ABSTRACT

Literature is a reflection of the past and present society. The same applies to Women literature of the May 4th. It not only has a close relationship with women literature of the Qing Dynasty but at the same time consists of the soul and aspiration of the May 4th women writers. Women literature of the Qing Dynasty has affected the May 4th female writers up to a certain extent. The influence of the Qing Dynasty woman literature can be seen from many different aspects and some have deep unspoken meanings.

By understanding the changing values of China society from the Qing dynasty to the May 4th period and the position of women in this transitional period, we will get to know the influence of women literature of the Qing Dynasty on the May 4th female writers. Women in the Qing Dynasty were petty and have low social status. The feudalism system denied them of public education and gave them living environments entirely different from that of the males. They had neither freedom of speech nor fair share of the economic resources. They relied heavily on males and were treated as reproductive machines. However, during the Ming and Qing dynasties, an influx of trade led China to be more open to external ideas and culture. This in turn led to the encouragement of daughters of affluent families to receive education as though they were sons. Education had led the Qing women to start showing concern about their living environment and the world outside. Some of them found out that it was the gentry who caused them to suffer from such low social status. They did not want to feel inferior to man and started to dress and speak like men in order to show that they were in no way inferior to men. But in doing so, it was actually corresponding to the fact that men dominated the society. In the late Qing Dynasty, western doctrine had spread to China and impacted the traditional culture. Some women managed to break free from the feudalistic constraints, advocating the equality of sexes, but the number was very small.

Hence, it was not until the May 4th revolution that broke out in 1919 that the feudalism system was overthrown completely. There was a group of female writers who rose to become prominent writers and thus put a stop to the past trend where male writers dominated Chinese literature. May 4th female writers went through revolutionary changes. They were exposed to both the ideas and culture of a feudalistic society and a modern society. Although they received modern education, the society still held certain
feudalistic characteristics. The May 4th female writers had two different cultures mixed within them. While they tried to modernize their style of writing, they were influenced by the writing style and ideas of Qing Dynasty women writers as well. Thus Qing female writers and May 4th female writers shared certain similarities, such as advocating the equality of sexes. However, May 4th female writers had accepted themselves as females and they did not attempt to act like men, as the Qing women had attempted to do. They had some common yet different characteristics as well. That was what made the May 4th women literature different from women literature of the Qing Dynasty, and became a unique and special literature.