

Feminism , Sexuate Rights and the Ethics of Sexual Difference : An Interview with Luce Irigaray

Liu Yan

Abstract: Luce Irigaray is a leading French philosopher and feminist theorist, and director of the Philosophy Department, National Scientific Research Center of France. She criticizes the patriarchal culture constructed by male subject, exposing how this culture secures a sexual ethics based on male privileges. She advocates the establishment of an autonomous female subject, independent of male subject, thus achieving sexual equality based on the respect of sexual differences. She moves on to call for the respect of other cultural differences and the construction of harmonious community. Her representative works include: *Speculum: Of the Other Woman* (1974), *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977), *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1984), *Thinking the Difference: For a Peaceful Revolution* (1989), *I, You, We: Toward a Culture of Difference* (1990), *I Love to You: Sketch for the Possible Felicity in History* (1992), *To Be Two* (1997), *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community* (1999) and *Sharing the World* (2008). This interview was conducted in the written form from October 2009 to January 2010. In the first part, Irigaray discusses the development of feminism worldwide and the significance of mother-daughter relationship and *l'écriture féminine* (feminine writing) in relation to sexuate rights. In the second part, Irigaray discusses man-nature relations and the relationship of her theories to the Oriental culture. The interview, above all, centers on a sexual ethics based on the respect of sexual difference across cultures and across regions.

Key words: Luce Irigaray feminism theory sexual difference sexual equality sexual ethics

Author: **Liu Yan** is professor of English at Faculty of English Language and Culture, and researcher at Research Center of Foreign Literatures and Cultures, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (Guangzhou 510420). Her academic interests include gender studies, Sino-American literary and cultural relations, and modern drama. Among her publications are *The Influence of Chinese Culture in American Literature* (Hebei People's Publishing House, 1999), *A Study of Motherhood in Modern Western Plays* (China Books Press, 2004), and *The Problem of Cultural Identity in the Postmodern Context* (Phoenix Publishing House, 2008).

标题: 女性主义、性别化权利与性别差异的伦理学:露丝·伊里加蕾访谈录

内容摘要: 露丝·伊里加蕾是法国哲学家、女性主义理论家,法国国家科学研究中心哲学部主任。她批判由男性主体建构的父权文化,揭露父权文化如何确立了基于男性特权之上的性别伦理;她提倡建立一个独立于男性主体而存在的、自主的女性主体,从而实现尊重性别

差异基础上的性别平等;她继而把尊重两性的差异原则推而广之到尊重其他的文化差异,呼吁建设和谐社会。她的代表著作有:《他者女性的内视镜》(1974年)、《非“一”之性》(1977年)、《性别差异的伦理学》(1984年)、《思考差异:为了一场和平的革命》(1989年)、《我、你、我们:走向一种差异文化》(1990年)、《我对你的爱》(1992年)、《二人行》(1997年)、《东西方之间:从单一走向合作》(1999年)和《分享世界》(2008年)等。本访谈以笔谈的形式完成于2009年10月至2010年1月间。在访谈第一部分,伊里加蕾讨论了全球女性主义的发展历程,特别关注母女关系和女性书写相对于性别化权利的重要性;在第二部分,伊里加蕾讨论人与自然的关系及其理论同东方文化的关系。访谈集中关注在尊重性别差异基础之上建立跨文化、跨地区的性别伦理。

关键词:伊里加蕾 女性主义理论 性别差异 性别平等 性别伦理

作者简介:刘岩,广东外语外贸大学英语语言文化学院教授、博士生导师、外国文学文化中心研究员。她的主要研究方向包括性别研究、中美文学文化关系和现代戏剧。代表著作有:《中国文化对美国文学的影响》(1999年)、《西方现代戏剧中的母亲身份研究》(2004年)和《后现代语境中的文化身份研究》(2008年)。本访谈是广东省普通高校人文社会科学研究重点项目“伊里加蕾的女性主义理论研究”【项目编号:06JDXM750001】以及广东省“211工程”三期重点学科建设项目之一“女性主义视角下的20世纪英美女作家研究”【项目编号:GDUFS211-1-005】的中期成果。

Part I Sexual Difference and Sexuate Rights

Li Yan: When I was conducting my doctoral research in Hong Kong between 2000 and 2003, I read a lot of feminist theories in an attempt to find a proper theoretical foundation for my dissertation. At the same time when I was bewildered, like many other researchers, I believe, by the varieties of feminist philosophies, I became gradually impressed by your pursuit of an egalitarian sexual politics based on mutual respect for sexual differences. Why does your attempt in initiating sexual equality begin with the definition of female sexuality? What do you see as the danger of simply asking for woman's privileges over man's?

Irigaray: We know that in human cultures an alternation has existed between matriarchy and patriarchy. A part of women today would like to overthrow again patriarchy for restoring matriarchy. I think that it is preferable for us to relinquish conflicts and alternance between genealogies. The important thing is to place ourselves in relation to our double genealogy without favoring one to the detriment of the other. We are born from a mother and a father and we have to situate ourselves with respect to our two ancestries and their respective values. This implies that we situate ourselves from the very beginning in relation to two different sexes. But we cannot remain only descendents of two genealogies. We have to become adults with a specific sexuate identity. And if we want to build our societies and communities on new foundations that are more just and more favorable to the becoming of humanity, we must start again from our real and adult identity. All that has been added to our natural identity is already dependent on constructions more or less influenced by some or other power. Furthermore, our task is today to build a global and pluricultural world. To succeed in this, we must base its elaboration on universal and democratic values. Our sexuate belonging is the real from which we can all start again. This sexuate belonging is, from

the beginning, a bridge between nature and culture. Being born a man or a woman amounts to belonging to a relational identity that constitutes the basis of a cultural world proper to each sex. Being born as different parts of humanity also means that we have each one to consider ourselves as only a part of humanity, a thing that entails not to aim at being the all but at treating, at any moment, with the part that the other is. In fact, the only equality women must first ask for is that of being themselves while respecting the difference of the other.

Liu Yan: As I can see, respect for differences is what you have been emphasizing again and again in your works. As regards sexual differences, the starting point is probably the recognition of the differences in physiology. Therefore, you devote pages to the definition of female sexuality in an attempt to awaken people's awareness of women's physiological features that have been wiped out in history. Only when we have acquired sexuate identities can we fully respect differences. I see this as your development of the kind of feminist thought that argues for sexual equality on the basis of the negligence of sexual differences. Different from other theoretical schools, feminism embraces such diversity within itself that sometimes contradictions of ideas are found among various arguments. On discussing the diversity of feminisms worldwide, scholars tend to classify the main trends into "Anglo-American" and "French". What convenience as well as limitations does such classification impose upon researchers? If there is such a thing as "French feminism", what are some of its common theoretical foundations and what are its chief arguments?

Irigaray: I do not think that these two trends really exist, and I could not define the theoretical foundations and the chief arguments of French feminism. I do not know how and why such a classification has emerged. And it was surprising for me to discover my name together with the names of other French theorists on this occasion because I do not understand what could be the reason for this gathering apart from the fact that all of us live currently in Paris. This does not represent a theoretical foundation, I am afraid. And, for justifying such a gathering, certain people do not hesitate to attribute to my work cultural references that have nothing to do with it. All that is really strange, and does not favor development of a culture in the feminine.

The main two trends that exist in all the world are probably: one trend that more focuses on equality and another trend that more focuses on difference. But such a division must be overcome, in my opinion. What has to be reached by women is equality in difference or, better, equivalence of rights for two different subjects. On this point, my position and that of Simone de Beauvoir are almost opposite. Simone de Beauvoir considers the second sex as being lower with respect to the first sex and she claims for equality to the only sex to which value is granted. She cannot imagine that it could exist two different subjects to whom equivalent value and rights could be recognized. I think that Simone de Beauvoir has worked for a feminine liberation in her epoch but that it is necessary to go further. It is especially crucial to overcome the stage of criticism of past culture and values to elaborate and affirm values that suit women in order to construct a world culture respectful for two different sexuate subjects, this difference being the most fundamental paradigm for treating the other differences.

Liu Yan: I share your argument that Simone de Beauvoir's pursuit probably suits her epoch better and that we have to move further than that now. And I regard your pursuit of sexual equality based on the respect for differences as your major contribution to feminist movement worldwide. I, too, find the division of feminism into Anglo-American and French groups to be problematic since it obscures the differences within each group and it fails to include feminist ideas in other

parts of the world. Interestingly, the word “feminism” in Chinese has acquired two translated versions throughout history: the first *Nvquan Zhuyi* (female rights-ism) and the second *Nvxing Zhuyi* (woman-ism). The former appeared at the beginning of the 20th century when the idea of feminism was first introduced into China during May 4 Movement (1919) together with a large group of translations of foreign literatures and philosophies; whereas the latter appeared around 1990s when the so-called third-wave feminist philosophers and their theories were introduced into China after the country adopted the open-door policy in 1980s. The change in the Chinese translation, as far as I can see, marks an awareness among Chinese scholars about the changes of the major concerns of feminism throughout the century. As a feminist philosopher yourself, do you see changes in feminism in the past 20th century? Do you think feminism has already transcended the stage of asking for equal rights for woman (as seen in the disappearance of “rights” in the Chinese translation)?

Irigaray: There are probably only two main trends in the past 20th century and still today: the first asks for rights for women equal to those of men: rights relative to public and private life, and also to work and ownership. From the so-called “cultural revolution of 68,” women—and amongst them myself—ask for rights not only equal to those of men but appropriate to women as such. This claim has not been understood by women claiming for equality. Now it is essential for allowing women to pass from a natural status to a civil status (cf. “Donning a Civil Identity”, in *I Love to You*) and to become really full citizens. For example, if a woman must obtain a permission to abort—or not to abort—she is still considered to be a minor who is dependent on the power of the family or of the state. In order to become a full citizen, woman must enjoy a liability for owning and controlling her own body. I am afraid that such a right does not yet appear in many civil codes! Now it is the basic right thanks to which a woman does not remain a state or family ownership. Holding a public function and having to ask for aborting—or not aborting—is still one of the main contradictions that paralyse the development of women, but more generally of humanity, becoming. Favoring some secondary rights over the right to enjoy a full civil identity as a woman prevents each people, but also all the peoples, from building a human democratic society or community. No doubt, women need other rights, especially cultural rights appropriate to them. But the first right they need is the right to enjoy a full civil identity. The basic equality to be established is an equality to be a woman and not to enjoy [the] same rights as a man: thus the right to be different and to enjoy rights appropriate to this different identity.

Li Yan: You make a distinction between “sexuate rights” and “sexual rights.” Once again I find this very important since it asks for recognition of the basic differences between human beings *before* anything else. In securing woman’s sexuate identity, you argue for the establishment of a female genealogy based on a healthy mother-daughter relationship. In the process of reading, I have become particularly fascinated by your observation that matricide is the founding myth of Western culture. How do you evaluate the importance of the Mother in establishing a female culture? You have noticed the dilemma of the daughter in establishing female subjectivity, as vividly expressed in her difficult steps and slow movement in “And the One Doesn’t Stir without the Other.” What role do you think the mother should play in constructing a healthy mother-daughter relationship, hence a female genealogy?

Irigaray: I comment on that in a really practical way in the chapter “The Culture of Difference” (*Je, Tu, Nous* Routledge, 1996), in which I also explain that cultivating the mother-daughter relationship is the first manner of getting out of the vicious circle of the patriarchal order. I suggest that the mother would teach the daughter to regain the respect for the mother and for nar-

ture that a patriarchal tradition deeply neglected. In the chapter on Hegel, in *Speculum* (Cornell UP, 1985), I already explained on respecting the values of maternal genealogy presupposed from Antigone's part, consideration for the living world, notably for air, for sun, for all the living beings. In our times, turning back to a cultivation of nature that does not amount to exploitation is urgent, as you know. And this takes part in values of feminine genealogy.

It is also essential to give the daughter attractive representations of feminine genealogy. I do not know what happens in China, but in Western cultures, images of feminine genealogies are almost never present in public places. I thus suggest to the mothers that they arrange images of both natural and cultural feminine genealogy at least in their home.

I also suggest that the mothers develop dialogues with their daughters, using specific grammatical forms and themes that suit them. It would be important too for mothers and daughters to find or make "objects" that they can exchange between them so that they could get a dialogue between an "I" and a "you" in the feminine, and so overcome any fusion or competition.

It would be also helpful if, from an early age, mothers taught daughters respect for a non-hierarchical difference between the sexes: "he" means "he", "she" means "she", and "he" and "she" cannot be reduced to opposite of complementary attributes or functions, but correspond to different identities.

It seems also critical to learn to the girls to lay out an external space around them in order to be able to preserve, but also to build, a world of their own. I indicate in the text that I already quoted, but also in the text "The Gesture in Psychoanalysis" (in *Sexes and Genealogies* Columbia UP, 1996) some means for girls, and also women, to succeed in preserving and building a space of their own, a crucial thing for developing a proper identity and entering into relation with the other with respect both for this other and for oneself. The role of the mother is essential for the development of a feminine subjectivity that has to take into account its specific belonging and the respect for the specific belonging of the other.

Liu Yan: A tendency has been developed in recent years to assert autonomy by writing the female body. Many Chinese female scholars, upon reading some of the French feminists' argument for *l'écriture féminine*, have developed a particular fondness for body writing. A large group of Chinese female writers devote pages in their stories to the description of the female body and female sexuality. In your understanding, does "body writing" mean "the writing of the body"? Many writers and scholars believe that the writing of female sexuality and female body is a way to challenge patriarchal values. However, at the same time when they expose and (re-)write the neglected her-story in human history, they are also in a dangerous situation of placing the female body under the male gaze, thus a possibility (and an opportunity, too) of being objectified. What should female scholars and writers bear in mind in order not to fall into the trap of patriarchal values a second time?

Irigaray: I frequently repeated that when women put the stress on the body, they run the risk of remaining their traditional role: the body on the side of women and the spirit on the side of men. I think that we must go further, and that each sex has to cultivate both its body and its spirit. Besides, the separation of the body and the spirit is an artificial separation that results from the imposition of dichotomic logic on the living real. Each body is already a cultural site as it belongs to a specific relational world. Each body is, from the very beginning, animated by feelings, desires, intentions, words and gestures that can be conscious or remain unconscious, that can be explicit or remain implicit. And intending to write one's own body is also a little ingenuous because this body is a weaving of relations with others—beginning with the mother—and with the

world. Writing what they call their body, women are probably trying to protect themselves from being violentated by the gaze of the other. But, as you note, they run the risk of falling back into that which they wanted to avoid, above all if they resort to a traditional discourse and logic for expressing themselves. In a way, they escape submission to a mere natural status through reaching a pervert behavior, as it has been often the case in human sexual story. Perversion, in fact, does not take into account the duality of people involved in sexual attraction. It distributes the roles between activity and passivity: to see and to be seen, for example. Showing her own feelings or experiences amounts, for women, to evade their traditional role: to be seen. It is in part to take the traditional role of man. It is not yet to overcome an artificial dichotomic distribution of man and woman in two opposite polarities in order to reach a sharing of desire in difference for which both man and woman are longing.

Part II Man-nature Relations and the Respect for Cultural Differences

Li Yan: In ancient Chinese philosophy, one of the many pairs of oppositional concepts that have been developed over the years to describe the nature of things is *yin* and *yang*. Whereas *yang* represents the sunny, the positive, the active, and therefore male and masculine; *yin* represents the shadowy, the negative, the passive, and therefore female and feminine. Another dimension of the dichotomy is often neglected, however, i.e., man contains both *yin* and *yang* elements, except that *yang* elements dominate; and woman, too, contains both elements, except that *yin* elements dominate. To make the situation more dialectic, the *yin* elements will transfer to the opposite *yang* elements if conditions allow; and vice versa. Do you find this explanation close to your argumentation of the relationship between the two sexes?

Irigaray: The human relationship between the sexes is more, or ought to be more, mysterious than a mere complementarity. The attraction between the sexes does not only aim to form again a one—or a One—that we would have lost but to reach a transcendence with respect to the one who each of us is. The other as other represents a beyond with respect to us, to our own world. The main characteristic of a human being is perhaps longing for transcendence. The attraction between the two different sexes takes part in desire for transcendence that is too often disappointed because of a lack of culture of our sexuate belonging.

How could we understand the pair of contrasting notions *yin* and *yang* in Chinese philosophy in relation to the difference between the sexes? First, I would like to say that I am careful about all pairs of opposites in relation to the difference between man and woman. I am afraid that such pairs—in Western culture, but perhaps also in Chinese culture—are already used to reduce something of the irreducible difference between the sexuate identities. I also think that the *yin* and the *yang* refer to a natural energy that could be modified when it participated in a human culture. But, even at a mere natural level—if this really would exist—what happens, for example, when a woman is pregnant with a boy? Or even, when she shares energy with a male partner in love making? And yet in feeling desire for a man? I think that it is also really important to distinguish the level of the manifestation of energy from the one of inner energy. Sometimes, reversals could, then, appear between the sexes.

Li Yan: Talking about energy, I have observed that in such writings as *Between East and West*, *Democracy Begins Between Two*, and *Why Different?*, you explain what you have gained from practicing yoga. In recent years in China, many people regularly practice yoga, but mostly for the sake of physical exercise and keeping fit. Could you explain further the importance of

breathing in promoting man-woman relations? And the importance of silence?

Irigaray: It is above all in *Between East and West*, one text of Luce Irigaray: *Key Writings* and some interviews of *Why Different?* that I began to speak about my practice of yoga. For a long time, I kept this part of my life outside of my texts and my public life. But more and more this everyday practice had an impact on my existence and my way of thinking. Such an influence became clear after ten years of practice. No doubt, my thought was ready to receive an oriental contribution: I already was attentive to life, to energy, to relation to nature. In fact, I began practicing yoga after a road accident and because I had no choice. But little by little I discovered what change this practice brought to my life. It allowed me to gain a real autonomy by myself without asking others for granting me freedom. I understood that becoming autonomous needs breathing by myself and cultivating my own breath more than having goods and money. Of course, we need to eat, to drink and to shelter from bad weather. Being able to satisfy these needs provides us with a certain autonomy but not yet with the autonomy necessary for freeing us from culture, from laws, customs and discourses that are not appropriate to us and affirming our own values. I experienced how having more energy could help me to create my life according to my desire without stopping at criticizing a life that has been imposed on me by others. People talk a lot today about the exhaustion of energetic resources, but not enough, in my opinion, about the exhaustion of energetic resources of human beings. Now it is an important and urgent problem to be solved. As I comment in a new book, *A New Culture of Energy, Beyond East and West* (forthcoming) we must care about a new culture of our human energy in order to face up to the challenges of our time.

The importance of breathing in man-woman relations is to preserve our autonomy the one with respect to the other in order to avoid fusion, domination or subjection, appropriation or possession and to remain two. Our first gesture toward autonomy is to breathe by ourselves when coming into the world. But, too often, we forget this elementary way of becoming autonomous and the necessity of cultivating breathing not only at a vital level but also at a cultural and relational level. Without transforming our vital breath into love, listening, talking, and thinking, we cannot reach human relations respectful for our mutual difference(s). Being able to keep silent—amongst other things thanks to a cultivation of breathing—is also crucial for meeting the other with respect for his or her world and constructing together a third world that does not belong to the one or the other but corresponds to a common creation that we can share.

Liu Yan: You have definitely described an active relationship between human beings and the natural environment in which we are living in. In many of your writings, too, you express a strong desire for the establishment of a harmonious relationship with nature. I find this especially impressive since man-nature relations have been a central concern with ancient Chinese philosophies. Chuang-tzu (369BC? —286BC) was believed to be the first to put forward the idea of “unity (or harmony) of heaven and man” in Chinese history, arguing that man is an integral part of nature. How do you evaluate the shift in your theoretical canon from gender relations to man-nature relationship? What is the unique significance of the emphasis on man-nature relationship in the 21st century?

Irigaray: To stress gendered belonging and relations is to bring back human beings to themselves and their natural context. The matter is not only of establishing harmonious relationship between man and nature, it is first of recognizing that we are ourselves nature and we have to cultivate ourselves starting from our natural belonging and not against it. We must discover the way to be faithful to our nature while cultivating it. Any culture needs difference for its elaboration. This difference exists in nature itself if we consider that our sexuate belonging is not only of use to re-

produce other living beings—as is the case for all living beings—but to construct a culture with respect for difference (s). Instead of remaining at the level of instinct—of self-preservation, of possession or appropriation, of submission, of procreation—attraction between us can become a source of cultural creation. This requires us to assume the partiality of our human belonging. In terms of Western philosophy, especially in terms of Hegelian philosophy, this requires us to take charge of the negative. As I repeat many times in *I Love to You*, notably in the chapter “You Who Will Never Become Me Nor Mine,” we have to recognize the irreducible difference between the one who belongs to another sex and ourselves. I cannot become the other, substitute for the other, completely understand the otherness of the other, and such limits allow me to cultivate my own sexual belonging and to enter into relations with the other without confusion, domination or submission, or return to mere instincts. For lack of taking into consideration enough the importance of our sexual belonging for our becoming humans, we stop at differentiation with respect to the mother-nature, and we do not reach our becoming adults responsible for humanity and our natural environment.

Liu Yan: We are now living in a globalized world. In this age of globalization, it seems that people on the earth depend on each other so much that we have to care more for our common natural environment. From the respect for sexual differences to the respect for differences in race, ethnicity, nationality, language, location, and other cultural aspects, I see your attempt in trying to build bridges between different cultures and the shift in your academic concern. What do you think is the crucial point in realizing such an aim? What role do you think the Chinese people (should) play in this process?

Irigaray: It is true that, in my last books, I more elaborate on difference of cultures, of traditions, of generations. But I stress on the fact that difference between the sexes is the most basic and universal difference and the one that allows us to deal easier with other differences. Thus, I do not leave the difference between the sexes to one side, but I develop an aspect of its possibilities that I had not yet developed. I think that constructing a world culture needs us to return to our natural and universal identity, a universal that is henceforth two and not only one. We have to return to our natural identity in order to defend our life and all the living world against exploitation and submission by money and all sorts of speculations. We have to discover the importance of sexual difference as a resource of human energy but also as a means to regulate at every moment both our own energy and the social or common energy.

Another thing: If we recognize that the culture of each sex is a full culture, also our relation to the absolute will become put into perspective. There will no longer exist one only absolute—One Absolute—that organizes a society or a culture and can differ from another absolute—Absolute—and create conflicts and wars between societies or communities structured by them. This could represent an important step towards peace and world coexistence.

Chinese people is a great part of humanity. If this people adopts a good cultural politics regarding sexual difference, this could have an important impact on a world culture. Chinese people has a past tradition more respectful for nature than Western culture. And this could be of help to elaborate a culture that more takes into account the two sexes without submitting one to the other. Can the Chinese people oppose to domination and exploitation of nature, to consumption of natural resources, to industrial capitalism and to subjection to money? I would like to believe that this possibility exists.

Liu Yan: In the recent United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Copenhagen

(December 2009), an Accord has been reached to cap temperature rise, reduce emissions and raise finance. Nonetheless, much remains to be done to stimulate a healthy relationship between the human world and the natural world. A harmonious relationship between human beings and nature, instead of man's exploitation of and domination over nature, is crucial to the living conditions of human beings, and thus remains crucial to the very existence of mankind. As far as this aspect is concerned, every human being should take a part. The Chinese culture which cherishes a tradition of respect for nature should continue constructing a healthy man-nature relationship. This would grow out of the respect for differences, and probably sexual differences to begin with.

【Notes】

"Sexuate identity", in Irigaray's theoretical canon, denotes an identity bearing distinguished sexual characteristics. For this recognition, Irigaray has been accused of keeping an essentialist philosophical position. However, more and more scholars have realized that Irigaray's essentialism, if essentialism at all, is a strategy rather than a stance. See Ping Xu, "Irigaray's Mimicry and the Problem of Essentialism," *Hypatia* 10. 4 (1995): 76; Naomi Schor, "Previous Engagements: The Receptions of Irigaray," *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia UP, 1994) 12.

For Irigaray's development of Simone de Beauvoir's feminist ideas, see Liu Yan, "French Feminist Thought From Simone de Beauvoir to Luce Irigaray," *Chinese-Foreign Cultures and Literary Theories* 14 (2007) 187 - 95.

For the problems of such division, also see Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker, eds., *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 4th ed. (New York: Prentice Hall, 1997) 129 - 30.

The so-called "cultural revolution of 68" refers to the democratic movement that originated in the form of students' strikes in Paris and later spread to other parts of Europe in 1968. In France, what happened in May 1968 is considered as a watershed that marks the development from a conservative society to a more liberal and democratic one. Luce Irigaray, then in her 30s and recently obtaining her second doctoral degree, was heavily involved in the movement, especially in MLF (*Mouvement de Liberation des Femmes en France*), the Movement for the Liberation of Women in France.

Irigaray has been working hard in recent decades to establish civil codes to safeguard sexuate rights for women. Unfortunately her early attempt in passing the civil codes at European Parliament ended in a failure in 1990s. For her argument in this respect, see Luce Irigaray, *Democracy Begins Between Two*, trans. Kirsteen Anderson (London: The Athlone Press, 2000) 60 - 94; 156 - 64.

Irigaray first put forward the idea in an international conference on "Woman and Madness" (Montreal 1982). See Luce Irigaray, "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother," trans. David Macey, *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1991) 36.

According to Irigaray, a woman's expected social roles include mother, virgin, and prostitute. In all these roles, a woman's body carries value in male imagination. See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985) 185 - 87.

Irigaray is critical of the dichotomous oppositions in Western philosophy since Aristotle. See Luce Irigaray, *Democracy Begins Between Two*, trans. Kirsteen Anderson (London: The Athlone Press, 2000) 113 - 15.

For more analysis of silence and breath, see Luce Irigaray, *Why Different? A Culture of Two Subjects: Interviews with Luce Irigaray*, ed. Luce Irigaray and Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Camille Collins (New York: Semiotext[e], 2000) 118, 106; Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*, trans. Stephen Pluháček (New York: Columbia UP, 2002) ix, 75 - 80.

责任编辑 罗良功