**ABSTRACT**

This paper not only discusses theories and practices of third wave feminist writing from a transnational feminist perspective, but also examines the possible interconnections and network exchanges between western and Asian women in the context of third-wave feminism. First, I shall examine the relationship between western feminists and third world women, using an overview of the literature on difference and identity in the last two decades of feminist engagement with postcolonial and multicultural discourses. Next, I shall examine the rhetoric and writing of young feminists in the Asian context. After examining the issues and concerns of the new generation of Asian women, I will examine the possibility of a transnational third wave feminist movement and the effects it may have on local communities. This project seeks to initiate a platform for dialogue between western and Asian feminist scholars so that we may build stronger transnational alliances.

**FULL TEXT**

**Headnote**

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**Keywords**

Third wave feminism; transnational feminism; Asian women; women of color; western feminism

**Introduction**

Emerging as a new feminist paradigm in the past two decades, third-wave feminism has often been criticized as a feminist theory and practice that merely focuses its concern on women's issues in the context of western culture (Woodhull, 2004; Gillis & Munford, 2004). This paper, however, refuses to dismiss too quickly the possibilities of third-wave feminism for feminist theory-building and activism. The latter grows from local experience and still has value in global discussions. More than a first world phenomenon, thirdwave feminism has both important local and global dimensions. "Within the US.," Amanda D. Lotz claims, "third-wave theory developed in response to the limitations of essentialist understandings of women that narrowed the relevance of some features of second-wave activism, and its attention to the diverse experiences of women aids in understanding not only the U.S. context, but the varied realities for women around the globe" (Lotz, 2003: 3). Embracing difference and diversity in perspectives among "women," third-wave feminism, in fact, can be regarded as a method of resisting the binary opposition between western and Asian feminisms, going beyond the dualisms of global/local and theory/practice. In this
sense, third-wave feminism does not need to be limited to a discussion of regional or even national politics. This paper not only discusses theories and practices of third wave feminist writing from a transnational feminist perspective, but also examines the possible interconnections and network exchanges between western and Asian women in the context of third-wave feminism. It seeks to address the following questions: How do we understand the production and reception of third-wave feminism within a transnational framework? What are the implications of the trans-nationalization of third-wave feminism for women in Asia? Does third-wave feminism address the key issues that women face trans-nationally? How third-wave feminism is variously deployed by feminists in different locations provides us an opportunity to trace the direction of flows of information and “theory” in transnational cultural production and reception. Rather than reducing the relationship between western and Asian women to simple opposition, this paper attempts to move beyond the assumed polarities of identity politics. My main concerns will be with the question of how to negotiate the local and the global, or the particular and the universal.

First, I shall examine the relationship between western feminists and third world women with an overview of the literature on difference and identity from the last two decades of feminist engagement with postcolonial and multicultural discourses. Next, I shall examine the rhetoric and writing of young feminists in the Asian context. After examining the issues and concerns of a new generation of Asian women, I will look at the possibility of a transnational third wave feminist movement, and the effects this may have on local communities. This project seeks to initiate a platform for dialogue between western and Asian feminist scholars so that we may build stronger transnational alliances.

Third-Wave Feminism and Third World Women
The struggle of third world women for recognition by western feminism has been long and hard. In the last three decades, instead of being the silenced objects of western analysis, third world women are increasingly making their voices heard and are changing the face of feminism in the West. Some feminists from the third world who live in the West are articulating powerful critiques of the Eurocentrism of western feminism, the effects of racism, colonialism and its legacies for women. Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues how women in the third world are often portrayed as a condensed symbol of oppression, subordination and victimhood (Mohanty, 2003). Similarly, Trinh T. Minh-ha considers that the popularity of the "third world woman" is due to the exoticizing of the native woman into a fixed, ineluctable alterity (Minh-ha, 1989: 82). Questioning essentialist, monolithic western feminism, which ignores the heterogeneity of women in the third world, they have made clear how important it is to pay attention to difference. Their politics of difference contrasts the singular gender focus of western feminism with the need to integrate race, class, and imperialism into the debate on gender subordination among third world women. Chela Sandoval goes so far as to construct US. third world feminism as a legitimized theory and practice. In her frequently cited article on US. third world feminism published in Genders, she recognizes that a "differential consciousness is vital to the generation of a next 'third wave' women's movement and provides grounds for alliance with other decolonizing movements for emancipation" (Sandoval, 1991: 4).

Indeed, US. third world feminists have created the space for the emergence of a third wave of feminism. As Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake asserted, "The definitional moment of third-wave feminism has been theorized as proceeding from critiques of the white women's movement that were initiated by women of color, as well as from the many instances of coalition work undertaken by U.S. third world feminists" (Heywood &Drake, 2002: 6-7). Since the 1980s, third world feminists, including Sandoval, Minh-ha, and Mohanty, have critiqued racism and class-bias among women, and feminists. Providing theoretical guideposts for the next generation of women of color, their theories of multiplicity and difference not only enable young women of color to deconstruct a homogeneous female subject and dismantle the idea of a monolithic feminism, but also allow them to register difference and affirm multiple female identities. For the younger generation, as Becky Thompson insists, exposure to feminism of color in the second wave means a lesson that race, class, and gender are inextricably linked (Thompson, 2002: 343). The critique of the fundamental premises of hegemonic feminism by earlier feminists of color has undoubtedly influenced the younger generation's feminist consciousness.

Following their precursors, young women of color have begun to focus on their personal experiences from a
multiplicity of social locations. This strategy provides them with different vantage points and conceptions of themselves, i.e., different from those being articulated by white, middle-class feminists. For herself, each young woman defines sexism in ways that are affected by such differences in identity formation, for example, those involving race, class, religion, disability, sexual identity, geographic location, and family of origin. Young feminist writers begin to applaud and theorize complexity and contradiction in their lives. While calling for attention to the hybridity and multiplicity of identities, they also embrace the diversity and differences in perspective among women. Acknowledging the necessity of recognizing multiple sources of domination in women's lives, they refute the universalization of women's experience and recognize instead the differences among women from different social locations. Taking into account the many differences that make up the category "women," they allow feminism to deal more adequately with the complex and myriad issues we face today.

As they try to formulate a feminism that addresses these concerns, third wavers also recognize their relationship to their "motherland" communities and how these relationships enrich their understanding of "feminism." According to American academic feminist thought, they wonder how it could be that their relationship with third world women is taken further away. Regarding the process of their identity formation, Bushra Rehman and Daisy Hernandez express their puzzlement: "Feminism should have brought us closer to our mothers and sisters and to our aunts in the Third World. Instead it took us further away. Academic feminism didn't teach us how to talk with the women in our families about why they stayed with alcoholic husbands or chose the veil. In rejecting their life choices as women, we lost a part of ourselves and our own history" (Rehman & Hernandez, 2002: xxii). Likewise, Bhargavi Mandva shares how she first used feminism to break away from her strict Indian upbringing, but eventually came to create a feminism of her own that drew upon her heritage, history, and her mother’s experiences. At first, she tries everything to escape from her patriarchic home where women are coerced to follow the father’s will. She rejects her mother because she perceived her as "weak, helpless and trapped" (Mandva, 1995: 97). After her father’s death, she takes a journey with her mother back to India, where she not only learns more about her cultural heritage, but also realizes that her mother is a woman of courage and strength, resisting the pressure of the traditional Indian family. Eventually she articulates a feminist voice that does not reject her mother’s practice of a form of feminism, one that has showed her what it was like to live as a third world woman, and enabled her to develop a broader conceptual framework of feminism.

To avoid repeating assumptions of second-wave feminism, women of color in American Third-wave feminism have now widely come to recognize the deficiencies of a white, middle-class framework confined to the perspectives and experiences of western societies. Resisting the binary opposition between western and third world women, they have endeavored to shorten the distance across cultural and national divides. Establishing the interconnectedness between women, they have attempted to move away from a narrowly national politics to forge productive political alliances with women in their "motherland" communities. In her attempt to build a bridge between Arab and western feminisms, Susan Muaddi Darraj claims, "The third wave is a global wave, but it must sweep through and carry back messages from women all over the world - and those messages should, in their own words, articulate their visions, their concerns, and their histories" (Darraj, 2003: 203). In this sense, third-wave feminism is not a border-restrictive parameter, but rather a circumstantial point-of-departure from which one should be capable of articulating transnational connections among women. As a model that recognizes the limits of US. bourgeois feminism, the heterogeneity of the US. women's movement, and the potential for coalition, third-wave feminism may offer a basis to connect with young women around the world for more effective collective action.

Is There Third-Wave Feminism in Asia?

Having examined the development of feminist identity and consciousness among young American women of color, I would like to turn our attention to the young generation's response to feminism in the Asian context. This section evokes two central questions about contemporary views of young Asian women on "feminism." Is there a third-wave Asian feminist politic? What issues are contemporary young Asian feminists prioritizing? By examining the rhetoric and writing of young Asian women in conferences and classrooms where feminism is discussed,
appropriated, and transformed, I am interested in exploring the intertwining forces of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and nation that inform and restructure the meaning of feminism when it moves across borders. However, do not mean to suggest that all young Asian feminists share a singular or uniform perspective rather, there are many areas of disagreement among them. I would like to show how young Asian women are actively engaging in the debate about feminism and its role in their lives as well as point to the possible directions for future feminist development in Asia.

Our way of understanding the contentious relationship between western feminism and Asian women has been built on a dualistic theoretical framework. Since the history and heritage of Asian women have been radically different from those of western women, some conservatives and ruling elites in the region have quickly dismissed feminism, for they claim it is a western intrusion and incompatible with Asian traditions. Western feminism is grounded in western values, thought, and ideology and those values differ from Asian customs and traditions. As Kumari Jayawardena notes, "traditionalists, political conservatives and even certain leftists, argue that Feminism is a product of 'decadent' Western capitalism; that it is based on a foreign culture of no relevance to women in the Third World; that it is the ideology of women of the local bourgeoisie; and that it alienates or diverts women from their culture, religion and family responsibilities on the one hand, and from the revolutionary struggles for national liberation and socialism on the other" (Jayawardena, 1986: 2). Some Asian feminists have also argued that western feminist models, methods and goals are inadequate to chart and assess the progress of women in Asia, for many of the goals of feminism as conceived in western society are not necessarily relevant or exportable across cultural boundaries (Hellwig & Thobani, 2006: 4). Western feminism, which ignores realities of women who are being confronted with diversities of values and religious lifestyle, has often been criticized of being essentialist, monolithic, and ethnocentric. Asian women thus hesitate to identify with feminism, for it reflects the white, middle-class concerns of the women who dominate the field, both among academics and in the women's movement generally.

Such rhetoric of western versus Asian values repeatedly appears in many Asian feminist writings (Hellwig & Thobani, 2006: 2). In negotiating the meaning of feminism for their own lives, young Asian women face a constant battle with dominant public perceptions of feminism built around the political discourse of Asian values, in which feminism has been firmly associated with the "West." For young Asian women, "becoming a feminist" is a process that is certainly influenced by dominant discourses about Asian values, nationalism, and imperialism. For example, Norman G. Owen conducts an interesting survey that shows his Hong Kong students’ general responses to the questions "why I am a feminist" or "why I am not a feminist." Some students provocatively embrace the label, while others use it as a personal reference point rather than a publicly identifiable badge. Recognizing that there is still inequality between men and women, some, however, are hesitant to identify with "feminism" because it is narrowly associated with middle-class, white women's struggle for gender equality. They tend to view the feminist movement with some apprehension, wondering whether the idea of "feminism," as it is thought of and practiced by western women, is applicable to them. As one student writes, "I am more in favor of equal status for all minorities, not just women. Thus the label of 'feminist' is too small for me to fit in" (Owen, 2002: 92).

The occasion of The Women's World 2005 conference in Seoul provided another important site to observe the development of the contemporary women's movement in Asia. While preparing for the conference, the Asian Center for Women's Studies thought of using it to support young women. The hope was that young women would be inspired to take this opportunity to develop a new movement on women issues by networking with other fellow scholars, and activists. In November 2004, graduate students and activists from various non-governmental organizations including the Unninetwork, WAW, and Beautiful Store gathered to develop an independent sub-theme that focused on the thoughts of the rising generation. Consisting of five panel sessions and one workshop, the "Young Feminists' Forum" at WW05 dealt with problems and questions that many emerging young feminists in Asia encounter.

Within the Asian context, young feminists in the Forum asked for a rethinking on "Asia" and "Women in Asia." Addressing such issues as identity, family, homophobia, and sexual orientation, they questioned patriarchy and
nationalism from an Asian perspective, and further explored the complexity of Asian women's identity. For example, Sun Zonig Xin observed that the younger feminist groups have been emerging and growing during recent years in China. They have already embraced some basic principles of feminism but have not necessarily labeled themselves "feminists." While becoming aware of how their lives are governed by social, economic, and political forces, these young feminists are middle class women who are concerned with gender issues related to their class. Though they try to explore and adopt the role of a woman agent who promotes social change, their middle-class stance might be simply to enjoy what they have and value the individual's "free choice." Sun, nevertheless, is aware that feminism in China cannot be separated from the particular history of the country and the contemporary social transitions without which there can be no understanding of gender equality and its discourse in China (Sun, 2005: 89-106).

While they were inclined to redefine feminism according to its Asian features, these young women did not hesitate to put their theoretical agenda into political practice. For instance, Ochiai Emi introduced young Japanese young feminists to political activism. In 2004 Emi and other graduate students established the PPP (Project of the Personal is Political), a young feminists' organization that provides an avenue where young women are able to encounter feminism without prejudice toward feminism. Similar to what Rebecca Walker's Third Wave Foundation did in the US. in 1992, this organization succeeded in increasing the voting ratio in the 2004 Upper House election by encouraging young women to vote, but also reached out to other women in other countries in Asia. In their attempt to engage in political campaigns that cross national borders, they also organized a fund-raising charity concert for a disaster relief effort to help depressed pregnant women and mothers in areas around the Indian Ocean hit by the earthquake and tsunami in December 2004 (Emi, 2005: 157-62).

In that same year, young Taiwanese women also had their first encounter with "Third-wave feminism" in a graduate course I taught, one designed to evaluate reception and reproduction of American third-wave feminism in Taiwan. At the end of the course, many students said that third-wave feminism had helped them to identify how media constructs feminism, thus clarifying why they misconceived feminists as man-haters or bra-burning radical women. Third-wave feminism's politics of differences also enabled them to recognize differences among women's lives in Taiwan, especially among new immigrant women, including imported female workers from Indonesia and the Philippines and foreign brides from China and Vietnam. Some students even found the third-wave rhetoric empowering and indicated that such a concept provided an alternative way of embracing the contradictions in their lives. Not all young women shared such views of empowerment, however. Some students pointed out that third-wave feminism remains an academic term, for it is difficult for them to put a third-wave feminist agenda into practice in their everyday lives.

It is undeniable that Asian women in mostly economically developed societies such as Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan face issues similar to those faced by young American women of color today. Sometimes, young American and Asian women even experience similar challenges and dilemmas. Comparing attitudes of US. and Hong Kong college students toward feminism, Getetanjali Singh Chanda finds that "both groups had similar problems with the label 'feminist' and were unsure about self-identifying as feminists. Their views," Chanda says, "reflect a more general malaise about the connotations evoked by the term 'feminist' " (2003: 62). HKU students rejected the label of feminist as well as feminism itself because of a very definite sense of betraying their own cultural identity. They felt caught between tradition and modernity and western and Asian values. Their cultural argument against feminism reappears in the responses of some Asian American students in the US., ones who have been brought up in a home culture that runs contradictory to mainstream feminist causes. Obviously, anxieties among Asian feminists about a hegemonic feminist discourse are relative, in some respects, to the struggles of women of color with Second-Wave feminism in the United States. Although they share similar dilemmas, young Asian women and American women of color are different in their views regarding feminist history. While American women of color represent feminist history as a succession of three waves running from the later nineteenth century to the present day, many Asian women do not see feminist history as a linear development. The subordination of Asian women has a long history and is deeply ingrained in
economic, political, and cultural processes. In the last three decades, Asian historians, sociologists, and feminists have recovered figures and events previously lost to women's history. They have focused on locating and preserving women's records, making women visible, and documenting the lives of non-elite women. They found that Asian women's history is often disrupted and fragmented because of colonization or nationalism. Rather than describing feminism as a single linear and progressive journey, it becomes one filled with fragmentation and non-linear progress. Sometimes, we might miss discontinuities more important than continuities in the history of the Asian women's movement. Consequently, if young Asian women want to embrace a feminist identity, they must first identify its historical legacy, as such identification would enable them to develop an autonomous intellectual movement in the Asian region.

Third-Wave Feminism: A Transnational Perspective

In striving to form their own feminist identity, young Asian women are inevitably pulled between Asian and western feminist values. Confronting a multiplicity of contradictions and oppositions, they must learn to negotiate the differences across cultural divides. In their struggles with western feminism, however, they were informed by women's issues aligned with those of race, class, community, nation and religious identity as well as the simultaneous shaping of women's identities by all these discourses. As a result, what is common among these young voices is that, increasingly, there is an understanding of the intersection of gender discrimination with other forms of inequality. Interrogating the connotations of pseudo-universal terms like "woman," "womanhood," and even "feminist," emerging young Asian feminists are beginning to incorporate race, class, community, or nation into their analytical frameworks. No longer seen as passive victims under patriarchy, young Asian women have opened up possibilities for themselves, but the task that remains for them is how to build feasible feminist coalitions so that they may participate in and resist not only their own oppression but also that of other women.

Indeed, the relationship between western and Asian women has changed in the early 21st century. As "Asia" has risen as "an idea, economic force, and identity," we have to rethink the conceptual and/or value conflict between western feminists and Asian women (John, 2005: 47). I argue that to view Asian women within a model of Asian versus western values sets up a false dichotomy of choice facing young Asian women. Neither Asian nor western women comprise monoliths: they are characterized by historical/political differences; therefore, pitting one against the other ignores issues of race/ethnicity, economic class, and gender/sexuality that affect power relations within both worlds. This would not only overlook diversity within the category "Asian feminism," when one takes into consideration issues of class or race within the same geo-political boundaries, but it also ignores our diverse engagements with the West. Besides, the binary opposition between the West and Asia risks impeding young feminist scholars who wish to collaborate in ways that move beyond a confining nation-state. We have to view Western and Asian Feminisms as mutually dependent and informing rather than exclusive and necessarily dichotomous.

Recently, several scholars have reconsidered the interplay of local and global influences in the development of feminist discourse. Susan Stanford Friedman asserts, "Feminism seldom arises in purely indigenous forms, but, like culture itself, develops syncretistically out of a transcultural interaction with others" (Friedman, 1998: 5). Her attempt to contextualize feminism globally is further explored in the writings of such well-known feminists as Amrita Basu, Ella Shohat, Inderpal Grewal, and Caren Kaplan. Their ways of looking at "local feminism" from a "global perspective" allow us to view the experience of women more broadly than is possible in localized situations, while at the same time they allow us to recognize the limitations of a global perspective that tends to homogenize experience and mask historical specificity. For instance, in The Challenge of Local Feminisms: Women's Movements in Global Perspective, Basu (1995) and the anthology's other contributors point out that women's movements in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, Russia, Europe, and the United States are not only critical of universal feminism, but they are also able to find common ground across regions, politics, and issues. "The 'local' is thus privileged but always in relation to the 'global,'" as Mohanty puts it (2003: 120). These transnational feminist scholars enable us to rethink the way we construct and write the history of feminists in national and transnational contexts. Seeking to articulate transnational connections among women, they have
suggested ways to move beyond constructed oppositions without ignoring the histories that informed these conflicts or the valid concerns about power relations that have represented or structured the conflicts up to this point (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994: 17).

In considering the possibilities of transnational feminist practices, some Asian feminists have recognized the importance to the Asia-Pacific region of moving away from binary relationships determined on the East-West axis. As Mary E. John points out, 'Questions of feminism and women's studies in Asia have been rather pre-occupied with western legacies and frames of reference, or else sought a space of autonomy and sovereignty by defining themselves in contrast to the 'West,' in spite of important and ongoing efforts to build larger regional relationships" (John, 2005: 60). Looking for a center of new comparisons, they attempt to develop new interAsian relationships. Niranjana and John further displace the tendency to counter an "Asian" or sub-Asian "identity" or "problem" against "the West as the implicit reference point for all political and conceptual discussions" (Niranjana & John, 2002: 335). Following the call to build inter-Asia connections, young feminist Fumie Ohashi has observed the interaction between Chinese and Japanese feminism after the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan. On the one hand, China's effort to push reproductive labor out of families during the period of the Great Leap Forward had a great impact on the Japanese women's liberation of the 1970s. On the other hand, she points out how the "non-uniform situation" of Japanese women and their equal employment opportunity influences Chinese feminists' resistance to the institutionalization of "periodic employment" in 2001 (Ohashi, 2005: 107-09).

With all the emphasis on local contexts, one, however, is left to wonder what would happen to the future development of Asian feminism. Should we be satisfied with regional transnational feminist practices? Or, rather, should we move beyond homogenizing conceptualizations that posit "nation" and "region" as coherent spaces of inquiry? I suggest that while looking for political alliances within the Asian community, we also need to take ourselves out of the confines of regional border to join forces simultaneously with feminists around the world. To confine attention to the Asian region would restrict our understanding of changes in the international development of the women's movement and the complicated, often conflictual, interchanges between local and global feminism. Instead, we need to be attentive to the impact of globalization: "The global nature of the colonizing process, the global flow of transnational capital, and the global reach of contemporary communications technologies virtually oblige us to move beyond the restrictive framework of the nation-state as a unit for analysis," as Ella Shohat argues. Indeed, she writes, "An ideological construction of 'here' and 'there' obscures the innumerable ways that women's lives are imbricated in the forces of globalization" (Shohat, 1998: 47). In this rapidly globalizing world the necessity of developing feminist transnational political solidarities worldwide has become an urgent necessity (Hellwig & Thobani, 2006: 9).

In the past two decades, as more and more feminists cross and meet beyond national boundaries, transnational women's movements and networks have also grown considerably. It is perhaps most useful, however, to focus on what actions have been possible across national borders, as in Kaplan and Grewal's advocacy of "transnational feminist practices":

The question becomes how to link diverse feminisms without requiring equivalence or a master theory. How to make these links without replicating cultural and economic hegemony? For white, Western feminisms or elite women in other world locations, such questions demand an examination of the links between everyday life and academic work and an acknowledgement that one's privileges in the world system are always linked to another woman's oppression or exploitation. As Cynthia Enloe's recent work demonstrates (1989), the old sisterhood model of missionary work, of intervention and salvation, is clearly tied to the older models of center-periphery relations. As these models have become obsolete in the face of proliferating, multiple centers and peripheries, we need new analyses of how gender works in the dynamic of globalization and the countermeasures of new nationalisms, and ethnic and racial fundamentalisms. Feminists can begin to map these scattered hegemonies and link diverse local practices to formulate a transnational set of solidarities (Kaplan & Grewal, 1994: 19).

In accordance with Kaplan and Grewal, I suggest that, although we might have different concerns and goals, we should endeavor to foster coalitions between third-wave women of color and young Asian women. The
development of a contemporary women’s movement in Asia in many ways resembles third-wave feminism in the United States. Young Asian feminists and young women of color in American third-wave feminism seem to have much in common in terms of originating impulses, trajectories, and even ambitions. As Asian women have borrowed, adapted, translated, misread, and critiqued western feminism the US. third-wave women’s movement in turn has absorbed the influences of the women’s movement cross-nationally, reformulating itself in response to Asian voices. Yet, I do not aim for a quick or simple consensus but for laying a firm foundation for sustained dialogue either in local or in transnational contexts. Qearly, in a world where our daily lives are increasingly affected by a global economy within which there is an unprecedented flow of people and information across international borders, it is no longer easy to separate a western component from an eastern one. If the project of third-wave feminism can encompass women in both the western and Asian worlds, it would open the possibilities for further collaboration. Ultimately, the development of Asian feminism can thus be better understood when viewed in the dual contexts of Asian culture and western feminism.

Footnote

Notes
1. This paper does not posit “third world women,” “Asian women,” or “Western feminism” as homogeneous and univocal collectives. Instead, it recognizes that they are contentious and problematic analytical categories. Following Mohanty and other postcolonial feminists, I believe that these analytic categories are still useful to examine the limits and possibilities of women’s relationships in transnational context.

2. I am aware that “Second Wave” feminism is a multi-faceted movement that not only comprises white, middle-class feminists. For analytical purposes, the distinctions between “Second Wave” and “Third Wave” feminism are necessary in order to make a coherent argument.

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AuthorAffiliation
Su-lin YU is Associate Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at National Cheng Kung
University, Taiwan. She has published numerous essays on American ethnic women writers such as Toni Morrison,
Amy Tan and Maxine Hong Kingston. Her current research interests include contemporary American women
writers, transnational feminism, and third wave feminism. (sulinyu@mail.ncku.edu.tw)

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