

MATERIAL FOR STORIES: THE EMBODYING RURAL WOMAN IN THE FICTION OF DING LING

MENGYAO LIU

Abstract:

Ding Ling's "When I Was in Xia Village" narrates, among many other things, a series of misreadings that comprises the indefinite subjectivity of the rural Chinese woman. Her representation, more in critical readings rather than narration, centers her body in a manner that forecloses her being possible as anything other than a wholly dominated entity. The figure of Zhenzhen in the story, corporeally marked by the violence of Japanese colonization, resembles a number of other women in early socialist Chinese media whose bodies have been read as feminist disavowals of patriarchy, colonialism, and their layered interweavings. Turning to deconstructive scholarship that examines the predicament of representing the Third World woman, bodies and embodiment come to connote discursive congealment of the very reified power structures that critics seek to expose. As Anirban Das aptly observes, "[The] sense of history remains authenticated by presence." This sentiment is lucidly encapsulated through Zhenzhen, who refuses to surrender her own inexplicability amidst the villagers' insistence that she embody a particular history. While she does not deny her experiences with physical and sexual violence, she contests the extent to which they determine the full spectrum of her existence, in all of its (im)possibilities. Applying deconstructive analyses of the Third World woman, this paper variegates and

problematizes embodiment as an interpretive strategy in readings of Ding Ling's work. Through a close reading of "When I Was in Xia Village", it aims to destabilize projections concerning the textual figure of the rural Chinese woman.

Keywords: Ding Ling, decolonial feminism, postcolonialism, Spivak.