacan (1998, 41) says that s/he should practice a “signifying scansion” and punctuation, which will have “a reference to the real... that supports the phantasy ...that protects the real”. The melancholic poetic tone in the Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry or Carolyn Kizer’s poems, if it is viewed from the perspective of the non-linear, unconscious time that structures the compliant, they are to problematize the introjective gender norms at the maiden’s melancholy of the gendered self.

5. Conclusion

In the sixties of twentieth century, Carolyn Kizer’s poetic creation is entitled as “Chinese Imitation”. Later on Kizer’s poems are embedded with Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetics. Up till to the eighties, Kizer translated the poetical works of *Shu Ting*, one of the most representative poetesses of “Misty Poets” into English. The evolvement goes through a process of imitation, creation and advocacy of the Chinese poetics, which proves the deep Chinese influence upon Carolyn Kizer. She thinks that the younger generation of Chinese people “belong[s] to a new world”, which lead her writing “The Ashes” (Rigsbee 147). The *Misty Poets* portrays the new world still in an indirect way, as Kizer observes, “there are certain parallels between the way she and her group have written and the way, the very indirect way” (Rigsbee 147). All in all, the Chinese poetics treats the sublime beauty as indirectness through the usages of images, metaphors, allusions etc. However, western poetry highlights direct exposure of the inner world with details. To them, poetry is the art of confession. Carolyn Kizer’s acceptance of Chinese *Gui-yuan* Poetry mainly relies on her fulfilment of the indirectness of emotion expression.

It is noted that the grievance of gendered self could be prominent trances of *Gui-yuan* elements in Carolyn Kizer’s poems. Lewis Freed, observes that (1962:172):

All poetry, of whatever kind, represents the transformation of personal emotion into an external form. The emotion, as embodied in the poem, is of a different kind and quality from its origin in the personal experience of the poet—it is an artistic emotion, in virtue of its form.

Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry indirectly narrates ancient Chinese women’s sullen melancholy about the gendered self. The gendered self is “a melancholic structure, it makes sense to choose ‘incorporation’ as the manner by which that identification is accomplished” (Butler, 2006:93). Incorporation with the manners as “stylized repetition of acts” on the corporeal bodies is to form the gender performativity, which is the gradual recognition of being a woman. Thus the psychological melancholy caused by the loss in fantasy determines the poetic tone of the *Gui-yuan* poetry is grief.

In order to express the women’s melancholy of the gendered self, Carolyn Kizer inherits Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry’s melancholic poetic tone by using recurrent allusions and images. She not only simply inherits but also transcends the tradition. She grasps the subtle psychological changes of the women go through in the searching journey of self autonomy and

reflexivity. By tactfully applying with female persona and her inferior position in the relationship with the addressees of the poems, Kizer fully represents her concern about woman's situation. Moreover she steps out of the domain of melancholy that female poetesses try to express in traditional *Gui-yuan* poems:

Everyone says my old lover is happy.
I wish they said he was coming back to me.

Meanwhile, we've had nearly forty years
to talk our dismal jokes
and love each other.

This was our providence, this was our wisdom.
The present is this poem, O my dear. (Kizer, *Mermaids* 34-5)

Not simply depicts a personal and fleeting state of mind, Carolyn Kizer has succeeded in transcribing woman's experience into a universal spiritual reality by employing the images and allusions from the Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry for the expression of the spiritual equality. The female persona not expresses her melancholy of the gendered self as the Chinese *Gui-yuan* poetry did but also yearning for mutual understanding and the gender-equated independence. "This was our providence, this was our wisdom./ The present is this poem," Kizer bluntly expresses her mode of thought in the poetic lines.

"Women's liberation, and indeed the liberation of humanity, depends upon the definition of a female generic, that is, a definition of what woman is, not just this or that woman. We need to define the female gender, the generic identity of women" (Luce Irigaray 65). This is the significance Carolyn Kizer tries to deliver in her poetic world. Kizer uses the same poetic tone: grievance as the Chinese *Gui-yuan* Poetry. Furthermore, her poems express the yearning for love, the imagined boudoir repinings, and the consciousness of being restricted by gender norms. Women, either Chinese or American, are confined by gender norms, which prescribed women's subordinate and inferior situation. This provides Kizer a ground for inheriting and developing Chinese *Gui-yuan* elements. But more importantly, Carolyn Kizer tries to use this poetic tradition to redefine the female gender, to subvert the prescribed gender identity for women, which contributes her great achievements. If not, she tries to destabilize and problematize the melancholy of the gendered self of woman.

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