

COMPLETION REPORT

This study has examined the figure of the “controlling” mother and her different incarnations throughout the Philippine and Japanese texts selected in this research. The depictions of the controlling mother in this study: all-knowing, vicarious, and alienated – serve as contrasts to the simplified view of mother often perpetuated in literature. These representations acquired a great deal of currency, particularly because they reinforced the unquestioned assumption of the mother as being central to the home and the family. What is supplementary, however, is a belief that the private and public were separate realms of experience and a woman’s double burden that consumed her energies. Historical and material circumstances delineated socio-economic conditions as unimportant to the standards of the good mother and failed to recognize that the maternal function is only one activity mothers engage in.

Chapter one begins with a brief historical survey of the constructions of ideal motherhood in both countries. Then it addresses the psychoanalytic and feminist critiques of motherhood and considers the key psychoanalytic and feminist theorists which are material to the study. Maternal representation is a normative function that reveals how mothers are compelled by cultural regulations. These theories, from Freud to Kristeva and also from Japan, by Doi, Kosawa and Okonogi, illuminate the mechanisms of these maternal constructions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of fiction and fictional representations of motherhood.

The second chapter compares fictional works with the all-knowing mother figure. The texts reveal the complex realities of patriarchal exploitation of mothers, and illustrate how the writers subvert the inequities of power in patriarchal ideologies through representations of the all-knowing mother. Such literature as found in Montaire’s *Ang Karaang Krusipih* and *Ikaduhang Sugo*, together with Espina-Moore’s *Bunga* and Taeko’s “Family in Hell” reveal and indict the economies of power in which women are always assigned the role of “good” mother.

The third chapter focuses on works that highlight the vicarious mother figure. The mothers in the texts under consideration manipulate their children to carry out their own selfish plans to achieve their goals within patriarchal dominance. Enchi’s *A Tale of False Fortunes and Masks* together with Hirabayashi’s “A Woman to Call Mother,” Montaire’s *Ikaduhang Sugo* and Espina-Moore’s *Inahan ni Mila* are five of the most representative works that narrate this kind of maternal control. These works are extremely complex multi-layered novels exploring exploitation of children by mothers.

Instead of narrating a body politics that posits withdrawal from the maternal body, some writers have addressed the resistance that arise in resolving the problems of identity displacement and fragmentation. In the fourth chapter, Montaire’s *Kasingkasing sa Inahan* and *Miraflor*, Espina-Moore’s *Lani! Lani!*, Takahashi Takako’s “Congruent Figures,” and Oba Minako’s “Three Crabs,” explore the forceful figure of the alienated mother expressed in the work of these writers.

The “controlling” mother that described earlier theories and representations are hardly monolithic since in the Philippines their marginalization made a 1800 turn, after the American and 70s liberation movement, to its opposite — an abstract celebration of the mother particularly in her involvement with salaried work. In Japan, however, early maternal examples, particularly those depicted in the fiction of Enchi, are very powerful and strong figures, which over the years, have undergone a strange transformation to a figure that is highly unpredictable

especially with the changes that the country has undergone. Still, these readings of motherhood failed to transcend beyond the figure of the good mother to the plenitude of social forces in which actual mothers really exist. It may be difficult to engage in alternative readings of motherhood such as the chapters, particularly that of the alienated mother, that I have discussed after the good mother in either psychoanalytic or other feminist frameworks. In the various typologies, the norm of the good mother/*ryosai kenbo* as nurturer and bearer of culture and tradition is seen to continue to inform our supreme endeavors to understand motherhood.

This study of the different performances of maternal subjectivity has been my attempt to reimagine motherhood in order to make its model consistent with the idea of maternal agency. In the particular context of feminist thought to conceptualize a truly alternative vision of motherhood, it is a useful paradigm that veers away from the longstanding framework that continues to recuperate psychoanalytic as well as other feminist discourses for the reconstruction of motherhood.

The novels of Enchi, Montaire and Espina-Moore, as well as the narratives of Oba, Hirabayashi, Takahashi, and Taeko although they depict maternal representations defined within the prevailing ideology of the good mother, are distinguished by the materiality of the maternal experience, which possesses the potential to disrupt what Judith Butler calls “the power that undoes the very effect by which ‘sex’ is stabilized, the possibility to put the consolidation of the norms of ‘sex’ into a productive crisis” (Bodies 10). Such capacity to undermine the norms of motherhood or sex primarily relates to performativity as defined in this work. It is the very materiality of the maternal experience in their fiction that, in the final analysis, generates this productive crisis with respect to the mother. Through the maternal subjectivities of their characters, “controlling” motherhood is itself to be defined clearly as a process of becoming rather than a state of being. Rather than perceiving the mother as an a priori existence, the novels and stories represent the process of becoming “controlling” mothers, and in particular, maternal subjects. The novels, likewise, have exposed the endurance of traditional familial and societal expectations for mothers as well as challenges to rigid patriarchal dictates over the 20th century.

From the controlling figures— the all-knowing and the vicarious to the alienated — mothers, the authors have endeavored to radically rewrite maternal subjects into their narratives. They have provided us with the understanding of motherhood as performativity. The maternal role transcends biology and in their various fictional mother-child relationships, reveal the significance of how performing the norm of the good mother is bound to fail not because of the inability to mother but because motherhood is limited by regulations of patriarchally prescribed domesticity. In these narratives, alternative maternal representations perform unconventional mothering and their failures in realizing the norm, suggest it is impossible to mother within the traditional family definition. This also reflects the changing standards of the Philippine and Japanese familial and social fabric. I suggest in this study that controlling maternity as an interpretive strategy avoids binary readings of the mother and provides new possibilities for the exercise of motherhood. The importance of a maternal paradigm based on performativity, allows not only for selfhood in terms of professional and social advancement as well as maternal fulfillment but also for continued resistance to easy characterization of maternal relationships.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

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Dragon Mothers: The Controlling Mother in Japanese Fiction by Women

Hope Sabanpan-Yu

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8th International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 8)

The Making of the “Controlling” Mother: A Comparative Analysis in Cebuano and Japanese Fiction (Panel 89)

Hope Sabanpan-Yu

Article (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Article, etc.)

Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society (forthcoming 2013)

Vicarious Lives: Controlling Mothers in Philippine and Japanese Fiction

Hope Sabanpan-Yu

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Self-will as Alienated Maternity in Asian Women’s Fiction

Hope Sabanpan-Yu

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)

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