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Li Qingzhao and Ecofeminism: Body and Language

Li Qingzhao (李清照), born in Jinan (濟南), Shandong Province, China, in 1084, in the time of the Song dynasty (960–1276 CE), is one of China's most popular poets, celebrated mostly for her *ci*- (詞) form poetry, or *song lyrics*.¹ In recent decades, Li has received more serious critical attention from Chinese Literature scholars—namely, Zheng Chengduo (鄭振鐸), Kang Zheng (康震), Lin Zeng Wen (林增文), Jiang Han Chun, Jiang Han Sen (姜漢椿, 姜漢森), and, foremost, Xu Beiwen (徐北文).² As those scholars amply point out, Li's achievements with the *ci*-form tradition match or outdo the efforts of her contemporaries. Critical interest in the formal qualities of Li's *ci*-form poetry inclusive of issues of translation and other formal and textual concerns also has expanded to include attention to the role that gender plays in Li's poetry. Scholars persuasively argue that Li's *ci*-form poems constitute and forward powerful critical connections between language and gender, and Li's work is a salient representative of women's writing (Sun 110–29). What needs to be added to the existing scholarship are readings that focus on the ecofeminist content of Li's poetry. I offer and defend such a reading here, supporting that reading with references to ecofeminist theory as well as scholarly studies of Li and Chinese literature.³ Ecofeminism offers highly relevant and useful theoretical tools by which to approach the poetry of Li and her contemporaries; ecofeminism emphasizes the materially located affective ties between human and nonhuman beings; the vulnerability, finitude, and capacity for suffering that nonhuman beings share with human beings; the need for an ethic of care in humans' relationships with nonhuman beings; and the

ISLE: *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 28.1 (Spring 2021), pp. 312–328

Advance Access publication April 2, 2021 doi:10.1093/isle/isaa074

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shared history of women and nature with respect to the secondary status that both have been given in both conceptual and material terms. Most importantly, ecofeminist attention to Li's poetry will push in new, ethical, directions the arguments that scholars have made about the influence of Daoism on Li; Li's reputation for being one of the most sophisticated wielders of *ci*-form poetry (and the genre of *chamber romance*)⁴; and how Li's poetry was shaped by great personal loss and political exile.⁵

Background

Li was born into a wealthy aristocratic family of scholar-officials. Her mother was highly literate. Her father was one of the four great students of the Song dynasty poet Su Shi (蘇軾). Li was a precocious and gifted student, and her attempts at poetry earned her a place among an elite literary circle before adulthood. At the age of eighteen, she married the young scholar and art collector Zhao Mingcheng (趙明誠). Zhao shared Li's proclivity for poetry, and by all accounts their marriage was an intensely happy one. That changed when, in 1126, the Jurchens (金人), rulers of the Jin dynasty (1115–234), invaded and conquered the Northern Song dynasty. The capital city fell to the Jurchens and Li and her husband fled to Nanjing. Zhao died in 1129 en route to an official post. Li never recovered from the loss of Zhao. Partly out of grief, she remarried. Her second marriage was a disaster, and within months, she left her new husband, Zhang Ruzhou (張汝舟). Throughout that difficult period in her life, she continued to write, and she would go on to become one of China's greatest poets. In 1926, a translation of twenty-five of Li's poems by the poet Bing Xin (冰心) brought significant critical notice to Li (Li Qing15). Between 1959 and 1962, at the height of Cultural Revolution, Li's reputation was all but eradicated on charges of spreading bourgeois decadence (Li Qing 16). Since the 1980s, Li's reputation has been revived and continues to soar.

Li and Daoist Philosophy

Chinese Literature scholar Yip Wai-lim (葉維廉), in writing about the Daoist influence on art in the time of the Song dynasty (143–60), discusses the representation of human figures in landscape paintings. The human figures are miniscule relative to other figures in the painting—rivers, trees, mountains, sky, and so forth—and are so depicted to underscore the insignificance of the human relative to the environment. The Daoist belief in the insignificance of the human in relation to the environment resonates with current environmental arguments in

the West about the hubris of humans when they attempt to absolutely control the environment. Certainly, humans have extraordinary ability to shape the environment, and they have shaped it, as is manifest in such phenomena as global warming, the mass extinction of species, earthquakes caused by mega-dam projects and underground drilling for oil, and more violent and more frequently intense weather associated with the warming of the atmosphere. Nonetheless, ancient Daoist philosophy supports modern understandings of natural and so-called unnatural agencies in holding, in effect, that humans cannot fully control their surroundings, even the surroundings that they engender (anthropogenic, or predominantly human-made environments). Such environments and conditions take on or amass agencies and outcomes that their human progenitors are unable to fully predict, circumvent, or control.

The Daoist suspicion of what in the West is known under the name of constructivism, which denies that there are things that exist outside of (human) language, also is useful for scholars who engage in theoretical work about the relationship between language and the world. Similar to philosophical traditions in the West that fall under the broad area of philosophical skepticism and the narrower areas of speculative realism (led by Ray Brassier, Iain Grant, Graham Harman, and Alberto Toscano) and Object Oriented Ontology (represented in ecocriticism by scholars such as Timothy Morton), a major strand of Daoism expresses that when humans use language to explain or grasp their world, they lose hold of it (Yip 152–53).

In discussing the pithy saying, “from object to see object” (*yi wu guan wu*, 以物觀物), Yip refers to a second major tenet of Daoist philosophy (153). This tenet also resonates with contemporary Western environmental discourse and with work by scholars situated in the environmental humanities as a whole. It refers to the Daoist belief that knowledge, human or other, is relative, shifting, and partial, as it is a bodied, not a dislocated sight or knowledge. Discussing landscape painting in the time of the Song dynasty—namely, landscape paintings with floating clouds that take up three-fourths of the space of the paintings—Yip argues that the clouds are figures for floating, shifting, and incomplete sight or knowledge (154).

Yip does not discuss Daoism or art ecocritically, or according to what that philosophy and art might reveal about attitudes toward and beliefs about the environment in ancient China. However, he gestures toward ecocritical inquiry in making the point that, according to ancient Daoist thought, the human figure occupies a diminutive place in the world and humans are limited in their knowledge because they are merely one kind of object among other kinds of objects and so have

partial and partially blocked sight of the world. That understanding of the human has been sidelined, overlooked, and suppressed throughout China's history; nonetheless, it continues to circulate with increasing urgency today in a time of environmental crisis. It springs to mind when reading the work of Li Qingzhao. Li's poetic output speaks to how knowledge is shaped by the objects around oneself.

In addition, and in contrast with much of the *ci*-form and chamber romance poems written by her contemporaries, Li's *ci*-form poetry foregrounds objects in the natural world in ways that bring to mind ecofeminist arguments about relative and situated perspective, body, language, and communication. In Li's poetry, the central female speaker is acutely aware of the other natural figures around her, and the figure of that human speaker does not so much dominate or speak *for* the other natural figures as it is but becomes part of and in effect empathizes *with* the conditions, states, and experiences of those other natural figures. Li expresses this sentiment through her intensely visceral language. Thus, her poetry reflects that the speaker is in an empathetic bodily communication and dialogue with the natural world. Other ecocritical theory gives a critical voice to such kinds of "trans-species communication" (Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism* xxi), namely bio-semiotic ecocritical theory (Wheeler), but, as Gaard makes clear in *Critical Ecofeminism*, ecofeminism foregrounds the moral and affective aspects of communication between human beings and other beings.

A case in point is "Rouged Lips" (點絳脣) (Jiang and Jiang 3).⁶ In this poem, a young girl plays in a semi-enclosed or semi-private garden on a swing. Hot and tired from her exertions, she alights from the swing and smooths down with slender hands her damp dress (起來慵整纖纖手... 薄汗沾衣透) (Jiang and Jiang 3). Suddenly, she catches a glimpse of a visitor. In her haste to avoid being seen, she barely has time to pull on her socks. Her gold hairpin dislodges from her hair, and her dress becomes disarrayed. Wanting, at the same time, to steal a glimpse of the newcomer, the young girl lingers at the gate to the garden, close to the camouflage of a plum tree and scent of a green plum (見客人來, 襪剝金釵溜。和羞走。倚門回首, 卻把青梅嗅。) (Jiang and Jiang 3). The description suggests that the two figures are one and the same, or share a similar condition, fate, and status. Here is the poem in its entirety: 蹴罷秋千, 起來慵整纖纖手。露濃花瘦, 薄汗沾衣透。見客人來, 襪剝金釵溜。和羞走。倚門回首, 卻把青梅嗅。 (Jiang and Jiang 3). The famous green plum of Li's poem is as fully present, or large, or "agent-full" as the human figure of the girl. The central human figure of the young girl is morally and affectively connected to the figure of the plum and other figures of physical bodies and states: flowers, fruit, trees, the temperature, the humidity, the weight of the damp fabric of

the dress the girl is wearing, and so forth. Another word for “vital,” as I have used it here, is “agential” from the work of material feminist and material ecocriticism scholar Karen Barad. In “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” Barad argues that all things—objects and subjects—possess inestimable agential power, even those things and beings that are stereotyped as being passive, weak, and secondary matter.

As I use the term “agential,” it also refers to the work of ecofeminists, who critically engage with communities that have been historically disparaged, oppressed, and treated as being without agency (Gaard; Alaimo and Hekman). Stacey Alaimo’s remarkably flexible ecofeminist concept of “trans-corporeality” and her term “bodily natures” represent that no body or object in space is without agency, inviolate, or separate or independent from another body or object close to it, no matter how seemingly tenuous the relationship seems to be. Alaimo’s concept resonates with ancient Daoist beliefs about embodied, naturally or materially, bases of sight (knowledge). In Li’s implicit articulation of those Daoist beliefs in “Rouged Lips,” the young girl’s experience and first memory of the stranger are inseparable from the garden and where the girl is situated close to and partially concealed by a plum tree. Li scholars such as Kang Zheng (康震) note that the figure of the green plum structurally unifies the poem, is the poem’s locus, and produces the dramatic effect of the whole poem (40–41). The figure of the green plum tells us something further: experience is affectively and materially shaped by a body or object’s proximity to other bodies or objects.

“A Dream Song” (如夢令) (Jiang and Jiang 30) is especially provocative for ecofeminist scholars and their emphasis on the materially located affective bonds between the human and the environment. Here is the poem in its entirety: 常記溪亭日暮，沉醉不知歸路。興盡晚回舟，誤入藕花深處。爭渡，爭渡，驚起一灘鷗鷺。(Jiang and Jiang 30). That emphasis reflects in turn ecofeminists’ attention and call for an “ethic of care” (Gaard, “Ecofeminism” 69). The two main tenets of that ethic are “[e]mpathy” and “connection” (69). In “A Dream Song,” the speaker goes on a boating excursion, to Jinan, to its far west lake. As the speaker is rowing, she loses her way in an area of lush lotus, where unintentionally she startles to sudden flight a shore full of resting egrets and gulls: (誤入藕花深處。爭渡，爭渡，驚起一灘鷗鷺。). Chinese literature scholars Critics Kang Zheng (康震) and Wang Zhao-peng et al. (王兆鵬等) read the figures of the egrets and gulls as conceits or tropes that refer to the human speaker’s excitement, happiness, trepidation, desire for solitude, and longing to be free (Kang 15; Wang et al., 156). The scholars’ readings are inspired by

anthropocentric interests. They see the birds only in anthropocentric metaphorical terms. At the same time, their readings do foreground the significance of the bird figures in the poem. Critic Mu Xi (木溪), reading these ornithological figures, states, similarly to Kang and Wang, that the poem owes its tremendous force and energy to those figures (18). Liu Yu (劉瑜) makes that same argument in his discussion of the poem's climactic ending and image of the sudden upward flight of the water birds (48). Li's poem suggests something even more than that. It suggests that nature—the birds—*shares* with the human affective traits and capacities such as love of solitude, love of companionship, and love of freedom and relatively unrestricted movement.

Another poem that resonates with ecofeminist arguments about the materially located, shared affective bonds between the natural world and the human is "A Spring of Plum Blossoms (Sorrow of Separation)" (一剪梅) (Jiang and Jiang 17): 紅藕香殘玉簫秋。輕解羅裳，獨上蘭舟。雲中誰寄錦書來？雁字回時，月滿西樓。花自飄零水自流。一種相思，兩處閑愁。此情無計可消除，纔下眉頭，卻上心頭。The poem forges connections between the human affective condition of loneliness and the season of autumn. The air is chilly and the lotuses have withered. The speaker sees geese returning from the south and hopes that they carry letters with news of her husband. As she feels the chill of autumn more keenly, she gets up, changes from her summer dress into warmer garments, and steps onto a small boat ("orchid skiff" [蘭舟]). Some scholars interpret the two Chinese characters, 蘭舟, as meaning a bed (Chen, *Li Qingzhao: Selected Works* 25). However, most critics follow the literal meaning of "boat," as I do here, for it reflects Li's great love of being on water. The west chamber where the speaker lives stands lonely in the moonlight. The speaker is saddened by the river that carries away the fallen flowers. Sadness plummets from her mind ("brow") and climbs high up in her heart: 纔下眉頭，卻上心頭 (Jiang and Jiang 17). Those lines, especially when they are read in the original, bring to mind ecofeminist theory's great emphasis on the inseparability of materially located knowledge and experience. The poem as a whole suggests further that the sadness that humans experience also is found in nature. In this poem, too, the conjoining of space and time seems to be a way in which Li does not separate the circumstances and condition of the human speaker from that of the world around her.

In another later poem, "Spring at Wuling" (武陵春) (Jiang and Jiang 90), the speaker grieves for the loss of her husband. Here is the poem in full: 風住塵香花已盡，日晚倦梳頭。物是人非事事休。欲語淚先流。聞說雙溪春尚好，也擬泛輕舟。只恐雙溪舴艋舟，載不動，許多愁。(Jiang and Jiang 90). The speaker wishes she could go to the lake at Suang Shi (雙溪), for it is spring time and she hears that Suang Shi is especially

beautiful then (Jiang and Jiang 90). However, she hesitates, for she has only a grasshopper boat (蚱蜢舟) and worries that it will not be able to support her weight of sadness: “a grief cannot be carried away by a grasshopper boat” (只恐雙溪蚱蜢舟，載不動，許多愁。). The boat that resembles a grasshopper reminds us of what material ecocriticism scholars call “narrative agency” (Oppermann 21). “[A] form of narrative transmitted through the interchange of organic and inorganic matter,” a “continuity of human and nonhuman forces,” and an “interplay of bodily natures . . . forming active composites,” narrative agency connects the human and the environment by complex material as well as affective and discursive paths (Oppermann 31). Further, in the implicit comparison between the heavy weight of sorrow of the human and the light and delicate body of a boat in the form of a grasshopper, Li emphasizes the material-discursive ties between the human and the environment in language that resonates with ecofeminists’ emphasis on empathy for what human beings share with nonhuman beings—capacity for carrying burdens and for being overburdened by too much weight of one sort or another. Such lines as “a grief cannot be carried away by a grasshopper boat” (只恐雙溪蚱蜢舟，載不動，許多愁。), especially when they are read in the original, articulate the fragility and finitude that the nonhuman world shares with the human world.

Li and *Ci*-form

Scholars of *ci*-form such as Sun Kang-i (孫康宜), Robert Egan, and Yang Holin (楊合林), distinguish *ci*-form poetry as being a fundamentally feminine as well as musical form and language (*yin xin* 陰性). *Ci*-form poems or song lyrics markedly contrast with masculine *shih*-form (詩) poems. In addition, *ci*-form poetry represents common and ordinary existence in contrast with upper class and privileged existence, which the masculine *shih*-form poetry lyrically captures (Yang 8). Nonetheless, much *ci*-form poetry in Li’s time betrays the class and gender biases of its male authors, who dominated the tradition and came from the educated and upper classes (Sun 116–17). Li was a rarity among her male peers. Moreover, she did not shy away from that common speech which her peers considered to be too bold even for *ci*-form poetry. She also represented female experience and female desire from women’s viewpoints. Critics attacked her for her uncommon use of common and vulgar street language and said she was too brazen to have come from an eminent scholarly family (Lin 27). Today, critics effusively praise, and are astonished by, Li’s *ci*-form striking visceral language. This language stands out precisely for its physicality, frankness (*zhen* 真) and lack of mannerisms, and it contrasts with much of the *ci*-

form poetry of Li's male contemporaries and with the affected coy female voice that they employ, which reflects their own gendered desires and perspectives (Sun 82–83). As Egan points out, in the late eleventh century, professional female singers or courtesans commonly performed *ci*-form before the middle-class male clientele of brothels, which were known euphemistically as tea houses (“Northern Song” 439). Moralists derided *ci*-form poetry because of that and because they could not tolerate *ci*-form's feminine language, sentimental expression (442). The intellectual elite classes eventually accepted *ci*-form poetry but continued to disparage it for being an unsophisticated poetic form that stretched the limits of propriety in its vulgarity (440).

Chinese Literature scholars' accounts of Li reflect interest in Li's work as it provokes feminist critical analysis. Li's work also merits attention from ecofeminist perspectives, which focus on the second-class and marginal status that women have shared with nature under patriarchal views of the world. The *ci*-form poem “Partridge Sky” (鷓鴣天) (Jiang and Jiang 4), about the osmanthus flower, exemplifies that historical linked low status. Here is the poem in full: 暗淡輕黃體性柔，情疏跡遠只香留。何須淺碧輕紅色，自是花中第一流。梅定妒，菊應羞。畫欄開處冠中秋。騷人可煞無情思，何事當年不見收？(Jiang and Jiang 4). In the poem, the speaker asks why the great poet Qu Yuan (屈原) (c. 339 BCE–278 BCE) (remembered and honored at the time of the annual Dragon Boat Festival holiday, one of the three most popular holidays in China), neglects to mention the osmanthus flower in his cornucopia and magnum opus. In that work, *Chu Ci* (楚辭), Qu Yuan compares gentlemen or virtuous men to various flower species. The *Chu Ci* was highly respected in Li's time and today is a foundation text of Chinese Literature. In their reading of Li's “Partridge Sky,” Jiang and Jiang suggest that the figure of the osmanthus is a self-portrait of Li and functions as a figure for women in general (6). To Jiang and Jiang's observations, ecofeminists would add that Li's osmanthus—a diminutive and unremarkable low profile flower apart from its heady fragrance—also functions as a trope for the larger natural world and how humans belittle or give secondary status to that world. Both were overlooked by Li's male peers.⁷ In “Partridge Sky,” Li implicitly admonishes Qu Yuan's patriarchal and anthropocentric, masculinist bias towards things and beings that are most imposing, take up the most space, are the most competitive, stand out the most, and are the most visibly prominent relative to other things and beings around them. The speaker of “Partridge Sky” also pays unusual notice to the small rivalries and jealousies that abound among beings in the natural world as much as among human beings. The fragrance of the osmanthus flower,

as it is described in “Partridge Sky” makes “plum flower jealous and chrysanthemum ashamed” [梅定妒, 菊應羞]).

“A Dream Song” (如夢令) (Jiang and Jiang 13–14) is another *ci*-form poem that epitomizes Li’s notice of nature in ways that are particularly provocative for ecofeminist scholars: 昨夜雨疏風驟, 濃睡不消殘酒。試問捲簾人, 卻道海棠依舊。知否? 知否? 應是綠肥紅瘦。⁸ I have translated the poem as follows:

Last night there was intermittent rain and a gusty wind.
 Sound sleep did not relieve me of my hangover.
 Now, half awake, I tentatively ask my maid (who is rolling
 up the blinds): “How are
 the crabapple flowers in the garden?”
 “As good as usual,” is her casual reply.
 “Don’t you know?” I answer,
 “Oh, don’t you know?
 When green is fat
 Red is thin.”

The last line is the climax of the whole poem. As many scholars have noted, the poem is about the impossibility of translating poetry. What also is striking about the poem is that Li uses very ordinary language to create and evoke the extraordinariness of nature. The literal translation of the last lines, “when green is fat/Red is thin” (綠肥紅瘦), captures in astonishingly physical language the feeling of sadness, which is commonly represented by the more abstract term and character (*chou* 愁). Scholars regard the lines as being one of the most inimitable expressions in the entire canon of Chinese poetry and language that seems to be more-than-human (Jiang and Jiang 15; Mu 20, Xu 41). Despite the fact that they recognize Li’s inestimable contribution to Chinese Literature, scholars tend to read Li’s floral tropes in anthropocentric terms and as having little to do with the natural world in which Li lived (Jiang 15; Kang 17). It is rare to see a different reading, such as one given by Liu Yu, who comments on Li’s remarkable attention to the crabapple flower (*hai tang* 海棠) (a flower known as the goddess among flowers) in “A Dream Song.” Liu implicitly argues that the poem cannot be understood without knowledge and observation of the actual flower that inspired Li’s figural flower (35). This argument is critically important today—in a time of great environmental oversight and loss—and it is one distinguishes ecofeminism (as well as material ecocriticism).

Exile and Loss

As scholars note, Li's poetry can be split into two major periods. The dividing line between them was the death of Li's husband Zhao and Li's exile from her home in Jinan in the north and relocation to the city of Nanjing in the south. The poetry that marks the first period is distinguished by profuse references to the natural world and joyous and youthful celebrations and evocations of that world. The poetry that characterizes the second period reflects a discernible shift away from the natural world. More often than not, the subject of nature recedes or takes a backseat relative to the subjects of culture and society. When Li does describe the natural world, she depicts it in a darker and sadder language. Li's world had collapsed politically, culturally, and personally. That break is reflected in the relative absence of nature. At the same time, the late work, similarly to the work Li produced as a younger woman, articulates the belief that the environment (which here specifically means the natural world) shares with the human affective states, conditions, moods, functions, and so forth. One is reminded of this description of environmental language by the ecocritic Cheryl Lousley: it opens "subjectivity ... to all [nonhuman] others" and reflects the search for a "social order" that enables "the reflexivity of becoming conscious of oneself and communicative with [nonhuman] others" (166).

In the instances of the late poems that are most evidently about Li's greatly reduced circumstances and intimate acquaintance with privation, loss, grief, and despair, the poems argue in effect that that it is not only humans who experience those affective states. In that sense, the poems resonate especially with the work of ecofeminist scholars; they thus bring to mind what Morton calls "dark ecological" thinking. For example, in the poem "A Long Melancholy Tune" (聲聲慢) (Jiang and Jiang 100), the lines, "withered yellow flowers are strewn on the ground and one cannot but feel desolate and despair ... I cannot bear to wait until the darkness of the dusk" (滿地黃花推積，憔悴損) ... 獨自怎生得黑) and "Searching, searching; seeking, seeking; cold, dreary; miserable, despondent" (尋尋覓覓，冷冷清清，淒淒慘慘戚戚。) evoke Morton's dark ecological argument about the "radical nonidentity" of nature and loving that which is "nonidentical with us" (*Ecology without Nature* 185, 186). Similarly, they bring to mind Morton's definition of a "perverse" and "melancholy" ethics that "refuses to digest the object into an ideal form" (195). Here is the poem in full: 尋尋覓覓，冷冷清清，悽悽慘慘戚戚。乍暖還寒時候，最難將息。三杯兩盞淡酒，怎敵他，晚來風急？雁過也，正傷心，卻是舊時相識。滿地黃花堆積，憔悴損，如今有誰堪摘？守著窗兒，獨自怎生得黑。梧桐更兼細雨，到黃昏，點點滴滴。

這次第, 怎一個愁字了得。 (Jiang and Jiang 100). *Ci*-form expert Yeh Chia-ying (葉嘉瑩) points out that “A Long Melancholy Tune” both repulsed and fascinated Li’s contemporaries because of its fantastic onomatopoeia (33). Yeh also notes that the poem does not represent the (anthropocentric and masculinist) notion of *ge wu* (格物), which refers to the idea that through language we can comprehend things; rather, it represents the (feminist and receptive) language of *wu ge* (物格), which refers to the idea that the thing is in excess of language (33–35). Such a reading also brings to mind Morton’s ecofeminist contribution to the area of inquiry of Object Oriented Ontology;⁹ and feminist poststructuralist thinker Julia Kristeva’s definition of the semiotic dimension of language as being a fundamentally “bodily” expression (27), as well as feminist poststructuralist thinker Hélène Cixous’s attack on traditional philosophy’s subordination of the body (thing) to the mind and exhortation to women writers in particular to return the body to language (Warhol and Herndl 337–38).

Reading Li’s poem “A Long Melancholy Tune” (Jiang and Jiang 100) according to the work of ecocriticism scholars, one is struck by how Li respects the body for being a “hinge or threshold located between psychic interiority and sociopolitical exteriority” (Weedon 121). The poem, in the sense of the given reading of it, recalls “Drunk in the Shade of Flowers” (醉花陰) (Jiang and Jiang 37), which Li wrote during one of the many long spells when her husband was away because of his work: 薄霧濃雲愁永晝, 瑞腦銷金獸。時節又重陽, 寶枕紗廚, 半夜涼初透。東籬把酒黃昏後, 有暗香盈袖。莫道不消魂, 簾捲西風, 人比黃花瘦。 (Jiang and Jiang 37). In the poem, the speaker says, “When the west wind stirs the curtain, / one is thinner than a yellow flower” (莫道不銷魂, 簾捲西風, 人比黃花瘦。). That line is similar to the line “When green is fat, Red is thin” (綠肥紅瘦) in “A Dream Song.” Chinese Literature scholars have repeatedly remarked upon both but without ecofeminist attention to how they are about affective conditions that the environment shares with the human. Unequivocally, Li’s most famous poem and the poem that critics commonly use to represent her work, “A Long Melancholy Tune,” includes a description of a Chinese parasol tree in soft but seemingly endless rain and suggests that nature experiences states that are affectively and materially analogous to those that humans experience, namely depression, melancholy, fortitude, endurance, vulnerability, and submission. In another poem, “Banana Trees” (添字醜奴兒 芭蕉) (Jiang and Jiang 59), Li describes the dripping sounds of the leaves of a banana tree during what also is soft but seemingly unending and relentless rain: 點滴淒清。點滴淒清。Here is the poem, “Banana Trees,” in full: 窗前誰種芭蕉樹? 陰滿中庭。陰滿中庭。葉葉心心舒卷有餘情。傷心枕上三更雨, 點滴淒清。點

滴淒清。愁損北人不慣起來聽。(Jiang and Jiang 59). The interaction between the leaves and rain is a kind of language in the sense that it is conveying, communicating, and doing something, even if we (humans) cannot fully decipher or translate all of what that something or function is. Li's dazzling feats with onomatopoeia evoke Morton's claim that language itself is "radically nonhuman" ("Here Comes Everything: The Promise of Object-Oriented Ontology," 178). Li's language is hard to distinguish along conventional anthropocentric and androcentric definitions of will, agency, language, identity, materiality, and affect; it thus resonates with arguments by ecofeminist scholars that language is embodied, that the human body is part of the finite and vulnerable (and also undaunted and brave) body of the world, and that the world is thus as deserving of empathy and moral consideration as humans are. Alaimo's term trans-corporeality (and material ecocriticism scholars Iovino and Oppermann's term "storied matter") expresses in effect that all bodies, whether they are human or nonhuman, microscopic or monolithic, earthy or pelagic, circulate through the environment and the environment circulates through them (Oppermann and Iovino 6). Li's poetry speaks for the concept of trans-corporeality, or for "processes in which entities are neither wholly independent of their environments ... nor wholly determined by them" (Raine 110).¹⁰

In the East, as Li Qing notes, some scholars have expressed reservation about using Western theories of translation, feminism, and textual criticism to read Chinese literature (40). For those scholars, such use betrays colonialist and imperialist assumptions and biases. Other scholars recognize that applications of Western literary theory and criticism can push understandings of Chinese literature in fruitful directions and bring more attention outside of the East to its greatest poets (40), as Scott Slovic notes in an essay entitled "On Nature and Environment." Slovic states that the application of Western-based ecocriticism is one of the most important trends in critical approaches to literatures of the East and has inspired such scholars as Ken Noda and Katsunori Yamazato and Won Chung Kim and Doo ho Shin to become specialists of their own local literatures (Japanese and Korean literature, respectively) because of their knowledge and use of ecocritical concepts (125–26). Postcolonial ecocriticism scholar Rob Nixon similarly argues that the "transnational blending" of distant (Western) and local (Eastern) discursive traditions in studies of literature is productive and promising (36).

If, on the one hand, approaching cultures and languages in the East by relying on theory generated out of the West risks repeating old prejudices, then, on the other hand, such an approach opens doors to

critical exchanges that are productive and sensitive to the issue of sleight-of-hand Western biases (Li 40). Western-based ecofeminist theory is especially relevant to reading the work of Li Qingzhao today; it opens up Li's work to claims that both challenge and complement arguments that other scholars have made about Li and Chinese literature. To study the poetic output of Li without taking notice of its ecofeminist content is to do the poetry and the poet a great disservice. Li's poetry emphasizes in powerful language the materially located, affective, and moral bonds between human beings and nonhuman beings. It also underscores the similarities between the status of women and the status of nature in the time of feudal China. The poet stands out among her contemporaries for seeing in nature a condition and fate similar to the condition and fate of women.

Recent studies of Li's poetry have exhumed it from the graveyard of political obloquy. These same studies reflect three main areas of interest: biographical and textual criticism, feminist criticism, and translation studies (Li Qing 16). Li's literary output merits attention from scholars situated in ecocriticism, and ecofeminism in particular. Her work speaks for Chinese environments today that are being dismissed or overburdened; environments that have been regarded as being inarticulately, unfeelingly, insensately, and amorally material, and environments that historically share with women a base secondary identity under anthropocentric and androcentric frameworks.

NOTES

1. See Chen Zumei (陳祖美), Huang Ya-li (黃雅莉), Wang Li-jen (王力堅), and Wu Huiyuan (吳惠娟). Other studies of Li include Huang Li-jin's (黃麗貞) *Li Qingzhao: A Great Ci Poet* (詞壇偉傑李清照), Liu Si-yuan's (劉思淵) *Li Ch'ing-chao [Li Qingzhao]: The Premium Poetess of China* (李清照: 中國第一女詞人), and Yang Yu's (楊雨) *Too Many Things Unable to Say: Yang Yu's Comments on Li Qingzhao* (多少事欲說還休).

2. In the body of this essay, Chinese family names (surnames) precede the given names of any Chinese scholar or poet, inclusive of Li Qing-zhao (whose family name is Li). In the Works Cited, I separate the surname from the given name by a comma.

3. In this article, "Chinese Literature" refers to the academic area of study and "Chinese literature" more broadly refers to poetry and prose written in Chinese.

4. "Chamber romance" poetry is both a subgenre of and a genre that overlaps with the genre of *ci*-form (Sun 117). As Lin Zeng Wen (林增文) notes, the chamber romance tradition is dominated by male poets, focuses on interior domestic and feminine spaces, and often narrates an illicit or clandestine

love affair (32–33). For more on *ci*-form poetry, please see the later subsection in this paper.

5. Chinese ecocriticism is a rapidly growing area of literary studies in China, but so far no ecocriticism studies have been published specifically on Li Qingzhao. For an overview of Chinese ecocriticism, see Wei Qingqi and his discussion of two key figures in it: Lu Shuyuan and Zeng Fanren.

6. I cite Li's poems (including the Chinese titles) as they are printed in Jiang and Jiang. There are no English translations of either the poems or the titles in Jiang and Jiang. The English titles that I cite are from Wang Jiaosheng's "The Complete *Ci*-poems of Li Qingzhao: A New English Translation." Note that the English titles that Wang uses are not literal translations of the Chinese titles. The English translations of the actual poems are mine.

7. For the links between the exploitation and dismissal of the natural world and capitalist economic and political ideologies in modern times, see Moore.

8. This poem (Jiang and Jiang 13–14) carries the same title as another poem in Jiang and Jiang (30).

9. See Morton's book *Hyperobjects* as well as his two essays "Deconstruction and/as Ecology" and "Practicing Deconstruction in the Age of Ecological Emergency."

10. See Iovino and Oppermann's Introduction in *Material Ecocriticism* (1–17).

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