Aijun Zhu’s well-crafted book *Feminism and Global Chineseness* is a feminist production of contemporary controversial women writers in different geopolitical locations—Maxine Hong Kingston in Chinese America, Wei Hui in Shanghai, Li Ang in Taiwan, and Li Bihua in Hong Kong. She not only explores the relations between nationalism, feminism and the female body in literary narration, but also analyzes how cultural and literary criticism produces the cultural and political significance of the text and the author. Zhu’s book lays bare the politics of cultural and literary criticism in discursively producing controversies between women and nation/community. There are three achievements of the book: first, she locates the feminist-nationalist tension in specific historical contexts, analyzes the flexibility of “feminism” and “nationalism,” and explores the contradictory interplay of feminisms and nationalisms in different geographical spaces. Second, she reconciles the “global connection among different geopolitical expressions of Chineseness” (p. 3) and the “different locational nationalisms” (p. 3), and investigates the interactions, negotiations, and antagonisms between different Chinese locations. Third, she elaborates on the representative power of female body, a site for power struggles among feminism, nationalism, consumerism, and neocolonialism.

The book has five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the theoretical framework—“the politics of literary/cultural criticism,” i.e. literary and cultural criticism “actively creates rather than passively unfolding the author’s intended meanings” (p. 4-5). Zhu upholds that literary criticism involves intense struggles for the ultimate power to define the work and the author. She rejects the “representational inevitability” approach to women authors of color, which “equates literary representation by Third World authors with actualities of the Third World” (p. 16), and regards Third World authors as spokespersons for their national or racial communities. Instead, she proposes feminist literary criticism to the works by controversial women authors to resist and refuse “masculinist and nationalistic interpellation” (p. 46).

In Chapter 2 Zhu delineates the development of literary criticism to Maxine Hong Kingston of Chinese America and her work *Woman Warrior* over the years. She argues that the “constructed mutual exclusivity” (p. 269) of Western women’s movements and the Asian
American masculinist cultural nationalist movements in the 1970s produced the controversy about Kingston and her work. The changing social and cultural landscape since then led to the shifting relationship between feminism and cultural nationalism; the irreconcilability of gender and race was ignored and the controversy was gone. She points out that the Kingston controversy is really about “what the Chinese American female body means” (p. 71), and the canonization of Kingston has much to do with the timing of the publication of *The Woman Warrior*—“when feminism and racial awareness were on the rise” (p. 78). Zhu reconstructs the Kingston debate in the 1970s by analyzing the tension between feminist Diane Johnson’s critique of the book with those of Asian American cultural nationalists Jeffery Paul Chan and Fran Chin, and then deconstructs the controversy by paying attention to the research of Asian American feminists who emphasize the inseparable experience of gender and race. She argues that the assumed conflict between women and the nation was the result of “ignoring the fluidity and complexity of both feminist and nationalist discourses” (p. 89). Her feminist reading finds that *The Woman Warrior* is about “a Chinese American girl’s lifelong search for the heroine in herself” (p. 93), and that Kingston has transformed “the traditional fixed, racist and sexist definition of America” by declaring her “non-white non-male identities as American” (p. 107).

In Chapter 3 Zhu locates “beauty writer” Wei Hui and her criticism in the context of the rising commercial popular culture, and argues that literary and cultural critics’ negative attacks rooted in revolutionary nationalist discourse have led to the ban of Wu Hui’s *Shanghai Baby*. She points out that the Wei Hui Phenomenon is “culturally produced and politically constructed” (p. 110)—the commodification of femininity, the popularization of mass media, and the commercialization of cultural critique jointly produced the controversy. Zhu analyzes the main character Ni Ke / Coco in *Shanghai Baby* as a free-spirited female author who is in opposition to “the state-sponsored didactic intellectual,” (p. 112) and is only concerned about how to enjoy her life and produce literary works with exciting formula—“evil omen, conspiracy, ulcer, dagger, lust, poison, madness, and moonlights” (p. 118). Zhu takes Coco’s love for fashion and Western commodities for a rebellion against “the suppression of an authoritative tradition” (p. 119), and finds that Wei Hui struggles for literary freedom to express concerns beyond nationalist expectations—the “disruptive and destructive” female sexuality (p. 120), drug and homosexuality, etc. In deconstructing the Wei Hui controversy, Zhu argues that the mass media “construct a caricatured Wei Hui,” and male-centered nationalist and xenophobic literary
criticism has “imposed censorship to works outside nationalist discourse,” (p. 151) thus endorsing and legitimating the official ban of *The Shanghai Baby*.

In Chapter 4, Zhu turns her eyes to the relations between feminism and nationalism in Taiwan by analyzing Li Ang’s 1997 *The Beigang Incense Burner*. Zhu finds the novel “a direct feminist critique of the male-centered oppositional struggle for democracy” (203); its defiance and irrelevance towards nationalist interpellation caused its criticism. Zhu maintains that Li Ang links women’s sexuality to national politics and social issues, exposes how the “absurd political ideals” (p. 176) censored the female body, and reveals the irreconcilable differences between feminism and nationalism, thus arousing criticism from both feminists and the opposition party. She contends that the media’s reductive reading of the novel as a war between Li Ang and Chen Wenqian made the complicated relations between female sexuality and nationalist politics a sensational love triangle, with selling points of “sex, politics and scandals;” (p. 183) and critics’ reading of the novel as the insinuating fiction is only one way of reading. She notices that the masculine reconstruction of Taiwan literary history often “excludes women authors from literary and cultural significance,” (p. 176) so Li Ang has to go through a process of self-production as a woman author by producing “dangerously sexualized national history” (ibid.), and her characters have to negotiate their sexual identities with the oppositional movement.

In the last chapter Zhu analyzes the debate on the popular Hong Kong novelist Li Bihua who writes on love and romance. She points out that Li’s romantic plots depend on the conventional gender hierarchy but also displace the masculinist nationalism and therefore deconstruct the gender hierarchy; and that the nature of the controversy of Li’s works is a debate on Hong Kong literature and culture. Li Bihua’s work demonstrates the feminist and nationalist negotiation in contemporary Hong Kong whose identity is in the making—as the “insider-outsider” in relation to China. Zhu states that the rise of Cultural Studies and the emergence of Hong Kong literature as a subject of study have brought Li Bihua to the center of the debate on popular culture, one of Hong Kong’s most distinctive features. Although Li Bihua explores national identity, Hong Kong consciousness, and sexual politics, she mainly writes on women and women’s sexuality. The absence of feminist criticisms to Li’s works only suggests the continuation of “a male-centered tradition in critical theory.” (p. 249) In offering her feminist criticism, Zhu finds that Li was ambivalent toward love/romance—romance “depicts both women’s submission and resistance to nationalist discourses,” (p. 256) and love provides an
alternative space independent of nationalism for women. Li’s critique on nationalism is centered on the “tension between women’s desires and the nation’s expectations as well as punishments” (p. 260).

The book demonstrates the author’s solid training in literary criticism and women’s studies, the depth of her critical thinking, and her sophisticated writing skills.

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